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EDITORIAL

IN THIS issue we present one of those reports from the field that **Nelen Yubu** was particularly founded for. In order to share with his Jesuit team-mates and as/an aid towards discernment, Pat Mullins sj wrote out some reflections on his work among urban Aboriginal people of Darwin, and has kindly allowed us to publish them.

It is a pity that so few people involved in evangelisation work among Aboriginal people do not do likewise. Writing it out gets us to detect, identify, acknowledge the suppositions and formal constructs we use to organise our experiences, direct our efforts, maybe beguile ourselves into shaky securities... Thinking and writing it out helps us reinforce the good, unmask the sham, modify the defective and redirect the faltering: it helps us keep ourselves honest.

One thing the indefatigable Dan O'Donovan will never be accused of is failure on that score. It looks as though recovery from his car accident will be a long process. Meanwhile he keeps on thinking it out...

We are pleased to publish another of the excellent papers produced by YTU takers of my Aboriginal Studies unit last year: this time Sr Patricia Healey rsm.

Next issue (our fortieth!) we shall offer a report on CAAPS, the combined churches' Aboriginal alcohol awareness and family recovery programs being conducted in the NT. Also we plan to mark the premature death of our colleague, Fr Anthony Peile sac, with a biographical note.

Martin Wilson msc
Editor

BELIEF AND CULTURE IN AUSTRALIA

Sr Patricia Healey rsm

Synopsis

This paper is presented in two separate sections.

Part One addresses the question of the role and purpose of mythology in traditional Australian Aboriginal societies. I felt drawn to explore this area, as I believe the mythic dimension of the culture - that is, "the horizon over against which one's conceptions of reality are intelligible" (R Panikkar, **Myth, Rite and Hermeneutics**) - permeates the cultural lives of the Aborigines. I direct focus to the question of the worldview and operative values system (Appendix A details the definitions for these words/phrases, which I have used for the purpose of this paper) of the societies, insofar as they relate to mythology.

I present the Dreaming as the basis of every aspect of life and mythology as a cohesive force within the societies. Individual Dreaming stories from the corpus of myths are not detailed. Some attention is given to man's relation to his Sacred Past and to his locale and to the sense of the Sacred that characterises Aboriginal philosophy.

Part Two is a reflection on some of the areas of relevance, for white Australians, to be found within the Aboriginal culture. I have been fascinated by the strong resemblance between the Aborigines' truly religious outlook and the basic Christian tenets, notably the sacramental dimension.

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PART I

"A Narrative Resurrection of Primeval Reality" (B. Malinowski).

If one wishes to understand the conditions of existence, he must put himself back directly, for explanation is found in what is behind, in the primeval time which is immediately accessible through myth.¹

The above words find echo in the vocative title of this essay, alerting me to the obviously immense and pervasive impact of mythology on traditional Australian Aboriginal societies. I have thus felt a strong urge to direct focus on their body of lore, and so to explore a little their worldview and operative values systems. It would seem that if, as Edwards asserts, "The Dreaming has been basic to every aspect of life for the Aborigines",² then an understanding of its concepts is essential to any understanding of Aboriginal philosophy, since their mythology has given them their assurance of having originated from their land during that period of creative activity.

Australian Aborigines give evidence of having a view of their world that could be termed animistic, in the sense that they accept that "the same kind of spiritual essence (*Kuruna*) which gives life to human beings, is present also in the other objects which draw their existence from The Dreaming."³ Not only animals and plants, but all features of the environment, that are conceived of as marking the movement of Ancestral Beings in the creative Dreamtime, are believed to be inhabited by their spirit. Aboriginal man envisions himself as an integral part of Nature, his mythology having kept him alerted to this tenet.

The mythic dimension of Aboriginal culture - that is, the horizon over against which their conceptions of reality are intelligible⁴ - gives them a sense of security regarding their place in society, as it highlights the truth, for them, of the origins of all aspects of their cultural, social and spiritual life and of the whole environment.

With an "eternal" relevance and dynamism, mythology has been a cohesive force within the culture, keeping them in living touch with The Dreaming, their source of life and accounting for a beclouded Past on the edge of history. All forms of communication, whereby traditions have been passed on and people have interacted, through song, story, dance or ritual seem to have their roots in this remote Past, for the whole culture is envisaged as the legacy of The Dreamtime epoch.⁵

Traditional Australian Aborigines have a truly religious outlook, for they have perceived in the world about them, signs of beneficent intent towards them and they have translated these into "assurances of life under mystical nurture."⁶ Hence, the stories of The Dreaming give a sacred significance to the events of everyday life, for since the whole environment is believed to have been formed by The Dreaming activity, there is a sense in which "all things partake of the sacredness of life [and] spiritual essence is present through the material world."⁷

Moving in an environment where they are conscious of the ever-present existence of Beings and Powers, Aborigines avoid offending against archetypal directives and moral imperatives laid down by the Ancestors. Through their mythology, sacred, primeval time breaks into the profane "here-and-now", ensuring historical and Dreamtime sanction for customs and rites. In fact, to say a custom is *altjira*, *djugur*, *ungud*, that is "The Dreaming" or "The Law", is to give it unimpeachable authority.⁸ In contradistinction, a man-made custom elicits less respect, for the Dreaming itself is

a coherent and all-encapsulating body of truths, which govern the whole of life ... includes the past and ongoing activities of creative and life-giving forces, which always retain a sense of immanence and transcendence, of the actual and potential.⁹

Ultimate questions that confront all of us - questions of origins, purpose and destiny : Where from? Why here? Where to? - are addressed by myth, and focus is directed to the origins of the natural and social worlds, the Aborigine's role in these worlds and their place in the wider spheres of spiritual existence. Myths demonstrate that life is possible for man because of the creative actions and life-giving powers of the heroic Beings of the Past. It

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is from "these life-forces that Aboriginal people get their identity [since] their whole lives revolve around these points of reference."¹⁰

Insofar as they reveal the nature of man and his world, myths have been, and to some extent, remain as revelation for traditional Aborigines, providing the terms whereby they understand themselves and their life-style. So great has been the emotional impact of this body of lore that it has been for them the reality of The Dreaming,¹¹ explicating how things came to be and continued to exist for the benefit of the clans. Their very complex family kinship system is intimately tied into the stories of the eternal Dreamtime and into the land, plants and animals which give that creative reality physical shape.¹²

The Dreaming! Eternal Dreamtime! Ancestral times! illo tempore! - whatever the appellation used, it signifies the period at the beginning - ab origine - the time of creation, when the Ancestral Beings, the Old People, lived and established the pattern of Nature and Life. No mere shadowy reflection of real life, for the Aborigine, The Dreaming has been accepted as the primeval reality itself, from which life as experienced today took its origin - the era when the dramatic events that gave shape to the environment, its inhabitants and their life eventuated. As a consequence of this, "the spirits of the ancestors of all human, animal and plant life are represented in the land forms ... the planets ... the stars ... the moon and the sun."¹³

In the Past, The Dreaming was manifested through the Ancestral Beings; in the present, it is revealed through the Elders and the initiates; and Elders today trust it will continue to be manifested provided the links - initiates, myths, rituals, sacred sites - are not broken. It is easy to understand their concern that numbers of more modern Australian Aborigines appear to be losing touch with their cultural heritage.

