

Editorial

The previous issue of *Nelen Yubu* (No.68) produced a very favourable response among our readers. People appreciated especially the freshness of John Leary's reminiscences of mission work in an earlier age when things seemed more direct and less complicated. They appreciated too Wayne Holst's paper for quite the opposite reasons: it represented a present-day reflection on earlier missionary work, with an awareness of limitations in vision and effectiveness but at the same time an openness to new, though different, possibilities — to revitalisation.

This issue is like a second movement, with development and variations upon the themes. Frank Fletcher takes up the issue of revitalisation within the Australian and Aboriginal context. Noel McMaster reflects and theologises upon a particular aspect of the church in the Kimberley — replicated in many other places. In fact, he invites us to think about the condition of the Catholic church worldwide. Paul said that in the new world of Christ there would be no more male or female... Officially we are getting no closer to the realisation of that vision. Maybe Aboriginal society is being called to an inner revisioning if the strength and courage of its women folk, like the late Mum Shirl, is going to be enabled to revitalise male Aboriginal culture into a new more meaningful form of human existence in the changing world.

The more specifically spiritual aspect of the revisioning theme is taken up once more by Dan O'Donovan as he searches for meaningful ways of meditation for us Australians.

Wik and Mabo form the backdrop to this issue, setting as they do the political and social context in Australia today.

Please read the notice on p.16 which announces, finally, the publication of the second, revised edition of *Australian Aboriginal Religions*, by Fr E A Wormsac and his collaborator and posthumous editor, Professor Helmut Petri. The production has been financed by the Australian region of the Pallottines. Distribution will be through Spectrum Publications — not through *Nelen Yubu* office!

— Martin Wilson msc

Editor

REVITALISATION AND REVISIONING SPIRITUALITY

Frank Fletcher MSC¹

In spite of its present multi-cultural character Australia remains a Euro-nation: its moral and spiritual roots derived from Western Europe were superimposed upon the reality of this land. For the immigrant peoples this imposition "worked": it was assumed to be right to bring European civilisation to the Antipodean land. The Church too moved in lockstep with this colonial assumption. But at the present moment of history this assumption is under question. There are desires for a Republic, for a relationship with geographic neighbours, for reconciliation with the Aborigines. Some say the root of these desires is a hankering for a national identity. I would rather call it a hunger for revitalisation. The derived Euro roots, moral and spiritual, still remain alive but are not adequate on their own: an inadequacy also felt obscurely within the Church. Many church-goers long for a spirituality that would penetrate the soul-lessness of modern culture to draw upon a well of spiritual life-energy: a revitalising spirituality. The spirituality usually available coexists alongside the culture: it minds its own business. Yet we believe in a Gospel set to transform culture, the catalyst toward a kingdom of justice and peace. Words, words, words.

There are a number of signs of a disappointment with the spirituality that is available: the absence of the young adult generations who are simply not attracted; the earnest ones who turn to fundamentalist groups or to hard-line conservative Catholicism; the vocations drought — do the young judge there is little power for revitalisation in the Church or the Orders? Revitalisation would stir desires and imagination so that the realities of the Spirit, hitherto blocked, would appear and enliven.

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So much negativity? Maybe; but all the more to take seriously the revitalisation that is happening. The most striking, I believe, is the spiritual movement across the nation in support of Mabo and Wik.

There are hundreds of groups, non-religious and religious, meeting in suburbs, in inner city, in rural areas. There are imaginative posters and demonstrations, local and national, such as the sea of hands. There is Women for Wik crowded with leading Australian women.

How does this movement "rate" with Church-goers? Across the Churches a number of leaders have spoken out in support, and they have had the backing of a notable minority of Christians at the grassroots. However many clergy and religious have remained very quiet for fear of opposition among their people. On the other hand non-religious people in good numbers have supported the movement across the nation. What are we to make of all this? Is support for Mabo and Wik in some kind of Gospel borderland? Surely not. I believe that taking seriously the revitalising movement surrounding Mabo and Wik leads us to a much needed re-visioning of spirituality today.

Robert Doran, a leading theologian in the development of the work begun by Bernard Lonergan, notes that prior to the universal religions of the Word, there have been two classic spiritualities which, by their receptivity to creation, provided spiritual vitality to a line of culture. Doran's treatment depends on the work of Eric Voegelin and is backed up by the scholar of primal religion, Mircea Eliade. Doran follows Voegelin in showing that the redemptive spirituality of the Hebrew-Christian tradition reconstituted the two creation-focused spiritualities; yet it also largely accepted them and built upon them.

If, as I will show, these two complementary spiritualities are driving forces behind the Mabo and Wik movement, then their relationship to Christian spirituality is important. So how should Church-goers relate to these spiritualities? And, more to the point, if Church-goers do not relate to them, how has this happened?

Today we more readily accept the notion of a spiritual receptivity to creation which is potentially present in all people, non-religious as well as religious. I would speak of it as a twofold spiritual "underlay" which is prior to receiving the saving Word of God and a condition for receiving it authentically.

The first receptivity to creation I will mention originated with the ancient Greeks: it was taken up strongly in the Western Christian tradition and reached its high point with Aquinas in the Middle Ages but has been struggling in the Modern era. Its basic proposition is this: Commitment to what is true and good is intrinsic to the worship and service of the divine Mystery. Commitment to what is objectively true and good takes us beyond our human self concerns and so allows us to be attuned to divine Mystery.

This spiritual approach was undermined by the Nominalist theologians (e.g. William of Ockham) of the 14th and 15th centuries. These theologians separated the supernatural order from the natural order. Aquinas had distinguished in theory the supernatural from the natural but had insisted that in the concrete they are interrelated and inseparable. The Nominalists' proposition left God's relationship to creation as merely external. When this theology of separation combined with the humanist movement – and so with humanism's stress on human autonomy – the cultural explosion which followed shattered the medieval synthetic understanding of cosmos, human society and divine Mystery. In place of this synthesis, the human mind became the autonomous interpreter of cosmos and human society – for its own purposes. By this shattering, spirituality became a piety focused on the other worldly mysteries of religion. It often became fearful of relating cultural, social or political issues to the Divine.

Meanwhile, in the mainstream the scientific revolution and early capitalism made material development and progress the icons to guide understanding. Seeking the true and the good became subordinate to development. From this subordination it is not too far to jump to the Utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham whose

pragmatic social philosophy became dominant in Australia. For Utilitarianism what should be done is what benefits the majority of the people. Bentham dismissed the human rights of individuals or minorities as not scientifically based and as dependent on the nonsense of metaphysics. Utilitarianism fitted with colonial governments bent upon developing the land for the British people. In the atmosphere of Utilitarianism, to be committed conscientiously to the true and the good irrespective of the material developments desired by the majority is to be in a counter-cultural stance.

Now to the complementary approach to spirituality. This second approach begins not from our capacities to know the true and the good but from what today many would call our religious soul. In 1987 the poet Les Murray wrote that there is a permanent poem of ourselves which we carry within ourselves. This image of each of us as a poem gets at the almost secret spirituality of each person.

There is a line of Australian painters who would extend what Murray has said about each human: they would say that behind each place, each landscape is a poem. If we sense the truth which these artists perceive, then we approach persons and places artistically: listening to their rhythms, sensing their energies, listening for the Spirit Mystery behind them. From this artistic viewpoint the ongoing creation may be thought of as a flow of mystical poetry, a flow that envelops the human history which we record in our human categories.

I want to suggest that Mabo and Wik, legal judgments of the High Court of Australia might be fruitfully considered from the perspective of these two complementary movements in spirituality.

