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Scripture Passage
1 Cor 12:12-14

Reading

Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church
Frans Wijsen

In its recent Assessment of Research Quality the Association of the Universities in the Netherlands noted the danger of 'an overly introspective Eurocentrism' in doing theology in the Netherlands and called for more 'involvement with extra-European issues'. (1) Some years earlier I made an investigation of missiological education in the Dutch faculties of theology. This investigation confirmed the diagnosis of Eurocentrism, except for some evangelical schools of theology which have a missionary and cross cultural set-up. (2) Since September 2000 the Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of Nijmegen has started an English programme in intercultural theology in which students from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe are enrolled. (3) But, to what extent do we escape from the 'danger of Eurocentrism'? Is our programme really intercultural? Or is it just another example of Western 'knowledge export', a one-way traffic, a manifestation of a Western superiority complex in which we presuppose that our rationality is the best, that our methods are the most appropriate? Are we prepared to learn from 'the others', or do we want them to adjust to our criteria? Do we accept the plurality of scientific perspectives, or has the claim of absoluteness and universality of the Christian faith just been replaced by the claim of absoluteness and universality of a western rational-analytic view of science?

The Nijmegen Graduate School of Theology has been opened as part of the 'mutual missionary assistance of churches'. But the question is: How mutual is this mutual assistance? To what extent are we open to a 'reversed mission' by which members of churches in the South help us to overcome the crisis of Christianity in the West? This contribution will have four sections. First I wish to elaborate on the paradigm shift in mission. Then I will introduce intercultural theology as new perspective and a new method in theology. I will continue by showing the need of developing an intercultural hermeneutics. Finally I will show a direction in which we could go, namely subaltern hermeneutics. In the conclusion I will discern the consequences of a new understanding of culture for the mission of the church in the 21st century.

1.   Paradigm shift in mission
In the course of its history, the Catholic Church developed various models of mission. I will not go into details, as I presuppose that this history is known. (4) I just mention four models briefly:

1.   The first missionaries in the modern time went to the non-Christian countries to bring to the so called 'pagans' the light of Christ and His message of salvation. According to them the pagans lived in the shadow of death. They were convinced that outside the church there was no salvation.

2.   Soon missionaries came to understand that individuals need some social support for their conversion. So, the 'salvation of souls' approach was soon supplemented by the 'plantation of the church'. In practice this meant the transplantation of the European Christianity to the mission countries.

3.   But, already before the Second World War it became obvious that this mission method was

not very effective. In consequence another approach developed. The aim remained more or less the same, but the method changed. Still the missionaries wanted non-Christians to enter the church. But the church from her side could meet the pagans halfway, by an 'adaptation of Christianity' in its externals, language, vestments and rituals .

4.   Whereas the 'adaptation' approach was still very strong in the sixties, and has become stronger again due to the rise of the pentecostal and charismatic movements, some missionaries and local priests worked out a new understanding of mission. It was recognized that Christ was already present in the non-Christian cultures. The missionary's task was only to help the non-Christians to discover the active presence of Christ in their lives.

When mission was defined in terms of a ' deeper adaptation' or ' incarnation', and later on of 'inculturation', this was a break-through in the understanding of mission.(5) It meant a recognition of other cultures in their own right. ' Inculturation' as an expression was taken up in Africa with eagerness. It included dialogue with people of other faiths (as was stressed in Asia) and liberation of all forms of oppression (as was emphasised in Latin America). (6)But the question is: Inculturation in what culture? Due to modernization and globalization most societies in the world are not multi-cultural in the sense of a patchwork quilt or mosaic of separate pieces with hard, well-defined edges, but of a cultural mix or cocktail, for which Ulf Hannerz uses creole languages as a root metaphor.(7) Cities like Amsterdam, Paris or London, but also Jakarta or Nairobi, create youth cultures that area mix of Hindu, Sikh and Muslim traditions, combined with secular-political and ethnic ideals, bound together particularly by reggae or rap music.

