

## **Editorial**

Susanne Hargrave, Culture Studies Co-ordinator at SIL, Berrimah NT, kindly accepted my invitation to reply to my comments in *Nelen Yubu* no. 55 on her *Missiology* paper.

At the AASR conference in Adelaide in July, I presented a paper which contains some further reflections upon the inculturation issue. This paper I present also in this number.

Br Cletus Read FMS continues his series of articles in which he is attempting to outline a renewed strategy of evangelisation towards Aboriginal people.

Dan O'Donovan airs some suggestions regarding the direction Broome diocese might take as it develops the 'education-centred' pastoral strategy.

**Martin Wilson**  
**Editor**

# A RESPONSE TO MARTIN WILSON ON 'INCULTURATION, ABSTRACTION AND ETHNOCENTRISM'

**Susanne Hargrave**

**M**ARTIN Wilson has invited me to respond to his comments (*Nelen Yubu* no. 55) on my article in *Missiology* (January 1993) entitled 'Culture, Abstraction and Ethnocentrism'. My response is in three parts: a brief background to the writing of the article; a summary of the article's contents; and a reply to points raised by Wilson. (For anyone wanting a copy of my complete article, write to me care of the address below.)

## **Background to the Article**

I first met Martin Wilson in 1979 when I profited from his lectures at Nungalinya College on Aboriginal kinship and social organisation. In 1982 I invited Wilson to speak to an anthropology workshop for new SIL field workers on the topic of Aboriginal Christianity. He presented the paper which was later published in *Nelen Yubu* and to which I referred in my *Missiology* article: 'Aboriginal Religion and Christianity: Ideological Symbolism, Ritual Sacramentalism.' I had queries about some of the views he expressed in that paper, queries which 'bubbled on the back burner' of my mind as part of a general query regarding trends in both theological and missiological thinking.

I first outlined the basic ideas of my article in 1976, but it was not until 1990 that I put together a paper and submitted it for publication. About that time, I began to work with Margaret Bain to adapt her MA thesis for publication, a thesis which explored contrasting uses of abstraction by Aborigines and westerners. The critique of the misuse—and ethnocentric use—of abstraction in theology and missiology. The editor of *Missiology* responded that they accepted my article for publication, but asked that I please cite more specific examples of what I was criticising. Wilson's paper provided

---

Susanne Hargrave is Culture Studies Coordinator and Academic Publications Editor, Summer Institute of Linguistics, PO Berrimah NT 0828.

the kind of example needed from the Aboriginal context. Though I was reluctant to cite it, I did so because I knew from past interaction with Wilson that he welcomed debate, debate carried out in mutual respect. It is in that spirit of respect that I make this response.

### Summary of my Article

The discipline of missiology has made great strides this century in distinguishing between the gospel and western culture and in seeking to contextualise the gospel in non-western cultures. However, these healthy developments have resulted at times in an 'uncritical contextualisation', to use the words of anthropologist and missiologist Paul Hiebert (1987:108). Hiebert states that an uncritical contextualisation denies absolutes and ignores the close tie between form and meaning in most tribal and peasant societies. In other words, it distorts both the biblical context and the cultural context.

I believe that a primary means by which such contextual distortions are made is the misuse of abstraction ('the process of stripping an idea of its concrete accompaniments': *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*). Abstract thought is a valuable tool which allows human beings to transcend the limitations of personal context and experience and to apply knowledge from one area of life to another. It is characteristic of western education and the western intellectual tradition. However, not all cultures, especially non-literate ones, have valued abstract thought so highly. Aboriginal culture shows a strong preference for the concrete and the specific. Margaret Bain argues cogently that many of the communication difficulties between whites and Aborigines stem from differences in the use of abstraction (Bain 1992). Echoing Hiebert's comment about the 'inextricable link between form and meaning, she also argues that what western scholars often describe as 'symbolic' in Aboriginal art and ritual are *not* symbolic. These designs, objects, actions are effective not because they 'stand for something else' but because they themselves bear something of the creative life of the Dreamtime. The forms not only carry meaning but are endowed with power to bring about desired effects.

Traditional Aboriginal religion is closely tied to the real and the concrete. Sacred sites mark where Dreamtime beings were active: where they moved, sat down, poked a stick in the ground. Each Aboriginal person's identity from birth to death is linked to particular Dreamtime beings and to particular sacred sites. It can be said that Aboriginal religion is earth-centred from beginning to end, focused on the physical and the particular.

Thus for a western scholar to interpret sacred site and Dreamtime beings as 'pieces of ideological symbolism' or as metaphorical statements of 'belief about basic principles of reality' (Wilson 1982:7) is, I believe, to distort Aboriginal religion. The following anecdote related by Wilson (1982:8) is illustrative:

I was distressed to hear an Aborigine who, after telling me solemnly about the danger of disturbing some mythological being by shifting the stones on its hill, went on to add, cocking an eye at me, 'It's all humbug, you know'. In a literal sense, yes, but as a figurative statement of the fact that this world is sacred because of the supportive immanence of God's creative and sustaining power, it is a statement that is immeasurably true.

To dismiss the literal in this way is to dismiss an essential reality of Aboriginal religion. It is not the notion of a transcendental power or universal Spirit that makes a site such as this hill sacred. It is the particular action of a particular Dreamtime being, one who *really* was active at this site. The Aborigine is not, I venture to say, worried about the effect of mining on 'the supportive immanence of God's creative and sustaining power'; he is afraid of what will happen if *this* being is disturbed on *this* hill. The kind of generalised statement that appeals to the western intellect offers small comfort to him, though he knows enough of how whites think to seek their approval by calling his own beliefs 'humbug'.

Why are we (and I use the first person purposely) as western Christians prone to this kind of abstraction? Firstly, as stated, it is characteristic of our education which thrives on comparison and generalisation, on abstract principles and statements. Secondly, it has proved a useful means both in western theology and western missiology for dealing with concrete details incompatible with some of our values. It is a means used by scholars and laypeople alike, from across the theological spectrum.

In regard to western theology, I have become aware from my own Christian background of the use of abstraction to avoid the pointed teaching of some parts of Scripture; for example, the Sermon on the Mount interpreted as a description of the future heavenly kingdom and therefore not to be directly applied to Christian living now. Or abstraction may be used to remove the offence of a virgin birth, miracles of healing, blood, the cross and bodily resurrection. These do not fit easily with a high value placed on rational thought and on systems of universal ethics. The all-too-concrete may be accommodated intellectually by interpreting them primarily or entirely as universal symbols, for example, by interpreting the cross as a symbol of self-giving.

In western missiology, abstraction has served well the desire to appreciate other belief systems and to find areas where they are compatible

with Christianity. Elements that may offend our western sensibilities—sacrifices, ritual bloodletting, beliefs in human/animal beings—can be labelled as symbols and metaphors which can then be interpreted in terms compatible with basic Christian beliefs. When this abstract form of another religion is matched with an abstracted version of Christianity, i.e. one from which historical details are deleted, the two can fit together very nicely. But the result is not the comparison of two living systems but the comparison of a caricature of each.

I am not arguing for a return to the bad old days of Christian missions when other cultures and religions were labelled altogether evil, when western Christianity *was* Christianity. Nor am I arguing against the search for and appreciation of points of contact, seeds of truth providentially provided to prepare a people for the gospel. But I am arguing against the imposition of western thinking that is biased against the concrete and which too easily assumes that abstraction is the way to find the real truth behind the world of appearances. It is a subtle ethnocentrism that imposes a western interpretation of the other's religion while it purports to value that religion.

