

THE WELLSRING COMMUNITY INC

PILGRIMAGE 2003



A TRYSTING PLACE WITH THE
LIVING GOD

NEIL HOLM

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THE PILGRIMAGE

I feel quite blessed to have the opportunity to put these materials together. It is a good discipline to do a little more reading or to dip back into materials previously read. I am finding the discipline of revisiting these materials each day to be very rewarding.

In the beginning my daily meditation on the pilgrimage materials focussed on our July experience. However, I now find that I am operating in both the present sense of pilgrimage and the future sense. Last night I read Day 5 of the last instalment. I focussed on Psalm 121 using Jim Cotter's version. I am facing some difficult and contentious decisions at work. Suddenly the "lurking terrors, stormy winds, avalanches, and trackless scree" took on new meaning! No one is forcing me to make these decisions. No one would know if I decided to avoid them. Suddenly being "tempted to slide back into the bliss of oblivion" was real. But yet I felt the "lure of my Lover and the strong hand grasping my own" so I "discovered my faltering Yes."

Your comments and contributions have been great. I am encouraged. I have heard from Lynette Benge, Peggy Goldsmith, Ailsa Maley, and Jack and Peg Goodluck. In addition, about 25 people who are not going on the pilgrimage have signed up to receive the materials. Jack and Peg sent some reflections and I have included some of their thoughts.

At this stage, the original schedule seems to be holding together:

Instalment 3:	March/April	Finding spiritual meaning in nature and animals
Instalment 4:	April/May	Finding spiritual meaning in relationships
Instalment 5:	May/June	Finding spiritual meaning in the stranger or the other
Instalment 6:	June/July	Great pilgrims and great pilgrimages.

I want to continue to commend Eugene Stockton's writings to you. One of the joys of preparing these materials has been to discover Eugene's work. He has said that the Wellspring Community is helping to fill an important gap in his life. He is now filling an important gap in the life of the Community. His vision for a spirituality for Australia is well worth considering. I have been very impressed with the way in which he is able to draw together his strong Christian faith and a deep understanding of the nature of both indigenous and non-indigenous Australia. His later books are *The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation* and *Wonder: A Way to God*. Contact the Wellspring Community Bookshop for copies.

I have shortened the length of each day. I hope you enjoyed having two day 4s in the last instalment. I just got carried away! We did not budget well for this material and the photocopying is costing more than we realised.

Please continue to send material that you think might be useful. Remember that this is a cooperative effort. It is not too late to offer to prepare an instalment!

I would be thrilled to get some responses by 3 April.

Salem-al-salakim--Peace

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Day 1: Sensing the presence of God in the world.

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat, *Spiritual Literacy: Reading the Sacred in Everyday Life* (Scribner: New York, 1996)

Nature provides a theater for some of our most dramatic experiences of the sacred. Most people can tell you about a time when they were soothed, inspired, or awed while contemplating the natural world.

The settings may vary but the feelings are universal. Communion with nature may take place while walking through the woods, watching a sunset, fishing in a mountain stream, looking at the waves of the ocean, observing the ripples on a lake, or sitting under a tree in a park.

Often these occasions turn into mystical moments when we sense that all the inhabitants of the world - the trees, flowers, fields, streams, hills, rocks, dolphins, bears, birds, and babies - are our relations, as Native Americans express it. When this happens, we have started to read the book of nature.

Both the historical and the primal religions emphasize the importance of the natural world as a reservoir of spiritual meaning. For Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the Earth reflects the glories of God. Buddhists, Hindus, and Taoists look for the connections between nature and human nature.

For the aboriginal peoples of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia, the land and all the creatures upon it are spiritual teachers who must be listened to and taken seriously. The shamans of these groups are those who understand the languages of stones, plants, trees, and animals. (page 123)

....

People are always telling Fred and me that we need to get out in nature more, but the park is nature, I reply. This year I began a spiritual discipline of walking around its perimeter every day. I try to practice attention, hospitality, and wonder on these short walks and allow the trees, bushes, birds, and animals to speak to me. Then I record the day's experiences in my journal. Here is an example.

June 22: It rained last night and the park today looks like it has been through the wash and the colors have all come out clean. The grass is greener, the leaves darker, the flowers brighter, the soil richer, the animals friskier. Why is it that we wake up, see a dark overcast sky, and declare glumly, "It's raining." Today the rain seems a blessing, a relief a gift-like the rain that drenches Lancelot and Gueneviere in the movie First Knight. He tips a leaf so the rain water flows into her mouth. I could drink rain from a leaf today too. (page 136)

....

"Faith is the touching of a mystery," writes Alexander Schmemmann, a Russian Orthodox priest. "It is to perceive another dimension to absolutely everything in the world. In faith, the mysterious meaning of life comes through. ...To speak in the simplest possible terms: faith sees, knows, senses the presence of God in the world." (page 152)

....

"Consider the lilies of the field," Jesus says in the Bible, and it's reported that the nineteenth-century poet Emily Dickinson claimed that was the only commandment she never broke.

