

## Editorial

IN this issue a number of important regions are represented. Principally in regard to the Kimberley we pay our respects to the retiring bishop. We commence a series from the pen of Kevin McKelson SAC. As Kevin has played a central role in the development of Aboriginal Catholic liturgy, we feel privileged to be able to publish his views and recollections. Also, I review Margaret Zucker's historical survey of the first one hundred years.

Our Secretary's daughter, an enterprising documentary filmmaker, who forays intrepidly out of Berlin from time to time into the Torres Strait islands, describes something of the vision that drives her.

Sr Pat Ormesher RSCJ reflects on her experience of living among Aboriginal people in the urban situation of Sydney.

From the NT we have a stirring letter rather in the spirit of the 1812 Overture. I mentioned to Cletus that there is a disturbing drag in the payment of current subscriptions, and this was his response. Next issue we will publish a list of the people who receive *Nelen Yubu*. Readers expressed pleasure at being given such information when we did it once before, back in 1988, No.35.

We are pleased to respond to a suggestion from Michael Costigan, executive secretary of the Catholic Bishops' Justice, Peace and Development Commission, that we mark Sandie Cornish's significant paper by reproducing Bishop Hilton Deakin's letter about it.

As usual, Secretary Keren adds her own assortment of salutations and observations.

— Martin Wilson msc  
*Editor*

*Nelen Yubu* Staff and Readers

wish to congratulate

**Bishop JOHN JOBST SAC**

on the occasion of his 75th Birthday

and the completion of his service

as chief pastor

of the Diocese of Broome

1959 – 1995.

We thank him

and all those who have laboured

with him

and before him

in the Kimberley

and we thank God

for the New Life that has sprung up!

# JAPULU KANKARRA

## The Father Is In Heaven

**Kevin McKelson sac**

*Muku: When the first people walked over the country, the country was already here.*

*Priest: Who made the country?*

*Muku: We don't know. You tell us.*

*Priest: The Father in heaven! (Japulu kankarra)*

**P**ROFESSOR Petri told me that Muku or Moko was the cleverest Aborigine he had known. He knew all the songs. He knew the Law.

The priest was myself and I would like to tell you my story . . . First a brief account of my time in Broome WA from 1954 to 1961 and then, perhaps in stages, of my time at La Grange now Bidyadanga, from 1961 to the end of 1994 — except for a brief memorable stint at Beagle Bay, and study leave during 1977-78.

In the course of the latter I would like to offer you my reflections on the relation between the Aboriginal and Catholic Law, between the Aboriginal world view as I understand it, and the Catholic Faith which I believe in and propose to traditionally orientated tribal people.

### **Part I: The Broome Years 1954-61**

When I was a boy of 12 to 13 years, Bishop Raible came to my school in Moonee Ponds in Melbourne, appealing for young men to go to the Kimberley in WA to work as missionaries among the Aborigines. In my mind I put up my hand.

Five years later I had still kept it up, when Br Purton of the Christian Brothers introduced me to Fr Worms, Bishop's Raible's righthand man. Soon afterwards I entered the Pallottine Missionary College at Kew in Melbourne to begin my studies for the priesthood. My father cried when I said goodbye to my family at the gate. I still remember it as I had never seen my father cry like that. Later, in the Kimberley on a few occasions I would cry myself when great sadness came.

In 1950 I became a priest. In 1954 Fr Bruno Kupke, the Provincial Superior, asked me to go to Broome to help Fr Worms. I could not believe my luck. I thought I would be college-bound for a long time.

Travelling by train from Melbourne to Perth and by boat from Fremantle to Broome, I arrived there the same year on the feast of Sts Peter and Paul. The trip had taken ten days by sea. Now it takes a little over two hours by air. It was mid-year and the weather was beautiful. As it was an exceptionally high king tide and we could not berth at the old jetty, we were taken by lighter to Streeter's jetty in China Town. It was a bit of a balancing act to go from the boat to the landing via a plank. A mustached and rather untidy character offered to take my suitcase. I gave him two shillings for his trouble. Fr Worms seemed displeased: I asked him out of earshot why. He told me that the man was Diamond Jack, one of the richest men in Broome. It was alleged that Jack had lightened the load in the form of a bag of diamonds from a Dutch plane shot down by Japanese fighters in 1942 near Carnot Bay WA. I had much to learn and had got my first lesson. Jack was a beachcomber and a rather colourful character. Towards the end of his life he went to Perth with the big C. There he was so touched by the kindness of the Sisters of St John of God in their Belmont hospital that he became a Catholic.

Broome was a small town. Life was nice and easy yet extremely interesting. The phrase 'Slip into Broome time' had not yet been coined though we lived by it. Shops would be shut for two hours or more at midday and all would have a rest. Even the convent school children did the same. Fr Worms was the parish priest. I was his curate.

The parish house was simple with two adjacent bedrooms to the south, an open living area in the middle with cane chairs, a small office with a phone attached to the wall to the north. There was a verandah with shutters all around. A wooden floor was set on stone stumps to control white ants. Fr Worms had one room and the other was kept for the Bishop when he came down from Beagle Bay. Somewhat removed from the presbytery was a small rickety corrugated iron roofed outhouse with ripple iron walls also set on stumps. One room was mine, the other reserved for a visitor, usually for Br William Schreiber who would from time to time come down from Beagle Bay and drive his tandem-wheeled seven-ton International truck, loaded with supplies, to Balgo Mission

south of Halls Creek. The journey took several days. There was no road, just wheel marks in the sand. Water for drinking was collected in a tank, having run off the roof in the rainy time. Water for showering came from a nearby bore. It smelt awful. One could not get a lather with it and it left an ugly dark stain wherever it fell. Sanitation was of the simplest, as were the rooms for that matter. Just a bed with mosquito net, a small table and chair, a wash bowl and jug and if you were lucky a place to hang your clothes.

Still and all, Mass was well attended. Broome at that time was basically a Catholic town. Father Worms and myself had our meals in the convent. We came on time. We visited the people (sometimes in white suits.) Fr Worms used to wear a pith helmet, I a felt hat as my father had been a hatter. Later I wore straw as it was lighter. There were two hospitals, one for Europeans, the other for 'natives'. Staff at both were devoted to their job. Later the Sisters of St John of God would pioneer Infant Health Care in the Kimberley.

Europeans and a few local people sent their children to the State school. People of Aboriginal descent sent theirs to St Mary's, the convent school. There were exceptions, but few.

