

Editorial

First of all, a word of appreciation is due to our contributors, especially those who have been steadfast in their active support of *Nelen Yubu* over the years. Our debt of gratitude was borne in upon me while I was writing the additional comment to Barry Brundell's review note of Eugene Goosen's *Australian Theologies* (pp.29-31). I am quite convinced that periodicals like *Nelen Yubu* perform an important function in the development of Australian theology, particularly if it is going to embrace the Aboriginal element, as it most certainly should.

In this issue we are pleased to initiate a series of papers that will finally constitute Frank Fletcher's book, *Jesus and the Dreaming, a Westerner's preparation for dialogue* (pp.1-10). The plan is to publish the drafts as they become available. Frank is keen that readers provide him with feed-back on them.

The widely experienced Kevin Barr msc briefs us (pp.11-15) on study on the topic of racism that is being conducted under the aegis of the United Nations and the World Council of Churches.

Rev. Wayne A Holst (whom I might be able to call our informal Canadian correspondent) reviews (pp.15-18) a history of the Oblates' missionary experience in British Columbia. For us here in Australia it constitutes a cautionary tale.

As I indicated in my review note (pp.30-31) on Eugene Goosen's *Australian Theologies* referred to at the beginning of this Editorial, I consider papers like that supplied in this issue (pp.19-29) by one of our stalwart contributors, Noel McMaster CSsR, to be the most precious element in *Nelen Yubu*.

People regularly tell me that the first thing they read is 'From the Secretary's Desk'. I'm sorry therefore that formatting considerations have allowed Keren only one page this time.

— Martin Wilson msc
Editor

JESUS AND THE DREAMING: A Westerner's Preparation for Dialogue

Frank Fletcher msc

Father Frank Fletcher msc, Theol.D, longtime theologian and seminary lecturer, after twelve years with the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry of Sydney archdiocese, is in the process of writing a book to be entitled *Jesus and the Dreaming*. Until the book can be completed and, hopefully, published, Frank is happy to share the first drafts of his chapters with *Nelen Yubu*. We begin in this issue with his first chapter, 'Meeting the Objections'. These days Frank lives at Chevalier Resource Centre, Kensington, NSW.

CHAPTER I

Meeting the Objections

THE MERE SIGHT of the title *Jesus and the Dreaming* can bring cannonades from opposing directions. The first cannonade, and one I take with respectful seriousness, comes from Aborigines: how dare you think you can speak for us concerning our most sacred things. To which I reply: please believe me, I would not dare to speak for you, nor would I dare to suggest I have knowledge of your sacred mysteries. I do not dispute the right of many activists, both black and white, to suspect from the title that this could be a Christian attempt to take over Aboriginal spirituality. That has been 'the form' of

settler Australians. They have already presumed to assimilate much Aboriginal symbolism and art whilst still withholding any treaty or agreement that would guarantee the distinct status of Aboriginal people within the nation. On their track record would Western Christians be any more trustworthy in their dealing with Aboriginal spirituality?

In my early years of ministry among Aboriginal people, I attended a meeting addressed by the Aboriginal leader, Rev. Charles Harris. Charles was the instigator for and a keen organiser of the great trek of 1988 which brought tens of thousands of Aborigines to Sydney for the We Have Survived March 1988 during the bi-centenary celebrations of European 'settlement'. He was also the founder of the Aboriginal Christian Conference. The meeting addressed by Charles was in protest against the government's attempt to repeal the Aboriginal Land Rights Act in the state of New South Wales. What I remember most from his address was just one sentence: 'The God of the Christian Churches has failed the Aboriginal people.' Those words cut me to the bone. But let me add quickly, Charles did not mean to attack Jesus. He went on almost immediately to say: '...but we Aborigines have found Jesus for ourselves.' I have wrestled with the pain of this issue in the years since. I am convinced, from knowing Charles, that what he was attacking was the Westerners' false representation of the Christian God to the Aboriginal people, the Western presumption that God was to be identified with their civilisation. To accept the Christian God meant embracing the civilisation whose practitioners had taken over the Aboriginal land. I have dedicated this work to Rev. Charles Harris because the project began from the shock of his words. I believe it is important that from the start I make clear the paradoxical nature of the Christian presence in the world. On the one hand we Western Christians have felt called to give a responsible witness to Christ's presence in the world. On the other hand, in so far as we have tended to interpret this

responsibility as superiority over others, then we have given a distorted witness to Christ. This paradox can be expressed in the terms identity and non-identity: the Christian's presence in the world is a unity of identity with Christ and of non-identity with Christ. Christians carry in sacred trust a care for the mysteries of Christ and his Gospel. Where they do so authentically in the world, their sign of Christ is an identity. On the other hand, Christians are as exposed as other people to cultural blindness and to the compromises of their social situation. An example of this compromising blindness would be the long toleration of the institution of slavery. Another example would be the acceptance that the lands of indigenous people could lawfully be seized by Western nations. Some will say that the expansionist Europeans brought Christian missionaries with them. And many missionaries and other Christians tried to protect the native peoples. But, to our shame, the majority of Christians supported the policies whereby the indigenous and their lands were subjugated. Of course, it is often pointed out that most of these policies go back to previous eras. Rev. Charles Harris saw the effects of these policies still active in 1989. He cried out that Christians who supported them did not reflect the face of Jesus.

We can take heart, however, from Charles' further words: 'We Aborigines have found Jesus for ourselves.' There is a continuing hope among Aboriginal Christians that through their own eyes they will see Jesus as one who is in kinship with them. Scholarship regarding the historical Jesus of Nazareth supports the people's hope. Though his country was under the dominion of Rome, Jesus did not consider himself as belonging to European civilisation. His culture and society could not in any sense be called Western. Likewise, of course, his culture was not Aboriginal. Jesus of Nazareth, however, was an ancient man, a man of his land who revered the stories of his ancestors. Aborigines notice Jesus' closeness to nature, his frequent withdrawals to its solitude. They feel the resonance of the land in

his stories. They are stirred also by his willingness to assert the integrity and justice of God against those who had long controlled the social order for their own self-interest. For these and other reasons they feel a kinship with Jesus. Should their gentle assertion of this kinship dispossess us Westerners? I believe that their kinship, by enabling us to judge ourselves from the viewpoint of those whom our Western culture has despised for more than two millennia, helps us to become aware that we do not possess the totality of identity with Christ. We have signalled much non-identity.

