CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Nelen Yubu has effected the change announced in last issue, namely, a shift of base from Daly River to Santa Teresa. The staff acknowledges with gratitude the excellent accommodation facilities provided by Santa Teresa mission. It is a pity that Santa Teresa is so far away from the Top End, the main locus of Catholic mission endeavour in NT. We feel we need to hold our options open still in order to be able to respond to various alternatives that people are proposing to us. The "good way" does wander about a bit.

Two changes to the periodical will already have been noticed. Firstly, we have been enabled to go into proper print! This has a number of advantages, especially practical ones. The bulk of distribution will be done by the MSC students at Croydon, for which we thank them in advance. We especially wish to thank the Sisters and printing staff (sometimes the same persons) at Port Keats and Bathurst Island for their labours in printing three of the earlier issues.

Secondly, another change of name. I was asked recently why I hadn't called the periodical simply "Nelen Yubu". They are true Aboriginal words that, moreover, were given to us to use, not an artificial concoction like the acronym, "Nymuna".

In reply I had to admit that the thought had never crossed my mind – mainly because in the beginning, before adding "Institute" and later changing that to "Missiological Unit", Nelen Yubu simply stood for the institution itself.

I decided it's better to pocket our pride and accept a good suggestion while there is yet time.

So, with apologies once more to librarians, what was *Tracks*, then for one issue *Nymuna*, now becomes *Nelen Yubu*, which it should really have been from the start.

We are appreciative of the favourable public reception of recent issues of the periodical, and we pass on our thanks to those among you, the readers, whose responsibility it is to keep things going by operating also as the writers.

As is proper to a sociologically orientated magazine, we try to keep in step with trends in modern Australian society and (with proper regret) note that we have to raise our rate for new or renewed subscriptions from $5 to $8 for four issues. As we have gone into print, we need to cover our cost as best we may – though the publication still depends largely on subsidy.

This issue is rather late in coming out. Beside the confusion that shifting base entailed, I was also absent in PNG for a few months helping as organising secretary of an MSC Chapter there. However, issue No. 6 should appear fairly soon.

Martin Wilson MSC

AUSTRALIAN MISSIONS *

TOM BOLAND

* Dr Boland wrote this paper in 1974 as the text of some lectures he was giving on Christian missions in Australia. He did not intend to cover all missions in Australia: he selected examples that would be representative of the missionary enterprises of each Church in the various eras. Readers should bear his aim in mind so as to guard against surprise at what they may think are omissions – he explained his limited aim to me when I wondered why he omitted the historically first Catholic mission to Aborigines in Australia, that of the Passionists on Stradbroke Island (1843-47), close to his own native Brisbane.

He added in a recent letter that the material just released in the Propaganda archives only highlights, unfortunately, the historic neglect of Aborigines on the part of the Church in Australia.

Dr Tom Boland did the work for his doctoral thesis in Ecclesiastical History at the Gregorian University, Rome, in the mid 1950's. Since then he has been lecturing in history at Banyo Seminary (Brisbane) and at the University of Queensland. For several years he was rector of the Seminary.

–Ed.

Australian settlement and Australian Missions to the Aborigines were very much the product of the 19th century explosion of colonial imperialism. All the conditions of cultural contempt and evangelising civilization that characterised the coming of the European powers to Africa and the Pacific were verified in the settlement of Australia. There were some differences, however, that were unique – or almost unique – to Australia. Unlike most others, the Australian colonies quickly became colonies of settlement, not of simple exploitation. This brought about a literally devastating competition for the possession of the land. The legal fiction that the land of Australia belonged to the British Crown, which extended its benefits to both black and white, concealed the harsh realities of dispossession and softened the blows of violence with which it was accomplished. Further, this competition intensified the contempt for the conquered culture and its violence created a fear that justified the contempt. The settlers should have been the natural source of missionaries and evangelization of the aborigines; but their own concerns of settlement and their cultural animosity created a gap in the work at an essential moment in the development.

Alliance of Mission and Administration

However, the Australian colonies did not begin as places of settlement, but as a gaol. Occupation of the land went along with the development of the penal institution. In this way government was more really absolute than anywhere else. Policy in all matters was determined

by the Governor's will and the directives of the appropriate British office. Among such matters of policy was the question of relations with the first occupants of the soil. From two standpoints, that of government itself and that of the Churches, which required permission for any approach to the aborigines, administration and mission were closer in Australia than in other areas of mutual interest in the nineteenth century. There was a touch of almost mediaeval alliance between Crown and Mission. Even when the convict era had passed the alliance continued and some evidences of it remain till the present day. In an age of increasing secularity, as societies moved away from Church establishments and even connections in the European homelands, colonial administrations were entering new marriages of mutual convenience with missionary societies. It was presumed that their interests were the same. The objective of governments was the domestication of the noble savage. The latter, it was presumed, could not continue in his present state: he must be integrated into the society that was about to take his land from him. More, he should be assimilated to that society to the lower orders of it, to be sure. The noble savage should become a useful citizen – or servant – of society. It was still presumed that civilizing and christianizing were practically synonymous. In the process of learning Western civilization, the aborigine must learn the ways of Christ. The missionary was the bearer of culture.

In this role the missionary became often the servant of government. Before the Churches themselves had come to realise their duty of evangelization, governors were employing missionaries to perform their missionary task in the interests of government policy. That great Christian, George Augustus Robinson, began his work for the aborigines in Tasmania as an instrument of the colonial administration. He toured the island from 1828-30 in an endeavour to reconcile the native population before they were wiped out by the policy he served. He inaugurated the segregation policy on Flinders Island and to defend the shattered remains of both the aborigines themselves and the Demarcation Policy of Governor Arthur, which ironically intended to save as well as dispossess them. Government allowed and even ordered him to catechise the remnant that so short a time remained, but it was as official colonial policy, not as a privilege granted to a mission.[1]

In 1814 Governor Macquarie reported to Earl Bathurst his plans for civilizing the aborigines. He intended to teach them to live in a settled community. This entailed two projects: one was a school for the children, the other was a community project from which a tribe could support itself on a fixed piece of ground. His idea for the latter was a fishing commune at Elizabeth Bay. For the former, the school, established first at Parramatta, then moved at the request of the respectable settlers to a bleaker locality that became known simply as Black Town, he engaged the services of a missionary named William Shelley. The latter reported:

> *Let them be taught reading, writing or religious education. The boys manual labour, agriculture, mechanic arts, etc. The girls sewing, knitting, spinning. Let them be married at a suitable age (to whom? at whose instance?) and settled with steady religious persons over them from the very beginning to see that they continued their employment . . .*[2]

Shelley and these other "steady religious persons" were going to reduce a free people to tutelage to create useful mechanics in accord with the programme of the benign autocrat, Lachlan Macquarie. It was probably inevitable at the time, and it probably seemed desirable to Shelley and his successors, but in the long run it was an unfortunate association and subordination for the missionary. What the government had given, the government could take away; and it did, when the Christian intentions of the missionaries proved inconvenient to the ambitions of the Christian settlers.

Special Cultural Contempt

There was another important respect in which the Australian settlement and missions faced an almost unique situation. In other colonies and among other cultures Westerners were assured of their traditional superiority. They were able to compare two societies and make the judgment, rightly or wrongly, that theirs was the better. They were able to decide all too easily that indigenous culture must be transformed, if not destroyed, because of the superiority of the victorious society. Cultural contempt was innate in the colonial situation. In Australia this contempt was intensified, because the Europeans could not recognise that there was a society to be transformed or destroyed. There were ways of life, nomadic, tied to season and soil, apparently unshaped by any intellectual judgment or organization. They could recognize no religious forms or beliefs; and such morals as they believed they observed they found repulsive. Aborigines, it seemed, were not only primitive: they were degenerate. Such knowledge of history and pre-history – as they possessed showed 19th century Europeans that as long as man existed there had been some attempt at organized civilization. If it was not evident in the aboriginal occupant of Australia this must have been because he was actually regressive. It has been suggested that Fundamentalist interpretations of Genesis demanding a six thousand years history of Man were a substantial contributing factor in this attitude.[3] Whatever its origin there existed such a profound contempt from the start. Long before Phillip or even Cook landed in Australia, William Dampier had established this conviction of the debased condition of the balck Australian. In Jan. 1688 he observed some inhabitants of N.W. Australia. His remarks are now notorious:

> *The inhabitants of this country are the miserablest people in the world. The Hodmadods of Monomatapa, though a nasty people, yet for Wealth are Gentlemen to these, who have no Houses and Skin Garments, Sheep, Poultry and Fruits of Earth, Ostrich Eggs, etc. as the Hodmadods have: and setting aside their humane shape they differ but little from the Brutes . . . . . .* [4]

The first contacts with the aborigines in Eastern Australia just a century later convinced some observers – like Captain Tench, the diarist – that Dampier was wrong.[5] Phillip never believed in the decadent savage. However, the Acquisitive Society that his successors created found it necessary to revert to the original view. You could not steal from a Brute.

Mulvaney Thesis

How far did the Christian Mission contribute to this cultural contempt? Undoubtedly the missionary history, the missionary impulse, of Christianity reveals a conviction of the superiority of the Christian Faith over all other religious forms. Modern attitudes based on policies of both Vatican II and WCC documents have been humbler and more realistic, but this was 19th century. It was easily assumed by most missionaries that all religious ideas and forms had to be destroyed before Christianity could take root. The policy of adaptation that was occasionally followed in ancient times and early modern ages seemed to have no relevance. Aboriginal customs, on the rare occasions when they were recognised as religious, were called debased. Such social mores as they noted, as polygamy, infanticide, even community of goods, were regarded as evidence of degradation, living proof of the effect of Original Sin untouched by Grace. Grace could not build on Fallen Nature. Nature must be purified first before it was elevated by Grace. As late as 1934 Abbot Catalan of New Norcia, supposed to be one of the show places of missionary endeavour in Australia, could speak of the "anti-Christian and unnatural practices deeply rooted in their poor, corrupted hearts" as the principal problems of

the missions.[6] All missionary societies could match the uncomprehending patronage of these remarks made as a serious contribution to a missionary conference 150 years after the foundation of Australia.

However, a more serious charge about destructive attitudes has been levelled against the missionaries and Christian evangelistic attitudes in Australia. A controversy was inaugurated in *Historical Studies A. & N.Z.* by an article of D. J. Mulvaney, "The Australian Aborigines 1606-1929, Opinion and Fieldwork."[7] In this work Mulvaney went further than accusing missionaries of incomprehensions and ignorant destruction. He stated that weak theological and exegetical arguments of missionaries had produced a picture of the thoroughly degenerate savage in whom no spark of God's grace did or could exist. This justified a generation of Christians in their violent assault on the aborigines. He charges specifically that in this real – if indirect – fashion missionaries were responsible for the Black War in Tasmania and the Myall Creek massacres. He quotes one missionary whom he describes as representative:

> *In the licentiousness of their lives they are as the men of Sodom, sinners exceedingly. And the prevalence of those diseases which, amongst men of every nation, constitute the established retribution awarded by the Creator as the first punishment of such abominations – whilst they exhibit the penalty, conclusively established the existence of the crimes of which they are the legitimate fruits.*

Mulvaney goes on to comment:

> *The cost of this gospel-mongering was that such prejudices were largely instrumental in conditioning native policy of a generation – that generation which witnessed the decimation of the aborigines.*[8]

Such accusations have found a willing hearing on grounds academic and unacademic. It is important to see on what grounds they rest.

Mulvaney cites as his principal witness the evidence of one missionary, W. Hull, before a Select Committee of the Victorian Legislative Council in 1858. One might note in passing that opinions expressed in 1858 had little bearing on the Black War of Tasmania, the Myall Creek Massacre or the virtual passing of the aborigines in Victoria, though they would have been in time for the Black War in Queensland. H. H. Nelson in a later article in the same journal ("Missionaries and Aborigines in the Pt. Phillip District" – Oct. 1965) summarises the evidence of W. Hull as follows:

> *. . . the whites were not responsible for the high incidence of venereal disease, the aborigines could not be made to undertake permanent employment, they had no right to the land, they could not be educated or converted to Christianity, and apart from a fear of some imaginary being, they had no religion.*[9]

The Committee rejected Hull's evidence. Apart from this comment on the misplaced value placed by Mulvaney on the isolated evidence of Hull, we must note that the facts of missionary endeavour consistently pursued demonstrate that these were not the attitudes of the majority. A disappointed few occasionally made such statements. Nelson points out what had been one of the constants of missionary experience in Australia: that missionaries were themselves the object of attack for their insistent reminder that aborigines were human beings with rights to be respected. He says:

> *However, to debate whether or not the missionaries were contemptuous of aboriginal culture is to ignore the most important contribution of missionaries*

> *during the years when the aborigines were so quickly deprived of much of their territory. The missionaries acknowledged that the aborigines were fellow human beings and as such, were equal in intelligence, had the right to possess property, should be treated equally before the law and, basically, had a right to salvation. Even to consider them 'Fellow creatures' was, in some areas, sufficient for censure.*[10]

We might note one instance cited by An Emigrant Mechanic in his *Settlers and Convicts*, London, 1849. During the unhappy relations of CMS missionaries and police authorities the police flogged men outside the windows of the missionary's house in an attempt to drive them out of Wellington, N.S.W.[11] However, any mission can record similar attitudes of settlers. (In the Wellington case, the magistrates were, of course, settlers, the amateur Justices of the Peace of convict days.)

Missionary Origins – Evangelicals and Evangelism

Government may have begun the Christianizing process among aborigines, but the Church approach soon enough followed. We ought to remember in estimating the attitudes of the Churches in the first years of the colony that it was then a convict colony, a gaol. The first Chaplain had more than enough subjects to concern himself with, and he was under orders. The other churches did not have even this amount of pastoral concern for some years. The second Anglican Chaplain to arrive came with determined missionary intentions. He was a man who suffered much from his critics in his lifetime and is enduring much more contumely now. He was Rev. Samuel Marsden, remembered in what passes for history in our time as the Flogging Parson. Mr. Marsden has only himself to blame that he gave such opportunity to the writers of journalistic caricature; but he deserved more of those, like C.M.H. Clark, who claim to write serious history.[12] One of his most important contributions to Australian Church and Missionary affairs was to introduce the work of the Church Missionary Society to the colony.

