

## **BORLUNG: THE RAINBOW SERPENT**

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In this Bicentennial year of Australia (1788-1988), may I present your readers with some reflections on the aboriginal inhabitants of this vast and mysterious continent "down under."

Australia today is a small nation living in a large place. Equal in size to continental U.S.A., a 17 million population, ringed by metropolises, it is a continent of extremes: from snow covered mountains with modern ski resorts, to desert where some aborigines still live as did their ancestors.

In terms of ancient culture and history, Australian aborigines stand out as by far the oldest surviving members, having been here an estimated 25,000 to 40,000 years (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 1988, 1:714). Some evidence suggests that the first inhabitants, here as on every habitable continent, were pygmies (Hallet 1975, 279-280).

The mythology of the Australian aborigine should be of special interest to the New Church historian since it goes back to "Alcheringa," translated "Dream-time" or "Dreaming," i.e. when the spiritual world was in open contact with the human race: "The Most Ancients had knowledge by revelations, for they spoke with the Lord, and with angels, and were also instructed by visions and dreams" (AC 125). This was when "mythical beings died and were transformed into living externally in spirit, manifesting themselves through and in human beings" (*Encyclopedia Britannica* 1988, 14:423).

Such myths refer to the creation of the universe, in which the main role was played by "Earth Mother." She owns us all, and no one can own her (Noonuccal 1988, 4). From her came the "creating spirit," variously called "Kabal" (the totem name), "Borlung," or "Ngalyod," translated as "Rainbow Serpent." This "Rainbow Serpent" came up from Earth Mother at the most sacred of all aborigine sites, "Uluru." Today this is called Ayer's Rock, a fascinating tourist-spot in the very centre of Australia (Smith, 1975, 99).<sup>1</sup> According to

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<sup>1</sup> Ayer's Rock was formally returned to the aborigines in a recent ceremony, and is leased to tourist operators in the Northern Territory. "Uluru" is perhaps the largest single rock in the world, about 8 kilometers around, and 335 meters high.

aborigine mythology Borlung or the Rainbow Serpent created the mountains first; next it created the Frog Tribe. This was the tribe which gave to the aborigines their skill in finding water, a prerequisite, of course, for surviving for so many millennia. Frogs have played a part in this survival.

In areas of extreme weather conditions, frogs will bloat themselves with water in the wet season, and bury themselves in mud. When the waterholes dry up in the dry season, the animal lives underground on the ingested moisture in a kind of suspended animation. Hunters who find themselves in waterless areas can easily find a drink at a dried-up water hole, by digging up a frog, puncturing the stomach and drinking the water stored inside. (Noonuccal 1988, 39)<sup>2</sup>

In the New Church, knowledge concerning the Most Ancient and Ancient Churches allows us to speculate on where in the historical sequence of the churches the Australian aborigines fit (see Sandstrom 1983, 170). They certainly antedate the ancient Biblical cultures around Canaan: Ebla, Egypt, Babylon, Assyria, etc. In fact, the Australian aborigines bracket the whole Bible, having their origins prior to its composition, and surviving essentially unchanged long after it. And that is why I ponder where their myth of the "Rainbow Serpent" fits, with reference to the Bible.

Why a Rainbow Serpent? Two connections immediately suggest themselves: the serpent in the Garden of Eden, and the rainbow in the Noah's Ark story. The aborigines being more ancient than the Genesis account, would have been around at the "time" of Noah's flood, which according to New Church chronology, of course, did not happen exactly as recorded (see Sandstrom 1975, 224). The flood was a mentally self-induced suffocation. The mental faculties

<sup>2</sup>This requisite skill proved itself by its absence in the ill-fated Burke and Wills expedition in 1860, which crossed Australia from north to south and back. Both explorers perished, whereas knowledgeable aborigines can to this day survive in the "outback" indefinitely. Aborigines did assist Burke and Wills and their expedition with their bushcraft, but the explorers perished when left to their own devices. Harry Gordon writes on this event as follows: "Of all the exploring tragedies, none has so entrenched itself in the Australian national psyche as the fate of the Irish mounted trooper, Robert O'Hara Burke and his younger companion, William Wills. Burke was a brave man, but with no experience in bushcraft" (Gordon 1987, 79).

of "will" and "understanding" (volition and conceptualization) were totally and mutually interdependent during the era when the "flood" occurred. People could not think one thing and then say another! Consequently, any false idea led directly to an evil practice: "In the process of time, they conceived direful persuasions (in the understanding or intellect), and immersed the goods and truths of faith in filthy lusts in the will, and then they were as it were suffocated of their own accord" (AC 560). "No flood is meant here [Genesis 6] but the expiring or suffocation of those who were there" (AC 662). Their breathing was "annihilated in the breast" (AC 1120).