A Quartet of Voices

Besides the activists, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, whose serious objections I have tried to take aboard, there is also a quartet of non-Aboriginal voices who are either antagonistic or inhospitable to this project. The antagonistic voices are the Christian fundamentalists and those secular post-moderns who are aggressive in their defence of pluralism. To the fundamentalists, the title 'Jesus and the Dreaming' would seem another sell-out of the true faith of our fathers. For pluralistic post-moderns there are no certainties and certainly none in religion! They make much of the damage done to indigenous people by the misguided acts of naïve missionaries in the past.

The inhospitable voices are those of the New Age and of the modern mindset. The New Agers are influenced by post-modernism. They too believe that pluralism in religions is how it must be: the various religions present differing paths from which the New Agers can choose whatever is helpful toward a self-development spirituality. Thus a person may choose some elements from Aboriginal spirituality, some from Christian spirituality. But there would be suspicion of anyone seeking any intrinsic inter-relationship between the two.

Some New Agers, seeing our title, may hope it will be another story of a white person (preferably American) who has been

initiated into the most occult secrets of a desert Aboriginal tribe far from Western contact. If they expect anything like that, this work (as I have stressed already) will be a disappointment. No desert initiations. My time has been spent mainly with the Aboriginal people of Sydney and with some wider connections in New South Wales and other southern Australian states. These Aboriginal people have lost a lot of their language, their sacred stories and their ceremonies. But they are convinced of the Aboriginality that still marks their consciousness; many remain aware of the dreaming spirits within the land and of their own belonging to the land. Further, they remember the stories of what was done to their families. They know they are sometimes referred to in Northern Australia as 'mixed race', implying they are not truly Aborigines. They are the Galileans of Aboriginal Australia: and Jesus was a Galilean. In fact, these 'mixed race' are the most dispossessed of their people, they constitute the majority of the Aborigines and they provide most of their leaders.

These are the people among whom I have found wonderful friends. They know me as nothing more than a *gubbah*¹ theologian struggling within my Western Christian tradition to face honestly the issues that challenge Western Christians as a result of our historical treatment of Aboriginal people.

The Modern Mentality

Finally we come to the modern mentality: this is the seedbed of all the objections from the quartet of voices. The inner dynamic of modernity and what makes it so inhospitable to religion is made clear in the story of that pioneer of modernity, Copernicus. Copernicus (b. 1473) himself was a happy combination of scientist and Catholic priest. It is, however, not so much the man himself we must focus on but upon the cultural revolution he set in motion. This scientist recognised that planet earth is not the fixed centre of the universe: it is just one of the

¹ A *gubbah* is urban Aboriginal term for a white person

bodies moving round the sun. Thus he perceived that the movements of sun, moon and stars are not in reality as they appear to us from our observations on earth. How these things appear to us is the result of our observing them from our moving positions on the moving earth. This new understanding of perception brought a change in how humans felt in the cosmos. This shift provided the impetus and the passion of the modern mindset. The Copernican revolution, as it became accepted after Galileo, stirred Europeans against any naïve understanding that the universe was a cosy arrangement set up by God to be a home for humans. Since religious traditions had portrayed the Creator as the maker of their centre stage home, the Copernican awakening seemed to shake the foundations of the religious traditions. Humans began to view themselves as tiny creatures dwelling on a small planet in a vast and impersonal universe. So the cultural attitude toward the earth changed from spiritual enchantment to the material attitude of practical exploration and utilisation. Darwin reinforced the displacement of the human from centre stage. Humans appeared to have emerged fortuitously from a random flux within an evolutionary spiral.

These scientific attitudes had an effect upon poetry, music and sacred stories. The Greeks and the medieval thinkers who built upon the Greek heritage had implicitly accepted that there were a number of ways of coming to meaning: the rational scientific was just one; the aesthetic (poetry, music, stories) was another; and the union of the aesthetic and the mystical (sacred stories and ceremonies) still another. In the modern mentality, however, the status of the non-scientific was diminished. The moderns affirmed that the cosmos is comprehensible by scientific reason alone. The other approaches, if taken as serious answers to world problems, were nonsense and dangerous. Thus the modern mentality is inhospitable as much to the religion of Jesus as to the Aboriginal dreaming with its ceremonies and stories.

Philosophers added to this inhospitable and disenchanted mentality by accepting as true the modern Westerners' emerging feeling of the conscious self as autonomous. Indeed, they went on to treat the individual conscious self as quite separate from the world within which it dwells. They viewed knowledge as a construction produced by the subjective operations of consciousness. This 'turn to the subjective' is at the root of the more recent shift from the technologically optimistic modern to the sceptical post-modern. Philosophers and artists have felt painfully the hubris of the Western nations who presumed that their subjective constructions of law, government and civilisation were normatively right and so were to be imposed upon others. These post-moderns perceived that, in the Western nations, their technological supremacy emboldened their will to power over others. So the post-moderns were stirred with an ethical revulsion against the modern certainties which, whilst supposedly neutral, were in fact at the service of power.

Both the modern and the post-modern mentalities delight to dig into what is behind Western institutions including the Christian Church. Often Christians have found these critical investigations much to the point. This situation of being under critical examination, however, has had two sad effects among Christians. Firstly, modernity's exaltation of reason as the way of penetrating to true meaning skewed many Christians in their attitude toward the Bible and sacred rites. They began to insist that both Bible and sacred rites had to be understood totally as historically based and their accounts as true in a quite literal way. This position was dominant in the Church till about mid-20th century. At that time some acceptance was given to scholarship which demonstrated that the Bible was constituted by a variety of literary forms such as the poetic, the dramatic, the mythic as well as the historical. A tension, however, still remains.