Before the colony was founded an interdenominational club for the consideration of religious and moral questions in London, called the Eclectic Society, had debated in 1786 the question: *What is the Best Method of Planting and Promulgating the Gospel in Botany Bay?* It was through the Eclectic Society that William Wilberforce was interested in the question of sending a chaplain with the First Fleet. He accepted their recommendation of Richard Johnson. The Eclectic Society met for a time in the Castle and Falcon Inn, opposite the Moravian Meeting House where John Wesley had his experience of conversion. From its premises came two of the great Missionary Societies of the modern age – LMS 1795, CMS 1799. It was an age of Missionary Societies, mainly with an evangelical slant. Baptist MS in 1792, LMS 1795, 2 Presbyterian Societies in the same year. What of the Established Church? Establishment itself created certain difficulties, and it inspired some dissatisfaction among the more evangelical members in its own ranks. In 1796 the Eclectic Society debated: *With What Propriety and in Which Mode can a Mission be Attempted to the Heathen by the Established Church?* Three years later they debated: *What Methods can We Use more Effectually to Promote the Knowledge of the Gospel among the Heathen?* From this discussion the CMS was founded by a small group of evangelical Anglicans for work in Africa and the East. Australia qualified as the East. It was specifically intended that it should be founded upon the Church principle, but not the High Church principle. A similar evangelical Society in England, the Elland Society for education of Evangelical clergy, arranged for the appointment of Marsden as Chaplain in 1793. He became Senior Chaplain to the Convict Colony, but he regarded his commission as including that of Apostle to the Maoris of NZ and the Aborigines of Australia. He probably had more

success in NZ but he was not inactive in Australia. In 1819 he created a CMS Corresponding Committee in NSW, in 1825 the first CMS Auxiliary, with Sir Thomas Brisbane as Patron and the Chief Justice as Vice-Patron. Till he died in 1838 he promoted vigorously the work of the Auxiliary at home and abroad. The year of his death is approximately the end of organized word for the aborigines in the settled districts of Australia. It was not just that Marsden died. Most of the aborigines had pre-deceased him.[13]

Wellington Mission CMS

Marsden offered his services to Macquarie in his civilizing plans for school and settlement. For reasons of personal antipathy they were rejected. He had more success with his successor and teachers were sponsored by the CMS at Parramatta and Black Town. With the foundation of the CMS Auxiliary he was able to be more ambitious and plan for a Mission Station granted by the government but run by the CMS.[14] This took some years to bring to realisation but in 1831 two missionaries arrived from England, Rev. J. O. S. Handt and Rev. W. Watson. Handt was later transferred to Moreton Bay but Watson stayed to the bitter end. The station was established on a grant of land at Wellington, 200 miles NW of Sydney in land recently opened up in the Macquarie River area as a result of the exploring and surveying work of Oxley and Mitchell. It is notable that already the idea of aboriginal missions in the white settled areas is being abandoned. Macquarie had decided on a 10,000 acre reserve in Moss Vale but his removal from office put an end to the scheme. Land for aboriginals – or for those who wished to work for the aboriginals – was to be on the outskirts of settlement. The question would inevitably arise: what would happen when this land too was settled by the whites? In the grant the land was given not to the aborigines but to the CMS; as well, it was provided that if the Mission failed the land reverted to the Crown to be made available to other settlers.[15] This produced constant pressures from settlers to declare Missions failed. In ten years most were so declared. As Rev. J. Needham stated in a *Survey for the Australian Missionary Conference* in 1926 every piece of land set aside for use by or for the aborigines became a Naboth's Vineyard to the settlers.[16] For most of the 19th century governments complied with the wishes of the settlers. The battle is still being fought out in the twentieth.

The object of the mission was made clear in the prospectus of the CMS Auxiliary in 1825:

> *The late alarming and fatal contests which have occurred between the aborigines and the Europeans, as well as the increased extent of more populous coast now occupied by the settlement of Pt. Macquarie and the more recent Settlement of Moreton Bay, render it expedient to exert every prudent measure to open and maintain a good understanding between the Europeans and the Aborigines; in order to prevent in future the destruction of property and the loss of human life; which desirable objects, it is believed, may be accomplished by the foundation of the long projected Auxiliary Church Missionary Society; by which the missionaries may be appointed to reside among them, for the promotion of their civilization and general improvement.*[17]

The missionaries were to promote better relations between whites and blacks, a government objective for which the Governor was prepared to pay with a grant of 10,000 acres of land good enough to become the object of European greed and the promise of five hundred pound per annum. The method mentioned was not the preaching of the Gospel precisely but the "Promotion of their civilization and general improvement". Watson persevered for over ten years in trying to set up a farming community and teach the aborigines "industry, order and subordination",[18] the social virtues on which society in England was based. A settled com-

munity seemed necessary also from the Christian point of view because without it no adequate liturgy or catechesis seemed possible. Civilization by Christening and Christianity by civilizing was the programme of Wellington. It was not spectacularly successful, but it had little hope of survival in view of the attitudes of the white settlers. They wanted the land, they destroyed the hunting lands of the aborigines and made war on them when they hunted the sheep and cattle that had replaced the kangaroo and the wallaby. They made depredation on their women and children and made a mockery of the Christian Faith the missionaries preached. By 1844 their efforts had brought about the closure of the mission by Governor Gipps.

Buntingdale MMS

More successful efforts seemed to be made for a time in Port Phillip by the Methodists and in Moreton Bay the Gossner Misisonary Society on the behalf of – among others – Dr. Lang's Presbyterians. In Port Phillip there appears to have been some effort to understand the life and the thought of the aborigines, as well as a determination to save them from the extermination threatening in the other colonies.[19] Rev. Joseph Orton of Tasmania came to Pt. Phillip from Tasmania with this express intention. He displayed some impatience with nomadic habits of the blacks, but he was for the time surprisingly tolerant of practices unwelcome in British society, including infanticide. He could see the reason for its origin in a nomadic society. He obtained a grant of 64,000 acres on the Barwon, west of Geelong, and in 1839 it was settled by Rev. Francis Tuckfield, sent out by the Methodist Missionary Society. Tuckfied is one of the great unknowns – or relative unknowns – of Australian history. He established a village style mission at great labour, a school of some efficiency, he taught some of the aborigines to plant and tend crops – some of them planted turnips "almost as well as a white man" – even persuaded some to live in houses. He was civilizing the aborigines while he preached to them. At the same time, however, he was learning to speak their languages, translating some liturgy and instructions into their tongue and constructing a vocabulary and seeking the grammatical patterns of their speech. At the same time Tuckfield was using his new skills with the language to explore new lands in northern Victoria around the Campaspe, the Goulburn and the Murray. His objective was to get a mission established there to anticipate the coming of the whites. However, his own explorations spurred on the white occupation before he could get approval for his plans. Tuckfield had come to the conclusion, becoming prevalent, that the aborigines needed segregation from white influence for their own physical survival and for the opportunity to preach the Gospel to them without the corrupting influence of neighbouring white settlers and stockmen. This had been a constant source of irritation at Wellington. This Buntingdale settlement was threatened with closure at the same time as Wellington, but Tuckfield managed to get approval for a squatting licence to the property. With assistance from Methodist sources – and some of his white neighbours – he survived till 1848 when it was necessary to convert the lease into freehold. He could not raise the money and Buntingdale was closed.

At its best it had encouraged about 150 aborigines to make it their headquarters and many more or less settled there. At time of walkabout Tuckfield, the missionary, tried to accompany the tribes. In this way he came to see that even if the settlement type of mission was desirable it could not be imposed immediately. In this he was joined by Langhorne, CMS linguist and catechist in Pt Phillip. The latter was officially rebuked for suggesting that Europeanization was a gradual process and hunting rights of the aborigines should be preserved in the meantime.[20] This cut across colonial, mission and pastoral policy. In his school Tuckfield managed at times to congregate about 60 children. He came to see this as the source of the civilizing and christianising process. Aboriginal parents at times committed children to his care – as they

did at Wellington – when they went on walkabout or when the white depredations on lands, food and the aboriginals themselves seemed to make this the only hope of survival. The care was temporary but it seemed to be the way of breaking the cultural cycle of nomadic life. In 1844 Tuckfield's associate missionary, Hurst, withdrew from the work in disappointment because he said all the work had not produced the salvation of a single soul. Tuckfield was more optimistic. He did not accept the theology of arithmetic and saw the work of the mission in the more peaceful life of aborigines among themselves and with whites and in the growing understanding of Christian life and prayer. It was common for all sources – Government, settlers and Churches – to speak of the failure of the missions. Tuckfield had a more realistic view of what was success and what was failure. He was not interested in mass baptism but in individual and social change.

The Moreton Bay Mission follows similar lines.[21] The Gossner Mission at German Station or Nundah had this advantage over the others. It was a community mission. Not just one or two but several families of missionaries came together to form the mission. They were already a village community, established with German order and efficiency. There was a community for aborigines to study and decide if they wanted to join. The activities at Nundah were similar to those of the South. The reasons for their failure were much the same, withdrawal of Government aid, lack of local support, the appalling results of the Black Wars in a frontier society. These Evangelical Lutherans were forced to abandon their work for the aborigines and turn to ministering to the whites. It may be noted that those missions like Nundah that provided their own community and were to some extent independent of local support, governmental or voluntary, had the most apparent success in civilizing and permanent christianizing. Examples are New Norcia and Hermannsburg.

Lessons of First Missions

By the mid-forties some things were clear. The Churches had not succeeded in their mission to the aboriginal inhabitants of Australia. However, the reasons for the failure did not lie solely – perhaps even principally – with the Churches. We could summarise:

1) Missionaries could not cope with nomadic peoples;
2) They had decided in practice to concentrate on schooling the children;
3) They saw their only hope in segregation of the aborigines from the whites;
4) They saw their function as protectors to aborigines in the state of forced tutelage.
5) Lands were never recognised as belonging to the aborigines;
6) Missions would not have a chance of succeeding in a time of settlement, since the aborigines were disappearing at such a rate.

On the latter point C. Irving Benson reports that "one of the reasons for the closure of Buntingdale was the yet more distressing and appalling fact – the rapid diminution of the native population. It was computed that certain well known tribes were reduced by one half in three years. The musket, murder, war, drink, poison and disease brought them to an untimely end."[22] Around Wellington the rate was even more rapid. Figures indicate that the aborigines lost their lands in SE Australia by 1850. Their survival depended on their chances to meet the challenge of the remaining Frontier Societies in Northern Australia. C. D. Rowley has this to say:

> *Destruction of aboriginal populations was eventually arrested, partly by the efforts of missions on the large reserves.*

He says, using the usual criteria of numbers, that they were hardly more successful than the

earlier missions but that on large, usually isolated reserves, they provided sustenance, a chance to learn some trade, and a chance to roam and hunt.

The trenchant words of the Emigrant Mechanic in 1849 might provide a fitting conclusion to this period of aboriginal missions:

> *Missionary efforts I for one feel inclined to put aside, as quite useless at present; indeed there seems something so intrinsically absurd in the nation which is robbing another of its land and its means of subsistence soliciting that other to adopt its religion, that the yet more revolting concomitant of the horrible scourgings which are inflicted on our prisoners is scarcely needed to make the aborigines despise and revolt from us, and to put such a case out of court.*[24]

Australian Apathy

There followed a period of relative neglect of aboriginal missions. This is an extraordinary phenomenon that marks the whole history of the Christian Church in Australia; so we might examine it at this point. Australian missionary effort has been remarkable, but almost all of it has been directed outside of Australia. One reason, the principal reason perhaps in the mid-19th century, was that the Churches were so busily engaged in getting themselves established in the continually expanding colonies. They had to come into being before they could engage in Mission. C. D. Rowley has asked why the great missionary societies which were responsible for so much expansion in the 19th century did so comparatively little in Australia. The CMS, the Benedictines in New Norcia, Lutherans in Hermannsburg, the Moravians in a scattered few stations – there was little more to show till well into the 20th century. Where were they with their internationally guaranteed funds and their international personnel? Some Societies – like the Propagation de la Foi, Ludwigsverein, Leopoldinum, SPCK, SPG were supplying funds for the spread of the Church in the colonies in general. The missionary bodies did not feel called upon to found their own, perhaps, because the Australian colonies were European settlements, not colonies of whites among non-Chrsitian majorities. It was seen, perhaps, as the task of the local Church to preach to the aborigines. If this was their expectation they were sadly deluded. The local Churches had little inclination to remember the aborigines. Most of the European settlement was in the South East, and there they rarely came into contact with aborigines. Attitudes were colonial, not national, and three colonies had no cause to remember that aborigines existed. In Queensland and WA most of them lived in the remote north. It was almost a foreign problem. If it had been, it would have received more sympathetic attention. Some figures from the Australian Mission Conference in 1926 are relevant over a longer period. A Survey of Aboriginal Missions, including Torres Strait Islands, revealed that there were 14 ordained workers, 4 women medical workers, 21 men teachers engaged generally in industrial work, and 33 women workers, frequently the wives of the missionaries, a total of 72. This seems to exclude RC missions. There were ten missionaries to the Chinese in Australia.[25] There were 33 missionary bodies represented at the Council. In the tabulated reports of these only 5 referred specifically to Aboriginal Missions. They sent missionaries and funds to India, China, South Seas, 2 of them to Egypt, 2 to the Sudan, one to Russia, one to the Jews; there was a Heart of Africa Mission, a Ramaba Mukti Mission, a Zenana Bible & Medical Mission, and a Missionary Birthday Band; but few sent missionaries or funds to the Aborigines.[26] At a RC missionary conference at the Melbourne Eucharistic Congress in 1934 one speaker denounced bluntly Australian apathy. Rev. H. Johnstone, SJ, said among other things:

> *. . . we are doing nothing for the conversion of the aborigines.*[27]

Till comparatively recently this held true. Belated stirring of the Christian Church in Australia is the work of sincere and energetic individuals, but many aborigines look upon it with suspicion, feeling that it displays – on the part of the Churches, not the individuals – too much of the grandstand and the bandwaggon. They have good historical ground for their suspicion. Australian Christians have been remiss in handing on their faith and giving an account of the hope that is within them. One notable demonstration of this fact is that much of what has been done has been the work of non-Australians. In the RC field the Benedictines in New Norcia were Spanish, the Pallottines in Beagle Bay German, the Salesians Italian, the Passionists in Moreton Bay Italian, the MSCs in the North French and other continental nationalities. The CMS has frequently sent English missionaries. The Presbyterians have more than once used the services of the Moravians. Where were the adoptive native sons?

