

Editorial

This number has a continuation aspect about it. Cletus Read's article continues his series of reflections that began with No.54. This is the fifth in the series. In the opening paragraphs he explains his overall aim. — Can we hope for some formal response from readers?

Noel McMaster takes up a theme initiated by Dan O'Donovan in the previous issue. Gerard Goldman provides us with the second part of his study of inculturation, white Australian style.

Gerard's initial study, 'Inculturating Theology', appeared in No. 56 (1994/1), pp.12-27. It presented the results of protracted dialogue with four women from his home area (Hunter Valley, NSW) about the way they have incorporated Catholic theological teaching and worshiping practice into their own lives. Its relevance to *Nelen Yubu* is this: many of the agents of evangelisation among Aboriginal people are white Australians: it is interesting to see how we whites gave gone about inculturation back home.

We thank the Pallottine provincial, Michael McMahan, for persuading Werner Kriener to send us his reflections on pastoral ministry in that important area of inculturating theology, the Eastern Kimberley. Fr Kriener has been one of the central agents in the process.

Regretfully, we must draw your attention to the notice on p.9. Please do send us any defective copies of No.57 for replacement. We are embarrassed by the trouble and apologise profusely.

The Pontifical Mission Societies office in Sydney has sought our aid in drawing up a register of 'missionary' personnel engaged in the Aboriginal apostolate. We have inserted a loose form with various blank categories. When you send in the cheque with your 1995 subscription renewal you might be so kind as to include a suitably completed list of the people at your place? It should be to your own advantage as it would help the PMS when they are allocating support funds!

Martin Wilson msc
Editor

TOWARDS PLURALISM

Cletus Read fms

1. In recent years different sources are reporting that Catholic missionaries in Australia, Canada and the United States of America have been much less successful in helping indigenes inculcate Christianity than have their counterparts in places such as Africa, South America and the South Pacific, and it might be inferred that the former missionaries have been lacking in enthusiasm and commitment.

2. I wish to expose the falsity of this view and to present what I consider is a more accurate picture, and in so doing, indicate the steps which I think the Catholic Church should take to close the gap between the performances. At an earlier stage I had in mind to write a book, but rejected this approach thinking that my message might then be directed mainly towards those with academic interest in missiology. Instead I have decided to present my ideas through courtesy of *Nelen Yubu* in the hope that they might attract more attention from Aboriginal people and missionaries, as well as from students of missiology. Since I will be displaying on a vast canvas, I propose in this article to present my ideas in outline (hence the disjointed form) in order to provide a panoramic view for readers. That will give others the opportunity to present differing opinions and will leave me free to follow up in whatever manner seems best suited to the situation.

3. In a previous article[†], *Inculturation or Assimilation?* I pointed out that evangelisation across cultural boundaries is distinguished from evangelisation in a common cultural milieu by dialogue leading to adjustment of view of Reality (a philosophy term—anthropology uses *world view*) and to adaptation of cultural symbols. I shall refer to this article later.

4. It is true that inculturation in the three countries named is lagging behind performance on other fronts, but this is not due to lack of interest of any particular group such as missionaries in the field,

[†]*Nelen Yubu*, No.57, pp.13-22 (1994/2)

diocesan administrators or church leaders in Rome. Rather, it is because the vision of the whole Catholic Church has outreached praxis. In the 19th and 20th centuries man's conscious knowledge of the process of inculturation has undergone enormous expansion due to developments in philosophy, psychology, anthropology, sociology, theology, spirituality, missiology, history and sociology of religion, the physical sciences and the technology of travel and communication. The result is that the Catholic Church today has a much more enriched vision of the possibilities offered by the process of inculturation. In *What is Process Theology?* Robert Mellert writes:

The Christian is free to choose whatever philosophical perspective can best integrate faith with view of Reality as a whole. The perspective chosen will determine the way in which faith is expressed. That is, choice of philosophy will determine the shape of theology. Consequently there can be many theologies endeavouring to explain the same faith. Unity in faith comes from a common belief in the revelatory significance of Jesus: plurality of theology comes from differing views of Reality into which that faith must be integrated.

5. In his address to Aboriginal people in Alice Springs in 1986 His Holiness Pope John Paul presented an exciting vision of Aboriginal people approaching the God of Christians in their own cultural way. This was right in line with the principles of the Second Vatican Council and conformed with more recent pronouncements of the Catholic Church.

6. But the Catholic Church has always had trouble in matching theory with praxis in its missionary work and ethnocentrism has often replaced theological principle. In the 17th century Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili attempted to help the people of China and India to incarnate Christianity into the symbols and social structures of the Far East, but this effort at inculturation was authoritatively terminated by Pope Benedict XIV in the middle of the 18th century (See *The New Dictionary of Theology*, page 511).

7. The term *inculturation* gained prominence after its use during the 1977 Synod in Rome when Pedro Arrupe argued convincingly for greater pluralism, 'because real pluralism is the most profound unity and the present crisis of unity in many cases is due to insufficient

pluralism which fails to provide the satisfaction of expressing and living one's faith in conformity with one's culture' (See *The New Dictionary of Theology*, page 513.)

8. The methodology of the Catholic Church in its apostolate among Australian Aboriginal people is based on an ancient restrictive vision of common diocese/parish structures; traditional forms of ministry dating back to the early church; and ethnocentric attitudes towards ceremony and costume and language—with the result that workers in the field find that their bravest efforts inevitably end in assimilation rather than inculturation. Many workers in the Aboriginal apostolate suffer frustration because performance always falls far short of the vision splendid as presented in Alice Springs in 1986.

9. At this point I suspect that many astute readers would wish to challenge what I have said:

“But the missionaries in Africa, South America and the South Pacific have to work under the same restrictive structures. We cannot argue that outmoded structures are the main cause of failure in Australia, Canada and the United States when they do not inhibit success in those other countries . . .”

10. We can so argue, if we examine the data carefully.

11. Two factors make it particularly difficult for Western missionaries to help indigenous people inculturate Christianity: philosophic differences in view of Reality and cultural difference in method of acquiring knowledge.

12. The Anglican author, Evelyn Underhill, writing in her book *Mysticism*, points out that man conceives Ultimate Reality in different ways, but that mystics and theologians are accustomed to distinguish two particular extreme ways: The Emanation Theory and the Immanence Theory. Philosophies which follow the Emanation Theory say that Ultimate Reality (or God or the Absolute...) is completely other and that man can know Reality only in so far as Reality reveals itself by means of emanations of some sort. Reality brought the universe into existence but remains completely separate from creation unless it chooses to intervene on special occasions. The Greek philosophers favoured this approach—so did early christians such as Denis the Areopagite—also Augustine—it is the framework of the poems of

Dante—it is implied in the writings of John of the Cross—it had the support of Thomas Aquinas. The soul who seeks unity with Reality must detach itself from the material world by a life of asceticism and undertake pilgrimage to the other world where Reality is to be found. At the opposite pole is the Immanence Theory which is becoming increasingly popular among theologians of modern times. The holders of this theory say that Reality is implicit in self and in the universe—those who would seek Reality must enter into their deeper selves or into communion with the cosmos—unity with Reality involves a new consciousness, not a journey. The description of evolution of the cosmos by Teilhard de Chardin is based on Immanence Philosophy—and it is the basis of Process Theology—and the religions of indigenous people expressed in myths imply a philosophy of Immanence. Some philosophers of this group support a theory of vitalisation which means that every object in the universe has some form of consciousness.

