

Editorial

This issue of *Nelen Yubu* centres on inculturation—not that the theme was deliberately pre-set, but that's what has turned out. Could this indicate that we are in step with modern trends?

I make this suggestion because, as my opening article recounts, I am just back from an international consultation on inculturation that was sponsored by Missio (Aachen).

From his vantage point at Santa Teresa Br Cletus Read fms continues his observations on and radical suggestions for the ministry of the church among the Aboriginal people of Northern Territory.

Gerard Goldman has just completed his master's (in theology) thesis about, in effect, inculturation in the Daly River (NT) area. He recounts in this issue the results of a similar sort of investigation that he conducted among a small group of white Australians. It was a course exercise, but proved remarkably fruitful.

To our standard (and popular) feature from the the secretary's desk we have added several incidental items.

Martin Wilson msc

Editor

INCULTURATION CONSULTATION

Missio, Aachen, 1994

Martin Wilson msc

Generously, and quite courageously, the Institute of Missiology, Aachen (Germany), set up and conducted an international consultation on the topic of *inculturation* 20-25 February, 1994, at Aachen. The 'Missionswissenschaftliches Institut Missio' is the research arm of the Aachen branch of the German Catholic church's funding and aid-bestowing organisation, Missio. The Institute represents a research and academic function that is lacking to Missio's Australian equivalent, Australian Catholic Relief.

The enterprise was *generous* in nature as it involved the financing of the travel and accommodation of some 50 participants, of whom 2/5 came from outside Europe. From the Pacific area were: Ennio Mantovani svd (Melanesian Institute in PNG), Jovili Meo (Pacific Theological College, Suva), Keiti-Ann Kanongata'a soln (Tonga, recently elected superior general of the Sisters of Our Lady of Nazareth), and myself from NYMU. There were eight from various parts of Africa; five from the southern Americas; six from Asia. The rest were from Europe, 20 being from Germany itself. The statistic that surprised me was that there was no one from North America—a discussion conducted mainly in English about inculturation on a world-wide basis, and no North American contribution!

It was *courageous* to engage in such an extensive consultation whose outcome could not really be predicted. Apparently also some high church authorities saw in it some threat to Roman centralism. The temper of the meeting was well expressed in an opening remark whose humorous format overlaid a serious intention: The world church these days is not so much in need of a Vatican III or even of a Chicago I, but rather of a Jerusalem II—it was at Jerusalem I that christianity first opened out to other cultures.

As all good consultations should, the conference had both theoretical and practical objectives. The practical objective was the establishment of a network of researchers who would identify, document, maybe clarify the process of inculturation in various parts of the church. That is why it was mainly members of *institutes* who were invited. The

theoretical objective was further clarification of the thrust of the church in the modern world.

Stages in the process

The stages in the process were:

1. **Monday:** *Inculturation in Asia* (M Amaladoss sj, A Pieris sj). The role of the church, i.e. of christians, is to proclaim its witness to the values manifested by the Spirit through Jesus by living them and celebrating them in symbol. It is more a matter of inter-religious dialogue than of inter-cultural action.

2. **Tuesday:** *Inculturation in Europe* (G Evers, L Bertsch sj). In brief, Europe always was a 'mission country'. European christians deluded themselves into thinking otherwise [—as Belloc put it, "Europe is the Faith, and the Faith is Europe"]. Confrontation between the gospel and the indigenous *religious* cultures was avoided: christianity became with Constantine a new state religion; missionaries suppressed "pagan" religions. Europe has a sad history in regard to religious and cultural minorities. Today Muslims are the second largest non-christian religious community in Europe. Also, there is a call to interpret secularisation positively, as an autonomous system of values, i.e. outside church control. The church is being called to acknowledge its mission to be a leaven within a mass, a small flock, rather than an all-embracing empire. Maybe the church is being called to become a network of basic Christian communities, not only in Third World countries but also in Europe.

3. **Wednesday:** *Africa (PS: and the Pacific!)*. (Laurenti Magesa, Teresa Okure, Keiti-Ann Kanongata'a). The African speakers manifested a surprising but healthy neglect of the colonial inculturating past. For them the problems of inculturation have to do with the present. In the dialogue between faith and culture the important difference is between the *official* level of inculturation (what church leaders think is happening) and the *popular* level of new christian churches (sects?). Thus the AMECEA bishops imposed Small Christian Communities from on high: these were to be implementations of the 'theology of incarnation' as opposed to the earlier 'theology of adaptation', but they are seen by the people as projects of the bishops and have not tapped into the people's sources of vitality in a way that their indigenous churches do. One African speaker (Okure) saw the real problem as between faith and the real context of hunger, drought, aids etc; hence she would prefer the term *contextualisation*.

Keiti-Ann gave a non-problematic presentation of the happy marriage that is possible between the Pacific Way and the gospel. One Pacific value is sharing, so she proceeded to share her time with the other three

of us from the Pacific: we were able to add a few observations on the topic of inculturation as it affected our own areas.

4. **Thursday:** *Latin & Indian America* (A Wagua, D Irrarazaval). Aiban Wagua is a Kuna (Panama) priest; the rest of his family practise the traditional religion. True inculturation implies respect for the religious values of the indigenous people: a process of adult dialogue: proposition, not imposition. — The question of the term ‘inculturation’ occasioned a heated dialogue. European and African theologians criticised liberation theology as being too narrow, neglectful of areas of culture wider than the socio-economic. Liberation theologians saw ‘inculturation’ as an attempt by the official church to put them down, keep them under thumb. One South American participant declared that he had wiped the term ‘inculturation’ out of his dictionary! — On the other hand Irrarazaval gave a positive presentation of inculturation as a process whereby people give witness in their lives to the incarnate presence of God with us human beings through the celebration of pain and joy (Easter) by virtue of the Spirit (Pentecost). On the level of human life the Christ events and christian experience are relevant to all human beings. The role of the church is to be a witness and a sacrament.

5. **Friday:** Research Network. Missio wants to continue the work done by the consultation through a widely-flung network of researchers. It was decided to work around two themes, ‘Conflict situations and christian experiences’ and ‘The building up of local churches’. Missio Aachen will act as initial co-ordinator, and it will publish results in a Yearbook of Contextual Theology.

Reflections

The theme of the consultation was really an attempt to explore further some of the particular implications of Vatican 2’s *Lumen Gentium* #22, entitled in the English edition as “Christ as the New Man”.

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light . . .

. . . linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, [christian people] will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope.

All this holds true not only for christians, but for all [people] of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all [people], and since the ultimate vocation of [everybody] is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to [everybody] the possibility of being associated with this paschal mystery.

This text was the cited source of Irrazaval's paper. It may have been cited by others, but its content certainly constituted the overall framework of the consultation.

