

## C O N T E N T S

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**NELEN YUBU**

## **EDITORIAL**

THE UNDERLYING theme in this issue turns out to be inculturation. It wasn't preplanned this way: just turned out like this - but this enhances the intriguing quality of the variety of aspects that have emerged.

Clare Ahern's is that sensitive sort of stuff that comes from the field when evangelisation is a shared and living thing.

At the other end, in Frank Brennan's paper we have the politics of it: committees, programs, plans of action...necessary in its own way but quite remote from the sort of people and issues Clare has been reliving in her mind as she recalls and writes it out.

And then with Dan we have the unbelievably detailed erudition of the scholar. Inculturation, he reminds us, is a theme as old and complex as christianity itself - and he has forewarned Nelen Yubu that its own missiology could be seriously flawed!

The poets have a personal message - or maybe not so much a message as a public disclosure of personal insights and particular sightings of things. Sr Bernadette Doyle saw Christ visiting a camp at Turkey Creek one Holy Thursday night. Anne Waterman (husband teaches at Daly River) reflects on a central mystery of the church and evangelisation: God's action through other people.

**Martin Wilson msc**  
**Editor**

## THE CHURCH SEEKING THE HAPPINESS OF BEING WITH GOD AND EACH OTHER IN ABORIGINAL FASHION

Frank Brennan sj

DURING 1988 the bishops committee for Aborigines conducted a review of the education and formation provided for people working among Aborigines. A questionnaire was distributed to each diocese. Collating the replies received, I then presented a report to the committee. The committee commended the Aboriginal Apostolate Formation program and recommended to the Bishops Conference that diocesan priests be encouraged to participate in the program. The Bishops' Conference endorsed these proposals in December 1988.

I was then asked to explore the practical implications of the report with a steering committee in January 1989, a national Catholic Aboriginal Conference was held and a working party was elected. Some members of that Working Party and one member of the Queensland AICC then attended the meeting of the bishops committee at the Bishops Conference in April 1989. All agreed that it was desirable for the Aboriginal Working Party to investigate the establishment of a National AICC to meet in 1991 and for there to be regular direct contact between the bishops committee and Aboriginal representatives.

My report to the bishops committee and a report on the first Working Party meeting held at Alice Springs in May 1989 follow.

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Frank Brennan sj is Chaplain to the Working Party for a National Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council, and Consultant to the Bishops Conference on Aboriginal Affairs.

## NELEN YUBU

### A. A Report to the Bishops Committee for Aborigines, 29 November 1988

#### 1. The Mission

This day two years ago the Pope said to the Aborigines:

The Gospel now invites you to become, through and through, Aboriginal Christians. It meets your deepest desires. You do not have to be people divided into two parts, as though an Aboriginal had to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes, from someone else who owns them. Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture. To develop in this way will make you more than ever truly Aboriginal.

The Church invites you to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to your Aboriginal minds and hearts. All over the world people worship God and read his word in their own language, and colour the great signs and symbols of religion with touches of their own traditions. Why should you be any different from them in this regard, why should you not be allowed the happiness of being with God and each other in Aboriginal fashion?

Considering education and formation "for work among Aborigines" (including presumably Torres Strait Islanders, though most are Anglican) as the bishops conference has requested, we must clarify:

Formation for what?

Formation for whom?

Education by whom?

With whom?

To quote the reply by the Parramatta Diocese: "A major shift of formation resources is needed to lessen Aboriginal dependence on white personnel and to promote Aboriginal church leadership if Aboriginal Catholics are ever to find a proper active, non-client role in the Australian church. It will be a test of whether the church means what it says." There will also be a need for some structural change, or more accurately, for the creation of structures where none have previously existed.

Throughout the last decade there has been much agitation and bewilderment as to how Aborigines may be involved more in the

mission of the church at a national level. Suffice to quote the findings of the relevant workshop at the National Catholic Conference of the Church in Social Welfare, 1980:

1. (a) that the workshop on "The Church and Aboriginal Justice and Rights" be seen as a first step in dialogue between the Church and Aboriginal people, at the national level. We recognise that this step is, by itself, inadequate for us to be able to resolve many of the issues and new directions which need urgent attention. At present there is no mutuality between the Church and Aboriginal people.  
  
(b) that the Australian Catholic Social Welfare Commission, the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, the National Catholic Education Commission, and the National Catholic Health Care Association establish a joint Working Party on this issue, with equal Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal representation, representative of Aboriginal communities from throughout Australia. The Working Party will be independent in its operation, chaired by an Aboriginal person, and staffed by Aboriginals.  
  
(c) that this Working Party organise a program of workshops around Australia for consultation among concerned people in the Church with Aboriginal people and workers with Aboriginal communities.  
  
(d) that the purpose of this workshop consultation program will be to develop a critique of all aspects of Church involvement with Aborigines, based on actual experience; and to develop and propose new directions, structures and processes for that involvement.  
  
(e) that the commitment of the program (and of the Working Party) be the creation of a genuine, mutual covenant between the Church and the Aboriginal people - a covenant based in love and expressed in compassion, sharing, justice and rights.

(f) that the Working Party be adequately funded to perform its task in a way that ensures that the program will involve the greatest possible number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The program may take up to two years, but regular and public reports must be made, and action should take place immediately on urgent issues as they are discussed.

## 2. The Church Structures

I see little justification for a bishops committee for Aborigines unless there be accompanying it a National Catholic Aboriginal Council which could play a role with the bishops committee similar to that between the Bishops Committee for Justice, Development and Peace and the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council. The Aboriginal Council should have an Aboriginal representative from each province and two persons nominated by the bishops chosen from people engaged in ministry among Aborigines.

Admitting the need for such a Council is not to subscribe to the idea that there are only national solutions or ways of proceeding in this work of the Church. But there is a need for a national response and approach to some issues. It is no longer tenable to have a national bishops committee for Aborigines unless there be a national structure for advice and consultation from and with Aborigines.