13. These two extreme philosophic approaches to Divine Reality are not mutually exclusive—they are complementary. In every religion one approach usually dominates and the other fills a subsidiary role. Western theologies of the traditional type are based on emanation philosophy, but immanence philosophy also receives some consideration. Dualism is inherent in the system. In the religions of Aboriginal people immanence philosophy predominates and evidence for belief in Transcendent Reality is not easy to find.

14. When a Catholic person of Western culture falls sick the family calls in the doctor to discover the scientific cause of the illness; it invites the priest to pray to the Transcendent God in heaven to intervene in the events of creation and to cure the person; and Grandma may go down to the parish church and burn a candle in order to influence those transcendent powers. When an Aboriginal person gets sick the family calls in the witch-doctor to discern the immanent unfriendly influence causing the illness; to dispel these and enlist the aid of immanent benign spirits; and the family carries out a smoke ceremony to drive away harmful spirits in the vicinity. The different patterns of behaviour arise from the different perspectives of Reality.

15. If a missionary proclaims the Gospel in a way that entices Aboriginal people to transfer major emphasis of philosophic perspective

from Immanent Reality to Transcendent Reality, then the process is assimilation. Authentic inculturation requires that the process should incarnate the God of Christians into the traditional philosophic perspective. Boniface Perdjert, a deacon to the Christian community at Port Keats, indicates how this can be done when he speaks of Jesus:

He liked the bush as we do. He loved Nature. He saw in the lilies of the field a glory greater than Solomon's. He loved big things like hills and open spaces—He loved the little things like the mustard seed and the grain of wheat. We have Dreamtime Figures who formed the world, who gave us law and ceremony and life-centres where our spirits come. We find it easy to see in Christ the great Dreamtime Figure who, more than others, gave us law and ceremony and life-centres and marked the way we must follow to reach our true country.

Contrast this with the approach in the first chapter of John.

16. Authentic inculturation also requires that the missionary be willing to replace language and some ceremonial and costume (heritage for the most part from European feudal court life) with action more in harmony with Aboriginal tradition. Miriam Rose, principal of the school at Daly River, writes somewhat wistfully:

The ceremonies brought us together on a religious group basis. They impressed on me . . . the satisfaction of worshipping together in a worship of language, song, dance and action that was meaningful to us all. I long for the day when our deep aboriginal ceremonial instincts can find real expression in our Christian celebrations—when the celebrations will no longer be foreign but truly ours . . .

17. The missionary who follows European culture and places major emphasis on formal verbal prayer, is also engaged in a process of assimilation. The deep-seated experience of being one with Reality through Nature, and preference for intuition rather than conceptualisation and verbalisation, incline Aboriginal people more to prayer of contemplation: 'I developed a strong love for the bush,' writes Miriam Rose again, 'and especially for quietness. I do believe in quietness, the Great Spirit, the Father of us all. Often when I am out hunting I am drawn to sit in the bush by myself among the trees, on a hill, by a billabong or by the river, and be simply in His Presence. To me, this is the closest and dearest prayer of all.'

18. The Catholic Church seems always to have been reluctant to encourage a theology in which immanence philosophy dominates, presumably for fear of lapse into pantheism. This is illustrated by the suspicion with which Rome treated the writings of Teilhard de Chardin when first presented for approval.

19. When Christianity transferred from Jewish culture to Greek culture, conditions favoured inculturation because Jewish theology was Eastern but had developed greater emphasis on Transcendent Reality than had other religions of the Middle-East—and Greek culture favoured the use of the intellect in the acquisition of knowledge. The dialogue necessary to effect changes in world view and in the symbol system took place (for the most part) informally and unconsciously. After all, we could hardly expect that goals would be set and a process of assessment decided when anthropology, sociology, psychology and missiology did not become formal sciences until the last few centuries. Dialogue in the process of inculturation has remained more or less informal to the present day. So far as I know, no mission organisation has developed a complete formal process of dialogue based on researched data in order to facilitate adjustment to world view and changes to symbol systems as necessary steps leading to inculturation. We shall look at Lumko later.

20. When Western missionaries herald Christianity to indigenous people, the situation is much more difficult than that faced by Paul. The religion of the missionaries is skewed towards a philosophy of Transcendent Reality—the religion of the recipients towards a philosophy of Immanent Reality. Moreover the people who have to adjust their world view and adapt their cultural symbols in order to incarnate Christianity are not skilled in abstraction, conceptualisation, data analysis or formal logical thought. Nevertheless sociological data indicates that inculturation can be effective in countries such as Africa, South America and the South Pacific using a process of informal dialogue (at least in part) and even in spite of restrictive parameters. But the data also seems to indicate that success does not occur in particular countries such as Australia, Canada and the States. We need to study this data and discover the reason for difference.

21. Success occurs in countries where the Western missionaries belong to the minority cultural group and the indigenes form the majority culture. The latter retain possession of their land; they wield political power; they have pride and confidence in themselves because they have never been subjugated and humiliated as a nation. This adds up to saying that success can be achieved by informal dialogue provided the *mana* of the indigenes is dominant in the environment. Failures occur in countries in which the indigenes have been decimated; their country invaded by hordes of foreigners; their land confiscated; their families subjected to violence and indignity; their spirit severely wounded; their self-confidence crushed. In these countries the respective remnants of indigenes form less than 1% of the total population, and the *mana* of the indigenous culture has been suppressed by the *mana* of the aggressive Westerners. Under these adverse conditions it would seem to me that inculturation is unable to take effect when there are common diocese/parish units, foreign ministers and foreign language and ceremony, and when the process of dialogue is informal.

22. I suggest that there is a possibility (but no guarantee) of success in the failure countries if the Catholic Church were to study the available data and plan and institute a more formal process of dialogue under the most favourable conditions possible. I suggest that these three changes might be worthy of consideration:

1) The Christian message should be heralded and dialogue take place only in situations where the *mana* of the Aboriginal people is maximised and dominant. This might require reorganisation into separate dioceses or separate parishes or basic communities within existing parish structures—it might entail a preference for evening worship—it might favour outdoor venues for worship—and camp fires might replace fluorescent lighting.

2) The ministers responsible for initiating the process would have to have spiritualities strongly based on the immanence of divine reality and in harmony with Aboriginal spirituality. Very few non-Aboriginal priests in Australia would meet this criterion but there is a select number who could get the project under way. Clearly there would be an urgency for the development of an Aboriginal ministry. Existing Australian seminaries would be socially unacceptable and theologically unsuitable for the

training of Aboriginal ministers. The Catholic Church could work in more closely with the Nungalinya system for this purpose.

3) The Catholic Church would have to show more commitment in the use of Aboriginal languages and be less ethnocentric about ceremony. In the past the Church has given lip service to the use of Aboriginal languages in liturgy and teaching, but we have been half-hearted in backing ideal with action. We should give far greater support to SIL workers who are models of commitment in this matter.

23. The question arises whether or not the Lumko Program constitutes a complete program of dialogue and teaching for the purpose of inculturation when Western missionaries are working among indigenes. The answer is 'No.' The program deserves the high commendation it has received but it deals only with Church as communion as if the two parties shared the same world view. The program avoids the controversial ground of philosophical perspective. Sociological data supports the view that this approach can be effective in Africa where the *mana* of the indigenes is dominant, but that it would not be effective in Australia. Lumko programs afford good resource material but they do not deal with the fundamental question of basic philosophy explicitly so, in my opinion, would need to be supplemented when used in Australia.

