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Jesus and the Dingo

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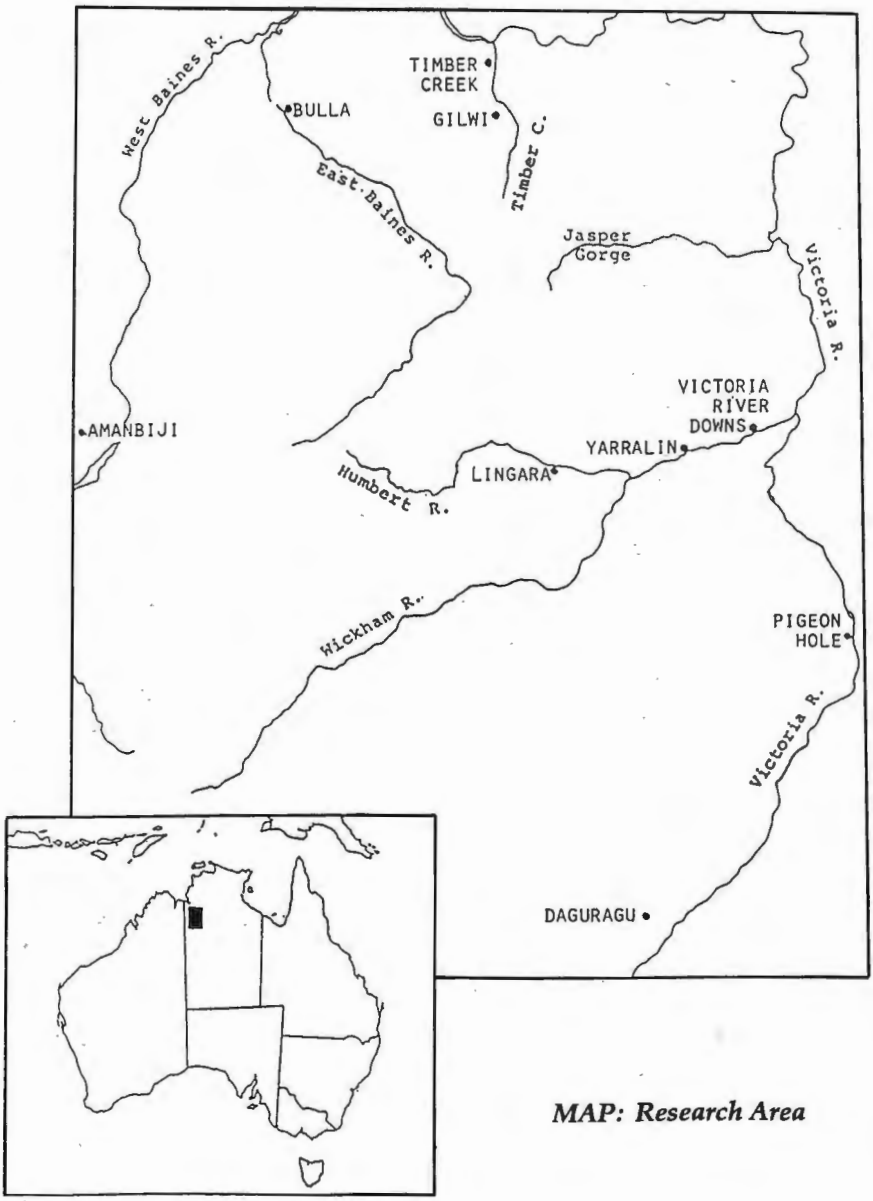
Introduction

Jesus was aware of some of the problems in missionising, for he said: '...you traverse sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves' (Matthew 23:15, RSV). He may have had more insight than latter day Christians have credited him with. In this paper I analyse an encounter between a group of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory of Australia and a group of Pentecostal missionaries seeking to gain Aboriginal converts. I will suggest that these particular missionaries are not so much posing a new problem for Aboriginal people as they are re-creating the conditions, in another context, of a continuing problem. I contend that a monocentric dialectic here wears two guises — one of progress and one of salvation. For Aborigines, the issue is one of an unresolved paradox: that of locating conquest in any sort of moral order. The missionaries have gained some control over discursive space through offering a resolution which achieves immediacy because invasion and conquest are current processes, experienced by Aboriginal people virtually every day of their lives.[1]

Sequence and Event

The analysis presented here is based on research carried out primarily in the Aboriginal communities of Yarralin and Lingara (see map, p. 362), located on Victoria River Downs Station (V.R.D.) and Humbert River Station, respectively. Yarralin is located on an approximately 200 km sq block excised from V.R.D. after twelve years of negotiations. Lingara is an outstation of Yarralin and for the past seven years has been making representations to be granted an excision.

