

# APPLICATION OF (GEERTZ') DEFINITION OF RELIGION TO THE BASIC FEATURES OF AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL RELIGION (With special attention to the Murinbata people)

M.E. TONKIN FDNSC

## Synopsis of Paper

### *Introduction*

Justification for approach: Stanner/Geertz – 'the same language'

Definition: "Religion is . . .

1. "a system of symbols which acts to . . .
  - a) definition 'symbol' (after Langer)
  - b) Aboriginal mind expressed in symbol
  - c) 'master-symbol': *The Dreaming*
  - d) symbols as 'model of', 'model for'
  - e) illustration: the *Punj*
2. "establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by . . .
  - a) definition 'motivation', 'mood'
  - b) 'totemic Sacramentalism' – motivation
  - c) initiation – *men*
  - d) the *Punj*
  - e) celebration – mood
3. "formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and . . .
  - a) in context of *The Dreaming*
  - b) religious quest: to come to grips with phenomena of *ignorance, suffering and injustice*
  - c) 'universal' conceptions/mutuality
  - d) 'doctrines' life/time
  - e) assent to life (mythology)
  - f) celebration in ritual

Essay presented as an assignment in the 1980 Aboriginal Studies course at Yarra Theological Union, the lecturer being the *Nelen Yubu* editor. Sr Margaret Tonkin (BTheol) is working now in the Catholic Education Office, Sydney, as RE Consultant for the Eastern Region.

4. "clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that . . .
  - a) transformation of self/reality
  - b) symbols – vehicles of reality
  - c) 'effectiveness' of the *Punj* as ceremony
  - d) in context of *The Dreaming*
5. "the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic."
  - a) religion shapes life
  - b) 'religion pure'/'religion applied'
  - c) proximate acts in ultimate contexts
  - d) Aboriginal *landscape* transformed
  - e) totemism/'tjurunga'/magic/taboo
  - f) the *Punj* – expression of 'suprasocial reality'

### Conclusion

Stanner's 'totemic Sacramentalism'

Geertz' religion

W.E.H. STANNER, in the introduction to his work, *On Aboriginal Religion*, states that, in his view, definitions of religion, such as would aim to comprehend all religions in all places and at all times, are doubtfully matter for anthropology. By religion, he would imply simply the content of a devotional life, as witnessed in the Murinbata culture: 'That kind of belief and conduct'. (1966:vii) Indeed, in that same work, Professor Stanner, examining social structure, writes:

The active search, of which we see many signs, for a set of conceptions to complement that of social structure is in one sense mistaken: not a complement is required, but something which will make it possible, logically sound and concretely persuasive. (1966:18)

To transfer this comment into the realm of religion, we find a telling parallelism in (the now classic) definition of Clifford Geertz:

Religion is

- 1) a system of symbols which acts to
- 2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by
- 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
- 4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that
- 5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. (1969:4)

It would seem, then, that Stanner would not reject such a definition of religion. (Indeed, Geertz and he seem to speak the same kind of language.) And, so, it is within that framework of Geertz, and with special reference to (Stanner's) Murinbata, that I attempt some understanding of Australian Aboriginal religion.

### 1. Religion is a system of symbols

Understanding *symbol* (after Langer:1951) to be any object, act, event, quality or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception – the conception being the symbol's meaning – we follow Geertz (1969:4). It is understood that the Aboriginal mind has expressed itself not in

## APPLICATION OF (GEERTZ') DEFINITION OF RELIGION

concepts but in symbols: myth, dance, song, art (Wilson 1979:62), as also in material objects and local sites, as conveyers/loci of meaning (Berndt 1964:198). Hence, the necessity of understanding the process of symbolic expression in order to begin to appreciate Aboriginal religion/life, so much of which is concerned with possession and dutiful use of efficacious signs (Stanner 1966:15).

It would appear that Maddock's concept of symbol as a (poor) substitute for direct encounter, underrates the 'sacramental' nature of symbol (1974:114-5) as signs which are reminders of the past, of transformative efficacy for the present and a guarantee of what is to come (Stanner 1966:29).

Before actually turning to the concept of 'system' of symbols, it may be valid to claim for Aboriginal religion a unique 'master-symbol', viz., *The Dreaming* (Wilson 1979:44).<sup>\*</sup> As such, it would be seen to embrace the multiplicity of the symbolic dimension of Aboriginal life, itself pre-eminently the vehicle for expression of religious (and other) concepts.

By definition, *The Dreaming* is understood, within the framework of Aboriginal cosmology, to mean that period, antecedent to both time and man, when enduring features of landscape were made, connections established between man and nature and repetitive cycles initiated. This is perpetuated in the 'eternal' dreamtime through the mythologically recorded events, which themselves find expression both ritualistically and in an actual plan of life. The world-and-life view is honoured by the very routines of daily life and commemorated periodically and dramatically in cult performances (Maddock 1974:109).

Following Geertz, again, we may distinguish a 'system' of symbols as 'models of' and 'models for' reality. By the former is understood that symbols are manipulated to parallel the pre-established non-symbolic structure, so that the system itself is the model. The latter would imply the inherent symbolic potential of human existence, in that the pre-existent is to be revealed in tangible form where the theory itself is the model. It would seem that the 'model for' concept could be seen in the Aboriginal tendency to order what *is*; the 'model of', in extending the human social order to encompass other forms of life/powers within their very kinship system, and that within the framework of *totemism*,<sup>1</sup> and, as Stanner would have it, 'totemic sacramentalism' (1966:28).

To illustrate this concept of a system of symbols as 'model for' reality . . . The post-initiation rite of the Murinbata, the *Punj* (a term meaning 'secret') may be seen in one sense as functional, transitive, a 'model for' reality, in that through the *process* of withdrawal, transformation and return, accomplished in a pre-determined series of ritual actions, the young men are indeed made 'to understand' the mysteries, to be made 'Kadu Punj' (Stanner 1966:4-28). Maddock would claim that the Aborigines take no credit for the rites and ceremonies they enact, as they were 'laid down' in *The Dreaming*, as, indeed, was so much of their life (1974:129). In that sense, then, such symbolic action is understood to be of the 'model for' reality.

Yet, as 'model of' reality, it would seem that, in pursuit of a goal which is itself intangible, viz., wisdom and mystical experience (in the sense of 'mystery'<sup>2</sup>), the *Punj* transcends such 'model for' categories. Stanner comments:

Symbolic activities attract rather than depend on mystical beliefs, which express human longings and valuations, rather than an illusion of technical competence.  
(1966:19)

Religion, then, is a system of symbols which acts to

<sup>\*</sup>I am only reporting a suggestion of Stanner's made in the course of his Charles Strong Memorial lecture (1976:23), 'Some Aspects of Aboriginal Religion'. — ED.

2. *Establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men . . .*

*Motivation* is seen to be a *persisting tendence* (a long-lasting thing), while a *mood* would seem to be a *recurring thing*. As far as Geertz' definition goes, then, perhaps we could interpret 'long-lasting' moods as those which are 'constantly recurring', dominant, given the required circumstances.

To give precision to the meaning of both terms: *motives* are seen to be liabilities to perform certain kinds of feelings. They are directional in cast, describing a particular overall course. Motives derive their meaning with reference to their ends, are interpreted in terms of their consummations. *Moods*, on the other hand, are states of mind springing from certain circumstances which vary in intensity. They are not directional; they follow no logic. When present, they are totalistic. Moods are validly interpreted in terms of their sources/causes. (Geertz 1969: 10-11)

Again, of 'totem sacramentalism', Stanner writes of the rites and institutions of totemism, characterised by

the use of external and visible signs betokening men's dependency on otherworldly powers for an endowment and flow of life-benefits. It is the set of relations which obtain between these elements which constitutes sacramentalism. Men act through signs towards the ground of dependency; the flow is accompanied – or is held to be – by external signs signifying that a solidary relation holds between that ground and men; and in this way, the acts, signs and flow not only interpenetrate each other but in a long established and involuted religious system compenetrates each other, that is, pervade each other in every part.

(1966:27)

It is clear that the concrete symbols involved both express and shape the fundamental life-view of the Aborigines, while achieving a sense of revelation, he stabilizes a sense of direction (Geertz 1969:9).

It is a general feature of Aboriginal religion that the level of secrecy increases the further one penetrates into the core of the Aboriginal religious complex (Wilson 1979:25). And it is immediately evident that only the *men* of the tribe penetrate to the core of that secret knowledge, and then only through (progressive stages of) initiation. *Initiation* itself could be said to mark the entrance into a life henceforth motivated by hidden springs of conduct, faith, hope and a depth of thought attained through the discipline, pain and enlightenment of the rite. On the basis of their new understanding of their totemic (spiritual and emotional) kinship with nature (the land, and all living things) as laid down in *The Dreaming*, the initiated men assume their share of privilege/responsibility for maintaining this relationship, together with custodianship of sacred sites: the motive simply that of continuity with 'The Dreaming'. (Berndt 1964: 247)

The rite of *Punj*, itself, is designed to play upon fear and awe which, together with the dramatic abandonment of the ordinary circumstances of life, is effective in a 're-casting' character. Stanner describes the ceremony as a

high, joyful celebration . . . at one and the same time a fearful approach to mystery . . .  
(1966:56)

And, again, in our context, as further comment on the mood of celebration:

If it is a religious task – and, were there nothing else to go upon, the liturgical complexity and lavish symbolism would assure us that it is – here is one instance in which the old jest of the 'opus dei' and the 'onus diei' is meaningless.

(1966:20)<sup>3</sup>

## APPLICATION OF (GEERTZ') DEFINITION OF RELIGION

To recall our definition as we proceed: Religion is 1) a system of symbols which acts to 2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by

### 3. *Formulating conceptions of a general order of existence . . .*

Universally, for men, there would seem to be three areas where the 'chaos' of events threaten to defy interpretability. These areas: the failure of his analytic capacities, of his powers of endurance and of his moral insights, viz., the phenomena of *ignorance, suffering and injustice* demand some explanation/interpretation if he is to find completion/fullness of life.<sup>4</sup>

In view of this understanding of the domain of the religious quest, it is rightly claimed, again, that *The Dreaming* and the consequent panorama of life, either spelt out or inferred in *myth and ritual* provide all the 'formulation' of concepts/beliefs which the Aborigines possess. For these people, amongst whom there exists no class of scholars, no form of writing, where the questions of 'how' and 'why' are rarely asked, in face of vast and undifferentiation of entities and relations, symbolic construction alone must suffice to formulate reality (Stanner 1966:51). Thus myth/ritual uniquely convey 'doctrine'/'belief'.