24. There are wider considerations why the Catholic Church should move in the direction I have indicated. To celebrate the Bicentenary the Australian people have been working to bring about reconciliation between whites and blacks. The fundamental platform on which enduring reconciliation can be built is reconciliation of views of Reality. Whites and blacks will heal memories and reach understanding and agree to tolerate differences only when they have a clear picture of how the other views life. The Catholic Church needs to move towards greater acceptance of pluralism of philosophical perspective in order to help provide this platform for genuine reconciliation.

25. The discussions about ownership of land taking place in the Mabo proceedings also have their roots in the ground of philosophy. The people of Australia have never had a clear understanding of the different ways in which whites and blacks relate to land because they have never had a clear picture of the different philosophical perspec-

tives. The Catholic Church has contributed to this confusion because it has never dealt formally with the issue of differing views of Ultimate Reality or different ways of imaging God. The land issue would be less contentious if Christian Churches were to establish the right of Aboriginal people with regard to choice of philosophical perspective in the inculturation of Christianity.

26. There is dysfunction between the vision which the Catholic Church is presenting to Aboriginal people regarding the outcome of inculturation and the process of evangelisation being carried out in the common local churches shared by whites and blacks. Sociological data seems to suggest that the goals associated with the vision cannot be achieved using the means in vogue at the present time. Continued toleration of this situation will result in further disappointment to Aboriginal people and to a mounting toll of psychological damage to missionaries in the field.

NOTICE re *NELEN YUBU* No.57

Did you receive a *defective* copy of the last *Nelen Yubu* No.57 (1994/2)? E.g. pages misplaced or blank? Our Printers at Springwood tripped over when printing and/or collating. We only discovered the mistakes when people started calling for replacement copies.

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Sorry!

Martin Wilson msc, Editor

INCULTURATION OF THE LITURGY IN THE EAST KIMBERLEY

Werner Kriener sac

WHEN I became parish priest of Hall's Creek in 1973, the majority of parishioners were Aborigines. They lived in town and on 22 cattle stations. These Aboriginal people were different from those I had known in the West Kimberley. They spoke their own language, many were illiterate, many non-christians. They followed their traditional way of life as much as their situation in town or on the cattle stations permitted.

Peter Willis, a Pallottine and a former parish priest of Kununurra, had introduced me to the Aboriginal people on the cattle stations. A start was made with these people, stockmen, domestics, old and young people. We conducted Eucharist with the people sitting on the ground. This was the way they conducted their own meetings. The land, to them, is like a mother. Sitting enabled them to be in contact with the land. This was a start but more needed to be done, to inculturate instructions, prayers, songs and sacraments.

Pope Paul VI writes in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*: 'What matters is to evangelise culture in a vital way, in depth and right to its very roots.' (n.20)

More specifically he states: '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 use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.'

After the referendum in 1967, which recognised Aborigines as citizens, pride in race, culture and dreamtime stories increased. They became more self confident and the question of Aboriginal identity

received greater prominence. Many Aboriginal people wishing to live in a more traditional manner, moved from the stations. From such movements, communities such as Turkey Creek (Warmun) arose. People from this community informed me that they desired to be baptised as Catholics. After the necessary instructions, on 14 March 1976, there were 25 adult baptisms and 12 marriage ceremonies (celebrations or validations).

Since language is the key to culture, I started to learn the local language, Jaru. The year was 1976: my tutor was a Japanese linguist, Tasaku Tsunoda. At this time he was working on his doctoral thesis. He later wrote a thorough Jaru grammar. At Red Hill, we started to use Jaru in the liturgy. We translated the simple English Mass text from Lagrange (the work of Fr Kevin McKelson sac). For music we sang the Bathurst Island melody, adapted for the various parts of the Mass. (This melody is the one used in the so-called Aboriginal Our Father.) The people, adults and children, happily sang the Mass, using clicking sticks and boomerangs for keeping time. This process has started with the Lunja Community at Red Hill and later on at the Yarumun community at Ringer's Soak. A similar process occurred with the inculturation of the Mass with the Kitja people.

On 21 September 1978 an historic meeting took place at Turkey Creek. The community decided to have a Catholic School (two ways: Kitja and English). The community made this decision despite opposition from officials of the Aboriginal Affairs Department and lobbying from community advisers supporting a non-denominational school like the one at Strelly near Port Hedland.

The Communities at Turkey Creek and Red Hill benefited greatly from two week-long seminars. They were held at Daly River Mission in the Northern Territory in July and November of 1980. The sessions were conducted by Father John Leary msc and Sister Mary McGowan fdnsc. The seminars reflected on Aboriginal life, the spirits and God in the Old Testament. They looked at Abraham and Moses, their prayers and problems. They were illiterate but expressed themselves by drawings. These were explained by the artists in language or in English. It was a very prayerful experience. It concluded with a sung Mass in language.

After the formation seminars at Daly River, we organised a retreat in October 1982. It was given by Father Dan O'Donovan who at that time was living the life of a hermit at Gregory Well near Lombadina Mission. Seven men from Red Hill community attended. The men were happy to be alone: no wives, no children, no dogs. They enjoyed the beach. Some had never seen the ocean before. They discovered God at night and in turn God gave them new spiritual thoughts. They composed a whole range of 'Junbas' which they would use at Mass. There was great enthusiasm. This was the birth of their own liturgy. In their law, messages had to be sent to other communities. These new holy songs were sent as 'Good News' to all our Catholic communities and parishes. Here was new life for the people of Red Hill.

Turkey Creek New Rites and Customs

In 1981 we commenced the indigenisation of the Holy Week Ceremonies at Turkey Creek. We did a lot of preliminary work to find out the rites and customs that surround death so that we could use them in the liturgy of Good Friday and Easter. The new rites were performed as follows:

- 1) The sisters and the priest went to five different camps on the Friday morning. Each camp told the story of the Passion of Our Lord in Kitja. All listened attentively.
- 2) Later we gathered at the school bower shed. The school children had painted the Stations of the Cross beforehand. Each station was announced in Kitja, the priest gave a short reflection in English and then a prayer. Years later the Stations of the Cross were acted out by the adults. Paddy Mung Mung, who carried the cross, wore a white headband, his body painted with cross symbols. A few women dressed in red skirts followed him. One woman took the role of Mary, another that of Veronica, a man that of Simon. George Mung Mung did the spearing of the side of Christ. Sincerity and devotion characterised the whole ceremony.
- 3) After this two men sang the passion, one after the other in corroboree style. Then Hector came forward with his painting of the crucifixion. He gave an explanation of it in Kitja, dwelling in particular on the spear wound in the heart of Christ.
- 4) The period of mourning for the death of Jesus began. As in the old Aboriginal custom, fasting strings (originally made from hair but now

from purple wool) were placed around the neck of all present, including the priest. The food restrictions on beef were enforced. Even today in this area, meat is forbidden for weeks after the death of a relative. Fish, crab, snake or mussel substitute for meat in this period of mourning.

5) The men conducted the funeral of Christ, the women had to stay in the rear. The cross was taken horizontally and carried in this manner to the burial place. The original method of burial was a platform in the fork of a tree. Later a makeshift grave under the roof of the bower shed was substituted.

