

C O N T E N T S

EDITORIAL	2
EASTER CEREMONIES AT YARUMAN Naomi Smith and Anne Boland rsj	3
THE POPE IN ALICE SPRINGS Dan O'Donovan	6
REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP Elizabeth Jordan rsm	16
NATION-WIDE ASPIRATIONS OF ABORIGINAL CATHOLICS Eugene Stockton	23
POEM -- REFUSAL OF THE SCRUB TREES Dan O'Donovan	29
FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK. . .	31

EDITORIAL

ONCE MORE IT IS GOOD to be able to publish the thoughts of those in the field. This is becoming more and more the function of *Nelen Yubu* — an excellent development, I think.

To be 'in the field' one does not have to be south of Halls Creek or at Fitzroy Crossing — though it does help! Sr Elizabeth Jordan, writing from the Brisbane Catholic Education Office, is there too. (Actually by now she has left the Brisbane CEO — cf. Secretary's Desk).

Eugene Stockton's writings always get plenty of attention. It is a bit hard at times to know when he is writing in his own name, stating his own thoughts, or when he is relaying those of others. I would not have thought my last Editorial had 'downplayed' the need for national approach, but rather suggested ways in which the approach could be made more realistic. And he does like to have a two-way bet: accuse us of having attitudes we say we have moved away from, and then blame us for holding on to them!

We are grateful to all those who responded to the statements of account we sent out with last issue. As Keren mentions in her column, quite a number added pleasant personal notes when they sent in their subscription.

Martin Wilson msc
Editor

EASTER CEREMONIES AT YARUMAN

Naomi Smith and Anne Boland

YARUMAN (RINGERS SOAK) is an Aboriginal community 170 km from Halls Creek, WA. The priest at Halls Creek, Fr Kriener, serves Halls Creek, Turkey Creek and Yaruman. He planned to come to Yaruman for Mass on Easter Sunday evening. This article tells the story of how this community celebrated the Easter story culminating in the final Mass.

I have not come to do away with them, but to make their teachings come true. (Mt 5,17)

These words of Jesus were in our minds as we began to prepare for the Easter ceremonies at Yaruman (Ringers Soak). We had both read Vincent Donovan's book, *Christianity Rediscovered* and liked his method of evangelisation, i.e. the telling of the gospel story and allowing that truth to be expressed in a way meaningful to that particular group of people.

The people of Yaruman have been initiators of their own development in a very determined way since their eviction from Gordon Downs Station five years ago. (Cf. C. Ahern's recent articles). We believed they would respond to an invitation to celebrate the Easter events in their own way. We related the story of Easter on three different occasions. At a meeting with the community the response was immediate and enthusiastic. They asked that we prepare the celebration for Holy Thursday and leave the Death and Resurrection to them.

Sisters Anne Boland and Naomi Smith rsj work at Ringer's Soak, 168 km south of Halls Creek, WA, cf. Ahern *Nelen Yubu* no. 24 (1985), pp.3-8.

Already they had ideas. 'We will show you Sisters, we will show you the proper Aboriginal way.' Pictures were painted in the camp and some of them were used for the Holy Thursday liturgy. Agnes and Julie led the prayers. Rose and Julie spoke to the group about their Last Supper pictures. Frank, the chairman, talked about the reverence they must have for the Eucharist and he distributed Communion. All of this, of course, in language readily understood by the whole community.

That night the people composed new Easter junbas. They sang them for hours. The night air was filled with something akin to the sound of Gregorian chant. It was uplifting and very conducive for our own private contemplation of the Easter mystery.

Unbeknown to us, a full sized image of Jesus was made by one of the women. It was made by stuffing clothing and sewing it all up. Even the head of Jesus bore the crown of thorns.

We were called over to the camp on Friday morning to begin the mourning ceremony. The image was laid out on a blanket with the head resting on Frank's lap. A sheet covered the image. The men sat around the image and declared Jesus dead. The wailing began then and beginning with the elders each person came in turn to embrace 'Jesus' as a sign of love and a farewell gesture. We found this a very moving part of the ceremony. After everyone had embraced the figure the sheet was returned to its owner and some of the men carried the image in single-line procession to the yiliri (tree bed) which had been prepared the previous day.

We all sat quietly awaiting their return. The same single-line reverent procession brought them back to us and we were each given fasting strings which meant that we were to fast from meat until after the next ceremony. Then we sang the newly composed songs for Good Friday and Easter.

Translated into English the songs we sang were:

They carried Jesus to the tree bed
Many men carried Him
The women cried for Jesus
Jesus rose from the dead

All people rise up with Jesus
God now comes closer to us
He comes close to us in His Spirit.

At 4 pm the burial ceremony took place. The ministers for the ceremony were completely painted in white. They danced a ceremonial dance to the tree bed. We were told to sit in a specified place away from the tree bed and were called over at the appropriate time to witness the burial. A full-sized grave was dug and the image placed in it. We all returned to the camp where a smoking fire was prepared and each person passed through the smoke as a sign of purification and the fasting strings were removed. We were edified that meat was not eaten all day as the first fresh meat to arrive in the camp this year had been brought in the night before. Such is their respect for a traditional custom Christianised to show love and respect for Jesus.

We were woken early on Sunday morning with the sound of men's voices outside our caravans. The men had completed the ceremony by taking Jesus from the grave. The intention had been that the women would come later and find the grave empty and run to tell everyone the news, but that morning we had a sudden cold wet snap and the women slept in! But we were assured that 'Next year it will be better'.

On Easter Sunday evening Fr Kriener arrived to celebrate Mass with us in the bough shed. The story of Jesus' Resurrection was very vivid in our minds.

* * * * *

THE POPE IN ALICE SPRINGS

DAN O'DONOVAN

I WOULD LIKE this to be a gentle, fond word.