A second position arose from the first. Many Christians insisted there could be no compromises with modern or post-

modern investigations and their worldviews. . These believers have taken a fiercely supernaturalist view in defending what they regard as the fundamentals of Christian faith. Christianity in its fundamentals is to be defended not only as historical and literally true but it *alone* is true. 'There is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.' (*Acts of the Apostles*, ch.4, verse 12). This is fundamentalism. It breeds an intransigent mind. However, we can sympathise to some extent with their fear that any compromise on the uniqueness of Christianity might lead to a faith collapse. In this work: we will be forced to take a stand against the fundamentalist view that the Aboriginal dreaming is merely a human invention or the paganism warned against in the Bible.

We will encounter fundamentalist objections again and again as we proceed. It may help to emphasise from the beginning that the Christian tradition affirms other religions. The most eminent and contemporary statement on this matter was that of Vatican Council II (1962-1965). The *Declaration on non-Christian Religions* (*Vatican Council II Documents*, ed. A Flannery, Collegeville 1977. 738-739) states: 'Throughout history even to the present day there is found among the different peoples an awareness of a hidden power which lies behind the course of nature and the events of human life...This awareness and recognition results in a way of life that is imbued with a deep religious sense.'

A little later in the same section it reads: 'The Catholic Church has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all.'

Evident in the background to the Vatican II statement is the long cherished Hebrew and Christian belief in a primordial revelation affecting all peoples from their beginnings (see J R Geiselman, *The Meaning of Tradition*, Burns and Oates, London, 1966. Chapter II, 39-78).

Following upon Vatican II the Church set up processes of dialogue with other world religions and more recently with the traditional or primal religions such as the Aboriginal. This dialogue with primal religions has stepped up in importance, especially in Africa. At the beginning of the new millenium the redoubtable Pope John Paul II spoke out on the urgency of dialogue between cultures and traditions (*World Day of Peace Message*, January 1, 2001). In the face of the widespread aggression of assimilationist policies, the Pope saw dialogue as the only hope (*World Day* section n.7). People do well to affirm their own culture but they need also to recognise its limitations. Regarding limitations, whilst acknowledging its extraordinary scientific and technological achievements, he noted that within the West 'there is a deepening human, spiritual and moral impoverishment' (n.9). The cultural models of the West, therefore, have had a corrosive impact on some other cultures. He mentioned particularly the condition of cultural minorities dwelling within the context of such dominant cultures (n.8). In all areas of concern the Pope saw that an open dialogue between the differing religious traditions should play a constructive role (n.16).

Clarifying Our Direction

The urgency for dialogue, including that between spiritual traditions, applies particularly in the case of indigenous peoples living within Western societies such as those in the Americas and Australasia. Dialogue would need a significant body of members of the dominant culture (Australians or Canadians etc.) who recognise the obligation to dialogue. However, prior to dialogue we Westerners must take stock of our readiness for dialogue. Why? Let me spell this out clearly: *the majority of Westerners lack the authenticity necessary for this dialogue*. We have little awareness of the human, spiritual and moral impoverishment of the modern Western culture and even less awareness of how it has possessed our forebears and ourselves in our dealings with the indigenous. Consequently mainstream Australia (or Canada etc.) harbours a

commonsense ideology of assimilation. It believes in giving help to indigenous people: but it is help so that they will fit in with the mainstream! No presentation of what the history of assimilation has done, no evidence to show how the wounding of a culture affects people, no case studies of generations of suffering can dent the ignorance of the assimilationist commonsense.

I confess, too, that many Christians share this common sense and are little concerned for what has been done to the spiritual life of the indigenous. Few understand that a dialogue truly sensitive to what has affected the Aboriginal spiritual world would have to take in their whole encounter with our 'settler' culture—and so would involve questions of *our* spiritual condition. In short, we need preparation to find within ourselves, as well as about ourselves, the truth of what has passed as our spiritual attitudes in this land. We have to face the sickness we moderns are and have been. If it is evident that this inner preparation for dialogue is necessary, then the purpose of this work will also be clear. It is not directly dialogue with the indigenous. It is *a Westerner's preparation for authentic dialogue*. That is the subtitle of this work.

For us Christians, the preparation for spiritual dialogue should include an approach to the Word of God as mirrored within creation in the form of Jesus of Nazareth, an ancient Galilean man with experience to some degree akin to the indigenous tradition. Through this approach we may be astonished to find that the primal people, whom the West has disdained for more than two millennia, can now help us moderns toward a more life-giving, Christian spirituality.

RACISM AROUND THE WORLD

Kevin J Barr msc

THE UNITED NATIONS World Conference against Racism will be held in Durban late in 2001. In preparation for that event, the World Council of Churches is working with the United Nations on a worldwide ecumenical study entitled 'Understanding Racism Today'. The main objective of the study is to analyse global and regional trends in racism, and redefine the focus for work on racism and its specific strategies—especially as these affect the Churches. The research group to which I belong is working on a paper on racism/ethnic tension in the Pacific covering Papua New Guinea, West Irian, Fiji, the Solomon Islands and New Caledonia. (In all these places crisis situations have arisen in recent years.) Others are working on a paper discussing racism in Australia and racism in New Zealand.

The World Council of Churches work on racism aims to help the Churches recognize, understand and attempt to overcome racism wherever it exists in their midst. In 1995 the Central Committee of the WCC noted:

Institutional racism and the ideology of racism, in their most pernicious forms,

Continue unabated in contemporary societies and still affect churches dramatically

While ongoing social, political and economic trends are producing new forms of racism.

It would seem that racism and ethnic tensions arise because perceived differences between groups are deliberately used to justify conflict between them. Thus in the 19th century European colonial ideology of white superiority aided by social Darwinism

sought to justify the power and domination of white Europeans over non-white colonized peoples. Hitler's ideology not only classified Germanic northern 'races' as 'superior' to Jews, Slavs, Gypsies and Blacks but used it to exterminate those who were seen to be 'inferior'. In the Southern USA white groups created an ideology of supremacy to dominate, oppress and punish blacks. (Tschuy, 1997:xi)

Religious differences are often used to add further justification to the ideology of conflict. Thus religious differences between Israelis and Palestinians compound the problems between them. Likewise in Fiji tension between Fijians (most of whom are Christian) and Indians (most of whom are non-Christian) takes on religious as well as racial overtones. Racial conflict in Northern Ireland was not helped by the fact that one group was Protestant and one was Catholic. The fact that most Indians are Hindu and most Pakistanis are Muslim helps to explain the long-standing tensions between India and Pakistan.