It is because they have a circular conception of time that they are able to be in more immediate contact with their creative Past than is possible for us with our linear view of history.¹⁴ Tracing their ancestry to the time of the beginnings of their existence, their heritage and their cultural life they discern "no division between Time and Eternity."¹⁵ according to Strehlow. This is no mystery to the traditional Australian Aborigine. It is simply The Dreaming, the sacred objects of which were:

symbols of the living presence that explained his totemic affiliations, and which he entered when he took part in initiation ceremonies.¹⁶

From their Elders, the initiates learn of The Dreaming, of how the incorporeal or divine Powers of the present once had human form (or human-animal or human-plant form), as they laid out the contours of the land, its flora and fauna, and of how, now, they can at will manifest themselves as part of their creations, because the life-force which they embodied was not limited to human manifestations.

The initiates also learn that they can draw on the ever-present influence of the creative Beings of the Past by repeating their actions in the appropriate ways. They are made aware of the consubstantial relationship that exists between an ancestor and his creations, of the close relationship between their religious life and the rest of social life in general. The initiation "symbolises the death of the boy and the emergence of the man,"¹⁷ empowered to play a part in the re-creation, for instance, of food and animals in increase ceremonies and to that extent to share in the ongoing creation of the world.

Many of the religious myths have as their framework the peregrinations of the Ancestral Beings, who on their travels performed certain actions so that the world, as now known, is the result of their activities. An aetiological function of myth is to explain the origins of natural phenomena, identifying them with Past heroes, and so that land is full of signs and "the mediating agency between the world of ancestors and the world of living human beings."¹⁸ to the extent that "a hill, a cave, a bend in the river evokes a Dreaming story and unites an Aborigine to a spiritual world."¹⁹ Natural phenomena - landscape, colours, animals and tribal experiences - are interwoven into mythical language and "the country is redolent with the sentient Beings who have occupied it."²⁰

Not surprisingly then John Paul II could pay tribute to the profound Aboriginal insight concerning their relationship to the land as the source of life, and to the way they have lived their lives in closeness to it, thereby touching "man's relationship with God, for the land was proof of a power in life greater than [themselves]."²¹

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From time immemorial myths have been the subject of graphic arts, the inspiration of music and the core of extensive ceremonial life, the medium by which the memories of The Dreaming have been kept alive. Ancestral activities have been narrated, not as mere existential facts, but in view of their being vehicles through which an Aboriginal might recognise "the inter-relations of the divine, physical and moral worlds."²² Hence the *tjurunga* (sacred objects of stone, carved wood, shell, bone etc.) might bring to mind their origins, traditions and conditions of being, giving them a sense of being part of the stream of their tradition, a feeling of at-oneness with the environment.

Stanner postulates that The Dreaming is many things in one, including a kind of:

- narrative of things that once happened
- charter of things that still happen
- "logos", that is a principle of order transcending all that is significant for Aboriginal man.

In his estimate it is much more complex philosophically than modern man has as yet realised.²³

In revealing models that give meaning to the world and human life, mythic narratives express emotions common to man - love, hate, likes, dislikes. All occupations are believed to have originated with the totemic ancestors, for the ritual, symbolic and aesthetic concepts of the Australian Aborigine have their roots in the remote Past.²⁴ Myths are concerned with issues relating to where man is most vulnerable - issues of birth, initiation, fertility, death.

There is the understanding that all are linked to the Past by virtue of their conception, and The Dreaming activities can be revived by each generation in daily and ritual life. Re-actualised in ritual - through song, dance, pantomime - myths are held to be life-giving. The cultic action renders the primordial event present, while the myth relates its presentation to its transcendent model and meaning.²⁵

While engaged in ritual a man is no mere actor, but for those moments, The Dreamtime figure himself. The apodictic value of myth is periodically reconfirmed through ritual.

It is believed that the spirit powers that emerged in The Dreaming and now invisibly inhabit all that they created, enter the woman's body and so are responsible for conception and the birth of

a baby,²⁶ thus providing a direct link with the Ancestral world. The pregnant woman attributes the conception, not to copulation, but to the totemic ancestor wherever conception took place.²⁷ The child's birth is regarded as "a manifestation and embodiment of the ordering and purposes of those who had created, and continue to create, all things."²⁸

Since both Man and Nature share the same life force and spiritual essence, ceremonies for the increase of species are the same for all. It renders the clans responsible for the care of the sacred totemic sites and periodically perform the appropriate rituals to ensure that the spirit of each species present in these sites continue to give birth and life.

It is alleged that just as the Ancestral spirit entered the woman's body to be born as a child, so at death it returns to that world to be

incorporated into that sphere from which other spirits will emerge to take human shape and personalities in the future.²⁹

Burial rites assist the passage there, at the same time safeguarding the living against any interference from the spirit before it sets out on its journey.

How truly then can it be claimed that mythology impacts all stages of the life cycle and maintains relationship between Ancestral Beings and all aspects of the physical, spiritual and social spheres of existence.³⁰ It keeps the people attuned to the idea that all their values, laws, traditions and customs have their roots in The Dreaming.

That the mythological era set the precedent for all human behaviour, I would question. After pondering the issue, I take a stance with Edwards in positing that, surely, traditional Australian Aborigines have had more freedom in this regard than seems to have been suggested by some writers. I cannot pretend to know, and can only offer my considered opinion, but it is to be hoped that a more eclectic approach to customs was possible, that is that they have been able to take their own moral stance regarding myths that deal with incest, murder, theft, trickery, cruelty, seduction, wrong marriage, wrong triumphing over right.

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Edwards³¹ postulates that myths contain some elements that indicate guidance for behaviour, but there are elements that do not give clear guidance. It would seem that Aborigines have chosen to include the "bad" with the "good" on the mythico-ritual scenario, in line with the imperfect human condition. If this is so, then surely they have freedom to make their own moral choices. In Edwards' view, "all of life is raised to the sphere of the sacred, and the totality of life is seen as purposeful,"³² and Stanner proposed that "this religious belief expressed a philosophy of assent to life's terms."³³

Revd Djiniyini Gondarra makes the point that "some of the ... ceremonies and rituals are not God-given gifts to the Aboriginal race. It has come ... through the fall of mankind,"³⁴ and suggests that it is up to them to decide which rituals need or need not be practised. Edwards draws attention to certain demands placed upon Aboriginal societies because of established codes.³⁵ He quotes Berndt on the question of their moral order consisting of a mixture of good and bad, stating "this is also the state of nature, of which man is an integral part."³⁶

It is important to note that, just as all societies and cultures undergo change, so regardless of the force of traditional values, the introduction of new, or adapted or modified customs, rituals and myths has been inevitable.³⁷

However that might be, it cannot be denied that traditional Aboriginal mythology has had a grandeur of its own within the societies, for the mythic dimension has permeated every facet of their lives, and has been integral to their religion, their social and spiritual lives - in effect, to their worldview and operative values system. Mythology has kept the clans within the territory of The Dreaming and so in touch with the primordial events that give meaning to reality and direction to their lives. Hence they have adapted themselves to the expression of an active, divine presence in the cosmos.³⁸

The narration of myths and their ritual reactualisation has perpetuated communication with The Dreaming, regenerated life and ensured its continuation, and thus the re-creation of the world. Myth has reflected the value and social importance of plants, animals, objects, natural phenomena, events and institutions, either directly or indirectly.

