

Editorial

This is rather an historical issue for us: the first from NYMU's new quarters in the old St Paul's National Seminary where we are one of the constitutive elements of Chevalier Resource Centre which has arisen, phoenix-like, from the seminary ashes. I provide further details in my short paper, 'NYMU and Chevalier Resource Centre'. Secretary Keren illustrates in her own particular way the actual process of moving.

Our articles cover quite a range of Australia. Dan O'Donovan writes from his station in the west Kimberley, from where he is able to scan the whole of the continent, indeed the whole of the Christian spiritual tradition with sharp flashes of insight. Elsie Heiss writes as a Sydney-sider: she describes the concern she displayed before the pope and bishops in the recent Synod of Oceania. Don Miller, an Anglican pastor, describes the hard slog of ministering the gospel in the semi-desert middle of West Australia, in a dry post-revival spiritual climate. At the other end of the continent we have the Torres Strait Islanders attempting to re-connect with their distinctive culture of masks: Frances Calvert talks with Peter Malone about her documentary film on the subject. And back in the Top End John Leary reminisces further about his experiences on the Tiwi Islands back in '53.

— Martin Wilson msc
Editor

NYMU and Chevalier Resource Centre

NELEN YUBU Missiological Unit has recently undergone a double transformation. It has moved into new quarters at Kensington and become part of a new institution.

St Paul's National Seminary for mature-aged candidates for the priesthood closed its doors last year after 31 years of service to the church in Australia: it has prepared 286 men for the priesthood, the last four of them even now awaiting proximate ordination back in their respective dioceses.

Various proposals were canvassed for the use of the vacated buildings, and the one that won through was to set up an MSC venture now called the Chevalier Resource Centre. It is to be a resource centre for theology, spirituality and mission. Some of St Paul's National Seminary staff have continued on within the CRC:

- Barry Brundell: *scripture, theology & related studies*: research, lectures and workshops for beginners and those seeking updating. Barry is superior of the MSC community and director of the institution. He has also taken over from Peter Malone (now in London, vide footnote on p.9) the editorship of *Compass* — which itself has become a responsibility of CRC.
- Ed Travers: retreats for clergy, religious and laity, spiritual accompaniment, workshops.
- Frank Fletcher: *spirituality in Australia*: Aboriginal and other — research and ministry.
- Tony Caruana: library, provincial archivist, business manager.

Some new members are caring for special areas of apostolic endeavour:

- Dr/Br Martin Kelly: *religion and medicine*: research, lectures and workshops.
- Gerard McCormick: *liturgy and liturgical music*: research, workshops, assistance for liturgical communities.

- John Frith: pastoral care and counselling, hospitality for groups using the Centre's facilities.

And finally, *Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit*, with a brief for missiological research and the organisation, maybe, of workshops for missionaries down on leave. The Unit will work particularly in cooperation with Frank Fletcher's Spirituality in Australia endeavours.

The immediate and practical advantage of the new arrangement for NYMU is that we have finally got a spacious area to be set up and work in. The best we have ever had!

We plan, of course, to continue the production of *Nelen Yubu*. Our biggest obstacle now is to persuade at least some of you readers to also become *writers*!

We hope to expand our publication activities in a somewhat lateral fashion: inexpensive desktop publishing of collections of papers, such as we did last year of Kevin McKelson's series of *Nelen Yubu* articles. At the moment we are preparing a collection of personal memoirs jotted down by Peter Malone under the enigmatic but functional title of *Names*.

CRC plans to do some work in the area of theological updating through workshops. The hope is that these could be made pleasant experiences, drawing upon the rich environment that Sydney offers. Not too heavy, not too light... In the same spirit NYMU hopes to offer a short summer-time experience for missionary personnel down on leave: a chance to catch up on recent developments in missiology, theoretical and practical.

Martin Wilson msc

SYNOD FOR OCEANIA

Intervention by Mrs Elsie Heiss, Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Archdiocese of Sydney 27th of November 1998

HOLY Father, my Brothers and Sisters in Christ. Thank you, Holy Father, for inviting me here to the Synod, as an Aboriginal representative and a woman.

The responses to the *Lineamenta* demonstrate that Oceania is characterised by many people with distinctive cultures. In some countries the indigenous people have become a minority group in the national society, like the Aborigines in Australia and the Maoris in New Zealand. (*Instrumentum Laboris II*)

I would like to pose a question, on why the Indigenous representation from the Aboriginal Catholics in Australia is so small? We may be a minority group, but a large Catholic group.

I would like to begin with a quote from our Aboriginal Deacon, Boniface Perdjert:

Deep down we Aborigines are a religious people. We did not have many material goods, but we were rich with spiritual goods. It was this strong religious side that made us. It gave us our identity, our dignity, our self assurance. My people existed in Australia thousands of years before Abraham. In all that time, God was with my people. He worked through their culture. He was preparing us for the day when we would see features of Aborigines in the image of His Son.

Among Christians there are those who still regard Aboriginal religion as a primitive mass of superstition, magic sorcery and fantasy. To this I would pose the question, who is fantasising? While inculturation is clearly an acceptable term within our church's society, we bring to the church our spiritual and cultural gifts, which can only enrich the church even more.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people celebrate the sacraments of the church in a way that is culturally appropriate, but we do not change the Mass, despite the fact that some people still believe that we do that magic and sorcery.

The Sacraments such as Baptism, Communion, Confirmation, Marriage and Burial are all celebrated with a celebrant of the church. We do, however, add our special smoking purification ceremony, and carefully selected artefacts and symbols to strengthen our culture and identity. In Sydney in 1995 at the beatification of Mary MacKillop, the Holy Father himself was part of a purification smoking ceremony.

The Aboriginal Catholic Ministry is an official ministry of the archdiocese of Sydney. It is supported financially for Aboriginals by Aboriginals. We support people in gaols, hospitals, community welfare. Here I feel I must extend my gratitude to the Society of St Vincent de Paul who are a great support to us in our work.

Our National Council (NATSICC) meets twice a year at the bishops conference. Our State Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Catholic Council meets to share our faith in spiritual gatherings. We struggle to overcome all the barriers that face us. We ask simply for respect of our culture and acknowledgment of our identity. At the present time in Sydney we have people working on Aboriginal languages so that our children may learn what we were forbidden to learn. To know your ancestors is to know your history; to know your history is to know where you have come from. We have a strong link to our ancestors. This is our Dreaming Past and Future.

In the words of Mafi Williams:

I thank our Elders for their words of wisdom that have led us through crises of identity, that their words can be passed on to our Children's children.

