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EDITORIAL

PEOPLE ARE starting to take a new look at inculturation. In the second number of his ongoing series in **Nelen Yubu** (no.41:13) Dan O'Donovan put a query beside the "fulfilment theory" of religions to which, he added, "Nelen Yubu has given its approval at least as a working hypothesis". In fact I tried to spell it out in my article on Ideological Symbolism and Ritual Sacramentalism in no.13. We are becoming ever more aware of the cultural elements we have introduced into the gospel message - properly and necessarily - otherwise the gospel hasn't really touched us and we haven't made it our own. But people of other cultures also want to welcome Christ into their own homelands free of colonial or "Western" or whatever other sorts of overtones there are. Some are coming to a crisis point. How much of our understanding and practice of Christianity is not only irrelevant to others, but even an impediment to their acceptance of Christ? Some theologians are talking about "crossing the Rubicon"...

Noel Mifsud puts the point in a particular way when he proposes that the eschatological outlook of the Port Keats people makes the common Christian teaching on after-life quite meaningless to them. It would be nice if one of them were to comment on this. I remember Paddy Dodson saying to me once that one great value that Christianity had certainly brought his people was clear future hope to live and more particularly to die for. Noel McMaster underlines some of the pastoral implications, and builds up some of the theological theory that stands behind the practical issues.

By way of an abbreviated Bulletin Board, I might note that at this stage (10 February) 23 people have definitely booked up for the Lumko International Course that is going to be presented at Kincumber South 14 August - 14 September this year. More than half a dozen others have indicated a firm intention of attending but are still in the process of getting themselves organised. We believe we shall hear from still more as the 1 March dead-line approaches. We have received over 60 requests for information.

Martin Wilson msc
Editor

CAN A PERSON SURVIVE HIS OWN DEATH?

Noel Mifsud

Djabangandi gadeg, budi wulur, banja rai nuwoda. All men die, they come back alive, the spirit of the old men returns to us. (Worms 1986:170).

THIS PAPER seeks to explain how the Murinth Patha people of Wadeye, Port Keats, believe that a person's spirit can "survive"^{his} own death. Their post mortem existence is not a personal immortality. The dead return to the mortal world as an incarnate spirit child or a purely spiritual being. Whilst the spirit of an Aboriginal person is indestructible, the body is not. I shall discuss how these northern Aboriginals perform the mulunu mortuary ceremony to free their spirit from all earthly ties. I will discuss the nature, presence and purpose of their spirit world and finally address the paradoxical notion of "surviving" one's own death.

Environment

In order to understand Aboriginal beliefs in the spirit world it is necessary to discuss their relationship with their environment. The people of Wadeye have a strong affinity with their land and believe it to be an integral part of their being. They speak of the land with reverence and respect, for it is the Ancestral home of the spirits of departed family members. This Ancestral home has always pre-existed and will always exist. When they die, their spirits too will continue to exist. Their spiritual body lives forever in this spirit centre or homeland.

Death

Death is believed to be the work of evil spirits or sorcery intervening in life. Life is natural but death is not. There exists a monumental struggle between the world of mortal humans and the spirit world. Murinth Patha people live in constant fear of the evil spirits who bring death. They will avoid

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absolute darkness for fear of their presence. The Wangka and Thanpa dancers join those in their clan in elaborate ceremonies to ward off evil spirits from the home of one who has recently died. The name of a dead person is avoided.

In avoiding the bringers of death it is logical to assume that the Aboriginals are avoiding death itself. To avoid death is a natural human reaction (unless of course one is suicidal). If death allows an Aboriginal person to enter into their Ancestral world as a purely spiritual being, why should death be avoided, even feared? Perhaps it is a matter of fearing the loss of a body, or fearing the pain of death or the unknown. By the nature of his eschatological beliefs an Aboriginal is unable to survive a bodily death and share in the Christian Resurrection promised by the Christian missionaries who share their land. The people of Wadeye believe the purpose of death is to ensure the link between the present and their Ancestral past. There is no need for a resurrection of the body if there is insurance of a future existence of the spirit.

I asked an Elder to explain how a person's body dies and his spirit is able to survive death. The Elder did not wish to have his name recorded. Death is not usually a topic which is discussed amongst Aboriginal people. I have adapted his answer and recorded it in language intelligible for the purpose of this paper. At any rate his answer was: The body (nen) "fell down", the breath or wind (nitkit) of the deceased stopped, marking a bodily death but the spirit (njan) survived. Eventually the spirit died a second death and returned as a butterfly which assumed the colours of the ground where it was buried. The spirit may be transformed into a spirit-child. That is, the spirit enters into the womb of a mother and is born again into a new body. There are Murinth Patha people today who are believed to be such incarnations of the dead of other tribes. "Facial or bodily resemblances were taken as proof that a dead person's soul/spirit had found a new body and a sort of immortality." (Stanner 1966:156). In summary it is only the body or nen which dies; the incarnate spirit survives death.

Spirit

In order to fully understand the Aboriginal notion of bodily death it is necessary to discuss the nature of the soul or spirit which survives. The Murinth Patha people distinguish two major states of the human soul in the cycle of birth, death and a rebirth of the spirit. They believe in the existence of a pre-existent Dreamtime spirit which is life and gives life, and a

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spirit which has survived death and takes on many forms including that of a trickster spirit, spirit-child or nature-spirit.

A spirit that was pre-existent before birth also has a meaningful post mortem existence. It returns to the spirit home (da ngugumingki) from where it came or where its creator lives. In Port Keats, Aboriginals believe their home is in totem dreaming sites, where various creations took place. These sites are related to totems (ngakumarl) which take the form of animals, foods, flora and physical objects such as the hooked spear (thamul menek totem from the Memarl dreaming.)

Some Elders believe the post mortem spirit to be a ghost of the deceased who remains behind at the place of his/her burial site. This spirit is able to communicate with the living in both their dream and waking life. They appear in the form of a trickster spirit. This spirit may live in the bush tormenting its incarnate relations as it dries up waterholes and dabbles in sorcery to influence men to kill each other in intertribal war. It is this second soul which resists a definitive separation from the body and gives rise to the funerary rites which protect the tribe from such spirits. Elders claim that this spirit has survived death "but not fully." This spirit is like mortal man. It can leave tracks, be chased away with stones, sticks, weapons and be frightened by loud shouts. Eventually it will make its way to the Land of the Dead to join and merge with the creative beings and spirits already there. Just how this transformation takes place is unknown.

There is also a belief that other spirits return to their totemic centre, the place of their Dreaming, to wait for a rebirth of reincarnation. Children born with the same physical scars or birthmarks or physical resemblance of a deceased member of the same tribe is said to be a spirit-child (ngəpan kanthin wurran) possessing the soul of the deceased. One child at Wadeye or Yidiye area (Kardu Diminin clan) has a scar recognised at birth as being identical to that of a deceased male from another clan. The scar was the result of an intertribal war which left a spear mark on the adult's left thigh. This child was "adopted" by the members of the deceased's clan and is now called son (ngathan).

