



'SPIRIT OF PLACE' -

A GIFT and UNDERSTANDING from OUR FIRST NATION PEOPLES!

A few months ago Jamberoo Lay Carmelites were fortunate to have **Sarah Bachelard** facilitate a Day of Reflection at Jamberoo. Sarah is the founder and leader of Benedictus Contemplative Church, an ecumenical worshipping community in Canberra, and has kindly given permission to share her thoughts with our readers.

"Last year in July, I participated in a deeply significant gathering in central Australia with a theme: **'Deep Listening to the Spirit of Place'**. The conference was held near Alice Springs, on the edge the West MacDonnell Ranges.

We were privileged to have two Aboriginal elders sharing something of their relationship to country. Many of us at this time in our spiritual journey and evolution in this land are learning how radically dependent we are on the well-being of the whole; an awakening to the possibility of fuller communion, fuller being and enlarged consciousness.

I think this call we're experiencing is not just brought about by the prospect of ecological catastrophe. Rather that here in Australia the faithful and persistent witness of indigenous people to the sacredness of land is part of what is bringing about this stirring, an awakened sense of the profound gift that indigenous teachers and elders have to share with us –the possibility of learning through them to belong to ourselves, to this land and so to each other in a new way.

Like many Australians, I have long heard of and sought to respect Aboriginal Australians' testimony that the land is 'sacred' to them. But despite my desire to respect and honour this as *their* reality, I haven't known how this Aboriginal way of seeing and being in the world connects with my Western Christian sense of what it means to be fully human, to grow spiritually or to participate in the reconciliation of all things. I still don't really know. But last year, I got a glimpse of a gift being offered – a sense that the Spirit is awakening something new among us and in our land, and to which I must pay attention.



Let me say something about three ways in which my sense of things is being opened up and turned to wonder.

The first of these is to do with our picture of human being.

As **Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr** from Daly River, points out, what she calls ***dadirri***, is something like what 'we' call 'contemplation', and in the Christian contemplative tradition, we often use the metaphor of 'ground' to talk about what happens in our prayer, In contemplative prayer. It's said, we come to our own 'ground', to what is deepest in ourselves, and here we meet God as the ultimate ground of our being. Sometimes in defeat, sometimes as a depth dimension of prayer, it's as if I know what it means to 'sink' into the ground of my being.

Aboriginal people speak of the ground as constitutive of themselves too. But 'ground' here is not so much a

metaphor for the depth dimension of themselves or God, but the literal ground of the earth. **MK Turner, an Arrernte woman** from the Alice Springs area, has said: **'The roots of the country and its people are twined together. We are part of the Land. The Land is us, and we are the Land'.**

And she spoke of experiencing the veins in her country as running through her, as the veins in her arm. Immediately, I felt how much on the skin of this land I live. I dwell, together with the vast majority of us, on the edge of our continent – barely present to the vast interior. And, even when I'm paying attention to the world around me, I'm aware only of what's on the surface – I am not present to the depth dimension, the flesh of the earth. What must it be like to have a sense of the veins in your arms and the veins in country as continuous? What must it be like to belong to this land in that way? And what does such belonging make possible – what spiritual awareness does it bring?



A second way in which my sense of things is being opened up is to do with time and with how we and our ways of life are formed by the time things take. As a good contemplative and a reader of Scripture, I know all about the significance of waiting, of letting things unfold and ripen. I like to think of myself as spiritually patient. But it turns out, everything's relative! **Sven Lindqvist, in Terra Nullius**, wrote this: *'The emptiness of the interior of Australia can be overwhelming to those used to a livelier field of vision ... The view in an urban street changes from one moment to the next. Its time is measured in fractions of a second. A stream of impressions bombards our consciousness. In the desert, there is little to see apart from geological formations that have been shaped over millions of years and take centuries to change. The heart of the desert beats at a different pace. Geology can't be rushed'.* When I read this, it suddenly seems pretty clear that immersion in geological time must profoundly affect the way of being of those whose awareness and consciousness are formed by *this* land.

As Miriam-Rose has written:



Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons. We watch the moon in each of its phases. We wait for the rain to fill our rivers and water the thirsty earth...We watch the bush foods and wait for them to ripen before we gather them. We wait for our young people as they grow, stage by stage, through their initiation ceremonies. When a relation dies, we wait a long time with the sorrow. We own our grief and allow it to heal slowly. We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and our meetings.

The right people must be present. ... We don't mind waiting, because we want things to be done with care. ... We don't like to hurry. There is nothing more important than what we are attending to. There is nothing more urgent that we must hurry away for.

The third area being opened up for me is to do with the depth dimension of place, the place we are now, the places we all live and journey through. In Aboriginal culture, places are storied. MK Turner insists that what are called 'Dreamtime' stories are not just 'once upon a time' kinds of stories; She prefers the term 'Traditional Country Stories', because she says, they are about now – they are maps of the land, and the telling of these stories recreates and renews the land, and the relationship of people to their country.

