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THE PILOT EDITION of *Nelen Yubu* issued forth into the world 14 September 1978. It comprised six A4 pages laboriously typed out by myself on an Adler golf-ball typewriter and photocopied at St John's College, Darwin. At that stage it was called *Tracks*, that is, marks along the "good (*yubu*) way (*nelen*)". The weak pun soon palled; also a rather racist review with the same name had started up in the Territory; the result was that I looked for another name. We renamed the "Nelen Yubu Institute" itself as the "Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit" and its review *Nymuna* by way of acronym with 'in Northern Australia' being added. It kept this name for several issues. At the instigation of the then Provincial Superior, Dennis Murphy, we moved into professional typesetting and printing with no.5 (1980). Such a dramatic move was marked by the final change of name into *Nelen Yubu*.

Between numbers 1 and 2 the Unit doubled in size. Keren Calvert took pity on me as I was tick-tacking my way into no.2 and she offered to help me for six months. She had been working as secretary at Bathurst Island for several years after her husband's death, and also a few months at Kalumburu. She was on her way home to Leura when she was brought on a visit to Daly River. Keren always finds it hard to turn her back on someone in need. On 27 July 1979 she began a 'temporary' period of secretarial work at Nelen Yubu ... which is still going on. Thirteen years! She peregrinated around the Territory with Nelen Yubu (Daly River, Santa Teresa, Darwin, Melville Island). Keren returned home to Leura in 1986 while I was travelling around Australia on my 'PICT' survey, and since that time she has continued to prepare camera-ready copy and look after production, mailing and subscriptions. Besides that she began (at my instigation, I believe) a column of her own, "From the Secretary's Desk". This brought a personal element into the magazine that many readers have responded favourably to. I have often been told that 'Sec. Desk' is what people read first.

Our first printer was Spectrum Publications (Richmond, Vic.). Spectrum did the typesetting and provided a lot of technical advice and service from no.5 (1980) to no.46 (1991). For this we thank Henry Rohr. After Henry's sudden death early in 1991 we began to use Mountain Press in Springwood (NSW). This was particularly convenient as by this time I had

shifted residence from Northern Territory to Drummoyne (Sydney). The only other technical detail worth noting was a change in size from 9.5" x 6.75" to the more economical 8" x 5.75" at no.28.

With this no.50 issue we present also a cumulative index 1-50 as a separate booklet.

We believe that *Nelen Yubu* has offered a special service. It saw *Anthropos* as its model in the sense that both present themselves as organs for expression and publication by people actually involved in mission outreach—whether as evangelisers or as people being evangelised. *Nelen Yubu* has also made the development of the Aboriginal church its special field. Over the years most contributions have been made by missionary people. At the same time it is worth noting that 13 contributions have come from Aboriginal people themselves. Our most prolific contributor has been Dan O'Donovan (32 items)—a few more than my own if you don't count Editorials and Reviews. Eugene Stockton, eleven; also eleven Daly River Centre Reports (Mary McGowan & John Leary); eleven poems by Rod Cameron; six articles from the field by Clare Ahern and Noel McMaster each; five contributions from Frank Brennan.

Issue 51 will mark a change. Australia Post is phasing out its Registered Publications category, to be replaced by Print Post. This nonchalant bit of bureaucratic domination will triple our postal charges. Our publication is too small to qualify for Print Post. This is the way economic "Dries" wipe out the small man and the small businesses. We intend to protest, but would not entertain much hope. We are reluctant to raise our prices. Our readers in the Aboriginal apostolate, the main ones in our clientele, are generally pretty close to the poor they serve in their own economic circumstances. One way of coping would be to cut back on one number each year, making it three instead of four, thus saving one lot of printing and posting costs. We could increase the number of pages per issue without affecting our postal category. So, we would be giving more, with slightly less frequency. Also, we will have to restrain our generosity. A number of people have been receiving complimentary copies from the beginning, of whom a few have quite spontaneously sent us their subscription fee nonetheless. We shall have to ask the other recipients of "No Charge" copies to please do the same! We shall also have to do something about the \$1700 owing to us in arrears.

So, we launch forth into the next 50 issues!

TALK ABOUT SPIRITUALITY

Eugene D. Stockton

Marisa Gallo

HERE IS SOMETHING *Nelen Yubu* readers might like to try out. If you are associated with an Aboriginal community and have their confidence, you may care to stimulate senior members to discuss their spirituality. The following may provide a basis or model for discussion, but feel free to choose other formats, questions or language. With the permission of the participants, the results might then be communicated to other readers through *Nelen Yubu*, so that this journal might become the means of building up an understanding of Aboriginal spirituality, especially among church workers.

What follows is the text of a discussion paper prepared for an AICC (NSW) conference held at Riverstone (2.11.91), together with a summary of the discussion. Marisa helped plan the questions and recorded the discussion, with the permission of the gathering. Eugene's publications (Stockton 1990a;1991) which formed the basis of the paper are given in the bibliography at the end [p.13], together with more recent writing on the subject of Aboriginal spirituality — again readers might write in to tell of other titles they have come across so as to build up a file of valuable material for ongoing discussion.

Fr Eugene Stockton is wellknown to *Nelen Yubu* readers. He is pastoral assistant to the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in the Sydney area. He combines this role with that of pastor of Riverstone parish within the Parramatta diocese.

DISCUSSION PAPER

At the annual conferences of the AICC in Queensland, a highlight of the meetings was the traditional discussions on Aboriginal Spirituality. At some of our NSW conferences similar discussions have proved most valuable. Things we hold deep in our hearts are good to be brought out in the open and to be shared among friends, as a way of affirming and strengthening our culture. These are things we want to pass on to our children (threatened as they are by other cultural influences) so they grow up strong in their own culture. It is also good to be able to say to the Church, 'This is our spirituality', so that the Church will recognise us as a spiritual people, deserving of a special place in the Church.

The following points were published by Fr Eugene in a theological magazine. The language is rather difficult because it was written for theologians, in their way of speaking. But they may help to get discussion going. Each point is followed by questions, not to force you to come up with a lot of answers, but to help you start thinking and later to share in discussion. You may disagree with some points or want them worded in a different way. The main thing is to let us get talking on something which is very important to us.

1. Basis in Creation

Traditional religion highlights primordial creation, the Dreaming, when ancestral spirits, in human and animal form, went about shaping the land and its inhabitants as we now know them. At the end of their labours they were transformed into animals or natural features. The life force they released at the beginning is still given off at special places, for Dreaming time still compenetrates the present. They also left a law for each species to live by and to ensure continuing life. Life, whether daily or pre-eminently ceremonial, is a celebration of creation.

Do you feel comfortable with this statement?

Is ceremony still important today, as it was in the past (parties, funerals, Christmas, christian services)? – Is ceremony a highpoint of celebration, that goes on in ordinary life?

Do you feel the Creator God/Spirit/Ancestors are still at work today?

Or, to put it in other words, is creation like a burst of energy (life force) which continues in its effects today?

2. Egalitarian World View

This contrasts with the typically Western view of the world as hierarchically ordered (reflected in politics, religion, science, language, etc.) It is not exactly a flat world perspective, because although all are equal, some appear as seniors among equals. There is evidence to suggest that a family model best describes their understanding of the world. Anthropologists have debated the belief in high gods among Aborigines, but the question may have been poorly posed, since the sense of the numinous is more diffuse, less focused than in Western hierarchical thinking. The English word 'Providence' may suggest an approximation. With the intense interest in new religious ideas (firmly documented at European contact), Aborigines seemed to be 'waiting for God to happen', like the diffuse light before the dawn.

Is God for you 'up there' or 'all around you'?

Could you sit comfortably with God the Father around a campfire, sharing good things to eat and drink?

Do you feel all people are equal?

If yes, is that consistent with greater respect for elders?

How do you as an individual relate to your parents?

3. Reverence for Land

The land is not just the surface but the whole of the biosphere and beyond, from the earth's crust to the heavenly bodies, a living conscious cosmos. There is a profound sense of its sacredness and, we might say, sacramentality. In the land the ancestral spirits left a world full of signs of their beneficent intent for humans, and especially through sacred sites and tracks transmit the life forces of the Dreaming. Not only the sacred places but the whole land is contoured with greater or less sacredness. It is pervaded with the numinous and is for Aborigines the source of transcendence.