The Difference Differences Make

There seems to be a tendency in human nature to be alert to differences. These differences could be natural (physical characteristics such as skin colour, hair type, body type) or constructed (culture, language, religion). When one ethnic group in traditional society found itself in the midst of other ethnic groups, they tended to celebrate the difference by seeing themselves as *the* people—'we are the people'. Others in their view were, in a sense, inferior because they were different in some way or another. Their way of doing things was perceived as 'strange' because it was different.

But, surprisingly, anthropologists such as Levi Strauss have found there is even a demand for establishing differences in order to conveniently separate groups in society. Thus, even within the same ethnic group, sub-groups were named after certain symbols (or totems) denoting animals or plants in order to denote differing

relationships and to determine who could marry who. This system of differentiating groups in society is very much a human construct.

Within any particular group people experienced a sense of oneness or belonging or community. It was their perceived differences from 'the others' which highlighted the characteristics which kept them together and encouraged them to protect each other and to maintain loyalty to the group. The 'enemy' were the others.

Usually the greater the number of similarities between groups of people in society, the greater the sense of unity and belonging. On the other hand the greater the number of differences, the greater the potential for disunity, suspicion and hostility.

In any dispute or crisis situation groups have tended to exploit their differences for their own advantage—especially if that group happen to be bigger or somehow more powerful.

From there it is not far to deliberately turn those differences into an ideology which supports one's own group and works against the other. Gregory Baum (1975:16) says that ideology is 'the deformation of truth for the sake of social interest' and refers to 'the largely unconscious production of ideas that protect the power of a group or class'. Anti-Semitism is one such ideology which European Christians constructed to control, restrict and even persecute European Jews. But so is white racist supremacy which had drastic consequences for colonized peoples in the 19th century—including the Aboriginal people of Australia. The apartheid system recently in vogue in South Africa is another outstanding example.

Armed with an ideology to support one's own group against others, it is only a short step to deliberately provoking hostility, warfare, destruction and killing. We can recall the Jewish pogroms, the Holocaust of Nazi Germany, the lynchings of 'niggers' in the Southern USA, and the numerous 'ethnic

cleansings' in recent years. The unbelievable genocide in Rwanda involving Hutus and Tutsi is a further example.

In societies where governments seek to promote harmony between different ethnic or racial groups there is much talk of equal rights in a multiracial/multiethnic/multireligious society. There is stress on what unites people rather than what divides them. Differences are celebrated not to incite division but to encourage a sense of unity in diversity in a society where all are accepted.

Jesus and the Kingdom

The genius of Jesus, of course, was to preach the message of the Kingdom of God where all are brothers and sisters in the one family of God and the basis of unity is love and forgiveness and compassionate concern. The Kingdom of God is at the heart of Jesus' message and it speaks of a new world order—the creation of a one-world family characterized by inclusiveness, love, justice, peace and liberation. Jesus symbolized the Kingdom in his table fellowship with all types of people.

Says O'Murchu (1997:163 and 168):

In proclaiming the power and message of the Kingdom, Jesus was not offering something to be realized at some future "escatological" time or in some other utopian place beyond this world. No, the New Reign of God is already at work in the here and now ...

The vision of the Kingdom opens up new worlds of possibility and hope, a strategy to make real and vibrant the relationships that augment life and diminish the forces of destruction and despair.

The tragedy is that the Christian Churches have sometimes been involved in promoting or justifying racism and ethnic

tension. The slaughter of Christians by Christians in Rwanda in recent years is a scandal for the Kingdom difficult to explain.

The current effort of the World Council of Churches seeks to help the churches identify oppressive, racist theologies and to better understand and combat old and new manifestations of racism in society and in the Church.

It is a worthwhile task and one in which we are all invited to participate.

References:

- Baum, Gregory (ed) 1975 *Journeys* ((Paulist Press: New York)
Levi Strauss, Claude 1972 *Totemism* (Penguin: Harmondsmith)
O'Murchu, Diarmuid 1997 *Reclaiming Spirituality* (Gill and Macmillan: Dublin)
Tschuy, Theo 1997 *Ethnic Conflict and Religion – Challenge to the Churches* (WCC Publications: Geneva)



THE LORD'S DISTANT VINEYARD: A History of the Oblates and the Catholic Community in British Columbia, by Vincent McNally, Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 2000. 443 pages, \$34.95 Cdn. Paper edition. ISBN #0-88864-346-2.

Reviewed by Wayne A Holst.¹

'At this moment in the history of Canada,' our church leaders declared at an Ottawa news conference in late September, 'it seems evident that as a matter of urgency we are called to work for peace in the relationship between the Aboriginal peoples of this land and the later arriving majority of people who live here'.

¹ Rev. Dr Wayne A Holst is a lecturer in religion and culture at the University of Calgary, Canada.

The leaders continue: 'The biblical imperative of Jubilee sheds a most challenging light on the unresolved issue of Aboriginal land rights in Canada. It is clear that the recognition and implementation of those rights is central to the health of Aboriginal communities and to the healing of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.' History can provide us with painful, though necessary lessons to help us better understand why the dominant churches of Canada failed tragically to listen sincerely with a non-patronizing, open heart and mind to the story of Native Canadians. History can also help us discover why noble and generous attempts at cross-cultural evangelization and advocacy for the rights of the First Peoples have too frequently come to naught. Well-written, truthful history can bring us to our senses.

Father Vincent McNally, a professor at Sacred Heart School of Theology, near Milwaukee, offers such a history. He presents a strongly critical but generally objective account of a missionary order's long term relationship with the Native people of British Columbia. Native missions assume a major portion of the early narrative of the Catholic church there. His account, however, is prototypical of the missionary story in many other places. His insights are timely and serve to illuminate a wide ecumenical audience. The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a French order originating in the wine rich region of Provence, viewed their mission to the Pacific Northwest as 'The Lord's Distant Vineyard'. McNally uses historical empiricism in his extensive research combined with scant sentimentality but a deep pastoral concern for the First Nations. This forces him to conclude that there was a destructive surfeit of non-native cultural insensitivity through the entire missionary encounter which covers a century and a half. This resulted in a less than abundant harvest in spite of considerable investment in cultivation, pruning and tending. Even today, many remain in denial of the truth of the serious harm that actually resulted. Beyond his generously terse judgement (and

this is particularly hard to accept from a member of the 'guild') it is clear that McNally has an honourable and constructive purpose in mind. He strongly affirms Christian faith and evangelization. Yet, he believes Christians must come to terms with their missionary history. The church needs to own its mistakes, learn from them, and undertake reconciliation, renewal and healing with those who were so often misunderstood and subsequently hurt.