Of course, Mabo and Wik were the outcome of a number of movements. One was the movement within the United Nations for treaties on human rights. Another movement originated within the disciplines of archaeology and anthropology but took forceful shape within the discipline of history: the emergence of a new field of

study, the indigenous side of European colonisation especially in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and USA. Another movement was the Aboriginal peoples' public campaign for Civil rights. Whilst Australia watched Martin Luther King campaigning for civil rights in the redneck US South, Aborigines organised their own freedom rides in rural towns. They continued to dramatise mainstream Australia's ignorance or denial of the true history and situation of their people through symbols such as the Tent Embassy, the Survival March of 1988 and much more. They empowered their own people to proclaim that truth and justice was on their side. Eddie Mabo and the Wik people drew strength (in part at least) from the new history that included their side of the colonial story. They challenged Church people to admit what was true and just.

But the Aborigines argued their case most passionately according to the second approach to spirituality: the land as poem, as filled with Spirit-Mystery, as their mother nourishing them through its sacred places, stories, ceremonies. This Aboriginal approach has a kinship (as well as notable differences) with the artistic approach I have already noted as a longtime movement among Europeans in this land. Robert Hughes in *Art of Australia* observes a number of times that the land as filled with Spirit-Mystery has been a consistent theme. Among the names he mentioned are Drysdale, Arthur Boyd and John Olsen. Stephen Watkins of the ABC Encounter Program (October 1997) suggests that Arthur Streeton in his early landscapes portrays this Spirit-Mystery. The kinship between this line in Euro Australian art and the Aboriginal spirituality is demonstrated by the Euro Australian mainstream's enthusiastic reception of Aboriginal art.

This artistic approach to spirituality in the land has not been confined to artists, poets and their devotees. For most Australians the spiritual symbol in this land is the land. The quest for an Australian spirituality has this poetry of the land as its basic experience. Even Bill Hayden, avowed agnostic, speaking as Governor General years before Mabo, opined, I sometimes think that unless we obtain an understanding of the landscape and the

truths as Aboriginal people know them we will always be aliens in Australia. (*In the Age of Mabo*, ed. Bain Atwood, p.xxv)

Before considering how these spiritual movements affected the Mabo judgment, let us first consider the hostile reactions to Mabo for they reveal the often cloaked dynamics in the mainstream. To Australian conservatism Mabo was a disaster: it could threaten dislocation to farmers, pastoralists, miners, groups upon which the economic viability of the nation depends. Mabo would be perceived by the market and transnational companies as bad for development. As regards the injustice of the *terra nullius* doctrine, there was acknowledgment of fault in the past. But the new history's emphasis on these injustices was exaggerated, it was a black armband denigration of so much that was good in Australian history. Let the past go. We must go on from where we are, preserving a stable development which benefits all Australians even Aborigines. These well-known arguments reflect the old utilitarian view. During the case the concerns and fears of farmers, miners, pastoralists were made clear to the judges. They sought to frame a judgment whereby properly legal ownership and leases were not threatened in their operations. Moreover the judges sought to confine Aboriginal claims to those whose people had maintained some kind of unbroken connection to the land. However, even in the face of these pressures the judges affirmed the truth and rightness of the Aboriginal position and the failure of British Colonial law to give them their due. This affirmation of what was true and good was reinforced by those judges who characterised the treatment of Aborigines under *terra nullius* as shameful, as having diminished Euro Australians as a people and of Euro Australians' need to admit the injustices for their own sake.

When Mabo moved from the judicial to the political arena, the government of the time accepted that Mabo could not morally be ignored. More than that, it was, to an extent, embraced. The Prime Minister claimed Mabo might have the potential to work a miracle of revitalisation; "a new foundation for the nation because after 200

Creator God uttered in the Spirit expresses also in creation the justice, truth and goodness of the Kingdom.

Mabo and Wik's shaking of the old cultural foundations has implications for Church bodies such as the chapters of religious orders. I will conclude by focusing on the Australian Missionaries of the Sacred Heart Chapter 1998. The motivation of the MSC society's founder, Jules Chevalier, fits with the notion of revitalisation. He was consumed by the spiritual crisis of the Modern West and the cultural and social pathologies that resulted (*les mals modernes*). He sought a spiritual revitalisation. However as a mid-19th century European he identified spirituality with the Christian religion: he did not contemplate a revisioning of spirituality as proposed here. But is this revisioning out of kilter with the mission and the spirit he bequeathed to his missionary society?

At the MSC General Chapter 1993 the superior general of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate was invited to spend a day at the Chapter's discussions on World Mission. He made an incisive comment: you have not interrelated adequately your spirituality and your missiology. This statement is worth a lot of reflection. From the origins and charism of the Society spirituality and missiology are meant to mesh together. Chevalier founded a society of Missionaries of the Sacred Heart: he resisted any moves towards the Society's being withdrawn from the world, from grappling with *les mals modernes*.

What of Zago's judgment of inadequacy? It must be admitted that missiology has not rated highly in our reflection, reading and studies. The Church theology at the time of Chevalier resisted authentic appreciation of the religious cultures being evangelised. Missionaries largely followed European colonisation: the planting of the Faith came within the "gift" of European civilisation.

However in the 20th century came changes in missiology: and following Vatican II a stress fell on pre-evangelisation and later on inculturation, both of these beginning at the spiritual underlay. This

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Noel McMaster CSsR¹

A priority for our Church in the modern world is to read and heed the signs of the times. Far from a millennial expectation of celestial news bulletins, our Christian gospel rather maintains its Australian relevance by openness to the likes of Mabo and the multitude of movements that would promote human well-being among us. Here there will be available to us a more profound sense of what we are meant to be as discoverers of and collaborators in the contemporary purposes of the God we believe in as Christians. As Iranaeus is quoted: the glory of God is man fully alive.

That we might expect 'sic' in parenthesis after the word 'man' in the previous sentence I take as a sign of the times worth following up in our Church experience here in the East Kimberley. It is a commonplace that women have contributed enormously to the planting of the Catholic Church in our region, as nursing sisters and domestic mentors from the beginning about fifty years ago, and subsequently as educators in schools and more recently as pastoral associates. The outcome, not unlike that in society at large, is often summarised in terms of women being significant evangelisers and of women being the more conspicuous converts to an as yet incipient Catholic Church among indigenous people. Fully alive women have manifested the glory of God in the East Kimberley.

As a perhaps provocative contribution to a reading of this sign of the times I would like briefly to make three points, the first local and empirical, the second theoretical and personal, the third theological and pastoral.

The Local Scene

A generalised secular influence on our lives today has impacted adversely on religious identity and fragmented much of our

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traditional social and religious fabric. Indigenous communities have not been immune from this as is witnessed by confusion and anomie particularly among the younger. This, however, is not the sign I am attempting to read. I am rather interested in the phenomenon that, where our Catholic Church and religious celebration seem to be vital in the local indigenous communities I know, women are by and large the motivators and mainstays.

It is my contention that within the flux of contemporary indigenous culture women have less than men to negotiate, or contend with, in the religious sphere. On their side women have nature and nurture to provide a relative cultural stability as they mature to become mothers, and in more recent times as they begin to assume roles in a more formal and two-way education process which is found in many of their communities. Integral to this stability is an observed religious dimension.

Non-indigenous church workers, usually religious sisters, have traditionally connected with this scene of nature and nurture, and legitimately added an evangelising interest through schooling and pastoral undertakings. With some evidence of women's Law encountered and noted, there has evolved a kind of cross-cultural women's church life readily accessible in humane outreach, in occasional sacramental celebrations and in regular classroom religious practices. Such influence, particularly beginning with the younger, can continue with girls until they become mothers who then forthwith renew the cycle by requesting infant baptism for their children: whereas with boys there is influence until the time of early adolescence and the prospect of initiation.

