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EDITORIAL

SISTER MICHELE, one of the Little Sisters of Charles de Foucauld, sent us from Yuendumu (NT) an English translation she had done of a French translation her Society has been distributing amongst its members, of a paper written some years ago in Portuguese by Carlos Maesters, a Brazilian liberation theologian. Though we generally avoid reprints, we thought this paper spoke so directly to the situation of the church among Australian Aboriginal people, even though it was originally conceived in terms of Amerindians, that we had to publish it.

We believe *Nelen Yubu* should maintain its specific attention to evangelisation issues among Australian Aboriginal people. However, local issues are often illuminated by being viewed from unusual angles. Neville Feeney CFC, who used to work in the education apostolate in Northern Territory and is now stationed at St Laurence's, South Brisbane, sent us a copy of a letter written to the missionary-sending church by a young priest from a young Pacific Island community on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of their young local church. Nev Feeney remarked in his covering letter that a number of Australian "missions" have moved or will soon be moving into centenary mode. "Please consider."

We are also happy to be receiving input from Koori people local to *Nelen Yubu's* new base down here in New South Wales.

Martin Wilson
Editor

LAKE MUNGO

MARTIN WILSON

DURING OCTOBER I had a chance to visit Lake Mungo in the south-western corner of NSW. The original plan had been to meet up with some people from the Melbourne Aboriginal Catholic Ministry. Some members of the group come from that part of NSW and identify with the area. They like to take their children to Lake Mungo during holiday times to help them grow into a living identification with Mungo and all that it stands for. Unfortunately, the Melbourne ministry group had to cancel their trip, so the *Nelen Yubu* staff, i.e. Keren and myself, decided to go nevertheless.

I suppose there would be Australian readers who do not know where or what Lake Mungo is. It is a dry lake bed covered with saltbush north-east of the Murray-Darling junction. It is about 110 km north-east of Mildura and 140 km north-west of Balranald. The lake dried up some 15,000 years ago as the Fourth Ice Age ended. For thousands of years before that it was a part of a richly fertile chain of fresh-water lakes that provided pleasant habitation for generation after generation of Aboriginal people. During the fertile times the strong westerly winds blew up sandy beaches onto the eastern side of the lake. Thousands of years of dry wind have made the beaches into massive sand dunes that keep moving onwards towards the east. The movement of the sand and erosion after heavy rain have the effect of uncovering relics of civilisation that existed in the area during the good times between fifteen and forty thousand years ago.

In 1968 an ANU geomorphologist, Jim Bowler, was studying the sediments at Lake Mungo for clues on the pattern of climatic change in western NSW. He came across some stone artefacts and mussel shells to which radio-carbon dating gave an age of some 32,000 years. Then he noticed protruding from the sand some bones that a later expedition showed to be human. They were the bones of a slenderly built ('gracile') woman who had lived and died there some 26,000 years ago. Her bones had been burnt, crushed, compacted together with ash and buried in a manner that was still

practised in some Aboriginal funerary rituals up to recent times. Since then more even earlier human remains have been found in the area. Lake Mungo and its dunes are now enclosed in a national park and it forms part of the wider Willandra Lakes World Heritage area. Because of its significance on the scene of world pre-history, Mungo deserves to be one of the best known features of the Australian landscape. It is much more important than Sydney Opera House, the Bridge, or even Sydney harbour itself.

I think it is fair to say that we went to Lake Mungo in a spirit of pilgrimage. Not in the sense that it was physically demanding, though it certainly was that too. It required a drive of over 1,000 km each way, camping out in tents, cooking on open fires, carrying our own water, washing in basins, eating meals with one side of us rugged up against biting cold westerly winds and the other side being scorched by the blazing fire of very dry belah branches. I cannot pretend that all this wasn't actually very pleasant in a holiday sort of way, but we were two very weary people when we finally got back home. What made it a pilgrimage was our awareness that we were visiting one of the most ancient sacred sites in the world.

Lake Mungo is the place where Aboriginal remains were found that come from the very dawn of human time. Actually they come from so far back that any distinction between races or nations becomes quite meaningless. When I went to school as a boy I learned about Ancient Egypt. The skeletons that the shifting sands at Lake Mungo expose to view are the remains of people who were living in that area some ten times further back in history than the pharaohs of Ancient Egypt. The Mungo people were members of the same part of the human race as ourselves, 'homo sapiens sapiens', but while they were living at Lake Mungo Europe was largely inhabited by Neanderthal man. We may not be so marvellous ourselves, but Neanderthal man was more primitive still!

What makes Lake Mungo so sacred is that it is impregnated with human history. It is not just that we have chanced upon the bones of people who lived so very long ago. What is so moving about Mungo is that we are confronted with such ancient evidence of human culture, that special personal thing that marks each and every one of us as beings of unique value, beings that think, feel, love, want, pursue willed goals... Some of the remains found were evidently painted with ochre at the time of burial some thirty to forty thousand years ago. That is the first evidence of ritual burial in human history. While thinking about this, my mind recalled Josephine

Flood's observation regarding the probable dating of cave paintings of the Rainbow Serpent in Northern Territory. Seeing that the Rainbow Serpent is still celebrated in Aboriginal ceremony, she wrote that this "would make the Rainbow Serpent myth the longest continuing religious belief documented in the world" (1983:134). But even so, she is writing about paintings that are *only* some 7000 to 9000 years old. At Lake Mungo we are faced with human existence three to four times further back in time.

When talking about Lake Mungo and its inhabitants we are talking about the period before the last Ice Age: between the Third and Fourth Ice Ages when the polar caps sucked up so much of the world's water that the sea level was at times some 600 ft lower than it is today. People could walk from the bottom of Tasmania to the north-western tip of West Irian. Apart from several relatively short sea crossings, they could have walked from Bangkok to Hobart. We read these things in books, but when we go to a place like Lake Mungo it all becomes so much more real. We are at one of those special places where eternity intersects with time.

Mrs Alice Kelly, a tribal elder of the Mutthi Mutthi people, who lives at Balranald and is a member of the Lake Mungo trust (and was declared National Aboriginal of the Year 1988), gave a talk at the 1989 state meeting of the Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council in the course of which she spelled out, among other things, some of the significance of Lake Mungo:

'I am Mrs Alice Kelly, Aboriginal Catholic Tribal Elder of the Mutthi Mutthi people. My mother and father were very strong Aboriginal Catholics, my father being especially centred in justice, having been very ill-treated from the European invasion. His baptism was very real to him as Jesus stood for the dispossessed and the outcast and called people to justice and repentance.

'Through my parents I received my Aboriginal identity, deep spirituality, heritage and cultural values, together with baptism and deep faith relationship with Jesus Christ and God, our loving Father.