6) The men stood in respectful silence while the 'Body of Christ' was placed on the ground as a mark of respect.

7) The body was then placed in the tree. A man shouted in Kitja that the evil spirits should stay away. The day of mourning now commenced. The fast was severe. They had caught only a small quantity of fish in the previous week. They gathered at noon to eat it. Later on a prayer meeting was held at the site of the grave. 'Sorry songs' were sung and the priest spoke about the purpose of the death of Christ. The Cross was carried away to the cave, the resting place of the dead. All went to confession and then went home.

Each community had its own liturgy depending on its history, tradition, customs and rites. Some reintroduced lost rituals. The Jaru tribe of Yaruman (Ringer's Soak) made a Christ figure which, after Christ's death, was laid on Mary's lap. There was great wailing, and tears were shed. I was never able to go to all three communities for all the ceremonies. I went to Yaruman on Easter Sunday and celebrated Easter with them on Easter Sunday afternoon.

They celebrated with the Sisters on Good Friday. I celebrated with the Turkey Creek community on Good Friday. The ceremonies on Easter Saturday and Sunday were held before 9.00 am, to prevent a clash with the local Races and Gymkhana.

Easter Celebrations

Easter was celebrated in the following manner. A fire was lit and then covered with green gumleaves. All present went through the resultant smoke for purification. This ceremony was originally performed to keep the restless spirit of the deceased person away but it was also occasionally used for the penitential rite in burial ceremony. When

the mourning was over the fasting strings were taken off. Then a person from the community distributed cubes of cooked beef. Each person tasting the beef knew it as a sign of the end of the fasting.

The priest carried the cross for all to see. He sang three times 'Jesus is Risen, Jesus is risen. He is alive again.' Six women dressed in red skirts followed him. (This occurred only at Turkey Creek.) A man then sang in corroboree style the story of Noah who was saved from the big flood by Ngabuny (Ngawi). The priest explained that we are saved by the waters of Baptism. The water was taken from the water in the rockholes. This water signified life to the people. The Yaruman people used water from a spring that belonged to a law man. The priest blessed the water and the people were baptised. In 1967 there was a large group of 13 adults and 19 children for baptism at Halls Creek. I baptised them in a creek at the old town. I used a big shell and poured the water from the creek, over their heads. This was the way they wanted it done. A few of the baptised lived near the creek. After the baptism the others were sprinkled with holy water. The Eucharist followed in the same way that we celebrated our Aboriginal Mass, with a few extra Easter Junbas.

Ash Wednesday

Special events were always attractive to the people. They inspired them to form their own liturgy. Such an event was Ash Wednesday. This celebration took place in the evening under the street light. All attended, young and old, even the dogs. The Mass was in Jaru. The story of fire from Dreamtime was used for the penitential rite. Two sisters, Munda and Ging, were sent in search of grass seeds to make bread. They collected the seeds in a coolamon and ground them on a stone. The flour was mixed with water. By twirling one stick on another they made fire for baking the bread. Suddenly there was a big bang. The two sisters ran and embraced each other in horror. They were burnt to death and became trees. The fire continued and spread underground. In different places it exploded to the surface. At each of these places is a spring. The place of the first explosion is called Guljauw Jaru (Banana Springs) and is a sacred place for the Yaruman people. The water of this spring is sacred. At this place there are two trees different from all others. The people say that they are the Dreamtime

Sisters. The sisters are mentioned when the priest blesses the water for the penitential rite and invokes the Holy Spirit on both the water and the people. The Burangali (Law Woman) reverently sprinkles the water over the priest and the people while the community sings in Jaru, 'We have sinned against you Father' and 'Have pity on us,' which means 'Forgive us.' Since most people were illiterate, drawings were displayed and explained. These drawings were the result of a week-long liturgical preparation. Two drawings were significant, the biblical creation story of Adam and Eve and the people's very similar Creation Story. The Spirit of Creation said 'I will make people like myself.' So he took clay and formed the figure of a man. The spirit was happy and formed another figure, a woman. Then he blew his spirit into both. It was like a storm. Man and woman became alive. The creation spirit stayed with them and told them everything they should know. He told them to pass on their knowledge to their children. Here is equality, though the practice sometimes seems different.

The fire story is used in another place, in the Gospel. The people know the creative power of fire. It burns dry grass and bush and causes new life. This was linked to the Gospel in which Jesus called for repentance in order to burn away all that is harmful: jealousy, theft, fighting etc., in order that we might receive new life from the Risen Jesus at Easter.

The celebration of the Ashes was a celebration of belonging to the earth. An old woman bent down, took a handful of soil and said, 'I belong here.' After the blessing of the Ashes the leader of the community, Robert Lala, and his councillor, David Tchoonga, with the priest, distributed the ashes to everyone saying, 'Bura nyanga nyundu yani walja-nyung, yangu warir waljangawu'—'Remember you come from the earth, you will go back to the earth.' The Aborigines like to die in their place of birth.

There were also Eucharistic Ministers who assisted with Communion. The celebration lasted over two hours, a joyful celebration with the beating of boomerangs and clicking sticks. Once there was a disturbance, an attack not by dogs but by a few big centipedes, attacking the people as they sat. These centipedes were rapidly dispatched with Kalis.

Pope John Paul in Alice Springs

Pope John Paul II spoke to Aborigines in Alice Springs on 29 November 1986: 'The old ways can draw new life and strength from the Gospel. The message of Jesus Christ can lift up your lives to new heights, reinforce all your positive values and add many others, which only the Gospel in its originality proposes. Take this Gospel into your own language and way of speaking: let its spirit penetrate your communities and determine your behaviour towards each other, let it bring new strength to your stories and your ceremonies. The Church invites you to express the living word of Jesus in ways that speak to your Aboriginal minds and heart.'

In Ringer's Soak the Yaruman people in their weekly preparation for the liturgy listen first to the Gospel told by the Sisters. The adults each pick a different part of that story, paint it as they see it. In the end there may be eight people who explain at Mass, one after the other, their painting. This helps to make personal application of the Gospel. The priest in the sermon tries to apply these insights to their life.

The Feast of Pentecost

The Feast of Pentecost has become a major celebration amongst the Aboriginal people of this area. Each year since 1983 the communities of this area have taken it in turns to host this feast on their land. The first took place at Rock Hole, then Violet Valley, Ringer's Soak and Bow River. In 1990 it was held in Beagle Bay to mark the centenary of that mission. This annual gathering was the idea of a strong but gently spoken Aboriginal man, George Sturt, from Red Hill (Halls Creek). When George heard of the importance of Pentecost for the Church, he suggested that the Catholics of the East Kimberley could demonstrate their faith and receive mutual support by coming together at Pentecost to celebrate in the bush. People from Wyndham, Kununurra, Dunham River, Glen Hill, Bow River, Frog Hollow, Turkey Creek, Ringer's Soak, Violet Valley and Balgo, come together before sunset on Saturday.

Pentecost Vigil

After all the groups had set their camps, the owner or the chairperson of the meeting place welcomes the travellers from the various Aboriginal communities, clergy, religious, bishop and guests. Fires are

burning. A friendly atmosphere is apparent. Near the centre of the camp is a windbreak, built of gumtree branches. On it hang the paintings depicting the message of Pentecost. They have been prepared by the communities in the preceding weeks. Themes include Dreamtime Stories, the life of Jesus, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Use is made of symbols of wind, bird, rainbow, snake and especially fire.

