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SEEK THE TRUTH AND SERVE HUMANITY

BLOOD, GAS & WAR CRIMINALS

EDITORIAL

If only the governments of the West and their despicable supporters understood this maxim, we wouldn't be witnessing the horrific murder of millions of innocent victims of their policies in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Palestine and Syria.

Even the most misguided and/or gullible in the world must surely now reject the hypocrisy of the arguments that we are bringing democracy to these countries by removing 'unpopular dictators' to bring new freedom to these people.

Witness the latest hypocrisy from the United States, 12 June 2013:

White House spokesman Jay Carney said Obama's Syria policy was under constant review to find 'what policy tools will help achieve our goal, which is a transition in Syria to a post-Assad government that respects the rights of the Syrian people and that gives that country a chance for a better future, a democratic future and an economically prosperous future.'

Heard this before? Iraq and Afghanistan continue to be telling examples of this hypocrisy with both countries in ruins and hundreds of thousands slaughtered. Libya and now Syria follow the same discredited pattern: to convince the people of the invading nations that we are the good guys, both countries in ruins, no genuine people's uprising, mostly foreign mercenaries and the 'mounds of corpses' rising horrifically.

The privately owned media trumpets the same old lies, hoping that the word 'terrorism' will justify the appalling slaughter, when it is our governments who should be wearing the terrorist label. The pattern is clear, we have seen it before, and we shine a beacon to illuminate that pattern as a stark reminder that we are really in these countries to meet the political and economic needs of a few greedy, power-hungry elites seeking to consolidate their imperialist plans, and that the 'mounds of corpses', however many, or whomever they are, are relatively unimportant to these criminals.

'If it were proved to me that in making war, my ideal had a chance of being realized, I would still say "no" to war. For one does not create a human society on mounds of corpses.'

LOUIS LECOIN

Beacon has consistently rejected these false claims, as it did during the Vietnam War when our position was swiftly vindicated, and we are convinced history will again vindicate our position.

Could we suggest that the real motive behind the 'democracy' excuse for aggression in these countries is something far more likely to be oil and natural gas?

Five months before 9/11, the US advocated using force against Iraq

to secure control of its oil. In a report commissioned by James Baker, Secretary of State under George Bush Snr, it says: 'Iraq remains a destabilizing influence to the flow of international oil markets from the Middle East.'

The Iraq and Afghan wars continue to be a disaster. All infrastructure is being destroyed, racked with deliberately fermented sectarian strife, millions dead and no democratic government.

Today, the British Cabinet is split over Syria, with the hawks led by the Prime Minister wanting to become further involved in the Syrian conflict and the doves pulling back for fear of another Iraq. You don't need to be an Einstein to reach that conclusion.

In the Syrian conflict the issues have nothing to do with democracy, or the leadership of the country, but all to do with natural gas, which is one of the ingredients that is fuelling an insane scramble for energy in the region. A gas pipeline from Iran would be highly profitable for Syria as well as Europe, but the West's allies, Qatar and Saudi (the most despotic of nations in the Persian Gulf), aren't happy about that and nor is Turkey. It can be claimed that the fight for 'democracy' is once again a false flag thrown out to conceal a totally different agenda.

If our appraisal is correct, then those pursuing this agenda are responsible for the 'mounds of corpses' of which the Western media keep reminding us, and they should be indicted for war crimes. As always, when profit and power are the issue, neither bodies nor justice matter. ■

Twisted Thinking

Somebody who went to high school with Dzhokhar Tsarnaev described him as a class clown. Well, that 19-year-old class clown somehow managed to trap 1 million people in Boston and its western suburbs in their homes as he and the police officers prepared for a final encounter.

Dzhokhar – the American kids he went to school with pronounce it Ja-har – is finally in custody.

His big brother, 26-year-old Tamerlan, is dead, a fate big brother must have known awaited them. He probably even welcomed it.

By some accounts, he, the big brother, dragged the class clown into his huge orbit of grievance, real or perceived, about the great Satan. That Satan, of course, being the very country that gave the Tsarnaev brothers more opportunity than they ever would have had if they had stayed in the troubled, poor country where they were born – Kyrgyzstan – or in the troubled, poor country where their ancestors came from, Chechnya.

Kyrgyzstan is one of the poorest countries spawned by the break-up of the Soviet Union. Hundreds of thousands of its 5 million people bugged out of the central Asian country in the years that followed the collapse of a system of government built on repression and corruption. It appears the Tsarnaev brothers, ethnic Chechens, began a nomadic trek that eventually brought them to, of all places, Cambridge.

I hear that poor, put-upon Tamerlan complained that Americans didn't like him. That he didn't have any American friends. He thought Harry Potter books created pagans and he condemned anyone who let their children read JK Rowling's books.