It is well known that advocates and critics of globalization theories differ in their opinion about the cultural consequences of globalization. Whereas some scholars speak of cultural homogenization, e.g. Ritzer's 'McDonaldization thesis', others foresee a cultural differentiation and fragmentation, as is the case in Huntington's 'Clash of civilizations'. 'Jihad' versus 'McWorld ', to use the title of Barber's book. (8) Some scholars even question whether cultures exist, as is the case in Hobsbawm and Ranger's 'Invention of Tradition'. (9) There is a plurality of overlapping cultural orientations, in such a way that each person is always involved in a multiplicity of such orientations at the same time, while none of these orientations coincide with only one society or one territory, says Wim van Binsbergen. (10) He shows that the classic understanding of culture as discrete, bounded units which are closed into themselves and which produce a total field of life, still has a wide circulation outside anthropology, notably in philosophy of culture and theology. Some twenty years ago Joseph Blomjous, the Dutch White Father bishop of Mwanza, Tanzania, and important spokesman at the Second Vatican Council in his well-known fore-sight proposed that, instead of `inculturation', missionaries should speak about 'interculturation', (11) a term that did not find its way into the missiological debate, but which I find most appropriate for today's discussion.(12)

Interculturation expresses the idea that the process of inculturation is not simply the interaction between gospel on the one hand and culture on the other, as if they represent two monolithic meaning systems, but between multiple cultural orientations.

2.   Intercultural theology
Intercultural theology is the theological reflection upon the process of interculturation.

Intercultural theology is not a new theological discipline, but a new perspective and a new method in theology. There are three developments that lead to this new perspective: (13)

First: At the beginning of the twentieth century two thirds of all Christians lived in Europe and North America. At the beginning of the twenty-first century two thirds of all Christians live in the southern part of the world, where new models of church and local theologies emerge. (14) Theologians in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Pacific have started to question the presumption of European

theology to be a universal theology. Theologies, European theology as well, are always contextual. Now that most mission churches have become local churches which produce their own theologies, the need of a dialogue between local theologies is obvious.

Second: Moreover, the presumptions of European theology have been questioned not only from outside, but also in its own context by secular philosophies. In Europe there has been a process of societal differentiation (secularization) by which the Christian frame of reference has been marginalized to the fringes of society. At the same time globalization and migration brought ethnic minorities which had their own cultures and religions. European theologians have to face multiculturalism and religious pluralism in their own countries. And in this respect they can learn from churches that had to face multiculturalism from the beginning of their existence.

Third: The Second Vatican Council recognized and approved the shift that had taken place. Looking back at the Second Vatican Council, Karl Rahner said that the most important result of the council was that the Church became aware that it had become a World Church. (15) In its documents the council challenges churches everywhere to become self-reliant, mature and local in such issues as finances, personnel and theology. However, as local theologies within the 'universal' church they must have a world-wide dimension. This is, however, easier said than done. After having worked for 20 years in Latin America and coming back to Europe to be professor in pastoral theology in Insbrück, Franz Weber noted that his European colleagues take up contextual theologies from Africa, Asia and Latin America with eagerness, but that they do not change their Western outlook and superiority complex. European theologians treat third world theologies as if they are exotic fruits that supplement their traditional European dishes. He notes that the export firm that the church used to be, had become a mufti-national import firm. (16)

Almost forty years after the official opening of the Second Vatican Council, local churches are still struggling to recognize that they are not the same, yet one. Intercultural theology is anew attempt to do justice to local theologies and particular experiences of churches within the universal church. It deals with such old issues as unity and diversity in theology; particularity and universality of churches; localization and globalization of contexts; in short: inculturation and interculturation. This new challenge asks for another method. (17) Shortly after Karl Rahner declared missiology to be a practical theological discipline, Adolf Exeler, who was the pastoral theologian in Munster, introduced the idea of a comparative pastoral theology. (18) Once the great variety of theological approaches has been recognized, comparisons can be made. One can look for similarities and differences.

As a consequence, there is the possibility of mutual enrichment and critical interrogation. (19) When I see the helplessness of Dutch parishes to overcome the shortage of priests I often think of our parish in Tanzania where the small Christian communities largely depend on lay leaders and lay ministers. When I see European bishops struggling to find answers to being minority churches in largely non-Christian environments: How much could they learn from their colleagues in Indonesia or India, where Christian communities have been minority groups since the very beginning of their existence? (20)

The aim of the comparative method is not to copy a theological approach which has been developed from one context into another context, but to stimulate critical and creative thinking. There are comparisons at different levels. Some comparisons are purely descriptive and analytic, other comparisons are evaluative. (21) In 1989, ten years before we started the Nijmegen Graduate School of Theology, the then department of missiology at this faculty, under the direction of Professor Arnulf Camps, attempted to launch an "International Course: M.A. in Comparative Theological Methods". Seemingly, the time was not yet ripe then.