New Norcia

One foundation at this time seems at first sight to stand out from the general neglect of the period, the Benedictine Abbey of New Norcia.[28] In June 1845 Pope Gregory XVI sent two Spanish Benedictines to Australia to make a foundation which would be a centre of missions to the Aborigines. Gregory himself was a Benedictine, so there were overtones of mediaeval missions about the enterprise and the model was expressly in the minds of the first pair, Joseph Serra and Rosendo Salvado. They arrived with Bishop Brady and a party of 27 missionaries in Perth in 1846. Brady had grandiose designs for four missions to the Aborigines. One was to the new settlement at Port Victoria (Darwin). All the missionaries except Angelo Confalonieri were lost in a shipwreck in Torres Strait. The Italian did not live long but he was able to demonstrate his missionary method by studying and mastering aboriginal language and customs. The three attempts at settlement near Perth were soon in difficulties through inexperience and lack of funds. Only New Norcia survived and it quickly flourished. In 1848 the government made them a grant of 1000 acres, 80 miles NE of Perth. On it they engaged successfully in several agricultural and pastoral enterprises. They seem to have been efficient and had something to attract the natives to their community and way of life. On two occasions large parties arrived from Europe, monks, teachers, instructors, farmers and tradesmen. They set up a village community of impressive quality. Their plans for the aborigines were on the grand scale and they had the means to achieve them. Their monastic liturgy was impressive enough to attract the attention of the tribes. They began early to train boys, not only in trade skills but in academic subjects. Yet Serra nearly ruined it all by transferring almost all the personnel to Perth to serve the white community there. For a time even the uniquely successful material plant was diverted to the settlement of the staggering financial problems of the diocese of Perth. New Norcia was founded for the Aborigines. It was turned to a source of support of the whites. In 1859 the mission was designated an Abbacy Nullius and Salvado was able to recall most of the Benedictines to the work of the monastic mission. A new beginning was even more successful than the first. Salvado ruled for nearly fifty years and his village became a small town, this time with a group of about forty houses for the settled aborigines. An article in the Perth Daily News of 13/2/1892 describes the success of the Mission – the blacks from a hundred miles around were drawn within the "humanizing influence of the monks; they were a quiet, industrious, wage-earning, well-fed lot of happy people"; they learned to read and write; "they have the ordinances of religion placed before them, and to these they carefully conform, and more regular church-goers and devout worshippers may not be found in Italy or Ireland". "In this matter of the blacks Bishop Salvado has proved himself to be the primate in Australia and a prince of colonists." What happened to Salvado's work? He died in 1900. His successor, Torres,

decided that the primary work of the mission at New Norcia had been achieved. 80 miles from Perth was no longer a bush mission. The work of civilizing and christianizing had been achieved. It was not intended that the Mission should be a place of segregation and protection forever. The aborigines were able to work in the general community. Just how far this optimistic judgment was justified I cannot determine without unavailable information. However, the decision was made. Following the earlier European pattern New Norcia became a regular Abbey, a notable centre of education, and a centre of pastoral and spiritual care for the Church in general. Aboriginals continued to receive their opportunities, but it was no longer a mission just for them. Again following the plan of earlier Benedictine missions a filial establishment was made further north in the unsettled territory – at Drysdale River; but that is part of another stage of development.

Last Frontier

A renewed burst of missionary activity among the Aborigines came in the late 19th century and early twentieth. The field was almost entirely on the Last Frontier – the north of Queensland, WA, Northern Territory, with the Centre as well. The destruction of the hunting grounds, outright war and ravages of new diseases had wiped out most of the race in the southern settled areas. It might have been expected that the same result would follow as the north became more closely settled, and, in fact, till recently both whites and aborigines seem to have been enervated by the myth of the inevitably dying race. The expected result did not follow, and there were various reasons for it. Principally, the north was not so closely settled as the south. The pastoralists did not feel the need to take all the hunting grounds. Moreover, they came to realise that they depended on the aborigines as a source of labour. Previously in the south graziers and some missionaries had insisted that the nomadic people could not take part in any industry. Northerners discovered that it was possible to work stations with the help of casual labour and the survival of tribes made the supply readily available. Further, Southern humanitarian opinion found it possible to concern itself with the fate of aborigines 1000 miles away, and governments took a legislative interest in the preservation of the race. Difficult as it may seem now to realise the fact, the Queensland Government was the model in what was considered enlightened legislation. In this atmosphere, particularly in Queensland, the Churches found a new part to play in the mission to the Aborigines.

In 1885 F. A. Hagenauer of the Moravian Mission visited North Queensland and advised that the Government hand over considerable tracts of isolated lands to the Churches for the establishment of Missions.[29] The keynote was segregation and protection – protection of life and protection of morals from white contamination. The Queensland Government sent its own investigator north, Arthur Meston.[30] He commenced with the usual white preconceived notions of the decadence of a dying race; but in the course of his travels he became convinced that the aborigines could survive, that they could, if they wished, learn the skills of European society, but that they still needed protection. These two sources, missions and Meston, were largely responsible for the 1897 Act[31] that established Queensland in the forefront of Aboriginal policy, but which in its undue prolongation has brought the state into storms of criticism in recent years.

There were already two missions, Myora on Stradbroke Island and Mari Yamba near Proserpine. Rapidly four were established in NQ. Mapoon founded by Moravians for Presbyterians 1891; Hopevale and Bloomfield River both near Cooktown Lutheran; Yarabah chosen by

Arthur Meston for C. of E. These have since increased in size and number. The Queensland government agreed to pay two hundred and fifty pound p.a. to Mapoon and Bloomfield River. The principle once established, the subsidies were extended and eventually payment was made on a per capita basis for education. Governments and missions were again in uneasy alliance. When the Commonwealth Government took over responsibility for the Northern Territory the Queensland plans were recommended as a model for policy. Sluggishly and in no consistent fashion, it followed. Commonwealth interest was slight till the administration of Mr. John McEwan in charge of Territories. WA tried to maintain a secular attitude to the aboriginal matter and refused to subsidise missions. Governments set up their own stations. By 1926 there were 3 in Queensland, 2 in the Territory, 2 in SA and 1 in WA, 1 each in NSW and VIC. Results were not encouraging. A Survey presented to the Australian Mission Conference of 1926 revealed that the 3 Queensland Government Stations cost 30,000 pound p.a. to run for 1700 residents. Deaths 121 p.a.; births 62 p.a. Three missions (Yarabah, Mitchell R. and Hope Vale) cost 5645 pound p.a. for 754 residents and births exceeded deaths p.a.[32] It seemed that the government stations could not support themselves, indicating a failure of industrial training. Excess of deaths over births, despite special reasons, indicated that they were not halting the passing of the aborigines.

Segregation

Much mission policy was concentrated on two objectives – segregation and defence. It was felt necessary to increase substantially the size of the territories available to the aborigines for hunting purposes and tribal identity; as well it was increasingly insisted that these lands should be under the control of the missionaries so that undesirable elements could be kept away.[33] Eventually a compromise situation was reached. Governments declared large areas of Cape York Peninsula, Arnhem Land and NW of WA to be aboriginal reserves controlled by governments.[34] Settlement was restricted, access was under departmental supervision, missions were allowed within the reserves, and on the missions access was in control of the Superintendent. It might also happen that the Superintendent of the mission was the Superintendent of the reserve. In this manner missions got their way. Few questions were asked till recently about the enforced immobility this could bring to the aborigines themselves. In theory the mission was to provide the segregation until the aborigines were able to mix in Australian society without exploitation or – in the missionary view – corruption. It could happen, however, that once an institution was established its perpetuity was taken for granted. However, in some fields the missions were advocates of measures that would bring the aborigines out of their own tutelage.

In 1929 T. W. Bleakley, Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland presented a Report to the Commonwealth government on aboriginal affairs in the Territory.[35] It recommended policies similar to those in force in Queensland. Pastoralists in the Territory opposed the recommendations of the Report and a conference was called by the Federal Minister. At it there was debate on the question of wages for Aborigines. This had long been a policy of the Missions. In fact, it had commenced as one of their attacks on nomadism – and community of property – in the civilizing, or Westernizing, policy. Now many of them were advocating wages in cash, not in kind. The reason for this was not entirely for incorporation in a capitalist society. The semi-nomadic aboriginals were not able to move at will on wages in kind. The tribes were tied to the stations by the rations method. Cash gave independence and mobility. On these grounds some missionaries argued the case in the Conference. The meeting decided nothing, but missionary policy was articulated.

One unexpected matter received an airing at the Mission Conference 1926 and the Federal Conference in 1929. The increasing size of the Reserves, especially one suggested to take in most of the central belt of Australia, raised the possibility of a special aboriginal state. There were two principles behind the suggestion, not necessarily compatible. First, there was a belated recognition of the fact that the land was the aborigines' when Europeans arrived. What remained should be left for them to do with as they wished. The fact that much of it seemd undesirable to whites made the offer easier. Second, a separate state run according to the needs of aborigines, not whites, might meet their requirements better and prepare them for entry into general Australian political and economic life. It was presumed that this was a desirable thing. Missionary opinion was not united on this Aboriginal State policy, but some supported it from a sense of justice and also for reasons of defence of aborigines, the other cardinal point of all missionary policy. This was not a question of moral or political tutelage, but the assurance of physical survival.

Defence

The Black War was far from over. Attitudes of callousness were common in officials of governments and in the community. However, in remoter areas actual fighting between blacks and whites had not ceased. Conflicts over hunting grounds, spearing of stock, depredation on camps, kidnapping of labour, rape and other problems resulted in attacks, murders, massacres and punitive expeditions, with or without the co-operation of authorities. The last reported took place in SA as late as the forties. Probably the worst area was the north of Western Australia. At least, it is the area we know most about. Western Australia had been reluctant to delegate authority to missions for various reasons. One of them cited by the Chief Protector of Aborigines in WA, A. O. Neville, was that closer settlement would inevitably bring about conflict with the pastoralists over conditions of employment. This was so. The constant reference by pastoralists to "cheeky mission boys" is evidence of conflict of policy. However, it was in providing refuge and protection that the missions served best the survival of the aborigines. As well they served as the sting to the sluggish conscience of Australia in the violent destruction of the race. Two persons stand out, though there are undoubtedly many others who did the same job. Rev. J. Gribble of Gascoyne.[38] He was not a man of restraint and he arrived at a time of considerable controversy in WA in 1885. He lasted less than a year. He insisted on attacking actions and methods of the pastoralists in public and demanding government action to correct the ills. His own bishop warned him to proceed more cautiously and to attain his ends by example and quiet pressure on the government. Gribble was physically attacked and felt unable to continue on the mission. One who used both methods, public attack and genial friendship in the corridors of power, was Matthew Gibney, an Irish RC Priest who first went to the NW in 1878.[39] He was revolted by the practices, official and unofficial, of control of native labour and the disciplining of alleged civil offences. In particular, the blackbirding of labour for both stations and pearling luggers, with the rapid deaths of those forced to dive, shocked him. Both before and after becoming bishop of Perth he exerted his influence in Church and State to have more missions set up and the reserves increased. Lord Forrest was one of his points of influence. During the nineties the question of pastoralists' treatment of aborigines was aired fully in the Press and Parliament. Gibney pushed his views and in particular his dissatisfaction with the Aborigines' Protection Board. When Forrest found himself unable to oppose too far the pastoralist interests in the North, Gibney did not hesitate to write direct to the Colonial Office in London. Eventually in 1905 a special commissioner

was called in and his Report was a scathing denunciation of the practices that Gibney had brought into the limelight. Probably, however, the most effective organ of missionary protest against the existence and excesses of the Black War was from the central organs of Missionary control, like the Australian Board of Missions or the Australian Missionary Council. More than one investigation of atrocities was forced on reluctant governments by public opinion, aroused largely by these national organizations.[40] C. D. Rowley described the function of the missions in these areas as that of a buffer between the aborigines and governments and pastoralists.[41] They served well in this role, saving the race from being crushed to death.

Mission Methods

When the Missions had achieved the segregation they wanted, what did they do with it? They were engaged in four principal activities:

1) *direct evangelism*, the extent of which varied from mission to mission. However, the general tendency has been to concentrate on the individual conversion method rather than mass baptism. If we may take the CMS missions in Arnhem Land as an example, after many years of presence a fine missionary like Rev. H. H. E. Warren regarded the baptism of a few adults as a milestone and the confirmation of half a dozen as practically the dawn of a new age. In ways he was correct, for his conditions for baptism were exceedingly severe and many persons who spent a lifetime in catechumenate would have been possessed of a stronger faith than thousands of recognised baptised Christians in the South.[42] The Presbyterian Mission on Mornington Island in 1926 reported a baptism of five persons with 15 more in the baptism class.[43] Against these meagre figures must be set the more realistic estimates of the Australian Missions Conference of 1926. Reporting on 29 missions to aborigines throughout the Commonwealth, but principally in the North, they estimated that out of a population of 73,000 some 4000 were being evangelised satisfactorily and another 7000 had "some knowledge of the Living God."[44] Comparison with the origin of Christianity on any mission field in the past shows that no matter whether people are baptised or not the assimilation of doctrine and practice is a process of generations. Given sufficient time, the Missions could have regarded the future as assured; but the years in isolation were numbered and the staff to speed up the process was not available.
2) *education.* This had been a missionary policy from the start and every mission commenced a school as soon as possible. The Survey of J. S. Needham at the Missions Conference of 1926 said that the usual standard reached in these schools was the fourth standard, and that many of the teachers were unqualified.[45] In 1926 this was not so far below the general Australian average. The numbers reached were comparatively low, but they seemed to be the principal hope of the future.
3) *industrial policy.* Missions tried to be self-supporting. For this purpose they employed where possible farmers, tradesmen and even mechanics. These trained aborigines formally and through work on mission projects. In this and in academic education they proved what was almost universally a strong missionary claim, that there was no reason why aborigines should not learn any subject they chose. Missionaries were the principal opponents of the theory that the aborigines were a regressive race, even though some mission policies were based on precisely that pseudo-scientific fact.