The Serpent in Eden, and the Ark of Noah are two symbols connected with this gradual suffocation. The serpent represents or symbolizes, in the Biblical narrative, the commencement of such a dreadful human attitude: requiring sensual proof for revealed truth. When anyone craves to convince himself of an already revealed and self-evident truth, by disbelieving it on purpose until he can prove it to his own satisfaction, then the "sensuous averts itself from the celestial and turns itself into something bodily, and curses itself" (AC 242). It would be like the shepherds on Christmas eve, saying, "Bah, Humbug" to Gabriel, and the angelic hosts!

Such a selfish attitude meant by the serpent brought about the eventual self-induced suffocation meant by the flood. Psychologically speaking, this killed the human will, and it remains dead to this day, and is called "proprium." It is the source of all destructive human attitudes—revenge, murder, hatred, etc. It is meant by Adam's "rib": "Nothing ever beguiles man but his proprium... his self-love and love of worldly things" (rib) (AC 152).

As this decline gathered momentum towards its appointment with the Deluge, The Lord God saved "Noah," that is, a portion of the human race which could respond to a new invitation from the Divine, and which did respond: a "new will" could be implanted in the errant understanding or intellect. This new will was an outright Divine gift. It provided a stable medium for a new human attitude. It is symbolized by the "bow" or "rainbow" that God showed to Noah and his sons when they came out of the Ark (Genesis 9:13). Today, this "new will" is labelled "conscience":

The Lord thus provided that the will be separated from the understanding and man be formed, not as before through the will, but that through an understanding of truth he should be

endowed with charity. . . He had to be reformed as to the understanding before the will (AC 640, 641).

In this case it is the intellectual part which can be reformed, and afterwards a new will can be given by its means (AC 652).

The consequence was that people after the "flood" had a different mentality from those before it:

The state of men after the Flood who can receive charity, is described by a bow in the clouds (AC 974).

Conscience... dictates that it is true because the Lord has so said in the Word. Such became the Churches after the Flood (AC 393e).

The "Ark" of Noah, was not a boat either: it was written documentation which preserved the knowledge, intelligence, and wisdom of those who wiped themselves out by suffocating or choking on their own inbred self-glory:

'Enoch' means those of the men of the Most Ancient Church [Biblical 'Adam'] who collected together the representatives and correspondences [things that correlate] of natural things with spiritual. . . . The Lord foresaw that this spiritual perception would perish [with 'Adam'], and with it, the knowledge of correspondences through which the human race has conjunction with heaven; therefore the Lord provided that some of those who lived with the most ancient people should collect together the correspondences, and gather them into a manuscript. These were meant by 'Enoch'. (AE 728.2)

The ancients after the Flood knew from traditions and from collections made by certain people, that worldly objects had such meanings (AC 2722.6).

This is meant by the Biblical words:

And Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him (Gen.5:24).

The "Flood" can thus be regarded as a real "watershed" in human history.

Returning to the Australian aborigines, their art, e.g. wall paintings, of which there are countless instances throughout Australia, is full of images, animals, and some symbolism, very similar to the

famous Cro-Magnon cave art in France and Spain, and from a similar time-period. Since both the aborigines and Cro-Magnon man predate even Bishop Ussher's so-called "date" for Creation based on the ages of patriarchs, viz. 4004 BC (cf. Hales, 5411 BC; Judaic, 3760 BC; Alexandrian, 5503 BC; etc.) (*Oxford Concordance* 1917, 35), it is entirely conceivable that such aborigine pictorial records, and the people responsible for them, provide a living link with that part of human history when the "Flood" took place: i.e. the actual event from which as from a fountainhead, all such legends flow. The Australian aborigines would by this reasoning be post-diluvian "pure-breeds," and their "dreamtime" would be a last link in living memory, echoing back to that spiritual event, the Flood.