I don't think it is enough appreciated how much an outdoor book the Bible is. It is a "hupaethral book," such as Thoreau talked about - a book open to the sky. It is best read and understood outdoors, and the farther outdoors the better. Or that has been my experience of it. Passages that within walls seem improbable or incredible, outdoors seem merely natural. This is because outdoors we are confronted everywhere with wonders; we see that the miraculous is not extraordinary but the common mode of existence. It is our daily bread. Who ever really has considered the lilies of the field or the birds of the air and pondered the improbability of their existence in this warm world within the cold and empty stellar distances will hardly balk at the turning of water into wine - which was, after all, a very small miracle. We forget the greater and still continuing miracle by which water (with soil and sunlight) is turned into grapes.

-WENDELL BERRY

in *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community* (page 129)

Suggestions

1. Read Matthew 6:19-34. Think about its context: In Chapter 4, after being in the wilderness, Jesus withdraws to Galilee where he begins calling the disciples. They go all around Galilee preaching and healing. Great crowds from Galilee, the Ten Towns, Jerusalem, Judea and beyond the Jordan follow them. In Chapter 5 Jesus leaves the crowds, goes up the mountain where he gives the Sermon on the Mount to the disciples. Chapter 6 continues this talk to the disciples. Like these disciples, we have left homes and families. We are on a pilgrimage with Jesus. Find a lonely “mountain” near you. Imagine that you are part of all that happens in Chapters 4-6. Take up Wendell Berry’s suggestion of reading the Bible outdoors. What happens?
2. Go on a nature retreat. Take an hour or two or a whole day to be silent and observe. How is God speaking to you?
3. Reflect on this poem by Mary Oliver. Can you imagine sleeping in the desert on our pilgrimage? Does it call for a creative response?

SLEEPING IN THE FOREST
I thought the earth
remembered me, she
took me back so tenderly, arranging
her dark skirts, her pockets
full of lichens and seeds. I slept
as never before, a stone
on the riverbed, nothing
between me and the white fire of the stars
but my thoughts, and they floated
light as moths among the branches

*of the perfect trees. All night
I heard the small kingdoms breathing
around me, the insects, and the birds,
who do their work in the darkness. All night
I rose and fell, as if in water, grappling
with a luminous doom. By morning
I had vanished at least a dozen times
into something better.*
MARY OLIVER in *The Twelve Moons* (page
128, 129)

4. Revisit your “magic moments created by nature”. What was God saying to you at these times. If they are available, you may like to rent the two French films by Eric Rohmer. In *Summer*, a young woman’s new lease of life comes through a ray of the setting sun – a green flash. In *Four Adventures of Reinette and Mirabelle* a country girl and a city girl get up in the early hours to witness a silent point in time between the night and dawn.

Day 2: Spiritual Earthiness

Eugene Stockton, *Landmarks*, Chapter 6: The Good Earth (*Eastwood: Parish Ministry Publications, 1990*).

The chapter will repay careful reading. Eugene’s suggestions for celebration and the biblical references on page 52 are worth pursuing.

Take time to reflect on the passages Eugene quotes eg Romans 8, Psalms 104, 148

Another Eugene (Eugene Peterson) practises a kind of spiritual earthiness that he draws from Wendell Berry who I referred to in Day 1. In *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*, Peterson says that he has learned much of his pastoral theology from Berry. He describes Berry as a farmer who ploughs fields and plants crops and who writes novels, poems and essays. In books like *The Gift of Good Land*, Berry contends that a farm is a small-scale eco-system, everything working with everything else in certain rhythms and proportions. The farmer's task is to understand the rhythms and proportions and then to nurture their health. Peterson sees his role as pastor of a congregation in the same terms. He draws on Berry’s understanding of the importance of topsoil to see the congregation as topsoil. Does this analogy work for you in your workplace or at home?

Eugene Stockton reminds us that God breathed the breath of life into all creation. Mary Oliver says she heard the small kingdoms breathing around her. So often we miss this sense of teeming life around us. Barbara Kingsolver has written a great novel, *Prodigal Summer*, in which she captures so well the teemingness of life, the sense that we live in a truly prodigal creation.

Day 3: The Creator's Handiwork

Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2001).

It is no accident that the Old Testament was the first ancient literature to celebrate the glories of nature, for its authors recognised the Creator's handiwork.

Yes, but is it friendly? Another scientist, the naturalist Loren Eiseley, tells of an event he calls the most significant learning experience of his long life. Caught on a beach in a sudden rain-storm, he sought shelter under a huge piece of driftwood where he found a tiny fox cub, maybe ten weeks old, which as yet had no fear of humans. Within a few minutes it had engaged Eiseley in a playful game of tug-of-war, with Eiseley holding one end of a chicken bone in his mouth and the baby fox pulling on the other end. The lesson he learned, said Eiseley, is that at the core of the universe, the face of God wears a smile.