3.   Intercultural hermeneutics.

It is important to acknowledge that an intercultural hermeneutics does not exist yet. It is being developed in response to the growing need of intercultural understanding and communication, but it is still at an early stage. (22) To begin with, it is not clear at all what is meant by intercultural hermeneutics. Different terms are used, and the focus shifts with the prefix.

The prefix 'multi-' just means 'having many of'. Mufti-cultural hermeneutics takes into account the existence of many cultures. 'Inter-' means 'between', 'from one to the other'. Inter-cultural hermeneutics refers to the understanding between two different cultures. 'Cross-' means more or less the same as 'inter'. But in theoretical studies, the term 'cross-cultural hermeneutics' seems to refer to the generalizations that are made about inter-cultural understanding. 'Trans' means 'across' or 'beyond' Trans-cultural hermeneutics moves beyond the existence of particular cultures, or culture as such. Consequently one can state that 'cultures do not exist'.

Intercultural hermeneutics is the theory and the method of interpretation and understanding across cultural boundaries. It deals with the question to what extent 'the others' really differ from 'us', whether and under what conditions the understanding of 'the others' as 'others' is possible. In short, intercultural hermeneutics is the hermeneutics of the intercultural encounter. (23)

We must acknowledge the fact that hermeneutics largely remains a Western enterprise, that it is dominated largely by the Western philosophical tradition, and that this tradition is increasingly challenged by nonwestern philosophers.

The 'North-South dialogue' on hermeneutics can be summarized in four points. (24)
1.   In classical hermeneutics the aim is ultimately to understand oneself. It is an individualistic enterprise. The non-Western hermeneutics has a communitarian approach.
2.   Classical hermeneutics is focused on harmonization. Intercultural hermeneutics recognizes differentiation. The other as a stranger is to be done justice.
3.   Classical hermeneutics is seen as instrumental: the reader takes possession of the text, makes the text his own property. Intercultural hermeneutics is relational.
4.   Classical hermeneutics is based on a propositional understanding of truth; intercultural hermeneutics is based on existential understanding of truth. It is a commonly held opinion among African and other 'third world' theologians that the Western logic, which is based on the Aristotelian 'law' of non-contradiction, is universalized too easily. This is clearly the case with Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' and the 'theory of communicative competence' of Habermas. (25)

One decision is crucial, for it determines the direction of intercultural hermeneutics and intercultural theology: Do we start from the assumption that all people are the same (read: like us), or, if they are not yet the same, that they will become the same by the process of economic globalization and cultural homogenization — which in the long run would mean that there is no need for intercultural theology — or, on the contrary, does the process of globalization lead to marginalization and diversification?

4.   Subaltern hermeneutics.

My contention in this contribution is that the decision on this point should be made on the basis of a careful analysis of cultural contact and cultural change 'from within' and `from below'. This is what is meant by 'subaltern hermeneutics'. (26)In my study of religious dynamics in Sukumaland I asked what happens when members of two different cultural meaning-systems meet. Although I would not ask the same question now as I did 15 years ago, recognizing on the basis of a new understanding of culture that one cannot simply oppose two cultures as if they are monolithic entities, `us' and `them', the answers are still illustrative:1. Some people kept a foot in two systems, leaving them as

they were, taking spiritual and material help from both sides. They were Christians on Sunday, indigenous believers on Monday.

Some people rejected completely one of the two, sticking to either a European-Christian civilization or going back to the 'path of their ancestors'.3. Some people rejected both, which was the attitude of some intellectuals who adhered to African ujamaa socialism which had a secular world view.4. But the majority created an intermediate set of beliefs and practices creating a synthesis between the two systems. My study showed the ease with which people understood strange (Christian) beliefs and practices in terms of their own (indigenous Sukuma) frame of reference. On the basis of a 'common ground', or a 'primal religiosity', rosaries were interpreted by my informants as 'amulets of the Christians,' and 'amulets' were interpreted as 'indigenous rosaries', a phenomenon which I earlier labelled a 'working misunderstanding'. My recent studies of Christianity and Islam in Tanzania show that the third alternative (secularism) died out, 'religionism' is alive as never before, which seems to be a world-wide phenomenon — Peter Berger even speaks about a desecularization of the world (27) — and that the second alternative (fundamentalism) had become stronger.

