

Walking the way of the Cross

DEATH AND RESURRECTION

A Lenten reflection

The season of Lent is a time when we prepare to celebrate the holy mysteries of Jesus' death and resurrection. In all four gospels Jesus foretells his death and resurrection, yet we are told that the disciples just didn't get the message. Peter indeed rebukes Jesus for even suggesting it. At a certain point in Jesus' ministry, after he had preached and healed, befriended and empowered the outcasts of society, the likely outcome was clear to him, especially if he went to Jerusalem. He did not withdraw to prepare for his death but set his face resolutely towards Jerusalem, knowing this was an important part of his mission. From then on his focus was on teaching and preparing his disciples. Jesus indicated at Gethsemane that he did not want to die, but was prepared to accept death.

In a homily on 27 January this year US Catholic Bishop Thomas Gumbleton said, "Two weeks before he was shot to death, Archbishop Oscar Romero was interviewed by a reporter who asked him, 'Aren't you afraid? Why don't you leave the country? Your name is on the death list.' Oscar Romero says to the reporter, 'Look, I have been threatened with death many times, but I don't believe in death without resurrection. Even if they kill me, I will rise again in the people.'" How

many of us would have even heard of or been inspired by Romero if he had followed the reporter's advice?

Indeed we all journey through Lent and through life from the other side of Easter, 'in sure and certain hope of the resurrection'. Tony Campolo recounts somewhere a wonderful sermon by an Afro-American preacher, 'It's Friday, but Sunday's coming'. However, I don't think that means that we can skip the process of preparation, of experiencing doubt and sorrow, pain and darkness, and go straight to the exuberant triumph of Easter.

Columba urged every member of his community to prepare for his own death. At the Gawler Foundation program that I attended last year, those of us who had been diagnosed with cancer were asked to name the best and the worst about knowing we had cancer, and it reminded me of Elizabeth Kubler Ross in one of her lectures saying, "Those of you who are fortunate enough to have cancer ...". I do not want to die yet and I am apprehensive about the process of dying, knowing that for some people it is painful and disturbing. There are things I want to live for, including seeing my grandchildren grow up, seeing some real progress towards Reconciliation between Indigenous and other Australians, doing more

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work on my family history. But I have found that having to face my own death has been a blessing in many ways. I have been able to hand over some responsibilities that I had seen as important in order to focus on priorities – time with family and friends, reflective time for myself, some writing, attempting to declutter my cupboards and my mind (still a lot to do there!). I think there has to be a gradual process of detachment from material and ego-centred things. The practice of giving up something for Lent, or the practice of silence and stillness in meditation can be useful exercises in detachment.

John O'Donohue (who died recently and unexpectedly in his 50s) writes in *Anam Cara* that death 'is a presence who walks the road of life with you'. Negativity about ourselves, fear of letting go and losing control often

prevent us from experiencing the eternal world which in the Celtic tradition was so close to the natural world. Like St Francis, many of the Celtic saints were open and hospitable to death. Though we have moved

'I want to be able to embrace the possibility of death, and somehow this enables me to get on with living wholeheartedly and joyfully now.'

a little in recent years from a totally death-denying culture, I still find people obviously uncomfortable when I speak of dying. They say I should believe in the power of prayer (which I do) or I should have a positive attitude (which I do) or I should fight

the cancer. I don't like the ubiquitous metaphors of fighting, then often losing a long battle with cancer, because I don't see death as defeat. I want my body to resist the cancer cells for as long as possible, with the help of chemicals if necessary, but I want to be able to embrace the possibility of death and somehow this enables me to get on with living wholeheartedly and joyfully now.

Bonhoeffer wrote 'Death is the last great festival on the road to freedom'. 'We have so much to learn from our Celtic forebears about how to prepare for death and celebrate it,' writes Ray Simpson in *Exploring Celtic spirituality*. 'I hope something of the spirit of triumphant dying seen in the lives of these Celtic saints will one day touch every home and neighbourhood'. So do I.

Anne McPherson

Book Review

Campfires and Wellsprings in surprising places

Anne McPherson and Peter Millar
Wellspring Community Inc 2007
ABN 81 293 869 355

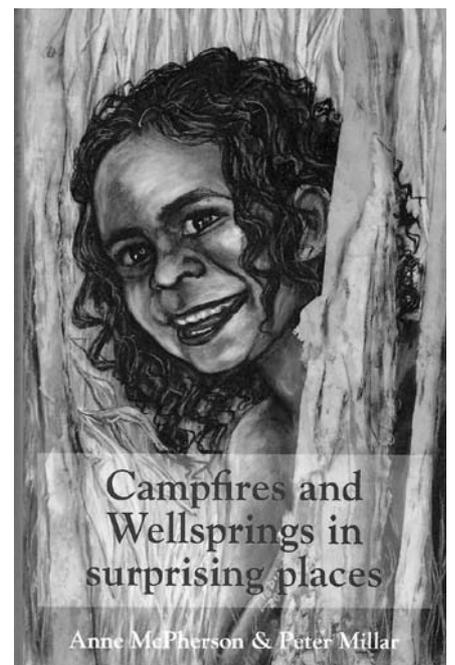
*Lord of every pilgrim heart
bless our journeys
on these roads
we never planned to take
but
through your
surprising wisdom
discovered
we
were on ... (Peter Millar)*

'Campfires' are opportunities to gather together, while 'Wellsprings' are places of spiritual refreshment. Subtitled 'a reflective dialogue on a Christian presence in Mt Druitt, Sydney', this is a story of a journey taken by Anne as she sought to respond to the call of God for service with the residents of

Mt Druitt, an area which is somewhat disadvantaged, multi-ethnic, with a high proportion of Aboriginal people, but which never failed to surprise with the vitality and talents of its people. The story is of their journey, as well as that of Anne and Peter. As Jonathan Inkipin says in his Foreword, '...there are "campfires" and "wellsprings" of real hope among us. Perhaps we do not often recognise them because they are not found where we expect them to be'. The story is also an ecumenical one, as the various churches worked together, and helps us to realise that denominational differences mean little in the process of meeting the needs of people.

The format of the book is by way of a vibrant dialogue by letter between Anne and Peter, who had a long-standing and creative relationship with Mt Druitt and the Wellspring

Community over a number of years. The narrative carries the reader along on the journey, illuminated with prayers and quotations. It is a story not



Cover design by Leanne Tobin

Book Launch - a milestone for Wellspring

only of one community, but of a part of the World Church and the *missio dei*, God's work in God's world. It is certainly not a dry factual account of events, but a deeply personal history of Anne's (and to a lesser extent Peter's) spiritual journey. We are privileged also to share in Anne's account of the way in which she deals with cancer. The development of the Wellspring Community is part of the tale as well, as both Anne and Peter were involved in its inception and helped it to take the shape it has today. Anne says, 'I think it is one of the main callings of Wellspring Community to sustain people spiritually in their various contexts, in their action for justice and peace and in their attempts to share the gospel good news...'