Myths are indeed serious perceptions of reality - statements of

a primeval greater, and more relevant, reality, by which the present life, fates and activities of mankind are determined, the knowledge of which supplied man with the motive for ritual and moral actions.³⁹

Through mythical thinking, the traditional Australian Aborigine has "discovered a memory that extends over thousands of years - back to the origins of his language".⁴⁰ He has indeed been kept in living touch with The Dreaming, his source of life.

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ENDNOTES - Part I

1. W J McDonald, et al. ed. **New Catholic Encyclopaedia**, vol. X citing E Cassirer (San Francisco, 1962), p.184.
2. W H Edwards, **An Introduction to Aboriginal Societies** Wentworth Falls, NSW, 1988), p.13. Hereinafter referred to as Edwards. (cf. Appendix A).
3. *ibid.*, p.67.
4. R Panikkar, **Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics** (New York, 1979), p.372. Hereinafter referred to as Panikkar.
5. W E H Stanner, **The Mardudjara Aborigines** (New York, 1978), p.36.
6. W E H Stanner, "Aboriginal Man in Australia" in A W Reed, **An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Life** (Sydney, 1974), p.57. Hereinafter referred to as Reed.
7. Edwards, *op. cit.*, p.73.
8. I question the extent to which authority for codes of behaviour is to be unquestioningly adhered to. This is discussed later in this paper. (cf. p.8)
9. Patrick Dodaon, "The Land our Mother; The Church our Mother," in **Compass Theology Review**, vol.22, ed. by P Malone (Kensington, NSW, 1988), p.1. Hereinafter referred to as Dodson, *Compass* 22.
10. Reed, *op. cit.*, p.57.
11. Melva Jean Roberts, **Dreamtime Heritage** (Adelaide, 1971), p.11.
12. Dodson, *Compass* 22, *op. cit.*, p.1.
13. *ibid.*
14. Edwards, *op. cit.*, p.13.
15. *ibid.*, citing I G H Strehlow, p.13.
16. Reed, *op. cit.*, p.57.
17. Edwards, *op. cit.*, p.70.
18. Nancy D Munn, "The Transformation of Subjects into Objects in Walbiri and Pitantjatjara Myth", in **Religion in Aboriginal Australia** ed. by Max Charlesworth, et al. (St Lucie, Queensland, 1984), p.57. Hereinafter referred to as Munn.

19. D Edwards, "Apprentices in faith to the Aboriginal View of the Land," in **Compass Theology Review**, vol. 20, ed by P Malone (Kensington, 1986), p.28.
20. Munn, op. .cit., p.67.
21. John Paul II, "Address to Aborigines - Alice Springs, 1986", in **Compass** 20 p.45.
22. Kenelm Burridge, **Encountering Aborigines: A Case Study** (New York), 1973), p.82.
23. W E H Stanner, **The Dreaming: in Cultures of the Pacific**, ed. by I E Harding and B J Wallace (New York, 1970), p.65.
24. Josephine Flood, **The Archaeology of the Dreamtime** (Sydney, 1983), pp.69-70
Totems are animal or plant species (at times, other objects or beings) which are thought to share descent with a group of people.
Totemism refers to the association between the groups of people and their totem, by which the groups are obligated to perform ceremonies to ensure the continued existence of the species.
25. Mircea Eliade, **Myth and Reality** (London, 1963), p.19.
26. Edwards, op. cit., p.13.
 In *The Dreaming*, Spirit Beings, existing in a formless substance, emerged from either water or land, and took upon themselves a variety of forms and identities as they moved over the face of the earth giving shape to the environment before disappearing from sight.
27. *ibid.*, p.17.
28. Burridge, op. cit., p.111.
29. Edwards, op cit., 70.
 "The myth of the origin of death narrates what happened in *illo tempore*" and so tells why man is mortal.
30. Eliade, op. cit., p.11
31. Edwards, op. cit., p.75.
32. *ibid.*
33. *ibid.*
34. Djinyini Gondarra, "Father, You gave us the Dreaming" in **Compass** 22, p.7.
35. Edwards, op. cit., p.76.
 For instance, infanticide if a baby is a burden or the result of a union that breaks the marriage laws; women harshly treated for breaking taboos; innocent people killed in retaliation for others' offences.
36. Edwards, op. cit., citing Berndt, p.76.
37. *ibid.*, pp.109-110.
38. McDonsld, op. cit., p.184.
39. Malinowski, op. cit., p.145.
40. Panikkar, op. cit., p.136.

PART 2

The Relevance Of The Australian Religious

Worldview For Us Today

In the pressured lives of most of us a move towards a more contemplative dimension of life makes room for big questions about faith and prayer and our scale of values.¹

With this statement Tony Kelly highlights an issue that has come to the fore in recent times - an urge on the part of many to seek space to "be" or to "get away from it all". My reflections on the question of the worldview and cultural matrix² of the traditional Australian Aborigines have convinced me that they have much to offer us.

Let us consider some areas of special relevance.

I believe they confront us with a deeply spiritual culture, and with Stanner that "there is stuff in Aboriginal life, culture and society that will stretch the sinews of any mind which tries to understand it".³ Their intrinsic relationship to the land invites a conversion to a range of values which are too often repressed by our materialism.

The land emerges as a symbol of the journey Australians need to make "to some centre away from the noise and busyness of the periphery to the silence and dispossession of the interior".⁴ For the Aborigine, the land is alive with the presence and power of the Beings who formed it and are now incarnated within it.

Their attitude to the land is not romantic mysticism. Rather, they make a theological statement in claiming that their land is related to a source of life, a Power greater than themselves. Such a vision is surely their "articulation of the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit,"⁵ for their living in closeness to the land "touched the sacredness of the God-man relationship".⁶

The fact that many more Australians seem to be seeking some contemplative moments in their lives suggests there might be more readiness to find what is relevant in Aboriginal spirituality and to hear Matthew Fox's call to a creation-centred spirituality. He

believes we are all children in terms of such a way of being and postulates that, if we are to regain our spiritual roots, which can nourish us into growth, we must return to the time of original creation,⁷ by adopting the spiritual paradigms offered by people like Hildegarde of Bingen, Mechtilde of Magdeburg, Juliana of Norwich and Meister Eckhart. His tenet is that if we can allow this type of spirituality to breathe life into the meaning of our faith, of sin and salvation, and even the person of Jesus (and so Incarnation), they will assume new vigour for us.⁸ What a challenge and one that bespeaks the relevance of Aboriginal philosophy!