A missionary crisis occurred after Vatican 2: if God is already present in cultures, why send out missionaries as if the people had not yet heard! Various answers were given, but the question has returned. This time the answer being formulated seems to be in the form:

- Christ, God-incarnate, is meaningful for all people.
- A christian's function is to bear witness to him in life and action.
- The sacrament of a christian life helps activate the Christ within the other, and vice-versa.
- This sacrament should be activated throughout the world, so that truth, justice, peace and love should flourish, and evil should be confronted.
- The church must disavow its colonising past and revert to its true function of being a light, a yeast, a small flock, a saving remnant . . .
- What is specific to christianity could well be its loving outreach to the oppressed and down-trodden—that's how its founder was amongst us: the victim of the powerful.

The consultation could well mark a watershed point in the history of the church—not alone, of course, but as a not insignificant moment in a new emerging pattern. Amaladoss a number of times humorously reminded the consultation that it is not the first group of people to have studied the question of inculturation.

On the negative side, I felt that a lot of effectiveness was lost by a lack of clarity of term and concept. I do not believe that there was a uniform understanding of 'culture'; hence 'inculturation', the topic of the consultation, was a hazy notion, culminating in its total eviction from the lexicon of one speaker. Time was spent unprofitably on the merits of alternative terms. I would like to have had a chance to develop a distinction between *invasive inculturation* (where one culture, e.g. the missionary one, intrudes into and effectively destroys the object culture, as happened with Aboriginal cultures here in Australia), and *sybiotic inculturation* (where cultures live side-by-side and mutually enhance one another, as can be the case in the religious situation in India today), but there was little time to do so. A number told me they liked the term *sybiotic inculturation*, so if it crops up in some later publications you may salute it as an Australian made product.

THE ABORIGINAL ANAWIM

Cletus Read fms

IN MY first two articles I introduced the topic of 'concept of church' and also that of 'equality of person'. I did this with a purpose because I wanted churches to reflect on what I had to say and to take up points of view before I presented a real life situation here in Central Australia. My expectation was that readers of *Nelen Yubu* would form opinions in the framework of a Top End Vision based on living conditions in places such as Bathurst Island and Arnhem Land where Aboriginal people still live in their own country, or on situations in towns such as Darwin and Alice Springs, focussing on those Aboriginal families who are successfully coping with town pressures and who have become stabilised town families. It seems to me that we whites have inherited from western Europe a conviction that an essential element in the concept of church is location: church is a community which worships God in a particular building; which sends its children to a particular school; and which entrusts the health care of its sick to a particular hospital. I believe this to be the mind set of Catholics and I suspect that it is also the mind set of some members of other christian churches.

Further, I contend that christian churches (except maybe for the Lutherans) have little or no vision of the most disadvantaged families of Aboriginal people among whom are the dispossessed of the agricultural region and those whose country has been taken over by pastoralists for cattle stations. These families, the 'anawim' of Aboriginal society, are to be found on settlements such as Santa Teresa, or in fringe camps bordering towns or in communities associated with cattle stations such as Stirling and Alcoota or in isolated camps scattered through the outback. Mabo offers no hope for these families because the law has cancelled all native rights to their land. Their forebears were semi-nomadic and had to travel a wide range to survive in the dry interior and

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today many of them are still mobile as they move from settlement to fringe camp, from fringe camp to pastoral excision, from pastoral excision to visit distant relatives and so on in a never-ending cycle. Church resource people seem to direct their efforts towards the more advantaged Aboriginal families who have attained a state of stability; church research groups turn up information relating to the well adjusted families; diocese and parish councils and programs are tailored to meet the needs of the more advantaged Aboriginal families; and training centres such as Nungalinya seem to me to have the same focus. In no way am I denigrating the work being done by churches and I realise that the target group being served constitutes the major sector of the Aboriginal population. What I am pointing out is that more attention could be directed towards the needs of the 'anawim' without significant loss of service to the more advantaged if churches were to take notice of their situation; if their needs were given more consideration when resources were being apportioned; and especially if they were empowered to play a more active part in determining their own future. The principle of self-determination is not limited to the case of whites' empowering blacks to make decisions about their own lives: rather, it is a general principle which applies also to small groups and to individuals. Too often in the past churches have set up councils of advantaged Aboriginal people and have left those councils to make decisions for the Aboriginal 'anawim' even though the Aboriginal members of the councils are just as ignorant of the circumstances of life of the 'anawim' as are the whites who delegated authority to them. It is high time that churches increased their awareness of the needs of the Aboriginal 'anawim' and listened to their voice and gave *them* power to make decisions about ways of improving the quality of their own lives.

The subject is too vast to treat in one short article so I propose in this article to describe a social change taking place in Central Australia at the present time which may have serious ramifications for government departments and for churches. Then, in future articles I propose to take a look at some of those ramifications.

Hermannsburg Lutheran Mission is situated some 200 kilometres south-west of Alice Springs in the country associated with the Dreaming of the Western Arrernte people. The main settlement is ringed by outstations where families live in their own country: the total population exceeds 1000. Because of the easy availability of alcohol from the

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Mount Ebenezer Road House and from Alice Springs, families at Hermannsburg have had to face the mixed problems of drunkenness and of violence. The Western Arrernte women have been very active in speaking out against conditions which aggravate these problems and they have picketed outlets, organised deputations to politicians and conducted public demonstrations in Todd Mall.

Santa Teresa Catholic Mission is home to the Eastern Arrernte people and lies only 80 kilometres south-east of Alice Springs towards the Simpson Desert. This community is made up of the remnants of some clans who were once owners of the town site and of the land now comprising cattle stations such as Yamba and Deep Well and Undoolya. Few of these Aboriginal families are living on their own country so there is no out-station movement. For years the Aboriginal women of Santa Teresa had to rear their families in an environment of uncouth drunken behaviour and of physical violence of an intensity probably in excess of the Hermannsburg experience because of closeness to Alice Springs. In the past 15 years however, the Eastern Arrernte women have come to the realisation that they themselves must take control if they are ever to enjoy a peaceful environment conducive to pleasant family life and to effective child rearing. But they have adopted a strategy quite different from that of their Western Arrernte sisters. Experience had shown them that an Eastern Arrernte woman who marries an Eastern Arrernte man becomes a prisoner in the extended family system. If she and her children become victims of violence in the marriage relationship she is caught because, when she tries to escape the cycle of violence by physical separation, she is set upon by the women of her husband's extended family and tribal custom prevents interference by her own family. So the women of Santa Teresa decided that the best strategy to break the cycle of violence was to choose husbands from other tribes in Central Australia or from tribes in the Top End. In this circumstance should a woman be subjected to violence she withdraws with her children to Santa Teresa. If her husband follows her and wishes to negotiate a reconciliation he is on his own and she is surrounded by her extended family and by sympathetic women elders. The women then explain in clear terms to the errant husband the conditions under which the wife and children would be willing to return with him. Already there have been cases where the litigant husband has tried to resort to

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aggressive behaviour to solve his problem but has been severely dealt with by the women of the community.