Indeed, from the start I was faced with a dilemma: while one side of me counselled, No, don't go. Don't identify, or be seen to identify. It is not entirely what you stand for or what, with your life, you want to say; the other said, Go, in spite of everything, go. Is she not your mother, from whom you have all that you have and whatever you are, this Church he momentarily symbolises?

And so, fondness prevailed and consciousness of the Mystery.

My pilgrim track led me first to Uluru (Ayers Rock). There it lay, in the dawning light, like a sleeping elephant, heaving with dormant life.

I climbed it at 5 am as day broke and it was still cool. Only three or four climbers at that stage. The crowds start coming later. Made this entry in the book at the top: 'See Lk 9: Jesus went up on the mountain to pray. And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was changed, and his raiment became dazzling white...' As we climbed and reached the summit, a strong wind blew around the mountain, like the wind of theophany.

At the Ranger's house they showed a good video on the events leading up to the acquisition by the Mutitjulu Community of inalienable freehold title to the land the rock occupies,

Fr Dan O'Donovan, PP of Fitzroy Crossing, WA.

and the big day itself of the actual legal transfer. Surely a symbolic gesture of singular importance. Brochures are available giving details of the background and content of the agreement. The cover design shows the Aboriginal flag; but instead of the round yellow sun at the centre, is flat-based Uluru with its well-rounded form. This captures the significance of ownership and is brilliantly suggestive of its wider implications. I will allow that image, I thought, sink deeply into my mind.

The contract between government and traditional owners is as fair a compromise as might be hoped for. Politics is the art of the possible. Aboriginal members of the National Park's managing board hold control with a 6 to 5 majority. Rangers, I was told, are mostly Aboriginal persons.

Next station was of course Alice, to enjoy the very warm hospitality of the hosting community. Already the busloads were beginning to roll in. There was a sense of happiness visible on people's faces as many old friends met and new friendships were struck up; and the euphoric atmosphere one naturally expects at conventions of this kind.

As the rain poured down on the eve of the papal visit, it failed to dampen the expectant air and rising spirits. Since the lawn could not be used, the programmed corroboree took place indoors. What an evening that was! Catholic Aboriginal Australia called the tune and danced to it with pride. There were some quite spectacular performances, and at times everyone gathered there clapped along. It was a religious, joyful manifestation.

The sky in the morning was blue. We hoped it would stay so. Pope John Paul II was due in around 3.30.

I drove out to the Blatherskite showground about 9.30. Pockets of people, Aboriginal in the main, stood or sat around, some of them dressed and decorated for particular acts in the piece.

Entertainers

At 10.0 or so compere Herbie Loughton took the stage to introduce the Country Rangers Aboriginal Band and from then on it was round upon round of excellent varied entertainment.

One thing, however, the observer could not help noticing. Almost all of the entertaining groups, so evidently experienced in playing to crowds, complained in one way or another of our irresponsiveness. Plea after plea was made for applause. On one occasion: 'I can hardly hear you. Again.' Expressions from energetic singers at the end of a song like: 'Phew, it sure is hot' seemed clearly to be saying: 'Come on, show your appreciation.' The Mills Sisters (jokingly): 'Who got us into this?', and towards the end: 'I don't know *what* we can sing to liven you up.'

It needs to be said that clapping does not carry well in the open air, especially to people who themselves have the benefit of microphones. Also that there were I think a good few clapping. But these trained performers would know about all that. And they complained of us. I recalled a journalist — French, by his accent — remarking in a television interview a few days previously that the international media were viewing the Australian visit of the Pope as 'a boring tour'. The reason he gave was that in Australia everything is 'going smoothly'.

Once I used to think that the word 'inert', 'inertia' meant immobile, immobility. A stone at the foot of the same mountain for hundreds of years was 'inert', had the quality of 'inertia'. Then one day by accident I came across it in the dictionary. It applies also to objects following the same courses repeatedly, unendingly. In this sense stellar or planetary bodies, which on completing their destined revolution start again and then again, are likewise said to be 'inert'. They are, one might say 'going smoothly.'

The Pope's Arrival

I'm afraid that thought — which did not come just then or all of a sudden, I must admit — coloured my view of Pope John Paul's arrival. As irony would have it, he first described in the popemobile a predestined revolution around the grounds. After that on foot he met in fact many people, so the irony was broken.

At the end however it reasserted itself, this time from the Aboriginal side and with a twist of humour. As the Pope read out the text pre-scribed (i.e. written beforehand), the rain clouds which had been ominously building up showed signs of bursting and gusts of wind were pulling at the tents. Few Aborigines listened through what the Holy Father was reading. Their inmost nature, their 'inertia', dictated that they run for safer cover. They made for the exits. Said the Pope later to Bishop Collins: 'They like meeting me more than listening to my word.'

Judging by the generous media coverage, the Pope's Australian tour was a classic demonstration of oldstyle Roman Catholicism. A retouch here, a retouch there, but through it all the same familiar and unchanging contours.

Now, contour is what the Mystery is all about. As with primeval rivers, if one way is blocked impeding the whole Christ from manifesting the spiritual-material communion the world and its divine Redeemer so hungrily awaits, then other ways can and must be sought. Contour is the muscle of dogma, its changing, unpredictable, circumstantial design. It is a delight to the eye of the Creator Trinity, who projected our race to image humanly the eternal inter-activity of the heavenly relations.

'...If then God, ... who was I' asked Peter (Acts 11,17) 'smooth' — and easy — repetition? 'When they heard this, they were silenced. And they glorified God, saying, Then ...' (Acts 11,18).

'...But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised...you cannot be saved." And when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question...

'After there had been much debate, Peter rose and said to them, "Brethren, you know that... Now therefore, why do you make trial of God..." And all the assembly kept silence...' (Acts 15,1-2.7.12).

The forming of contours calls for silence on the one hand, the word of guidance and enlightenment on the other. There is wonderment, and God is glorified (Acts 11,18).