This is a delightful and challenging book. The presentation is lively and carries the reader along, while the prayers and quotations help a sense of involvement in the journey. Reading it is a form of pilgrimage.

Margaret Allen

The book can be ordered from publisher Wellspring Community Inc: PO Box 1689 Macquarie Centre NSW 2113 admin@wellspringcommunity.org.au; 02 9868 5915 or annemcp@bigpond.net.au; 02 4567 7269. Cost \$28 (+ 10% p&p).



Anne responding at book launch

Campfires and Wellsprings in surprising places was launched by the Rev'd Niall Reid, Moderator of the NSW Synod, Uniting Church in Australia, at the Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sydney, on Friday, 15th February 2008. Both Anne McPherson and Peter Millar were present.

Wellspringers do not often have a chance to come together, but the launch of Anne and Peter's book brought folk from far and near – Scotland, Wagga Wagga, the Hunter, Blue Mountains, and Sydney cell groups, and there was plenty of chatter as around 80 people met together.

Mary Gilchrist commenced proceedings, welcoming us and the Moderator, and introducing each of the speakers. We were informed that this is the Wellspring Community's **first venture into publishing** — so we'd better support it or we would be out of pocket!

The cover of the book, 'Woodland girl', is by Leanne Tobin. Leanne is a descendant of Yarramundi, a Darug leader and karadji (medicine man) who met with Governor Phillip in a cordial encounter on the banks of the Deerubbin (Hawkesbury) River in 1791. It depicts a young Darug woman living a traditional life in the woodlands of the Cumberland Plain on which Mt Druitt now stands. From Leanne, we received a 'Welcome to country.'

Following the book's launching by Niall Reid, Jonathan Inkpin, who has written a Foreword to the book, reiterated three points:

- ... prophetic witness is frequently unseen and undervalued. Yet, as the authors of this book tell us, and themselves embody, there are 'campfires' and 'wellsprings' of real

hope among us. Perhaps we do not often recognise them because they are not found where we expect them to be. Or perhaps their light and life can be too challenging, as they typically call us into deeper relationships than we ourselves may find comfortable. Are we willing to be surprised, encouraged and inspired by them?

- it is a book about sharing pain and

- it is a story told by people who are true encouragers: 'The strength of this witness thus lies in the life upon which Anne McPherson and Peter Millar reflect: the life of compassion (that is, literally, suffering with others),' and the ways in which they have enriched the lives of many by being who they are and offering their great gifts of encouragement to a wider audience.

Anne and Peter were delighted to receive an email from Kathy Galloway, Leader of the Iona Community, and to share Kathy's good wishes with us. (Kathy Galloway was our guest speaker at our National Gathering in Canberra, March 2007.)

Just a little note to congratulate you on the launch of 'Campfires and Wellsprings in surprising places'. I have enjoyed reading it very much, been inspired and challenged by it, and it has been made more real for me by the day I spent in Bidwill with Anne last year.

The book speaks out of an Australian context, but the questions it asks go far beyond Australia. What sustains us in these dark times? What enables us to hold fast to the truth and gives us the courage to continue to speak out against evil? How do we put down deep roots and draw sustenance from the unseen? How do we rekindle in each other God's gift, not 'a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of love and of power and of sound judgement?'

These are questions for us all, and in the book, in the lived reality of a compassionate life, we see some clues that might direct us in our own search. I am grateful for the book, and for the life and the lives it makes visible. I hope you have a very joyful day.

Love and peace,

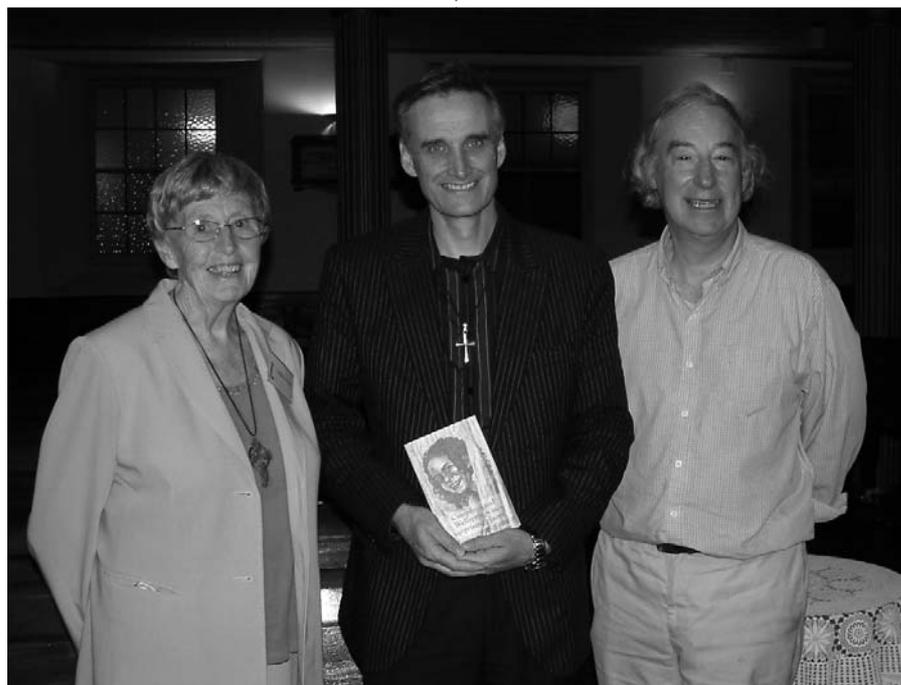
Kathy

And then Peter, followed by Anne, spoke to us. But you'll find their words in the book itself! For Anne, who was able to travel to Canberra, this has been a big week, and for Peter a great time to be in Australia.

All who know Anne feel deeply blessed by their association with her and by her love for them and the courage she has shown. This was Anne's night when people had a chance to acknowledge her wonderful life-giving work and

service. But what do Anne and Peter say? That they learned and received

far more from the people of Mt Druitt than they themselves ever gave. (BF)



Anne McPherson and Peter Millar with Niall Reid

Leader's Message

Dear Wellspring friends,

I am writing this letter from Hong Kong on New Year's Day in the Chinese calendar – a new beginning – the year of the rat! All around us there are decorations in red celebratory colours and people are having special family times. Like most families around the world, I am sure that the gatherings will be a mixture of happiness and awkwardness and stress. Yet, the time of celebrating the beginning of a New Year together is a stronger pull than staying apart. I know many families feel the same at Christmas time.