4) *medical.* Increasingly medical missionaries were engaged by the missions. In some areas this was the only medicine available.

The multi-purpose mission was a complex affair, and its increasing sophistication added to the difficulties of the missions, but as the outbreak of the Second World War approached, they showed evidence of achieving success..

Part Aborigines

One policy missions pursued at this time may have delayed their impact. There was a concentration of energies on those of mixed blood. Queensland – and eventually the Commonwealth paid a minimum sum for the education of children. Part-Aboriginal children qualified if they were resident on the Reserve. Increasing numbers of orphans of mixed blood found their way to the missions. The tendency was increased by the Report of T. W. Bleakely to the Commonwealth Government in 1929. He accepted the pseudo-scientific theory of the regression of races.[46] He believed a part-Aboriginal would regress if married to a full aboriginal. The consequence of this was that part-Aboriginals were exposed to a double segregation on missions. They were isolated from the whites to save them from exploitation and corruption, they were to be isolated from the aborigines to save them from regression. The CMS followed this policy to the extreme by concentrating their part-aborigines on Groote Eylandt. Even there they founded the mission for the full aborigines some miles away from that for the part-Aborigines. The concentration was on the latter. This policy was officially encouraged by the Diocese of Carpentaria and the Victorian CMS, the sponsor of the Mission. Rev. H. Warren devoted his energies to getting part-aborigines from Darwin transferred to Groote Eylandt.[47] The object of the policy was to allow the boys and girls trained at the Mission to marry among their own. It was not given to the Missions to see whether or not this policy had any future. CMS policy in Victoria changed to emphasis on the full Aborigines in 1929; the special mission was broken up in 1933 and during the War most of the part-Aborigines were moved out of the Territory. In the meantime the problems of the still tribal aborigines had not been properly considered.

Assimilation

The years after the Second World War revealed a new situation. Army occupation had ended the isolation of the North. Even Arnhem Land did not escape. The speedy communications developed in the War made it possible for white society to make impact which could not be controlled by reserves and missions. A new passion for mineral wealth threatened to convert the last lands of the Aborigines into yet more Naboth's vineyards. Even where mining companies did not want the land of the missions they made it impossible to maintain isolation. The Methodists had been forced to give up Elcho Island and earlier the Jesuits found Daly River impossible after a mining company started up nearby.*

* The closure of the Jesuit mission in NT was more a matter of shifts of policy within the Jesuit Society, as has been shown by Greg O'Kelly SJ in his unpublished BA Honours thesis (Monash, 1967) *The Jesuit Mission Stations in the Northern Territory, 1882-1899.* – Ed.

Two items of policy introduced by the Federal Government in a series of ordinances beginning in 1947 induced the Missions to change their attitude about segregation.[48] A new policy extended to Aborigines many of the benefits accorded to white citizens of Australia in medicine and education. Mission personnel were able to enjoy subsidies for the welfare work they were doing. They were prepared to co-operate with the government in the introduction of the aborigines into Australian society.

The other item was that the Australian Federal Government decided on a policy of assimilation. This was a reversal of the protection policy. Mission response to this volte face was on the whole favourable. A. P. Elkin, one time missionary and Professor of Anthropology of Sydney University, convened a conference in 1947 to explain new Federal attitudes to missionaries. As Keith Cole put it:

> *On practical terms it means that the Government has sought over the past few years through improved nutrition, health, hygiene, schooling, housing, vocational training, employment, and removal of any legal restrictions, to promote advancement of the Aborigines towards life in and with the rest of the Australian community, and on exactly the same conditions as those enjoyed by all other Australians.*[49]

But assimilation was greeted with moderated raptures. A statement by the National Missionary Council in 1970 agreed with assimilation as long as it was voluntary:

> *Opportunity for assimilation may be offered but acceptance cannot be forced.*[50]

Further, they did not see assimilation as being simply absorbed into the labour pool of white society, a return to the assimilation into the lower orders envisaged by the benign Macquarie; but "equality of opportunity to participate independently in free enterprise, to train for and enter professions, and to learn useful skills and trades."[51] They called for a New Deal that would transform the relationship between the races to one of equal rights and responsibilities. They were not interested in merely swelling the ranks of the "hopeless fringe-dwellers."

One service the Missions could render in this painful transition was to provide a shock absorber against the impact of capitalist objectives and mass technological methods. This they have endeavoured to do. On Groote Eylandt two large industries have been established, manganese mining and prawn fishing.[52] The firms are the biggest in Australia: BHP and Gunn Enterprises. Royalties negotiated by CMS with BHP had brought in $400,000. This sum has been paid into a Groote Eylandt Aboriginal Trust Fund. Many of the Aboriginals, including the women, have found regular employment in these enterprises; so the Trust Fund is used for community projects, decided on by an executive from the tribes. A Community Hall, a shopping centre, housing aid, assistance for training and the founding of businesses are some of the works made possible by the Fund. There are many difficult adjustments socially and psychologically to be made by the Aborigines. The Mission provides the halfway house for cultural transference.

Urban Aborigines and Indigenisation

One area where most of the Christian Churches have been and still are negligent is in concern for urban and town Aborigines. New offices have been set up within the last few years, but the past is too well known for aborigines to forget. At last the major denominations seem to be providing more personnel for the aboriginal missions; e.g. CMS has over 60 missionaries;[53]

RC 384.[54] However, all have failed significantly in providing indigenous missionaries. After nearly 200 years there are few aboriginal missionaries, clerical or lay. This is part of the hangover from the cultural contempt. For long it has been presumed that it was necessary to absorb the white culture. Aboriginal culture had nothing to offer to religion, to the Christian Church, to the ministry. Indigenisation has come late to Australia. There were efforts from the start to make some progress in cultural understanding. As early as 1826 Governor Darling reported that Rev. L. Threlkeld was learning the aboriginal language as the basis of missionary work.[55] Not only the Methodists at Buntingdale tried to translate some Scripture and Liturgy into local languages. The Lutherans at Hermannsburg were particularly zealous in this field. However no one produced an aboriginal liturgy. Some missionaries who experimented with it were regarded with suspicion. Only very recently have some Churches come to realise that there are cultural forms in all peoples that can express man's relations with God and his fellowmen. The anthropological revolution came to Australia with the foundation of a Chair at Sydney University. In 1933 A. P. Elkin took the chair and held it for a generation. He was himself an Anglican clergyman. Another noted clerical anthropologist was Ernest Worms, German Pallottine missionary from Beagle Bay. Worms was not just an anthropologist; he was a practical missionary. In this dual capacity he came to recognise the skill with which the aborigine could carry a faith on each shoulder.[56] He was not outraged by what others saw as reversion or backsliding. In particular he was not alarmed at the cultural importance of initiation which had concerned the French Cistercians who had preceded the German Pallottines in Beagle Bay.[57] He believed that it was necessary for the aborigines to accept Christianity in their religious background not in place of it. A Christian aborigine would filter out whatever was incompatible with Christianity. It was a process of acculturation. In such a process aboriginal liturgy, aboriginal clergy, aboriginal missionaries would be possible. In 1849 Dom Salvado took two aboriginal boys to Italy with him.[58] There they were given the Benedictine habit by Pope Gregory XVI. It was intended that they should study there, be ordained and come back to Western Australia as Benedictine missionaries. The plan started well but came to nothing. The RC Church has not advanced from that position in over 100 years. Some Churches have, but all too few. The future of aboriginal Christianity depends on how soon this yawning gap can be bridged.

Australia and the Churches in Australia have to realise that in the seventies they are in an ambivalent position. Australia is usually considered one of the developed countries. We must recognise that we belong to the Third World as well. As Rev. C. Hally has put it:

> *Christians in Australia are confronted with exactly the same problem as they are in Latin America and Africa; i.e. the rush into the cities of culturally marginal people of a median age of sixteen, suffering from malnutrition, inferior education, lack of normal family relationships, unskilled in a competitive labour market, and subject to racial discrimination. This is one of the most crucial missionary challenges in every country of the Third World. The crux of the problem is how to move from a posture of paternalism (solving the problems of the Aborigines for them) to creating the cultural, political and economic conditions which will make it possible for the Aborigines, divided as they are, to choose their own way of life.*[59]

Parkinson's Law is one of the ironic truths of history. At times it is almost too poignant to be amusing. Old gods can be heard laughing at what fools these mortals, these Christians, be. Christians are building up their establishments on the remote missions. As we have seen, they have there a role to play; but the future lies in the settled areas, even in the Old South. The problems of the urban aborigines will only increase if the aborigines decide they want to be assimilated to Australian society, the most urbanised in the world. New missionary attitudes

are called for, and new missionaries, aboriginal and Christian. The problem of the Churches is where to find them.

FOOTNOTES:

1. C. D. Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*, Pelican 1972 (ANU 1970), pp. 43ff.
2. Ibid. pp. 89ff.
3. D. J. Mulvaney, "The Australian Aborigines, 1606-1929, Opinion and Fieldwork", Part I, *Historical Studies, A. & N. Z.*, May, 1958, p. 150.
4. W. Dampier, *A New Voyage Around the World*, Vol 1, pp. 462-7. Contained as well in M. Clark, *Sources of Australian History*, OUP, 1957, p. 25.
5. W. Tench, *A Narrative of the Expedition to Botany Bay*, London, 1789, pp. 74ff. Also in M. Clark, op. cit., pp. 89ff.
6. *National Eucharistic Congress (Papers)*, Melbourne, 1934 p. 179.
7. Mulvaney op. cit. Also in *Historical Studies A. & N. Z.*, Selected Articles, MUP, 1964.
8. Ibid. p. 21.
9. *Historical Studies A. & N. Z.*, Oct. 1968, "Missionaries and Aborigines in Pt. Phillip District."
10. Ibid. p. 65.
11. *Settlers and Convicts*, by An Emigrant Mechanic, London, 1847 (Ed. C. M. H. Clark, MUP, 1964) p.200.
12. C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, Vol 1. MUP 1962. passim.
13. For the origin of the CMS and its coming to Australia see Keith Cole, *A History of the Church Missionary Society in Australia*, Church Missionary Historical Publications, 1971, pp. 4-10.
14. Ibid. pp. 8-9.
    cf. Rowley op. cit. pp. 94ff.
15. Rowley, op. cit. p. 93.
16. *Australia Faces the non-Christian World*, Papers of the Australian Missionary Conference, 1926, p. 15.
17. Cole, op. cit. p. 7.
18. Rowley, op. cit. p. 55.
19. For an account of Buntingdale see C. Irving Benson, *A Century of Victorian Methodism*, Melbourne, 1935, pp. 40ff.
20. Rowley, op. cit. p. 55.
21. For an Account of the Gossner Mission at Nundah and Burpengary see *Journal of the Royal Queensland Historical Society*, Vol VI, No. d, 1960-61; pp. 511-539.
22. Benson, op. cit. p. 52.
23. Rowley, op. cit. p. 246.
24. *Settlers and Convicts*, p. 232.
25. *Australia Facing* . . . . . Survey 2, pp. 6ff.
26. Ibid. pp. 139ff.
27. *National Eucharistic Congress (Papers)*, Melbourne, 1934 p. 176.
28. For an account of New Norcia see *The Story of New Norcia*, published by the Benedictine Community, New Norcia, (no date). Also Rosendo Salvado, *Memorie Storiche dell 'Australia*, Roma, 1851.
29. Rowley, op. cit. p. 177.
30. Ibid. pp. 177-180.
31. *An Act to Make Provision for the Better Protection and Care of the Aboriginal and Half-caste Inhabitants of the Colony, and to make more Effectual Provision for Restricting the Sale and Distribution of Opium*, No. 17 of 1897, Qld.
32. *Australia Facing* . . . . . p. 15.
33. cf. *Australia Facing* . . . . . Conference Resolutions:
    2) That the Conference is strongly of the opinion that, judging by the evidence before it, the only effective way of saving and developing the Aboriginal natives of Australia is by a policy of strict segregation under religious influence;
    3) that the Conference is further of the opinion that the object, where possible, will be best secured by the Governments providing adequate reserves for the complete segregation of the aboriginals and a more generous assistance to the mission stations within those reserves . . .

34. cf. *Australia Facing* . . . . . Conference Resolutions:

    4) that the Conference suggests that the Continuation Committee consider the advisability of asking that, over and above the reserves at present in existence, the remainder of the northern part of Cape Yorke *(sic)* Peninsula (Qld), Arnhem *(sic)* Land (NT) and the coastal portion of the Kimberley District (WA) from Cambridge Gulf to King Sound (*sic,* should be declared inviolable reserves for the aborigines.

    From 1904 existing reserves in western Cape York Peninsula were extended and amalgamated to form a single block of 30 miles in from the coast from Mitchell River to Batavia River.

    By 1920 the governments of SA, WA, and the Commonwealth had set up the vast Central Australian reserve.

    By 1929 the WA government had created reserves of 5000 sq. miles in the recommended area.

    By 1931 the Commonwealth had gazetted 31,000 sq. miles in Arnhem Land.

35. For an account of the Report and its consequences see Rowley, op. cit. pp. 264-278.
36. *Australia Facing* . . . . . p. 21.
37. cf. Mary Durack, *The Rock and the Sand,* Constable, 1969.

    Keith Cole, *Groote Eylandt Pioneer,* Church Missionary Historical Publications, 1971, pp. 84-102.
    For the Nemarluk episode, see Bro. John Pye, *The Port Keats Story* (no date.)
38. C. L. M. Hawtrey, *The Availing Struggle,* (no date), pp. 73-76.
39. Mary Durack, op. cit. passim.
40. e.g. the role of the Australian Board of Missions in publishing the facts in the Nulla Nulla killings in 1926; and the indictment of the WA government's response to the situation by the National Missionary Council.
41. op. cit. p. 201.
42. Keith Cole, *Groote Eylandt Pioneer,* pp. 45-6.
43. *Australia Facing* . . . . . p. 20.
44. Ibid. pp. 11-12.
45. Ibid. pp. 13ff.
46. Rowley op. cit. pp. 264-7.
47. Rowley ibid; also Keith Cole, *Groote Eylandt Pioneer,* pp. 44ff.
48. For impact of the new policies on Arnhem Land missions see Keith Cole, *History of the CMS in Australia,* pp. 169-70.
49. Ibid. p. 170.
50. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. Keith Cole ed. *Groote Eylandt Stories,* Church Missionary Historical Publications, 1972, pp. 81-8.
53. Ibid.
54. C. Hally, *Australia's Missionary Effort,* ACTS, 1973, p. 12.
55. Reported in Rowley op. cit., p. 93.
56. Durack, op. cit. pp. 235-45.
57. Ibid. p. 87.
58. *The Story of New Norcia,* p. 17.
59. Hally, op. cit., p. 13.