Life, too, takes on a more 'universal' dimension with reference to the *High Beings*, those known as 'All-Father' or 'All-Mother', whose creative acts are seen as transcending the more 'parochial' specialized areas of the totemic powers, and with whom the Aborigine is more intimately associated.

The real problem for the Aborigine is not with *concepts* of life but, rather, life in the sense of *living*. Rather than attempting to control the environment in which he lives, he welcomes it into an orderly relationship within his world. So, in Aboriginal totemism, the common life shared by man and nature, by mythology, becomes personal (or quasi-personal) (Elkin 1974: 251-2). Man is understood in relation to his natural environment and to his supernatural environment, within a broader horizon than the narrow span of a human life cycle (Berndt 1964:245-7). Thus, while individuals are born, develop and die, they belong to a scheme in which is inherent both continuity and comprehensiveness. The 'mutuality' of this system, too, lies in the harmonizing of natural and social rhythms, the sustaining effects of which are reciprocal. Since, if man co-operates in maintaining nature, natural plenty, in turn, nourishes him. Man is responsible for keeping the natural/social cycles in motion. Furthermore, on each clan there falls responsibility for the continuance/support of a part of nature. As a result of this co-operative effort, all nature is supported (Maddock 1974:132-4).

The 'doctrine' of life is seen to lie in the 'belief' that, as the spirit exists before birth, so will it survive after death (Maddock 1974:158). Thus, polarity of body/spirit is seen, too, in the antithesis between the transitory and the permanent, the body's decay and the immortality of the spirit. And it is by 'sym-bol' (in the sense of 'hold together') that these concepts are affirmed/expressed (Maddock 1974:170) within the dichotomy which is fundamental to Aboriginal religion.

A unique quality of Aboriginal life is that there is no division between time and eternity (Wilson 1979:63, quoting Strehlow). The 'Dream Time' is not a succession of time periods but, rather, an ever-present immutable reality which underlies and is expressed in *time* (Elkin 1974:209). Hence, man's involvement in ritual is essential in so far as it is the occasion and means through which the Dreaming becomes effective in the sphere of space and time, the here and now (Elkin 1974:234).

For the Aborigines too, it would seem that there never was a 'Golden Age' devoid of ignorance, suffering and injustice, for their mythology generally expresses the understanding that

2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and 4) clothing those conceptions with such an aura of factuality that

5. *The moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic*

The *dispositions* which religious rituals induce have their most important impact outside the boundaries of the ritual itself, to colour the individual's conception of the existing world. Hence, religion is sociologically (and, consequently, anthropologically) interesting not because (as positivism would have it) it describes the social order, but because it *shapes* it.

Whereas religious belief has usually been presented as an homogeneous characteristic of an individual, it would be more accurate to distinguish between two modes of religious experience. Belief/experience, in the midst of ritual, engulfs the total person, transporting him into an encounter with the 'really real'. This belief/experience, a remembered reflection in the context of the living of everyday life, is hardly of the same order. Hence the qualitative difference between *religion pure* and *religion applied* (a qualitative difference, not a transcendental difference).

It is the placing of proximate acts in ultimate contexts which makes religion socially so powerful. By altering the entire landscape presented to common sense, through ritually inspired moods and motivations, there would seem to be only one response to the way things 'really' are. Having ritually 'leapt' (and, for the Aborigines, this term would be generally accurate enough) into the realm of meaning, defined thus by such 'belief', and returning again to the 'common-sense' world, a man is (or should be) changed. And so, too, is the very world he inhabits, for it is understood now to be but a partial form of a wider reality which corrects and complements it.

The nature of the bias religion gives to ordinary life varies with the religion involved, with the particular dispositions induced in the believer by the specific conceptions of cosmic order he has come to accept.

(Geertz 1969:35-8)

Clearly, again appealing to the 'master-symbol' of *The Dreaming*, the entire *landscape* of Aboriginal life is transformed – totemically so effectively! For ritual procedure is to be seen against the complex network of economic obligations, reciprocal duties, payments and receipts, teaching and learning which so readily provide a moral basis for action, a set of fundamental principles for the channeling and directing of conduct (Berndt 1964:250).

The function of 'totemism' is, indeed, extensive. In the social sphere (as also for the individual), it unites all the totemites/clan as one 'flesh', one 'meat', from the womb of a common ancestress – the totem itself becoming mate, partner – enough to set a person meditating (Elkin 1974:173). After initiation, the possession of secret knowledge, won at a price, binds the tribe/clan together (Elkin 1974:200). The 'tjurunga', especially those of ancient significance, enable the people of today to communicate with the great ancestral heroes. Such 'tjurunga', too, mediate strength and life: rubbed on the sick, carried when out hunting (the catch, in consequence, sacred) and lent in friendship. In some societies, each initiated male possesses his own sacred object (Elkin 1974:209-11).

It is beyond the scope of this paper to treat the many ways in which the sacred infuses the whole of Aboriginal life. Hart and Pilling, speaking of the Tiwi of Bathurst/Melville Islands, describe them as "magic-free" but 'pukamuni'/taboo-ridden" (1960:88). Other Aboriginal societies could be said to be 'magico-religious' ridden, not necessarily sorcery-ridden (Berndt 1964:254). Indeed, a dying medicine man may leave his totem (familiar) to someone else – in doing so, he bequeathes part of himself (Elkin 1974:187).

And from Stanner, we may understand that the myth attached to the *Punj* appears 'as an elementary attempt to make an identity between a social reality and a new intuition of a supra-social reality' (1966:51).

In the *Punj* as assessed by Stanner

the symbol-functions are indeed carried out with high efficiency by the choice of symbol-vehicles: truly brilliant combinations of mime, song, dance and stylized movements make what seems to be an indelible impression on those who experience them . . . [and] responses to given stimuli have become so deeply settled that an Aborigine finds true interest, spiritual ease and intellectual satisfaction only in that system of life which the stimuli connote.

(1966:19-20)

### Conclusion: Correlation of Geertz and Stanner

So, having claimed to somehow equate Geertz' definition of religion with Stanner's understanding of the term, and attempted to apply that definition to Aboriginal religion (and Murinbata) in particular, perhaps we could turn to Stanner's understanding of Aboriginal religious 'economy' (within the 'master symbol' of *The Dreaming*) as our final word of comparison and appeal.

The Murinbata religion, he claims, is 'sacramentalist' through and through. In order to understand this 'totemic sacramentalism', it is necessary to recognize

1. the nature and principal of endowment (the totemic function) [corresponding to phrases 1 and 3 of definition] ;
2. the exchange of signs (the rite) [corresponding to phrases 2 and 4] and
3. the plan of dispensing or distributing the 'flow' among men (the social institutions) [corresponding to phrase 5].

(Stanner 1966:28. Tabulating and association original)

### FOOTNOTES

1. Elkin 1974:165: 'Totemism is a view of nature and life, of the universe and man, which colours and influences the Aborigine's social groupings and mythologies, inspires their rituals and links them to the past. It unites them with nature's activities and species in a bond of mutual life-giving, and imparts confidence amidst the vicissitudes of life.'
2. As Murinbata expresses it, 'It is a thing we do not understand'.
3. A comment on Maddock's statement (1974:111) about powers which burden men with a weight of dead custom.
4. Geertz 1969:24: 'The effort is not to deny the undeniable — that there are unexplained events, that life hurts, or that rain falls upon the just — but to deny that there are inexplicable events, that life is unendurable and that justice is a mirage.' It is a matter '... of affirming, or at least recognizing, the inescapability of ignorance, pain and injustice on the human plane, while simultaneously denying that these irrationalities are characteristic of the world as a whole.' In terms of religious symbolism, it consists in '... relating man's sphere of existence to a wider sphere within which it is conceived to rest where both the affirmation and the denial are made.'
5. Stanner 1966:31: 'Murinbata religion might well be described as the celebrations of a dependent life which is conceived as having taken a wrongful turn in the beginning, a turn such that the good of life is now inseparably connected with suffering.'
6. And, to quote him further of the relationship of concept and life: 'To argue that the Murinbata act as they do because they have the conception of life sketched out in the myths would be absurd. To argue that the facts of life are the reason why they have the conception would be an undue simplification. It seems nearer the truth to say that actuality and conception are variables which have developed together with others.' (1966:44)

# APPLICATION OF (GEERTZ') DEFINITION OF RELIGION

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

BERNDT, R.M. & C.B.

1964 *The World of the First Australians*. Sydney: Ure Smith.

1974 *The First Australians*. Sydney: Ure Smith. (Third edition)

ELKIN, A.P.

1974 *The Australian Aborigines*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson. (Fifth edition)

GEERTZ, C.

1969 'Religion as a Cultural System', *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, ASA Monographs 3 (ed. Banton, Michael), Tavistock.

HART, C.W.N. & PILLING, A.R.

1960 *The Tiwi of North Australia*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. (Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology, Stanford University)

MADDOCK, K.

1974 *The Australian Aborigines: a portrait of their society*. Pelican Books.

STANNER, W.E.H.

1966 *On Aboriginal Religion*. Oceania Monograph No. 11, University of Sydney. (Reprint of series of articles *Oceania*, December, 1959-September 1963)

WILSON, M.J.

1979 *New, Old and Timeless: pointers towards an Aboriginal theology*. Sydney: Chevalier Press. (Nelen Yubu Missiological series No. 1)



# LITURGY AND INDIGENOUS CULTURAL VALUES

ALVARO BOTERO ALVAREZ CJM  
(translated by Tom Luby MSC)

*In 1975 Fr Alvarez, Executive Secretary of DELC, the liturgical department of CELAM, the Conference of Latin American Bishops, sent to Fr A. Corry MSC of Darwin a Spanish text of which the following is an English translation. The translation was done by Fr T. Luby MSC who, in spite of ill health, had ideas of offering his final years to the service of a part of the Latin American church. For this reason he was studying hard at Spanish. Some Spanish speaking Dominican sisters were helping him and under their tutelage he did this translation as a self-imposed assignment. Having completed it, he offered it to me for Nelen Yubu, as adaptation of Catholic liturgy to Aboriginal culture was quite a preoccupation at that time. Investigations about what form we should cast it into for publication became protracted and were waylaid. In the meantime Tom Luby died suddenly of a heart attack on the night of 23 September 1979. In his memory and to complete his desires I publish his translation as he handed it to me.*

*Fr Alvarez has given me permission to publish his paper 'Liturgia y valores de las culturas nativas' – though meaning a more polished form of the Spanish text, a copy of which he sent me recently. I trust he will understand the reasons for using his earlier redaction.*

M.J. Wilson MSC

## Summary

### I. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

- A. First centuries
- B. Middle Ages from the 5th century
- C. Tridentine Reform and its consequences
- D. The period of missionary expansion

