

Editorial

Contributions in this issue come from a wide range of territory: South Africa, India, Canada, Kimberley and Sydney.

Reconciliation, the big issue here in Australia at the moment, is only touched upon in the Secretary's description of the marvellous experience we had when we and the best part of a third of Sydney walked across the harbour bridge on Sunday 29 May. Unless someone else beats us to it or we have some trouble with copyright, we plan to make the third issue of this year a special one on reconciliation by collecting together some of the most significant statements made about the topic here in Australia by a couple of popes, a former prime minister (not the present one, mind you) and the Dodson brothers.

On page 21 there is a notice about GST. We have been given conflicting advice as to whether or not *Nelen Yubu* incurs GST. At this stage we believe we should add 10% on to our base annual subscription fee of \$15, which makes our annual fee into \$16.50.

We have always endeavoured to keep the price within easy reach of people engaged in Aboriginal ministry. We expect that such people will generally be qualified to reclaim the added GST as a tax credit. Our ABN is printed on the top line of the inside back cover.

As our billing time does not come until November, further clarifications may have emerged by then.

Please have a look at our publications display on p.14. We assure you that Peter Malone's *My Names* makes very entertaining reading. MSC readers in particular will find Tony Caruana's *Monastery on the Hill* of particular interest. It will be a history of the monastery on Kensington hill where we live. Through its narrow focus one will gain insights into the history of the MSC society in Australia and indeed into the manner the Catholic church has conducted itself in this country over the last hundred years. We at NYMU are involved with the book's typesetting and proofreading. It should appear later in the year at the expected price of \$40.

— Martin Wilson msc
Editor

Creative Interaction between Australian Aboriginal Spirituality and Biblical Spirituality

Cornelia Versluys¹

THE ABORIGINAL mothers and I were sitting down talking about the stories which the children were encountering in their lessons in preparation for their First Eucharist. The aim of the gathering was to familiarise these women with the stories the children were hearing at school. Then, when the children brought the drawings of these stories home and talked about them, these mothers would be ready to talk further with the children and perhaps add to these stories events from their own cultural and family context. After the women and I shared some insights about meals that are shared, the stories around the campfire, and the relevant Biblical texts, the women were invited to paint what they thought Eucharist meant for them. It became very obvious that these women loved to hear the stories from the Bible and it was with great enthusiasm that they shared their understanding. By painting events from their own lives it could be seen that they saw themselves as Jesus' people by giving life through feeding the hungry and by forgiving those who hurt them.

It was these encounters and others of a similar kind which led me to undertake a study which would further enable me to facilitate the creative interaction between Australian Aboriginal spirituality and

¹ Cornelia Versluys RSJ is a Josephite Sister who has spent nine years teaching in Catholic schools in the Kimberley. She is currently on the staff at Mirringki Spirituality Centre, where she develops and presents Scripture programmes for Aboriginal people. This article is a very brief and amended version of a project presented for a Master of Arts in Pastoral Studies degree for which Cornelia (Nellie) is studying, through CTU Chicago.

biblical spirituality. Much has been and is being done in the area of liturgical inculturation,² and much has been done to familiarise Aboriginal people with the stories of the Bible³ they have in recent gatherings expressed their need to study at a deeper level.⁴ They believe that such study will give them the opportunity to become more involved in the spiritual life of the Church. It will give them confidence in their own truth and give them confidence to teach their families and communities. It is hoped that an in-depth study of Scripture will give them a better understanding of the readings used in Sunday liturgies and enable them to involve young people in the spiritual life of the Church,⁵ and, to do all this within the context of their own culture. What follows is a description of the background materials which were collected to form the foundation on which some Scripture programmes could be formulated. The programmes respond to the Aboriginal peoples' request for an in-depth study of Scripture. It is believed that this request is fulfilled when there is a creative interaction between Aboriginal and Biblical spirituality.

In order for this creative interaction to take place it is necessary to take into consideration the culture and spirituality of the Aboriginal peoples and the culture and spirituality of the people of Israel—of Jesus and his ancestors. Some research was undertaken to record some of the hopes and fears of Aboriginal people so that when searching the Scriptures together we may be able to discover how Jesus addresses such hopes and fears. Some hopes and fears were:

² See Werner Kriener, 'Inculturation of the Liturgy in the East Kimberley', *Nelen Yubu*, 58 (1994): 10-18. See other examples in David Burke, *Dreaming of the Resurrection* (North Sydney: Trustees of the Sisters of St. Joseph for the Mary MacKillop Foundation, 1998).

³ See Kevin McKelson, 'Japulu Kankarra (Father in Heaven) Part VI: Inculturation', *Nelen Yubu*, 64 (1996):7.

⁴ See the requests of Aboriginal people at the NATSIC Conference in Broome, 'Blacks Urge Sharing of Their Spirituality', *The Catholic Leader*, (Brisbane) 27 July 1997. This request was also made from a group of Aboriginal Catholic people who came to express their needs, at the Priests and Pastoral Associates Meeting in Broome, Western Australia, on 25th March 1998. When Priests and Pastoral Associates met in September 1998 Aboriginal people repeated this request.

⁵ Maryanne Holm and Peter Rosengren, 'Indigenous Catholics Call for Unity,' *The Record*, (Sydney) 27 July 1997, 1-2. 'Delegates strongly supported motions dealing with the place of young indigenous Australians in the Church. They want to examine ways of helping them become more involved in their faith. Suggestions included establishing a youth council for Catholic Aboriginals and pastoral training for indigenous Catholics.'

- a) Grave concern about the young people.
- b) Fear of violence and alcohol related problems.
- c) Hope that people will be able to return to their own country.
- d) Hope to become strong in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal culture.
- e) Hope to grow strong in the ways of Jesus.

Personal experiences with the Kija people of the Warrmarn community in the Kimberley were reflected upon and recorded. With the permission of the appropriate Kija people of Warrmarn Community it was noted that:

- a) Aboriginal people have a particular way of being-in-the-land.
 - ◆ land gives people identity.
 - ◆ they spoke with reverence of the Ngarrankarni - which we have called the Dreaming.
- b) It is impossible to understand Aboriginal people without some understanding of what is central to Aboriginal religion: the land, the people and the Dreaming. These are therefore examined in great detail.
- c) Colonization and the disruption it caused in the web of life of the Kija people was also recorded.
- d) How the people became Catholic Christians is a vital part of their particular story.

After these reflections on personal experiences with the Kija people other areas for research and reflection became obvious. There were essential aspects in the lives of Aboriginal people which were also essential aspects in the lives of the people of the Bible.