HOME

Peter Wood MSC

Tubercular refugees lie awake, aware
in the white sheets of this old hospital
on the edge, northern edge of this land.
Reborn from watery crucifixions, boat people
who thirsted many days.
We bring them bread and would give them wine
if the law allowed. They smile anyway.
Jesus, come home.
A child, delicate as a nestling bird, dies,
her heart wings fluttering wild, at last is free,
enters the waking dreamtime of the race,
our people. I, stumbling, patronise a saint.
She is ten. She is black.
Norma Sam pray for me.

The above poem was one of several sent me in conjunction with a projected Encounter *publication of MSC poetry. Peter, an MSC seminarian at St Paul's Seminary, while doing some work in the Top End during his holidays last year, apparently happened to be present at the death in Darwin hospital of a little girl from the Daly River area. His sensitive response I reproduce here as a tribute to her and her family. I thought first of changing the name, but I don't believe the family would require that in this context: it is one of religious respect.* [Ed.]

LOCALISATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

M. J. WILSON MSC

PART 1: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS[1]

MODERN MISSIOLOGY: "LOCALISATION"

The outstanding feature of missiology today – missiology briefly is the theory of evangelisation – is the preoccupation with what might be summarily described as "localisation".

Structural Level: Local Churches

On the structural level the modern thrust is towards "local churches", and within this general thrust the endeavour is to get down to "grass-roots levels", i.e. to the levels people actually live at in their day-to-day lives. Like most summary statements, this is not a completely accurate one. The church does not merely reflect raw human experience but always endeavours to modify it, in fact to lift it up. However, further qualifications can be postponed to a later talk on "Basic Christian Communities", which are the focus for this part of the modern missiological movement towards localisation.

Doctrinal Level

On the doctrinal level the thrust towards localisation can be variously described. I am taking 'doctrinal' in a very broad sense so as to include the theory of belief (theology), the transmission of belief (catechetics), the application of belief to the practical requirements of everyday life (moral theology and Christian ethics), the ritual expression of belief in ceremony (liturgy). In general the thrust towards doctrinal localisation can be called variously "indigenisation", "adaptation", "accommodation", "enculturation" or – the most recent favourite – "contextualisation". One can make various finer distinctions between each of these words and relate them correspondingly to one or other of the sub-divisions of the "doctrinal level". Thus one may prefer to talk about "adaptation of ritual", "contextualisation of scriptural exegesis", "accommodation of preaching" etc. In this paper I shall use 'indigenisation' as a general term covering all these more particular meanings and indicating localisation on the level of doctrine and belief.

1 Text of two papers presented for discussion at Alice Springs parish, November 1979.

World Scene

It is remarkable how widespread is the preoccupation with indigenisation in the church today. Every missiological periodical is full of it. The African church wants to "africanise" Christianity, the Asians want to find the "Asian sense", the Papuan New Guineans want to 'melanesianise", the Polynesians and Micronesians are looking for the "Pacific way". The various liberation theologies in the Americas are in fact endeavours to relate Christianity to the local socio-political, cultural scenes. Even white Australians are looking for ways of developing a theology more closely related to our Australian context, and we are scrutinising our own art, literature, history and social experience for clues. The sub-title of my booklet, *New, Old and Timeless*, namely "Pointers towards an Aboriginal theology", is therefore nothing extraordinary. What would be extraordinary is the opposite, i.e. if we made no attempt at all to "aboriginalise" Christianity. If we believed that that should not be done or at least attempted, we would be manifesting a frame of mind that would isolate us from the ordinary preoccupations of the rest of the modern church. We have to remember that the interest in so-called 'basic Christian communities" is the form the preoccupation with localisation is taking in older European" churches. It is not only in the sort of places that anthropologists typically frequent that localisation and indigenisation is a present concern.

OPPOSITION TO ABORIGINALISATION OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

It has to be recognised that the "aboriginalisation" of Christianity presents many difficulties. Some people, including some Aborigines, would be opposed to it in theory. For others, the obstacles would be practical, but massive, massive enough in fact to abort any attempt at it. For many, it would simply be a non-issue.

Non-Issue

It is a non-issue for most white Australian Christians because of what Professor Stanner described as "the great Australian silence" regarding Aborigines, their history and their culture. Fortunately, this negative obstacle is fast disappearing. The Aboriginal presence has obtruded itself onto the Australian consciousness especially over the past ten or twenty years. In response attempts are being made to dispel our white Australian ignorance throughout the whole of the educational system – in schools, teachers' colleges, universities, colleges of advanced education and institutes of theological education. The movement has not got very far as yet, but the important thing is that it has begun. Australian literature and cinema are endeavouring to inform the Australian populace in general through a sympathetic presentation of what they hope to be Aboriginal realities. A lot of the credit for the awakening of interest in Aboriginal Australia must go to a number of Australian anthropologists, especially the recently deceased Professors Elkin and Strehlow, the ANU Professor Emeritus W.E.H. Stanner and Professor Ronald Berndt and his wife Catherine of the University of West Australia.

No Such Thing

The most basic form of opposition to the project of relating Christianity to Aboriginal religion rests on the simple denial that there is any such thing as "Aboriginal religion".

In the past this belief was held not only by people whose disbelief comes as no surprise to us, seeing that they treated and apparently believed the Aborigines to be sub-human - simply a part of the Australian fauna that could be shot for sport like kangaroos or dingoes. It was held

also by such unexpected persons as ministers of religion. One of the clearest statements, one that Stanner quotes on several occasions, came from the Rev. John Dunmore Lang who observed that the Aborigines had "nothing whatever of the character of religion or of religious observance to distinguish them from the beasts that perish" (cf. *New, Old and Timeless* p.47). The Jesuits working in the Top End during the last quarter of last century felt they had to defend the basic religiosity of the Aboriginal people, even though some at least of them also accepted at the same time the thesis then commonly held in Australia, namely that Aboriginal culture was in a state of decadence, having fallen from a previous state of higher achievement. The Jesuit missionaries based their belief on observation of ritual elements that they considered to be humanly deviant and on the linguistic perfection of the local Malak Malak language in relation to their assessment of the cultural standard of the then local speakers.

Nowadays there is so much talk about sacred Aboriginal sities, ceremonies and objects that we are probably surprised that apparently well-meaning men could have denied a religious character to Aboriginal culture. In the eyes of Professor Strehlow the opposite was so evidently the case that he could be said to have denied that there was anything important in Aboriginal culture that wasn't either straightout religious or at least reductively such. The categories "religious", "political", "social" did not exist as such: everything was basically religious, and he proposed that the Aborigines' great and specific contribution to religious thought was their conviction of the interpenetration of time and eternity (cf. *New, Old and Timeless* pp.33, 66). – If I might make a comment in passing: I think more people than the Aborigines believe in the interpenetration of time and eternity. I believe in it myself. What may be specific to them could be their way of conceiving of it and expressing it: the ideology of the "Dreamtime". While therefore I might criticise the exclusiveness of Professor Strehlow's mode of expression, the relevant point here is his strong affirmation of the religious character of Aboriginal culture.

Factors Facilitating Denial

I would propose that a number of factors made the early denial of Aboriginal religion possible, viz. the initial ignorance of the white invader; his assumption of cultural superiority which prevented him from attempting to dissipate his initial ignorance – which became therefore an habitual state of nonchalant disregard, even amongst officially appointed historians of Australia – the "great Australian silence"; the secret, esoteric nature of Aboriginal ceremony; the exotic nature of Aboriginal religion. I think this last factor could do with some amplification.

Exotic Nature of Aboriginal Religion

Aboriginal society has evolved in virtual isolation from the rest of mankind for some 7000 years up to 200 years ago. There could have been an invasion of people from the north-west around that time. That is back in the so called "Stone Age" of mankind in general. Back beyond that stretches a not substantially different culture for at least some further 30,000 years. Cultural evolution over that long period was minimal in the area that eventually became maximal in Europe, i.e. in technology, the use of material substances to change and shift around other material substances. In Australia a lot of evolutionary energy went into the patterning of society, i.e. into the structured development of inter-personal relations (moieties, sections, subsections, semimoieties based on a variety of generative principles) and into the development of an integrated worldview and its associated ideology and ceremonial (i.e. myth and ritual). Worldview with its associated ideology and ritual is what we mean by "religion", but developing as it did in isolation the final Aboriginal product did not bear the superficial marks of what a modern – or not so modern – European would immediately think of as

"religion". The anthropologists are still arguing among themselves about the leadership function in Aboriginal society, simply because Aboriginal society did not develop institutions that are convenient to European recognition. Their ideology of relationship to land is sufficiently different for early European invaders to be able to declare without the appearance of illegal aggression that the whole country is technically ownerless and open to acquisition by the Crown by a mere act of declaration. In the same way, as Aborigines did not appear to have a priesthood, sacrifice, prayer or belief in a Christian-style God, Europeans denied that they had "religion". Superstitions, yes, and other magical practices, but not "religion".

Professor Stanner's most important work, probably, is his monograph called *On Aboriginal Religion*. His claim is to have detected, by the use of apposite strategies of interpretative transformation, the equivalent of "sacrifice" in a certain Aboriginal ceremony (Punj, "Sunday Business") and the existence of a factor as fundamental to Christianity as "sacramentalism". At the same time even he wanted to use the terms in a sense that precluded comparison with their usage in Christian theology (cf. *New, Old and Timeless* pp.53-58). As I have noted in my booklet, I believe the basis for his fears to be unsubstantiated. Moreover, it is self-contradictory to write in English of "sacrifice" and "sacrament" and deny any relevance to Christian usage.

Aboriginal Denial

Some Aborigines would want to deny that there was or is such a thing as Aboriginal "religion". If by 'religion' one means a worldview such that man finds the real meaning of his own life and the realities he sees around him in something beyond himself and the things he can perceive (cf. Barr 1979: 9-13), one cannot justify such a denial. I can imagine denial being attempted in fact by either of two opposite groups. An Aborigine totally absorbed in the Black Power movement or its equivalent could want to repudiate anything that would relate him to a Christian non-Black: so, if Whitemen have "religion", Blacks don't. On the other hand, an Aborigine totally converted to Christ could believe his conversion involved the repudiation of Aboriginal "religion" as a false religion: and a false thing really doesn't exist as such! However, I think an Aborigine rejecting Aboriginal religion would more likely mean he was rejecting it as "pagan" rather than as no religion at all.

Anti-Christian Opposition

There is a third group of people who would be theoretically opposed to the aboriginalisation of Christianity, namely anti-Christian or non-Christian scholars or social activists. I am not going to bother more about this group as, speaking as the guest of Alice Springs parish, I can presume I am addressing a principally Christian audience. I take for granted here the "universal commission" Christ gave to his church to go out to all nations. I shall return to the task of interpreting the practical significance of this universal commission – a very important point – but to spend time here defending the existence of Christian missions would be like teaching tables at a symposium of mathematicians. In another context the apologia for missions would be a good topic. The only sub-group I would feel little patience with is that of those non-Aboriginal social activists who manifest not the slightest respect for anything religious or sacred in their own culture and make great public fuss about sacred sites and ceremonies in Aboriginal culture. This is bogus.

"Pagan"

Finally there is a group whose opposition to "Aboriginal Christian theology" would be a mixture of theoretical and practical issues. This group would include many (most?) zealous

missionaries of the past, and some very dedicated ones today. It would also include, as I noted above, some Aboriginal Christians who would see rejection of old-time Aboriginal religion as a condition of their genuine conversion to the Christian faith. I should like to approach this part of my topic by means of a potted history of recent missiology.

In the past insistence has been on the oneness of the truth, especially in view of the fact of revelation by God. Christ has come to teach us with divine authority. He has set up his church as a means of transmitting that teaching down to our very selves and beyond us to those who will come after us. Once God has spoken, all must listen. Any other sort of religious teaching or belief is that of the "bushies" – which is what 'pagan' actually means. If what the non-Christians, the "pagans", think, say and do is the same as what Christ and his church have told us, then it is all right but superceded. If it is different, in the sense of opposed, then it is wrong. Wilfully to persist in believing it is to be opposed to Christ, to be under the control of anti-Christ, that is, the Devil. Missionaries and their converts believed this to be the case especially when the non-Christian religion showed signs of "depravity", e.g. incorporating sexual orgies or murder.

In theory, Christian missionary enterprise is undertaken to implement the twofold Christian commandment, love of God and love of our neighbour. The theory is that I, the missionary, love the person I evangelise as a person called to brotherhood with me in Christ, but I "hate" what would prevent him from accepting that call to brotherhood. If my love of a person is genuine, I try to extend it as far as I can. To say I love you but hate your nose -- and that is why I have just given it an almighty punch – is a misguided form of love. Many Christian missionaries therefore have endeavoured to extend the boundaries of the purely social, cultural, secular, as far as possible in their confrontation with "native", Aboriginal culture. Paradoxically, this could be another reason for their desire to deny the character of "religious" to much, even all of Aboriginal culture. Thus totemism, "skin" groups, marriage rules, initiation ceremonies, corroborees in general, even collections of "dreamtime" mythology, they would want to describe as purely secular, sociological, artistic, ideological, philosophical – in brief, non-religious. In this way they believe they can preserve the main body of Aboriginal culture without infringing the absolute validity of Christian belief and practice.

The difficulty with this view, on its own premises, is the contention of Aboriginal people and scholars like Strehlow that in Aboriginal society the religious and the secular compenetrate. A Christian scholar can, of course, cope with such a contention by observing that it is not a factual statement, even when made by Aborigines themselves, but really an interpretative one, and so open to dispute.