New Year is also a time for making resolutions. We *will* change the way we are/do/think/speak/look!! Not easy! I also think of the ways in which we gradually change our attitudes towards ideas, politics,

theology, and recognise that for me the process of changing my way of thinking is certainly not easy. It takes a lot of humility to admit that something you previously stood for is no longer part of your thinking. That has not been easy for me, and I rather suspect all Wellspring people would have had similar experiences. When I look back on the theological thinking I had a few decades ago I sometimes cringe, and am just very grateful that we have an understanding God who constantly encourages us to keep thinking and developing our theology and loves us through the, sometimes painful, process.

Change is not easy. But it is vital or we will not grow and develop. To use a very practical example at the moment, the reason I am in Hong Kong is not to admire the scenery (given that every day has been foggy so far, that

is probably a good thing) but to help my daughter and her family settle into living here. Despite all their well-made plans, things have not gone as smoothly as we would have liked. The ship carrying their goods was sent on a diversion to Singapore instead of coming straight to Hong Kong, so all our plans for moving and unpacking before I leave have had to be abandoned. I leave the day after their shipment is now due to arrive! When things like this go wrong, it is natural to question whether God gave you the right directions in the first place. It all seemed so clear. Hanging on to the original call is a vital part of the process of change, and the thing that keeps us motivated.

For Christmas I was given the DVD of the film of **Amazing Grace** and was astounded at the tenacity of William Wilberforce in his call from God to

get the parliament to abolish slavery. He kept up that effort for over twenty years before it was passed. He never lost the motivation and was rewarded in the end.

The other person in that film who impressed me was John Newton. He is famous for writing the hymn 'Amazing Grace' – after his conversion from being a slave trader himself. He describes his new beginnings in the words *I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see*. His profound remorse for his previous way of life was movingly portrayed in the film. Changes of attitude, new realisations, do not come without pain.

As we see the promising beginnings of our new government and the change of political positions happening in the

opposition, we can only hope that our politicians will continue to embrace change and not mind if they get some flack from doing so.

Easter is a time when every year we talk about new beginnings, but this year I have been thinking again about how hard it would have been for Jesus' disciples to hold onto their new beliefs when things got hard for them. It was their personal experience of the risen Christ that kept them going, kept them believing, kept them focussed. I believe it is exactly the same for us. Keeping our eyes on Christ is what we are called to do, and then live with the consequences, whether they are what we are expecting or not. With all the amazing things that Wellspring people are involved with in all our areas of concern, I certainly pray that you are



Jill Robertson in Hong Kong during Chinese New Year

given the reassurance you need to keep going, and the conscious presence of the risen Christ with you each day.

Mary and I wish you a blessed and peaceful Easter, and the courage to keep on making new beginnings with Christ.

Jill Robertson

From the Editor

When I said I would take on the task of editing this issue of *Pipeline*, I suggested that Easter be our theme. (Thank you, Anne, for your reflections at what must be a difficult time for you.) The material seemed to be coming together, and then the amazing events of 12th and 13th February took place and I knew that we, Wellspring Community members and friends, needed to acknowledge these longed-for events. Surprisingly, the theme of Easter has come together very well with the theme of Reconciliation and apology, as we also reflect on change.

My thoughts on the theme of Easter

Easter is my favourite time in the Christian calendar. The mad rush and bustle of Christmas is over, that time when we seem to lose track of the true meaning of the season. The commercial purveyors of goodies have not yet stolen Easter from Christians, try as they might to tempt us with hot cross buns, chocolate eggs and rabbits.

Easter gives us time to breath, to slow down, to reflect. I still ponder on what this story of a crucified man is all about. Why did the story not end there? What was it about the man Jesus that caused the early followers to call him the 'Son of God' and to believe in his resurrection from death?

You will have your own questions and reflections during these weeks of Lent.

As Easter approaches, hopefully a stillness and a silence will settle on our days, days in which we can ignore the restless voices of our desires for success, human respect, pleasure, power and influence, and we hear that gentle, sweet voice that says 'Follow me'. I am trying to be still, to die to self, so that I can taste with joy the new life which Christ offers me. It is my prayer for you this Easter.

And as we've been praying together on Saturdays, we say:

Give us life, O God, to change,

And enable us to change that we may truly live.



STILLNESS © Margaret Nicoll

The day we said “Sorry”

HONOURING OUR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

What a momentous, historic week this has been! It's been a huge week for the Australian nation, for both its indigenous and non-indigenous people, but especially for the stolen generations. I think we will all remember where we were on the morning of Wednesday, 13th February 2008, when our newly elected Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, moved that the Parliament of Australia say 'Sorry' to the stolen generations, and received a standing ovation. Tears flowed. Many feel that a huge 'burden' has been lifted and that a shift – morally and spiritually – has taken place in this country. Hope and compassion are returning to our public and private lives. I was at home, glued to the T.V. I forgot to get dressed and have breakfast. I was so proud of my Prime Minister, proud to be an Australian again, a feeling I haven't had for many years (BF).

The Wellspring Community added its voice to the activities of this momentous week, with a group joining the activities in Canberra and raising our banner. Gillian Hunt writes an eyewitness account.

Wednesday 13 February 2008, the Day of the Apology.

The car clock reads 14.01 and k.d.lang is singing Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* on the radio. I listen to the words 'love is not a victory march' and my mind, heart and eyes are brimming full as I drive back home from Parliament House in Canberra, pondering on a momentous day in my life and I sense, in the life of our nation.

Two big days in fact.

The previous morning, Tuesday 12th February, I had joined with other Wellspring Community members in a rally and walked from the Aboriginal

Tent Embassy to Parliament House. Mary Gilchrist, Anne McPherson and Peter Millar had driven from Sydney that morning and met up with Rosemary and Bob Douglas, Jonathan Inkipin (who was in Canberra for ecumenical meetings), Norma Brown, Marjorie and Jim Houston.

I have been at that site on many occasions and for me, this was the first time I had experienced such a unified mood among the hundreds of participants. Yes, there were some outspoken views and naming of unfinished business, but it seemed to be coming from a new sense of hopefulness, not bleak despair and doubt that anyone would listen or anything would change. It became a 'walking pre-amble' to the events of the next morning.

People were interested in the Wellspring Community banner with its words:

Peace and Justice, Reconciliation, Christian Spirituality, Inter-faith

And I heard a National Aboriginal Alliance speaker from Alice Springs say: 'I cannot say any more, my heart has been taken away with pride that you are all here.' And another: 'We can go home with something solid, in our stomachs and in our hearts.'