This social change is not an unconscious process of evolution — it is a deliberate political action. The leaders of the movement are a group of women elders some of whom have had experience working in alcohol crisis centres in Darwin and in Alice Springs and one has carried out research in Canada. These women collect bales of clothing generously donated by the St Vincent de Paul Society of Alice Springs and they sell re-cycled clothing in order to finance their work. They conduct regular classes in the school teaching the children about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse and they explain to girls the problems arising from traditional marriages arranged according to skin groupings and the advantages offered by outside marriages.

In order to test the extent to which the movement had taken hold in Santa Teresa I worked with the women and we compiled lists of marriages for women born in 1960 or later (i.e. women under the age of 33) so as to scan a period of about 15 years. We classified them into four groups: (1) unmarried, (2) married to an Eastern Arrernte man, (3) married to an outside man from Central Australia, and (4) married to an outside man from the Top End. The results of the survey show that outside marriages were about equal to inside marriages for the women of the group. But the accompanying table includes fifty men who would belong to this same age group. Clearly if research were extended to the remaining men of this age group we would find the outside marriages outnumber inside marriages by a significant margin.

Cf. the Table Showing the Pattern of Marriages on p.9

Notes

- (1) There has been a marked decrease in the level of violence at Santa Teresa during the test period but, of course, other factors have been at work.
- (2) Twelve of the women listed among the 'not married' are under the age of twenty.
- (3) The history of mission activity of churches in the Territory has meant that there are regions of influence for various churches. The result is that an outside marriage in all probability is a cross-church marriage.
- (4) The strategy of encouraging outside marriages has produced the result that less than half of Santa Teresa marriages today are Catholic/Catholic.

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(5) For Aboriginal people, visiting relatives is a serious duty so that, when a Santa Teresa Catholic marries a Hermannsburg Lutheran, the family will spend significant amounts of time in each settlement. What is the concept of church for these families?

(6) Those who participate in church worship at Santa Teresa come exclusively from Catholic/Catholic marriages. Members of cross-church

TABLE SHOWING THE PATTERN OF MARRIAGES			
<i>Criteria for Inclusion:</i>		Eastern Arrernte Born in 1960 or later Has lived for one year at Santa Teresa	
Women not married			35
Women married to Eastern Arrernte men:			50
Women married to non-East-Arrernte men:			
Central Australia	Cattle Stations	15	
	Hermannsburg	9	
	Maryvale	6	
	Yuendumu	2	
	Ali Curung	2	
	Tennant Creek	1	35
Top End	Maningrida	4	
	Lake Evella	3	
	Bathurst Island	2	
	Borroloola	2	
	Others	3	14
TOTAL NUMBER OF WOMEN			134

marriages do not attend services in the Catholic Church. Do these families find it difficult to identify with either church?

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(7) Is a divided christian church becoming an obstacle to evangelisation among Aboriginal people?

(8) There has been a significant fall in attendance at the Santa Teresa Catholic School in recent years although the level of population has remained fairly constant. Maybe the outside marriage policy is a main factor?

(9) Lumko? Is this a burning issue for Aboriginal people in Central Australia, or is it relevant only in situations where families are more stable?

(10) Dispossession, unemployment, discrimination, loss of status . . . these are some of the factors which have pressured Aboriginal men to seek escape in alcohol and other drugs. How are they being affected now that they may be seeing themselves rejected by the women of their own tribe?

(11) Readers may now better understand why, in my model, the church went in search of the people instead of dropping anchor in one place—also why I chose a rabbinical style basic church in order to avoid the delicate ground of eucharistic practice when most of the families have allegiance to two different christian churches.

I wish to make a further observation before closing. Government and statutory bodies have long since realised that factors such as distance and differences make it ineffective to try to serve the needs of the Top End and of the Centre by means of one central administrative body acting out of Darwin. For this reason they have regionalised as we see in cases such as education, health care, Aboriginal legal aid, Aboriginal land councils and the police force. It seems to me that, so long as the Catholic Church tries to meet the needs of Aboriginal people through one pastoral council centred in Darwin, then the Top End will continue to receive preferential treatment and the 'anawim' will have to be satisfied with less generous consideration. There is a desperate need for an Aboriginal pastoral council in Central Australia to serve as a medium for enabling Aboriginal people to reflect on the state of their relationship with God through Jesus Christ so that they can make more informed decisions about ways in which that relationship could be improved. I am not inferring that the resident priests in Alice Springs and at Santa Teresa have been remiss in their service to the people. Rather do I maintain that we, the Church, have failed to provide the workers at the coal face with the back-up support to which they are entitled.

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Book Review

Blue Mountains Dreaming. The Aboriginal Heritage. Ed. Eugene Stockton. Three Sisters Publications P/L, Winmalee NSW. 160 pp., RRP \$14.95.

In 1788 the Aborigines of the Blue Mountains had had no contact with Europeans; within thirty years almost all of them had disappeared.

In this book, six scholarly authors have combined to present all current information on the Gundungurra and Dharug tribes which inhabited this region. It makes fascinating reading. The perfection of detailed information reflects the enormous amount of research that has preceded the presentation.

Blue Mountains Aboriginal lifestyle—laws, legends, rituals, art forms, leisure activities, tools, base camps, the foods that were hunted and gathered, the nurturing of the land (fire-stick farming) and, sadly, the devastating results of contact with Europeans (particularly of diseases)—all beautifully set out.

There are photographs, maps, finely executed graphics, and even a dictionary of the Dharug language!

Whilst present-day Blue Mountains dwellers in particular are fortunate to have this Aboriginal heritage gathered into one volume by the Aboriginal Resource Collective, this is a book for all Australians interested in the long, long occupation by the original inhabitants of our country.

—Marie Breen

A Cry From Kiribati

In a letter to Keren, Fr Terry Naughton msc, of St Mary's Towers, Douglas Park, 2569, wrote of his visit to Kiribati in December 1993:

'Kiribati, in Central Pacific, straddles the equator. Wherever you are you can hear the sea. My time there was a profound religious experience. I arrived in time for the graduation of the Kiribati Pastoral Institute. KPI offers a two-year course for young people desiring to prepare for ministry. In her Director's report, Sr Veronica McCluskie, an Australian Good Samaritan, said a number of promising students had to drop out because they could not meet the fees—a princely sum of AUD 150.00. The KPI is run on such a tight budget that it is not possible to carry them. It

is especially difficult for people from subsistence living areas where there is little cash flow.

