

## ***Editorial***

With this issue we have introduced a change in our cover format. If we can keep the weight of each copy under 50 grams, we can save quite a deal on the cost of posting. The cardboard cover we have been using weighed about 12 grams on its own. So we are trying out a lighter cover carrying what used to take up two separate pages, the Editorial and the Contents.

People who have not yet paid their subscription fee for this year will receive a reminder notice with this copy.

The overall theme of this issue is inculturation. The main focus is on the church amongst Australian Aboriginal people—in the Kimberley, in Northern Territory and in New South Wales. The Little Sisters of Jesus have once more shared with us a paper they have been distributing among themselves written by a Brazilian theologian. The translation is theirs.

Keren, who is a cousin of the Fallons, has written a short note of farewell to our common friend, Father John Fallon msc, who died on 3 May. He had a great love for the Tiwi people of Bathurst and Melville Islands. They requested that his body be brought back to them for burial. Not only did they pay for the cost but also donated a return airfare for his priest-brother, Jim Fallon msc, whom they had got to know while he was Australian MSC vice-provincial.

John was a very gospel-style person. He was pointed out to me while we were both boys together at Douglas Park as 'an Israelite without guile'. When we lived very happily together at Daly River I was able to share with him as he agonised over his relationship with the Darwin diocese. He went off to Papua New Guinea in quest of an ideal that he only found almost fulfilled amongst the Tiwi people. In *Nelen Yubu* No.48 in an article he called "The Good Old Days" he reflected on the stages of his attachment to (and sometime physical separation from) the Tiwi people. He had begun with the missionary imperialism that most of us shared in those not-so-good old days, but towards the end he found his way, or was led, or both, to a situation of interdependent relationship. And at the very end his adopting family asked for his body back.

Martin Wilson msc

# TOWARDS ABORIGINAL CHURCH

Cletus Read fms

RECENT issues of *Nelen Yubu* have stirred up memories of happenings in the Territory during the past eighteen years relating to the work of evangelisation on Catholic Aboriginal missions. Anthony Peile sac on *Aboriginal Religion and Catechetics* in the late seventies; the 1977 seminar in Townsville sponsored by the FMM dealing with *Aboriginal Theology*; Kevin Barr msc and his message in *Not to Destroy but to Fulfil* published by *Nelen Yubu* in 1979; *New, Old and Timeless* by Martin Wilson msc dealing with pointers for an Aboriginal Theology; the Mission Conference in Darwin with Bishop O'Loughlin at which Aboriginal language was a central issue; more recent contributions to *Nelen Yubu* by Eugene Stockton stressing the centrality of culture and by Brian McCoy raising the question of ministry.

I found rich food for thought in all the contributions but they still left me confused because some were academic rather than practical and each seemed to focus on an element of the picture rather than present a panorama in which the various elements were displayed in relation to one another. They failed to provide me with answers to questions such as: 'What is the overall plan?', 'Where do I start?', 'What am I going to do today?' and 'Anyway—what am I here for?' Now I don't profess to have ready answers for all missionaries who subscribe to *Nelen Yubu*, but I'm a bit clearer in my own mind about how we might proceed in future in the Santa Teresa or Central Australian situation in the 90's.

I started off by looking for what I thought was the most central task of evangelisation and I came up with the answer that it wasn't dogmatic theology or liturgy or ministry or moral theology or canon law or even

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Aboriginal culture *per se*—it was spirituality. It was how Aboriginal people relate in spirit with the creative powers of the universe. I saw that my job was to help Aboriginal people to reflect on the manner in which God had revealed himself in a personal way as Creator and loving Father to the Israelites in times past and how later he had made a fuller and clearer manifestation of himself in the person of Jesus. I would hope then to lead them to reflect on their own experience and to come to see more clearly that in a mysterious manner God has been revealing himself to his Aboriginal children for thousands of years through their history and their culture and I would try to lead them to realise with greater clarity how God has been nurturing them and touching their lives even beyond Dreamtime. Drawing on Bernard Haring I would tell them that ‘God has so abundantly revealed his glory and the freedom of his love because he wants the free response of his creatures’. To flesh out the meaning of ‘response’ I would turn to John (4:23-24) and remind them that ‘God is spirit and those who worship him must worship him *in spirit and in truth*.’

So whilst proclaiming the abiding presence of God among his people as Creator and loving Father I would also be urging them to respond in acts of worship. This response must be *in spirit and in truth* so I would urge them to make this response from the very core of their Aboriginality and their Aboriginal spirituality. I would discourage them from imitating the response of people of other cultures by using foreign formulae and cultic actions for fear that such worship might be displeasing to God because it could so easily lack authenticity. I would invite them to act in ways they think appropriate to Aboriginal people who are in the awesome presence of the Great Creator Spirit himself.

What I am trying to do, of course, is to help Aboriginal people to build up *Aboriginal church* where ‘church’ translates the Greek ‘ecclesia’ which always referred to a worshipping community and never to an institution or to a building. So I see that my primary task is to help Aboriginal people to establish and to develop *Basic Aboriginal Church*. I feel pretty happy about this statement because it seems to describe what Paul and John and the other apostles did in the early church in Syria, Asia Minor, Greece, Egypt and other countries.

I wouldn’t concern myself explicitly with Aboriginal theology. I am unable to contribute to the development of an Aboriginal theology

because I don't have an Aboriginal spirituality or an Aboriginal mind. Aboriginal people themselves will develop their own theology as their churches mature and as they reflect on their religious experience. By helping them to bring their spirituality into the field of consciousness and by encouraging them to reflect on the manner in which God has been involved in their history and in their lives in the past I will be helping them to prepare the ground for the cultivation of an Aboriginal theology in the future.

I cannot believe that people of non-Aboriginal culture can be ministers in the *Basic Aboriginal Church* and once again I refer to the model of the Pauline and the Johannine churches of the apostolic age. If we really believe that Aboriginal people should respond to the initiatives of their Creator *in spirit and in truth*, then we must admit that the ministers in the *Basic Aboriginal Church* must be Aborigines. There could be ministers of the Word who would proclaim as readers or as story-tellers and they could be men or women. There could be more highly trained ministers who would fill the role of teachers and they would explain and interpret the Word and either men or women could be selected for this ministry. And Aboriginal persons with the powers could exercise the ministry of healing in the *Basic Aboriginal Church*. I would hope too, to get approval of the bishop to have Ministers of Baptism who would initiate children into the basic Aboriginal church by administering the sacrament of baptism and this role could also be filled by either men or women. Before you protest that this would be too radical, let me remind you that for years and years nurses have been administering baptism to new-born babies whose lives are threatened. There could be other forms of ministry too, in which members used their gifts for the benefit of others: 'To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between Spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit who apportions to each one individually as he wills'. (1 Cor. 12:7-11)

What about Eucharist? Ideally we would follow the precedent of Paul and John and get the bishop to ordain influential members of the

worshipping community as Presidents of the Eucharist, but Rome has resisted approaches from other developing peoples to proceed in this manner. To be frank, I cannot accept that worship in the *Basic Aboriginal Church* can be *in spirit and in truth* if a person of another culture is needed to bring the worshipping community into union with Christ. I would therefore opt for a non-Eucharistic rabbinical type of church in which Christ is made present through the sacrament of worshipping community: 'For where two or three meet in my name I shall be there with them'. (Matt. 18:20) As a matter of fact I would fear that Aboriginal people might be led to perceive Eucharist as a form of magic if I insisted that the white Father was the only one who could make Jesus present to the worshipping community even when that community was a basic Aboriginal church or an Aboriginal family.

