

Editorial

That theologically active parish of Halls Creek is in eruptive mode again. Its parish priest, Noel McMaster CSsR, adds another weighty missiological disquisition to his impressive list of *Nelen Yubu* articles: this is his thirteenth. In the Contributors Derby he ties for second place with early runners Eugene Stockton and Rod Cameron. Dan O'Donovan in first place actually leads by a double lap of the field: his meditation in this issue on God's sacred presence in nature and culture is his forty-second contribution to *Nelen Yubu*. (I consider the editor and secretary as stewards of the course, not runners.)

Noel's paper is actually a part of his preparation for a pastoral workshop he plans to hold in the East Kimberley at Mirrilingki, Turkey Creek, at the end of July and the beginning of August. He has kindly invited me to take part in it, so readers might expect to hear more about it in next issue.

We are pleased to have another contribution from Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann, who is the designer of our logo. We had asked her for some of her thoughts on an issue presently being debated in the Northern Territory. She has replied with insight and an independence of thought typical of her. In a box on p.13 we reproduce a few lines of her widely influential 'Dadirri' address at the 1988 International Liturgy Assembly at Hobart.

Sr Moya Hanlen's eulogy for Sr Beatrice has already been reproduced elsewhere. All the same, I believe some of our readers would not have seen it. It is about our general missiological topic, inculturation of the gospel, but it deals with the topic in a vibrant, poignant, individual way as the life-theme of a person who sought the *nelen yubu*, the 'good way', throughout her life and by doing so preached the good news more effectively than most.

Please think about answering Martin Kelly's question about ants on p.22. Or is that the real question?

— Martin Wilson msc
Editor

Local Comment:

Gideon Goosen's Article in *Theological Studies*¹

Noel McMaster CSsR²

THE prestigious inter-disciplinary journal, *Theological Studies*, recently carried an article by Gideon Goosen entitled 'Christian and Aboriginal Interface in Australia'. It dealt with established themes such as the continuity or discontinuity of Aboriginal world-view with the gospel, High Gods, the sense of time, sacramentality, celebration and liturgy. The article concluded:

So the interface of Christian theology and Aboriginal spirituality has provided all those engaged in this venture with many new challenges to their own theologies and practices and thus has provided a time of theological opportunity for both Aborigines and Westerners.

From my post here in the East Kimberley (Halls Creek) it was a good read. Many familiar names were footnoted, leaving the impression, though, that the interface was marked with the influence of many Christian people, mostly metropolitan, who may have ventured outback in passing (around Uluru), but, with exceptions, have made their contributions in the Eastern States through books and available journals. Thus, at the interface the author himself seems to have been more concerned with the higher profiles of Aboriginal/Christian reflection. The lower profiles involving those he has vaguely described as 'still living a semi-traditional tribal life' (like those, I suspect, in remote communities of the East Kimberley) are not easily identified.

I thought to myself, *Nelen Yubu*, well supported by contributors from the Kimberley experience, must keep serving Aboriginal/Christian faith interests as it has done for twenty five years or so.

¹ *Theological Studies* (1999). Vol. 60, No. 1.

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For example, the way the article in *Theological Studies* treated Aboriginal spirituality's (out here preferably Aboriginal *Law's*) continuity or discontinuity with the gospel took me back to my first acquaintance with *Nelen Yubu* and to the dialogue (in Nos. 4,5,7) between *Nelen Yubu's* editor, Martin Wilson, and Kimberley's Dan O'Donovan — not 'Don, the Discalced Carmelite', as referred to by Goosen. Indeed, in discussing this dialogue, Gideon Goosen's reference to Rahner's theology of grace was similar to one I too had made locally (in Kununurra), and had expressed in my own response to the dialogue, cf. *Nelen Yubu*, No. 11. Maybe a further dialogue between Martin and Dan will be forthcoming when these respective *Nelen Yubu* contributors will have read Gideon Goosen's summation of themselves: "Wilson is sensitive to the Aboriginal mythopoetic mindset, whereas [most intriguingly] O'Donovan is locked into a rational, logical, cognitive Westerner's mental framework". (Parenthesis mine; it is worth wondering whether Dan is a hermit in the Eastern or Western tradition!).³

Before addressing what interests me most in this question of Christian and Aboriginal interface (viz., a suitable anthropology model), another Kimberley contributor to *Nelen Yubu* over the years deserves recognition. In Gideon Goosen's comments on the inculturation of indigenous liturgy a text is quoted which, if traced to its source, would most likely be attributed to Father Kevin McKelson SAC who, beginning at Bidydanga, south of Broome, has laboured over the years on a so-called Kimberley Mass text and format. This Mass was subsequently brought to the East Kimberley and has been translated into the local Kukatja language at Balgo. Part of its shared prayer (appearing also in the New South Wales text Goosen quoted) between celebrant and participants is the response, *Father you are good*.

Basic to Goosen's hope for positive outcomes from the Christian and Aboriginal interface as he presents it, is a new awareness of the importance of a good anthropology model for a properly

³ Dan's article in this issue, 'A Sacramental Universe' (pp.23-27), would put a strain upon Goosen's characterisation of him!

inculturated theology and liturgy. Earlier flawed models of anthropology (called the colonial and the civilising), he notes, have been superseded, and a new sensitivity to history and to signs of the times, like the Mabo decision, offers the Church a new opportunity for relevant theologising and debate. From there the article continues through the themes already listed, but in a generally insulated manner, leaving the contemporary anthropological reality, at least as I read it here in the East Kimberley, pretty much out of the discussion, or even erased from the interface.

This reality in the Kimberley has been articulated by authors like Erich Kolig⁴ and Tony Swain⁵, and orally for some of us here in the Halls Creek parish by anthropologist, Will Christensen, who worked with us in an awareness-raising weekend, June, 1998. Christensen (an expert witness for the Miriuwung/Gajerrong successful native title claim, 1998) described the current Aboriginal cultural scene as becoming diffused. This means, for example, that there is a continuing 'place for strangers' among Aborigines (Swain), and that there have been silent religious revolutions among Aborigines such as that centred in the Fitzroy Valley of the Kimberley (Kolig). To these developments must be added the pervasive presence of a largely enforced experience of welfare and dependence in so many remote indigenous communities of the Kimberley today. A volatile socio-religious mix results, of creative cultural festivals (music and dance and art), sporting carnivals, a CDEP ethos (community based responses to unemployment), a range of church affiliations and celebrations, and often the individually and socially destructive effects of alcohol and other drugs. And since that phrase 'semi-traditional tribal' still has some currency here in the Kimberley, at particular times of the year there will be Law ceremonies with a cultural (dif)fusing of people, traditional myths, and sacred places. From these secular and sacred phenomena are generated the valid 'continuing connections' of the

⁴ Eric Kolig, *The Silent Revolution: The Effects of Modernisation on Australian Aboriginal Religion*, Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1981.