With such a spirituality we could be "sensitive and aware, alive and awake to the everflowing, evergreen unfolding of the divine Word"⁹ - a stance that marks a spiritual, creation-centred person, and one which finds echo among Aborigines, who believe their creative life-giving forces are in their midst. They have "a beautifully-worked-out spirituality complete with a full and coherent sacramental theology".¹⁰ Their world is full of signs of the spirits, thoughts and deeds of the life-giving forces, and they believe they share the same life-force with all created reality. They thus challenge us to reflect on our own awareness of the sacramental dimension of our lives, of the abiding and life-giving presence and self-communication of God in our midst - of our search to discover the kingdom of God in the cultural context.

It would seem that a creation-centred theology and spirituality are especially appropriate for Australians. Our timeless land, images of vast, open spaces, the common struggle to form a nation in the face of drought and natural disasters, The Dreaming of the first people in the land - all speak of "the mystery of the Spirit in this land of the Holy Spirit".¹¹ The Aboriginal worldview surely echoes thousands of years of searching for God.

Since the Aborigines' lives pivot around their point of reference, the life-forces from which they derived their identity, they are "oriented towards all that is meaningful and good".¹² and stand as one of the least material-minded and most life-minded traditions of any of which we have knowledge, and we need to beware of remaining "tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance".¹³

It has been asserted that "immanence is a connatural awareness in the Aborigines".¹⁴ Their contemplative quality is perhaps the greatest gift they have to offer us. Their word for the inner, deep

listening and quiet, still awareness is *dadirri* - a tuning-in of self to the deep, inner spring in each person. It was with this quality that myths were heard and held deep within.¹⁵ Through this *dadirri*, they experience a renewal of spirit and wholeness, and with the influence of the Christian message they are learning to listen to God's Word as in the past they heard all that came to them through their traditions and culture. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr calls all Australians to be more sensitive to "the great life-giving Spirit, the Father of us all",¹⁶ and to be attuned to "the deep spring which is the very Spirit of God ... a sound ... the Word of God, Jesus".¹⁷ A profound spirituality indeed, and one that our Australian culture stands in need of!

Aborigines show what it means to have an habitual recognition of the sacredness of life and of all created reality. For them, the Sacred and profane meet, and according to Chardin, that is what we are all called to, for

by virtue of our creation, and, still more, of the Incarnation, nothing here ... is profane for those who know how to see. On the contrary, everything is sacred.¹⁸

If we could but learn from the Aborigines to value the whole of life and so touch Nature, ourselves, God and prayer, our care for others, then we might believe more deeply that "there lives the dearest freshness deep down things and that the whole of reality is charged, with the grandeur of divine origins, over which the Spirit broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings".¹⁹

We are reminded of the Aboriginal reverence for words and their meanings. As Stanner points out, when we took what we call 'land', "we took what, to them, meant 'hearth', 'home', 'the source and locus of life' and everlastingness of spirit".²⁰ John Paul II praised them for their closeness to the land and for not spoiling or exhausting it. A message for us!

The Revd Djiniyini Gondarra suggests that "many Australians have lost their dreaming and in so doing have lost a precious gift from God".²¹ With the surge of Australianism during the bicentennial year, the opportunity has been there to recover some of our roots. Hence the exploration, through literature, of the themes of alienation, land, the battler, the bush, urbanisation, family. There is yet more we can learn from the Aborigines in this regard.

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They can also acquaint us with the meaning of responding to the impetus of a shared story, resulting in a way of seeing the world, a way of being in the world, for community is "a way of being united through the common experience of a core vision".²² Likewise, since we all share creation in common, we have a responsibility for that creation and are called to re-create, as the Aborigines are aware (cf. increase ceremonies). Undoubtedly then the philosophy evident in the values and worldview of Australian Aborigines has relevance for us today, challenging us to be "recycled in creation-centred spirituality".²³ Their presence poses a challenge and stands as a source of richness and diversity, if we but take time to know them and to hear them. Then perhaps Chardin's words could ring more truly on the Australian scene - his message that

something is afoot in the universe, a result is working out, which can best be compared to a gestation or birth.²⁴

We might then come closer to realising the "life ... to the full" (Jn 10:10) that we have been called to experience.

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ENDNOTES - Part 2

1. Tony Kelly. "Theology in an Australian Context" in **Compass Theology Review**, vol. 12 ed. by P Malone (Kensington, 1978), p.6. Hereinafter referred to as Kelly.
2. *ibid.*, p.2.
3. W E H Stanner. **After the Dreaming: 1968 Boyer Lectures**, (Sydney, 1969), p.41.
4. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p.6.
5. Denis Edwards, "Apprentices in Faith to the Aboriginal View of the Land" in **Compass Theology Review**, vol. 20, ed. by P Malone.
6. John Paul II. "Address to Aborigines - Alice Springs, 1986", in **Compass Theology Review**, vol. 20, p.45 (cf. Appendix A).
7. Matthew Fox, **Original Blessing** (Santa Fe. Mexico, 1983), p.37.
8. *ibid.*, pp.26-27.
9. *ibid.*, p.40.
10. Patrick Dodson, "The Land our Mother; The Church our Mother" in **Compass Theology Review**, vol. 22, p.1. Hereinafter referred to as Dodson.
It is not a far cry from the Aborigine's truly religious view of life to the heart of the Christian message - especially in terms of sacramentality.
11. Kevin Ireston spoke of this at a school Staff conference in Warrnambool in 1985.
12. Dodson, *op. cit.*, p.1.
13. Stanner, *op. cit.*, p.61.
14. Dan O'Donovan, "Letter on Aboriginal Religion" in **Compass Theology Review**, vol.14 (Kensington, 1986), p.26.
15. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, "Dadirri" in **Compass Theology Review**, vol.22, p.9.
16. *ibid.*
17. *ibid.*, pp.9-11.
18. Teilhard de Chardin, **Le Milieu Divin** (London, 1957), p.6.
19. Evelyn Woodward, **Poets, Prophets and Pragmatists. A New Challenge to Religious Life** (Melbourne, 1987), p.90 [drawing on Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur", **Gerard Manley Hopkins, Poems and Prose** ed. by W H Gardner (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1953), p.27]. Hereinafter referred to as Woodward.
20. Stanner, *op. cit.*, p.44.
21. Djinyini Gondarra, "Father, you gave us the Dreaming" in **Compass Theology Review**, vol. 22, p.7.
22. Woodward, *op. cit.*, p.35.
23. Fox, *op. cit.*, p.23.
24. de Chardin, *op. cit.*, p.73.

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APPENDIX A

The following definitions are the ones I have accepted for the purposes of this paper:

- * VALUES: "the moral principles or beliefs or accepted standards of a person or social group". (Webster's Dictionary).
- * WORLDVIEW: "comprehensive view of philosophy of human life and the universe" (ibid.)
- * RELIGIOUS WORLDVIEW: as above and in relation to the Ultimate Concern.
- * PHILOSOPHY: "a personal outlook or viewpoint" (ibid.)
- * MYTHIC DIMENSION: "the horizon over against which one's conception of reality are intelligible" (Panikkar)
- * CULTURAL MATRIX: "the setting of meanings and values that inform a given way of life" (T Kelly)

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A religious worldview is dependent upon social support. The more unified and reliable this support is, the more these interpretations of reality will be firmly established in consciousness. P Berger, 'The Heretical Imperative', cited in Woodward, op. cit., p.5.