What about forms of ministry? So far we have been talking about the functions carried out by the ministers in the church. We note that forms of ministry varied in the apostolic church. In some churches there was the hierarchical structure of bishop, priest, deacon whilst other churches were served by a council of elders, in particular some churches in Palestine, Syria and Mesopotamia. Clearly the forms of ministry were adapted to suit the needs of various groups of people. If we're going to strive for the ideal of worship 'in spirit and in truth', I think we have to avoid imposing on Aboriginal churches forms of ministry which were established by men to serve situations in other ages and in foreign cultural settings. I think that we should allow forms of ministry to evolve according to need. So, in answer to Brian McCoy, I would not favour presenting the diaconate to Aboriginal churches as the only option available.

What emphasis would we give to moral behaviour in the basic Aboriginal churches? When we live in communities of marginalised people we witness the products of emotional and psychological stress in the form of family break-down and violence and self-destruction through abuse of drugs. We missionaries sometimes experience the urge to distort the Good News and to convey the false message that conversion from sin is the path to the Kingdom. In the basic Aboriginal church we would take care to preach the authentic Gospel message that the Father loves all men and women in spite of human weakness and sinfulness and that conversion of heart resulting in love of God and love of neighbour is the true path to the Kingdom. We would teach in faith that

## *Towards Aboriginal Church*

conversion of heart brings a hunger for righteous living by virtue of grace from the Spirit rather than that grace must be earned through rectitude.

I guess that by this time many of you are biting your tongues to tell me that the model I have presented is completely alienated from the real multi-cultural Catholic church and that it could not possibly be approved by church authority. This is because I haven't given all the detail as yet. In Santa Teresa (Central Australia) there would be three levels of church:

Level 3: The Bi-Cultural Church

Level 2: The Aboriginal Community Church

Level 1: The Basic Aboriginal Churches

So far I have been talking about the basic Aboriginal churches. A basic Aboriginal church would be a worshipping Aboriginal extended family. This family might live in one of the villages at Santa Teresa or in an out-station or in a fringe camp of Alice Springs or in some more remote area of Central Australia. Quite likely it would be mobile and from time to time would shift location. A basic Aboriginal church would be an extended Aboriginal family which had taken on board responsibility for its own worship of God.

The Aboriginal community church would form when a group of basic Aboriginal churches came together to worship as a larger group. For example, all or some of the families of Santa Teresa might decide to take part in a combined act of worship on a special occasion or perhaps basic Aboriginal churches from a wider area covering Alice Springs as well as Santa Teresa might meet in worship at a place of their own choosing. We wouldn't need to give too much explanation to Aboriginal people how to do this because they have been following this pattern for thousands of years in their religious activities. The Aboriginal community church would be non-Eucharistic and of rabbinical type because at present there are no ordained Aboriginal priests available.

If you think that this model is unrealistic you should visit Lutheran Headquarters in Alice Springs. In the mission office there is a huge map of Central Australia covering the best part of one wall. On this map are

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placed coloured pins marking the locations of Lutheran Aboriginal families scattered through the desert country from Hermannsburg to the Western Australian border. As families move they are tracked and the pins are relocated. Each of these families has been trained to take responsibility for its own worship in the manner of the patriarchal families of Abraham's era. Like Paul, Aboriginal pastors journey through that vast tract of country affirming, advising, instructing, encouraging out of pastoral concern. From time to time a family is brought in to Hermannsburg for a refresher course. If our fellow missionaries are able to support basic Lutheran churches in such adverse conditions surely Catholics should be able to reach out to Aboriginal families located in places which are far more accessible than the Western Desert.

The model I have presented would require an efficient training scheme if Aboriginal men and women were to be challenged to accept greater responsibility for developing their spirituality, for building up Aboriginal churches, for moving towards the creation of an Aboriginal theology. Nungalinya would play an essential role in this model. Persons chosen to fill the various ministries in the basic Aboriginal churches would have opportunity for training by enrolling in courses at Nungalinya and families who wished to live more enriched christian lives could look to Nungalinya for help. Brian McCoy sj and Robyn Reynolds fdnsc would be important bridges between the people of Central Australia and the community of Nungalinya. Looking into the future it might be seen to be of advantage some day to convert the old Santa Teresa town house into a Central Australian annexe of Nungalinya to serve as a training centre for the families of Central Australia and maybe those of northern South Australia, too—the Pitjantjatjara mob, for example.

The non-Aboriginal people of Santa Teresa could form a westernized basic church so as to work at enriching their own relationships in Christ. This would witness to Aboriginal people that missionaries regard God as the ultimate value in the universe and that, being committed to serve him, they are prepared to devote time and energy to his worship. They would do well to operate out of a centre other than the central church building so as not to give the impression that they are the hosts and Aboriginal people the guests when the Bi-cultural Church forms for a service.

The Bi-cultural Church forms (as now) when the basic churches of different culture come together to worship as a combined community. This would happen of course, at Sunday Eucharist; also at funerals. I think it should happen on a smaller scale at daily Eucharist. By this I mean that daily Eucharist should be celebrated in a way which makes clear that all are invited to give witness to solidarity in Christ of the whole community. It would be unfortunate if missionaries sent out the signal that daily Eucharist was a privilege for white people or, worse still, if the religious develop a ghetto mentality and want to retire behind the walls of their monasteries for the celebration of this sacrament which is supposed to open our hearts to acceptance of all people as brothers and sisters in Christ.

It might help readers put things in better perspective if I point out that the plan I have suggested has a rationale similar to that of the bi-lingual school. It is considered good pedagogy to teach children basic skills such as reading, writing, numeracy and so on, in the medium of their own language as a first step. It is only when they have acquired a firm base of proficiency in these skills in their first language that they are taught to exercise them in a second language and at this point they enter the bi-lingual stage of their schooling. What I'm proposing is that Aboriginal people should first establish their Aboriginal spirituality by learning how to relate in spirit to God in their own cultural milieu. I maintain that they will operate more fruitfully in a bi-cultural church if they first establish their identity as Aboriginal Christians in an Aboriginal church. There would be no fear that this plan would bring about erosion of the existing church structure or that it would undermine the role of the priest. On the contrary it would affirm the priest and underpin the bi-cultural parish church just as the bi-lingual approach makes the Aboriginal school so much more effective.

What a can of worms Brian McCoy has opened by inviting us to share thoughts on ministry! At some future time I'd like to put forward some ideas on the way we should present the Good News so as to help Aboriginal people develop their innate spirituality. This relates of course, to the way Aboriginal families might conduct sessions/services/ceremonies in their basic churches and also to the material which might prove useful. Lumko—to be or not to be—that is the question; one of the questions anyway. I'll try to do that at some time during 1993.

# WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO MISSION METHODS IN THE KIMBERLEY, WA

Brigida Nailon csb

**M**issiology is the formal theory relating to the work of missionaries. The original mandate of Christ to preach the gospel to 'all the nations', as written in Greek, is *παντα τα 'εθνη*. The word 'εθνη (ethne) refers more to ethnic, cultural groups.<sup>1</sup> Donovan described missionary work as:

that work undertaken by a gospel oriented community, of transcultural vision, with a special mandate, charism and responsibility of spreading and carrying that gospel to the nations of the world with a view of establishing the church of Christ.<sup>2</sup>

Donovan saw the missionary as a catalyst or a midwife seeking to assist in the birth of something to be produced by others. For effective mission, in the contact situation serious dialogue had to take place by an interchange between what the missionary brought and what the indigenous traditions already possessed. The new Church would be the product of the interchange. This is a complex process so a structure of knowledge about missiology cannot be single unified discipline. It stands at the crossroads between many different specialities including, theology, cultural anthropology, and comparative religion.<sup>3</sup>

Because of this, evangelization of Aborigines is an extremely complex task. Not many missionaries are capable of meeting others at a

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<sup>1</sup>V J Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered: An Epistle from the Masai*, London, SCM Press Ltd. (1978), 1982, p.29.

<sup>2</sup>ibid., p.194.

<sup>3</sup>A Dulles, 'Current Trends in Mission Theology', *Studies in the International Apostolate of Jesuits*, vol.1, no.1, (January 1972), pp.21-37.

point of culture which enables incarnation of the word to take place. Perhaps only one of the early French missionaries had the gift. Felix Tachon, in his relationship with Felix as they explored their languages and religious concepts together.<sup>4</sup>

In looking at which evangelical principles are to be 'culturally appropriate' for traditionally oriented Aborigines, one needs to be aware of their multitude of rules about language, law, ceremony, land, and the kinship system which regulates to whom they may speak, with whom they have to share, and with whom there is to be avoidance behaviour. Their ways of imparting knowledge are traditionally gender separated. For contextual theology to occur a community needs people who are able to receive the gospel and have the ability to en flesh it in their own culture. Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, a tribal woman, living in the Aboriginal community of Daly River, writes about her people's future by describing the past. She uses the image of a bougainvillea plant on the hospital fence: it is a straggly plant that should be pruned or have some form of support such as a trellis. She points out that gardener could help it weave in and out of the trellis framework:

The bougainvillea is my way of trying to explain how the early missionaries found their way when they first came to Daly River... the early missionaries were the three and a half foot fence. They had a set programme for the people but sometimes they pushed too hard in some areas. Aboriginal people don't work to set programmes but they work steadily and get their jobs done if they have understanding guidance.<sup>5</sup>

In the Kimberley, both male and female missionaries have performed the function of that fence. The first religious sisters to take up the task came at the invitation of Bishop Gibney of Perth. They were financed through the efforts of Fr George Walter who toured Australia to obtain funds to support them in their early days, but there were other female church workers before they came, both Aboriginal and Asian women helped the early missionaries.

In a recent book, *Catholics in Australia*, Naomi Turner uses two articles written by Mary Durack in 1963, to evaluate the work of the

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<sup>4</sup>Brigida Nailon csb, 'Land of Wait and Wonder', Unpublished document, ADB. Chapter 3.

<sup>5</sup>Miriam-Rose, Ungunmerr, 'Teaching (And Being Taught)', *Nelen Yubu*, no.9 (1981), pp.37-38.

Beagle Bay Mission. They are entitled, 'Beagle Bay as a Symbol of Futility', and 'Collapse of an Ideal'.<sup>6</sup> The question is asked:

Where are the skilled tradesmen and artisans that, Mission-trained, were to fan out through the country, selling their skills and doing a little lay-proselytising...

What happened? What went wrong? Why did a whole idea collapse?<sup>7</sup>

Issues raised by these questions need to be explored. Murphy's law, 'Whatever will go wrong will go wrong!' worked overtime in the Kimberley, but the underlying motto of Bishop Raible's 30 years of missionary work was, 'Nothing is wasted in the Kingdom of God'.

The whole Catholic idea of mission in the Kimberley did not collapse, but bore fruit. Episodes of Church history reflect value shift and provide a focus for the missionary role. Since Fr Duncan McNab was sent by Bishop Griver of Perth to found a Catholic Aboriginal Mission in 1884.<sup>8</sup> A hundred years later, as the cradle of the Catholic church in the Kimberley the Beagle Bay Mission was regarded as a place of pilgrimage. The Beagle Bay community also has other aspects that attract Aboriginal visitors studying methods of establishing Aboriginal communities. In *The Rock and the Sand*<sup>9</sup> Mary Durack wrote of the enduring missionary work done by the Cistercians at the Beagle Bay Mission (1890-1990) and followed her story chronologically with ensuing missionary efforts and dreams to 1969. There is no possibility of today's missionary either adopting or continuing methods similar to those of earlier missionaries. The field of mission has changed.

Conceptual and linguistic clarification of missiological enterprise is affected by current shift of values and growing awareness of radical differences in the world view of Aborigines and that of the dominant Australian society. 'Paradigm shift' is a term coined to describe a change in world view. The word 'paradigm' comes from the Greek word 'paradeigma' meaning 'pattern'. In the evolution of mission theory

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<sup>6</sup>Mary Durack, *Sydney Morning Herald* 4 May 1963, 11 May 1963.

<sup>7</sup>Naomi Turner csb, *Catholics in Australia: A Social History, Vol.2*. North Blackburn, Collins Dove, 1992, pp.213-215.

<sup>8</sup>Brigida Nailon csb, 'Fr Duncan McNab, Pioneer Priest of the Kimberley,' ADB. An abridged version was published in *Footprints*, 1981.

<sup>9</sup>Mary Durack, *The Rock and the Sand*, London, Transworld Publishers, 1979.

since the time of Christianity, major changes have been identified by David Bosch in *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology*.<sup>10</sup> The six epochs are:

1. The apocalyptic paradigm of primitive christianity.
2. The hellenistic paradigm of the patristic period.
3. The medieval Roman Catholic paradigm.
4. The Protestant (Reformation) paradigm.
5. The modern Enlightenment paradigm.
6. The emerging ecumenical paradigm.

The structure of the book is organised around the missiological paradigms obtained in each of the first five epochs with the last part focussed on what the emerging paradigm should look like.<sup>11</sup>

The insistence of Paul and others of like mind who fought for the translation of the gospel into the Hellenistic culture made possible the Gentile breakthrough, the first major missionary paradigm shift. But this breakout into the Graeco-Roman world, instead of leading the church to adopt 'Translation' as a fundamental missionary sub-paradigm, resulted in the fossilization of the gospel into a Hellenistic mould, which hindered its mission again and again for centuries to come.<sup>12</sup>

In the thirteenth century when Thomas Aquinas combined Aristotle's comprehensive system of nature with Christian theology and ethics, he established a conceptual framework for the Middle Ages. There were revolutionary changes in physics and astronomy culminating in achievements by Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton. Unlimited material progress and ongoing development was an assumption underlying future social change,<sup>13</sup> and the shifting patterns of thought that dominated Western culture for several hundred years. These developed during the periods of Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. The outline of modern Western thought was

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<sup>10</sup>D Bosch, *Transforming Mission, Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series, No.16, Orbis Books, New York, 1991. pp. 181-189.

<sup>11</sup>Hwa Yung, Book Review, *International Review of Mission*, vol. LXXXI, no.322 (April 1992), p.324, quoting from *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, Maryknoll, Orbis, 1989, pp.9-87.

<sup>12</sup>op.cit., p.324.