These essential aspects were:

- a) Family and community.
- b) Keeping the culture, Law and language alive.
- c) Land influences identity and relationships.
- d) There is a strong belief in the spirit world.

Three values which seemed to connect Aboriginal and Biblical spirituality were studied. These values were hospitality, family and community, the land. Much background reading and gathering of materials related to these values was organised in the following manner:

a) Hospitality.

- ◆ Contemporary Arab customs of hospitality.
- ◆ Hospitality of Abraham and others.
- ◆ Jesus and hospitality.
- ◆ Giving and accepting hospitality is life-giving.

b) Family and Community.

- ◆ Immersion of the individual within the family and community.
- ◆ Extended families in Eastern Mediterranean region, and Aboriginal extended families.
- ◆ Kinship.
- ◆ How honour and shame influences behaviour in families and communities—Jesus' handling of the same, Aboriginal peoples' handling of this.
- ◆ Trouble in early Christian communities to be inclusive.

c) The land.

- ◆ Israel, a small land, various influences on the people.
- ◆ Australia, large land, various influences on the people.
- ◆ Creation stories.
- ◆ Caretakers of the land.
- ◆ Pilgrimage and sacred sites.

While interacting with Aboriginal people one soon discovers that Aboriginal people learn and think differently from Euro-Australians. It was considered important to record the following:⁶

- a) Learning by doing more than by speaking.
- b) Visual rather than describing—linked to song, dance and story.
- c) Repetition, trial and error.
- d) Outside rather than inside, or what is most comfortable. Under a tree is fine but inside with an air conditioner during extreme temperatures is also acceptable.

Other important things to remember.

- a) Certain people own certain information or stories or have access to certain sites of significance.
- b) People are quite comfortable with duality of thinking. Anthony Gittins explains it this way:

A both/and approach to knowledge and relevance across cultures might be surprisingly helpful and freeing... A both/and approach would be open to the richness of the experience and the validity of the knowledge found in other cultures, and thus other people would be able to discover for themselves the relevance of Jesus and the gospel, just as the Jews and the pagans of Jesus' time were called to the same discovery.?

- c) People are usually intrinsically motivated, meaning that they learn because they want to learn, not because people pressure them or tell them what is good for them.

The above background provides a rich variety of material which was used to carefully craft a programme which took into consideration the culture and spirituality of the Aboriginal people. It examines the similarities and differences of this culture when compared with the culture and spirituality of the people of Israel—of Jesus and his ancestors. The culture and spirituality of the people of the Early Church and of the contemporary East Mediterranean people are also

⁶ Gleaned from Stephen Harris, 'Aboriginal Learning Styles and the Three R's', (1979) [Photocopy] Edith Cowan University, Perth, Western Australia.

touched upon. One of the primary tasks in designing these Scripture programs is to enable Aboriginal people to make connections between their own culture and spirituality and the culture and spirituality of the people of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, as well as the people of the Early Church.⁷

Some of these Scripture programmes were designed and presented. As Aboriginal people participated in the Scripture programs it was discovered that many other connections could be made even though acknowledgment had to be made of differing aspects of family, community, land, and hospitality. People several times exclaimed, after studying Jesus and the land of his ancestors, 'Now I know that Jesus was a real person who lived in a real country!' This in itself spoke volumes and helped us to realize that we cannot take for granted what people know or do not know. It also confirmed that what we set out to do and how we presented the material, was working.

By thoroughly researching the material, and willingly changing and adapting the style of presentation we facilitated the practical application of the study undertaken. Some adaptations which had to be made were, to do less talking and engage people's right brain as well as their left brain; to supplement the input with visual materials; to provide more time for reflection; to keep the language simple and unsophisticated rather than cerebral and academic; to pace the input so that people had more time to absorb what was presented—through drawing, painting, talking with each other.

Finally, the connections people made and the willingness they had to be challenged by what was presented showed how their faith was being nourished and developed through the process. Some raised the question, 'What if a person from a different kinship group to mine asks me for something—will I give it?' Another group was asked 'If Jesus was in your community on that last night, he would not have washed people's feet. What would he have done?' The fact that Jesus washed Judas' feet triggered the following tentative response. 'He would have given clothes to all *skin groups* (kinship groups).' Another person told the story of her father who was 'being sung' (sorcery) by three men in the community and he started to get sick. 'He knew who

⁷ Anthony Gittins, *Gifts and Strangers* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1989) 60.

had sung him. He forgave them. He died. That makes me think of Jesus.'

It is very obvious from the above that there is an integral connection between the biblical story and understanding of the biblical culture and values. When Aboriginal people are exposed to these and study them in depth, and are invited to make connections with their story, and their culture and values, then the Scriptures become a resource for the faith development and nourishment of Aboriginal Catholic Christian people.

In the past, in the process of colonization we westerners rarely listened to the cultures of the people whose lands we liberally invaded.

Here we have listened to the Aboriginal peoples' requests for real involvement in liturgy, ministry, and theology. There is much to do, and this is an attempt to bring resources together. The working out of these Scripture programs and the use of these resources, and a real listening and responding to the expressed needs of the Aboriginal peoples have been part of this process. It is by no means finished.

SYRIA

Dan O'Donovan¹

MANY YEARS AGO now, a Christian conference was being held in Broome. Among those who came from every part of the Kimberley was a group of elders from Billiluna, in the Great Sandy Desert. At a break in the program, one of them asked me if I could show them around a bit, as a few hadn't ever seen the sea. So, six of us crammed into my little Bundera, and off we drove to Gantheaume Point.

The tide was in, but we were able to see the plastercast replica of the dinosaur's footprint—the original visible at low tides. We went over to the rocks then, and stood there for a long time, in silence, just taking it in. There was a wind, and the waves were crashing and throwing foam. The sea extended pale blue to the horizon. I was slightly behind the men. One of them, in bated voice, at last spoke out. In what he said, I caught only the word *tarruku*. It was a moment of overwhelming intensity. *Tarruku*, in Walmajarri, means holy/sacred, or Law. It is related to the word *kunju*, meaning strength, power...

In a far distant country named Syria lived a young Christian people who would have shared these elders' feelings. A people of Nature, born of Mother Earth. Their heart answering to Nature's movements with the greatest pleasure. In their Christian faith, they were well aware that God had made the world beautiful for their enjoyment, and the all-embracing *wunan*, or exchange.