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Urban Aboriginal Apostolate

There is a distinction in Darwin between coloured people (i.e. those of less than full Aboriginal descent) and Aboriginal people (i.e. those of full Aboriginal descent). The distinction takes its origin from the old government policy which sought to "assimilate" the half caste people and "protect" the full bloods. I confess to finding the distinction quite difficult to come to terms with. The distinction was not made among the people in Townsville with whom I had worked previously and I still find the language (half caste, full blood etc.) distasteful. But the distinction is real in the minds of many people and cannot be ignored. I prefer to use the more recent terminology and draw the distinction in terms of culture, between urban Aboriginal people and traditional Aboriginal people. This is not entirely satisfactory either but it has the virtue of acknowledging the Aboriginality of both groups, which is necessary for us given the task of ministering among "Aboriginal" people.

There are about six permanent camps around Darwin with a couple of hundred traditional people in each. There would be several hundred more traditional people (many from Bathurst Island) who live in the suburbs and all the urban Aboriginal people live in the suburbs, as distinct from the camps. There is also a population of transient Aboriginal people, mostly traditional, who live in the parks and on the beaches. Some of the urban people are very well integrated into the steady society. They are well settled and have held steady jobs for many years, some even in the private sector. One other group should be mentioned. These are people of less than full Aboriginal descent who come from Darwin itself and have never been associated with any Aboriginal community outside Darwin. These are mostly Catholic, well integrated into the general population, and often do not identify as Aboriginal to any large degree.

As far as the Church was concerned the policy had been basically that the parishes were to meet the needs of Catholic Aboriginal people although for the last two years there had been a monthly Aboriginal Mass, and six Missionaries of Charity conducted an apostolate among mainly Aboriginal people in Darwin. It is true to say that this approach proved unsatisfactory. Given that all the people from Garden Point, Bathurst Island, Daly River, Beagle Bay and Port Keats were at least nominally Catholic, the percentage of such people who received any degree of spiritual nourishment from the parishes was very small indeed.

Having landed in this scene in February the question was: what are we going to do? The only other relevant factor was the appointment of Sr Christopher Cleary FDNSC to work among ex-Garden Point people in Darwin. The bishop gave no particular instructions, so I was by and large a free agent.

The years in Townsville and shorter periods in other places have convinced me that whatever else we do among Aboriginal people we must strive to ensure that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is given every chance to influence peoples' lives. We must preach the ancient Christian message: Repent, believe the Gospel and you shall be saved, not just in the next life but now. The proclamation of this and the working out of its implications must be number one priority. It is what the people need to hear; it is what they want to hear; and it is what our priestly and religious vocation charges us with.

This may sound rather obvious but there have been other competitors for the title of top priority in the Aboriginal apostolate: social advancement, community organising, education, health, awareness raising and others - all valuable and necessary but not number one for at least this Jesuit in 1988.

I put the proclamation of the Gospel as number one for several reasons. I know the Gospel saves people, heals them, gives them meaning, direction and purpose. The other things (advancement, education, organising etc.) follow if the basic orientation of life is right. Without the specifically Christian commitment these other things could become soul-less activity and could be done by non-Christians anyway. I suppose I also have a fear that we could wake up one day and find ourselves in a similar situation to what Daniel Donovan described in "Christianity Rediscovered" that among the Massai there was a tremendous amount of activity in the areas of education, health etc. by the Christian missionaries but nobody was hearing the central message of the Gospel.

So, given the proclamation as top priority the vision is the growth of a Catholic community which celebrates, draws life from and itself in turn proclaims the Gospel to others. In the concrete we work to develop a regular Sunday liturgy where there is true participation, celebration and joy - where people will come because there they find life; the development of prayer groups where the spiritual life can be nourished more fully; the encouragement of the people to minister to one another; the encouragement of people to organise themselves; the ministry among youth; outreach to other people.

So much for general principles. What actually happened?

It was relatively easy to establish the Sunday Mass as a regular thing and it has developed during the year in terms of the quality of participation, traditional input, music, feeling etc. After one youngster fell out of a tree during Mass and broke both his arms, we decided to establish the Children's Liturgy program during Mass. It seemed preferable to paying insurance premiums! There is still a long way to go before you could say that our Mass is a worthy celebration of God's grace or that you would feel confident about saying to someone: "Come to Mass; it will do you good", but despite times during the year when the devil seemed to be winning and I was despairing, all in all I think we are making progress. God does indeed bless us if we take a few steps in his direction. One thing is certain - there has been great growth in Christian community spirit among the people. The average weekly attendance would be about 100 people.

Near the end of the year we conducted a Life in the Spirit seminar with the help of Betty Walsh. Six people completed the seminar. We now have a regular weekly prayer meeting which meets in a private home. We also began a youth ministry. There is a youth meeting every fortnight and they have organised several discos, a Christmas party, Christmas nativity play and day outings for swimming etc. The adult participation in the youth ministry, especially by Norah Houghton and Alma Cadell, has been most gratifying.

We formed the Top End Aboriginal Catholic Association (TEACA), an incorporated body which functions as parish council, finance council and decision making body. It is run by a committee of fifteen people: five office bearers plus two members of each of the following groups resident in Darwin: Bathurst Island, Daly River, Garden Point, Port Keats and original Darwin people. TEACA is still finding its feet but I have been most impressed with the competence of some of the committee members and the dedication and hard work of others. TEACA has the potential to be an influential organisation in Aboriginal circles in Darwin.

These have been the major initiatives during the year. Other things which have occupied less time are: prayer meetings (at least weekly) in the Aboriginal camps. (I was greatly helped in this by Ben and Frank Cubilla, Elizabeth McCann and Betty Wash when she was here). Prison visitation once a week, Religious Instruction class at

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Kormilda Aboriginal secondary college, irregular hospital visitation, random home visitation (especially when I first arrived), chaplaincy to the Charismatic Renewal movement, and participation in a few diocesan committees.

Events and Processes which I Reflect on with Pleasure:

- * the real religious conversion of a small number of people (about half a dozen) through our ministries.
- * the growth (albeit painstaking) in spirit in our liturgy,
- * the beginnings of participation by people in the liturgy and the willingness of a number of people to help with practical things like altar linen, taking up the collection etc. I mention especially Geraldine Liddle, Margaret Thompson and Frank Cubillo in this context,
- * being befriended by some of the most contented Aboriginal families that I have met anywhere,
- * the joy expressed by some people that at last they have a priest they can call their own,
- * the quality of some of the work done by the committee and the relative ease with which this committee has come together,
- * the challenge of working in a community where there is so much leadership potential and where traditional culture and language are still alive,
- * it was great to have Dave Ryan here for the first six months. He is very much remembered by our community and his presence and work at Nungalinya were highly appreciated. It was good for me too to have someone to share each day's experience with,
- * the success of the NT football team at the national championships! At least fourteen members of that side are members of my "parish".