'I have many concerns and dreams for my people arising from the dislocation of my people caused by the European invasion and from the position of our people in this society today.

'I have long and patiently awaited this moment for my family and my people when they would come together in their Aboriginality and their baptism to say to the church: "We are Aboriginal. We are baptised Catho-

lic. We have been invisible to the church in Australia. The church has been absent from our lives but in our hearts we deeply experience our baptism and our faith in Jesus. We see our latest generation of children growing up out of touch with all we hold dear, all it meant to me and the spirit of my family and community. We want to see the spirit of our people and Jesus come together."

'Especially in the last eight years I have been expressing this deep concern to my family and their children, my longing for my grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The Mutthi Mutthi tribal people's place of wisdom is Lake Mungo and Willandra Lakes World Heritage Sacred Site. I have yearned for them to experience the wisdom and the healing and the energy in the silence of this most ancient of our tribal heritage places where the breath of the Great Spirit is alive and tangible today. To experience here the healing for their spirit from the ravages of our modern technological society and its alienating effects.

'It has taken eight years for them to accept this message. My children have often recoiled from this message, a direct result of the dislocation that white society and its education and attitudes have caused to happen to them over their formative years. Only now is my message coming to them. Only since Pope John Paul II's encouraging call to the Aboriginal people to "take heart". The time for rebirth is now that the church herself in Australia will not be fully the church that Jesus wants her to be until we have made our contribution to her life and until that contribution has been fully accepted by [them].

'I, as a Mutthi Mutthi Elder, meet these groups saying (in language): "Thelluatta inginto whanten wongi Doonklaura", i.e. "It is good you have come to the land of our ancestors". In Aboriginality, Christianity, Humanity, let the youth come forth. But only the non-Aboriginal youth comes forth. Tread softly, peacefully as we seek and as we share the classification of circumstances (i.e. the laws, customs, heritage, the appearance of the oldest known human occupation in Australia dated 40,000 years at least), which lives within the shores of Mungo and Willandra Lakes World Heritage. Let the youth come forth.

'I believe, for us, that Mungo is where the spirit of wisdom lies, not only for our own people, but for all non-Aboriginal Australians to taste and see that the Lord is good.

'It is this circumstance that I speak to my non-Aboriginal brothers and

sisters and to you, Bishop and hierarchy of the Catholic Church, soliciting aid to restore to my own people and youth an experience of their spirituality that will mend with their baptism and responsibility to their brothers and sisters and the wider community.'

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A TRIBESMAN'S PRAYER

Nazarene accept us as your own.
Be born again within our sacred caves.
Within your body break dividing walls
and make of all one consecrated people.

The Rainbow Snake that arcs the mystic sky,
the coloured lizard on the mouldy log,
the bird that shares its mysteries with the moon
are all immersed in your divine intentions.

Your Spirit watches from high desert rocks.
Your light gives birth to every morning sun
and every little thing that lives and breathes
is touched by your arising Incarnation.

Rod Cameron osa

* * * * *

CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION AMONG INDIANS (Pt. I)

**Talk by Carlos Maesters
(Brazilian liberation theologian)**

A CHRISTIAN INSTRUCTION that truly transmits the Gospel seeks to reveal, by witness and by the Word, the Good News of the liberating presence of God who works in our lives through our Lord Jesus Christ. The way God is present in our lives and the way he brings us up (this is the sense of *educates*) to be ready for Christ is revealed in the Old Testament. There, as the Constitution *Dei Verbum* says, we are shown 'the way the just and merciful God acts with men and women' and find the story of the 'true divine pedagogy' (DV 15).

We are going to speak of two subjects connected with the life of the Indians and linked to their evangelisation and Christian instruction: their myths and their land rights. We will try to explore these in the light of the Bible, the Old Testament particularly, hoping to find better approaches to evangelisation and religious instruction among Indians.

A. THE MYTHS OF THE INDIANS

1. The Wrong Approach to Myths

In their tribes Indians hand on stories of long tradition, which we call 'myths'. For many of us a 'myth' is a synonym for something not good, a pagan thing of no value like the fantasies that frame the false practices of heretical cults. The myth is often taken for an error which evangelisation

This article was published in Portuguese in the *Bulletin of the CIMI* and later translated into English. Sr Michele of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Alice Springs graciously submitted it for publication in *Nelen Yubu*.

should root out, for something backward that progress and culture should do away with. But for the Indians themselves, myth is the central pillar of their tribal life, around which all the rest is structured.

2. The Content of Myth

A myth is much more than a spicy story about creation times. If you really wanted to know an entire myth, you would have to listen many hours, even days, to learn its whole content. And a myth's content is not hard and fast. It is constantly being retold in light of the new problems that keep appearing. It is like a tree continually growing from a mysterious, unseen root, always forking out in new branches, as events rain on it and problems fertilise its soil. Few people would know its whole content.

3. The Myth Depicts the Tribe's 'home' and preserves it

The myth, in the whole range of its stories, is like the web spread across rocks and boughs to serve the spider as its dwelling. The myth is the invisible fabric the tribe spreads across the territory it occupies and the history it has travelled. The myth speaks of mountain peaks, rivers, fountains, plains, trees, trails, animals, flowers, fish, clouds, etc. – elements of the territory the tribe inhabits. It speaks besides of ancestors, battles, invasions, epidemics, migrations, upheavals, heroic epochs, etc. – elements of the history the tribe has lived through. These elements of territory and history (of space and time) are the points at which the tribe attaches the threads of the invisible web woven across its domain, constructing its 'home'. The stories in the myth 'explain' everything the tribe encounters in time and space, and link it all to the tribe's own origin. The myth thus establishes a 'frame of reference' over the tribe's world, providing them security and identity. It is within the time and space ordered by this invisible fabric that the tribe feels at home, as a spider does in its web. By means of its myth the tribe knows what it is about, encounters itself, encounters others and also the divinity. In their myth they find the harmony of their life.

4. Myth as the Memory of the Tribe

In a certain sense, the myth is greater than the tribe's members. It is their collective memory, the memory of their origins, by which the members of the tribe know their identity and their place in the world. The myth enfolds, sustains, guides and protects them, provides their upbringing. With

its strange symbolism, the myth hides its secret from outsiders and reveals it to those who belong to the household. Its ultimate secret is to reveal to the members of the tribe the meaning of existence. The worst thing that can happen to someone is to lose his or her memory. The person with amnesia becomes lost and easily falls plaything in the hands of the clever, having lost the capacity to react and resist. To deprive someone of memory is the same as killing him or her from the inside. The worst evil one can inflict on a tribe is to destroy its myth.