McNally's book provides more than historical recitation. He well recounts the story, but his assessments of what actually took place provide an important and serious wake up call. He advocates a fundamental re-examination of traditionally accepted evangelization. To read this book is to be confronted with a reality, shorn of propaganda and pious sentiment, that is both a bitter pill and a harbinger of hope.

The Oblates' desire for reconciliation with the Native people took concrete form in 1991 when the order issued an official 'Apology' on behalf of 1,200 Oblates then living. It noted their 'sorrow for the part they had all played, however inadvertent and naive that participation might have been, in the setting up and maintaining of a system that stripped others of not only their lands but also their traditions'. The order requested an opportunity to establish a 'renewed covenant of solidarity' and pledged to continue to 'journey with' the people as they had always intended.

Subsequently, the Oblates have been hit with hundreds of lawsuits claiming both personal and cultural abuse. The price to be paid for apology can be extremely high. McNally respects the Apology and serious attempts on the part of many Christians to make good on their words. There is hope so long as future dialogue reflects mutual respect and an open admission, as Pope John Paul recently reminded all Catholics (*Tertio Millennio Adveniente*), that 'grave forms of injustice' have been done in the church's past in the name of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The

author calls for ecumenical inclusiveness in this commitment to renewal. Competitive denominational activity has often been at odds with Christ's teachings and witness. Bigotry and hate, narrowness and intolerance, have more often been reflected in the missions than a gospel message of radical inclusiveness. The gospel, not the institutional church, is central to the Christian message. We live in a special moment when it is possible to reverse, but not forget, much of the past history of unjust relations between the First Nations of Canada and the rest of us. It is time to make amends and to begin anew.

Peter Malone's *My Names: sketches and glimpses in hindsight* was reviewed in the *Catholic Weekly*, 7 January 2001, p.7, thus:

My Names is a fascinating collection of short stories and anecdotes about people who have lived in the author's memory or imagination and with whom he has had degrees of connection.

In the book we meet such diverse characters as Tut, who never really grew up; Archbishop Thomas Vincent Cahill who was known as TV; and Kev the 'grizzled' caretaker of a property in central-western Queensland.

As well as introducing us to an assortment of characters and experiences, the book also includes a touch of autobiography and of history

It is available from NYMU, 1 Roma Ave, Kensington NSW 2033, for \$16.50 incl. GST. Add \$1.20 for postage within Australia.

AFTER JUBILEE, SOME SERIOUS ANTHROPOLOGY

Noel McMaster CSSR¹

IT WAS Paul Ricoeur, I think, who once wrote that symbols appear and move with life much as foam is seen to rest on, yet belong to, the ocean in all its depths. The point of this short offering is not to equate Jubilee's occasional celebrations (and its *de rigueur* souvenirs like headgear and bookmarks), with the superficial and the transient. There have been considerable gains and favours during the year of Jubilee, from the relief of some debt across the globe to reconciliations national and individual. Rather, what is to be proposed here is that evangelising advance in any year will be lasting to the extent that it flows from a sound anthropology serving our works of evangelisation. Anthropological assessment beyond the phenomena that suggest human purpose and progress parallels exploration of the sea in its deep and shifting currents beneath surface moods and movements.

Back in 1992, at the 4th Conference of Latin American Bishops, Pope John Paul II stated that the 'new' evangelisation had three axes which were anthropology, Christology, and ecclesiology. As we enter a new decade, already searching, I suspect, for its own slogans, it would be a shame if John Paul's statement were to be seen as just another (geometric) figure of speech, a memory now of last century, drifting away to disintegrate like disconnected, not to say 'dia-bolic', foam. Realistically, there is always a risk of

¹ Parish priest of Halls Creek, WA. A frequent contributor to *Nelen Yubu*.

dissipation if we choose to proceed only by slogans, even if these happen to be 'the year of favour', or the 'new', but with that the 'decade' of, evangelisation.

My remarks from the local church will relate to anthropology as an achievable, unpretentious critical awareness in dealings across cultures as such awareness arises from patient human interest rather than from strict academic pursuit. Even in such a non-threatening sense, anthropology, I suggest, is under-developed in the East Kimberley. The word with ready currency among church workers is 'culture' which, with the missiological neologism, inculturation, is more accessible to, and friendly towards, evangelisers usually in a hurry and to other church agents (often teachers) naively facing cross-cultural contexts quite new to them.

But anthropology as posited here is the foundation of any worthwhile cross-cultural evangelising. Whereas (Euro-) Australian Christian and Australian Indigenous cultures are said to offer some symbolic equivalents for doctrinal links and liturgical celebration, anthropology, as I am using the word, seeks to penetrate culture and expose the raw workings of a human values-calculus which over (a long) time yields a values-structure for life's world-view and ethos. It is the word which brings acuity to that patient in-depth cross-cultural engagement which has been described as *interculturation* by Joseph Ratzinger.²

I will offer three examples of what I regard as situations demanding anthropological awareness in the process of interculturation, and after commenting briefly on a theological anthropology called for by these situations, conclude with some further anthropological reflections on wider local church issues.

Situations

- An old man at Warrmarn explains, while speaking within a Eucharistic meeting, that Ngarrangkani (world-view,

² Cf. My 'Inculturation - Faith at Work in Life and Rite', *Nelen Yubu*, No. 62, pp. 4-5.

Dreaming) is Christianity the Aboriginal way, as a perfect fit. Anthropological question: how does Jesus of Nazareth belong to Ngarrangkani and its ethos which an anthropologist like Stanner once evenly described in general as not without its 'sad finality', the tragedy of which, however, might on occasion collapse into sudden laughter. History and the passing of more time might help us assess the difference implied in the old man's contemporary view.

