

# JAPULU KANKARRA

(The Father in Heaven)

Part IV: The Dream Time

Kevin McKelson sac

WHEN asked by me for the Aboriginal word for Law, my Aboriginal friends would invariably translate it as *pukarikarra*, *jukurpa*, *jumangkarni*, *mangarikarra* or *mangury-la* according to the language each one spoke.

But then they would qualify it by saying the words meant 'in the early days'. Two of these terms were meaningful for me. One was *Pukarri* or *bugarri* and the other *mangunyja*. 'Pukarri man' means in Karajarri he is dreaming. *Pukarri* itself means dream. *Karra* which is added to it to form the word *pukarikarra* means dreams or a state in which there are many dreams.

La Grange area is well known for its white gum trees. The word for white gum in Karajarri is *kunurru*. Once when talking to Jack Mulardy about this he said '... *kunurrukarra* ... the place where there are many gum trees.' *Karra* is a plural suffix favoured by the Yawuru people in the Broome area, the tribe immediately north of the Karajarri. *rrangu* is the usual plural suffix for the Karajarri but over centuries words or ways of speaking must have been easily slipped into one another's language without drama.

Incidentally, the word for Dream Time in Yawuru is *Pukarikarra*. It seemed clear to me that the term Dream Time or *Pukarikarra* referred to a period in time perhaps lasting thousand of years, during which events happened which shaped the history of the people locking them into a certain view of the world and to a definite pattern of behaviour.

The other word *manguny* means 'always.' Adding the suffix *ja* meaning 'from' to it formed the word *mangunyja* meaning 'always from.' Paraphrasing, could not one say a tradition which has been unchanging,

or further that *mangunyja* means that what was done by our ancestors should also be done by us?

Modern scientists tell us the people have been in Australia for 50 to 60 thousand years. In September 1995 a friend from the WA museum mentioned to me that the presence of fire remnants have been discovered which indicate human beings could have been in Australia 125,000 years ago. Over this time a *traditional way of life* was formed which stood the test of time. But of this Captain Cook and his friends and a multitude of others following him had little or no idea. Indeed, we know of no oral history before colonisation began. Only rock art and skeletal remains tell us there was a past and these ancient witnesses of the Dream Time speak a language the stranger will never really know.

As time went by and my friendship with the people grew, proven I would hope by my study of the languages and interest in law and culture, they began to tell me the stories from the early days.

Others, notably Fr Worms and Dr Petri had been told these stories and tried to give them a deeper meaning just as we Christians try to give our stories from the bible a deeper meaning. In this, my search for deeper meaning into the term *Pukarrikarra*, I must be careful not to give the impression that I am betraying confidences as most if not all of the matters I am thinking about have appeared in books. Secondly, my intention is honourable. I do not rubbish the Aboriginal Law as something bad but state it is basically good as it tells the history of the people and their beliefs just like the books of the bible tell the story of our Christian beliefs. And just as there are stories in the bible which tell of bad things so there are stories in the Law which tell of bad things. Stories which tell of bad things done by people are told not because they belong to one culture rather than to another, but because they were human beings.

Jack Mulardy a Karajarri and Tommy Dodd a Nyangumarta and others began to tell me stories from the early days. Jack had been an informant and friend of Dr Petri and was acquainted with Fr Worms whom he held in high regard. Tommy had been close to Dr O'Grady and became my instructor in the study of Nyangumarta. I had the privilege of doing linguistic work with Tommy over a long period of time notably during 1968 and 1969. From this period I have compiled a collection of

Here I found the answer to the question which had gradually formed in my mind in my early years at La Grange. It was this: 'What was primary in the traditions which I had been hearing and reading about?' For also I had been reading and hearing about stories which indicated an extraordinary complex of very early migrations of people which involved a criss-crossing of migratory lines over the entire Kimberley. Noticeably among such movements were two definite dynamic migratory thrusts, one from west towards the east and the other from the north to the south.

I would like then to give a summary of Dr Petri's 'Cosmogony' and comment on it. The study disagrees with Fr William Schmidt's assertion that numinous beings discernible in the Aboriginal traditions of southern Australia and responsible for the creation of the world, can be compared with the Creator God of the bible.

They should be termed 'Culture Heroes' or 'Bearers of Culture'. Nor should they be termed 'Tribal All Fathers' as Howitt did in 1904. Petri says the 'Culture Bringers' were not to be conceived as divinities in the biblical sense, according to which they would have created the world out of nothing.

For the Aborigines the world was already there. It still lacked a profile but the culture heroes gave it a profile, establishing nature in all its forms including the human in a 'timelessly conceived existence.'

He said the Culture Heroes were not Demiurges in the absolute sense like the Christian Creator God (I do believe he was wrong in that, as God is not a Demiurge in the christian sense), but they were beings which did nothing else but establish spiritually and socially an already existing world as it was mirrored in the experience of traditionally orientated Australians. Here he was right.

Here may I quote John L McKenzie on page 181 of a *Theology of the Old Testament*: 'Greek philosophy did not know the idea of creation; philosophers who spoke of a demiurge thought of an agent who introduced order into reality.' If they did assume the status of a divinity, Petri continues, it was only after they had completed their work on earth when they withdrew to heaven to fulfil the role of idle divinities.

If there were instances of intervention from on high, such as that of Ungud of the Ungarinyin or of Builany the rainbow snake adduced by Fr

Worms, they were rare. More to the point were reports he received from various tribal traditions of the Two Men tradition of the western desert and its confines. He claims it would be a mistake to deny them the character of a demiurge. I agree, but in the second sense I have outlined. Through their activity they were responsible for not only establishing social *mores* but of providing nature with its manifold forms both animate and inanimate.

He continues to state that their activity 'was a manifestation of a religiosity that did not seek to discern the ultimate ground of all things'. It was taken for granted things existed before life appeared. Indeed, here we have instances of a chronic religious sense according to which the Culture Heroes at the term of their earthly existence either went back into the ground or went up to the stars.

Dr Petri then continues to refer to information he received from various Aboriginal informants. In particular he refers to the statements made by Pincher Dalan whom I also knew well. According to Pincher the two men came out of the earth in the Dream Time, the Pukarrikarra. Not only did these two men bring the social code and shape the landscape, but at the end of their life went bodily back to earth, and their spirits went to the sky where they can be seen at certain times as the two pointers in the Magellan clouds. But their most notable achievement was the effective separation of heaven and the earth through the power of the ritual objects they carried with them. Through this action primordial darkness disappeared, the light of the sun came into the world and the day and night cycle began.

Pincher added the following with a certain discomfort: the two men came from the ground and gave us the law Pukarrikarra, but we don't know who made the ground out of which the two men came in the early days. Dr Petri also brings the view of a certain Clancy McKenna from the Port Hedland area who knew something about the biblical account of creation. He commented, 'If God made the world, then what did he stand on when he made it?'

Dr Petri then continues to report and summarise the information given to him by other Aboriginal informants all of whom I knew, bar one. According to them the formation of the

world took place in three stages which can be described by three terms:

1. *djaramara*
2. *kuranggara*
3. *bugari-gara*

Let me summarise each stage.

### 1. The first stage, *Djaramara*

According to *djaramara*, the oldest law, groups of primitive beings in the darkness and long before the coming of the two men, wandered through a shapeless world and either discovered or established water places as centres for rain and weather-making. To these primitive beings is to be ascribed the power of rain-making and of the fruitfulness of nature. The *djaramara* men were under the leadership of a certain Gurl Gurl or Gurgur who eventually took steps to put all the *djaramara* beings into the water holes, if they had not gone already into them before of their own accord.

People including women and children would henceforth gather at certain times around these places to take part in rain-making ceremonies. At this point the study inserts a new piece of information, namely that a Crow man made the first human out of pieces of wood, gave it human features and life itself. Here we have an instance of what is called in German *Misch Gestalt*. In volume L, no. 2, December 1979 there is an article in *Oceania* by Dr A Capell on the subject *Misch Gestalt* or 'Mixed Form.' The article is entitled 'From men to gods and back again' and is a review of a book by Richard Merz called *Die Numinouse Misch Gestalt*, 'The Numinous Mixed Form.' The article quotes views on the subject on the linguistic expression of shape-changing by Peter Taylor and Joyce Hudson and views by Wilf Douglas and R M and C H Berndt.

In Nyangumarta the process became quite well known to me, e.g. *pangarri kanyalnga*, *mirurruja yukurru jarrinyilnga*—its form changed, the evil spirit became a dog. In other cases a human being became a dog and so on. In this latter case the shape changing was the *Deus ex machina* to see that justice was done to someone who had been offending badly. *À propos* of Dr Petri's article let us accept

the Mixed Form as a given, and that the reading of the article cited in *Oceania* will throw light on the subject.

Also mentioned in the article was that the Crow Man circumcised Djuli the Night Owl man. It was this Djuli who introduced ritual circumcision into the Two Men tradition. The Crow Man also was the first to make the landscape high in places and was the first to cause earthquakes.

## 2. The Second Stage *Kuranggara*

According to the informant Kuranggara groupings swarmed over the country really opening it up. Taking into account the water places and rain-making centres discovered by the Djaramara, they found more of the same, both great and small, in the centre of Australia, made changes to the landscape, instituted ceremonies and organised increase rituals. Women and children were not to participate in these. All these activities took place in primordial twilight or in the darkness of primordial night, as Dr Petri puts it.

These days people call *guranggara*, Kura-ngara. Kuranggara itself is an ambiguous term. Fr Worms has also left behind a detailed account of a Kuranggara ceremony according to which ceremonial procedures are described through which murderers are identified. Also it seems to me, that on reading the literature, Kuranggara movements could have taken place after the advent of the Two Men indicating how migratory movements still occurred after the law was established finally by the two men.

## 3. The Third Stage *Bugarrigara* — The Dream Time

These two came from the east from the direction of Ayers Rock. According to Joseph Broncho, another of my informants, they were in a potential brother-in-law relationship. These two wonderful men not only brought a new rite of ritual circumcision with them as they traversed the country, but their crowning achievement was that through ceremonial procedures they brought the light of the sun to the world, thus expelling forever the perpetual obscurity of primordial night.