### **Response to Wilson**

Wilson offers the possibility that he and I are using 'abstraction' in two different senses. I am not a student of philosophy nor of Thomistic thought, and therefore I cannot comment on his statement that he is employing the 'third degree of abstraction'. However, if I understand him rightly, he is saying that the Aboriginal person who acknowledges the presence at a sacred site of a Dreamtime being is making an analogous statement about the presence of God in this world, in the same sense that a Christian who calls God 'Father' is making an analogous statement about God's loving care of human beings. But I do not believe the Aboriginal person who converts to Christianity may re-interpret his previous actions toward Dreamtime beings in an analogous vein, but I believe it is a re-interpretation and one that is done under the influence of western thought. More likely, the Aboriginal convert holds on to both realities, perhaps keeping them in separate Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal compartments of his life or perhaps seeing the Dreamtime beings as in some way subsequent to and serving under God.

I grant that the belief in such beings and such sites reflects an awareness of something 'beyond' the merely material, and thus may prepare Aboriginal people for the revelation of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And in that sense I would affirm that the Christian has more in common with a follower of traditional Aboriginal religion than he/she does

with a western materialist. But Scripture makes a strong point of contrasting the 'God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob' with other gods, and the God of the Old Testament with all its historical details is also identified in the New Testament as the 'God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ'. As I stated in my article, we westerners have some difficulty coping with these historic and concrete realities of our faith; we find it difficult to bring together both the universal God of all creation and the God who chose to reveal himself primarily to and through a particular people, the Jews, and more fully to reveal himself through the God-Man Jesus Christ.

In my article I was primarily addressing Wilson's use of 'ideological symbolism' and metaphor and I did not comment on his view of Aboriginal religion as sacramental. I agree with him that there is a strong sacramental element to Aboriginal religion and that it is a caricature to attach the label 'magic' to much of their ritual. I believe there is a similarity between this sacramentalism and the Catholic understanding of sacramentalism. But it is still imperative to treat Aboriginal religion on its own terms, i.e. to understand what power and what life-giving essence is believed present in the sacramental rituals and what benefits they are believed to effect. It cannot be assumed that they are the same as that present in Christian sacramental acts.

I must answer Wilson's last point, which he has raised in several other contexts, namely the impossibility of honestly supporting Aborigines in their fight for sacred sites if one denies the reality of the Dreamtime beings said to be active there. It puzzled me that this is such a problem to Wilson. I have no difficulty in saying I do not believe in the reality of these beings, either in a literal or in a metaphorical sense. But I acknowledge that they are reality to many Aboriginal people, and since a democratic society must allow a plurality of beliefs and modes of worship, I maintain the right of others to practise rituals that I regard as false. And given the invasion of Aboriginal land by whites, I believe we have a special responsibility to go the extra mile of returning land to them. Such sites, of course, need to go through the established procedures for determining legitimate land claims and for balancing competing claims. I myself would not take part in a protest on behalf of such a site, because I think it would confuse and offend some Aboriginal Christians, but neither would I take part in a protest against its return to Aboriginal people.

One final point: Aboriginal people were introduced to Christianity as the religion of the white people, the religion identified with the western way of life. If they maintained a religious attitude to life and wished to participate in western lifestyle, the pressure was there to identify in some

way with Christianity while, for many, still holding on to traditional beliefs and rituals. But today's world is different, and the intellectual tradition is changing. Now a growing number of westerners are attracted to Aboriginal beliefs and ritual and at the same time repudiating Christianity. They are not interested in Aboriginal religion as analogous to Christianity but as an earth-centred religion on its own terms. And increasingly some Aborigines are confidently taking the same stance. No longer do they feel obligated to dismiss their own beliefs as 'humbug' or explain Dreamtime beings, the uses of crystals, or the assertion of the earth as Mother in terms of metaphor, symbol, or analogy. In today's world traditional Aboriginal religion can occupy a niche of its own, a niche that can be maintained in opposition to Christianity.

## **REFERENCES**

- BAIN, M** (1992) *The Aboriginal-White Encounter: Towards Better Communication*. Darwin: SIL-AAIB.
- HIEBERT, P** (1977) 'Critical Contextualization'. *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11(3):104-112.
- WILSON, M J** (1982) 'Aboriginal Religion and Christianity: Ideological Symbolism, Ritual Sacramentalism.' *Nelen Yubu* 13 (Sept.):3-13.

# ABORIGINAL RELIGION & CHRISTIANITY

**Martin J Wilson**

**O**VER the space of a few decades a dramatic change has come over the format of discussion of Aboriginal religion. Stanner for one spent quite a deal of time and space displaying the genuinely religious character of Aboriginal belief systems and ritual practice. He gave a memorable paper on this topic at the inaugural meeting of the national AASR association here in Adelaide back in 1976, the Inaugural Lecture of the Charles Strong Memorial Trust: 'Some Aspects of Aboriginal Religion'<sup>1</sup>. He referred to 'a blindness of the mind's eye' that had prevented Europeans in Australia from recognising the manifest presence of religious behaviour amongst Aboriginal people. Elsewhere<sup>2</sup> he had amazed us with reported statements of earlier christian ministers of religion who declared that they found nothing remotely resembling true religious belief amongst the Aborigines, only superstition. These days we are in a counterpoint situation where religious thinkers are turning towards Aboriginal people to find a way to revitalise christianity, especially in relation to the Australian context. For instance, Eugene Stockton has a book in the last stages of publication—it will appear next year—which will carry the significant title of *Australian Spirituality: Gift to a Nation*.

## **Question of Congruence**

Underpinning such practical use of Aboriginal religious concepts is a question that I approached at an AASR meeting in Melbourne in 1982. The paper was published subsequently in *Nelen Yubu* (No.13, pp.3-13) under the title, 'Aboriginal Religion and Christianity: Ideological Symbolism, Ritual Sacramentalism'. Its aim was to investigate the congruence between Aboriginal religion and christianity on two central issues, belief and ritual practice. I believed it was important for anyone manifesting an interest in Aboriginal religious culture, particularly for christian missionary personnel, to endeavour to understand the processes of Aboriginal religion. Understanding works through the correlation of the unknown with the already



known. Such a correlating process is not a simple, one-way reductionist one, but rather involves mutual interaction. When each side of the equation is dense with meaning, the format of the interaction can be an ascending, zigzagging spiral, with the result that the initial 'known' category can end up quite expanded and transformed by the process.

In brief, I proposed that a western christian like myself and most of the people who would listen to or read my paper can come to an appropriate understanding of the mythological content of Aboriginal religion if we read it as *ideological symbolism*. Similarly, we can come to an appropriate understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal ritual practice we approach it as *sacramental*.

In the process of endeavouring to penetrate the ideological symbolism of the Dreaming, we can come to a more refined appreciation of the symbolic content of our own christian religious statements. By this I mean that we should become more sensitive to the 'seeing as in a mirror, darkly' aspect of our religious belief, less dogmatic in formula, more open to the mystery that can only be hinted at in language . . .