A spirit-child which enters the mother's womb becomes the essence or soul of the deceased, assuming similar but not identical physical and mental attributes. After a child is born, if a mark is seen on that child and recognised by another family as a mark representing a physical characteristic of a deceased person, then that child is considered a spirit-child of the deceased. The spirit-child then becomes an adopted family

member and physical reminder to the clan that the spirit of the dead lives on.

Survival

The Murinth Patha people are convinced that Man does "survive" his own death. It is a belief which is passed on in their songs, dances and traditions. Ceremonies reinforce the belief that: "Death is merely the permanent disability to return to the body, produced by the evil magic of some enemy...the individual continues to exist after death, although usually invisible to the living." (Charlesworth 1984:226). It is only through bodily death that individuals reach their highest status, that is they become purely spiritual beings free from their earthly bodies. Death is the final rite of passage where an individual's spirit is transferred from the world of the profane into the spiritual world of the sacred. Ceremonies such as the funerary rites reinforce such beliefs and make philosophical discussions amongst Aborigines unnecessary.

By analysing the Murinth Patha funerary rite we discover the co-operative effort made by the living to help a human spirit make the transition from the "here and now" to the after life. Just before death relatives gather and chant the songs of the dying person's totem. This both serves to comfort, and to prepare the dying for their return into the spirit world. If the singing and funerary rites are not performed accurately the clan fears that evil spirits (ku banambitj) might capture the body (nen) and prevent its spirit (ng-pan) from a definitive separation from its body (and return as a trickster spirit).

Mortuary Rite

Stanner (1966:118-119) described the traditional Mortuary Rite or "Mulunu" ceremony. He observed that its dynamic is to sever the bodily-bound spirit from all ties for the sake of disembodied existence as a free spirit.

There were six phases in the Mulunu rite: (1) Isolation of the body outside of the camp, exposure of the body on a platform to await decay, a ban on the mention of the deceased's name and abandonment of the locality where the deceased ended his/her bodily life. Members of the Murinth Patha community still avoid any direct mention of the deceased. Photographs are burned and the name of the person is avoided for fear of invoking ku banambitj, the spirits of sorcery. (2) The destruction and burning of the deceased's personal drinking vessels and eating implements. (3) Sending away the deceased's hair and stone axe, also used in the inquest held after death.

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(4) Dismemberment and cremation of the corpse. (5) Celebration of a funerary feast (magindit) over a fire and offerings of food in payment for the ritual. (6) The final rite of the ashes held in the dead man's clan estate.

In the first rite we see a total separation of the spirit from the body, and a physical separation of the corpse into a sacred place. The body is exposed on a raised platform to await decomposure. Sources suggest this is done to prevent wild dogs (ku were) removing the body before its spirit has been released. It may return as a trickster spirit if this occurs. The purpose of this stage is to destroy the corrupt body and its social extensions and conserve its spirit. The platform consists of four forked stakes (daranin or pandaruma) fixed firmly to the ground and meshed with a strong platform of strong fibre, presumably thithimampe a strong fan palm still used today for meshing durable dilly bags. The body is wrapped in paper bark. The physical body has negative value; it must be destroyed. If it is not, trickster spirits will remain at the burial site and corrupt all who enter upon the site. This explains why there is an abandonment of the burial site by all after this first stage and a total ban on using the deceased's name for years.

The burial of children and women did not progress to any higher rites after the first stage. There was a total taboo regarding discussion as to the outcome of their spirit. I would presume their spirits, free from evil spirits, would ascend to their totems.

In the second phase of the mortuary rite all earthly and material possessions belonging to the deceased are burned over a sacrificial fire. Only his blanket or nanji magindit is preserved to be burned later at the funerary feast, and his stone axe which is given to a close friend. Chattels or movable artefacts are removed to free the spirit from any trace of material connection with the mundane world.

The purpose of the third rite of hair removal and sending away the deceased's stone axe physically severs the deceased from Aboriginal symbols of vitality, masculinity and shame. The custom is to remove locks of hair from the scalp. Hair is thought to be intrinsically associated with the social personality of the living. Hair also symbolised shame (yidiwe) for within the hair ku mimbi or lice existed. Taking the hair from a corpse was evidently a complex and compound symbolism...that beyond life man was now beyond shame...that if hair, a symbol of his life were sent away then the actuality of his shameful death went with it too. We shall see later how hair removal after death is still practised today for Aboriginal divination or inquests.

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The fourth phase of the Murinth Patha mortuary rite involves the dismemberment and cremation of the corpse. All visible or material form (e.g. the body) is removed at this phase, which may not be carried out till many months after death. The body must be dried out sufficiently for the removal of both bones of the forearm to be kept as memorials by the close kin or mother's father (damun). The males (except for the primary kin or Kadu manda) then smash the remaining bones to pieces. The bones are burned and reduced to ashes and charcoal. It is believed at this stage that the spirit of the dead sits upon the burial platform looking after his bones until the final rite (mulunu), when all worldly or physical remains are pounded back into the earth.

The fifth phase involves a funerary feast or **magindit** which may take place as much as two years or more after cremation. The emphasis among the bereaved is to settle any worldly accounts the deceased may have had with other clans. Food and valuables (merkat) were exchanged. It is important to stress that the emphasis was on the termination of the worldly life to free the spirit, and not only a transition to a more valued status. The mulunu ceremony was thus held in the greater esteem than other important ceremonies such as circumcision (naitpan southern Wadeye). The deceased is now ready for the final stage.

The final interment of the deceased body's ashes were celebrated in the mulunu ceremony held in the dead man's clan estate. "...The corporal and social extensions of the dead are brought home to be destroyed by fire and neutralised by gift exchange, while the last ashes are merged with the ground of the former being, and the spirit is freed to find a new life so that the new dynamic force - permanent and unconditioned death - is integrated with proximate and new life." (Stanner 1966:135). A ring twenty metres in diameter was prepared and the ashes were deposited in a shallow hole within the ring, and sprinkled with charcoal from the cremation fire. There is much singing and dancing at this stage which continues throughout the day and night. The deceased's last physical traces are made at one with the Earth (Putek). Now he is no longer human but survives as a spirit.

From the mulunu rite we see how the deceased adopts a new status of life as a spirit. The spirit or soul returned as either a spirit-child or as (mir) the totemic spirit. Although the mortal body of man was buried in their clan estates, the spiritual dimensions survived controlling vital phenomena such as food, rain, disease and the ability to dream of song and dance.