I have had my own encounters with foxes, now that I live in Colorado. When three cubs were born in a den across a ravine, I fancied myself a latter-day St Francis and decided to befriend them. I sat near their den on a cushion and wrote my books and articles until soon the cubs became accustomed to me. (The first time, I announced my undetected presence by saying, 'Hi!' and they bolted in the air as if struck by lightning.) They peered at me inquisitively, golden eyes alert, ears twitching to every sound, their unscarred red coats glistening in the sun. Eventually the three began following me and I felt like the Pied Piper. If I stopped, they stopped, and hid behind a rock or bush. If I ran, they ran too. If I sat for a picnic lunch, they surrounded me and watched me eat.

As the summer progressed, I would stand in my driveway and whistle; on command, the three handsome young foxes came bounding across the ravine. They stalked butterflies in a patch of wild flowers, batting at them like a cat. They gave clumsy chase to wily squirrels. They dodged in and out of the spray of the sprinklers watering our grass. They stood on their hind legs and lapped water from our birdbath -once jumping back in alarm when a skim of ice reflected their own faces. If I threw a tennis ball, one would chase it down and take off running, the other two in hot pursuit.

All summer I had three companions. As I weeded the garden, cut the grass or read the mail in a hammock, they followed my every move. If I ate lunch on our wooden balcony, they would climb the steps to join me. If I sat outdoors to write, they would observe me for a while, then curl up, white-tipped tails folded across their eyes, and go to sleep. I felt a thrilling flashback to Eden, when fear had not yet arisen between the species, and a flash-forward to heaven, when the lamb shall lie down with the lamb and the fox shall curl up with the writer. I learned, like Eiseley, that at the heart of the universe a smile is found. 'The beauty of the world,' said Simone Weil, 'is Christ's tender smile for us coming through matter.' We glimpse it only rarely on this defaced planet, but that glimpse reveals as much reality as all theology books stacked together.

Gradually, music and romantic love and especially nature softened the incessant monotone of despair inside that had nagged me like a dull pain. I came to see the despair as a normal symptom of fallen humanity estranged from its Creator. Somehow, I needed to reconnect.

Chesterton had pointed to St Francis, who learned his proper state from 'Brother Sun' and 'Sister Moon', and who saw inexhaustible beauty in the humblest weed, like a dandelion. In a memorable passage, Chesterton contrasts our state with that of God, who

is strong enough to exult in monotony. It is possible that God says every morning, 'Do it again' to the sun; and every evening, 'Do it again' to the moon. It may not be automatic necessity that makes all daisies alike; it may be that God makes every daisy separately, but has never got tired of making them. It may be that He has the eternal appetite of infancy; for we have sinned and grown old, and our Father is younger than we.

Bit by bit, nature helped to rejuvenate in me that appetite of infancy.

I AM NOT FRANCIS, however, and unlike the saint of Assisi I keep finding mixed messages in nature. What glimpse of the Creator might I draw from the *Cecidomyian* gall midge, whose young hatch inside their mother and literally eat their way out, devouring the mother as they go? Or from the *Xenon peckii* fly, sightless and flightless, which spends its entire life inside the innards of a paper wasp, feeding on it? Or the tiny Amazon *Candiru* catfish that swims its way up the urethra of an unsuspecting bather, then extends its sharp spines, causing excruciating pain that can only be mitigated by surgical removal? Even my beloved foxes: eight times I have seen them catch a squirrel in my back yard, a

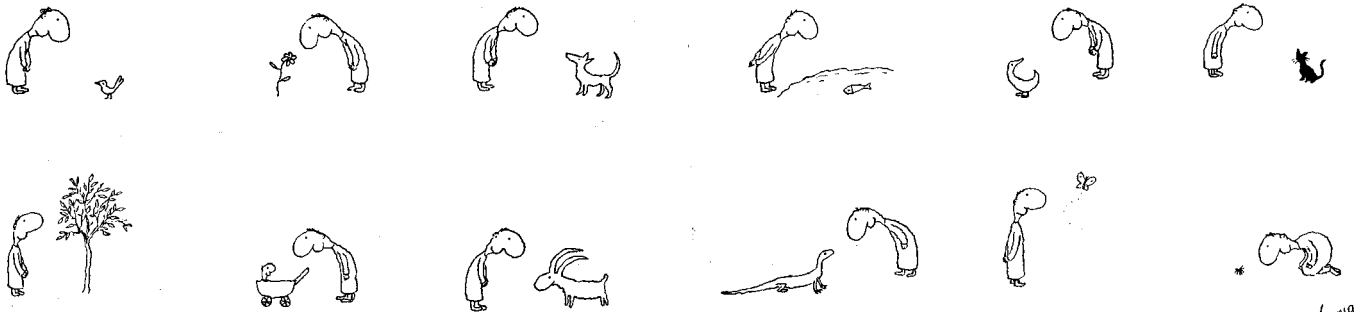
bloody, shrieking affair that one does not easily put out of mind. Yesterday I watched a bull elk in rut, snorting, urinating, sweating and crashing with horns lowered towards all males in sight, hardly a winsome image of romantic love.