I make a cup of tea and let the thoughts flow.

I was seated with about a thousand others, in the Great Hall of Parliament House, and was pleased to note that as an Anglo Australian I was in the minority. In front of our row were seats reserved for members

of the Stolen Generations. One woman beamed as she sat holding a cardboard sign with a photo of her family and around it words that read 'God bless you Thanks Thanks Mum and Dad xx xx'. People exchanged big tearful hugs and embracing smiles.

The Apology was delivered in an atmosphere of intense respectful listening. We had just heard the newly elected Prime Minister, in his party's first Parliamentary act on the first sitting day, offer an Apology, long overdue, to the thousands of Indigenous Australians who had suffered terribly as a result of laws enacted in our Parliament and carried out as policies of various governments. Heartfelt, fitting, emotional, potentially healing and I sensed, Spirit-led.

I was being carried along on a huge wave of communal thankfulness, of deep relief and surging hope. No tsunami this, but there were some moments in the Great Hall when the incoming joy was at risk of being dumped or of gushing out the door in disappointed and disaffected response to some of the speech of Brendan Nelson. I sat between Indigenous and non Indigenous friends, feeling the rip of hurt of those around me who



Left to right: Anne McPherson, Norma Brown, Peter Millar, Bob Douglas, Rosemary Douglas, Mary Gilchrist, Marjorie Houston, Jim Houston

were standing and clapping, their backs turned to the big screens. All I could do was hold the space between us in as prayerful a way as I could, as a swimmer does when the wave is too big and one's breath is running out. It was awful, but it was not the defining moment of the day. A bigger scene was unfolding as the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd invited the Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson to accompany him and Jenny Macklin, the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, as they paid their respects to the Elders and members of the Stolen Generations who were present as distinguished guests in the Chamber.

Outside in the Foyer afterwards I spoke with Jackie Huggins, Deputy Director of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit at the

We acknowledge

Wellspring wishes to acknowledge the contribution of the late Sir Ronald Wilson as co-author of the HREOC report 'Bringing them home,' which recommended, among other things, that the government should say sorry.

Ron was a Friend of Wellspring from its inception until his death in 2005. He believed that eventually good would overcome evil, and that justice would eventually come for the Indigenous people of Australia, even though he was very distressed that it did not happen much sooner. Let us keep on believing!

We are pleased that Ron's widow, Lady Leila Wilson, was invited by the government to attend Parliament on the day of the Apology, and understand that her son, Professor Bruce Wilson, went in her place. *(from Anne McPherson)*

University of Queensland and Co-chair of Reconciliation Australia. We said we were not going to let those difficult moments spoil the day for us. We agreed to leave them back in the Hall – reminders of what still must be addressed before all Australians understand what was done and why it was necessary to offer the Apology without qualification. To me it is the difference between the one Leader who spent two hours on the eve of the Apology in a home in a Canberra suburb listening to Nana Fejo telling him her story, and another Leader who did the research but did not sit down across the table and say, 'I want to hear what happened to you'.

The phrase 'We are sorry' repeated three times, was in my mind an echo of the three denials of Peter and the three moments of forgiveness Jesus offered him. This connection does not feel like too long a bow to draw, as we know something of Kevin Rudd's Christian beliefs. It was the giving and the receiving of the Apology that was profound, and I felt again the willingness of Indigenous people to accept, forgive and embrace us.

I walked with a friend down the hill to Federation Mall past smiling people wearing T-shirts printed with powerful words like Kinchela Boys, Sorry, Thanks and Journey of Healing, then down further towards the lake and the cleansing fire smoke at the Tent Embassy. At lunchtime, at the Australian Centre for Christianity

and Culture, an ecumenical service of prayer celebrated what we had just witnessed. There were many words but these were the ones I heard:

Anglican Archbishop Saibo Mabo, 'The bridge is connected. I am happy. I could dance an Island dance here today. We put all our gifts in one basket now, and we call that basket Reconciliation.'

Rev'd Professor James Haire, 'For Christians this is the beginning of us as a nation.'

*Gillian Hunt
Canberra*

Saying Sorry Hope Regrouped

"Goodbye, Daddy" said the pretty little four year-old, as she and her mother got out of the car outside Parliament House that bright morning, Wednesday 13th February. Just two more people among the crowd scurrying around in the hope of finding a vantage point to hear the long-delayed S-word finally offered to the stolen generations. I couldn't help wondering how many little Aboriginal children through those long years ever had the opportunity to say goodbye to Daddy or Mummy.

The day before, we had taken part in the National Convergence of Aboriginal people and their supporters, gathering at the Tent Embassy in front of the old Parliament House, joining with the small Wellspring



The group from Alice Springs - some are fourth and fifth generation 'town campers' - who spoke about the effects of the intervention

We say Sorry

... today we honour the indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment....

For the pain and hurt of those stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind

We say sorry

To the mothers and fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities

We say sorry

And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture

We say sorry

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, 13 February 2008

Community detachment from Sydney, Melbourne and locally. There had been an impromptu practice for the march up Capital Hill to the new Parliament House, shouting slogans and responses.

As I stood directly in front of the main entrance to the old building, gleaming white in the morning sun, my mind turned back to 11th November 1975 – a generation ago, when I had stood in the same spot with a colleague from the Attorney-General's Department a stone's throw away, staring in disbelief while the Governor-General's secretary read out the dismissal notice of the Whitlam Government. Arguably the greatest victims of the political upheaval were the Aboriginal people, robbed of their dawning hopes: of self-management, having their languages taught in NT primary schools, the legal aid program, incipient moves towards land rights, and maybe even a measure of sovereignty. They had been hard years, those 32. On every social indicator the people had gone backwards. Even the olive branch of reconciliation had been cruelly snatched back. The anger at their losses seemed to climax in the harsh syncopated cries of 'End the intervention. Human rights for all'.

It brought to mind the current suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act in order to facilitate the intervention by the police and the army in the NT. I recalled another

day just a few months earlier in 1975, when I heard Gough Whitlam, in the theatre of the Department just across the rose gardens, proclaim the entry into force of the Act. A significant day in contemporary Australian history. I had responsibility then for the program of community education to highlight the role of the new Act as a guarantor of equal rights and equal treatment, a new champion against the entrenched racism marring the Australian fair go. Small wonder that one of the four demands at the National Aboriginal Convergence was to restore the Racial Discrimination Act as mandated under International Law.

SORRY

A single word becomes a symbol
of hope
for a family,
for a community,
for a nation,
as a divided world in search of
healing
is momentarily
illuminated.