The Aboriginal Council could liaise with and even formalise links with the Australian Council of Churches' proposed Aboriginal Commission. It would have close contact with the emerging national AICC.

I suggest again the need for an executive secretary of the bishops committee who would perform a task similar to Michael Costigan, though there may not be the need nor the resources to make this a full time position at the outset. The Council would need to meet three or four times a year. I can see no other way in which Aborigines will be able to make their unique contribution to the Australian church which "will not be fully the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you [the Aborigines] have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others." (John Paul II at Alice Springs).

### 3. The Means

The Aboriginal Apostolate Programme which has been largely funded by the major superiors has well served the religious involved in the apostolate. The annual three week course is a splendid initiative which now receives almost universal praise around the traps. It begins with a two week Cross-Cultural Community Work Course at Nungalinya College, Darwin. The Principal of the college says "Without the Catholic participation, it may be that the course could fold." It is desirable for all parties that the course continue. The third week consists of a week of reflection and input at Daly River.

Diocesan priests should be encouraged to do the course especially if they be in country centres with a large Aboriginal population. Unlike the religious in the field, the priests have had little opportunity for any specialised education or formation. Some religious have done the one year course at the Pacific Mission Institute which assists them with a general approach to missiology though the focus is not specifically Aboriginal.

The major superiors are prepared to continue funding the program if no other funds are available. The setting up of the suggested Aboriginal Council would require some funds through the bishops conference. The major superiors readily see the need for the new structure and understand that limited funds from the bishops conference would first be directed at setting up such structures.

Courses for Catholic Aborigines in spirituality, ministry, leadership and community development are done mainly at Nungalinya and Wontulp.

These cost effective ecumenical initiatives should be further supported unless and until the Catholic Church sees a need for its own courses. The Commonwealth Department of Education provides assistance with funds for community development courses. Many Aborigines are now anxious for courses in bible study and spirituality. No government assistance can be expected for these. The Daly River Spirituality Centre will revive in the new year and the Turkey Creek Centre is now operational.

### 4. Future Formation

There ought be one Catholic theological college in the country which is given the national charter of providing a course on

"Aborigines and the Church." It should be a full time one semester course with units available on Australian history from the Aboriginal perspective, missiology, liturgy, psychology of racism, cross-cultural pastoral method, structural analysis and Catholic social teaching. Individual units should be available to external students. Religious orders and dioceses would support their own religious and clerics doing the course. But there would be a special need for provinces to provide periodic scholarships for Aborigines to do the course. It should be remembered that dioceses with a large Aboriginal population are generally those that are materially disadvantaged and theologically less resourced.

The AAP's three week course should be offered in the Northern Territory every second year. Each alternate year there ought be a three week course available in another part of the country which has a more specifically Catholic and urban input. Such a course could be organised by a group of three or four workers from the field who would meet a couple of times a year to plan the course in conjunction with the Catholic Aboriginal Council.

There would be advantage in having the Nungalinga course occasionally in North Queensland or the Kimberleys. If this is not possible, the Nungalinga course should occasionally provide social and political input about areas other than the Northern Territory.

In the last couple of years Pamela Barker's team, Action for World Development, and I (all in our different ways and with no co-ordination) have been responding to local requests for talks and workshops on racism and reconciliation. These initiatives should continue bearing in mind that we have committed ourselves "as a Church to influence the minds and hearts of the people of Australia to achieve justice and harmony and to uphold the dignity of the Aboriginal people." (Bishops' Pastoral, 25 January 1988). More importantly there ought be commitment to an even more ecumenical format for these workshops providing for more involvement by Aboriginal convenors and speakers. In Catholic circles, such sessions could be given a higher profile by making them part of the agenda for diocesan pastoral councils and senates of priests.

## **5. The Bishops Conference's Questions**

Without any responses thus far from the Victorian, Broome or Darwin dioceses, it is premature to draw many conclusions from the

questionnaire answers received to date (27 November 1988).

**(i) What education for work among Aborigines is being given in the Provinces?**

For religious, the AAP

For priests, very little

For lay workers, little

For Aborigines seeking training in leadership, scripture and spirituality, there are the courses at Nungalinya and Wontulp and the spirituality centres at Turkey Creek and Daly River.

**(ii) What education needs to be done in the Provinces and at a national level?**

**National:** There is a need for at least one Catholic theological college in the country to offer a full time six months course (every two or three years) on Aborigines in the church. The course should be designed to attract committed Aborigines who have some formal academic qualifications and religious who may not have the benefit of a theology degree.

There is a need for inservice courses, one of which has an ecumenical dimension and input about traditional Aboriginal life and another of which a Roman Catholic dimension and input about urban Aboriginal life.

**Provincial:** There is a need for Aborigines involved in the life of the church to be given the opportunity for formation in spirituality, scripture and community development.

There is a need for parish and school education and awareness of the Aboriginal perspective and the reality of racism in our history and social life.

**(iii) What is our opinion of the AAP?**

The annual three week course is a great thing for those who have been working in the field for a time. It is also a helpful introduction for those coming into the field. The newsletter has been a good beginning for getting some more information to people in remote places. The workshops in country towns have been well received.

The problems have been with funding and accountability. The bishops committee, if it have a rationale for continued existence, will for the first time need a sizable budget with the first

priority being the setting up of appropriate structures so that Aborigines may be involved in the national structural life and mission of the church. Dioceses should ensure that priests in contact with Aborigines have the chance for proper formation and reflection. The major superiors while retaining the responsibility and initiative for the AAP would undoubtedly welcome the opportunity to receive suggestions and advice from the Catholic Aboriginal Council. Once the Council was properly established, we could work towards a "mutual covenant between the church and the Aboriginal people" and ultimately to a vision and model of church which would view programs such as the AAP as the primary concern and responsibility of the Council working in conjunction with local Aboriginal councils.