### II. CHANGED SITUATION AFTER VATICAN 2

- A. First Stage: Revised Latin form
- B. Second Stage: Vernacular with minor adaptations
- C. Third Stage: Adaptation and new forms  
(The remainder of the article concentrates on this third stage)

**III. THIRD STAGE OF LITURGICAL REFORM**

- A. Doctrinal and pastoral criteria
  - 1. Liturgy and faith
  - 2. Liturgy and church
- B. Anthropological criteria
- C. Areas where adaptation is possible
  - 1. Signs
  - 2. Words
  - 3. Music
  - 4. Art

**IV. PROCEDURE FOR IMPLEMENTING THE THIRD STAGE**

- A. Ordinary adaptations
- B. Deeper adaptations
- C. Experimentation

**I. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

**A. The First Centuries**

IN A BRIEF AND summary fashion let us look at the transition from Hebrew culture and mentality to the new Christian situation:

- fidelity to the Word of God and Salvation History
- use of the Septuagint Bible; early Latin translations; different lectionaries and texts
- Christianity breaks away from Judaism: elimination of circumcision and the Law (cf. Acts, Romans, Galatians)
- transition from Judaic cult to Christian liturgy:
  - problems from Judaisers
  - continuity and renewal go on simultaneously (e.g. the meaning of the Pasch, Liturgy of the Word, the Eucharistic Prayers etc.)
- in the first expansion of the Church, Hebrew culture encounters the Greek and Latin cultures of the Mediterranean region, e.g. the matter of food offered to idols (cf. 1 Cor 8)
- the break between the Faith and various features of Jewish as well as pagan religiosity: a new relationship with such ideas as the Sacred, Priesthood, Sacrifice, Temple, Altar etc.
- use of some elements from local culture and daily life, e.g. water used in ceremonial purification, light, salt, incense etc.
- pagan festivals replaced by Christian parallels:
  - birth of the sun replaced by birth of Christ (Rome)
  - feasts of martyrs replace the pagan celebrations of heroes, preserving certain elements from folklore
  - cathedra (or Commemoration of the Dead) becomes the Cathedra of St Peter, finally losing all funereal associations
  - cult of the martyrs modelled on the cult of the dead
- to meet the demands of the catechumenate a clean break with pagan customs, cult, offices etc. (cf. The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus)

Hence various Eastern and Western liturgies are born according to various cultures and circumstances around the great metropolitan areas of Byzantium, Athens, Rome etc.

## B. The Middle Ages (from the 5th century)

- fixation and solemnisation of liturgical forms which adapt (or rather adopt) the Imperial forms, the ritual of the court etc.
- the Gospel is fused with the Imperial culture
- massive conversions without sufficient evangelization or true conversion
- certain pagan features continue with the Christian forms, a matter frequently condemned by the Fathers as in the case of the 'Lupercalia' (Pope Gelasius)
- the Christian Faith penetrates 'Barbarian' culture (Germanic and Gallic) during the Carolingian Empire with consequent ritualization in the liturgy. But it is really a process of adaptation
- we find concrete examples in the norms given by Gregory the Great to Augustine of Canterbury: to purify, not destroy, the pagan temples, and to place relics of the saints in the altar in place of idols; to conserve the sacrifice of livestock as a popular festival in which Christians take part
- other examples of cultural assimilation:
  - matrimonial rites such as dowries, rings, veils etc.
  - ordination rites with Biblical elements (Hebrew-Roman) such as the imposition of hands, and elements from the feudal investiture such as the handing over of instruments
- from the beginning of the 7th century liturgical forms and prayers become more and more stabilized with the advent of the first Sacramentaries, and the *Roman Orders*, and the imposition of the Roman Liturgy on the West by order of Charles the Great. Nevertheless, Roman forms are not imposed as such but are enriched with a whole series of features from Gallic-Germanic cultures. By a process of ebb and flow, these features find their way back to Rome and become obligatory in the West. This is especially true from the 13th and 14th centuries. Later there was the influence of the Franciscans and Dominicans. A characteristic of this last period is the fixation of the liturgy in a continually more 'clergified' way, having little contact with the people
- the experience of the people is not so much with liturgy, but with devotions, not all of which were to be commended, but which they practised frequently while the clergy, isolated in their sumptuous presbyteries or screened choirs, celebrated a liturgy which they themselves little understood
- from here on there was a total decadence and degeneration in liturgy, a whole series of abuses which the Council of Trent set out to curb.

## C. Tridentine Reform and its Consequences

After its doctrinal and disciplinary decrees, Trent entrusted to the Pope the publication of new Roman Liturgical Books which would be binding on the Latin church.

It is certain that the mind of Trent was not absolute uniformity; the Roman books themselves, especially the Ritual, foresaw national and local rituals modelled on the Roman style. In part this was done, as in our case at Toledo. But the Sacred Congregation of Rites, according to the outlook of the time, imposed a most rigid uniformity and gave rise to the so-called *era of rubrics*: three centuries in the history of the liturgy in which a Baroque liturgy, not understood by the people, became fossilized.

The fact that there were 4,015 authentic decrees from the Congregation of Rites between 1898 and 1900 is sufficient evidence for the absolute universality of this fixation and uniformity.

#### D. The Period of Missionary Expansion

Coinciding, it so happened, with this post-tridentine period, especially from the 16th century, there was the great missionary expansion in the East (China, Japan) and in the 'West Indies' – our Latin America, the area where today the task of evangelization falls to us.

We have to take account of this historical fact if we are to form an authentic, efficacious and fruitful liturgical renewal and adaptation.

Most of the indigenous groups in our countries have a hybrid culture and for centuries they have lived a Christian life with a liturgy that has three facets:

- a) On the one hand they had *to assist at* a Catholic liturgy, celebrated in Latin, with elements and forms completely strange; recall the problem of 'Chinese Rites'.
- b) On the other hand, in some places, they kept much of their ancestral Aboriginal religion, e.g. myths, rites, signs etc.
- c) Under the influence of Spanish and Portuguese missions, devotions proper to the [Iberian] Peninsula were brought in, e.g. processions, veneration of images etc., as well as other festivals from traditional religion, which however had lost their religious significance, such as bull fights.

To this must be added the Negro element in many places, a mixture which created many different situations. Practical cases are: voodoo, 'macumba' and others.

We have to keep this heterogeneous mixture very much in mind. It has lasted for two or three centuries and for the present generation it is an acquired heritage, and an established fact that we cannot ignore.

Groups and tribes which are truly Aboriginal form a case apart. For example, isolated in corners of the Amazon jungle, they have kept their own culture and religion in its pure form even today.

## II. THE CHANGED SITUATION AFTER VATICAN 2

The Second Vatican Council formally rejected the absolute uniformity which *de facto* was implanted in the Latin Liturgy.

Even in Liturgy the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and peoples.

This general principle with which the Constitution on the Liturgy (SC 37) begins its sections dealing with the adaptation of the Liturgy to the mentality and culture of a people, is of the greatest importance, and its practical consequences will be seen for many years to come.

*Lumen Gentium* (LG 13) and *Ad Gentes* (AG 22) insist again on this point.

All post-conciliar liturgical legislation is consistent with this adaptation, which forms the so-called third stage of the liturgical reform begun by Vatican 2.

#### A. First Stage

Tridentine liturgy in the vernacular: This provisional stage is superseded almost everywhere. It was celebrated in Spanish according to the old missal of Pius V, and the small missals of Lefevre, Ribera etc.

## LITURGY AND INDIGENOUS CULTURAL VALUES

- a) Adaptation and diversity in Liturgy can be allowed only in those matters *that do not affect the faith*. Hence:
- Values superseded by Christian Faith cannot be allowed. Missionary activity tries to find those Aboriginal values which, like seeds of the Word, are a path leading to faith. It must know how to separate what is good and acceptable, permanently and profoundly valid, from what the Christian Faith supersedes and must reject: e.g. in some circumstances values such as Life Force and Fertility can be orientated, as they were in the Old Testament, towards God and the life and Resurrection of Christ.
  - But there is a danger of making a too rapid transition and thus Christianising a Nature-religion.
- b) ‘Anything indissolubly bound up with superstition and error’ (SC 37) is unacceptable.
- When Paul begins his evangelization in Athens from the altar of the Unknown God, it is to lead his hearers immediately to the God of Salvation History and to faith in the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus.
  - Liturgy cannot be a syncretism of myths and pagan rites.
  - Christianity needs to break away as it did from the beginning in matters such as circumcision and bloody sacrifices, etc.
  - Liturgical adaptation must look rather for elements from ordinary life, social forms etc. which express the traditions and culture of a people, but in general not for rites and religious forms properly so called.
  - Christianity has come to supplant all those rites valid only for the time of ‘infancy’ and divine pedagogy, as St Paul says in Gal 4:1-11.
  - Furthermore, the expressions and forms rising out of the religiosity of a people must be studied so as to find values which are useful as well as superstitious, non-Christian elements which have to be rejected or purified.
- c) Fidelity to, and great respect for Salvation History and Sacred Scripture.
- Christian Liturgy has to be faithful to its own special originality. Born within Salvation History, and in continuity with it, it cannot cease to be faithful to the Word of God and the Gospel of Salvation destined for all peoples and cultures.
  - The Gospel always comes with its own special force and originality, destroying myths and presenting the God who has revealed himself in history – a history which culminated in the Pasch of the Lord and continues in the church.
  - In all liturgical adaptation Sacred Scripture has, and must always have, ‘a role of paramount importance. For it is from Scripture that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung; the prayers, collects and liturgical songs are scriptural in their inspiration, and it is from Scripture that actions and signs derive their meaning.’ (See SC 24, also Melgar 29)
- d) Liturgical adaptation must respect those elements which are immutable because they are of divine origin. (SC 21)
- This refers not only to some limited features such as baptism with water and word, the species of the Eucharistic sacrificial banquet, but also to other matters which all the churches of the East and West have always kept as of certain Apostolic Tradition.

### 2. Liturgy and Church

Liturgy is an activity and manifestation of the whole church. Each liturgical celebration which gathers together the people of God hierarchically organized, represents the visible church established throughout the whole world. (SC 42) Hence, Ecclesiology has much to say in the

field of liturgical adaptation and creation.

- a) Liturgical adaptation which affects the good of the whole community is not legitimate. (SC 37)

We have to consider the good of the whole community both on universal and local levels.

Elements which manifest in depth the unity of the church, and are of great ecumenical value, cannot be set aside by a mere practical judgement of the moment or place, e.g. the broad plan of the Eucharistic celebration, even the structure of the Eucharistic prayers, or the universal quality of the Prayer of the Faithful etc.

On the local level adaptations to suit indigenous cultures or certain groups (such as children, youth etc.) cannot be such as to isolate them from ecclesial communion, from that normal heterogeneous celebration which expresses the unity of the church made up of diverse participants.