So I have started penny pinching and tightening my belt. With the bushfires, people have had big demands on their charity. I would never trade on friendship, but if you'd like to push a sheckle or two in this direction, I'd be glad to deliver it with no middle-man expenses.

I have just completed [Jan. '94] my annual retreat at Kensington and am at Douglas Park waiting for my God of Surprises and the Provincial to make their next move for me until I start the next novitiate group in June. Jesus and Brian [Gallagher] are a volatile combination!

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INCULTURATING THEOLOGY WHITE AUSTRALIAN STYLE: A CASE STUDY

Gerard M Goldman

As a research exercise in his work for a Masters in Theology at Catholic Theological Union, Sydney, Gerard Goldman studied the way in which four women, siblings, whom he knows well, have inculturated Catholic theology in their own lives. Their names have been changed for this publication (though they have all agreed to have their stories published). Their home town in the Hunter Valley of NSW has been given a fictitious name. —Ed.

The target research group consisted of four sisters which met on four occasions over two and a half months. Each session lasted between two and three hours. Due to their common familial history the following information is important in gaining an overview of what is constitutive of their social identity.

The group capture four of the first six positions in a family of eleven. There are seven brothers alive. The ages of the group range from forty-five (45) to thirty five (35). Each has two or three children whose ages range from twenty-two (22) to eleven (11).

All left school by the ages of fifteen (15) and sixteen (16).¹ One completed a TAFE course; no other tertiary education has occurred. All were married in their early twenties to non-Catholics. One spouse has been unsympathetic to raising the children as Catholic, whilst another has recently converted. The others have presented no problems in rearing the children as Catholics and occasionally attend church with them. None are divorced. Three are now working; two as secretaries at Catholic schools, while another works as a nursing aide.

Three would be classified as middle/lower middle-class, with the other working-class. Four of their children have completed the Higher School Certificate and gone on to tertiary education. Two have graduated from university.² Their other children remain at school.³

PART ONE: What Are Their Religious Themes And Values?

Table 1 (pp.16-17) covers the themes and images that exist in their understanding of church and their personal faith. It is a summary of the first group session where each was invited to state what influenced or affected their understanding of church and what contributed to their faith-journey. Each spoke for approximately thirty minutes with minimal direction from myself. I encouraged them not to respond to each others' story until the end of the session. Where possible, original statements have been kept. The columns appear as eldest to youngest.

Themes

There are a number of themes operating in their theology. These can be summarised under the following headings:

(i) *Primacy of their personal experience of God as a loving God.*

Their personal experiences of God were axiomatic to their understanding of God. All three experienced this as a momentous, intimate experience of love and sense of being cared for by God. It is interesting to note that all experiences came during harsh difficulties in their life; one during a miscarriage, another in near death experience from childbirth, the other after despairing of parenting ability. These experiences have contributed to their positive view of experiencing God outside the church. Their appreciation of God in creation was also fundamental to them. These have almost certainly influenced their positive understanding of non-Christians and those who do not attend church. As such they believe that salvation exists outside the Roman Catholic Church.

(ii) *Critical stance towards church hierarchy.*

The love of God and neighbour came before church laws. They would not place priests on pedestals. This understanding of the ordinariness of priests did not diminish their respect for the clergy: they regarded it as an affirmation of the human nature of priests.⁴

An issue that highlighted their critical stance towards church hierarchy was contraception. Each had little difficulty in applying their informed conscience in making a decision on this issue. They were bewildered that women accepted some priests' proclamation that artificial contraception was against church teaching and if used they had to

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abstain from the sacraments. They were angry with church hierarchy for placing guilt on women, many of whom were living in situations where contraception was appropriate and necessary for their marriage and health.

(iii) *Constitutive dimension of self-giving in their faith.*

They expressed they had a duty to give time and money to the poor and those in need. They considered this a real witness to their faith: without this they felt their faith would be shallow or meaningless.⁵ This was brought up in the second and third sessions.

(iv) *Struggle to understand, confrontation with church teaching.*

They all placed church teaching low in priority. They felt some church rules were absurd. This was influenced by the changing nature of church rules since Vatican II. They grew up with rigid rules which after Vatican II were no longer important. The sceptical stance towards present rules is partly a result of the dramatic changes that they experienced. Past and present examples of absurdity of church teaching were the church's position on: artificial contraception; meat on Fridays; Protestants having to convert to marry Catholics; unbaptised babies not being received into Heaven.

They felt the church does not understand "family" and is incapable of speaking for ordinary people: the church should not make decisions, only provide guidelines. They were acutely concerned with not giving "power" to themselves and being outside the church teaching. They felt a need to abide by general rules and believed that priests and bishops were generally exemplifying church law.

PART TWO: Why Is Their Theology The Way It Is?

Due to their essential similarities it is necessary and appropriate to give serious attention to both their familial, cultural and socioeconomic history.⁶ This provides significant pointers to comprehending why and how their theology developed.

Socio-cultural

They were third generation Coaltown residents.⁷ Coaltown was established as a coal mining town in the 1890's and the working-class

character still remains an integral factor of its identity.⁸ In the past two decades the tourist industry has increasingly become a significant component of the community as the vineyards are located only fifteen minutes drive from Coaltown.⁹

Grandparents

Their maternal grand-mother was a staunch Baptist. She worked for the church in a home for single mothers. At the age of twenty-eight she married a hard drinking English coal miner. He had no strong Church conviction. They had two daughters and a son. In 1952 at the age of sixty-three year he died. She died in 1981 at the age of eighty-nine. She was the last grand-parent alive.¹⁰ The influence of this Protestant family, especially the grandmother, can be recognised in a number of ways, particularly their questioning stance towards Church teaching.

Their paternal grandmother was a strong Catholic who had a particular charism of associating with the poor.¹¹ Her husband came to Coaltown to open a business with his wife's family. He was a practising Catholic. They had four children. Both died at seventy-six years of age during the late 1960's.

Their knowledge of both grandmothers' witness to personal self-giving has increased in recent years. Stories of their charity are recounted with a spirit of reverence. They saw them as role models of christian charity and very strong influences in their christian identity. Their influence became obvious in the second and third sessions, when the group articulated its understanding that helping others is an integral component of their faith.

Parents

Their mother was a dressmaker who gave away her trade after marrying. She had to convert to marry,¹² which she did at twenty two years of age. She bore and raised the eldest child during her husband's absence in World War II. Her Protestant understanding has profoundly affected the group. They began to recognise how her history had subtly penetrated them. This was most apparent in the group's positive attitude to other churches. Another influence was their mother's charity to others and self-giving in rearing a family of nine.