Gwandalan, Burragah, Tamba (Peace in our meeting place).

Thank you.

Ullula

A North West Ministry to the Mardu People

Don Miller¹

In 1982 a revival swept through Aboriginal people of the desert regions of Western Australia, a fire which had begun on Elcho Island in the Northern Territory.

LATE in that year I came as the rector of the vast parish of North Eastern Goldfields, which covered most of the area of the revival in WA. Services were held in Wiluna once a month. Probably at least 75% of the adult Aboriginal people of the town had recently made a commitment to Christ. It was the sort of situation that we dream and pray about as Christians. So, as part of my visits, I was able to observe what was going on, and I got to know well the key leaders of this 'Crusade', as it was called.

Within five or six years almost all of the effects of the revival in Wiluna had been dissipated. This had happened not because the Aboriginal evangelist's gospel had been defective; they had faithfully presented the gospel that had been given to them. But, although the crusade brought a spiritual revival to the people, it had provided little help for their day by day living in their new context. The Mardu people of Wiluna were amongst the last people in Australia to come out of the bush. There are people as young as their early twenties who were born as nomads. Living as fringe dwellers in a small town, there was little attraction other than the pub. It was in

¹The Rev'd Don Miller is an Anglican pastor within the Anglican diocese of North West Australia - centered on Geraldton WA. The article is taken from *North West Network*, a publication of the diocese (Nov. 1997, no.41), a copy of which was sent to us by Bishop Anthony Nichols (onetime principal of Nungalinga College, Darwin).

this rocky ground that the seed withered, and it was heartbreaking to see.

Overcoming this problem of a nomadic desert people being locked into a white urban environment became a very real challenge. The Uniting Church were aware of the need, but did not feel that they were able to respond. Government and semi-government agencies didn't seem interested. I then had the opportunity of buying Ullula, a 120,000ha sheep station, 70km from Wiluna. In 1988 I moved here with the encouragement and support of Bishop Muston, with the challenge of seeing how Jesus' words, 'I have come that you might have life — life in all its fulness...' might have meaning for these people.

One of the 4 or 5 "family" groups from Wiluna now call Ullula home. This family group would number about 100 people, of whom 30 or so would be at Ullula at any one time. This family was the very last of the nomads. The station provided some ready made infrastructure, basic shearers' quarters, water, and a 30 by 40km area in which to hunt and go bush.

Much of my work over the last nine years has gone into being a go-between for the people and the various government departments that greatly impinge upon their lives — Social Security, Ministry of Justice, Welfare, ATSIIC etc.; improving facilities — upgrading the living quarters, providing a bus for going into town or on trips, and to go bush; providing employment opportunities, starting a school and a schoolteacher, running a shop. Over the years I have moved from being the boss of Ullula to being a part of this Mardu family.

Much of the people's problem has centred around loss of purpose and not knowing what to do with time. Part of the answer has been found in having community based rather than personal based resources. Starting the school, which involves 0-25 year olds, has been a help. As well we have a Community Development Employment Program ('working for the dole') administered by ATSIIC. We have been greatly encouraged this year by two volunteers from parishes in Perth. One, an early retiree, has been

acting as a works manager for our CDEP project, and the other, a 30 year old teacher, gave up a secure job in Perth, for some partial funding from Family and Children's Services here. Both have made a very noticeable contribution in breaking the tyranny of boredom.

After nine years, one of the ways of gauging what Ullula has achieved is by looking at the diminishing impact that alcohol has on the people here. Before they came here virtually all of the people were living under the immediate influence of alcohol most of the time. Now, this is limited usually at most to a binge in town for one or two days a week. The rest of time is taken up with a normal sort of living.

Now that life has become more normal, the task that confronts us is to rekindle the spiritual flame that has seemingly gone out. These people find it almost impossible to understand denominational jargon and they abhor discussions where issues are analysed, which includes most western style sermons and bible studies, as well as more secular meetings and committees. The challenge is to retell the gospel as a 'yarn', just relating the Biblical story as it actually happened, a medium that they enjoy. We need to find appropriate ways of using other mediums such as music, dance and drama too.

The support of the National Home Mission Fund has been vital in the ministry of Ullula. The yearly expenses are not more than \$50,000, which is very minimal for an enterprise of this magnitude. The station itself makes a major contribution to this. But we are limited to running a maximum of about 2,000 sheep. Any more than this would take away too much time from working with people. NHM is the only major benefactor that we have in this age of smaller government and decreased resources for ATSIC. Already this year we have lost a year from my part-time contract with the Ministry of Justice because of restrictions in their budget. Our only other income comes from a small profit that we make from our shop and the sale of kangaroo tails! This type of budget makes it very difficult to finance expenditure on major capital items. Our

Holden ute which was provided by the diocese, has travelled 200,000 km on rough dirt roads and is literally falling to bits. It urgently needs replacing.

We are grateful for the support that we have received in the past. We also give thanks to our Father for His encouragement and guidance over these past nine years. □

Compass. A Review of Topical Theology

(formerly *Compass Theology Review*)

is an Australian quarterly publication that has provided intellectual stimulation and nourishment since the immediate post-Vatican II days.

It aims to serve the Church by fostering quality reflection and debate, being informative and thought-provoking, and thereby assisting its readers in their personal and communal efforts to charter a course through the many currents of theological opinion that they encounter. It is a popular journal among the fast-growing crowd of Catholics and others in this country and beyond who are interested in current theological developments.

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Peter Malone Interviews Frances Calvert

The following interview with film-maker Frances Calvert was recorded after the Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane film festivals of 1997 by Peter Malone.¹ *Cracks in the Mask* documents the fate of Torres Strait turtleshell masks and artefacts in European museums and follows the journey of Torres Strait Islander Ephraim Bani and his wife to the great museums of Europe where their cultural heritage lies. The film cleverly reveals why Western museums find it so difficult to deal with living claimants to their collections.

Since its release, the film has travelled to many festivals worldwide including Munich, Berlin, Cork, Chicago, Montreal, Taiwan and Agenda 21 and has gained three awards. Thanks to EZEFE, the film's German distributor, it has been widely shown in Germany, where Frances Calvert lives and works, arousing a lively debate. In October 1998 a major podium discussion in Berlin included the director of one of the museums featured in the film. As part of his response, he pledged to oversee personally any request made by an Australian museum, to borrow Torres Strait objects. The film was also featured in Berlin's famous *Long Night of the Museums* in January 1999. In Australia *Cracks in the Mask* is distributed on video by Ronin Films, PO Box 1008, Civic Square, Canberra, ACT 2601. It has been shown on SBS.