5. The Force of Myth in Defence of the Tribe's Life

When a strong wind tears its web, the spider goes into action. If possible, the spider reweaves the web and stays. If not, the spider goes away. When some event ruptures the harmony of life the myth was holding in place, the tribe must go into action or be lost. For example, the government indifferently builds a road through the middle of the tribe's 'space'. The road is like an open wound on the soul of the Indians. It shakes the tribe's identity. If possible, the tribe reweaves its harmony. That is, people introduce this new fact into their myth, giving it thus its place already 'accounted for' in the myth. If this is not possible, the tribe retreats, loses itself, and dies as a tribe. Only isolated individuals survive, without their memory, lost. When a wound is opened on a human body, life reacts and sets forces to work which protect the body against the invader and the danger of death. This defence against invasion scars the skin with its marks. Thus the Indians' myth is full of scars, the result of the wounds inflicted by events and the defensive response of the tribe. For instance, almost all Indian myths speak of the arrival in the Americas of the Portuguese and the Spanish. This event was an upheaval in the life of the Indians and many tribes disappeared. Others, to keep from being lost and to recover their slipping identity, linked this new event to their ancient origins and thus reappropriated it in the myth. That is to say, the 'centrifugal' force of the event was absorbed and neutralised by the 'centripetal' force of the tribe's consciousness, which is expressed in its myth. The myth by its own nature is a 'conservative' force: it conserves the life of the tribe and protects it.

6. The Applications of Myth in the Tribe's Life

To put it another way, the myth is constantly being retold and modified in light of new events, which are thus incorporated into the tribe's con-

sciousness and life. The myth, under the form the Indians apply and retell it today, is the expression of their consciousness of themselves. The myth is evoked and recited according to its proper ceremonial procedure, for precisely determined seasons or situations. It is connected with specific festivals, problems or events. Accordingly, the appropriate myth or part of a myth is recited. It is not just anyone who performs the recitation, but the person whose function it is in the tribe. The stories the myth recounts are to the Indians events happening in the present, seen through the eyes of the one who recites them, at the same time as he recites them. By the recitation the tribe binds itself, or binds itself again ('re-ligion' means re-binding) still more to the energy of its ever present origin, and received from this origin the force to live, or to come back to life. The myth is like the storehouse from which the owner takes out old things and new, according to the tribe's needs, to offer them light and guidance for the solution of life's problems. The myth dies with the tribe and is reborn with them. It is the gauge of their health.

7. The Myth as Key to the Tribe's Life

Briefly put, the myth is like a catalyst in the tribe's life. It is the key the Indian holds to read and interpret all that exists and all that happens. Their myth is the tribe's encyclopaedia. Everything is in it! The myth is the tribe's tradition, its rule of life, its law, its medicine, its past, its present and its future. Whatever is important for the life of the tribe is found in it. You could call the myth the 'Indians' Bible': it is the expression of their way of seeing life, nature and the world, the consciousness the tribe has of itself as a tribe. Better still, you could call their myth the tribe's 'Old Testament'.

B. THE OLD TESTAMENT

1. The Stories of the Old Testament

The way in which the Old Testament was written and compiled, and the function it played among the Hebrew people and still plays in our life, are rather similar to the process which determines the origin and function of myths in the life of the Indians. The Old Testament is the collection of stories and traditions, told and retold in the light of current situations, that

enabled the people to bring their faith to bear on new events, discover their mission and find guidance for their actions. The new events may have battered and wounded the people's identity as the people of God, but the inner force of their faith was always stronger than the force of disintegration in events. The people always succeeded in picking up the thread again, reinterpreting their past in the light of the new present and in response to it, reweaving thus the invisible web of their 'home' as a people.

2. The Twelve 'Tribes' and their 'Myths'

In the beginning the Hebrews were not yet a people. They were simply an agglomeration of twelve nomad tribes wandering in the desert. Like other tribes, then and now, they had their stories and their myths. All that we have just said about the myths of the Indian tribes is equally valid for the myths of these tribes. Twelve Asiatic tribes, driven by hunger, started to migrate from Mesopotamia to Egypt, looking for a morsel of land they could settle on. Their migrations extended from 1800 to 1600 BC and marked their cultural transition from a people of nomadic herders to a people of sedentary planters. Their 400 years in Egypt were the beginnings of sedentarisation, during which the Hebrews experienced a time of relative peace and prosperity. But the Pharaohs, the previous owners (inhabitants) of the land, reasserted themselves and started to reduce to slavery the Asiatic inhabitants of the Nile delta. Under the leadership of Moses the Hebrews succeeded in escaping to the desert and reverted to what they had been before, a nomadic people herding sheep and goats. When they came out of Egypt, there were not yet a 'people'. They were merely a band of twelve tribes, held together by a common will to escape from bondage. They preferred the hard life of the desert with freedom, to the abundance of Egypt without it. But their Exodus, that is their escape from Egypt and their forty years in the desert turned out to be a 'new juncture' that had a deep effect on them even changing the focal point of their lives.

3. The Influence of the Exodus on the Myth

When the tribes came out of Egypt, the God of Abraham made his presence felt in a new way. They understood that God was with them in their effort to free themselves from the bondage of Egypt. The 'new experience' of the Exodus, which they had realised was like a liberating act God performed on their behalf, was so great and of such deep impact that it

could never have been absorbed and neutralised by the framework of their myth. This time it was not the myth that incorporated the new event. Rather, the new historical fact provoked a new consciousness into which the myth was integrated and where it got new meaning. This is the sign and likewise the proof that the event of the Exodus set a decisive mark for all time on the existence of the Hebrews. Through the Exodus the Hebrews made a new discovery of their *Origin*, which is God himself. They underwent a new experience of God. Instead of the God of nature and the eternal cycle of return, proper to myths, God became for them the God of history accompanying them on the journey through life toward a future of freedom and peace. The Exodus started a gradual change of conversion at the centre of their lives. The paradise of the past became a projection into the future as a pledge and a prophecy of their hope. This was the great change that the events provoked in the living core where myths are generated. After this new experience of God the myths and old stories began to be 'retold' a new way. The myth was transformed not from without but from within until it became the expression of a new consciousness in the people rooted in their Origin and knowing themselves as the people of God.