Meanwhile the older men of such communities usually preserve their attachments to their Law in its traditional secret dimensions. One still finds in many men the 'mystical understanding' emanating from initiation, and an acceptance in the community at large that this is integral to the continuing character of their cultural life together, albeit with the manifold confusions visited on them and the young by modern secular society.

Superimposed on such an ambivalent 'mystical understanding' the social benefits and selective demands of the kinship system, the latter demands evidenced often in crippling co-dependencies among women especially, and we have that troubling flux which confronts an evangelising Church. Nevertheless from time to time there is relief for both women and Church in religious gatherings of mostly women participants praying for strength for themselves and rehabilitation for their men.

A Theoretical Position

In a continuing cultural world of esoteric secrecy an evangelising Church such as ours will seek to analyse any sign of evolution for its positive or negative worth. Such a sign, I have proposed, is the position of women in the brief history of the East Kimberley Church with which I am familiar.

My position is that a variety of circumstances have worked together, sometimes to suggest the emergence of a Church enabled largely by women, and often enough to suggest that any emerging Church is disabled by a continuing naïveté in the face of persistent intracultural exclusivity. We outsiders may be tempted to say that such exclusivity is in favour of men and their 'mystical understanding' developed in secrecy. Of course, the indigenes would say it is not favouritism, but simply the way things are in the following up of the Dreaming. And therein is the occasion for our naïveté.

Too often, I suspect, we evangelisers embrace the indigenous world view with insufficient critical rigour. We thus align ourselves with the ambivalence epitomised in the secrecies of Law, whether it be men's or women's business. Women as nurturers will be affirmed co-naturally by evangelising women in an indigenous world of immanence and its available rituals relating to birth and mother earth. Their men are left to that 'other' seasonal business of cosmological control and continuity. Through all, evangelisers of 'neither male nor female' conviction, or, more positively, evangelisers with a commitment to the Christian *koinonia* of men

and women, nevertheless find themselves with a Church of mostly women participants.

It may be pointed out that this eventuality is no different from religious outcomes pervading society at large. To rest with such an observation, however, is to beg the question at issue: the predominantly women church character of some East Kimberley indigenous communities.

In summary, then, the theoretical position I am espousing is that the continuing cultural divide within these indigenous communities has enabled women evangelisers to relate well to indigenous women and in doing so to accept at least implicitly with these women the 'sad finality' (Stanner's phrase in another context) that men and women in ultimate indigenous rituals inhabit different worlds. This has its positive and naïve-negative aspects. Women are bonded together with a sense of church in life and rite, but at the cost of a continuing and arguably life diminishing cultural naïveté. From another angle, that the ritual world of men, judged by their participation in Christian celebrations, largely resists the approaches of Christian evangelisers, men or women, is an issue which occasions an on-going challenge to local Catholics, to the indigenous as much as, if not more than, the nonindigenous.

A Pastoral Theology

A readily available ecclesial conclusion might be that in the scene I am considering, women are at least on the way to being the more successful evangelisers. Certainly much that is humanly affirming has been achieved. But the theological reality is more complex.

I suggest that a useful theological and pastoral way forward is to review the way of praying bequeathed to us by Jesus of Nazareth. In one respect at least, I believe the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father, helps us to address the complex social and religious reality of indigenous communities today, along with the naïveté I have endeavoured to identify in the general acceptance of the continuing and separate secretcies of indigenous culture.

Of particular interest is the juxtaposition of the prayer's opening, 'Our Father in heaven', with the later, 'Thy will be done on earth as in heaven'. There is, of course a wealth of theological possibility here: the trinity, the incarnation, kingdom praxis in the Spirit and much more. However, from a specifically indigenous point of view there is an interesting parallel with a difference: the *other* quality of 'Father in heaven' as it might be imaged in the secrecy of men's law, while the mundane image of indigenous women *mothering* here on earth (with its own elements of secrecy), remains culturally removed from that *other* secret domain of men.

In Christian terms, however, the two domains of heaven and earth have come together, thanks to a trinitarian kenosis or emptying and an incarnational fulfilment of the Father's will or purpose for us on earth. Instead of separated worlds, heaven and earth, and instead of an arcane discipleship of male and female operatives in any culture, there is envisioned in the Lord's Prayer the collaboration of women and men for the coming of the Kingdom in which the due dignity of all God's children has pride of place.

This must be a point of intra-religious dialogue for Christians. It invites, through a critical rigour, what has been called the movement towards a second naïveté, and a third, etc. As an evangelising Church we may still cultivate meanings for heaven, but too naïve are those which are bound by three dimensional space and measured time.

Equally is there a need for inter-religious dialogue when there are at hand secret rituals driving towards cultural ultimates which enshrine beliefs in enduring geographic space. As Christians in our local East Kimberley Church we will be wary lest so much energetic evangelising, often uplifted by insightful indigenous tradition, might nevertheless stall in order to accommodate the earth bound with its easy ground of separation between women's and men's business. For Christian faith there is ultimately a new heaven and a new earth that as one will accommodate the absolute beyond our familiar references of space and time.

There are two pastoral corollaries to this theological suggestion. The first is that the women evangelisers I have focused on in these few pages are well on track in their commitments to schooling and the works of healing and rehabilitation whose need is well recognised by indigenous people themselves today. This is the arena where we Christians believe that paschal grace is capable of resuming so much of the theology alluded to earlier. Life is about learning to learn critically and recovering from mistakes that are made and have been made by teachers and students of religion as much as by anyone else. A degree of emptying always accompanies the quest for that full human being and that equal share for all of being human which inspired Jesus' teaching, the Sabbath is for man (sic!). Our continuing dialogue with indigenous people and their culture, their Law and their sense of kinship, will be well served by a rubric of ever present and critical human awareness faithful to our gospel. Such gospel, though rooted in history, allows an ultimate transcendence in the spirit of Jesus Christ risen.

The second is the importance of our celebration of such paschal grace in our eucharists, both among ourselves as evangelisers from time to time, and with indigenous people when and where we can. It is, we believe, only here that give us our daily bread finds its comprehensive meaning which is the elimination of cultural practices that would stunt personal growth or allow gender distinctions and rites of a 'you cannot be nourished here' kind. A willingness in any culture to embrace as often as one can this eucharistic brand of daily kenosis can lead to the koinonia always needed at the heart of Christian faith and evangelisation.

Read On

I would like to think that we would all wish to continue this particular reading of an all pervasive sign in Church life today, and that we would like to listen to one another's reading, to compare notes as it were. As I have already indicated in passing, the heeding of the sign of women's significance in our local Church can take us down many theological paths with arresting pastoral signposts. It

Nelen Yubu

can also liberate us from that naïveté which can accompany the best intentioned among us, a naïveté we have now begun to address within our own traditions of studying the bible and the theologising to which it gives rise. In our dialoguing with other cultural traditions we might encourage the same openness to a more mature second naïveté.

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL RELIGIONS

Ernest A Worms & Helmut Petri

New edition, improved translation from the German original (*Australische Eingeborenen Religionen*) with the cooperation of Fr Gerard Christoph sac and Maria Gelhausen.

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OUT BUSH IN THE NT

Further reminiscences in the life of an Outback Priest: The Garden Point People

John Leary msc¹

When a Government legislates to have a child removed from its natural mother, purely because of the Government policy of assimilation, then this legislation contravenes natural law and basic human justice, and is to be condemned outright.

Some of the children who ended up at Garden Point were victims of this Government Policy of assimilation and were sent there by Government Agencies. Some however were sent there by a parent or parents mainly for the purpose of education — contact, sometimes eager, was maintained with the parent or parents. Some few of these returned home for holidays. One family I know of, consisting of an Aboriginal mother and three young daughters were sent there by their white father who, along with his son, was diagnosed as having leprosy. Before going to the leper station on Channel Island, the husband had his wife and daughters sent to Garden Point for protection and education. They lived there in a house in the village vacated by one of the married couples who had gone to live on the mainland. Each day the daughters came to the school and generally joined in the activities of the place. In later years several children were committed to Garden Point through the Children's Court. Part of the tragedy in the lives of some of these children was the fact that they were not acknowledged by their fathers, often a white father. Many of the children expressed a desire to know and to meet their father.