Moreover, the Constitution on the Liturgy (SC 23) says that 'there must be no innovations unless the good of the church genuinely and certainly requires them; and care must be taken that any new forms adopted should in some way grow organically from forms already existing'. And it adds, 'As far as possible, notable differences between the rites used in adjacent regions are to be carefully avoided'.

- b) Liturgical adaptation must be the work of the whole People of God with the guiding and efficacious help ('servicio') of ecclesiastical authority, especially of the Apostolic See, Episcopal Conferences and Bishops. (Cf. SC 22, 39-44; AG 21)

It is easy to say that people make the liturgy, and this is evident enough when speaking of the actual liturgical action, but when speaking of the different forms of celebration, the regulation of liturgy and local adaptations, it is utopian to state that 'an incarnated liturgy will be a work of the people, not of the missionary'. (Cf. The study of missionary activity by Camps in *Anthropology and Theology*. Also Iquitos p.109 and the document of Iquitos No.47) It is utopian, not only in the sphere of faith, if one accepts in faith-obedience the hierarchical constitution of the church, but it is utopian even in the practical sphere if one examines the actual situations with peoples and their diverse cultural states.

But this does not exclude, but rather requires, a constant and lively effort entered into jointly by hierarchy and people, by the missionary who brings the Gospel and the people which accepts it and incarnates it, so that it will be translated into a liturgy which is alive and expresses the community truly.

What is needed as well, is a constant movement of action and reaction between the foundation and the dome (the top and the bottom).

Besides, given the actual situation, the historical process which the church and our peoples have experienced, given the complexity and the importance of the problem, one cannot do less than seek the collaboration of experts in anthropology, liturgy, in pastoral skills etc. Melgar (No.39) and Iquitos (No.48) asked for this and it is foreseen in current liturgical legislation which we will examine later.

## **B. Anthropological Criteria**

1. 'Commitment to the greatest understanding, respect and acceptance in regard to indigenous cultures' (Iquitos 39, 1)

This means approaching a man and his culture with great respect, in a spirit of welcome

and dialogue, with heart and mind open to the seeds of the Word (AG 11). Hence the importance of collaboration with local laity, anthropologists and scientists.

2. 'Serious commitment to assure the biological and cultural survival of indigenous communities. This requires our involvement in their historical process.' (Iquitos 39, 2)

Adaptation and creation of a new liturgy will greatly help this effort for the survival of Aboriginal cultures – and it is an indispensable condition.

3. Respect for the plurality of cultures and the actual mixture with which the missionary of today is faced.

It is an elementary and inescapable fact that we cannot approach an indigenous people today in a way that we might sometimes wish the missionaries of the 17th century would have done. We have to begin from the concrete fact of this racial, cultural and religious mixture – a mixture influenced more and more by Western urban culture through the communications media, technology etc. (Cf. The study of the socio-cultural situation and its areas in Melgar 19)

- 4) The whole work of adaptation and creation ought to be preceded by 'a careful investigation . . . into each part of the liturgy which is to be revised. This investigation should be theological, historical and pastoral.' (SC 23)

We cannot treat indigenous communities like laboratory rabbits. They are human beings who merit a serious, respectful and attentive treatment from us. It is an indispensable precondition that we understand well the man to whom the Gospel is directed and who celebrates the liturgy.

At the same time it is necessary to have a profound knowledge of the Liturgy, of the nature of its parts, its structures, its more important values, and of its theological, spiritual and pastoral content.

Only in this way, through a knowledge of man and a knowledge of Liturgy, can we achieve a really incarnated liturgy.

### C. Areas for Adaptation

There are many areas or elements in the liturgy open to adaptation. Let us consider the main ones.

#### 1. Signs

These are an essential part of the Liturgy, but the kind of signs, their greater or lesser significance, their countersigns vary infinitely among the different cultures.

Speaking generally we include symbols, images, gestures, position, bodily expression, utensils, colours, style and material of liturgical garments, ornamentation etc.

It is an area of great risk but of enormous possibilities. Present legislation leaves a wide degree of choice to the bishop and even to the celebrant with his community. Very practical and interesting examples of this can be found in India and Africa.

#### 2. Words, Texts

Although the word is foremost among signs, it requires special attention because of its role in the liturgy and in civilizations where communication is mainly oral.

We have to single out first of all the biblical Word of Sacred Scripture whose importance for faith and liturgy is transcendental. It is evident that here the problem is in the difficulty of translations as opposed to mere literal versions. It is the difficulty of transposing the language of Scripture into different languages and dialects, often very primitive, which lack adequate terminology for the deep and spiritual meanings of the bible.

Nevertheless, all evangelization, and with it all implantation of Christian liturgy, must begin with the introduction of the bible which will be the source for catechesis and liturgical expression.

There is a constant tension between the style of expression proper to a culture and its language and the language of scripture, but the missionary must always be faithful to the biblical meaning.

Texts of prayers frequently present a greater difficulty, given their very Latin and Roman character, their brevity of style, their generic and abstract ideas, their reflection of situations belonging to other ages, of geophysical conditions proper to Europe, e.g. the seasons.

Hence liturgical adaptation cannot be content with a merely literal translation, almost a transliteration of the Latin text, as was done until now for the great Western languages in the second stage of liturgical reform. Translations are required which are much more free and which simply find their inspiration in the magnificent ideas expressed in the Latin prayers.

But this is not enough. A creativity is needed which can express itself fully in the language, symbols, situation of a people and the state of their culture.

In this matter the current Roman legislation exacts primarily a great respect for the Eucharistic Prayers without excluding the possibility of new adaptations or creations at the level of Episcopal Conferences. But in respect of the other texts of the missal and rituals the greatest liberty is allowed, and indeed, the pastoral directives for masses which children (art 51) say clearly that, since the prayers of the missal were planned and executed for adults, new compositions can be made, a faculty that remains with the local authority.

By a sound principle of analogy (Cf. CIC 20) and without wanting to treat indigenous peoples like children, one can do as much for them.

### *3. Music and Singing*

In this matter liturgical documentation is abundant and insistent. The transition to indigenous languages necessarily supposes the creation of their own hymns and their own musical compositions, as well as the use of their own type of musical instruments.

Here also criteria are needed for evaluation of the suitability or unsuitability of this or that music, of these or those instruments which may be linked with magical rites, or which can be for example animistic practices in funeral rites, or songs of mourning which really contradict the Paschal significance of Christian death.

### *4. Art*

This is an area where there is great scope for adaptation and creativity – an era where all doors are open. Some examples: construction of places of worship, items used in celebrations, liturgical garments etc. Art is one of the main manifestations of the culture of a people – where an artisan can express himself with more spontaneity and freedom.



## IV. PROCEDURES

## A. Ordinary Adaptations

The Constitution on the Liturgy distinguishes a two-fold procedure: ordinary and extraordinary (or deeper). (SC 39-40)

Besides this the Liturgical books foresee a series of ordinary adaptations according to the judgement of Episcopal Conferences, of the bishop in his diocese, or even the one who presides at a celebration. These adaptations form part of the Second Stage of liturgical reform and in general refer to matters that are secondary and superficial.

Nevertheless they form a first step in adaptation and creativity that has not been sufficiently understood or utilized among our own Christian peoples nor on the level of indigenous cultures.

Here one could mention the composition of words and music for hymns, canticles, antiphons, catechetico-liturgical instructions etc.

Outside those adaptations which are subject to the judgement of the Episcopal Conference there is a wide choice available at the level of the local community in its celebrations.

*The President of the Assembly*

Even though the new Rituals insist that (e.g.) 'whoever presides over the celebration should use gladly the faculties granted for adaptation, taking into account various circumstances, listening to the wishes of the family of the deceased and of the community' (Ritual for Funerals Art 20), frequently quick and easy formulas are sought and used in a routine way for any group of the faithful. Thus the president of the assembly imposes his choice and private decision, contrary to what the Missal itself indicates (OGMR 73 and 313).

*The Bishop*

At the diocesan level or its equivalent, under the direction of the bishop, a field for pastoral activity opens up. This was undreamed of in past times when the bishop was asked merely to see that the Roman liturgical norms were carried out. (CIC 1261) His role is indispensable in achieving a more incarnated liturgy. It was described in broad outline in the Council documents (CD, LG, SC), and other documents pertaining to liturgical reform describe rather its spirit. Let us recall especially:

- a) The *third instruction* (5/9/1970) pointed out in its introduction the following functions of the bishop:
  - the need for his intervention because of the close ties between liturgy and faith;
  - dialogue with the diocesan commissions so as to become acquainted with the situation and to discuss with them the most suitable ways of meeting it;
  - to make good use of the possibilities offered by the new rites;
  - so as to provide inspiration and correction he should persuade and guide wisely and prudently;
  - to develop union with his priests so as to facilitate the obedience required of them in matters regarding liturgical celebration.
- b) The letter of Cardinal Tabera to the Bishops of Latin America (4/11/1972) comments in a certain way on these topics, making them more precise. Bishops should:
  - be true inspirers and animators of liturgy (through the Episcopal Conference and at the diocesan level), studying and evaluating the state of affairs among their people and the

conditions under which clergy and laity come together in respect to liturgy and liturgical pastoral work;

- promote and support ways of bringing liturgical formation to all;
- suggest the more suitable forms for liturgical celebrations in the special circumstances of their people;
- supply matter for celebrations;
- provide indirect education which uses to the full all the pastoral resources which the new liturgical books contain and offer;
- dialogue frequently with those who, in the area of liturgy, take individual initiatives, so as to correct abuses and capricious actions that tend to rest on inexact ideas or proceed from inadmissible attitudes;
- inspire, direct and guide whatever comes correctly from a true liturgical spirit or from other authentic pastoral concerns.

A series of activities entrusted to the responsibility of the bishop can be found in present legislation, especially in the 'Praenotanda Generalia' of the new Rituals. But that is not enough. The spirit of renewal goes much further especially in a time of change and when the whole legislation lacks arrangement. This spirit will find solutions for many particular problems that cannot be foreseen in general legislation, e.g. the relationship between the bishop and religious in relation to liturgy – religious are not independent (exempt) in an area that has profound pastoral significance.

This disciplinary and pastoral activity on the part of the Bishop supposes an outlook that is open to change as something normal in time (times change, as do the spiritual sensibilities of each generation) and space (there is a diversity among the authentic values of various cultures) and a clear view of the value of a liturgical book and its parts:

- the lectionary with its invariable texts and with features that can be varied;
- the pastoral introductions so that he will understand the meaning and fundamental structure of each celebration and its parts;
- admonitions to guide celebrations and continually build up the assembly;
- music for various purposes and the possible ways in which it can be used;
- presidential prayers;
- more solemn formulas which are an expression not only of prayer but of the faith of the church.