4. How the Myths of the Twelve Tribes Changed

As we have said, the change or conversion did not come about by an external action shattering the myths but by a new discovery of God as the liberating God, the Lord of History. It was not a change in the 'content' of the myth but rather in the 'receptacle' or 'container', you also changed the 'content'. (Anyone who does not note this will always be frustrated. No matter how new and round your content is, if the receptacle is square the water you pour into it will take on angular shape!) The change is in the mental structure with which the tribes looked at their stories and myths. Even after the Exodus they would continue to refer to the same stories and the same myths and tell them, but these stories and myths were applied and told from a new outlook, born of God. Here lies the decisive moment of conversion and change. A new concept of 'space' and 'time' is appearing. It is no longer the cyclical time of the eternal return to the origins but a linear time that starts from a beginning and heads towards an end, following a plan that comes from God. Time becomes history. The space of the people's territory once a mere geographical area, becomes the space where

the people live with their God and walk with him. Still, all this change was slow and progressive. It was intimately intertwined with the cultural transition from a nomadic to a sedentary people, bound up with social and political changes. It was a seed buried in the field of the people, planted at the Exodus and growing under the rain and fertilisation of events, crisis points and problems to its maturity at the time of the Captivity. The fruit was born after the Captivity, when Cyrus decreed the return of the people to their land. The fruit was finally harvested at the Resurrection of Christ.

5. Faith and Religion

The origin, the root, from which the people's consciousness forms, and the centre around which it revolves, was and continues to be faith in the One God who loves his people and makes a plan of salvation and liberation for their benefit. It is faith in God-with-us, Emmanuel. 'Religion' is the concrete manner of putting faith into practice, that is, of binding and re-binding one's life and all the expressions of one's life, to God. To religion belong the observances, customs, rules, rites, festivals, ceremonies. Religion is conditioned by the culture one lives in. It changes and has to change. It is faith that does not change. Faith is purified and intensified through the changes that religion undergoes. Faith is religion's soul; religion is faith's body. Religion is like the wire conducting the electric current of faith. Evangelisation and Christian instruction refer first of all to faith rather than to religion. It is no help to people to tell them their religion is false. It would amount to changing a steel wire for a copper one, but without hooking up electric current. When God entered into communication with the twelve tribes, he didn't find fault with the wiring of their religion, he charged those wires with a new energy. This new energy of faith, of itself, little by little improved on, purified and transformed the wires of religion. This change took 1800 years. How should we skip that 1800 years? How should we start changing the wires of the Indian tribes' religion when they do not yet possess the current of faith to pass along these wires? All peoples have their religion and their religion has its wiring. And as the story of the Old Testament shows us the wires of the prior religion of the twelve tribes were considered suitable by God to receive and conduct the first shocks of the electric current of the Faith. It was the tribes themselves, as they walked with their God who began to perceive

the faults in their wiring and repair them, adjusting the wiring to conduct faith pure and undistorted, to the members of the tribe.

6. Faith and Religion form an Inseparable Unit like Soul and Body.

The body does not exist without the soul, nor the soul without the body. Faith does not exist without religion; it does not exist without finding concrete expression in observances, rites, festivals, duties, missions, rules, clergy etc. Faith can only exist embodied in a culture. On one hand, if the culture changes, faith may undergo a crisis. On the other hand, a more exacting vision of faith may reveal deficiencies in a culture. Faith and culture always exist intertwined with one another and at the same time they are in a continual conflict. The Old Testament is a clear proof of that. For example, the principle festival of the Hebrew people, Passover, was a mythic festival of nomadic origin. The Passover was not condemned or repudiated but taken over and purified until it became the centre of the life of faith as it still is today. The temple of Jerusalem was built on the model of the pagan temples of Egypt and lasted until the coming of Jesus Christ. Any number of laws in the book of Exodus can be found in the codes of other peoples of Mesopotamia or Egypt. Passages in the Wisdom books were copied from the wisdom literature of Egypt. The system of government of David's kingdom was copied from neighbouring peoples and yet still conveys to us today the focal image of the Gospel message, namely the Kingdom of God. Even God's name, Yahweh, was the name of a divinity venerated by nomad tribes on Mount Sinai. After this name became the name of the Living and True God, it received a new explanation, arising from the people's faith in a Liberator God (see Ex 3:4). The ways of worshipping God, for example, the golden calf and the high places, were common to the peoples of the surrounding regions and belonged to the cultural background of nomadic tribes. Some of these were condemned and rejected but only in proportion as it was verified that they could not be vehicles for faith in the Living God. All of this shows that God made his entrance into the life of a people slowly and progressively in step with the capacities and the culture of the people in question. The 'law of incarnation', which reached its high point with the incarnation of the Son of God, underlies the whole course of God's action towards humanity. God takes upon himself human nature and through it he communicates with the human race, thus drawing people themselves to transform their lives in

accord with the call of God they begin to perceive. The history of the people of God is a history of 'renovation' – that is, it starts from the 'old' to arrive at the 'new'. It is in the 'new' that the old finds its fulfilment. There it reveals all its dimensions. All of this can also be applied to the myths of the Indians, which depicted their 'home' and preserved it.

7. The Old Testament Depicts the 'Home' of the People of God and Preserves it.

The myths of the twelve tribes were not eliminated but transformed, and from within. The good that existed in them was entirely retained and even enhanced. Thus, just as myths do, the Old Testament weaves an invisible web across the history (time) and the territory (space) of the Hebrew people. By the fabric of this web the people explain themselves and their place in the world, become conscious of themselves as the People of God. For instance, the Old Testament recounts the sojourns of the people and their past migrations, explains the origin of their centre of pilgrimage, justifies the laws that regulate their life as a people, describes illnesses and their remedies, tells the story of wars and the deeds of great personalities of the past. It contains long genealogies, which carry far more meaning than just a list of names. The sun and the moon are there, the stars, the rivers, the desert, political alliances and enmities, languages, festivals, rites. There is a complete account of the cities and villages that belong to each tribe, precise indications to the limits of their territories, etc. Thus all things belonging to the life and history of the people were bound and rebound (re-ligion) to their abiding origin, that is, to their God.

8. The Content of the Old Testament

As with the myths, the content of the Old Testament was not immutable. It grew as the people grew in the course of their history. The last book of the Old Testament was written less than sixty years before the coming of Christ. The content of the Old Testament is quite varied, just as life and history are. It contains edifying stories and licentious ones, some still more spicy than the stories in many myths of Indian tribes. Like the myths, these stories were continually retold and updated in the light of new events and in function of them. Like the myths, the Old Testament is full of the scars of this process, fruit of the constant effort of the people to absorb, neutralise and assimilate into their life the disintegrating force of events. The last

of these successive retellings of the story was made by the Christians in the light of the definitive event of Jesus Christ. In Jesus is revealed, in Paul's expression, God's *Yes* to all the hopes of the people, nurtured during 1800 years and kept alive in their midst by constant evocation and recitation of the stories of the Old Testament. In Christ, at last, the Old Testament found its fulfilment, the bud opened and revealed the flower. What was already present in the tiny seed of the beginnings, appears now at the end as the goal of all creation. Christ came not to abolish but to fulfil, that is, to bring 'former things' to their accomplishment. The same principle applies to the myths of the Indians.