When we look at the strongly drawn outlines and starkly presented colours of Aboriginal ritual practice, we are led to a refreshed appreciation of the mystery element in our own christian sacramental practices. We need at times to peel off the exuberant overlay of decorative language, expensive materials, special settings, so as to allow ourselves to be confronted, maybe overwhelmed by the powerful presence of the Other at some intersection point between time and eternity.

If such a renewal of our own religious outlook were the only result of study of Aboriginal religion, then the effort would surely be worth it. However, our endeavour is also other-oriented. In anthropological and allied studies we are interacting with other *persons*, not as a physical scientist might be with other mere *objects*. Personal interaction and mutual enrichment as persons is a goal in its own right, self-authenticating, worth doing simply because of what it is, regardless of any utilitarian advantage. Just as a good song is worth singing whether we get paid for it or not. Moreover, on account of our physical circumstances and our history it is of particular importance that we Australians, white and black, get to know and value one another. The key to a culture is its basic value system, that is to say, its religion. (It is rather doing violence to language, but in this sense of it one could talk about 'atheistic religion'.) It should be a great help towards national reconciliation if we whites and blacks can arrive at a better understanding of each side's basic value system.

The aim of my 1982 paper was to find a way in which I, with my background in christian religion and philosophy, could make sense of what Aborigines are thinking and doing when they perform ceremonies. I was not trying to say that this is how Aborigines really think in their own minds, or should be thinking if they have become christian. With those of them who might go on to study theology and philosophy I could expect to be able to discuss in terms like the ones I have been employing, 'ideology', 'symbolism', 'sacrament'. I could expect to be told that some of my terms are too constrictive, too culture-bound, and I could even hope to be lucky enough to be led into expanded notions, new theologies . . .

Following on such forays into comprehension, one could take up practical questions about the use of Aboriginal religious concepts, religious expressions, myths and ritual actions within the christian religion: as either additional, or supplementary, or substitutive. However, these practical questions are beyond my present range of interest.

### **Ethnocentric Imperialism?**

My 1982 paper quietly sank and merged into that vast historical dump of past conference papers. To me it was a quite pleasant surprise to find in 1993 that not only was it not totally forgotten but was considered worthy of critical attention. Susanne Hargrave, who is the Cultural Studies Coordinator at SIL, Berrimah NT, published a paper in the January 1993 issue of *Missiology*<sup>3</sup> on disguised ethnocentrism in Western missiological writing. As she herself will explain in a paper to be published in the coming issue of *Nelen Yubu* (No.57), the editors of *Missiology* had asked her to give point to her general charge by some particular examples. She found in my 1982 paper a good example of what she wanted to complain about. I had actually used the paper as a guest participant in a workshop she had conducted at Berrimah. She paid me the compliment of knowing that I would welcome discussion.

Hargrave's contention is that attempts like mine to re-express Aboriginal religion in the categories of Western christian experience rob Aboriginal religion of all its specific characteristics and reduce it to being a colourless variation upon Western religious themes. The process whereby this travesty is produced is philosophical abstraction—'heavy-handed abstraction'. Granted, my sort of approach is well-meaning; nevertheless it is really only another form of 'imperialism and ethnocentrism'. In fact, it is even a more pernicious form of the reptile! 'But an ethnocentrism that poses as a positive appreciation and acceptance of others is more dangerous than a bald statement of disagreement and rejection.'(1993:10)

## **Reply**

Of course, while preparing the context for presentation of Hargrave's charge, I have already couched my views in a way that anticipates her arguments.

In particular, I note that I am not asking Aborigines to reformulate their myths or redesign their ceremonies in a new "Western" mode. I am merely trying to construct a model that might allow me to comprehend what they are doing and saying in ceremony. Not having been born and brought up Aboriginal, I could never understand Aboriginal religion from the inside. For it to make sense to me, I have to re-express it in terms that are meaningful to people with my sort of cultural background, provided I can find terms that are adequate for the job. My proposal is that I can come to some appreciation of Aboriginal religious language if I attend rather to its symbolic function than to its literal content—in quite the same way as I do when I read the garden of Eden story in Genesis. The Tiwi Purukapali myth deals in a similarly figurative way with human existence: the pride of being as we are and at the same time the dire results of selfish human passion.

Similarly, when I took part in a burning of the clothes ceremony I was aware that I was doing something not dissimilar from what I do as a Catholic priest when I celebrate an anniversary of death mass. People may want to say, Of course it's similar; what's the fuss! But the question cannot be brushed aside so simply. I recall an occasion when the local Aboriginal group where I was staying invited me to take part in a burning of the clothes ceremony: merely sitting down with the mob and being there. Later an Aboriginal Catholic visitor from another place accused me of having contravened my status as a Catholic priest by having taken part in a "pagan" ceremony. I needed to discover the rationale on the basis of which I could defend my action as proper—and in the process maybe find out why my accuser felt no compunction at his own participation in spite of having been baptised into the same faith as I.

## **Observations**

Hargrave's paper functions positively for me like a 'No Entry, Private Property' sign-post indicating a boundary to access. Intellectual imperialism is a real trap that a systematic thinker can construct for him/herself and fall into. In my endeavour to understand Aboriginal religious practice I must remember I am acting more as a translator back into my own language than as a reformer of the culture I am translating from. I suppose one of the most dramatic differences between the christian missionary of today and

many of the pioneer missionaries (of all denominations) is in this same respect. The pioneer missionaries wanted to reform Aboriginal society by replacing its religion with Western christianity. The christian missionary of today endeavours to approach the indigenous religious culture with respect. But what he precisely wants to do is not quite so clear, especially to himself, as I shall indicate later.

In her coming *Nelen Yubu* paper Hargrave spells out her own personal attitude towards the status of Aboriginal religious objects:

I must answer Wilson's last point, which he has raised in several other contexts, namely the impossibility of honestly supporting Aborigines in their fight for sacred sites if one denies the reality of the Dreamtime beings said to be active there. It puzzled me that this is such a problem to Wilson. I have no difficulty in saying I do not believe in the reality of these beings, either in a literal or in a metaphorical sense. But I acknowledge that they are reality to many Aboriginal people, and since a democratic society must allow a plurality of beliefs and modes of worship, I maintain the right of others to practise rituals that I regard as false.

As a good christian (and a good American) she takes her stand on respect for the democratic rights of others. This stance of course is admirable and should be the minimal requirement for every non-Aboriginal person in our country. However, I would expect further clarification from a person who is actually intruding into Aboriginal society as an SIL worker or any other christian missionary in Aboriginal territories is doing.

## Missio Consultation

Early this year I was privileged to be invited to participate in an international consultation on inculturation sponsored by the German catholic missiological institute known briefly as "Missio, Aachen". The consultation was held in Aachen 21-25 February. There were some 50 missiologists present, of whom 2/5 came from outside Europe. There were five from the Pacific area; eight from various parts of Africa; five from the southern Americas; six from Asia. The rest were from Europe, 20 being from Germany itself. Strangely, there was no one from North America. Most of the participants were affiliated with the Catholic Church, but not all. The major points to have emerged from the consultation were:

Europe no longer enjoys a privileged position within christianity. It has to come to terms with large non-Christian blocks resident within it.

Christian respect for the other and a new appreciation of the church's constitutional role as 'light' and 'leaven' implies respect for non-christian religious beliefs because of their inherent status as religious values.