There were a few hundred Asians, Japanese, Chinese and Malays working on the pearling luggers. There were a hundred or so Europeans associated with the Pearling Business, the Public Service and the Meat Works. Most of the local people, about a thousand in number, came from Beagle Bay and Lombadina Missions. The rest had come from cattle stations and other Aboriginal communities. The local people were all very kind and friendly, struggling to survive and support their families despite hard economic circumstances. In other words most were poor. Many were employed as crew on luggers or as sorters and packers in the shell sheds. Some of the women did domestic work. Some, encouraged by the Church, sought and found work in government departments where there was no colour bar.

The people from Beagle Bay and Lombadina were associated with the Nyul Nyul and Bard tribes. Their languages had been fairly thoroughly studied by Fr Herman Nekes. But despite the efforts of Fr Worms to support their cultural activities, life was pretty difficult in Broome and in the communities, and in a way they were more self-reliant in those

days than they are today. It was largely a question of *primum vivere deinde philosophari* . . . First survive, and then reflect on our experience afterwards.

There were relatively few tribal people in Broome in my day. But there were some. Some lived on Kennedy's Hill where they could look across to Roebuck Bay (Rubibi in local talk) to Fishermen's Bend, the business place of the Yawuru people, the original inhabitants of the Broome area. These too had intermarried with the Karajarri from La Grange. Such was the social dislocation of that time, there was frequent intermarriage between members of the local and neighbouring tribes and their descendants. Yawuru, Jukun, Karajarri, Nyikina, Bard and Nyul Nyul intermarried. Many of the people of mixed race who had come from the East Kimberley also intermarried with the locals. Then there was marriage, and associations with Asians and Europeans.

There were tribal people at the One Mile, Morgan's camp and Birlingurru near the Japanese gardens which were located a little to the north of where the Cable Beach Club stands today. Raphael Philips from the Yawuru, Tommy Mayapala from the Karajarri, and a host of informants up and down the coast had supplied Fr Worms and Fr Nekes with abundant information about culture and language, much of which is only being appreciated today.

Sometimes when visiting the One Mile I heard some strange singing and saw some young lads who seemed to be taking part in some kind of ceremony. They were from La Grange and had come to Broome to invite their relations to the man-making ceremonies back at home. But at that time I had not as yet firsthand experience of tribal ways.

It was not long before Fr Worms left me for good, as he had been appointed Rector of our students in Sydney. Furthermore, he was ailing and needed medical treatment. Fr Worms was not only a great scholar, but a sympathetic pastor. Once I reported to him that so-and-so was living with so-and-so and refused to marry her; he explained he was just trying her out. Father commented there was a certain wisdom in that! Another time we were discussing what Catholics believed and how they should behave. He said that when we go to heaven, we may find that what we witness there tallies with our belief on earth, but in matters of conduct it may be quite different. Quoting Latin he said some things

would be *taliter qualiter*, others would be *totaliter aliter* — perhaps he was trying to tell me we were in the business of praying for people, not of judging them.

Shortly before he died in Sydney in 1963, aged 72 years, I visited him in his hospital bed. I asked him for advice to guide me in my work in the Kimberley. He said two things. One was to always leave the door open to people; never shut them out of your life. Secondly, he reminded me that we had totally broken the pride of the Aboriginal race and should feel a deep sympathy for them and act accordingly. Much of his research and insights have been recorded in a book entitled 'Australian Aboriginal Religions' which he had written in German with friend and colleague, Professor Helmut Petri of Cologne University. Fr Martin Wilson, Fr Dan O'Donovan and Professor Max Charlesworth translated it into English. To them may I say publicly, on behalf of the Pallottines in the words of our founder, St Vincent Pallotti, *Grazie Infinite*.

During my time in Broome I was caught up in the affairs of the Broome parish of Our Lady Queen of Peace, usually known as St Mary's. Mary Durack Miller suggested the Church in Broome should be likened to the calm eye of a cyclone, a quiet place in the midst of the turmoil of the town outside. She was speaking of things of the spirit. Following in the footsteps of Fr Joe Kearney, one of the first Australian Pallottines and also a curate of Fr Worms, I encouraged local Catholics to take their place within the Australian Church at large by creating and promoting a healthy parish life, taking as my role model that of St Brendan's, Flemington, Victoria, my home parish. I saw in a healthy vibrant parish, run by locals, a way of their regaining at least in part that self-esteem and pride in themselves which Fr Worms said we had destroyed in them. To cut a long story short, there was over time a wonderful response: young people playing sport together as a team, with their role model, St Mary's football team in Darwin; and their parents using their time and talents to raise funds to build a new school. They succeeded very well, built a school paid for by themselves, the only time, if I recollect correctly, this has been done in the Diocese. Bishop Raible blessed the school. We had a parish party to celebrate the event and a great time was had by all.

Many Asians had formed friendships with local women, but were prevented from marrying them because of government regulations. I ap-

proached Mr Downer, the Minister responsible and father of Alexander, requesting him to waive the regulation, especially if children were involved, or if the friendship was genuine. This he did, to the great joy of those involved.

Sometimes Fr Worms had asked me to visit the camp of some elderly Manila men who lived in humpies close to the sea. I would hear their confessions, give them Holy Communion and listen in wonder to the prayers they said out loud in Spanish. Broome Catholics owe much to seafarers from the Philippines who married into local families and founded dynasties as it were. Their features still survive with traces from other races in the striking racial blend, discernible in the physical make-up of local people.

But there was another side to the picture. People of Aboriginal descent did not have the right to vote and were not citizens of Australia. And although they appeared happy-go-lucky and gracious on the outside, deep down they carried bitter memories of past ill treatment at the hands of others, and of the grave injustices they had suffered. Surely, there were some who treated them with kindness and respect like missionaries and like-minded decent lay people. But generally most did not care.

It is only fairly recently that they have begun to make public the stories from the past . . . stories that had passed by word of mouth from family to family, and from generation to generation. Last year one came to light which was nigh 130 years old. It had been reported as a battle, but in truth it was a massacre of women, children and elderly people who had been engaged in foraging peacefully for food while the men were away 'on business' . . .

From time to time the Bishop would send me to Derby, Wyndham and Balgo to relieve the priest there. Derby Leprosarium, Bangaran, shocked me. Never had I seen people sick like that, with features and members deformed and ravaged by Hansen's Disease. Never had I seen good Sisters caring so courageously and perseveringly for those poor outcasts of society. The St John of God Sisters have a record they can be proud of.

Wyndham was terribly hot, but the people there were very hospitable. Whilst there I visited the grave of the 'Quiet Stockman' immortal-



ised in 'We of the Never Never.' At Balgo I had felt the ground shake as it were as desert tribesmen stamped their feet during their cobbba cobbba, and broke the silence of the night with their strange but beautiful chants. In the early days, before technology came, the quiet of these places was something unique to experience. A visiting Provincial from Germany described the quiet of Balgo at night as *in-karnierte Stille*. Palpable silence, perhaps would be close to a true translation.