Would you think it right to put sacred objects straight on the ground?

If you sat on the ground or placed your baby on the ground, do you think

the soil makes you dirty or whole (holy)?

Do you ever go into the bush and sit on the ground to renew the life force within you?

4. Identity with Land

The sense of being one with the land contrasts to the Western sense of humankind being distinct from and standing over against an inanimate setting. The typical expression 'I am the land' is no metaphor for emotional solidarity but understands the person as an articulate part of the whole. Through the earth as mother a person has a kinship with all living things (and all things are alive). The land is not to be exploited nor needlessly disturbed for short term advantage, for it is more important than any resource it contains, but the resources it offers can be culled as needed. The human role toward the land is one of care and stewardship, as traditionally exercised in ceremony and by firing practices.

Do you really feel a kinship with all things through the land as your mother and father?

Does this make you want to care for the land as your mother, and for all living things as your relations?

Would you say your sense of being one with the universe goes so far as to say 'all that is part of me and I am part of all this'?

5. Harmony with the Land and all Living Things

It is believed that each part of the cosmos is responsible for the law of its own kind, and respects the law of others. This law was ordained in the Dreaming and is written in the landscape as a set of moral principles to nurture the life of the whole and of its parts — the preservation and enhancement of life is the ultimate criterion of morality in Aboriginal law. The preservation of life demands the preservation of relationships between the parts within a self-reproducing cosmos. Each part is autonomous, neither dominant nor subservient to others. Where opposition arises the attempt is not to destroy but to contain, each part being kept in balance with the others and in equilibrium of power. The autonomous parts are yet interdependent, each acting and reacting with others, and in so doing each tests the limits of its boundaries. This harmony calls for discipline to conform one's life to the pattern set by tradition.

Do you feel that in the conduct of your life you are not simply doing what you like but guided by a law bigger than yourself?

Do you feel other beings are directed by laws which are similar but different from your own?

Do you think these laws under which all living things live and move make for consistency, harmony, mutual care and respect?

If you are being bothered by an animal (e.g. possum in the roof, barking dogs) is your instinct to kill it or restrain it in its own place?

Is life (its preservation and betterment) the most important test of moral upright conduct?

When competing with another (e.g. in sport) do you look for a complete win over him or to be evenly balanced with him?

6. Assent to Life as Given

This is the mood of accepting life as a mixture of good and bad, of joy and suffering, and that it has been such from the beginning. Aborigines share the Hebrew insight that what exists is good per se, but can go wrong, that evil is an inescapable condition of existence, a flaw in an otherwise good system. On a clear day, everything is bathed in sunlight but each thing casts a shadow. Submitting to what is and not quarrelling with one's environment (patience) leads to simplicity and contentment. This is not the same as passive resignation, for there is enthusiasm for living, a readiness to celebrate it as it is, a will to survive and to pass on the baton of life to the next generation. Continuity is valued over revolution. I have been curious why Aborigines are so apologetic about swearing, and have wondered whether it is felt to fall short of the ideal of assenting to life.

Is evil accepted as a part of life?

Are you angry at the unhappy circumstances in your life?

Is life worth living, to the extent you want to hand it on to the next generation?

7. Timelessness

Europeans are puzzled by Aboriginal sense of time, with a concept of Dreaming time as an 'everywhen' (i.e. an heroic past compenetrating the now), little idea of historic time (spanning back only a couple of generations) and hardly any appreciation of

future-oriented values e.g. wealth, security, career (probably the result of millennia of hunter-gatherer activity which offers little opportunity for economic storage strategies). There is a care to pass on to the next generation a 'country' that is in as good a shape as when it was received. But it is the present moment which is all important, and one takes from it and gives to it what one can. With little sense of past and future, of irretrievable duration of time as measured by the clock, or of time as an external frame in which experience is poured and calibrated, one does not become bored or impatient. The readiness to wait, part of the givenness of life, is remarkable, as also the flexibility to change direction as the need arises. There is acute sensitivity to a quickening pace of life, to deadlines and to 'pressures' to hurry, even in the face of clear advantage.

Is time progressive (linear) so that as time goes on you pass by events which will never occur again?

Or is time like the seasons (cyclic) so that history keeps repeating itself?

Or is time stationary, an eternal, everpresent now, full of creativity (of the Dreaming)?

How real is past and present by comparison with the present moment?

Do White people with their urgent sense of time put pressure on you, even when they want to 'do good'?

If you want something good and pleasurable, do you want it now?

8. Priority of Persons over Things

Aborigines find it hard to understand the European value system, which is ready to sacrifice life and persons for political causes, material things, position and power. Personal and family values are what matter most. Conversation is a highly developed art form with attention not only to words but to body language — listening to the speaker, not just to his speech. On the arrival of a stranger, the interest is in his personal details (name, kinsfolk, country) rather than in his category (work, rank, etc.) — the newcomer often has the feeling of being 'desystematised'. At meetings the minority position is closely attended to, for the desire is not for a majority decision but consensus.

Have you ever wondered at the sort of things white people go after, by contrast with what are important to you?

- List the most important things in the two value systems, black and white.
- What are some 'personal and family values' for you?
- What do you look for in conversation with close friends and relations?
- What are the first things you want to find out in a newcomer?

9. Hospitality and Sharing

This is probably the best known Aboriginal quality, but it is not so well known that it is less a matter of sharing goods, as of sharing debts. A community is bonded by a network of mutual indebtedness. It operates primarily in a family setting, but family is a fluid perception extending to distant relations, 'countrymen' and indeed anyone of goodwill. There is no room for gratitude, for how can one be thanked for giving what is due. Hospitality and sharing founds a network of care, which affords the individual security against unexpected misfortune. Sadly this ideal comes to grief with alcoholism and with the expectations of modern living.

If you have only just enough food and bedding for your family and an unexpected visitor calls, what would you do?

Would you feel shame if you turned that person away?

If you were travelling and at night-time found yourself in a town where you had friends or relations, would you think twice about asking to stay overnight?

Name some of the people you (or your family) call uncle, aunt, brother, sister, who are not really related to you.

How does an alcoholic member of the family upset the sharing ideals of the family – how does he endanger the Koori culture of the family?

Someone has said TV is the greatest intrusion of white culture in the Koori home – does it make the children want things which Koories do not normally look for?

10. Creative Accommodation to Adversity

In recording the traumatic post-contact period it is significant that historians have shifted in depicting the Aboriginal reaction from one of passivity, through resistance, to a positive mode of seeking some kind of harmonious modus vivendi. In conditions of relative powerlessness (e.g. missions, stations) there is evidence that Aborigines have 'tested the limits of their boundaries', to find loopholes of control and advantage. This characteristic has

something of 'rolling with the punches' and of 'making the best of it'.

Adversity can mean death of a loved one, trouble with the police, trouble at school, a quarrel, a telephone or power bill, racism (things over which you have not much control) – think of some recent experiences of this kind to show whether your usual reaction is

- a) to take it
- b) to oppose it
- c) to live with it as best you can

What did you do and was it successful?

11. Earthy Honesty

Aborigines value what is real, and have little time for the romantic and the dramatic (although in cross-cultural situations it may be felt advisable to play along with it, while seeing through it). Again they feel no need to maintain what is irrelevant, simply for the sake of form. However, a misunderstanding of how Aborigines represent the facts or their general tendency to share often results in blame for dishonesty.

These days there is a lot of news about Aborigines (arts, protests, enquiries, politics) – does some of it make you ashamed because it doesn't put the case the way it really is? What are some cases of gammon in the wider society?

In some recent cases where you had to go through bureaucratic procedure (e.g. hospital, school, court, social security office) what parts of it did you feel was unnecessary, irrelevant, sham?

12. Humour

Aborigines relaxing among themselves show a great sense of fun. They love to deflate self-importance, taking oneself too seriously or supposed urgency. It is disconcerting to hear one joke even about tragic or bitter experiences – probably such black humour helps for survival in defusing the seriousness of an otherwise crushing situation. Humour is an important aid to keep a sense of reality.