Peter Millar

Off we marched up the hill, chanting antiphonally. I felt privileged to be holding one pole of the Wellspring banner proclaiming our Christian commitment to reconciliation and justice. We sprawled on the grass in front of the sound stage, listening to

a sustained outpouring of anger, hurt and grief from the stolen children and other Aboriginal people who'd undertaken the long march from the Northern Territory.

Could their spirit ever be healed, their wounds assuaged? What might be the power of one word? Would it sound like a heart word or a weasel word? Yet already you sensed the muted excitement - or was it even celebration in the morning air? The crowd rippled with emotion, tears of pain, relief, joy struggling to be born. They were survivors, these people, but they were also evoking and honouring the many more who were not.

By tribal custom every one of the 20 or so from the NT communities and outstations had to be given a say. One was a community radio man, a powerful speaker, others could barely communicate in English, mike-shy probably, some spoke in the vernacular - many languages, or a mish-mash. One lamented not being able to speak his language but proudly pointed to the little boy by his side who could (a beneficiary of the current bilingual education initiatives dating from the 1970s?)

There followed the urban activists, several snarling with anger at remembered contempt and continuing deafness to their cause – only too well aware of the nationwide situation of their people, both oppressed and oppressing. It came as a relief when

after perhaps 90 minutes, a small group of men and boys enacted a hunting dance while the didgeridoos groaned.

Wednesday dawned, a brilliant Canberra summer's day, heralding one of the greatest days in many of our lives, Aboriginal and non-indigenous alike. Great crowds thronged the grassy slope of Parliament Hill, where the proceedings in the House of Representatives would be seen on large outdoor screens - access to the public galleries by invitation only. We were early enough to gain entry into the building and made for the theatre to watch in air-conditioned comfort. Suddenly there it was: the

and also with the 'Sorry, but...' reply by the Leader of the Opposition and its aftermath of a further apology to an affronted Aboriginal woman quoted without her acknowledgment.

I would only add that the following morning on ABC local Canberra radio a talkback caller identified himself as the one who had first turned his back. With strength and dignity he traversed the sad journey of his life as one of the stolen generation, and told of the pain of a re-opened wound listening to the Opposition speech. Throughout his life his wound had been a running



The Rally/Walk began with a Smoking at the Tent Embassy. People were given a twig and leaves of eucalypt and invited to add it to the fire.

the dispatch boxes. In this image of shared goodwill lies a realistic hope of truly turning a new page. Let the real work begin.

Jim Houston

I will never forget participating in the Aboriginal Convergence on Tuesday 12th February, and spending most of Wednesday 13th in Parliament House soaking up the atmosphere which was charged with joy, relief, happiness, pride, gratitude and grace.

There were many special moments. At one point on his way out of the building the Governor-General for some reason paused in his stride and shook hands with me, saying, 'Thank you for coming today'. But the moment I treasure the most was, after being accidentally bumped in the crowd by an older Aboriginal man, hearing his words, 'Sorry, Auntie.'

Marjorie Houston



Some of the crowd walking from the Tent Embassy to Parliament House on 12th February 2008

Speaker gabbling the Lord's Prayer, unbelievably in the King James Version. (Can someone please tell him that the world has turned – God's been speaking everyday English for a good 30 years now). And immediately the Prime Minister was on his feet and into it without ado.

The whole country by now is familiar with the text of the address with its robust moral and ethical dimension,

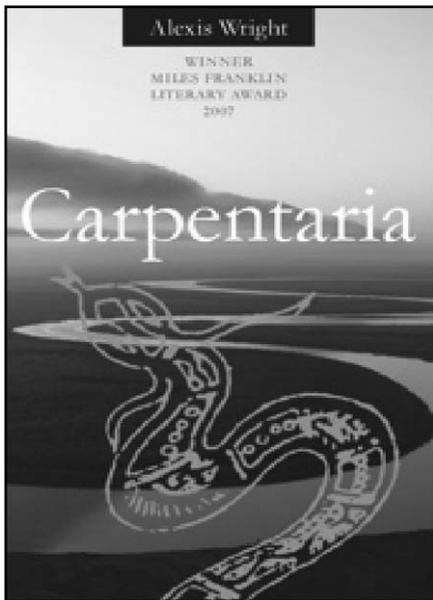
sore but the day before it had been stitched and stilled - until he heard the offensive words.

For me, perhaps understandably for a person emotionally involved in the Aboriginal struggle of the 1970s, the most heartening moment proved to be the PM's offer to the Opposition leader of a bipartisan involvement in tackling the base-level issue of housing, sealed by the proffered hand across



Wellspring people in Canberra 12th to 13th February

Book Review



***Carpentaria*, by Alexis Wright**

Publisher: Giramondo Publishing Co, 2006

I was born in Lismore in northern New South Wales. In those days Aborigines lived on the fringe of Lismore, at Gonellabah. When I was quite young I was told that ‘you don’t have anything to do with those dark people, they’re dirty’. As I grew older these remembered words felt wrong, and the plight of these “fringedwellers” became a great concern in my life.

Until now, Australian fiction with Aborigines as characters has been written by well-meaning and, indeed, eminent non-Aboriginal authors such as Katharine Susannah Prichard (*Coonardoo*), Mrs Aeneas Gunn (*We of the Never Never*), and Xavier Herbert (*Capricornia*). Now at last we have a novel by an Aboriginal author (not her first, actually). It deals with Aborigines living on the fringes of a white town called Desperance in the gulf country of northern Queensland. As if in opposition to Herbert’s novel, this is *Carpentaria* by Alexis Wright.

It is a novel peopled with a fascinating cast of characters, all with different personalities and attitudes to life. The Aborigines live in what they term ‘Pricklebush’ until conflict divides the community and some move to the other side of Desperance. The non-Aboriginal residents of Desperance are referred to as ‘Uptown’. The white settlers constructed Desperance as a port town until the river ‘simply decided to change course’ and the town was ‘left with nothing to do’. Thus the petty, self-important white officials of Uptown and the neighbouring Gurfurrit (say it out loud) mine are risible and despised: Bruiser the Mayor, Truthful the policeman, Lloydie the barman at the local pub, Gordie the fat neighbourhood watch-man. Only two non-Aborigines connect with the Pricklebush people: the strange and mysterious Elias Smith, and the Irish-Catholic priest Fr Danny.

Each of the Indigenous characters is drawn in detail, especially Norm Phantom and his family, through whom most of the story is told. Others include Norm’s wife Angel Day, the visionary Mozzie Fishman, Joseph Midnight, and Norm’s son Will who is in constant combat against the destructiveness of the mine and its cheating owners.