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The following is an incident which illustrates this point. I was driving one of the girls, a late teenager who had gone to Darwin to visit some of her relations. This particular girl had often asked about her father and often expressed the desire to meet him. As it happened, on the way to this visit, I saw her father outside a store. I struggled within myself as to what to do. I knew very well that the father had never taken any interest in this daughter and his other two children. I took courage in both hands. I stopped the car about a hundred yards from where the man was standing and I said to the girl, 'There is your father standing outside the shop.' On hearing this, she immediately wanted to get out of the car. I reminded her sadly that she might be disappointed. Despite this she insisted on going to present herself. I watched anxiously from the car as she approached him. She was there for no more than half a minute. She simply had time to say who she was when the father turned his back on her and walked away. The girl came back to the car in great distress, weeping unrestrainedly.

In the majority of cases, children who came to Garden Point came with the scar of deprivation and the loss of such connections, whatever those connections were. I would like here to make an observation of my own. Sometimes, when speaking in later years with these people, I proposed to them that they certainly must not deny their Aboriginality but that they should also not deny the other culture they inherited at birth. For myself, I am convinced that in the search for identity, for who you are, you must look to both sides; otherwise you have a false image of yourself. Also I have observed frequently that when it comes to living in modern society the non-Aboriginal heritage so often predominates and makes for easier access.

I also feel that people of mixed Aboriginal heritage or, if you prefer, people of Aboriginal descent, can and should be of great assistance to their fellow traditional people. In fact, there is much room for a mutual sharing. Many of the people of mixed heritage have lost, often so tragically, so much of their Aboriginal inheritance — such things as land, language, ceremony. They feel

their loss, and so for this reason can partake effectively in a mutual sharing. There is indeed an urgent need for traditional and mixed race Aboriginals to come together in such mutual sharing for the strengthening of both and the building of unity. Having made these observations of my own, I will now go on to say something about Garden Point and its people.

I went to Garden Point at the beginning of 1953. I found it a place where people who in the past had had so much against them, found eventually a real home and built up a family or a community in solidarity and security, all of which have lasted over the years and have been transmitted to grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Today, there are some still living at Garden Point but the majority who live on the mainland, are very identifiable and are a confident group who proudly call themselves 'Garden Point People'. They have a strong loyalty and vivid association with the place and the people of their upbringing. They, for example, naturally refer to Sister Annunciata fdnsc as 'Mum' from the older ones, and 'Granny' from the later arrivals.

You might ask how this spirit came about. I will attempt to explain. When I arrived at Garden Point I found myself living with two MSC Brothers. Br Bennett had been there earlier. He was a mechanic and had taught some of the bigger lads how to look after the machinery, namely the lighting plant and a very old Chev truck which the mission had inherited from the RAAF who operated at Radar 60 at the top of Melville Island. Brother Barrett worked with a group of boys in the vegetable garden. But the person who had been there from the beginning was Sister Annunciata. As I have said, the people looked on her truly as a mother. We used to consult a lot as to how to make Garden Point a true home for these young people who were homeless. She was a disciplinarian, but at the same time a loving and very caring mother. The children and the adults responded accordingly.

This little story indicates how the people responded to her love. Marriages were celebrated by the whole community. I remember one young lady who had prepared everything for her wedding

Nelen Yubu

including a beautiful bridal gown. However several days before the wedding, a visiting doctor diagnosed her as having contracted leprosy. Hearing the news she went straight to Sister Annunciata, heart-broken. They hugged one another, both in tears. For the best part of half an hour the woman's tears stained Sister's habit. Quite definitely Sister's whole life and concern were for the people of Garden Point.

She developed a group of benefactors in the south who collected money so that the children could have sufficient food, suitable clothing, sports equipment, musical instruments. Being quite musical herself, she gave music lessons to those who showed interest. Some were taught to play the piano, some were taught various other instruments. In this way, she built up a little orchestra. She encouraged concerts and there were regular dances. She promoted bush camps during school holidays. All attended these camps, school children and otherwise. It was an exciting time. All revelled in the bush and the hunting. In consultation with and the co-operation of the small staff, she organised sports carnivals for the whole community who were divided into teams. Sport was very much to the fore at Garden Point. I will have more to say on this later on.

Just by the way, it's amazing how many Aussie Rules Footballers came from that little place. I remember watching a Grand Final the year Essendon won it, mainly (I'm prejudiced) by the brilliant play of Michael Long. When Michael heard that Maurice Rioli, who also came from Garden Point, was to present the Smith Medal for the best player on the ground, Michael told others he was determined to win it. He and Maurice claimed relationship because of their upbringing at Garden Point and when Michael did win that coveted prize, and he was presented with the medal by Maurice Rioli on that famous football ground before ninety-seven thousand people, I was in a state of great emotion. I'm afraid I even shed a few tears. I felt like calling out to the two of them, 'Tell the ninety-seven thousand people' where you come from!' Anyway, more about sport later on.

As people got married at Garden Point, they lived in their own little village. The future husband generally co-operated with his fellows in building his house. The married couples made their important contribution to the life of the community. Indeed, they were an integral part of it. When I arrived in 1953 I got the immediate impression that this was their place, their home. The younger children were cared for by the staff: the girls, by the nuns, four of them; the younger boys by the two Brothers and the one Priest. In this caring the children were closely involved. The bigger girls were each given charge of a small child. The bigger boys occasionally got involved in fights defending their respective God-child. They kept a watchful eye on the smallest lads, encouraging their sport and taking them hunting.

I think the Tiwi people also had a hand in helping these people to feel at home and make a home. There was quite a group of Tiwi, the traditional owners, camped in the area. As the Garden Pointers grew up, they became 'adopted' into some of the Tiwi families; others were on kinship terms. Many of the Garden Point people had a good working knowledge of spoken Tiwi.

My experience of crocodile hunting with the young men, some of them teenagers, left me with the impression that they were so self-assured, responsible, confident, completely in command of the situation, anxious to show me what they were on about and at the same time protective of me. In a situation, made to inspire fear, I felt almost at home. This impression of the older Garden Pointers running their own place became more and more evident the longer I was there. It seemed to me that I was more a priest-chaplain than the person in charge. In so many aspects of the place I had no answers. The people seemed to have them all.

Under the tutelage of Br Bennett and Br Pye, two of the young men, Ambrose Tomlins and Matthew Lorenzo, had taken over the servicing and the maintenance of all the machinery, including the lighting plant. The original engine was a Lister Diesel, bequeathed to the place, like the old Chev truck, by the RAAF on their departure from Radar 60 on the north of the island. It was a

decrepit old piece of machinery and needed expert care to keep it going. Ambrose and Matthew always rose to the occasion. Later came a brand new Southern Cross Diesel which they also managed.