¹ Fr Dan O'Donovan, a frequent contributor to *Nelen Yubu*, lives as a hermit at The Rice Bowl, near Beagle Bay WA.

If you look in the map at the back of your Bible, you will easily find the country of Syria (Aram). It is at the east end of the Mediterranean Sea. Running through part of it are two great rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates. The land between those two rivers was known as Mesopotamia, (a word which means simply 'between-the-rivers.')

All that country today we call 'the Middle East,' which includes the Holy Land of Israel.

People there spoke a language called Aramaic, or Syriac. That is also the language Jesus spoke. Sometimes those people are referred to as 'the Semitic race,' from their first ancestor Sem, one of the three sons of Noah (see Genesis, 5,32).

The creative centre of the Syrian Christian East is first of all Jerusalem, the mother Church, but with her the Churches of Antioch and Edessa. These two cities were situated at the starting-point, and on the great road from the Mediterranean Sea to India and China. The foundations of these Churches were tied up with the names of the apostles of Jesus: James, Peter and Thomas.

So, we see *three Christian cultural families* spreading around the world in different directions, each proclaiming the one unchanging Gospel, but in its own way. *The Latin* spread around what today is sometimes called 'the West', (Europe and America, north and south). From its Roman beginnings, it took on more a legal, disciplined way of living as Church, and even of worshipping. *The Greek* spread outward from the country of Greece and to its north, later taking in Russia. The Greek spirituality and mysticism had a strong philosophical content, rich and very deep. *The Syrian*—the one we are most interested in here as it comes closest to the Aboriginal way—spread eastward through Asia, as far as China. The Syrian, or semitic cultural way is more earth-related, and is consequently full of colourful and varied symbolism drawn from Nature, inexhaustible.

Saint Ephrem, one of the outstanding Syrians of the Church's beginnings in that country, composed many hymns in his own style. Quite a number of titles he gives to Christ in them originate in ancient Mesopotamia, his homeland. He felt free, as a Christian, to use them. No one complained. Themes and symbols from the same pre-Christian source also abound. That is why he is regarded by many

today as 'a link and meeting-point between European Christianity on the one hand, and Asian and African Christianity on the other.'

I will try now to outline, as briefly as possible, the main emphases of the Syrian Christian way in its earliest stage, when it hadn't yet become influenced by Greek philosophy.

We may note first that the general tone of the Bible is semitic from beginning to end. It is not a work of philosophy, but *a revelation*, expressed in often quite earthy terms, depending on the mentality of the writers.

The Syrians took it as it was. Its language pleased them, as it was the sort of language they used themselves. They liked poetry and song, story, body and dance. As Christians, they continued that way. It was *their* way of being Christian.

The Syrian theology/spirituality we are looking at is, therefore, a thoroughly Bible-based theology/spirituality. Afrahat, Ephrem, 'Macarios' and others, were all 'disciples of the sacred Scriptures' (Afrahat). These they took in their historical and plain literal sense, while drawing many spiritual meanings from them.

Hope

Syrians saw Christ as bringing a completely new slant to their Syrian holistic vision. Their traditional understanding of the universe had been in the shape of a closed circle. Life in all its forms was seen to be forever circulating. There was birth, growing, flowering, withering and dying. They watched this Law at work in the wild berries they gathered in season, or the fresh-water turtle they caught. It would never be any different.

One of the greatest theologians of the early Latin Church, saint Augustine, tells us that, with the coming of Christ and his revelation of God, that kind of holistic circle falls away. 'Those circles have now been blown open', he says.² They are replaced by a faith-grounded hope, open to That Which transcends them. This other holism the Syrians accepted with joy. They saw it as freeing them, at last, from the crippling bondage to Fate. The action which opened up this happy liberation of spirit was:

² 'Circuitus illi jam explosi sunt.' *De Civitate Dei*, 1. 12, c.21.

Baptism

...into Jesus Christ, and the community of God's People, by word and sign: that is, the baptismal formula Jesus left us, (Matthew 28,19), and water.

Baptism had been given to them by Jesus not just as the means of cleansing them of sin. By Baptism, they were incorporated into the whole Mystery of Christ and the Church, his Bride: 'Happy those who are called to the wedding-party of the Lamb.' (Revelation, 19,9).

Baptism was, in fact, where the spiritual experience now began for them. Life had been there already, of course, from the time they were born, but not the high and deeper Life of awakened communion with the All-Holy. This they now started to know in a small way at baptism.

They liked those words of Jesus which compared Baptism to a little seed put in the ground. First it is so small you can hardly see it. But when it grows, it becomes able even to give fruit. No one knows how (Mark 4, 26-29). Or it might become a tree, with leaves and branches the birds can build their nests in, and cattle can lie around in its shade, out of the sun (Daniel 4,12; Mark 4, 30-32).

They saw that there was nothing in the whole world as great as Baptism. For this, their hearts were filled with thanks to the God who allowed them to be one with him (2 Peter 1,4).

Incarnation, Eucharist

Being a people of Nature, Syrians naturally valued, and were in continual wonderment at, the mystery of the Eucharist, in which they saw a divinisation of matter. They called it 'the Medicine of Life,' and always understood it in the most intimate association with the Incarnation Mystery itself.

Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit they considered to be feminine, maternal: 'the good and heavenly Mother' ('Macarios'). It is through her that they came to be reborn in Baptism in the first place (see John 3,5). Like any good mother, She gave them many gifts in their growing. Everyone is gifted with the different gifts of this Mother.

She was also the sacred Presence of God in everything, 'the Flame of things,' the binding Force of a Love-kinship without bounds.

Mary

Syrian Christians had a tender devotion to Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the one upon whom the Holy Spirit had descended, bringing Salvation, (wholeness), for all.

A Heart-Centred Spirituality

To the baptised Syrian, heart and Holy Spirit were made for one another, like a good marriage. 'The love of God is poured forth in our hearts by the Spirit who is given to us,' saint Paul had said (Romans 5,5). That love of God *is*, in fact, the Holy Spirit in Person—the Spirit of Jesus Christ and of the Father. Syrians understood that well.

A Spirituality of Experience

The Holy Spirit indwelling in their heart was a God whom they actually *knew* and experienced. She was the guarantee, or pledge, of the truth of the Gospel and of eternal life beyond the grave (Romans 8,23; 2 Corinthians 5,5; Ephesians 1,14).

Love (charity) is the fulfilling of the Law' (Romans 13,10; again, in Jeremiah 31,33: 'I will place my law within them and I will write it on their hearts.')