Here, too, Chesterton proved a helpful guide. He countered pantheism and modern cosmic religion with the strong assertion in *Orthodoxy* that 'Nature is not our mother; Nature is our sister.' God created both the natural world and human beings as any artist creates, forming something separate from himself and then setting it free. 'God had written, not so much a poem, but rather a play; a play he had planned as perfect, but which had necessarily been left to human actors and stage-managers, who had since made a great mess of it.' (pages 48, 49)

SUGGESTIONS

1. You may like to meditate on this Leunig cartoon

A man meets twelve great spiritual leaders



2. *The Eagle* by Robert Harris in *The Oxford Book of Australian Religious Verse* edited by Kevin Hart (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 87,88

All day the telephones rasp
and nothing in the city can
discern you in its mother tongue,
if you are alone
or at your desk,
dark haired, a lily of Solomon, walking in
grace at seventeen.

Not the telephone, the intercom,
or the electronic Adler,
the cabinets and birthday cards
and cafe-bar beside the blinds
which horizontalise the view. Nothing will do,
though the suburbs stretch to sunset,
nothing will prove a substitute

for clearer air, though all day
the typewriter chatters, but at
the self's fringes
you feel the insistent, slight pressure
lifting you from earth to prayer.
There, in His praises,

the eagle rests on an updraft,
as He dwells above time in His praises,
past and future. And those who pray
with you know also that each heart's a desert,
flesh is as grass, its joy as a wildflower.
But the eagle rests, a freed spirit,
and the lilies rise with the river.

3. Try to look at nature as St Francis did:

St. Francis was not a lover of nature. Properly understood, a lover of nature was precisely what he was not. The phrase implies accepting the material universe as a vague environment, a sort of sentimental pantheism. . . . For St. Francis nothing was ever in the background. We might say that his mind had no background, except perhaps that divine darkness out of which the divine love had called up every coloured creature one by one. He saw everything as dramatic, distinct from its setting, not all of a piece like a picture but in action like a play. A bird went by him like an arrow; something with a story and a purpose, though it was a purpose of life and not a purpose of death. A bush could stop him like a brigand; and indeed he was as ready to welcome the brigand as the bush.

In a word, we talk about a man who cannot see the wood for the trees. St. Francis was a man who did not want to see the wood for the trees. He wanted to see each tree as a separate and almost a sacred thing, being a child of God and therefore a brother or sister of man.

(From GK Chesterton, *St Francis of Assisi*, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), pages 102, 103.)

Day 4: A Spiritual Landscape

Eugene Stockton, *The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation, (Chapter 5: Tradition Religion)* (Millennium Books, Alexandria, 1995).

There pre-existed a formless mass of matter, dark and featureless, from which mother-like emerged, as from sleep, the first beings. These ancestral beings assumed various shapes and appearances, both human and animal, such that one might at times act and look like a specific animal and at other times like a human. In an intense burst of creative activity these beings moved across the landscape shaping its physical features as they can now be seen- indeed there was not a landmark which did not have its story. These ancestors gave rise to living forms, each founding a line of descendants comprising a living species and their human counterparts linked as a single totem or Dreaming.

This period of intense creativity was as yet without law or morality, as different totemic ancestors in their travels and exploits negotiated, experimented, tested the options until they were finally closed and the boundaries were set for the living and acting of the descendant line. So the ancestral spirits gave to each living form its own law, fixed for all time and written on the landscape. Some of these ancestral beings were culture heroes who taught humans how to hunt, to make fire and utensils, to perform ceremony and all that was important for survival.

At length, after completing their tasks and overcome by weariness, they sank back into their original slumber. Some vanished into the ground whence they first emerged, others turned into the physical features of the landscape, leaving behind a trail of their life, the spirit-children yet to be born in the form of their ancestor. Though immobilised, these creator spirits did not cease to be alive, powerful and conscious. This creative activity continues through the life-force latent in their resting place, in sites of significance for their story and in their various transformations. Their transformations include not only specific landmarks, but also sacred objects of many kinds, totemic emblems, images, participants in ceremony and especially in their totemic descendants. (page 53)

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The land has a story to tell. Since every feature of the landscape was formed by ancestral spirits of the Dreaming, to an unlettered people the land is a concrete record of creative events which still persist. As Aborigines move through this country they are constantly recalling the primordial happenings associated with each landmark, while back at the camp site they rehearse that memory in myth, ceremony and painting. So the story is written on the landscape. It is no surprise to hear an Aboriginal person say 'The land is my bible', or of developers, 'They are ripping a page out of my bible'. Just as the bible is a book that is not meant to sit on a bookshelf but be opened and read and digested, so the land is a record to be noted. According to Stanner:

They had found in the world about them what they took to be signs of intent towards men, and they had transformed those signs into *assurances* of life under mystical nurture.

And again,

But most of the choir and furniture of heaven and earth are regarded by the Aborigines as a vast sign-system. Anyone who, understandingly, has moved in the Australian bush with Aboriginal associates becomes aware of the fact. He moves, not in a landscape, but in a humanised realm saturated with significations. Here 'something happens'; there 'something portends'. Aborigines, seeing the signs, defer to the significations; and watching others do so, seem to understand why.