Respect for Other Religious Cultures

Of recent times a more positive attitude towards non-Christian religions had appeared in the church. It was being aired in theological circles before Vatican II but gained guarded public expression in the Council (in *Nostra Aetate* and *Ad Gentes* – cf. Kalilombe 1979: 144-145), and firm expression as a general principle in Paul VI's encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975) which publicised the results of the discussion of evangelisation carried out by the Synod of Bishops in 1974. In particular (#53) the encyclical speaks of "the immense sections of mankind who practise non-Christian religions because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. They carry within them the echo of thousands of years of searching for God, a quest which is incomplete but often made with great sincerity and righteousness of heart. They possess an impressive patrimony of deeply religious texts [*here read* oral traditions]. They

have taught generations of people how to pray. They are all impregnated with innumerable 'seeds of the Word' and can constitute a true 'preparation for the Gospel' . . ."

In theory therefore the relationship between Aboriginal religion and Christianity is a positive one. The church is not open to Aboriginal culture on condition that it is not religious, but precisely the opposite. Because something is religious, it is related to and belongs to Christ, the head of creation. Christianity's task is to complete Aboriginal religion by adding to it the gift of Christ who is God's unmerited and unmeritable "grace" to mankind. In the past we have tended to defend our missionary, evangelising activity in terms of the darkness in which men walked without the light of Christ. The *real* motivation for evangelisation is expressed marvellously by one writer (Joseph Masson) thus: it is not so much that these people are so badly off that they need Christ, but rather they are so good that Christ cannot afford not to have them in his church! For more particular illustration of the close relationship between the religious dynamic of Aboriginal religion and Christianity I make bold here simply to refer you to my booklet, *New, Old and Timeless*, especially pp.49-51.

Salvific Value of Non-Christian Religion

Since *Evangelii Nuntiandi* the discussion has moved one step further. If one really respects non-Christian religions, is one prepared to say that they constitute a way of salvation? Otherwise it would look rather like praising another's cooking, but declining to taste the results on the ground that they were inedible!

The question is discussed very carefully by an African bishop, Patrick Kalilombe, in an article in *Afer* (June 1979: 2/3: 143-157): "The Salvific Value of African Religions". Naturally, I cannot repeat the details of his discussions here. I restrict myself to four summary remarks:

1) He points out that up to recent times most theologising on this theme has been done by European theologians, who have the advantage of objectivity and impartiality in regard to the variety of African religious traditions; but at the same time the important handicap of lack of the inner sense for African religiosity. Just as only an African has the African religious sense bred into his bones, and so the task of africanising Christianity belongs to him in a special, irreplaceable way; likewise the Aboriginal Christian has an irreplaceable role in the task of developing an Aboriginal Christianity.

2) The African (respectively Aboriginal) theologian will be concerned about issues and emphases that a non-African (non-Aboriginal) might not even notice, and vice-versa. For instance, an African's attention will be caught by texts like the following from Amos (9:7): "The Lord says, 'People of Israel, I think as much of the people of Sudan as I do of you. I brought the Philistines from Crete and the Syrians from Kir, just as I brought you from Egypt'."

3) In this whole project, a holistic standpoint is essential. There are quite a number of essential elements: neglect of any of them can simplify procedures but totally invalidate the outcome.

4) A standpoint of central importance will be "the meaning of Vatican II's favourite description of the Church as 'light of the Nations' (*Lumen Gentium*, 1) and universal Sacrament of Salvation (*Ad Gentes*, 1)." (*op.cit.* p.154)

He spells out some of the implications of the church's status in the world as a sacrament, i.e. a visible and effective sign of the coming Kingdom of God (p.154):

> *If this is so, the Church's preoccupation should be less with mere recruitment of numbers, and more with authenticity and efficacy of its witness in the world. The other religions should be seen, not so much as an adversary or a threat, but as the field within which her witness makes the good grain grow and bear fruit a hundredfold, while the tares are being pulled out and burnt.*

PART 2: PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The second part of my paper is the question of practicality. People may agree with all my theoretical argument for a positive relationship between traditional Aboriginal religion and Christianity, but would maintain that it is impossible in practice.

Possible Grounds of Impracticality

Let us attempt to spell out the possible grounds of the alleged impracticality:

1) Aboriginal people have effectively lost their traditional religion as a result of their past experience of dominance by white society, de-culturation, marginalisation . . .

2) The Aboriginal people have accepted the values, goals, ways of living that are the cultural pattern of white society in the context of which their present and especially their future experience lies. The old ways of extended ceremony, of care for sacred sites etc. are no longer possible to maintain. A part of the new deal is the new style of religion. The only realistic course is adaptation to the surrounding, dominant culture and so, in the religious sphere, the acceptance of the standard white Australian pattern of Christianity.

3) Unlike other peoples in the world where indigenisation is a concern being carried on by indigenous theologians and scholars (Africa, Asia, the Pacific), the Aboriginal people have in fact not persevered sufficiently in the educational process of this country to produce their own theologians and scholars to do their essential, irreplaceable part of the work.

4) In any case, apart from such accidentals as the vestments one wears, posture, style of liturgical music, the language used, the doctrine and the liturgy of the Church are standard throughout the world and so there is really very little to indigenise, certainly not enough to become too het up about. The passion for indigenisation is really little more than a passing fad.

Comment

I should like to comment briefly on each of the foregoing allegations.

1) and 2) Loss of Religious Tradition, Assimilation into White Culture

As a visitor to Alice Springs, my initial instinctive reaction must be like that of most of the tourists, and it probably replicates the opinion of many of the white residents too, viz. that Alice Springs is one of the last places in the world where one would question the massive disruption Aboriginal society has undergone in the contact situation. One looks at and hears about the aimless wandering groups, the public drunkenness and fighting, the fringe camps right beside the town. Where else could one expect to find marginalised people if not in fringe camps?

I would hope that as an anthropologist I would be sufficiently wary of the misleading character of the appearances of things on the other side of a cultural boundary to feel the need of testing initial reactions.

Fortunately, before dealing with this question here before an Alice Springs audience I have had an opportunity to view a well written report on Aboriginal visitors to Alice Springs and their accommodation needs. (Robert Layton, Patrick Guiness, Elizabeth McDonald, Kinvin MacKenzie: "Report to Aboriginal Hostels on Aboriginal Visitors to Alice Springs and their Accommodation Needs", July 1979.) The picture that emerges is similar in relevant characteristics to the one discovered by the anthropologist, Basil Sansom, in his study of Knuckey's Lagoon, Darwin's self-described "grogging village" for the people of a definite area in the north-west corner of the Top End. Where the casual outside white observer sees only disorder, irregularity, even squalor, an anthropologist is confronted with a patterned, highly regulated way of life where traditional rules regarding residence and behaviour have been or are being transposed into new conditions of existence. The transposition is not easy; sometimes it is unsuccessful; but again often it is, especially when the white community is prepared to listen to Aboriginal needs, wishes, plans, suggestions and to search for a basis for co-operation.

I should like to presume permission to quote several lines from the Layton *et alii* report that are especially relevant to our present topic. (It must be remembered that each sentence is amplified by supportive argument in the original text):

> *It is easy to overlook how recently White contact disrupted the traditional way of life for many of these groups . . . [i.e. in general terms, Aranda, Luritja, Pintupi, Pitjantjatjara, Walpiri, Alyawarra]* (p.2)
>
> *Much of the culture which formerly was associated with a hunting and gathering economy has not only survived to the present, but is valued by Aboriginal people as an expression of their distinctiveness. Foremost, perhaps, is the religion, expressed in ceremonies, song-cycles and legends. Even in Alice Springs itself, sacred sites are still known, ceremonies performed and legends preserved.* (p.3)
>
> *The ability to move between communities to attend ceremonies, visit relatives, shop for goods imported into the Centre etc., is highly valued today. Settlements are littered with vehicles which bear witness to the present aspirations of the people to preserve their mobility across the greater distances characteristic of post-contact settlement.* (p.4)

Homeland Movements

A distinctive feature of Aboriginal society today is the "homeland" or de-centralisation movement. I do not believe, at least up in the Top End, that the correct model for understanding it is the "nativistic", "revitalistic" one. The people involved in such movements that I know of personally are not endeavouring simply to return to the way of life of their forefathers. They may start off very simply, but their early aspirations – and, if they are lucky, their later achievements – are for electric power, water reticulation, shops, manufactured goods (including

food), a hospital, school and church, Landcruisers and an airstrip. I will not be surprised to hear of one that has its own plane, as the Murin Association at Port Keats actually did up to a couple of months ago.

One feature of such homeland communities that might be described as "revitalistic" is the re-introduction of Aboriginal ceremonies that for some groups had been impeded, even forbidden, in the previous mission situation. At the same time, some at least of the homeland groups are actively seeking for a way in which their traditional ceremonies and overall religious values can be fitted into the Christian system. In such places, not even religious activity is accurately described as "revitalistic". They are actively involved in what is the main topic of this paper, namely, the interpenetration of Christian and Aboriginal religious values.

Religious Memory

I shall say something later about the importance or respectively non-importance of the memory of ceremonial details. However, it is clear that the Aboriginal people have not yet forgotten as much of their old religious culture as might appear to be the case in the eyes of the white observer, missionary or otherwise. One example that came to my attention I wrote up in an issue of *Tracks* last November and presented as a paper in August this year at the Sydney conference of the AASR. It relates to belief in a transcendent father-figure called "Nugumanj" amongst the people of the Daly River Reserve area. In his characteristics and functions he is remarkably close to the Christian conception of God the Father, so much so that in the early days of Port Keats mission, after hearing instructions from the missionary priest about the fatherhood of God, the people were asking one another if the priest was really talking about Nugumanj. They decided he couldn't be, as he had dismissed their old religious ideas as "pagan", and so they stopped talking publically about Nugumanj. Stanner stumbled on a memory of how in the days of his old informant's youth the older people used to cry out to Nugumanj for food during nights when they felt particularly hungry. The comparative religionist of world-wide reputation, Mircea Eliade, took up Stanner's brief account and presented it in his *Australian Religions* as an example of the way sky gods tend to fade away into obsolescence. Yet recently at a course for a group of Murintjabin people at the Daly River Centre, once the older people on the course realised that they were being actively encouraged to remember and recount their ideas about Nugumanj, the whole conception reappeared in much fuller detail than Stanner had recorded as an almost forgotten memory. Subsequently I found that the very children at Daly River Mission knew about Nugumanj, adding another important detail especially relevant to themselves as children.

I think it is clear that rather than being forgotten much traditional religion simply went underground. Moreover, though ceremonial activity had to be severely modified – hence the *anomie* affecting so much of the male section of Aboriginal society – much of it still continued on quietly away from the observation of white society, missionaries included.

3) Absence of Aboriginal Theologians

The practical difficulty of getting Aboriginal theologians who could do the work of indigenising Christian theology and liturgy, because theologians are end products of a long educational process, and Aboriginal boys and girls are dropping out long before theology is even broached – is a real difficulty that affects not only the church but every area of society where tertiary qualifications, matriculation or even a set standard of theoretical knowledge are required. In this respect the church is seriously handicapped here in Australia in comparison

with such places as Africa, Asia and the Pacific.

It is little consolation to us in the church to know that our worry about Aboriginal theologians – and ministers in general – is shared by those in government departments, social services and educational institutions who are wondering on their part where the engineers, accountants, doctors, lecturers, tradesmen, entrepreneurs and administrators of Aboriginal societies are going to come from.

At this stage I believe that it is the task of us white Australians to work away at our side of the interface preparing as best we can for the breakthrough that we trust will happen at some future time in a way that we can't at present predict.

At the same time, as far as localising Christianity is concerned, we can note some important happenings that are occurring at the vital grass-roots level, without which whole schools full of Aboriginal theologians would be futile.

Typically, the agents of religious change are those persons variously described as the "charismatic leaders" (Weber), the "philosophico-religious men" (Radin), the "old men" (cf. Barr 1979: 12, and in Wilson (ed.) 1979: 17); when operating with certain formal academic techniques they are what I am calling "theologians". However, they do not introduce change in a cold-blooded, deliberate sort of way, but emerge from a background of popular religiosity as the members of a community in and through whose minds what is happening in the community comes to more or less explicit consciousness and achieves formal or at least effective expression. The community in general must already be feeling and thinking in an implicit, inchoative sort of way what their philosophico-religious leaders tell them; otherwise their propositions are viewed by the community variously as mere speculation, interesting but unreal, trivial, extravagant, strange, somewhat mad, or even perverted and dangerous.

In this sense I believe Christianity must already be receiving an Aboriginal flavour in the minds and spirits of ordinary members of Aboriginal communities before an Aboriginal theologian could operate usefully in a formal way towards the formulation of a localised, aboriginalised theology.

Moreover, I would believe that the interpenetration of Christianity with Aboriginal cultural and religious values has been going on for quite some time – much too slowly for the expectations of many of us. However, the pace has picked up dramatically of recent months because on the one hand, of deliberate, isolated attempts such as was conducted with Kardu Nwmida (the council of old Murinbata men) at Port Keats and was written up by C.J. Connolly MSC in *Tracks* 1979/1, and particularly, on the other hand, by the operation of the Daly River Centre, where what are in effect conscientisation courses for groups of Aboriginal people are being conducted. It was in the context of such a course that belief in Nugumanj, the father-figure from on high, surfaced again into consciousness and the people recalled the feeling of their parents and grandparents that Christianity and Aboriginal religion did not seem so far apart. They didn't have the keystone to the whole edifice, Christ, but, as some of them told Stanner – and I beg to be allowed to quote it once more (cf. *New, Old and Timeless* pp.49-50), "We blackfellows just missed!"

Here in Alice Springs I am speaking at this moment in the context of another potentially important part of the process of preparing for the emergence of an Aboriginal form of Christian belief and worship, namely as guest speaker of "Injulka", a cross-cultural religious group.

Further, one of the possible fruits of the recent Northern Territory Catholic Missions Council is the incorporation of more Aboriginal people into the extended ranks of church ministers.

In brief, the difficulty stemming from the present absence of Aboriginal theologians is nowhere near as daunting as it might first seem.