<sup>13</sup>F Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*, London, Flamingo, (1983), 1989, p.14.

firmly established in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>14</sup> The view of man as dominating nature and woman, and the belief in the superior role of the rational mind, came hand in hand with scientific and rational analytic thinking, and anti-ecological attitudes.<sup>15</sup> Then, during the three decades prior to the 1970's, a dramatic change of concepts and ideas in physics affected the Western world view of knowledge, and introduced holistic<sup>16</sup> and ecological views.<sup>17</sup> Adaptations of economic and political systems, with accompanying shifts in values are now apparent in changed attitudes to women, environment, and cultures. Such different conceptualization of scientific theories opens up other realms of knowledge. Fritjof Capra explored parallels between modern physics and eastern mysticism in *The Tao of Physics*.<sup>18</sup> He recognised two modes of consciousness as characteristic properties of the human mind. If it is accepted that the intuitive and the rational are complementary modes of functioning of the brain it can be argued that intuitive knowledge is based on a direct, non intellectual experience of reality arising in an expanded state of awareness. Such thinking is found in Aboriginal society. It tends to be synthesized, holistic and non linear. As Capra sees it, the two modes of consciousness, intuitive and rational, demonstrate two kinds of knowledge, that of mysticism,<sup>19</sup> and that of science. The Aboriginal mode of consciousness exposes an intuitive dimension of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> Bird explains that in the complex web of relationships

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<sup>14</sup>ibid., p.37.

<sup>15</sup>ibid., p.24.

<sup>16</sup> F Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*, London, Flamingo, (1983), 1989, p.21. The term 'holistic', comes from a Greek word 'holos'. It refers to an understanding of reality in terms of integrated wholes, whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller units.

<sup>17</sup>Capra, *The Turning Point*. p.14.

<sup>18</sup>F Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, London, Wildwood House, 1975.

<sup>19</sup>While living with her tribal relations, Margaret Wirrapanda, an urban Aborigine married to a tribal man at Yirrkala in Arnhem Land, described her state of mind as secure and at rest, and completely different from when she lived in the city.

<sup>20</sup>Deborah Rose Bird, 'Consciousness and Responsibility in an Australian Aboriginal Religion', *Nelen Yubu*, no.23, (1985), p.9. 'It is not necessary for humans to know broлга culture in detail; it is sufficient to know that broлgas have their own culture... Uniqueness indicates their autonomy -

which, in its totality, nurtures life, morality lies in enhancing all life, and mysticism is part of the Aboriginal sense of responsibility. In Ngarlingman/Ngaliwurru cosmology, the Absolute is the oneness of the whole cosmos. Yarralin people are born and educated to this sense of oneness, regarding it as their rightful heritage as living, conscious beings. All responsible acts are acts which place the individual in a state of harmony with the cosmos. Both daily and ceremonial life are expressive of this sense of oneness, and responsibility is an act of will, taken by conscious beings, deriving from and producing self-interest, reverence, morality and mysticism.<sup>21</sup> Capra pushes this line of thought further, arguing that intuitive wisdom is the basis of ecological activity whereas rational knowledge is likely to generate self-centred anti-ecological activity.<sup>22</sup>

By what criterion is Aboriginal mission work to be evaluated? Robyn Reynolds<sup>23</sup> and Michael McMahon<sup>24</sup> stand 'with' or 'beside' the Aboriginal leadership. As a missionary in the field Robyn Reynolds, in more recent times, points out that the faith and the example of the Arrernte Australians confirm her in the belief that the Jesus of history still saves, and his Spirit still empowers to make his kingdom come despite the tension between the Jesus of history and the Christ of our faith.<sup>25</sup> She accepts that the struggles of the Arrernte towards discipleship challenge her.

...Our terminology gives us away: 'Training local leaders', 'constructing local theologies'—it is not freeing, not respectful and it is too dominating,

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"they have their own Law"..."

<sup>21</sup>ibid., pp.11-12 .

<sup>22</sup>F Capra, *The Turning Point: Science, Society, and the Rising Culture*, London, Flamingo, (1983), 1989, p.14.

<sup>23</sup>"Move along beside us or leave and walk your own way," Robyn Reynolds fdnsc, 'Aranda Literacy Programme: Santa Teresa', *Nelen Yubu*, no.2, (1979), p.5.

<sup>24</sup>"I am grateful for the dreams that we have dreamed together and hope that they may one day come true..." Michael McMahon sac, 'Liberation Theology Kimberley Style: A Short History of the Bishop Raible Co-op.' (Parish priest in Broome 1967-1989 - article written in June 1992). *Nelen Yubu*, no.52, 1992. p.22.

<sup>25</sup>Robyn Reynolds fdnsc, 'Tracks in the Desert', *Nelen Yubu*, no.52 (1992), p.6.

too powerful. With opportunity given us by God, we are sometimes privileged to sow seeds...<sup>26</sup>

José Comelin would agree with her attitude that change is initiated by the Spirit, for 'if the missionary decides that success has been achieved, then it is failure that has been embraced.' These views present the dichotomy which is part and parcel of 'mission'.<sup>27</sup>

To decide about mission directives, in the Kimberley, in October 1960, Bishop Jobst had met with Fr E A Worms, Professor Dr H Petri<sup>28</sup> and Dr Micha, a visiting German ethnologist, to draw up a statement, about whether and to what extent Catholic Aborigines should be encouraged to adhere to their traditions, mythology, initiation rites and their Law if they accepted the Catholic faith. All three agreed that cultural practices should be retained, as of social character, with the exception of child marriage, mutilation such as subincision and magic, which would clash with Christian belief and moral law. Directives were given in the vicariate to encourage a renaissance of tribal traditions where the tribal social structure had been destroyed. Where tribal social structure still existed all the good elements of tribal life could be integrated into Christian life. The formation and training of lay apostles was a top priority. Militant and responsible laymen from amongst the coloured Catholics would be recruited to help with spiritual and material means in the conversion of their own people in the Kimberley. Mission policy could never ignore Government policy. At the time, the native department had adopted 'assimilation' as official policy. The bishop was careful, 'Much as we co-operate with the department... we must be wary lest Christian

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<sup>26</sup>ibid., p.7.

<sup>27</sup>Martin Wilson msc 'Review Article: Jose Comblin: *The Meaning of Mission*', *Nelen Yubu*, no.10, (December 1981), pp.30-34. Jose Comblin's book is an English translation edited in 1977 by Orbis Books Maryknoll of 'Atualidade da Teologia da Missão' which appeared in *Revista Eclesiastica Brasileira* 1972-3, p.31. There is an awkward dialectic involved in the historical process of evangelisation (cf. pp. 134 ff). To the extent that it is successful it starts to fail!

<sup>28</sup>H Petri, 'Native Law and Mission Policy in the Diocese of Broome', Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, Cologne University, 1964. Translated and edited by Bishop J Jobst, 27 August 1985. ADB.

principles and human rights are violated.<sup>29</sup> To implement his mission policy was not easy.<sup>30</sup>

Bishop Jobst was present in Rome in 1962 when a pastoral council, rather than a doctrinal council, caused a shift in Catholic thinking. The Vatican Council took the diversity of local churches seriously. A process of moving to a concept of a communion of local churches, each fully church, altered the church's perception of itself. In the discussion of new ways of defining the nature of the church, a reversal of the manner in which the secular world was to be envisaged took place. The Conciliar expression of the reality of church was 'The church is a kind of sacrament or sign'; 'The church is the universal sacrament of salvation'.<sup>31</sup> 'As long as a sign is communicating, it does not have to apologize for being small.'<sup>32</sup>

The Catholic church is not the only institution currently being forced to rethink its ideological base with Aborigines. *Singing the Land, Signing the Land*<sup>33</sup> is one of six portfolios of knowledge and graphic illustrations compiled from research on 'World View' and its impact on conceptualization. This systematic review of the cross-cultural content of course materials resulted from collaborative scholarship of a group of academics who believe that their discipline, 'History and Philosophy of Science', was guilty of a high degree of European ethnocentrism. They

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<sup>29</sup>Policy Documents, ADB.