Yarralin is a community of about 120 people. The residents maintain close ties with the 60 or so people at Lingara (about 35 kilometres away). The major languages are Kriol and Ngarinman; Ngaliwurru, Mudbura, Bilinara and Gurinji are also spoken. The two communities were formerly one and the people are related to each other through ties of kinship, marriage, shared language, Dreamings, and culture. Two other communities in the area must be mentioned in this context: Gilwi (formerly Eleven Mile) and Bulla. People in both of these communities are related to Yarralin and Lingara people.



MAP: Research Area

The history of this pastoral region is marked, most significantly, by the expropriation of land through conquest and the exploitation of labour (Berndt and Berndt 1987 provide some details; see also Danayairi in Rose 1984b, and Hardy 1968). My estimates indicate that during the first sixty years of European occupation, Aboriginal population declined by about ninety per cent because of massacres, brutal working conditions, malnutrition and disease. A system of relentless exploitation of Aboriginal labour continued until Aboriginal people took action on their own behalf through the pastoral strikes of 1966-71 (Doolan 1977; Hardy 1968). One result of the strike was that some Aboriginal people gained control of land. Another was that most Aborigines were pushed out of the pastoral labour force.

Although Aboriginal people in this area now produce very little cash through their own labour, they are the target of a vast amount of government spending. Million dollar budgets and thousands of jobs, mostly held by Europeans, depend on the fact that Aboriginal people are defined as people who must be 'helped'. In slightly less than two decades, Aboriginal peoples' productive capacity, in relation to the national economy, has changed from the status of being appropriated under conditions of virtual slavery to the status of being virtually irrelevant.

I first went to the area in September 1980 to carry out doctoral research. The focus of my research was on cosmology, moral philosophy, and social action. I wanted to gain some understanding of the world as it is construed by Aboriginal people, and I wanted to investigate the ways in which people act and evaluate actions within the construct of a cosmic order.

During the two years in which I carried out this research, Pentecostal missionaries, often referred to as the 'God mob', visited Yarralin and presented services every few months. I returned in 1983 to conduct a more focussed inquiry into missionary activity, prompted by news that some of the people with whom I had worked closely had converted to Christianity. Upon my return I found that all of the people I knew well had since abandoned the missionary message. A segment of one extended family alone had remained Christian. As of 1987, no new converts had been made. Although my research since 1984 has had a different focus, I continue to follow the influence and impact of the missionaries as the opportunity arises.

In this paper I refer to the people with whom I worked most closely collectively as 'Yarralin people'. Because matters concerning missionaries have the potential to create conflict, I do not identify people by name.[2]

The God Mob

The essence of the missionary message can be briefly summarised: the world is divided between those who are saved and those who are not; those who are saved will go to heaven while those who are not will be cast into the fiery pit. The end of the world is at hand; a choice must be made; the future of each individual will be judged by the decision they make now. The saved are those who do the work of God, while those who are doomed are agents of the devil. Almost all aspects of Aboriginal culture are identified as the work of Satan.

A belief in the power of the Dreaming is categorised by missionaries as the work of the devil; so too is respect for sacred sites and participation in ceremonial life, and involvement with such 'secular' aspects of Aboriginal life as traditional trade and marriage arrangements. Missionaries have also indicated that it is the work of the devil to support land claims under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act.

The Pentecostal Christians have a local headquarters at Bulla; the regional headquarters is in Kununurra (WA). I understand that the religious organisation backing the missionary endeavour at this time is the Assemblies of God. However, over the past few years, particularly since 1983, there have been upheavals among the missionaries about which I know very little.

Bulla camp was set up as an Aboriginal community on a small block of land set aside for them from Auvergne station. Sometime during the late 1970s missionary endeavours originating in Kununurra were successful in making some converts at Bulla. Initially at least, their message was favourably received. By the time I came to

know any of the Bulla mob well enough to discuss these matters, Christians spoke of their involvement with the missionaries as a matter of belief; non-Christians felt that they had been tricked by unfulfilled promises of secular assistance.