Humans lived now in a two-dimensional world in which there were the earth and the heaven, *ngurra pa kurrwal*, or as the people say today, *kaniny pa kankarra*, down here and up there or inside

and on top. The tradition of the two men came from the desert, traversed the desert and spread along the Kimberley coast. It is central to all the tribes from Hedland to Broome and to those of the Great Sandy Desert and thereabouts.

In his conclusion Dr Petri claims that such a description of a primitive cosmogony into stages is unique to the area. He leaves the question open whether such a division into stages has been influenced by Aboriginal contact with Europeans, or whether it has always been part of Aboriginal law in these parts. At any rate, it presents an astonishing tableau of Aboriginal thinking, seeking to explain the shaping of nature as they experience it, a shaping of, not creation of, but still and all a cultural achievement of the highest degree.

Up till now I have avoided the use of the term myth. In Part V, I hope to write something about this subject. □

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*Cont. from p.31 [Goldman]*

moreover which formally separates him from everyday activity . . . draws him closer to the realities of his existence.'

<sup>86</sup>This support role is also found in the sun dance ritual. During the most painful moments of the ritual each dancer would have friends who would be near, encouraging and cleaning any wounds. Cf. *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, 196.

<sup>87</sup>Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 20.

<sup>88</sup>Victor W Turner, *The Ritual Process: structure and anti-structure*, New York: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969, 96-97. (Henceforth, *Ritual Process*.) Cf. Arbuckle, *Strategies*, 188. He refers to *communitas* as the result of the liminality

stage. It is an experience of deep comradeship and sense of shared journey.

<sup>89</sup>Turner, *Ritual Process*, 127.

<sup>90</sup>Duffy, 'The rites and rituals', 88.

<sup>91</sup>Quoted in Duffy, 'The rites and rituals', 88.

<sup>92</sup>Duffy, 'The rites and rituals', 88-89.

<sup>93</sup>Duffy, 'The rites and rituals', 89.

<sup>94</sup>Duffy, 'The rites and rituals', 89.

<sup>95</sup>Duffy, 'The rites and rituals', 89.

<sup>96</sup>Duffy, 'The rites and rituals', 89.

<sup>97</sup>Duffy, 'The rites and rituals', 89.

<sup>98</sup>John G Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: being the life story of a holy man of the Oglala Sioux*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979.

# THREE CEREMONIES

## OF LIFE

Gerard M Goldman

### I INTRODUCTION

LIFE is made up of many difficulties. Sickness, death, trauma and environmental vandalism remind us of our individual, communal and ecological fragility. Eagle Voice (Black Elk) of the Lakota wryly observes that we all must travel 'the hard black road of difficulties . . . a road of trouble and need.'<sup>1</sup> The Lakota remind us that the world, despite its difficulties is indeed holy. Life comes not from ignoring pain but is most fully present where the 'black road of difficulties crosses the good red road of spirit.' This place becomes so holy and powerful that it is understood as 'the center of the hoop of the world . . . and there springs the Tree of Life.'<sup>2</sup> This is a profound statement on life. It captures the profound interconnectedness of pain and joy, death and life, fear and hope. It is in facing our difficulties that we most fully enter holiness.

The world community is beginning to realise what indigenous peoples like the Lakota in South Dakota, and the Murrinhpatha of the Northern Territory, Australia, have always known — that our very existence is interwoven with our relationship with Mother Earth and all living creatures. In recent years the christian Tradition has been busily retrieving its understanding of humankind as *steward* of all creation. More than ever our human community knows the vulnerability of creation and our responsibility for its and our preservation and renewal. A human individual only gains an identity through her/his relationship. We cannot live life in 'splendid isolation.' Through our birth we are called to being with others.

#### (i) The Life-giving Function of Sacrifice

The presence of sin, death, trauma and ecological devastation remind us that we have not achieved authentic relationship with

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God, ourselves, one another and creation. We are continually mending and beginning relationships. We need help to become fully alive, mature, holy. The three Traditions in this paper all recognise the need for people to undergo radical change. They do this in the context of being in community. The rituals and mythology found in each Tradition all highlight the creative role of *sacrifice* and suffering in life. They recognise our need to be reminded that we are always inter-connected with God, others and creation. In some mysterious way we are all called to participate in life-giving sacrifice. The three Traditions uniquely approach this calling. However, the similarity of the goal of their ceremonies is striking. From the *sun dance* of the Lakota, to the Murrinhpatha *punj* ceremony, the christian *baptism*, humans are participating in a personal, communal and cosmic renewal. This paper does not aim to reduce the three ceremonies to one uniform approach. Whilst the ultimate goal of renewal may be present in all three, each displays a genius and uniqueness of form and content. The fundamental differences within each ceremony work not to make each unintelligible to the other, but more to discover and admire humanity's vast efforts to make sense of the reality of suffering in life.

These three ceremonies represent the definitive, all-embracing meaning within each Tradition. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the entire cultural understanding of each tradition can be found through examining the above rites.<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, this paper will limit itself to an exploration of these three ceremonies. The exploration of each rite will necessarily involve reference to other rites and mythology found within the Tradition. This is due to the inter-relatedness of different ceremonies and myths within each Tradition. As such, the Lakota sun dance will include some discussion in the *Inipi* and vision quest rites as well as an examination of their mythologies of *Inyan*, 'The Rock' and 'The Chief Who Lost His Arm.' The Murrinhpatha *punj* will be examined in view of an understanding of Rites of Initiation: there will be reference to the circumcision rite and an earlier childhood rite. The christian understanding of baptism cannot be isolated from the other christian sacraments of initiation, namely confirmation and eucharist.

It will be seen that within the rites of the three Traditions, parallels and differences exist. The foundational component of each Tradition is the place of sacrifice and suffering: this is located at the centre of each rite. The Murrinhpatha and christian rites can be explicitly named and understood as rites of initiation. The second part of this paper will include a direct comparison of punj and baptism as rites of initiation. Despite the Lakota's refusal to have the label 'initiation' applied to their rites, I believe there are profound grounds to allow their rituals to be brought to conversation with rites of initiation such as punj and baptism. This paper will point to significant areas of connection between the three Traditions. Differences will be noted and discussed. The question, 'Does the christian Tradition have anything new to say to indigenous peoples like the Lakota and Murrinhpath?' will be examined.

## II LAKOTA UNDERSTANDING OF SACRIFICE: MYTH & RITE

### (i) The Significance of Generosity for the Lakota

Generosity is the cardinal virtue of the Lakota.<sup>4</sup> Implicit in this is that our strengths, gifts and wealth are for the greater good of others. Generosity implies self-giving: we do not store or hide our gifts, we share them with others. It is not too difficult to trace the connection between generosity and sacrifice. Giving to others is sacrificing one's own desires for the greater good of the community. This quality of generosity is foundational to the Lakota's understanding of their individual selves. Underlying the apparent individual nature of their ceremonial life is a profound connection with the communal importance of their ceremonies: Individual sacrifice for the well-being of the whole community will be seen as the striking feature of all Lakota ritual. Not surprisingly, the theme of sacrifice can be found in their mythology. This section will first explore the mythologies of *The Chief Who Lost His Arm*, *The Hand* constellation, and *Inyan*. The reflection on these mythologies necessarily leads to a discussion on the sun dance. In this discussion I will refer to the repeatable rites of inipi and vision quest.

## (ii) The 'Chief Who Lost His Arm' and 'The Hand' Constellation

The Lakota are enveloped by a sacrificial understanding of life. The very origins of the world are understood as the result of sacrifice. Each year they are called to participate in the sacrificial renewal of the Earth. This understanding is captured in the story of 'The Chief Who Lost His Arm' and the Lakota constellation called 'The Hand'.<sup>5</sup> In order to understand the importance of these we need to comprehend the spiritual significance of the night sky for the Lakota.

Stars are understood as being 'the holy breath of God,' the *woniya of Wanka Tanka*.<sup>6</sup> Constellations are recognised as 'sacred utterances — holy speech.' The annual disappearance of 'The Hand' constellation in the spring is understood 'as a divine signal of the impending loss of the Earth's fertility.' 'The Hand' represents the arm in the story of 'The Chief Who Lost His Arm.' The following is Goodman's summary of Black Elk's version of the story:

Fallen Star announces that he is planning to marry a woman in a nearby village. When he speaks to the woman, who is the daughter of a chief, she tells him that the Wakinyans, or 'Thunder Beings', have torn away her father's arm. She will only marry the man who is able to recover it. Fallen Star goes in search of the arm. As he travels from village to village, he meets spirits who give him special powers. He gains a sinew and a live coal, an eagle plume, a swallow feather, a wren feather, and words of power. These gifts will enable him to change his shape, and also to escape from the Wakinyans once he finds the chief's arm. As he goes from village to village, he sometimes seems to be in the area of the Black Hills, but at the same time he also appears to be travelling through the star world. He travels through three villages of 'star peoples,' and it is said that his son will have to visit the other four. Fallen Star reaches the Wakinyans and by changing into a man he is able to outwit the Wakinyans and Iktomi<sup>7</sup> and recover the chief's arm. By using the other powers he was given, he is able to flee successfully. He restores the arm to the chief, marries the daughter and they have a son.<sup>8</sup>

Goodman explains that like many Lakota stories, 'The Chief Who Lost His Arm' describes how not to behave. He observes that: 'Lakota listeners understand implicitly that the chief had been selfish, and that his selfishness threatened to interrupt the cosmic cycle.'

from him, so much of his powers would go with it, for his powers were in his blood and his blood was blue. He decided to create another as part of himself so that he might keep control of all the powers. To do this, he took from himself that which he spread around about himself in the shape of a great disk whose edge is where there can be no beyond. This disk he named *Maka* (Earth). He gave to *Maka* a spirit that is *Makaakan* (Earth Goddess). She is the second of the superior gods, but she is part of Inyan. To create *Maka*, Inyan took so much from himself that he opened his veins, and all his blood flowed from him so that he shrank and became hard and powerless. As his blood flowed from him, it became blue waters which are the waters upon the earth. But the powers cannot abide in waters, and when the blood of Inyan became the waters, the powers separated themselves from it and assumed another shape. This other being took the form of a great blue dome whose edge is at, but not upon, the edge of *Maka*.<sup>14</sup>

#### (iv) Voluntary Sacrifice: Inyan and the Sun Dance

The story of Inyan and the beginning of creation locate sacrifice as the cornerstone of Lakota existence. Inyan needed to be in relationship: to develop relationship demanded shedding his life-force blood. Goodman points out that this 'voluntary sharing of blood'<sup>15</sup> is repeated annually during the sun dance: there is a profound connection between Inyan and the sun dance. Referring to this Goodman asserts:

Contemporary Lakota Sun Dancers are participating in the renewal of life ... As Inyan sacrificed his blood to create the world, so the Sun Dancers voluntarily sacrifice their flesh and shed their blood in order symbolically to re-create the world and renew life on Earth each year.<sup>16</sup>

Joseph Epes Brown, in his article 'Sun dance: sacrifice—renewal—identity', provides a delightful reflection on the meaning of suffering and sacrifice in the sun dance.<sup>17</sup> Brown argues that the Lakota see sacrifice as an essential component of their life. This sacrifice is life-giving: the sun dance works to affirm the power of suffering in sacrifice. He poetically reflects on the individual, communal and cosmic significance of the sun dance.