The modern christian missionary finds him/herself in a perplexing situation vis-à-vis non-christian religions. This was dramatically underlined at the consultation by the status of one of the participants. He is a catholic priest, a member of the Kuna (Panama) tribe, and the rest of his family have chosen to continue practising the indigenous Kuna religion. In the old days the christian missionary might have strode in and declared them all to be trapped in error, from which he would deliver them. A thousand or so years earlier, if their missionary had come from the Kingdom of the Franks, they may have been given the choice between baptism or death. Today the christian missionary starts to wonder if he should ever have gone missionising in the first place. But that is another story.

Meanwhile, we search to understand and we realise that the process of the search is changing us.

---

<sup>1</sup>Stanner, WEH 1976, 'Some Aspects of Aboriginal Religion', monograph reprinted from *Colloquium*, Journal of the ANZSTS, Melbourne 1976.

<sup>2</sup>For example in 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism (1962)', reprinted in *White Man Got No Dreaming*, p.106-107.

<sup>3</sup>HARGRAVE, Susanne 1993: 'Culture, Abstraction and Ethnocentrism', *Missiology*, vol.XXI, No.1, January, pp.3-11.

# INCULTURATION OR ASSIMILATION?

**Cletus Read**

## **PREFACE**

Some readers may consider that I am presumptuous to express the radical views presented in this article. Be that as it may, I can at least claim to have had more experience than most in the work of the Catholic Church in evangelisation and far more opportunity to reflect on that experience. I was involved in teaching and administration in Catholic schools for more than forty years and I have spent twentyeight years on Aboriginal settlements in the dry inland of West Australia and the Northern Territory. In 1978 at the invitation of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart I took on responsibility for the religious instruction (language of the 70's) of the senior boys at Santa Teresa and it proved to be a traumatic experience for me. I was quite at a loss to know how to teach christianity across the cultural gap. Some years later I was given the time and the resources to reflect on my experience and to research ways of carrying out the christian formation of Aboriginal boys and girls so that I might pass on advice to other teachers. In this article I am reporting to teachers that they will never discover a satisfactory answer to the problem in the school forum in isolation because the question is part of the wider challenge facing the Catholic Church: 'How do we carry out evangelisation among Aboriginal people?' It is for this reason that I am addressing my findings to the Catholic Church of Australia instead of to the body of teachers.

In this article I propose a theory; I develop a framework of post-conciliar ecclesiology to serve as background; I attempt to expose the shortcomings of the present process of evangelisation; I suggest other approaches which might prove to be more effective; and I draw attention once more to the address of Pope John Paul to the Aboriginal people at Alice Springs in 1986 in order to prod the collective conscience of the people of God.

---

Cletus Read fms, Santa Teresa, NT.

## THEORY

I am of the opinion that the manner in which the Catholic Church in Australia is carrying out evangelisation among Aboriginal people in the present system of dioceses and parishes is resulting inevitably in the destruction of Aboriginal spirituality and is tending to assimilate Aboriginals into western style churches rather than inculcate christianity into Aboriginal culture.

I suggest that, in order to make the evangelisation process consistent with the policies of the Second Vatican Council and the pronouncements of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul, two changes are necessary: a change in the attitude of the Catholic Church towards Aboriginal ministry; and a change in the way that Aboriginals are incorporated into the system of dioceses and parishes.

### Argument to Support this Theory

#### 1. *The Primacy of Mission in the Post Conciliar Church*

'Are you he who is to come or look we for another?'

'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk; lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the Good News preached to them.' (Matthew 11: 4-5)

In the synoptic gospels Jesus, in self-definition, announced that his purpose is to carry out a mission from the Father by proclaiming the coming of the kingdom and by offering man a new vision of human life and a guarantee of hope.

The Good News is that man at last will be able to free himself from whatever oppresses him or holds him captive, especially sin; and that life need no longer appear to be without meaning but that it has potential to provide passage to a dignified and glorious future with the Father in the kingdom. Jesus insists that he has come not merely to announce a saving message, but also to make salvation a reality by overcoming the forces of evil. But he warns that this gracious gift of the Father will be available only to those who undergo radical conversion and re-orient their lives in accordance with the will of the Father. Jesus states clearly that mission has primacy in his life and that his main purpose is evangelisation.

The gospels inform us that, at the Ascension, Jesus handed on responsibility for the carrying out of his mission to his assembled followers: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you . . .' (Mt 28: 19-20). It follows that commitment to follow Christ is primarily commitment to engage in the mission of Christ: to work for the coming of the kingdom by evangelising and by being evangelised.

It is clear from the gospels that Jesus passed on authority to carry on his mission to his followers as a communion. Later on this communion was referred to as disciples, as the people of God, as church and by the use of other titles, and people could be invested with authority to share in the mission of Christ and to evangelise only through communion with the church. As the number of followers increased it became necessary for the church to become a visible institution and to develop structures in order to co-ordinate its activities, but the establishment of a church as institution was secondary in importance to the mission of Christ. And just as Jesus focused on the will of the Father and refrained from promoting himself apart from the Father, so also it is the function of the church as institution to work for the coming of the kingdom and not for its own prestige. Unfortunately, at times human ambition has led us to concentrate more on ambition, traditions, structures and organisation of diocese and parish business rather than on proclaiming the kingdom.

## **2. *Evangelisation***

Since the second Vatican Council the momentum of conversion to gospel living has brought the term 'evangelisation' into the very heart of discussion of the identity of the church and its mission. Today evangelisation is viewed as the entire work of the church in carrying on the mission of Christ and it covers three main areas:

*Pastoral Activity:* Nourishment and deepening of gospel living among those already committed to it in established dioceses and parishes. This includes evangelisation of the rising generation.

*Evangelism:* Proclamation of the gospel to the unchurched within our own culture.

*Missionary Activity:* Proclamation of the gospel across cultures in traditional missionary apostolates.

## **3. *The Church is Mystery***

The church is mystery because, although it is a human institution exercising a function among human societies, its primary function is to act



as an instrument of the Spirit in working to establish the kingdom. Although the church defies comprehensive understanding and precise definition, Avery Dulles suggests that we can form an image of church if we study the various ways in which the church functions and represents different modes by a series of models. The church working in dioceses and parishes and schools and hospitals administering, teaching, healing, monitoring integrity and maintaining solidarity is *Church as Institution*. The people of God joined in mystical union with God as loving Father and with one another as brothers and sisters in Christ is *Church as Communion*. We see the *Church as Herald* when it proclaims the gospel. The church acting as source of grace through its sacraments is *Church as Sacrament*. And when the church becomes involved in secular life and challenges falsehood and injustice and makes a stand for truth we see the *Church as (Suffering) Servant*. We must not imagine that these models fit neatly together to form a super-model because, in fact, there is often conflict between different modes of functioning and this produces tension. At each moment of history the church must make arbitrary decisions regarding the pattern of power of these different modes of functioning. If we study the early church we notice that a characteristic of this pattern is flexibility. The early church never becomes crystallised into a static pattern but is able to adapt to changing situations and to make different modes dominant at appropriate times. At the Last Supper/Washing of the Feet rite, the Church as Communion is dominant—in the story of Corinth, the Church as Herald—at the Council of Jerusalem, the Church as Institution—at the Pentecost Event, the Church as Sacrament.