An important issue in Tanzania today is how to cope with religious extremists or fundamentalists, (28) an issue that was absent from the national debate when I lived there in the 1980s. This also seems a world-wide phenomenon. Whereas I do agree with constructivist theories that cultures are not monolithic blocks, that they are extremely diverse (not homogeneous) and flexible (not static), it goes without saying that ethnic groups often engage in collective responses to subordination with recourse to practices and beliefs that anthropologists nowadays tend to call 'essentialist', stressing their own cultural identity in contrast to 'the others'. (29) For a Sukuma the statement 'I am a Sukuma' refers to a reality. To write this subaltern understanding of culture or cultural identity off as 'popular' or 'pre-scientific' knowledge that has to be replaced by a deeper or better anthropological insight, namely the insight that all talk about cultural identity is purely instrumental and a mere product of construction, an illusion to which nothing corresponds in reality, is a manifestation of academic arrogance and not very helpful to the subaltern movements' quest for self-determination. One can understand the 'culturalist' notions in the subaltern movements' quest for authenticity from Pierre Bourdieu's model of habitus. (30) The habitus I sa set of dispositions which inclines agents to act and react in certain ways.

These dispositions are inculcated, structured, durable, generative, and even embodied. Particular practices or perceptions are the product of the relationship between the habitus and the 'field' or 'market'. A market is a structured space of positions which are determined by different kinds of recources or 'capital' by which people or groups of people serve their own interests. According to Bourdieu, the confusion surrounding 'cultural identity' stems in part from the fact that one tends to forget that classifications are subordinated to practical functions and oriented towards the production of social effects. (31) Moreover, practical classifications contribute to the production of what they apparently describe. Classifications institute realities by using the power of objectification in discourse. The act of calling 'Sukuma' the language spoken by those who are called 'Sukuma' because they speak that language, and by calling the region in which this language is spoken 'Sukumaland', is not ineffective. The effectiveness of the performative discourse which claims to bring into existence what it asserts is proportional to the authority of the person who makes the assertion. But the objectification in discourse depends also on the degree to which the discourse is grounded in the objectivity of the group to which it is addressed, this is, in the recognition by the members of the group, as well as in the economic and cultural properties they share in common. Bourdieu goes beyond the dichotomy of constructivism and culturalism. He criticizes post-modern relativism and constructivism, without relapsing into a `cultural grammar' theory or an economic determinism. Cultural diversity is related to class differentiation, but class is defined in a broad sense as a position in a field. Coming back to the question at the end of the previous section: I am not

convinced of the cultural homogenization thesis. It is my contention that cultures do exist, be they more flexible and diverse than they were thought to be, that being a mufti-cultural society is a problem and intercultural understanding a necessity. (32) With this we are back to the urgency of an intercultural hermeneutics which takes cultural distinctiveness seriously.

Conclusion

Missionaries have a great expertise in coping with cultural differences. They know by experience what it means to live and work in another culture. They realize that the more you get to know another people, the less you understand them. Consequently many missionaries are contributing to the development of intercultural hermeneutics as the hermeneutics of intercultural encounter.

Many missionaries experience that they are no longer at home in their own culture and not yet at home in the host culture. (33) They are intercultural ministers in the sense that they constitute an intermediate culture. From this we can add another meaning to the term `inter-cultural' than the one given above. Inter-cultural refers to the space between cultures, or the culture in-between. Interculturation is a missionary challenge for the church in the 21st century. Interculturation does not abandon the concept of inculturation, but broadens it. Missionaries are mediators between different cultural orientations, bridge-builders between people of other faiths, signs and instruments of solidarity, scouts of the promised land, forerunners of a 'global ecumene' in a creolizing world.

Notes:* Dr. Frans Wijsen (b. 1956 in Maastricht, the Netherlands) did research on Christianity in East Africa and popular religion in the Netherlands. He is a Professor of Missiology andDirector of the Graduate School of Theology at the Catholic University of Nijmegen. His address: PO Box, 9103, 6500 HD Nijmegen – The Netherlands; e-mail: F.Wijsen@theo.kun.nl1. Association of the Universities in the Netherlands, Assessment of Research Quality, Utrecht, 2000. I have to confess that the religious studies programme of my own university, is focused exclusively upon the European context.

2.   F. Wijsen, J. van Slageren, Missiologie-beoefening in Nederland en België, in: Wereld en Zending 27 (1998/4), 25-34.