Societies meet and prepare for the 'moon of grass growing,' springtime when the power of the sun will return to renew the life of the earth, to bring new strength, goodness and joy to all of life's beings. It is the one annual occasion when bands or clans, or even several allied nations, may come together to celebrate in solemnity and joy a sacred event, the beginning of a new cycle of life, to insure that the energy of this world and life will be renewed so that the cycle may continue. For three or four days of life-shaping formal rites and ceremonies, and in the additional camp days of preparation and endings, *individual and group will better know the power of suffering in sacrifice, yet also, in joyful celebration of life and life's season, a little of the mysteries of this life, thus also of the mysteries of death*<sup>18</sup> (italics mine).

#### (v) A Description of the Sun Dance Ceremony<sup>19</sup>

Located at the centre of the circular ceremonial lodge is 'the most sacramental cotton-wood tree.' The tree is understood as 'the center of the world.'<sup>20</sup> This had been ceremoniously cut down ('coup').<sup>21</sup> Even the knife that is used to cut the earth where the tree was placed, was sanctified and resanctified by the burning of sage (to dispel evil) and sweetgrass (to bring good influence).<sup>22</sup>

Those who have been 'called' in a vision or dream to dance, prepare themselves through fasting and purification (inipi). It is during the time of preparation that the elders warn the dancers not to 'look back'; they must trust in the powers of the universe. Not to do so could result in death.<sup>23</sup>

The powers of the universe cannot be invoked 'as long as man retains impurity'. So it is, says Brown: 'that participants purify themselves in the little universe of the round sweat lodge where forces generously released from the rocks of earth, from air, fire and water, cleanse man and give new life.'<sup>24</sup> This effort to maintain purity is ongoing throughout the ceremony through the 'sacrificial concentration on the Sun or Centre, or through the purifying agency of smokes from tobacco, from burning sweet grass and other wild grasses, from sweet sage and cedar',<sup>25</sup> and from painting the body red and blue.<sup>26</sup>

The dancers are dressed with the sacred sage wreaths on their heads with eagle plumes in them. Beautiful blankets are wrapped around their waists, the eagle-bone whistles hang around their necks.<sup>27</sup> The significance

of the eagle is explained by Brown: 'In recreating the cry of the eagle to the powerful rhythm of song, dance, and drum, the eagle is present in voice and being, man's breath is united with the essence of sun and life.'<sup>28</sup>

They dance 'from morning to night without food or water' until they are 'close to dropping in a dead faint'. This continues over four days. Throughout the sacred days while the singers are singing and drumming, all the dancers move around the circle raising their hands to the tree and blowing on their eagle-bone whistles. They dance while 'staring open-eyed at the blazing sun, the blinding rays burning' deeply into their skulls, 'filling it with unbearable brightness'.<sup>29</sup> It is understood that they now have a deep receptivity to visions and dreams. In a certain fashion, the secondary state of the unconscious takes over. Finally each of them goes to the centre and lies down beneath the tree where they are pierced. An eagle claw or a skewer is pushed through the skin on the chest. A long leather string is tied from the tree to the claw or skewer. After this is done, each of the dancers gets up and starts dancing around the tree in a wide circle. They blow on their eagle-bone whistles and pull back. They do this so that after a while they can break themselves free from the tree.

When they tear loose, they return to the tree and lie down while the leader puts healing herbs on their wounds. They rejoin the group when able.

When everyone has finished dancing, the leader takes the sacred pipe and prays to the Great Spirit asking him to hear the voices that have been raised to him in their suffering.

When he finishes, everyone smokes the pipe and then the dancers leave for inipi. There the leader listens to the dancers talk about visions that they may have had when dancing.

After the inipi is finished, all the dancers join the rest of the people for a feast.

#### **(vi) Lakota Understanding of Human Nature: Four Souls**

Arthur Amiotte suggests that in order to more fully comprehend the meaning of the sun dance ritual, 'we need to examine the nature of

the Lakota person and how he [sic] perceives himself in relation to the world.<sup>30</sup> Amiotte believes the key to Lakota understanding of the self, is that the self has *four* souls. The first soul is *niya*, from *woniya*, meaning 'life breath.' This is the part that ties an individual's body to his innermost. It is that which is most visibly absent from a corpse. The second soul is called *nagi* — it is like a ghost that 'retains our personality.' As such, it varies according to the nature of each individual person. The third soul is *naglia*, known as the 'little ghost.' Amiotte indicates that this soul approaches the concept of *Takuskanskan*, 'That Which Causes All things To Move.' He notes: 'Inherent in this concept is a vision of the entire universe as infused with a force of movement.' The *naglia* 'is that part of *Takuskanskan* which is alive in all of us.' He continues: 'When you consider that we share the common energy force of *Takuskanskan*, of course we are related to everything.' The fourth soul is the *sicun*. This has to do with sacred power that can be received through the intervention of and intercourse with the supernatural. This mostly occurs during visions. This *sicun* can remain with the person long after the vision occurred. Amiotte succinctly notes that the person 'goes back in his mind to the time he received it (*sicun*) through the vision experience, in some degree activating it so that its power joins with his own power, thereby transforming him. He is no longer himself. He is his spirit helper; his spirit helper is him.'<sup>31</sup>

One of the roles of the sun dance is to nurture these four souls. By strengthening the *niya*, *nagi*, and the *naglia* one 'can gain *sicun* through proper sacrifice'. Thus, when the sun dancer's flesh is torn and the skewers inserted, the dancer 'perceives this not as a torture but rather as the embodiment of the profound truth' that all 'four parts of himself are literally being joined to the sacred power inherent in the sun, the tree . . . all of the forces of the earth that are centered there.'<sup>32</sup> In short, he is attached to 'That Which Is Sacred'. It is this attachment to the sacred that demands that the dancers try to release themselves as quickly as possible: the sacred is both mysterious, engaging, yet ultimately fraught with danger for us mortal folk.<sup>33</sup>

## (vii) The Role and Meaning of Sacrifice in the Sun Dance

The role and meaning of sacrifice permeates all aspects of Lakota existence. Sacrifice begins in the sun dance ritual with the laying down of the sacred cotton-wood tree. The chosen tree is made even more holy because it has been chosen to 'die' so that the ritual can begin. This 'dead' cotton-wood tree is understood as being infused with the life-giving energies of the source of our existence. It is planted in the centre of the Earth, our mother. It becomes the source of connection — dare one say, relationality with *Wankan Tanka*, and the entire cosmos.

For the Lakota, the body is the supreme gift of sacrifice that they can make. Lame Deer poignantly notes: 'our body is the only thing which truly belongs to us . . . [when] we . . . give of our flesh, our bodies, we are giving of the only thing which is ours alone.'<sup>34</sup> Thus one can see the significance of preparing the body through fasting and purification. They undergo a holistic preparation that makes them ready for the tests and trials that the sun dance will provide them.

They dance not for themselves, but for the entire community. Eagle Voice (Black Elk) speaking about the communal nature of the sun dance elucidates that the sun dance ritual 'is the time for all the people to come together and dance his [the sun's] sacred dance, that his power may be theirs and their hearts may be strengthened for the road of difficulties ahead.'<sup>35</sup> In a striking comment he adds that this communal and cosmic undertaking is important because people can get so proud that they *'forget that by themselves they are nothing'*<sup>36</sup> (italics mine). Echoing this understanding Lame Deer emphatically declares that the ritual is *not* an initiation into manhood: it must be understood as 'a prayer and sacrifice,' reminding us that the dancers do not voluntarily participate, but do so in response to a dream or vision.<sup>37</sup> Thus, their call to participation comes not from self, but from the Great Spirit and those elders within the community who can recognise and interpret those dreams/visions.

The sacrifice of the body is elevated to another level in the ritual. Eagle Voice understands suffering or pain in the ceremony as a wise teacher, 'without courage,' he wryly observes, 'there is nothing good.'<sup>38</sup>



Lame Deer describes in detail some of what the sun dancer goes through:

... a man may faint for lack of food and water. He may become so thirsty blowing on his eagle-bone whistle that his throat will be parched like a cracked, dry riverbed. He may be blind for a time from staring at the sun so that his eyes see only spirals of glaring whiteness. The pain in his flesh, where the eagle's claw is fastened in his breast, may become so great that a moment arrives when he will no longer feel it.