The good spirit is part of their culture, past and present. George Sturt or Hector speak of the purpose of the meeting encouraging the people to sing in their language. The people respond with songs about the Holy Spirit, the Father, Jesus and 'Sorry Songs' in Jaru, Kitja, Walmajari, Kukatja. It reminds us of the original Pentecost when the Apostles with 120 people gathered around Mary to await the coming of the Holy Spirit. Under the starry sky is an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation. The priest invites all to come to confession. The night concludes with the song, 'New Hope'. All return to their camps for sleep.

Pentecost Sunday

Just before sunrise, the fires are lit and the people have breakfast and preparations for the Mass begin. The women wear red skirts and tops, the men red ngakas [oincloths]. Adults and children paint their bodies with cross and fire symbols. Many wear red headbands. The headgear of the Balgo men is particularly elaborate. The cone-shaped headgear is decorated with emu feathers and bound to the head by hairstrings. The headgear features a cross on top, a sign that Balgo people are now Christian.

Eucharistic Celebrations

When all is ready the people sit on the ground in a big circle around the altar. The liturgy commences with a procession of dancing and singing from people of Turkey Creek and Kununurra. The priest and bishop follow behind. The Kununurra women do a ceremonial dance. They dance around the altar and call down blessings on the water placed there. The bishop blesses the water and then the women sprinkle all present. This water ceremony was often used when the people found water. The women from Red Hill and Ringer's Soak then enter, raising the Gospel on high for all to see. Readers from various communities bring the good news of Pentecost in their own language. The bishop delivers a homily on the meaning of Pentecost. He then invites the people to renew their baptismal promises. The answer is 'Yawu'.

At the Offertory gifts are presented by various groups. The dancers lead up people bearing gifts of bread, wine, shells, flowers, beads, seeds, bush fruit and ancient rocks. After the consecration the Balgo men stamp on the ground whilst singing: 'The Light Beats the Darkness.' Then reverently, but with some difficulty, they take off their headgear and lay it before the altar. There is singing right through the liturgy. I translated and spoke the words of the Mass. At communion Aboriginal ministers assist the bishop and priest in the distribution of communion. Songs are sung during communion. The Mass ends with the well known song, 'New Hope'. During the day many people renew friendships.

Evening

The ceremony commences with a Holy Spirit dance performed by the women of Balgo and Yaruman. But the main ceremony is the fire ceremony, held after sunset. They make fire in the traditional way by rubbing two sticks together. All the people sing, 'Bilir Yandani', 'Come Holy Spirit.' All light dry sticks and hold them high. It resembles the tongues of fire at the First Pentecost. George Sturt's dream is realised. Dancers welcome the fire by stamping on the ground and swinging around the fire sticks. Other corroboree dances follow, some amusing. There is enjoyment for all. Thus the festival comes to an end.

Pope John Paul II said:

The hour has come for you to take on new courage and new hope. You are called to remember the past, to be faithful to your worthy traditions and to adapt your living culture wherever this is required by your own needs and those of your fellow man. Above all you are called to open your hearts evermore to the consoling, purifying and uplifting message of Jesus Christ, who died so that we might have life, and have it to the full.

* * * * *

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

August 4, 1994

Dear Martin,

Towards the end of his article in *Nelen Yubu* (No. 57), Dan O'Donovan, my neighbour 100 kilometres across the way in Wyndham, remarks that our good health as Catholic evangelisers in the Broome Diocese requires both an education-centred view and a relation-centred view.

I have no dispute with Dan's broad thesis. However, I think that Dan, always generously affirming and sanguine, gives too glowing a picture of what he has called our 'education-centred *evangelisation* priority': naïvely or not, that is what we have always supposed our education undertakings were about, and in the end it is the health of 'evangelisers' for which Dan expresses concern.

The key to my reservation on this point is the much developed understanding of the contemporary role of an evangelising Church, especially as this relates to our educational involvement in schools and higher institutes.

If I speak from just one context, my own here in Kununurra, school evangelising attitudes and outcomes are at best confused. There are abiding issues of enrolment and subsequent respect for the freedom of children, both in the classroom and in celebration. The presence of children from other faiths especially Aboriginal, and likewise of children from unchurched families both Aboriginal and European, have for some time been calling for more critical understandings of evangelisa-

tion, e.g. the need for so-called re-evangelisation of many adults, and without this the perplexing status of their children in school catechesis.

At another level the employment of teachers generally, and the growing practice of the recruiting and tertiary training of indigenous teachers for our schools will often pose the same issue of world views by no means always Catholic. If, in the face of the broader and admirable contributions such teachers might make to education in our schools, we choose to run with this seemingly inevitable present-day scenario, adjustments are called for. We should be more willing to see our schools as agencies of a Church which must operate now in a modern world of pluralism, and thus of a Church whose customary and comfortable proclamation of Catholic school ethos is necessarily nuanced.

In effect I am saying that while I agree an education-centred view and a relation-centred view are both required for our Church's growth, it is the former which immediately demands our in-house honing of relation-centred skills: respectful acceptance of difference, persevering dialogue, and appropriate celebrations. We can only move to worthwhile partnership in education with other Churches when at every educational level we have reassessed our traditional evangelising attitudes in the light of modern-world faith realities.

Noel McMaster,

St Vincent's Parish, Kununurra WA

FROM THROWING PETALS

TO MINISTRY (Part 2)

Gerard M Goldman

This paper is a micro study of four women who identify as being christian. They are members of the Roman Catholic Church and consider their christian values and reflection on their life experiences as central to their identity. The aim of this paper is to explore what their story may encapsulate and symbolise for the wider church community. I will particularly focus on their perception of their call to ministry.

The spiritual quality of their journey

Their spiritual journeys are outstanding examples of fidelity to a liberating God. Their relationship with their God has been very rich. They draw from the love and wisdom that they have gained from this relationship to help them cope with life problems. They have found particular strength from reflection on how Jesus and Mary overcame the pain in their lives. Other elements of Christian heritage which they draw from are: the Eucharist, Holy Spirit, Jesus, God as the Creator, and the centrality of being close to the poor and needy. Awareness of the importance of Scripture was evident. Church teaching rated very low in priority.

Another principal influence on their spiritual journey was their journey towards individuation.¹ They identified this as having critical importance in their life's journey. Three of the four have come through what they termed the 'mid-life crisis'. They were confronted by the way their parents covered up their own pain. The women recognised their own need for help and nurturing. As a result they went to parenting courses and other programs that improved their self-awareness. As one succinctly stated: 'I learnt the art of "straight talk" with my husband.'

The information for Table One: *Memories of Being Female* and Table Two: *Work and Marriage*, came from the first two sessions where each discussed how they saw their identity as female from the period of childhood up until the present. It is from this process that the group recognised fundamental similarities and differences in their positions and commenced to re-

Gerard Goldman lives in Abbotsford, NSW. This paper is a sequel to *Inculturating Theology*, 1994/1, pp.12-27

flect on what may have contributed to this. Each sharing enabled others to recall significant memories and empower them to talk about intimate details of their story. It is from this process that patterns of oppression and liberation emerged in their stories. Where possible I have retained original phrases in an attempt to capture the spirit of vitality, growth and frankness that came from these sessions.