The story calls for response. The ancestral spirits who gave form and life to the land and to all its inhabitants, also encoded in the landscape an ethical system to be entrusted to their descendants, both human and non-human. Again, on the analogy of the bible, which the Jew also calls the Law (*Torah*), so the Aboriginal can say 'The land is our law'. To convey the feeling of imperatives embedded in the landscape I might offer the weak analogy of my garden: to others it might be a pretty place, to me it is a yard crowded with imperatives 'water here', 'weed there', 'prune that'; similarly for a farmer or grazier. Or a natural scientist, who views not just a static bushland, but a tract teeming with interactive forces and laws of nature. (pages 57, 58)

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SUGGESTIONS

1. Read Eugene's description of the Aboriginal view of Creation again. Allow yourself to imagine the Central Australian landscape being transformed. Imagine the landscape as alive and throbbing with life. How far is this vision from a Christian vision of Creation?
2. What does this view say to you? *The Cloud Passes Over* by Robert Harris in *The Oxford Book of Australian Religious Verse* edited by Kevin Hart (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 85,86

The high spring winds
 arrive unannounced,
sparks bowl superbly
 and dangerously
as heaving power cables rub,
cars lurch
 on the mountain highway,
children and dogs
 are restless,
water flows sideways
 from faucets outdoors.
What happens to things,
 to a roof
or municipal flowers,
 bending as though they were
voluntarily rifled,
 had blossomed for wind
to lift and touch and know them
 gets lost for days-
in the roaring among young eucalypts,
 the uproar
threshing cypresses,
 wobbling speed signs,
the glass shaken out
 from a wretched bed of dried putty
to shatter as a week of conversation. . .

Some nights
 the Lord God of waters
moves down the freshwater,
 the estuary, rivers
veiled in darkness.
 In silence He inspects
the snags
 where the bank drops away,
examining every rotting trunk,
 every hole where fish sleep.

He sets aside mullet and trout
 for koori people,
for dairymen mourning
 under the quota system.
But these nights
 there aren't any fishermen out
from caravan and tent enclaves,
 their hair on end,
their lines frightened in;
 no little white cloud
with damaged oars
 passing over so carefully
that nothing below
 may hear it think.
The Lord of all
 is at large throughout His
Creation.
Mornings they find
 in a boarding hotel courtyard
His gale has raised
 from a tree a branch,
red flowers
 spattered,
blowing around the white pickets
 and every lifted grass-blade
cranes, on tiptoe.
 Old men with catarrh,
the kitchenhand who can make
 them back steps glitter
find the slat and steel
 chairs flat-a-back.
These too appear to
 wonder
up, through sky and through spring,
 through every seemingly
physical thing.

3. As I think about the Dreamtime Heroes moving about the land scattering their life essence, imbuing the land with fecundity and prodigality, I find it very easy to imagine God's Spirit imbuing all of life with that abundance that we attribute to God. Look around you, can you see the Spirit at work?

Day 5: Reverence for Life and Land

Eugene Stockton, *The Aboriginal Gift: Spirituality for a Nation, (Chapter 7: Reverence for Life and Land)* (Millennium Books, Alexandria, 1995).

In chapter 5 I showed how ceremony was a celebration of creation, of its present sequel (life as it is now) and of its assured continuance in an unchanging future, while law was directed to the preservation, nurturance and enhancement of life. Traditional religion was all about life. Stanner claimed that Aboriginal religion was probably one of the least material- minded and most life-minded of any we know. It magnified life and this is shown

in the intense, one could almost say obsessive, preoccupation with the signs, symbols, means, portents, tokens and evidences of vitality. The whole religious corpus vibrated with an expressed aspiration for life, abundant life.

Stanner further claimed that the underlying philosophy of Aboriginal religion was one of assent to the received terms of life} This is the mood of accepting life as a mixture of good and bad, of joy and suffering, and to celebrate it notwithstanding. Life as now given, warts and all, is not some falling away from a primordial golden age, but is as it was initiated in the Dreaming. The Dreaming myths suggest other choices might have been made, but in fact the ones that were made set the terms of life ever after. While anthropologists generally concur that the past weighs on the present 'with overpowering authority', Stanner rejoins that

the human response to that situation was not tragic, pessimistic, fatalistic or even quietistic on the one hand, or rebellious and complaining on the other. . . The Aborigines seem either to have stopped short of, or gone beyond, a true quarrel with the terms of life. They appeared to assent to a reality-as-it-is-and-must-be.

By contrast to themes of salvation, after-life, nirvana, messianism or eschatologies found in other religions, Stanner notes the absence from Aboriginal religious thought and practice of any 'life-compensatory themes'. Submitting to what is and not quarrelling with life's terms is not the same as passive resignation, for there is an enthusiasm for living, a readiness to celebrate it as it is, a will to survive and to pass on the baton of life to the next generation.