Gilwi was established in 1980 by a group of men and women who left Bulla as a response to the missionary 'take-over'. They started their new community in an area identified as a *Kaya* Dreaming site. *Kaya* is a term which I gloss as 'custodians of the dead'; in Kriol it is 'debil debil'. 'Debil debil' Dreamings have become the basis of an elaborate send-up of the missionary endeavour. In the act of establishing a community, the Gilwi people asserted their Aboriginal identity[3] through a Dreaming association, and mocked the Christian obsession with the work of Satan, with a gesture which could only be construed as an act of defiance. Lest the point be missed, one of their first activities was to construct a bough shed close to one of the 'debil debil' Dreaming trees. In gathering there to conduct their own business, they mimicked the Christians in their tabernacle at Bulla, and said that they got together in order to put reports through to the 'debil debil'.

For most of 1980 and 1981 the missionaries were a presence in the area but were not seen as a threat. Yarralin, Lingara and Gilwi people seemed to have the attitude that if they avoided overtly offending the missionaries, the missionaries would leave them alone. Missionaries came to Yarralin every few months, held a church service or two, visited, and left. During this period the most regular visitor was a Ngarinman man from Bulla who had converted and had become a missionary, or 'God boss'. His services were conducted with acoustic guitar, song, sermon, and healing; they were attended by about half of the community. People who wanted to be healed and comforted went forward, were prayed for, and received the laying on of hands. But no one converted in the sense required by the missionaries.

Some Yarralin and Lingara people did not attend missionary services at all, saying that they did not want to be troubled by what was going on. Of those who listened to, and thought about, the missionary message, many were troubled.

In 1982 the missionaries added a new element to their message, by speaking out against land rights. It seemed to be no coincidence that the message appeared at the same time as the Timber Creek land claim, and it is not difficult to see that land claims could be perceived to pose a threat to these particular Christians because the process rewards an adherence to Aboriginal cultural traditions.

On one occasion I heard the missionary preach a sermon in which he asserted that this earth is just rubbish, just garbage. At the time, I was impressed by how singularly inappropriate this message was for Aboriginal people. Similar sermons, discussing the 'golden city of heaven' and the fact that 'we are all just tourists on this earth', confirmed my impression. I will return to this point in a later section.

Yarralin and Lingara people framed their absolute disagreement with this message in two ways. First, they asserted most eloquently that the earth is the mother of all life and is to be respected, that she is not garbage, and that it is extraordinarily arrogant to make such an assertion. Second, they noted the political implications of the message. They pointed out that during all the years in which they had been killed, abused, forced to work, underfed, denied medical care, and so on, no missionaries had been there to temper injustice with compassion. But now that their rights to land had legal recognition and they were able to take action on their own behalf to regain some control over their lives, the missionaries were there telling them not to do it.

Other events which have pitted the missionaries against local non-Christians in heated and angry conflict include disrupting initiation ceremonies and burning sacred objects. In addition to provoking conflict, the missionaries have had pervasive effects on the region as a whole by attracting people away from Aboriginal social and cultural practices. For example, young women who did not want to stay with their promised husbands could find refuge at Bulla camp, where they would be protected 'under the power of Jesus'. Likewise, young men who wanted to avoid being initiated could find sanctuary at Bulla. The regional trade network, in which Bulla was a vital link between east and west, has been disrupted, in part because Bulla has dropped out of the system. And the Christians in any given community who refuse to participate in organised events leave gaps so that their responsibilities must be taken over by others. Through these processes, missionaries exert a greater influence on the region than might first be evident (see Rose 1985 for more details).

Cosmologies

I turn now to an analysis of cosmologies. My approach is influenced by recent work among historians of religion and some anthropologists linking cosmogonies to moral systems (Lovin and Reynolds 1985). According to Lovin and Reynolds:

> the ...study of cosmogony must ...be broadly construed as a study of the ways in which cultures and individuals relate their basic notions of the origins of the reality in which they live their lives to the patterns of action that they consider to be dependable and worthy of choice. (*ibid*:8)

These scholars take cosmogony to encompass 'accounts or conceptions of the way in which the cosmos or cosmic process is continually being generated and structured' (Reynolds 1985:203).

My first concern is to analyse the two cosmogonies, traditional Aboriginal and Christian, using as reference points concepts of time, space, and the individual. My second concern is to develop the analysis through reference to what I will term a singular event and key events. In focussing on different types of cosmogonic event construction I will show that each constitutes a different way of linking past, present, and future in a meaningful human order. I conclude this section by examining abstract models of cosmogonies in order to develop the link between social and cosmological systems.