Unless the structure question is addressed first, answers to questions about education and formation will be white fella answers to our own questions which will not necessarily further our attempt to be the Australian church that Jesus wants her to be. When the structure question is addressed, the bishops and the Aborigines together might discern the needs and ways for the formation of those "seeking the happiness of being with God and each other in Aboriginal fashion."

#### **B. A Report on the first meeting of the Working Party for a National Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council**

The Pope in Alice Springs sowed the seed for a national Aboriginal Catholic council. The first national conference was held in Cairns in January this year with the theme: **On with the Dreaming in one Spirit.**

A twelve member Working Party was elected with representatives from all parts of Australia. Charged with planning a charter for a national council before the next national conference in 1991, the Working Party held its first meeting in Alice Springs on May 6-7.

Sonny Flynn, the chairman said: "We wanted to start in the Centre." Missionary of the Sacred Heart, Bishop Ted Collins of Darwin, opened proceedings with the prayer of the Aboriginal people of Alice Springs in honour of the Pope's visit.

Parishioners provided meals and delegates bunked down on the floor of the art room in the convent school. "It wasn't flash, but it was very Aboriginal" - said Sonny Flynn.

The Working Party drafted a comprehensive set of aims, objectives and suggestions.

### AIMS

1. To promote and celebrate the Catholic identity of Aboriginal and Islander people, by developing personal commitment to our faith, culture and lifestyle.
2. To be an avenue for us Aboriginal and Islander people to voice our views and concerns to the hierarchy of the church.
3. To be a consultative body providing advice to church organisations on issues relevant to Aboriginal and Islander people.
4. To be a national network supporting all aspects of educational needs of Aboriginal and Islander people.
5. To be a body through which we Aboriginal and Islander people throughout Australia can share our ideas on:

What kind of church we want  
How we can help each other  
How we can co-operate on wider issues.

6. To be a place of belonging for our youth where they can come to be at home in the church.

### OBJECTIVES

1. To allow us to make our full contribution to the life of the church so that the church may "be fully the church that Jesus wants her to be" as the Pope said at Alice Springs.
2. To ensure that church authorities listen and instigate necessary action to meet the aspirations of Aboriginal and Islander people.
3. Provide facilities and personnel for a Catholic Training College to train Aboriginal and Islander people in all facets of church life.
4. Provide induction courses and formation for people working in the Aboriginal Apostolate.
5. Provide resource material on spiritual and social issues affecting Aboriginal and Islander people.

## NELEN YUBU

It is hoped that each province of the Australian church will set up a statewide Catholic Aboriginal Council by May 1990, so that a national body can be constituted from state branches in 1991.

The Working Party will meet twice a year. Meanwhile, members are committed to consulting with their local communities and bishops.

In Alice Springs members were able to participate in a parish Mass with an Arrente choir made up of parishioners from the town camps. After Mass, Margaret Mary Turner explained Rosemary Webb's Last Supper painting which hung in the meeting room.

Guest speakers included Betty Carter, deputy director of the Aboriginal Congress, who also provided the lunches, and Patricia Miller, director of the Aboriginal Legal Service. Parishioners opened their homes for evening barbecues.

Maria Tomlins, the Northern Territory delegate who organised the meeting, summed it up by replying to a vote of thanks: "I am so grateful that we have come together as one family, one in the Spirit, in the one Dreaming."

The meeting held great promise of things to come.

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## HUGO RAHNER'S ESSAYS (2)

### Children of the Sun (and Moon)

Dan O'Donovan

IN A RECENTLY published book "An Asian Theology of Liberation" Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris gives us a timely warning from the heart of Asia against what he refers to as "theological vandalism" - a method in western style theology, particularly apparent in modern times, by which riches of the great Asian religions are plundered under all sorts of pretexts, disengaged from their religious matrices, then westernised and often returned in neatly packaged form to the East for (re-)consumption there - perhaps even as "inculturated" Gospel. A dangerous not to say deceitful activity, observes Pieris, himself Asian and a classic Indologist thoroughly at home in the asian ethos. He has been for many years now a leading figure in the Christian-Buddhist dialogue; a voice therefore to be heeded.

I warmly recommend his small-sized paperback. Though concerned in the main with Asia proper, his vision extends to every human situation of christian mission and offers a firm framework for our own north Australian endeavour if we are to live and act realistically in our Asia-Pacific context. He regards as highly suspect "the fulfilment theory" of religions, enunciated by us Euro-Christians (to which **Nelen Yubu** has given its approval at least as a working hypothesis). He is also critical of the "instrumental theory" of inculturation by which (for instance) "Greek **philosophy** was pulled out of its own **religious** context and made to serve the Christian religion as a tool for doctrinal expression - that is, as **ancilla theologiae**, a medieval image used as early as Clement of

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Fr Dan O'Donovan, the pastor at Fitzroy Crossing, WA, continues his writings on Rahner's Essays for **Nelen Yubu**. His first instalment appeared in issue 37 (Summer 1988/89).

Alexandria and expressed in its classic form in Peter Damien's allegorical interpretation of Deuteronomy 21,10ff."<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this present series of articles is purely anamnestic (anamnesis = memory, recollection). I hope to record, after Hugo Rahner, how early Christianity handled the cross-cultural situation in which it found itself in an intensely religion-conscious age.

Pieris dismisses the greco-roman model of inculturation as unsuited to the Asia of today for the following reason among others:

The historical circumstances surrounding the church in its early Mediterranean phase differ drastically from those of twentieth-century Asia. The Greco-Roman model was a viable and even a justifiable process of indigenisation, given the socio-political context of those early centuries when the waxing. In fact, it was through inculturation that the church salvaged the culture of the Greeks and Romans from being buried in the archives of archeologists.