When the pain becomes so excruciating that the dancer is numbed, 'when he loses consciousness,' when his strength is completely absent, this is the time Lame Deer says that 'the visions occur.'<sup>39</sup> Lame Deer spells out the wisdom that can unfold from authentic sacrifice. He reflects: 'It is when we are fasting on the hilltop [vision quest], or tearing our flesh at the sun dance that we experience the sudden insight, [and] come closest to the mind of the Great Spirit.'<sup>40</sup> He dryly adds: 'Insight does not come cheaply.'<sup>41</sup>

The understanding that this sacrifice is made on behalf of the community is made explicit by Eagle Voice as he recalls an occasion in his past when he danced for the people:

It was going to be the last day. When I got up from the ground, my body felt dead and it was hard to lift. But when I looked at the morning star above the pale streak yonder . . . a power ran through me stronger than ever before. While a holy man was praying, the power in me grew; and when the drums began and the singers sang, my heart sang too . . . 'I will give them a day'. . . Then they turned me to the blazing sun, and I stared straight at it. The burning brightness turned dark . . . I felt the knife in the flesh of my chest and the thong pushed through. If it hurt, I do not remember. I think the power lifted me above my body.<sup>42</sup>

Eagle Voice continues: 'All power had left me alone with my body in the burning dark, and my heart was tearing from its roots.'<sup>43</sup> At the moment of breaking loose from the excruciating pain he went into a fantastic vision. The corporate nature of the dancer's sacrifice is vividly recognised in the prose with which Eagle Voice addresses the Great Mysterious One, after his vision. Statements like: 'I have fulfilled the vow that I made to you. Send me the good

day that you have shown me. *I want to be a nation and live,*'<sup>44</sup> and again, 'Have mercy on me, for *I want to be a nation and live*'<sup>45</sup> (italics mine) highlights the individual dancer's communal relationality to the Great One. Brown concludes:

The Sun Dance, thus, is not a celebration by man for man; it is an honouring of all life and the source of all life, that life may go on, that the cycle be a cycle, that all the world and man may continue on the path of the cycle of giving, receiving, bearing, being torn in suffering, growing, becoming, giving back to earth that which has been given, and so finally to be born again.<sup>46</sup>

### III RITES OF INITIATION: PUNJ & BAPTISM

#### (i) The Integrating Values of Initiation

An understanding of the anthropological significance of rites of initiation is essential to this part of our discussion. Arnold van Gennep claimed that each rite could be divided into three distinct phases: preliminal (separation), liminal (transitional), and postliminal (integrative).<sup>47</sup> In the light of this anthropological understanding, the Murrinhpatha rite of punj and the christian rite of baptism will be examined. Not including the sun dance in the discussion on 'rites of initiation', honours the world-view of the Lakota. However, we will perceive some similarities and overtones in this discussion with the Lakota's sun dance ritual. During this discussion I will endeavour to make points of connection and dissonance amongst the main rites.

Anthropologists have long recognised that rites of passage are fundamental to the well-being of a community. The goals of these rites are twofold: firstly, they aim to bring about a transformation of the individuals who are undergoing the rite; and secondly, they rejuvenate and strengthen the entire community. The rites do this by integrating and fostering peoples' identity through their sense of unity with their community.<sup>48</sup> Mol adroitly states: 'They unify, integrate, and sacralise.'<sup>49</sup> The rites contribute to the cohesion and therefore, ultimately to the survival capacity of the community.<sup>50</sup> Breakdown in the rites of initiation inevitably leads to systematic weakening of the community's sense of identity. This is called a state of *anomie*; it produces chaos, numbness and meaninglessness for the members of the community.

## (ii) Dying, Transforming and Returning

Eliade states: 'Initiation represents one of the most significant spiritual phenomena in the history of humanity.'<sup>51</sup> The Berndts observe that the primary focus of the rite is that there will be in the initiand a change in status culminating in a transition from one social category to another.<sup>52</sup> Stanner highlights that rites of passage are 'a variation of the theme of withdrawal, transformation and return.'<sup>53</sup> This transition is normally fashioned on the greatest transition rite of all, namely *death*. Eliade identifies that the central moment of every initiation is represented by the symbolic death of the initiands and their return to fellowship in the land of the living. In their return they assume another mode of being.<sup>54</sup> Elkin notes that as the initiand 'passes from rite to rite, ordeal to ordeal, revelation to revelation, he is disciplined and made of no account, and yet at the same time realises that he is becoming of more importance . . . ;his personality is being enhanced.'<sup>55</sup>

This emphasis on death is not a feature in the sun dance ritual.<sup>56</sup> It appears to approach this through an emphasis on suffering and sacrifice, but the aim of the person is never to 'die', or symbolically 'approach death'. The Lakota's recognition of the power of God produces the opposite effect: in order not to die the sun dancers release themselves as quickly as possible from their pierced connection. Those who undergo the ceremony do so as a *living* sacrifice. The closest allusion to death for the Lakota is when the young man undertakes his first vision quest. Eagle Voice described the area of land that was prepared for him for his first vision quest as if he 'were dead up there and lying on a scaffold.' He recalls the 'wolves mourned' and he heard 'the criers calling to the people that the village would move the next day.'<sup>57</sup> This would happen when someone died.

Through a system of discipline and teaching the initiand is made into a mature member of society and a future custodian of its sacred mythology and ritual. This not only strengthens the initiand into a sense of belonging but also renews in the minds and hearts of those present their sense of community and identity. For the Murrinhpatha and christian tradition there is a deposit of truth, of

sacred stories, that need to be passed down in order for the community to maintain its identity. It is evident from the mythology of Inyan and Fallen Star that this is also present within Lakota belief. However, there are striking differences in the participating ritual life of the community. The Murrinhpatha and christian communities require all to undergo certain rituals in order to become adult members of the community. This is not the case for the Lakota. It is not uncommon for Lakota men and women never to dance or give a flesh offering in the sun dance; some may never undergo a vision quest. Inipi is the one ceremony which all are expected to experience throughout their lives. This contrasts dramatically with the christian requirement that one be baptised, and for Murrinhpatha, that all pubescent boys be circumcised and as young adults undergo punj. The contrast may be due to the Lakota emphasis on ongoing dynamic revelation through individuals' visions and dreams. This reveals itself through their understanding of being *called* to dance, and through the individual characteristics of the vision quest ritual.

The Lakota view of the individual appears to contrast markedly with the Murrinhpatha understanding of how an individual matures. Without the elaborate ceremonies of initiation, Aboriginal youths can never attain status and personal development in their culture.<sup>58</sup> It is impossible for an Aboriginal youth to grow alone, separated from others. This concept is the driving force behind the group paradigm of initiation. Every part of Murrinhpatha identity is found in the individual's relationality to the whole tribe. Difference is viewed with suspicion and discouraged. The Lakota never view their individual existence as separate from the group. However, there is an expectation that the individual's 'spiritual journey' is for the good of others: that is why visions and dreams must be told to the holy men of their community.

### **(iii) Murrinhpatha Rite of Initiation: Punj**

The main Murrinhpatha rite of initiation is the punj. It occurs when the circumcised youths (male) are perceived to be in need of understanding the restraints of adult life and to listen to the counsel of age. Punj takes place at any age from sixteen onwards. Stanner highlights the profound importance of the punj ceremony to the Murrinhpatha when he states: 'It

would be possible, and in many ways desirable, to relate the entire culture and organised life of the region to this single ceremony.<sup>59</sup>

Stanner notes that the youths are expected 'to submit themselves to the disciplines of punj and learn its secrets.'<sup>60</sup> The youths are offered a discipline which is at the same time a privilege and a means of acquiring full membership in the community. The theme of dying and rebirth feature prominently in punj. There is no doubt that the youths suffer (sacrifice), but the understanding that they are to 'die' is expected by all in the community. This theme of dying and rising will feature significantly in christian initiation.

#### **(iv) A Description of the Punj Ceremony<sup>61</sup>**

After gaining parental consent the boys are asked to 'submit themselves to the disciplines of punj and to learn its secrets.'<sup>62</sup> They are then taken away to a secret location where they find all the adult men assembled. For the first time they hear the secret name of *Karwadi* — the Mother of All. They are placed in a tight circle and required not to speak to anybody and to act quietly and modestly.<sup>63</sup> After the first evening until the end of the ceremony they are not spoken to or seen by anyone disbarred from the ceremonial ground.

On the second day the initiands are made nameless. They are symbolically no longer human. Their personal ornaments are taken away from them and they are required to be naked. Anyone who speaks to or about them refers to them as 'wild dog.'

The initiands are told that they will be swallowed alive by *Karwadi*. They are intensely frightened as they move in file towards the group of men awaiting them. Special dances are held. They are placed in the centre of the circle and told to imitate the actions of the men.

They are smeared with blood from head to foot and are told to stand in the heat and smoke of the fire until they are dry. The blood came from their future brother-in-law. This is kept secret from the initiands. At sundown the men return with loud cries to the main camp. The initiands return later in the evening when the women and children are not allowed to hear or see them.

The ceremony climaxes on the third day when the initiands find out the true source of the blood together, with the stark presentation of the bull-roarers (symbolic of the 'All Mother'). The young men have the bull-roarers thrust between their legs where it stands erect like a penis.<sup>64</sup>

With the tension over, the ceremony undergoes a certain alteration. The disciplines are not relaxed. They are still treated as wild dog and stay naked and nameless. However, now they are treated more as equal fellows. During the following days the initiands are escorted outside while preparations for mime and dance are made. They are told to hunt for the old men and cook the food. They sound the bull-roarer when they are returning with their food. They are given specific instructions from the old men and are expected to keep these regulations for up to a year after the ceremony. The time with the old men can vary. It is usually around four to seven days.

On the final day of the ceremony the initiands are covered in blood again. When they are dry they are given (again by their brother-in-law) a forehead band, a hairbelt, a necklace and a genital covering. At this point they are no longer judged to be wild dog. They are called *kardu punj* which signifies their achieving of mature male status.