Frances Calvert's first film, *Talking Broken* (1990), also dealt with the Torres Strait Islands — a retrospective of the Haddon anthropological expedition from Cambridge in 1898.

- **Peter:** *Why has the film appealed to Australian audiences?*

Frances: I'm very interested in the way Australian audiences have responded to my film. Most people have concentrated on the content for its strong political message of repatriation, i.e. why are these artefacts not back here in Australia? How can people try to negotiate to get them back? Personally, I've always been rather sceptical about the possibility of their return, especially of those

¹ Peter Malone msc, now resident in London as president of the International Catholic Organisation for Cinema and Audiovisual (OCIC), interviewed Frances Calvert when she was in Australia for the 1997 Sydney Film Festival. It is the editor's privilege to note that Frances is our Secretary's daughter.

objects classified as art. The screenings I had with students at various institutions showed me how progressive and sensitive they are to the wider issues of Museum Studies. Naturally, in Australia at this time we are highly sensitive to the rights of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, from land rights to art.

- *This response would be quite different from the appeal to Germans that would lead to awards at Berlin?*

Well, German audiences have responded very emotionally to Ephraim's sense of loss and they often confess to a feeling of guilt about colonial collection. However, they also look at the second level of the film, at my attempt to offer some rather avant-garde reflections upon museums as such. The film was screened in the very museum where I filmed in Berlin, and a conference was actually convened to discuss the way the museum appears to the public and some of the problems they have in dealing with visitors from the Pacific. In the film, the Curator speaks almost patronisingly to the Torres Strait Islander protagonist about skulls and headhunting as if he didn't know! I think that Europeans see Torres Strait Islanders as sad cases of small indigenous minorities, somewhat marginalised, having lost all their material culture and now wanting to reclaim it after years of neglect.

- *Was that the appeal of the Torres Strait Islanders for yourself in making Talking Broken as well as Cracks in the Mask?*

Yes, my films are about the thorny question of why a white person makes a film about Torres Strait Islanders and Aborigines! It's a very sensitive issue in Australia. I doubt that Germans would deeply question how a white person looks at black people. I did not want to make a film about Torres Strait art, a normal television documentary, say; I always knew that my films involved collaboration. In fact, Ephraim Bani, the Torres Strait Islander in the film, felt free enough to act exactly as he wanted to and to say what he wanted. He knew the whole time that my interest was in

museums and that he could direct his part of the film as he wanted. Naturally, I researched which museums had the greatest collections of Torres Strait Island artefacts and I got to know their curators, asked for filming permission and so on. But the interviews are all straight, there are no set-ups, there are no retakes.

And why I came to Torres Strait? It's an old story. I was helping a German film-maker with his research in northern Australia and I wondered who these people with fuzzy hair were? I think a lot of Australians — this was the mid-80s — didn't realise how Torres Strait Islanders differ from Aborigines. I think a lot of people still don't know what Melanesian art means. So the films gradually grew out of this, about not really knowing a lot about one's own country's indigenous minorities. Then when I went there and returned many times, people said to me: 'Tell this story'. There was a great longing to have their story known, and also a longing to see at first hand objects which they knew existed, but which they also knew had been lost from the islands.

I find that in Australia people use very strong verbs about this loss. They say 'stolen', 'plundered', 'robbed'. While this certainly happened in some cases, we're not necessarily talking about wholesale plunder. Anthropologists and others collected assiduously and sometimes paid for their objects. But, in a sense, what does it matter today if, say, there's a receipt for five pounds in the records of Cambridge Museum?

I think the real sadness is the gradual loss over the years and, especially, the fact that people stopped making those beautiful, elaborate turtle-shell masks. The islanders would like to revive their art, and as they are now allowed to catch turtles, they could use turtle shell again. There's one artist working there, doing scrimshaw work on turtle shell, in fact using the catalogue of black and white photographs from the 1898 Haddon Collection for his inspiration. I don't know when people stopped making the masks, but it seems to be somewhere in the 1920s. As a result of missionary activity there wasn't the same demand for elaborate ceremonies. After all, making

a 6 or 7 foot long headdress — the longest is a 7 foot crocodile — moulding the turtle shell in hot water, sewing the pieces together, is a lot of work. There is still fantastic dancing in Torres Strait, but now you see decoration made not out of turtle shell but rather out of cardboard, fretwork or wooden nose-clips.

▪ *How does Talking Broken connect with Cracks in the Mask?*

My first film, *Talking Broken*, was released in 1990. It hasn't the same linear argument as *Cracks in the Mask*; it's much more of a mosaic. The theme is social change and the question was always: how do Torres Strait Islanders see their development and their future in a First World country in view of the fact that they are Melanesians, and see themselves as separate from Australian Aborigines and Papuans? I interviewed countless people and became friends with many. *Talking Broken* is about this encounter and the way they constructed their identity.

▪ *In Cracks in the Mask you began with your own voice-over. You sounded as if you were on a quest. Then, afterwards, for the bulk of the film, Ephraim Bani and his wife were on their quest. What was your quest? The museum quest?*

I knew that my quest was not to find Torres Strait art and to hold it up to them saying: 'Look, isn't this beautiful?' That wouldn't have been fair. I felt, as an Australian who lives in Europe — and I say this in the commentary — that I have access to so many museums. I could study a thousand different cultures in all the ethnographic museums if I wanted to, but I ask myself: Why? I think it's much more important to say, 'When we go into those museums, how do we look at this material? What's going on in our heads?' We can't ever hope to imagine what those people felt, the people who made these things, or even to understand how they feel about how they're represented.

I wanted to cast a more philosophical light on museums as such. I've met so many people in Europe who don't reflect. They say, 'Aren't we lucky to have all this stuff?' And I say, 'Well, do you understand it? Does it mean anything? When was the last time you went to an ethnographic museum?' So the film is about people making other people's heritage into their own commodities.

▪ *Ephraim and his quest?*

He was always working on this film. I showed him photos of the new collections I'd seen, and he kept saying, 'It's wonderful that we were the subject of a major expedition in 1898, because a lot has remained, thank goodness, and we have been closely studied. But what good has it done us? We don't have any of this stuff. We haven't had any access to it. Of course it's wonderful that we can travel over there, but not many Islanders can do so.' He confided to me before he left Australia that he felt that the force of his personality and his knowledge would somehow convince the curators to look kindly upon his longing to have things back. However, during the trip he said to me once, 'I don't even have the language to talk to these people, we are not even speaking the same idiom, we're not on the same wavelength. All I can do is be nice and grateful that they've allowed us to come in between 9.00 and 5.00. The debate has not even begun.'