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Man is considered beyond life and able to survive his own death in the shadowy spirit world. Survival in this sense involves a future "life", a spiritual one, a return to the totems of nature where individuals pre-exist in Dreamtime and continue to exist. There is a dimension of the former person which lives on - a spiritual dimension.

Inquests

The people of Wadeye also believe that the person's spirit who has survived death may return to earth to avenge his/her murderer. It is believed that the corpse and/or the spirit uses its former body to inform the Elder or medicine man of the guilty person. Not only is there a survival of death but a continued participation by the spirit in human affairs. This spirit is in essence an active participant in the mortal world.

Aboriginal inquests are secret ceremonies, generally taboo, to discuss and performed solely by the male. Eliade (1983:168) provides us with some insights. The Elder discovers the identity and clan of the murderer by using a number of tests involving the corpse of the deceased through the intervention of his/her spirit. There are several tests used by the Wadeye people. One is by examining the ground around the grave or by seeing the spirit of the dead coming out of the grave on the side nearest the murderer's country. Another method involves hair being pulled in jerks whilst the names of different tribes are pronounced, the guilty group is revealed when hair is removed. I have been told that by sleeping on the hair and clothing belonging to the deceased, an Elder has the identity of the murderer revealed to him by the spirit in a dream.

The inquest indicates that the spirit of the deceased still animates, controls and uses the corpse or parts of it "...It is not until revenge (payback) has been taken and the burial and mourning rites completed, that the spirit finally leaves the body and goes to...its spirit home." (Eliade *ibid.*)

Death is an "ecstatic" experience: the soul abandons the body and journeys to the land of its post mortem existence. The difference from other ecstatic states (sleep, trance, illness, shamanistic voyages) is that the spirit of the dead leaves the body for good. The body is prepared in the funerary rites for decay and final destruction.

It is very difficult to talk about death with the Murinth Patha people. They do not think about death, let alone discuss it. It is strictly forbidden to mention the name of a deceased person, photographs are destroyed, and people bearing the deceased's name change their name. A cleansing ceremony is

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held to rid the deceased's house from evil spirits. There are many beliefs and ceremonies in the Aboriginal culture at Wadeye to assist the deceased spirit to continue his journey from death to its transformation into a butterfly and back into the earth where it pre-existed. Stanner observed (1966:135): "This idea shows that for the Australians spiritual powers are at work in the world, which in our language could be called eternal."

The people of Wadeye believe man, though not escaping death, does survive it spiritually.

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CROSS CULTURAL MISSION

An Interpretative Framework in Kununurra, WA

Noel McMaster, CSsR

AT THE CONCLUSION of a brief reflection on Church mission in Kununurra (*Nelen Yubu* no. 11, March 1982) I wrote: "The spiritual eye of man (sic) can never be darkened. He may fashion a blurred lens for himself and do it so thoroughly it is almost like a cataract on the natural lens, rather than an opaque optical prescription. But whether it be blurred lens (Aboriginal Religion) or ill-prescribed lens (many of our offerings), the power to see is still there." While acknowledging the limits of cross-cultural judgments, I believe this metaphor for graced human faith, religiosity and missionary concern is still valid. In this article I propose to reflect further on these realities in themselves, and in relation to the same cross-cultural mission in Kununurra, drawing particularly on the anthropological insights and interpretative framework of Jesuit author, Juan Luis Segundo.

The work of Segundo in his profound study, "Faith and Ideologies," leads me to relate the elements of the metaphor above to what he calls anthropological faith and ideology. For Segundo faith is a wager and every human person takes a punt, if you will, on what is worthwhile in life. This happens in virtue of an anthropological given (faith itself) and is prior to religious faith which is a particular instance of anthropological

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To establish such an anthropological given in human experience has obvious advantages in today's world (and parish) with its religious pluralism, denominational variety and secular inclination. Given that everyone wagers on some scale of values, a missionary for example has a tool of interpretation and a guarantee of standing on common ground when the question is posed: what are these people wagering on in their lives today?

As illustration Segundo presents a somewhat Freudian example: genital sexual love is the prototype of all human happiness. If one's faith is in such a value it is necessary to note the presence of transcendent data. By this Segundo means that in adopting one life orientation or scale of values as worthwhile, explicitly or implicitly, a person necessarily accepts the inability to encompass personally the sum total of its variety of human experience, in this instance sexual genital love. Hence in faith there are data beyond one's ability to verify experientially and there are therefore referential witnesses to such data; here Freud would be one such. To wager like this on a scale of values, which everyone does with anthropological faith, always involves such referential witnesses and transcendent data. It is an anthropological given.

Proceeding further anthropologically Segundo presents religious faith (not religion, which he will call an ideology) as a particular instance of anthropological faith. In this case there are once again transcendent data, e.g. in Christian faith: God is love, God has no favourites; and there are again referential witnesses. Jesus himself identified with the Old Testament witnesses of a particular tradition, learning from their experience not without its occasional mistakes, and in his turn yielding to New Testament witnesses and their successors. Religious faith to be such must have its own transcendent data, while its referential witnesses must stand in a tradition extending over a number of generations; at least this is so if we are dealing anthropologically with the major religious traditions and their well tried world views.

Religious faith itself must be distinguished from religion which in Segundo's interpretative framework is an ideology, a word he employs with his own peculiar precision. Segundo cites Jesus' polemic with the Pharisees over religion to show that religion in its most common social setting, i.e. as functional, is really an instrument, not a values structure. As such it is an ideology, a way of expressing faith and moving towards the realisation of its wager. Indeed from the gospels it can be seen that often what passes for religion is bad faith, i.e. a refusal to own one's human project of establishing a values structure

(faith), and instead a pretence of living by religious precepts, symbols, rituals, privileges etc. as though these were prior to that faith wager which is incumbent on all. This misplaced preference to live by hypocritical religion is at the heart of Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees' attitude towards the sabbath: the sabbath is for man, not vice versa. Again the dispute over Beelzebul and devils and the refusal of Jesus to give a sign from heaven is an affirmation that values and faith's wager on them is an intensely human work of calculation. An authentic values structure, in Segundo's words, must evolve from no other "criteria than those which human beings use to orientate themselves in history."

One further observation should be made: the possibility of false consciousness (in deference to sociologists and psychologists) and/or invincible ignorance (in deference to moral theologians). The options people make are contextual and never escape completely the limitations which burden the human condition. But withal, the values structure actually espoused is one's anthropological faith wager and is the practical orientation of one's life.

To sum up we will find people at their most authentic human level when we look at their anthropological faith which may or may not be religious faith, and may even be bad faith in the manner already described. This will have profound significance for today's cross-cultural missionaries as they face the mercurial mix of contemporary values structures on which people are in fact wagering, and the variety of ideologies (means) that accompany them.