TABLE ONE: MEMORIES OF BEING FEMALE

Memories of early childhood: birth to primary school

Rhonda:

- no memories of childhood, just a person - not male or female.
- men had the good times, e.g. pub, darts, table-tennis. Women stayed behind.
- boys encouraged to be better students.
- girls encouraged to be nuns: marriage or convent: no career.
- Dad was wonderful. Realised only later the work that Mum did.
- can't remember Dad hitting anyone. Mum belted Bill.
- Mum dressed herself up in the afternoon for Dad coming home, special perfume for dad.
- Dad went to all the meetings. P&F president, Soccer Association - all male oriented.
- special 'alleluia' for our brother's birth—male child!

Margaret:

- no memories of early childhood
- women were the doers, doing the work.
- boys had better games. Played with them.
- nuns had higher expectations of boys than girls.

- girls practised music. Boys were sissy if they practised music.

Allison:

- treated like a 'little girl.'
- pretty dresses for the Bishop—petals, dressed in white.
- did not play sport until highschool.
- feminine dresses.
- football heroes.
- I'm going to be a nun.
- kept thinking that Mum had children to have another boy for Bill.

Jade:

- dresses.
- motorised boat — wrong present!
- football heroes.
- girl sports were not important
- used to wonder how Mum and Dad felt when she was born a girl — disappointed?

Memories and Influences during adolescence

Rhonda:

- breast development: 'the oranges are growing', awkward years.
- boarded with Black Josephites: felt very much like a woman, look after hair, face, etc.
- TV came when she was 14. 'Told all the time that she was female'— 'girls don't do anything, girls don't have fun'.
- wanted to be teacher but advised against this by the nuns: better not to go on!

NELEN YUBU

- boys were allowed to get drunk: he was a man!

Margaret:

- boarded at Dominicans; loved being treated as an individual woman. Until then meant being 'sister of a brother, being part of the other half, the lesser half of the classroom'.
- two exceptional nun influences; women could do whatever they wanted to do (1961).
- trauma of puberty as a female.
- used to ring boys for dates: this was secret from mother.

Allison:

- wanted to grow up beautifully so she could go off on a boat with someone and live happily ever after.
- romance shows on TV.
- can't ever remember being encouraged to excel at school. Is fascinated that her present friends went on to higher education.
- never allowed to phone boys: wrong for women to make first move.

Jade:

- girls don't pursue careers.
- unless you were extremely clever you weren't encouraged to go on.
- received scholarship, but no expectation to go on with higher education.

Sexuality and gender roles

Rhonda:

- was secretary of the CYO: led the whole thing.
- did not think there were roles; I mowed the lawn.
- got pressure from Mum & Dad to leave work: still does; felt guilty about going to work.

Margaret:

- expectations from other people that she should have been married: she was 24 years old.
- Youth Club & Sexuality: males couldn't handle honesty on sexuality; didn't hesitate to put you down.
- as for church & female role we had no role other than attending Mass and cleaning the altar - throwing petals.
- CYO was developed so we could marry Catholic partners.

Alison:

- can remember a man calling her a lesbian because she had close friendship with a girlfriend.
- most friends met and married through the CYO.
- throwing petals - sexuality - felt pretty - white veils
- definite roles in family: Dad was money earner, Mum was the worker.
- first question Mum asked future husband: When is Alison giving up work?
- her job in her own family is seen as insignificant - secretary is the lowest! Thinks of her job as a career.

Jade:

- double standards in the church. Priest told them: 'It was all right for fellas to have sex, but good girls wouldn't'. Who are they doing it with?

TABLE TWO: WORK AND MARRIAGE

Work experience and being women

Rhonda:

- worked 21 yrs and 5 mths of full-time work out of 25 yrs; never considered herself a worker: 'kidded herself her whole life'.

- worked at home and at work; seen as mother rather than part-time worker.
- 'worked for extras': this was a myth; didn't want to go 'permanent' as this contradicted her thoughts of herself.
- presently has fear of losing job as it is a 9-5 job: she doesn't deserve this!
- finds it difficult to confront superiors in the work scene. As a nurses aide she cleans up after nurses; feels superior when she does this!
- at meeting told the enrolled nurses that 'they should learn to follow orders from the registered nurses: learn to take authority'.

Margaret:

- always wanted to be lay missionary. Wrote to PALMS when she was 12 years old.
- was the first Catholic where she worked.
- never felt less than the males.
- there were set jobs for females, e.g. secretaries.
- breakthrough for equal pay; her pay more than doubled was robbed by male boss: stayed there four years. Stayed there because of pressure from home not to leave. Her salary was multiplied by six within two years of leaving that boss.
- there weren't male secretaries. They were called office workers or clerks.
- gave up a great job because of having a child: that was the done thing.
- difficulties with female workers is because of competitiveness between them.
- recently her name was left off newsletter report of school's pastoral care meeting. She was the only 'home duties' person at the meeting: her name was the only one left off. Felt insignificant.

Allison:

- Dad got her jobs; had to wear gloves and look feminine to get job.
- up to 15 years ago men had got her all her jobs.
- girls were chemist assistants; there were definitely two separate categories. Family celebrated when she became bank teller.
- higher salaries went to those who went to highschool but we know that the majority of those were male.
- has made her bitter and hungrier for justice; didn't know the choices she had.
- was asked to be put on affirmative action committee before she confronted consultant: may have thought she was a quiet person!

Jade:

- can't talk now with parents about work; had great feelings of guilt.
- secretarial jobs are seen as lowest of the low: still at bottom. Noted their history in the CEO. Originally they were voluntary positions; if they want professional people they need to be treated and paid professionally.
- Now has good work experience: stands up for her rights. Was belittled by teacher in front of students & teachers; confronted her.
- female teachers do not go across table to speak with secretaries in break times.

Experiences of marriage

Rhonda:

- defended man's right to be ocker: 'that was their routine'.
- only recently nearly vomited with worry over Margaret's son doing the washing up while the girls went to the movies.
- when I was first married I did all the things because I was in love: but even love wears thin after a while.

Margaret:

- told her children that first she's herself, then wife, then a mother, and finally she is never a slave to anyone!
- husband does something if he knows he will get something in return; always a purpose to what he does. Nothing has changed since husband left work; it is character forming: be responsible for your own maintenance.
- it is the experience of children that is important.
- our lack of materialism in comparison with our husbands. Makes us freer to make choices.
- husband wouldn't let me paint before I got married: hasn't stopped me since! Not sure whether this was a female thing or whether I could do as good a job as him!
- has felt very second-class in partnership.
- has challenged her husband on a number of things; mentioned male dominance when it came to money matters.
- early years of marriage worked like a slave.
- did not want to fall into Mum and Dad's role.

Allison:

- early in marriage found out that husband didn't see his role to be cleaning clothes.
- feels like a slave.
- foreign for her husband to do anything feminine: if he does so it must be seen to be fantastic!
- wished she didn't have children when they have deeply hurt her.
- still has lack of choice in some decisions in marriage: e.g. holiday destination, colour of car.
- challenged by husband to look sexy; husband likes her to look good.

- felt comfortable when she recently told her children: 'I am forty years old, tired and physically as a female not capable of doing it'; never admitted this before.

Jade:

- hated norm/ocker image of husband and Friday nights.
- women are stupid: we do double jobs. Struggled with partnership for a long time: sense of not being fair; change came from inner growth, not other women or books.
- first thing about being married was SHOCK. He expected me to do everything! You didn't talk about these things when you dated. Sees marriage now as a partnership: this has only been recently.
- when husband cleans the toilet that is when I'll know it is an equal partnership!