▪ *There was quite a range of responses from the curators.*

I especially chose elements of each encounter that reflected something different. I thought there was a certain similarity among the British curators — very friendly, very welcoming, very open, but basically just showing him the stuff.

▪ *Speaking of 'stuff', the Scots commentator had a great deal to say about 'stuff'.*

I think Charles Hunt has something very significant to say. Some people may think he's eccentric in the film, but I chose him because he has some very interesting ideas about representation in museum displays. He says in the film, 'Whatever happens in a museum

doesn't happen because people are there; it happens because the objects are there.' And when you think about it, they are just bits of stuff: feathers, grass, whatever. He says the Torres Strait Islanders have a very close relationship to their 'stuff'. It is an unmediated relationship. Hunt says Europeans got hung up on words. We started analysing and cataloguing and classifying and we lost that direct relationship with 'stuff'. Maybe museums are the thin silken cord that tie us back to a time when we had a relationship to stuff. He means not having to verbalise what it is, but just knowing. He asks, 'How can we in the west try to say something about that in our exhibits?' And so places words in his glass cases together with objects.

- *His approach was a contrast to the woman who commanded Ephraim, off-screen, 'Don't touch the exhibits'.*

She was just the woman who brings the material in and out, but she certainly felt she was in authority.

- *That sequence had a great impact on the audience. It seemed to crystallise a lot of their thinking and emotions about Ephraim's quest and the treatment he receives.*

It was not a set-up and, in a way, illustrates the point that documentary film can sometimes reveal how truth is stranger than fiction. That remark summed up all my efforts to gain access to museum collections. I had had some difficulty getting access to the British Museum's collection and I was very relieved when the filming fee of two hundred pounds an hour was finally waived, as they said, 'If Ephraim's people hadn't made this stuff, we wouldn't have it'. I thought that was a good enough excuse.

- *Another point you make, as do the curators and even Ephraim himself, is that the artefacts have moved from*

being part of the heritage to being considered as part of world art. And who has rights to this art?

In Australia we do not seem to be buying a lot on the world market. Either we are not rich enough or not yet so interested in this type of art. We are not seen in the same light as a country like the United States which has a huge market thirsty for new objects. And art theft from museums does occur. I didn't have time in the film to go deeply into this question of art theft, but we know it's been happening for a long time, especially in Eastern European museums before 1989. We don't know how many generations will elapse before such art reappears, if ever. In my opinion, this weakens museums' arguments for holding on to their collections. So I wanted to say that, ironically, the emotional arguments about the Torres Strait Islanders having a legitimate right to see this material, or to have it back, scarcely count when one considers that these objects are now regarded as art. They are now collateral, commodities, and they will go on being passed from hand to hand for huge sums of money.

I often tried to find out what people thought a turtle-shell mask, say, might sell for. I heard of one magnificent example that was estimated at 250,000 Swiss francs. This is big bickies. The Australian Museum would not be in a position, I'm sure, to buy back one mask for a quarter of a million. Or to set up a museum on one of the Torres Strait islands.

■ *Ephraim and his background?*

I always knew that Ephraim knew more than anyone else about his stories and traditions. He comes from the western islands of the Torres Strait. I doubt that his use of the word 'king' — 'I am descended from the King Bari' — means the same as in our culture, but there is a strong sense about him of being a leader. He received an education, went to Brisbane University, started an MA there and then he went to Canada to study how to describe one's own language, with a view to creating a dictionary of his language, which he did. I've met other Islanders who have gone to University, but I

must say there's something very impressive about Ephraim's knowledge. He really does know his traditions.

- *His reading from his diary was certainly a very effective way of structuring the journey.*

Yes, his daily writing up of his diary caught my attention. I interviewed him at length at the end of the shoot about his reactions. However, I realised that he hadn't really had enough time to mull over it thoroughly, so I left it for about six months. When we later assembled a rough cut of the film, I rang him up and invited him back to Berlin. He liked the rough cut and used his diary to write and record a voice-over. Again, it's not a set-up. I think it is probably one of the most philosophical Australian indigenous voices you've ever heard.

- *Very articulate and a strong presence. Somebody remarked that the usual thing is for Europeans to come out to the Pacific, but this time it was the Pacific going to Europe and that was a different mindset for us to watch.*

Yes, I think it is time we heard thoughts from the people actually affected by it.

- *Your musical score was distinctive.*

It's very new music. I didn't want to use any classical music and I don't believe that the whole of the soundtrack should be Torres Strait songs because that's not our culture. We might merely find it 'exotic'. I wanted to create tension throughout the film along the lines of 'Who's scrutinizing whom?' I wanted the music to work in an ironic way. I punctuated the film with recurring scenes of masks that comment by their mere presence, and for these I used music composed by two Australian friends, Brett Dean and Simon Hunt. I also took John Cage, and I used a percussion piece by Edgar Varèse for the finale. It is powerful because it's not bombastic. I also decided not to use the wax cylinder chants from 1898 under Haddon's film, for the same reason that I didn't explain what the masks meant. Mine is not a 'show and tell' film. Those chants mean

something specific to Torres Strait Islanders. So I used western music instead, to reflect our different cultural points of view.

- *You mentioned that you went bankrupt blowing the film up to 35mm. It looks beautiful, especially the photography of the pieces themselves.*

That was a conscious decision. My cameraman did not know about Torres Strait, but after a while he kept saying, 'But this is fantastic! These objects are so beautiful.' He sensed how sadly lost they were to public gaze and he wanted to do justice to them. So he devoted all the time he could to filming them. This was especially effective in the British Museum as we were not allowed to touch, so he decided to give them movement and beauty by using dimmers rather than the bright lights you use for an interview. I hope that the aesthetics of the film will persuade some Australian museums to mount an exhibition one day. It's only they who can bring them out to Australia. And of course the costs are astronomical.

- *The lighting reminds us of paintings.*

I had made the intellectual decision to present these artefacts as art, because I think a western viewer does so. In the interviews, objects are removed from boxes and turned over and talked about and they go in and out of focus and the style is much more *verité*: and this shows Ephraim's direct connection to them. I felt all this would challenge the western viewer to say, 'But this is art!' The next step was to listen to curators talking about museums and, like Jacques Hainard, the museum director in Neuchâtel; to question what we see when we look at all these objects. Jacques Hainard poses startling ideas such as whether we 'need' other people's heritage, or does keeping their objects give us a good conscience in case their culture disappears? We have all their material culture in our storerooms.