Now, Cambridge is probably the most tolerant swath of these United States. It is a sanctuary city for immigrants. We're not just talking about a few well-meaning lefties wearing Birkenstocks and 'Free Tibet' T-shirts.

Spare me the soul-searching, no one deserved this, writes Kevin Cullen in Boston.

The people of Cambridge, the city government of Cambridge, have created a wonderful community, the most inclusive, generous community to outsiders I have ever encountered. People in Cambridge go out of their way to be nice to, and genuinely supportive of, people like the Tsarnaev brothers.

I wouldn't doubt that Tamerlan Tsarnaev encountered some jerks over the years. We all do. It's called life. If Tamerlan Tsarnaev nursed murderous grudges because it was so hard to grow up and live in Cambridge, then he was, as his uncle said, a loser.

Kids who went to Rindge and Latin High School with Dzhokhar said he was a terrific wrestler, which makes sense. The country of his birth produces some of the best wrestlers in the world. They regularly win medals in Graeco-Roman wrestling in international competitions, including the Olympics. One kid told me Dzhokhar got a scholarship, which he used to attend the University of Massachusetts in Dartmouth.

Here's the portrait emerging, still subject to lots more reporting and confirmation and separation of fact and fiction: Tamerlan Tsarnaev had an overweening sense of grievance. He decided to kill and maim innocents. And he dragged his little, more impressionable brother into the whole thing. Now, that might change. It probably will change. It will become more nuanced, more complicated, as the hours and days and weeks pass.

On radio station NPR, a caller came on the air and started talking about how we've got to look in the mirror and ask what we as Americans have done to create angry young men like this. I almost drove off the road.

No one who lost their life or their limbs on Boylston Street last Monday did anything to create angry young men like this. And I know that eight-year-old Martin Richard, a beautiful little boy from Dorchester who was killed by a bomb the authorities say the Tsarnaev

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brothers prepared and left near the finish line of the Boston Marathon, never hurt a soul.

He was a kind little boy who was unfailingly nice to his classmate, said the daughter of the Boston firefighter who knelt over his body.

Sean Collier, the 26-year-old MIT police officer who was shot to death on Thursday night, was a wonderful young man. He worked as a civilian for the Somerville Police Department, but he desperately wanted to be a cop. He was thrilled when he got the call to join the MIT force last year, and he was willing to put his life on the line for all of us, as he did on Thursday night when he responded to a call in Kendall Square and was, the police say, executed by the Tsarnaev brothers before he could even get out of his cruiser. I am willing to bet my life on the certainty that Sean Collier would have laid down his life for anybody, including immigrants from Kyrgyzstan or Chechnya. In the end, he did lay down his life, trying to protect others.

I don't want to listen to how innocent people bear

some responsibility for creating the twisted minds of the Tsarnaev brothers, who emerged from the break-up of a totalitarian form of government that collapsed under the weight of ordinary people wanting freedom.

The Tsarnaev brothers are responsible for twisting a great religion to foment hatred. They don't speak for Muslims any more than I speak for overweight Irish-American guys who like to play hockey. It would be a horrific insult to their victims, and to the unimaginably brave first responders who ran towards the bombs last Monday, if there is a backlash against Muslims.

But, please, spare me the guilt. At least let's see how this ends. At least let us bury our dead first. At least let us heal our wounded. At least let us take care of our first responders. Then maybe I'll listen to 'what did we do to make them hate us?' claptrap. Then maybe I'll go to some soul-searching debate about how our foreign policy is screwed up and how we're creating too many enemies and too few allies.

But then, maybe I won't. ■

OUR RESPONSE...

Beacon reader Shirley Angus sent in the article 'Twisted Thinking' and requested that the Beacon Board respond to the article.

The attached article by *Boston Globe* columnist, Kevin Cullen, probably expresses the views of most Americans and indeed many others around the world who all felt the horror brought to us so graphically, by camera, of the Boston Marathon bombing. We ask why? Yes, we are horrified that innocent American lives were lost so needlessly. Yes, we all ask ourselves how this could happen? That is why it is so important to analyse this article, and we thank Beacon reader Shirley Angus for asking us to do so.

Cullen says the two brothers Tsarnaev were from 'Kyrgyzstan [is] one of the poorest countries spawned by the break-up of the Soviet Union', which he claims was a system of government built on repression and corruption.

Perhaps he is referring to the tsarist system that the Russian people freed themselves from to build the Soviet Union. Tsarism was certainly based on repression and corruption, albeit supported by Western nations in order to protect their financial investments in the region. He also seems not to recognise that the US system today has more than its share of repression and corruption, but is this what spawned the violence in Boston? We think not!

What has spawned such violence is their capitalist wars (illegal occupations, violent overthrows, assassinations, slaughter of innocents), which have nothing to do with democracy and justice but all to do with power and profit. That in this grab for power, and profit, the US and its so called 'allies' have supported some of the most 'repressive and corrupt' regimes in the world, often against the demands of the people of those countries. That list is long.