Before proceeding to some interpretations on our local Kununurra scene, the framework I have tried to outline may be schematised thus:

CROSS CULTURAL COMMON GROUND

sociological, psychological, ethical filters

Anthropological Faith (values)

(what people wager on)

Philosophies

Religious faith

data, witnesses e.g.
wager on Xian service
"As often as you did
this to one of these
least ..."

'isms e.g.
hedonism
consumerism
alcoholism

Ideology (means)

(ways of implementation)

sabbath for man

sacraments for
people

Religion

e.g. corporal
works of mercy,
dogmas, rituals,
laws etc.

hypocritical
religion, bad
faith, if given
priority, i.e.
self-serving
security

NB. The place of grace (faith in Paul's sense of the word): openness, transcendence, trust in others, an **other** as freedom for the human project, rather than false security in works of the law. Faith in Segundo's sense follows.

This, I would propose, is akin to Rahner's "supernatural existential" approach to grace.

The issues on the ground in any cross-cultural parish or mission setting are numerous. In this section I will list some local ones and attempt to show how they might be interpreted according to Segundo's framework.

1. Aboriginal Symbols, Myths, Rituals - The Dreaming

The Dreaming as an expression might be applied equally to both an Aboriginal values structure (this mythological founding drama is a source of meaning that might be worth following), and to the means of realising it (the Law, rituals, etc.). In this latter sense we readily talk of Aboriginal Religion, of following up The Dreaming.

On the local scene two points are worth making. In recent times I believe there has been a tendency to promote such religion to the level of faith, to eliminate the human calculus which was obviously present among earlier generations of Aboriginal people who came to direct their lives in the worthwhile ways of cosmic oneness and environmental harmony by means of totemic sacramentalism (Stanner's phrase) and the laws of kinship. In other words there are leaders abroad today who often overlook the fragmentation of much of the Aboriginal world with its alcoholism, violence and alienation, and tend to promote Sacred Sites, rituals, and knowledge of stories in much the same way as Pharisees promoted their Law as religious faith. While attention may be given to issues like deaths in custody and the prevalence of alcoholism, these realities can be conveniently overlooked as the source of an anthropological faith in favour of an inviolable religious system reduced to a self-serving ideology (means) of security. Or if The Dreaming is proposed as a founding drama worth following (faith), individual lives often belie the sincerity of such a stance.

Our primary missionary attention must be to anthropological faith, joining forces with those Aboriginal leaders who encourage their people to use the criteria of history and their own life experience to establish or recognise their faith, their sense of what is worthwhile. In this context today we are often looking at substantial government grants for projects and welfare with their varied influence on life orientations, sense of responsibility and personal gains. Here one's scale of values can evolve quite differently from those assumed in The Dreaming of old. Upward social mobility, a degree of wheeling and dealing within commissions and administrations, nepotism - all so familiar to us - are indicators of a changed contemporary anthropological faith for many. It is not difficult to see the more naive,

"traditional" people with their modest fortnightly cheques being exploited and manipulated in the name of religion, thus adding to their loss of dignity and self-esteem. Do we hear again echoes of Jesus' polemic against religion?

The second point is for us missionaries to be wary of inculturation which in the past often meant trying to link our Christian ideology of religious practice with another, the Aboriginal. To be preoccupied today (it may have been different in former times of more holistic Aboriginal living) with symbols, myths and rituals will, I suspect, easily take us, in our turn, away from anthropological faith, just as it has taken Aboriginal people away, and Pharisees in the past, and Christians of every age.

There is, I believe, still a place for a fulfillment theory of religions (or mission), but it does not come about by getting our ideological Christ into another religious ideology. It will rather happen by all of us discovering through the calculus of experience and history that the worthwhile direction of our lives has been absolutised in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. (For a development of this theme cf. J L Segundo, **An Evolutionary Approach to Jesus of Nazareth**. Orbis Books, 1988. Pp.64-66.)

2. Catholic Sacramental Practice

Already, of course, the Church has been down the road of Inculturation, with goodwill often, but in such a way that many a religious (ideological) conundrum remains. Sacraments, belonging to the sphere of religion, are instruments and means of expressing and realising a values structure of religious faith. So it is necessary to be clear about such values, their human context, and the possibility of invincible ignorance in people's estimation of the link between religious faith in God and Jesus and our western perspectives of sacramental theology. In our old dictum "sacramentum propter homines" (sacraments are for people), there is a real echo of Jesus' approach in the dispute about the sabbath: the sabbath is for man, not vice versa.

Among our Aboriginal brothers and sisters there are real pastoral pointers here relating to sacraments. On the one hand, for example, we baptise when anthropological, religious faith is judged favourable; on the other, we desist when there is little sign of that calculus which leads to acceptance of the transcendent data of Christian faith viz. interest in Jesus' example of service to others, or an appreciation of the value of prayer to God in a Christian mode as expressed, say, in the Mass. Likewise, and more pressingly, couples living in some kind of

marital relationship should be approached in a similar way, bearing in mind again the possibility of invincible ignorance of our sacramental marriage laws. We are in the realm of ideology (means) and human orientation is first found in faith: what are people wagering on as worthwhile; it is not found in our inherited criteria of sacramental laws and practices. *Sacramentum propter homines* echoes again, i.e. the possibility of Eucharist for those who may not be sacramentally married.

3. Religious Faith, Instruction, Practice in our Catholic School

In Kununurra St Joseph's School is almost as old as the parish itself, fair testimony to the role of teaching and instruction in the faith from an early age. In terms of the Aboriginal enrolment we must deal with the same elements of faith and ideology as proper to a cross-cultural school setting. The children of course, some baptised, some not, have already begun that calculus, albeit unconsciously, which will eventuate in some kind of anthropological faith, their wager on the worthwhile. Such calculus will naturally be affected by home and camp environment with all the fluidity and ambivalence noted in previous sections of this reflection. As an example, it is my hunch that very few past pupils have an appreciation of what we call the sacrament of marriage (ideology). But numerous young mothers with babies bear witness to a certain scale of values: it is worth having a baby, a sexual encounter, a love-affair, a lasting relationship. Again we need to be clear about faith and ideology. Catechetical Guidelines, (ideology), that suit a well ordered faith wager as expressed in our Bible stories with values such as Creation is good, Jesus is Redeemer, God blesses marriage, are inappropriate for faith wagering like that in the example above. Here the values are more like caring for babies, supporting-parent allowances and associated security. Not to start from a consideration of human experience like this will nullify any ideology of supposed Christian instruction.

A more favourable example might be found in an innovation called "Heart Talk," an ideology aimed at helping children realise the values of temperance and sobriety and peace of mind, all worthy objects of a faith wager. There is in such a program a recognition of the milieu in which children are growing up and in which their faith calculus must take place. It is a small project, but significant, and I wonder whether we see it as a model of faith-ideology to be followed on a wider front.