<sup>30</sup>Author's note: It was not until 1978, that a case for inculturation in liturgy for Australian Aborigines was submitted for approval to the Bishop's Conference in Sydney and permission for a period of five years' experimentation was given.

<sup>31</sup>*The Teaching of the Second Vatican Council: The Complete Text of the Constitutions, Documents, and Declarations, with an Introduction by G Baum, OSA*, Maryland, The Newman Press, 1966, para. 48, pp.145-147.

<sup>32</sup>'Sign' is the term which runs counter to 'Sanctuary thinking'. A sign points beyond itself. As an image, it hints at humility, service, and compassion. It points to where the action is and had a quality of openness to its environment, the world. It allowed for co-operation with the enormous spiritual potential of the world which surrounded it. W B Frazier, 'Guidelines for a New Theology of Mission', *Worldmission*, vol. 18, (Winter 1967-68), pp.16-24.

<sup>33</sup>Helen Watson, (ed.) *Singing the Land: Signing the Land*, Geelong, Deakin University, 1989.

considered that the traditional view of their academic discipline was intellectually unsound. Its tacitly imperialist stance dominated scholarship and teaching. Through a comparison and contrast of a variety of knowledge and belief systems, they saw the need in Australia to recognize the stature of Aboriginal modes of thought.

Some churchmen question if it is possible that traditional theology has been co-opted by the 'Empire' and is in epistemological and cultural bondage? Don Carrington argues that traditional theology is the handmaid of Western expansion.<sup>34</sup> Cyril Hally, who claims the perspective of a cultural anthropologist, does not hold that Australian theology has ever been bound by having an imperialist epistemology. He questions whether the values of Western society ever fully became true Australian concepts, and argues that the majority of Australian Catholics do not fit easily into the context of a Roman, or a Western church, let alone one of the Empire. Though the industrial revolution and the French and American revolutions brought about profound changes in English culture and led to modern democracy, urbanisation and capitalism, such changes did not require religious legitimation. Christendom never existed here.<sup>35</sup>

Aboriginal Society has its own human constructs. It is diverse and includes hundreds of groups, languages, cultural traditions and habitats. Generally it is recognised that patterns which organise, and laws which govern European knowledge and perception have little in common with the patterns which make sense of the Aboriginal world. Djiniyini Gondarra, an Aboriginal theologian, writes that the roots of denominational differences should not be part of Aboriginal Christianity.<sup>36</sup> Such differences are extremely difficult for Aborigines,

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<sup>34</sup>D Carrington, 'Theologians Struggling to cope at the End of an Era', in J Houston, (ed.), *The Cultural Pearl: Australian Readings in Cross Cultural Theology and Mission*, Melbourne, Victorian Council of Churches, 1986, p.13.

<sup>35</sup>'Modern Australia was probably therefore the first secular nation. None of the major components of our social structure have been sacralised. They are conceived of as human constructs, precisely what culture is.' C Hally, 'Inculturation and Poly-Ethnicity', in Houston, *The Cultural Pearl*, p.32.

<sup>36</sup>'I recognise the contributions of the Western Churches in Australia and their missionary agencies in the birth and growth of Australian Churches in many Aboriginal communities ...but...denominational differences have been introduced by the white Church.' Djiniyini Gondarra, 'Overcoming the

for whom the genealogical pattern explains all relationships in both the social world and the world of nature.<sup>37</sup>

Currently new theories regarding the essence of an Australian spirituality are probing differences in Australian culture.<sup>38</sup> Incidents of cultural contact by female Catholic missionaries in the Kimberley of north-west Australia expose the diversity. Courageous efforts made by male missionaries, who spear-headed the thrust in the difficult task of founding the church are not being downgraded by concentrating this research on the feminine activity in the Church. The reason here is to provide a focus.

In *Catholics in Australia: A Social History*, Naomi Turner writes: ‘...In the light of today’s thinking...there is no justification now for adopting or continuing methods similar to those of earlier missionaries for Aborigines ...’<sup>39</sup> Actually, in the light of the ideas being expressed by women in the field, there is no need to try to do so. In Australian missiology today, the women are exploring avenues in the changed structures of the church. Among the women writing about the theory and practice of this paradigm shift is an Australian Sister of St Joseph who was appointed to work in the east Kimberley. Her name is Veronica Mary Ryan. To her, such an appointment seemed very much in keeping with the spirit of her Australian order which had a such a humble beginning in 1866.<sup>40</sup> She has entitled her research, ‘Aboriginal Women in the Face of Change: “We Gottem Two-Way Right Through Now”’. Veronica Ryan argues that new ideas were acceptable to Aboriginal women only insofar as they enhanced the value of beliefs, customs and practices already held.<sup>41</sup> Through their stories she

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Captivities of the Western Church Context’. The Biblical text is ‘For freedom Christ has set us free, therefore do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.’ (Gal.5:1). *Nelen Yubu*, no. 25, (Summer, 1986).

<sup>37</sup>Watson, *Singing the Land, Signing the Land*, Geelong, Deakin University, 1989, pp.31-32.

<sup>38</sup>P Malone, (ed.), *Discovering an Australian Theology*, Homebush, St Paul Publications, 1988.

<sup>39</sup>Turner, *Catholics in Australia*, p.206.

<sup>40</sup>Veronica Mary Ryan, ‘Aboriginal Women in the Face of Change: “We Gottem Two-Way Right Through Now”’, a thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Education at the University of New England, March 1991, p.vii.

demonstrates how the Aboriginal women of Turkey Creek understand their gender role within society according to the way the older women educated them to understand it. Access to gender knowledge gives direction to the women's actions in social, cultural and political contexts. For example, control of land does not only belong to men, the women are responsible for their own sacred sites.<sup>42</sup> For practical application of theological principles in missiological theories, the women are searching for their way to participate in the current cultural transformation now taking place. New conceptual frameworks for a holistic approach to reality are being evolved to encompass both ecological and feminist perspectives. Recognition is being made of current roles of leadership of Aboriginal women in ministry.<sup>43</sup> Clare Ahern writes:

I became friends with Aboriginal women from different places and learned the names of their communities. So many had the names of trees. I prayed that we would be hopeful, that we would allow the life of the Spirit to blossom in those Aboriginal trees, that we should look to the new shoots and receive life from them, and that we would not worry too much about or trip over the older branches that made way for the new.<sup>44</sup>

She described herself as a younger missionary conscious that older missionaries have paved the way for her. Eugene Stockton wrote about 'viewing the mission scene through the eyes of the mission personnel'<sup>45</sup> and she realised that she saw different scenes.<sup>46</sup> (In this context is it feasible to raise the issue of a gender difference with regard to the

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<sup>41</sup>ibid., p.xxii.

<sup>42</sup>ibid., pp.24-25.