⁵ Tony Swain, *A Place for Strangers*, Cambridge: Cambridge Uni. Press, 1993.

new Native Title era, as well as a contemporary expression of what many Westerners have been wont to describe as Aboriginal spirituality.

East Kimberley Christianity has no choice but to deal with this anthropological data, data it might be said, which are very much from below, and to this extent representing quite some qualification of that anthropology which hitherto has raised, and still raises, issues like High Gods, the then-become-now notion of time within Dreaming's life and rite, and the sacramental moment's mythopoetic density — I recall a young initiand in Kununurra a few years ago calmly reading a comic while, duly painted and surrounded by his chanting elders, he waited in the Law place for the solemn moment of his initiation.

What, then, might be the anthropological model to maintain and promote (in company with indigenous people themselves) any Christian and Aboriginal interface here in the East Kimberley? In the first instance there would seem to be a need to break with the generally reductive (integrative) attitude deriving from the role of the Dreaming as master symbol of indigenous culture, within which Goosen accepts the role of the mythopoetic as functioning differently from a Western top-down approach to thinking and theologising. It might be said, though, that any surviving influence of the Dreaming as master symbol in a scene of diffusing culture is itself easily construed as one now flowing from a top-down approach similar to that of Westerners. An anthropology model, then, with a more inductive approach, would seem better suited to that diffusion of culture which has been noted and described to some extent in this local comment from the East Kimberley.

In this comment I would like to suggest that for the East Kimberley, and even elsewhere, the anthropology model being sought might be found in the thought and particular writings of the late Jesuit theologian, Juan Luis Segundo. I have found this theologian a most useful guide in dealing with the complexity which

confronts any Church endeavour to promote the Christian gospel cross-culturally.

Segundo's anthropological foundation, for example, is the fruit of an inductive approach, and might be stated thus: it is an anthropological given that we humans are continually involved in a process of calculating from our experiences, from our concrete satisfactions, what is worth wagering on in life. Segundo calls the wager an act of anthropological faith; faith, because it is drawn from life's human witnesses, and because it will not be verified until life's journey is run. In that sense, too, the wager is involved with transcendent data, i.e., with data enshrining values which although they might be in a sense self-validating through time if persevered with, are only definitively verified or not at the end of life.

Such an anthropology model when applied to the diffusion of culture with which I am acquainted here in the East Kimberley has distinct possibilities of connecting with that down to earth theological movement which carries the tag of *liberation*. (Segundo, of course, considered all true theology liberating). For example, in his book, *The Liberation of Dogma*,⁶ (his last published book in English, I think), Segundo seeks to open dogma again especially to the experience of lay people by promoting a good liberating theology from below and with it necessarily a good anthropology from below as well.

The local hope offered here by any such model of anthropology stems from the words of Pope Paul VI (quoted by Segundo) at the close of the Vatican Council II:

'Has all this and whatever else we might say about the human value of the Council perhaps meant that the mind of the Church in the Council has deviated in the anthropocentric direction of modern culture?' [...] And when even the most optimistic expected this rhetorical question to be answered with a flat no, the response [...] was, 'deviated no, turned Yes'.⁷

⁶ Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Dogma*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992.

⁷ Segundo, *ibid.*: p. 236.

That direction for Segundo can be humanising in the spirit of the gospel through the wagers people make with their anthropological faith; or, of course, such humanising praxis can be (dis)missed or postponed. The model of anthropology being promoted here will then examine particular cases, hopeful that the way will be cleared where possible for a good (liberating) theology for life and a worthy celebration in liturgy. I would like to add, then, to this local comment, at least for discussion, some local examples of what I have entertained as pertinent wagers of anthropological faith.

Within local indigenous Catholic communities of the Halls Creek Parish it is common for people of Jaru and Gija language groupings to refer to their Mass (Catholic eucharistic celebration) as 'Ngawi or 'Ngabuny time'. The two language words from Jaru and Gija convey Father-God, although Swain⁸ and an isolated experience of my own suggest the religious provenance of the titles is complex; they could, if only rarely now, refer also to Jesus. Nevertheless, I wonder sometimes what has happened to Jesus' time, and how adequately the freedom essential to Jesus' gospel message has been proposed to people of these communities; and, indeed, how adequately we who have proposed it have understood it and the context of its proposal. Any faith wager grounded in the gospel of Jesus today would surely be open to a critical reflection on particular crippling elements of the inherited (diffusing) culture within these communities which are often now quite dysfunctional and in need of strong, reforming action. Till now, though, the usual practice (of older people) in Catholic prayer within liturgy has been to invoke Ngawi or Ngabuny as a Father-God figure who can make people strong in their hearts. There is little direct addressing of, nor noticeable overflow into engagement with, their social environment which, for example, is often characterised by manipulative kinship and other disturbances that easily issue in a damaging co-dependence with irresponsible spouses or with wayward relatives and other individuals from a younger generation.

⁸ Swain, *ibid.* p. 254.

What has led to this wager within ritual on the power of the FatherGod to give inner strength to Jaru and Gija peoples at prayer, while in the liturgy of life's complementary wager on the power of external cultural challenge in the spirit of Jesus seems as yet little developed? Perhaps the explanation is an earlier wager made within their traditions, one which was related to a mythopoetic All-Father who was appearing in Kimberley indigenous culture with the first invasions of the pastoral industry, some years before the advent of the (Catholic) Church in the East Kimberley. Tony Swain writes interestingly of further complex developments with mythically active characters like Djanba and Djulurru who "while not explicitly 'All-Fathers'... transcend kin-lands, with Djanba infusing every ritual, and Djulurru having an ubiquitous significance with all the aptly borrowed trappings from the god of... [now present] Christian proselytisers."⁹ This seems to allude to an earlier phase of diffusing culture in which the needs of the indigenous peoples for access to the advancing nonindigenous world (of pastoralism especially) were addressed with mythic, ritual innovation. My suggestion is that this world which has continued to encroach detrimentally on indigenous peoples (through welfare-dependence etc.) is still so addressed culturally and ritually by Catholic Jaru and Gija peoples with a blend of old and new.

The Christian God as Father, revealed only by Jesus who does his will and invites his followers to do likewise to achieve both necessary and desirable changes, may be thus syncretically tied to this earlier and continuing adaptive (over-) reliance on a mythic Father-type who himself is ritually influential in dealing with the socio-cultural needs of the people. In the more recent times of cultural diffusion and a pragmatic acceptance of the non-indigenous world of welfare, the negatives flowing from such welfare, dependence and anomie, may certainly generate a need for inner strength. While this is not alien to a Christian Father-God liturgy, there is from the Christian perspective a need to balance it with the will to address and change, in the spirit of Jesus, those same

⁹ Swain, *ibid.* p. 284.

negatives of the external socio-cultural environment. In current life and rite too much seems to be left to the FatherGod in this domain, thus suggesting the style of the earlier Djanba and Djulurru. The old dictum *lex orandi, lex credendi* comes to mind: the way of praying and the way of believing mutually construct one's world.