Towards the end of the volume "Faith and Ideologies", Segundo deals with the link between religious ideology and

wider culture as they might support or hinder religious faith. In view of the large investment of Church (parish) resources in education we should explore this link further as it touches the ethos of our Catholic school.

Popular religiosity, the mix of religion and culture, evolves with time. Where religion and culture are closely linked, or practically fused as they were in traditional Aboriginal life, or as they were in earlier Catholic parishes and schools, devotions, practices and celebrations readily emerge out of life as it is lived. Hence, for example, in earlier times May Devotions were a natural in our Christian Brothers Schools, and later on class Masses fitted comfortably into the school life from time to time. But when by historical accident or policy a school very closely mirrors that religious pluralism, denominational variety and secular inclination alluded to at the beginning of this article, the scene is quite different. There will be a variety of expressions of anthropological faith (not always religious!) in parents and children and therefore different ideologies will be called for. One ideology, such as the Catholic, with authorised religious instruction guidelines and class Masses could hardly be adequate.

One need not necessarily deplore such a development in a Catholic school. It does, after all, reflect contemporary society and our Church and mission are nowhere if they are not in the modern world.

So what do we do? Ideologies are always imperfect, the more so they are in tandem with cultural relics. As Segundo points out, Jesus founded a community (later the Church) on the basis of separating religious faith from an ideology being manipulated by or languishing in a controlling culture. Instead of presuming our school is a sacred place where Mass and the sacraments are immediately at home as ideologies, following the example of Jesus with the sabbath discussion we must start with the values which present and work towards ideologies that enhance them, if indeed they are worth enhancing. This is no easy task, but if we wish to relate to our Aboriginal brothers and sisters and others on an authentically human level we have no choice. And I repeat we are following the example of Jesus as pedagogue: repent, i.e. assess your store of values, and in the light of the kingdom, receive the Gospel. Or in the words of James' epistle, religion pure and undefiled is to go to the help of orphans and widows in their distress. (Cf James, 1.27).

We must remember too that any gains we might make in the school ethos will always be fragile while there is poor parental and community interest in the efforts of school personnel.

Outside influences like home entertainments, videos, TV, peers etc. can always militate to some degree. We can diminish that degree by looking for ideologies that include and involve parents and others in the wider home environment in which children move and live.

4. Catholic Social Teaching

There is no faith without ideology and vice versa. But in this sphere of religious and social value even the "Cedars of Lebanon" seem to be suspect. Segundo takes Dom Helder Camara to task over words attributed to Camara in a **CELAM** bulletin: "With the gospel message, the social encyclicals, Vatican II and Medellin, we have no need to appeal to any ideology to inspire us in our sacred commitment to foster human betterment." After establishing that the use of ideology here corresponds with his own, and pointing out that no society has implemented the social encyclicals in structural terms, Segundo proceeds with ruthless logic to reduce Camara's reported statement to an expression of bad faith. This is indeed shocking, and I wonder did Dom Helder ever reply.

But from this and many another local scene we get Segundo's message. When ideologies are elusive or too demanding, the challenge of life with its uncanny contours, suffering and injustice can remain safely contained in a corpus of social encyclicals. Just as Segundo's assailing of Camara seemed almost too hot to write about, so this local issue seems too difficult to pursue. We are only a small community and structures contain us almost as thoroughly as the forces of gravity hold us. And our Aboriginal brothers and sisters generally don't seem to be able to work like us. Such is our train of thought. And yet ideologies are never perfect. Maybe in some future parish projects our faith values structure might consider an ideology that includes opportunities for human betterment across the racial board with jobs and responsibilities and dignity for the unlikely ones.

CONCLUSION

At the end of Part I of Faith and Ideologies Segundo writes that it doesn't really matter whether we stay with his terminology or not. What does matter is that we do not diminish, confuse or divorce the anthropological dimensions of living to

which he applies them. By following his framework of faith/ideology in this article I believe the unfinished business in our parish can be seen a little more clearly with both its promise and its pitfalls.

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(Australia: Dove Communications)

* * * * *

SISTER AGATHA

Her voice is still like music about Wadeye.
Her joyfulness still lingers amidst the trees
for she will be remembered till the tide
stops muttering moments on the mangrove shore.

Even the cautious mud-crabs are not sure
for they pop their eyes in careful circumspection

She walked forth as a girl from tribal places
and hers was the longest journey of them all.
She brought her Dreaming from the Heart of Christ
to those with fading hopes and weary eyes.

Agatha of Wadeye, you are loved
and from our lives you have never walked away.

Rod Cameron osa

* * * * *

Sister Agatha fdnsc was born at Wadeye (Port Keats) in 1941. She became a nun and a nurae, working at East Arm, Daly River and Wadeye. Agatha encouraged the people to take a deep interest in their own culture. She organised bush holidays during which the people lived off the land and thrived on bush tucker. She was an expert at catching mud crabs. I became a personal friend of hers, meeting her first in Sydney and later in Cairns. She died of cancer at Wadeye in 1984 and is buried beside the church, next to the Founder of the mission, Fr Dick Docherty msc, and Fr John Flynn msc.

HUGO RAHNER'S ESSAYS (3)

The Christmas Sun (continued)

Dan O'Donovan

THE SECOND main contact-area between Christianity and the extra-biblical Sun-cult is found in the double birth festival of Jesus, Epiphany and Christmas. Here the relationship between dogmatic kernel and cultural wrapping is even more clear-cut than in the case of the Easter Sun.

The first forms of cultic celebration of the Christmas datum appear more than two hundred years after the Church's origins. This means that the simple, unadorned elements of christian belief concerning the human birth of Jesus - in the words of the Apostles' Creed: *Natus de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria virgine* - can be seen first in their distinctive purity. Then only, from that independent position, and as late as the third and fourth centuries of the Common Era, did the Church go on in self-assured thought and action to utilise existing Sun-cult forms in expression of its own Mystery liturgically.

Faith in the genuinely human but virginal birth of the Messiah is closely connected with his resurrection, itself a first beginning: "Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him..." (Rom 6,9). In rising from the dead he was born into a new lifestyle. As Horace had written in his "*Carmen saeculare*" to the "*Almus Sol*": "*aliusque et idem nasceris*" (You are born the same, and other).

In the New Testament resurrection and birth are linked. The Easter morning Victor is "the first-born from the dead" (Col 1,18; Rev 1,5); and Paul applies directly to the risen Jesus the words of Psalm 2: "You are my son, today have I begotten you." (Acts 13,33).

Fr Dan O'Donovan continues his writings on Hugo Rahner.

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We have heard Clement of Alexandria sing of Christ as "Sun of the resurrection". He goes on "...begotten before the day-star, emitting life in his rays," (an obvious allusion to both Psalm 110,3 and Mal 4,2).