I remember once receiving a request from the Superintendent across at Snake Bay for Ambrose to come and repair his lighting plant. He had had it repaired from Darwin several times, but each time it had broken down. Ambrose and I drove in the old Chev. truck as far as our swimming hole at Gulumbinni, and then walked on to a large and wide tidal creek that separated the two settlements. Usually there was a dug-out canoe on either side. On this occasion unfortunately both canoes were on the distant shore. What to do? It was either a case of swimming the creek or returning home, mission not accomplished. It was Ambrose who suggested we swim. I suppose it helped somewhat that the tide was neap and near its top so there was little flow in the water. We set off at a slow breast stroke chatting as we went. The conversation turned to an old Tiwi man who used to move between Snake Bay and Garden Point. He always wore a heavy bandage on one foot and walked with a bad limp. I took it for granted the foot was a result of leprosy. I mentioned this to Ambrose. 'Not leprosy,' replied Ambrose. 'He had part of it bitten off.' 'What bit it off?' was my next question. 'He never knew,' replied Ambrose. 'Maybe it was some sort of fish or shark or perhaps a crocodile, though a crocodile would have taken more, perhaps the lot!' Ambrose had a good sense of humour — perhaps a bit too realistic at times. My next anxious question was: 'And where did this occur?' 'Somewhere in this creek,' calmly replied Ambrose. My breast stroke developed another knot or two. Ambrose repaired the lighting plant at Snake Bay within an hour and we returned home, crossing the creek by canoe.

The girls did their share of the work — cooking bread, preparing meals, laundry work, needle work. As we said, the older girls looked after the little ones. Peter Brogan, who is still living at Garden Point, supervised the growing of tobacco leaf and irrigation. It was a considerable area that stretched towards the front beach. It was a painstaking work, down to inspecting each leaf for an

occasional, destructive grub. As the leaves matured, they were hung in a specially built kiln. This of course involved setting a fire in the pit below and sitting up all night making sure the heat was kept at the right temperature. When the leaves were at the right colour, they were stored away and eventually sold. Later we acquired a formula for spraying the leaf, an hydraulic press and detailed instructions on how to produce plug tobacco or 'nicky-nicky' as it was called. All this machinery and information came through the good services of the William Butler Tobacco Company. I got to know the son of the man who started the company, a young fellow called Bud Jenkins. Bud invited me to come down to Redfern and see how to process the leaf and how to turn it into 'nicky-nicky'. I think I was there for two weeks learning the process. So Garden Point became a registered tobacco factory under the direction of Uncle Peter and some younger helpers.

Jackie Burke ran the sawmill. This consisted of a large frame saw before breaking down the logs into flinchers, and a large circular saw for cutting the flinchers into the various timber sizes. Logging camps were established on various parts of the northern section of the island according to the type of timber required, whether for housing or for furniture. About this time when money became more available a new truck was purchased and was proudly cared for by Jackie Long. He kept this truck almost spotless for many years. It was used for bringing in the logs to the mill, carrying supplies from the supply boat, carting gravel from a spot on Melville Island not far from Nguiu Mission. Also on weekends it was used for transporting hunting groups, for bush trips, for swimming excursions to Gulumbinnie, our beautiful waterhole some seven miles away. This waterhole was spring fed, and was always flowing with crystal clear water. It was a most popular spot, often frequented by the children.

With the assistance of a skilled cabinet maker, Manlio Patrochi, the boys built a new school, a staff house, and made their own houses as they got married. They also made their own furniture. Some of the chairs they made are still found in various places.

Garden Point also boasted a dairy, the milking cows having been supplied by the English family from Malanda. Many of these cattle were donated by other Catholic families in the vicinity including the Daley family. Apart from the dairy there was also a piggery, which I have mentioned in another article in connection with crocodile tales.

I mentioned earlier the work of Sr Annunciata in providing music for the place. There was also another source of entertainment, namely movie pictures. Garden Point obtained these movies from MGM on condition that no charge was made and that they did not leave the island. They were physically old but good enough to be entertaining. There was a limited number of these films and the audience got to know every move. Still, they were a great source of entertainment. I remember sitting one evening next to Gerard, a little four year old. I think it was that old religious film 'The Sign of the Cross' which was being shown. At any rate there was in this particular film a young Roman soldier who had got himself attached to a small christian group, not out of religious motives, but because of his attachment to one of the group, a very beautiful christian girl. His motives were clear. Eventually, the christian group, the soldier among them, was rounded up and thrown into prison. The prison looked out on to the arena where the beautiful christian girl was tied to a pole. In front of her, in her defence, stood a christian slave, a very giant of a man, determined, sweating with tension and bristling with muscle. His task was to defend the girl against a raging, horned bull that was pawing the ground inside its stall, ready to be released to destroy the girl. The Roman soldier is shown looking in agony at the scene on the arena. He grips the prison bars and screams out in a voice that echoes throughout the arena, 'Christ, give me strength.' Little Gerard grabbed me by the arm and excitedly remarked, 'That's the first time that bugger been pray.' Prior to this remark I used to wonder how much such little ones got out of such films.

I have already mentioned, with a certain amount of pride, the fact that Aussie Rules was played with skill at Garden Point. They

had some source of competition among themselves and always played with great zest. Occasionally they took on the men from Bathurst Island. Because of the lack of numbers of suitable age they had to draw on some of the under-age to make up the team. The opposition, of course, was more mature, heavier, taller. Among them were such greats as David Kantilla, later a South Adelaide champ. Finding it impossible to outmark the opposition, the Garden Pointers developed a game that was fast, quick-off-the-ground recovery, fast passing, the accent definitely on speed. From my personal observations I believe their type of game has had a great influence on the type of football played in Darwin. Eventually the Garden Pointers were able to claim a victory over the men from Bathurst Island. Later their team, called Imalu, became famous in the Tiwi League Competition.

Sports Days occurred, as far as I remember, at least twice a year. With all the ordinary kinds of events such as running, high jump, long jump, pole vaulting, the pole vaulting was interesting because the poles were actually green saplings cut out from the nearby tree life. They proved heavy and cumbersome of course but did not diminish the determination to break world records. There were the usual novelty events. One of them proved amusing to me at all events, and that was climbing the greasy pole to collect a present placed on the top. On one of these occasions after many of the boys had struggled and failed to reach the top and claim the present, one of them eventually made it. Next it was the girls' turn. Of course the present for the girls had to be placed on top of the pole too. While someone searched for a ladder to deposit the present, one of the girls, a renowned tomboy, grabbed the present and quickly climbed the greasy pole and attached the prize.

One of the unusual novelty events was the donkey race. First the donkeys had to be rounded up. They were a wild lot and often of nuisance value. They occasionally invaded the bakery and ran off with loaves of bread left out to cool. They were also the centre of disputes between the girls and the boys. With all of this, I do believe they developed some sort of persecution complex especially

related to the children. They seemed to sense when persecution was imminent and headed for the scrub out of harm's way, making it very difficult to be rounded up. So on Sports Day the first task was to locate the donkeys and round them up. I can still see a very black little six year old going for his life through the low scrub to head off a mob of donkeys bent on retaining their freedom. Eventually all the animals were more or less lined up under the goal post at the far end of the football field, about ten of them in all. The riders looked very important as a wild mob of youngsters assembled behind them. The enthusiastic assembly in the background puzzled me until the word 'Go' was given and then I knew. The shouts increased, hands and sticks waved and the donkeys under this wild impetus made off kicking their hind legs wildly in the air. Some of them took a direct course down the football field, others veered off to right and left almost demolishing several of the urgers as they went. The riders, saddle-less and bridle-less, were helpless to do anything except kick and wriggle in an effort to steer the donkeys on a straight course down the football field. Towards the finish, one big black donkey known as Blackie had the race in hand. The rider evidently thought the same because he ceased struggling with his charge and began waving a victorious arm in the air. However, within ten yards of the winning post, Blackie baulked and refused to move another inch. It was only under the savage kicks of its rider and the wild whoops of his supporters that the black terror decided to move off, not in the direction of the winning post but sideways into the scrub. If I recall correctly, there was no winner to that race. All ended up in a confused, circling mass of donkeys and camp followers.