Influences on marriage

Rhonda:

- Mum and Dad made me aware of being fair to husband: 'Men have got it tough — had to be provider — big responsibility — particularly when you have children'. They made me aware of what men are going through.
- read *Marriage in a Catholic Home*: absolute rubbish!

- it is a wonder anyone stayed with us: referring to Catholic practices that existed, e.g. Rosary in darkened house.

Margaret:

- was aware that Rhonda was working as well as being wife and mother; Rhonda is greater influence.
- read books on partnership.

Allison:

- life has been so hectic
- given sex books to read.

Jade:

- parents: marriage is sacred in good times and in bad.

Slavery: from Collusion to Completeness

The final session was a significant experience for the group as they reflected back on their earlier statements. Three themes which were discussed in this final session were: their understanding of slavery; the possibility of collusion in their lives; and, how their spiritual journey had impacted their life story. After this discussion I will conclude with an analysis of how they perceive their role in the church and what this may signal to the church.

'I will not be a slave to anyone'.

The group deliberately chose the word 'slave' to describe their experience.² Their understanding of slavery is that the individual does not have a choice: they did not want to be metaphorically chained to their house, family and husband. Over the years alternatives to oppressive scenarios had emerged. These alternatives empowered them to become increasingly flexible in how they dealt with previously oppressive situations. It is the ability to make free choices that liberates them from the slave mentality. They had all felt the exhaustion and sense of unfairness in their roles as mother, wife and worker. It was particularly important for them to work towards a meaningful partnership with their husbands. The understanding of marriage as partnership had come into their awareness in the last few years.

'To collude or become aware'

They felt that they had contributed to their own sense of powerlessness in the family and at work. Their commitment to marriage as the highest level of self-giving had clouded their ability to identify their own needs. It was only through reaching acute levels of exhaustion and pain that they were brought to an awareness of 'this should not be so'. They now view life to be about complement and compromise.

They deliberately began to reprogram their responses to life situations. They all experienced failure when trying to copy their mother's role-modelling: it was not working for them. As one put it: 'Mum lived for her children. I live for them to live.'

Whilst having awareness that their situation was oppressive they previously did not have the knowledge to extricate themselves from the situation. One exclaimed: 'I knew I was in a trap—for a while I did not know how to get out of it'. Gradually they began to work boundaries within their marriage. This was viewed as a mature response to their fundamental need to have self-respect and self-care.

The spiritual journey to liberation and completeness

Ruether claims: 'The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women'.³ This understanding is implicit in

their view of Jesus. They identify Jesus as someone who calls them to full capacity, to become a completely liberated individual. Jesus never judged women: contrary to the cultural norms of his era 'he hung out with women'. They noted that Jesus respected women: he respected his mother. This was symbolic of his respect for all humanity — each human being is sacred to him.

The story of Jesus and Mary's painful journey was one they drew sustenance from. It was meaningful that Mary had experienced the pain that they have felt: there being no greater pain than witnessing your child's brutal death. Mary was seen as peacemaker, encourager and inspirer. They noted that she was behind Jesus' first miracle.

The stories of Martha and Mary, Mary Magdalene, the woman who touched Jesus' cloak and was cured from haemorrhaging were all significant. As they discussed the power of the touch that healed the woman they reflected on how they 'touch' people in their own lives. One has the gift of healing which she immediately acknowledges comes from the Holy Spirit. The other two spoke about how they heal people at work. One bluntly stated: 'I do touch! This is the important part of my job.' They saw this as directly related to pastoral care in the school community. The other eloquently stated: 'The children are the key to my role as school secretary.'

The one who chose 'home duties' was concerned to keep 'reaching out' to people. She noted that her children often relate stories of how they thought about how she would respond to situations as they occurred at school. She clearly understood her work involved touching people through her children.

Observations on Church Structure: Male Inflexibility

Before exploring their understanding of their call to ministry it is necessary to identify their observations on current church structure. Their call to ministry and current church structure appear to be at opposite ends of the spectrum. This is significant as these women would judge themselves to be representative of ordinary females in the church. They have been faithful servants of the church yet are increasingly feeling alienated and oppressed within it. It is from this level of history and connectedness with the church that their commentaries merit serious attention.

They view the church as a very male-dominated structure. By continuing in this fashion they see the church men as 'cutting their own throats'. They believe it is representative of their maleness that they will not compromise when it comes to female involvement in the church.⁴ They are openly questioning whether the church is fearful of women becoming empowered. They believe the recent papal directive to the bishops where it noted that

contraception was intrinsically evil is a deliberately veiled attempt to bring people, particularly women back to subservience.

They asserted that the term 'Father' as a mode of address is a power statement. They recognise that many laity prefer the priest to take the powerful decision-making role. They view this as a return to the 'obedience movement' where rules and regulations replace any risks in one's personal faith journey. When a priest attempts to promote lay participation they often lack social skills in encouraging this.⁵ Ironically, the lack of social qualities (which they attributed as female qualities) like tact, gentleness and persuasiveness resulted in people resenting the priest's attempt at empowerment of the laity. They believe people are voting with their feet: choosing parishes that are more life-giving or ceasing active involvement in the parish.

Being Woman: a Costly Discipleship

Each disclosed how they felt women were treated as second class. This was best exemplified in the failure of the church to address women's ordination⁶ and as symbolic and petty in girls being unable to be altar servers in their parishes.⁷ They identified that the menial jobs in the parish were 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.⁸

They articulated 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.⁹

This group of women see themselves as Jesus' disciples who have a fundamental right to be completely free to serve God and God's people in whatever way they choose. With a striking turn of phrase one claimed: 'If we don't want to be secretaries administering the Gospel we should have the choice to be priests ministering the Gospel!' There was unanimous agreement in not wanting a return to pre-Vatican II theology. They saw it as vital to continue challenging the rules of the church. They were aware that this would impact their children's perception of church and were hopeful that it would arouse them to be active in the future. One feels called to priestly ministry in the future: all would like to see female priests and parish workers. They claim for the church to be authentic; all people need to be freely able to minister to

each other. One who does not feel called to priestly ministry would like to study psychology: for her 'psychology and the priesthood are the same thing'.

Ministry Comments and Conclusion

Clare Watkins in a brilliant paper entitled 'Collaborators, Informers and Secret Service', highlights the crisis occurring as the People of God actively seek their rightful roles within the church. She cleverly describes as the *Secret Service* this group of lay elite who find themselves in positions of active though not publicly recognised ministry.¹⁰ She refers to them as 'this group of unusual lay people' who are knocking on the doors of our church hoping for recognition and practical movement on the issue of lay ministry.¹¹ She specifies that the documents of Vatican II '*communicate the message that the lay person is really and significantly priest, prophet and sovereign*'.¹² She then confronts the contradiction of the model of the People of God ministering as priest, prophet and sovereign with the hierarchical male celibate model of ordained ministry. She judges the latter to be actively crushing any real development in active lay ministry.¹³

My study has provided powerful argument to support Watkins' fear of a continuing crisis in the church. It is perhaps even more astonishing that this paper has focused on four women who would not consider themselves to be part of the lay elite. They are not tertiary educated: they are not active in recognised ministry in the church: they would refer to themselves as ordinary church-goers fulfilling their natural obligations and duties. Yet amongst all this 'ordinariness' stirs an extraordinary flame of rage and disgust at the manner in which the official hierarchical, patriarchal church is moving towards the twenty-first century. It is this very ordinariness of their lives that highlights the profound dis-ease in the church structure. Ordinary people can have profound spiritual experiences. The richness of people's spiritual lives will be where the church is judged. If they are experiencing a God who is constantly calling them to change and become more and more complete then the church has a dangerous phenomenon to cope with.