The tomb is like a womb: both are the night out of which the sun arises. I am tempted here to draw in comparisons with Australian Aboriginal initiation ceremonial which would be much to the point and of lively interest; but must resist for reasons of space. Perhaps another time. Or someone else could do it, preferably an initiated Aborigine.

In the greco-roman world we are considering, a birthday was seen as a sunrise. Already Plutarch: "sunlight is the symbol of birth."²² And again the christian Clement: "Sunrise is the picture of the day of birth."²³ So it is that the sunrise of Christ's Easter birth completes the Light-mystery begun on the night of his birth in Bethlehem as "light for revelation to the Gentiles" (Lk 2,32; cf. Isa 42,6; 49,6).

The "Sun-day child" was specially blessed by christian and gentile alike. Tomb-inscriptions expressly mention persons' being born or dying on the "dies Solis". One inscription tells of a christian child born on a Sunday who was named "Heliopais" (Sun-child).

On Bathurst and Melville Islands off the north coast of Australia, Tiwi parents have from time immemorial made a cultic oblation of their newborn babes to the sun. This ceremony usually takes place when the child is three days old. The photo here, by courtesy of Fr John Leary, shows a contemporary christianised version of this ancient custom. In the icon painting of the christian East, the same dark cavern encloses the Redeemer - as infant in the Nativity icon and as Crucified Servant in the Entombment.

The Baptismal font is similarly regarded as both womb and tomb. The person who goes down into it emerges "a new creature" (2 Cor 5,17). The Paschal Vigil, filled with the light of the nocturnal Sun Jesus, is truly a birth-night; the neophytes are "newborn babes" (artigenneta brephe, 1 Pet 2,2).

There is thus a doctrinal connection between Easter and Christmas. In regard to liturgical forms it may be said that the Christmas festival, which was the later in taking shape, was modelled on the older Easter celebration, their common ground being the established symbolism of the sun. This is used in the dramatisation of the Mystery of both nights in express opposition to the sun-cult content, and yet in undoubted relationship to it.



Jesus is, forever now, "the brightness of [God's] glory" (Heb 1,3); and the newly baptised, enlightened by his divine rays, are "children of light" (Eph 5,8; 1 Thess 5,5).

Christmas is an anticipation of Easter, the opening of a spring-time, a festival of the Sun.

1. The Epiphany

The early Church efforts at giving the Saviour's birthday a cultic form could not, as in the case of Sunday and Easter, appeal to a biblically determined day of the calendar year. Scripture and tradition are equally silent concerning the month and day of the Christmas event. Even the year in which it happened can be reckoned only after a diligent weighing of certain statements in the Gospel accounts leading, still today, to no more than plausible conclusions.

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The Church dealt with the subject either by following a highly artificial biblical-allegorical method which results in quite a variety of conjectured dates, or by concentrating rather on the Easter prototype and the application of the sun symbolism likewise to the birth of Jesus. One example of this last is a text called "De Pascha computus", from the year 243 written by an African cleric. It comes therefore from a time in which we can find no trace yet of a proper Christmas celebration and when the Church was still preoccupied with arriving at a correct dating of Easter. Built upon the already established symbolism of the Easter Sun, this artistic allegorical computation of the day of Christ's birth starts out from the premise that the first day of Creation coincided with the vernal equinox on March 25; and that hence on the fourth day, that is March 28, God made the sun and moon. The author then runs through the entire Old Testament allegorically, finally reaching the conclusion: "ad diem nativitatis Christi pervenimus, qui invenitur... quinto Kalendas Aprilis feria quarta" (we will come to the day of Christ's birth, which occurs...on Wednesday, the fifth of the Kalends of April). Jesus is thus born on 28 March, four days after the vernal equinox, and on the same fourth day on which God had once created sun and moon. At this point the writer breaks out of his habitual laconic style to exclaim, "O quam praeclara et divina providentia, ut in illo die quo factus est Sol, in ipsodie nasceretur Christus, quinto Kalendas Aprilis feria quarta. Et ideo de ipso merito ad plebem dicebat Malachias Propheta: orietur vobis Sol iustitiae." ²⁴ (Oh, how glorious and divine is the Lord's providence, that on that very day on which the Sun was made Christ should be born, the fifth of the Kalends of April, Wednesday. And so Malachi the prophet rightly declared to the people: for you the Sun of righteousness will arise).

Already here, before the formation of any Christmas liturgy, Christmas Day is the birthday of the Sun; so that the whole life of Jesus to his death and resurrection is in this naively-spun, but deep, christian proclamation, one single mystery of the Sun.

You may smile at this as childish or light-weight stuff. But one needs to remember that in the course of that third century - we are in the time still of the State persecution of Christians - the ancient Heliolatry was gaining in popularity through the neoplatonic theosophy and through the Mysteries of Isis and of Mithras, both of which have taken on solar emphases. It was this that pressed the Christian Church in the Greek-speaking East, in conscious contention with Sun-worship, to initiate a common celebration of the Birth of Jesus, probably towards the close of the third century.

This common celebration, we can say surely enough though not with certainty, took its first form in Alexandria and the East as the Epiphany. It was fixed for January 6, and was a protest against the heathen sun-festivals which occurred on that date. For January 6 was the day of the winter solstice according to the old Egyptian reckoning when the winter darkness had passed and the sun began again its growing process. It was only with the Julian reform that the date of the solstice was more accurately placed on December 25. The content of the solar festivity was therefore the "genethlios Hēliou", the birthday of Sun.

The christian feast was a declaration then that Jesus Christ was born of the virgin Mary and that with his "appearing" or "becoming present" (parousia), his epiphany on earth, the true Sun has come up. "Epiphaneia" was already the non-christian hellenistic description of the birthday of God. The coming of Jesus in the flesh was consequently seen by Christians as the Epiphany (cf. Titus 2,11; 3,4; 2 Tim 1,10). In the fourth century when we can examine this feast more exactly, the Nativity of Jesus is always named "epiphaneia" or "theophaneia".

Clement of Alexandria has preserved us the information that, in his day, a group of followers of Basilides the Gnostic celebrated on January 6 a feast of the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan,²⁵ - a further confirmation of the fact that January 6 was for the Church universal the feast of the birth of Jesus. Because, the Gnostics maintained that what most mattered was not the fleshly birth of Jesus, but his spiritual birth in the Jordan when the Spirit descended upon him and the Father's voice was heard saying (according to one reading of Lk 3,22): "You are my Son, this day have I begotten you" - the same words applied by Paul to the "birth" of the risen Christ at Easter. For early christian theology, itself resting upon this reading which from the second century came to be the more widely accepted, the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan was a "birth", not in the gnostic sense, but in the sense of an "epiphany", a divine authentication of Jesus as the only-begotten of God.