In the two items above (adversity, unreality) do you find yourself poking fun at times, even though they are serious matters?

At home, or among Koori families, do you come across a lot of fun and laughter?

What sort of things do Koories make jokes about?

Can you recall examples of where a sense of humour helped you pull through a serious matter?

13. Celebration

I like to describe celebration as a communal act of heightened meaning affirming links with a significant event. In traditional religion ceremony, associated with story, song, dance, art and pilgrimage, brought people into life-giving contact, merging on identity, with primordial creation and its release of life force. In anticipation and retelling, ceremony overflowed into daily living, making for an almost continuous party spirit to celebrate life. Modern Aborigines still love to travel long distances for big occasions, such as funerals, christian conventions, sporting carnivals, artistic gatherings.

When there is to be a big Koori get-together (a funeral, football match, ball etc.) do you find yourself going because you are expected to or because you are keen for any excuse to come together?

Are you energised by such gatherings?

Do you feel the way we 'live it up' on such occasions is the way we should live our ordinary lives?

Is there a kind of 'party spirit' in our ordinary lives and meetings?

14. Dadirri

In a much publicised address to liturgists in Hobart, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr (1988) claimed this as the greatest gift of the Aboriginal Australians, both for themselves and for their fellow Australians. She described it as 'inner deep listening and quiet still awareness', with an element of patient waiting. It is a mode of contemplation, turned outwards to one's environment but conscious of deep springs within. In a sense it combines all the elements above, and puts the segments back again into their circle.

Do you like to get away sometimes to your favourite spot in the bush to be alone?

What do you do there?

What does it do to you?

What do you bring back from there?

Do you ever relive that experience in your imagination as you go about your daily doings?

RESULTS

The discussion started slowly. As was to be expected there was difficulty in finding English words to express deeply-felt convictions. Another reason was put by a lady who regularly attended White prayer meetings: *Sometimes I'm drained by a person seeking facts about my spirituality and so I put up a wall and give none.* The same lady seemed at home at this gathering and took an active part in discussion. Others noted how Aboriginal people are reticent to share their beliefs with White people, or even among themselves. One highlighted an important cultural difference: *White culture wants all information. Black culture understands that some knowledge is kept secret. Black people do not expect to be told everything.* This underlines the sensitivity in which such discussion needs to be undertaken and the strong motivation to be offered in gently leading the people to go against the grain of their instincts.

There was seen to be value in spiritual sharing. 'The Aboriginal spirit has been eroded and now we do need to share so we can strengthen our spirituality'. It is worth noting that this exercise, one item in a packed agenda, was planned to last one hour and had to be closed (by a time-conscious Gubba!) after two.

There was general agreement that there is a distinctive Aboriginal spirituality even among urban dwellers. *Our spirituality is very much alive and real.* Aboriginal culture is seen to be dynamic, adapting itself to a modern Western world in an Aboriginal way. 'In modern Aboriginal culture people are still carrying on values taught many years ago but today they are expressed differently'. This different case of values, 'what is inside a person, not the colour, is what makes a real Koori'. It is a source of personal pride and grounds for respect from others. One impression of values, a criterion of morality, was *If I am happy, and making others happy this is all that matters.*

There was general approval, too, that Aboriginal Spirituality is based on creation. There is a lively sense of kinship with animals and birds. Even urban dwellers know and respect their totems. God is understood to speak to us through animal forms. One commonly hears how the first intimation of a relation's death came through the call of a certain bird.

It was recognised that traditional religion lost much of its support in the loss of sacred places, yet *God is still with us*. The sense of the divine is diffuse: *Our spirituality is everywhere....we are all one mould and all the same*. And again: *God is everywhere. He does not need to exist in a place, in a church*. In this context favourable mention was made of our outdoor liturgy, (expressing, I suspect, the feeling that God is not tied to any place). Yet immediately after, land rights was affirmed as *the heart of Aboriginal spirituality*. This, I suggest, highlights two things which would take white people by surprise:

- a) *The sacredness of open space*
- b) *The global symbolism of the land rights movement.*

I was surprised that speakers tackled questions 2 and 7. A person's world view and sense of time are so basic that he/she rarely, if ever, reflects on them and presumes they are the same for everyone. It was agreed in a general way that these two items, as proposed, were important components of Aboriginal thinking and spirituality, and ones not sufficiently recognised in the wider community.

There was ready acceptance of items 11, 12 and 13. One person grouped them together: *The strength of the Aboriginal people is to be honest, to be able to laugh at oneself, and to come together*. One woman speaking for the delegates of our state AICC to the recent national conference in Adelaide, which proved very traumatic to the NSW delegation, said: *The thing that got us through the conference and helped heal what happened, was our sense of humour* — a statement which neatly linked the tragic and the funny.

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CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION AMONG INDIANS (PT. II)

Talk by Carlos Maesters

C. THE GOSPEL BROUGHT TO THE INDIANS

1. Some Negative Effects of Evangelisation in the Past

All we have examined till now shows how important the myth is, not only for the tribe itself, but also for the evangelisation of the Indians and their christian instruction. Doing something to the myth means doing something to what Indians have as most truly their own. It is equivalent to tinkering with someone's personality. To destroy the personality of someone by violence or brain-washing is anti-human and anti-Gospel. In the same way to destroy a people's myth by cultural invasion or by an approach to evangelisation that does not respect the tribe's 'difference' and its personality is anti-human and anti-Gospel. It would be the same as destroying the receptacle that was to contain the Gospel message. It would be destroying the basic foundation for evangelisation and ongoing christian instruction. In the past religious instruction has not always respected the Indians. In a number of cases Indians have been obliged to abandon their myths and put in their place the stories of the Old Testament and the life of Jesus. The result of this approach has been that a number of tribes have lost their identity and disappeared as tribes. They remain just as isolated individuals. These survivors drift without a memory and without a destiny, alienated from themselves and from their origins, over the land that was once theirs and now no longer receives them. Other tribes were able to defend themselves and for centuries have managed to hide their myths. On the outside they passed for christians but in their hearts they continued to

Carlos Maesters is a Brazilian liberation theologian. This is Part II of his article published in *Nelen Yubu* no. 49, which now concludes the series.

be what they had always been. They were able to mask and conserve their myths, their observances, their customs, in their very practice of christianity. Thus they have managed to survive as a tribe without losing their identity. This centuries-old resistance reveals the 'conservative' energy of the myths, whose vitality has helped the tribes traverse over 400 years of dark exile in their own country without dying. Evangelisation like this is the contrary of what we noted in the 'true divine pedagogy' God used with the twelve tribes of Israel, as depicted in the Old Testament. It is also the contrary of what the church has always taught, namely that 'grace builds on nature'. Grace does not destroy, and cannot destroy, the person who is to receive a grace. Less still can it destroy a whole tribe. With this we do not mean to say simply that Jesus Christ cannot be presented as the substitute for the myths. Jesus did not come to abolish but to fulfil. Salvation history is not a replacement for Creation history, but God's fulfilment of it and its highest manifestation.

2. The Gospel Does Not Destroy the Myth but Fulfils It

Those who want to devote themselves to the evangelisation of the Indians must imitate Jesus. That means: first become incarnate among them so that the word of the evangelist becomes flesh of the flesh of the Indians. They must, like Jesus, live among them thirty years to preach for only three. To reveal to us the Good News of liberation he was bringing, God did not mount a cultural invasion or commit violence, but made himself equal to us in everything, except sin. He took on himself our human condition and lived with us. He entered the fabric of the 'invisible web' the Old Testament had spread over the space and time of the people, and he spoke from inside the people's own life. The Old Testament was not destroyed by Jesus' message. It was the receptacle of his message, its groundwork, its point of departure. The New Testament is born on the foundation of the Old Testament. The flower of the Old Testament came to full bloom and revealed all its meaning in the New Testament. The Good News of Jesus removed the outer sheath that enclosed the flower of the New Testament within the bud of the Old. It brought the fullness of time. We are not the ones to determine the hour. It is God and God alone. To us, evangelisers and teachers, belongs the task of preparing the ground, of watering, of tending, until the 'Old Testament of the Indians' develops, sheds its outer wrappings, blooms and reveals the beauty of its flower.