David Turner (1986) has provided the outlines of an analytic dialectic with which to examine Aboriginal societies, and I will be using some of his concepts in this analysis. Turner asserts that Aboriginal societies are driven by a process of confederation: a type of social and cultural dynamic in which things (groups, individuals, ideas) defined as being different accommodate each other by establishing relationships of interdependence such that each contains a portion of the other without becoming subsumed. There is no unifying principle in this system; rather, both opposition and unity are subordinated to complementarity (*ibid*: 62). This system can also be termed pluralism; it depends on the recognition of numerous ultimate principles (see Turner this volume).

Yarralin Peoples' Cosmogony

It is impossible to be both brief and comprehensive in presenting a summary account of Yarralin peoples' cosmos; here I opt for brevity (see Rose 1984a, 1986 for more comprehensive expositions of the major principles).

In the beginning, according to Yarralin people, there was only earth covered by water. The water pulled back, and life emerged from the earth. The earth is mother to all life, and all life is related by virtue of being descended from one mother. Within this cosmogony, time is conceptualised as being of two interpenetrating types: Dreaming and ordinary. Dreaming time is essentially non-sequential, an 'everywhen' to use Stanner's (1979:24) felicitous term. In the Dreaming, the forebears of all life acted together, producing what I will term 'key events' which continue to inform the present. Although a boundary is conceptualised between Dreaming and the ordinary present, Dreaming interpenetrates ordinary time (see Lewis and Rose 1987 for more discussion of the social management of time). The cosmos is emergent; life is always coming into being according to the principles established in the Dreaming.

Ordinary time is marked by sequence and by patterned recurrences, and can be characterised as the time in which moral agents (humans, animals, and others), continue to construct the cosmos according to Dreaming principles. Through continued regeneration in social action, Dreaming continues to inform the ordinary present. Life in the cosmos is maintained and verified through the regeneration of the Dreaming. Continuity is a key value. The moral order of the cosmos depends upon actions which are designed to maintain in the present, and construct for the future, the relationships which derive from the Dreaming.

In the relatively closed system in which this cosmology was developed, a circular order of morality was sustainable. Those beings who were Dreaming existents had the right to be by virtue of birth-like origins in the mother earth. One could say that they were 'good'. That which continues to exist does so because it understands, respects, and acts upon the principles of life in the cosmos. Therefore, that which exists is good. As I understand this system, there is no concept of evil. While there is ample recognition that horrible events can and do occur, they are explained as an aberration of the system when a part goes out of control. The forces which can be termed 'bad' are individualised; ignorance, stupidity, accident or uncontrolled wilfulness are *conditions* of life but they are not ontological *principles*.

As Yarralin people explained things to me, one of the guiding principles of the cosmos is reciprocity. Each part of the cosmos (individual, social group, animals, and 'natural elements') tests its relationships with others and vigorously defends its autonomy, thereby maintaining a moral order. With respect to social groups, the implication of this principle is that each group defines itself with reference to country, and each 'country' (defined along numerous parameters, but achieving relatively fixed identity from the actions of Dreaming beings) is conceived to be autonomous in its relationships to other countries. A threat to the autonomy of a country (social group) must be responded to; threat leads to response (defense). Testing, responding, and accommodation are means through which the moral order is regenerated and continuity is achieved. Yarralin people most frequently take this dynamic to be self-evident; the process only becomes problematic when one party fails to behave in the appropriate way.

Another essential guiding principle is the spatial dimension of morality. Many narratives of Dreaming beings, who through their activities (key events) establish

the basis of moral principles, recount travels in which key events are played out again and again, in one area after another. I believe that the apparent redundancy in these narratives establishes that the same principles are recognised across a broad area. If each unit is to be autonomous, it follows that none can submit to a law other than its own. Not all narratives conform to this structure; in some instances redundancy is assumed, and dispensed with, in favour of other points of emphasis.

With respect to individual life, many Yarralin people say that they were 'born for country', indicating that a relationship between person and country exists prior to birth and is to be developed during life. At death, significant portions of the individual return to their 'own' country. The individual life span is sequential, takes place within a rhythmic structure (Ricoeur 1985:22) of seasonal change, is part of broader patterns of continuity, and is localised in moral/geographical space. Individuals are given localised definition as agents in the world by virtue of birth, preceding social relationships, subsequent rituals and relationships, and personal action. Individuals engage with other people and with other beings in a life-long process of constituting their value in the cosmos. The process of achieving dignity, respect and worth is channeled into, and managed through, relationships with other people, other species, and with country.