Syrian Christians recognised charity as the highest good, superior to knowledge.

Says their countryman, Joseph Hazzaya, for instance: 'When your thought reaches out to all the human family, tears run from your eyes as from a well. It is as though all people were in your heart. You embrace and kiss them tenderly, in thought spreading over them your loving-kindness. When you think of them, your heart becomes alight as with fire by the force of the activity of the Spirit who is in you. From that, kindness and meekness are born in your heart, so that your mind thinks ill of no one.'

For Hazzaya, this humility of heart turns the attentive soul, in fact, to seeing others in the *image in which they were first created*, and which they will regain in eternal glory.

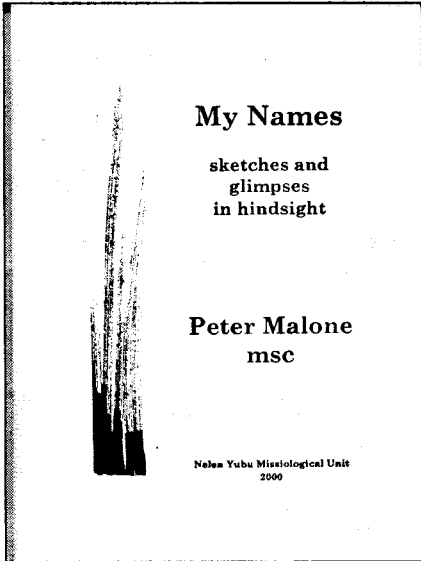
That such exalted charity was applied in practical action becomes evident in the life of saint Ephrem among others. He was close on 70 when a famine struck Edessa where he was living. He played a major role in organising relief for the poor, and himself died shortly after.

I said at the beginning of this article that I would try to 'outline the main emphases of the Syrian Christian way in its earliest stage.' It is a question merely of emphases.

The Syrian Christian cultural family bore witness, as we have now seen, to a pneumatic Christology, (from the Greek word, *pneuma*, meaning 'Spirit') — an understanding much in favour among theologians today.

Walter Kasper, for instance, has this to say: 'A Christology in a pneumatological perspective is ... what best enables us to combine the uniqueness and the universality of Jesus Christ. It can show how the Spirit who is active in Christ in his fullness is at work in varying degrees everywhere in the history of humankind, and also how Jesus Christ is the goal and head of all humanity.' (Quoted from, Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, page 197. Dupuis himself adds: 'It must be made clear, however, that Spirit-christology cannot stand without a Logos-christology. Were this to be the case, Jesus Christ would be reduced to a man *in Whom* and *through whom* God is present and active. He would not be Son of God in whom God stands revealed and communicated. To be complete, a pneumatic Christology must stress, on the one hand, the active presence of the Spirit throughout the human story of the man Jesus and, on the other, the sending of the Spirit to the world by the risen Christ. It must likewise show that Christocentrism and pneumatology belong together in the same economy of salvation.')

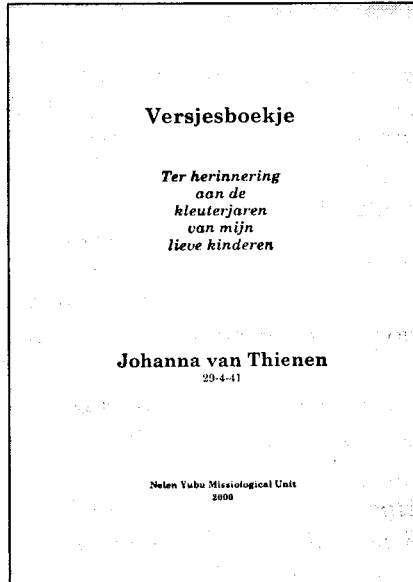
With Francis of Assisi (a Latin), the focus in my next article, will be rather on Jesus, who is the Christ.



NYMU has involved itself in some publication ventures. It is presently working hard at a 400 page history of Kensington Monastery being prepared by Fr Tony Caruana msc. On the left is the clever, insightful, witty character sketches of people whose names are significant to the author, Fr Peter Malone msc – people, as he says, who have lived in his memory or imagination.

My Names: sketches and glimpses in hindsight is available from NYMU or from Pauline Books & Media. Pages 179. ISBN 0 9587869 1 7 Cost \$20.

On the right is another more specialised production, all in Dutch, for Fr John Bosman msc: the poems and songs his mother wrote into note books for her children. Only 30 copies were made, for private distribution.



The Old Order Changeth . .

Deborah Wall¹

LAND IS LIFE' is a simple yet profound statement Aboriginal teachers want to share with us new settlers on this continent. 'If the land is being poisoned, culture itself has to die out,' says Rodger Shannon Uluru, 'and it will be non-Aboriginal people who will have to keep Aboriginal culture alive.' By 'poison', Rodger is referring to land degradation and ecological damage, a phenomenon often associated with mining and unsustainable abuse of land. He is also referring to its consequence, the passing away of Aboriginal culture.

For example, the holding of ceremony in his mother's culture ended in 1947 even though the people's language still exists. In contrast, Rodger's father's culture and connection with land, while still strong, is fading away and will eventually die out.

The teaching of Aboriginal culture by Aboriginal people to non-Aboriginal students is now taking place to keep Aboriginal culture alive.

At Tranby Aboriginal College, an educational institution in inner Sydney Glebe, non-Aboriginal students have some of their classes in the bush at a campsite in Rollands Plains, in a 5-hour drive up the

¹ Deborah Wall, originally from the Philippines, is Head Teacher of Communication at Sydney Institute of Technology. She holds a BA (Mass Communication) from the University of the Philippines, BA (Honours, Sociology) from Univ. of Wollongong, Graduate Dip. Ed. (Sydney Teachers College), Graduate Diploma in Ministry (Sydney College of Divinity). She is a member of the first group (22) of non-indigenous students at Tranby College.

This paper has appeared in *National Outlook* (May 2000 pp.16-17. Permission to reprint has been sought.

coast north of Sydney. The property has a lush bush environment with cattle, chicken, horses and other farm animals.

Camping out over a weekend in the bush not only gives students the opportunity to leave the stressful environment of city living, but also allows them to meet Aboriginal mentors, listen to their stories, experience bush tucker, learn about bush medicine and try their hand at Aboriginal art and craft.

All these rich experiences have become possible only because, for the first time in its history, Tranby opened its doors to non-indigenous people. This development in July last year was certainly a breakthrough and a boon to Australian Aboriginal studies because the curriculum is designed and taught by Aboriginal people in an applied and experiential way.