The exact opposite is true of Asia. The imperial religion now in crisis is colonial Christianity, whereas so-called pagan religion is regaining vitality not only as a socio-political force that articulates the national ego of some of the decolonised countries but also as a current of contemporary spirituality that is passing through the length and breadth of the post-Christian West.

Placed against this background, inculturation-fever might appear to be a desperate last-moment bid to give an Asian facade to a church that fails to strike roots in Asian soil because no one dares to break the Greco-Roman pot in which it has been existing for four centuries like a stunted **bonsai!** No wonder non-Christians are as suspicious about the whole inculturation movement as some liberation theologians are skeptical about it...<sup>2</sup>

\* \* \* \*

But to proceed with our business - an exercise in archaism; yet deliberate and maybe not altogether unuseful.

While Australians at the centre of the world greeted the daily and seasonal sun, wondering in dance and song, a strange palefaced people called "Greeks" or "Romans" who lived it was said, at the antipodes, were making **their** observations.

Hugo Rahner significantly heads his introduction to the subject: "The problem in the history of religions of the debate between Christianity and the ancient Sun-cults". It was not a matter simply of transposing sun-cult imagery and ritual into the new Church setting. There **was** a problem.

Our road winds through the beliefs of several civilisations at the turn of the era: from the Egyptian religion of the beyond with its nightly mobile sun-boat, to the agral piety of Roman Sol; from the mighty Hēlios of Greek tragedy to the sublime transcendence of the plotinian sun-mysticism; from Plato's Cave parable to the inner secrets of hermetic speculation.

To all these religious cultures Christianity felt itself sent. What stand did it adopt toward the popular Sun-cult of the Mediterranean world of its youth?

It was not an altogether negative stand as Justin's words, already in the second century, so remarkably bear out: "Christ is the Logos in which the entire human race participates, and all who live in accordance with the Logos are Christian, even if they be reckoned as godless as was the case with the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus" (Apology, I, 46).

For Eusebius the historian, all previous attempts at discovering the truths of life and life's meaning were not to be rejected but rather reinterpreted in the new light of the revealed Truth contained in the Gospel. They **were** still precious in themselves as a "praeparatio evangelica" (a preparation for the Gospel).<sup>3</sup> "Seeds of the Word". (Cf. the stoic terms, "logos spermatikos", the seminal Word). At once enticing and dangerous, such skilfully wrought language enabled the Church in due course to refine its own formulation of its faith in Jesus Christ.

In the case of the solar cult this fundamental openness to the positive wherever it appeared, meant that the Church was able to recognise in it a limited but genuine premonition of the "Sun of righteousness" prophesied by Malachi (4,2), "the sunrise from on high" announced by Zechariah (Lk 1,78).

There was on the other hand Paul's reminder to the Galatians: "When we were children, we were slaves to the elemental spirits of

the universe..., in bondage to beings that by nature are no gods..., weak and beggarly elemental spirits" (Gal 4,3.9).

These two perceptions led the Church to its considered treatment of the question.

Firstly, there had to be the de-throning of Hēlios (personified Sun-god).

Christianity entered the hellenistic world from the start with its clear sure knowledge from the Bible of the one God, creator of sun and stars. Nothing is more patent, particularly in the writings of the second century apologists, than Christianity's rejection of anything like sun-worship. The dethroning of Hēlios is thus a decisive, brusque corrective of all stoic pantheistic, or platonic mystic worship of the Sun, in favour of transcendent monotheism. Only this radical self-distancing would allow the Church later to receive back in welcome the Helios it had deposed.

Not for the Christian therefore subjection to any Fate determined by the course of the stars. Says Tatian the apologist: "We are raised higher than Fate, and in place of planetary demons, we know only the one unwandering Lord of the world."<sup>4</sup>

From this basic standpoint - monotheism, faith in the supernatural, the historic humanity of God in Jesus - we are now better ready to appreciate the second positioning of the Church in relation to the ancient Sun-cult. Rahner calls it the homecoming of Hēlios. And here begins the problem:

Was it syncretism and feeble compromise as the Church appropriated, in thought and cult, the riches of hellenistic tradition? Was it a hellenising of an originally simple faith in Christ, as the Fathers composed their songs of praise to Christ the Sun, or to the Church as spiritual Selēnē (Moon)? Or, is this not rather a singular example of how the supernaturally Living can take to itself, strongly and with sureness of touch, everything coming to it which is truly alive, in nature and human history?

Hēlios and Selēnē are not then for the early Christian a "contemptible nothing", as Celsus the platonist jibed. Origen took Celsus up sharply on this: Hēlios and Selēnē are for us merely creatures, "yet we do not hold in contempt these masterly works of God, nor do we see in them, with Anaxagoras, simply 'lumps of fiery matter'. We speak as we do about Hēlios and Selēnē because we realise that the unutterable majesty of God and his only-begotten Son surpasses all. But we are also convinced that Hēlios and Selēnē offer their own proper prayer to the Almighty through his only-begotten Son."<sup>5</sup> The Christian reads in sun and moon the "heavenly letters" of a text on God's beauty; and what he sees in the stars is a divine sign of what has occurred in the mystery hidden in the humanity of the Word.

The Church which entered that world of nature so beloved of Greece, with its knowledge from revelation of mankind's call to the supernatural, was thus able to find in the light-giving sun a deep symbol of the grace which "enlightens everyone coming into this world" (Jn 1,9). The Logos, said Hilary of Poitiers, is like the sun: his rays are eternally ready to illumine wherever a window of the human soul opens out. The Church's refusal to see the sun as representing any sort of esoteric and purely interior enlightenment arose out of its understanding of John's words just quoted as being fully realised in the Incarnation event. "The whole earth is filled with the mercy of God," exclaimed Ambrose of Milan, "and so, even as the sun rises daily upon all, so does the mystical Sun of Righteousness. For all he appeared, for all suffered, for all rose from the dead."<sup>6</sup>

The "problem" then boils down to this (Hugo Rahner calls it "the deepest theological problem of the Christian faith"): the assumption of the human by the divine; or the relationship between nature and grace.