These 'invasions' murder, maim and kill thousands of children such as '8 year old Martin Richard, a beautiful little boy from Dorchester' ... 'a kind little boy who

was unfailingly nice to his classmates'. These children, also kind little ones, have mothers and fathers who love them, who mourn them, who begin to hate the perpetrators, and the young people of these same countries grow up amid this wanton destruction and burn with anger and frustration toward those they see as responsible for their plight.

Is the murder of innocent people in the US justified? No! Is Islam responsible? No! Is the US government responsible for untold deaths in many countries? History tells us that yes, indeed, they are.

Kevin Cullen says, '*Spare me the guilt!*' Sorry Kevin, we can't. All of us whose governments are complicit in these murderous wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria and so many others before them, have a responsibility to ask why, to analyse and understand and condemn, as have so many wonderful, courageous American writers, academics and prominent people, and as has our wonderful journal *Beacon* over many years.

A 'NOT IN MY NAME' campaign, based on a policy of non intervention, no bases on foreign soil, a halt to the arms race, a ban on nuclear weapons of all kinds is the only way to prevent further Boston bombings and to recognise that innocent people of every nationality have the same rights to live in peace as Americans. ■

THE CASE FOR A MAXIMUM WAGE

SHOULD OUR SOCIETIES HAVE A 'MAXIMUM WAGE'? WOULD THE WORLD BE BETTER OFF IF THE US HAD ONE?

Currently, Americans are debating raising the national minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$10 per hour over the next two years. While conservatives will oppose it, such a boost shouldn't be contentious.

Back in 1967, the US minimum wage was \$1.40 per hour. That's not as measly as it sounds. Your grandparents' tales about when 10 pennies could actually buy something are not mere nostalgia. In fact, the 1967 wage had 20 per cent more purchasing power than the current minimum.

Economic productivity is an even bigger part of the story. Our labour is producing more value today, but working people aren't seeing any of the gains. Had the US minimum wage kept pace with productivity increases since 1960, it would now be \$22 per hour.

Who has walked away with the proceeds from all that productivity? It's a fair question, but it leads back to discussion of a maximum wage. And that's where things get controversial.

A January report from Oxfam noted: 'The richest one per cent has increased its income by 60 per cent in the last 20 years.' It further argued that the 2012 net income of the world's top 100 billionaires – a haul of \$240 billion – would be four times the amount needed to eliminate extreme poverty internationally.

While regions such as Latin America have made strides in reducing the gap between the rich and poor in the past decade, the US has led the way in manufacturing excess at the expense of equity.

To remedy this, US transit workers' union leader Larry

Hanley recently proposed a 'maximum wage' law that would limit an employer's income to being no more than 100 times the salary of his or her lowest-paid employee. If an entry-level worker gets \$30,000 per year, the CEO would make no more than \$3 million.

Other countries provide precedents for such a policy. 'In Spain, the manufacturing and retail enterprises that belong to the Mondragon cooperative network limit top pay to three to nine times worker compensation,' explains author and policy analyst Sam Pizzigati, perhaps the most outspoken US proponent of a maximum wage. Since 2011, Egypt and France have each pursued fixed pay ratios for leaders of state-owned enterprises. Even Switzerland, a country not known for being inhospitable to bankers, has passed restrictions on pay for bank executives and banned 'golden parachute' severance packages.

Some advocates contend that a maximum should apply only to businesses receiving taxpayer support in the form of bailouts, government contracts, tax abatements or other public subsidies. Since American industry has been notoriously hungry for corporate welfare, this would cover a very large portion of the US economy.

Free marketeers will no doubt blast the idea of a maximum wage as the type of insane socialistic tyranny that chains everyone into the same, lowly state of mediocrity. Yet a ceiling based on a ratio between the executives at the top of a business and the grunts at the bottom doesn't set a hard cap on earnings. It merely puts to the test one of their most cherished claims: that the profits of a successful enterprise trickle down to benefit everyone.

Economists love to talk about incentives. In this case, such limits would motivate CEOs to augment the pay of their janitors, secretaries and cashiers for a simple reason: their own raises would depend on it.

Besides, a 100-to-1 discrepancy is hardly government-enforced equality.

It would be a considerable departure from the status quo, however. A typical American CEO now makes 380 times what the average worker in the country earns (never mind the lowest paid).