This grasp of the distinct value of the parts of a liturgical book helps pastoral activity and can resolve disciplinary problems both at the diocesan level and in local celebrations.

Personal experiments and compositions create a special problem. The involvement of the bishop seems necessary so that he prudently protects the principle of ecclesiality in the liturgy according to the situation in each case and the importance of the particular matter.

His involvement should be more than possibly prohibiting something in a juridical way. It will be necessary for him to show an initiative that, taking the personal responsibility of a bishop beyond the letter of the law, allows him to act as a true pastor and liturgist who takes account of particular situations which cannot be resolved merely in the mainstream of the general law. It is an application, in the field of liturgy, of the direct power in his church which he holds because he is its bishop. The important thing is that the principle of ecclesial communion is maintained.

#### *The Diocesan Commission*

Its basic outline is in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* No.45 and *Inter Eocumenici* No.47. The

bishop should set concrete norms through diocesan bodies, e.g. the Council of Priests, with a view to uniting the diocesan pastoral work itself. For examples of the relationship between bishop and commission see the Introduction to the Third Instruction. Co-ordination and joining together of the Commissions for Liturgy, Music and Art. (Cf. SC 46)

### *Interdiocesan Commissions*

These were foreseen as both possible and opportune in the *Motu Proprio Sacram Liturgiam* (25/1/1964). This principle can be applied in an analogous form, but with different aims and organization, to National Commissions, e.g. by joining geographic zones together. The possibility, kind, boundaries etc. would have to be studied.

### **B. Deeper Adaptations**

The Council entrusted to Episcopal Conferences a role of great importance in liturgical renewal and adaptation. In effect translations, adaptations, compositions, new experiments, pastoral norms, co-ordination of liturgical-pastoral work – all are in their hands. There is no complete list of the matters that are within their competence. Many things are indicated in the *Praenotanda* of each ritual.

This role, carried out until now in the area of translations, must be extended and deepened in the field of adaptation and composition so as to incarnate the liturgy in the different cultures. Hence it is necessary to consider what can be done by the Episcopal Conference. It may be the possibility of offering various solutions to different problems or for different areas, e.g. missionary areas, indigenous peoples, the marginalized etc., leaving it to interested bishops to carry them out.

It is indispensable that the Episcopal Conference looks not only to what is required of it by law, but keeping in mind the spirit of the reform, that it knows how to interpret in its work the real situation and aspirations of its people and to translate these into pastoral realities which incarnate the spirit and aims of the liturgy.

### *National Commissions*

A fundamental outline of the constitution, work and mode of procedure of these commissions will be found in the Constitution *Sacrosanctum Concilium* No.44 and in the instruction *Inter Oecumenici* Nos.44-45.

The National Commission should be organized along definite lines within the scope of the Conference and according to a specific national pastoral plan. It is essential that it be co-ordinated with other bodies of the Conference which have some connection with liturgy and pastoral work. If the Commissions for Music and Art are separate, then it is urgent that there be collaboration with these.

It is foreseen that, linked with the National Commissions for Liturgy, there be an Institute for Pastoral Liturgy as a consultative body for the National Commission (SC 44 and Instr. *Inter Oecumenici* 46). It is not a question of an academic institute but rather a body of experts who assist the Conference, the Commission and the bishops in liturgical disciplines and matters related to liturgy. The work of Episcopal Conferences supposes a prudent experimentation which merits special study.

### **C. Liturgical Experimentation**

The principle of liturgical experimentation is directly related to the principle of legitimate variety which must be achieved by necessary adaptations. (SC 37-40)

*a) In the second stage*

In liturgical renewal on the universal level (the second stage) this principle was not forgotten. Actually

- experience gained in preconciliar reform was taken into account (SC 23);
- experiments were carried out with different parts of celebrations, testing different plans, conditions, reactions etc.
- in different parts of the world a period of experimentation was proposed using previously prepared patterns of rites. (See the letter of Cardinal Lercaro to the Presidents of National Liturgical Commissions 21/7/1967)

*b) In the third stage*

The official publication of a liturgical book, even though it presupposes the completion of experiments necessary for its preparation, does not exclude a series of experiments useful for verifying any adaptations that an Episcopal Conference may judge necessary.

Father Bugnini, at the Conference of Bishops gathered at Medellin, stated that those experiments were legitimate 'which, after the publication of the new liturgical books, were judged necessary by the Episcopal Conference in some particular country, to decide those matters which, in their opinion, required adaptation'.

Also the third instruction (No.12), after stating that 'in regard to the Mass there has to be a vigorous consideration of all the faculties granted for experimentation in view of the reform of the rite' (second stage), goes on to state that 'if there is need for wider adaptation' and 'if some experimentation is deemed opportune' the Episcopal Conference carries this out following the disciplinary guidelines which were foreseen in the Conciliar Constitution.

The most important among the experiments, and one that is binding on all, is to test the global value of the new liturgical books, looking at their various possibilities and the requirements for putting them into practice. This is normal for a new liturgical book which is definitive and yet, at the same time, provisional.

But beyond this experimentation with a new book proposed for the whole church, there is the experimentation that considers an adaptation in the concrete circumstances of a particular church. I think that two kinds of adaptations and related experiments can be distinguished:

- 1) There are adaptations which the text of the ritual itself suggests; in this case the Episcopal Conference takes the initiative through the Commissions, studying plans, experimenting with them in areas which have been prepared and which are capable of taking part. Finally it proposes the experiment to higher authority for definitive approbation. This refers to ordinary adaptations already examined, e.g. suppression of the anointing of catechumens, provisional translations etc.
- 2) There are deeper adaptations not foreseen in the liturgical book but which the Episcopal Conference judges opportune. In this case the Conference makes contact with the central authority, proposes an outline of the plan of the experimentation, and carries it out with the agreement of the same authority to which it finally proposes its conclusions for definitive approbation.

There is also a two-fold pattern of procedure in regard to the intervention of the central authority and its collaboration in experiments and adaptation. In the first case (ordinary adaptations) given that the liturgical book indicates the possibility of adaptation, it is supposed that authority is also given to the Episcopal Conference to study and undertake the necessary steps; in the second case (deeper adaptations) it is necessary to make contact, as is foreseen in all

innovation, with the central authority so as to examine, first of all, the possibilities for change, and ways of bringing it about in a spirit of ecclesial communion.

The following is the procedure which Episcopal Conferences should follow in the two cases of adaptation:

- 1) Preparatory work by experts in liturgy, pastoral work, theology and human sciences (not forgetting collaboration with the laity, so as to choose those elements that require change and to point out what can be taken from the culture and the traditions of a people. It is necessary to remember the outline given by the Council for general reform (SC 23).
- 2) To decide the boundaries of the experiments:
  - the group in which it will be carried out: which, after preparation, collaborates actively in the preparation, execution and evaluation;
  - the persons, also prepared, who are made responsible for the experiment;
  - other possible circumstances as regards place, time, people.
- 3) Carrying out the experiment:
  - in celebrations not necessarily large;
  - but letting all know about it.
- 4) Evaluation of the experiment:
  - in the same group in which it was carried out;
  - among the experts who organized it;
  - in the Episcopal Conference.
- 5) Proposing to the Holy See that it be introduced, and after confirmation of the acts of the Conference, applying it in the respective territory. (See the Third Instruction No.12)

It is important to notice that recourse to the Holy See takes place only after the work of study and experimentation so that confirmation can be obtained and to place at the disposal of all the adaptation and creation achieved by the experiment. Only in very special cases, listed in the same article (No.12) is it necessary to have recourse to the Holy See *before* initiating any experimentation. These cases are: modification of the structure of a rite or its parts; something that is well outside tradition; introduction of new texts.

Notice the responsible role which the Episcopal Conference should play in the whole development of this work of adaptation and experimentation. It is not necessary, nor is it possible, to depend on the Holy See for all details. Once the outline of the experiment has been set out in the clearest possible way and the permission to set it in motion has been obtained, the Conference should directly take responsibility for the changes and any later decisions which the progress of the experiment will indicate to be necessary.

The activity of the Episcopal Conference will be carried out through the Liturgical Commission with the collaboration of the bishop of the place where the experiments take place. The role of the bishop in this matter is to use his authority to guide and inspire the experiments. It is an indispensable role because there can arise necessary changes, regulations, new points of focus within the general outline.

Lastly, let us keep in mind that Liturgy is a well-defined discipline. Through specialization a whole series of skills are needed – doctrinal, historical, human, pastoral. Hence it cannot be entrusted to a mere enthusiast ('aficionado'). It should have its own trained personnel – trained especially in collaboration with other sections of the pastoral life.

## DALY RIVER CENTRE REPORTS

WOMEN'S GROUP FROM KUNUNURRA (2-9 May 1981)

**Participants:** Georgina, Freda, Doris, Daisy, Gypsy, Rita, Peggy, Ruby, Charlotte, Katherine

IT WAS INTENDED originally that this course be a type of catechetical course for Aboriginal teachers and that some women from the community would be included to help develop a communitarian aspect of catechetics. However, as it turned out there were two teachers in the group and eight women from the Aboriginal communities in Kununurra – the Reserve and Moongoong Darwung.

On Monday we had a prayerful reflection, basing the theme as close as possible to the religion programme – Eastertide – Jesus appearing to the apostles on the lake and the miraculous catch of fish. After drawing their reflections, the group shared together. The teachers had associated some fishing spot at home with the lake of Galilee and drew Our Lord into the scene – ‘spillway, people in boats fishing; Napun, standing on the bank. I’m fishing’.

The old women began to tell myths and stories associated with their country. This could have been as a result of the couple of days Fr Leary and I had spent at Kununurra a fortnight before, when we had asked them questions about their country. One woman had told Sr Anne Boland she had to go to Daly River because she had not had a chance to draw her country. So their minds were still very much turned in that direction.

This occurred again on the second day when a similar topic was introduced. However, this time they associated Napun more readily with their country. It seemed to follow so naturally:

Those rocks – Napun is near them rocks.

I love Him – Him love me – my country.

Jesus said to me, ‘Do you love me?’ and we went and sat around the fire.

The group were to spend the afternoons preparing the morning’s theme, in some way, to present to the children and community. The teachers did this to some degree in the form of posters, but the rest of the group became quite frustrated and I knew it would be fruitless and unwise to follow this procedure.