At the second Vatican Council the believing world of Catholic Christianity was silent and wondered for the most part at the word of change proposed. At the time it seemed a happy proclamation and people seemed resolved on implementing it. But the Spirit works through privileged moments, and comes in power only when a mighty longing on our part invites and enables her. During the Council, this Spirit was present in pentecostal force. Since then, perhaps the ardour of that longing in some geographical areas has cooled and doubt has begun to show through as to the appropriateness of the Council's directives in particular localities.

I have heard it argued for instance that the word of ecumenism is inappropriate at present in the evangelisation of recently constituted Aboriginal communities in the Kimberleys, east and west. 'They are not ready yet, it is said, for the ecumenical idea. They need first to find their deep catholic identity.' The fallacy of this line of reasoning is exposed in the teaching of Vatican II that our deepest catholic identity *is* ecumenical. Ecumenicity is integral to every catholic's nature as catholic. The 'catholic identity' which is not consciously and actively ecumenical is a truncated and spoilt identity, not representative of catholic truth. Who would want to pass it on, or pass it off even provisorily on the searching catechumen?

This one issue, weighty in itself, is symptomatic of a wider resistance. In the new circumstances of catholic mission in the northwest we are at present and deliberately, in our attempt to define the contours of the new missionary phase, choosing to tuck ourselves into our own complacent bed in the belief that, as we were able to get along quite well on our own over the first long stage of our missionary presence, so will we be able to do so in this second.

Here, I'm afraid, we are gravely mistaken. Everything cries out to us just now in the interests of our own healthy continuance in Christ as well as in the interests of the many denominations to open out to other christians even if we have to do so unilaterally.

At the exit of the Blatherskite showgrounds a lonely fellow-christian stood distributing anti-catholic leaflets. We would do well to pray through the profound sadness of this

action and humbly attend to the questionings expressed. Someone has well said: 'Listen to others, listen to everybody, listen to the utmost, further than what they are able to articulate... It is the attitude of the poor of Jesus.' This is the first step in the dialogue relationship.

But there are also our bilateral christian partners, notably the Uniting Church's Northern Synod and the Anglican Communion. With these, close practical collaboration from the Kimberleys across into Queensland seems both imperative and easily feasible. We close ourselves off to it to our own immediate and longterm loss. If our Catholic church shows signs of ageing, we rejuvenesce by opening out and planning ahead jointly with our fellow christians. Doctrinal refinements will fall into place as we do so in hope and love. 'This is the victory which overcomes the world, your faith.'

An operation which should fill us with new courage is the self-monitoring and correcting, the continual self-evaluating, now for some time in process *from within* almost all christian bodies, catholics included. Let me give one illustration.

'Today' is a popular-style pictorial 'family magazine', designed for Aboriginal readership. It is produced by 'Mission Publications of Australia', a 'joint literature arm of the Aborigines Inland Mission and the United Aborigines Mission'. It is distributed free of charge or at five cents a copy, and would have I guess quite a wide circulation.

In the October 1986 number of 'Today', a one-page summary was presented of an address by the Revd Djiniyini Gondarra. (No date given). The overhead title was 'Aboriginal Style?' with a sub-caption 'Please write soon to the Editor of Today to say what you think about these ideas.'

I will not quote this article-excerpt 'from a report by Paul Ainsworth, Bible Society of Australia', since readers of *Nelen Yubu* are already familiar with the Revd Djiniyini Gondarra's christian thoughts and plans and since we are interested here only in the precise matter of internal correction within christian bodies.

Instead, we will move on to the August '86 number of 'Today' in which pages 11-12 contain 'A reply from Fitzroy Crossing Peoples Church'.

'We elders of the church do not agree with much of what Rev. Djiniyini Gondarra had to say in the article 'Aboriginal Style?' published in the May 'Today' magazine.

We know some people want culture, but we see that this leads us back into tribal law to worship spirits of animals and other spirits. God says we must not do this. He is angry with all people who do not worship him in truth. Only God's Word is truth. There is much poison of error in culture and tribal law.

What does Rev. Gondarra mean when he says 'Aboriginal people have been in bondage to the European style of worship'? This is strong talk from him and splits up people.

We want God's people to unite! All over the Kimberleys, Aboriginal people and European people worship God together. We are happy to keep going this way. Jesus prayed that we should be one group of people coming together in him (John 17:22,23).

We worship God just like his Word tells us — this is how all people must worship God. It is wrong to call it 'bondage to European style of worship'.

We pray and sing and read the Bible and preach and fellowship [sic]. We meet at the Lord's Table and baptise believers and discipline those who go wrong. And we give money for God's work through his church. This is how we worship. Does Rev. Gondarra mean this to be 'bondage to European style of worship'?

We do not want culture to come into the church. We do not want corroboree and dreamtime stories. Culture takes us away from God and back into bondage to tribal law. God must not be worshipped in new, strange and different ways — only like his Word tells us.

What does Rev. Gondarra mean when he says 'we want to make worship that...has Aboriginal spirituality'?

We want to follow the Bible way — it is the good way. Nobody can trick us that way. We do not want to

become like Nadab and Abihu who were destroyed by God for inventing a new way to worship (Numbers 3:4).

Didgeridoo and clap sticks are corroboree things. We must not go back to old ways. Didgeridoo and clap sticks sing out to pull our people back to old ways. We have finished with old way. Guitar and hand clapping and singing is good enough.

Missionaries are still needed in the Kimberleys because the work is great and there are not enough trained pastors. Many people can't read the Bible and more workers would be welcome. We know not many people in Arnhem Land are able to read and write. How can Rev. Gondarra say 'We no longer need missionaries'? More light is needed and not less!

To have 'truly indigenous Aboriginal church' means to separate blacks and whites. Does Rev. Gondarra want to see apartheid? We, through the blood of Jesus Christ and faith in his name, are made one people — God's people. His blood-bought church should not separate on account of colour and culture. We must work to integrate and unite and not be split up.

We have an independent church with about 100 full-blood Aborigines and about 15 Europeans. The church eldership consists of 6 full-blood Aborigines and 3 Europeans.