4) Small Scope for Indigenised Theology

The final practical difficulty is, I suppose, the most basic. Is it true that the only way of being Christian has already been developed in substance, so that any further adaptation refers only to such relatively unimportant accidentals as how one sits, what one wears, the style of music? Even in liturgical adaptation, is what we say and pray in church already so firmly established that all that remains to be done is the mere technical task of translating it?

I write this section of my paper on the feast of Pope St Leo the Great. When he was pope, the Christian church was already in its fifth century. Yet it was during his pontificate that belief in Jesus Christ was made theologically relevant to the men of his time by the application of a couple of technical concepts that came from the Hellenistic culture of that era, namely, 'nature' and 'person' (neither of which terms, it might be noted, do we use today in ordinary speech in the same way as Leo and the people of the time of the Council of Chalcedon used them). The new formulation had a big influence on the formulation of the Christmastime liturgy.

Is the formulation of belief in Christ in terms of 'person' and 'nature' substantial to Christianity or not? If substantial, what about those Christians, including the Apostles themselves, who did not think about Christ in this way for some four hundred years? If not substantial, then where is the dividing line and who is going to draw it?

When we are faced, on the one hand, with the profundity, endlessness and incomprehensibility of God's wisdom, and on the other with the almost extravagant variety of human cultures, who can foretell what the limits are? We know that the substance of our belief, as of revelation itself, is self-consistent and timeless. We know that a lot of the old things maintain their validity and force. At the same time the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who takes new and old things out of his storeroom (Mt 13:52). This is why I entitled my booklet dealing with "pointers towards an Aboriginal theology" as "*New, Old and Timeless*".

So far the Christian church has been passing through its Western cultural phase. When we ourselves were young, many of us responded vibrantly to Belloc's ringing phrase, "The faith is Europe, and Europe is the faith". We could not have imagined then how hollow it would sound within our own very life-time. In my own religious society (MSC) I see our parent provinces in Europe withering away: novitiates are closed, seminaries are almost empty, our religious houses are filling up with old men retiring from the field. But our provinces in Indonesia, the Philippines, the Pacific Islands and Latin America are expanding annually. Theologians are already paying serious attention to the various, sometimes highly developed, soteriologies of Africa and Asia. Who knows what new richness the religious philosophy of Aboriginal society, with its special compound of realism and mysticism, might give to Christianity? As I explained briefly in *New, Old and Timeless* (pp.43-44), I don't think the accidentals of ceremonial ritual, Aboriginal or Christian, are a very important issue in themselves. Whether we say Mass sitting down or standing up, or even in Greek, Latin, English or Aranda, gets its

importance only from the extent that such behaviour creates an atmosphere and ambient within which the really important work of Christianising a culture, of subsuming another section of the human phenomenon under the lordship of Christ, is able to proceed. As *Evangelii Nuntiandi* puts it (#63), the gospel message has to be transposed into the languages that particular people understand; "And the word 'language' should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense which one may call anthropological and cultural."

Finally, I would like to express the hope and prayer that by being subjected to the saving power of Christ, Aboriginal culture itself may experience both renewal and salvation. Otherwise, like other human things, it can be expected simply to die away – and maybe quite rapidly at that!

Martin J. Wilson MSC
Feast of St Leo the Great,
10 November, 1979

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DALY RIVER CENTRE

In reply to a request for information about courses at the Daly River Centre, Sister Mary McGowan wrote me a letter (15 June 1980) of which this is the relevant part:

During April and May I have been concentrating on the Catechetical programme at Port Keats and Bathurst Island. Some wished to see an overall programme for a given length of time. So this was done – a year's work, with outlines for three lessons a week. Instead of the teachers coming here, I went over to Bathurst Island and we did two full days work on part of the programme – the Aboriginal teachers.

This type of approach, hopefully, can be repeated in August with more of the programme. This time I hope in Port Keats as well. It is not the ultimate by any means – having it on site – quite a lot of distractions and hard pressed for time. But they prayed and one very good point was there that after the teachers prayed, they went immediately to their own class and took a small group out to pray also.

Just briefly, a group of Aboriginal Health workers arrive on Sunday for a week's course – a type of awareness programme – awareness of self, other people's needs, i.e. community, Health worker, white staff. Also, facing up to problems, difficulties, etc. They (all women this time) come from a variety of places in the Top End arranged by the Health Department. If it is not too late, I can have the report written up and sent by Wednesday 25 June.

Early in July there is a group coming from Turkey Creek (near Halls Creek) for a leadership course. Then later in the month, a group from Santa Teresa. If you would like it, I would send you copies of these two reports also.

REPLY TO FATHER DAN O'DONOVAN'S LETTER [1]

Nelen Yubu Missiological Unit,
Santa Teresa,
via Alice Springs, NT, 5751

14 May 1980

Dear Dan,

Thank you for your letter, which is only a public part of the support and encouragement you have continually given me since Nelen Yubu began three years ago.

It is indeed somewhat humbling when I remember that the part of my booklet that you found most praiseworthy (Chapter One) is little more than a compendium of other people's opinions. However, it is the basis for any attempt at localising Christian theology, and it is good to recognise our basic agreement.

When you go on to criticise my views of 'sacramentality' as a ground common to Christian and Aboriginal belief and practice you have touched on an issue that is much dearer to me. I am not trying to reduce Christian sacramentalism to Aboriginal, but I am searching for an internal consistency between them. You rightly see the basis of our disagreement in our views about 'transcendence'.

Transcendence

It is hard for me to expound my views about transcendence without getting involved in philosophy, which I fear would not make interesting reading matter for many who would, all the same, be keen to explore the relationships between Aboriginal and Christian religiosity. However, as you question me on the point, I must go ahead.

First of all, I must warn that any discussion about transcendence in the Aboriginal context cannot take its start from Maddock (1974) for whom some beings are "transcendental" merely in the sense that their respect transcends social categories, whereas others belong as "totems" or "dreamings" to particular social categories like moieties, sections, subsections etc. However, while I have not proposed that the Aborigines laid particular emphasis on the transcendence of their religious entities, in the sense of being "Wholly Other", I would not be prepared to deny with you, Dan, that the Australian Aborigine had ever "arrived in his religious creations at either the conscious experience or the concept of a transcendent", unless you are using 'conscious' and 'concept' in a more technical sense than I think you are doing. When you go on to add your reason, viz. the Australian Aborigine's "amazingly heightened sense of fantasy held him from doing so", then I have a very clear ground of dissent from you.

With my own background in Thomist speculative psychology (the area in which I did my Ph.D. thesis at the Gregorian University, Rome) and without bothering to acknowledge here the various philosophers I am in debt to, I am keen to distinguish *insight* (the intelligent perception of concrete significance) from its *expression.* The insight can be spelt out, articulated in basically different modes: in reflectively elaborated *concepts* (whose material qualities and dimensions function purely as *analogues* for an otherwise humanly inexpressible reality) or in *correlatives* (concrete models expressive in their own particular material characteristics). A main point is that insight comes before and grounds expression.

I see philosophers, theologians, logicians, all the various scientific analysts as working typically in the first mode: they strive for objective, abstract, reflectively defined *conceptual* descriptions from out of which personal feeling and emotional colour has been refined away.

I see musicians, artists, dancers, story-tellers, and people who sometimes just grunt or sigh, refusing further comment, as working typically in the second mode. Poets straddle the two – and that's the importance of poetry.

When an artist is asked what he really wanted to say, he rightly just points to his painting. *That* is his expression of his insight. When he makes up words about it, he is no longer speaking as a painter, not precisely as such.

The difference in mode of expression should not prevent us from acknowledging that the same thing is being said or that a basically identical insight has been had.[2]

I believe that the Aborigines *do* perceive transcendence and express it in figure, and that their "amazingly heightened sense of fantasy" enables them to do so with special effectiveness. Like most people, they may not have the word 'transcendent' in their vocabulary (nor even a clear *concept* of it), but they indicate it in a figurative way when they say something like "All the dreamtime clan spirits like Kunmanggur, Karwadi and the rest *had the same stories about* Nugumanj as we [ordinary human] people have." That is, Nugumanj is *above* the dreamtime, i.e. the realities of clan and "totem", of human beings, culture heroes and the countryside. (Cf. my article on Nugumanj in *Tracks* (No. 2) which you refer to.)

Moreover, scientific accuracy is surely out of place if one were to take pains, for instance, to instruct an Aborigine that if a being like Nugumanj lives "in the sky", then he is not outside the cosmos; if he is in the moon, then he is only a quarter of a million miles away and men have actually been there. We too go on praying "Our Father, who art in heaven". Each year we celebrate Christ's ascension . . . The heavens, the sky, are a symbol of transcendence. That our ancestors thought they were more than that does not mean that they had misidentified their God.

Father

I must confess, Dan, that the sort of dubiousness you manifest towards Aboriginal perceptions I exercise towards "cultural" theologians.

That the Hebrews attributed fatherhood to the transcendent God with great caution I am prepared to accept as a factual statement (to the extent that it might be which I wouldn't bother to investigate). But I would find it a logical fallacy to conclude, *e converso*, that a people who had an easy custom of addressing a spirit as "father" must thereby have failed to perceive its transcendence.

No doubt it is correct to say that in himself *(in se)* God is transcendent, the Wholly Other. But this does not mean that he is outside our scope, for the simple reason that we are not outside his. That is, if one wants to talk in the technical jargon of Thomist philosophy, God is absolutely independent of any other, but we are totally, intrinsically ("transcendentally") dependent on him. So, God is transcendent of us, but we are immanent within him. It might even be more theologically correct not to talk of him as "our" God (but rather of us as "his", i.e. his people). However, who is going to insist on these nice logical points in a matter that affects us all so deeply and so personally? I'm sure you do not chide Augustine for his evocative phrase, that God is closer to us than we are to ourselves?

Moreover, outside of the technical jargon (a specialist, possibly defective mode of expression) of "real relations" and the like, who is going to define as "Wholly Other" a God whose knowledge of us and love for us is creative of our very existence? In this sense I propose that about the last thing that the Christian God is is "transcendent", "Wholly Other", and I rather commend the Aborigines for insisting on the creative dependence they and their world have on a source of vitality whom they glimpsed truly but only under the guise of metamorphosing presences in a strangely potent dream.

Envoi

Dan, I know you and I share the same hope, that Christ becomes recognised by the Aboriginal people as theirs too. I recall with pleasure and emotion the Aboriginal pastor who told some of us last year that his conversion to evangelical Christianity marked the first time in his life of cultural and physical deprivation on a NSW reserve that he ever had something he could really call "his own", namely, Christ, his own Redeemer and Lord.

My belief is that the Aboriginal people have a lot of Christ's stuff already, and when they enter his kingdom, they should not be introduced as paupers. They are rich already, but are in danger of not knowing it because we white people cannot recognise a stamp of guarantee we're not used to.

You wrote that your "conjecture may be wrong", that is, about Aboriginal cosmography having no outside, and if so, you "would have to reconsider completely" your misgivings about my approach. Well then, Dan, you will not mind if I say, Many thanks for making this a dialogue, and you do need to do some reconsidering because, on my account of it, your conjecture *is* wrong.

Hoping to hear further from you,

Martin Wilson MSC

1 Cf. *Nymuna* (formerly *Tracks*) No. 4 (January 1980) pp.1-6, "Open Letter to Author of *New, Old and Timeless*", by Fr Dan O'Donovan OCR, of Djarinjan (Lombadina) WA. – This reply has been published in *Compass* along with Fr Dan's original letter.

2 As I guess you too, Dan, were trained in Thomistic philosophy, I must warn you that I have waged long battles with some of my colleagues (and teachers) who have tried to make me accept that monstrosity of Maritain and Garrigou-Lagrange, the so-called "analogous concept". For me, following Gilson, Lonergan (and of course Thomas Aquinas!) analogy is a matter of *predication*.

REVIEW NOTICES

(Notices and Notes that may be of interest to Church people working in the Aboriginal context)[1]

OCEANIA Vol. 50, No. 2 (December 1979)

JOHN BERN: "Ideology and Domination: Toward a Reconstruction of Australian Aboriginal Social Formation" (pp. 118-132):

Bern has taken a new approach to the question of government (social control) in Aboriginal society. Hiatt had summarised the position in 1965 thus:

> . . . *observers in the middle of the last century denied that Aborigines had governmental institutions but did not indicate satisfactorily how affairs were conducted despite the lack. Observers later in the century asserted that Aborigines had governmental institutions but did not explain in detail how these functioned. Observers in the first half of the present century described Aboriginal government as gerontocratic, but the evidence they themselves supplied indicates that the old men had little authority outside the sphere of ritual. Finally, in recent years Meggitt and I found no governmental institutions in two different areas and have described how, nevertheless, the people organised and controlled their activities.* (pp. 120-1; Hiatt 1965: 147).

Elkin, Berndt and especially Strehlow disagreed: authority, even in secular life, was exercised by ceremonial leaders.

Bern is proposing a materially similar view to Strehlow's, but formally different. Whereas Strehlow *et alii* wrote from a functionalist viewpoint, Bern is writing from a "Marxist" one. While one needs therefore to be wary of facile reductions of values to economics (e.g. "It is a truism that religion operates for the benefit of society." p. 125), his approach has the advantage over especially Hiatt's *et alii* in that it is concerned about ideology, not just details of dispute settlement and the like.

In effect, his analysis comes to this: Dominance in Aboriginal society belonged to the mature men, amongst whom through the chance combination of various ("segmentarily differentiated") factors some individuals could achieve predominance. Mature male dominance was exercised by control of the young males (initiation) and of the women both in using and allocating them as wives for reproduction and as labourers (producers). *The ideological justification of such control was expressed in Aboriginal religion.* In that sense it is correct to say that Aboriginal society was controlled by a religious gerontocracy. Moreover, the intrinsic threat to such a governmental system consists in this that women are both subjects (potential controllers) and objects (things controlled), particularly the young women objecting to be-

1. Unless otherwise indicated, any page references are to the article, book etc. the *Nelen Yubu* reviewer is directly commenting on.

stowal, "promise", in marriage. Women can subvert the system by proferring secular interpretations instead of religious ones [as e.g. girls on the Daly wipe off "promises" made by their parents as "grog promises"]. The threat to the authority of mature men from the fact that young men nowadays are often better educated comes from outside the system and is not so crucial, as young men do not challenge *male* dominance and they become mature men themsleves after a while.