<sup>43</sup>'Our country is blessed with the unsung songs of Australian women, untold stories of Aboriginal women leaders who have had to lead without the support of their menfolk. Those of us who have walked alongside them have seen and felt the strength, wisdom and humour in their leadership. They wear it lightly, leading when it is necessary and taking the fringe benefits as they come. Leadership is not seen as limiting but as part of life, mixed with pain and pleasure. We have so much to learn from them..' Clare Ahern, 'Biblical and Aboriginal Women of Note', *Nelen Yubu*, no. 46, (Autumn, 1991), p.11.

<sup>44</sup>Clare Ahern rsj, 'A Kimberley Response to Eugene Stockton', *Nelen Yubu*, no.29, (1986/7), p.10.

<sup>45</sup>ibid., p.6.

<sup>46</sup>ibid., p.6.

perception of reality?) Clare Ahern then points out that 'with her colleagues', presumably male and female, she met regularly to discuss, plan and evaluate their mission work. Sometimes these meetings take place in non-mission places, where non-Aboriginals and church-workers discussed community issues. Their interest is not confined to the 'spiritual' because they are aware of the principle that the sacred and profane are not separated in Aboriginal society. She pointed out that non-church people also initiated changes in the lives of Aborigines.<sup>47</sup>

In 1982 a lease of 3500 hectares was given to the Kundat Djaru community of Ringers' Soak (Yaruman). This is 168 km south of Halls Creek. The sisters' involvement in the women's affairs, and their acceptance of their responsibilities, was made with the realization that the Aboriginal women involved the sisters in making an unwritten contract. In the community as the forerunner of many nuns, Clare Ahern recorded what happened so there would be no deviating from the position they had taken at the time.<sup>48</sup> As one of the Catholic church personnel of the Kimberley, she accepts an understanding of mission as that:

whereby the Universal Church relates to the local indigenous church and the missionary works to enable a people/community to realise the Gospel for themselves, as a people true to their own culture,<sup>49</sup> with their own spiritual leadership and ministry.<sup>50</sup>

Some episodes of history demonstrate an ethnocentric missiology, when there was an assumption that it would be good to make the Aborigines into Catholics like the missionaries, with similar work habits. Efforts were made to learn the language. Both Aboriginal women and Asian women played a supportive role. Later episodes of history show how all available resources were used in an effort to educate Aboriginal children and young adults. The role played by the women was very important.

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<sup>47</sup>Clare Ahern rsj, 'A Kimberley Response to Eugene Stockton', *Nelen Yubu*, no.29, (1986/7), p.1-11.

<sup>48</sup>Clare Ahern rsj, 'A Religious Contract with the Kundat Djaru Community', *Nelen Yubu*, no.24, (1985), pp.3-8.

<sup>49</sup>Bird contends that Yarralin people use principles derived from the past as guides to action in the present, in order to produce a certain kind of future. The future to be produced is one in which the same principles will still be applicable, and in which life will continue. Bird, p.14.

<sup>50</sup>Ahern, 'A Kimberley Response ...' p.10.

An accommodational missiology was implemented when the decision was officially made to go in the Aboriginal door. Aboriginal rituals were encouraged to flourish. The Mulan community at Lake Gregory represented a fresh missionary response which was alive with potential, when, in contrast to the classic mode of mission establishment, whereby the Church moved into an area unbidden, setting up a complete community structure, here Church presence became a response to an Aboriginal request and a sensitive accommodation to a new development.<sup>51</sup> Lengthy preparations for christian ceremonies by the Mulan people recently returned to their homeland is an objective measure both of the renewal of the community and of the internalisation of their initiation into following the tracks of Jesus.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>Colleen Kleinschäffer rsm, 'Fresh Shoots on the Mulan Tree', *Nelen Yubu*, no. 23, (Winter 1985), p. 16 .

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# ST MARY'S SCHOOL BOWRAVILLE

Anne Maree Lavis rsj

**I**N LIGHT of the current national trend towards *reconciliation* and the recent formation of the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation*, it seems timely to give recognition to an educational program whose main function and impetus has been the revitalisation of a small part of Aboriginal culture but whose consequences reached beyond this into a 'grass roots' illustration of this *reconciliation* that is being talked about and aimed towards.

Nestled into the valley of the Nambucca River on the mid-North Coast of New South Wales lies the small country town of Bowraville. During an eighteen-month period spanning 1990-91 it received much regional, state and even national media coverage, and for this brief period it became quite famous, or should I say, infamous, not for its picturesque views, great fishing or quiet country intimacy but for the disappearance and murder of three children. Although the memory of these events has faded from the wider world, the tainting of this small rural community remains deep in the hearts of many of its residents and will continue to produce an overwhelming sadness for all those involved for many years to come. This memory also tends to overshadow any positive aspects that Bowraville has to offer, and it is the gift and potential of an important positive contribution that Bowraville is making to the education of the young children of the area that will be the focus of this article.

Bowraville has a significant population of Aboriginal people, most of whom are members of the Gumbayngirr group. The Nambucca Valley is the traditional area for the Gumbayngirr people and there still exists today areas sacred to their heritage and culture. Bowraville was

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also the site for a government mission station that was set up on the outskirts of the town. The remnants of this mission, although vastly different from its beginnings, remains to this day.

During the many years of assimilation and education the Gumbayngirr language and culture had just about been lost to posterity. In the late 1980's, when there began to appear an interest in preserving the culture and language of traditional Aboriginal groups, the demise of the richness of the Gumbayngirr language was being felt by some of the older members of the group, as well as by some of the non-Aboriginal community. There was in the area at that time a Christian Brother, Steve Morelli, who had come to work among the Aboriginal people in whatever way he could. He had a background in teaching and a specialty in linguistics. On arriving in the area Steve attempted to assess the areas of need and realised that he had a skill that could be helpful in recording the language and culture of the local area. As a response to this Steve joined with a few of the older members of the Aboriginal community in the Bowraville/Nambucca/Kempsey area and began recording the language, stories and anecdotes that could be remembered. The timing of the formation of this group was vital, as the few people who could remember any of the language were frail and aged, and two very significant contributors to the group have since died. The wisdom, guidance, knowledge and encouragement received from Pop Pacey and Joyce Knox will long outlive their lives. Other significant contributors to this group were Emily Walker, Paul Knox and Sharon Smith whose gifts of story telling, music and drama were tapped and used to help record the wisdom and memories of Pop Pacey, Joyce and other members of the Gumbayngirr group that could remember any of their traditional language and culture.

Over a period of three years this team developed a program of oral and written language, stories and songs that were developed around the traditions of the Gumbayngirr people. Once the team began to gain confidence and pride in the work they were doing, they came to the local Catholic school community and began to share their knowledge and wisdom. They would simply sit with each of the class groups and their teachers and share the stories and songs that had become part of their repertoire. Eventually the language team put together a collection of words and phrases that they then began to teach to these children.

The Aboriginal children of St Mary's saw their own older people begin sharing parts of their story and language that they had never heard before. They then began to experience and show pride in these stories and realised that they had a language and a culture of which to be proud. A side effect of the whole process was the impact on the children themselves.

The then staff of St Mary's, under the leadership and encouragement of Christine Dodd, helped the language group develop a learning scheme whereby children who had previously shown very poor self-esteem, gradually began to hold their heads high and be proud of who they are, and successfully share this gift with others. Not only did the children become familiar with the words, stories, songs and dances that had been put together by the language team, they began performing them at local functions. This was epitomised in 1991 on National Aboriginal Day when St Mary's hosted, for the first time, the area's proceedings to commemorate NAIDOC. The children performed a Welcome Dance, three tribal dances that told of local legends, and sang their *Hullo Song*. There was a feeling of pride and awe as many of the wider community witnessed, for the first time, the local children take ownership of, and pride in a heritage they thought was lost.

