

TRACKS

NELEN YUBU NEWSHEET

Pilot Edition

INTRODUCTORY

SOME DEFINITIONS

Nelen Yubu is a missiological centre that the MSC Society is setting up at Daly River, NT. It means "good way" in the local Ngan'gikurunggur language. By 'missiology' is meant "theory of mission". Nelen Yubu's aim is to help find out the good way for us to walk as followers of Christ and children of the Church, as members of our respective cultures and as citizens of the Australian nation. It is a resource centre: one of the main resources is anthropology as applied to the mission situation. -- besides other such purely material resources like books, periodicals, duplicators and the like. Finally, by 'mission' is meant the service of one local church (or localised part of the Church, to use a different terminology) to another that could be a potential future church, a young church or even a developed one that still has the need of some service or other from outside itself.

BRIEF HISTORY

The idea of a mission resource centre in NT has been going around for some time. I can easily track it back to 1975 without bothering to look any further. The idea of making use of the resources of anthropology has been with us much longer. One big difficulty has been to find someone free to take on the job of manning such a centre and with some background in anthropology.

At the time of the MSC conference at Daly River in 1975 I got the idea of setting up some sort of resource centre in NT. (I hope my MSC confreres, who know me only too well, will pardon me if I give a few biographical details that others would not know but which are relevant to the background of Nelen Yubu...) Apart from normal priestly training, my professional field was basically philosophy (Ph.D. from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome), to which I added an anthropological direction while and after lecturing in philosophy at a seminary in PNG (MA, University of Papua New Guinea, thesis on social change amongst the Doura people in the Vanapa valley north of Port Moresby).

Partly for the purpose of getting some orientation to the Aboriginal scene I did a field study of the Peppiminati homeland movement during the first half of 1976. Unfortunately I have yet to write up my account. (My present plan is to put off other big engagements from now until I get the account written up, to the extent that I'm allowed to do so by circumstances, which tend to be unkind.)

It has not proved easy to get the Nelen Yubu missiological centre going. However, we finally got approval from the various authorities concerned. I applied to Australian Catholic Relief for an establishment grant of \$13,000: I am grateful that they saw their way clear to granting my request. This has

enabled me to buy a serviceable vehicle to get around in (a diesel Landcruiser), a good typewriter (for getting out productions such as this), some office equipment, some books and periodical subscriptions (missiology and anthropology: I'll supply a list in a later issue) -- and soon a dry-process copier to run off copies of articles and things for people. I have the money also for a duplicator, but shall hold off on that as the Training Centre nearby has one that probably works and, at any rate, I plan to produce most stuff on the plain paper copier at Catholic Missions Services and Supply Centre in Darwin (old "Headquarters") -- like this newsheet.

The Darwin diocese has offered me accommodation and board. Daly River Mission has accepted the presence of Nelen Yubu and has set me up in the single male quarters known as "Wembem Kungi" or the "Education house", about 200 yards upstream from the Training Centre. The situation is pleasant and adequate for the moment, but what happens when Nelen Yubu expands by the addition of staff, I don't know.

So far the Nelen Yubu staff comprises just myself. Though I am formally stationed here (since early this year), the plan is that I spend the first term of each year teaching anthropology at the Yarra Theological Union near Melbourne. DAA has reacted favourably so far to the idea of supplying the salary of an Aboriginal typist-secretary, but we are still at the idea stage. Maybe also I have to think about an advisory committee with strong Aboriginal representation. However, it's early days yet.

Actually, Nelen Yubu got off to a poor start. After teaching the first term 1978 at YTU I arrived here in the middle of May, giving some papers at the FMM seminar at Alice Springs on the way up. I left for south in June for medical reasons that turned out, fortunately, to be nothing in comparison with what had looked like being the case. I got back towards the middle of July, but then had almost another month south taking in some conferences (*vid. infra*). So far I have only had time for three specifically Nelen Yubu enterprises, viz. working on two productions (one being this newsheet) and an attempt to start some organisation of our work in NT for an Aboriginal liturgy.