The course, an Advanced Diploma in Applied Aboriginal Studies (non-indigenous), includes some weekends at Linga Longa Aboriginal Philosophy Camp, run by Jack Beetson and his wife, Shani, in conjunction with Tranby Aboriginal College. Jack is the Executive Director of Tranby.

The property in Rollands Plains near Port Macquarie is in Biripai country. It is not Jack's country. He comes from the Ngembaa clan in Brewarrina. Nonetheless, Biripai elders, Auntie Pat and Auntie Lois (Pat Priest and Lois Davies), gave Jack permission to teach Aboriginal culture on their land.

How Jack and Rodger's paths crossed at Linga Longa must have been predestined. Fourteen years ago, helping to run an Aboriginal philosophy farm would not have crossed Rodger's mind at all. If anyone had suggested Jack and Rodger would be running such a farm, they would have both burst into laughter and found the idea simply incredible.

At that time, Rodger's focus was on the welfare and rehabilitation of homeless Aboriginal people. But Jack and Rodger met at Tranby and graduated there. When Jack acquired the property at Rowlands Plains, the idea of a philosophy farm was conceived and he asked Rodger to come as a resource person. He gladly accepted.

While Rodger occasionally teaches at Tranby, his style of teaching goes beyond the four walls of a classroom. In fact, he is in his element

best in the bush. His teaching consists of sharing culture, bush craft, painting, carving, building campsites made of natural bush material, bush medicine and generally giving students a broader perspective on Aboriginal people and culture.

Jack's sharing, on the other hand, often provides insights into the struggle of Aboriginal people. Phil Au Wang, a Torres Strait Islander and another grassroots resource person, teaches traditional songs as well as preparation of traditional food cooked in an underground oven, the Torres Strait Islander way.

The course is very successful and this year, another non-indigenous class has started. During Easter, a world indigenous gathering was to be held at the camp from 24-29 April and about 200-300 people were expected to attend.

This gathering is a milestone considering that the Aboriginal Philosophy Camp started only in 1998 with 150 people in attendance.

Many people will have now been able to meet Rodger, a man of innate intelligence and wisdom. He is a teacher, artist, craftsman, dreamtime storyteller, bush interpreter and translator of Aboriginal symbols, bird and plant life, and landscape. Like Jack, he is not from Biripai country. He belongs to the Adnyamathanat and Pitjanjatjara clans, from his mother's and father's side respectively, in South Australia where he was born near a creek in Hawker in 1955.

Another breakthrough that occurred late last year was an initiation ceremony which will ensure that Linga Longa will have a deep-seated connection to the Biripai elders' traditional land. Young Jack Beetson, aged two, son of Jack and Shani was initiated on Biripai land.

When Jack and Shani asked Rodger to preside over the ceremony, he felt honoured by the request. He returned to South Australia to seek permission from his elders to conduct their ceremony in New South Wales. First, Rodger conducted a ceremony to renew Jack and Shani's marriage vows, and then he initiated their son Jack as a man.

This latter ceremony is historic. South Australia's traditional initiation rites were used in the presence of a Biripai elder, Auntie Lois. The rites were for a young fellow whose roots are from another country, the Ngembaa in Brewarrina, his father's country. The

ceremony was conducted to open up the spirit of young Jack and bring it back to the land.

At the smoking ceremony, indigenous and non-indigenous friends were present and in this sense, it was again ground breaking. This was 'sharing culture' in a broader sense.

'The ceremony would have taken five days in Central Australia, but I broke it down to 45 minutes and kept it basic, simple and in English because of the presence of people from other cultures, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal,' Rodger explained.

After the ceremony, a new relationship emerged between young Jack and Rodger who will now assume the role of Jack's 'father' or mentor throughout his life. On this land, a new story will be written about the meeting and sharing of diverse Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal cultures. Early this year when Jack was re-introduced to us as a man and each of us walked around with him in a smoking ritual, and afterwards, we became his 'aunties', a term of respect usually accorded to elders.

'As the landscape changes, so does culture,' Rodger pointed out. 'We are now experiencing a modern way of understanding and communicating culture. We can feel sad for it, but things change. We can no longer do it the traditional way at home.'²

² Readers interested in further information on the Aboriginal Philosophy Farm may consult the Web site: <http://go.to/LingalOnga>.

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN ASIA

The following compact statistical note was forwarded to us by Fr Dennis Murphy msc with the comment that [Fr J H Koeger's] 'statistics in Asia are very informative and would help make Australians a little bit more aware.'

It is reprinted from *Mission Today*, April-June 2000, pp.285-286, by kind permission of the editor, J Puthenpurakal sdb.

Catholics world-wide constitute 17.2% of all people; all Christians are 33.1% of humanity. In Asia, Catholics (105.2 million in 1997) represent only 2.9% of the nearly 3.5 billion Asians. Significantly, well over 50% of all Asian Catholics are found in one country alone—the Philippines. Thus, if one excludes the Philippines, Asia is only about one percent Catholic; this leaves very small minorities of Catholics in most Asian nations.

The Church in Asia continues to grow. In 1988 there were 84.3 million Catholics; by 1997 they had reached 105.2 million (an increase of 20.9 million or 25%). The number of priests rose from 27,700 to 32,291 during the 1988; 1997 nine-year period. Asian seminarians increased from 19,090 to 25,842 in this same period. Asian countries with the most seminarians (given in descending order) are: India, Philippines, South Korea, and Vietnam. In 1997 Asia had 617 out of the 4,420 bishops in the world.

The 1997 statistic of 32,291 priests in Asia includes 17,789 diocesan priests and 14,502 religious priests. Two-thirds of all religious priests are Asians; the vast majority (86%) of religious sisters are also Asian. The countries with the largest number of indigenous sisters (in descending rank) are: India, Philippines, South Korea, Japan, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

The Church in Asia is known for its commitment to education. 1998 statistics present the following data: kindergartens (9,388) with 1,861,530 students; elementary/primary schools (13,467) with 4,660,914 students; secondary schools (7,935) with 4,195,208 students, the number of students in Catholic higher institutes is 703,834.

An interesting exercise is to shrink the entire earth's population into a village of precisely 100 people, with all the existing human ratios

remaining the same. In this village there would be 57 Asians, 21 Europeans, 14 from the Western Hemisphere, both north and south, and 8 Africans. Of these 100 persons 52 would be female and 48 would be male. There would be 70 people of colour and 30 would be white. Religiously, 67 would be non-Christian and 33 would be Christians. Out of 100 people 70 would be unable to read; 50 would suffer from malnutrition, 1 would be near death, 1 would be near birth; 1 (only 1) would have a college education; and, 1 would own a computer.