- An old man at Yaruman prayed movingly to Ngawi (God/Father) at the celebration of the Eucharist. In conversation afterwards I asked him if there were any others like Ngawi, like Djulurru, for example, whose ritual sequence had come up the Canning Stock route some years ago. He replied, yes; and averred that Djulurru, though not activated in recent times, was still significant, even 'hard' *law*, not to be trifled with; this mythic character in ritual had brought access to the gudua (whitefella) world for Indigenous people. Anthropological question: are Ngawi and Djulurru on a par mythically? Allowing for the tension between the graced individuality of faith and faith's communitarian cultural provenance, only time will complete the intercultural story of Ngawi and Djulurru at Yaruman.
- Indigenous women at Warrmarn explain that the Christian baptismal ceremony is, amongst other things, the occasion for their own cultural response to pregnancy and recent birth. They do not wish to describe the pouring of water constituting the Christian element of the rite as an incidence of initiation. Anthropological question: are Warrmarn women indicating that they are more anthropologically aware than we are in addressing the concurrence of such distinct cultural elements? We need to give more time and patient consideration to the reality of cross-cultural syncretism.

Communications.

The three anthropological questions posed above are really the expression of a single anthropological concern: to ensure that differences across cultures are identified and respected, and not facilely reduced to so-called dynamic equivalence, comprehensive or partial. After all, it is an anthropological given that cultural traditions involve communications from generation to generation of those differences which have been endorsed as differences existentially *making a worthwhile difference* to living and dying. Ultimately, of course, with any world-view and culture there will be greater or less individual analysis of these differences, resulting in one's effective and finally absolute preference which by definition has no equivalent.

Eschewing any cultural sparring, and much more a cultural knock-out, we do well as evangelisers to engage respectfully and patiently across cultures and beneath surface similarities in attempting to appreciate *the* absolutely difference-making communication accepted in any tradition. Such a communication will have addressed individual faith within a faith community searching collectively, and been influenced or not by any interculturalisation its members might have allowed. Moreover, as Juan Luis Segundo often wrote, it is of the nature of what he called anthropological faith, one's wager on the worthwhile, to be verified conclusively only after a life-long communications-calculus and structuring of values. The meta-message emerging here seems to be that we need to be wary of phenomenal dynamic equivalence; the foam that takes our notice rides above the dark depths of ancient oceans.

In the anthropological context developed here there are theological observations worth making, all germane to John Paul's reference to the anthropological axis that helps coordinate our evangelising.

Coordinations.

With the first of the old men referred to anecdotally above, we might (sometimes tentatively) presume that Christianity has been proposed interculturally as making a difference. Is there a difference? Or do we have but a distinction in names—Ngarrangkani and Christianity—without a difference, even from the point of view of some Christian evangelisers? There is obviously still theological work to be done within Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, separately and together.³

It seems worth pointing out that the old man from Warrmarn might be proceeding in a way akin to that of early Christians in their post-paschal faith: hearing of Jesus Christ the old man has retrojected him to Ngarrangkani, where the Christ figure now resides with other mythic characters belonging to the local Indigenous (Gija) world-view. The same respectful question persists: what kind of difference does Jesus make if this is the case? If there is a Christian difference, is it believed to be absolute such that the Jesus of Christian faith is not diminished in any way, or is it ultimately relative to other (supposedly a-temporal) dimensions of Ngarrangkani which itself is *the* absolute?⁴

In the instance of the Yaruman man the same question of difference, as now referred to Ngawi, may not perplex us so greatly. While Djulurru is still there plausibly on a par with Ngawi (not to mention Jesus), Christianity has not made an absolute difference. Interculturation can continue, at least for as long as people like the old man survive.

Again, with the Warrmarn women and their rites for the newborn accompanying the Christian baptismal liturgy we are in the now familiar theological environment of syncretism which has been described aptly by Jesuit theologian, Carl Starkloff, as

³ Cf. *Rainbow Spirit Theology*, Harper Collins Religious, Blackburn, Vic. (1997).

⁴ *Ibid.* Various contributors seem to be adding to a supposedly a-temporal *Dreaming* by virtue of present Christian faith, in contrast to allowing an evolution in faith.

messy!⁵ Interculturation can continue as long as younger women are having babies and inheriting their culture from older women in communities open to Christianity. Herein, of course, is the rub for continuing theological anthropology.

Whereas Christian theological anthropology formerly has been largely concerned with fairly settled notions of grace, sin, redemption, and beatitude, nowadays more and more the context is seen to be one of evolution. Theologically there is a positive and negative pole to this development. Negatively, we older folk are fading away. Within Indigenous communities like Warrmarn and Yaruman the rising generation has a much wider calculus of communications facing it as it seeks to structure values for living. The realms of Indigenous Law and the Christian Way struggle to hold their place in the diversity and diffusion of cultures. Both immanence and transcendence as religious givens can be replaced by the noise and confusion of much of our individualistic and competitive modern world. In any remote community like Warrmarn or Yaruman, Law and the Way are juxtaposed with gambling, with sports weekends, with youngsters absent for long periods of time for schooling and without much hope of worthwhile work when they return. In evolutionary jargon, there is much entropy here, and not much apparent negentropy; there is much dissipation of energy and not much graceful emergence of that human novelty which is hopeful, and redemptive both now and in a new world to come.

The more positive theological attitude is taken from findings like those emanating from the work of a fellow of the Centre for Mission Research and Study at Maryknoll, NY. The researcher, Thomas Bamat, endorses the view of another missiologist, the Indian Michael Amaladoss, to the effect that the 'modern, westernised church... needs above all to focus squarely on the

⁵ Carl Starkloff, 'The Problem of Syncretism in the Search for Inculturation', *Mission* (1994), No. 1, p.93.

conversion to which Jesus called people, the conversion from Mammon to the reign of God.’⁶

What could be positively novel here in evolutionary terms is to recognise that our Church itself is not beyond the need of conversion. It shares in giving entropy rein through its own ideological positions expressed often in massive growth of its works (as in its parishes and schools, with the latter’s plant and personnel), and in then guiding these works by remote control from its distant administrative centres. Negentropy, in Teilhardian language the successful eddy rising on the descending current, is a possibility, given our ecclesial conversion to a more locally informed and responsibly collaborative presence to those (especially the younger in remote communities) drifting in the grip of entropic distractions. Herein is an opportunity for the most serious anthropology and theology, undertaken as an evolutionary reading of the needs of others, with a willingness to meet such needs wherever and whenever possible, by whatever conversions are indicated to us.