We can see then that the origin of the feast of January 6 as introduced in the wider Church, besides being a protest against collateral Sun statements, (Dionysos, Mithras, the "dromena" of the Eleusinian mysteries etc.), was also a disclaimer of the Gnostic denial of the divinity of the Child born of Mary.

2. Christmas

The sun cult of late antiquity against which the christian Epiphany drew itself up, had taken on in the course of the third

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century in Rome, at the political instigation of the Caesars, a stature amounting to State religion. The Christian reaction was here the same: first the clear rejection, the de-throning of the Sun; then the consecration and the welcoming acceptance, but on the Gospels' own terms. The result is the existence and the liturgical shape of our December 25 Christmas, still acknowledged today, in some measure, by Christian and non-Christian alike.

To understand the spiritual climate in which the Church, during the peaceful period between the persecutions of Decius and Diocletian when the Caesars' Sun-worship must have been felt by Christians as an increasing threat, one would need to take one's stand in the great Temple of Sol on the Campus Agrippae, built by the Emperor Aurelian after his victory over Palmyra with its regal Collegium of the Pontifex Sol, and watch all the bombast of the new imperial holiday which from now on, on December 25 the day of the solstice, was celebrated as the *Natalis Invicti* (Birthday of the Unconquered; i.e. the Sun-Emperor, a reminder of Egypt with its old Sun-Pharaoh; or, closer to us, Japan's late Emperor Hirohito). One would need further to read in the fragment from Cornelius Labeo, preserved for us by Macrobius, how this theologian of the Hēlios-Sol sun-cult places this deity beside the Jewish Jao and Dionysos; to say nothing of the Mithraic tidal-wave from the East affecting in particular the Roman army.

It is thus an entry profoundly symptomatic of this last Church-Suncult confrontation, that the so-called Chronograph for the year 345 conveys to us, under one date, December 25:

VIII. Kalendas Januarias Natalis Invicti.

VIII. Kalendas Januarias natus Christus in Bethlehem Judeae.²⁶

This calendar notice tells us that at that time, in the year 354 in Rome on December 25 there was one single liturgical celebration of Christ's birth. In fact, from other data of the Chronographer we know that this was the case in 336 and indeed that the African Donatists held the same feast on the same day; leading us to conclude that it was already celebrated before the onset in Rome of the persecution of Diocletian.

Thus the origin of the feast can be traced to the close of the third century, that is to say almost the same time as the origin in the East of the Epiphany, both arising from the liturgical and apologetic exigencies of that long halcyon period which preceded the last persecution. Both are the Church's strongest response to that so widespread inclination in the Mediterranean world, which no religion escaped, to worship the Sun.

One particularly interesting Latin tract has come down to us, probably from the first decades of the fourth century. It deals with the question of the winter solstice and its bearing on the Nativity of Jesus. Toward the end, and under the date of December 25 we read:

Sed et Invicti Natalem appellant. Quis utique tam Invictus nisi Dominus noster qui mortem subactam devicit? Vel quod dicant Solis esse Natalem: ipse est Sol iustitiae, de quo Malachias propheta dixit: orietur vobis timentibus nomen ipsius Sol iustitiae et sanitas in pennis eius.

(But they also call it the Birthday of the Unconquered. Who indeed is so unconquered as our Lord who, subjected to death, yet overcame? Or, that they say that it is the Birthday of the Sun: he is the Sun of righteousness of whom Malachiah the prophet pronounced: for you who fear his name the Sun of righteousness will rise with healing in his wings.)

We hear the echoes in this passage of the same paean which in far-off Syria Ephrem sang on the feast of the Epiphany, still unaware of the Nativity celebration of December 25:

Vanquished is the winter darkness
to show that Satan is overcome.
Triumphs the sun, proclaiming
that his victory honours the Only-begotten.

To catch the full flavour of this hymn one needs to bear in mind that Ephrem's homeland, Syria, was a hotbed of the old sun-cult: Baalbeck-Heliopolis, Emesa, Palmyra - all these towns paid homage to the Sun well into Constantinian times.

The new liturgical creation of fourth century Rome was slow enough to displace in the East the established Epiphany as the Church's preferred celebration of the Lord's Birth. In one of Jerome's homilies to his monks in Bethlehem one gets the feel of the tension involved in the transition. He had brought with him from Rome the custom of honouring the Birth of Jesus on December 25, but discovered that in the East the January 6 feast was still in vogue. Playfully he taunts at the conservatism of Jerusalem and Bethlehem Christians who claimed to be keeping alive in the January 6 dating a genuine local tradition of historic value. Jerome (Homilies on the Lord's Birth) points out that Nature itself

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with its solstice favoured the Roman order:

Even creatures vindicate our preaching, the cosmos testifies to the truth of our word. Up to now (December 25), the dark days grow long; but from this day on the darkness starts to lift. Light increases, night gives way. Day grows longer, error falls away, truth arises. For, today is born to us the Sun of Righteousness.

In announcing the weakening of error Jerome has in mind especially worship of the Sun, still very much alive even in Rome. Emperor Julian attempted to reinstate Hēlios as Dominus Imperii; and the revered sanctuary of Adonis on the Janiculum had its devotees, seeking comfort and salvation in the solar pantheism of their Syrian avatar.

We can understand from this with what thoughts Jerome took part in the Nativity feast there in the cave of Bethlehem - the same cave in fact which from Emperor Hadrian's time had itself been a sanctuary of Adonis (Epistola 31,3; cf. Paulinus of Nola). In one letter he writes: "Bethlehem, which now is ours, and the most venerable place in the whole world, was once shaded by the groves of Tammuz, that is to say, Adonis. And the cave where once Christ cried as a babe, rang out with lamentations for the Beloved of Venus (Epistola 58,3).

Even at a time when the old mystery religions were dead, the Church's renouncing and accepting of that Sun-consciousness still continued on through its Nativity celebration. For what survived in people's mind was not only the setting aside of December 25 as the Dies Natalis and Sol novus, but also the same religious awe with which their ancestors had stood before the wonder of the heavens, the regular cycles of Hēlios in particular. The Church consecrated this vision in the mystery of Christmas: "Begotten of the Father, Christ is the maker of every day; born of the mother, he blessed this day", said Augustine in a Christmas homily.³¹

The christian greek East accepted the Roman Nativity toward the end of the fourth century. Gregory Nazianzen personally introduced it at Constantinople; and his first Christmas homily declared: "Once again, the dark winter shadows weaken. Once again, the light mounts on high."³² Chrysostom celebrated the feast for the first time in Antioch. For him it is the "metropolis", the light-source and the rising of all subsequent feasts.³³ In Alexandria, Christmas took over the Council of Ephesus in 431.