(Prayer to this syncretic Father-type in Catholic liturgy without an immediate inclination to critical cultural challenge, if such is the case, may have an apparent counterpart from time to time at the presbytery door. There the resident priest, pondering whether or not in the particular circumstances a request for assistance can be met in the spirit of Jesus, has sometimes been reminded: 'You're the Father!').

The anthropology model, then, which employs the gauge of anthropological faith's wager can help to clarify both past and present faiths, and open up possibilities for reflection on what alternative concrete satisfactions (and celebrations) might be achieved by engaging and exploring more deeply the Christian faith wager on Jesus' gospel. These considerations, it must be said, are a long way this side of (or below) those of Goosen's article on Christian and Aboriginal interface, which nevertheless has prompted them into print.

A second example of anthropological faith, flowing from the first, can further explicate the Segundo anthropology model in action. In the two remote indigenous communities which are within the Halls Creek parish boundaries I note again the environment of welfare and its strong ethos of dependence. Ngawi/Ngabuny time can be scheduled and attract some (mostly older) people. As this is within their faith (Ngawi/Ngabuny) wager as described above, they willingly leave other interests which may be in progress, such as playing cards (gambling), or resting, or preparing meals, or watching television, etc. Many, especially the younger, will not be so willing, nor even attracted. In anthropological faith terms this is not surprising. The cards and other secular involvements seem apt realisations (flowing into celebrations) of an anthropological faith

placed existentially in the arrival and usefulness of welfare cheques for food, clothing, card playing and travel etc. Though most of these younger folk (parents often) have been baptised, and introduced to Law in some degree, formally or informally, nevertheless both as Aboriginal and Christian they are seen now to have become embroiled (more than their elders) in a divided world of sacred and secular values; or, with Christensen, their indigenous culture has become more diffused; in Segundo's terms, their values calculus has led to a new anthropological faith wager.

With these kinds of Christian/Aboriginal faith wagering exposed by the chosen anthropology model, what kind of theologising is possible? In the first instance, given much syncretism especially among the older people, any worthwhile theology will be able to live with considerable 'messiness' for some time yet. (Cf. Starkloff¹⁰). Right now, however, and especially with the younger generation, a renewed theology of grace as it reaches into revelation and evangelisation seems paramount. The topic is vast, of course; for those interested, I commend the work of Segundo already cited, *The Liberation of Dogma*. From that work I choose a particular text which reflects on the Judaeo-Christian inheritance while highlighting the crucial role of leadership in any community pushed to its limits by a history of oppression and continuing disadvantage. Critical (Mosaic-type) indigenous leadership at the coal-face of a (diffusing) culture in many remote communities, I suggest, can draw these communities to a greater maturity in that freedom which Christians believe was central to the life of Jesus of Nazareth and which continues as the goal of contemporary, contextual evangelisation.

The text:

From his religious experience, Moses discovered the living presence of God in the longing of the Jews to be delivered from their oppression. The 'experience of contrast' between the actual situation of his people and what he felt to be the salvific will of God, who seeks the human being's liberation, gave him the intuition that the Lord was present in

¹⁰ Carl Starkloff, 'The Problem of Syncretism in the Search for Inculturation', *Mission*, 1994.

that longing, and supported the people. As he gradually succeeded in instilling this certitude of his in others, helping them, as well to discover this presence, he awakened history, promoted religiousness, and ultimately created Yahwism.¹¹

To conclude: the uniqueness of so-called traditional Aboriginal culture, its Dreaming, and within it the mythopoetic matrix of meaning and celebration, — these notwithstanding, some remote East Kimberley indigenous communities into which Christianity has entered now find themselves through circumstances of history in need of an anthropology model from below to critically enable a liberating Aboriginal/Christian future. I have suggested that the gauge of anthropological faith offers a means of determining what past wagers of faith have been, what the most recent ones have been, and therefore what kind of culturally critical leadership is called for to preserve all that is good for gospel freedom in Aboriginal/Christian life and to build on it in the future to the advantage of us all.

Since I began by referring to Gideon Goosen's article in *Theological Studies*, a closing image seems appropriate. The Aboriginal/Christian interface as presented in the article I view as an interesting, but distant religious panorama. Here in the East Kimberley I am more conscious of sub-religious tectonic plates whose movements locally with anthropological faith have shaped and will continue to shape the shifting religious landscape, into which non-indigenous Christians might yet venture in the hope of travelling patiently with indigenous people of Christian faith.

Gloria Dei, homo vivens! — The Glory of God, humanity alive!



¹¹ Segundo, *ibid*: p. 250, quoting A. Torres Queiruga.

Some Thoughts on Bi-Lingual Education

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann¹

IT is imperative that Aboriginal children learn to speak and write their own language. An ignorance of one's language leads to a breakdown in knowledge of one's culture and this, in turn, leads to a loss of one's dignity and self-esteem.

Quite a number of Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory have been able to run a full bi-lingual programme because within the school population there is only one language group. Perhaps in some cases there may be two groups. Consequently, the children's first learning experiences are in their mother-tongue and so, when the time comes for the teaching of English as a second language, the children already have the necessary learning skills. While I support those schools which have used and are using the full bi-lingual programme, I would like to emphasise the fact that it is very necessary for our Aboriginal children to have a very good grasp of the English language as well as their own Aboriginal language in order to be able to survive in a world where English is the common language of the majority. Because of this, I firmly believe that lessons in English as a second language *should* be given the same emphasis as the Aboriginal language from the very beginning. These lessons should be given equal importance.

In the area around the Daly River from which most of our people come, there are about fourteen different languages and dialects. Within the school population, there would be about ten different language groups and so the language common to all is Aboriginal English. Consequently, there is a great need for a real

¹ Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr MA, married to Ken Baumann, is principal at the Daly River school, NT. She is a much acclaimed artist, doyen, one might say, of the Daly River School — in the sense of a school of artistic tradition. Her *dadirri* speech at the International Liturgy Assembly in Hobart (Tas.) in 1988 will probably be signalled as a decisive moment in the development of Australian spirituality.

expertise in the teaching of English as a second language (ESL). It has not been possible for us to try to run a full bi-lingual programme but we do endeavour to do as much as we can to help the children to know and understand their mother-tongue.

The most commonly understood Aboriginal language here is Ngangikurunggurr, but other main language groups are Ngengiwumirri, Malak Malak, Marithiel, Marringarr, Marimanengi, all of which are still in the process of being written, some more so than others. Much work is being done on Ngangikurunggurr and Ngengiwumirri by Patricia Marrfurra McTaggart who has just graduated very successfully in the Advanced Diploma of Linguistics Course. Patricia, with another qualified linguist, is presently working on an English/Ngangikurunggurr dictionary and this is more than half completed. It is hoped that it will not be too long before this work is ready for publication. Some work has also been commenced on the other languages.