Visits to such places were relatively short and as yet I knew precious little about that factor which made the tribesmen tick, namely their Law. But that was soon to change. In 1961 a new Bishop, John Jobst, sent me to La Grange to take the place of veteran missionary, Fr Francis Hügel who, together with Aboriginal lay helpers from Beagle Bay and European counterparts from Melbourne, had begun the mission there in 1955. Fr Francis was musically gifted, a renowned choir master. On hearing of his death, Br Richard Besenfelder commented that the angelic choirs should be very careful lest they miss a note — otherwise they would incur the now celestial wrath of Fr Francis!

At the beginning of 1994 I left La Grange and came to Broome to become chaplain to the Kimberley Campus of Notre Dame. It is there I am writing these memoirs. In the next instalment I hope to convey some impressions I gained in the early years of traditional life at La Grange. Suffice it to say life in Broome, and life at La Grange, were as different as chalk and cheese.

## CRACKS IN THE MASK

### A Documentary Film about the Torres Strait Islanders, the Haddon Collection and European Museums

Frances Calvert

**I**N 1989-91 I made *Talking Broken*, a documentary film about the Torres Strait Islanders, Australia's 'other' indigenous minority. Often passed over by anthropologists as 'too acculturated' in favour of Papua New Guinea, little had been heard of them until they made a claim for independence in 1988. The *Broken* of the title is Broken English, a pidgin spoken only by the Torres Strait Islanders; but it also pinpoints the problems of all indigenous minorities: although they appear to keep up with 'the system', the *hidden* language of the authorities will always remain a mystery.

One outstanding figure in *Talking Broken* was Ephraim Bani, a witty, highly-articulate, university-educated Islander.

Well, it's fascinating. You're looking at me like someone in a zoo, but why don't you watch yourself in a mirror and look at yourselves? Maybe one day I'll come around, get my camera and start studying you people.

This 'threat' to come and study our culture, spoken by Ephraim Bani at the end of *Talking Broken*, naturally begs a sequel. When I screened *Talking Broken* publicly on Thursday Island, I discussed the idea for a new film with Ephraim and he declared himself willing to come to Europe to participate in *Cracks in the Mask*. Islanders at all levels told me that they find my filmic approach sympathetic to their needs and declared themselves happy to work with me.

I have twice returned to Torres Strait to conduct interviews and to explain the idea for *Cracks in the Mask* to Islanders at all levels. The project met with enthusiastic response wherever I went. When I showed

my large colour photographs of the collections, many Islanders expressed a deep desire to learn more about and even get back some of the objects, especially the masks.

### **The Haddon Expedition—A Brief History**

In 1898 the Islands were the goal of a comprehensive expedition by the Englishman A C Haddon. He is said to have paved the way for scientific anthropology because his team attempted to document the entire culture. They took with them scientific instruments, including a movie camera, with the intention of presenting as complete a picture as possible of people who were fast losing their culture with the encroachment of white civilisation.

Haddon first became interested in the Torres Strait while carrying out research in marine zoology there in 1889. On the island of Mabuia, where he settled for an extended period, he talked to the already missionised Islanders and they 'yarned' in Broken about what life had been like before white men came. Haddon became convinced that if he missed this opportunity to record a culture it would be lost forever.

Returning to Cambridge, he raised money with great difficulty for a large scientific expedition and assembled a distinguished team that included the anthropologist C G Seligman, the Melanesian linguist Sydney Ray, the psychologist William McDougal and the musicologist C S Myers. W H Rivers, perhaps the most famous in the party, 'discovered' kinship in the course of his psychological investigations in Torres Strait.

The findings of the expedition were published over the thirty-seven years as the Cambridge Reports and they established anthropology as a science. Apart from the usual study of material culture, social organisation and religion, the team studied ethno-musicology, dance, colour perception and ethno-astronomy. Not only did Haddon and his team take copious written notes, but they recorded both songs and chants on wax cylinders, and Haddon used a movie camera to film dances — only four years after film was invented. Even more amazing are the wax cylinders that have survived storage in a damp laboratory: film with sound from the very Stone-Age of cinema!

## **What the film is about**

For the Islanders the Haddon Collection exists only as a history of remembered loss. Now, at a time when a cultural revival is taking place in the Strait, the Islanders want to reclaim this 'stolen' history, using it as a building block to construct their contemporary cultural life. The number of carvers, weavers and painters is growing and the artists are searching for authentic representations of their early culture. The local newspaper *Torres News* reported:

- a cultural centre has been established on Thursday Island, the administrative centre of the Strait;
- the 'Cultural Festival', founded by Ephraim Bani five years ago, is now flourishing.

## **The Themes of the Film**

The themes of this film are cultural preservation and revival, cultural communication and contrasts. The film will ask: What does a people like the Torres Strait Islanders, a small indigenous minority living in a first world country, want to make of its past? Will they be inspired to renew the old arts and handicrafts once they have seen the objects they thought lost forever?

Ephraim's task will be twofold: first, to encounter and meditate on his heritage and secondly, to throw out a challenge to western institutions, to the way they represent and catalogue cultures. In Europe, Ephraim will also discover how other indigenous minorities have managed to display their culture so as to offer multiple perspectives — not just eurocentric or colonialist views — of their culture and art.

To share a moment of rediscovery through the camera can be very moving, but beyond that, the film will give a glimpse of the Islanders' hopes and plans for the future:

- Will they get their longed-for museum in the Strait?
- or will they at least be given the chance of having a large exhibition in Australia of the masterpieces of their culture from around the world, if foreign museums can be persuaded to lend the cherished objects?

It is hoped that *Cracks in the Mask* will lay the groundwork for a major art exhibition in Australia to raise fellow Australians' awareness of

the Islanders' high artistic achievement. Although famous as the only culture to produce elaborate tortoiseshell masks, their carvings in wood and stone also rank as aesthetically pleasing sculptures. With each revival of interest in their traditional arts and crafts, Islanders are once again inspired to apply their outstanding artistic skills to producing beautiful objects, both for their own fulfilment and for the artistic pleasure of all peoples.

### **Museums — Custodians or Keepers?**

Museums play a central role in the film because they are one of the few links between us and the peoples and cultures of remote regions of the world. But are they reliable and responsible mediators? And what are museums for, anyway?

Ephraim will give new emphasis to the need for change, and raise the important challenge of the future, which is to provide the conditions for cultures like his not only to maintain their own identity, but to appraise and influence our own.