While on the subject of donkeys, Br Barrett once, on Christmas Day, decided to ride in on a donkey, dressed as Father Christmas with a large bag of presents. Brother was accustomed to using a donkey on his garden scuffler and was convinced, where donkeys were concerned, that he had all under control. All the children were gathered under the recreation hall waiting expectantly for Brother. There was a wild cheer as Brother, on the little donkey, appeared across the flat from out of the saw-mill shed. Brother indeed seemed

to be in complete control and the donkey willing. Everything went well until Father Christmas was some fifty yards from the children. The donkey at this stage no doubt smelt the enemy, and pushed both legs forward refusing to move one inch. Brother began confidently to deliver a few gentle kicks, urging his mount with 'Come on now, Biddy. Come on now!' Biddy remained as still as a statue. The kicking became more vigorous and the language a little more provocative: 'Come on now Biddy, you little — !!!' Still Biddy refused to budge. A situation was developing. Brother had an Irish temper. There were small children waiting expectantly, and also the Sisters! I thought it best to walk out from the group and rescue Father Christmas with his bag. He was somewhat flushed from the heavy Father Christmas clothing and perhaps still more from the heat of the moment. The children gave him an enthusiastic welcome as he arrived on foot. Biddy, relieved of her burden, retired to the saw-mill shed.

These, and many more similar stories, give some idea of the family spirit engendered in these children as they grew to adulthood in the happy atmosphere that was present at Garden Point. As I mentioned earlier, no matter where they now reside, they still proudly refer to themselves as the 'Garden Point People'.

* * * * *

Open Letter to Fr Brenden Walters msc Regarding Native Title

7 March 1998

[Fr Brenden Walters msc, who had spent some years at Port Keats and recently achieved qualifications in law, wrote a paper critical of the response of church people to questions of native title. The main gist of his argument I give in the second paragraph of the following open letter which I wrote as my response to his thesis. My letter has since become something of a statement of case in the eyes of colleagues of mine who are unhappy that we MSCs might seem to be espousing opposition to Native Title rather than being in the forefront of the fight to defend and consolidate the Aboriginal title to land so belatedly recognised by the High Court of Australia. Some Aboriginal people have found Brenden's letter offensive. For this reason, contrary to my previous intention, I have not reproduced it here, but have restricted myself to baldly stating the main line of his argument. Brenden's paper was published in the *Lightning Ridge Advocate*, and is also available, I am told (though I have been unable to find it), on the internet at www.gwb.com.au. This is linked to Pauline Hanson's page. Brenden is not responsible for the publication of his paper on the internet.]

Dear Brenden,

Thank you for showing me your paper 'The Catholic Church: Native Title v. Tribal Law'. I gladly accept your invitation to comment on it.

You are arguing that Church people are mistaken in the support they have given to 'native title' claims to land where the claimants are non-tribal, 'mixed-race' Aborigines. Your argument is that on tribal law, and also in the purport of the High Court Mabo judgment, only 'tribal people', i.e. not mixed-race people can enjoy rights to tribal land.

Your argument looks logical and cogent *prima facie*. I believe it is defective in the truth-value of its premises.

I imagine your legal interpretations are open to legal dispute. However, I wish to leave the legal considerations aside — bypassing them without concession, as we used to say in the Schools. I want to maintain that your propositions are *anthropologically* defective.

1. The clearest defect is in your statement 'Native title rights are vested only in the male person.' I realise you are quoting Top End Aboriginal elders, but their statement is a transmitted one and as such is subject to unconsciously injected interpretation.

a) Of recent years a lot of attention has been given by anthropologists and cultural workers to the previously much neglected field of Aboriginal women's rights.

b) There seems to have been operating amongst anthropologists and legal officers a bias towards *unilineal* descent patterns, such as are found in other parts of the world, especially in those parts like Africa, Polynesia and Papua New Guinea where many of our anthropological concepts and tools were developed.

— However, the Australian Aboriginal people have evolved so long in isolation from the rest of the world that they have developed quite idiosyncratic ways of doing things. Their style of leadership is very much their own, their manner of religious belief and observance, their ways of marriage and social control, their world-view, their manner of livelihood, their patterns of social organisation.

Either one should avoid the terms 'patrilineal', 'matrilineal' as too misleading, or, if one prefers still to use them, one must realise that they have to be used in expanded and correlated senses.

Thus the father passes rights in land both to his sons *and* his daughters. Children get certain rights also from their mothers. Typically the rights transmitted through father and mother are specifically different, but are complementary — often to the extent of being mutually dependent. Thus a man might 'own' a ceremony connected with his land, but he cannot perform it without the

cooperation of his mother's people who both prepare him for the ceremony and oversee its performance. In English terms, using a station analogy, the affines (mother's people) are said to be the 'managers'. The roles are reversed when the 'managers' in the first instance are performing one of their own ceremonies as 'owners'. This moiety type of interaction is intrinsic to much of Aboriginal social life. It is the case, for instance, amongst the Murinbata people whose tribal elders' opinion you are reporting. — 'Ownership' is a polyvalent term. It distorts the Aboriginal understanding of the term to confine it to its normal English meaning.

To say that 'Native title rights are vested only in the male person' is quite wrong.

One of the troubles is that people of European background often demand a degree of definition in the Aboriginal concepts and structures that is not present simply because the Aboriginal realities are much more subtle and fluid, and have operated successfully for so long in a great variety of circumstances precisely because they are so.

c) I recounted to you, Brenden, an instance in my own experience where a 'mixed-race' person was discriminated against by a tribal leader. In the area where conception was and is conceived in terms of spirit-children who enter the mother-to-be in cooperation with the father and so determine the personal 'dreaming' of the child, the old man said, 'How can such and such have a dreaming — his father was an Englishman!'

i) The statement must be interpreted. It was made in a political context of leadership contention. It must be noted that the mixed-race man in question was the recognised leader of a large group of home-land dwellers, mainly tribal, and a member of the Northern Land Council. — To what extent can we let our preconceived ideas redefine reality?

ii) It is typical of the Aboriginal way that there is a complementary way of tracking relationships. The 'skin' or section-subsection system is generally expressed in terms of

descent from the mother. It is significant that the mixed-race man in question placed great store on his 'skin'. It conferred on him an ideologically respectable right to membership in the Aboriginal society of which he was the recognised leader.

It should be noted that the 'skin' system has proved itself to be a remarkably flexible tool of social organisation. In the older days of multiple polygamous marriages, it provided a means of keeping track within a tangled web of relationships. It is always clear who the mother of a child is; paternity can be quite indistinct. In more modern times it has enabled traditional communities to fit white long-term visitors meaningfully into their structures of living.

One must take note also of Aboriginal beliefs regarding the role of a father in conception, especially where the ideology of spirit-children obtains. The father is more the formal tool of access or vehicle used by the spirit-child to enter the mother-to-be and cause new life to start within her. Stanner recounts the joy of a man whose wife gave birth while he had been away from home for three years. Whatever the physiological facts might have been, ideologically the child was clearly his. (I might note in passing that the standard Christian view of God inserting souls into fetuses at or soon after the moment of oval penetration has some fuzzy edges about it.)

This sort of structure has allowed Aboriginal people cope with the 'mixed-race' situation. If the mother is Aboriginal, then so are the children. One cannot pre-define social ideologies on the mere basis of genetic blood-stock rearing! This was the unfortunate fallacy behind all the legislation that preceded the 1967 referendum. Jokes about the official register of Aboriginal peoples as the 'Stud Book' were more revelatory than intended!

2. A second fallacy is to treat 'native law' as if it had the characteristics of Australian (white-man's) law. As a living reality it is fluid, hard to define and changing. Back before Cook it didn't

have to cope with the mixed-race situation — except presumably along the north coast where the Indonesian trepang fishermen called year by year, and that complication seems to have been handled without amiss. In modern times intermarriage of white and black has generated a different social scene. The Aboriginal people have gradually, almost imperceptibly, adapted their ideology of social belonging to cope with the new emerging situation. — On what basis would you as a white lawyer declare that the modern form of 'native law' is illegitimate?