9. The Evocation and Recitation of the Old Testament in the Life of the People

As for the myths, the evocation and recitation of the Old Testament followed the appropriate ceremonial rules. It took place at fixed seasons or in particular situations, connected with specific festivals, problems or events. According to the festival or situation, such and such a portion of the Old Testament was to be recited. This recitation could not be performed by just anybody; someone specific among the people exercised that function. For example, on their return from captivity the people were assembled by Ezra for the solemn reading of the Law. This was a way of helping people orient themselves in a new situation. When they held the renewal of the Covenant in the time of Joshua, there was a solemn reading of the terms of the contract at Shechem. During the Maccabees' revolt the people had replied to envoys from Rome that they needed no letters of support from the Emperor since they had their sacred books to derive their encouragement from. In the time of Jesus the people assembled every week in the synagogue to listen to readings from the law and the prophets, followed by a commentary. Paul said that the reading of the Old Testament taught patience, that is, the capacity to hold out and wait. Evoking examples from the sacred books and reciting their stories was the hidden potency that enabled the people to hold steadfast, and still today it is the stimulus of their renewals. Paul says further that Holy Scripture is inspired, that is, the power of God is communicated through it. When it is recited, the people, through faith, enter into direct contact with this power. For those who believe, for those who belong to the 'household', the stories they retell are not an affair of the past but a truth of the present, experienced by

those who recite them and those who listen. Paul clearly says that these stories were written for us, and, in another passage explains that they are 'types: that is, an abiding model of what is wont to occur. The reading of the Bible has a purifying function, for it puts the people in contact with their Origin, God. It used to be that after the priest had read the Gospel he had to say '*per Evangelica dicta deleantur nostra delicta*'. ('By the words of the Gospel may our sins be washed away.') In a word, the function of the Old Testament in the life of the people was very similar to the function the myths still play today in the life of the Indians.

(to be concluded)

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NEW ERA DAWNS FOR ABORIGINAL CATHOLICS

Continued from p.20:

The last evening of the work of the conference came to an end with the presentation and blessing of the new NATSICC. The results of the workshops by the religious were also reported back to the conference.

The Chairman of NATSICC, Br Graeme Mundine, did not close the conference but saw the weekend as the beginning of a new era both for Aboriginal Catholics and the Australian Catholic Church.

The Aboriginal Catholic Community of Victoria would like to thank the Sisters of St Joseph, Bishops Coffey, Daly, Mulkearns, O'Connell, Mgrs. Murray and Deakin and Mr and Mrs Bouchier for providing the Aboriginal Catholics of Victoria with the opportunity of expression, feeling and a stronger belonging in the Mother Church.

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NEW ERA DAWNS FOR ABORIGINAL CATHOLICS

VICKI WALKER

OVER TWENTY MEMBERS of the Aboriginal Catholic community of Victoria joined in unity with their brothers and sisters from all over Australia to build a stronger church recently at a national conference held in McLaren Vale, South Australia.

Each state was represented at the conference by people they elected to be their representatives on the newly formed National Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council (NATSICC). The delegates came to the conference prepared with their liturgy, art, artefacts and T-shirts as well as a draft constitution drafted by the National Working Party over the past two years.

The conference, as I see it, was the most historical event we Aboriginal Catholics have ever shared together. We all came to Adelaide with one vision and that was to form¹ a national Aboriginal Catholic body.

The conference was opened by South Australian Aboriginal elders who welcomed us all to their home. A smoking ceremony to bless the conference was led by Tiwi people. Archbishop Fawkner also welcomed us to his diocese and celebrated Mass with us. The liturgy was prepared by the Tiwi people of Bathurst Island; and our three Aboriginal deacons stood so proud. We were just as proud of them.

The celebrations of our traditions and Catholicism during the four day conference gave a strong spiritual bond among us all. Our Aboriginality and spirituality was reinforced and gave strength to everyone.

On the Friday morning the whole group — 150 Aborigines, Torres Strait Islanders, religious and non-Aboriginal people — met for the first session

¹ Vicki Walker is Director of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry, Melbourne. Her article is printed here by courtesy of *Kairos*, Fitzroy, Victoria.

of the conference. Each state spoke of their hopes and suggestions for the conference and the formation of a national body.

The religious and non-Aboriginal people were asked to separate and go into a group to workshop a series of questions put together by the national working party. This was necessary so we could work through our own destination and future of our children.

We broke into our states to workshop the draft constitution. Each state chose a spokesperson to bring their recommendations to the conference the next day. It was decided by all the states that the person must be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Catholic member. The number of delegates was not appropriate for some states.

As each state brought forward their concerns, Fr Frank Brennan explained the legalities of such a document.

It was very clear the concerns of states were not only important for today, but also for the next generation and generations after.

A motion was moved to approve in principle the draft constitution and the delegation of the state representatives to approve a final draft. This was voted in unanimously by the conference.

Once this motion was approved, words such as reconciliation, unity and community proved to be the basis of our lives. Everyone's spirits were alive because we had nearly reached the stage of our coming together.

After a hectic day-and-a-half, we decided to be fair to our brothers and sisters from WA and watch their team play in the AFL grand final for the first time.

The next day the new committee met together to begin the new journey for Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander Catholics. Eleanor Harding (proxy for Danny Kelly) and myself were elected at the State Aboriginal Catholic conference in June to represent Victoria on the NATSICC.

The committee elected five executive members to the council. The Aboriginal Catholic community of Victoria are proud the secretary of the executive committee is a Victorian.

Aboriginal units officers in the Catholic Education Offices from various states presented a session on what has been achieved in Aboriginal Catholic education and what still is desperately needed. This was the first time CEOs from all over Australia who worked in Aboriginal units shared policies, aims and experiences.

continued on p.18

A HUNDRED YEARS OF MISSIONARY FORTITUDE

A Letter to the Missionary-Sending-Mother Church from a Local Mission Church.

Apollinaris I Thall sj

GREETINGS AND PEACE to all of you from your fellow Christians in the Lord Jesus Christ: May the Spirit in whom we are all one continue to console and sustain you on your Way as you progress day to day in this our common journey to our God.

It has been a little over a hundred years now since the Faith first came to our shores. In the course of those years you have continued to be very kind to us. It was out of your love and joy that you first wanted to share with others like us the 'treasure' you had found in the Lord. You sent us men and women from your church to introduce the Faith to us. They came to us from over the horizon like strangers and looking as pale as the froth of the ocean waves. At first they spoke to us in a language that we could not understand. They built schools in which they taught us their language. Then they were able to tell us about the faith, the story of salvation, the ten commandments, the soul, the devil, sin and eternal life. They built with steel and concrete other big and sturdy structures (thanks to your material and financial support) which they called 'churches' wherein we gathered

W.C.