Animadversions

Already it has been noted that faith’s communications-calculus and values-structuring generally arises with individuals living in communities not closed to interculturalisation. It is now worth noting that sometimes people have been carried along in assumed group-conversions to Christianity without church agents giving due regard to individual differences in faith’s existential character still influenced by a primary, traditional world-view. So-called inculturation can then reside more in the minds of particular evangelising individuals and subsequent rituals developed with the ‘evangelised’ on reflection can appear rather to be moving towards a syncretism. We have seen something of this in the baptismal liturgy of Warrmarn where the real issue can now be

⁶ Cf. Thomas Bamar, ‘Popular Catholicism— Global Paradox and Promise’, *America* (1999), Vol. 180, No. 19.

seen to be, what will be the lasting significance of jointly celebrated Indigenous and non-Indigenous rites, of smoke purifications and, not infrequently, later cultural initiation on the one hand, of immersion in purifying, regenerating waters of Christian initiation on the other? The clear minded assertion of the Warrmarn women that initiation does not belong in this joint rite reinforces the need for cautious patience in deciding that any dynamic equivalence has been discerned, and a corresponding reserve then in moving into celebrations and related catechesis. In the interests of authentic evangelisation the need we all have 'to focus squarely' on the here and now conversion to which Jesus calls is further highlighted.

A similar conundrum is to be faced in the religious education classrooms of Catholic schools such as those of Warrmarn and Yaruman. To the range of individual home (camp) faith-environments of Indigenous students must be added the likelihood of unfamiliarity of non-Indigenous teachers with the phenomenal trajectory of religious faith and commitment of individual adults within the communities. The total cultural environment includes the variable sway of the Ngarrangkani of Warrmarn, or the Waljirri at Yaruman, and a general drift from Christian celebrations among young members, especially the males, of these communities, most of whom would have been baptised. Again noting the ambiguity that can attach to dynamic equivalence, close attention needs to be given to the imparting of religious knowledge, Catholic and Indigenous, and then the inclination to celebrate religion inappropriately in the classroom. In a general Australian context it is worth recalling the words of Gerard Holohan: '[a]s an activity of evangelisation, how religious education seeks to provide for students who are *believers* will differ from how it seeks to provide for students who are *searchers* or *doubters* or *non-believers*'.⁷ Celebration and prayer cross-

⁷ Gerard Holohan, *Australian Religious Education—Facing the Challenge*, National Catholic Education Commission (1999): p. 28, (italics in the text).

culturally in their turn will often have to be modified, even excluded.

Finally, it should not be surprising that the ambiguity arising with most if not all purported dynamic equivalence in cross-cultural evangelising contexts makes its last stand at funerals in the communities to which I have been referring. Circumstances should guide just how 'Catholic' a funeral might be planned to be, and later judged to have been. In these ritual instances human emotions and conflicts often envelope an already blurred cross-cultural mix of word and symbol. My own attitude is conveyed by a graveside incident at the first 'Catholic' funeral I participated in at Yaruman. The Eucharist had been celebrated and at the cemetery a local Jaru elder guided the Indigenous rites as I stood back. A well-meaning bystander said to this man, are you going to ask Father to say something?—dynamically equivalent, I suppose. I felt I had already said and done enough on that occasion; I judged, as on similar occasions since, that interculturalisation could not be forced ahead of cultural dynamics which were adjusting at their own pace and suggesting to me a need for reticence at this, the ultimate in the mystery of individual and community faith.⁸

⁸ A generalised funeral scenario might provide a summary of the general message I have been endeavouring to communicate. At the funeral of an Indigenous Catholic person, there will be rites which have been instrumental in communicating values over generations within Indigenous and non-Indigenous traditions. People participating in the rites will do so from a range of (cross-) cultural, spiritual and theological perspectives, from the fundamentalist, to the conservative, to the more liberal. In a sense beneath, and beyond, such ritual phenomena lies the deceased who in life would have been influenced by any of these perspectives as they were communicated within his or her community; the individual would have assumed through a communications-calculus applied more or less consciously, a unique and finally absolute existential faith position which (in death especially) eludes the reach and understanding of those engaged now in the funeral rites. These rites may now suggest dynamic equivalence of particular funeral symbols to which the deceased person also could have subscribed, e.g. as with symbols of (graced) common humanity such as physical contact with the coffin, the singing of 'In the Sweet Bye and Bye', and the sprinkling of Catholic holy water to recall baptism and to signify the communion of saints. But these very symbols of their nature convey that the reality of individual faith in life and death is accepted as having depths which defy comprehensive

Restorations

Further unfolding history, then, and enduring interest over time in human well-being and destiny, already alluded to in these few pages, may well bring us closer to answering the vexing cross-cultural questions which have arisen in places like Warrarn and Yaruman in the East Kimberley. At this time, I have argued, the presence of a genuine difference-making Christian connection and its absolute value across cultures is dubiously first sought in diverse, yet supposedly equivalent, Indigenous religious symbolisms encountered at various stages of life. Such symbolisms constructed over centuries can be resistant to that hasty interpretation which would affix the tag of an equivalence with Christian symbol.

There is, however, an alternative line to follow which restores, in order to draw on, the basic gospel message of conversion to Jesus, also mentioned already. Such a restoration can even suggest the imitation of a certain 'conversion' in Jesus himself who in his time had shared in the increasingly unassailable 'House of Israel' ideological world-view which was to crumble when a poor woman insisted in Jesus' presence that she deserved a few breadcrumbs. (Cf. Mtt. 15, 21-28). That was a great day for the anthropological faith of both man and woman. It belonged to a 'year of favour', which may be highlighted from time to time as Jubilee, but in the reality of Christian faith continues to be absolutely available whenever we deal with others in the expansive spirit of Jesus; indeed, we are told that in particular circumstances we will be dealing, absolutely, as with Jesus himself. (Cf. Mtt., Ch 25). In this spirit evangelisers of tomorrow might continue to engage interculturally and critically with

community understanding, the more so across cultures. In these circumstances, the reminder "to focus squarely" on the conversion to which Jesus called people is all the more the touchstone of evangelising connection. For the rest, the ocean of life rolls on from generation to generation, always allowing the foam of the image evoked by Ricoeur.