The adoption by the early Church of human religious findings on the sun followed two related modes of expression, in theology and in cult. Though both are of great importance and interest for the question we are studying, space obliges us to confine our exposition here to the second.

In contrast with theology's more static reaction to existing solar doctrines, in the area of liturgy and devotion the Church took a dynamic stand. We might add that the long-term consequences of this dethroning, then reinstating of Hēlios are still apparent in

our catholic worship forms today. Sacramental words and gestures indicate how the Church has remained from the outset very close indeed to nature. Liturgically, it expresses its sublimest truths with water, oil, bread, wine, besides using the realities of sun and moon and many other symbols from the natural order.

The stage is now set for the remaining parts of this article. In its ritual the Church speaks the word of its own identity: the mystery of Jesus Christ as redeemer and of the communion of humankind in him. "A great mystery", says Paul ... "I am speaking of Christ and the Church." (Eph 5,32).

The first Christians could find no more fitting image in which to express this than nature's combination of sun and moon. Hēlios is Christ, Selēnē the Church. Origen even pointed to "the heavens of the heart" as the place where the Drama unfolds.<sup>7</sup>

Although in what follows we shall be treating of Christ as Helios, it will be well never to allow Selene leave our mind. (She will be the subject of the next article.) For these two are an inseparable bridal couple. "Truly blessed are you, Luna, to be worthy of such honour," sang Ambrose in his hymn to Sun and Moon. "For Luna it was who announced to us the Mystery of Christ."<sup>8</sup>

## I. THE EASTER SUN

### 1. Sunday

As the young Jerusalem Church set forth into the world of hellenism with its Christian message, two biblically founded truths were central to its concern: the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the eucharistic meal as a memorial celebration of the Pascha, to be enacted to the end of time. There was little doubt that Jesus had died on a "Preparation Day" of the Great Sabbath, hence on Friday, and therefore rose from the dead on that day which by Jewish reckoning was called "mia tōn sabbatōn," "the first day of the week."<sup>9</sup> This appellation was adhered to for a while as we know from Luke and Paul.<sup>10</sup> But soon a new name for that day had to be found to distinguish the Christian community from the Jews. So the word "kyriakē" was coined as is testified to in the Didache, Revelations and Ignatius of Antioch.<sup>11</sup> It was "the Lord's Day"; and on that day was held the "deipnon kyriakon", "the Lord's meal" or "the Lord's supper."<sup>12</sup>

However, from the first century before Christ the days of the week had been named from Persian and Egyptian astrological sources after the seven planet-deities. Thus the first day after the Jewish Sabbath was the "hēmera tou Hēliou", "dies Solis", or Sunday. So was Christianity thrown into contact with one form of the Greek Sun-cult. As the Church saw the matter, Christ had risen on the very day set aside for devotion to Helios, the second day of the planetary week which began with Saturn. Their big day therefore, in which they celebrated the sacred mysteries of the Resurrection and the Eucharist was not the Jewish Sabbath, nor the day of Saturn which opened the secular week, but the day of Hēlios. That Christians fondly accepted this as an occasion for professing their faith comes across in a statement in Ignatius Martyr's letter to the Magnesians in which Christians are depicted as those who "no longer hold to the Sabbath but live by the Lord's Day, on which indeed our Life arose" (en hē kai hē zōe hēmōn aneteilen). This "aneteilen" is the first sign of a clear christian self-positioning vis-à-vis the hellenistic Sun-day: Christ rose in very truth as an "anatolē ex hypsous", "sunrise from on high", (Lk 1,78). His resurrection is a sunrise even as, for Ignatius again, death for Christ is a sunset: "It is good, like the sun to go down on this world. From this I have my sunrise in God."<sup>13</sup>

Several decades later Justin shows how that thought was developing even further: "On the day people call the Day of Hēlios, the general gathering takes place... because that is the first day on which God, by changing darkness and primeval matter, made the world, and because Jesus Christ our redeemer on this day rose from the dead; for on the day before Saturn's Day he was crucified and on the day after Saturn's Day, that is to say the Day of Hēlios, he appeared to his apostles."<sup>14</sup>

Here the significance of the "first day" in the sense of the biblical account of the seven days of creation is linked up with the Greek understanding of the same day as "Hēlios' Day"; in both we see the indication of the real meaning of this day in its christian fulfilment: it is Sunday and Creation Day because Christ on that day rose from the dead.

Outsiders must have been all the more struck by this christian liturgical feast in that it fell on a simple "working-day"; that is, after the rest-day of Saturn. Pliny the Younger expressed his surprise to the Emperor Trajan: "they said they were accustomed to

meet together on a certain day before dawn, and to sign a hymn to Christ as to their God."<sup>15</sup> The "certain day" is the Day of Hēlios. On that day the praying Christians in fact **turned toward** the rising sun (a practice still today technically called "orientation") as the great symbol of the risen Christ, and ate as Pliny further observed "a common and harmless meal." So striking was this christian observance to the unbelieving mind of the time that Christians were characterised by some as a sect which prayed to the sun.

## 2. Easter Day

We know from the dating in John's Gospel<sup>16</sup>, and from the early tradition in Asia Minor tracing itself back to John as eyewitness of the historical salvation events, that Jesus died on the fourteenth day of the springtime month Nisan.<sup>17</sup> That day (both in the year 30 and 33 CE) fell on a Friday; in other words on the Parascevē, the "Preparation Day" on which Jews, in accordance with the Law (Exod 12,6.18) ate the Passover lamb.

Jewish Nisan is the first month of the year; its beginning determined by the waxing moon: the day after the first shining of that fine sickle as it arose out of its newmoon darkness was 1st Nisan, newmoon in question here being always the one immediately following the vernal equinox. Thus 14 Nisan was the day of springtime's full-moon.