Individual Statistics

This presentation now turns its focus to individual Asian nations. Abundant statistics are available; only two items will be included. For each country the estimated population in millions for the year 2000 is listed, this is followed by the percentage of Catholics in that nation.

Bangladesh (145.8m/0.27%); Bhutan (1.8m/0.02%); Burma Myanmar (48.8m/1.3%); Cambodia (10.3m/0.02%); China (1,239.5m/0.5%); Hong Kong (6.9m/4.7%); India (990m/1.72%); Indonesia (202m/2.58%); Japan (127.7m/0.36%); Korea-North (22.6m/?); Korea-South (47.2m/6.7%); Laos (6.2m/0.9%); Macau (0.5m/5%), Malaysia (22m/3%); Mongolia (2.5m/?); Nepal (23m/0.05%); Pakistan (142.6m/0.6%); Philippines (74.8m/81%); Singapore (3.1m/6.5%); Sri Lanka (20.8m/8%); Taiwan (22.1m/1.4%); Thailand (61.6m/0.4%); Vietnam (78.2m/6.1 %).

Concluding Reflections

These few secular and religious statistics already indicate that "being a missionary church in Asia" demands creative, innovative, dialogical and inculturated approaches to Gospel proclamation. In addition, although beyond the scope of this short presentation, one should also consider diverse cultural, political, social and economic realities in envisioning pastoral program of integral evangelization. The task before the local churches is great; they must respond with enthusiasm and insight!

Though numerically small, the churches of Asia are a blessed and vigorous minority. This fact was clearly recognized during the Asian Synod; some of its words in the Final Message (nos. 7-8) can be a source of genuine optimism for Asia's local churches. Why? "Our

greatest reason for hope is Jesus Christ, who said: 'Take heart, it is I: have no fear' (Mt 14:27), and 'I have overcome the world' (Jn 16:33).⁷ "So let us be confident. The Spirit of the Lord is obviously at work in Asia, and the church is quite active in this continent." "This is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is always the one at our side to help us."

NOTE: These composite statistics are drawn from nearly 20 sources, such as Yearbooks, Almanacs, Encyclopedias, News Services, Country Profiles. They aim to be accurate as well as to indicate trends and developments in Asia.

—J. M. Kroeger MM

GST

The new Goods and Services Tax will mean that the annual subscription for *Nelen Yubu* will increase by 10%, to \$16.50.

Organisations and persons qualified to do so will be able to reclaim \$1.50 as a tax credit.

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When the Drum and the Rosary Meet

Ways of Knowing: Experience, Knowledge, and Power Among the Dene Tha, by Jean-Guy A Goulet, Vancouver. University of British Columbia Press, 1998; 334 pages, softcover. \$29.95 ISBN #0-7748-0681-8.

Prepared by: Wayne A. Holst¹

'if you're an Indian, you know what is going on'

- Dene Tha speaker

With his book *Ways of Knowing: Knowledge and Power Among the Dene Tha* Jean-Guy A Goulet, a professor of anthropology and a dean at St. Paul University in Ottawa, takes a new approach to the heroic story of Catholic missions among Canada's First Nations people.

Traditionally, non-native missionaries have usually informed us about how the Christian message was shared with the Native people. Through a careful investigation of one Native community located in a secluded part of the country Goulet's study furnishes helpful, even startling insight into how that message may have actually been received by the people themselves. It is apparent that considerable differences in understanding continue to exist between Native and

¹ Rev. Dr Wayne A Holst is a lecturer at the University of Calgary. He was a pastor, missionary and church executive for twenty five years and his current work focuses on modern spiritualities, the comparative spirituality of indigenous peoples and cross-cultural awareness.

non-native cultures. Those committed to the church's mission will be attracted to this challenging assessment.

From 1979, when he began twelve years of field work in the settlement of Chateh (known as Assumption) in northern Alberta until the appearance of *Ways of Knowing* Goulet learned much from the Dene Tha about their distinctive beliefs and practices. The author respects both the missionaries and the native people but concludes that, after more than a century of ever-increasing participation in Euro-Canadian institutions such as the church, the Dene Tha have rejected neither their traditional culture nor the Catholic faith. They have adapted them both to deal with modern realities.

"If you're an Indian, you know what is going on," a Dene Tha once told Goulet. In response, the author determined to understand what this meant and to learn all he could about Native ways of learning how to think and come to know things. In a manner differing from others and through a combination of scientific skill, attentive listening, language-learning, patient trust-building and mutual respect Goulet was able to at least partially penetrate the Dene Tha world and to begin reconstructing reality as they know it. His search caused the author to break with anthropological convention and to interpret what he discovered from 'personal experience' and 'radical participation'. He gained a rich appreciation of traditional Dene Tha knowledge and a unique understanding of their perspective. His efforts can help the church to better understand First Nations people as a whole. They constitute an important part of the Christian community in Canada.

'When only two people are left on earth, one to sing and another to dance for him, this song will not become old, but will remain fresh.'

- **Dene Tha dreamer**

After more than a century of faithful Catholic missionary service among them the Dene Tha claim a strong Christian loyalty. Often, however, this is understood in ways outside the knowledge of the missionaries and in a manner that non-natives might not immediately understand, says Goulet. He has no doubt that the people are Christian, but the Christianity they espouse has been developed in a way that is uniquely their own. The Dene Tha, like many other Dene

in the Canadian subarctic, identify themselves as Roman Catholic. They baptize their children, pray the rosary, and attend Mass, especially on the occasion of a funeral. Nonetheless, they have had to distance themselves from some Euro-Canadian ways of thinking and acting which run counter to cherished values they have always held as a people. The Dene Tha outlook: world—and life—persists. Christian labels have been applied to Dene Tha concepts, and Christian symbols have been applied to Dene Tha lives and rituals.

This may upset some Christians who believe that their Euro-Canadian traditions are the only valid expressions of the Catholic faith. But those who hold that the faith will only be valid for a people if it becomes 'enculturated' or 'indigenized'—grafting itself onto the life patterns of those receiving it—will celebrate something very special about what has been taking place among the Dene Tha.