Ideally the variations in pattern of the relative powers of the modes should have responded sensitively to the movement of the Spirit, but, all too often, the human face of the church becomes visible and disaster follows. The Johannine churches placed great stress on Communion but appear to have given insufficient attention to Institution and this probably explains why they disintegrated at the end of the first century as we read in the Epistles of John. At the Councils convoked to formulate Christology and the theology of Trinity the churches of Alexandria and Antioch seem to have been more intent on competing as human institutions than on maintaining communion. History records that this bitter rivalry led eventually to a permanent rift between the churches of East and West.

#### **4. *Significance of the Second Vatican Council***

In the second millennium of the history of christianity, the Roman church seems to have become increasingly defensive as it faced a succession of crises: schisms, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, the Scientific Revolution, the Enlightenment and others. This

brought about loss in flexibility as the bonds of Communion weakened and the Church turned to the use of power as Institution to deal with situations. The Roman Catholic Church tried to limit the freedom of local churches as Heralds of the Good News; fearing loss of members to the Evangelistic churches it discouraged the reading of the bible; and in an effort to further control the minds of people it published an Index, a list of books which Catholics were forbidden to read. And a defensive church, of course, tended to adopt the role of Master rather than of Servant.

The Second Vatican Council moved towards restoring dynamism to the Catholic Church; towards overcoming its defensive attitudes, and towards regaining some of the flexibility of the Early Christian Church. Pope John XXIII adopted the title of Servant of the Servants of God. Articles 22 and 23 of the Constitution on Divine Revelation stressed the importance of scripture and once again encouraged Catholics to read the bible. And the Council opened the Church to the Modern World: it related with warmth to the Orthodox and Other Christian Churches; it recognised that God had also revealed himself in mysterious ways to people of non-Christian religions; and it announced a new vision in which it saw itself as partner with the secular world in promoting the welfare of man.

### ***5. Modes of Evangelisation***

The manner in which christianity is passed on to an individual or to a group is also mystery because it is the work of the Spirit acting through human instruments. We are unable to define evangelisation but, reflecting on experience, we can see that it takes place in different modes.

In the 1940's and 1950's I taught for some years in the parish of Hawthorn in Victoria. The church building was like a small cathedral; there was Manresa Hall, a parish primary school, a parish junior secondary school for boys, a senior secondary school for girls; and it was a short trip by ambulance to the Mercy Hospital. In the parish were active organisations to meet the needs of men and women, boys and girls. In those pre-Vatican days 'the faith' was handed down from the older generation to the younger mainly through Church Institutions. This institution mode of evangelisation was efficient only so long as the younger generation was willing to be moulded by tradition. Its strength is that it conserves the *status quo*—its weakness that it tends to produce conforming christians lacking personal commitment. This mode of evangelisation was rejected by young people in the 60's and 70's when they began placing increasing emphasis on the value of freedom and personal identity and refused to be part of any process which threatened them with the anonymity of mass production.

During this period pressure came on schools to change emphasis in evangelisation of the young. Abandoned were the impersonal intellectual theology of the catechism, the religious knowledge exam, the herding of classes to confession and the routine daily Mass for boarders. In the new approach emphasis was transferred to relationship with Christ and with one another in Christ, and catechetics changed from study of God as object of worship to the development of personal spiritualities based on the symbol of God as loving Father. Methodology in schools changed from an intellectual approach to an experiential approach and music, art, drama, dance, small group sharing, christian living camps and youth festivals became part of the process. And to maintain credibility the Catholic school changed emphasis from being an institution for imparting knowledge to a family in which encouragement was given to students, teachers, auxiliary staff, parents and former students to develop their full potential as human beings. This paradigm shift marked a change of emphasis in evangelisation in schools from Institution Mode to Communion Mode.

Any established church using only Institution/Communion/Herald modes can perform the work of evangelisation within its culture re-vitalising local churches, inducting the on-coming generation into the church community or establishing new churches within its cultural society. This is the case because what is called for is renewal of zeal for religion expressed in traditional symbols, initiation into the mysteries by revealing the meaning of tribal symbols or proclaiming Christ to a developing church through the medium of common symbols.

But when a church faces the task of helping those of a different culture to establish a prototype church, the task is much more complex and another mode of evangelisation must be brought into operation. This is because the task is now the transfer of a religion from one culture to another by translating the symbols and the idioms and the thought patterns of one world view into those of another world view so that the religion is transformed in appearance but remains the same in essence.

## **6. '*Evangelii Nuntiandi*'**

Pope Paul VI gave a clear explanation of the inculturation of christianity in cross-cultural situations in a pronouncement entitled *Evangelii Nuntiandi* which he made following the Synod of Bishops (1974) which had devoted its attention to evangelisation:

...every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelisation of culture or, more correctly, of cultures.

What matters is to evangelise man's culture, not just in a decorative way by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way in depth right to the roots in the

wide and rich sense in which these terms have in 'The Church in the Modern World.' We should always take the person as starting point and always come back to the relationship of people with one another and with God.

Evangelisation loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed; if it does not answer the questions they ask; and if it does not have an impact on their concrete lives . . .

The Church recognises the place of non-ordained ministries whereby certain people are appointed pastors and consecrate themselves in a special way to the service of the community. They offer an important service to the Church. These ministries such as catechists, directors of prayer and of singing; Christians devoted to the service of God's Word or to assisting those in need; the heads of small communities or persons charged with the responsibility of apostolic movements. These ministries are valuable for the establishment, life and growth of the Church.

A serious preparation is needed for all workers for evangelisation. Such preparation is all the more necessary for those who devote themselves to the Ministry of the Word.

## **7. *The Dialogue Mode of Evangelisation***

Evangelisation can be carried out in cross-cultural situations only if there is mutual respect for cultures and only by means of a lengthy process of dialogue. Those proclaiming the gospel will themselves be evangelised as they are privileged to receive intimate insights into the manner in which God has revealed himself in a mysterious way through myths and cultic rites to people of a non-christian society; and the ones receiving the Good News will discover what adaptations they must make to their religion and their spirituality in order to come into communion with the christian church. This is the *Dialogue Mode* of evangelisation which, of course, is used in conjunction with the Institution/Communion/Herald modes.

We have a graphic account of the Dialogic Mode of evangelisation in action in the Epistles of Paul, particularly in those to the people of Corinth. Unfortunately we do not have scripts of his oral proclamations but it is clear from what remains of his many letters that his method was based on dialogue. Although he was a Jew he was able to converse with his audience in their native Greek and he had a thorough acquaintance with their culture because he had been brought up in a Jewish community of the diaspora and he had become Hellenised. Paul's method was to proclaim the Good News in the language of the hosts and then to engage in dialogue answering their questions, challenging to generous response, urging conversion from old ways and reproving shortcomings. The atmosphere during these dialogues seems to have run the gamut of the emotions. Paul always insisted that

converts in developing churches should be served by ministers of their own culture. And he maintained with fierce conviction that the developing churches should translate the christian message into their own cultural symbols or adopt basic symbols (such as the cross) into their own cultures, and that they were under no obligation to adopt the Jewish cultural medium in which the message had been delivered to them.