The final scene of the punj strongly enforces this new solidarity. With the women looking on, the initiands crawl through the legs of the men of the opposite moiety: the conception that it is to the mothers they are going is explicit. They momentarily sit in front of their mothers with their backs to them. All the women wail and lacerate their heads to draw blood. The initiands then return through the legs of the men thereby completing the symbolisation of their new birth and the cutting of ties with the old birth.<sup>65</sup>

The initiands are under less escort now. Not a word has passed between them and any female. This continues for up to another week from the day of their first return to their camp. When a week has passed they are taken to bathe for the first time since punj began. They are then brightly adorned with ochres and charcoal in which representations of the bull-roarer are incorporated. It is said that this is unknown to the

Lathrop summarises that New Testament preaching is 'filled with the powerful weakness of the cross of Christ.'<sup>73</sup>

Baptism meant a casting off of one's old life and a putting on the new life of Christ (cf. Rom 13:12-14; Eph 4:22). This symbolically occurs with the putting on of new baptismal clothes after the immersion into the water. As Searle highlights: 'it marked a total conversion of a person's life.'<sup>74</sup> Paul recognises that baptism is not an entity in itself, it is not something that can be closed off and isolated from the rest of the christian Tradition. Fuller argues that baptism for Paul 'derived its whole meaning from the gospel' (mythology). Paul understood baptism as 'the enactment and effective representation of the gospel itself: that being Christ's life, death and resurrection.'<sup>75</sup> Those who are baptised are *called* to enter into this realisation with an ever increasing earnestness..

For the early church, baptism was clearly understood as gaining entry into the christian community.<sup>76</sup> The community took great responsibility in the preparation of the initiands.<sup>77</sup> Becoming a Christian was not a mere individualistic experience: it was a corporate one through which the entire salvific community participated in.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, baptism brought about 'a special union with all Christians'.<sup>79</sup> Pauline theology summarises this as 'the body of Christ.' Fuller points out that Paul deliberately establishes the ontological reality of 'You are the body of Christ,' so as 'to drive home the mutual responsibility which all in the community have for one another,'<sup>80</sup> Thus Paul stresses the communal obligation which baptism entails.

## **(vi) Comparing Baptism and Punj Through Van Gennepe's Phases of Initiation**

Van Gennepe's three phases can be easily identified in both rites. The *preliminal* separation stage commences with the removal of the initiands from the community. For christians this is the period called the *precatechumenate* where the initiands are presented for possible admission into the sacrament. In the punj it commences with the removal of the boys from their camps. It concludes after the first evening when the initiands are told not to speak to anyone and forbidden to see anyone who is disbarred from the ceremonial grounds.

The second stage is one of *liminality*. During this stage all the markings of social humanity are taken away from them.<sup>81</sup> Arbuckle notes that 'there must be death to self, death to false worldly attractions.'<sup>82</sup> For the christian initiand this is the lengthy period of the *catechumenate*. During the period of the catechumenate the initiands undergo a process of education and faith-sharing. This process brings about a stripping of self, where the initiand undergoes a 'drowning/dying' to self and values that are in opposition to the gospel of Christ. Mol identifies liminality, lostness or meaninglessness as 'always clearly present in the Australian rites of initiation.'<sup>83</sup> This is so strong in punj that the initiands are no longer made nameless but are symbolically no longer human.<sup>84</sup> The initiands are enjoined to maintain silence, and forced to concentrate and meditate. These physical ordeals have a spiritual meaning. Notable rites in this stage are the blood rites, fire ceremony, and the washing of the initiand.<sup>85</sup>

The final stage of the initiation process is the *integration* stage. In baptism, this involves the actual ceremony; that is, the immersion into the baptismal waters and the anointing with special oil. The foundation for this stage is usually laid in the early beginnings of the rite. This is observable in the spirit of affection and fellowship which the initiators establish with the initiands. For baptism this is found in the initiand's being able to choose Godparents who will assist her/him throughout the process leading up to the baptism and after it is completed. It is also evident through the encouragement that the entire community provides to the initiands. Stanner describes this as the role of the protector during the punj ceremony.<sup>86</sup> He points out:

... at the time of privation and pain, a warm companionship is always there; and, when the youths are most humbled, and perhaps most in fear, the proud things of acknowledged manhood are known to be not far off in time.<sup>87</sup>

This support found in both rites captures for the initiators (the community) and the initiands, what Victor Turner calls *communitas*.<sup>88</sup> For Turner, 'communitas has an existential quality'; it involves whole people in their relation to other whole people.<sup>89</sup> Duffy points out: 'communities are never permanently achieved but rather require



the constant effort of renewal and rites of passage.<sup>90</sup> For christian communities the rite of baptism is an essential reminder and recommitment of each person to following the radical message and life of Christ. It works to bind the members of the community in solidarity with each other. Moss Kanter succinctly captures the vision of this commitment: 'The search for community is also a quest for direction and purpose in a collective anchoring of the individual life.'<sup>91</sup>

### **(vii) The Meaning of 'Death' and 'The Cross' for Christians: Some Comments**

Baptism symbolises 'the death and resurrection of Jesus and the christian's entry into the same experience.'<sup>92</sup> It is understood that the power of Christ's death is not separated from the gift of the Spirit. It is the Spirit which brings christians together.<sup>93</sup> In the words of St Paul:

It was in one Spirit that all of us, whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, were baptised into one body. (1 Cor 12:13).

Duffy emphasises: 'This "body" was not simply a social metaphor but, often enough, "a concrete allusion to the human body of Jesus, crucified and raised from the dead".'<sup>94</sup>

The cross is the ultimate symbol and realisation of death. As Duffy notes: 'The cross motivated the morality of the community.'<sup>95</sup> Through living out of the cross the profile of the early christian communities began 'to emerge more sharply.'<sup>96</sup> The cross is the 'ultimate symbol of commitment.' A life of self-giving and self-emptying is captured in baptism through being joined to Christ and his community. This demonstrates itself through the praxis of the community. It reaches its climax in the tradition of the martyrs where christians have lost their lives through fidelity to the practical living out of the gospel message of Christ.<sup>97</sup>

In a similar way, the Lakota take their virtue of 'generosity' to the ultimate symbol of death. In the defence of their country and people, their warriors would cry: 'Take courage! This is a good day to die! Think of the children and the helpless at home!'<sup>98</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Ronald Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice in Lakota stellar theology as seen in "The Hand" constellation, and the story of "The Chief Who Lost His Arm"', in Ray A Williamson & Claire R Farrer, (eds.) *Earth & Sky: visions of the cosmos in native American folklore*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1992, 215. (Henceforth, 'On the necessity of sacrifice')

<sup>2</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 215. The following is a condensed version of Goodman's article.

<sup>3</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 215.

<sup>4</sup>Raymond J DeMallie, (ed.) *The Sixth Grandfather*: Black Elk's teachings given to John G Neihardt, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984, 408. 'The Ichtomi (Iktomi) is a smarty who knows everything and can turn himself into other things, and fools the people very much.'

<sup>5</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 217-218. Condensed from DeMallie, *The Sixth Grandfather*, 404-409.

<sup>6</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 218.

<sup>7</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 218.

<sup>8</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 216.

<sup>9</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 216.

<sup>10</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 216.

<sup>11</sup>James R Walker, *Lakota Myth*, ed. Elaine A Jahner. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 11983, 206-207.

<sup>12</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 216.

<sup>13</sup>Goodman, 'On the necessity of sacrifice', 216-217.

<sup>14</sup>Joseph Epes Brown, 'Sun dance: sacrifice - renewal - identity', *Parabola* vol. 3, no. 2 (1978): 12-15. (Henceforth: 'Sun dance'.)

<sup>15</sup>Brown, 'sun dance', 13.

<sup>16</sup>The following is a condensed version from: Brown, 'Sun dance', Ron Zeilinger, *Lakota Life*, 1986; and Lame Deer, & Richard Erdoes, *Lame Deer*

*Seeker of Visions*, New York: Pocket Books, 1972.

<sup>17</sup>Brown, 'Sun dance', 13.

<sup>18</sup>Cf. Amiotte, 'The Lakota sun dance', 81-83.

<sup>19</sup>Amiotte, 'The Lakota sun dance', 79.

<sup>20</sup>The warning 'don't look back' is also given to those who undergo the vision quest ritual. The possibility of death is acknowledged.

<sup>21</sup>Brown, 'sun dance', 13.

<sup>22</sup>Brown, 'sun dance', 13.

<sup>23</sup>Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 124.

<sup>24</sup>Zeilinger, *Lakota Life*, 13.

<sup>25</sup>Brown, 'Sun dance', 15.

<sup>26</sup>Lame Deer and Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of visions*, 187.

<sup>27</sup>Amiotte, 'Lakota sun dance', 86.

<sup>28</sup>Amiotte, 'Lakota sun dance', 88.

<sup>29</sup>Amiotte, 'Lakota sun dance', 88.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Amiotte, 'Lakota sun dance', 88-89.

<sup>31</sup>Lame Deer & Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, 187.

<sup>32</sup>Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 113-114.

<sup>33</sup>Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 114.

<sup>34</sup>Lame Deer & Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, 188.

<sup>35</sup>Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 114.

<sup>36</sup>Lame Deer & Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, 189.

<sup>37</sup>Lame Deer & Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, 197.

<sup>38</sup>Lame Deer & Erdoes, *Lame Deer Seeker of Visions*, 197.

<sup>39</sup>Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 124-125.

<sup>40</sup>Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 125.

<sup>41</sup>Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 127-128.

<sup>42</sup>Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 128.

<sup>43</sup>Brown, 'Sun dance', 15.

<sup>44</sup>Cf. Regis A Duffy, 'The rites and rituals of commitment', in *Conversion and the Catechumenate*, ed. R Duggan, New York: Paulist Press, 1984, 88.

Hans Mol, *Identity and the Sacred: a sketch of a new social-scientific theory of religion.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1976, 235. (Henceforth *Identity*.)

Mol, *Identity*, 233.

Mark Searle, 'The rites of christian initiation', in *Berwick and Between*, eds. L C Mahdi, S Foster, S and M Little, Illinois: Open Court, 1987, 50. Searle points out: 'The rituals are never merely for those who undergo them: they are so intended to renew the imagination and sense of identity of all who participate.' Cf. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: elements of a sociological theory of religion*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1967, 22ff.