Life itself, and in itself, is sacred, as Rose contends 'in the sense of having ultimate value and being an ineffable miracle'. Whereas Western concepts of religion contrast the sacred and the profane, the supernatural and the natural, there is no basis for such distinction in Aboriginal religious thought, as everything is alive and therefore sacred.

Likewise, seemingly commonplace actions have a sacred significance, not because they reproduce the past as Eliade suggests, but because they nurture life, create balance and promote the future.

Standing within the sacred, as it were, and being part of the sacred process, one would not need the acts normally associated with religion, such as sacrifice, petitionary prayer, thanksgiving and praise-living itself is religion.

Since life is sacred, reverence for life is a fundamental characteristic of Aboriginal life 'pervading every aspect of daily and ceremonial life'. Reverence is extended to the earth 'for the earth is the original mother of all life and a living, conscious being in and of herself', and indeed to all life:

Death adds, for instance, are controlled but not obliterated. They have their own law, their autonomy, and their own right to be.

(pages 77, 78)

Aboriginal reverence for life at the same time embraces the land, for it is not only the locus of life, but is itself a living thing and the mother-source of all the living. What follows is a remarkable series of testimonies by modern Aboriginal Christians showing the persisting importance of land in modern Aboriginality, despite the passing, in many cases, of traditional religion.

Ann Pattel-Gray testifies:

We have always centred our lives in the natural-spiritual world. We are deeply committed to God the Creator and to the earth in consciousness and in instinct. Only through our spiritual connection to the earth can we continue in our identity. This is why we conceive ourselves in terms of the land. In our view the earth is sacred. It is a living entity in which other living entities have origin and destiny. It is where our identity comes from, where our spirituality begins, where the Dreaming comes from; it is where our stewardship begins. We are bound to the earth in our spirit. By means of our involvement in the natural world we can ensure our well-being.

The following statements were reproduced in *My Mother the Land* edited by the Galiwin'ku Literary Production Centre, Elcho Island, and have been quoted often since. This endorsement shows the wide acceptability of these views among modern Aboriginal Christians.

The land is my mother. Like a human mother, the land gives us protection, enjoyment and provides for our needs-economic, social and religious. We have human relationships with the land: mother-daughter, son. When the land is taken from us or destroyed, we feel hurt because we belong to the land and we are part of it. (Rev Djiniyini Gondarra)

For the Aboriginal people, land is a dynamic notion, something creative. Land is not bound by geographical limitations placed on it by a surveyor who marks out an area and says, 'This is your plot'. Land is the generation point of existence, the spirit from which Aboriginal existence comes.

Land is a living place made up of sky, clouds, rivers, trees, the wind, the sand and) I the spirit has created all these things, the spirit that planted my own spirit there, my , own country.

It is something-yet it is not a thing-it is a living entity. It belongs to me, I belong to the land, I rest in it. I come from there.

Land is a notion that is most difficult to categorise in English, but it is something ...

that is very clear to me and to those people who belong to my group. Land provides for my physical needs and provides for my spiritual needs. It is a regeneration of stories.

New stories are sung from contemplation of the land, stories are handed down' from spirit men of the past who have deposited the riches at various places-the sacred places.

The sacred places are not just simply geographically beautiful. They are holy places, even more holy than shrines, but not commercialised. They are sacred. The greatest respect is shown to them and they are used for the regeneration of history-the regeneration of Aboriginal people, the continuation of their life. Because that is where they begin and that is where they return. (Patrick Dodson)

The land is my backbone. ..I only stand straight, happy, proud and not ashamed about my colour because I still have land. I can paint, dance, create and sing as my ancestors did before me.

I think of land as the history of my nation. It tells of how we came into being and what system we must live. My great ancestors who live in the times of history, planned everything that we practise now. The law of history says that we must not take land, fight over land, steal land, give land and so on. My land is mine only because I came in spirit from that land, and so did my ancestors of the same land. My land, is my foundation. (Galarwuy Yunupingu)

(pages 81, 82)

Suggestions

1. Reflect again on Romans 8: 19ff
2. In *To Care for the Earth*, Sean McDonagh (Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1986) writes about the Greening of the Earth. Can you turn these thoughts to prayer or art?

For [Hildegard of Bingen], the natural world is not an area of chaos or wilderness which humans must either avoid or do battle with in order to conquer and domesticate. Nature evokes joy, wonder, praise, awe and especially love. She is so beautifully adorned that even her creator approaches her in the guise of a lover to embrace her with a kiss.

As the Creator loves his creation
so creation loves the Creator.
Creation, of course, was fashioned to be adorned
to be showered
to be gifted with the love of the Creator
The entire world has been embraced by this kiss.

Many cultures around the world revere the Earth as mother and celebrate her fruitfulness. It is not surprising then that Hildegard takes up this image. The nourishing role of the Earth is not confined to our biological needs but includes our emotional and spiritual well-being. Finally, the Earth is most creative in moulding the very flesh of the Son of God.