Goulet transcribes a marvellous dream sequence which he was able to receive from a Dene Tha prophet named Alexis Seniantha of Chateh. Alexis follows a long line of traditional dreamers and shamanic prophets who were not always understood by the missionaries. The Dene, on the other hand, respected the Catholic priests among them and thought that they too possessed the gifts of dreaming and prophetic utterances that traditionally they had honoured. Most priests did not consider themselves gifted in this way and suspected those who were. Alexis is a devout Catholic and, for him, the traditional Dene drum and the Christian crucifix—signs of the prophet and the priest—have become integrated prayer symbols of his faith.

Goulet believes that there are significant differences of understanding between some Dene Tha and Christian meanings and that many of these differences remain largely unexamined today. But the Dene Tha are convinced that their way of praying will continue into the future so that 'when only two people are left on earth, one to sing and another to dance for him, this song will not become old, but will remain fresh.'

Goulet muses on the decline in the number of priests serving in the North. 'More and more Native communities are being left to live and die—indeed, even to bury their dead—without the presence of a priest. The Dene Tha and other Dene communities in the arctic and

subarctic may soon find themselves again with religious leaders who pray and are priests by themselves.'

Ways of Knowing provides both clarification and challenge to Christians who wish to see the Dene Tha remain within the Catholic community but who also wish to respect the traditional spirituality of this noble people. These realities open the door to the possibility of a constructive interfaith dialogue between those who follow only traditional religion, those who are Catholic Christians and those who consider themselves adherents of both. The questions Goulet raises will no doubt occupy the Canadian church for many years to come.

THREE VIGNETTES

Vince Carroll msc¹

I

I WAS an official at a *Baby's Coming Out* the other day. For the child's health sake, it (and mother) stay indoors for three months after birth. The mother looked ravishing in her best clothes. The ladies of the church group, Daughters of St Anne, usually in drab purple and black, had laid aside those clothes and come in gay dress.

The mother made a confession (about what I don't know, but gave the usual one Our Father: *Tate Rena Tee*). We sang a song in the house and lavishly incensed the baby. The Lady-in-Waiting carried a candle as we processed into the Sun. It was a lovely day and a happy occasion.

The mother sat on the ground in the house tapa (compound) and everyone sat about. The grandmother was seated central. A medal was blessed and fixed to the baby. The baby was presented to the Grandma, and then via safe hands and many smiles to everyone present, who held and dandled the child (even I!). It was a great baby.

A simple set of words were used, and I was invited to say a few words. We finished with the Our Father and Blessing. This is how the child was separated from mother and made a member of both church and village community. It is the village that educates the child.

¹ Fr Vince Carroll msc is working in South Africa at St Brendan's School, Dwars River, Bandelierkop, North Province, within the diocese of Tzaneen.

I usually don't know all the details till it's over, but I did notice the Grandma looking a bit glum. Apparently the mother, a relief teacher, who has three children (one due for Grade 8 at St Brendan's next year) has had them all by different husbands. Still, the Catholic population of devout women support her.

II

WE WERE visiting students for confirmation in 2001 in their homes, and came last to a couple who had left the church and become ZCC's. Both were teachers, but she had no job, and the house was impoverished by teachers' standards. Most of our students' parents are teachers. I questioned the dad mostly, if it was advisable to confirm his daughter Catholic in these circumstances. She was young. The grandmother was a devout Catholic, a Daughter of St Anne, had been sick, and despite constant invitations, decided to remain a Catholic. 'You can bury me as a Catholic,' she said.

The man had left the church to get healing of a pain under his heart. It had been healed. He was happy in his religion, but occasionally (e.g. Ash Wednesday) came back to our church. They are thinking of making him a leader in the ZCC.

ZCC is the Zion Christian Church: the largest African indigenous church in South Africa, with a membership of five million. Once American, it is now local. They gather one million strong about their Bishop for three days each Easter, and sleep on the hillsides round Moria, their centre, just outside the Tzaneen diocese.

Their theology is basic. I thought they had no sacraments, but find from the teacher that they baptised at about sixteen years. Their form and matter seem appropriate but they are not listed in the very broad group of churches accepted by the SA Catholic bishops as having valid baptism.

They worship under the Sun (if no rain — rain itself is a blessing — 'Pula e segofatsa') in a low-walled compound, no seats, with a large tree inside it. They are trusted and honest workers, men always wearing a uniform of peaked cap and coloured overalls, women a

beret. Their star of silver and patch of green is always on their chest. They are proud to be ZCC and seemingly find solace in their religion. They stand all day Sunday in their circles, men mostly, and are a silent witness to us all who would push our religious observance into an hour or so.

III

A baptismal rite recommended by my Sotho teacher to the bishop would go something like this:

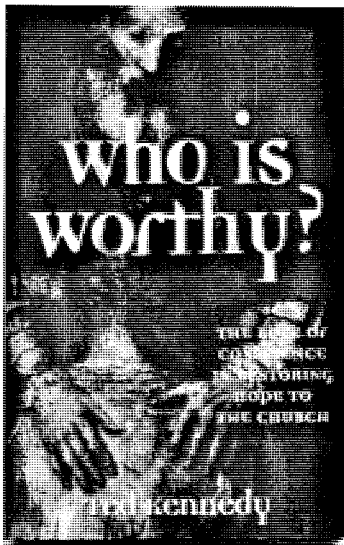
The mother takes the child outside and presents it to the *Sun* (the light). It is laid on the *ground* and the mother walks about it (to show her separation from it and its belonging to the earth). She washes it *with water* (washing is a necessary part of all African rites here, especially funerals, to get off the darkness (Leswiswi) and finally the child is *oiled all over*. It is *re clothed*.

African kids have beautiful names, such as Mpho² (Gift), Tshifihwa (Hope), Lerato (love or desire). Some too are banal, like Windy or Rainy (Mapula) according to the weather conditions at birth time. It is the nature of a child in our Sotho (Sefedi) culture 'to be sent.' It right well fits the sending of the Son of God.

² The manuscript was sometimes hard to decipher. This spelling is a guess. Ed.

Book Note

On Palm Sunday, 16 April, Fr Ted Kennedy launched his new book *Who Is Worthy?* in St Vincent's Church, Redfern. The church was packed to overflowing with people who wished to honour Ted who has maintained his rage over the decades for people discriminated against by society and the church, that is, the ecclesiastical institution itself.



The back cover blurb states it well:

'This is a radical call for major and profound change in the Australian Catholic, as well as a direct challenge to the conservatism epitomised by Melbourne's Archbishop George Pell.'