There is no doubt that a myriad of influences have impacted these women's development and formation. However, it appears that their spiritual journey is the one that has contributed most significantly to their increased radical awareness that the church cannot and must not continue in its present structure of ministry. My query with Watkins is 'How small is the secret service?' My micro-study suggests that it is growing daily in places that one would not imagine: perhaps like the Catholic Education Office consultant who thought she was getting a passive, unaware school secretary on her affirmative action committee only to be confronted and challenged soon after! Demographic trends indicate that the church will increasingly be forced into

some form of compromise with lay ministry. I believe this study has illustrated how this attitude is quite sad and abusive: the church is in dire need of being touched by her women.

* * * * *

ENDNOTES

¹This was raised in the final session where it should be noted that the eldest was not present. A number of significant texts were discussed at this point. They ranged from *The Road Less Travelled* through to *I'm OK, You're OK* and on to Leo Buscaglia's works and the *Joshua* trilogy.

²During the first two sessions the term 'slave' was mentioned on five occasions in regard to their relationship with husband and children.

³Rosemary Radford-Ruether, *Sexism and God Talk: toward a feminist theology*, p.18.

⁴Cf. *ibid.*, pp.110-113. Ruether points towards biological research that indicates 'women have a tendency towards greater integration and males toward a more dualistic perception', p.112. It is interesting to note that the group chose the word 'inflexible' to describe their understanding of males.

⁵This occurred five years ago in one of the group member's parish. It resulted in that priest choosing to leave that parish.

⁶All 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 priest.

⁷This is the situation in all four parishes represented. In one parish female special ministers of the Eucharist and Readers of the Word have only recently commenced.

⁸They 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.

⁹All stated that whilst some of their experiences in the church have been hurtful they have been spiritually strengthened by these experiences. Two have changed parish and another is considering to do likewise.

¹⁰Clare Watkins, 'Collaborators, Informers and Secret Service', *New Blackfriars*, May (1993): pp.264-266.

¹¹*ibid.*, p.265. ¹²*ibid.*, p.267. ¹³*ibid.*, p.271.

**FROM THE SECRETARY'S
DESK...**

Fr Alan Corry msc, now stationed at Alice Springs, and a very old friend of mine from NT days, wrote in October about preparations for the Retreat at Alice by a Redemptorist Father, for which he needed a back copy of *Nelen Yubu*. Fr Corry's report reads: 'Fr Carroll CSsR needed to study the article [by Fr Eugene Stockton] before he spoke to the Aboriginal people at the special Opening Mass. There was a good attendance and we were fortunate in having buses to transport them in from the camps. The Aboriginal Mass was at 12 noon, followed by damper and a cup of tea. Then at 5.15pm we had a Youth Mass, which was also well attended.' Fr Corry goes on to express his high hopes of success in the retreat, after a couple of weeks of intensive visitation. We hope so too, and it was great to hear from you, Father.

* * * * *

Also in October this year, *Nelen Yubu* was invited to attend the ecumenical gathering out at Lake Victoria in far western NSW, where ancient bones of Aborigines were recently discovered when

the reservoir was drained for repairs. Off we went again across the limitless plains, which are becoming very familiar to us when October comes around. Picturesque Lake Victoria, once a giant billabong running back into the Murray River, is now several kilometres long with backwaters stretching across the land. It is here that the bones have lain in peaceful silence for many thousands of years.

About 500 people were present that hot, cloudless day, at the special Barkindji tribe memorial service, and they came from all parts of Australia as well as from overseas. It was a joint project between the Barkindji and the Melbourne Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, the co-ordinators being Joyce Smith and Christine Kelly, with the Master of Ceremonies Br Graham Mundine fms, Chairman of NATSICC. We were there to show our respect and sympathy for some 10,000 Aboriginal people who had been buried there over thousands of years—some of them killed in the Rufus River massacre, and its aftermath some 150 years ago.

Guests were welcomed by the Barkindji elders: Mesd. Rennie Mitchell, Christine Kelly, May

Johnson and Mr. Roland Smith. The fifth elder, Mr Larry Mitchell, had not been able to come.

The proceedings began with the *smoking ceremony* at the lakeside, followed by a procession uphill to a canopy where elders and special guests were waiting.

Deacon Monty Pryor had travelled from Townsville for the event and, speaking from rising ground overlooking the lake where the remains are lying, he exhorted the Aborigines and whites to join together as one nation.

It was touching to see how many concerned people had embarked on that long trip to pay their respects: many elderly Aborigines including Mrs Alice Kelly, elder of the Lake Mungo people, Sisters of various congregations, families with their children, priests, ministers of various denominations, and representatives of organisations from as far away as the Torres Strait Islands, all joining together in a concerted effort to heal a wrong. Even a black snake appeared on the lake shore which caused some excitement but proved how closely involved we were with nature in our quest for unity among us all. As we all sat about in the shade of ancient gums we listened to the

voices, sometimes emotional, of those on the hillside telling us the stories of their ancestors and the terrible ordeals they had suffered. And it seemed as if some of the wounds were already being healed as we watched tiny children splashing about in the cool water with confidence and a sense of utter security. At least we had set out along the road of reconciliation.

One particularly striking part of the ceremony really impressed me. Three people, Vicki Walker bearing the bible, flanked by a young Aboriginal hauntingly blowing the didjeridoo, with another gently knocking his clapsticks, mounted the hillock to present the bible to Deacon Pryor. Vicki, a tall and graceful figure, held the bible aloft as they slowly rose to make the presentation—a slender golden candle pointing to the sky, while a lone white cockatoo high overhead winged its way westward and a hush descended on the gathering under the trees.

The ceremony came to a close with the Deacon proceeding to the lakeside where wreaths and individual flowers and ferns were cast out on the water in memory of those whose bones lay beneath. Deacon Pryor then stood on the

hillside while we all quietly approached him to be sprinkled with lake-water and wished Godspeed.

What a memorable occasion! As we sat on the shore to have our lunch before the long haul back to Wentworth we chatted with some nuns and others, all of whom were so glad we had come out there, even in 35-plus degree heat, because something had touched us all that Sunday which would always remain with us.

* * * * *

Unfortunately, on the road back tragedy struck. A car bearing four Sisters from Victoria overturned on the difficult corrugated road. As we were driving across

the plain we could see a line of some fifteen vehicles stopped ahead of us, and when we arrived the police, ambulances and fire brigade were already there. Sr Mary Rose Bown rscj of Braybrook, Victoria, was the driver of the car. She died after being trapped for about half an hour; the other three RSCJ Sisters were conveyed to Mildura Hospital. Fortunately there were several priests and a doctor at the scene, all of whom had attended the service at Lake Victoria. All we could do was to wait quietly on the plains, praying for the victims whose beautiful day had ended so sadly.

Secretary Keren



Nelen Yubu Staff



wish all our Readers

a Happy and Blessed Christmas

and All Good Things

in 1995

Thank you for your continuing support!