3. Jesus Christ and the Indians' Myth

There are a number of tribes considered 'converted' or christian. Some of these are genuinely quite devout. To what point have they in fact been evangelised? Paul was converted and believed in Jesus Christ because he encountered in Jesus the answer to the question that flowed out of his past as a Jew. He himself says he found in Jesus the *YES* of the Father to the promises and hopes embedded in his Jewish spirit. Paul had been Jewish to the core and it was at that deepest core of his Judaism that he met Christ, who was waiting for him there. It was not the Old Testament that incorporated into itself the new event of Christ, but the new event, Christ, that incorporated the Old Testament and gave it a new meaning. And so, to determine if there has been true evangelisation among the Indians, it is not enough to look at their outer practices, but necessary to see the inside, that is the new mentality from which they look at life and at the 'conversion' (metanoia: that is, transformation) Jesus asks of them. To know if Christ has really touched the Indians' life in depth, we must look at the place he has come to occupy in their myth. Has Christ been incorporated into the myth or the myth into Christ? In the first case we cannot call it true evangelisation, for Christ would have been absorbed by the myth and neutralised. In the second case it would have been an evangelisation because the myth would have been retold from the cast of the new consciousness generated by Christ. That is, Christ would have become the key to interpretation of the myth and the new point of reference for understanding life. From what we know of present-day Indian myths, Christ has nowhere entered the heart of these myths as the New Testament entered the generative core of the Old. In some tribes, nevertheless, we can observe small changes in the myth and see the fruit of a retelling influenced by the Gospel. In other myths, to the contrary, it seems that Christ has come in only superficially as an element linked to white civilisation. This near absence of Christ from the Indians' myths gives us an invitation to a serious examination of our consciences and a basic review of our evangelisation efforts among the Indians. For it is a sign that our evangelisation has not yet gone beneath the surface of the life of the Indians.

4. The Central Problem: Confusing Faith with Religion

As we have already said, faith and religion, though inseparable, are not the same thing. The evangelist lives his or her faith in the form of a

religion, inherited from his or her occidental culture. Not knowing how to make this distinction between faith and religion, they transmit to the Indians their occidental forms and expect these to kindle in the Indians the same faith, awaken the same hope and reveal the same love of God the Father. And this is impossible. In reality what ends up happening is the following: instead of transmitting the Good News of God, they impose and transmit a culture, engendered in the past by the ways people in Europe pursued life according to the Gospel. Accustomed to the ordinary model of occidental christianity, we never think that people can live faith in Christ in a different way from ours. Without realising it, we import Jesus packaged in a different culture, and because of this different culture, which is often hostile to the Indians, Christ is himself rejected or is not understood as message of Good News. The Christ who came on the banners of the colonisers can hardly be perceived by the Indians as Good News, as a liberator. The problem thus remains: to christianise or to occidentalise? To christianise or to Catholicise? To put it otherwise, we have the same problem today that rocked the church of the first christians. As it presented itself then it was: to christianise or to Judaise?

5. Christianise or Judaise?

The problem that troubled the early church was this: 'For pagans to become christians, must they observe the Jewish religion? Yes or no?' The problem was new. It had appeared with the entrance of pagans into the church. Prior to that, no one had asked the question, it could not even have entered someone's mind that there was more than one way to be a christian since the first christians were all Jews and knew no other expression for their christian faith than in the forms of the Jewish religion. The first to raise the question was Stephen. He paid a steep price. Later, the practices of the community in Antioch brought the question under scrutiny again, for in this community the gospel was preached to pagans without requiring them to observe the prescriptions of Jewish law. Some christians in Jerusalem, however, did not perceive there could be a choice. They found it the most normal thing in the world that pagans had to pass by way of the Jewish religion to be able to live faith in Christ. These conservative christians did not accept the practice of the community of Antioch. There was argument and confusion. An assembly was held to discuss the subject. Paul and Barnabas were delegated from the community of Antioch. They

argued that to be saved in Christ faith was sufficient and it was unnecessary to observe the whole law of Moses. This position was dangerous and liable to provoke Jewish anger against the church. Paul puts it clearly at the end of his letter to the Galatians, 'Those who want to impose circumcision on you do so only out of self-interest: they want to escape persecution for the cross of Christ' (Gal 6:12). Those from Jerusalem were for Judaising; those from Antioch were for christianising. At the conclusion of the assembly Peter decided the affair in favour of the opinion from Antioch. James brought to bear a few simple conditions enabling smooth relations in communal life. Today the problem again arises when some take a new approach in evangelisation among the Indians. What is it we want: to christianise or to occidentalise, to Catholicise, to Italianise, to Brazilianise, Europeanise? Paul, with Peter's support, responds: the goal is for people to become christians. The rest of our traditional observances have nothing to do with Christ, who must be preached as Good News for the Indians.

6. The Hidden Mystery: Everything was Created by God for Christ

The decision of the Council of Jerusalem opened the doors, and the pagans began entering the church, bringing with them the riches of their cultures. This new approach led Paul to a theological reflection on why the Council had decided as it did. It usually works this way: practice forges ahead and opens doors for theological reflection to follow it. Paul's reflection is set out in his letter to the Colossians and still more in his letter to the Ephesians. He pondered and reached this conclusion: the Old Testament is oriented toward the New Testament. That is, when God guided the Old Testament through to its fulfilment in Christ, this did not confer a sole privilege on the Old Testament. The contrary is true: the orientation of the Old Testament to the New is a pattern of how God is regularly at work among all peoples. The history of the Old Testament and how it led to the New was simply God's freely chosen anticipation, where he offers us a clear revelation of what he is in the process of doing among us all, since the creation of the world. The fact is that God has created all things in Christ and for Christ. All things are oriented towards Christ, including the story of the Jewish people, including likewise the story of the Indian people here in the Americas. This is why it was not necessary to pass by way of the observances the Old Testament prescribed for Jews in order to reach Christ. For this reason when Paul preached the gospel to the pagans

of Athens, his reference was not the Old Testament of the Jews but rather the pagans' own 'Old Testament', that is, the myths and history that marked the lives of the population of Athens. If he made use of the Old Testament, it was more as an example, a pattern for avoiding error, rather than a condition required of pagans wishing to become christians. It was reality as experienced by the people to whom he was preaching the gospel that became the foundation and the starting point for evangelisation. The revelation of the Mystery hidden in God that Paul speaks in his letter to the Ephesians consists precisely in this discovery of the universal dimensions of salvation. Since the creation, all peoples have been destined by God for Christ, each one in its own manner. Therefore in the life of the Indians too, God is already at work; he is leading them toward Christ.

7. Fellow-Workers with God

Paul defined his mission as an evangelist as being a 'fellow-worker with God'. We are to collaborate with God who is already at work in the life of the Indians bringing them to Christ. We cannot turn them aside to make them follow our own paths. If we do, we are obstructing the manifestation of the treasures that God has placed in the life of the Indians. From the point of view of anthropology, everyone today recognises the value and riches in the Indian cultures, and for this same reason there are campaigns to preserve these cultures, to let them grow and reveal their messages to the rest of the world. But from the point of view of faith, the value and riches these cultures bear within them have still not appeared. By evangelisation we serve as God's fellow-workers so that one day this wealth may be shown forth to the face of the nations. To know how we are to work alongside with God, it is helpful to look in the Old Testament at how God educated the twelve tribes of Israel. Their path towards Christ contained progressive stages, which must be respected. If there are mistaken elements in their myths, it is not we who are to convince the Indians of their errors. We do not have the right in the name of our culture, to require them to change their culture. When they discover that they are children of God, loved by God, they will discover, in the framework of their own realities, the relative and limited side to things that today perhaps they hold as absolute and certain. Only they may do that. It is for them to discover in Christ God's *YES* to their deepest hopes. And at that time, though remaining Indians, Indian to the deepest core of their being, they will be able to

accept Christ without its meaning a rupture with their people and their culture. It will be at the heart of their own myth that the Indians will meet Christ, who is waiting for them there. Then truly will the gospel be the Good News. It will make them more Indian than ever, and in it will be restored to them the deepest meaning of their life. Their myth will have attained its purpose, it will have been fulfilled by Christ. Clement of Alexandria said, 'The One God was discovered ethically by the Greeks. 'Jewishly' by the Jews, and spiritually by the christians.' We may add, 'And he must be discovered Indianly by the Indians.'