### **8. *The Council of Jerusalem***

In the whole period of his missionary life Paul was harassed by followers of the Christian Church of Jerusalem who kept on insisting that Gentile converts must accept the christian religion in its original Jewish setting rather than translate it into symbols of their own culture. This was the issue at the Council of Jerusalem at which Paul won the first round when he forced the pillars of the church (Peter and James) to concede that Gentile Christians were not bound by the Jewish law of circumcision. Later at Antioch the second round flared up when Paul confronted Peter who was insisting that Jewish christians must observe the Jewish law concerning dining, which meant that they should not celebrate eucharistic meals with Gentile Christians. When we read Paul's letters we get the impression that most of the imprisonments and the beatings and the abuse he suffered were initiated by hard-line Jewish christians rather than by hostile pagans. The battle for inculturation was won decisively in the year 70 AD when the Roman army sacked Jerusalem and expelled all Jews.

### **9. *The Violent Mode of Evangelisation***

When we use only the Institution/Communion/Herald modes of evangelisation in cross-cultural situations and exclude the use of the Dialogic mode and the translation of symbols, then the process is geared towards assimilation into the culture of the Herald and not towards inculturation. This is the *Violent Mode* of evangelisation because it tends to destroy the spirituality of the recipient and to replace it with a foreign spirituality.

### **10. *Syncretism Leading to Rejection?***

Here is a clear statement of my belief. When Aboriginal people who form less than 1% of the population are incorporated into a common diocese-parish system served by western ministers who conduct western style liturgies in English, and when the congregation is predominantly white, then the dynamic is strongly oriented towards destruction of Aboriginal spirituality and towards assimilation. But Aboriginal spirituality is so deeply entrenched that it is most likely that this will result in syncretism in most cases and that eventually it will lead to rejection of christianity. Having separate eucharistic liturgies for Aboriginals in camps or in other places

may ease the pain of assimilation but it will do nothing whatsoever to alter the dynamic of assimilation.

### **11. Possible Alternative Strategies**

If we wish to generate a dynamic of inculturation in the Aboriginal community, I believe that we must take two initiatives:

- inaugurate a program to train and to empower Aboriginal ministers to take over the pastoral care of Aboriginal members of the church;
- take steps to create opportunity for lengthy dialogue with Aboriginals leading to incarnation of christianity into the symbols and thought patterns of Aboriginal culture.

This latter initiative would require reorganisation of pastoral regions and could be done in three different ways, (1) by ordaining Aboriginal bishops and ministers and by setting up separate dioceses for Aboriginals superimposed on existing dioceses; (2) by creating separate parishes for Aboriginals superimposed on existing parishes and served by Aboriginal ministers; (3) by establishing small Aboriginal churches (basic communities) served by Aboriginal ministers within existing parish structures. This is the choice outlined in *Towards Aboriginal Church*.

### **12. The Dream of Pope John Paul**

I end with an excerpt from the address of Pope John Paul to Aboriginal people assembled at Alice Springs in 1986. This is the dream which could become reality if only we had the faith to abandon worn out ideas and ways of acting—the will to listen to the Spirit calling us to take fresh initiatives and to follow new paths—and the spiritual energy to fan enthusiasm for the mission of Christ:

The Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. It supports them in everything human and, when necessary, it purifies them. Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God.

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

Take this Gospel into your language and way of speaking; let its spirit penetrate your communities and determine your behaviour towards each other; let the Gospel come into your hearts and renew your personal lives.

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

You will feel courage rising up in you when you listen to God speaking to you in the words of the prophets:

*I am going to gather you together and bring you home to your own land...I shall give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you...You shall be my people and I will be your God.*

(I wish to acknowledge that I have drawn extensively in this article from *The New Dictionary of Theology* (Michael Glazier 1987) and from *Encyclopaedia of Theology* (Editor: Karl Rahner).



# **BROOME DIOCESE**

## **— WHICH WAY?**

**Dan O'Donovan**

### **I. Education-centred View**

According to this view, as I understand it, education holds the top priority in our Catholic north-western mission.

A truly admirable system of inter-related educational structures and programs has been set in place, serving in particular Aboriginal needs and interests. This is in line with the worldwide Catholic Church's accepted 'preferential option', as stated by our present Pope John-Paul II at the Puebla Conference, 1979, (Latin America), and frequently since.

Here in Wyndham I have been buoyed with hope and encouragement as I see the full range of this educational plan realised: from the pre-school stage on through pre-primary, primary, then secondary schooling (in many cases, at Perth or Tardun). A final direction of this movement goes through to the TAFE or tertiary level, some of the qualified persons returning with their accreditations to take up teaching roles themselves in the classrooms they had started in as tots.

Now at last, with the establishment of the Broome Notre Dame Australia (NDA) campus, this last stage in the Catholic educational program in the Kimberley will be simplified and much improved. New and easier opportunities will arise for personal or community undertakings which before, if not out of the question, were certainly more expensive, arduous and daunting.

Along with all this impressive growth which has taken place over many years now, and with untold generosity and effort, there has been developing in Aboriginal-related syllabuses, the enlightened method which has come to be called 'the two-way learning', engaging communities young and old in the process of schooling locally. It 'acknowledges both a western and Aboriginal curriculum.'

At a Catholic Aboriginal Educators Conference held in Broome in July 1989, Tom Stephens MLC, representing the Minister for Education



said, 'The Aboriginal Studies programs at Catholic schools in the region are the finest examples and have no rival.'

While junior education is at the centre and at the top in current Catholic Church mission policy according to this first view we are describing, it is not, needless to say, the whole story. A variety of adult education projects, or mini-projects, are in course in different places, based either on the Lombardi Movement for a Better World model (Broome), or the Lumko model.

In the East Kimberley, but serving the entire north-west, is the Mirrilngki Spirituality Centre at Warmun, which offers a wide range of courses from alcohol understanding and rehabilitation to group retreats.

The Balgo art and craft Aboriginal cultural centre is typical of this further reach of the overall church vision we are considering. Clearly, it is a generous and worthy effort. Is it adequate?

## **II. Relation-centred View**

When I first came north in 1972 the Kimberley seemed like an Australian Tibet: a remote place, not easy of access. One heard little or nothing of the Catholic Church there.

That was just the time however when, with Labour coming into government, the scene started shifting for better or for worse depending on one's judgment. Land rights, self-determination of Aboriginal communities were subjects which began gaining wider public attention and interest. In tandem with this, Aboriginal people started to assume responsibility for their own affairs, to form associations, to talk and plan in a more corporate way: in a word, to be their own leaders.

The Catholic Church, known to be for a long time involved in the north-west, found itself thrown into the national limelight in 1979 with the so-called 'Kalumburu Affair.' It came across in the media, fairly or unfairly, as a rather archaic establishment having its difficulties with modernity; in particular with the incoming liberalising tide. Also, as a conservative parochial enclave, geographically cornered.

It must be admitted that communication with the 'outer world' of Geraldton or Darwin had never had time to mature. During its century or so of existence, the Kimberley Catholic Church had been fully occupied with its own implantation. No island can be blamed for its isolation. But now it is different. That 'outer world'—Darwin notably, for our purposes—has moved along. I very much fear, I must confess, that the recent quiet and rather sudden extension to Broome of the NDA giant from the south, with its US links, is set consciously or not to box us in on ourselves irreversibly.