Mercia Eliade, *Rites and Symbols of Initiation: the mysteries of birth and rebirth*, New York: Harper & Row, 1958, 3. (Henceforth, *Rites*.)

R M & C H Berndt, *The World of the First Australians: Aboriginal traditional life, past and present*. Revised Edition, Sydney: Landsdown Press, 1981, 166. (Henceforth, *The World*.)

W E H Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 19. Cf. Berndt, *The World*.)

Eliade, *Rites*, xiii. Cf. Hans Mol, *Meaning and Face: an introduction to the social scientific study of religion*, New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1983, 5. He states: 'There is a stripping from one identity and the welding to a new one.'

A P Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*. Revised Edition, Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1979, 39.

It should be remembered that the sun dancers are warned about the danger of the ceremony, and the need to fully trust in the powers that unfold. A failure to do this can result in tragedy. Sun dancers have died during the ceremony, some from natural causes like heart attacks, others being 'unaccountable'.

Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 50.

Cf. Falkenberg, *Kin and Totem*, New York: Humanities Press, 1962, 164. Referring to the initiation ceremony he states: 'Initiation is the gate which admits the boys into the men's group and into secret life.'

Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 20.

Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 6.

Condensed from: Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religions*, 6-9.

Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 6.

Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*. Stanner presely states that they cannot talk to their utrikin or matrikin. This would leave very few people. The person they had some contact

with during the ceremony was their future brother-in-law.

<sup>64</sup>Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 8. Cf. Gerald Arbuckle, *Strategies for Growth in Religious Life*, USA: St Paul's Publications, 1987, 193. (Henceforth, *Strategies*.)

<sup>65</sup>Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 9.

<sup>66</sup>Cf. Gordon W Lathrop, 'The origins and early meanings of christian baptism: a proposal.' *Worship*, 68:6 (1994):518. (Henceforth, 'The origin')

<sup>67</sup>Barnabas M Ahern, 'The christian's union with the body of Christ in Cor. Gal. and Rom.' *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 23:2 (1961):204. Cf. Lathrop, 'The origins', 519. Thus, the baptismal candle is lit from the Paschal candle.

<sup>68</sup>K B Osborne *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: baptism, confirmation and eucharist*. New York: Paulist Press, 1987, 46.

<sup>69</sup>Reginald H Fuller, 'Christian initiation in the New Testament' in *Made Not Born: new perspectives on christian initiation and the catechumenate*. Ed. Murphy Centre for Liturgical Research, London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976, 10. (Henceforth, 'Christian initiation'.)

<sup>70</sup>Nancy Burkin, 'The discovery of the astonishing in the common: the process of conversion.' *Way*, 29:3(1989): 212.

<sup>71</sup>Mark Searle, *Christening: The Making of Christians*, Essex: Kevin Mayhew, c.1980, 1. (Henceforth, *Christening*.)

<sup>72</sup>Searle, *Christening*, 3. Cf. Lathrop, 'The origins', 516.

<sup>73</sup>Lathrop, 'The origins', 506.

<sup>74</sup>Searle, *Christening*, 3.

<sup>75</sup>Fuller, 'Christian initiation', 19.

<sup>76</sup>Fuller, 'Christian initiation', 13. Cf. Aidan Kavanagh, 'A rite of passage', *Liturgy* 70. Chicago: Office for divine worship, 1978.

<sup>77</sup>Searle, *Christening*, 5.

<sup>78</sup>Osborne, *The Christian Sacraments*, 48.

<sup>79</sup>Osborne, *The Christian Sacraments*, 48.

<sup>80</sup>Fuller, 'Christian initiation', 20.

<sup>81</sup>Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 7.

<sup>82</sup>Arbuckle, *Strategies*, 194.

<sup>83</sup>Mol, *Meaning*, 37.

<sup>84</sup>Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 7.

<sup>85</sup>Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, 7-9. Cf. Berndt, *The World*, 177. They claim that during this period the initiand: 'feels that he is on the threshold of a new life - a life which revolves around his religion - a life

## CHURCH PRESENCE

### IN PORT KEATS: POSSIBILITIES

**Phil Costigan cfc**

**H**AVING been here in Port Keats over this 1995 Christmas period when so-called 'riots' broke out once again in the community, one is sorely tempted to join the myriad of white arm-chair philosophers and speculate on 'them'; the problem with 'them'; the way to fix 'them'; the attitude of 'them', etc. The main contribution we whites can make is to reflect on *our* presence in the community and how it helps such situations or complicates them: what is our role, motivation, and attitude for being part of this community? I have worked for the last three years in the Language, Culture and History Centre in the community. And as I am one of the 'church people' here, I offer some reflections on how the white church might assist the local people to envisage the 'spiritual' aspect of their lives in a different way.

Perhaps the time is right for such a re-visioning. The community of Port Keats and the church within it has reached a critical point. Both seem unable to address adequately the crises facing them. New possibilities have to be found. The non-appointment of a priest to Port Keats will also give the church the opportunity to restructure church presence here. In addition, the present closure of the club will give the opportunity for the local people to attempt new ways of celebrating their social, cultural and ceremonial life.

#### PART I THE PRESENT SITUATION

##### The Coming of the Church

The Catholic mission at Port Keats began with the arrival of Father Richard Docherty msc at Werntek Nganangi, 'Old Mission,' on 9 June 1935. He found a people for the most part untouched by western influences as the whole area south of the Daly River had

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Br Phil Costigan is a Christian Brother who has been working in linguistics at Port Keats for the last three years.

been declared an Aboriginal reserve. The people were noted for being a fierce, proud people who resented white interference, many white intruders paying for this with their lives. However, in Father Docherty they seemed to recognise a different sort of white person. He was seen as a 'good man,' a 'spirit man.' As well, he had taken the precaution of bringing with him from Darwin, Aboriginal people from Port Keats who were living there.

But christian missions in those days worked out of a theology that had as its premise that Christians have *the* Good News, that it must replace the Aboriginal belief system: 'We are right and you are wrong.' The Catholic missions were no different. There was a clash of cosmologies and it was inevitable that in the long run, at least externally, the Christian world view, backed as it was by western 'civilisation', would dominate.

While it seems the missionaries did not explicitly denigrate the traditional beliefs and practices of the Port Keats people, the systems that were introduced lessened the people's hold on them. The people here were well used to being exposed to variant religious traditions, as those they had partly adopted came up from the desert or across from the Kimberley. But the christian belief system allied to western values and technology proved too strong. On the more positive side, the Port Keats mission did provide a safe haven from the fierce inter- and intra-tribal warfare that was decimating the tribes; it countered the fears of sorcery and kidney-fattening; it provided treatment for yaws, leprosy and other diseases; and it provided regular and reliable food for work. The tribes freely chose to move into the mission so much so that in the early days Father Docherty had two shifts with half the people out bush while the other half were at the mission.

The mission in its spiritual and temporal purpose worked well. The priests, sisters, brothers and lay missionaries were tireless workers. There were regular routines of Mass, sacraments, prayers and instruction. The school was an effective instrument for religious instruction and the teaching of western values, particularly through the English language. The dormitory system effectively segregated the girls from the influences of the camps and their culture until they were ready to marry.

These were well ordered and productive times and most people who experienced them look on them positively, perhaps even as 'the good old days.'

## **The Present Church Situation**

Times have changed. And for the church they have brought the good and the not so good.

In the seventies there was the transition in the temporal area from administration by the church through the priest-administrator, to that under the governance of the local people. There was the outstation movement when the different tribes were encouraged to move back to their traditional lands. There was also a revival of traditional beliefs, ceremonies and customs. As a result the church began to lose a lot of its accustomed influence on events that were shaping the future of the community.

Also during this time the church was coping with the application of the renewal of Vatican II to an Aboriginal community and many valid initiatives in enculturation were undertaken. Christian hymns, christian words to traditional chants, traditional dancing and painting were introduced into church ceremonial. The design of the newly built church attempted to emphasise the communal nature of the gathering. Chester Street from the Summer Institute of Linguistics spent years forming a Murrinh Patha dictionary and translating the bible into language. A Missiology Unit was established at Daly River whose aim was the exploration of the enculturation of the Gospel by Aboriginal people themselves. Unfortunately, this latter visionary venture failed through lack of support. Father John Leary, a man devoted to the Aboriginal people and continually seeking alternate ways for their involvement in church, seems to have been the one constant church presence over these decades.

By today, church life in Port Keats as based on external practice seems to have almost died. White church people are discouraged by the poor church attendances, the drop in baptisms and marriages, the lack of reverence and devotion. The people seem to have lost interest in what the church has to offer. Maybe they do not see it as relevant any more to their lives. Middle-aged women still cling to some devotional practices such as rosary, statues and medals but the majority of the people, especially the young, seem to be at least

confused if not indifferent. There has been a constant changeover of priests in the last few years. The bishop has not been near Port Keats for the last two years except for one fleeting visit of a few hours for Confirmation. The people must feel neglected or consigned to the too hard basket.

Unlike the recently formed Aboriginal Catholic communities in the Kimberley at Wurman, Yaraman and Mullan, it seems as though the older missions such as those at Port Keats, Balgo and La Grange reach a point in their history when much of the good work of the past runs to seed, and radical pruning and replanting is called for.

### **What is Needed**

More than ever before there is need for spiritual values and leadership in the community. In early mission times there might have been the dominance of the christian value system over the Aboriginal religious one, but now it seems that a westernised materialistic and secular value system with its attendant evils has replaced them both. Unfortunately Port Keats is noted for its violence, drinking, juvenile crime and lack of social unity. There is sore need for the restoration of the pride, dignity and worth of its people. Material values alone cannot provide them. Money cannot buy them. Better health, school and administration facilities help towards this but they must be accompanied by a restoration of spiritual values; the 'soul' of the people must be revitalised.

Traditionally the 'soul' of the people was nurtured in the religious culture of the people: the land, the dreamings, the beliefs, the ceremonial, the customs. Christianity came in with another religious culture which in many ways displaced this older one. In turn both have been wounded badly by the materialistic secular culture which came with white 'civilisation.' There is now the need to revive both religious systems again. But this time both value systems must be placed on an equal footing and real parity of dialogue must ensure. This can only be done by the Aboriginal people themselves. But whites have a key role in this also since they still control so many of the outside influences in Aboriginal communities. This challenge falls particularly to those who claim to be the 'spiritual' people, the carers of the 'soul' - the priests and religious who live and work among the people.