Because we feel very strongly about our language, Patricia gives weekly lessons to our Aboriginal teachers in the study of both oral and written language and in the basics of linguistics. She also gives language lessons to the children. Some of the older people of differing language groups come to the school to give oral lessons to their own particular group. It has been interesting to note that in the translation of songs and hymns from English into local languages, knowledge of the English language has also been improved. Another plus in the study of language by Patricia has been a deeper learning of Aboriginal culture because Patricia has necessarily to work with the older people and in the process she is learning more and more from them, not only language, but customs, traditions, laws and stories that would surely be lost with the passing of the old people.

In spite of the difficulties we have because of the number of different language groups among the students, we do have special lessons for each of these groups and there are various cultural activities in which the older people are involved. This also is a

language lesson in itself because the older people speak to the children in Aboriginal language.

There are really many ways by which language and culture can be taught and preserved. It is up to communities and schools to make sure that their priorities are in the right place. ■

...What I want to talk about is another special quality of our people. I believe it is the most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language this quality is called *dadirri*.

It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness.

Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call "contemplation".

When I experience *dadirri*, I am made whole again. I can sit on the river bank or walk through the trees; even if someone close to me has passed away, I can find my peace in this silent awareness. There is no need of words.

A big part of *dadirri* is listening. Through the years, we have listened to our stories. They are told and sung, over and over, as the seasons go by. Today we can still gather around the campfires and together we hear the sacred stories.

As we grow older, we ourselves become the storytellers. We pass on to the young ones all they must know...

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr
International Liturgy Assembly
Hobart, 1988

(quoted from *Catholic Leader* report, Feb.7, 1988, p.10)

SR BEATRICE FDNSC

(DEMKARDATH KILINGKILING THARDIM)

10.05.40 – 12.04.99

A Eulogy by Sr Moya Hanlen FDNSC¹

IT is my privilege to speak on behalf of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart and to give thanks for the life of Sr Beatrice. I offer our sincere sympathy -to Beatrice's sisters, Veronica and Therese and their families, and to her extended family, the communities of Port Keats (Wadeye) and Daly River (Naiiyu).

Beatrice was born at Mardunungame, about 70 km from Port Keats, in 1940 and she celebrated 10 May each year as the anniversary of her birth. She was the third of the seven children of Gabriel Ngarlaparn and Anna Karringarri, both of whom have predeceased her, as have her five brothers. At birth she was given the name Demkadath, the meaning of which is derived from the name of her totem, *nanthi yetpala*, the zamia palm. The fact that she wore her hair long was part of who she was, a woman of the Yetpala clan, and her long hair resembled the fronds of the palm hanging down.

The young Demkadath grew up in 'her country' and regarded herself as fortunate indeed to have learnt Aboriginal culture, law, customs and language from her parents and grandparents. The country became part of her and she of it, bush tucker was her natural food and her extended family was the human side of her world.

¹ Sr Moya Hanlen is Provincial Leader of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart (FDNSC). She is based in Kensington, NSW. She delivered this eulogy at Sr Beatrice's funeral, Wadeye, 22 April 1999.

When she was about four years of age her family moved to the recently established Port Keats mission and settled there. Beatrice was baptised on 3 December 1944 by Fr Richard Docherty MSC, founder of the mission. As she grew into adolescence, the example and teaching of her grandparents and parents exerted a powerful influence on her. She would speak of her grandfather's strong belief in Nugumanth, the Great Spirit whom her people knew as God before the coming of Christianity. When Fr Docherty began speaking about the God of Christianity, her grandfather recognised this God as the God of his people, the Father of us all.² Beatrice rejoiced that the God of her ancestors was the God of Jesus.

There was, too, her father's non-violent attitude to life and people. With pride she would recall that when her father was approaching death he was able to say: 'When I meet my God he will say, "Show me your hands." When I open my hands to him there will not be one drop of blood on them because I have never killed anyone. My hands will be clean.' Perhaps it was from her father that Beatrice learnt her gentle approach to life. Neither was her mother's conversion to Catholicism without its impact. Beatrice regarded her mother as somewhat of a fighter in her younger years; however, after her Baptism and First Communion on a Christmas Eve, Anna became a changed woman and never reverted to her former ways.

Beatrice received her education from the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart at the mission school. By the age of 14 she had decided that she, too, wished to be a sister. Her mother was not happy about her decision but her father was delighted. At the age of 19, with other young Aboriginal women who felt called to religious life, she began her preparation, first at East Arm, then Daly River and finally at Leura in the Blue Mountains west of Sydney. On 25 March 1963 she entered the novitiate at Hartzler Park, Burradoo, taking the name Sr M Basil and making history as one of the first tribal Aborigines to enter a religious congregation.

² Cf. Wilson, M 1978, *Nymuna* [early *Nelen Yubu*] No.1, pp.23- 27.

It is difficult to imagine the enormity of the adjustment this would have required, particularly as in the 1960s there was little appreciation of Aboriginal customs and culture. The life she and her companions were now expected to live was totally different from everything they had known, even in matters such as food and climate. The sometimes extreme cold of Leura and Bowral would have been an experience unknown to them and not one to be enjoyed. More difficult than physical hardship was that caused by the fact that others did not always understand the Aboriginal way of doing things. Over the years there have been many occasions when Beatrice had legitimate reason to be angry or hurt but she seemed always able to excuse people. She had taken to heart the words of Jesus: 'Do not judge'.

Despite the difficulties and struggles, Beatrice was sincere and unswerving in her desire to serve God and her people as a Daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Throughout her early years in religious life the most frequently recurring sentence in her letters to superiors is 'I am trying very hard to be Our Lady's true Daughter'. Beatrice was professed on 12 January 1966 and after spending three years at Kensington she returned to the Northern Territory, her country, and for almost thirty years worked among her people at East Arm, Bathurst Island, Daly River, Santa Teresa, Port Keats and in Darwin.

Beatrice had a variety of ministries. Initially she assisted with chores in the community, hospital or school and often taught sewing to the older girls. In 1970 she moved into the classroom scene and in 1973 trained as a Teacher Assistant at Kormilda College, Darwin. In 1990 she began her apostolate as a drug and alcohol counsellor. To equip herself for such a specialised ministry she successfully completed the course at the Central Australian Alcohol Programmes Unit in Alice Springs. Beatrice derived great satisfaction from this work and regarded her years working at the Five Mile Centre, Daly River, as among the most rewarding of her life. She also trained as an Aboriginal Language Interpreter and in this capacity was available to the Law Courts in Darwin.

Beatrice had an evident deep love for her own people. They in their turn loved her, and her presence and word drew their respect. As a religious she became a woman of God for all. She did not distinguish between relatives and non-relatives but regarded herself as available to everyone. When she sensed there was something amiss, her comments were realistic and forthright. Frequently she was able to mediate among her people because she understood from the inside the real issues behind a situation. She would move among the people, listening, supporting, challenging, offering advice — always the quiet achiever. In times of sadness her presence with them brought comfort and consolation.