As a Marxist interpreter, Bern honestly confesses (p. 118, 130) puzzlement about the non-emergence of classes in this society with a "primitive communist mode of production". He hopes to deal with this later presumably, with final success.

MJW

A. CAPELL: "From Men to Gods And Back Again", a review article on *Die Numinose Mischgestalt*, by Richard Merz (pp. 141-149):

This book is an endeavour to understand the mentality of peoples who like the ancient Egyptians conceived of gods with "mixed form" (Mischgestalt), i.e. were partly human, partly animal, either at one point of time or successively. Merz looks to "modern primitives", especially the Aranda, for enlightenment. In comment Capell advances some interesting evidence from Australian Aboriginal studies. While he is content to leave the topic unresolved as part of man's incomprehension of his own mysteriousness, he suggests that scholars with fieldwork experience can make more sense of the mystery than Merz apparently does – not that they can explain the mystery but rather that they do not locate it in the wrong place.

Interesting for people trying to understand "totemic" religion.

MJW

1. Unless otherwise indicated, any page references are to the articel, book etc. the *Nymuna* reviewer is directly commenting on.

OMNIS TERRA No. 109 (June 1980)

CESARE BONIVENTO: "The Nature of Evangelization according to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*" (pp. 249-260).

Historical background to broadening of the concept of 'evangelisation' in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. Briefly: From the beginning of the century with the foundation of Catholic missiology till Vatican II missiologists have been exerting influence on ecclesiologists to give greater attention to specifically missionary characteristics. At the Council the *essentially* missionary nature of the Church was affirmed. After the Council the concept of 'evangelisation' was further explored. Four possible definitions were proposed to the 1974 Synod of Bishops, viz. 1) any activity transforming the world in accordance with the will of God, creator and redeemer; 2) priestly, prophetic, kingly activity of the Church; 3) activity of proclaiming the Gospel to non-Christians and nourishing it in Christians; 4) first proclamation of the Gospel to non-Christians. The Synod outlines advised No. 3, i.e. 'evangelisation' = proclamation of the Gospel. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* however opted for a "global vision" made up of elements that "appear to be contradictory, indeed mutually exclusive" (#24). Fr Bonivento concludes by allowing with post-conciliar critics of the Church's specifically "missionary" outreach to non-Christian peoples that, while Paul VI on the contrary wished to insist on the continuing importance of of such mission *ad extra*, his *Evangelii Nuntiandi* was not specifically about that, and "we can only hope that another document, which treats of the specific problems of the missionary world on the basis of E.N. comes out sometime." (p. 260) This reviewer feels rather surprised.

A remark by the way: At the recent PIPA Chapter the MSC Superior General, E. J. Cuskelly, recounted that at the time of the 1974 Synod, the African bishops especially were insisting on the adaptation of the Gospel to African culture. At the recent Synod they went silent on this. Rather, they were putting it the other way round: the need for African culture to adapt to the Gospel - the Gospel's redeeming function in regard to African culture. Those of us working on the Gospel-Aboriginal culture relationship should think about this.

MJW

GABA ORIGINAL (No. 3) Gaba Publications, Kenya

MARLENE SCHOLZ: "Group Media & Community-Building" (June 1979)

This 12 page pamphlet by Sr Marlene Scholz OP, head of the comnunications department at the AMACEA Pastoral Institute would be of interest to anyone involved in conscientisation work, like Daly River Centre. It distinguishes 'group media' from 'mass media' and 'audio-visual aids'. "Group Media comprise all those things which may help members of a group to see a theme, to intensify their awareness of a needed response, and to sustain them in their search into ways of doing something constructive to meet a need they have seen." (p. 1)

The pamphlet is specifically orientated towards building up small christian communities, first of all in an African setting. The various sections indicate its scope: Group Media; Mass Media; What is the Difference? Mass Versus Group? The Church and the Media; Evangelization Today; Group Media: Pros & Cons; Inculturation; Our Task: Community Building; Method; Hints for the Group Leader; Group Process. The concluding bibliography is divided into three sections: Some Books for Group Media Work (14); African Stories, Proverbs, Sayings of Use in Group Media Work (9); Group Communication (9).

It might be worth noting here that the Kenyan AMACEA Pastoral Institute (Gaba) put out also various publications of interest to us here in Australia, especially a nicely produced bi-monthly periodical, *Afer* (African Ecclesial Review), and the Spearhead series which includes a number of catechetical source books providing "contemporary insights in theology, sociology, scripture and educational methods" for people engaged in the catechetical apostolate. Eight of the projected nine have appeared.

MJW

ALFRED T. HENNELLY, **THEOLOGIES IN CONFLICT: The Challenge of J. L. Segundo.** (Orbis NY 1979, 200 pp., $Aust11.95).

Over the past two decades the Uruguayan Jesuit, Juan Luis Segundo has been one of the most prolific theologians on the Latin American continent (16 books and 41 articles). In *Theologies in Conflict* Alfred Hennelly SJ analyzes the major themes of Segundo's work so far, situating them in the context of the Latin American movement known as the theology of liberation, and pointing out the challenges they pose for North American and European theology.

Juan Luis Segundo was born in Montevideo in 1925 and has spent most of his life working in Uruguay. In 1965 he founded the Peter Faber Centre for social and theological studies at Montevideo, and began publication of a monthly entitled, *Perspectivas de Dialogo*. The periodical was suppressed by the Uruguayan government in 1975 and soon after the Centre was closed by Segundo's religious superiors.

Alfred Hennelly is associate professor in the religious studies department of La Moyne College, Syracuse, New York. In the prologue of his book he attests to "the experience of

studying and teaching for six years as a Jesuit scholastic in the Philippine Islands" as a major influence in his life leading him to engage in dialogue with Latin American theologians.

Hennelly begins his book with a picture of the world structured in such a way that roughly a fifth of its inhabitants (mainly white and Christian) utilize four-fifths of its limited resources for their own sustenance and happiness (with levels of overconsumption and waste), while the remaining four-fifths of the population struggle and often fail to survive with a meagre 20 percent of the goods of the earth (with levels of almost total deprivation of the absolute essentials of life). In this world Christians claim to proclaim and practice "a kingdom of justice, love and peace". Hennelly, a Christian from among the privileged fifth of the world's population, sets out in this book to listen to Segundo, a Christian from among the marginalized and deprived four-fifths.

It would be a mistake, therefore, to categorise and dismiss this book as just another to be added to the bibliography on liberation theology; as mere "consumer theology" – a book by a theologian for theologians about another theologian's books. Hennelly, aware of his position as a man schooled in an affluent society, states that his "principal objective in this book (is) to establish a first moment of dialogue" with Latin American theology as "the Christian voice of the poor in today's global village". He, along with others, sees Latin American theology, therefore, as "the most serious, sustained and theologically informed challenge the Western, dominant Christian paradigm has so far received." Hennelly puts the challenge in these words: "I would risk the speculation that the real, though unexpressed major thesis of *The Liberation of Theology* (Segundo's book on method in Theology) is that the entire millenium and a half of Constantinian Christianity has involved a gradual and massive ideologization of the Gospel in favour of powerful and privileged interests in western society" (p. 135). If this is so, then this experience of a millenium and a half is still deeply embedded in the consciousness and religious practice of both clergy and laity in every area of the world.

Thus Segundo poses radical questions concerning what emphases, what omissions, what interests have influenced the development of the Christian tradition during the past fifteen hundred years. He asks too, how profoundly the dominant ideas of western society have distorted and perhaps at times eviscerated the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ that the church exists to transmit.

Segundo's theology through the optic of the poor, his process of deideologizing, is in fact a recentering of the whole of theology by taking the issue of justice as the core of all theological and biblical interpretation. This fundamental re-examination of the theological roots of Christian belief, focussed on the integration of the demands of faith and justice, is a first step towards these demands being translated into consciousness and real practice by the whole church, religious and laity, as well as by the most visible and influential symbols of the church, the hierarchy themselves.

Hennelly contends that Segundo's theology brings to explicit consciousness all the critical problem areas that would be involved in such a re-examination: the crucial question of the basic meaning of Christianity (Chapter 3: *What is a Christian?*), the true function of the church in the world (Chapter 4: *The Mission has a Church*), an adult understanding of Christian morality (Chapter 5: *Praxis versus Magic*), a creative relationship to biblical sources (Chapter 6: *The Struggle for a Liberation Theology*), the ambiguity and yet necessity of ideology (Chapter 7:

Is Christianity an Ideology?), the retrieval of an authentic spirituality (Chapter 8: *Toward a Spirituality of Liberation)*, and the priority given to creating just sociopolitical structures (Chapter 9: *The Challenge of Marxism)*.

The theology of liberation Segundo's included should not be treated as just another theological fad. Hennelley is aware of this danger:

> *In my view the most serious danger (in this dialogue with Latin American theologians) is that of the co-optation of liberation theology; in other words, there is the possibility perhaps the probability that a North American will take the hard sayings and basic challenges issuing from the south, smooth off the rough edges of challenge and conflict, and present liberation theology as an interesting and exotic new product, calculated to relieve any tedium that may have developed in the western theological marketplace. Thus, once its conflictive nature is blunted and its challenge muted, the movement may be fitted into the extant paradigms of the West and soon thereafter forgotten (p. 14).*

The theology of liberation should not be dismissed by the orthodoxy of the western churches as heterodoxy. Already the process of deideologizing central to liberation theology has been seen as a direct attack on the very essentials of Christianity. Both within and outside Latin America it has been the object of vigorous assaults. But liberation theology is a movement founded not on some fashionable philosophy that happens to be in vogue in the West, but rather on the configuration or moral geography of the real world itself. And as long as that world remains split, as it is now, into segments of overconsumption and desperation, a church that claims to bring Good News to the poor must be engaged in dialogue with this Christian voice of the poor. The theology of liberation has been created not by atheists or anticlericals who seek to undermine and destroy the faith, but by committed believers who are searching for means to renew and to revivify that message for contemporary humanity. Their basic goal is to create a theology that will aid in the transformation of the situation of utter misery in which millions of their compatriots are trapped.

Hennelly is intent throughout the book to clarify the conflictive nature of Segundo's Christian perspective for the North American (and by extension the Australian) church. At the centre of each challenge is the basic question:

> *Ideological suspicion must lead us to ask whether the biblical passion for justice has in the course of time been submerged or displaced by the dominant interests of western society. In other words it could be the theological and biblical interpretations themselves which function, consciously or unconsciously, as a vehicle for undermining any real praxis for justice at the most profound level* (p. 179).

In the chapter on "the mission has a church", Hennelly points towards the implications of this on the grassroots level of the ordinary Christian parish. Speaking of the typical parish he refers to "the majority, both clerical and lay" on the one hand, and certain "marginal phenomena" (specifically various lobbies for justice on a local and national level) on the other. He suggests that, seen from the optic of the Christian poor, the former appear no longer as "fringe groups" or "mere activists", an optional addition to the church's real task, but as the church fulfilling its essential function: that is, participation in the struggle to humanize the local, national, and international institutions social, political cultural that deeply affect the lives of every man and woman on the planet. Jurgen Moltmann puts it succinctly: "What

we have to learn . . . is not that the church 'has' a mission, but the very reverse; that the mission of Christ creates its own church".

The serious and radical question Segundo raises is in conflict with our understanding of ourselves: Is it possible that the majority of western Chrsitians, both clerical and lay, form a church whose mission is no longer the mission of Christ, but the (unconscious) service of the interests of western affluent society? Is it possible that the mission of Christ, in seeking out and creating a church is bypassing us who call ourselves "church"? Hennelly, in writing this book, wants to suggest that we leave oursleves open to being called into question: Yes, it is possible.

John Flynn MSC

OMNIS TERRA No. 103 (Nov 1979) excerpt pp.373-4.

Australia: Pacific Mission Institute Founded in Australia

Sydney (AIF) – After a long wait Australia now has its own Mission Institute. It is located at Saint Columban's College, North Turramurra, near Sydney, and is under the direction of the Columban Fathers.

Following the Second Vatican Council the Australian Episcopal Committee set up a National Missionary Council to coordinate all missionary activity originating within Australia. In early 1972 the Missionary Council sponsored the first National Missionary Conference which was held at Saint Columban's College. Discussions at the Conference and again the next year at the International Eucharistic Congress which was held in February 1973 in Melbourne led to the conclusion that there was an urgent need to provide professional facilities for missionary formation.

In the Australian Church there are 64 religious congregations that have members assigned to overseas missions or to Aboriginal missions within the country. In addition, 15 Australian Dioceses have released priests for a limited period of missionary work overseas. It was only by a cooperative effort that adequate formation could be provided for Australia's 1672 religious and 370 lay missionaries. In 1973 the superiors of six missionary groups decided to provide a ten week course in missionary formation. The Columban Fathers volunteered to host this formation program at their college.

Primarily intended for religious who had completed their initial religious and professional training and had received their mission appointments, the program attracted some older missionaries who were on home leave. Basically the subjects covered were the same missiological subjects as those studied by the Columban seminarians in their seven year course. The first course lasted ten weeks. It was attended by three priests, ten Sisters, one Brother and five non-Columban seminarians. Immediately the course proved its worth. It was decided to offer the course over the full academic year in 1974 but so arranged that the basic needs could be met in a ten week course. For the next four years this course, with slight modifications based on annual evaluations, was the standard program.

Formation of Mission Institute

In 1978 the Columban Fathers made a major change in their own formation program when they sent some of their own seminarians on a two-year Overseas Training Program. The missiology program was then put on a permanent basis, facilities were made for the Sisters to live at the College. With the change in status, the name was changed to Pacific Mission Institute.

While Saint Columban's College staff provides most of the lecturers, qualified Catholic and non-Catholic specialists in the Sydney area are also employed. In addition the Columban Fathers also provide mission specialists from the Philippines and from some of their mission areas.

The experience gained over the last six years has dictated the nature and the methodology of the Mission Institute program. The three basic themes of the program are cultural anthropology, development ethics, and theology of revelation. These courses are supplemented by courses in ecclesiology, scripture, mission history, world religions, sociology of religion, catechetics and missionary spirituality.

The present Director of the Pacific Mission Institute is Columban Father Cyril Hally, former executive secretary of the National Missionary Council and Australia's best known missiologist.