Pentecostal Cosmogony

Pentecostal cosmology, as I understand it, rests on at least two cosmogonies. The first is the creation of the world and its inhabitants as recounted in the book of Genesis. For Pentecostal missionaries, and for other Christians generally, the second cosmogony is the life of Jesus (see Eliade 1959:110-112). In the New Testament the events of Genesis are reworked, the fall is redeemed, and a new order is established on earth. While recapitulating many of the relationships set out in Genesis (Jesus as the new Adam), the life of Jesus is posited as a singular historical occurrence. It can be incorporated into the lives of individuals through radical conversion, but it stands alone as the event which defines all subsequent life. It is only through submitting to the authority of this event, and allowing it to define the quality of one's life, that an individual achieves positive value.

According to this cosmology, time is marked by a series of radical disjunctions —between God's perfection and the imperfection of humanity, between the Garden of Eden and the fall from Grace, between the state of sinfulness and the state of redemption. Redemption was enacted initially by Jesus and is now effected through symbolic rebirth mediated by Jesus and symbolised by his blood (see Harding 1987 for a dramatic analysis of the symbolism of blood and birth among fundamentalist Baptists). The final disjunction, mediated by death, is between life on this earth and the afterlife in either heaven or hell.

Past, present, and future are oriented along a temporal trajectory which is neither cyclical nor precisely linear, but rather is marked by a progressive set of radical disjunctions focused on the singular event of the existence of Jesus of Nazareth. In Eliade's terms, historical time is sanctified through the personal intervention of God in the world (*ibid*:111). Salvation is achieved through submitting to the authority of this event. The singular event of Jesus sets the conditions for the trajectory of both the world and the individual life.

My information on how the missionaries conceptualise space is rather sketchy; they appear to conform to standard Pentecostal beliefs. In 1986 a European missionary

who was visiting Yarralin gave a sermon which included slides that he had taken during a trip to the 'Holy Land'. He said that as the Israelites return to their 'tribal homeland' they are making possible the end of the world as we know it, for their return is one of the pre-conditions to the second coming.

On the one hand, this cosmology appears to deny that space has a moral component; the singular event of Jesus is asserted to be true for all people everywhere. On the other hand, it incorporates many elements of an earlier medieval orientation toward space and time. Fabian (1983:26) contends that in medieval Europe space was defined by the criterion of distance from the sacred centre. Jerusalem and Rome together constituted the epicentre of the world; the farther one was located from the sacred centre, the less one was incorporated in the moral order established there. Sanctified historical time was located in real and finite space, and the world trajectory was designed to gather the heathens into the sacred centre, morally if not physically.

In sum, the Pentecostal cosmology consists of a series of radical temporal disjunctions which are spatially fixed. The singular event of Jesus overthrew the conditions of the earlier cosmogony of Adam; the return of Jesus will overthrow the conditions of the world as it is now. The spatial dimension of the series is focussed on Jerusalem and adjacent areas of the Middle East. Actions throughout the world are interpreted as critical in forwarding the processes which will hasten Jesus' return.

The contrasts between the two cosmologies can be briefly summarised. With respect to time and space, Aboriginal cosmology recognises interpenetrating types of time, repetitively localised in units of moral/geographical space. Pentecostal cosmology recognises a series of radical temporal disjunctions localised in a single sacred centre. With respect to the individual, Aboriginal culture fosters the processes through which individuals become self-constituting beings of value. Pentecostal cosmology appears to assert that the individual only achieves positive value through submission to the authority of Jesus.

Key Events

In contrast to the Pentecostal focus on the singular event of Jesus, the Dreaming past is remembered and recounted through narratives which depict what I term key events. Key events are Dreaming actions with specific moral content; other events, other persons, other images will be conflated with the key event if they share in the same moral content. Key events, I contend, are open-ended in that they attract and accommodate specificity; they are continuously emergent. The process of specifying relationships between present and past is a process of regenerating the past in the present. It is also a process of accommodating new elements within an existing order.