So the next morning we turned to Moses, called by God – God with him in his journey towards his country. There was mention of the place Moses met God on the mountain. The group responded and seemed to be transported back to their country and to old times. Again the association of ideas – nearly every woman had drawn some hill of consequence or special meaning located in her country. In the afternoon they were asked to discuss some topics that were important for their children to know, e.g. their country, myths, songs, correct behaviour etc. The group came alive in this discussion, they were enthusiastic and eager. They explained in detail the intricate marriage laws and customs within their culture, right kinship relations etc.

Following on from there, the group discussed ways and means they could give support and help to their husbands as they had a big drinking problem. This was low key, but it showed just how many and varied were the difficulties the women had in contending with this problem. They decided to have meetings to help their men – to try to make the young people show more respect for them.

At the end of the week, it was seen that the group were still immersed in the stories and places connected with their country. Future work, therefore would need to be extremely slow in order for them to savour to the full, that which they hold most dear. And so we too will understand better and appreciate that their God, the seemingly highest deity, Napun, who has some of the attributes of the one true God, will be the common ground from which to move forward to give the full revelation of Christianity.

I am very grateful to Sr Anne for her advice and assistance and also to Fr Noel McMaster for his support and understanding.

Sr Mary McGowan

BATHURST ISLAND WOMEN'S GROUP (1-8 June 1981)

**Participants:** Marie Carmel Alimankinni, Monica Timapatua, Gwen Adams, Gerardine Tungutalum, Elizabeth Kelantumama, Inez Tipungwuti, Maureen Portaminni

This group of Tiwi women came to the centre for a week. The time was spent in prayer and reflection and sharing. The women prepared liturgies, in the form of song and dance for the forthcoming feasts of Pentecost, Corpus Christi and Sacred Heart. They hoped to share these liturgies with the community at home and in particular to assist the teachers in their preparation with the children. They were a very enthusiastic and sincere group.

Sr Mary McGowan

**Themes**

Translated into English from Tiwi, the themes of the song and dance for the three feasts are as follows:

*Pentecost*

Shadow -- wind -- Himself, His Spirit -- all nations, all the world,  
He's in our heart.

Be kind to other people, no matter who they are. Speak to one another, think of each other, nurse one another.

We follow Our Lord, His footsteps, all the things He has done on earth.  
His Spirit in our heart and mind.

Flames of fire -- God has made us bright (sanctify).  
Listen to the Spirit in us. He is the third Person.

*Corpus Christi*

Jesus, our brother, telling us. You think of my Father. Your grandfathers, old people, my Father gave them food. I gave people bread and fish, sitting on the hill-

## NELEN YUBU

side. I give you my flesh to eat, so you will live forever.  
My last supper with you – I give you myself.

### *God's Love For Us*

God is talking to us – you are my children. I don't forget you.  
I won't get angry with you. I carry you in my hands. I won't leave you.  
I won't forget you, you are my people. You are not greatest, you are simple.  
I still think of you all the time. Your great-grandfathers, old people, I gave them all  
food on the land. This is your Father.  
I gave you my only Son. He gives you light and strength in your heart and mind. (God  
in you.)



# COMMUNITY GOVERNMENT AT HOOKER CREEK

M.J. WILSON MSC

*A conference of Council Presidents and Community Advisers was convened at Kormilda College by the Chief Minister for 12-14 May this year (1981). Its theme was 'How Aborigines Wish to Run their Communities'. There was plenty of input and discussion of particular problems, but nothing really on the general theme, even though Santa Teresa had suggested as an agenda topic 'Formation of councils - how does council membership reflect the social organisation of the people?'*

*Because of the present situation at Santa Teresa, we arranged our own informal discussion of this topic. It seemed particularly important to hear what was being done by the Hooker Creek, i.e. Lajamanu, Council. After lunch on Wednesday 13 May the Santa Teresa delegation (John Kelliher MSC, Jim Kurnan, Alfie Gorrie and Martin Wilson MSC) sat down with Morris Luther, Town Clerk of Lajamanu Council, along with the Council members, and eventually with quite a large number of men (20-30) who sat around listening and taking some part in the discussion.*

*I took notes of the discussion and reproduce here an ordered account. The main part is on community government, but I append also some interesting observations on liquor restriction.*

*It will be seen that there are a few gaps and inconsistencies in my notes, but none of any consequence, as far as I know.*

M.J. Wilson  
19 May, 1981

LAJAMANU (HOOKER CREEK) is a small community of some 800 people. There are some 50-60 council employees, apart from people employed in education and health work and in the shop. For a year now the Lajamanu Council has been constituted on a new basis, entirely Aboriginal. That is, not only are the Councillors Aboriginals, but so also is the Town Clerk and all the office staff.

It is curious that what has occurred is in fact something closer to the Westminster model than is the Australian Federal Parliament itself. The community government is really performed by two 'houses'. The Town Council in the ordinary sense is composed of nine elected members who are aided in their work by a Town Clerk. There is also a Council of Elders, self-appointed, whose advice and wishes the Town Council must respect. Their functions are analogous to those of the House of Commons and the House of Lords respectively.

### **Town Council**

The Council is made up of nine elected members. Seven members constitute a quorum.

In the past the Council had as many as 24 members. Experience shows that when the number is so large, individual councillors do not feel a sense of personal responsibility for council work. Previously too the Hooker Creek Council was composed on the basis of the subsection system ('skin'), as is still the case at Yuendumu. The Hooker Creek experience was that when there are several representatives for each 'skin', one delegate tended to leave the burden of council work to the other (or others), and again individual responsibility was not assumed.

Nine members seems just the right size for a council.

The councillors are elected. First of all nominations are called for in a public meeting. The people look for representatives who 1) can talk up and 2) can make sound judgements. They must have understanding, but need not be able to read and write.

Women are eligible. People tend to pick a woman whose performance in council meetings would not be hampered by too many avoidance rules. (There is one woman councillor at the moment.)

When nominations have been completed (they could be in the 30s in number) a photo of each candidate, with his/her name, is posted up on the wall. After a fortnight elections are held by secret ballot supervised by officers of Community Development and (if I remember correctly) the NT Electoral Office. Each elector fills in his/her vote for each of the nine council positions. Old people can be helped in filling out their ballot paper.

Those persons with the greater number of votes down to the ninth place are considered elected.

If a councillor misses six council meetings, then number 10 on the list of election results automatically takes his place on the council.

The nine councillors elect their own president.

Council meetings are held each Monday, starting at 9.00 am (or 10.30 am?). They normally go on to something like 3.30 pm, but can end at 1.00 pm or sometimes extend even to 6.30 pm – until the business is finished.

Attendance at council meetings is considered 'work': no payment is lost from wages by council members who are attending council rather than performing the work function they are given wages for, e.g. as builders, teachers, health workers etc.

There has been some thought of making individual councillors responsible for specific areas, e.g. education, cattle work etc., rather like Cabinet Ministers with portfolio, but so far this development has not taken place: it has only been tried in a tentative way.

### **Council of Elders**

In one part of the camp a bough shelter has been erected for the Council of Elders.

This council has set itself up in a 'tribal' fashion. The elders work out in their own fashion who their members will be in this upper house. There are no formal elections. Last year it started off with 24 members, and by the end of the year the numbers had fallen away to six.

They gather together on the day set for their meeting each week (Thursday, cf. below) or when they see the Town Clerk's truck parked outside their shelter.

The Council of Elders performs an overseeing role in regard to the Town Council. The

agenda for a coming Town Council meeting is submitted to them for their consideration and approval. Should they disapprove of a council decision, a process of consultation and amendment is set up until agreement is reached. The Town Clerk is the intermediary in the consultation: he travels to and fro between the two councils until agreement has been achieved.

The Council of Elders also has the right to initiate ceremonies. The normal pattern is that once a ceremonial series has been decided upon, ordinary work is suspended from mid-day Wednesday until the end of the week. However, no pay is given for the two and a half work days during which ceremonial activity occurs.

## **Staff**

The endeavour is to aboriginalise all staff positions as much as possible.

At the moment the white supervisors employed by the Town Council at Hooker Creek are in the areas of housing, plumbing, cattle management and the power house. (There are other white persons in areas outside of the sphere of council employment: police, school etc.)

For this year the garage has been run by Aboriginal mechanics. The understanding is that should such an arrangement fail, the council would advertise once more for a garage supervisor.

One year ago it was decided to abstain from the use of white advisors to the council for one year, to see how it would go. At the moment, therefore, the council office staff is entirely Aboriginal. One girl is office supervisor, another the bookkeeper, and a young man who has recently finished at Yirara College is the bank-keeper. There is one more who is probably a secretary/typist.

Each of the office staff checks on the work of his/her companions, so everything is checked three times. Each office worker is required to be capable of using a calculator.

Auditors come in by contract every three months. They have been very complimentary of the standard of office work performed.

Occasionally a field officer of the Department of Community Development pays a visit and looks over the work. He is now teaching the staff how to make a monthly report on their work.

There has been some changeover in office staff. One girl has been permanent. Should a staff member be encountering difficulty from personal and family problems (so absences from work etc.) the council tries to straighten things out. If this fails, then the position is declared vacant and a replacement is sought.

All the bookwork for areas of council responsibility is done in the one council office. At the moment Education and Health do their own bookwork separately. It is projected that at some future date these two sectors will be looked after also by the council office. In the meantime the council office works in close co-ordination with the Health and Education offices.

## **Town Clerk**

The linchpin of the system is the Town Clerk. He prepares the agenda for the council meeting, consults with the Council of Elders concerning it, presents business correspondence etc. to the council during its meeting (often summarising correspondence and presenting the main points in ways that make them suitable for consideration by councillors who may not be literate). He sees that minutes are kept and properly recorded and dated, and that resolutions are entered into the Resolution Book. He oversees the work of the office staff, especially in regard to wages, accounting and the recording of council meetings. He also sees to the implementation of council decisions and oversees all areas run by the council: cattle, garage etc.

## NELEN YUBU

(Each month the supervisors of the various employment areas write a report for the council on the jobs done and on the progress of job training.)

The present Town Clerk, Morris Luther, is obviously a very capable person. His early schooling was in bible school. He did a six week course at Carpentaria College. For 13 years he worked as a teaching assistant and then did a few years learning carpentry and mechanics. Since 1974 he was Executive Officer in the old council and became Town Clerk when the new Town Council was set up.

It seems clear that the operation of the present community government system at Hooker Creek would depend for its success on having a man of his calibre in the position of Town Clerk.

Two young men were sent to Sydney to do a course in council work at the Aboriginal and Cultural Training Institute run in Sydney by Margaret Valladian. However the council has experienced difficulty in funding such training: travel costs etc.

The Town Clerk's programme of work for each week is as follows:

Monday: Town Council meets.

Tuesday: He does his office work arising out of the council meeting.

Wednesday: He oversees work done by council employees in various parts of the community.

Thursday: He goes to the Council of Elders in preparation for the next Town Council meeting.