St Mary's School is a small rural Catholic school, part of the systemic schools of the Lismore diocese. It was opened in 1905 by the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and has had a chequered experience of administration and enrolment since then. During the early to mid-1980's the total enrolment dropped to below 25 and the school was threatened with closure. After consultation with the local community the Lismore diocese decided to invest time, money and personnel into building up the school's resources as a support and commitment to the Aboriginal and local parish communities. By 1991 the enrolment had climbed back to 50, approximately 60% of whom belonged to the Aboriginal community.

After the introduction of the Gumbayngirr language scheme, the staff and children of St Mary's began to express to the rest of the community that it was possible for two cultures to coexist and value the gifts that each had to offer. They became conscious of each other's rights and were fiercely loyal and protective of each other.

On one level the school functioned as a struggling, economically and socially disadvantaged school that attracted certain government and diocesan funding to help it along. It presented the normal ups and downs of any school, with difficulties in staffing, buildings, the normal problems of playground tiffs and classroom discipline. At another, and I believe more significant level, St Mary's displays in small-scale the potentialities of society that is enriched by cross-cultural experiences. I also believe that it is a very real example of how the program for reconciliation can work. The wrongs of our past, even present, history cannot be *righted*. But their memory can be used as a positive impetus behind the implementation and encouragement of the many small steps towards reconciliation wherever they appear.

It is widely recognised that *education* is the most powerful tool in any area of change and I think that the Australian society as a whole realises that there cannot be true *reconciliation* until we will really know each other and appreciate each other's cultures and perspectives on life.

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### **In Memoriam Fr John Fallon msc**

My 'bush cousin' is dead. Father John Fallon msc died in Sydney on 3 May this year after a brave fight against cancer. Space in this issue is short, so I will just say in a few words what John Fallon meant to me.

Apart from his being guide and comforter at the time I was widowed, John and I had a shared love for seeing God in the trees, the sea, the bush—ever marvelling at what we found in the wilds of Daly River, the Tiwi Islands, the Blue Mountains of NSW. 'Let's go out bush, coz' was his signal for a packed lunch and quick departure for a day's tramp through what he called 'God's own country', where we talked on his favourite subject, his Maker, and how we are all held together in the hollow of His hand. I owe my bush coz so much for his deep understanding of life, and death, and of the way in which we must ever hold ourselves prepared.

I visited him a number of times in the weeks just before his death, and now he has gone to meet the God he lived for. Much loved, much missed, a faithful priest: John Anthony Fallon msc. *Requiescat in pace.*

— Keren Calvert

# CHALLENGES FOR THE MISSIONARY CHURCH —The Encounter with Other Cultures

Paulo Suess

## 1. The Missionary Church: Three Questions

VATICAN II liberated new missionary energies in the church. Nearly every one of the Council documents gives impetus to new missionary action. At the same time—particularly in countries where evangelisation arrived together with colonisation—there have risen deep questions and doubts about how the missionary church has conducted itself towards other peoples in history. Questions from without and from within have provoked a crisis of identity among the ministers of this missionary church. It is important to resolve this crisis before turning ourselves *ad gentes*. We are not sent to the oppressed and outcast to load them with the burden of our confusions, but to offer them the Gospel as good news.

### a. The necessity of missionaries

The first question rose among the missionaries themselves, wondering ‘Is our presence needed for people’s salvation?’ *Lumen Gentium* (no. 16) affirms:

The plan of salvation enfolds also those who recognise the Creator...God is not far from those who seek the unknown God among shadows and reflections...Therefore, those who without blame ignore the Gospel of Christ and his church but seek God with a sincere heart, and try with the inner gift of his grace to do his will as they perceive it through their consciences, can obtain eternal salvation. And Divine Providence does not refuse the aid necessary for salvation to those who through no fault of their own have not yet arrived at explicit knowledge of God...

Christopher Columbus, with his vessel stranded helplessly in the sand, experienced the ‘natural goodness’ of the Indians on Christmas

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Paulo Suess is a Brazilian theologian. His paper is being distributed among themselves for consideration by the Little Sisters of Jesus. Sr Michele of the Yuendumu community sent it to us.

Eve 1492. 'They are people so kind-hearted and so free of greed and capable of so many things that I certify to Your Majesties that there are no better people, I believe, to be found in all the world. They love their neighbour as themselves and have the most honey-toned language in the world and are forever laughing'.

Columbus himself would a few years later, see Indians sold as slaves in the Plaza de Sevilla. Is this how to treat people who love their neighbours as themselves and live in joy and reciprocal sharing?

On the other hand it was deeply gratifying to the Franciscan Toribio Motolinia when he could report that by 1536 through the efforts of the religious of New Spain (today's Mexico) five million Indians had been baptised. In a few years they had made in Mexico more christians than there would have been in Spain. And making a christian meant 'delivering someone from hell'. On this basis the Jesuit Antinio Vieia could tell the black slaves in Bahia, Brazil, 'Your slavery is not a misfortune. Your parents are in hell for all eternity, but you are saved, thanks to this slavery'.

We missionaries and evangelisers since the Council no longer have the joy of delivering people so easily from hell and eternal condemnation. We know that Divine Providence takes care of the salvation of innocents and people of good will. Many missionaries thus started wondering, 'If people can be saved outside the church, is there still a need for my missionary presence?'

## **b. The legitimacy of missionaries**

A second question rose among people who were on the receiving end of the Gospel, whether in the 16th century or today. They cast doubt on the way the Gospel was transmitted to them. Several Indian groups, for example, asked us why we had respected their culture so little and were still ignorant of their history. They asked us, 'By what right have you imposed the Gospel on us and how have you dressed it up?'

When the conquerors came to the Maya Indians, witnesses expressed their misgivings, as we can read in the book of Chilam Balam de Chumazel:

They christianised us, but they treated us like animals...

The 'most christian' gentlemen arrived here with the true God, but it

was the beginning of our woes, the beginning of tribute, the beginning of beggary...

It was the beginning of our struggle matched against fire arms...the beginning of losing all we had...the beginning of enslavement for our debts...

When we read the correspondence of 16th century missionaries, we understand better the laments of the Indians. The Franciscan Mendieta, for example, wrote to the Commissar General for the Indies, 'Since these people are so wretched and low, one must either hold all authority over them or one will hold none'.

The friars considered themselves the 'Fathers of this wretched nation' which had been 'entrusted to us as babes and children, that we might bring them up, give them doctrine, guard them, correct them, preserve them and make them useful in christian faith and civilisation'.

Acknowledging the 'vicissitudes of history' (Puebla document no. 6) the Bishops Committee for the Pastoral Care of Latin American Indigenous People made a declaration at a meeting of the CELAM at Bogota in 1985, which is surely valid for missionary practice in Africa too:

In the past there have been in the Church too attitudes marked by the sin of cultural aggression...The liturgy today is still far from native cultures...In the Latin American Church the predominant pastoral care directed towards indigenous peoples is one which turns the Indians into passive receivers, not creative subjects in the process of their own evangelisation and human promotion.