It was (partly) to signal in the other direction that, at the end of 1992 in response to an appeal by Bishop Carlos Belo, I volunteered service in Dili for two years, with Bishop Jobst's consent. (I am still waiting for a visa!) In a letter circulated by Bishop Jobst to the Broome clergy, he referred to this as an 'assignment.' I took the word to mean that the move was acknowledged by the bishop as a diocesan, rather than a merely personal one. At present the ground is ready ecumenically across the north for most significant things to happen in the emergent Australian church, which would define its shape deep into the future.

Already, back in 1984-85, the Reverend David Thompson, then field-officer at Nungalinya College, Darwin, paid a visit to Broome. There was question at the time of the setting up of a Catholic 'training college for further education of local people in church matters.' David was positively interested in the possibility of a joint church venture after the manner of Wontulp-bi-Buya in Queensland. Personally, I was much in favour of the Nungalinya connection. I saw that year 1985 as a graced occasion. Sadly, graced occasions often pass quickly and are not retrievable. Our rejection of this one not only disappointed, but worried me, as it confirmed suspicions of continuing Broome Catholic isolationist trends in an outward-bursting Australia.

At Nungalinya College annual general meeting in March 1991, which I had the privilege of attending, the following motion was passed with warm unanimity (and applause, if I remember correctly.) It is quoted from the minutes: '... Father Dan O'Donovan reported that he had been invited by Bishop Jobst to develop ecumenical co-operation where appropriate. Dan reported on the struggles with the Spirituality Centre in Broome and the developments at Mirrilingki Spirituality Centre at Turkey Creek in East Kimberley. David Thompson indicated that the door has always been open for co-operation as far as Nungalinya is concerned. Motion: ... that Father Dan O'Donovan convey to the Bishop that Nungalinya would be happy to pursue with the diocese of Broome a combined work in the Kimberley.' Bishop Clyde Wood was in the chair.

Not long after he was succeeded as Anglican Bishop of the Northern Territory by Bishop Richard Appleby, whose induction ceremony I had the joy of attending in Darwin. In a letter, dated 25 August 1992, Bishop Appleby wrote to me:

... Your comments about ecumenical involvement across the north of Australia interest me greatly. You may know that the Anglican Diocese of the Northern Territory comes within the Anglican Province of Queensland. In that regard I am a member of the Executive of Queensland Churches Together,

though at this stage I have been unable to attend any meetings. I had wondered what relevance there was for us in the Territory belonging to QCT given the fact that it would be mainly concerned with Queensland issues. Your letter however raises new and interesting possibilities. I am very conscious of the need for some ecumenical endeavour here in the Territory. We have the Darwin Inter-Church Council, though as the name implies, it only concerns churches here in Darwin itself. Maybe we should be asking Queensland Churches Together to help us organise a consultation between the churches across the north of Australia.

If you ever get to Darwin do let me know as I would certainly welcome an opportunity for some discussion with you on these important matters.

In the meantime of course, what originally started as a Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council project, ripened to become the 'Murri Ministry Project', exploring the way toward full Catholic integration with Nungalinga College. It has the Catholic bishops of Queensland and Bishop Ted Collins of Darwin keenly behind it, and offers a thoroughly worked-out program of Catholic action promotive of Aboriginal ministry.

The Director of NDA Kimberley Centre in Broome, Sister Pat Rhatigan, visited Nungalinga College in May 1993. I was full of hope; and wrote to Pat before she went:

This seems to me an exceptionally important move, and hopefully the beginning of an ongoing co-ordination effort, through the NAICC Murri Ministry Project, approved last year for the Kimberley region by Bishop Jobst. ('... I immediately and fully supported the Murri Ministry Project.' *Letter to me from Bishop Jobst of 17 September 1992*. I add now: In a letter of 13 October 1993, the Bishop clarified: '... At the meeting Fr Heading assured me of the future Catholic presence of the teaching staff of the College which prompted me to support (not officially approve) the Murri Project. My reservations at that time were the lack of catholicity in the curricula, especially in the areas of sacramentology and ecclesiology. It appears that with the presence of Sisters Brigida Nailon and Robyn Reynolds and Fr Heading *these defects would have been remedied*. . .' (my emphasis). In reply, I wrote: '... Am I to understand, from the words underscored, that you now do, at last, "officially approve" the Murri Ministry Project?' (but received no response.)

The Nungalinga College "National Education Network", is of course a much bigger enterprise than the still embryonic Murri Ministry Project. I believe we Kimberley Catholics ought to approach it in humility, as late starters and as respectful listeners. . .

Later, on 24 September, in a phone conversation, Pat Rhatigan described the event in May as 'a courtesy visit.' On 14 October, after travelling to Darwin to talk the subject over with Nungalinga principal, Dr Les

Brockway, and with the Murri Ministry staff, I wrote this letter to Bishop Jobst:

Dear Bishop Jobst,

At the big turning-points in history, greater deliberation is required.

The Broome diocese is currently at one such turning-point. . .Or, are we? We can always continue to go-it-alone, avoiding collaborative action.

The logo we are using for our review of diocesan policy—Kimberley 2000—makes me hopeful, however, that we are not going to close in on ourselves, but rather open out in many directions, with confidence and trust.

The diocese is at a stage now when major operations affecting it need to be examined closely in themselves, and from a distance to see how they cohere, or relate, in terms of the Gospel interests we share with certain other Christian Churches, and with the north-western social ground in which our evangelisation is planted.

Practical considerations may suggest keeping things moving without too much pause or delay. Nevertheless, mistakes these days are always costly, and there is much to be said for the constructive pause, and the canvassing of experienced views. As Church, we are trying to lay out ecumenically a new landscape, which will locate our evangelising activities far into the future. I fear, as things stand, that the NDA Kimberley Centre has not been sufficiently thought through, nor the detail hammered out, with NATSICC; in particular its co-ordination with the carefully staged Murri Ministry Project, which also has your approval.

I would therefore take seriously and, since it is public now, publicly respond to Paul Ryan's comment in *The Kimberley Echo* of 27 September. 'Mr Perdrisat' he writes, 'and Ms Poelina believe that the current moves by the University of Notre Dame to establish tertiary education facilities in Broome are progressing too quickly, and without proper consultation with the broader community to see what their needs are. . .What we need to do is ensure that any moves in the Kimberley to develop tertiary education is done with the whole community in mind, and that everyone has a say in what type of development goes ahead.'

Mr Perdrisat is speaking for the new proposed organisation, the *Kimberley Cultural Institute of Education and Research* he and Ms Poelina are currently planning, and which is 'an independent Aboriginal Community controlled initiative.' Joining it to service, educationally, this one sparsely populated Kimberley region, is the TAFE *Kimberley Community College*, announced on this morning's news and already government funded to the tune of \$3.5 million.

Dear Bishop, none of us wants the NDA Kimberley Centre to turn into an embarrassing complication for our northern Catholic Church. Hence this letter.

PS. What I am proposing is: 1) that you agree to a 'constructive pause' in the NDA Kimberley Centre program, allowing time for consultation with NATSICC and with the key Murri Ministry personnel (inter-church), since as Christian presence across the north we badly need to get our act together; 2) that serious friendly consultations be held with representatives of the Kimberley Cultural Institute of Education and Research and of the TAFE Kimberley Community College; 3) that a gentle response, clearly indicating our goodwill be submitted without delay to Paul Ryan's observation in the *Kimberley Echo* of 27 September. D.O'D.