In Rome while the thirty runners in the *Agōn Solis* (Sun-contest) raced through the Circus, while people everywhere on the *Natalis* lit fires of happiness and bowed reverentially to the rising sun, the Church celebrated its own Sun-festival. In the middle of the fifth century, Pope Leo counselled his listeners to bow their heads from the steps of St Peter's basilica to the sun as it rose: "Before entering the basilica of the holy apostle Peter, climb the steps, turn bodily toward the rising sun, and with bowed neck, humble yourself in honour of that radiant orb."³⁴ And he concludes his Christmas homily with a hymn to the beauty of that heavenly body which is yet only an image of the light of Christ: "Let the light of that heavenly body fall on your bodily senses, but with all the love of your soul embrace that Light which enlightens everyone coming into this world."³⁵

One last testimony, that of Bishop Maximus of Turin in a Christmas homily of the mid-fifth century, is worth recording:

Wisely do people call this holy birthday of the Lord "Sol novus"; and indeed so wholeheartedly that Jews and non-believers also find agreement in this name. Willingly we comply. For, with the coming of the Saviour not only is the wellbeing of the whole human race renewed, but the bright rays of the sun also. If the sun was darkened at the Passion of Christ, it has to shine with special splendence at his birth.³⁶

That brings us to the entrance of the Middle Ages. In its Christmas liturgy the Church hands on antiquity's now consecrated love of the sun to the peoples of the north. The Gothic Missal, that Sacramentary which in the seventh century was prayer book to the Franks, begins the midnight Mass of December 25 with the words: "You have risen for us, Jesus Christ, as veritable Sun of righteousness. From heaven you have descended as Redeemer of the human race."³⁷

Today, out of the Old World's treasure-trove, the Church continues to transmit the precious and the good:

Deus qui hanc sacratissimam noctem veri luminis fecisti illustratione clarescere, da quaesumus, ut cuius lucis mysteria in terra cognovimus, eius quoque gaudis in caelo perfruamur.

(God, who have brightened this most sacred night by the illumination of the true light, grant we beseech

you, that we who acknowledge this light on earth may come to the joy also of possessing him in heaven.)

(to be continued)

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26. *Corpus Inscriptionum latinarum*, I,1.
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28. Jerome, *Homilies on the Lord's Birth*.
29. This information from Paulinus of Nola, *Epistola* 31,3.
30. Jerome, *Epistola* 58,3.
31. Augustine, *Sermo* 194, In *Natali Domini*, 11,1.
32. Greg. Naz., *Oratio* 38,2.
33. Chrysostom, *Homily in S. Philogonium*.
34. Leo M.; *Sermo* 27, In *Nativitate Domini*, 7,4.
35. *Ibid.*, 7,6.
36. Maximus, Christmas homily, 2. At the end there is a hymnic song of praise to Christ as "Sol novus".
37. *Missale Gothicum*, in *Nativitate Domini*.

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From the Secretary's Desk. . .

This is a quite exciting edition for me. I am determined, after much patient tuition from Fr Martin Wilson on the computer, to produce my contribution in column-form for issue 42! I wonder how it will turn out and what you will think of it?

During the Xmas holidays we took a run to Douglas Park to meet Fr Frank Andersen msc and his happy band of six workers who are giving yeoman service in the community; this was followed by a few days spent with Dr and Mrs David Morgan in their beautiful cliff-top home at Rosedale, soaking up the sun on my favourite beach and being treated like royalty by Irene and David; then a quick visit to Merriwa where Miss Bette McNamara made us very comfortable in her homestead while the temperature outside on the property was 43 degrees C! And in between all this, I was hard at it learning the new version of WordStar 5.5 in an attempt to produce an improved **Nelen Yubu** for our readers.

Messages poured into NYMU over Christmas, for which we thank you. Amongst them, news from Sr Elsie Flicker fdnsc of Santa Teresa who hoped to visit Sydney during the holidays, prior to taking up duties at Alice Springs. Greetings from Sr Kay McPadden rsj

at Lake Cargelligo; and Sr Céline Auton, Melville Island; Sr Monica fdnsc and Brother Groves msc of Daly River; also from Sr Elizabeth fmm, Palm Island. Fr Terry Naughton msc of Douglas Park wrote "Dear Swaggie Keren" which I thought delightful: he'd obviously been reading my last column in **Nelen Yubu**! To Mrs P Knight of Kurmond NSW our thanks for your donation. And to those who asked us to take note of change of address: that has been attended to.

A special treat for us was a visit to Leura from Fr Claude Mostowik msc who brought Sr Annette Barron fdnsc to dinner one Sunday evening. Fr Claude came twice so my cooking couldn't have been as bad as I imagined. We all certainly enjoyed our reunion.

Prayers

We have a special request for prayers for nine novices who have gone to Douglas Park this year. Our prayerful support is essential if they, and all other students for the priesthood, are to continue steadfastly in their vocation. We won't let them down.

Congratulations and best wishes to Fr Rod Cameron osa, Mareeba, Qld, who has celebrated his 40th year in the priesthood in 1990. He was

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ordained in Washington, USA, on 9 February 1950. A Mass, followed by refreshments was held in the local hall of St James' parish, Coorparoo, Brisbane on Sunday 18 February to mark the occasion. Thank you for the invitation to attend, Father, but I am at the wrong end of the Continent at present!

Min Min Light:

I have been to Mareeba and mooched about in North Queensland, and am reminded of a strange thing that happened to me once as we crossed the Channel country in that State. Travelling by car from Darwin, we had left Mt Isa, and were heading towards Chartres Towers, driving for hours across a grim stark plain with only the tip of a mountain emerging on the horizon hundreds of kilometres away. Watching from the passenger's seat in desultory fashion, I was suddenly alerted to a weird sighting — around the edge of that distant mountain came the flash of a Min Min light! There was no mistaking it: I can see it still. It lingered in the sky, scintillating and gleaming. It was a Min Min light alright and in broad daylight! Silvery, pulsing, poised for an instant in mid-air, I saw this famous phenomenon which has never been seen in daylight before! Shouting to Fr Wilson I pointed to the shining object — but he couldn't see it and because he had missed it, refused to be-

lieve in it. He tells me now I have his full authority to quote him right here in my Column that there was no Min Min light that morning! He insists if there were any flash at all, it was from a car or truck! Coming around the edge of a far-off isolated mountain with no roads or habitation, and halfway up in the sky? I tried to convince him it had really been there. He thought the heat was affecting me. I know strange things happen in the desert, but had there been an Aborigine with us he would have seen it without any doubt. The truth is the driver was just too late to witness this amazing occurrence. However, I know what I saw: it was a Min Min light in the middle of the day, shining in ethereal beauty in far north Queensland — and I saw it!

Best wishes to all for a happy and rewarding Easter.

Secretary Keren