If historical realism shows us that the Good News of the Gospel is frequently confused with the bad news of western civilisation, what reason is there for our missionary presence among these peoples? What guarantee can we offer them that today's New Evangelisation will no longer impose on them the burden of an alien civilisation?

### **c. The bias of missionaries**

The Church of Latin America has made a renewed commitment to the 'apostolic path' of evangelisation of the world. We call ourselves a 'missionary Church at the service of evangelisation' and have made a 'clear and prophetic option of preference and solidarity towards the poor' (Puebla no. 1134). This gave rise to a third question: 'When we made an option for the poor, are we not as colonialist as ever if our

evangelisation is based on the view points of the dominant culture?' What importance does the history of the peoples we evangelise have for the salvation history we proclaim to them? What importance does their culture have in our missionary practice?

'The poor' are not just human beings we can define by their deprivations in society. Social reality is a partial view of the world. The poor are also historically and culturally 'other' bearers of inherited values, subjects of their own historical and cultural drama. Even after Puebla, there is still a step we must take, 'a rupture with our cultural and religious ethno-centricity which reproduces the colonial system and perpetuates it,' as the bishops said at the CELAM meeting in Ipacarai, Paraguay. Africa and Asia, our indigenous and black peoples, our peasants and workers, all peoples, in short, are waiting for us to base our missionary attitudes on these words of Puebla: 'When the Church, the People of God, proclaims the Gospel and nations accept the faith, the People of God becomes incarnate in them and assumes their cultures. "What is not assumed is not redeemed".' (Puebla no. 400).

The great challenge for the meeting in Santo Domingo will be to complete the preferential option for the poor with an option for basing evangelisation of the poor and outcast in their own culture and history. This is the challenge of New Evangelisation, a new and plenary proclamation of the Gospel.

## **2. The Other, the Culture of the Other: Three Answers**

Is missionary presence necessary? Is it legitimate? Is it unbiased? (and is it authentic?) These questions require new answers. The challenge as to whether the mission is necessary to salvation comes from within and calls for a theological and ecclesiological answer. Whether the mission is legitimate and whether its vision is authentically inclusive are challenges from without, and others will help us beat the swords of colonialism into the ploughshares of liberation.

### **a. From necessary to gratuitous**

Many groups have the custom of looking outside the tribe for marriage partners. Anthropologists call this practice 'exogamy'. Marrying within the tribe (or marrying first-degree relatives, as we would call it today) is considered incestuous and the culture forbids it. Such marriages cause biological damage.

The mission is a similar thing. It represents the deep need for the church to stay turned outward, for the sake of the health and vitality of the 'tribe'. The mission comes of following Jesus who called himself 'Path' and was the Path. The missionary church—the People of God on their pilgrim path—assures the vitality of the whole church by keeping it on the move. Strictly speaking, the work of the mission is not the department of specialists. 'The whole church is missionary.' (*Ad Gentes* no. 35, cf.. *Lumen Gentium* no. 17).

The mission is therefore not primarily something other people need in order to be saved from hell, but something the church needs to stay healthy. A church that spends its energy on its internal problems or institutional disputes would be a diseased church.

Seen from this point of view, the mission is not a favour we do for others, but a favour others do us when they receive us as guests among them. When we live among other peoples, the grace of our faith in Jesus who died and rose lives in us there. This grace is mere gift and so is our presence. Gratuitousness is what transforms the world, not demands or threats.

## The legitimacy of mutuality

The presence of the missionary church among peoples who have been colonised for centuries has to be a de-colonising presence. The church cannot therefore accept 'policing' duties or have political or religious power. We are not, as St Paul tells us, the masters of the faith of others, but the collaborators in their joy (2 Cor 1:24). We are not the masters nor the parents. We and they are brothers and sisters together, and we are the junior brothers and sisters.

How can we recover the lost mutuality? How can we disarm the mistrust that has built up through the 'vicissitudes of history'?

Mutuality among brothers and sisters has many sides in the world today. It always, however, resembles what St Paul described as 'love' (1 Cor 13).

- As brothers and sisters all of us are active agents in the mission. There are no receiving 'clients' of evangelisation. In principle, everyone is 'ministerial material': fit to exercise actively the services the People of God need.

- As brothers and sisters, our missionary practice is a collective phenomenon. Mission is always pursued within a missionary community.

- The mutuality of brothers and sisters implies receptivity and listening. It implies empathy and communion. Communion means 'suffering with' the crucified peoples.

Being brothers and sisters therefore means solidarity all the way to the last places and the last consequences. Yet the last place is precisely the place we can find the Lord (cf. Mt 25:31ff and Puebla no. 31-39). The 'Mission of the Fringes', where the outcastes are centre and starting point, is the confirmation of the presence of the Lord. And this mission is the solution to what is called the crisis of missionary identity.

- Missionaries who see themselves as brothers or sisters to all, mirror the Servant of the Lord as described in the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah (Is 45:1-4, etc.).

### **c. From bias to Pentecostal plenitude**

The poor are one but also many. Their presence is universal; their ways of being are multiple. The plurality of their cultures does not form a Babel-like confusion, but a new Pentecost. Each people, each group, each social class has the right to receive the Gospel through the mediations of its own culture. Why? Because of what culture is.

Culture is like a second layer of our environment. It is a human creation mantling the divine creation, and human groups constantly recreate it. Through culture they adapt their primary environment, nature, to themselves; they adapt and organise themselves to different geographical and historical situations. When we plunge into the adventure of evangelisation, we must ask ourselves, 'Within what culture are we evangelising?'

There is no evangelisation that does not pass through cultural mediations. Examples of these mediations include the language, the symbols, the values, the structure of thought, the concept of time and space, the way the society organises its services (ministries!), the interactions of community life, the notions of family and kinship. All of these mould the way the people conceive of God, and vice versa. The Gospel revelation of God does not need to be mediated by one specific culture.

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* (no. 20) tells us, 'The Gospel, and therefore evangelisation too, are by no means identified with a culture and are independent of all cultures.'

These are the foundations for an evangelisation of the poor based in the culture of the poor, an evangelisation of the Ayamara based in the culture of the Ayamara, an evangelisation of the Bantu based in the culture of the Bantu. The church will have an authentically inclusive vision if it can take to itself and express within itself elements that are not reduced to one another. The plurality of cultures and of national histories that the churches assume is a sign of faithfulness to the original Spirit, the Spirit that hovered over the waters as a creative principle, the Spirit we invoke in the liturgy as Source of life and Father of the poor.

The Church of Latin America has this contribution to make to the mission *ad gentes*. It is not successful 'solutions' we are exporting—not our basic communities, our biblical movement, our liberation theology. We offer, out of our poverty, our history and our suffering, new evangelical attitudes: the gratuity, the mutuality and the socio-cultural plentitude of New Evangelisation. This evangelisation need not worry about whether it is necessary or legitimate or unbiased. The peoples will know how to tell the good grain from the weeds. They will say about this new missionary presence what the Indians said about Cabeza de Vaca, the christian layman and wonder-worker who was shipwrecked with his companions among them and lived there for ten years:

We (they imagine Cabesa as saying) come from where the sun is born, while they (that is, 'the false Christians') come from where the sun disappears. We heal the sick and they kill the healthy. We came naked and bare-foot, they on horses and with swords. We had no ambition but, rather, shared what we had received with all; they had no other aim but to steal whatever they came upon and give nothing to anyone.