Friday: He prepares the agenda and materials for the Town Council meeting on the following Monday.

Morris Luther observed that the Town Council places great importance on a well prepared agenda. Once when he appeared before them without such an agenda, they cancelled the council meeting. Good presentation overcomes the problem of illiteracy that otherwise would be a handicap to a few of the councillors.

### Public Meeting

In the event that a council decision meets strong public disapproval, a public meeting of the community is called to consider the issue.

This safety valve underlines the council's function as a service to the community at large. The councillors are elected representatives of, work for, and are accountable to the Hooker Creek community.

### Land Owners

The relationship of the council in its decision-making role to the traditional owners of the area has been simplified by a curious series of circumstances.

It appears that the traditional owners of Hooker Creek were driven away by the grandparents of the present community: the former group's descendants are now living at Wave Hill to the north.

Recently the situation was regularised by a three week ceremony in the course of which the traditional owners handed over their rights to the land to its present occupants. They handed over their ceremonies, songs and tjurunga, and so made the recipients into true owners. This 'tribal' act was paralleled by an act of concession of title in 'government' fashion. Meanwhile the former owners of Hooker Creek land were granted title to the Wave Hill country they are now residing in.

Thus, as the Land Trustees of Hooker Creek country are also members of the Hooker Creek community, there should be no conflict between them and the Town Council, especially as the Council of Elders would have the protection of the land and the traditional estate as one of its major concerns. Any differences of opinion should be able to be settled by the dynamics of the system as described above.

### **Summary**

While the Hooker Creek community has responded to the demands of life in the modern world in setting up an identifiable body for the sake of community regulation, it feels it has done so in a way that respects and conserves traditional values.

## APPENDIX: LIQUOR REGULATION

### **Hooker Creek (Morris Luther)**

Last year Hooker Creek elected to go dry. The election was held in a public manner by division: all who wanted a dry area stood to one side, and those of the opposite opinion stood to the other. Only some 20 young fellows voted against restriction.

### *Permit System*

A permit system operates. A person who wants a permit to drink at home must apply to the Town Council. Should the council approve of his/her application, a request for the granting of such a permit is sent on to the Liquor Commission.

The council has decreed that the liquor must be ordered through the Hooker Creek store, and it is delivered by truck to the permit-holder's door. A maximum of three cartons is allowable. The liquor must be kept and consumed inside the house, or if outside the house, it must also be outside the community boundary (10 miles away – and the nearest unrestricted outlet is 120 miles away, Top Spring).

If the conditions of the permit are broken, the permit is lost and a fine exacted. Eight Aboriginal permits were granted last year: of these five have now lost their permit. One man who brought in a carton of his own was fined \$750. Another for a similar offence was given a lesser fine (\$450) in view of the needs of his family.

One European (building supervisor) lost his permit and was fined \$750.

A number of people found drunk on the premises have been gaoled. People report them immediately.

If a person objects to his loss of permit, the Town Clerk invites him to write a note to the council and attend a meeting to present it. So far no one has taken up the invitation.

### *'Nightwatchmen'*

The policing of the system is done by four security officers or 'nightwatchmen'. One is about 50 years of age, another 45, the other two in their late 20s. They have the right of inspection, but carry no weapons and take no direct action themselves. If they find a person drunk or breaking the permit conditions, they report immediately to the (resident) police, who take appropriate action.

**Warrabri (Gus Williams)**

Warrabri voted both for a dry area and the total exclusion of permits. This has caused some difficulty with contractors, but the 'dry' condition of the area is explained to any contractor who puts in a tender for work: most accept the job and its conditions.

A curious feature of the programme to exclude permits was that the main agitators against the exclusion were the police, who endeavoured to gain supporters among the community before the decisive vote was taken. Representatives from Yuendumu and Docker River stated the same fact of police opposition to the proposal of setting up dry areas.

# TEACHING (AND BEING TAUGHT)

MIRIAM-ROSE UNGUNMERR

I HAVE BEEN AWAY from my community for four years now, but I have been back at various times for brief visits to see my people. The people have changed, however, the times I had visited weren't at all long enough for me to really know how much they have changed; and whether it was for better or worse. I decided while in Darwin that I wanted to return home and work there amongst my people. After all, I only taught for a year in my community as a qualified teacher Band 1. (I qualified after my third year training in Melbourne.)

Well, the year is disappearing around the corner and I have to pack up and move on. I hope the people, and the children especially, have learnt from me, because I certainly learnt a lot from them.

## Things I've Seen, Felt and Heard

### *School Children*

First of all the school children – children from the pre-school to post-primary have responded to me more. They wanted my help with their work and asked for ideas when it was necessary. If there was some disagreement amongst themselves either at school or outside, it came back to me to act as the peacemaker. If I had to correct any of the children by trying to talk some sense into them, they listened.

With the various grades I worked with in the mission school, I found that the children and I enjoyed learning together. I feel that I 'got through' to them in various subjects and found that in general their weakest subject was mathematics. From the way they work, it is obvious to me that the children have the patience to learn, if they are given the chance to work at their own pace. Art is their strong subject and they nearly all excel at it.

There is satisfaction for me in having been able to work with children who really wanted special help. You realize from teaching these children that a lot of young Aboriginal children are being dragged through their learning years too quickly. If they are given the time to work at their own speed by patient, understanding teachers they will develop their full potential and enjoy life better, as they grow up.

---

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr comes from Daly River. Besides being a qualified teacher, she is also an artist of exceptional talent. The *Nelen Yubu* logo is a simplified design (done by her) of the decoration she painted on the pulpit of the Daly River church. Having worked in the Education Department's Media Centre, she returned to Daly River school in 1980. This year (1981) she began teaching at St John's College, Darwin. She is married to Ken Baumann.

Children have helped me also, to find out what obstacles they had that they couldn't overcome. The main group of students I have worked with this year were a remedial group of seven, who are in grade six. Five of them will be capable of joining the main stream next year; however, the other two just get along. These two need maybe another year working on their own, then I think they will find their own footing.

I know that a lot of people say that Aboriginal children never ask questions about things they would like to know. It is said they only learn from observation. OK -- that's true and it's a good sign in some ways. It indicates that they are curious -- they have asked me many questions on varied subjects throughout the year. This shows that they will 'open up' if they trust and respect you. Truly, they have asked me questions about topics they wouldn't ask their parents about, or ask other teachers about. From their enquiries, we talk about things I find they already know about but were afraid to discuss in the open. The children and their parents could know about something that happened in the village and keep it amongst themselves, and the rest of the mission wouldn't know about it for weeks. You may call it gossip and there's a lot of that in any small community. If the people want to just keep things to themselves they can. They've done it many times. But the children know they can confide in me if they feel it is necessary to talk to someone.

Well, what I'm trying to say is that if I am open with them I get somewhere with them and I find that they are open with me. This way I learn a little bit from them. However, it is essential that I have a firm approach when dealing with someone who is in the wrong.

Throughout the school year we talked of many things. We watched and discussed educational films, aid projects and in general we all learned a bit more about our world. I felt a need to really get the kids to listen, learn and speak on subjects such as sex, marriage, the 'promise system', alcohol, drugs, culture and illnesses such as VD, to which there is a stigma attached. You learn that the children are aware of all these things that I call facts of life. These are the topics they really wanted to learn more of, so I feel that they will really ask what is in their hearts if they know and trust the person they turn to for knowledge. In their eyes I have been that person. In trying to answer all their queries, I have gained help from the elders and sometimes the hospital staff, especially with things I wasn't sure of.

All in all, children are changing with time, but at their own pace, and they are like children everywhere who are full of curiosity. I wish our children much learning, about today's way of living the past, while marching into the future.

### *Council and Community Affairs*

Being a member of the Council Executive I've tried really hard to keep things in order with the council president and the rest in the community. It is often hard to not get too involved in this capacity. No matter what it may be -- drunken brawls, domestic disputes or whatever, most times there is always the legal side of things to consider and this I cannot ignore.

The people are more free these days. They are now given the opportunity to choose what they want to do in life. Their housing is better and most are occupied by family groups. However, some of the houses that the people live in were around when I was a kid and they are still in the same condition. The sinks in the kitchens have rusted away to nothing and when they turn on the taps an empty bucket is needed to catch the water.

The kitchen drains block and when it rains the water off the roads in front of the village houses and from the roofs runs onto the concrete verandahs and into the houses. The people don't complain about it, but I know they'd like to have things fixed.



People in these homes try very hard to keep them clean; not just around the houses, but all around the mission. Visitors, tourists (and the army, when they were here) say that this is the cleanest Aboriginal community that they have ever been on. A couple of army personnel went around with our hygiene man, Harold, on one of his rounds and gave him a hand.

When a family moves into a new house on the mission I've noticed that they plant lawns and get gardens going. They 'police' the children playing around the house so that they don't play leapfrog over the shrubs that are planted. I think that eventually each family will have a house to live in and I believe that the new houses I have seen built for the community are the best I've ever seen.

### *Summing Up*

The people here still need encouragement with a lot of things, e.g. religious instruction (more people should attend Sunday mass), keeping our culture (what is left) alive and blending with the new culture. Unfortunately there are the Aboriginals who use western laws one day and their own laws when it suits them another day.

The community would benefit from a mothers' club and also a youth club. An art centre for our young artists to work from is also important; as is a small residence for women who are threatened by their menfolk, some of whom like using them as punching bags. The women could shelter here until order is restored.

### **The Future**

I can't find the right words to explain *how* the people have changed since I last lived here. But the other day I noticed the bougainvillea plant on the hospital fence. The beautiful flowers have died and fallen away and where they had once blossomed there are new branches growing over and above the fence which is about three and a half feet tall. A couple of branches have weaved themselves aimlessly into the fence wire but they have eventually found their way out and started growing upwards with the rest of the branches. The overall picture is a straggly plant. It should be pruned or have some form of support such as a trellis and a gardener could help it weave in and out of the trellis framework. This could be done every time new branches sprouted until there were enough strong, mature branches to support the smaller ones, so that the bougainvillea could grow strong and gracefully the way it was meant to.

The bougainvillea is my way of trying to explain how the early missionaries found their way when they first came to Daly River. The children at school had jobs to do. These chores were such things as cooking staff meals, setting the table, washing up afterwards; also housework such as washing staff clothes, ironing and the like – you name it. Each chore was done for a month by the particular children, and at the end of the month they swapped around to add some variety to their work. Some of them worked until eight o'clock at night. An older person would work with and supervise them.