The Earth is at the same time mother
She is mother of all
For contained in her
are the seeds of all
The Earth of humankind
contains all moistness
all verdancy
all germinating power
It is in so many ways fruitful
Yet it forms not only the basic
raw material for humankind
but also the substance of God's Son. (page 135)

3. From Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1993)

*i thank You God for most this amazing
day:for the leaping greenly spirits of trees
and a blue true dream of sky;and for everything
which is natural which is infinite which is yes*

*(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday;this is the birth
day of life and of love and wings:and of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)*

*how should tasting touching hearing seeing
breathing any--lifted from the no
of all nothing--human merely being
doubt unimagined You?*

*(now the ears of my ears awake and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)*

-e.e. cummings

Day 6: Not a Retreat but an Advance

A contribution by Jack Goodluck.

Jesus passed through the wilderness, through trials in the wilderness. He emerged with a clearly defined identity and direction, and was wholeheartedly himself with people, with life, with death and with eternity, full of pain, sorrow, peace and joy. In that way he became for us the Way, the Truth and the Life, our Saviour and Master. He gave a general invitation for anyone to follow him carrying their own cross.

Scott Peck, contemporary Christian psychotherapist and author has written in *A World Waiting to be Born*:

As We Proceed through the Desert

Consciousness and pain are inextricably interwoven. If someone has severe enough physical pain, what do we do? We give him an anesthetic to render him unconscious. Similarly, people will anesthetize themselves to deal with their emotional pain -either with drugs or, more commonly, through a variety of psychological tricks called "defense mechanisms." While sometimes necessary -even life-saving -these defense mechanisms are more often employed in an unhealthy fashion to limit consciousness so as to ward off existential, "legitimate" suffering. When used this way they are the cause of psychospiritual disease. As self-imposed limitations of consciousness they prevent the person from moving forward through the desert and becoming all that she or he can be. Conversely, psychotherapy -the healing of the psyche - is a process of relinquishing these defenses so as to directly face the painful issues of life. As the Twelve Step programs put it, "no pain, no gain." (p. 17)

Our Lord of The Way has called us to dare to live without defense mechanisms. "The one who saves his life will lose it, but he who will lose his life for my sake will find it." He calls whoever will to find the painful narrow path of reality, and find life; to really carry the cross that is really ours and follow him with the "yoke" that is easy and light. Peck continues:

So the further you proceed through the desert, the more conscious you become, the more healthy and "saved" and civil you are, the more it will hurt. You will become ever-more aware of your own sins and psychopathology. You will also become more aware of the psychopathology of others and the games they play -as well as the sorrows and burdens they bear. And finally you will become ever-more conscious of the sins and evils of society. That's the bad news.

If we travel to the heart of the Central Desert, or "take the wings of the morning and fly to the uttermost part of the sea" we might be surprised and dismayed at the painful realities that we discover, and the suffering we encounter and our inescapable selves. Peck continues:

The good news is that simultaneously -paradoxically -you will experience more joy. These principles hold true for groups as well as individuals. Organizations, too, are either more or less conscious. Families, churches, businesses, and governments become sick by refusing to face painful realities. If they allow themselves to become conscious of their painful issues, however, then they can work on organizational healing and grow into painful but joyful maturity. Another part of the good news of this book is that, yes, there can sometimes be joyful and civil organizations.

Upon occasion I used to tell my patients, "Psychotherapy is not about happiness; it is about power. If you go the whole route, I cannot guarantee you will leave here one jot happier. What I can guarantee is that you will leave more competent. There is a kind of vacuum of competence in the world, however, so that as soon as a person becomes more competent, life or God will give her greater problems to work on. So you may leave here worrying about far larger issues than when you came in. But there is a kind of joy that comes from knowing that you're worrying about the big things and no longer getting bent out of shape over the little ones."

A Kind of Joy

O Joy that's seeking me through pain
I cannot close my heart to thee:
I trace the rainbow through the rain
And feel the promise is not vain,
That morn shall tearless be.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Where does my journey through the desert with Christ take me?
2. What helps me to find my way in the wilderness?
What brings me through my existential be-wilderments?
3. Can a Pilgrim also be a Retreatant? A Retreatant be a Pilgrim? Can both be Escapists?
4. What can a "Wellspring" traveller do for life in the desert in the 2003 International Year of Fresh Water?

Day 7: A Liturgy for Pilgrimage: the Integrity of Creation

Per Harling (ed), *Worshipping Ecumenically* (Geneva: WSS Publications, 1995), pp. 116-135

One of the priorities of the World Council of Churches is work on justice, peace and the integrity of creation. These themes were the source for some of the worship services at the Canberra assembly.

Giver of Life -Sustain Your Creation

This worship focused on our responsibility for creation. The hymn "God made the crystal clear waters" helped visualize this. The verses were sung by soloists and everyone joined in the refrain. During the first four verses people carrying baskets of fruit and vegetables, flowers, clean water, put them under and around the altar and the presenters moved slowly around the altar. After a moment of silence verses 5 and 6 were sung during which the presenters put a thin black cloth over the fruits of creation and knelt in a position of "despair" during the confession of sins. Another option would be to bring in rubbish, for example, paper cups, dirty water, old boxes, cans, etc., and put them on top of the fruits of creation. As words of forgiveness verses 7-9 were sung and the Bible was brought in a procession. The black cloth was taken away (or the rubbish is taken away) and some of the fruits were put on the altar as an offering of thankfulness.