The Pricklebush people, while ignoring Uptown as much as possible, engage in travelling both the adjacent sea and its friendly sea-creatures, and their country which they see as ever-active, teeming with birds, animals, their ancestors, their history and their spirituality. Thus Mozzie roams the country with a cavalcade of religious Indigenous zealots, in battered cars kept going by ingenuity, tracing the songlines and ancestral resting places.

Perhaps this convoy is a metaphor for the themes and rambling structure of the novel. And both the climax and conclusion are brilliant!

Terrible events happen: petrol-sniffing children blamed for a murder are bashed and thrown into jail (with subsequent deaths in custody), white men force themselves on black girls and then disown the ensuing children, black workers are exploited and destroyed by the mine, and there is a total ignorance and lack of respect for the humanity and skills of the Aborigines and their traditional lands and sacred sites.

The great delight of this book, however, is that all events, good and bad, are told from an Indigenous viewpoint. There is humour in their opinions of politicians from ‘down south’ flying in to the township, shaking a few hands, and then flying out again without changing anything. There’s a dry, funny, common-sense commentary on the actions of the white population who choose to live in the gulf country and the next wave of mining company invaders. Characters express a mixture of Christian and Aboriginal Spirituality, while Aboriginal Dreaming is described lovingly. Events of great emotion and pathos occur, such as Norm finding and taking care of his grandson Bala.

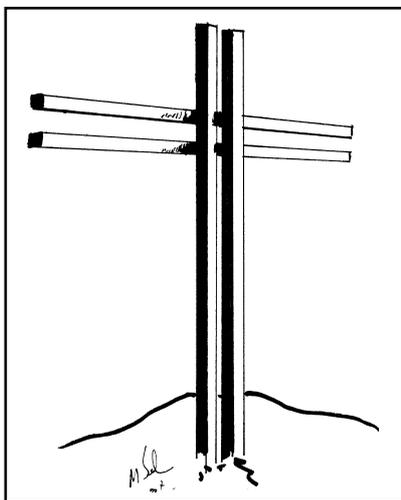
The narrator tells the story in a colloquial style which draws on the Aboriginal oral tradition of storytelling. It consists of big themes with little stories in between, making this book a grand, contemporary Australian epic. Echoes of Eugene Stockton’s words came back to me: ‘they taunt and frustrate mainstream Australia in their gypsy-like scorn for what the rest of us hold to be

deadly important...’ (*Waymarks*), and ‘according to Aboriginal intuition, the land and all within is alive, conscious and aware’ (*Wonder*).

At my Book Club meeting of 12 people, only 4 (including me) greeted this novel with enthusiasm. ‘I didn’t like it’, ‘I was bored’, ‘I struggled to get to the end’, and others were lukewarm. It is long (519 pages), it does ramble, but it has, it seems to me, an Aboriginal structure as it moves effortlessly from one topic to another in the same chapter, where in the middle of action it will branch off to Dreaming, only to return several chapters later to pick up the story of what happened to the issue left up in the air some 50 pages earlier. This irritated a number of my fellow Book Club members.

I loved this novel, and other critics have admired it as well: it won the Miles Franklin Prize, Premiers Awards in Victoria and Queensland, the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal and the ABIA Literary Fiction Book of the Year. After the thrilling joy and deep emotion of the Prime Minister’s ‘Sorry’ day, this novel took me further along the track of understanding and respect for our fellow Indigenous Australians. I commend it to all Wellspring members, and especially to those on the Aboriginal Reconciliation network.

Jeannie Walker



A wee small biography from the Editor

A war baby (that is, born during the Second World War), I grew up on a sheep farm in NSW. My mother suffered depression when my brother and I were very little. It was discovered that my brother was deaf-and-dumb and he needed to go to Sydney to be educated. It was a very lonely childhood for me, and while my parents’ families have always been strong Christians, I did not feel they formed a very warm, supportive community. The emphasis was on independence.

I married a Public Servant (an Agronomist/Extension Officer with the Department of Primary Industries), and we have four children (two born in Darwin, two in Miles, Qld); but our marriage had broken up by the early ’90s. However, while in Townsville, thanks to Gough Whitlam’s free university education policy, I was able to graduate with a BA from James Cook University. I’ve moved many times, and wonder what life is like for a person to spend his or her whole life in the same town, surrounded by family and the same set of friends. A son and a daughter live in Melbourne, a daughter near Ulladulla in NSW, and another son is working in Jakarta. I have 4 grandchildren, with another due in July. Life has been interesting and challenging for me, if at times very

painful and confusing; my greatest joy is my children and their families, who I don’t see often enough. What keeps me focussed, however, is my connection to the Pitt Street Uniting Church, the Wellspring Community and the Iona Community – such interesting, not-so-diverse groups spread across Sydney, Australia and the world. I’ve been a Friend of Wellspring for about 4 years and am now seeking to become a Member. I am attracted to the commitment of living by the Rule of the Community.

Bonita Frank



Bonita with her Melbourne grandchildren, Soraya and Remy

PIPELINE - THEME FOR JUNE ISSUE: “Restoring our Land”.
Fiona Cockingham will be the Editor-in-Chief for this issue.

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Pipeline now has an editorial committee of three. Please feel free to contact any one of us. Letters to the editor are most welcome

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POSITION VACANT: Nungalinga Principal

Applications are being sought for the position of Principal of Nungalinga College in Darwin. Anyone interested in this position, please ring Rev Neil Forgie 08 8941 7440 or visit <http://www.nungalinga.edu.au>

Centenary of Week of Prayer for Christian Unity

Making all things new – moving towards the Church for which Jesus prayed –

in which his followers would “be one”, that the world might believe”.

John 17:21

Can you imagine trying to explain how members of some groups within the Christian Church had condemned or cut themselves off from each other for nearly 500 years, some for 1,000 years and others for 1,500 years? It is hardly surprising that, during and since the global missionary efforts of the nineteenth century, there has been huge confusion when new Christian converts, for instance, encountered other Christians who would not accept them at the Lord's table.

Orthodox Christians have always prayed for the unity of the church. A century ago an annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity began. We are tempted to say how slow progress has been. Younger generations seem to 'just get on with it', ignoring the differences. However, if the world is to make any sense of the Gospel, it needs to actually see the visible unity of the church, a church living out its founder's prayer.

We may lament that we are not further along the journey, but this centenary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity is a great opportunity to give thanks that in the past hundred years all those major rifts between the Eastern and Western churches and between Protestants, Anglicans and Roman Catholics have seen breakthroughs so that now brothers and sisters in Christ can at last greet each other in love and fellowship. The World Council of Churches (WCC) enables them to work together in areas such as in the response to human need in disasters,

and emergencies arising from wars and in working for justice and peace in many places.