Some Problems and Difficulties:

- * the lack of a suitable venue for our work. The diocese very generously provided us with a large house which is excellent to live in and caters well for meetings of committee-style proportions. For our Masses we have used a hall at the local parish. It is too small, we have been unable to use it at any time other than on Sunday morning, and it is soon to be converted into offices anyway. At the moment we have nowhere we can conduct a proper liturgical service or youth gathering or

- even a community meeting. We really do need a decent-sized hall where we can feel that we belong,
- * the weather. Darwin is a hot place for about eight months of the year. Since I get severe headaches from the heat a lot of physical exercise is ruled out for me. It is even too hot for me to play golf most of the time.
 - * Darwin is also quite isolated really and there is nowhere much to go for a day off. I contrast this to Townsville where you could go to Magnetic Island or to one of the nearer towns to get away for a while,
 - * prison ministry. There are at least 250 adult male Aboriginal prisoners in the gaol and on prison farms around Darwin. Obviously this is an important area for ministry. We are virtually prevented from conducting religious services, there are no appointed chaplains (despite provision for this in the Prisons Act) and all we can really do is apply to visit for one hour per week in the visiting area of the prison. Authorities point to the lack of facilities and there is some truth in this. It is also true that the prison authorities have shown no willingness to help. For change to take place an approach from the heads of churches at the political level will probably be necessary.

The Future

The Aboriginal people of Darwin have seen plenty of priests come and go and a very often asked question when we first arrived was: how long are you staying? The implication was that they really did not expect us to stay very long. Add to that the good natural greeting of a certain MSC Brother: "I would like to welcome the Jesuits back to the Territory. How long are you going to stay this time?" It will be apparent that we need to be committed here for an extended period; at least five years, by my reckoning. By the end of that time the Aboriginal Catholic community will have to have developed within itself a confidence in its capacity to minister to itself to a large degree.

It would be quite possible for me to put in five or so quite happy years here, then leave and everything fall back to where it was before, with no priest available to carry on the work in a full time way. A priest will be needed to work with the Aboriginal people in a part time way for the foreseeable future but by the end of five

years it is my goal that the community will have the capacity to minister to itself in a very large degree. They will need to be able to do their own baptisms, weddings and funerals, manage sacramental programs, conduct Communion services and prayer meetings, minister to youth, sick, the imprisoned, manage finances and property and organise themselves to achieve the goals they set as a community.

It is not simply shortage of priests which makes such a goal necessary. This is the age of Aboriginal self-management and self-determination. In a sense they have a right to take control of their Church and develop it according to their own culture and needs.

So I am quite serious about this goal and intend to work away at it steadily. It involves a change of awareness of the people towards leadership and ministry in the Church. As a sign of good intentions on my part, I have no control over any money collected or raised by the Church community. I go to the committee to request money for ministry. Also the committee is so structured that the chaplain does not even have a vote and any other religious appointed to work with Aboriginal people in Darwin can only attend meetings as observers.

God has blessed our work here this year. I know He will in the future. My prayer is that He provide us with the understanding and the strength to do things His way.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

I must tell you how much I enjoyed the paper by A. Michelle Carr, "Aboriginal Art in Australia" in your **Nelen Yubu** 38. I found the subject matter interesting and exciting. Her coverage of the meanings underlying the visual and performing arts of Aboriginal society, so well developed under the various headings, was of enormous value to me in my endeavours to appreciate Aboriginal culture. Congratulations! I am looking forward to the next student's paper.

By the way, I am one of those readers who turn first to Sec. Desk! I hope you can persuade Keren to continue her cheery contributions.

Best wishes,

M. Breen, Wentworth Falls.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR. . .

Dear Editor,

The AICC (Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council) conference held this year in Cairns, January 9-12, was a landmark.

Not that anything in particular seemed to come out of it, but that it happened at all.

I had intended going, but missed out in the end. However, I have received a copy by mail of the proceedings and would like to offer a few comments arising from my reading of that volume of pages.

1. We live in a world where organisation is at a high premium. You have organised crime, organised terror, organised policing, organised warfare, organised defence, organised business (even small business). And whatnot.

The Catholic Church in north Australia seems, by comparison, pitifully unorganised; or rather, immobilised by its isolationist super-organisation. We need the political sense: "cunning as snakes" as our founder put it.

A National Conference (and the first) of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council, involving expense and inconvenience to participants, ought to be able to come up with something substantial. "Work out contents for the annual conference months prior to scheduled conference date. That way we will be able to discuss the real issues" (p.106). "If the people who are to convene the conference have this information months beforehand, then it gives them time to organise workshops that will be efficient and effective and a benefit to all participating as well as back home on grass-roots levels" (ibid).

But perhaps organisation aimed at efficiency and effect is just not our catholic thing at present. At this stage of the game, it seems to me ridiculous that, alongside the AICC there should be a UAICC, when we can already point to many successful joint operations between the Uniting Church and us Catholics, not to mention the Anglican Communion, both in the NT and in Queensland (confining ourselves to the northern scene). Would it not be worth while setting aside a future AICC national conference to considering this step of joining forces and, if positively resolved on, to submitting

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that resolution to the Catholic bishops, before approaching the UAICC? Apart from other advantages, it would be better economy in every sense. The resulting body could have bite and spine.

2. (Quote) "Reports are **always** too long at these conferences... Do away with this session... If delegates wish to inform others of what they are doing, have copies prior to arrival which can be left for distribution throughout. I feel we all know what problems we are faced with, so at times such as national meetings we should be working out strategies for how we can best find out ways to overcome them, and each state should make the commitment to take action when they go back home..." (p.102).

(Quote) "I reject very strongly the type of process adopted for the conference, and feel very saddened at this point that so much natural energy and initiative was - as happens anywhere with this type of process - stifled. I would encourage the Aboriginal people to endeavour to formulate their own process in future". (p.100).

3. On Tuesday the conference broke up into groups to discuss the subject, "Understanding our Aboriginal spirituality". You might as well say "Understanding our Aboriginal life", since life and "spirituality" are not distinct in Aboriginal thought. To throw this out for group discussion is to attempt the impossible and invite the banale. Better assign a few experts, like Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr and the Reverend Djiniyini Gondarra, to prepare a paper together in advance, with due doctrinal caution, and have this material presented to the conference and discussed. An agreed foundation could thus be achieved, for retaining in the memory; an authoritative christian Aboriginal statement for future reference.

The conference could purify or emend the statement if required. What matters is that there would be a visible progress, inspiring hope.

Yours truly,

Dan O'Donovan.

Perth, 5 March 1989.

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EAST TIMOR - OUR CONCERN?

Dan O'Donovan

"NELEN YUBU Missiological Unit ... its function is to mediate the Evangelical Message to Aboriginal society through missiology, anthropology, sociology and kindred disciplines. It aims at the positive, mutual cultural enrichment of two traditions, Aboriginal and Christian."