8. Conditions for the Evangelisation and Christian Instruction of the Indians

There are conditions for any work of evangelisation of christian instruction among the Indians.

a. Knowledge from within of the life of the Indians, as Jesus himself knew the life of his people. For this, observing from without is not enough. The outer manifestations are not the ultimate secret. The people's myths must be studied, using to this end the findings of the human sciences.

b. Life among the Indians, as Jesus himself lived among his people thirty years (and never forgetting that the preparation of these tribes for Christ took 1800 years). Only thus, by *convivencia*', does knowledge become concrete and alive, sharing from the inside the tribe's own vision, within which it holds its myths, applies them and transmits them to preserve its life.

c. Living faith, and a conviction that God is already at work in the lives of the Indians, that he is guiding them towards Christ. The knowledge that comes from study and *convivencia* and their constant interplay, will thus bring both the evangelist and the evangelised to discover what God's call means and how God reveals the Good News of the liberating presence of the Spirit of Jesus Christ at work in their lives and in their history. The result of such an evangelising process will be that the evangelisers themselves end up being 'evangelised', by those they teach.

9. Some Signs of the Times that Require the Attention of Evangelisers

Evangelists or religious teachers must always give attention to the signs of God, for they are not the proprietors of their message. They are simply servants, both of God and of the Indians. They must collaborate with God, who wants to reveal himself to the Indians. Today there can be found some signs in the life and history of the Indians, which, when held up to the pattern of 'God's true pedagogy' in the Old Testament, reveal the stages by which God is leading the Indians towards Christ.

a. *The return of the myths*

In a number of places Indians are beginning once again to be interested by their own heritage. They are starting to retell their myths and are trying to recover their old stories, their customs and their festivals. For example, an Amazon pajé (religious leader) made a trip of several weeks all the way to Colombia in order to meet someone who could furnish him a name for a genealogical list. All this is a sign of a general reawakening of tribal consciousness. In the Old Testament at the times of crisis and change, one always notices the same reawakening of the people as they reinterpret old traditions in the light of the present. These reinterpretations were stages by which God led the Hebrew tribes towards Christ. For this reason, the return to the myths, conditioned and motivated by a number of social, economic and political factors, can surely not be happening without the presence of the Spirit of Christ, at work leading his people towards the Resurrection. It is part of the task of evangelisation to encourage this return, for it belongs to the path of the tribes towards Christ.

b. *Time becomes history*

In Peru where a large part of the Indians are Christians, the following phenomenon is occurring. As noted previously, myth has an ecstatic vision of time. It is like a revolving disc, always describing the same circle, never shifting from its spindle. This is the cyclical time of the eternal return. But in Peru the Indians are beginning to discover a new notion of time, the prophetic, or linear, notion. The disc rights itself and becomes a wheel, which while turning travels a path. The Indians are beginning to retell their history, no longer as a cyclical phenomenon meant to absorb and neutralise historical events, but as a journey which has a starting point and a destination. They are beginning to make their history theirs. Time is becoming

history, and the people are now on the move. The writings of the prophets are what attract them most. They find in them the mirror of their own present situation. Whenever a change as important as this one occurs on a people's path, and wherever it happens, it cannot be occurring without the spirit of Jesus being there at work. A change like this one is part of the path of the Indians towards Christ and should be encouraged by those who evangelise.

c. *The diversity of Indian cultures*

Only the fact that there are over 280 different Indian languages in Brazil, belonging to people of different and even opposing customs, is enough to show that it is not possible to arrive at a uniform plan of evangelisation that can serve as a single practical model valid for all the tribes. Just as we must respect the individuality of each person, we must respect the individuality of each tribe. For example, everyone does not attach the same meaning to names, to water, wine, the cross, tradition, kinship, marriage, death, afterlife, etc. Each tribe has its universe and its 'religion'. Each one has its own 'Old Testament', its own path towards Christ. We must respect these with the same respect we owe to things created by God. The existent diversity is the starting place for the work of evangelisation.

d. *Land rights*

The problem of the land, today become so acute and urgent, is perhaps the greatest sign of the times by which God issues his call to those who evangelise. It merits consideration apart.

D. EVANGELISATION AND THE PROBLEM OF THE LAND

1. The Problem

Many say that the problem of the land is an economic and political problem that bears no relation to evangelisation. Some go so far as to say that the CIMI (Missionary Council for Indigenous Peoples) should worry less about land rights and more about the gospel. We disagree. The land occupies a central place in the bible as much as it does in the life of the Indians. Seeking a land, taking possession of it and fixing its boundaries were fundamental in the path of the Hebrew people towards Christ. And

this continues to be so today, in the path of the Indians towards Christ. This is why evangelists may not ignore the problem and may not say that it has nothing to do with the gospel or christian instruction. When the bible talks of the 'land' or the 'promised land', it does not refer to a spiritual place understood as a 'heavenly homeland'. This expression did not make its appearance until the 'material' homeland had already exercised its influence over the path of the people towards Christ. When the Old Testament speaks of 'land' or the search for a land, it means land in its most literal sense. Land as the object of disputes and struggle, coveted by many, but in reality offering place only to some.

2. Land and its Possession in the Old Testament

Abraham left his country and set out in search of another. Seeking a land and taking possession of it were an integral part of the people's cultural transition from nomads to cultivators. Once in possession of their land, the twelve tribes spread over this territory the 'invisible web' of the stories of their myths that turned it thus into their 'home.' The country became their stage set, the 'space' where the tribes encountered one another and their God. The land became much more than a mere parcel of ground necessary for sowing food and subsisting. It was important not first for its economic aspect as a means of production for planting crops and feeding one's family; it was far more than that. It was their domain, the family home where the tribes found their identity. For this reason, the boundaries of the land are marked out ('defined') with great precision, for an uncertainty in the demarcation of their land reflects an uncertainty about their identity itself. For the same reason, the holy sites are fixed and explained as places where the tribal patriarchs once passed. The people criss-crossed their country and made their pilgrimages to these sanctuaries that served as something like refueling points for their identity as a people. It is to the sanctuaries that people made their way when they wanted to encounter themselves, their past, their God. The sanctuaries were the elements Jeroboam made use of when he laid out a new territory after the split of the northern tribes from the southern. In the time of Joshua when the tribes took possession of the land, a complete list was recorded of all the cities and villages belonging to each tribe. Everything was precisely calculated and catalogued. For if you change boundaries you change something about a people's consciousness. The incursion into the land by the Philistines at

the time of the Judges and again in the time of Saul and David was a threat to the tribes' survival. The people had nearly 200 years of struggle in defence of their borders and these years form part of their path towards Christ. Even today these struggles fill the pages of Judges and Books of Samuel. Their struggle to keep the land led the twelve tribes to adopt a new system of government, the monarchy. David was the first king to unify the twelve tribes and their territories. This unification of the national territory was at the origin of a new consciousness and brought about the appearance of the first account of the history of the people, what is called today the 'Yahwist narrative'. In accord with the mentality of those times, the 'land' meant the territory where God reigned. Those who lived outside that territory put themselves outside the protection of their God. Thus when David had to flee before Absalom, he lamented bitterly that by fleeing outside the land, he would be going away from God's protection.