Returning to Borlung, the Rainbow Serpent: after creating the Frog Tribe, he next created color, by throwing up "Biami," a good spirit, into the sky, telling him how to find the light:

Now Biami, he real good fulla [sic]. He jump up high in the sky and smile down on the land. The sky lit up from his smile, and we, his children, saw colour and shadow. (Noonuccal 1988, 19-20)

Biami would perhaps be the aborigine equivalent to the Biblical "Let there be light." These words from Genesis 1 stem from the Ancient Word, which could have been contemporary with the aborigine "Alcheringa" or "Dreamtime." But the Ancient Word succeeded the earlier manuscript of Enoch (see above AE 728). The two documents had led to a renewal of culture based on conscience, which then spread worldwide. In the wake of Enoch's document had come the later Ancient Word, of which Genesis 1 through 11 is a sample (see Sandstrom 1976, 385).

In this section of Genesis we find the account of the flood. Secular writers also recognize that the legends of mankind seem "to originate as super-historical sagas of the Pleistocene disasters" (Hallet 1975, 279). All such legends would point to an original event of which perhaps the Genesis account is the first, and thus the source of other similar accounts (see AC 2895-2899 on The Ancient Word). Tales of a flood would subsequently be varied by whichever strand of culture perpetuated them. They would be cast into the terms of local mythologies and dialects. But all would point to that time of self-induced suffocation, which brought about the "flood" or inundation, when people thought that God had suffused Himself into mankind. That belief is meant by "there were giants on the earth in

those days" (Genesis 6:4). Those giants mean those who were convinced of their "own prominence and superiority" (AC 580). "They supposed themselves to be gods, their thoughts divine" (AC 562).

That is why Borlung, or Kabul, is intriguing: why a Rainbow Serpent? I believe the aboriginal myth stemming from "Alcheringa" or "Dreamtime," is a compacted version of both the story of Eden and of the flood: the time from the Serpent (Eden, Genesis 3) to the Rainbow (Flood, Genesis 7) in the Biblical sequential narrative is compacted or condensed into a simultaneous view of both stories in one beast, namely, the "Rainbow Serpent." The one beast collects the extremities of the two stories: the beginning (Eden, Serpent) and the end (Flood, Rainbow).<sup>3</sup>

Australia carries secrets in her ancient history, a bit like the way the plethora of marsupials there carry their young in a pouch. The Aboriginal culture being so ancient, I would even surmise that the whole of Australia is indicated by one of the Biblical names mentioned in the Ancient Word, in Genesis chapters 5, 10 or 11. Those lists of names (genealogies) refer to "systems of doctrine or Churches, which, though they underwent certain changes, were preserved from the time of the Most Ancient Church down to that of Noah, or the Ancient Church (AC 468). Which Biblical name might indicate Australia, or the Americas etc.? A museum in Katoomba, New South Wales, displays evidence that ancient Egyptians, who were part of the Ancient Church, came to Australia and used eucalyptus oil in the process of mummification.<sup>4</sup>

Borlung, stemming from Alcheringa, preserves a mysterious and tenuous Australian link with our common Biblical past. Biami, the spirit of light, says in modernized words of invitation:

Giddy, Giddy, all you earth fullas. Come, sit down, my country now. Take time, you earth fullas. Let the spirit of this mighty land touch you as it touches my people. . . . Kabul send her spirit ones with message sticks to help us take time. To

<sup>3</sup> The Vikings, incidentally, also had the myth of Valhalla being linked to the earth by a trembling rainbow, "Bifrost," and the earth was surrounded by the great ocean, home of the "Midgard Serpent." Again a rainbow and a serpent. (See Brosted 1965, 271.)

<sup>4</sup> I visited a museum in Katoomba, New South Wales, and spoke later by phone to its curator, Mr. Gilroy, about the display of evidence of Egyptians having visited ancient Australia.

remember. To care for her special things — The Rainbow Serpent will return to earth when the spirits of men and the spirit of this land are once more together as one. (Noonuccal 1988, 1,9,35,37)

A useful reminder that cultural and environmental pressures today combine to force us to realize that this planet is all we've got here. No issue can be isolated either from its own "genesis" or its "exodus " nor from its potential "apocalypse." ■

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