We can rejoice that the Iona Community has been a catalyst in drawing together for action Christians from many traditions. So too, the Taizé Community in France attracts tens of thousands of young people each year from every Christian tradition and beyond, to pray together, so breaking down barriers and building up trust. A very recent example comes from Geneva, where around 40,000 young people met between Christmas and New Year 2008 and heard Br Alois, leader of the Taizé Community, call them to initiate in their own situations, prayer vigils for reconciliation, for the unity of the church.

Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 4th-11th May, 2008

Loving God

In the perfect unity of your being,

keep our hearts so burning with the desire and hope for unity that we will never stop praying and working for the sake of your gospel.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

Recent landmarks include: the November 2007 Global Christian Forum near Nairobi where WCC member, Pentecostal and broader Evangelical church leaders dialogued; a meeting in Rome on 25 January between the Pope and the General Secretary of the WCC (representing around 350 national churches) to celebrate the centenary of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. At the end of January also, Australian

secular newspapers reported, under the headline, “Churches unite in leap of faith”, a joint venture of a formal covenant between the Catholic Dioceses of Maitland-Newcastle and Broken Bay and the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle. They will covenant to meet for an annual ecumenical service of worship, an annual joint clergy day, annual exchange of pulpits and exploration of possibilities for sharing church plant.

Our Australian celebration of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, 4-11 May, 2008, provides the chance to join in the world wide theme and use the materials (jointly prepared by the WCC & the Vatican), ‘Pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess 5:17). God is indeed making all things new - calling us into this life giving process for the Church.

Access 2008 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity materials through www.churchestogetherinprayer.org.au or phone NCCA/NSW Ecumenical Council 02 92992215. Like to share news of exciting ecumenical activity in your area? Please contact me so I can pass on the good news. Jenny Johnston Ph 02 49733920 or Email lance.jen@bigpond.com

*Jenny Johnston, Contact for
Ecumenical and Interfaith Issues*

Invitation to join a Celtic Pilgrimage.

Doug Hewitt advises that in August/September 2008 the NSW Ecumenical Council is arranging a Pilgrimage to sites in Ireland, Scotland and the north of England. Over three weeks the pilgrims will spend time at Corrymeela, Iona, Lindisfarne and Whitby, and visit other religious centres with Celtic links. A few places are still available. For further information contact Kathy Moroney on (02) 9299 2215, or kmoroney@ncca.org.au.

Round the world in search of enlightenment

In the past 12 months, I have had three overseas trips, giving papers on my research into the links between religion, media and popular culture, and sharing ideas with scholars and church workers. These were my first overseas adventures since 2005, when I was invited to speak at a conference in Tokyo which examined the place of religion in various Asian-Pacific societies

In my 77th year, for the first time in my life, I have a university card identifying me as a full-time student, although I have spent years studying, and acquiring certificates, which I guess I could put up on my study wall, if I could remember where I put them.

And I am suddenly being invited to speak at various conferences and gatherings, and being listened to, as if my opinions and the findings of my research were of some significance. It's all a little hard to believe, especially after bringing up four children, none of whom take much notice of my opinions or suggestions!

In June last year, I completed an MA in religious studies at the University of Queensland and was invited to join their doctoral program to work for a second PhD. My project is to interview journalists in various parts of Australia who write about religion, seeing how they cope with what I call the 'cultural dissonance' between the beliefs and values of the great religions and the beliefs and values of popular culture, which are both reflected and fostered in the media.

In March last year I chaired a series of studies of the Scriptures of the great world religions at the Wellspring Gathering in Canberra. In April, I

gave papers on 'religion and popular culture in Australia' at Oxford university, and, the following week, at another conference in Södertorn University, Stockholm. I was also able to visit Gallipoli, where my grandfather served in 1915, and visit the Islamic Study Centre in Istanbul.

In July, I was reviewing Gary Bouma's stimulating new book *Australian Soul* at a conference at the University of Western Sydney, and in January this year, I was in Manila reflecting on the theology of the 'virtual church' -- religious programs on TV and the internet.

In November, I travelled to Hong Kong, Damascus, Jerusalem, London and Denver sharing ideas with other scholars, and talking to clergy, reflecting on the links between religion, media and popular culture in very different cultures, and spending some days at the Islamic study centre in Damascus. A tiring but stimulating six-weeks' journey.

Quite a few scholars are reflecting on the influence of the media on religious and secular beliefs in a variety of cultures in a number of universities worldwide, but most of them are 'outsiders' -- they have no particular religious beliefs and they have not worked in the media. My approach has to be different, in that I have been working in the media and teaching about the media and serving as a lay minister at the same time for more than 50 years. So mine is an 'insider's' view. Some scholars will not accept it, because of that.

And what have I learned from all this study and all this travel and all this discussion? Besides what other people are doing and thinking?

That religion is in the academic spotlight, as more and more sociologists and historians and psychologists and others reflect on the rapid changes going on in almost every part of the world and try to explain them, and try to predict what could happen next. The American Association for the Study of Religion has more than 14,000 members, the Australian Association around 300 members.

In Oxford, I heard about the impact of the social phenomenon of 'believing but not belonging' -- more and more people, particularly young people, are rejecting the church as an institution while continuing to believe in God and in the teachings of Jesus.

In Stockholm I discovered how religion is being pushed more and more to the edges of many societies, as the American 'cultural empire' expands. In some cities, there are as many MacDonaldis as there are churches, mosques or temples!

In Damascus I saw the impact of tight government controls over religion, in its efforts to suppress fundamentalism and radicalism. There are also issues with the personality cult of the president, whose picture hangs on every lamppost, and every school and every government building. Some of these images are floodlight at night, like shrines, complementing the mosques (which are also floodlit!).

In Denver, I read and discussed the records of scholars' interviews

- with families on how the media had helped to shape their beliefs and their behaviour, and
- with journalists about the issues of reconciling their own beliefs with

the professed standards of 'objective' reporting in the media.

More and more people are studying religion but, in many countries, fewer and fewer people are practising it. Maybe that is why not all of us see change as change for the better. Maybe, too, that is why Wellspring is so important, in helping us both to build up our faith and to live our faith in particular areas of concern. As James reminds us, 'if we are hearers of the word only, and not doers, we deceive ourselves'. (Ja 1.22)

From a bemused Douglas Golding

News from Friends HUNTER CELL GROUP

Prayer invocations for the land and its first people

When our cell group meets now, we commence our gathering with an agape meal that Helen and Keith Weavers adapted for our group from sources used in the Iona Community. At the opening of this prayer/ritual we have begun to incorporate one of the invocations for the land and its first peoples to be found in the book by Trish Watts and Gabriel Lord titled *Sanctuary: Where Heaven Meets Earth*. Judith Keller has copies of the agape meal prayer used by the Hunter cell group and would be happy to forward a copy by email upon request. Her email is kellsull@ozemail.com.au (JK).