The loss of the land during the Exile was the greatest crisis in the history of the people of the Old Testament because they lost their natural 'abode', the land they took their identity from. It was quite a negligible group that stayed faithful. At the end of the Exile, Cyrus appeared, the king of the Persians, the man who was to help the people return to their land. Their return was their rebirth. Even without reobtaining their independence, they recovered their identity, for they were back in their country. The 'land' was their memory: its mountains, rivers, sanctuaries all reminded the people of something. It is enough to see how the Song of Songs describes the land. The poetic terms give meaning to each morsel of the land of Palestine. The return from exile was like someone's going home to his father's house, where he finds once again all the familiar objects from his childhood. He is reborn. This is what happened to the returning people. Cyrus, their benefactor, is saluted in the bible as the 'servant of God', the 'Anointed', for he made it possible for the people to get on with their journey towards Christ. Cyrus was not a Jew, he did not belong to the people, but he was the one who helped the people most and he received from them their highest praise. He received the title they reserved for the Messiah. The prophet Isaiah even goes so far as to use the word 'gospel' for the good news that the people were to return to their land. After Isaiah the word 'gospel' took its place in the New Testament. All of this shows us that we may not ignore the Indians' problem of their land, as if it had nothing to do with the gospel and their christian instruction.

3. Teaching the Gospel

The problem of the land is fundamental if the Indians are to survive as Indians. As we have already said, to an Indian the 'land' is much more than a parcel of ground that allows him to plant, harvest and eat his fill. The land's first purpose is not to be exploited but to be 'lived with' (which is what *convivencia* means). The language Indians use for the features of their land is tender and poetic. They live with the trees, the rivers, the animals, the rocks, the mountains, the flowers. The possession and demarcation of their lands, under their own control and in accordance with their ancient traditions, is fundamental on their path towards Christ. Threatened with losing the land, they need a modern-day Cyrus to help them defend their land or recover the land which once belonged to them, exactly like the twelve tribes of the bible, after this long, dark exile of 400 years. To struggle for the defence of the Indians' lands is an evangelical task in our days, just as Cyrus' work was evangelical. The possession and demarcation of their lands opens to the Indians the way to their identity as themselves and will allow them one day to discover themselves children of God, loved by God in Jesus Christ. If the people of the bible had not returned to their country after the Exile, Christ could not have come as he did and history would not have been the same.

All this brings us to say that at the point on their path where the Indians today find themselves, the problem of the land is a sign of the times. By it God is issuing a call to those who believe in him and to those who wish to be his fellow-workers. He is asking us to help our brothers and sisters, so that in possession of their own countries they may continue their path forward and not be destroyed. In the future the great beneficiaries of today's struggle will not be the Indians but all peoples. We all will receive in exchange the riches that the Indians will discover when their path takes them to Christ.

The people of the bible received from God the chance to live their Old Testament before the New Testament came, before it could come. The Indians must have -- must receive -- the chance to live their Old Testament with all its necessary stages in order to come to Christ. To help and encourage them to live these stages is a work of evangelisation.

* * * * *

TO KNOW THIS LAND

**Would you like to know this land?
Then know that it is deep!**

**Sit in circle round the fire glow
and listen to the stories through the night.**

**Look into the drama of the skies
to let your open soul be filled with stars.**

**Walk into the ritual of the seasons
and take your place in the ceremony of the world.**

**Stand stuated amidst the eucalypts
until the forest touches all your bones.**

**Caress the texture of the leaves
and hold the fragile flower in your hand.**

**Let what is true permeate your mind
into the sacred centre of your spirit.**

**Close your eyes and breathe the invisible air.
Walk bare-footed on the mother ground.**

**Stroll by night beside a still lagoon
and let the lilies gift you with their light.**

**Then walk crowded city streets
till all the sounds are speaking in your dreams.**

Rod Cameron osa

PREFACE TO A LOCAL THEOLOGY: THE MURINBATA CASE

Gerard Goldman

THE MURINBATA are a highly sophisticated people with a great respect for the presence of God in their lives. Jesus Christ is seen as The Great Dreamtime Figure for the Murinbata. This has profound implications for the church at Port Keats, as the western theology which has existed could become increasingly felt as irrelevant and alienating to the Murinbata. A local indigenous theology can only occur through Murinbata initiative. The Church needs to support and encourage them as they struggle to en flesh the Good News of Jesus into their lives. It is only through inculturation of the Good News and a biblical hermeneutics at the grassroots level that the Murinbata can develop an authentic church at Port Keats, and so enrich the entire Church.

Sacramentality

The Murinbata concept of *sacramentality* could be developed into a relevant theology. The notion of sacramentality in their traditional lives revolves around the phenomenon of totemism. Totemism is seen as the foundation as well as the frame of the sacramental plan.¹ Intrinsically linked to totemism is the sacramental nature of land.

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Stanner warns that it would be an incorrect procedure to make a comparison between Murinbata and christian sacramentalism. His concern is that it may make the Murinbata concept appear 'primitive, uniform, linear, serial sequence' compared to the christian concept.² To make this comparison would narrow what needs to be widened. As Atkins states, 'the deeper fault of all Churchly Sacramentarianism is our undue limitation of its meaning' and that the idea of sacrament is 'capable of a vast and helpful extension.'³ Sensitive dialogue between Murinbata and the church on this issue would result in an enrichment of christianity. Papal instructions direct the church to incarnate Jesus into Aboriginal culture. The first step in doing this is a sensitive and profound understanding of the apex of their religious belief system - totemism and land.

Totemism

Stanner identifies *totemism* as being central to the Murinbata religious system. He also regards totemism as being sacramental. He states:

The main rite is marked by the use of external and visible signs betokening man's dependency on other worldly powers. It is a set of relations which obtain between these elements which constitutes sacramentalism. Men act through signs towards the ground of dependency; the flow is accompanied — or is held to be — by external signs signifying that a solidary relation holds between that ground and men; and in this way the acts, signs and flow not only interpenetrate each other but in a long established and involuted religious system compenetrates each other, that is, pervades each other in every part. In a sense Murinbata religion is sacramentalist through and through. It could be described as totemic sacramentalism.⁴

Stanner identifies totemism as the foundation as well as the frame of the sacramental plan. The purpose of the main rite referred to above (Punj) is to make a man into a man of mystical understanding. He should become a transformed man, 'one who knows the truth about a cardinal mystery of human affairs.'⁵ Aboriginal Uniting Church Minister, Djiniyini Gondarra, stresses that totemism is not idolatrous and that it should be respected by the entire christian church. He argues that christians should be able to comprehend the significance of sacred sites as there were sites in Israel

where worship of Yahweh was deepened and personal renewal was experienced. He states that the Jewish understanding of places where the law was retained and remembered is very close to the understanding that Aboriginal people have of sacred sites.⁶ He concludes that totems are not idols and that 'totems and sacred sites serve to retain the law in a way analogous to that of the ark of the covenant.'⁷

Stanner cites four classical examples of totemism in the Murinbata region. He proposes that the function of Murinbata totemism is to mediate the first ordained order to living people. He states that 'it may be said to dispense the ancestors' endowment, and to provide channels for the flow.'⁸ The types are:

1) **Personal or Conceptional Totemism.** This is where each person has a private totem that links him or her as an individual with a non-human entity. The totem is identified by means of some notable incident associated with a child's conception.

2) **Sex Totemism.** All men as a set are linked jointly with a class of non-human entities, as are all women. Kinship terms are extended to the totems.

3) **Clan Totemism.** All members of each exogamous, patrilineal clan are linked with a large class of animal or natural entities which are thought of as being connected, as species, with particular places within the clan territories.

4) **Moiety Totemism.** All persons, whether male or female, in each patrilineal moiety jointly possess a totem distinguishing them from all members of the other moiety.⁹

The effect of the totemic complex illustrated above is to share out, in a kind of distributive plan, all the non-human entities which were made or recognised by the ancestors. They are all made relevant, one to another. That is, they are set up as a moral system. Stanner states that the outcome of this is that with the exception of personal or conceptual totemism, 'the totemic sets are sacramental corporations of a perennial order.'¹⁰

Totemism and land are intrinsically linked. Without the sacred sites, the right to visit and live on their own country, the Murinbata would probably deteriorate. Deacon Perdjert speaks of the Murinbata having a great sense

of God in nature. He states that the way Jesus used nature to teach, and the important point nature has in the Sacraments, appeals directly to Aborigines. Perdjert emphasises the importance of Dreamtime figures and totems. He states:

We have Dreamtime figures who formed the world, who gave us law and ceremony and life-centres, from where our spirits come. We find it easy to see in Christ the Great Dreamtime Figure who, more than all the others, gave us Law and Ceremony and Life-Centres, and marked out the way we must follow to reach our true country.