In the course of his odyssey Ephraim will learn a lot about European museums but, by the same token, curators will learn a great deal about Torres Strait Islanders. Islanders are their own best ambassadors in dealing with curators and governments, using their own particular brand of rhetoric, humour, and irony.

Ephraim is interested in the repatriation of both skeletal material and artefacts. However, he realises that museums do not yield up their holdings without a struggle. He also sees *Cracks in the Mask* as a means of preserving on film art and artefacts that would otherwise never be seen in Australia. Ephraim will visit collections in Britain, Germany and Switzerland for the first time and will discuss the question of regaining some of them with museum curators.

### **Stylistic Approach**

The film style of *Cracks in the Mask* will be revelatory rather than explicatory. This emerges from the relationship of trust between the Islanders and the filmmakers, a result of repeated visits and long-term friendships. The Islanders' own brand of rhetoric and humour transforms the

conventional interview situation and gives the viewer a glimpse of people with a strong sense of their own identity who nevertheless fear that it could be lost from memory if not strenuously safeguarded.

As filmmakers, the team are not merely people with the power of technology interviewing people without power. The essence of this kind of filming is a dialogue between cultures, and the team will take great care to avoid voyeurism. Unlike the so-called encounter of the 'naïve and the sophisticated', this film will demonstrate how acutely the Islanders perceive *our* european-dominated philosophy and ideology. As with *Talking Broken*, the Torres Strait Islanders will be intimately involved in shaping their own film image for the world to see. Islanders will again be trained on the spot as camera and sound assistants, will serve as translators and interpreters of songs and dances. Video sequences made by the Islanders themselves may also be incorporated in the film.

Creative collaboration, and bringing back the completed film to Torres Strait for communal discussion, have always been part of my 'contract' with the Islanders. The lasting impression will be of a highly articulate people speaking out in their own voice to audiences around the world. The Islanders will breathe life into Haddon's artefacts and offer an update on his nineteenth-century view. Haddon's fears that their culture would soon be lost will be refuted as Islanders demonstrate that they are not merely rediscovering their history but remaking it.

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## A TIMELY PIECE

### Bishop Hilton Deakin

FOR some years now, the Australian Catholic Social Justice Council has produced a series of Occasional Papers. Each paper tackles a specific social justice problem or teaching that is topical, and over the years a wide range of subjects has been presented. Authors, even groups of authors, are invited to deal with topics within their competence.

The author of Paper no. 21, *The Catholic Human Rights Tradition and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is Sandie Cornish, who presently works for the Secretariat of the Bishops Committee for Justice, Development and Peace. She holds a degree in economics, and a licentiate in Social Sciences specialising in Catholic Social Doctrine from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. She was also the first recipient of another imaginative innovation of the Australian Bishops Conference, its Social Justice Scholarship. She therefore brings a well grounded competence and interest to this paper.

It is not an exhaustive study, but rather a presentation of lines of thought to invite further reflection and research.

Firstly, it deals with three major strands of thought about social justice — the collectivist or Marxist, the individualist form associated with western liberal thought, and the Catholic tradition with its theological underpinnings. She nicely ties these traditions in to the substance of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and their respective covenants, and also with the more recent teachings of the Popes. She pays close attention to the specific teachings of the present Holy Father, and also to the various statements made by the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference on such matters.

Secondly, the paper reflects on the thoughts and writings of the present Holy Father that offer insights on the rights of Indigenous People. The Holy Father has made significant statements about this matter during his visit to Australia in 1986. He has also contributed widely to the subject with similar statements in various countries he has visited during his pontificate, and where he has visited indigenous people spe-

cifically. For Australians, these reflection are of paramount significance at a time when this nation seeks to have sound reconciliation with its own indigenous people.

This paper is relevant — and that alone makes it attractive. But it is also a tidy, succinct production, attractively presented. It offers a firm temptation through its subject matter and style for a reader to research a deal further the topic under review. And that is a quality that any occasional paper would envy.

It would be an excellent booklet to have as a study paper for a social justice study group, especially in these times when social justice issues are fast becoming matters of deep concern to all people of good will. Paper No. 21 is an excellent contribution to a series of occasional papers of high standard.

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CORNISH, Sandie 1994, *The Catholic Human Rights Tradition and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. ACSJC Occasional Paper No.21, Collins Dove, Melbourne. ISBN 1 86371 469 3.

The pamphlet is obtainable from :

The Australian Catholic Social Justice Council (ACSJC)  
19 Mackenzie St  
NORTH SYDNEY NSW 2060

Phone: (02) 956-5811 Fax: (02) 956-5782

The pamphlet costs \$4.00, which includes postage within Australia.

The above letter and information was sent to us by Michael Costigan, Executive Secretary of the Bishops' Committee for Justice, Development and Peace.



# THE BACKGROUND OF REDFERN: Assimilation Post-Assimilation and Australian Racism

Patricia Ormesher rscj

**T**O WALK into Redfern is to experience a sharpened awareness of the effects of racism on an urban Aboriginal community.

To live as a religious community adjacent to what is known as 'the Block' or 'The Mission' is to be constantly aware of past ethnocentric missiology and church policy. Far from being a counter witness to harmful aspects of prevailing ideologies, evangelisation has been carried out as a christian expression of such thinking. Later, the institutional church has also played out the theme of exclusion of significant Aboriginal involvement (as with the other major social institutions).

Church people, like myself, needed to confront these issues before attempting ministry with Aboriginal people. This paper addresses racism in the context of both assimilation policies and post-assimilation. For me it is the essential underpinning for the future of the Aboriginal church.

\* \* \* \* \*

Assimilation policies marked a major watershed in official relations with Aboriginal people in Australia. Following the externally repressive control and segregationist policies of the 'protection' era, assimilation was a 'benevolent' bureaucratic management style, reproducing more subtly and pervasively the Anglo-European ethnocentric emphasis on white superiority.

Only in so far as Aboriginal people could learn and accept white ways were they officially tolerated by white society and rewarded with 'privileges' (A Curthoys et al. 1987 p.136). Also, cf. Glenyse Ward 'Unna You Tullas', and 'National Unity.' The 'education' of individuals into a white life-style was extensively implemented, thus perpetuating social Darwinian beliefs in the inferior status of Aboriginal culture. The great

ideological debate about the importance of environment as compared with heredity in human development was mirrored in this policy:

...stress on environment as the source of 'the Aboriginal problem' underpinned the escalation of pedagogic or sociological intervention of state power [and Church power?]. The biologism which denied the possibility of such intervention was rejected in the new policies: racial inferiority which had been seen to be congenital was now seen to be environmentally determined [brackets mine]. —B Morris 1988 p.35.