True to her being an indigenous Australian, Beatrice had a wonderful sense of oneness with the earth and all creation. It was as Yahweh had said, very good, and she was quick to recognise and respect the interconnectedness of creation. She protected all sorts of creatures because they were related to her. For example, she often rescued the small black and white striped cockroach called *ku lala* as it was about to meet its death at the hands of others of us who regarded it as a pest. The kookaburra gave her signs or messages, usually with some kind of warning. She protected the little *ku lala* beetle.

She was a wonderful bush woman, a woman who belonged to the land. This was a gift of her family and her people which she readily shared with those who wished to go with her. She shared not only her skills for survival in the bush but, more precious, her links with her people and the land. Those who were privileged to accompany her to a sacred place found it an awesome experience, a palpable experience of the sacred.

Beatrice made a significant contribution to the early efforts at inculturation of the liturgy at Port Keats. Sr Tess Ward recalls that she and Beatrice worked together on many occasions with the groups for the liturgy — *Thanpa, Wangka and Lirrga*. Prior to the Sundays and feasts, they would sit with Boniface³ and the songmen

³ Deacon Boniface Perdjert. Cf. *Nymuna*, 1, 1978, pp.8 - 11, 'Record of Interview for Internationales Diakonatszentrum' [Freiburg].

and talk about the feast. These would then create hymns in their own musical tradition and accompany them with dance. As time went on they translated parts of the Mass, including the Canon.

Those of us who lived with Beatrice during her earlier years in religious life found her reticent and slow to offer an opinion in a group. As the years unfolded she grew in confidence and self-assurance and we came to enjoy the stories of her people and her concerns for them, her ready wit and laconic sense of humour. More importantly, we came to appreciate the wisdom of her insights, the depth of her spirituality and the beauty of her person. As she confided to more than one of us, she was professed for many years before she felt free to live her life as an *Aboriginal* Daughter of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Those who shared the celebration of her Silver Jubilee of Profession remember well the joy and appreciation with which she spoke of her family and her people and of her religious vocation. On that occasion she recalled with pride and conviction her father's words to her when he was dying: 'You have given your life to God. You belong to him. Never turn your back on him, just as I have never turned my back on your mother.'

As her health deteriorated, Beatrice was forced to lessen her active involvement and last year she retired to Daly River. She saw the main work of the latter years of her life as that of prayer and suffering for her people. Her uncomplaining acceptance of her illness and the pain and weakness that accompanied it bespoke the peace of heart of one who does not fear death. On the afternoon of 12 April Sr Beatrice gently surrendered her spirit and returned to her ancestors to enjoy with them the vision of God face to face for all eternity.

I take this opportunity to thank Sr Therese Marie, Mark Mullins, Anne Davies and Marion Shaw for their exquisite care of Beatrice, especially during her last months and days. I thank too, the sisters of the Daly River and Darwin communities, Dr Paul Snelling and the staff of the Renal Unit, Nightcliff.

Finally, I suggest that Sr Beatrice offers each of us a special gift. She was blind to skin colour, tribe, clan or family of origin and she moved between two very different cultures with dignity and respect. Like Jesus to whom she had dedicated her life, in herself she was reconciliation. Let us ask her to intercede for us and for all Australians that we may work with sensitivity, compassion and commitment to heal the wounds and divisions of the past so that we are able to move into the new millennium as friends and true equals, children of God blessed to share a beautiful land.

We praise you, Lord, for your many gifts to Sr Beatrice.
We thank you, as we do the Thardim Family
and the people of Port Keats
for the gift of Sr Beatrice to our Congregation.
We rejoice with her that her suffering is now ended
and that she is held in your embrace.
We celebrate her today with deep admiration and affection
and bless her in your name.
We pray that her prayer will support our own hope
as we continue our journey in faith.
May our loved Sr Beatrice rest in peace.



MINGA TJUTAKU — A Story about Ants

Martin Kelly¹

SOME years ago it was my privilege to work for Nganampa Health Council, the health service run by the Anangu Pitjantjatjara people of Central Australia. I worked as a doctor in the clinic there, in the Amata community, on the AP Lands, 140km south of Uluru. I loved it, but it was tough. I was out of my depth, I didn't speak the language (luckily most people there spoke two or three languages), the terrain and the climate were challenging, and culturally I didn't have a clue. . . It was like living in a different world. But it is a different world that I have come to love over the years.

This is a story about one family and one question. When I talk back home in Sydney to people about life on the Lands, they will often ask, 'Does anyone work out there?' This is a typical non-Anangu question. What they *mean* is, 'Is anyone there "earning" a wage?' In fact, in the desert there are very few paid employment opportunities, so people spend a lot of time hunting and gathering to feed themselves and their families.

One such family is that of my friends, Ingrid and Jamie. Don't let the Western names fool you... Jamie and Ingrid are people of the land, with earnest faces, laughing cheeks, black skin and dark brown eyes that are centuries deep... like their understanding of the Land. And they have the slimness that goes with barely enough food, in a land that sustains, but rarely has time for plenty.

I met Ingrid one night after a rain storm. She came to borrow a broom so she could sweep the water out of their house. We became

¹ Martin Kelly msc is a medical practitioner and ethicist who works at St Vincent's Hospital Sydney and the Plunkett Centre for Ethics in Health Care; he is a staff member at Chevalier Resource Centre. He is writing his PhD thesis on the role of trust in clinical practice and is a member of the Australian Storytellers Guild.

friends, her children Karen and Rebecca would often have lunch with me. And as my first stint on the Lands was drawing to a close, I asked Ingrid if it would be OK to take a picture of her and her family.

She wondered 'Why?'

'Because I am going home in a couple of weeks,' I said.

'So you want a picture of my family to take home and show your family,' she said, so enthusiastic she wanted to rush home and get everyone for a photo, right then. . .but it was too dark.

Next morning she arrived with the family and the announcement that after the photo we would go out to collect honeyants.

Collecting honeyants is a complex business. In the old days, you would dig for them with a digging-stick (*wana*) and a wooden bowl (*piti*). Nowadays people use crowbars and short-handled shovels. So we drove around to various houses in the community to borrow a shovel here, a crowbar there. At every place people would want to know where we were going, and could they come? Eventually we had three carloads of people (all in one Toyota) and off we went into the scrub.

Digging for honeyants involves finding the worker ants on the surface, then digging down, perhaps 2-4 feet to the chambers where the honeyants 'are sleeping', to collect them. The soil is dry and hard, so to dig for the ants you sit on the ground and dig and scoop a little hole, then sit in it and dig down where you were just sitting... going down in stages until you are in the hole waist deep. The honeyants are very delicate, so when you are deep enough you probe the walls of the hole with a twig or piece of grass to find the chambers containing the honeyants. It is hard work, in 40 degree heat. So it's women's work, of course. When I asked Ingrid why she went to all this trouble for a few ants, she said simply, 'Because the children love them.'