PRODUCTIONS

. Nelen Yubu plans three sort of publications that can be spaced out along a continuum of formality. At the least formal, a newsheet, *Tracks*, that is, tracks that might run along, near, across the "good way". At the other end, a series of missiological monographs, the Nelen Yubu Missiological Series. In the middle, a periodical magazine.

The first issue of the missiological series is now with the printers. It comprises four papers I gave in May at the FMM seminar at Alice Springs around the theme of investigation into the concept of "Aboriginal theology". The second issue will be Kevin Barr MSC's long essay *Not To Destroy But To Fulfil*, an investigation into indigenisation which he wrote as a result of his study at the East African Pastoral Institute and his work in Africa. The Nelen Yubu Missiological Series will be published by Chevalier Press with financial support from the MSC provincialate.

I entertain hopes of starting up a missiological periodical, something like *Catalyst* for the Aboriginal apostolate -- something that would resurrect and continue the function of the quickly defunct *Forum NT*. However, at the moment I don't see the way how. My idea is that maybe this newsheet will grow into it as people start contributing papers and longish statements.

Therefore, I am looking for contributions from any of you working in the Aboriginal apostolate: news and views. An article you may have written. A good university essay. A few thoughts you may have jotted down and worth sharing. An assessment, review of a book you have read recently and would like to recommend to others, or to warn them against! Some thoughts on religious instruction, bilingual education (*cf. later*), homeland movements... This pilot edition of the newsheet is full of my stuff just to get things started off. I hope that in the future I'm hardly more than the editor. The next edition will be when there is enough matter at hand.

I imagine the area of public interest in each of these productions will be directly proportional to formality. Interest in the newsheet will probably be confined to NT and religious houses of involved congregations; maybe the Kimberlies too, being our twin "missionary" diocese. A periodical should find a wider reading public within Australia, while a missiological series could, in theory, be of interest also to overseas readers.

The bugbear in all these nice ventures is finance. Postage especially and paper are expensive. If people or institutions, who or which would like to receive copies of *Tracks*, would please write and let me know and include something to cover the cost of paper and postage to them, I should be able to ensure some continuity and to tailor production to demand. Maybe I'll be able to score a grant from somewhere or other to subsidise the venture, but I'll need more support than just your good wishes until the fairy godmother arrives.

OTHER ENTERPRISES

As I wrote earlier, I'd like to avoid taking on any big ventures for a bit. But Nelen Yubu will be hoping soon enough to organise some *workshops* on specific themes that will have been researched by local staff; also some sort of *orientation* or *in-service courses* of a missiological and anthropological character, especially for new personnel. Suggestions are welcome.

I see Nelen Yubu as orientated principally towards *staff* (white or black, though the plain fact is that so far most of our mission staff are white). The Daly River Leadership Training Centre is geared more directly towards consciousness raising amongst the Aboriginal people themselves. The two institutions are side by side but separate in space, and complementary in function.

Readers outside the Territory may not know what the Daly River Leadership Training Centre is. I shall try to get a contribution from its staff (Fr John Leary MSC, Sr Mary McGowan FDNsc) for next issue. Also we plan to publish the reports on the two or three courses that have been held so far. Another course, with a Port Keats group this time, starts in a few days time.

NEWS

RECENT NELEN YUBU EVENTS

From early May till the middle of July a BA Honours student in anthropology at the ANU, Sue Crawford, was doing some fieldwork in the NT, mainly on Bathurst Island. Her theme was Catholic Mission policy in the NT. After some negotiations she specified it down to Bathurst Island. Her project was granted by NARU (North Australia Research Unit based at Nightcliff in the Archives building: it is the northern research arm of the ANU). She is now occupied back at Canberra in writing up her work; I think some 15,000 words are expected.

Ann McGrath, from La Trobe university, Melbourne, spent a few days at Daly River in July researching the question of Aboriginal employment between the Wars.

: Nelen Yubu sees liaison work with university people as one of its functions.