That's not an example the world needs. And it's something that will take more than just a small boost in the minimum to fix. ■

Mark Engler is a senior analyst with Foreign Policy In Focus and author of *How to Rule the World: The Coming Battle Over the Global Economy* (Nation Books, 2008). He can be reached via the website: DemocracyUprising.com

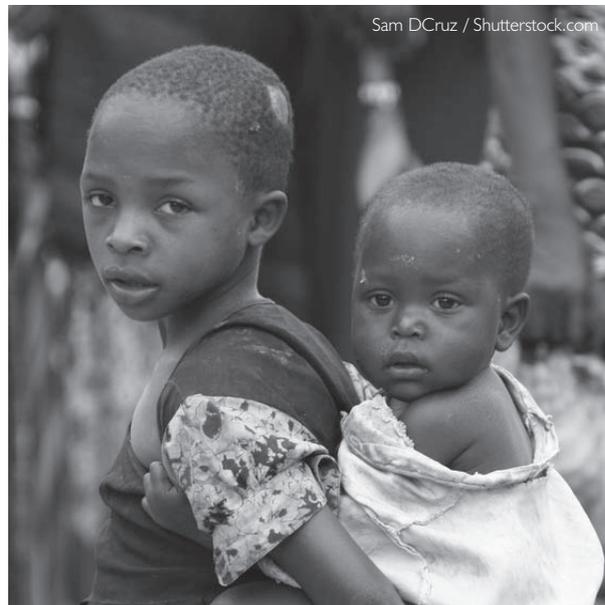
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Children and Armed Conflict

Graca Marchel, wife of Nelson Mandela, in her groundbreaking 1996 report to the UN, reported that around the world millions of children are caught up in conflicts in which they are not merely bystanders but targets. More recently, she stated that wars have always victimised children and other noncombatants, but modern wars are exploiting, maiming and killing children more systematically than ever. War violates every right of the child – unlawful recruitment, sexual violence, displacement, killing and maiming, separation from family, trafficking and illegal detention. And in addition to these effects are the indirect consequences of war – including the loss of basic services such as water, sanitation, health and education as well as the rise in poverty, malnutrition and disease.



Graca Marcel also points out that today's weapons of mass destruction are not nuclear or biological – they are the estimated half-billion small arms and light weapons that fuel conflicts around the world.

At the time of this report, UNICEF stated that in the last decade:

- two million children had been killed
- four–five million children had been disabled
- twelve million children made homeless
- more than a million children orphaned or separated from their parents
- some 10 million children traumatised.

In a new report to the UN, Graca Marchel notes that armed conflict now kills and maims more children than soldiers.

It is 66 years since the UN was founded and 54 years since the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of the Child. Other key documents for the protection of children include the Geneva Conventions, various Security Council resolutions and the Paris Principles.

It is obvious that little progress has been made over the years and this is because international law is not binding on the signatories. Sadly, also, the world's only super power has not signed the UN Declaration for the Rights of the Child. Nor does the US support the banning of land mines and cluster bombs, both responsible for thousands of ongoing casualties amongst children.

To be able to kill and maim people on the scale as indicated above involves a lot of firepower and munitions.

The permanent UN Security Council members: The USA, UK, France, Russia, and China also dominate the world trade in arms, which is big business. The world spends \$1000 billion annually on the military.

Former president Jimmy Carter, during his presidential campaign in 1976 said, 'We can't have it both ways. We can't be the world's leading champion of peace and the world's leading supplier of arms.'