Fr Apollo Thall sj is from the Pacific island of Yap in Micronesia, about 600 km southwest of Guam. He is currently completing an STL at the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkely, USA, after which he will take up a leadership position at the regional seminary in Fiji. He here reflects on about 100 years of missionary activity on his island and graciously offered this paper to *Nelen Yubu*.

every Sunday to hear the *Word of God* and attend the *Sacrifice of the Mass*. The importance of this weekly gathering was such that failure on our part to be present would be tantamount to 'mortal sin' (a near-death blow to the soul). They also told us about 'forgiveness', that God would 'erase' our sins as it were, from his mind, a marvellous thing we thought because it seemed to us to be an impossible task for someone to keep track of all the sins that people commit throughout their lives. (But we were told that God knew everything, a great *mystery* and we left it at that.)

The missionaries also taught us to pray. We were taught many prayers for all kinds of human needs and occasions. The prayer that we liked most was the 'Our Father' because whenever we said it we felt a sense of 'family' with everyone else who called God as Father. We were also told about the *Sacraments* as the 'pathways of grace' into our lives. Grace, we were told, was necessary for eternal life; without grace we could not enter 'heaven' when we die. (We thought of grace as something like the 'papers' that one must have in order to enter another country.) We liked especially the sacrament of 'confession', considering our constant need for forgiveness and purification. Grace we were told was in measureless supply but the flow was managed by the 'universal church.' The 'flow chart' had the Pope on top followed by the cardinals, then the bishops followed by the priests and the sisters with the rest of the people including us at the bottom.

Those early missionaries did many great things like building churches and schools, taught us many things that we had not known, of which the above were only a few samples. For them and for all that they did for us, we will be forever indebted and grateful to you. We thank you and we salute you!

A hundred years it has been! We have grown a little bit in some ways. We have translated the Scriptures and the prayers into our native language. Some of us have even joined the missionaries in their work of spreading the faith among our people. We now feel that to some extent we have 'owned' the faith that the missionaries laboured mightily to bequeath to our grandparents and parents. Like every growing person we have come to that point where we begin to ask questions, to wonder aloud, even to say things that previously we felt we could not utter. (Even writing this letter to you makes us feel like we are over-stepping. At the same time, when we read the letters of Paul in the Bible we regret that nothing is available of the letters that those people then might have written to Paul. If such letters

were available we might understand better all those admonitions that Paul sent to the early churches). In what follows we will try to communicate to you some of our questions and hopes.

We are still very much interested in learning more about God, the one true God, the Creator and Father of Jesus Christ. The missionaries showed us pictures of this God – an ancient-looking man with a mantle of unruly grey hair and a flowing equally unkempt beard (something similar to those portraits of Karl Marx that we see today in newspapers and magazines). At the same time we are told that God is beyond gender, not male nor female (which is no problem for us because we have never seen pictures of God as female). When we read the Bible we cannot but imagine God very much like a man. The images of God that the Bible presents to us are mostly masculine. The men in our churches do not seem to have any qualms about these pictures and images of God but some of the women do, and this is beginning to cause feelings of discontent, disharmony and dissension among our people. We think that these male pictures and images of God have distorted the way we ought to think of our God; moreover they have given an unfair and undue advantage to the masculine ways and behaviour among our people. Consequently these one-sided images have been operative in justifying some practices that we feel are not in accord with our christian way of life. Why can't we employ more female images in our pictures and language about God?

We feel very much consoled and empowered by the knowledge that our God is 'all powerful'. The missionaries have told us that all those previous 'powers' that we once put our trust in, like the spirits of our ancestors and the spirits of the land and the sea, were evil powers opposed to the beneficent power of God. In fact, it was really the power of God that we in our ignorance have mistakenly attributed to the spirits of the dead and the earth. We used to believe that the spirits of our ancestors continue to live among us when we tell their stories and celebrate their memories. They are somehow connected with the land beneath us and the sea around us. We have always respected the land and the sea because we do not want to offend our ancestors when we destroy the land or pollute the ocean. We respect all those invisible powers connected with the spirits of our ancestors and our natural environment. Now we feel that in some strange way God has 'usurped' all the powers, and consequently our reverence for the spirits of the dead and our material environment has been eroded. Can we

more than the men those Christian values that Jesus and the missionaries proclaim. These christian women will have more credibility for us because what they will proclaim and preach we know they have truly and existentially lived. They will possess that kind of 'authority' that we know and respect! The perpetration of having only males in leadership roles in our local church does not only contradict our cultural notion of 'authority', but also is beginning to look more and more to us like some kind of a 'power game' which does not seem to us to be in conformity with our christian identity. Why can't we be more inclusive not only in language and images but also in our roles of ministerial leadership?

Christianity has continued to challenge us in other ways. We have learned from the missionaries that God has a personal concern for everyone as individuals and that each individual has an irreplaceable value in God's eyes. This knowledge of God's personal concern for each one individually makes each one of us feel very important and precious. At the same time we feel that this emphasis on 'individual' can lead to distortions with dire consequences for us. We have always respected and valued human life, the life of each and everyone, but we do not think and perceive of persons as individuals apart from a community. A person does not stand alone, but he or she always exists in community with others. The wellbeing of the community, everybody together, has always been primary for us. Individual rights and individual freedoms apart from the community are new concepts for us. Now more and more of our young people are talking of their individual rights and freedoms and are not showing much concern for the community. They appear to be losing the sense of community and solidarity with others. This phenomenon has greatly disturbed the elders among us. Our elders worry that the traditional spirit of self-sacrifice and co-operation for the sake of the greater community will give way to 'each one for himself or herself' and that will lead to all kinds of quarrels among us and destroy in the process our traditional sense of sharing and mutuality. Is there some way of making sure that each individual is appreciated and honoured because of his or her value in God's eyes without at the same time lessening the sense of community and shared values among us?

These are some of the questions that have emerged in our local church after a hundred years of Christianity. We have tried to formulate them in the best way we can. Their answers may not surface in our lifetime and we

are in no hurry. Maybe when the next batch of missionaries come they might have some answers for us, missionaries fortunately tend to have all the answers!

We hope that when new missionaries come they will not have all the answers. Sometimes they have all the answers but not to our questions. They have the answers to their own questions. Their questions may not be our questions!

We hope that the coming missionaries will spend some time with us before they start telling us about God, Church, sacraments, grace, eternal life, salvation, sin, soul and freedom. It will help if they take some time, maybe five years or so, to learn our language well, our values, our culture, our customs and our ways of looking at the world. We are now more and more realising that not all our 'pagan' practices came from the 'devil' as the early missionaries have told us; some may have even come from God after all. Maybe the early missionaries were too busy doing God's work like building churches and schools, teaching catechism and baptising, that they had no time left to understand much about us, our traditional beliefs and our island ways. They had a lot to give and very little to receive.