Such extreme, almost surrealistic ways of regarding museum collections were the kind of challenges that made the film an experience.

— Peter Malone

OUT BUSH IN THE NT

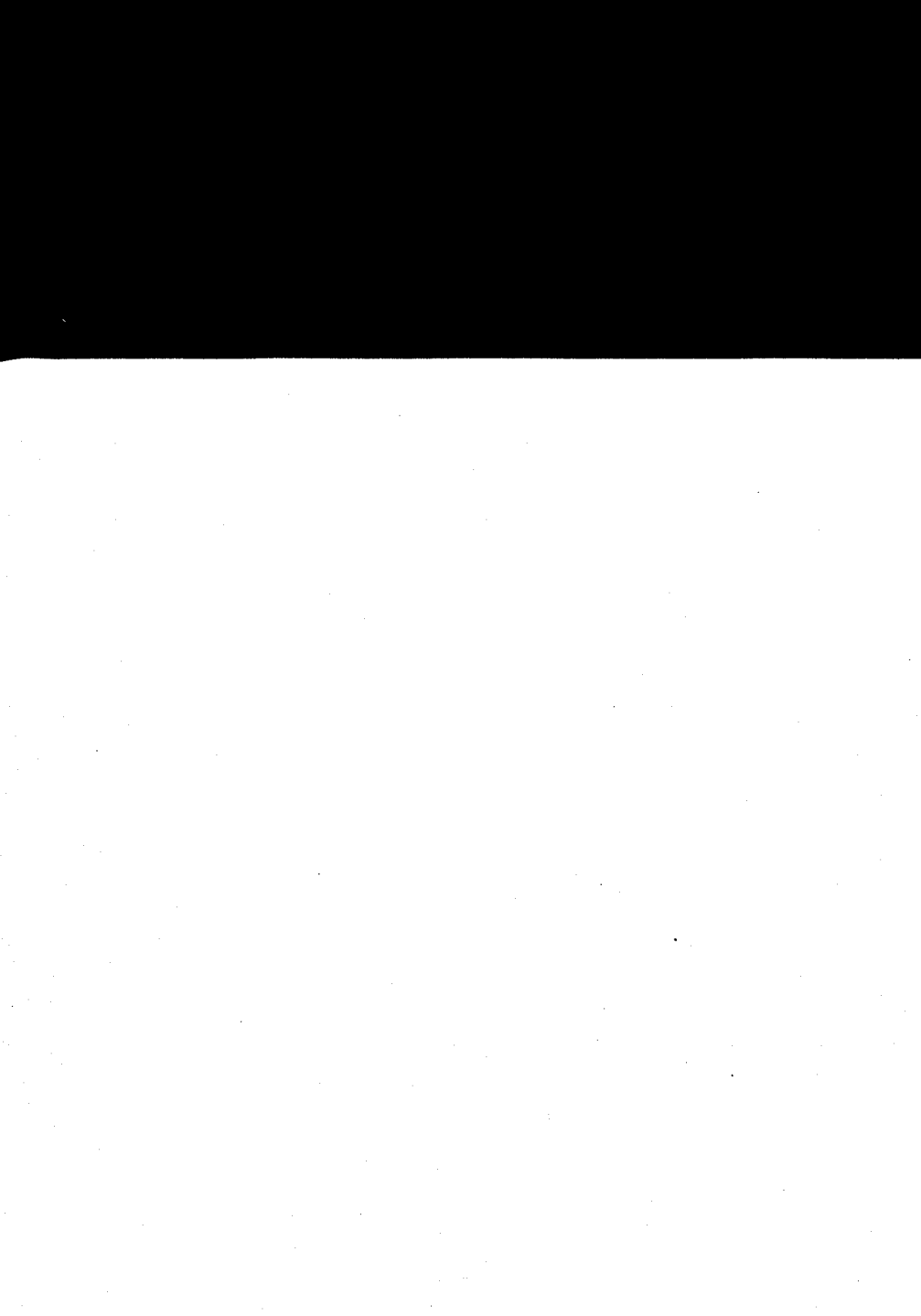
Baptism, Easter Ceremonies, Last Rites

John Leary msc¹

I DID my first Baptism in the missions on 1 April 1953. Benny, a Melville Island boy who had worked about the mission since its beginning, came in with word that two old women were in a camp at the end of the airstrip and wanted to be baptized. I asked Sr Annunciata to go across and see how they were as regards health and dispositions, and if all was right to give them some instruction. She told me they were very old and weak and definitely wanted baptism. I went across armed with stole and baptismal water. After some time I found my way through all the obstacles and smells of dogs — dingo breed — and discovered the two old women crouching in the sand under some pieces of iron. Never had I seen humans so frighteningly thin. Their arms were as slim as broom handles and their withered, parchment-like skin was stretched tightly over every bone. They were too thin and weak to walk. They spoke only a word or two of English.

I made the sign of the cross, went through the action of pouring the water, and looked to Heaven. 'Kwa' (yes), they cried, made the sign of the cross and pointed to Heaven. 'Kwa, baptism, we be Catholic.' I could do very little in the way of instruction. I walked across to one, held her head backwards and sideways and poured the water: 'Therese, ego te baptizo in nomine. . .' Therese and Mary. I smile now as I think of their names and the two old women — they seemed so incongruous. Yet Baptism has lifted them up to Mary and Therese. What a change will soon be theirs! In place of the squalor,

¹ Fr John Leary msc is now stationed in Darwin at the Bishop's House. He is Episcopal Vicar for the Aboriginal Apostolate. In earlier numbers of *Nelen Yubu* he recounted some of his experiences with the people since he first came to Northern Territory in 1953.



home' — a few sheets of tin and brambles. The boys said the *Confiteor*, I called on the Holy Family to drive out all power of the evil one, by the imposition of my priestly hands and the invocation of 'Mary, St Joseph, all the angels and archangels, patriarchs, prophets, confessors, virgins and all the saints' — Mary, the newly baptized, was associated with them now. I finished anointing about eleven o'clock.

I returned to the boys who had been helping me build a shelter for the goats. At 12.15pm we heard the high-pitched wail of the women. 'Old lady dead now, Father,' said one of the boys. We knelt down and said three *Hail Marys* for Mary. I sent one of the boys up to see how things were. He returned and confirmed the fact that she had died. She had both her hands over the medal on her breast when death came.