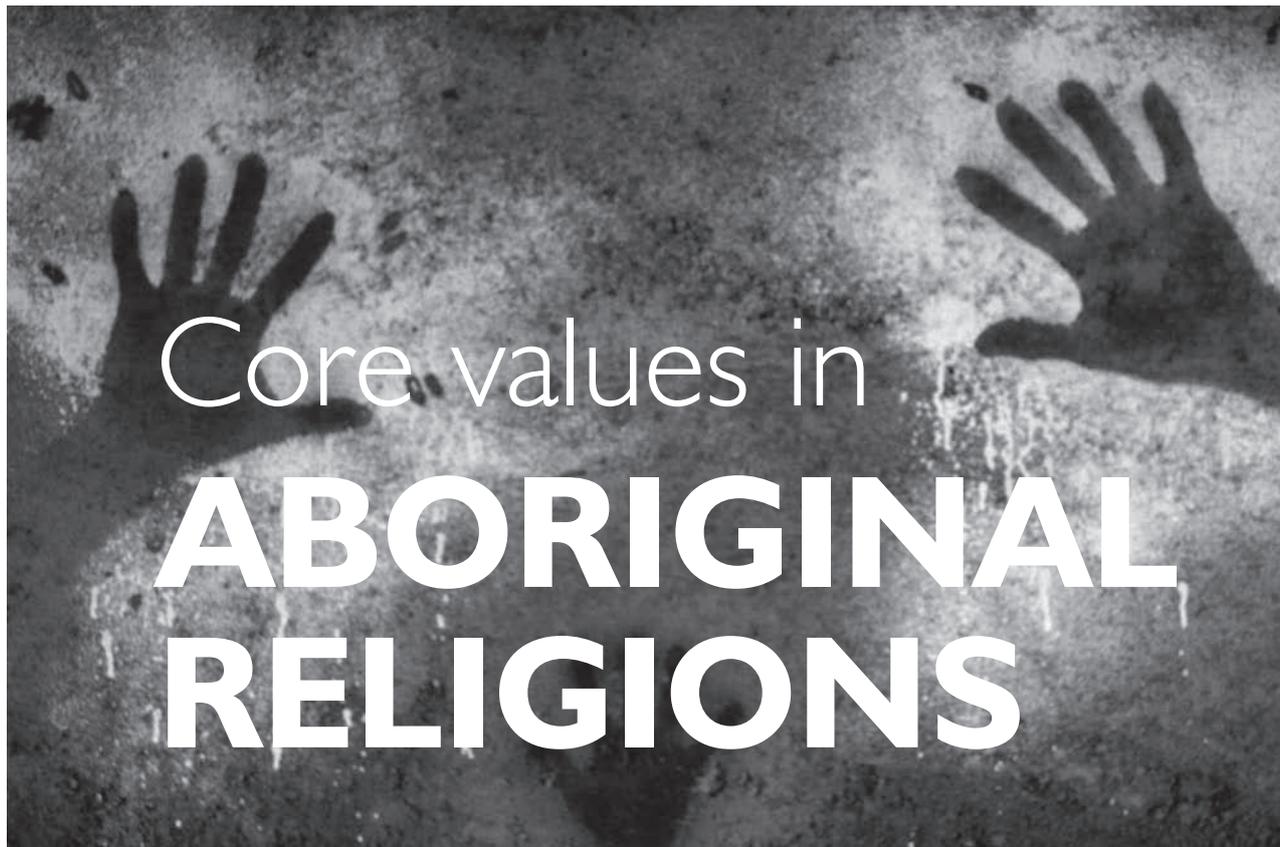
In September 1939, President Franklin D Roosevelt made an appeal to the governments of France, Germany, Italy, Poland, and to His Britannic Majesty:

The ruthless bombing from the air of civilians in unfortified centers of population during the course of the hostilities which have raged in various quarters of the earth during the last few years, which has resulted in the maiming and in the death of defenseless men, women, and children, has profoundly shocked the conscience of humanity.

If resort is had to this form of inhuman barbarism during the period of this tragic conflagration with which the world is now confronted, hundreds of thousands of innocent human beings who have no responsibility for, and who are not even remotely participating in, the hostilities which have now broken out, will lose their lives. I am therefore addressing this urgent appeal to every government which may be engaged in hostilities publicly to affirm its determination that its armed forces shall in no event, under no circumstances, undertake the bombardment from the air of civilian populations or of unfortified cities, upon the understanding that these same rules of warfare will be scrupulously observed by all of their opponents. I request an immediate reply.

Six years later the US dropped two atomic bombs on Japan.

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by Dr Gary Presland

I would like to begin by making two quite general points on the subject of Aboriginal religions:

Firstly, I think we have to realise that the detailed study of Aboriginal religions is in fact a comparatively recent one. It took non-Indigenous observers the best part of 150 years to realise that the indigenous population of this country even had a religious life, let alone to begin to understand the very great depth there is to that life. And for most people even now, that point of understanding has not been reached.

This is not to offer excuses, but in some respects it is not surprising that Europeans failed to recognise Aboriginal religion when they encountered it.

- In the first place, the religious framework of Aboriginal Australia is so very different to that from which the colonisers came; and certainly few if any of the immigrants would have been exposed to anything like it previously.
- Moreover, few of the newcomers were trained to look for or appreciate the more spiritual aspects of life.
- Even those individuals who *did* have some understanding of religion, and particularly their own religion, were still disinclined to see anything positive in the Aboriginal way of life. For example, the Rev. Joseph Orton (who came to Victoria to set up a Wesleyan mission) in August 1836 wrote back to his headquarters about the Aborigines:

After the minutest observation and strictest inquiry I could not discover that they possess the most indistinct notion of a Supreme Being – nor have I been able to ascertain that they have the slightest vestige of religious worship or superstitious observance (HRV, 2A, p. 86).

And one of his brethren, the Rev. Francis Tuckfield, likewise wrote in February 1839:

‘their mind as it regards religion seems to be a rude chaos presenting an awfully distressing vacancy of thought (HRV, 2A, p. 114).

In the main, the general view these men had of Aboriginal culture, like that of the overwhelming majority of whites, was one that mitigated against their either recognising or acknowledging the presence of a religious sphere in Aboriginal life.

The second point that I should make is that when we speak of Aboriginal religion we have to speak in the plural. There is no single Aboriginal religion – there are in fact scores, if not hundreds of them.

But, notwithstanding the cultural diversity that existed across the continent, it is clear that Aboriginal religions were similar in kind. Although there was widespread diversity of belief, across Australia there was a likeness in the organisation of activities that involved ritual expression.