VIEWS

CONFERENCES

August vacation is the time for academic conferences. I went south for one conference at which I delivered a paper. It was the AASR conference (Australian Association for the Study of Religions) and took place at La Trobe university, Melbourne, 17-20 August. It coupled up with and shared the main speakers of a joint conference at the same place of two theological societies, ANZATS (ANZ Association of Theological Schools) and ANZSTS (ANZ Society for Theological Studies). These latter are specifically Christian: their core of membership would be seminary staff members of Protestant and Catholic seminaries. The AASR caters more particularly for staff members of religious studies departments in universities and CAEs. The ANZATS-ANZSTS conference ran 14-17 August.

I found that by staying south a bit longer than I had planned I could take in the annual conference of the Australian Anthropological Society at Sydney university 28-31 August.

Obviously I cannot write much here about the various conferences, papers etc.. But briefly:-

1) The ANZATS-ANZSTS conference had the interesting central theme of "Doing It Here: Theology in the Australian Context". We white Australians share a problem with the Aborigines even though we are largely unconscious of it. Our theology has mainly been formulated within and in relation to the European and American contexts, which are different in important respects from the Australian one. (One relevant example: What place have Aboriginal studies had over the years in our seminaries, our schools?) Even themes that are common are expressed here with an Australian accent peculiarly our own... The main overseas (!) speakers were Dr John Mbiti (African theologian: *Concepts of God in Africa; The Prayers of African Religion*), Dr James Cone (leading negro exponent of "Black theology": *God of the Oppressed* etc.) and Dr Ben Reist

(white American theologian working at the white-Indian interface: *Theology in Black, White and Red* or a title close to this).

- 2) The AASR conference: Beside the above speakers it also had Professor Thomas Luckmann, a leading scholar and writer in sociology of religion.

To my mind, this conference was split up into too many sections (each religious tradition has a right to one, then the various disciplines: sociology of religion, psychology of religion, anthropology of religion etc.) with no unity of theme either among them or within them and too little time for sectional papers, with all sections operating at the same time. In the section I was interested in it almost came down to something like: "You read your paper to me and then I'll read mine to you..."

Peter Willis, who was at the conference, shocked the general assembly into silence by suggesting that, as they are a group of people principally interested in religion, they should have a religious service as a part of their conference. The academics were relieved of their embarrassment by an Indian scholar who offered to lead a prayer meeting at next year's conference.

- 3) The *Australian Anthropological Society conference*, on the contrary, had no main speakers: all the time was spent in sections which were organised around central topics. There was much that was interesting, but a theme that particularly caught my attention was a criticism of bilingual education when viewed within the total social context.

It was maintained that, whatever the theory and good intentions, the factual result of bilingual education in Canada, the States, Mexico and Russia has been the rapid suppression of the local minority languages and the eventual dominance of the "national" language. Moreover, it was maintained by an anthropologist from Darwin Community College that some NT educationalists are promoting bilingual education in NT schools precisely to achieve the more efficient transmission of English and the eventual disappearance of the local Aboriginal languages rather than their maintenance -- which many of us suppose (naively, they would say) to be the main intent.

It is being maintained that the best way to kill a local language is to put it into the school that is the instructional agent of the dominant culture. In which case, the best way to keep a minority language alive is to do with it what the Santa Teresa parents had suggested regarding Aranda: "You teach our children English in the school: we'll teach them Aranda back at home." Another question is, What happens to the other languages in a multi-lingual area like Port Keats when only one language is chosen for literate treatment?

This is a new thought to me personally. Is it something those of you teaching in NT schools are aware of and take for granted, or have heard said and disagree with? Do you know of the work of Kyolseth, or of B. Spolsky (*Language Education of Minority Groups*)? If so, have you some comment you could make for the benefit of the rest of us? Write it down and send it along for the next newsheet...

6.

CONCLUSION

Again I apologise that this pilot issue of *Tracks* has been entirely taken up with Nelen Yubu affairs. All the same, some of these things had to be said some time. It's only a *pilot* edition: I don't even call it "No.1". It's to get you started. And if you think the next, *real* issue should not all be taken up with Nelen Yubu stuff, the solution is in your hands.

Mamak!

Martin J. Wilson MSC

Director, Nelen Yubu

14 September 1978

P.S.

Some potential contributors may like to send their contributions along already typed out and so ready for photocopying without re-typing here at Nelen Yubu. If so, please note the size of paper we are using: **A4**.

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