Their father was a pious Catholic who regularly invited the religious home for a meal or an outing with the family. These experiences of

SISTERS PROFILE

RHONDA	MARGARET	ALISON	JADE
<i>Eucharist:</i>			
Very special. Needs quiet time, contemplative.	Very important. The most important part of her faith. Feels very close to God.	It is more important than the Mass. It is literally the food of eternal life.	It is a time of celebration.
<i>Jesus:</i>			
He is the yardstick through which our life actions are judged.	The Spirit is stronger than Jesus.	He is a miracle worker. Does not like to simplify him. He was God. It is documented in the Bible. The Bible is a history book.	Feels very close to him. He became real in married life. He is a friend to her. The qualities she loves in Jesus are his humility, associates with anyone, did not judge, listening quality.
<i>Mary:</i>			
Very close to during childhood	Most important. Loves her qualities of gentleness, compassion, mother. Role-model.	Rosary. Mary too good for me as a role-model.	Not very strong. "Hail Mary".
<i>Church Organisation:</i>			
Loved pomp & ceremony. Proud to be Catholic. Closeness to God during Latin Mass. Has seriously questioned the Church in the last few years.	Felt disgust for pomp & ceremony.	Dislikes hypocrisy in the Church.	Disliked pomp & ceremony.
<i>Non-Christians:</i>			
They often teach us more about God's love than the church. Opening up to other Christian Churches and religions.	Admires the indigenous people's reverence for God, earth, Creator. They challenged her materialism. Had missionary experience in Solomon Islands.	Definitely positive attitude towards.	They do not need to convert.
<i>God as Creator:</i>			
Kakadu.	Ocean.	Mountains, trees. There is a sense of growing, aliveness.	Beach/sea, water, surf. God is there. Calmness and rhythm.

<i>Holy Spirit:</i>	
Not mentioned.	Awareness of H.S. at confirmation. Feels very close to. Has a gift of healing through the H.S.
<i>Felt Abandoned by God:</i>	
	Confirmation was special.
	Felt close to Jesus. Jesus is close to Spirit - Spirit of Jesus.

qualities of gentleness, compassion, mother. Role-model.	role-model.
Church Organisation:	
Loved pomp & ceremony. Proud to be Catholic. Closeness to God during Latin Mass. Has seriously questioned the Church in the last few years.	Felt disgust for pomp & ceremony. Dislikes hypocrisy in the Church. Disliked pomp & ceremony.
Non-Christians:	
They often teach us more about God's love than the church. Opening up to other Christian Churches and religions.	Definitely positive attitude towards. They do not need to convert.
God as Creator:	
Kakadu.	Mountains, trees. There is a sense of growing, aliveness. Beach/sea, water, surf. God is there. Calmness and rhythm.

Holy Spirit:	
Not mentioned.	Confirmation was special. Felt close to Jesus. Jesus is close to Spirit - Spirit of Jesus.
Felt Abandoned by God:	
Doubted God during mother's pregnancy at late age. Very angry towards God. May have given God away if she died.	Isolated in Sydney. No personal experience of friendship. Disgust at hypocrisy of Church members. Questioned what the Church was about when in Sydney. Taught Scripture to children which raised questions. Never felt abandoned.
Personal Experience of God:	
Did not mention any.	Felt "cuddled" by God. (i) Jesus visited her during miscarriage difficulty. Never doubted his presence from then on. (ii) Told by God to be herself, not to be like any one else.
Sunday Mass:	
Went out of fear. Never questioned this. Still important. Never missed a Sunday Mass for forty years.	Go to mass because she needs it. Feels like a sinner full of faults. Not mentioned in story. *
Church Teaching:	
Can not understand annulments. Conscience now first and foremost. Jesus associated with and helped the poor.	Bewildered how friends allowed the contraception issue to stop them from receiving the sacraments. Has knowledge of sacramental teaching. Conscience is most important.
* In following sessions it was clear that regular Sunday church attendance was an expression of their Christian identity. They particularly want their children to follow their example.	

priests profoundly influenced their perception of them as ordinary, normal people.

Their father worked for almost fiftyfive years with his brother in his father's business. Their father was a member of the Labor Party, and often mentioned that his father would remind him not to forget his working class origins.

Schooling & Work Experience

Their high-schooling was at Catholic schools¹³ in the Maitland district.¹⁴ Maitland is a genteel, middle-class, rural district. It was during their three to five years high-schooling that they first noticed class distinctions. They reacted against these judgements, believing them to be hypocritical and against the teaching and example of Jesus. This attitude to hypocrisy has remained with them.

All experienced non-Catholic work environments after leaving school.¹⁵ Their membership and faith in the Catholic Church was challenged by those they worked with. They were confronted with people who had no contact with churches yet were examples of life that they recognised as christian. Thus they developed a positive attitude to non-christians or irregular church attenders. They also were confronted with those who felt the church was hypocritical and inconsistent. Their internalising of some of this criticism can be recognised in some of their attitudes to the church.

Feminist & Protest Movement, Vatican II, Personal Growth.

Whilst being somewhat remote from the debate and movements in the cities and universities, the impact of the feminist and protest movement did not fail to reach Coaltown.¹⁶ All were teenagers during the sixties and early seventies. The questions that these movements raised contributed to their free-thinking disposition.

The other significant impact on their life was Vatican II. All had significant experiences and memories of church before Vatican II. They felt they had benefited from the change in emphasis to the laity being identified as having increasing influence and effective roles in the church.¹⁷ The changing church rules represented a major shift from their previous experience of church. With previous rigid rules now being discarded they felt they had to differentiate the truth in the church them-

selves. The teaching on conscience was a major influence on their thinking.

The other influence that marks them is their commitment to personal growth. This particularly centres on spiritual and psychological growth. This yearning and searching is a significant component of their faith journey.

The extent to which they draw on christian heritage.

The elements of Christian heritage which highlight their theology are: the Eucharist, Holy Spirit, Jesus, God the Creator, and the centrality of being close to the poor and needy. Significantly the Holy Spirit rated more strongly than Jesus, with God the Father receiving slight mention. Awareness of the importance of Scripture was evident; however, they had not felt drawn to becoming more familiar with it. Mary was very significant for two and was gradually increasing in importance for another. As already noted, church teaching was very low in priority.

They perceive the bishop and the parish priest as trying to represent the spirit of Vatican II. They all expressed a difficulty and sense of powerlessness to change or address them. This was summarised by the statement, "*the Church is an organisation, we can't have sacraments without the priests*". They felt a need to re-educate themselves through something like the RCIA program.