(individuals of) that generation which will be the first to be identified (with or without a slogan) in this, the new century.

August 15, 2000.



Book Review

Gideon Goosen, *Australian Theologies: themes and methodologies into the third millennium*, St Pauls Publications, Strathfield 2000.

Since the early 1970s theology has increasingly been 'contextualised' that is, made to reflect the culture and deeper concerns of the theologian and the intended audience. There has been a turning from the timeless, uniform and deductive theologising of earlier times, as in neo-scholasticism, to a more down-to-earth, inclusive and multi-cultural proliferation of explorations of theological themes. This book by the Associate Professor of Theology at Australian Catholic University, Strathfield, is the first attempt to tell the story of that move by Australian theologians. He has done the job well: his account is readable, interesting and informative.

When he comes to describe the efforts of Australian theologians to take the culture seriously he is faced with the question: Which culture? The answer to that question produced chapters on Aboriginal spirituality and theologians' reflections upon it; on what he calls 'First Theology' in Australia, concerned with God, salvation, grace, faith, Christology; on 'everyday issues', such as the land, sport, wealth, leisure, work, mateship; on the environment and ecotheology in Australia; on Australian feminist theologies; on economics and theology, especially social justice. An extensive bibliography is provided, also indexes, one for names and one for subjects.

In the subject index one looks in vain for 'science'. Goosen does make some mention of science and theology in the text, but this omission indicates that the theological dialogue with what is arguably *the* dominating influence in Australian culture—of whatever colour—needs greater effort from theologians.

This book chronicles the massive effort of theologians to bring their theology down to earth. It also hints at a deeper story of the theological search for a sense of belonging, for a place we can call our own in this vast land where most of us are relative newcomers.

Barry Brundell msc

Editor's Note

Having figured several times in Eugene Goosen's book reviewed above by Barry Brundell, I thought it appropriate that I add a few comments.

I was first made aware of Goosen's line of thought through his article in *Theological Studies* (1999, vol.60, No.1) 'Christian and Aboriginal Interface in Australia', to which the pastor of Halls Creek, Noel McMaster CSsR, drew my attention. Knowing both Dan O'Donovan and myself, Noel was amused by Goosen's designation of me as 'sensitive to the Aboriginal mythopoetic mindset' whereas Dan is 'locked into a rational, logical, cognitive Westerner's mental framework'. Those who know me as a philosopher in the scholastic and analytical traditions and a social anthropologist, and have read Dan's articles over the years in *Nelen Yubu* as he has been developing the mystical theme of *dadirri* (soon to emerge in book form) would share Noel's amusement. Goosen's paper has been incorporated into *Australian Theologies* pp.98 ff.

The main point I wish to make about the book is that Goosen seems to have got his access to *Nelen Yubu* second-hand (mainly

through *Compass* which reprinted the dialogue between Dan and myself on transcendence in Aboriginal religious thinking). Of course, I am biased, but I think Goosen has neglected a primary source. Over the years there has been a lot more theologising on the Aboriginality–Christianity issue in the pages of *Nelen Yubu* than he shows an awareness of. He would do well to refer to Dan's later articles, and to the papers of men like Noel McMaster and Gerard Goldman, for instance. Noel is very much a man in the field who is searching strenuously for alternative paradigms by which to understand Aboriginal–Christian religion as it actually exists on the ground rather than in some sort of academic cyberspace...

The main 'theologians' in the Aboriginal–Christianity dialogue are the Aboriginal people reflecting on their religious experience—I understand 'theology' as reflective understanding of primary religious experience. We Westerners generally express our understanding in conceptual terms. Aborigines can do so too, but most Aboriginal theology is being done in dramatic and graphical terms (songs, stories, poetry, dances, paintings, ceremonies and social actions). This sort of theology can be fed into 'our' Western system through the medium of sensitive, intelligent observers in the field, who write up their observations and experiences in special periodicals like *Nelen Yubu*. It is important not to neglect them!

Martin Wilson msc, *Editor*

From the Secretary's Desk...

Quoting from a recent letter from Fr Fred Mordaunt msc in Boroko, PNG: "Thank you, Martin—and the Australian Provincial—for sending me regularly *Nelen Yubu*. It is very much appreciated. I found your article on 'Jubilee Central Australian Pilgrimage' very interesting, especially as I had a three-month supply work at Santa Teresa as well as three-monthly visits as Extraordinary Confessor. In those days I was at Tennant Creek.

"Thank you, Keren, for your interesting account of an 'epic' trip through western-northern NSW and up the Centre to Alice Springs, etc. By the way, I was interested in your account of the 'locks' on the Murray River at Morgan. That was the place I spent the first four years and eight months of my life! I can still see in my imagination the punt we used then to carry us across. Our property was out of Morgan, beside one of the lagoons that ran beside the river." — Glad our tale evoked some memories, Fr Fred.

It's February again, and NYMU was looking longingly towards the South Coast for our annual spell midst sea and sky. At quite short notice, off we went to

Bawley Point in response to the kindly annual invitation of our generous friends, Kerry and Neryl Callaghan. The fishing was great and we dined nightly on trevally, flathead, sole and/or tailor. No mishaps to speak of this time, although I did crash down on wet rocks on three occasions and am still black and blue from the falls. But, unlike one terrible earlier experience (cf. NY71) — no ill-effects!

There are lots of middens along the NSW south coast, pointing to the fact that groups of Aborigines must have come down from the mountains in earlier days to feast on the delicious shellfish after their long stretches in the high country. We followed in their tracks, looking down from cliff ledges into bright green ocean waters; wandering through National Park forests; even scrambling out on to a rocky island accessible only at low tide, and having to race back to beat the incoming tide when we found ourselves too far out on the headland, with the waves beginning to fling themselves into the air above us, even wetting our faces! A great holiday!

We wish our readers all the Blessings of Easter 2001!

Secretary Keren