However, contradictions abounded, for biological determinism was still widely accepted. Skin colour was an important criterion in the policies of the Welfare Board. Fay Mosely, an Aboriginal friend of ours, tells how the future of the children in Cootamundra Girls Home was decided on this basis. Those with lighter skin were adopted into white families because it was believed that they assimilated more easily. Darker-skinned girls were put out in 'service' on farms. Here, there is an implicit assumption about the importance of biological difference.

One question emerges: to what extent are changes, or 'fashions' in ideology connected with political or economic interests behind policy, and to what extent does mission/church practice reflect these changes? It was in the interests of powerful institutions e.g. pastoral or mining, to promote 'the progress of a nation' and 'National Unity.' Such a monolithic view of Australian society was congruent with vested interests. Similarly a monolithic view of the Catholic Church rested on the idea of a oneness confused with conformity. 'The Australian Way of Life;' the 'Catholic Way of life' merged well with the idea of assimilation.

It seems quite clear that ideological emphasis changes to suit the exigency of the moment. For example, with assimilation, racial 'difference' was officially ignored, or under-emphasised, so that merging could be envisaged. 'Sameness' was stressed. 'Ideas of self-determination and independence were never considered.' —Morris, B p.35-64).

However, although 'difference' between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals was officially denied, there persisted an entrenched racist division between black and white, a division or invisible barrier 'tied in with a whole ideology of worth and acceptability': (Cowlshaw 1988, p.249) underpinning enduring stereotypes (cf. particularly 'The drunken stereotype' of McMahon, B; and Quin, R. 1987, p.193). Perhaps a major contribution of christian presence in places such as Redfern is the pro-

motion of such Gospel values as self-respect and self-worth, and the breaking down of stereotypes about Aboriginals among non-Aboriginals.

Assimilation did not succeed. An undercurrent of resistance developed into what has been termed an 'oppositional culture', subtle, yet persistent —Morris, B 1988 p.47ff.

...a culture of resistance emerged in some cases as a conjunction between earlier cultural practices and an opposition to the prevailing hegemony, or simply in oppositional claims expressed by denial, distancing and evasion of European authority. —*ibid.* p.60.

Such resistance was necessarily guarded, covert, in the face of often blatantly open racist practices of the controlling bureaucracy (cf. Aboriginal Musical: *Bran Niu Dae*).

With the abandonment of the policy of assimilation and the promotion of policies such as 'Self-Determination', 'Self-Management', 'Integration', 'Self-Sufficiency', Aboriginal resistance, springing from the groundswell of oppositional cultural activities, became openly self-definitional. They became expressions of cultural independence — a response to, rather than a reaction against facism. (e.g. the creation and widespread use of the Aboriginal flag and the tent embassy in 1972 — now succeeded by a new tent embassy; the march for freedom, justice and hope in 1988 (what *Christian* goals!) the coining of words such as 'de-colonisation', the developing reality of Aboriginal self-definition in media, literature, art (including 'christian' art), the establishment of Aboriginal Councils, social organisations, church organisations such as NATSIC and the struggle for land rights.

It seems, however, that in the post-assimilation era, racism has not changed in its reality, is operating very effectively, but covertly, for the most part within the institutions of society, including the church:

To recapitulate: Assimilation policies were characterised by our official 'benevolent' bureaucratic, pedagogic management style based on liberalism. As Barry Morris points out, the use of the 'total institution' with regard to Aboriginal Affairs was in fact:

grounded in those essential conceptions of knowledge and power so centrally located within liberal discourse (cf. the centralised Church). In this respect, too, racism can be seen to be an endemic aspect of the wider society, inseparably intertwined with universal and moral imperatives found in liberalism. (1988 p.60)

Racism operated within the assumptions of white superiority implicit in the very notion of 'assimilation' (into 'our' society . . . into 'our' church) Ideas of biological determinism persisted, while 'sameness' was aimed for through environmentally conditioned behavioural change : (e.g. mission hours and schools, church or state).

The view of Australia as 'one nation' 'justified' assimilation practices. Mining, pastoral institutions benefited from such policies.

The effects of assimilation policies was the threat to Aboriginal culture/ identity

The policies failed because of the persistent resistance of Aboriginal people to such racial discrimination.

One of the more important changes in Australian racism since the so-called abandonment of assimilation policies, is the role of the institution. In assimilation years, the institution, in the form of the Welfare Board, took full responsibility and control of every aspect of the lives of individual Aboriginal people. Control was obvious, and extended to personal matters such as permission to marry or permission to come and go.

Since assimilation, racism operates more by the exclusion of Aboriginals from opportunity, from advancement. The movement to train Aboriginal ministers in the church is slow, incredibly slow. In New South Wales it is only beginning to be discussed . . . Why?!

There were many 'white' words spoken within church missions and government reserves. They were teaching words, directing words. They were intrusive words, interfering in individual lives. By contract, in many social contexts, including church, post-assimilation means silence, non-delivery, quiet exclusion, a backing down, broken promises. There is often 'lip-service' but it ends there. Aboriginal people are no longer 'the same as we are' but different. It is natural to exclude them because they will not fit into 'our' society.

The ideology of worth and acceptability still negatively affects race relations in Australia. The idea 'that Aboriginals should not be given power or wealth because they are incapable of handling it' (McMahon, p.192) has not changed. It is the often unacknowledged mindset of many institutional policy makers (including church policy makers?). Is this the result of fear of real power being put into the hands of Aboriginal people? Self-Determination spelled out the right of Aboriginal people to control

health and education, as well as their right to maintain their value system. Why are there not more Aboriginal-controlled institutions such as schools?

With regard to the Royal Commission of Enquiry into Black Deaths in Custody: after extensive hearings, years of work, pages of recommendations, the real issue of racism within the police force has not yet been adequately addressed. Prosecutions of culpable police officers have never occurred:

It is one thing to change police procedure . . . it is quite another to change entrenched prejudices and stereotypes. (Editorial SMH 11.5.91).

The television program *Cop It Sweet* proved the above statement beyond doubt.

ATSIC discourse is aimed at drawing Aboriginals inexorably into the corporate State, participating in government decisions (Tonkinson R & Howard M, p.71). This body is designed to provide greater involvement and decision-making on the part of a representative group of Aboriginal people. However, the structures of ATSIC are largely operated by non-Aboriginal people. A similar trap is likely with regard to church bodies wishing to include Aboriginal participation. In these areas and others, racism operates, it would seem, from the fear of real power being put into the hands of Aboriginal people.