PART THREE: Strengths And Shortfalls Of Their Theology

In assessing the strengths and shortfalls of their theology it is essential that their present and past socio-cultural identity be remembered. In summary: all are women, married to non-Catholics, belong to parishes, have families, and are working in lowly paid jobs. Their formal education level is minimal. Their origins belong to a working-class, patriarchal environment. Their experience of church has been dominated by educated males, particularly the clergy, rendering a sense of frustration to impact the church at any level.¹⁸ They have clearly felt the sexism of the church and society.¹⁹

My understanding of our christian heritage and how this could be applied in their context can be summarised as: a need for fidelity to church tradition as understood in the magisterium and scripture; the constitutive link of faith and justice in one’s life; the church as the People of God where the hierarchy are trusted servants; and the need to come together sacramentally, particularly in the Eucharist and through reflection on Scripture.

Table 2: *The group’s perceptions of the strengths and shortfalls of their theology.*

Strengths	
	• Acceptance of and patience with others.
	• Concern for the poor and needy.
	• Having higher values than materialism.
	• Grassroots faith in God’s love.
	• Fidelity to tradition: strength in following the rules.
Shortfalls	
	• Impatience with rules and regulations.
	• Lack of knowledge on church teaching and scripture, particularly the Old Testament.
	• Lack of motivation to be informed about church teaching.

Before I disclosed my perceptions of their theological strengths and shortfalls I asked them to evaluate themselves. Table 2 lists those results.

Their theological strengths

The following are my perceptions of their theological strengths. I have attempted to rate them in order of priority. Some of these are inter-related.

(i) Their acknowledgment of and fidelity to their personal experience of God's presence in their life.

These experiences have resulted in fundamental changes in their value system, particularly being cautious of the materialism that surrounds them. Each gives serious recognition to their search for personal growth. They believe that the primacy of God's love for humanity is more important than any church legalism. This has contributed to their openness and acknowledgment of the Spirit's work outside the church.

(ii) Their acceptance of and concern for others constitute a healthy parallel to their personal growth journey.

They particularly focus on the need to be with the poor or those in need. They recognise that charity is only one response to the poor. Their actions of spending time with, giving money, and praying for those in need (psychologically and materially) are an essential element to their faith.

(iii) Their acknowledgment of the increased role of laity in the church.

They recognise the need to become more involved in the church, that they can no longer passively wait for the church to move. They demonstrate this in both their work and parish roles.²⁰

(iv) Their questioning, critical stance towards church statements and positions.

They do this whilst being acutely aware of the need to remain inside the church tradition. They saw it as a sign of their theological maturity to be able to be critical of the church and yet be faithful to its essential teaching and values.

The shortfalls in their theology.

I perceived three principle shortfalls in their theology, most of which are inter-related. These are:

(i) *Their ignorance and confusion over church tradition.*
This involves scripture, magisterium and pastoral letters.

There is a need to update their knowledge on these matters so as to have an increasingly informed belief. Intuition and authenticity are insufficient in influencing their parish environment: they need to become more familiar with their tradition so as to adequately contribute to dialogue in their church.

(ii) *Not being organised to be heard in their faith community.*

The lack of knowledge has led to a lack of confidence and organisational ability to impact the faith community. This has resulted in their voices not being heard, and contributed to a type of collusion with dominant church forces. In some a lack of motivation to be informed and concern with church direction has commenced.

(iii) *An insularity and isolation from the wider church.*

They need to become more familiar with movements that are occurring in other areas of church. Particularly appropriate is feminist theology and reflection.

PART FOUR: Prescription And Planning

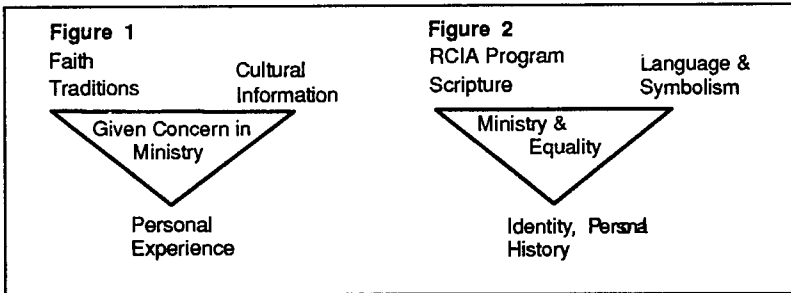
This stage commenced during the final session. My reflection on the group's progress between the third and final session became a time of painful awakening. As I listened to the conversation of the previous two sessions I began to recognise the nature of their struggle. I realised the common thread to their journey was their being women: their personal experiences of God were closely connected to their womanhood, their significant role models and influences were mostly women (Mary included). I received the impression that their feeling of powerlessness in the church was mostly attributed to their being women.²¹ Kane says that part of the role of a theological consultant:

means digging deeply into their experience in order to discover God in it as well as digging deeply into Christian tradition, to make their own discovery of God.²²

It was with this in mind that I felt it proper for the group to articulate further what they meant by cost of being a follower of Jesus.

With little prodding each disclosed how they felt women were treated as second class. This being best exemplified in the failure of the church to address women's ordination²³ and as symbolic and petty in girls being unable to be altar servers in their parishes. They identified the menial jobs in the parish being nearly always done by females. They saw these as examples of church male domination. They judge the small improvements in women's standing in the church to be concessions and doubt whether any real improvements have occurred.²⁴

They began to articulate the costs they have experienced in trying to be an authentic witness to Christ. They spoke of the times when they have felt humiliated in the church. They had experienced this in both their working, home, and parish environments. All had experienced significant pressure to be less involved and discerning in their church. This has come from their Catholic employers, family (particularly husbands) and male religious. They have experienced despair, humiliation and anger with the limited manner in which they have been able to contribute and be listened to in the parish and their families.²⁵ Gradually I began to see a pattern in their history. Their role models were their



grandmothers and mother who struggled under the domination and insensitivity of men.

It is essential that they work with this issue as it impacts their contribution to the church and role-modelling in their family. Currie provides a model that succinctly encapsulates what is required for further development. His "*Tripolar Model for Theological Reflection*" centres on exploring presenting concerns through the constant and intense interaction between personal experience, cultural information

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and faith traditions.²⁶ (See Figure 1) I have chosen to envelope this process with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Figure 1

All experienced with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a spirit of prayerfulness.

This continuous process of attending to, asserting, and acting in Currié's model is endeavoured to be met in the future direction that I would suggest for the group. This would look like Figure 2 and involve exploring the following.

Figure 2

All experienced with the guidance of the Holy Spirit and a spirit of prayerfulness.

(i) Re-education in church teachings and scripture through a process like the RCIA.

All recognised the need for clarification and information in this area. There appears to be a "hangover" from pre-Vatican II which is confusing their sense of towards where the church is being called to move. This education would demystify some of the developments that occur in their local parish. It would contribute to their having a more fruitful and participative role in the dialogue on the changes and issues facing their local church.

(ii) Meeting in women's groups that reflect on Jesus' relationship with women.