So it happened that Jesus died on Venus' Day, remained in the tomb on Saturn's Day and rose on Hēlios' Day. He rose on the middle day of the month whose beginning almost always fell in Martius (Mars' month, or March) which was also for imperial Rome the first month of the year. He rose on the day when Selene stood in the full glare of the growing light of bridal partner Helios, mounting to his summer height.

Now, if Jesus rose on Hēlios' Day, if annually the full-moon shining in the spring sunlight marked the day of the Resurrection, then we are looking at the whole picture of the "triduum sacrum" - of the dying on Friday, the resting in the tomb on Saturday and of the new life on Sunday; like the going down, the night journey and the rising of the sun, and have reached the inmost circle of the religious encounter of the Church in magnificent freedom with the ancient Sun-cults.

We will take these events in turn: a) Jesus' death and descent into hell, imaged by sunset and Helios' travel through Hades; b) Jesus' resurrection as symbolised by the rising sun, and c) the sharing by the faithful in the grace of the risen Christ, as "enlightenment".

a) Just as for ancient Greek thinking, Helios represents Life, so did the daily setting of the sun stand for death. In the far West where Helios sinks into the sea, are the "Gates of Hades" through which the Sun-god passes to start out on his mysterious return journey to the East, there to rise again in the freshness of youth. The West connotes Death and the sway of demonic forces.

Christian preachers thus found ground in the Gospel statements: "Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land" (Mt 27,45), and "the sun's light failed" (Lk 23,45), for the reflection, "Occasus Christi, passio Christi" (the setting of Christ in the passion of Christ)<sup>18</sup> Jerome saw that failing of the sun as symbolising the shame the sun felt at the sight of the setting of the true Sun, Christ<sup>19</sup>, a theme taken up in medieval art.

There was also that dogmatic conviction in the Church, acknowledged in the Creed, of Christ's descent into hell (cf. 1 Pet 3,19; 4,6; Eph 4,9; probably Rev 1,18) to impart the grace of salvation to the righteous who had died before his coming. For those thinking in terms of sun symbolism, this was the journey through Hades of the Sun, Christ.

We may now conclude that Christianity first rejected Hēlios, then took him in, not in the sense that the Church formed its articles of faith from any ancient sun-mythology, but that to express its clear biblical traditional beliefs, it made use of images and symbols from the religious world around it. It aimed by so doing to show that all those good (and evil) things dimly intuited by mythopoeic man, found transcending realisation in the Christ event, the revealed "Mystery".

b) The Paradise-garden was "planted by God...in the east" (Gen 2,8). By celebrating the Paschal Vigil in the depth of the night, the Church was saying that the Christ-Sun reaches even into the west and brings it redemptively with it to the east. "Lumen Christi", sings the deacon; and then goes on to proclaim the exultant Gospel of the discovery by the myrrh-bearing women of the rising of Jesus, anateilantos tou Heliou, orto iam Sole, "when the sun had risen" (Mk 16,2). What Greek mystery-religion had thought and felt

of Hēlios was fulfilled beyond all expectation.

c) For the Christian faith, the Resurrection of Jesus is a victory over death, and hence over the Devil "who has the power of death" (Heb 2,14). The Easter morning Sun therefore is the true Apollo-Hēlios who slew the dragon, Python.

The grace of the victor is now bestowed on others in a sacramental happening, Baptism, which from the Church's inception has been known by the name "phōtismos" or "enlightenment".

The departure-point of the baptismal light-symbolism is: "...know you not that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." (Rom 6,3-4).

Baptism is in the first place negatively a renouncing of Satan and the demonic sundown. "In this celebration," says Jerome, "we reject the one who is in the West, and who, in sin, is Death to us; and then, turned to the East, we make a covenant with the Sun of Righteousness, and promise to serve him."<sup>20</sup>

On the positive side Baptism is thus a turning to the East, a covenant with Christ the Sun, a being enlightened by his Easterly light. In Ephesians 5,14, Paul has preserved for us a few lines from a primitive baptismal hymn:

Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead,  
and Christ shall give you light.

For Clement of Alexandria, commenting on this verse, the Christ who "shall give you light" is "the Sun of the resurrection" (ho tēs anastaseōs helios)<sup>21</sup>; in consequence, Baptism is a sharing in his Sunlight. This is why in the blessing of the baptismal water on Easter night, the paschal candle "lumen Christi" is lowered into that element as the invocatory prayer is pronounced. The water, fiery now from the true Sun, becomes an apt instrument to fire believing persons, or a believing people, who in turn become apt to fire the world. "I baptise you with water...but he who is coming after me...will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Mt 3,11; Lk 3,16).

(To be continued)

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## HOLY THURSDAY NIGHT FIRE

As I sat round the campfire in the soil of Turkey Creek on Holy Thursday night, it came to me that if Jesus were to come he would choose that fire, sit and say:

Come, my people, sit round my fire.  
Let's tell the story of ancestors  
whose lives dance in flames of  
orange and red.  
In breaking damper and sharing tea  
listen as I bring my story to yours  
and together as one we mirror  
each others' pain.

A story of Exodus, of strangers who came,  
of death and loss, grief and pain,  
of deliverance and dreaming,  
of a spirit born true,  
taken, betrayed for sugar and tea -  
bullets exchanged in place of unity,  
the betrayer set free.

Of washing and denial we can say it all,  
our blood washes the soil  
making it red.  
High Commissions, Inquiries, demonstrations,  
floggings and all. Silently to be arrested  
swiftly at dawn.

Of standing and mockery, torture and grief -  
our women, sons, husbands, daughters have  
all been into Pilate's place, there before  
you we stand faceless and debased,  
a sovereign nation arrested and displaced.

Crucifixion, torment, our way of the cross  
with women among us whose tears  
wash tracks into the feet of the cross.