We white people have been mesmerized by the concept of Aboriginal people being so connected with the land that it is an inalienable part of them. — Aboriginal people have shown themselves masters of this part of their destiny too. In *Nelen Yubu* #9 (1981:29-34) I recounted a remarkable incident of Aboriginal transference of *native* title to land, with all its conjoined ceremonies, songs and tjurunga. The people living at Lajamanu (Hooker Creek) are inhabiting land whose original owners had been driven off their country: their descendants live now at Wave Hill. Around 1980 the situation was regularised by means of a three-weeks ceremony in the course of which rights to the 'dreaming', and consequent obligations, were formally transmitted to the present Lajamanu residents by the former owners. This 'tribal' act was paralleled by an act of concession of title in 'government' fashion.

3. Finally, I wish to indicate two other quite relevant examples of the way 'native', Aboriginal conceptions are changing to cope with the emerging situation. Both examples refer to the extension of the 'dreaming' to non-Aboriginal inhabitants of Australia.

a) When planning was afoot in Alice Springs in 1986 for Pope John Paul II's visit, it was suggested that the local children be presented to the Pope. Some Aboriginal organisers from 'down south' objected to the inclusion of white children. It was the Aboriginal elders of the Alice Springs area who demanded that the white children be included because, having been conceived in

the Alice Springs area, they too partook of the local dreaming spirits.

b) During the recent Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne, the Aboriginal theologian, social and church leader, Revd Djiniyini Gondarra, made what I thought was an extraordinary statement, to the effect that *all* Australians share in the 'dreaming' of the land, especially those born here. The statement was made in one of the Conference workshops, and I had the opportunity to question Djiniyini publicly as to whether or not I had heard him correctly. He answered that I had. The Aborigines in fact are offering us non-Aborigines the extraordinarily rich gift of an invitation to share in their millennial spiritual heritage — if we can be big enough, and humble enough to accept it.

Brenden, I would like you to leave your musty legal tomes aside for a while and look at the great reality that we live in.

Martin Wilson msc

Meditation, Aboriginal style? (4)

Dan O'Donovan⁵

'Then Moses went up on the mountain and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it ... And Moses entered the cloud.' — Exodus 24, 15.

Meditation is an experience of totality as Sacred. It is a total experience, engaging the whole person: body, soul and mind. When we are quiet, and awakened, we can know this deeply. Peace fills us then, because we are tasting the sweet water of the Well, Truth.

But the presence of the Sacred (whom we call 'God') is also most mysterious. It is hard to speak about in words for two reasons.

The first reason is that God is other than us; other than his creation. 'All things were made through God's Word,' John tells us in his gospel, 'and without him was not anything made that was made.' (1, 3). Before all this creation, God alone is, forever. So, how can we speak about 'him' except in a roundabout way?

The second reason is that our understanding is so weak. And the words we have to use to describe things are just not enough. Neither our understanding nor our words are equal to this speaking about God.

These two reasons can never change. They will always remain true, because this is simply the way things are, in time and in eternity.

That is why we are told here that Moses entered into *the cloud* where God was. When the people asked him later what it was like, he would have said, Cloudy.

⁵Begun at Rishikesh, in the foothills of the Himalayas, this article was completed at Varanasi (Banaras). Both these centres of life are situated on the great River Ganges. The Ganges, Varanasi, Rishikesh — all three holy beyond compare to the Hindu. Dan is presently pursuing the eremetical life at Beagle Bay, near Broome WA.

That this is not just made-up, but would be rather the standard Israelite answer to such questions, might be shown from many Bible texts on the darkness of our human perception of the divine.

To give just two of the better-known:

'He made darkness his covering around him, his blanket thick clouds dark with water...' Psalm 18, 11.

'Upon my bed by night

I sought him whom my soul loves.

I sought him but found him not...' Song of songs, 3, 1.

By the grace of the One who has 'called you (in Christ Jesus) out of darkness into his marvellous light', (1 Peter 2, 9), we can now, however, become 'sharers of the divine nature' (2 Peter 1, 2). In our creaturely way, we can share in what God is. But, 'God is Light and in him there is no darkness.' (1 John 1, 5).

On earth, our experience of sharing in the divine nature always has a trace of loneliness, because we are, at this stage, 'away from the Lord: we walk by faith, not by sight.' (2 Corinthians, 5, 6).

Along with the picture of the cloud, there is the important picture of the cave: important because it fits in well with *dadirri*, as described by Miriam-Rose, and with the old Aboriginal understanding.

Both Moses and Elijah had intimate experiences of God when they were sitting in a cave.

The cave, we know, is a dark place. In this, it is like the cloud.

When he was on Mount Sinai, Moses thought it would be a good chance of asking God to let him understand him fully. The way he put it was, to let him see God's face.

God said, No, I can't ever do that. But if you stay here in this little cave, I will walk past you. I will shield you with my hand so you don't see my face. You will be able to see me from behind. Even God has no way of getting around those two reasons we have spoken about.

could not even say whether he was 'in the body or out of the body' during that time. Ask God, he added: 'God knows.'

That is why, to the people, when he came down, Moses seemed to be shining. The light of God's knowing and loving him went out from him, and the light of his knowing and loving God. For his part, he was not able to say anything whatever about it, apart from the words God had given him so say, which were all about the journey.

Now, this same 'Moses was very meek,' we are told in the Book of Numbers, 'more than anyone else on the face of the earth.' (12, 3) He had started off with a meekness for his people, (Exodus 2, 11) and for the sheep he was herding, (Exodus 3, 1). That meekness, or tender pity, spread out now, in a big way, to *everything*. There was nothing he did not have merciful pity for. It was as if he were mothering the world. And that was not easy. (Numbers 11, 12. See also Romans 8, 22; Galatians 4, 19).

ERRATA

Regrettably in *Nelen Yubu* no. 68 there were two omissions in the article 'Meditation, Aboriginal Style?' as follows:

p.2, line 9, after: ... the *horizontal* understanding.

ADD: The second story is sometimes called: the *vertical* understanding.

p.5, line 6, after: ... from one to ten.

ADD: Then start counting again. Do this for three or four rounds of ten.

From the Secretary's Desk. . .

At last we are on course again at NYMU. Our Editor is back on deck complete with pacemaker, to the relief of all his friends. I have begged him never to give us such a terrible fright again — but it *is* good to see him gracing the office, all smiles. . .

Fr John Leary msc has returned to the NT after quite a long spell at the monastery. He had undergone an operation for knee surgery, so we benefited by his enforced presence here, complete with stories of his experiences in the Territory over many years. It's always entertaining to have Fr John around. . .

As we go to press I learn that my daughter, Frances Calvert in Berlin, is having great success in Europe with her documentary *Cracks in the Mask*, a sequel to *Talking Broken*. I am losing count of the number of invitations she has received to screen her latest film, some of which were in such places as Tallinn in Estonia, Paris,

Amsterdam, Montreal Canada, and others. AIATSIS graciously screened *Cracks* in Canberra on 22 June with complimentary entry at the National Film and Sound Archive. And during NAIDOC Week it was also shown here on SBS — so it is certainly getting its share of attention! I had earlier mentioned her involvement with *Cracks in the Mask* in relation to the story of the Torres Strait Islanders' artefacts in *Nelen Yubu* no. 66. Needless to say we, her family and friends, are proud of her success in doing her bit for our traditional Australians. . .

The Blue Mountains of NSW were much loved by the Aborigines before the influx of the white man. They are full of sacred sites, cave markings; pristine pools in swift flowing creeks where traditional owners lived their lives out except for brief journeys down to the wide river in winter, or even across to the coast for those who were hardy.