What needs first to be acknowledged is the present confusion. The people are confused over the role and place of the church. The church is likewise confused. The priest if present must acknowledge that he has no longer the previous influence in community decisions of the former mission administrator. He must find a new role which mainly lies in giving worth to the local people and empowering them to take responsibility for their local church.

## **PART 2: A POSSIBLE MODEL OF CHURCH**

### **The Structure of the Port Keats Community**

Port Keats has a population of 1900. There are seven major language or tribal groups in Port Keats: the Murrinh-patha, the Marti Ke, the Marri Tjevin, the Marri Amu, the Marringarr, the Ngankiwummerri and the Djamindjung. In addition there are a number of sub-tribes as well as people married into the Port Keats families from places such as the Tiwi Islands and Beluyan. These diverse tribes had settled at the mission and today are both a source of richness as well as the source of much disharmony in Port Keats.

Each tribe consists of a number of land-based clans. There are about twenty such clans. Each clan has family units with a number of families in each. Clans are grouped into three dance groups: the Thanpa, the Wangka and the Lirga. The style of music and dance of each of these groups is distinctive. An example of the overall belonging pattern applied to one person would be: Tribe/Language – Marti Ke; Song group – Wangka; Clan – Yedder; Family unit – Chula; Family – Gordon and Majella Chula's.

### **A Possible Model**

In a recent article in *Nelen Yubu*, Cletus Read fms, then living at Santa Teresa and who only recently passed away, wrote about a new model of how church can be present to Aboriginal people living in remote communities. His ideas were based on the theory of the Basic Christian Communities present in many third world countries as well as the practical application of a similar model in the Lutheran communities of Central Australia.

He proposed a three level system:

Level 1: Basic Aboriginal Church

Level 2: The Aboriginal Community Church



### Level 3: The Bi-cultural Church

I would like to modify this model slightly to discuss the possible reorganisation of the Aboriginal Catholic church in Port Keats. The model would be:

- Level 1 a: Basic Aboriginal Clan Churches
- b: Basic Aboriginal Song Group Churches
- Level 2 Aboriginal Community Church
- Level 3 Bi-cultural Church

### Level 1a: Basic Aboriginal Clan Churches

*Composition:* The land-based clan consisting of family units with all families within them. For example: The Kardu Thangkural Clan with the Berida, Dumoo, Kundjil, Kungiung and Mullumbuk family units and all their families.

*Leadership:* Wisdom – the men and women elders; Formal Instruction – the literate and/or artistic members; Care and example – all members.

*Instruction:* Traditional clan as well as christian beliefs and practices conveyed through own language, art etc.

*Ritual:* Simple ceremonies including traditional and christian songs, instruction, readings, prayers etc. in language. Sometimes the rosary might be used.

*Occasions:* Such a simple gathering might be once a week in the camp or outstation. Preparation would be done beforehand.

*Outside support:* Help in preparation could be given by a trained Aboriginal person, a white sister or brother. These people would be better than a priest at this stage so that the sacramental and authority expectation is reduced.

*Aids:* Christian songs in language; christian Aboriginal chants; English hymns; traditional chants; modern land songs. Texts and tapes of bible in language; Dreamtime stories; worksheets. Paintings and drawings following the Lumko method of instruction.

### Level 1 b: Basic Aboriginal Song Group Churches

The Basic Aboriginal clan churches that belong to a particular song group would meet in that group to prepare song and dance for large religious events to be held in the Aboriginal Community

Church. Leadership would be from the accepted elders and songmen and songwomen from that group.

## **Level II: The Aboriginal Community Church**

*Composition:* The whole Catholic Aboriginal community of clans and song groups.

*Leadership:* A religious leader who is accepted by the whole community, e.g. an Aboriginal deacon. Elders, songmen and songwomen as well as literate persons from each of the song groups.

*Rituals:* In general any traditional rituals would contain some christian elements; and any christian rituals would contain some traditional elements.

*Occasions of gathering:* Traditional Aboriginal ceremonies: conclusions of stages of initiation ceremonies for men and women; funerals; clothes burning; opening of the house of deceased persons. Historical occasions: Founding of the Mission. Christian ceremonies: funerals, baptisms, marriages.

Major feasts: Start of Lent, Easter, Pentecost, Christmas.

Other feasts: Sacred Heart, certain feasts of Our Lady, blessing of babies.

*Timing:* The Aboriginal Community Church would only gather approximately once a month to celebrate a key feast. It would not gather each Sunday. This special-time gathering is more in accordance with traditional ceremonial cycles. Venues could vary for each: church, open air, Airforce Hill, oval.

## **Level III: The Bi-Cultural Church**

*Composition:* This would be the Aboriginal church community combined with the white church community.

*Attitude:* The white church community, especially the priests, deacons, sisters and brothers, must believe that they are here to minister to the needs of the Aboriginal community, not vice versa. In general they would join the Aboriginal clan churches or the Aboriginal Community church for their celebrations and under their leadership and at a time and place designated by them. It is important not to set up a purely self-serving white church enclave apart from and maybe implicitly superior to the Aboriginal church. Some private ceremonial to cater for the specific needs of the white church people would not be ruled out.

## Organisation

An overall church committee would be drawn from the major song groups. It would consist of a ceremonial/ritual sub-committee responsible for the planning, organisation and preparation of the major ceremonial occasions of the Aboriginal Community Church; and a religious instruction sub-committee responsible for promoting religious/cultural instruction in the Clan and Community Churches. All committees would have elders and literate people in them. White sisters, brothers and lay people would assist these groups where necessary.

Aboriginal representatives would be part of any diocesan Aboriginal council. Contact with other Catholic and non-Catholic Aboriginal church groups would be encouraged. Leadership at all levels would be fostered through attendance at Nungalinga College and the Daly River Spirituality Centre. This Centre hopefully will again assume its role as a place where the interaction of Aboriginal and Christian spiritualities will be explored. □

### Notice

A private collector, Lucio Nigro, of Concord, Sydney, is looking for old (i.e. not newly manufactured for the tourist trade) artefacts, bark paintings and other works such as might have been acquired by missionary workers in Aboriginal communities and they no longer want to keep them.

He is willing to pay a fair price for them. All correspondence will be private and confidential. His telephone number is (02) 743-4415.

If you have some items you would like to dispose of, please contact him directly—not through *Nelen Yubu*.

## FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK . . .

**From Geraldton:** Bishop Anthony Nichols has sent me a copy of the Anglican Church's Prayer Points and their bulletin. The Prayer Notes come under the headings of Praise and Pray. Beautifully constructed, the Praise prayers are of intercession and thanks to God; and those under Pray are for those especially in need, even mentioning the ministry to seafarers. The bulletin I received had an excellent editorial from the Bishop on 'The Ordering of Priests.' It's good to be able to keep up with the news and doings of those we knew in earlier days, and to refresh our memories of Darwin and Nungalinya friendships.

**From Rockhampton:** And from the Revd. David Thompson a Christmas message embodying news of his work as Field Officer for Wontulp-Bi-Buya. Formerly Registrar of Nungalinya College in Darwin, he says his work now in Rockhampton 'continues with both positive and negative sides.' We well understand that situation! Again we are glad of the opportunity to keep in touch. Thank you, Tony and David.

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### Apia Group Graduation

For nine months in 1995 the Apia Group consisting of four MSC priests and three Sisters from various parts of the Pacific were studying at *Dadirri*.

I spent many happy days with them, culminating in the celebration of their Graduation at Navarre on 7 December. Now all but one have returned to their own lands and are much missed by all of us.

### Nelen Yubu Moves

With the closure of *Dadirri* at Drummoyne, Fr Martin Wilson was offered a transfer to Kensington Monastery, which meant NYMU and all its trappings had to go along too. Under the direction of the Superior, Fr Frank Crilley, a large room was made available as an office and every assistance given, even to the extent that I was invited to stay at St Paul's in the monastery grounds when I am working with Martin. The office walls are now lined with bookshelves, computers adorn the desks, and the outlook across to the Verjus chapel is beautiful. I am personally very grateful to Fr Crilley, Fr Paul Cashen and Fr Anthony Caruana for their generous assistance and hospitality to me.

Leaving *Dadirri* was sad but memories of my stay there will long remain. First Fr Barry Brundell, then Fr Roy O'Neill went out of their way to make me welcome, especially when it was necessary to spend several months helping Martin over the trauma of his cataract operation that 'went wrong.' I thank them all very much for their generosity and thoughtfulness.

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Congratulations to two well known identities for their inclusion in the Australia Day Honours List! Sister Anne Gardiner fdnsc of Bathurst Island and Father Adrian Meaney msc of Bereina House in Port Moresby, were each recipients of the OBE for outstanding work in their separate fields. We heartily congratulate them and all those who were decorated in January.

Secretary Keren

## Editorial

The overall focus of this issue is Wadeye, or Port Keats, as it used to be known. Christian Brother Phil Costigan wrote a paper in which he attempted to evaluate his recent three years in ministry there, as he explains in 'Church Presence in Port Keats: Possibilities'. It was shown to me and he graciously agreed that we could publish it.

It is very apposite in two ways. Firstly, Phil has taken note of Cletus Read's ideas and adapted them to the special Port Keats scene. If Cletus had been still alive, how warmly he would have acknowledged the interest!

Secondly, we have a long article from Gerard Goldman on the same area, but from a more theological or missiological perspective. Gerard worked at Port Keats for some years as a teacher; then in the nearby Daly area as a counsellor in drug dependency programs; more recently he did fieldwork at Port Keats for his Masters in Ministry program; he is presently working towards a doctorate at CTU, Chicago — whence the Amerindian dimension in his paper on life ceremonies.