Bernadette Doyle rsj  
Easter 1989

\* \* \* \* \*

## AND THE THIRD DAY WAS RESURRECTION DAY

Sr Clare Ahern rsj

THEY CAME IN from the desert, a group of nine, traditionally hunters and gatherers but on this occasion seeking help from Ngarpu, the name they gave to the God we all share. They were anxious, disturbed by the tension that had entered the life of two of their group. They had come to the Centre (a place they recognised as a christian sacred area) with the hope of the hunter in their hearts, hope that they would find what they needed - peace and joy and once more the ability to live in good relationships with each other.

We listened to their hopes and prayed that the God who lives in the heart of every hunter and searcher would answer their needs and guide us together in the search.

The first evening came and as we sat around the campfire singing their christian sacred songs, the natural leader within the group asked to speed, "to come straight." Gently he told in soft, sincere and sorrowful tones his story of pain, struggle and worry, and as he spoke a bonding of empathy, of genuine care settled on the group.

They all knew their leader was in pain, his cry was for help and freedom from his deep unhappiness. They were saddened by the story of this man, a story they had known for some time but were bewildered by their inability to help.

I was quietened, humbled by the level of the sharing and touched by the worry and its cause.

Silence enveloped us as we gazed into the soft fire on that warm night. Reverence for the man who shared his agony and hesitation about the direction to take, entered my heart. "What words have you for us?" I asked the Easter God, "Release your gifts within us."

Finally the words came, guided by the Great Hunter and the Gatherer of all people's needs - and I suggested that a cry for help must never go unheeded; that when someone calls, we must answer; that we have within us the gift to be healers, the power to bring the peace of Christ to each other.

Sr Clare Ahern rsj conducts Mirringlki, a spirituality centre at Turkey Creek (halfway between Kununurra and Halls Creek in the East Kimberley, WA). It is a resource centre (pastoral courses, retreats, counselling, renewal and special programs) for Aboriginal communities and their pastoral workers. In this paper Sr Clare reflects on a healing experience with one group.

## NELEN YUBU

So we shared the stories of the pain and guilt that surrounded the life of Peter and his friends between Holy Thursday evening and the Resurrection and we thought about our own weakness and guilt and our need for peace. We remembered the wonderful gift of Easter to all of us who experience weakness, the gift of peace and reconciliation. Gently we all began our prayer for the troubled man and gradually strong sounds of sacred songs, pleading with the God who knows pain, filled the earth.

Over the days we reflected on life in a christian community, the good times, the support system experienced and the joys and fun. Slowly we moved into the pains, the struggles, the conflicts and the tensions that also form part of the life of a christian community. It was during this session that the worry of the troubled man was clearly described, and with his freedom to speak came freedom to other members of the group to share painful experiences.

A common story of pain, resentment and hardened hearts emerged and an equally common story of the grace of God and his healing power to change hardened hearts to compassionate hearts opened up.

A new reality had entered the life of this group, only a year baptised. It was a hard reality but one they were now ready to accept. Pain and struggle were to be expected in the lives of christians. Being christian did not automatically mean a life of freedom, from family worries, alcoholism and its related problems. Baptism and Confirmation were not guarantees of protection against bad times. Hard times were part of the lives of all, just as much as joyous times but, as christians we had the sound gifts of peace and reconciliation and the Eucharist to assist us in the struggle and growth. Silently we observed the group as the reality of the christian life settled in. Being baptised did not mean having powerful magic to resist life's struggles but having a Jesus who understood what pain and suffering meant and who could assist us to live and love and keep struggling towards the vision of the Kingdom in spite of personal weakness and the condemnation of others.

The second night came and we reflected on a Thomas who chose to suffer in sadness rather than hear the news of the Resurrection and be joyful. We returned to Peter and Christ's acceptance of Peter's weakness and his love. In the reverence of the prayers shared, the wife of the unhappy man suddenly left the group. Anxiously some of the women followed her to return for her husband. Aware that some sort of crisis was developing, the group began to sing "Marka

Pirlurr," (Strong Spirit). "Come Holy Spirit, make us strong." They sang repeatedly until the couple returned and then spontaneously surrounded the woman, laying hands on her, asking for peace the happiness to return. We prayed in unity for the woman, all of us aware of the physical as well as emotional pain until the group was satisfied. The experience and awareness of the group flowed into a need for a sacramental reconciliation and the third day came.

At breakfast as we all shared bread, tea and cornflakes, we greeted the troubled couple. Peace and joy were evident in their responses. A resurrection had taken place. Once more the Risen Christ had lifted up sorrowful people, had seen the pain and confusion and guided the searchers of peace through the path of chaos.

We shared the story of the disciples on the road to Emmaus and the group laughed knowingly at the two who didn't know that Jesus was walking with them. It was their story, all of our stories, a forgetfulness that the Jesus who knew pain was there in the midst of our struggles.

The acceptance of this story brought peace, freedom and a mature joy to the group. Gone was the exuberance of the first fervour of new christians, to be replaced by a more stabilised joy and peace. This lasted through the rest of the day as we reflected on the sacred food for the journey of joy and peace, pain and growth and as dusk fell we sat around the fire with the pastor of the little community to break bread and remember the first Eucharist.

The fourth day came and the group departed for the desert. The search of the hunters and gatherers had been successful. The great Hunter, the Hound of Heaven, had lead them to the gifts of Easter, peace and joy. Good relationships had been restored and the group was strengthened and inspired to work at establishing their small christian community.

And as the Toyota landcruiser turned into the highway and I was left alone with my thoughts and the two dogs rubbing against me, I thanked the God of all hunters and gatherers for allowing me to share in the journeying of this wonderful little desert group. I thanked him for the fresh honesty they shared in facing the trouble within the group; for their authentic caring for each other and for their freedom from complex, hidden agendas.