This could be an effective lead into feminist theology. They need to become aware of the commonality of their struggle as women. This is similar to Kane's claim:

the lay task is that of searching for, holding to, living, struggling, and dying in, the creative centre of the culture ... it is here that the Word ... is to be found - that is at those critical points in society where God's creativity and redemptive acts are contending with forces of meaninglessness, dispersion, disorder and despair.²⁷

This recognition that they share experience with others can lead to a heightened hermeneutical suspicion of the structures that work to

oppress and marginalise people. Coming together with others to discuss, study, pray, and implement a process that endeavours to dismantle some of these structures will be life-giving.

(iii) Gaining an understanding in how to successfully dialogue.

This is particularly relating to their ability to influence the local church level. Having knowledge and increased awareness without being able to communicate this effectively is frustrating. They need to become more skilled in discovering methods and using language and symbols that assist in clear, non-aggressive communication. These skills would be developed out of the small group-sharing and through contacts with other such groups. This could be a slow process because increasing people's self-esteem is a vital element to a life-giving methodology.

CONCLUSION: What I Learned From This Exercise

This exercise uncovered areas that I had not noticed before while validating a process that I have found to be life-enriching. An essential discovery was the depth of listening that is required for a theological consultant. It was only through repeated listening to and reflection on the taped sessions that I began to discover the point of pain that was present in the group's journey. As Schreiter notes:

. . . there must be a clear commitment to listening as a point of departure for constructing local theologies, and a commitment to continue to listen; to develop a . . . "listening heart".²⁸

A reason for my lack of ability to listen with this group was perhaps my own cultural blind spot and lack of education on the issue that was underlying much of their discussion. Whilst being aware of sexism in church and society it is an area that I have not seriously studied, nor, explored or been challenged to examine my relationships with women.

I believe that it was also their combined energy and focus in coming together as a group that empowered them to recognise some structures that are oppressing them. The group process worked to affirm their fidelity to their experience of a loving, compassionate God. This was an integral factor in their recognition of anomalies in the church. I believe the group process is unmatched in its capacity to transform people

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through exploring their situation through the eyes and ears of others. Gradually people begin to realise that they have the ability to create life-giving environments for themselves and those they meet.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹Two left school at fifteen years of age.
²Two are currently enrolled in either second degrees or post-graduate study.
³It appears that the other children will follow this progression to tertiary training.
⁴They felt that they judged priests' mistakes or failings less harshly than those who treated them as superior or different from themselves.
⁵They mentioned that their association with the poor went back to their childhood at Coaltown. Some recalling that their happiest moments have been with poorer people and that their faith was challenged by the poor.
⁶These influences were discussed and reflected upon during the second and third sessions.
⁷Coaltown has a population of fifteen thousand. It lies in the Hunter Valley, one hundred and forty kilometres north, north-west of Sydney.
⁸This was etched into its consciousness by a bloody union strike that occurred at Rothbury (a coal-mine twenty-five kilometres north-west of Coaltown) in 1929. Two hundred workers marched the twenty kilometre journey to Rothbury protesting against the use of non-union labour. The police were brought in to break up the strike resulting in one person being killed. The group's father was eleven when this happened and vividly remembers the details.
⁹This does not divert from the working class nature of the town as many of the young residents do seasonal grape-picking. Three of the group's children have all earned money from this during holiday time.
¹⁰She was the only surviving grandparent for fifteen years.
¹¹She frequently gave to the poor and needy to an extent that often frustrated her husband.
¹²This was much to her mother's dislike.

¹³Three being taught by the black Josephite Sisters at Lochinvar; the other at a Dominican Convent school in Maitland.

¹⁴Maitland lies twenty kilometres east of Coaltown on the Hunter River.

¹⁵Three being employed, the other completing further training before commencing employment.

¹⁶Two mentioned the possible conscription of their husbands to Vietnam.

¹⁷This represented itself in lay people teaching Scripture to children and preparing children and adults for the sacraments.

¹⁸One member helps prepare families for First Communion for their parish. This was taken away from another member where the parish priest has reverted to teachers preparing the children without any parental involvement.

¹⁹Both who are working as secretaries in Catholic schools stated that if they were male they would almost certainly receive a substantial pay rise as a male would not accept such a low salary. The other who is considering joining the work force mentioned that the low salaries for females is a major reason for her delaying such a move.

²⁰Two have been very outspoken on parish matters. Another confronts the school principal with the need to give priority to the adult faith educator. All these actions have brought about costs and pain to them.

²¹I acknowledged that I belonged to the group and culture which diminished women's roles. That I did not diagnose this earlier is perhaps indicative of my own insensitivity and need for participation and growth through feminist theology and its associated movements.

²²Margaret Kane, Class Handout, "*What God Has Taught Me*", p.8. par.6.

²³All believed that women should be allowed to be ordained. This should not be restricted to single women. They also felt that married men should be allowed to be priests.

²⁴They are pained by the great cost that others in the church are experiencing, particularly those with gifts that are not being encouraged or allowed to contribute. This covers both women and non-Religious men.

²⁵All stated that whilst some of their experiences in the church have been hurtful they have been spiritually strengthened by these experiences.

²⁶Joe Currie, Class Handout, "*Theological Reflection in Ministry*", *Vidyajyoti*, May, 1984, p.8. pars.20-25.

²⁷Margaret Kane, Class Handout, "*What Kind of God*", p.4, par.18.

²⁸Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, p.40.

G U S T O

By

Fr A W Bryson msc

There's laughter to be won from pain;
Humour to be filched from grief;
Wisdom in knowing life is a gain,
Be it ever so brief.

There's fun and enough in myriad things,
Mockingly held out of Time's reach:
Cats, I find, still look at kings;
Pharisees still preach.

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK

We offer our sympathy to Fr Roy O'Neill msc whose father has died in Mackay, Queensland. Roy was able to return to Mackay in time to be with his father before his death. RIP.

* * * * *

News from Dr John May in Ireland, who writes: 'This year I've had visits from Frank Fletcher and Ken Gallagher, also briefly from Max Charlesworth, so even in distant Dublin I get bits of news from people committed to Aboriginal matters...I hope to attend the AASR in Adelaide this year (1994), en route to a teaching stint at the University of Wollongong, so I may have a chance to see one or both of you [the NYMU staff].' Here's hoping John. Safe travel!

Also a letter from Fr Eugene Stockton: 'I am keeping up my writing and have just finished the first draft of a book called "Aboriginal Spirituality: Gift to a Nation." It grew out of demand for talks on the subject in the Year of the Indigenous People.'