I sent copies of this letter to Dr Peter Tannock, Vice-Chancellor of NDA, Fremantle, and to Sister Pat Rhatigan. As I received no reply, and as no response appeared in the following issue of the *Kimberley Echo*, I undertook to write myself. The letter appeared in the *Kimberley Echo* of 1 November 1993 under the title, 'A New Dimension':

Dear Editor,

In your article 'Aboriginal group releases education discussion paper' (*Echo* Sept.27, 1993), you observed that 'Mr Perdrisat and Ms Poelina believe that current moves by the University of Notre Dame to establish tertiary education facilities in Broome are progressing too quickly, and without proper consultation with the broader community to see what their needs are...What we need to do is ensure that any moves in the Kimberley to develop tertiary education is done with the whole community in mind, and that everyone has a say in what type of development goes ahead.'

On reading this I began to see the Notre Dame Kimberley project from a new angle, one that suddenly made it interesting to me. The fact is that historically we Kimberley Catholics have always been occupied with our own general operation, and not so much besides. We have had little practice in the give and take of healthy interaction, in a plural society, with organisations other than our own. Apart, that is, from the government education department upon which we depend financially. This is true equally, and more surprisingly, of practical communication with the other major christian churches. Maybe now, this Catholic Broome campus project may serve, as Perdrisat and Poelina are suggesting, to open us out to this further dimension of the Gospel we have not been used to.

Dan O'Donovan, Parish Priest, Wyndham.

I have titled this second understanding of the Broome diocese as 'Relation-centred.' We are not relating as well as we might in the Broome diocese at present, either among ourselves, or beyond. Communication has never been a salient in our diocesan policy; but now too much is at issue, and this is going to have to change. It is obviously not a question of follow-

ing *either* the education-centred view *or* the relation-centred view. Our good health as Catholic evangelisers requires both.

But as we face the future together in prayer, I would see the second as more urgent than the first. Here at the frontier, it will be the test of our Australian Christian witness to Asia.

\* \* \* \* \*

**Note:**

It should be noted that between the time Dan wrote his text and its time of going to press an important event occurred in Northern Territory: the Catholic diocese of Darwin formally joined the Anglican and Uniting Churches in sponsorship of Nungalinya College as a training institution for ministry and Christian leadership. — *Editor*

## BULLETIN BOARD

THIS year the Australian Association for the Study of Religions (AASR) annual conference was held in Adelaide, Sunday 3 July till Thursday 7 July.

As happens at times, the AASR met this year in conjunction with the Australasian theological societies ANZATS and ANZSTS. (Next year AASR will hold its annual conference in Ballarat, while the theological studies societies will meet in New Zealand.) The list of participants handed to us in our conference folders numbered 183 — of whom 76 were female, which is a consideration relevant to the overall theme.

Actually the AASR itself had no central theme, but the theological societies had the theme of 'Sin and Grace: Gender Perspectives.'

I had not attended an AASR meeting for a number of years. There were a lot of familiar faces, even from the time of the inaugural national conference in 1976. The big difference was the number of women presenters. Of course, this was related to the rider on the central theme 'Gender Perspectives.' It is a part of where we stand in history that speakers on gender issues tend to be female. I suppose I have been out of academic mainstream for a while, but I had no idea that there were so many women theologians in Australia, some in such important positions as that of Dorothy Lee, Professor of New Testament at United Faculty of Theology, Melbourne.

I was told that some 70 papers had been offered for presentation — all

within the space of three and a half days. This meant that most of the time there were five papers running in parallel. This does seem extravagant. Some particular interests, like Religious Education ran continuously through most sessions so that a person interested in that particular range of topic could employ him/herself usefully, dipping out into another stream should something of particular interest be offering. However, there were probably quite a few other participants in a position similar to my own.

I had been invited to present a paper in the Aboriginal Religion section by Bill Edwards who is head of the Aboriginal Studies unit at Underdale campus in Adelaide. (My paper is printed in this issue of *Nelen Yubu*.) The Aboriginal Religion section operated in the late morning periods of Monday and Thursday. That left a lot of free space in between. There were interesting things going on in other sections, like the major theme of the theological societies, but this required continuing presence to be truly useful.

The philosophy of paper-giving might need some consideration. With no central theme to bind them into unity, multiple papers tend to lack significance, especially, as was too often the case, they were not prepared with time limits in mind and consequently no significant discussion after them. A good model might be the one used by the ANZATS/STS: a series of theme papers followed by general or panel discussion.

In the Aboriginal Religion section

four of us presented: Bill Edwards spoke about the Aboriginal Studies Open Learning Project on TV, which he had been asked to organise. Les Brockway, principal of Nungalinga College, spoke about the college, particularly expressing his pleasure that the Catholic diocese of Darwin had finally found its way through the thicket of prejudice (my words, not his) to corporate membership. I presented my paper on convergence between Aboriginal religion and Christianity. Veronica Brady spoke on the topic 'Theology, Aboriginal People and Marginalisation.'

Two other features in the general program related to the Aboriginal theme. The second of the Charles Strong Trust lectures was presented by Nonie Sharp on the religious background to the Mabo case. Rosemary Crumlin described the search for theologically significant Aboriginal paintings which resulted in her publication (along with Anthony Knight) on Aboriginal art and spirituality.

— Martin Wilson



## FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK . . .

OUR holidays as such in *Nelen Yubu* are few and of short duration, but this year I ventured into unknown territory, where to my delight I found myself in the midst of some very interesting history regarding the local Aborigines. It was in the Warrumbungle Mountains, a strange volcanic outcrop coughed up by an earth spasm in the middle of the western plains of NSW, about 18 million years.

The Aborigines were the Kamilaroi people, who lived in the strange mountains west of Coonabarabran, which abounded in food and water and excellent living conditions from spring to autumn. And in the freezing winters the inhabitants simply moved quietly towards the coast to enjoy a change of diet and to shelter from the fierce westerlies.

Tucker in the Warrumbungles must have been fantastic for those ancient dwellers, even up to the time of white settlement. 'Roos and wallabies are prolific, and we were told that many varieties of edible vegetation still exist on which the indigenous people could feast themselves, never running short. Sparkling creeks run all through the mountains so that drinking water was ever available and the lush growth of grasses, plants and trees made living quite luxurious for the families scattered through the valleys. It was a truly magnificent place to live and savour the goodies of life.

The famous *Breadknife* stands erect now as it did for all those mil-

lions of years, as well as the Bluff, Split Rock and dozens of other attractive monoliths.

Today the Siding Springs Observatory stands atop one of the higher peaks, well worth a visit to see the largest telescope in the southern hemisphere. There are myriad walks in all directions, the shortest of which bore the legend '1.8km' so we took this one. But they had failed to tell us that the 1.8km went completely vertical! Up we strode, then stumbled, then almost crawled, often thinking of turning back but determined not to be beaten. The upward track went for one thousand steps. We counted them on the way down!

But the view from the top was breathtaking, and I am sure our friends of long ago were never deterred by the small matter of height and steepness.

The Warrumbungles are worth a visit, perhaps not in the middle of summer, but in the interests of Australian history and to drink in the topography of the area where so many happy people had lived until we came along to intrude on their privacy. There is an Aboriginal Council in Coonabarabran, and the Tourist Association has plenty of information in the form of brochures and historical information for those interested in the stories of this ancient place.

Secretary Keren