



Hope Built on the Dreaming

Reflection on the Pope's Speech in Alice Springs in 1986 by Elizabeth Pike

Why do we keep referring to the Pope's speech of 1986 in Alice Springs. Why celebrate and draw attention to it 20 years down the track?

Since 1788 till the present time, newcomers to this land, the prisoners, the landed gentry, the pastoralists, the gold seekers and later the missionaries', have always harboured a hope for a better life in Australia.

There was a grand vision of freedom and liberty. A plot of land to build a home on, a chance to create a new tolerant society with economic opportunity, education for all, and social equality. In all - a chance to be your own person.

At the beginning, this vision was looking good for the lucky ones. But where did the original owners, the Indigenous people, of this wonderful country fit into this scenario? Sadly they didn't !!!

However, many Aboriginal people believe, that it was the intention of the first missionary people to bring love to help Aborigines. Many stories of acute poverty, sickness, heinous violation and murderous attacks on people who were once strong and healthy, were drifting back to the distant world across the sea. These stories struck a chord in the spirit of the religious vocation of some missionary Orders. Sadly, many of these well meaning people had misguided ideas of how to help, because of language barriers, distance, isolation and the yet unknown vagaries of extreme weather conditions.

Unfortunately, these missionaries had no idea of the richness of the culture they were meeting and thinking their own cultural ways were best, they sought to impose their own European values. Slowly the Indigenous culture began to disintegrate. Very few groups escaped the destruction of language, culture and identity. The loss of homeland and family connections tore at the very core of their being. Along with this loss of a belief system, that had sustained and nurtured them from time beyond time, an unknown fear and bitterness began to develop deep in their psyche.

It is my view, that it is fear that lies subconsciously at the very heart of this nation as a whole.



For Aboriginal people, it is fear for the complete loss of culture. Some still have a remnant of it, but so many are living in a vacuum, lost and wandering in a darkness they don't understand. For a vast majority of the non-Indigenous in the nation, they still unconsciously do not recognise the fear behind what was done to a whole race of people and their land. Could their fear be, that one day they too, may be taken over by certain new migrants and asylum seekers losing their identity and way of life?

Another fear is now slowly rising to the surface; people are beginning to witness the damage of pollution, the denuding of our forests, the misuse of uranium mining, and the dumping of nuclear waste onto our land and into our waterways. We are all in grave danger and fear is now beginning to filter into the hearts of many discerning ones.

This is not a pretty picture, but it has to be brought into the open, acknowledged, and acted upon urgently, before any hope can become a reality for us all.

Now what has all this got to do with the Pope's Speech in Alice Springs? Everything

In 1986 many people in this country welcomed John Paul II, known as the Pilgrim Pope. A visitor of great importance, not only for those of a religious persuasion, but for many who saw him as a man bringing a message of 'Peace', something the world was sorely in need of. Aboriginal people saw in him a 'Wisdom Man of High Degree.'

Along with his mission of promoting world peace, he was anxious to ensure that Indigenous cultures be fully recognised and included into the renewed church, not as an appendage seen only on the fringes of communities, but participating and contributing in ceremony in their own cultural way. This was evident in the many strong and beautiful passages throughout his speech. He began right at the start with ...

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

'It is a great joy for me to be here today in Alice Springs and to meet you all... I want to tell you right away how much the Church esteems and loves you and how much she wishes to assist you in your spiritual and material needs... To all human beings throughout the ages, God has given a desire for Himself, a desire which different cultures have tried to express in their own ways.



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For thousands of years you have lived in this Great South land of the Holy Spirit. You have fashioned a culture that endures to this day. During all this time, the Spirit of God has been with you. Your 'Dreaming,' which influences your lives so strongly, that no matter what happens, you remain forever people of your culture. It is your own way of touching the mystery of God's Spirit within you and in all creation. You must keep your striving for God and hold on to it with all your lives...

The Church in Australia must joyfully receive your cultural contribution if it is to be the Church that Jesus would want it to be.

This ingeniously creative speech had many more things to say, not only to Aboriginal people, or the Catholic Church but for all Christians striving to live within the gospel message of justice and love.

It is disappointing to know that in a message that gave us such great hope and encouragement, many Churches, as well as other Australians, twenty years later, have not taken up the challenge seriously.

This speech was like a blue print for an initiation into a New Dreaming for the future, for all Australians to create together, using some aspects of our Aboriginal culture as the cornerstone.

Somehow, the cornerstone has been misplaced. It needs to be rediscovered and given its rightful priority; otherwise we are a nation not built on rock but on sand. It is time now to let go of our fears and begin with the cornerstone of Hope and the underlying wisdom of our ancestors who as stewards and guardians of the land kept it sustainable for thousands of generations. It is time for a re-examination of the western beliefs of the mechanistic reductionism that has dominated not only the world but the Churches.

As our stories are beginning to be heard and the new green shoots of the burnt tree are slowly breaking through, there is also a deep and humble responsibility to be observed. We have to be worthy keepers of our New Dreaming, just as our Ancestral Dream Keepers were strong and trustworthy in their belief that the true spirit of the land came from the Great Spirit of all creation.

This is the 'Truth' that John Paul referred to and has to be retold for each new generation to hear. This is the responsibility for our communities to uphold. Our future depends on it.

This then is the answer to the question posed at the beginning, why remember the Pope's Speech, why celebrate 20 years down the track? Rebirth must always continue. It is essential to keep alive the truth and hope that was given to us, in order to keep the Dream alive and to enrich



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this nation to become the nation it was meant to be - the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit and the True Spirit of the land. The True Spirit within all creation is continually being reborn.

This then is the answer to the question posed at the beginning,. Why we must continually remember the Pope's speech, Why celebrate 20 years down the track and why rebirth must always continue? It must if we are to keep Truth and Hope in the Dreaming alive. It is also important for our culture to enrich this nation if it is to become worthy of its name - Great South land of the Holy Spirit. **E Pike 2004.**