At Wentworth Falls, near my home in the mountains, there is a high rocky plateau with a 360° view, which must have been a favourite resting ground for the Aborigines. It is full of scrape-holes where they used to sharpen their tools. These elongated, foot-long depressions in the rock surface are never far from deeper holes containing water, which would undoubtedly have held rainwater to cool their instruments as they worked.

On a cold and frosty night when the stars are hanging in the black sky like bright little balloons, I stand on the highest point of this magical place, listening to the nightcall of an owl, the busy scattering of a small creature in the grass at my feet; the wind in my hair. This is when I talk to the ancients who dwelt there in the Dreamtime; who left their marks and signs for me to see and to touch in this year of 1998.

Slightly below the pinnacle there are caves with timeworn outlines of hands, animal figures and objects full of meaning to them, still visible in the walls. To stroll along the wandering tracks or stand atop its windswept peak is to feel the presence of those long gone people who have left us their relics down the ages. We are grateful that they are now preserved for us who love to see and enjoy their heritage...

When I reached Leura by train from Sydney last week I was met by a barrage of sleet, sago-snow, and howling winds. It looks as if we are in for a fierce winter, but after the scorching summer we've just endured, overlapping almost into June, I think a lot of us mountain dwellers will be happy to settle into a drift of deep snow for a bit.

Best wishes to all,

Secretary Keren

years we will at last be building on the truth”². In spite of the Australian cynicism about politicians it must be admitted that such aspirations were a genuine commitment to the true and the good, because they were uttered in the face of widespread fear and hostility. The 1996 election showed how unpopular these aspirations were. In the massive overthrow of the government the argument of the Coalition on this issue was very effective: the government had favoured the rights of a small minority over against mainstream productive groups.

Moving to the second approach to spirituality felt so strongly by the Aborigines, did it have any effect on the judges? If we believe commentators, this spirituality was transposed to secular terms such as cultural identity. This term suggests Durkheim's anthropology whereby primal religion is a product of the need for social cohesion. This does not do justice to Aboriginal religion. Some of the judges, I believe, would have had sensitivity to the genuineness of Aboriginal religion. There is another aspect to this. The Aborigines' forthrightness about the presence of the Sacred in their land has made a dent in the armour of secularity of Australians – and that is what has awakened a mystical response especially among some of the younger generations.

Some may still object that these two approaches to spirituality fall far short of what Christians know and experience. That is true. However these two approaches are needed prior to Christian forms. Without these foundations the Christian forms lose their authentic vigour. As noted above, without commitment to what is true and good, Christian piety has a false otherworldliness. Without the poetic sensing of the mystery within creation, the whole sacramental and incarnate vision remains empty words. The rejection of these two approaches to spirituality was precisely the Nominalist error – to separate the divine order from the natural order. On the contrary the poem of the universe finds its deepest centre in Jesus. And the high poem of Christ as Word of the

²*In the Age of Mabo* Ed. B. Attwood (Allen & Unwin, Sydney. 1996) pp xxxii-xxxiii.

journey of missiology was picked up by many missionaries working in other lands but was not related to by the MSC Australian province as a whole: so it has not been applied to the situation in utilitarian Australia. Yet the missionary desire, surely, is to break through the cultural armour, to reawaken the hearts almost deadened by utilitarianism. The Mabo and Wik movement has wedded a poetic, mystical imagination with an authentic search for what is true and good, especially regarding those suffering in the margins of society. The imagination opens the heart, the authentic search promotes integrity. This wedding is the "underlay" for the kingdom.

the Alice Springs area, they too partook of the local dreaming spirits.

b) During the recent Reconciliation Convention in Melbourne, the Aboriginal theologian, social and church leader, Revd Djiniyini Gondarra, made what I thought was an extraordinary statement, to the effect that *all* Australians share in the 'dreaming' of the land, especially those born here. The statement was made in one of the Conference workshops, and I had the opportunity to question Djiniyini publicly as to whether or not I had heard him correctly. He answered that I had. The Aborigines in fact are offering us non-Aborigines the extraordinarily rich gift of an invitation to share in their millennial spiritual heritage — if we can be big enough, and humble enough to accept it.

Brenden, I would like you to leave your musty legal tomes aside for a while and look at the great reality that we live in.

Martin Wilson msc

enlightenment will arise... maybe slowly, maybe quite suddenly, a work entirely of grace responding to our desire.

Many Aboriginal sacred sites are caves.

The cave is a good place to stay. It offers shelter.

It was recognised ages ago by Aboriginal people that in the darkness of the cave there is an intensity of Presence and inner light.

It was often in caves that their religiously creative spirit felt most released. So, some caves are covered with art around the walls. Not just any sort of art: Wanjina, Ungud, Galeru, Rainbow Snake, people from a particular story, like the Wati Gudjara, Goanna men, all of whom have a profoundly religious meaning, become present in the cave through their paintings. There they continue to speak. That is why it is a ritual responsibility in Law to paint them over, every now and again, so that they won't fade.

Elijah 'came to a cave and camped there.'

God spoke to him very clearly: Don't be afraid. I am weak with you. only now, go back to your people. Do for them what I tell you: anoint a prophet to take your place, because life is passing and you can't go on forever. 'So he departed from there, and found Elisha.' (1 Kings 19, 19).

We come now, therefore, to our first question: what was it that kept Moses such a long time in communion with God in the cloud? What went on between them?

It was the God of Israel who kept Moses there. This gave him a chance of getting to *know Moses*.

That is what contemplation is about: being *known*, loved – with mind resting in the cave of the heart, it is the same thing, by 'the Spirit of God who fills the whole earth and holds all things together.' (Wisdom 1, 7. See also Colossians 1, 15-20). As God came to know him, so Moses came to know (love) God. Because that is the way it happens. And that is unspeakable. Up there, inside the cloud, 'he heard things that cannot be told, unspeakable,' as Paul was later to say of his own experience. (2 Corinthians 12, 3). He

Nelen Yubu

Elijah's experience also came to him after he had been in *dadirri-mood* for 'forty days and forty nights.' Or, one might say, for a long time:

'He arose, ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food for forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mount of God.' 1 Kings 19, 8.

Horeb is another name for *Sinai*.

The next verse tells us: 'He came to a cave, and camped there.' Like most caves, it was dark inside. For, the cave is full of emptiness, NOTHING. Is simply a readiness to receive. Like a coolamon.

In there, God showed himself to Elijah as small, quiet and weak. This surprised him, as he had always thought that God was only big and strong. So, 'Elijah wrapped his face in his coat, (a sign of religious fear at being close enough to God maybe to see God's face, and that would be the end of him), and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.'

What we have been speaking of, with Hesychasm, as 'the place of the heart,' Hindu Asia likes to call 'the *cave* of the heart' ('Hriday *guba*'). The *guba* (cave) is also the innermost part of the Hindu temple, as in our Bible language we say, 'the Holy of holies.' It is always kept dark, except for when it is lit up by oil-lamps for ceremony, named *arati*.

This reminds us of Paul's words that our body is like a temple, full of the spiritual presence of God (1 Corinthians 3, 16; 6, 19).

There, in the middle of that temple is 'the cave of the heart,' a place of darkness and awful mystery. 'Who can understand it?', asks Jeremiah the prophet, who knew a lot about the heart, (Jeremiah 17, 9): its evil when it is un-natural or stony; its goodness when it is its natural self after being touched and softened by messianic grace, (Jeremiah 31, 33; and see Ezekiel, 36, 26).

Though revelation can come to us in many different ways, as God pleases, most often it happens when we are quiet and at rest in the cave of the heart. We can go in there any time we like, and just stay listening, waiting. In that dark, and out of the dark,