Judith has recently had an article published in *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* titled, 'Songs of the Australian Landscape: The Art and Spirituality of Rosalie Gascoigne'. Details of the publication are available from the *Pacifica* website: http://www.pacifica.org.au/current_issue/. Wellspring people whose areas of concern are spirituality and worship or the environment may be interested, and Judith is happy to forward a copy. Her email details are above.



Some of the Wellspring group that attended the Convergence Day Rally to protest about the NT Intervention and the need for Compensation



A wonderful smiling woman inside the Great Hall in Paliament House, Canberra on Apology Day, Wednesday 13th February 2008

Meeting the Black Panther in Australia

When I woke up in sunny, but very cold, Sydney on the morning of July 2nd 2007, I never for a moment thought that the day would contain a once-in-a-lifetime experience! For the 2nd of July was the day when for the first (and presumably last) time I met face to face with the legendary black panther of the Blue Mountains in New South Wales.

This is a true story! I was not drunk, nor drug-induced, nor hallucinating, although as you know all those (or some of them at least) may have been possibilities. I was my calm self, aware and open to life! And in that openness to life and to new experiences I became the 281st human being to have the privilege of sighting the big cat which was first recorded in the Blue Mountains in 1835. (See the Big Cats of Australia web site.)

A little of the background. On the morning of July 2nd I travelled up

from the centre of Sydney to the Blue Mountains to work on a book with close friend and colleague Anne McPherson, a former Leader of the Wellspring Community. Anne has cancer, and writing a book with her was to be a very special experience.

While with Anne in her small home near the beautiful village of Kurrajong Hills, I went out for a short walk and to buy some apples in the neighbouring village of Bilpin which lies at the heart of some amazingly rich and large apple orchards. (If you ever have chance, go to Bilpin for apples – they are fantastic and cheap!) The orchards themselves are surrounded by the ancient bush of the Blue Mountains - a largely uninhabited area (apart from on its edges) which stretches for hundreds of square miles and which through the centuries has been home to many indigenous communities.

On my way backed from Bilpin, I stopped the car and walked about a mile into the bush. It was cold and it was getting dark. I walked down a steep path to a gorge and then on my return a strange animal crossed my path, halted some yards above me on the slope, looked around and then after a couple of minutes disappeared into the darkening bush. I looked at my watch and it was 3.40.p.m. I had kept looking at this large black creature with its strong face and bushy tail but had no clue what it was. On the way back to the car I thought how little I knew about the animals of the bush – despite having walked so often in bush land. Who was my companion on the lonely trail?

Later that evening when I recounted this meeting in the bush to Anne she seemed very surprised and asked me to once again describe this animal in detail. When I had completed my tale, Anne immediately came to the conclusion that I had seen, at very close quarters, the legendary big cat, known as the black panther, of the Blue Mountains. (The panther has also been sighted in the state of Victoria

many hundreds of miles south of the Blue Mountains.)

The rest, as they say, is history. My sighting has been recorded by various groups in Australia who are tracking the black panther (no one is clear how many panthers there actually are) and the tale has been recounted by me and many others. In all my travels in Australia I have never met a person who has seen the big cat, and many friends told me that they thought it was only a legendary creature like the Loch Ness monster in Scotland. So there we are – the wee Scots guy, out to buy a bag of apples, and the elusive black panther meet face to face on a cold winter afternoon. A moment not to be forgotten. (And just by the way, several expeditions mounted over the years, to track and film this big cat have never had clear sightings of it!)

The Reflection

But I can't leave it at that! As I think about this encounter with the black panther, several things come to mind. When I saw this animal I had absolutely no idea what it was. At that moment it was just a strange animal. I had never heard that a black panther roamed the bush, and I knew nothing of earlier sightings. The historical and social narrative concerning this creature only came later. Now I am not able to go back to that 'raw experience' without being aware of all the other facts. When I met the panther, he or she had no hinterland of meaning, but now, having received so much information about the big cat of the mountains, the animal has a huge hinterland of history etc. One example. I did not see it as a 'dangerous animal' but when I was later asked if I would have gone down that path on my own on a dark afternoon, knowing that a panther might be there, I replied that I may have thought twice before setting off. My initial experience remains the same, but my understanding of what I saw that afternoon has totally changed. Others have told me the story of the panther. All I saw was an

unknown animal.

Which brings me to the person of Jesus Christ. None of us have had what I would call a 'raw encounter' with Jesus. Yes, we may have had a personal experience of Christ in our lives as millions, through the ages, have claimed. I feel that in my own life I have encountered and been changed by the one we know as Christ. I can say that I have some certainty about that, as can many others. But in what sense was the Jesus who met me on life's road an 'unknown Jesus'? He could not be. The Christian narrative has been held in my family for centuries. It has been held in my culture for centuries. It has been held in the world's narrative for centuries. And it has been 'interpreted' by the Christian church for centuries. We may be able to 'imagine' something of Christ's life 2000 years ago (a task which personally I find very difficult) but the meaning of his life does not, and cannot come to us raw. We meet a Christ who is embedded in his story (a story of the centuries) and that fact interests me a lot. For the early disciples it must have been very different. Or am I wrong? Was their encounter raw or also filtered through a wider story?

Who was that panther? Who is that panther? Who was this person Jesus? And what are the links to that Jesus of history and the 'filtered' Jesus we hear about today? Does it matter that we have never encountered a 'raw Jesus'? Biblical scholars will write about this till the end of time, but my encounter with an unknown Australian animal has raised theological issues! Who is this Jesus we meet in our lives? It would be great to have a response – even if you've never seen our friend in the bush. I can assure you he's there!

*Peter Millar,
Edinburgh, October 2007.*

[This article appears on the Wellspring website: it is printed here for the benefit of those who don't have easy access to the internet. Ed.]

PRAYER FOR THE JOURNEY OF HEALING

(with thanks to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission)

Almighty and loving God, you who created ALL people in your image,

Lead us to seek your compassion as we listen to the stories of our past.

You gave your only son, Jesus, who died and rose again so that sins will be forgiven.

We place before you the pain and anguish of dispossession of land, language, lore, culture and family kinship that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced.

We live in faith that all people will rise from the depths of despair and hopelessness.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have endured the pain and loss of loved ones, through the separation of children from their families.

We are sorry and ask Your forgiveness.

Touch the hearts of the broken, homeless and inflicted and heal their spirits.

In your mercy and compassion walk with us as we continue our journey of healing to create a future that is just and equitable.

Lord, you are our hope.

Amen

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