Now, the head and thorax of a honeyant is about the size of a bull-ant, but the abdomen of the ant is swollen — 1cm diameter —

and full of nectar. You just suck that and it is like an explosion of honey into your mouth. They really do taste like honey. I only had a couple because it also tastes just a little bit like ant. But the children really did love them!

Now it happened that, just before I went to Amata, I was at a training workshop for rural medical practitioners. One of the sessions was on stress management, and the psychologist presenting it told a story of a recent session with a group of businessmen (thirty of them, and they were all men, as it happened.) He asked them why they worked such long hours. All of them said it was for their families.

'Oh, yeah,' he replied, and asked 'Do you have any children?'

All of them did. Then he asked what their child's teacher's first name was. None knew. He asked what their child's favourite food was — again no takers. When he asked what date their children's birthdays were, one fellow piped up and said, 'My wife takes care of all that.'

These are the kinds of people, I suppose, who think it is a reasonable question to ask, 'Do people out there work?' Well, let me answer that question. Yes, Anangu do work, they work hard. *And* they know why, and what matters to them. And they play, and dance and sing.

So *my* question is: 'Who are the ants in this story?'

For interest's sake, the editor would like to see your response to this story. Write it down and send it in — by email (mjcw@ozemail.com.au) if you use that facility, or by ordinary mail. Looking forward to receiving some answers!

— MJW, *Editor*

A SACRAMENTAL UNIVERSE

Dan O'Donovan¹

AS one looks outward from the silent cave of the heart, the world one's eyes rest on is alive with a holy rhythm. The dance of the brolgas at mating-time is expressive of a musical totality. Sound, scent, flavour, colour, beat.

This living rhythm — which sadly includes our human dissonance (sin) — is no mere projection of the mind. It is what the attentive soul is able to *recognise*. It is *there*, without necessarily being seen to be there. But happy those who have eyes to see!

So intimate is Aboriginal communion with Nature that it may be said there is no division between the two. Even still today, there are many landmarks for traditional people which are *animated*. Once they were human, or part-human; now rock, frilled lizard or owl. They remain ancestral.

* * * * *

It is 2.30am on 1 January 1999. From my hut, remote in the bush I can hear the (amplified) strumming of a lone guitarist. A quiet strumming, improvised, spaced-out, aimless. By now, after the play and enjoyment of the night, all the children and most adults would be fast asleep. Yet the music goes on, as if without sense, disturbing nobody.

Four o'clock: already the birds are beginning to sing, and still I can hear it. A sound laden itself somehow with repose.

I recall, some years ago in Fitzroy Crossing, a *marlulu* (initiation) ceremony for three young Punapa males. After the prescribed Law, which occupied the night, with much dance and song and intervals now and then, at last, out of the heavy darkness the first signs of dawn appeared. The initiands set fire to the bark screens behind

¹ Fr Dan O'Donovan, a frequent contributor to *Nelen Yubu*, lives in an eremetical situation at Beagle Bay, north of Broome, WA.

which they had made their preparations during the ceremony and, bark torches aloft well above their heads, set off at a steady pace, single file after their ritual custodian, in the direction of the morning light. Further and further, until their painted bodies under the torchlight became lost to sight, swallowed by the surrounding bush. Soon the sun would rise.

The ceremony had begun around 9.00pm. The father of one of the young men, proud and smiling, turned to me and said: 'Now you can sleep.' He too, I suppose, would be going home to get some sleep.

When God became 'flesh and lived among us' (John 1,14), he assumed this Aboriginal oneness with Nature — as he assumed all that is human — bringing it through his humanity into participation with his divinity. Since he found no strict division there between Nature and the human, it is the totality that he took up into himself and sacralised, as he showed finally when he took bread and wine in his hands saying, 'This is my body... my blood.' It is from this central point out that the world becomes a sacramental whole, apparent to the eyes of faith. Everything is changed, elevated in a way no one could have expected, the initiative being God's, who is free and generous.

In this, Nature reflects him — for is it not also free and generous? The sun gives light and warmth, the rivers and seas all sorts of fish. And there is no end to the bounty of the bush, although often you have to wait for the proper time.

So all is holy, sacred, in the One who chose it: first by creating it, then by taking it to himself only 2000 years ago. Long before, the Aboriginal communion with Nature was, in its way, 'a shadow of what was to come' (Colossians 2,17). Let's look more closely at that saying. The writer uses an image which makes it easier for us to understand where Aboriginal Law fits in to the total picture.

Therefore, [he says], let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come. But the body is of Christ.

There is the shadow, therefore, and the body.

If you are walking along and the sun is shining behind you, your shadow will come before your body. People looking on will first see your shadow. Then they will see your body. So the old (Jewish) Law came before Christ, like a shadow of him. That is what the writer of the Colossians letter is telling us: that all those customs, rituals, rules about eating — the teachings and beliefs too — all these were like the shadow in front of the body. The reason they were there was the body, Jesus Christ.

In spite of the inescapable theological difference between the Jewish Mosaic Law and Australian Aboriginal Law, this biblical image of shadow and body is still valid, and will help in Aboriginal Christian theology. It is Christ-related. It is positive. In applying it to Aboriginal traditional Law, the difficult question remains: *in what sense, 'Christ-related'?*

God's 'reckoning', 'regarding.'

In his letter to the Romans 1,21 Paul tells us that all those people on earth who were not of the Jewish race, and did not know of the Mosaic Law, 'knew God' from their closeness to Nature, their observation of Nature. In the way appointed for them by God during those thousands of years before Christ, they 'knew God.' In this, Australian Aborigines were at one with the cosmic religiosity one finds in Asia generally.

It was the innate sense of a sacred Presence in the people, in the ground they occupied; but reaching much further to the boundaries of perception. Kinship, oral tradition, Law, ceremony — in a word the entire Aboriginal religious culture — were steeped in this knowledge of God, this experience of 'him' as tremendous, fearful, in the lightning-storm; as fascinating in the riddle of childbirth.

Now this 'innate sense' was none other than the action of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ and of the Father, accompanying and illumining all peoples, in many different ways, from the beginning of time.

What God required of them by way of obedient service was somehow 'written on their hearts,' (Romans 2,15), not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God' (See 2 Corinthians, 3.3). Or as we would say today, they had spiritual consciences. Many things would have made it difficult, if not practically impossible at times, for them to follow what their developing moral conscience may have told them they ought to do, or not to do: the irresistible pull of the group in particular, of its dominant forces and influences; the authoritative word of the elders. Over against this however, Paul draws our attention to another and decisive factor: *how God regards both group and person.*

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Over against this however, Paul draws our attention to another and decisive factor: *how God regards both group and person.* The words God's 'reckoning', God's 'regarding', occur a number of times in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of Paul's letter to the Romans. He saw that as very important indeed for our understanding, and not judging. It leaves room for God's all-wisdom and all-mercy — his justice too, of course — which are different from ours.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, says the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts'.