The effect of the succession of government policies on Aboriginal people is a profound mistrust. Too often have they experienced racism in the form of broken promises, backdowns, and the failure to meet real need. The current backdown over the Federal land fund is an example. It is of major importance for 'church' people, particularly non-Aboriginals to deliver, even if the matter is small. Many government (church?) policy documents are couched in language which is vague, high-sounding, strong on ideology and rhetoric. They are, however, lacking in proper assessment criteria. (The tragedy of Toomelah is a localised example of the shortcomings of policy and reporting) cf. Toomelah Report: 1987. In some ways the situation of the housing in Redfern is another example of apparent neglect — an example of institutional racism.

## **To Conclude**

With the official abandonment of assimilation policies, racism has remained alive and well, albeit under an altered guise.

What were proclaimed to be policies of liberation from oppressive forced dispossession of the Protection area emerged as a radical dispossession of culture, family, land, identity, in their attempted implementation under Assimilation. The 'equality' proclaimed by Assimilation thinking continued as an unequal sharp distinction between Black and White.

Likewise, ideas behind the concepts of 'Self-Determination,' 'Self-management' were, and are belied by persistent obstruction in the implementation of such policies. This profound incongruity between the rhetoric of so-called autonomy and continued dispossession prompts the argument that assimilation policies have now been abandoned. (cf. Tonkinson R & Howard M, p.26)

During eight years of living and interacting with Aboriginal people in Redfern, I have noticed a groundswell of resistance to domination and determination to take control. Within the consciousness of the people is an ever-present memory of past oppression and the experience of white racism and black oppression. Against this there is all of quiet persistence, stubborn resistance and more outspokenness. The 1994 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council conference is a case in point. The meeting brought together a group of self-motivated Aboriginals from many areas of the country. They came to stand within an institution (the church) as members, equal yet unique, with regard to other members. As the chairperson, Graeme Mundine expressed the beginning of (hopefully) a new time in church-Aboriginal relations:

It is not sameness (assimilation), or a one-sided affair (dominant/subordinate), but rather family membership — which includes Aboriginal rights to develop and prioritise their share and contribution. (Conference address.) [Brackets mine.]

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# PUTTING THE *HAIL MARY* INTO AN ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE

Kevin McKelson sac

SOME years ago I wondered how people of other cultures expressed themselves when saying the Hail Mary. Being reasonably familiar with some European languages I found most gave a direct translation of the Latin with one or two modifications here and there.

*Blessed is the fruit of your womb* was softened in Italian to 'Benedetto il frutto del tuo seno' — blessed is the fruit of your bosom. In German it was 'deines Leibes' — the fruit of your body. In French it was 'de vos entrailles.' 'Pray for us poor sinners' was heard also.

Indonesian offered something interesting: *Hail Mary* became 'Salam Maria' — Peace be with you, Mary. *Full of Grace* was rendered 'penuh rahmat.' Penuh means full, and rahmat mercy or charity. *Blessed* was 'terpujilah' — Praised be. *Blessed is the fruit of your womb* was 'Praised be the fruit of your body': 'terpujilah buah tubuhmu.'

It was not until I met Fr Fafard omi who knew Eskimo that I realised some radical adaptation was possible. He gave me a literal translation of the Hail Mary from Eskimo into English. It sounds like this:

'Hail Mary' (I did not get the equivalent of this) 'You are filled with consolation. The one who made the world has you as a companion. You feel more consolation than all the women. Your Son has more consolation than all the women and Mary, you have no dirt. The one who made the earth has you as mother. We are doing bad things. Pray for us now, and at the time of our death.'

If I rightly understood my informant and if 'blessed' is synonymous with 'happy', the Eskimo regard happiness or blessedness as the equivalent of feeling the seminal fluid flowing. They themselves use the term without giving it a second thought, but it obviously can't be used in liturgical prayer.



At La Grange no such radical adaptation was necessary but a certain interpretation was offered. *Hail Mary*, 'Wayirti Mary' — Hello Mary, or: Is that you Mary?

Fr Peile of Balgo has 'Pukurlarriwa Mary' — Rejoice Mary. A friend from SIL mentioned that 'Yes' would be more appropriate and that this word Yes, namely 'Yu' was used by the Fitzroy people in the sense of a greeting. Imagine the beautiful, gentle way one could say 'Yu' to Our Lady: 'Yes Mary! You are full of grace.'

*Full of grace.* 'Nyuntu ija ngarlu mapumarta' — You are truly good deep in your heart. The word for heart, 'ngarlu', indicates the innermost self. The effect of grace is described. I have as yet found no word for grace. *The Lord is with thee*, 'Nyuntu maja pari wantin' — You are with the Lord. You possess the Lord.

*Blessed are you among women*, 'Mapumarta nyuntu waraja wakalarrangu nguru.' — You are singularly good from among women. *Blessed is the fruit of your womb*, 'Mapumarta upa nyentukura Jesus.' — Good is your son Jesus. In no way could one use the Aboriginal word for womb. 'Mapu Mary' — Good Mary. *Mother of God* — 'Godkura kutany.' The word God is retained as the people are familiar with the term. *Pray for us sinners*, 'Mapu muwarr puwa nganinakurangala kurlujangka' — Say a good word for us therefore when we have done wrong. *Now*, 'Janyja nangu' — Right now. *And at the hour of our death*, 'Kayipa pungawuyarnangala' — And when we fall down. Used in this context 'fall' means to die. *Amen*. 'Kalayi' — That's the finish.

## BOOK REVIEW

*From Patrons to Partners: A History of the Catholic Church in the Kimberley 1884-1984.* Margaret Zucker, University of Notre Dame Australia Press 1994, ISBN 0 646 207830, pp.240, soft cover, \$16.95.

As stated in the Acknowledgements, Margaret Zucker was commissioned to write this history of the Catholic Church in the Kimberley by Bishop John Jobst sac. Much of the research the book is based upon was performed by Sr Brigida Nailon csb, who has contributed several articles to previous issues of *Nelen Yubu* (Nos 31, 53, 54, 55), mainly on Kimberley themes.

The book covers 100 years of missionary outreach. Fr Duncan McNab, aged 64, began the first Catholic mission to the Kimberley region when he arrived in Derby on 1 April 1884. In 1984, as recounted in the last chapter (ch.22) the Kimberley church celebrated their first 100 years. The book has been published ten years further on, at another significant milestone: 1994 was the last full year of the episcopate of the third bishop in Kimberley. As is the custom, on his 75th birthday earlier this year (1995) Bishop Jobst tendered his resignation from the see. It is expected that he will continue on as administrator until his successor is appointed.