3.   Cf. Intercultural Theology. A Challenge for the 21st Century. Prospectus 2000 - 2001, Nijmegen Graduate School of Theology.

4.   Cf. D. Bosch, Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, Maryknoll 1991; M. Geijbels, Mission and Dialogue, in: Studies in Interreligious Dialogue 10 (2000/1),30-43.

5.   As a matter of fact it was just a rediscovery of the theology of the 'seminal word' of the early church. Cf. A. Roest Crollius, What is so new about inculturation?, in: Gregorianum 59(1978) 721-738; J. Waliggo et al., Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency, Nairobi 1986.

6.   Cf. D. Irarrázavaj, Inculturation. New dawn of the Church in Latin America, Maryknoll 2000.

7.   Cf. U. Hannerz, Cultural Complexity. Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning, New York 1992.

8.   Cf. G. Ritzer, The McDonaldization Thesis. Exploration and Extension, London 1997; S. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order, New York1996; B. Barber, Jihad vs. McWorld, New York 1995. 9.

9.   Cf. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger, The Invention of Tradition, Cambridge 1983; T. Ranger, The Invention of Tradition Revisited, in: T. Ranger and O. Vaughan, Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa, Oxford (1993) 62-111.

10. Cf. W. van Binsbergen, Culturen bestaan niet. Rede in verkorte vorm uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van bijzonder hoogleraar `grondslagen van interculturelefilosofie', Rotterdam: Erasmus Universiteit, 1999.

11. Cf. J. Blomjous, Development in Mission Thinking and Practice, 1959-1980. Inculturation and Interculturation, in: African Ecclesial Review 22 (1980/6) 293-298.

12. David Bosch, Transforming Mission, 455-457, has a brief note on interculturation. For the need to broaden the concept of inculturation see also M. Amaladoss, BeyondInculturation. Can the Many be One?, Delhi 1998, 16-17.

13. Cf. R. Friedli, Interkulturelle Theologie, in: K. Müller, Th. Sundermeier (Ed.), Lexikon Missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe, Berlin, 1987, 181.

14. Cf. Dana L. Robert, Shifting Southward. Global Christianity since 1945, in: International Bulletin of Missionary Research, April (2000) 50-58. This shift was the central thesis in W.Bühlman, The Coming of the Third Church, Maryknoll 1978.

15. Cf. Karl Rahner, Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II, in: Theological Studies 40 (1979) 716.16.Cf. Franz Weber, Mission. Gegenstand der Praktischen Theologie? Frankfurt am Main, 1999, 228.17.Cf.Hermann Siller, Überlegungen zur Methode von Theologie Interkulturell, in: M. Hungerkamp, M. Lutz (Ed.), Grenzen überschreitender Ethik, Frankfurt 1997.

18. Cf. A.Exeler, Vergleichende Theologie start Missionswissenschaft?, in: H. Waldenfels (Ed.), "...denn ich bin bei euch", Zurich 1978, 199-211; A. Exeler, Wege einer vergleichendenPastoral, in: L. Bertsch, F. Schlósser (Ed.), Evangelisation in der Dritten Welt. Anstdsse für Europa?, Freiburg 1981, 92-112.

19. Comparitive pastoral theology is not to be confused with comparative theology as the study of religious traditions other than one's own and their theologies. Cf. Fr. Clooney, Theemergent field of comparative theology, in: Theological Studies 56, (1995) 521-550.

20. Cf. K1. Piepel, Lerngemeinschaft Weltkirche. Lernprozesse in Partnerschaften zwischen Christen der Ersten und der Dritten Welt, Aachen 1993.

21. Cf. M. Pankoke-Schenk, G. Evers (Ed.), Inkulturation und Kontextualitüt. Theologien im Weltweiten Austausch, Frankfurt am Main 1994.

22. Cf. R. Schreiter, The New Catholicity. Theology between the Global and the Local, New York 1998, 32.

23. Cf. Th Sundermeier, W. Ustorf (Ed.), Die Begegnung mit dem Anderen. Pllidoyers fir eine interkulturelle Hermeneutik, Gütersloh 1991; Th. Sundermeier, Can Foreign Cultures beUnderstood?, in: Studies in Interreligious Dialogue 4(1994/1) 32-41.