In previous articles I have spoken of the appropriateness, in view of our general isolation, of forming active ties with the "Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians." This Association is engaged in its Asian branch, the "Ecumenical Fellowship of Asian Theologians", in constructing a contextual theology suited to the region.

The illegal annexation of East Timor by Indonesia in 1975 and the sad story of this closest neighbour of ours since then, raise the question for **Nelen Yubu** policy-makers: are "the positive, mutual cultural enrichment of two traditions, Aboriginal and Christian," in any way affected by the events so slightly to our north? Is it permissible in conscience to muse on insularly about our Australian Aboriginal concerns when in fact - even in geographical fact - we must exist relatedly to our environs?

The Uniting Church in Australia has for some years been actively engaged in publicising the facts of the East Timor situation. Its important 1987 report on East Timor was published in "East Timor Link", 11, 1987. "East Timor Link" is a well-balanced newsletter (\$7 annual subscription), produced by the "Catholic Institute for International Relations", 22 Coleman Fields, London N1 7AF, UK. The UCA report on East Timor is naturally available also from the Social Responsibility & Justice Committee, UCA, 130 Little Collins Street, Melbourne, 3000. This Committee will itself now regularly publish news and reports about East Timor, an initiative growing out of the Asia Pacific Consultation on East Timor held in Manila in 1987. The first issue of its East Timor newsletter appeared in October 1988 under the title, "The Church and East Timor". It contains reports about the size of the Catholic church in East Timor, a UCA interview with the apostolic administrator of Dili,

Bishop Belo (recently consecrated, but not as bishop of the diocese of Dili!), reports of conflict inside East Timor, the text of a letter to Bishop Belo from the Commission for Mission of the Uniting Church, the statement of concern made by the US Catholic Bishops in 1987 and the speech made by the Portuguese bishop Dom Manuel Martins at the Fourth Christian Consultation on East Timor in Lisbon etc.

In view of the highly controversial attempts by Australia and Indonesia to demarcate the undersea boundary line between East Timor and the Australian coast, much of the seabed concerned belonging to East Timor and probably containing rich reserves of oil, it seems scarcely justifiable to remain silent on an issue which is interesting increasingly the rest of the world. Doing theology, or missiology, today cannot any longer cordon itself off, if for no other reason than that progress in any and every field of thought and action, is necessarily inter-relational.

This further supports the proposal in my letter to the Editor, (page 27), that AICC join forces with the UAICC. Together, we can hope to achieve something. Apart, nothing of lasting worth.

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BOOK RECEIVED

We have received a book from the Centre for Humanity's Adulthood, Box 5095, Sydney NSW 2001. It retails at around \$12 a copy. However, it is not really relevant to NYMU and its work.

Free: The End of the Human Condition by Jeremy Griffith, is published by Southwood Press Pty Ltd, Marrickville, N S W, January 1988, 228 pp.

Jeremy Griffith, born in Australia in 1945, graduated in science at Sydney University after which he carried out an investigation into the plight of the now-believed-extinct Tasmanian Tiger. It was while in Tasmania that he turned his attention to the plight of another species - Humanity. He says this book, "grew out of my desperate need to reconcile my extreme idealism with reality."

This is the condensed version of a much larger 500,000 word book on which Griffith has spent thirteen years in the writing.

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FATHER ANTHONY PEILE SAC

Obituary Notice

Sadly, respectfully, proudly, and even joyfully we salute a colleague who has passed on before us.

Fr Anthony Rex Peile was buried in Perth on 9 January, his 58th birthday, as the obituary notices poignantly remark.

We see him as a colleague particularly because he dedicated many years of his life in a special part of the Church's outreach to Aboriginal people, a part that this periodical is dedicated to. Though his ultimate goal, just like the rest of us, was "the gathering-up of it all in Christ", (which can be expressed as evangelisation, salvation, redemption, whatever), his immediate aim was at coming to know the people we are trying to incorporate into Christ's Church: coming to know them in their culture, world-view, value systems, symbols of communication.

We are sad at his passing, as he was one of us. We underscore our respect: he was a totally dedicated scholar, one whose pre-occupations were not always appreciated by the more "practical" men. We are proud of his achievements. He knew he was dealing with a very ancient culture. Having survived in an inimical environment for tens of thousands of years, it could be blown away in a few decades, he knew, by the whirlwinds of change. Any single item he found was precious and to be preserved. To editors' chagrin he found it difficult to leave anything out!

As Christians, we must be joyful even at the loss of someone close. We all look forward to the fulfilment that Anthony has already entered upon.

Next issue we will publish a longer and more detailed biographical note.

Martin Wilson msc
Editor

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK. . .

I was very distressed to learn that several copies of our last issue, **Nelen Yubu** no. 38 were defective. And worse than that, I later found that some of the previous issue, no. 37, also had missing pages. I have replaced those I heard about - but dread to think of how many others may have received bad copies and have not notified me. This is something beyond our control, because although I typeset and paste-up, we do not see them before posting. If anyone has a defective copy, no matter how far back, please let me know and unless it is out of print, we will replace it. Our apologies to those who may have received unsatisfactory copies.

Brother J R Pye, msc, Bathurst Island, has done it again! His book "Santa Teresa and East Aranda History 1929-1988" has been published and is already in the bookshops. It joins those written by Br Pye about the Tiwi Islands, Port Keats and Daly River, and is a very creditable account of the "desert mission". Congratulations once again, Brother, on your achievement! -- Fr David Ryan sj is now at Nguuu (Bathurst Is.) with Br Pye and Fr John Leary. He hails from Melbourne, and was previously involved with Nungalinya College in Darwin.

Dr John May, previously of PNG, writes from Ireland where he lectures at the Irish School of Ecumenics: "I was in Germany till Christmas [1988] and I've been catching up with teaching and administration ever since. I was asked to lecture at the University of Frankfurt on 'Theology in the Pacific,' well aware of my unworthiness to be spokesperson for the region, but privileged to speak on a topic which has become even dearer to my heart now that I am so far away from you all. I tried to weave in as much on Aboriginal religion as my limited lights allowed, and of course **Nelen Yubu**, together with memories of my visit to you and Martin in 1985, was one of my main sources for what is really going on at present."

A long and very interesting letter from Fr Fred Mordaunt msc, of the Sacred Heart Novitiate "Vunapau", Kokopo, PNG. He recalls some of his holidays at Shoreham, Vic. when newly ordained, and his delightful reminiscences are extremely entertaining. Father also

writes: "...We have what I think must be the record, 34 members in the Community: six Postulant Brothers, 16 Novices, five newly-professed Brothers and a staff of seven...so many candidates to be MSCs. How many Religious Orders in Australia would be green with envy if they knew of our numbers! We are now all gearing towards our Provincial Chapter, starting 16 April, held at Vunapope. Five of our staff have been elected as delegates, myself excluded! I will be needed here to say Mass and give a class a day, at least, during the fortnight. As it is a very important event in the life of the new PNG Pro-Province, I would be glad of a few prayers for its success."