(Isaiah 55,8-9).

I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious
and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.
(Exodus 33,19 and Romans 9,15).

We plunge into the unfathomable mystery of God's saving grace, the meaning and direction of history. Paul thought it over for a long time in prayer, (Romans, chapters 9-11). His conclusion?

O the depth of the riches,
of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God!
How incomprehensible are his judgments and
how unsearchable his ways. (Romans 11,33).

So, there is the shadow, and then the body. When the Sun shines directly overhead, both merge. ■

Congratulations to

Dr Gerard Mark Goldman

on the occasion of his being accepted into the ranks of

Doctors of Ministry

at Catholic Theological Union, Chicago

Gerard has written frequently in *Nelen Yubu*, viz.

'Listening to a culture' (#47), 'Discerning the life-sustaining structure of Alcoholics Anonymous' (#48), 'Preface to a local theology: the Murinbata case' (#50), 'Inculturating theology: Part 1' (#56), 'From throwing petals to ministry: Part 2' (#58), 'Punj ceremony of the Murrinpatha' (#61), 'Three ceremonies of life' (#62), 'Insider-Outsider or In-Between: reviewing old categories' (#65), 'Missionary as change agent' (#66), 'Reconciliation—an urgent task: a review of the literature' (#67).

Questionnaire on Land Issues

Martin J Wilson msc

[I was approached earlier in the year with a questionnaire from Sedos which is constructing a database of information on experiences of religious and church personnel on issues of land use. I thought my brief answer may be of some interest.]

Type of involvement

I have had some experience in two areas. First in PNG, in the area along the Vanapa River some 40 miles outside Port Moresby; the second in Northern Territory of Australia. I shall describe briefly the nature of my involvement in the two areas.

PNG:

I was in PNG from 1967 till 1974. While teaching philosophy at the national seminary at Bomana (near Port Moresby) I began to study for an MA in social anthropology at the University of Papua New Guinea and also I took on some pastoral care of an area that had recently been taken over by the Port Moresby archdiocese from the neighbouring Bereina (Yule Is.) Diocese. During the last two years of my sojourn I lived in the village of Doromoku and worked on my thesis on the changing pattern of social control in the area: they were rejecting the traditional chieftainship pattern common along that part of the coast. A number of forces were operating, one of which was confusion regarding land ownership and competition among the Doura clans and between the (rather disorganised) Doura people and immigrant PNG peoples who were infiltrating the area. The Land Commission was finding it impossible to settle rival claims to land ownership in the area. As far as I could work out from their stories, that part of the coast had been subject to generations of invasion and retreat by various peoples. The coastal Doura, who like a fairly relaxed way of life, would tend their gardens, live in often unfinished houses, fish and hunt. Hill people, used to harsher environments and aggressive in nature, would come down from the hills and drive the Doura out, taking over their land. Soon malaria, to which the Doura had acquired a certain immunity, would drive the hill people back up to the hills... This pattern had been going on, probably, for quite some time, so that, when the Land

Commissioner tried to find out who were the ancestors who had originally lived on that land, he had to conclude that everybody's ancestors had done so at one time or another...

The interaction took some strange forms. During the earlier part of this century some hill people had begun to live with the Doura somewhat like serfs. A patrol officer expressed in one of his reports his horror at finding the feudal system well and truly alive in his bailiwick! Towards the end of my stay, i.e. the late 1960s and early 1970s, some of the immigrants, who had meanwhile established sizeable villages in the area, declared that they had paid enough rent in money and work and now claimed ownership of the land they were occupying. There was little danger of their claim being opposed as law and order does not run strong in Papua New Guinea, especially outside of the big towns — and not even inside them either these days!

What the Doura really wanted the land for was to be able to collect the easy money that came from selling gravel and timber rights to the government departments and commercial enterprises.

The only practical solution I can see to the social and economic problems of the Doura area is the slow march of history, much the same as it has been doing for hundreds of years, though with changes in the materials being striven for, the nature of the struggle, all sorts of additional agents involved...

The church's role? To be a moderating and humanising factor in a situation that nowadays involves personal danger for the church personnel.

Northern Territory:

I have had a number of experiences in regard to land in the NT. One was doing some preliminary investigation for the Northern Land Council into the claim of the Mullak Mullak people for traditional land in the Daly River area. Also I lived as parish priest on Melville Island in the middle 1980s: Melville Island is a part of Tiwi land run by the Tiwi Land Council. I had no dealings with land matters, just the experience of living on land being confidently administered by the local traditional owners.

The third sort of experience of land matters that I have had in the NT is quite a significant one. In the 1970s there was a stirring among the Aboriginal people, especially in northern Australia, after years of apparent apathetical acceptance of colonial expropriation of most traditional land, faced as Aboriginal people were with the legal fiction that they never

'owned' the land in any case: *terra nullius*. With an almost imperceptible change of attitude in governmental and judicial circles towards Aboriginal rights in land, the Aboriginal people experienced a resurgence of hope and they began moving back, where they could, to their ancestral homelands — the 'homeland movement'. It was being done on a pretty informal basis, but with official and financial support from government agencies, and support from the churches that varied from being enthusiastic and intelligent (especially Uniting and Lutheran churches) to patchy and somewhat bewildered (Catholic). One of the biggest homeland villages was in a 'mission' area cared for by the society I belong to (MSC). I received permission from the relevant authorities (Aboriginal community of Peppimenarti, my Society, the Daly River mission and the Diocese of Darwin) to spend what turned out to be something like half a year living in or near the homeland village as a simple resident, without any 'mission' obligations or functions at all — though the people did ask me to say Mass for them on a daily basis.

My assessment of my experience was very positive. For me personally it led me to form the Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit and found the missiological journal *Nelen Yubu* which is now up to issue #72.

Peppimenarti itself is an ongoing concern but has gone through a somewhat troubled history since its foundation in a sort of original puritan enthusiasm. ■

TOYOSHIMA HAJIME

The first Japanese pilot captured on Australian soil in WWII

George F Cusack msc¹

RECENTLY I saw the picture of Toyoshima's suicide in the burnt-out kitchen of the Cowra Prison Camp, in a display case at the Australian War Museum in Canberra. I had seen this picture before in a book I had read about the breakout, which also illustrated the pages from his diary.

The story about Matthias, a Tiwi, and the capture of Toyoshima Hajime in 1942 is well known. What is not well known is what passed through his mind in the aftermath of his capture, which was documented in his diary about his shame that he was captured at all, for the Japanese firmly believed that to die for his country would see his spirit return to the place of heroes in Japan.