24. Cf. Bénézet Bujo, The Ethical Dimension of Community. The African Model and the Dialogue between North and South, Nairobi 1997; Heinz Kimmerle, Mazungumzo. Dialogentussen Afrikaanse en Westerse filosofieën, Amsterdam/Meppel 1995.

25. Cf. Th. Sundermeier, Den Fremden Verstehen. Eine praktische Hermeneutik, Göttingen 1996, 13, 154.

26. Cf. F. Wilfred, Towards a Subaltern Hermeneutics. Beyond the Contemporary Polarities in the Interpretation of Religious Traditions, in: Jeevadhara 26 (1996) 21, 45-62.

27. Cf. P. Berger, The Desecularization of the World. Resurgent Religion and World Politics, Grands Rapids 1999.

28. Cf. Fr. Ludwig, After Ujamaa. Is Religious Revivalism a Threat to Tanzania's Stability?, in: D. Westerlund (Ed.), Questioning the Secular State, London 1996, 216-236.

29. Cf. E. Fischer, Cultural Logic and Maya Identity. Rethinking Constructivism and Essentialism, in: Current Anthropology 40 (1999/4) 473-499.

30. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, Outline of a Theory of Practice, Cambridge 1977; Pierre Bourdieu, The Logic of Practice, Cambridge 1990.

31. Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, Language and Symbolic Power, Oxford 1992, 220-228. Bourdieu transcends the opposition that sciences make between reality and the representation (mentalimage) of reality.

32. Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia coined the African world view 'vitalogy'. He clearly shows that African thinking is different from Western thinking. Cf.Martin Nkafu Nkemnkia, AfricanVitalogy. A step forward in African Thinking, Nairobi 1999.

33. This experience is well described in: B. Joinet, I am a Stranger in my Father's House. The insertion of the Missionary in a Local Community, in: Pastoral Orientation Service (1972)Nos. 8-9, 17-28.

34. Cf. A. Bellagamba, Mission and Ministry in the Global Church, Maryknoll 1992; A. Kalliath (Ed.), Pilgrims in Dialogue. A new Configuration of Religions for Millennium Community,Bangalore 2000

Possible activity

1.   My Spirituality, then and now.

Share in intercultural groups of 4 –5 members on the following questions:

1.   How did I pray at home as a child?

2.   What were my most meaningful experiences of prayer during childhood?

3.   What are the central dimensions of my spirituality now?
   a) in the area of spiritual practices
   b) my images of God, Christ, mission, life, prayer
   c) my central struggle in life

4.   Finish with silent prayer, the Lord's prayer or a hymn known to everyone.

2.   Symbols of my Relationship with God.

1.   Take 20 minutes to find a material symbol (or to draw picture) of your relationship with God.

2.   In multicultural groups of 4 – 5 take turns to present your symbol or drawing and explain it's meaning for you.

3.   Finish with a period of silence, the Lord's prayer or a hymn known to all.

3.   Exploring Silence

1.   A multicultural group spends 20 minutes together in silence.

2.   At the end of 20 minutes the facilitator announces the end of the silence. S/he then says what his experience of that silence was.

3.   Using the Mutual Invitation Method other members of the group are invited to say what their experience was of the period of silence.

4.   Finish with a short prayer or hymn.

For Reflection

The spiritual concept of the Dreaming provides the framework by which these meanings may unfold on different levels. The term 'Dreaming' is in fact a trivialising English word which does not do justice to the complex concept as such. Franchesca Cubillo, Indigenous art curator of Yanuwa, Larrakia, Wardaman and Bardi descent, explains: The Dreaming is the eternal moment of creation, when the spiritual Ancestors moved across the land, creating the landforms, the plants, animals, people and the languages. Rules and languages were also established by the Ancestors in this timeless moment and are maintained by Aboriginal people in the present. The land is looked after, animals respected, ceremonies performed and social obligations adhered to according to the precepts of these traditions. Aspects of the Dreaming are taught and reinforced from an early age.
Everyone within the community is expected to know, in varying degrees, their place in the Dreaming, their country, kinship and ceremonial obligations. Designs are used to empower objects, people and places within the landscape. The artwork is painted on the bodies of the performers, on the ground on which the ceremony takes place and on ceremonial paraphernalia used during ritual. Songs are sung to establish communication with ancestors at particular locations and at specific times. (2000: 44)

This means that the Dreaming, also known as the Indigenous Law, determines social and religious behaviour and defines the relationship between people and land.

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