We have certain things in nature for our dreaming [totems]. We call some of these brother and sister. They not only represent our dreamtime figure but in some way they are Him. In some way He lives in them and is them. So He is forever present. So it is not over-difficult to realise that Christ is with us always, the same yesterday, today and forever.¹¹

Perdjert's observations concur with Strehlow's statement that 'the great and specifically Australian contribution to religious thought has been the unquestioning Aboriginal conviction that there was (is) no division between Time and Eternity.'¹²

Stanner was concerned that his thoughts on totemism being seen in a sacramental light for the Murinbata, could be easily wrought into fanciful shapes by those of particular convictions, that is the Missionaries. He stated, 'I do not myself regard the facts as giving any weight to general theories of natural religion or to the conception of any theories of natural religion or to the conception of any particular religion.'¹³ Stanner's comments are open to criticism. Deacon Perdjert's statement regarding totemism and Christ implies that the Murinbata see Christ as present in the sacramental nature of totemism. Wilson, in his criticism of Stanner's allegations states, 'the religious conceptions of the Murinbata...are conceptions of people living today. They can be rightly considered to illustrate, indeed exemplify, the sort of religious conceptions that can be spontaneously generated outside of the context of christian revelation'.¹⁴ Aboriginal theologians are articulating the presence of Jesus in their cultural traditions.

Aboriginal Spirituality

In his essay, 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism', Stanner sketches briefly the positive character of Murinbata religion in a series of seven propositions. These could assist the Church in its task of inculturating the message of Christ into the Aboriginal Church. These insights were:¹⁵

- 1) The Aboriginals universally believed that ancestral beings had left a world full of signs of their beneficent intent towards people. The wisdom given to men cherished by traditional experience, could interpret these outward and visible signs so as to live under an assurance of providence.
- 2) The human persons had value in themselves and for others, and there were spirits who cared.
- 3) The main religious cults were to renew and conserve life, including the life-force that kept animating the world in which people subsisted and with which they were bonded in body, soul and spirit.
- 4) The material part of life, and of people themselves, was under spiritual authority, and that the souls of the dead shared in maintaining the authority and the providence over them.
- 5) The core of religious practice was to bring the life of the person under a discipline that required him to understand the sacred traditions of his group and to conform his life to the pattern ordained by that tradition.
- 6) The underlying philosophy of the religion was one of assent to the received terms of life; that is to say, it inculcated a strong disposition to accept life as a mixture of good with bad, joy with suffering, but to celebrate it notwithstanding.
- 7) The major cults inculcated a sense of mystery by symbolisms pointing to ultimate realities which were thought to show themselves by signs.

The above list indicates that the Murinbata can develop an authentic Aboriginal theology. There needs to be a process created to enable the Murinbata to come together as a Basic Christian Community to formulate

their own theology. Gondarra believes the Aboriginal Church should not be dominated by a western model of Church: 'It must be a church that organises itself in its own context of structure, tradition, style and with a theology which is our own.'¹⁶

Gondarra makes three points about what an Aboriginal theology should entail. Firstly, it should be *biblical* - that is, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit speaks to Aboriginal people through the scriptures. Secondly, it should be *spiritual* -- God is Spirit and Aboriginal Christians need to struggle to put into their language this spirituality. Thirdly, it should be *prophetic* -- it needs to challenge Aboriginal culture, the good parts of culture need to be kept and built up, and the more evil parts need to be condemned and done away by the Gospel of Jesus.'¹⁷

Land

A complete presentation of Aboriginal spirituality needs to examine what Aboriginals see as their relationship to land. This is well summarised by Pat Dodson when he states, 'sacred places are not just geographically beautiful. They are holy places, even more holy than shrines, but not commercialised. They are sacred. The greatest respect is shown to them and they are used for the regeneration of history - the regeneration of Aboriginal people, the continuation of their life. That is where they begin and that is where they return.'¹⁸ Gondarra states that Aboriginal spirituality is based on the sacramental nature of land, and that spirituality is the basis of their lives and cultures. The land is their Mother and 'like a human mother, the land gives us protection, enjoyment, and provides for our needs, economic, social and religious.'¹⁹ He states that sacred sites have always been central to the life of Aboriginals: 'Sacred sites are where our law and ceremony, our teaching are embodied.'²⁰ He concludes that God gave Aboriginals their law in the form of land the ceremonies and stories that go with it. This is written in the hearts and minds of Aboriginals.²¹

Stockton points to a parallel in Aboriginals' sense of oneness with the land and St Paul's teaching on the Church. 'Individually and corporately nurtured by our Mother, we are active members of the Body of Christ, which is growing to encompass the whole of creation under the headship of Christ. Our oneness with the land in joint yearning and hope for fulfilment, under the Spirit is mysteriously described in Romans 8:19-23:'

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now, and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly, as we wait for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.²²

The reign of God may be near as one begins to listen to the Spirit in the land and feel its inward groaning as one's own.

Stockton believes that Aboriginal spirituality can lead one to a richer understanding of the Truine God. If land is viewed as the sacrament of God our Mother-Father, and Jesus is seen as the Great Dreamtime Figure subsuming all others, 'another analogy for the Trinity can be found in the Land, Man and Song.'²³ Song being the breath of the Holy Spirit, 'which pervades the universe as a wind, renewing life and inspiration, drawing together all who hear the dance of life.'²⁴

Elements of Religion

It is worthwhile to highlight what Stanner viewed as 'religious' in the context of Murinbata life. These included:

- (a) A view that the structure of the world and life was fixed once-for-all at a remote time in the past.
- (b) Myths depicted the structuring part as a set of dramas each of which moved to a climax in which a particular set of things became determinate.
- (c) Certain myths dealt with divisive things that somehow were reconciled if only momentarily.
- (d) The Murinbata thought the dramas of the past a very great mystery which could be understood by simply receiving tradition.
- (e) The Murinbata consider the countryside was filled with plain evidence that drama had occurred. The forces expressed in the dramas were thought to be immanent in all such places and to be dynamically available to people to use. The whole environment, though charged with numinous import, was still a ground of confidence since it had been continuously occupied by their own people.
- (f) Living persons were thought to be connected intimately - as

individuals, sexes, genetic stocks, groups and categories - with personages, places and events of the dramas. The connections were thought of as historical, mystical, substantial and essential. They were expressed through the device of totemism.

(g) The Murinbata believe that many classes of beings existed in the spiritual domain, two having particular importance : external beings which resembled human persons but had not lived as such and beings that once had been human through possessing powers beyond those of ordinary humans.

(h) The main rites simulated events of the founding dramas, though in covert ways often difficult to perceive through the complex and crevice symbolisms. The rites followed a set liturgical formulary and had the character of great celebration, being made the repository of the highest products of imaginative, theatrical and material art.

(i) Political force may have dominated the religion in the interest of men, but it did so only in their secular interest; it did not, and could not deny women their place - in some respect a leading place in the structure-ontology of the life process.

(j) To pass through the ritualised ordeals put a mark on the psychological, emotional, mental and social character of the initiates. It heightened their sense of ambient mystery and deepened their interior life...taught the value of social fellowship.²⁵

Questions to the Local Church

What does this knowledge of Murinbata totemism, ritual, ceremony and relationship with the land mean to the Church at Port Keats? The paradigm that one seeks must come from the people to whom the Good News is being given. It is now vitally important that ongoing processes be developed so that the Murinbata can have the freedom and space to express and articulate what Jesus Christ means to them.

The Murinbata are intimately connected with land. Their law and ceremony is intrinsically linked with land.

Cletus Read observes that at Santa Teresa the Aborigines are voting with their feet: they are rejecting the white institutionalised church.²⁶ He states that Aborigines 'behave as embarrassed strangers' when inside the church.²⁷ Does this stem from the church's failure so far to integrate the

Aboriginal sacramentality of land and ceremony with its own sacramentality of worship?