The wind and rain which had continued over the past few days seemed to increase in intensity. I decided we would have the funeral whenever a break came in the weather. The break came about four o'clock. The women wrapped the body in paperbark. I arranged things in the church while Brother went up in the lorry. He took a blanket to wrap round the body which was then placed on the tail-board and put on the lorry. When they arrived at the chapel the board was placed on two forms and a sheet draped over the lot. Mary got all the Church had to give her. As we left the chapel the weather again looked very threatening, so the Sisters and girls did not come. I removed my habit and, armed with ritual and umbrella, boarded the truck. We then drove the short distance to our little cemetery. When it came to lowering the body it was discovered that the paperbark had made the shroud too long; consequently, two boys had to hop down and lengthen the grave. Rain came on just as we were leaving the cemetery.

On 7 April 1953 at about 9.00am, I went down to Bathurst Island in the *Quail* with Sr Annunciata and four crew boys. We had to pick up Mrs Thecla Brogan and her newly born baby. I also had a poisoned arm and wanted Sr Marietta, a trained nurse, to have a

look at it — just a quick job. As things turned out the job was not so quick. Even on the way down my arm was getting worse: a big red mark stretching from the elbow up near the armpit and rather severe swelling. Sister put me to bed and started the treatment: injections, poultices and bathing. I was in bed till Saturday. A great deal of matter came from the arm each time she dressed it, a lot of hard cores too. At one stage there was a blockage. Sister pressed here and there until suddenly there was a whizz and a core hit the wall about two yards away — then out came the matter again. My temperature on several occasions was just under 103 degrees.

While in bed I was often amused at the chatter, everlasting chatter, that went on in the vicinity of my window. The camp was just across the way and I heard everything that went on there, the family squabbles, etc. The people spoke little English and all the conversation carried on among themselves was, of course, in their own tongue. One evening towards six o'clock, I heard an argument start up in the camp between a husband and wife. The wife's voice grew louder and higher as the argument progressed. The husband would say a few words in a low, emotionless voice and away would go the wife again. At one stage, after the wife had given a particularly long and savage reply, there was a sudden pause. I expected the usual, that is, that the hubby had given his dear spouse a crack over the head with a lump of wood. To my surprise the low calm voice of the husband broke the silence, with each word slowly and forcefully said in perfect English: 'Don't pull my hair!'

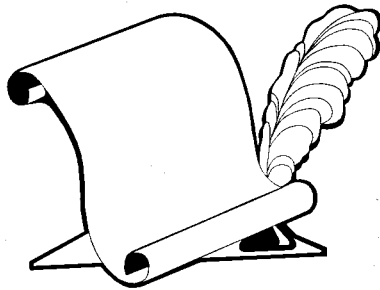
Among other stories Sr Marietta told me was this one. A daughter was neglecting her old mother so the mother lifted camp and came up to the hospital. Sister met her and said that since her daughter would not look after her, she would be her daughter and do the job. Later, Sister happened to hear the old lady chatting with a friend: 'Yeah, she be my daughter all right, but don't know how it is she been gone and turn white!'

We left Bathurst Island at eight o'clock on Sunday night, 12 April, and arrived home at midnight.

Nelen Yubu

On 13 April Doctors Elphingston and Matherson called with pilot Jack Slade. I showed Dr Matherson around while Dr Elphingston attended to any cases that needed it.

After rosary this evening, I baptized Peter and Thecla Brogan's baby, Helen Annunciata. □





Mission Outreach

Last year at an MSC Missions Conference held near Cairns, Queensland, the Australian MSC Province recommended the establishment of a Mission Office to promote and support our missionary efforts especially those in the overseas areas of evangelisation where we are working.

Fr Adrian Meaney was eventually appointed to turn the project into a reality. There were a variety of ideas about where the Missions Office should be located and what precisely it should do. Adrian was commissioned to work these things out. He has an extensive background of missionary work in Central Australia and the Port Moresby and Bereina regions of Papua New Guinea.

So far Adrian has based the Missions Office within the Sacred Heart Monastery, Kensington, Sydney. With a lot of volunteer support he has been developing an extensive network of interest. By correspondence and public speaking he is casting a wide net to gather in people who are willing to be 'Missions Partners'.

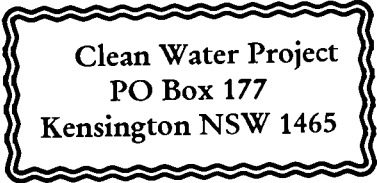
'Missions Partners' are people willing to:

- Be Partners in Mission through Prayer;
- To accept the *MSC Mission Newsletter*, which he distributes free of charge.
- Maybe are interested in doing lay missionary work.
- And at any rate would like to keep in touch.

A practical project he has been promoting vigorously over recent months is the 'Clean Water Project'.

The '*Clean Water Project*' arises from the experience of our Missionaries of the lack of an adequate supply and the effects of 'bad' water on people — especially babies and the young.

This project aims at supplying roofing iron, downpipes, guttering, tanks, pumps, implements for digging wells, etc. The month of June will be targeted as a time for concentrating on a 'Water for Water' theme. People will be encouraged to give up soft drink, beer, tea etc. And drink water instead. The money thus saved can be sent to:



Clean Water Project
PO Box 177
Kensington NSW 1465

KINSHIP IN MEDITATION

Dan O'Donovan¹

1. Living always in wild surroundings of bush or desert *does* something to the soul. Traditional Aboriginal people still in their country are close observers and relaters. This sets them off to a good start in the way of meditation.

According to anthropologist of the Fitzroy River Valley, Erich Kolig, the sections and subsections ('skins') are highly specialised artefacts. They seem to be unique to Australian Aboriginal society, and in complexity are unparalleled in any other culture, at least in historical times.²

As we have been talking about *Meditation, Aboriginal Style?* I would like to say something here about the kinship *sense*, which by now, I guess, would be inborn in every Aboriginal baby. This kinship sense would have started to be applied, I suppose, as a survival method, helping people to stay alive and strong together. It was a brilliant invention!

The development from (an original and general) moiety system to sections and subsections is a fairly recent happening, according to Kolig. 'The two systems, (sections and subsections), were dynamically spreading at the time of European conquest,' and 'are by no means found in all traditional Aboriginal societies.'³

The exact point, or points, of origin of the section and subsection systems are [anybody's guess]. Elkin...placed the origin of the subsections in the East Kimberley and McConvell, on the basis of linguistic evidence, supports this.⁴

For our purposes in the present article: by 'the *sense* of kinship,' I would understand something prior to the kinship *system*. It is that out of which the kinship system arose: the Aboriginal spirit, one

¹ Fr Dan O'Donovan, living hermit style at Beagle Bay, north of Broome in WA, is a frequent contributor to *Nelen Yubu*.