We live in a big ocean that divides and unites us at the same time. Below the oceans we are all anchored to the planet earth 'sailing' around the sun. Long before the missionaries came to us we travelled across the ocean in small outrigger canoes. A canoe takes a lot of time and skill to put together, but once it is put together and launched it can travel, even gracefully, a thousand miles over the wide open sea, being propelled by the force of the wind on its sail. You once sailed across this same ocean to bring us the *Good News*. Now we ask you once again to sail with us across the ocean of life, ours and our children's. A hundred years has been time enough to give us the makings of a pretty solid and seaworthy canoe: 'Let us put together the canoe and sail the ancient journey', (a traditional marriage proposal).

May the windy breath of the Spirit permit us voyage

unto Godself!

Harris Island

With all the juvenile crime problems besetting our country, I heard during my years at Pularumpi of one deterrent that had worked wonders in the NT. Several young lads decided to engage in petrol sniffing in the presbytery shed after dark. Finally caught, they were taken before the Magistrate who ordered that they be confined to Harris Island in the Apsley Strait between Melville and Bathurst Islands, for two weeks. They were not to leave the island for the duration, but would be supplied with a certain amount of sustenance and water every few days by an officer from one of the settlements, who would deliver the goods but not converse with them unless an emergency had occurred, such as accident or sickness.

The boys were not unduly troubled at this method of punishment since they could hunt, catch fish, collect oysters and generally have a sort of picnic holiday. But the euphoric prospect soon faded. Harris Island is a rain forest about half a kilometre square, there is very little wild life on it, and when the fishing wasn't good, the boys got fedup with eating oysters. They could see the lights of Garden Point, watch the boats going about their business, and dreamed of

their comfortable homes and hot dinners -- not to mention the freedom of their lucky mates who had **not** been sniffing petrol!

The obvious thing was to try to swim across to the home beach, but that was where the magistrate proved to be a very wise man: the strait is full of crocodiles, sea wasps, sharks, swordfish, and venomous sea-snakes. While it is said there are no crocs actually on Harris Is, nobody is quite certain of that, since crocs are good swimmers and the distance from shore is not great! The boys were forever looking for claw marks in the mud, and some of them even tried to sleep up in the trees for fear of being attacked at night. The officer kept strictly to his job of regularly delivering minimal food and water to be shared amongst the boys, carried no news to them and was quickly gone. That fortnight was the longest punishment those lads were ever likely to endure, and on their return home after the sentence, did they ever sniff petrol again? Never! A pity we haven't a few dozen islands in similar situations. I think many drug problems would become, quite dramatically, a thing of the past.

There was to have been an article in this issue from Fr Eugene Stockton, but unfortunately it could not be completed in time for publication. However, Fr Eugene promises it will be in the next issue — no. 50, a milestone for *Nelen Yubu*.

* * * * *

Glow Worm Tunnel

I never cease to be amazed at the precarious situations we Blue Mountaineers can get ourselves into. We can set out on a perfectly normal expedition only to find ourselves staring incredible perils in the face.

On a crisp bright morning we lit out for a favourite picnic haunt, deep in the Blue Mountains forest, with three priests in the party for protection. The road had been graded so we sped along its 35 kms, only stopping for a morning cuppa and to admire the hefty kangaroos beside the bush road.

Passing our local 'correction centre', we drove through the old train tunnel that used to carry coal trucks to the Wolgan Valley for shipment to Lithgow last century. Car lights were switched on, till we re-emerged to brilliant sunshine.

We reached our own special picnic spot, parked the car and

walked the last 1km, armed with torches, to go through the second tunnel. Once in complete darkness, the glowworms on the walls and ceiling showed their pale green lights, and the creek splashed us in devilment. Apparently only the female worms have this little glow in their tails, while the males lie doggo in case of danger. A couple of hours later we got back to the car and had a great spread for lunch, complete with fire and billy-boiling. By 3.0 pm we were replete and pleasantly tired, so decided to pack up and move off for home.

With us all sitting up in the car, Fr Peter suddenly went rather white. "Er, I must have left the lights on after the top tunnel, and now the battery is flat!" I roared laughing, knowing him to be a scaremonger, deadpan faced. But my laughter died -- he was in deadly earnest. Nothing for it but for us to try to push him back up a gentle rise, then send him hurtling down towards the cliff-edge to start the engine. No dice! Four times we performed this feat till we sank exhausted in the ferns. A few numb moments, then all stood gaping. It was 25 km back to the correction centre, our nearest point of contact. Nobody, we agreed, would come down the range at that time of day on a Monday to jump-

start us. Somebody was going to have to walk back to the prison farm!

Frs Mick and Martin gallantly volunteered, not with great enthusiasm but in desperation. I quickly packed some biscuits and a bottle of water into a knapsack and they set off, warning us not to expect them back much before 9.0 pm. 'Pray hard!' they called. It was sad to see them go...

I took myself off down the winding track to where I'd seen water seeping from an overhanging rock and collected some in a thermos. Then I trekked further along saying the rosary on my fingers that our brave rescuers wouldn't have heart attacks, or break limbs, or get lost. Twenty-five kilometres in mountainous country up a bush road is a long way to walk.

Between rosaries I thought of what my Aboriginal friends in the North would have done, and worked out that we'd need big mobs of wood for night fires; we'd have to ration food, and most of all, eke out the remaining drinking water after we'd been so lavish in dousing our picnic fire. My friends in the Territory wouldn't have been the slightest bit perturbed by the prospect of a night stranded in the bush -- but they

would not have welcomed the freezing conditions facing us now.

I loved having the bush all to myself, and walked to where I could sit above a brown tarn nestling in a beautiful gully and plan the next move, but I did feel uneasy and apprehensive. After a while in the distance a sound like a plane seemed to throb on the air, but I felt it was wishful thinking: no plane would be wandering about out there, much less spot our camp under the gums. So time drifted on.

Levering myself up, I stumbled back uphill, feeling it was time to put in an appearance at the car. Heaven knows how far I'd walked, but suddenly there was a sort of murmur on the breeze. Then a shout! Grabbing the thermos I flew up the track -- till there on the hillside was a man waving his arms and calling my name. Fr Mick! Closer in was the sound of an engine and excited voices. I arrived to find a fresh-faced young fellow, David, linking up his engine to ours and trying to charge our battery! So it hadn't been a plane I'd heard.