For the parents and the community as a whole, there were also meaningful past-times such as religious instruction, feast day celebrations (parents were encouraged to offer mass on such days as the feast of the Sacred Heart, and on All Souls Day we would have mass at the cemetery). Religion was more meaningful with processions, mass or rosaries often said in one of the mission homes. In those days parents and children would take some of the staff out on picnics or would take them out camping, to teach them how to hunt, cook and enjoy bush tucker. Sometimes the white staff were taken too and shown some of the historic sites (here was mutual respect: for the things the black people and the white people could teach each other).

Some staff used to visit the families in the village at evening time, maybe just to say hello. Some of the staff were keen to learn the local language well enough to hold a conversation with the old people when they went on their evening stroll in the village, or with the Aboriginal people they worked with. We had our problems in those days too, but at least the people felt that they had support in the form of their religion and the helpful staff when it came to confronting the changing life-style that was creeping up on us. They had various jobs to do around the mission; they worked hard and retained their pride.

So, from my point of view, the early missionaries were the three and a half foot fence. They had a set programme for the people but sometimes they pushed too hard in some areas. Aboriginal people don't work to set programmes but they work steadily and get their jobs done *if* they have understanding guidance. Agatha Morgan, Suzanne, Roseanne and Bruce Morgan, Minnie, Louse and William, Jacob and Dorothy are the results. They stick to their jobs and to their homes and don't roam uselessly from town to town. However, others still have itchy feet.

The people I have mentioned would like to learn more: maybe cooking, sewing, gardening, arts and crafts, sport; be shown how to best use their money (how to put some aside for a rainy day). Call it adult education – it would give them the long-awaited chance to use and develop their abilities. At the moment they haven't really got anything to aim for, because like the bougainvillea plant, they are growing 'every which way but loose'. They need encouragement not only from their own kind, but from those who are working amongst/with them.

I remember a priest who used to say that he wasn't here to sell beautiful things in the shop or to make money, but to gain and share true 'riches' by helping people to get to know God – to love and serve Him through the people; and to guide them to face the new way of life.

# NELEN YUBU MISSIOLOGICAL UNIT AND NUNGALINYA COLLEGE

M.J. WILSON MSC

DURING SEPTEMBER negotiations regarding co-operation between NYMU and NC continued at an accelerated pace. On 10 September I met with the MSC Area Council (NT); on 11 September an informal meeting with NC principal (Robert Bos) and several staff members; on 14 September attendance at a meeting of the NC Council; on 17 September a meeting of the NC Review Committee for Academic Concerns; 22-23 September the NYMU 'think-tank' at Daly River.

## CONCRETE RESULTS AND/OR PROPOSALS

### 1. NC Orientation Course

Instead of the Community Workers Course A (cf. *Nelen Yubu* No. 8 p.30), in 1982 NC will offer an orientation course for staff (especially recently arrived and non-Aboriginal) in Aboriginal communities. It will start on 31 May and will run for seven weeks in four modules, all of which may be taken or any combination of them.

#### *First Module: Basic Orientation*

31 May – 11 June

(co-ordinator: Murray Johnson)

Basic information on the factual determinants of life in present-day Aboriginal communities:

- introduction to the development policies of government and missions and to the various agencies that pursue such policies: self-determination, local government, land, sacred sites, community development, social services, law, education, health, finance etc.
- historical background of NT and church missions
- mode of interaction with Aboriginal people
- techniques of successful living in an Aboriginal settlement.

#### *Second Module: Cultural Orientation*

14 – 25 June

(co-ordinator: Martin Wilson)

Indication of traditional values that subsist into the present day and determine attitudes and behaviour of Aboriginal people in their own and mixed communities:

First Week: Social factors, e.g. kinship systems, marriage systems, social organization (moieties, sections etc.), economy, social control, land owning and use.

Second Week: Religious culture: belief (mythology, nature of man, spirits, land, social groups); ritual (initiatory, funerary, particular rites); shamanism; relationship with Christianity.

*Third Module: Methodology of Learning an Aboriginal Language*

28 June – 2 July

(co-ordinator: Michael Christie)

Intensive practical workshop.

*Fourth Module: Cupapuyngu*

5 – 16 July

Intensive course on one NE Arnhem Land language – As this would not be practical for staff from Catholic Missions, during this time, or later, a specific course could be offered on missiology, especially from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and allied sources.

This Orientation Course, or part of it, could be taken by about twenty participants. There is accommodation available on the Nungalinya campus for twenty-two single students (boarding charge \$80 per week). Clerical or Religious may prefer to stay at one of their own houses in Darwin. Tuition fees are \$20 per week. Thus the full fee (boarding and tuition) is \$100 per week.

## 2. Workshops, Short Courses

For experienced staff NYMU would offer short workshops of a few days to a week in length on specific topics. These could be done on site or maybe in Darwin. NC programmes times when its staff become available for short regional courses, particularly during the second half of the year. Workshops sponsored by NYMU would therefore be joint ventures with other NC staff.

### *Particular Workshops*

a) 'Initiation: Cultural and Christian: a theological investigation.' Murray Johnson (Development studies, NC) and M.J. Wilson (NYMU) are offering to set up during the first semester of 1982 a workshop on initiation for ordained ministers of the three churches (Anglican, Catholic, Uniting) who are working in or have had experience of a tribal situation within NT. It is thought twelve participants would be a good number: a reasonable spread across the three denominations would be desirable. It would probably last at least a week, preferably a fortnight. It would be held at NC. Participants would act as their own resource people. After due approvals have been gained, it is proposed that participants be sought, topics farmed out, dates set etc. (Any ordained minister within NT already interested could let either Murray Johnson at NC or myself at NYMU know.)

b) The 'think-tank' indicated a range of topics for workshops. It suggested that the list be circulated and people be asked to indicate their preferences or add to the list. (Though such a canvassing of opinions will be done more specifically later, expressions of opinion from readers of this present text will be gratefully received.)

*Possible Topics*

- initiation, traditional and Christian
- social control, education, law
- celebration: Aboriginal ceremony and Christian liturgy
- death and its ceremonies, Aboriginal and Christian
- kinship systems and their operation (avoidance, reciprocity, free giving of goods etc.)
- marriage, traditional patterns and contemporary (Christian ideal; behaviour of whites, staff . . .)
- interaction: personal relationships, from love to violence
- values in society: traditional and contemporary
- cultural interaction: psychology and behaviour (romanticism, culture shock, adjustment etc.)
- ‘self-determination’ and its options
- land: ownership and use

Naturally only a few topics could be handled in any one year, but the same topic could be treated in various locations. And we trust there will be other years to do the topics not selected for 1982!

**3. Other Programmes**

The ‘think-tank’ discussed the question of preliminary orientation and induction into an Aboriginal community. *It was observed:*

- i) That the Conference of Major Superiors of Women’s Religious Institutes (CMSWA) is organizing an orientation and ongoing formation programme for personnel involved in the Aboriginal apostolate. As, presumably, such a programme would be operated ‘down south’, new staff (clerical, religious and lay) could use it to gain a general initiation into the Aboriginal apostolate before coming to the NT. The NC Orientation Course could then provide a specific Territory direction to people who had had enough direct experience of life in an Aboriginal community to make the course effective.
- ii) Induction into a specific locality is surely the task of the local community – its council, its community advisor etc. However, NYMU might be able to provide some help on request.
- iii) A short introductory booklet providing some information on the historical and cultural background of each of the Catholic missions in the NT, on the structures operating within them and on expected norms of behaviour could be beneficial if NYMU were to prepare one.
- iv) The FDNSC have reproduced in booklet form (27pp. foolscap) with SIL’s permission a list of questions and topics an SIL worker in a community should inform himself about. It can be used as a means of induction – though a person who could answer all the questions and speak on all the topics would have a knowledge of the community that would be the envy of any anthropologist!
- v) The *Culture Training Manual for Teachers in Aboriginal Communities* produced by O’Brien, Plooj and Whitelaw through the School of Social Sciences of Flinders University (1975), being a programmed case study that can be self-administered, provides an excellent instrument for the induction of individuals who arrive in Aboriginal communities at awkward times when no one else is new.

life was crooked at the core from the very beginning, e.g. the Murinbata myth of Mutjinga (class notes AS 107.2).<sup>5</sup> Stanner speaks of the buoyant, even high-spirited attitude to life of the Murinbata, in spite of its contingency. They give their 'assent to such life without morbidity' (1966:58).<sup>6</sup> Indeed,

A prolonged exposure to the rites comes to suggest both a depth and a dignity of outlook which may lack formulation but not reality.

(1966:44)

Religion is 1) a system of symbols which acts to 2) establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by 3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and

4) *Clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality . . .*

The religious perspective surpasses other modes of 'seeing' reality: beyond the commonsensical, the scientific, the aesthetic. It is in ritual and ceremony that the moods and motivations and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate meet and reinforce one another. The world as lived and the world as conceived, expressed in a single set of symbolic forms, are perceived to be identical. Thus occurs the transformation in one's sense of reality. The metaphysic formulated by those symbols and the style of life they recommend are imbued with a persuasive authority. It is in the context of concrete acts of ritual/liturgy that religious conviction is strengthened. These enactments are seen to be not only 'models of' what man believes, but also 'models for' the believing. In these actual 'dramas', men attain their faith as they portray it (Geertz 1969:26-9).

In Aboriginal ritual, sacred objects never remain merely symbols; in ritual they become imbued with power, a power which is communicated. Thus, the initiate 'knows' that the 'tjurunga' is no mere stone but, rather, the material substance of the Ancestral Being with whom he himself has a compelling spiritual relationship (Berndt 1974:72-74). Strehlow recounts how a man explained, when handing a 'tjurunga' to his initiated son, 'This is your own body, from which you have been reborn' (Wilson 1979:40).

So, too, within this context, we turn to Stanner's assessment of the *Punj*:

- a) the re-enactment of the primordial tragedy brings understanding;
- b) the covenant duality is thus endorsed by and on the new generation;
- c) each man is taken (so to speak) out of his empirical/social self, as though to meet his essential self;
- d) touched by encounter with the transcendental: the 'All-Mother's' blood, symbol both of life and of suffering;
- e) he is given a sign (bullroarer), perpetuating the new relationship;
- f) within a *logos* which gives life and suffering a common source and a joint *imperium* (1966:56, tabulation original).

Within the 'master-symbol' of *The Dreaming*, participants in a ritual/ceremony, are not just commemorating/re-enacting the past. Whatever happened in the mystic past is happening now (Elkin 1974:210). Hence, the *Punj* is something to do, to celebrate, rather than to talk about (Stanner 1966:14). It is essential to the function of symbol that the development of conceptions be along an aesthetic rather than an intellectual course. Through song, dance, mime and painting, symbolical conceptions of mysteries are brought to mind by analogical speculation (Stanner 1966:14).

And so, to the last stage of our definition: Religion is 1) a system of symbols which acts to