It is possible then to make some general statements regarding the core values of these religions as a whole. In this regard, I cannot improve on what Professor William Stanner wrote in a number of places.

As Stanner has put it:

There is a tetrad in Aboriginal culture, which consists of living people, their countries, their totems and their ancestors. These four elements are bound together with inherent and imperishable links.

Indeed, such is the nature of these links that, in truth, it isn't possible to consider one without considering all. It is virtually impossible to talk about any specific aspect of Aboriginal culture in isolation; the religious and social connections of people to their land and all that is in it, and all that made it, infuses every aspect of their life.

Nonetheless, and once again following Stanner (1979 & 1998), there are a number of general statements that might be asserted by way of characterising the broad parameters of Aboriginal religions.

1. Aboriginal people believe that ancestral beings left a world full of signs to show their beneficent intent toward the people they had also brought into being. Further, these outward and visible signs could – through wisdom about living which was cherished by traditional experience – be interpreted to indicate that people's lives had to follow a perennial pattern and, if they did so, people would always be provided for.

A great deal of attention has been focused on Aboriginal mastery of their environments, through their subsistence strategies and use of segmentary social organisations. But these strategies are more than just a means to ensure physical survival; they are underlain with an absolute belief in the efficacy of their religious system, as expressed through ritual observance. Aboriginal people see within nature a pattern that it is their role to maintain and renew through proper religious observance. The relationships between the physical world, human and other life and the role of humans in that world were laid down for all time in that period usually referred to as the Dreamtime – more correctly the Dreaming. At the same time humans, along with all other beings, were endowed with their good and/or bad properties, including (in the case of humans), what constituted right and proper behaviour.

2. The human person, a compound of body and several spiritual principles or elements, had value in himself and for others, and there were spirits who cared.

There is a high degree of ritual within the life-cycle of every individual in Aboriginal society; at some time or other each person is honoured above all others, suggesting that a high value was placed on human life generally. This is implied also by respect for totems and totemic places, and emblems that stand for individuals, the unquestioning care of the sick and elderly, and respect for the memory of the dead. Moreover, in many parts of Australia there are thought to be spirits – in some cases great spirits, in

others lesser guardians – whose role it is to care for humans.

3. The main religious cults in Aboriginal Australia were concerned to renew and conserve life, including the life force that kept animating the world in which humans subsisted and with which they were bonded in body, soul and spirit.

Aboriginal people everywhere across Australia were preoccupied, sometimes to the point of obsession, with the symbols, signs and portents of vitality. Through numerous myths and rites, things of vitality – water, blood, fat, hair – vibrated, and natural things such as green leaves, rain, lightning, whirlwinds, shooting stars and the heavenly bodies, were animated. The evidence from all parts of the continent points to the perception that Aboriginal religions were among the least materially-minded and most life-minded of any of which we know.

4. The material part of life, and of humans themselves, was under a spiritual authority, and the souls of the dead shared in maintaining the authority and the providence over them.

There are many qualifications that one could make on this general proposition (for example, there was no one spirit that had authority over the entire material world; and some parts of nature were simply inanimate things). However, the proposition is substantiated in the recognition of two sets of beliefs:

- firstly, those concerning the impregnation of women by child-spirits that act under their own volition

- and secondly, those concerned with the necessity of humans to release the potential of life (of plants, animals and humans) that pre-exists in totemic places.

5. The core of religious practice was to bring the life of an individual under the discipline that required that person to understand the sacred tradition of his or her group and to conform the person's life to the pattern ordained by that tradition.

Much of the mythology of Aboriginal Australia points to the frailties of human nature. Original man is egotistical, self-willed, sometimes wanton, greedy and envious, etc. The body of religious rites serves the function of keeping these all-too-human features in check – by fashioning uncompleted humans and transforming them into beings of higher worth.

6. The underlying philosophy of Aboriginal religion was one of assent to the received terms of life; this is, it inculcated a strong disposition to accept life as a mixture of good with bad, of joy with suffering, but to celebrate it nonetheless.

Although Aboriginal people accepted the authority conveyed by the Dreaming, there was no sense of fatalism or pessimism on the one hand or rebellion or complaint on the other. The world was as it was and always must be.

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Much of the mythology of Aboriginal Australia points to the frailties of human nature. Original man is egotistical, self-willed, sometimes wanton, greedy and envious, etc.

Something of the importance played by religion in traditional Aboriginal society should be clear from the foregoing. As anthropologist Ronald Berndt has said (1998):

Aboriginal religion is a total way of life; and the transcendental is viewed as a necessary component, inseparable from ordinary living.

Thus there are no agnostics, no non-believers in this society. Men, women, children of all ages are a part of the religious community.