To this letter the editor appended the following note:

Editor's Note:

This letter was very long so we had to cut some parts out.

It says some important things. But we need to think carefully about the words 'we do not want culture to come into the church.'

Some things belonging to local or foreign culture are in every meeting, even if we don't realise it.

Is the meeting held around a camp-fire? That's the Aboriginal way of doing things (part of culture). Is it held in a room with chairs and a piano? That's part of European culture.

There are good and bad things in every culture. Some are okay to use in church services, some are not. Only those who belong to a culture can say about that. But is there any real reason why a European guitar is more suitable than an Aboriginal didgeridoo?

You might like to tell us what you think about that.

The October number of 'Today' carried (p.10) this final letter:

Dear Editor,

I write about the letter written by the Fitzroy Crossing Peoples Church about Rev. Djiniyini Gondarra's recent article in 'Today'.

While I do not agree with everything written in the letter, I thought your comment at the end of the letter was very good.

I have had the chance to share worship and prayer with Djiniyini and also have had him pray with me. At no time did I find that he was racist or wanted apartheid.

I think proof of this is that he is Moderator of the Uniting Church Northern Synod for two years. He has oversight of nearly 3000 people. Numbers are 50% 'black' and 50% 'white'.

Djiniyini does say 'We no longer need missionaries'. He then goes on to say that Aboriginal people need Christian people to work side by side with them in true discipleship. In Christian fellowship — not segregation.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Dale Chesson.

White Australian Community Worker, Aurukun Qld.

This series of articles in 'Today' gave me the opportunity of offering (one-time catholic) Rev. Bob Boska, the local white pastor of the Fitzroy Crossing People's Church (no longer United Aborigines Mission, by the way) a recent copy of *Nelen Yubu* (Spring '86) containing the full account by Rev.

Djiniyini Gondarra of 'The Pentecost Experience in Arnhem Land Churches in 1975.'

In the course of our conversation he remarked, 'I always like discussing doctrine with you,' — an indication that dialogue is possible even with the freer style christian churches. Though they reject 'ecumenism' as they understand it, they are not closed. Indeed, the World Baptist Movement, with which groups such as the Fitzroy Crossing People's Church would feel a certain closer affinity and sympathy, is undergoing currently re-definitions which can only be termed sensational.

In Djiniyini's account just mentioned there is reference, further, to the invitation extended to himself, his wife Gelung and Rev. Ronang Garrawurra by the Warburton Ranges people, with its dramatic spiritual aftermath. Does this Warburton Ranges occasion not suggest a possible convergence, in one Spirit, of the so-called 'mainline' churches, typified in the Uniting Church's Northern Synod with the christian 'Free Churches', still allowing for a certain plurality of opinion on non-essentials.

Before leaving this subject and concluding, I would like to cull attention to the excellent contributions of editor H R Miles, simple in style yet informative, to the 'Today' magazine we have been speaking of, on 'Words we need to understand' (e.g. Race, Racism, Racist: July, August, September '86; Multi-cultural: October '86; Paternalism: November '86). Another series by the same author, (February-May inclusive) counsels well on 'How to treat Other Christians'. On subjects like 'Unemployment', there is more sound advice. Catholics could well benefit from such readings.

Pastor Boska said also, however, about our Roman Catholic Church and ecumenism as he views it: 'It is all on one side. Everyone else has to change, but Rome never budes' (or words to that effect).

And indeed it seems to me that he has here a valid and serious criticism. Our Pope-centred status finds it hard to enter into the merry bowings and yieldings of contour, human and divine.

If we can use the papal visit to Australia as a sobering reminder of this catholic poverty and insufficiency of ours, it will not have been in vain.

REFLECTIONS ON CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Elizabeth Jordan rsm

I HAVE NEVER SAT very comfortably with the notion that I am a leader, called to leadership. On reflection though, it seems that the mode of leadership I personally reject is that where power is the product, charism or popularity with the followers is an essential ingredient, as well as a good dash of the skills of persuasion, effective communication and getting the point across in a forceful manner. However, the notion that I am called to be a leader in the christian sense is one that is challenging, exciting, yet daunting at times. **Challenging** — because to accept the role to which I am called is to face the need for change which can only be brought about through a great deal of conflict and suffering, but which will eventually bring life and hope! **Exciting** — when I think of that life and hope transforming the lives and offering hope for those with whom I work! And **daunting** — when I allow myself to dwell on the struggle, the pain, the feeling of powerlessness in the face of what seems to be a much greater force than mine!

In spite of this however, I have accepted the challenge which for me now is to work hand in hand as a disciple of Jesus with those other friends of his — the Aboriginal people of Australia. My specific field of leadership is within the Catholic Education system, to look to the provision of more appropriate forms of education for, and about the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Queensland. My appointment is a

Sr Elizabeth Jordan, Project Officer: Aboriginal Education, within the Queensland Catholic Education Office, Brisbane.

pioneering one — to survey the current situation, to research the needs and to recommend appropriate programs for implementation. The changes which I see as essential are in the provision of relevant programs which cater for the cultural differences of the Aborigines. A more urgent aim which needs to be addressed concurrently with the first, or even as a prerequisite for the first, is in the area of attitudinal change towards Aborigines by a vast number of Australians. Only when Aboriginal people are accepted and valued as a people with a rich cultural and spiritual heritage, can they be enabled to take their rightful place in Australian society with dignity and pride.

After completing an exercise to determine leadership style tendencies, my style profile revealed my dominant style to be that of developer. While this may only be a guide, I found it useful in reflecting on my role, which I see indeed as that of developer.