It seemed that after climbing the first steep part of the mountain, the two priests had marched along for quite a few miles till in the distance they thought they heard a

thudding sound on the hot summer air. A ranger? Surely no such luck at that time of day. Quickening their pace and rounding a bend, what did they see but a blue car approaching! Incredulous, they hailed it and, grinning, the driver listened to their story. He had come out for a run before collecting his girlfriend from her job in Lithgow. But whatever had sent him along our lonely road? He didn't know, nor did they – but really, I did!

Flashing a prayer of thanks, I pulled out our provisions, poured cups of hot tea for everyone while chatter filled the valley, all talking at once. The battery took ages to charge, but it did the right thing in the end, and both cars started off in convoy with David behind us in case we konked out again. What relief! No night-long vigil sitting up between two fires to keep warm, no braving the prison dogs for help (if the trudgers had ever reached so far, which was doubtful), no worry about broken bones or aching backs or exhaustion.

David would be very late meeting up with his girlfriend in Lithgow, but we made it worth his while as we gratefully waved him goodbye at the crossroads.

We laugh about it now. But Someone was looking after us with extraordinary care that day – and I very much doubt that any of us will ever forget to turn off our lights after driving through a disused tunnel.

* * * * *

A happy and blessed Christmas to all our readers from the *Nelen Yubu* staff. Half the staff is presently in PNG, but he insists that he is thinking of us and keeps us in his prayers. We wish Fr Martin Wilson a happy Christmas in PNG, safe journeying in his work, and we look forward to his return to base when it has been completed. Meanwhile I hope this issue of *Nelen Yubu* reaches all our friends without the drama of my last effort of 'going it alone!' I've had a few cranky passages this time too, but here is the finished effort, do or die.

Many blessings for 1992.

Secretary Keren.

BULLETIN BOARD

New Anglican Bishop for Geraldton

THE SYNOD of the Diocese of the North West, in Western Australia, has elected the Revd Anthony H. Nichols, Principal of St Andrew's Hall, Melbourne, to be its new Bishop following the retirement of the Right Reverend Ged Muston.

Assistant Bishop Bernie Buckland reported that the election proceeded with a real sense of God's leading and that the final choice from a strong field of twelve candidates met with the overwhelming support of the delegates.

Tony and Judith Nichols have served for over twenty years with the Church Missionary Society in Sabah, Indonesia, the Northern Territory and St Andrew's Hall. While Principal of Nungalinya College Tony headed a unique education network for the training of Aboriginal ministers and community leaders. It is anticipated that this experience plus that of working with migrants in Melbourne will be useful in their new ministry.

Judith was a keynote speaker on Cross Cultural Evangelism at the 1990 EFAC Conference at Monash University and is known for her racy and salty style. She has a background of language teaching (Latin, French, Indonesian and ESL) and serves on the Council of the Missionary Aviation Fellowship. Tony and Judith have four children ranging from 22 to 13: Elizabeth, Naomi, Daniel and John.

Tony was closely associated with Nelen Yubu through Nungalinya College, particularly working with Martin Wilson, who was a member of the Nungalinya (academic advisory board) for some ten years. It is with pride that we extend to Bishop Elect Tony and his family our warmest congratulations on his appointment.

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somehow continue to respect and honour our ancestors and our earth without feeling that we are trusting less in the power of God?

The missionaries have taught us and we have also read in the Bible that everyone is equal in the sight of God. As Christians we all have been given the same Spirit. Our gender differences, our ethnic or racial origins and our social status have no bearings on our place in the Church. We all equally belong. Our human differences do not determine our worth before God and by the same token should not in any way play any part in the degree of our belonging to the Church. We are very happy about this quality of fairness on the part of our God; we are also motivated by the ideals of service that give focus and direction to all our human and spiritual gifts – that all our human gifts are God-given for service toward the up-building of the community. At the same time we are distressed when we see that the leadership roles in our church are occupied by men only. Only men are allowed to preside in our eucharistic assemblies, only men have the privilege to lead and govern as bishops. We cannot help but feel that in our church the males have appropriated unto themselves all the powers and privileges of leadership. Why is it that this is so?

The missionaries tell us that this is the case because all these leadership roles in the church are really a continuation of the ministry of Jesus among us and as we all know Jesus was male and there is no way we can get around that fact. At first we agreed but our hearts have not been put to rest. This issue has continued to trouble us to the point that we now feel that the time has come to raise the question once again – why only men? We now feel that the maleness of Jesus is not constitutive of the content and meaning of the ministry of Jesus for us. As we read the stories and the teachings of Jesus in the Bible we cannot help but notice that the virtues that Jesus lived and now calls his disciples to live by – humble service, life giving, long suffering, tender mercy, forgiveness, concern for the weak and outcasts of society – are more obvious in the lives of our women than in our men. Our women have lived these virtues as far back as we know, even before we ever heard of Jesus.

In our local culture we look up to those among us who seem to embody in their personal and public lives those qualities and virtues that we traditionally and commonly value. These people have 'authority'. They are considered by us to be in touch with what gives depth, sense and meaning to our lives. The women in our local church seem to embody in their lives

FROM THE SECRETARY'S DESK . . .

GREAT NEWS from Tony Nichols, Bishop-elect for the Anglican Diocese of Geraldton, WA. In a recent letter to me he wrote: 'The Nichols are heading northwest...' which is rather a modest way of announcing his stupendous appointment. He seems to be very young to be a bishop, but I know he will carry out his ministry with courage and dignity. Tony also mentioned that he hoped *Nelen Yubu* would not expand: 'Re the suggested expansion of *NY*'s range of interests - I would regret such a change. Other journals canvass e.g. African views. The more specific, generally RC, homely, yet theologically strong, focus on the Aboriginal situation is its strength.' — Perhaps this is sound advice.

Every blessing in your new sphere, Tony, and best wishes from us all.

An interesting letter from Br Nev Feeney of St Laurence's Catholic College for Boys in Brisbane conducted by the Christian Brothers. In part I quote: 'While in California recently I met the writer of the attached paper [One Hundred Years of Missionary Fortitude], Fr Apollo Thall. His reflec-

tions on about 100 years of missionary activity on his island reminded me that one Territory mission has already celebrated its centenary and other centenaries will occur in the not too distant future. Maybe the paper will inspire some Territorians to write their reflections on the missionary effort there.' Thank you, Br Nev, for that timely suggestion. With some of our Australian centenaries coming up, we hope this gentle publication of Fr Thall's will spur our missionaries to submit their accounts of 'Our First 100 Years' for *Nelen Yubu*.

As we go to press, Fr John Fallon msc, of Bathurst Island fame, is about to pay us a visit at Leura for a while. He reports that he is feeling very well after his operation (and the scare he gave us in June!), his only problem being that he has to eat 'little and often'. However it appears this is not an over-burdening chore, so I am sure he will be very happy to enjoy his small meals, back in the Blue Mountains he loves so well.