The Chapter is now over of course, but Father can be sure of prayers from the south for the work of the "Vunapau" Novitiate.

Snippets from far and wide...

Fr Kerry Crowley, Aboriginal & Islander Apostolate, Cairns, Qld, writes to us: "Thank you for the good work you are doing and also for the report you ran on the AICC National Conference held in Cairns earlier this year. The working party chosen from that Conference are meeting in Alice Springs this month".

From the Editor of EAPI in the Philippines: "Your periodical [**Nelen Yubu**] is a good source of information for us".

Requesting some lost back numbers, Fr Eugene Stockton, Kingswood NSW, says: "It is a measure of the value of **Nelen Yubu** to me that I need to keep the run complete".

Dr David Morgan, Rosedale, NSW, writes: "We are still waiting to hear of Fr Wilson's adventures in South Africa!" David and Irene are staunch supporters of our periodical.

And from Noel Mifsud, OLSH School, Port Keats NT: "I wish to subscribe to the **Nelen Yubu** magazine. I have read many back issues, which our Christian Brothers at Port Keats have in their possession, and I have been very impressed with the content".

These comments are very encouraging for us. I marvel too at the number of friends I have made throughout the world, simply by being involved with the work of NYMU. This prompts me to send greetings,

issue by issue, to our wellwishers in the various countries who receive our journal. This time it is to West Germany: the Missionswissenschaftliches Institut in Aachen; and to Frances in Berlin, a very precious daughter!

A small world...

In April four of us drove from Leura to Yerranderie, exactly 400 km return, via Oberon and Black Springs. The last 100 km is through the wildest, most beautiful Australian bush, unsurpassed anywhere. It leaves the NT and all other States for dead! Remote, dangerous, with six creeks to cross, precipitous and enthralling: we were all entranced by its beauty and affected by mile after mile over weaving ravines and mountains. Yerranderie is in the vicinity of Black Dog Range and the Kowmung River, deep in the forested heart of the Great Dividing Range. We drove for an hour and a half without meeting another vehicle, passing three dead foxes on the road, healthy-looking specimens with beautiful coats; and one little sugar glider, quite intact except that its eyes had been gouged by some animal or maybe ants, and apparently it had fallen from a high branch of one of the age-old gums, and died. I wanted to take it home but that was very smartly scotched.

After crossing four of the six creeks we were beginning to get a bit worried; it seemed we couldn't possibly reach any habitation after this great distance. The gravel road was good, plunging climbing, winding - but did it go anywhere? "Turning back" was discussed and dismissed so on we ploughed, till finally hungry, bemused and rather lost we suddenly came upon Yerranderie, 94km from the nearest civilization, and apparently deserted. It's described as a "private ghost town", has only two occupied homes, neither of whose owners appeared until we were about to leave. We investigated an old pub to the accompaniment of a twittering bird up in the verandah rafters which intrigued us because it seemed to be saying: "Get out of there!" It poked its little head through the slats, expostulating, until we enticed it to the ground and found it to be a lonely wattle bird. Sandwiches were unearthed from the car, and to our delight the little thing marched up and took the crust straight out of my hand! Quite fearless, it seemed to be sole guardian of the place.

On the front wall of the old hotel was a casement of ancient notices, maps, advice to intrepid bushwalkers, etc. - and this is where we all stopped, stunned, in our tracks! For there sat an old brochure with some (to me, very familiar) Tiwi drawings under an advertisement for "BIMA WEAR, BATHURST ISLAND"! It said that if we couldn't come to BI then we could perhaps purchase some of their products from the adjacent, tightly closed, little 'shop' bearing the legend "Meldrum, Tailor"! How incongruous! 4,000 km from Bathurst Is., where I'd spent two years, I found Tiwi clothing for sale at the end of a romantic trail leading to a far more isolated spot than Nguuu ever was! I wonder if anybody has ever managed to buy some...?

Secretary Keren

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NOTE TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS:

When sending anything to me as Secretary, please be sure to mark clearly on the envelope either my name, or the words "Nelen Yubu". I live in a villa run by a Strata Corporate Body, which also has a secretary and a secretary's mail box. Hence there is sometimes confusion as to which secretary is being addressed. Especially as I have just retired as the Body Corporate Secretary!

So it would be very helpful if all communications were sent to me as:

K. Calvert
Nelen Yubu
4/17 Jersey Ave
LEURA NSW 2780

or:

Nelen Yubu
C/- K. Calvert
4/17 Jersey Ave
LEURA NSW 2780

* * * * *

BULLETIN BOARD

The Revd Tony Nichols, formerly of Nungalinya College, Darwin, now Principal of St Andrew's Hall, Parkville, Victoria, will be visiting East Africa during August and September this year.

Changes of Address:

Sr C Kleinschafer RSM has gone to Wilcannia, NSW.

The Sisters of Compassion, Wilcannia, have returned to NZ.

Fr Frank Brennan SJ, to Parkville, Vic.

Fr Brian McCoy SJ to the Jesuit base in Darwin, NT.

Fr Noel McMaster CSSR to Kununurra, W.

EAPI has moved from Manilla to Quezon City in the Philippines.

New Subscribers:

Sr Gay Shears PVBVM, Inala, Qld.

Noel Mifsud, OLSH School, Port Keats, Wadey, NT.

Fr Kerry Crowley, Aboriginal & Islander Apostolate, Cairns, Qld.

Gerard Goldman, Daly River, NT.

URBAN ABORIGINAL APOSTOLATE, DARWIN

Pat Mullins sj

IT IS WITH quite some enthusiasm that I sit down to write my report for this year. To write things down helps clarify the mind on some issues and, insofar as I share my thoughts with others, do contribute to and in turn benefit from the collectivity of our enterprise among Aboriginal people, spread out though it be across the whole continent. I shall begin by endeavouring to describe something of the social situation in which David Ryan and I found ourselves in February when we arrived.

There are about seventy thousand people in Darwin. I have no figure for the number of people of Aboriginal descent in the population but it must be upwards of one-fifth of the total population. There are a few of the original Larrakeyah people of the Darwin area but the majority come from elsewhere. There are small colonies of people from many of the Aboriginal communities such as Bathurst Island, Maningrida, Millingimbi, Roper River, Daly River, Balyuen etc., who have moved to Darwin in recent times and who still have strong ties with the places from which they came. A very significant group are the people who came from Garden Point (Pularumpi). When the government policy was to remove the children of less than full Aboriginal descent, the Catholic children in this category from all over the Northern Territory were sent to Garden Point on Melville Island. When that policy was abandoned in the 1960s these people, now grown up, were free to move to Darwin or elsewhere. They now form a community numbering more than a thousand in the Darwin area. As well as the above groups there are small but significant communities of people who trace their origin to Broome or Beagle Bay mission in the West Kimberleys and to Thursday Island in the Torres Strait.

Pat Mullins sj, having worked in the Townsville Aboriginal scene, came to Darwin in 1988. This is his report to his confreres.