Some reference needs to be made to the roles and practices of women in Aboriginal religions. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that anthropological studies carried out by male fieldworkers (e.g. Stanner, Warner, Maddocks) tend to downplay the importance of the women's role; studies by female anthropologists (e.g. Berndt, Goodale, Bell) on the other hand do the reverse. (To some extent these differences may be a reflection of the fact that the fieldworkers join with their own gender group.) Thus, perhaps the most interesting fieldwork studies are those done by couples (e.g. Catherine and Ron Berndt, Noel and Phyl Wallace).

However, there are at least two aspects of Aboriginal life and lore that might suggest women's part in religious observance is an important role – both for the women themselves and society at large:

1. Given the role of women in day-to-day subsistence or economic activities – where they play an important part but can be essentially independent – it seems reasonable to assume that in ritual and religious matters they have a similar standing.
2. In the traditional myths and stories of a number of areas, far from being passive participants, women are in fact major characters, including creative beings.

Following Diane Bell, we can suggest then that:

1. Women trace their rights and responsibilities for the maintenance of their religious heritage to the past in diverse ways. But women's ritual roles appear to be the structural equivalents of men's.
2. In secret rituals that are closed to men, women celebrate their relations to the land, its sites and the Dreamings. Their focus on health, emotional management, and resolution of conflict benefits the whole of society, not just women.
3. In women's ceremonies the dominant theme is that of woman the nurturer.

Ritual and myth

Most of what I have said thus far has been by way of defining a conceptual framework. But, of course, as in all religions, there is also a central core of practice in Aboriginal religions, which certainly needs to be considered. One way of looking at this practice is through the study of two closely related aspects of Aboriginal religious and social life, that is, ritual and myth.

Both of these areas are immensely complex of course, and could easily occupy us for the rest of the day.

I have already briefly alluded to the place of rituals and myth within religious practice and in the time left to me here I can elaborate only a little.

Looking firstly at ritual, we can say that, basically, the ceremonies and rites that are such a fundamental part of Aboriginal religious life can be arranged in four groups, each of a different kind:

1. 'Commemorative' or 'historical' rites – these are concerned to honour relevant life-giving ancestors of a clan or sub-clan, and are generally carried out at the site that is sacred to the emergence into the world, or of the activity, of those ancestors.

2. So-called 'increase' rites, which take place at the site associated with the particular totemic being and where the spirit power of that totem dwells; such ceremonies are actually ill named since what is intended is maintenance, not

increase.

3. 'Initiation' rites – are primarily concerned to bring the initiate (male or female) by stages into the fellowship of the most knowledgeable members of the group. More than all other rituals, those associated with initiation have the purely practical aspect of ensuring that individuals acquire the level of knowledge that will allow them to survive.
4. Finally, there are death and mortuary rites, which were concerned to firstly ensure that the deceased could be quit of earthly ties; and, secondly, to place his or her spirit within its proper country. In some cases this had the corollary of permitting that spirit later to inhabit a human host.

This classification is by no means clear cut or accepted; there are some blurred edges. For example, the rites associated with death might be considered as ceremonies marking a specific form of initiation.

However, to a greater or lesser extent, all of these rituals are an acting-out or a re-telling of stories that elaborate the conceptual parameters within which the rituals have a meaning. That meaning may be secular or sacred. Moreover, there are stories that are just stories. We can say that although there is a great deal of variation and diversity across the continent, there are once again similarities – in this case in the intent and nature of the content of the stories. To this end, Stanner has pointed out that:

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In secret rituals that are closed to men, women celebrate their relations to the land, its sites and the Dreamings. Their focus on health, emotional management, and resolution of conflict benefits the whole of society, not just women.

'If one analyses the hundreds of tales about the Dreaming, one can see within them three elements.

- the first concerns the *great marvels* – how all fire and water in the world were stolen and recaptured; how men made a mistake over sorcery and now have to die from it; how the hills, rivers and waterholes were made, etc.
- the second tells how certain things were instituted for the first time – how animals and humans diverged from a common stock; how black-nosed wallabies got their black noses, the echidna its quills, etc.
- the third element creates the impression that many of the main institutions of present-day life were *already ruling* in the Dreaming, institutions such as marriage exogamy, sister-exchange and initiation, as well as many of the well-known breaches of custom.'

Conclusion

In conclusion, it might be said that we have evidence of a huge body of religious experience across the continent, from within which we can draw a number of parallels and generalisations. Although in Aboriginal Australia there were no deities, no veneration or prayer, there was certainly recognition on people's part of a dependence on powers outside their being, and there was devotion.

From what I have said here it should be clear that the study of Aboriginal religions, as indeed the study of any religion, is an extremely complex one. I thank you for the opportunity to speak about something that is of interest to me and hope that I have provided not only an insight into the complexity of Aboriginal religions but also hints, for those of you who are interested in further study of such things, into ways in which the thought and practice of these religions might be usefully compared with those of one or more of the world religions. ■

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Continued from page 6: **Children and armed conflict**

Since the end of World War 2, the US continued by bombing 26 mainly Third World countries. The carpet-bombing of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam alone killed and maimed millions. Like all Third World countries there would be very little medical help available for the victims.