* * * * *

We received warm greetings from Bishop Anthony Nichols, Geraldton, WA, who wrote "I still read *Nelen Yubu* with interest and

profit.' That word 'profit' is very encouraging, thank you Tony! It was very interesting to read your *Prayer Notes* for November 1993. These notes cover large areas of the Anglican Diocese of North West Australia and would be of inestimable help to so many of the flock living in remote situations. They embodied praise 'that the Sovereign Creator and Lord of all has not left us in the dark concerning Himself and His will for us'; and prayer for the wellbeing and blessing of people whose ministry is among Aboriginal people, for a spirit of unity and community; for guidance and spiritual assistance. The newsheet ends with this exhortation: 'These *Prayer Points* can be used in First Friday Intercessions when it is the custom of many of our Diocesan family to fast and pray together.'

* * * * *

Lake Mungo Revisited

Suddenly an exciting opportunity presented itself for the *Nelen Yubu* staff to join Melbourne's Vicki Walker and her friends on a nostalgic trip back to the haunts of Mungo Lady. It was October again and we had less than a week to get into gear and be ready for the road — Mungo is much farther from Sydney than from Melbourne. Overnighting in

Hay, we hit Balranald early next morning, to be told that the threatening clouds meant bad business for the 150km gravel road to Mungo, but nothing daunted, we defied the elements and took to the bush. It rained a bit, and we had our fill of kangaroos, emus, wild dogs, lizards, the lot, but managed to fend off disaster. It was mid-afternoon when we drove into Lake Mungo with her brooding Walls of China — standing sentinel just as we had left her two years before.

This time I am going to give you some of the sidelights of the trip. Leaving West Wyalong I took my turn at the wheel across the never-ending but thrilling western plains where the road ran straight so far ahead that we could see over the edge of the world: it just dipped down out of sight. At one stage we were buzzed by a tiny plane that was doing a bit of crop-dusting, but there was so little traffic out there that we had the place virtually to ourselves. At length in the distance we saw a speck on the side of the road and ran a guessing competition as to what it was. It took some time for us to catch up, but it turned out to be a rather young man on a push-bike pedalling along in the blazing sun, heading for Hay because there was nowhere else to head for

at that stage. That bike must have had super powers. It was almost hidden by the parcels, bags, swag, rolls of clothes, not to mention the rider who was bedecked with a pack on his back topped by more parcels, an old hat pulled down on his forehead and a box just behind his seat jam-packed with mysterious gear. One thing that stood out was a pale blue object mounted above his front wheel. Quietly passing him, we wondered where he could be actually heading, but he seemed to know alright.

Emus were in profusion out there, some with biggish chicks; two dead foxes were lying on the side of the road, miles apart; an occasional tree loomed out of the mirage; otherwise the world was dead flat and unmoving, just the way I like it.

Townfolk on the far western plains are smiling and helpful, and send us on our way with a grin and perhaps a warning as they laconically scan the heavens. It's all so casual and peaceful in the saltbush country, where only 150 years ago swagmen tramped with dog and pannikin, looking for work. No bikes for them: how did they *do* it, '... all day long in the dust and heat when summer is on the track.' But they knew that at the end of the day there'd be a billy of

tea and unfractured rest, sleeping under the stars.

We set up the tents under a huge coolabah, its branches reaching to the ground and enveloping us with its magic. At night the birds I'd so longed to hear since my last visit were calling to each other across the plain, and that strange little bird that sings the first bars of 'I love to go a-wandering' (to the amazement of people who haven't heard it before) was very fetching for the first few days, but finally drove us mad with its weary repetition. Nevertheless, no complaints about Lake Mungo. And to cap it all, we had a blue moon in October '93 to add mystique to our adventure!

On the 60km drive around the lake itself, we were stopped by a scaly lizard that refused to move off the track. Honking, shouting, shooining had no effect so we climbed out to see if it was dead. It even let us gently pick it up and be photographed, but when it had had enough, with a flick of its tail it took off into the saltbush in high dudgeon. The emus on the lake are enormous. They were unafraid of the car and stared back at us as if we were caged exhibits.

We had Mass in the bush with some Sisters and a Uniting Church minister, and on Sunday it was

celebrated in the visitors' centre near the old woolshed, attended by Mrs Alice Kelly, elder of the ancient Mungo tribe who shared her hymnbook with me. Visits to the lunette where the children from Melbourne delighted in tearing off to the top of sandhills for slides, revelling in the land of their ancestors.

All too soon we had to turn east and leave that bewitching place. By this time the days were hot, rain had vanished and we drank in the freshness of mulga and belah on our way back to Balranald. After lunch, we hit the road to Hay again — and what did we see coming towards in the distance but our friend the bike-rider! Still pedalling doggedly, looking neither to right nor left, head down, parcels and bags all safely secured — there he was, with his pale blue load still perched on his front mudguard, pushing ever westward in some quest known only to him. It had taken him about five days to creep along from West Wyalong, through Hay, towards the never-never. Half his luck!

The visitors' book at Mungo showed some incredible remarks as 'Boring', 'Why ever did I come here?' 'Not for me!' But for us who love to steep ourselves in the *feel* of Mungo Lady's presence,

this was a stupendous reward after 'the ceaseless tramp of feet...of the dusty dirty city' to which we were inexorably returning.

* * * * *

Mission News

A long and interesting letter just received from Sr Monica fdnsc now stationed at Tara, near Dalby, in Queensland. I have known Sister for many years, having first met her at Daly River mission where her delightful wit and TLC with her patients calmed many of us in the outback. Her present job is visiting the sick and aged sometimes in 40-degree heat, in places where drought meant carting water, and townspeople had to rely on bore water. I know how valuable Sr Monica would always be in that situation and we send her our love and prayers for success in her admirable work.

* * * * *

Another friend at Daly River is Miriam-Rose Ungunmer-Baumann my barramundi partner, now 'Woman of the Year' in the Northern Territory, who I believe has been appointed Principal of the school at the mission. Congratulations Miriam!

* * * * *

I would like to add a word of thanks to Fr Dan O'Donovan and

the Sisters at Wyndham, WA, as well as to all those friends everywhere who sent messages of enquiry and prayer for recovery during my recent illness. Fr Dan phoned me twice from Wyndham to encourage and reassure me that, to use his very words: 'You are being surrounded, Keren, by prayer and intercessions to the Holy Spirit.' How comforting that was, being 'surrounded' by the enveloping prayers of those who care. Thank you indeed, Dan, and all who helped, and I am glad to report that the cancer was completely excised from my arm and my doctors are confident of complete recovery. I am most grateful to everyone, including the Holy Spirit!

* * * * *

Finally, welcome back to our editor, Fr Martin Wilson who has returned safely from a visit to Germany as detailed in this issue. After the conference, Martin went to Berlin to visit my daughter Frances, who lives there. It was a happy and entertaining reunion for them both, and judging by their individual reports, they made good use of the time together, even visiting Dresden and several churches, museums and life-saving cafés! Thanks, Fran.

Secretary Keren