The prophetic cry of Deacon Perdjert encapsulates the desire to be Aboriginal Christians. He states:

God did not begin to take an interest in man with the Incarnation of His Son, nor with Moses and the prophets, nor with Abraham. In all that time (and before) God was with my people. He worked through their culture. He was saving us despite human weakness. He was preparing us for the day when He would see the features of Aborigines in the image of His Son. So I must recognise, I must use the things of God that are in my culture, I must use them in His service. If I do not do this, my faith and my service is shallow. They are pretending. They belong to someone else, not to me. God has asked us to love Him with whole mind, heart and soul. So I must give myself to God as an Aboriginal. This is what God wants or else He would not have made me what I am. Really, it is the only way I can go about it.²⁸

He wishes the Church to allow him to pray to God as an Aboriginal. More profoundly, he wishes to minister to his people as an Aboriginal.

Inculturation

John Paul II in his address to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders states, 'the Gospel invited you to become through and through Aboriginal Christians.'²⁹ By this, Aborigines do not have to borrow the faith and life of Christianity from others, because Jesus calls them to accept His words and values into their own culture. John Paul II states, 'The Church invites you to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to Aboriginal minds and hearts...Why should you not be allowed the happiness of being with God and each other in Aboriginal fashion?'³⁰

It is now appropriate to examine the role that inculturation should have in bringing about a more authentic Aboriginal witness.

Carrington defines it as a movement to transfer decision-making power to the people. 'Implicit in this shift is that local people should be theologians, and not rely on expatriate experts.'³¹ This shift focuses upon the need for a new paradigm in hermeneutics. Carrington states, 'Contrary

to attempts at external manipulation, the Incarnation implies that God transforms cultures from within.'³²

A theology appropriate to Port Keats must experience a transformation which can work within the Murinbata culture. Theology needs to be seen as inherently incarnational and intercultural. It is of critical importance that there is an appreciation of the Murinbata theologians' theological awareness. This implies that there needs to be an entirely different set of cross-cultural relationships in theological education.

It is not enough to want the Murinbata to have a theology within the same structures which operate at present. Carrington believes, 'Theology must enter all contexts where people are living with a message responsively appropriate to each context. In biblical imagery God's response to historical pluralism is the Incarnation.'³³ God responded to all people by becoming contemporaneously available through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not come to rubbish culture, but in compassion, to heal, transform and fulfil it.

There is no need for conformity. The Church needs to invite the Murinbata to add their individuality to the mixed band of disciples who believe in christianity. The Church must take this initiative if our theology is to account for the Incarnation, Pentecost and pluralism seriously.³⁴

At Pentecost the various national groups clearly maintain their individuality, yet all of them hear the message in their own language. There are no translators or interpreters at Pentecost. Carrington exclaims, 'this is a mystery which exposes "chauvinistic christianity" and dominating triumphalism, to plot the seeds of a new spirituality which may be realised by all types of people all over the world.'³⁵

Inculturation and the irruption of new insights from the Scriptures adds to the gift of human diversity. There is a new vision of unity at work in the world. Carrington reminds the Church, 'There is nothing to suggest that the Christian God has a mandate to destroy the diversity of cultures, but rather He calls the followers of Jesus to adopt methods that enable sharing without threat, and unity not uniformity, which will work towards harmony and coexistence of different groups.'³⁶

The need to revitalise hermeneutics is implicit in any understanding of the inculturation of theology. As the Port Keats church develops, the biblical world must be again contextualised in the Murinbata culture. Hermeneutics becomes an essential discipline. Static interpretative proc-

esses which exist at present must be rethought and hermeneutics must become exercised in the Port Keats christian community. This is because the western theological view which has prevailed is irrelevant and can become alienating. This view is counter-productive. It creates dependency with its own culture of silence. New methodologies need to be developed which will liberate biblical hermeneutics for the formidable task of creating a new Port Keats Church.

Guidelines to an Indigenous Theology

Gondarra lists six guidelines for an indigenous theology which are essential for a new paradigm to be developed.³⁷ These include:

- 1) It should be formulated in the language of the people, not only in terms of its grammar, but also in terms of its culturally-founded conceptual imagery.
- 2) It needs to be a methodology that is logical and has a set of procedures which makes sense in the cultural context.
- 3) It must listen to people. Aboriginal theologians must set the agenda and only Aboriginal theologians can achieve the goal.
- 4) It must use language that the people understand; stories, poetry, songs, ceremonial dances need to be used.
- 5) It must come from the people who constitute the local church; developing Aboriginal theology is a task for all members of the community.
- 6) Indigenous theology must have action. There needs to be action towards helping those who feel oppressed, lonely and lost - so that the Gospel of liberation can truly be proclaimed to the people.

Gondarra's list may be a starting point for the Murinbata. There needs to be developed a creative contextual awareness and a willingness by the Murinbata to take initiatives in biblical hermeneutics in the grassroots level. Western theologians, missionaries and educators need not feel that they have to produce in order to justify their roles. It is now better to spend time and energy on what can be further done to enable a Murinbata

theology to become more creatively competent, than to waste time and energy trying to find a new, more attractive wrapper for some external theology, which will only detract from the Murinbata's creativity. Inculturation is not a theology. It is a process placing power and control in the hands of the local people. The Murinbata are the ones who must engage in the inculturation process, as they are the church in Port Keats.

The first step now is to trust the potential creativity of the Murinbata who have experienced the incarnation of Jesus and wish to further articulate and express this in their cultural categories. Stanner has provided much analysis and illustration of the depth and richness of Murinbata religion and spirituality. Deacon Perdjert has expressed the Murinbata desire to be truly Aboriginal Christians. Pope John Paul II has signalled that now is a vitally important time for the Church to take the option of an epistemological leap into the exciting world of cross-cultural hermeneutics. The Murinbata are patiently waiting for the space and support to be provided to allow this to happen.

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We would like to thank all those people who have supported *Nelen Yubu* over the last 50 issues, either by contributing articles, taking out a subscription, sending us encouraging messages, making donations towards costs—or a bit of everything!

Nelen Yubu Staff

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK. . .

Our 50th issue of *Nelen Yubu!*
I think that's quite a feat. Thirteen years ago I cast my lot in with Fr Martin Wilson because he desperately needed someone who could type a bit faster than he in producing his periodical! I volunteered for six months — somehow, I am still here. All credit to him for his dedication and perseverance. I personally congratulate him on reaching issue 50, with my thanks for the experiences and friendship I have enjoyed while working with NYMU across the Northern Territory. *Bonne chance* for the future of *Nelen Yubu!*

Our 'PNG Reporter', Fr Fred Mordaunt writes from the Novitiate at Vunapau, of the ten novices who had set their sights on the priesthood: "They are down to seven, but these have made the journey through the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises - for all 30 days of them. Three are going to the Major Seminary in Port Moresby. Two of the others had entered to be Brothers but now expressed the desire to be priests. Unfortunately, it was too late to enrol them into the Minor Seminary at Chanel. So they are entering the post-novitiate Brothers Training Centre here, for 1992. Four young men were here

for two weeks late last year. They had just completed Grade 12 at Chanel, and they came here for a fortnight's Orientation Course, then went home for a six months' Postulancy. Three others from former years have also been accepted for this date; plus quite a few accepted for Brothers." — Things are looking very healthy in that area, Fr Fred! Thanks for your report, and the lovely 'original' Christmas card you sent me.

Another Christmas of visits and hospitality for me in Melbourne with my family, as well as at 'Dadirri' Drummoyne, where we farewelled Fr Barry Brundell msc before he left for three years in Rome; also trips to friends at Port Macquarie, Batemans Bay, Merriwa and Cassilis; and visitors from far and wide to Leura. One joy was having daughter Frances, out from Germany for the screening by the ABC of her film, *Talking Broken*, on Boxing Day.

My thanks to those who helped make our holiday time very happy and to all who sent cards and messages, especially for the gifts of Masses. Best wishes to all from the *Nelen Yubu* staff.

Secretary Keren