A terrorist is someone who has a bomb but no air force.

President FD Roosevelt would have been as dismayed as President Jimmy Carter is at the ongoing use of torture, the indefinite detention without trial, the use of dogs to make prisoners talk and more recently, the use of torture to obtain information from Afghan civilians.



And predator drones pose another sinister threat to the Third World as if there aren't enough already.

What does Christian America mean when it pronounces 'In God we Trust'? It is even printed on their bank notes.

What can be done to end this madness and turn the world around? The downward spiral of depravity has to be stopped.

Might a worldwide social media have an impact on world leadership?

Who would initiate and finance the campaign?

Reading the *Anatomy of Peace* by Emery Reeves and the open letter to the American people might inspire some people. ■

John Wheeler 20/5/2013

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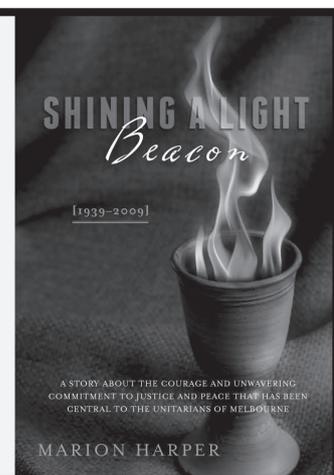
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from our readers



Dear Editor

The recent episode of the ABC's *Foreign Correspondent* was a very insightful and deeply moving show on Cyprus. This report brought a personal perspective to the small nation's political and economic upheavals. The program showed the real social and economic suffering the European Union's austerity policy has inflicted on the people of Cyprus and elsewhere. It is criminal that a couple of bank's bad loans can be used against a whole people who were not responsible for the problem. This amounts effectively to collective punishment of the population. Watching this program, I was struck with the feeling that the EU's solution amounted to destroying the country in order to save it. It was also wonderful to witness the compassionate and united strength of the island's community and vividly showed the resilience, tenacity and solidarity of the Cypriot people, the things that have gotten them through so many previous tragedies and hard times. The actions of the EU won't break the indomitable willpower of the Cypriot people and this spirit will ensure they overcome this latest catastrophe.

Steven Katsineris, Vic

Dear Sir

Enclosed please find \$20 as subscription to the *Beacon*. I would appreciate it if you could forward me a copy of the 2013 April issue.

Thanking you for a great publication.

Greetings

PM Pastourel, Qld

Great article Peter (Barrack). I'm glad to see you still have 'fire in the belly'.

Regards

W Lees, Qld

Dear Beacon

Please find enclosed subscription renewal. Thank you for printing the IPA Wish List – a really scary scenario.

Yours sincerely

M Rimington, VIC

AUSTRALIA SHOULD END ITS DOUBLE-SPEAK ON NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT, AND LEAD THE PUSH FOR NEGOTIATIONS ON A TREATY BANNING AND ELIMINATING NUCLEAR WEAPONS.

FOREWORD

Australia has made important contributions towards a safer and more peaceful world – such as helping found the UN, helping establish the Chemical Weapons Convention, and opposing nuclear test explosions, after itself being contaminated by British tests. However, Australians should be profoundly concerned that our government is today doing more to increase the dangers of nuclear weapons being used than it is helping to ban them. Its professed support for nuclear disarmament is contradicted by its actions. We claim the protection of US nuclear weapons, despite there being no agreement or treaty giving the concept of 'extended nuclear deterrence' any credibility. We support continued investments in US nuclear weapons and willingness to use them, despite this making us a nuclear target.

We are dramatically ramping up Australia as a subservient US military base, with growing spy, surveillance and communications facilities; increasing military exercising; US troops on permanent rotation; plans for drones based on the Cocos Islands; and possibly a US aircraft carrier taskforce in Fremantle.

We are accomplices to a hazardous and provocative US policy of containment of China that risks a new cold war. We, our children and the world, deserve better.

Australia should, as New Zealand has done, ensure that nuclear weapons have no place in our military alliances, and that no facilities on our soil and no Australians ever take part in their use. We should use our position on the UN Security Council to help lead the push for negotiations on a treaty to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons.

A world freed from nuclear weapons would be more readily achieved and sustained if we ended uranium exports to nuclear weapon states, to states that have not signed on to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and to states with inadequate safeguards.

Nuclear weapons can only jeopardise, not safeguard, one's security. Their elimination is the most urgent global priority. It is time Australia ended its double-speak on nuclear disarmament and did much more.

Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser AC CH May 2013

Source: ICAN (*International Campaign to abolish nuclear weapons*)

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Marion Harper

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Julie Stafford

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