Invocation

Call to Worship

- Leader 1: Glory to you, Almighty God.
 You spoke, and light came out of darkness,
 Order rose from confusion.
- Leader 2: Glory to you, Jesus Christ!
 You met us as a refugee, a threatened child,
 The word made flesh, born in a forgotten place.
- Leader 3: Glory to you, Holy Spirit!
 You brooded over chaos,
 Mothering and shaping God's new creation.
- Leader 4: Glory to you, God, Three-in-One!
 You are surrounded by the song of the saints in heaven
 And you are present with us now.

Hymn: God made the crystal clear waters (verses 1-4)

2. God wove the tapestry of green grass,
embroidered flowers, bees and
mushrooms,
and fashioned trees within the garden.
God saw that it was good.

3. God made the fish and life of oceans
and all the birds that fly above us.
On land there were all kinds of
creatures.
God saw that it was good.

4. A man, a woman in God's image,
in full communion with creation,
were loving, sharing with each other.
God saw that it was good.

Silence

Confession of Sins: God made the crystal clear waters (verses 5-6)

5. But birds are dying, grass is withering
and poisoned waters kill our children.
The paradise is lost for profit.
God saw the goodness lost.
God saw the goodness lost
and there was evening and there was
morning.

6. The covenant of all creation
between the earth and heav'n is broken.
The earth is ruled by hate and evil.
God saw the goodness lost.

Leader: Giver of Life
In the midst of a plundered earth we groan with creation:
People: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of Life,
In the midst of poisoned waters we groan with creation:
People: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of Life,
In the midst of polluted air we groan with creation:
People: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of Life,
In the midst of mountains of waste we groan with creation:
People: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of life,
In the midst of a world at war we groan with creation:
People: Have mercy on us.

Leader: Giver of life,
We who are made in the image of God have gone astray,
And creation groans with us.
People: Have mercy on us.

Silence

Entrance of the Word: God made the crystal clear waters (verses 7-9)

7. When Jesus walked his way among us
we were reminded of God's image
and how it was from the beginning.
God saw that it was good.
God saw that it was good.
and there was evening and there was
morning.

8. The Spirit's fire burns within us
to care again for all creation
in covenant of bread that's broken.
God saw that it was good.

9. All things will be renewed in Jesus,
who loves both sinners and creation.
Our future will be life forever.
God saw that it was good.

Old Testament Reading: Deuteronomy 30: 15-20

New Testament Reading: Revelations 22: 1-3

Affirmation of Faith

Leader: O God, the source of our being
and the goal of all our longing
we believe and trust in you.
The whole earth is alive with your glory,
and all that has life is sustained by you.
We commit ourselves to cherish your world,
and seek your face.

People: O God, embodied in a human life,
we believe and trust in you.

Leader: Jesus, our brother, born of the woman Mary,
you confronted the proud and the powerful,
and welcomed as your friends those of no account.
Holy wisdom of God, firstborn of creation,
you emptied yourself of power
and became foolishness for our sake.
You laboured with us upon the cross,
and have brought us forth
to the hope of resurrection.
We commit ourselves to struggle against evil
and to choose life.

People: O God, life-giving Spirit,
Spirit of healing and comfort,
of integrity and truth,
we believe and trust in you.

Leader: Warm-winged Spirit, brooding over creation,
rushing wind and Pentecostal fire,
we commit ourselves to work with you
and renew our world.

Intercession (sit)

Leader: Spirit of God, intercede for us,
Give voice to the weeping of the world,
Name for us the pain of your creation.
Spirit of God, intercede for us now.

Response: Giver of life, sustain your creation
(sung a cappella, if there is a gong it can be used on the last note)

Leader: Spirit of God,
come search our hearts.
Bring to life the seeds of hope.
Point us sharply to truths that we know.
Spirit of God, come search our hearts now.

Response: Giver of life, sustain your creation.

Leader: Spirit of God, open us to your will.
Gather around us your goodness.
Take the things which we have destroyed,
Take the brokenness of our living
and renew the whole creation with your saving grace.

Response: Giver of life, sustain your creation.

Lord's Prayer

Leader: Sisters and brothers, God has formed us from the dust of the earth, and has breathed into us the spirit of life. This spirit calls us to join in the holy act of creation and preservation of all that God has made. This gracious invitation confronts us with choices. We have set before us this day choices of life and of death. When we pray, "Giver of life, sustain your creation", we commit ourselves to choosing life, for the healing of the nations and for the care and redemption of all that God has made. Let us join together to affirm our choice for life, and our commitment to cherish God's world and to work to sustain all of creation.

Blessing

Leader: Eternal God, our beginning and our end,
be our starting point and our heaven
and accompany us in this day's journey.
Use our hands to do the work of your creation
and use our lives to bring others the new life you give this world
in Jesus Christ, Redeemer of all.

People: Amen.