The final paragraph of the book (p.201) sums up its theme well:

It [the Back to Beagle Bay Centenary pilgrimage] was a time to recall and pay homage to the vision of the Bishops — Griver, Gibney, Kelly, Coppo, Raible, Jobst; to the generous Pro-Vicar Apostolic, Fr John Creagh C.Ss.R.; to the sacrifice of the hundreds of religious who made the vision a reality at great human cost — Fr Duncan McNab, Trappist Fathers and Brothers, Pallottine Fathers and Brothers, St John of God Sisters, Benedictine Fathers and Sisters, Salesian Fathers and Brothers, Sisters of St Joseph, Christian Brothers, Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition, Sisters of the Infant Jesus, Good Shepherd Sisters, Loreto Sisters, Our Lady of Mission Sisters, diocesan priests, Missionary Franciscan Sisters, Sisters of Mercy, Canossian Sisters, De La Salle Brothers; to the numerous lay missionaries who faced enormous challenges as they walked a new path in the church. Also to the generations of Aboriginal people who accepted the strangers and their new message, who adjusted to domination, assimilation, integration, and who, finally, took back responsibility for their own lives and

their own faith and became real partners with their companions on the Christian journey.

The story of the Kimberley mission is told with economy of detail. The early period covering the pioneering work of Bishop Gibney, Fr Duncan McNab and the Cistercians has already been presented at some length by Mary Durack in *The Rock and the Sand*: Zucker has restricted herself to a summary account.

Though the relatively small amount of space available (188 pages of main text) means that Zucker had to be very selective in reporting the complex affairs of many people over a hundred years span, I expect a reader will feel that he/she has been well informed. Some big issues had to be dealt with, in effect Australia's main own special task, the inter-relationship of two diametrically opposed cultures, one invasive and dominating, the other passive, suffering but indomitable. On top of this basic theme, and interwoven with it, runs the universal theme of gospel and culture.

One of the strengths of Zucker's presentation is her careful abstention from canting comment. She has selected and presented facts and incidents in a way that allows them to make their own commentary, with no need for a glossing observation. In this way she has been able to present fairly the good things that happened, and the not so good. For instance, I believe that in her treatment of the Benedictine Kalumburu mission she has been able to indicate the goodwill of missionaries who cared *too* much, and so were *patrons*.

Any reader of *Nelen Yubu* would be particularly observant of the inculturation theme as it crops up in various pages of *From Patrons to Partners*, and of missiological views and practices. It is important for us to understand something of Kimberley history, because the Kimberley church has had a high influence on what inculturation there has occurred in Australia and also on Aboriginal – non-Aboriginal cross-culturation.

The 'Aboriginal Mass' that was used at the Eucharistic Congress in Melbourne in 1973 and has since functioned as a basic form that has been variously adapted in other parts of Australia where Aboriginal communities are celebrating the Eucharist — originated at La Grange, or Bidyadanga as it is now called. It was put together under the pastoral

leadership of Kevin McKelson sac (these days at Notre Dame Campus, Broome). Zucker treats briefly of his officially sanctioned efforts towards inculcated liturgy on pp.177-178.

The 'Aboriginal *Our Father*' originated in the Kimberley. I believe it was (the then Father) Peter Willis who put the simple words to a tune he borrowed from the Tiwi people of Bathurst Island.

Inculturation of the sacraments has been developing strongly in the East Kimberley (cf. *Nelen Yubu* nos 23, Coleen Kleinschaefer; 26, Clare Ahern). A special way of contracting with Aboriginal communities in ventures that are 'western' in character is being developed in the Kimberley education scheme — cf. Zucker, ch.21, *Nelen Yubu* no. 24, Clare Ahern).

When Rosemary Crumlin and Anthony Knight were looking for Aboriginal art that might display a vision where old and new, dreamtime and christian belief interpenetrate and indicate the beginning of a new sort of christianity that will be proper to us Australians, it was in the East Kimberley that they found it. Cf. Rosemary Crumlin and Anthony Knight, *Aboriginal Art and Spirituality* (Collins Dove, 1991), 'Introduction', pp.13-15.

Technically, I commend the use of endnotes unencumbered by commentary or data the author just couldn't bear to leave out! In the body of the text there occur a few highly concentrated summary sentences that rather taxed my comprehension skills (e.g. p.95, lines 2-5), but the overall action of the book moves with a simplicity that must have taken quite an effort to achieve.

The overall theme and spirit is well represented in the third-last paragraph of chapter 21 (p.198):

The deep pain of dispossession that had been theirs for some 40,000 years, the massacres of their people as recently of the 1930s, the dreadful leprosy epidemic of the 1940s and 1950s, the trauma of being uprooted from new tribal country in the forced moved from the cattle stations in the 1970s, the struggle to maintain their identity when forced to live, unemployable, on the fringes of the towns, and the privations of the early days of establishing their own Warmun place had left deep wounds of anger and loss of hope on the Warmun people. The partnership and encouragement of church personnel in the brave new undertaking help to foster the growth of self-esteem and self-confidence which became evident in the community.

— MJW

## LETTER FROM CLETUS READ fms

To the Editorial Staff of *Nelen Yubu*  
and to Readers,

I HEARD with deep concern that support for *Nelen Yubu* is not as enthusiastic as we could hope. My misgiving was aroused by the fact that I think that *Nelen Yubu* offers a valuable means for moving towards the actualisation of the vision which Pope John Paul presented to us in 1986 at Alice Springs Showground — a vision of Aboriginal people being able to be members of the Church by living Aboriginal Christianity.

That vision was abstract reality and it was based on the assumption of a Church living the full richness of the Vatican Council model: comprehensive collegiality (growth emanating from grass roots); apostolic sacramentality (communion generated by the sacraments of initiation rather than by power born of the misuse of the sacrament of orders); a balanced world view (in which mutual respect was extended between those who favoured use of Greek Logic and those who placed more emphasis on the emotional and the mythical;) and, contingent on the above, a Church in which

concepts of the sacred and participation in sacramental ministries were not monopolised by males and in which females were granted equality and a share in ministry (where the word *ministry* is used in a general sense and not in the restricted sense of *ordained ministry*). The dream quality of that vision is apparent when we examine the missionary activity of the Church today. The Second Vatican Council went only so far as stating that, in principle, each people considered independently, has the right to inculturate Christianity into its own culture. We see individual national Churches trying to inculturate Christianity into local culture in Papua New Guinea, in Africa, in India and in other countries, and recent reports stress the problems being faced and the slow progress mainly because of the reluctance of the western Church to yield ground. Nowhere in Vatican Literature is there any mention of inculturation into communities of indigenous minorities, the powerless people of God, who live under western domination in countries which have been colonised. And, further to that, neither the Vatican Council nor the Post Vatican Church (including Pope John Paul himself) has made any attempt to conceptualise a church structure in which

an ancient people and a modern society live Christianity each in its own cultural milieu. The existing simple unified Church of Australia is certainly not the answer — a common Church implies western domination and assimilation of the weaker group. How can an Aboriginal person be baptized into a worshipping community in which Christianity is presented in Aboriginal symbols if no such Aboriginal worshipping community exists? Today the Catholic Church is losing credibility because it is talking Post Vatican vision but it is still using pre-Vatican thinking and praxis.