Some European figures have been located within the geographical and moral dimensions of Yarralin people's cosmology. Yarralin people believe that humans originated out of an ancestral class of beings which was made up only of dingos. They were dingos who became human and thus became the ancestors of all human beings. Occasionally people say that white people are descended from white dogs, and Aboriginal people from dingos. That is, they take the origin of humans to be a key event which must have occurred everywhere for all people.

God and Jesus are granted space in the beginning; both are part of the moral order established then, both continue to be powerful in the present, both can be communicated with and can influence the shape of the present and future, as can the Dreaming Beings. One old man, who several times told me the story of the creation of humans, stated that as Jesus was a man his father must also have been a man (in the sense of male human being). Therefore both God and Jesus, like all of us, are descended from dingos.

One body of narratives provides excellent examples of the positioning of moral agents in localised space. Conflating Ned Kelly with biblical stories from both the old and new Testaments, these narratives locate key events in the Victoria River District. For example, I was told a story about Ned Kelly's first visit to Wave Hill Station during the course of which he taught people how to make tea and cook damper. Although there was only one billy of tea and one little damper, everybody was fed.

Another narrative has Ned Kelly sailing in a boat in the very beginning when the earth was still covered with water. Seeing a leaf floating in the water he realised that there must be land emerging somewhere. He found the land, got out of his boat and started travelling around the Northern Territory with his band of angels, shooting police. Ned was eventually caught and hung and on the third day after his hanging there was a great noise and shaking of the earth (like an earthquake) and he rose up to the sky. This narrative was told with a great deal of expressive evocation of the emotions involved, and part of the story was told as a subtle joke. The man who told me this story said that when Ned Kelly rose up to the sky, there was such a great shaking of the earth that the buildings in Darwin trembled and all the Europeans cowered in fear and wondered what was happening. He found this to be very funny. As I understand the joke, it was based on the Aboriginal perception that Europeans typically fail to recognise their own key events. Rather than being frightened, they should have known what was happening, for it has all happened before as part of Europeans' own Dreaming.

Dialectics

I do not want to belabour an abstract analysis of the dialectics of these two cosmologies, for the discussion so far has indicated many of the differences. However, some exegesis is required to make the connecting link between Pentecostal cosmology and the western world more generally.

We can begin a comparison by looking at the logic informing these two cosmologies. The essential features are two types of logic: either-or, and both-and. I am using these terms in the strong sense proposed by Wilden (1980:116): 'both-and' is a relationship of co-operation and long-range survival, while 'either-or' relationships are those of competition and short-range survival.

Either-or is a relation of opposition. Scholars such as Wagner (1975) and Wilden (1980) contend that the dialectic logic of either-or posits difference as a contradiction to be resolved through inclusion into a higher logical type. But as paradox is integral to logical typing, every effort at resolution merely reposes contradictions in a new context. In contrast, both-and is a relation of patterned accommodation in which paradox is an integral feature.

Both types of logic are, of course, fundamental to human thought; if we could not think in both modes we would not be the human beings that we are. In comparing them, however, two points require attention: privilege and practice

Yarralin people's logic privileges both-and: a relationship of accommodation and co-operation. In Turner's terms this relationship is phrased as both thou and I, them and we, the universe and us (1986). It is a dialectic of differentiation based on a plurality of ultimate principles.

In contrast, the Pentecostal cosmology privileges either-or: one is either saint or sinner, working for Jesus or working for the Devil, and in this context, either Christian or traditional Aborigine. It is a dialectic of incorporation, based on monism. The act of privileging either-or is by no means unique to Pentecostal missionaries. Mol (1986:67) asserts that:

> ...it would be difficult to attend a [Christian] service ...anywhere, in which not in some way or other basic themes of sin versus salvation, evil versus goodness ...freedom versus constraint, chaos versus order, integrity versus fragmentation, the sacred versus the profane are dramatised...

In a more secular mode, it is equally clear that our political system privileges either-or, generating relationships of competition, coercion, power and oppression. In social praxis the relationship has become one of domination: the strong versus the weak, the rich versus the poor, the west versus the rest.

Said (1979) puts the case most forcefully. In discussing the characteristically western construct, 'monocentrism', he states that:

> Monocentrism denies plurality, it totalises structure, it sees profit where there is waste, it decrees the concentricity of western culture instead of its eccentricity ...Monocentrism is practiced when we mistake one idea as the only idea... (*ibid*:188)

My point is that the Pentecostal message, for all that its contents appear bizarre to the non-believer, is a thoroughly western product. As such, its power even to suggest the possibility that it might be believable lies in the fact that the dialectic of the message is the same dialectic that Aboriginal people experience daily as a conquered and oppressed people.