² *Oceania*, 58 (1988) page 215. This enlightening article has the title, 'Australian Aboriginal Totemic Systems: Structures of Power'.

³ Same article, p. 216.

⁴ Same page.

might say, searching always, acutely relation-conscious and open. Potentially it is open, as is the kinship system, to every part of what we know as 'the universe.' Nothing knowable is closed out, by this kinship sense, from relational introduction into the system. In this it presents itself as one more wisdom species in our already supercolourful and spacious world-garden. To its marrow, rooted deep in the fertile ground of God's Mystery, it is therefore an *accommodating* sense. The only condition is that what is accommodated has to *fit*, without the continuity's being lost.

2. Now, our own 20th century has dug some interesting things out of the ground which broaden our understanding of how the Gospel of Jesus Christ spread. We have heard much about our Latin Christian Church (sometimes referred to as 'the Western tradition'). This is the one the Australian Aboriginal people have been exposed to; into which many have even been baptized. It is after all, as we say, a Catholic church, open to all.

Then we would have learned probably about an 'Eastern' christian tradition which separated from the Latin church way back, and has its own manner of worship and of interpreting the Gospel, very like ours. (This has been popularly known as 'the Greek Church' or the 'Orthodox Church', and is the faith followed by many of those countries which lie to the east of Europe, including Russia which has a highly evolved Orthodox tradition of its own.)

What we have heard hardly anything of, because we didn't know much about it till recent times, is the Syrian tradition, starting from Jerusalem and the Syrian city of Antioch, a seaport on the east Mediterranean Sea, not far north of the Holy Land. Antioch can claim descent from the apostles Peter and James. Both of them spent some time there. There was also the apostle Thomas who, with his two disciples, Addai and Mari, headed north and east with the Gospel, the first to bring it into Asia proper, so far as we know. The main cities in that direction which soon grew into organised local churches were Edessa, Nisibis and Sellaucia-Ctesiphon, a busy port

on the Persian Gulf and terminus of international sea-traffic eastward to China.

Well then, back to the diggings which in our own century have revealed a flourishing christian church stretched out right across Asia, from Arabia to the Yellow Sea, and from Siberia to the south of India. Around the time when Pope Gregory the Great sent monks to England to evangelise the Angles (late 6th century), the christian Gospel was coming to be firmly implanted also along the east coast of China.

It was brought there by Syrian (Nestorian christian) monks. Their guide, A-Lo-Pen, was warmly received by the emperor T'ai Tsung, who ruled over a China then enjoying the most prosperous and glorious period of its long history. During the years following, hundreds of monasteries were founded; a christian literature in Chinese took shape and appointments were made of archbishops for China and Mongolia: all this attested by a pillar in Hsiang-Fu, the imperial capital, and in other documents exhumed.

It so happened that, toward the end of the first millennium, another emperor, fearing the influence Buddhism in particular was gaining across China, put out an edict which banned both the Buddhist religion and Christianity from his country. So the Gospel came to be fairly well wiped out, though not entirely.

3. What now has all that to do with the Australian Aboriginal accommodating sense of kinship? This: that the third christian cultural vision, which we are calling the Syrian, is quite distinctive and is being judged today by some christians in India to be better suited to Asia than either the Latin or the Greek. It lays emphasis on the fact that there are two sources of divine revelation: Nature and the Scriptures. It makes most abundant and eloquent use of both the one and the other, Nature coming first — a typically Asian intuition.

'For the cultivator (of the vine, in John 15), Nature and Scripture go together. Once Nature and Scripture have prepared the soil —

the ground of the heart — new words are sown in it to bear fruit. Praise to the Lord of Nature! Glory to the Lord of Scripture,' says Saint Ephrem the Syrian.

The primacy of the Spirit in the Word, with a leaning toward the Feminine, is dear to this Syrian line. Saints Ambrose and Augustine (Latins) used its hymns as models for their own. Its exuberant mystical writings rise like the mountain the prophet Isaiah had sung about himself, on which 'the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow...' (Isaiah 25, 6) Because of its constant allusion to the Sun with its healing nourishing warm rays, this Syrian Christian tradition was known in China as 'the Religion of Light.'

4. But what about the break in continuity with their own Aboriginal religious integrity which people with strong traditional loyalties may still feel that the christian Gospel is requiring of them? Is this feeling of theirs entirely well grounded?

The Rainbow features most significantly in a wide variety of Australian Aboriginal mythologies. The author of the Book of Genesis in the christian bible, inspired by the same one divine Spirit, again chose the rainbow for a sign:

'This is the sign of the deal which
I make between me and you and every
living creature that is with you,
for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud,
and it shall be a sign of the deal between me and the earth. When I
bring clouds over the earth
and the bow is seen in the clouds,
I will remember my agreement which is between me and you
and every living creature of all flesh;
and the waters shall never again become a flood
to destroy all flesh.
When the bow is in the clouds,
I will look upon it and remember. . .'
The sons of Noah who went forth from the ark
were Shem, Ham and Japeth. These three

were the sons of Noah; and from these
the whole earth was peopled. (Genesis 9, 12-19).

Placing ourselves in the third christian cultural world-vision, the
Syrian, what a canvas this offers to our religious imagination!

For Aborigines, the Rainbow Snake was often (usually?) a
fertility symbol. And according to Genesis 8, 21-22,

In his heart the Lord said,
'I will never again curse the ground because of man. . . ;
Neither will I ever again destroy
every living creature as I have done.
While the earth remains,
seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,
summer and winter, day and night,
shall not cease.'

Rainbow calling to rainbow — above the deep? (See Psalm 42, 7).

(*) Much in this article about the Syrian Christian world-vision I
owe to the Indian Cistercian community of Kurisumala Ashram in
Kerala, India; and mostly to its leader, Francis Acharya who, himself
Belgian, has translated from Syriac into English for their liturgical
use a 5-volume text of the annual Divine Office cycle, *Prayer with
the Harp of the Spirit: the Prayer of Asian Churches*. Available for sale
from: Kurisumala Ashram, Vagamom, Kottayam Dt., Kerala -
685503, India.

Saint Ephrem the Syrian was affectionately known as 'the Harp
of the Spirit.' In the Latin rite he is venerated as a Doctor of the
Church. He was neither bishop nor priest. Probably a deacon. □

From the Secretary's Desk...