In attempting to outline the leadership task entrusted to me now, I plan to focus on just a few aspects which seem most significant. In doing this I will attempt to show how these particular aspects of my leadership role fit in well with the world view of the Aboriginal people and are at one with the mission which Jesus envisioned for himself and for those who follow him. These significant aspects are: firstly, as a person of hope, analysing the present situation, offering alternatives and being an agent of reconciliation. Secondly, as a person who inevitably must live with conflict, I want to highlight here the role of conflict in my present situation, to reflect on the role of conflict in Jesus' life, and in this light to reflect on how I as leader can be an agent of change in my conflict situations. So I will begin with this point — conflict.

While I work with Aboriginal people, perhaps my greatest time is actually spent with non-Aboriginal people. Therefore from the start there is conflict within myself as I discern the relative values of time spent with each group. Both are essential. There is the conflict evident among the non-Aboriginal people on these issues, as well as the conflict among various factions of the Aboriginal people. Overall, there is the conflict between the two racial groups.

I have found it helpful to base my reflections on conflict on Brueggemann's *The Prophetic Imagination*.¹ Here Brueggemann exposes the conflict between the alternative community of Moses and the royal regime of Solomon. In focussing on one small element in our Australian society and paralleling it with the major societal conflict according to Brueggemann, I take the risk of touching only superficially on the issue. Time here does not allow more. Nonetheless, the exercise is worthwhile. Firstly, I see the Aboriginal people as the alternative community. Politically they are an enslaved, oppressed, powerless group. They have been dispossessed of their rightful ownership of what traditionally has been most dear to them — their land. The land is the heart of their spiritual lives, all relationships between kin, nature and ancestral beings are linked with the land.

Their consciousness of their present state is alive and becoming more so. As they are enabled to offer criticism, they are being energised. Their groaning and their public expression of grief is gradually being heard by the nation. They are being energised from within to be able to proclaim their own worth, to recognise their dignity, to take control of their own lives, a control which for so long has been denied them.

Economically, as a group they are the poorest of Australia's poor. Yet they know how to share of their scarcity. In this sharing, demanded by the laws of kinship, they have an inner strength which is retained even by the urban dwellers. As one Aboriginal woman said to me the other day, 'That's something good we've still got, eh!' And they still have, in spite of their oppression, a very strong sense of their relationship to spiritual beings. Again that same woman said, 'Everything we do is spiritual — go fishing, light a campfire, or have kids — that's all tied up with the spirit, and it's not hard now to know the Christian God in all that.'

Where do I come in? My role is very much one of a 'disciple among equals'. While Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza used the phrase to describe the new kind of church community where women are allowed to share collegially, mutually in the development of church vision,² I use it here to describe my position among the Aboriginal people. While I may have something to offer them of skills in coping with the dominant

society, they have so much to offer me of their own spirit, their view of the world. So much of that view of the world is what we christians have been seeking often so unsuccessfully. Jesus talked about it and acted on it — collaborative sharing in a non-competitive society where forgiveness is an essential element of survival and peace.

On the other hand there is the reign of those of the royal consciousness among whose ranks are many with whom I work. Politically they are numbed into maintaining the *status quo*, where those of the minority culture are labelled with the typical stereotype of inferiority, scorn, worthlessness. For them it is too painful to allow the gap between their own supposedly superior society and the poorer despised one of the Aborigines to decrease. They are ignorant of the riches which the Aborigines can offer culturally, spiritually, socially.

My role with this group is to challenge, to unseat them from their throne of superiority and to invite them to listen to the others. Already in small ways I have seen the hearts of some in authority positions being warmed, softened. To hear them say, 'I have so much to learn', to hear them acknowledge gratitude for the chance to speak face to face with Aboriginal women and to glimpse their inner peace, hope and gentleness in the face of so much opposition is a small breakthrough. To plan the situations which enable these dialogues to occur is perhaps an important aspect of my role in the early stages.

The conflict is inevitable. So the task is to analyse the source of conflict and to plan strategies to resolve it either through reconciliation or confrontation. Nolan in his article 'Taking Sides'³ presents a useful guideline in deciding which strategy to use. Some conflicts are based on misunderstanding, which if properly handled can bring about greater understanding and a commonality of purpose, thus aiding reconciliation. However, there are conflicts in which we as christians must take sides. If one side is right in their search for justice and equality, and the other is wrong in that they cause the injustice and have the power to maintain the unjust state, then we must take sides. Jesus showed an example in this. His uncompromising stance on some issues divided the people into those who were for him, and those who were against.⁴ The kind of conflict Jesus would bring as a result of his stance would

bring dissension. 'Do you suppose I am here to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division...' (Luke 12:51).

Jesus also took sides in the clash between groups in his own society. He disapproved of Roman oppression in Israel, of their 'lording it over their subjects'. (Mark 10:42). He confronted the Jewish authorities because they exploited the poor. He chose to be with the sinners, the prostitutes, the tax collectors rather than with the Pharisees. His pursuit of condemnation of the unjust authorities eventually led to his arrest and death. There is no evidence of Jesus' compromising with the authorities on issues of justice and freedom of the poor.

There are however instances of where individual oppressors are reconciled, for example Zaccheus. Jesus repeatedly spoke of reconciliation, of the need for individuals to make peace. 'Love your enemies. Do good for those who hate you.' (Matthew 5:44). 'If someone takes you to law and would have your tunic, let him have your cloak as well.' (Matthew 54:40).

In any conflict situation where I am called on to stand with the poor — in my particular case with the Aboriginal people, I need to reflect on how Jesus did this. His overriding attitude was one of compassion — a compassion which is 'the ability to stand in solidarity with the victims of the present order'.⁵ Jesus was able to take upon himself the anguish of those rejected by the dominant culture. The history of Jesus is the history of his entering into the pain and giving it voice.⁶ He wept with the widow of Naim, with Mary and Martha when Lazarus died. That was not the way of the powerful leaders of the dominant culture. Yet it was in making the suffering visible, in articulating the grief, that hope would come. It was Lazarus, the poor man, dispossessed of riches and social status who would win life and hope in the future, not the rich Dives, burdened by possessions and the false power they bring.