This No. 62 will be the first issue totally produced by *Nelen Yubu* since No. 3 back in 1979. The first three numbers were photocopied at St. John's College, Darwin. No. 4, a record of Northern Territory Catholic Missions Council, 1879, was the first typed on Secretary Kacin and printed at Port Keats literacy centre by Miss Ward. Henry Ross, of Spectrum, printed Nos 5 to 46. After Henry's death in 1991, our printing was done by Mountain Press at Springwood and most recently by Pantina in Gladesville. However, with the spiralling cost of paper and printing, we decided we could manage our own production with generously allowed access to the modern-style photocopier owned by Rydalmere parish where I supply regularly on weekends.

— Martin Wilson msc  
*Editor*

# JAPULU KANKARRA

(The Father in Heaven)

Part IV: The Dream Time

Kevin McKelson sac

WHEN asked by me for the Aboriginal word for Law, my Aboriginal friends would invariably translate it as *pukarrikarra*, *jukurpa*, *jumangkarni*, *mangarrikarra* or *mangunya-la* according to the language each one spoke.

But then they would qualify it by saying the words meant 'in the early days'. Two of these terms were meaningful for me. One was *Pukarri* or *bugarri* and the other *mangunya*. 'Pukarri man' means in Karajarri he is dreaming. *Pukarri* itself means dream. *Karra* which is added to it to form the word *pukarrikarra* means dreams or a state in which there are many dreams.

La Grange area is well known for its white gum trees. The word for white gum in Karajarri is *kunurru*. Once when talking to Jack Mulardy about this he said '... *kunurrukarra* ... the place where there are many gum trees.' *Karra* is a plural suffix favoured by the Yawuru people in the Broome area, the tribe immediately north of the Karajarri. *rangu* is the usual plural suffix for the Karajarri but over centuries words or ways of speaking must have been easily slipped into one another's language without drama.

Incidentally, the word for Dream Time in Yawuru is *Pukarrikarra*. It seemed clear to me that the term Dream Time or *Pukarrikarra* referred to a period in time perhaps lasting thousand of years, during which events happened which shaped the history of the people locking them into a certain view of the world and to a definite pattern of behaviour.

The other word *mangunya* means 'always.' Adding the suffix *ja* meaning 'from' to it formed the word *mangunya* meaning 'always from.' Paraphrasing, could not one say a tradition which has been unchanging,

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his comments on every conceivable subject especially on those of current interest which I called Tommy Dodd's Diary.

Unfortunately, I was writing in a way which favoured *b*, *d* and *g* plus other things and I have never had the chance to write it down, plus translation into the orthography I use now which favours the *p*, *t* and *k*. I changed due to the request of a SIL friend who said a change in the lettering would bring me into line with the main stream orthography used in the region.

Jack had at one time told me that in the early days two men had come from the direction of Ayers Rock, 'that big stone in the east' in the direction of La Grange, bringing with them the law of circumcision and more significantly by their intervention introducing the normal cycle by which day follows night. Originally, he said, the world was covered with a blanket of darkness in which there was no sun or moon but only the stars, to give light to the earth. People at that time walked in perpetual twilight or dusk as it were. Then through the power of the ritual objects they carried with them, they pushed the blanket of the darkness upward and continued to do so till the rays from the sun poured in over the landscape, displacing the darkness with light. To add a touch of drama he added, 'then they heard the song of a bird.'

The more I reflect on the story in the light of further study I am continually struck by the powerful impact it would have made on people when they first heard the story and the impact it would have in a modern context, say in modern choreography, if the elders consented to its use in such a medium.

These remarks of Jack really began my long search to come to an understanding, however imperfect, of the Aboriginal world view which I could accept in the light of my own christian faith.

I had, besides the information received from the people, the studies and comments which both Fr Worms and Dr Petri had made in the past and which they had published one way or another. I had reflected on what both Fr Worms and Dr Petri had written in *Australian Aboriginal Religions*, and compared some passages I had read and reread in a study in German by Dr Petri on the Cosmogony of the Coloured People of the West Coast of Australia, published in *Anthropos* in 1965.

The chief failed to make the necessary sacrifice of himself; he disobeyed their foundational understanding that the continuation of life demands 'renewal of sacrifice.' As such, divine intervention becomes necessary: thus we see the involvement of the Wakinyans and Fallen Star. Goodman explains:

Implicit in this story is the Lakota understanding that the Wakinyans take away the fertility of the Earth every year. They also take away each year the masculine power to fertilise the Earth, which the arm symbolises. This is an essential function of the Wakinyans in the annual cycle of life, death, and renewal. The power to generate life is gained, lost, and regained each year, *but only through sacrifice*<sup>9</sup> (italics mine).

The disappearance of 'The Hand' functions 'as a summons to the whole Lakota nation'. As Goodman explains: 'In the context of Lakota culture, it means that a willing sacrifice of blood is necessary.'<sup>10</sup> Goodman cites the sun dance, which occurs in midsummer, as providing 'the opportunity for Lakota men and women to participate in the cosmic renewal of life by shedding their own blood *for the sake of all life*'<sup>11</sup> (italics mine). The generosity of the dancers stands in contrast to the Chief's selfishness.

### (iii) The Creation Myth: *Inyan* (The Rock)

Goodman asserts: 'Self-sacrifice is primal for the Lakota, as it is involved in the very creation of life as we know it.'<sup>12</sup> This can be found in their creation myth involving 'the first of the superior gods, *Inyan* "The Rock".'<sup>13</sup> Goodman draws from James R Walker's version of the myth (Walker, 1983). According to this myth, *Inyan* gave his own blood to create the Earth and sky. It is worth providing the key portion of the story.

*Inyan* had no beginning for he was when there was no other. His spirit was 'Wanka Tanka' (The Great Mystery), and he was the first of the superior gods. Then he was soft and shapeless like a cloud, but he had all the powers and was everywhere. 'Han' was then, but she is not a being; she is only the black of darkness.

*Inyan* longed to exercise his powers, but could not do so for there was no other that he might use his powers upon. If there were to be another, he must create it of that which he must take from himself, and he must give to it spirit and a portion of his blood. As much of his blood would go



women. Thus marked by the insignia of their new state and position of life they return under strict rules to their camp.

### (v) An Understanding of Christian Initiation: Baptism

The emphasis on death and dying is even more starkly found in the christian rite of baptism and its related mythology. For the christian, initiation endeavours to fashion the transformation of a person, and the entire believing community into a new creation.<sup>66</sup> This transformation is modelled on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Baptism signifies the total immersion of the initiand into the Christ event. This is symbolically represented in the immersion of the initiand in baptismal waters . . . This death is more than mere external symbolism. For Paul, the baptised *actually die and rise with Christ*. Paul understood baptism as being critically linked to Jesus' death and resurrection.<sup>67</sup> Osborne notes that for Paul:

This is not meant simply through some external symbolisation, namely, a person's body descending totally under the water, the symbol of death, and the person's body coming out of the water, the symbol of resurrection. Rather, *there is a mystical union between the person being baptised and the very death-resurrection of Jesus*<sup>68</sup> (italics mine).

The initiand is understood to have 'died' to self and to the values which separate people from the gospel message of Jesus. It amounts to the beginning of a total conversion of the person's life.<sup>69</sup> Through baptism the person gains entry into the whole christian community.

This immersion into the Christ event brings about a radical confrontation with God: this leads into the reality of the ongoing conversion process of dying and rising.<sup>70</sup> In short, baptism is the occasion where the initiand and community affirm their trust and radical commitment and faith in the self-emptying journey and message of Jesus Christ. Mark Searle succinctly notes that rites of initiation anticipate both the direction and conclusion of a person's journey. For the christian, baptism informs us 'what the cost of discipleship may be and what hopes we may have for our final home-coming.'<sup>71</sup> For Paul, baptism is 'initiation unto a life of faith lived in the Spirit, whereby we are conformed to the image of the crucified Christ.'<sup>72</sup>

## IV CONCLUSION

Each Tradition locates suffering and pain as a normal constitutive element of human existence. The genius of their efforts to make sense of this in their life is demonstrated through their rituals and mythology. The importance of maintaining harmony and cohesion in relationships is crucial to their understanding of human existence. To be out of relationship means that we are alienated and therefore dehumanised. To be in relationship means that we in some capacity have become selfless and aware of our interdependence with other/s. This reality of interdependence (both with other human beings and God) means that we either individually or corporately make sacrifices. We recognise that maintaining relationship is at the core of all ritual efforts.

This understanding impacts the manner in which we minister. To be involved in ministry requires a participation in the sacrificial nature of human existence. That is, effective ministry demands that I be in relationship with those I minister with. A core way of creating authentic relationship is through participation in the shared life of others — this necessarily means a participation in their struggle, hope and joys. How we share in this is a requirement for discernment, not in individual isolation but in a *context* of community.

I believe the exploration of sacrifice, suffering and 'life being difficult,' that is contained in the above rituals and mythology, will lead to an increased awareness of the constitutive component of our human existence, namely *shared vulnerability and hope*. This means being able to identify more closely and intimately with our own human poverty. Through openly acknowledging the poverty of our human existence we become humble. In humility we can then recognise that being in relationship with the *Anawin*, the poor, the broken and the dispossessed is a foundational component necessary for our life to become meaningful. □

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>John G Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*: the fictional autobiography of Eagle Voice, A Sioux Indian, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951, 47. (Henceforth, *When The Tree Flowered*.)

<sup>2</sup>Neihardt, *When The Tree Flowered*, 47.

<sup>3</sup>Arthur Amiotte, 'The Lakota sun dance: historical and contemporary perspectives', in Raymond J

DeMallie & Douglas R Parks (eds) *Sioux Indian Religion*, Norman University of Oklahoma Press, 1987, 84 (Henceforth, 'The Lakota sun dance'.) Amiotte states: 'Inherent in the sun dance itself is the total epistemology of a people.' Cf. W E H Stanner, *On Aboriginal Religion*, Sydney: University of Sydney 1966, 20. Referring to the importance of the punj ceremony he states: 'It would be possible, and in many ways desirable, to relate the entire culture and organised life of the region to this single ceremony.'