Why no progress in actualisation of the vision of 1986? If you say that the stumbling block is the conservative leadership of Rome or that the problem lies with the Australian bishops or that clericalism is stifling thought, then I'm afraid you are a pre-Vatican thinker because you clearly expect the initiative to come from above and you place your hope in the use of power. In a church of communion bonded by the Spirit, the movement of growth comes from below — from grass roots. The reason that there has been little progress is because we, the people at grass roots, are still benumbed by centuries of authoritarian domination and we seem to

have forgotten how to show bold enterprise. We need to be shocked into action. The very source of the stream of christianity is Exodus which tells the story of how a suffering people respond to the invitation of the Sacred and move to better their human situation. Paulo Freire acts on this principle when he tells the oppressed people of Brazil that the first step towards liberation is conscientization of the masses of the oppressed, in order that action may be sparked from below so as to release both oppressed and oppressors who are prisoners of their historical situation.

At the present time quite inspiring initiatives are being taken by people at grass roots but this is happening only in isolated centres. The leaders in these enterprises are acting as path-finders. But there is no structure by means of which people at these centres can communicate and exchange information and co-ordinate effort. Papua New Guinea has the Melanesian Institute which is ecumenical and therefore able to provide a supportive network to missionaries of all churches by researching indigenous spiritualities, by working out processes of inculturation and by planning strategies to help missionaries in the field. Australian missionaries at the coal face desperately need

a similar type of organisation, but a useful structure can emerge only when people at grass roots feel the need and start agitating for a structure. It would be futile for those in power to move to impose such a structure from above.

Today the only link of communication between missionaries in the field is *Nelen Yubu* which serves to pass on information, to enable missionaries to share experience and to develop a supporting network offering encouragement to missionaries of all churches. People who wish to move towards the actuali-

sation of the vision presented by Pope John Paul at Alice Springs in 1986 should consider ways in which *Nelen Yubu* could be helped to improve its focus and to develop greater awareness of and sensitivity to the present problems facing Aboriginal Christians. If *Nelen Yubu* were to fail for any reason whatsoever, then the sole link transcending state and church boundaries would be severed, and hope that the bold vision of 1986 would become reality would be dealt a damaging blow.

\* \* \* \* \*

In response to the above clarion call

Readers

who have not got around to  
paying their current subscription

will be stung into action.

Please do not hesitate!

Help keep *Nelen Yubu* afloat!

## FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK . . .

GREAT celebrations on the last Saturday of December '94 at Nguiu, Bathurst Island. Br R J Pye MSC OAM AFL Award and Patron of the Tiwi Is. League, turned 88 while still looking only a young 50. A birthday party was arranged which must have been a great success. Three of us in Sydney: Fr Martin Wilson, my daughter Judy up from Melbourne, and I tried to ring Brother that Saturday evening, but despite allowing for the time difference, we rang on into the night to no avail. I think Brother must have been hitting the high spots of BI at that party! But he did write to me afterwards with some of the details, sending me a copy of the Tiwi Is Souvenir Program which was loud in praise of his efforts for the Tiwi footy team since the 1930's. So, Congratulations Brother, and we can't wait till you hit the century and receive a telegram from the Monarch.

Thanks to the long hot summer this year, it's been great weather for surfing in Sydney, so that many of us decided to descend upon Manly and Harbord beaches to shoot their crashing, bashing boomers. Then a week's holiday on the North Coast tanned the cheeks and revived tired brains after a

heavy year chained to the computer. Now I'm ready to face my stint for NYMU in 1995.

My parish now rejoices in the topical title of *Mary MacKillop Parish of the Upper Blue Mountains*, which embraces the four previous parishes of Katoomba, Leura, Wentworth Falls and Lawson. It's a huge area with only two resident priests (co-pastors), but you can imagine how proud everyone is to be specially involved in the Beatification of our future first Australian Saint by Pope John Paul II in Sydney. We now wait with bated breath for that miracle which is going to enable her to be proclaimed a saint. However, we wonder exactly what her title will be: St Mary MacKillop, or St Mary of the Cross, or both or what?

About three years ago, probably in February, I visited Mungo Brush and camped on the banks of the Myall Lakes. A five-minute walk through bush and over sandhills landed me on a long, beautiful ocean beach stretching north to Seal Rocks. I camped among melaleucas, was bitten by a spider and taken to Bulahdelah hospital across the river in an old-fashioned punt; and even tried a bit of fishing in lake and ocean. The place was captivating—the only snag was the dusty bumpy gravel road from



Hawks Nest for about 15km before reaching this fairyland. But to compensate, for about a 1km stretch beside that road there was a ten-foot wide strip of flannel flowers in bloom, a magnificent sight. I vowed to return.

This year I did go back and to my delight found the road had been tarsealed all the way to the punt. But alas, no flannel flowers, save for two tall stalks, in all that area! Some mechanized tool had slashed all the hundreds of flowers, except these two, and I couldn't even see any shoots appearing in the sandy soil. I thought our wild flora were all protected! This is the month they are in full bloom (February), so I'd like to know the reason for such a deliberate act of desecration.

Otherwise the area had changed very little, so I roamed along the foreshores of the lake and ear-marked several likely spots that would be ideal for a restful holiday should such an opportunity crop up in one of *Nelen Yubu's* busy years!

While on the lower north coast, I investigated the history of Port Stephens et environs. It appears the traditional owners were the Worimi people who were great fishermen. This didn't surprise me when I saw the dozens of people who every day clambered along the

harbour breakwater and landed sizeable juicy fish while balancing themselves precariously on enormous boulders which the white man used to build the embankment. There are several high rocky ocean islands just off the mouth of the port and I can visualize the Worimi in their sturdy canoes setting out on calm days to hunt for seabirds' eggs and other goodies that must be found on those bare outcrops.

Apparently the Aborigines were kind and caring people. There is a story about three or four convicts who escaped from a Sydney prison in the early days of settlement and fled up the coast in a stolen boat which, when overcome by a storm, managed to limp into Port Stephens to deposit its human cargo on a harbour beach. Some of the Worimi tribe found the starving men and nursed them back to health, anxious to integrate them into their own clan; and the story of the white convicts' gratitude has persisted to this day.

\* \* \* \* \*

This issue is jam-packed with interesting articles, so I must desist from my yarn telling, and wish you all the blessings of 1995, good health, and much success.

**Secretary Keren**