So for me to spend time with the dispossessed Aboriginal people, to listen to their stories of pain and struggle, to be touched by their gentle strength in spite of their powerlessness, to be haunted by their expressions of rejection — 'Do you ever wish you weren't black — just for a little while, to feel what it's like to be free and to be accepted' (one

Aboriginal woman to others in a group) — all of this evoke in me compassion. I must learn to be a truly compassionate woman who can move from a position of solidarity with the victims to a determination to act for the good of those involved — the oppressed and the oppressors.

To act for the good of the oppressed entails often a confrontation not just with the individual oppressors but with the social and political structures which perpetuate that oppression. Thus in my role I can be faced with an ominous task of analysing and criticising the structures — in this case not of the whole Australian society, nor of our whole church community, but of our own institution of Catholic Education. I am not alone in this task. However, by the very nature of my specific role which is an isolated one within the system, there is at least some opportunity to challenge the structures. In administration at systems level and at local school level there are factors which currently militate against a just attitude towards minority groups — in culture, customs, language, lifestyle, economics. My aim would be to promote equality of opportunity which is not always achieved by meting out equal treatment to all. Some are more equal than others and the Aborigines are one group that have a long way to catch up.

One major way by which the Aboriginal people can be enabled and energised to promote their own search for justice is to provide them with a legitimate voice within the system. This year such an opportunity within our system of education has been given and enthusiastically received. Already a small group representative of each of the Queensland dioceses have begun the process of articulating their needs and requests for appropriate responses. My membership of this group, where I am forced to recognise my own minority position among equals, has been for me one of the most rewarding experiences of my work. Here I am very much the listener, while at times the facilitator perhaps, in the healing process which we experience together. I try to reflect on my role in the light of Jesus' mission — 'to bring good news to the poor, to set the down-trodden free'. (Luke 4:18,19). I acknowledge that my inability to always listen, my desire for efficiency and more immediate results must be overturned. At the same time, in

humility, I must acknowledge that it is Jesus who calls me to this; it is he who has set the example — and once again I remember the challenge, the excitement, and the daunting fear which accompany me!

NOTES

1. Bruggemann, W. 'The Prophetic Imagination'
2. Cardman, F. 'Not as Servants but Friends'
3. Nolan, A. 'Taking Sides'
4. Nolan, A. 'Taking Sides'
5. Brueggemann, W. 'The Prophetic Imagination' p.86
6. Brueggemann, W. 'The Prophetic Imagination' p.88

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brueggemann, W. 1978 'The Prophetic Imagination'. Fortress Press, Philadelphia.
- Cardman, F. 1985 'Not as Servants but Friends'. *The Way*, December '85.
- Dulles, A. 1984 'A Church to Believe in'. Crossroad, New York.
- Nolan, A. 1976 'Jesus before Christianity. The Gospel of Liberation'. Darton, Longman and Todd, London.
- Nolan, A. 'Taking Sides' (Article — source unknown).

* * * * *

NATION-WIDE ASPIRATIONS OF ABORIGINAL CATHOLICS

Eugene D Stockton

THE HARE IS STILL on the run, to invoke an image in the last issue of *Nelen Yubu*. My reply in that issue was to part of Sr Clare Ahern's 'Kimberley Response'. The rest I had not seen prior to publication, but I welcomed the positive contributions to the discussion. Issue must be taken, however, with the editorial downplaying of the need for a national approach and with the claim that church people do not make the distinctions I described between Aborigines. Here I would like to record the perceptions of Aboriginal Catholics, as far as I am capable of hearing and expressing them, which surfaced in the developments of 1986, centred as they were on the Papal Visit.¹

The AICC meeting in January at Townsville, when presented with the plans for the Pope's meeting with Aborigines, strongly demanded the right to have a say in the preparations. For this purpose delegates from each state formed an Advisory Committee to work with local Church authorities and DAA. This committee comprised highly experienced and competent persons and they perceived the Pope's wish was to meet with Aboriginal people as a whole, without deference to particular place, group or individual. This led to painful disagreements with DAA representatives (seeking kudos for their leader) and with local Church authorities (seeking kudos for the town). The insensitivity of the latter towards the Aboriginal representatives, especially in the days just prior to the Pope's arrival, became widely known and resented among the Aboriginal visitors.

Fr Eugene Stockton, Mt Druitt parish; priest-assistant to the Aboriginal Apostolate in Sydney.

The difficulties of the Advisory Committee were seen by all as highlighting 'the same old story of divide and rule', to which Aboriginal communities have become accustomed in their treatment by white authorities, both secular and religious.

Back in the communities began the feverish preparations to get some of their people to represent them in meeting the Pope. From what I know of the eastern states these plans were initiated and realised by the communities themselves. Unless you were nearby, it would be impossible to imagine the complexity of organisation required — booking buses and accommodation, budgeting, saving, fund-raising, publicity, leave from work — but people without normal experience in these matters carried it off. Nation-wide link-ups were established as communities communicated with their respective delegates on the Alice agenda and with each other in sharing facilities and tips on organisation. The convergence of the community representatives from all over Australia to 'the heart of Australia' became elevated in people's minds as an epic, and as you now hear stories of it you are conscious of a modern legend in the making. Most communities were repeatedly knocked back in trying to book accommodation (why? they asked) but many, the bulk of those from Queensland and NSW, found welcome at an Aboriginal-run resort. The camping together of most of the visitors from eastern states led to fraternisation, which was to feed the sentiment of 'let's work together'. (After the papal visit many of the busloads again met each other at Uluru, which was felt to be, not a tourist trip, but another pilgrimage).

The successive meetings of the Advisory Committee, exacerbated by their difficulties with representatives of church and state, convinced the Aboriginal representatives of the need of a nation-wide organisation for Aboriginal Catholics. They were further encouraged on this in consultation with communities back home and at their urging arranged for two days of cultural activities prior to the Pope's visit, which was to include meetings of Aboriginal Catholics from every part of the nation. Despite the Committee's plugging in advance, no tribal people showed up for these meetings (indeed the inter-state travellers met NT communities which knew nothing of the Pope's coming!) — Aboriginal Catholics who had come felt let

down, especially by the local church people who could easily have alerted tribal people and encouraged them to these meetings. Why are we considered different? Are we a threat to the missions? Hence in the two meetings which took place there was even stronger feeling for the need for a united national organisation of Aboriginal Catholics to dialogue with the Church on matters of their concern.