NYMU has moved to a new and spacious office complete with changed telephone and fax numbers, in a lovely setting overlooking some paperbarks, as if we were in the heart of Melville Is.

The move was somewhat horrendous in that it took over a week at the very time that Fr Martin was on Retreat, but I had decided to do the deed while I had the urge. And to my rescue came Brothers Kevin Guthrie and Stan Neisson who gave yeoman service in loading vehicles from our old office in the Monastery's West Wing, while I drove across the lawns, down to recently closed St Paul's which is now the Chevalier Resource Centre. There were many others who offered help and advice where possible and I am indeed grateful for all the assistance so willingly given.

At last we are ensconced in a large airy office with all our computer gear and equipment about us. The move took place just before Christmas so we've had time to settle, complete with library, artefacts, furniture, an alcove to entertain visitors for afternoon tea if they're game — still with space to spare, which is a rare commodity for us.

* * * * *

I am a beachcomber. When Nelen Yubu goes on its annual holidays, the staff usually heads for a certain beach, rarely peopled, far down the south coast, girded by a wide stretch of virgin bush and flanked by two rugged headlands. There I become an instant beachcomber.

This February was no exception. Armed with our fishing gear, off we went to try our luck for dinner. Our Editor caught a nice bream which I mangled into a thoroughly delicious though unsightly evening meal. That week the seas were very rough and the locals warned us about the danger of fishing off the rocks. But nothing daunted, that's just what we did. We tried from clifftops, from distant outjutting steep headlands, overhanging crags. And in between I strolled along my favourite beach, talking to the seagulls, climbing cliffs.

The weather worsened but Martin continued to woo the elusive piscine delicacy up and down the coast, even landing four large salmon. Once he was standing far out on the rocks where boisterous surf came bounding in to shower its spray high in the air as it roared past him, heading for the shore. I sat farther away on dry rock, wishing he would come back a bit from the edge, aware that it

was almost high tide. I watched water breaking over his feet, even up to his shins. Oh well.

Then it happened. I was looking straight at him when a huge rogue wave reared up and smashed into him, sending him crashing to the rocks, tossing him like a bit of seaweed. I saw him struggling in deep water, then picked up by a following wave and bashed on to more rocks. Knowing how enormous and sharp and dangerous they were I, stunned, started to run towards him; then realizing I couldn't do anything for him by myself, I tore back to our gear and grabbed a long-handled fishnet, thinking I may be able to reach out to him. Futile thought—but still I tried. Then he disappeared altogether and I wondered if he had hit his head on rocks and was unconscious underwater. Which way to go? But he came up again, then was swept outwards away from the killer rocks, lifted up by another huge wave and sent hurtling back towards them. Frantically I chased him, waving my useless net.

Suddenly a voice shouted: 'Can we help?' and four clean-cut young men were beside me.

I don't quite know what happened after that, but amazingly Martin was with us leaning against a high rock, his feet entangled in the

line from his rod, blood streaming from his body, spectacles washed away, his ashen face dazed. But he was alive! The boys gently assisted him out of the water. How wonderful they were: one collected our gear, others encouraged us on the walk to the nearby Coastal Patrol & Rescue Centre where his gaping wounds were dressed. While we waited, the youngest of our rescuers told me: 'We're down from Canberra for the weekend and were sitting on the beach. I was looking at the man fishing out on the point. I just turned away for a moment and when I looked again, he was gone!' The others had actually seen Martin swept off the rocks, and they were up and racing along the beach and across the rocks at a handgallop. How can we ever thank them; we don't even know their names.

When the patient had been bandaged up, still losing a lot of blood, but thankfully with his pacemaker intact and operating, we went to the car, a brand new automatic Holden station waggon. I spread beach towels on the seat for Martin, then jumped in to drive him home, although I hadn't driven the thing before except once across the Monastery lawns. As we moved away from the beach our four stalwarts waved us off, together with some spectators who had been

concerned at the close call. Very much in shock, I tackled the 6km-odd drive without incident, only realizing when we arrived that I had been driving home without my licence.

Martin has recovered, thanks to the tender mercies of our Good Lord and the people He sent to rescue our Editor. But please take the warning I heard on today's

radio: don't try to go fishing off the rocks until you have first sat for half an hour watching the seas and gauging the possibility of being washed off. I believe 20 people have been drowned this way in the last few months.

Good reading and best wishes for Easter 1999.

Secretary Keren

NYMU's new address is:

**Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit
Chevalier Resource Centre
PO Box 13 (1 Roma Avenue)
Kensington, NSW 1465**

Telephone: (02) 9315 2231

Fax: (02) 9315 2275

E-mail: mjcw@ozemail.com.au

the rotting food, the dogs, the pain, theirs will be the vision of God, the gift to see what has not entered into the heart of man to conceive, what eye has not seen, nor ear heard. Mary and Therese, please look after them during their last days on earth, and I know you will be there to welcome them home.

On the afternoon of 2 April, Br Clarke went down in the *Quail* to collect a hundred one-day-old chickens. Maybe Thecla, the wife of Peter Brogan, would return with her little baby girl. We held the Holy Thursday ceremonies that morning with all solemnity. I had to smile at the twelve little flower-strewers, the veils and dresses so very white and the little dark faces looking so shy behind them. All the girls wore white dresses and the boys were in their Sunday best: khaki shorts and wet-ironed, snow-white shirts. No one of course wore shoes. The altar boys always wore a long white soutane or surplice and no shoes.

Next day was Good Friday and we went through the ceremonies in fine style. All came up for the adoration of the cross, even the little ones. The singing of the *Pange Lingua* was most impressive. The little flower-strewers were in action again of course, with their neatly decorated baskets (covered tins).

On Easter Sunday Benny came again to me and said: 'That old lady I think die pretty soon.' I prepared the Holy Oils, Br Clarke got out the car, a group of big lads jumped on the back (they had never seen the Last Sacraments given and wanted to do so now), and off we went over to the camp at the end of the airstrip. Poor old Mary was stretched out under the low-slung iron, the other women around her, and the dogs were feeding three feet away from her head. I had sent the two old ladies over a miraculous medal each, and there was Mary's hanging round her neck. At intervals she uttered a few faint groans, the sweat of death was on her cheeks and I wondered how such a thin body could still be alive.

Without wasting time I began the last anointing. It was the first time I had given anyone the Last Sacraments. As I looked at the opening words of the ceremony, my heart fell: 'Peace be to this