## NELEN YUBU

I had witnessed a Resurrection and experienced through this group a newer and deeper understanding of the Easter gifts of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

The words ringing in my ears were: "Lord, it is good to be here, good to be learning to live the Gospel from the First Australians."

And I prayed for all of us who have come to the land of the First Australians to have the heart of a hunter-gatherer, a heart of hope that went searching and seeking, a heart full of awareness and wisdom and a heart full of openness with a readiness to follow where the searching lead.

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**Nelen Yubu wishes a happy  
Christmas to all our readers,  
our subscribers, our contributors, our printers  
and everybody!**

## MAN OF GOD

"This is the Gospel of the Lord", he said,  
Voiced by heart, toned by soul,  
tuned by God's spirited control.

His colour is purple, I say, silverlined.  
His excellence is courage, I say divine.  
The assassin of evil, hired by God.

There he stands this man,  
heart tender upholding the bleeding palms of Christ.

"This is his body: This is his blood", he said  
Lifting the bread of life on show,  
silently projecting Christ, I know.

His compassion is in the finale, it seems,  
To bring on a pigmented race in communion,  
with God I know, retouching the difference of  
opinion, I'm sure, through Christ's eyes,  
Ultimatum beyond his own, God knows.

And he leaves, with the dawn of the eastern sky,  
holding the seventh heaven in his voice.

"Thanks be to God", I say.

Anne Waterman  
1 September 1989

**NELEN YUBU**

**FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK. . .**

Fr Brian McCoy sj, previously stationed at the Daly River mission for a few months, is now employed by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody at Broome, WA, where he expects to remain for the next twelve months.

Sr Clare Oldfield csj, formerly of Garden Point, Melville Island, now spends her time between her convents at Miranda NSW and Greenwich just north of Sydney. She reports being in good health and very busy.

**Early Traditional People in the South...**

Mallacoota is an attractive place on the coast in Victoria just south of the NSW border. To a great degree it is unspoilt land, with beautiful waterfalls and an extensive rain forest, not to mention its inlet and the rivers and myriad and diverse birds. Before white settlement, the Kurnai was the Aboriginal tribe in the Mallacoota area, and they lived well on the local abundant sea fare. It is known that they fiercely resisted white invasion, but it seems they are now no more. How sad that we couldn't manage to share this vast country between those early inhabitants and ourselves!

**A Passing Stranger...**

Just before going to press with this issue I suddenly took french leave in reply to an attractive invitation to go bush in some untamed country on the Cox River in the NSW Blue Mountains. Three of us went off into that wild region where the Cox comes pounding down from the ridges and spreads itself across the valley floor so widely that one can walk across without being drowned or threatened by quicksands. We must have been more than 20km from the main road and had it all to ourselves except for giant lizards and multifarious birds.

Before lunch we each went our separate ways to stroll along the glistening river amongst river oaks and ferns. I decided to paddle my way upstream to some dry rocks where I lay basking in hot

sunshine. Imagine my surprise when a cracking twig disclosed a man passing right under my rock! He was just as startled when he saw me, and didn't seem to know whether to continue doggedly on past me, or to cut and run. We both laughed and I climbed down from my perch to be told his name was Jake. He carried a knapsack over his shoulder and dangled a black billy, so I decided he was pretty safe and we sat down on the bank to talk, our feet in the water.

Jake had walked for miles ("I didn't count 'em") from some faraway junction with another stream, idling his way along the river to see where it led him. He had a little tent, his swag, and enough food to last him five days if he didn't overindulge. His age would be anything from 45 to 68 and he had that laconic Australian drawl that spoke of unhurried days and deep love of the bush. Sometimes he had even supplemented his fare with bush tucker: five-corners, geebung nuts, fish, (...and I hoped with nothing more!).

We talked for a while about the beauty of our bushland, the fun of waking up to squawking parrots in the morning, the search for a cave during thunderstorms -- and what city people missed by not being attuned to the bush. Then he said he'd better wander on. I said, "My friends and I are just about to boil the billy!" His eye lit up but he said, "Aw no, reckon I'll keep going." "We've got asparagus sandwiches and some fruit and stuff...?" "Aw well, if it's not a bother then." How he reminded me of the Henry Lawsons and western swaggies, and those old-timers who trekked their lonely way through our vast land rather than be condemned to suburbia.

In a quiet way we all set about our campfire, chatting, sharing our lunch, exchanging yarns. Squinting skywards he finally said "Reckon we'll get a storm this arvo", then took his leave and we watched him cross the river with a backward wave and climb the rise amongst spreading bluegums.

His reckoning was right! A couple of hours later a fierce storm sent us scurrying for our car and racing uphill to escape getting bogged. Drenched but happy, I looked down on the river from the mountain top, wondering if Jake had found his cave in time, and wishing I could, like Clancy, swap with him for a year or two to follow my bent along the talking rivers of our land, just living in solitude with nature.

We three agreed we had benefited from our casual encounter with that unintrusive man who loved nature.

Secretary Keren

## BULLETIN BOARD

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council has moved from Surry Hills NSW, to 19 Mackenzie Street, North Sydney, 2060, where they are sharing accommodation with the Australian Catholic Relief, and the secretariat of the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace.

A Small Christian Communities Workshop was held at Daly River Centre 16-20 October for pastors in the NT. It was attended by about eight priests, with a bit of early going and late coming, and by Bishop Ted Collins for one day.

### **Lumko International Course, 1990**

Even before we got around to advertising the Lumko International Course to be held at Kincumber South (NSW) 14 August - 14 September 1990, there were some 20 applications already in. At this stage we are already over limit. The deadline is 1 March 1990. Our plan is to give preference to facilitating or training teams working on diocesan or regional levels. Accordingly, some people who may have made a block booking from one parish will be asked to curtail their number of applications. Hence, it is still worthwhile applying, especially if you are working as part of a pastoral team or in a facilitating or training position, and with the backing of your bishop - but don't leave it too long!