It is hard to describe the 29th November 1986. Many of you saw highlights on television. For those of us there, humbler events made a deep impression and are still being recalled in homely gatherings. Many came to the showground early and spent up to six hours meeting old friends and making new ones. Some from the east met tribal people for the first time and made their first shy attempts of contact with their ancestral culture. One old man in our group, respected as an elder and seer, told the children of 'the great man come to visit us...for 2000 years our people have lived in a state of suspended animation...he comes to call us out to full life.' Others spoke of a new Pentecost for the Aboriginal people, of coming to meet not just the man but the Spirit in the heart of our land — even now there are those who point to subsequent events as evidence that the Holy Spirit has begun to act powerfully in Aborigines.

The Pope's speech calls for separate analysis, but let me go on recording Aboriginal impressions as I heard them. 'Here is a man of God who is on our side.' Viewers may not have noticed, but a terrific storm of wind and rain was raging on at the time, adding drama to the event, but still the stocky Pope, a picture of determination, battled with wind-whipped pages of the speech and an unruly cassock. Even when we could not catch the words, we sensed he had something important to say and he was going to say it to the end. He was not just speaking to us in the showground, but speaking our voice to the whole Church and to the whole nation.

It is interesting to note that at the subsequent meeting of the AICC, the following passage was picked out as particularly significant:

You have learned how to survive, whether on your own lands, or scattered among the towns and cities.

Though your difficulties are not yet over, you must learn to draw on the endurance which your ancient ceremonies have taught you. *Endurance* brings with it patience; *patience* helps you to find the way ahead, and gives you *courage* for your journey.

Take heart from the fact that many of your languages are still spoken and that *you still possess your ancient culture*. You have kept your sense of brotherhood. If you stay closely united, you are like a tree standing in the middle of a bush-fire sweeping through the timber. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is scarred and burned; but inside the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have endured the flames, and *you still have the power to be reborn*.

The time for this rebirth is now!

If my assessment is accurate, the church in her dealings with the Aboriginal people has reached a critical turning point. Missionaries in the past might have felt that Aborigines were passive clients of their ministry, that their work was like pushing a boulder uphill. Now Catholic Aborigines are making the running, and the wisdom is to run with them — and a great deal easier. They openly speak of an Aboriginal Catholic Church. While appreciating efforts at pre-evangelisation in the past, they now want a greater accent on a spiritual ministry. They further insist on their own people assuming ministry roles more and more.

For the rest of the Church it is a crucial moment: how best to respond? Like the tacking giants of the America's Cup, the one has to change tack as soon as the other begins to change. Certainly there are obstacles in the way of a united Church response. The diocesan division of the Australian Church is one, but that can be overcome by a united stance of the Australian hierarchy and of the national funding agencies of the Church.

Changing attitudes is more difficult than changing procedures. Church workers need to put aside their natural instinct for parochialism and think big, together. The

instinctive tendency of white masters to 'divide and rule' needs to be recognised and renounced. The more tribal communities need to be helped understand the initiatives being taken by fellow-Aborigines with longer experience of European contact. A truly Catholic spirit on the part of the Church worker will assist the Aboriginal identify what he has in common with others living in different environments. (The full-blood pastor Ngukurr, on entering a church meeting with Aborigines of mixed descent, was heard to query whether they had anything in common, but coming out after a lively session he remarked: 'No, we are all the same'). There is needed positive efforts to overcome past antipathy and suspicion. Across the whole gamut of Aboriginality, between the urban and the tribal, there has to be stressed the mutual need and concern of the one for the other. The urban Aboriginal is concerned for the proper evangelisation of the tribal Aboriginal and feels he is best placed to help. Further, from his own long experience in a white world, he feels he can help make less painful the tribal person's growing contacts with that world, at the same time as he needs tribal affirmation of his own identity. Readiness to facilitate these links shows a truly Catholic heart. On the other hand to continue to treat tribal people as children, as 'tame natives' to be kept apart from their fellow-Aborigines, is viewed with severe resentment by those who act and see themselves as adult Aboriginal Catholics.

Much more, of course, could be said about the Australian Church's response to the nation-wide aspirations of Aboriginal Catholics. Much of what I wrote in 'Aboriginal Revival' (*Nelen Yubu*, no. 19, 1984, pp.3-11) is still pertinent. It is of interest to note that the four conditions for revival proposed there by Hans Mol are beginning to be realised.

Yes, Father Francis, on your remarks on the need of a mandate from the whole Australian Church, it may seem to be a case of 'the voice of one crying in the wilderness! And who is going to convey this message to our Catholic brothers and sisters?' (*Nelen Yubu*, no. 29, 1986/7, p.18). Now Aboriginal Catholics themselves are coming together to demand action from the Church. It is now up to the Church, if she believes in her own words about self-determination, to sit up, listen and respond.

At a lull in the proceedings just before his departure, the Pope was told of the aspirations for a national body for Catholic Aboriginals. He strongly applauded the idea and urged that it be pressed home to the Bishops. Momentum for the idea carried on to the 1987 conference of the AICC in Brisbane. In the knowledge that the issue was to arise, pleas went out to bishops, priests and religious to encourage delegates from interstate to attend. Again disappointing results. However, NSW sent delegates from different localities (previous contacts with Queensland communities in Alice Springs made them all the more enthusiastic) and plans were made for a state body similar to the AICC, for a conference after April to put this together and for NSW participation in the continuing efforts for a national body. I gather that these efforts are in the hands of a steering committee, which intends to make an initial approach to Australian Bishops at the next Episcopal Conference.