Jesus versus Dingo

In the first section of this paper I took a sequential, temporal, event-oriented approach to describe an encounter between cosmologies. In the second section I took an atemporal approach in analysing dialectics and cosmologies with specific reference to time, space, and the individual, and to the contrast between key events and a singular event. In this final section I pursue the argument that the Pentecostal message gains power as an expression of historically emergent processes of invasion and conquest.

In another paper I presented an edited version of a set of narratives told by Hobbles Danayairi which describe and analyse the history of European invasion

and conquest (Rose 1984b). I labelled this set the 'Saga of Captain Cook', and showed that the Sagas are constituted as a discourse of resistance to conquest. They are organised to conform to the same structure I have discussed in reference to Dreaming narratives. In the first portion, a key event, in this case conquest through killing, stealing, and enslaving, is identified with Captain Cook and is shown to be repeated over and over again through space, locating the event throughout the continent. In the second portion of the Saga, more recent events, attitudes, and social processes are poured into the organising configuration of the key event. The Sagas demonstrate social relationships and social processes which, once established in the key event, are managed through time; invasion and conquest are shown to be continuously emergent.

The Sagas present the Captain Cook event as a paradox. Narrators identify Captain Cook as an immoral man, and assert that he established an immoral law. As Captain Cook emerged and remains emergent, so he ought, logically to constitute a key event in a moral order. However, a moral order which does not locate immorality as a principle of life is not sustainable unless Captain Cook can be shown to be somehow outside of that order. At the same time, the circularity and cosmic breadth of that order constrain the possibility of defining anything as outside of it.

From Yarralin people's perspective, Captain Cook's law is alive and well in the Northern Territory. Invasion and conquest continue to mean the loss of autonomy in respect to many of the basic conditions of their lives: loss of control over their country and sites, loss of ability to carry out many basic moral actions such as renewing cycles of growth through setting fires and burning the country; loss of residential choice; loss of subsistence. At an ever increasing rate it is clear to Yarralin people that they are losing control over the relationships through which they define themselves as persons of value. At the same time, their ability to engage in non-dependent relationships with European society is effectively circumscribed by the fact that they are seen either to be in need of help or to be irrelevant to the 'modern world'.

Yarralin people's cosmology defines continuity as a key value, and in daily and ritual life, within the contexts still available to Aboriginal people, the process of constituting one's self requires maintaining communicative and other links among people, between people and country, between the past and the present, and between Dreaming and ordinary time and life. The Captain Cook Saga offers a point of resistance to conquest through postulating that whatever Captain Cook may have been, and continues to be, he was not part of a moral order.

The Pentecostal message is not oriented toward any of the links which define a moral order for Yarralin people. It focuses only on the relationship between the individual and Jesus, requiring that people reject responsibilities to kin, the earth, the past, and the future. It posits a future, after death, which unifies the individual with the singular source of value. In addition, it asserts that the world is in a state of decline, that things are getting worse, and that these facts signal a cause for rejoicing. It further implies that human beings do not have control over the conditions of their lives; that they do not constitute their own value; that relationships with this world are without worth; and that the self is to be held above others.

Between 1980 and 1982 Yarralin people were concerned with classifying the missionary message. Was it to be linked with the Captain Cook key event or was it yet another kind of Law? Much of their initial concern was to understand exactly

what was meant by missionary teachings. For example, on one occasion the missionary preached a sermon in which he stated that 'Jesus would lift up the whole world'. The next day I was asked whether I thought this meant that the whole globe would be physically lifted up and put somewhere else or whether it might be that Jesus would only take the outer, productive portion of the world. In the latter case, people suggested, there might still be something left over for Aboriginal people.

I understand this and other questions to indicate a concern with determining the moral content of the message. If Jesus were to take the whole world, the implication through analogy is that Jesus is an invading conqueror, perhaps even more wild and willful than Captain Cook. If Jesus were only to take the productive outer portion, then the implication might be that he is concerned to come to some accommodation with Aboriginal people.

Many Aboriginal people throughout the Victoria River District have come to the conclusion that the missionaries are just 'telling lies'. They point out that few of the missionary predictions have occurred, that few of the teachings suggest love and compassion, and that the prediction that God is intending to destroy the world is also lacking in this regard.