He saw his recapture at Cowra as once again a vehicle for shame. This shame was reflected in the fact that he did not commit Hari Kari, and that he hanged himself, not in his dress uniform but in his field uniform. These signs of his mental distress and trauma came from several sources. His diary shows his confusion. Unexpectedly he had found that his guards and the Red Cross people had treated him kindly; he had made friends through the wire with local kids who used the local swimming pool next to the camp; he had expected torture and harsh treatment. His heart had still longed for death and the return of his spirit to Japan.

Whilst I had the book I had used the story and illustration to give pupils an idea of the Japanese ideas about war and death to promote a better understanding of their strange ideology, tied as it was with their religious beliefs. It is a pity really that the pages of his diary are not with the Canberra display; his writing is almost poetic. I am also sad that I have lost the book I had: a casualty of shifting about and the tattering of time. ■

¹ Br George Cusack msc now lives in retirement at The Ranch, the MSC house in Darwin, after many years of service at St Johns College, Darwin, and earlier at other MSC colleges in Australia.

From the Secretary's Desk...

ON Wednesday, April 4 this year I was standing in my room high up in the Chevalier Resource Centre at Kensington. It was, I think, about 7.30pm when I heard the strangest noise, just like those jackhammers used in road repairs. It occurred to me that it was a bit late for that type of work to be starting up, but never mind.

Then I began to realize that the noise was getting louder and closer and quite menacing till it became a virtual roar. Suddenly I thought it must be a plane coming in to crashland against our building — in particular outside my window.

I flew to the casement, pulled up the blind and saw to my horror a high wall of white hail heading for me. No exaggeration to say the iceblocks were as big as cricket balls, some even bigger. As they beat against our walls it was deafening and terrifying — and in the space of 8–10 minutes the world became white with deep piles of monstrous hailstones strewn all over the ground, mingled with the smashed glass of windows. People

were screaming in the streets below, and I spotted the *Nelen Yubu* car minus both windscreens.

Flying downstairs, here were people shaking in fear — that ten minutes had felt like three hours. Even when the downpour had spent itself a bit, all was chaos in the raging wind; some people trying to help others in distress — and that has been the tone of the disaster; dozens of houses were instantly unroofed, cars dented, people cut by glass, everyone in shock. But wherever one looked in the following days, there were people helping each other.

This has been labelled the third-worst natural disaster in Australia, after Darwin's cyclone 'Tracey', and Newcastle's earthquake. Thank God there were very few human casualties in our avalanche of cricket balls; and the ocean of blue roofs is gradually receding as tarpaulins are being removed from repaired homes.

It was a sad and trying time, but it has brought out the best in many. May such a disaster never be repeated in our brittle land.

Secretary Keren

Some Thoughts on Bi-Lingual Education

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann¹

IT is imperative that Aboriginal children learn to speak and write their own language. An ignorance of one's language leads to a breakdown in knowledge of one's culture and this, in turn, leads to a loss of one's dignity and self-esteem.

Quite a number of Aboriginal schools in the Northern Territory have been able to run a full bi-lingual programme because within the school population there is only one language group. Perhaps in some cases there may be two groups. Consequently, the children's first learning experiences are in their mother-tongue and so, when the time comes for the teaching of English as a second language, the children already have the necessary learning skills. While I support those schools which have used and are using the full bi-lingual programme, I would like to emphasise the fact that it is very necessary for our Aboriginal children to have a very good grasp of the English language as well as their own Aboriginal language in order to be able to survive in a world where English is the common language of the majority. Because of this, I firmly believe that lessons in English as a second language *should* be given the same emphasis as the Aboriginal language from the very beginning. These lessons should be given equal importance.

In the area around the Daly River from which most of our people come, there are about fourteen different languages and dialects. Within the school population, there would be about ten different language groups and so the language common to all is Aboriginal English. Consequently, there is a great need for a real

¹ Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr MA, married to Ken Baumann, is principal at the Daly River school, NT. She is a much acclaimed artist, doyen, one might say, of the Daly River School — in the sense of a school of artistic tradition. Her *dadirri* speech at the International Liturgy Assembly in Hobart (Tas.) in 1988 will probably be signaled as a decisive moment in the development of Australian spirituality.

expertise in the teaching of English as a second language (ESL). It has not been possible for us to try to run a full bi-lingual programme but we do endeavour to do as much as we can to help the children to know and understand their mother-tongue.

The most commonly understood Aboriginal language here is Ngangikurunggurr, but other main language groups are Ngengiwumirri, Malak Malak, Marithiel, Marringarr, Marimanengi, all of which are still in the process of being written, some more so than others. Much work is being done on Ngangikurunggurr and Ngengiwumirri by Patricia Marrfurra McTaggart who has just graduated very successfully in the Advanced Diploma of Linguistics Course. Patricia, with another qualified linguist, is presently working on an English/Ngangikurunggurr dictionary and this is more than half completed. It is hoped that it will not be too long before this work is ready for publication. Some work has also been commenced on the other languages.

Because we feel very strongly about our language, Patricia gives weekly lessons to our Aboriginal teachers in the study of both oral and written language and in the basics of linguistics. She also gives language lessons to the children. Some of the older people of differing language groups come to the school to give oral lessons to their own particular group. It has been interesting to note that in the translation of songs and hymns from English into local languages, knowledge of the English language has also been improved. Another plus in the study of language by Patricia has been a deeper learning of Aboriginal culture because Patricia has necessarily to work with the older people and in the process she is learning more and more from them, not only language, but customs, traditions, laws and stories that would surely be lost with the passing of the old people.

In spite of the difficulties we have because of the number of different language groups among the students, we do have special lessons for each of these groups and there are various cultural activities in which the older people are involved. This also is a

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL REFLECTIONS

MIRIAM-ROSE UNGUNMERR-BAUMANN

FELLOW CATHOLIC WOMEN, thank you very much for inviting me to speak to you tonight. I am nervous. I know you will understand. I have spent a lot of time wondering what I should say to you. Finally, I decided to speak about 'me'. Please don't think I do this in a spirit of vanity. I feel that in speaking about 'me' I can best speak about my own people.

I was born in the bush in 1950 at Daly River eight miles upstream from where the Mission is now. My language is called Nangikurrungurr. I speak four other local languages.

I have been thinking over what I have learned from my parents and my group. It is summed up in the word 'culture'. I learned how to look out on my world, the country and the bush. I listened to the wonderful stories that told how everything came to be — hills, the waterholes, the river, the places of importance and the stories that went with them. My life was filled with beautiful stories. My people could not read. They did not write. They remembered and they told and they retold. Interest was always fresh like new discovery. The countryside was somehow part of me and I was part of it; it was filled with named places and I came to learn so many of them. It was my home. It was me.

Text of talk given to the Catholic Women's League, Darwin, early 1986. Miriam-Rose prepared the NYMU logo - a simplified form of the pulpit decoration she refers to in the text. Through Dove Communications we helped her publish her Stations of the Cross last year (*Australian Stations of the Cross*).