NOTE

1. These have been expressed more forcefully and with greater detail by Aboriginals, as recorded in *The Catholic Leader*, Jan. 18, 1987, pp.3, 7, 16.

SUBSCRIPTION NOTICE

On your address label will be found a figure set in brackets which indicates the last issue of *Nelen Yubu* for which you have paid. If possible, we prefer subscriptions to cover yearly blocks of four issues. The 1987 issues are nos. 30 - 33 inclusive.

REFUSAL OF THE SCRUB TREES
(in drought)

Dan O'Donovan

We thirst.

Mockers are all around —
ground, sky and dry dry wind
vie to touch our broken lips
with dessicated vinegar and gall
in sponge hardened by the long baking.

They think to kill us.
Die, they hiss.
Who, after all, can save you
against sky and ground and the dry driving wind?

But *they* are mocked.
Between us moves the night
not slow to soothe.
The scarce-moisture, mother, of her caressing fingers
cools our throat
while inside
revives contracted veins.

Leaves, — who can scream for the leaves?
sore swollen tongues in plaster palates,
hanging as the hanged.

We, we,
even the very trees which carry them shall cry
faint though we be:

We shall not die!
Burn on, you naked sun, until the close of day,
and pressing rock about these scorched feet turn triple
granite.

We shall redeem,
Yes, we shall redeem,
and, with the night,
prepare for the washing rain!

* * * * *

NOTICE

The NYMU office will be in recess from the middle of February, and will reopen about the middle of March. Any correspondence and orders will be attended to immediately on reopening.

Fr Worms' book *Australian Aboriginal Religions* is available also at Chevalier Bookshop, PO Box 13, Kensington, NSW 2033.

* * * * *

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK . . .

Very exciting news from Bathurst Island! Brother R J Pye msc has been awarded The Australia Medal for his long years of service in the missions, including the writing and publishing of his books on Aborigines in the Northern Territory. There could not have been a more popular and deserving recipient of this honour than quiet, retiring Brother Pye who had his 80th birthday in December last. Through long, long years of hard work, prayer, and unstinting attention to all who crossed his path, Aboriginal, European or whatever, Brother Pye has earned the respect and affection of us all. The citation reads: 'Brother Rexford John Pye, Bathurst Island, .NT, for services to the Aboriginal Community'— A Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AM). Congratulations, Brother Pye!

Congratulations also to Emeritus Professor Ronald Berndt and his wife Dr Catherine Berndt, who were similarly honoured with the Australia Medal. They were gracious hosts at dinner to our editor, Fr Wilson, during his passage through Perth on his PICT survey last year.

* * * * *

So many readers have sent in gentle and encouraging messages when forwarding their subscriptions, or for the festive season, or perhaps just in a friendly note — and such a lot of these have been addressed to me personally. I do appreciate the thoughtfulness behind these gestures and always feel up-bucked when they arrive. Many of you I have met, but some I have not: yet it is very touching to receive letters that say you feel we are friends nonetheless. Thank you indeed.

Recently we have heard from Fr John Fallon msc on Melville Island, in charge of Garden Point and Snake Bay; Sr Eunice Kerr, North Sydney; Fr Ron Perrett, Sth. Tamworth who enjoyed meeting up with Fr Wilson at Moree on the latter's PICT survey in December; Sr Marie Marron rsj of Kununurra; Fr Terry Lyons, Mt Isa; Fr Phil Hoy, Alice Springs; Fr R Gleeson of Moree.

Fr Dirk Tolboom mhm of Mt. Magnet, WA, wrote '...I agree that this magazine [*Nelen Yubu*] can help me to understand the Aborigines a little bit. They are so different from my head-hunters in Borneo. I still have to learn not to compare these two groups of people as their background and history are so

different.' Fr Tolboom was a missionary for 34 years on the island of Borneo until osteo-arthritis forced him to leave his beloved mission. But headhunters? It's good to know you are continuing your work in the safety of WA, Father.

A query from Br Leo Scollen of Balgo Hills WA, who wonders if the weather at Leura is preferable to that of the NT? No comparison, Brother, except that we did begin the year with drought and a heatwave! — From Fr Leon de Souza at Tennant Creek, telling us that the historic Church of Christ the King there has been renovated and blessed by Bishop Collins. The ceremony took place on 22 November '86, the vigil of the Titular Feast.

Others who wrote are Fr Terry Naughton msc, of Douglas Park; Sr Barbara Linge fmm, Alice Springs; Fr Brian McCoy, Townsville, just returned from a year overseas; Fr W Kriener at Halls Creek, WA; Fr V Carroll msc, in PNG; Fr M Hayes, Rockhampton; Sr Elizabeth, Port Keats, NT; Fr Hilton Deakin, Mt Eliza, Vic; Sr Lucy Kert, Halls Creek, WA; Fr Noel McMaster, West End, Qld.

And Fr Rod Cameron osa, of Mareeba in the Atherton Tablelands, Nth. Qld., who has been selected for fulltime work in the Aboriginal Apostolate in the Cairns Diocese. He says Fr Kerry Crowley has also been appointed by the Bishop to this work, and Sr E Jordan is going from the Catholic Education Office in Brisbane to assist also. Fr Cameron visited Nelen Yubu on Melville Island in '85, and we all met up again at Innisfail later on. Congratulations on your appointment, Father Rod!

Other snippets of news are that Fr John Savage msc has been appointed Mission Superior in Darwin; Fr Brian Healy msc is PP of Holy Spirit parish, Casuarina, NT; Sister Patricia Smith FDNsc is the Principal of the first Catholic school in Katherine; and we hear that Fr Gerard Remie sdb, lately of Katherine, is at Palmerston, NT.

So, we thank you all for your news and good wishes. The object of this column is to disseminate news of our readers' doings, so we hope you have enjoyed hearing about each other.

A Happy Easter to you all, and many Blessings upon your work.

Secretary Keren