While asserting defiance of the missionary endeavour through mocking references to 'debil debils', some Aboriginal people also evaluate evangelical activity as the work of 'devils'. The logic of this evaluation is twofold. There is the experiential proposition that people who shout about Satan and who make other people unhappy appear to be working for the Devil they are so concerned with. There is also a logical proposition: the missionaries are the overt teachers of the concept of evil and the concept has considerable explanatory force in the contemporary Aboriginal world. If Yarralin people were to expand their cosmology to include the introduction of the principle of evil as a key event, then the missionaries would appear to be appropriate actors in the key event.

On my last visit to Yarralin, in 1986, I had a long conversation with a man who rejects the Pentecostal message totally. He did not mention Christianity at all, but rather spoke to me of impending death, both his own and that of his culture. In doing so he made use of missionary terminology, saying 'these are the last days now'. He spoke of how the Dreamings, the country, and the ancestors who continue to live in their own country remain strong and happy through communication with the living. He said that as fewer people learn the song cycles, fewer people communicate across the boundaries of time and death and all the life of the past and of the Dreaming is starting to fade away from living people. He was, of course, immensely saddened by the sundering of links between various parts of the cosmos, seeing therein the ultimate diminishment of his world and of his own life. For he was not anticipating going to heaven, but rather going as a dead person to his own country, there to live with ever diminishing contact with living people.

Conclusion

I have suggested that Yarralin people are granting the missionary message discursive space without, as yet, assenting to its content. A significant number of people think seriously about conversion. For them, it is a choice which they are not willing to make now but which they feel they might make in the future.

There is one essential point of agreement between the missionaries and many Aborigines: both are anticipating the end of the world. The missionaries see this as a global affair which they say they anticipate with pleasure. Many Aborigines see it as a localised affair, being the end of the world as they know it. They face a barren future both in life and in death.

The appeal of the missionaries can be seen in this context of death and destruction, for the missionaries offer a cosmology which affirms as primary moral principles many of the processes which Yarralin people experience as invasion and conquest. The Ngarinman missionary's words, spoken in 1986, sum it up: 'Praise God. Don't be on the losing side. Come in on the winning side.'

Inverting the Aboriginal evaluation of conquest, the missionary message suggests that invasion and conquest were necessary interventions, apparently ordained by Jesus, in order to bring a true cosmology to Aboriginal people. It thus signals one hundred years of European brutality as a cause for rejoicing. While reversing many of the principles of Ngarinman cosmology, it also expands the possibilities for thinking about the cosmos through introducing the concept of evil, personified as Satan.

I indicated earlier that many of the sermons I heard struck me as inappropriate for the audience to which they were addressed. I would now suggest that at another level they may, in fact, be singularly appropriate. Pentecostal cosmology encapsulates conquest, providing a moral frame for brutality. And it mirrors social processes of invasion and conquest, offering a larger frame in which conquest, undertaken through immoral means, is granted moral value. It thus offers at least the illusion of resolution to the paradox of conquest through a radical reframing of cosmic principles.

To date, the God mob has not been successful in gaining numbers of converts, but it is being listened to. One cannot evaluate the missionaries' endeavour as a failure on the basis of lack of numbers. Time is their best ally. While the missionaries disassociate themselves from unbelievers, both black and white, and while most European Territorians dismiss these missionaries as 'ratbags', the fact remains that both groups are involved in processes of conquest that show every indication of escalating. Modern capitalist expansion continues to generate the Captain Cook paradox for Aboriginal people, and the God mob is relentless in telling people that the paradox can be resolved through submission to their monocentric cosmology. An indigenous discourse sustains resistance precisely through paradox: through refusing to submit to a monocentric dialectic and refusing to accept destruction as a cosmogonic principle.

Notes

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2 Analyses of religious phenomena seem to call for a clarification of the researcher's own position on these issues. I am not a Christian, and, as is clear from the analysis, in this

instance my sympathies lay more with the Aboriginal non-converts than with those who were attempting to convert them. I have not written the paper in order to proselytise. My main objective has been to try to understand the cultural premises to the cosmologies and to analyse the intellectual problems posed by the missionaries' confrontationalist approach.

3 Frequently in this paper I contrast 'Aboriginal' with 'Christian'. This usage is consistent with missionary discourse, and is pertinent to the analysis I present here. However, Aboriginal Christians throughout Australia have clearly avoided this type of dichotomy.

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