Maybe it is a pity that Ted's flaming desire to speak out in the name of the targets of discrimination, particularly Aboriginal people and the homosexual community, should have been so massively concerned with the views and actions of one contemporary Australian churchman, who may not otherwise have been much remembered (but you never know!).

On the other hand, it is in character that Ted would not be talking just theory but actual issues at hand.

And further, one must acknowledge that Ted's historical vision is quite wide, even though perforce only sketchily developed within the compass of some 150 pages. As Ted sees it, the rot began to seep in with the seduction of empire in the fourth century. The desire to dominate is still with us. One of its practical manifestations is the presumption to discriminate in regard to who is *worthy* to access Christ in the sacraments.

Who Is Worthy? is published by Pluto Press Australia, 2000. It is soft cover, 151 pages, ISBN 1 86403 087 9. The front cover displays a detail of Rembrandt's intensely symbolic painting of the Prodigal Son. It retails for \$24.95. My copy came from the UNSW Bookshop.

From the Secretary's Desk . . .

Once long ago when I was a skinny kindergartner, too tall for my age and very bossy, I found myself settling into school life in a stately ex-church building with plenty of playground space, a huge peppercorn to sit under for lunch, and a dear old nun who used to tell us stories of the missions. Even now, I can see her gentle face full of longing and concern for the people of Melville Island. Entranced by her tales, I made up mind on the spot to go and work there as soon as I grew up, just to be with those happy, laughing, dark children living in freedom on a sunny island away from the big noisy towns and home chores. Strangely, that ambition has never left me.

In fact I remember the disappointment on realizing that this could never actually happen. How could I ever get myself from my own home town 'way up to that far off romantic place of tropical bush, long sandy beaches, billabongs, boats and hundreds of merry children running about eating mud crabs and bush nuts like Sister said?

Then along to join our mob came a new pupil: Billy Butt. He was a small brown boy of indeterminate age with black curly hair, happily bare-footed, a face

of smooth black skin and big dark eyes that shone. Immediately I developed a mad crush on him because here was my chance—if Billy and I could get through school at lightning speed, we could be married and take off to this exciting Melville Island to live and work with the wonderful people there.

Sadly, Billy seemed to prefer to play with the boys at school.

That mind-picture of Melville (Pularumpi) in the Northern Territory, about 150km north-west of Darwin across the Arafura Sea, stayed with me through childhood (minus Billy) till I was married, had children and was eventually widowed. How strange to realize a dream come true! I went to Bathurst Island Mission for two years, then to Kalumburu, Daly River, Santa Teresa southeast of Alice Springs—and finally the long-remembered Melville Is! For more than three years I revelled in the land of my dreams! That old nun, long since gone to God, had left me a directive that couldn't be denied, lasting over half a lifetime.

And what a life I had in the Tiwi Islands: apart from clerical work with Nelen Yubu, there was fishing for barramundi and mangrove jacks, taking risks in small boats out on the turbulent Apsley Strait, exploring unchartered creeks, sleeping out bush under the stars with the Tiwi women; crabbing, swimming, playing the organ for Mass, driving the truck to

Snake Bay and Picertaramore—
and precious friendships made.

So my cup is full. There are copious photo albums crammed with snaps of all my mission 'homes', which I revisited only a couple of years ago. And I have never forgotten that elderly nun who firmly planted her wish in the heart of a little girl.

I wonder what happened to Billy?

* * * * *

My ten-year-old granddaughter, Anna, came from Melbourne to spend a week with me just before Easter, which gave us a good excuse to visit some famous Sydney sights and beaches such as Manly, the Zoo, La Perouse, etc. Our first outing was to Wattamolla on the south coast, beyond Bundeena. This is a wild and solitary place, but when we arrived, we found a helicopter weaving above us and men running about on the opposite headland south of Little Marley. We decided this was a military exercise which didn't interest us much, so clambered down to the lagoon and prepared to cook our sausages for lunch. Suddenly Anna jumped up, grabbing her camera. 'Nan! there's a ship landing...' and we bolted to the beach. Here was a hive of activity, with the replica of one of the ancient vessels that had discovered Australia, dropping

anchor. More than that, there was a large contingent of Aborigines on the beach, one of them, an elderly man, sitting in his boat tending a fire! Anna's camera clicked and flashed as we stumbled through the bush and down the hillside.

Standing on a ledge, we watched the performance of a film crew photographing a segment on the landing of Capt. Arthur Phillip, two and a half centuries ago. The Aborigines were certainly realistic as they raced down the beach brandishing their spears to portray the earlier landing. And the old man in the boat kept his fire alight despite a leaking plank.

The shoot took hours, but we were not in any hurry. As we were leaving, some of the film crew spoke to us: they were doing a segment on the historic landing for a documentary, *Continent of Fire*, organised by a television company in Germany where it is to be released. They told us some were local Aborigines; others were recruited from an Aboriginal dance company.

Even when she barked her shin on a rock, Anna was determined not to miss any of the thrill. To a little girl of ten this was a newsworthy story to take back to Melbourne.

* * * * *

Can't let this issue go to press without my contribution to Sorry Day. On Sunday, 29 May 2000, together with what looked like half a

million people, three of us from the Monastery, our Superior, Fr Peter Hearn msc, our editor Fr Martin Wilson msc, and I braved the elements to crush into a packed bus from Kensington to Bathurst Street in the city, in support of Aboriginals all over Australia. We alighted into the teeth of a raging, freezing westerly wind and, bent-double, had to force our way down to Town Hall station to crush into one of the jam-packed trains taking us to North Sydney. Here we joined the Sorry Day march, and how privileged we felt! The milling throng was serious, quiet, and very determined to make its mark in history. We were there to send a message to the world in general and our Prime Minister in particular.

As we slowly wended our way on to the mighty Sydney Harbour Bridge, I was struck by the calmness and pleasant attitude of those around me. People smiled,

were deferential to other walkers; there was no pushing or jolting; no riots or filching, swearing or rudeness. Everyone simply trod the bridge with dogged determination to be counted as a friend of our indigenous neighbours. One man put his hand on my shoulder and said: 'Look up!' and there in the sky was a huge SORRY being carved by an almost invisible plane. As soon as one faded in the fierce wind, another would appear, and on and on it went — a very important word!

What struck me in particular was the friendly enthusiasm of everyone marching. It was the most willing, peaceful, single-minded demonstration we could offer, and its message was over-whelmingly clear.

I am grateful to have had that opportunity to show my support—and proud to have been one of those marchers across the bridge on Sorry Day 2000.

Best wishes,

Secretary Keren