I've wanted to share what is for me an awakening sense of the depth dimension of this country, our place, and of the possibility of a new way of being in and of it. Not just settlers, not just strangers and aliens in this

land. I don't mean that we could ever come to inhabit and experience this land as Australia's indigenous peoples do – or that we can pretend to adopt a consciousness that isn't ours. 40, 000 years of formation in country is a lot of ground to make up. Yet we can be open to learn – we can seek to understand. Miriam Rose has said:

My people are used to the struggle, and the long waiting. We still wait for the white people to understand us better. We ourselves had to spend many years learning about the white man's ways. ... We have learned to speak the white man's language. We have listened to what he had to say. This learning and listening should go both ways. We would like people in Australia to take time to listen to us. We are hoping people will come closer. We keep on longing for the things that we have always hoped for - respect and understanding...Our culture is different. We are asking our fellow Australians to take time to know us; to be still and to listen to us...

My sense is that we are at the beginning of something ... and we don't know where it will end, or how it will change all of us. But I believe it's no coincidence that our engagement with this journey of listening and learning is increasing in intensity at a time when humankind is in such desperate need of recovering our connection to creation and to each other. I came away from central Australia last year feeling that, if



indigenous peoples and cultures have been for so long 'stones that [we] builders rejected', we are perhaps now discovering they will be, after all, 'cornerstones' of the renewal of our life on earth."

Sarah Bachelard

NAIDOC WEEK - NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WEEK

The importance, resilience and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages will be the focus of national celebrations marking **NAIDOC Week 2017**. ...The theme

Our Languages Matter - aims to emphasise and celebrate the unique and essential role that Indigenous languages play in cultural identity, linking people to their land and water and in the transmission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, spirituality and rites, through story and song. www.naidoc.org.au > [About NAIDOC Week](#)



FOR YOUR CALENDAR - JULY

- 2nd July - NAIDOC Sunday begins NAIDOC Week
- 10th July- 1985 Sinking of Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior* in Auckland
- 12th July - 1971 Aboriginal Flag first flown in Adelaide
- 14th July - 1995: Proclamation of Aboriginal Flag and Torres Strait Islander Flag as official flags of Australia
- 18th July - 1918: Birth of Nelson Mandela - Nelson Mandela International Day
- 20th July - First moon landing accompanied by US astronauts
- 26th July - 1833: Approval of Emancipation Bill, abolishing slavery throughout the British Empire
- 30th July - World Day Against Trafficking in Persons
- 31st July - National Tree Day - started in 1996, now combined with Schools Tree Day, more than three million people have planted 23 million seedlings!



**CARMEL ENGAGES
WITH LAUDATO SI':**

***Hearing both the cry of the Poor
and of the Earth (cf. LS 49)***

**CARMELITE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ON JPIC ... FATIMA, Portugal 22-29 JULY 2017**

JPIC Survey Results

Around the world Carmelites and others associated with the work of JPIC did a simple survey last year about the work of the Commission. The recently published results, though unsurprising, are hopeful and give encouragement to those working in the social justice and environmental ministries. The survey found that while there was a high level of participation there is a clear desire to learn and do more, specifically in the areas of ongoing formation, networking and advocacy.

A common theme was '*prophetic stance*' expressed most notably through *prayer, community and service*, the three pillars of the Carmelite charism.

Predictably those who responded to the survey gave as their sources of motivation for involvement; sacred scripture, Carmelite spirituality, the social teachings of the church and a deep concern for building a better world where human injustice is overcome and creation is respected.

Although most of the responses related to conceptual beliefs and opinions there were examples given of practical common projects relating to recycling, simplicity of life and persuasive advocacy. Many Carmelite communities together with the individual results position the preservation and sustainability of the earth to be fundamental to their ministries in education, communication and advocacy.

Based on an analysis of this survey, the JPIC Commission will develop a working document for the JPIC Congress in Fatima, Portugal in July, 2017.

THANK YOU to ALL in Australia who completed this survey.

Our Carmelite Province of Australia & Timor-Leste will be represented at this Congress by Gabrielle Fogarty, of the JPIC Commission.

ULURU STATEMENT FROM THE HEART

We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial', and according to science more than 60,000 years ago.

*This sovereignty is a **spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature', and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born there from, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.** It has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.*

[Read the Uluru Statement in full](#)

HAVE YOU SIGNED the TIMOR SEA JUSTICE petition? Download a copy of the handwritten petition closing at the end of July from the [Carmelite Webpage](#)

PRAYERFUL REFLECTION

- May we appreciate and value the culture and beliefs of the First Peoples of this land, and condemn any threats to their true place on this land and to their human rights, let us pray: **Lord hear us.**
- May we, as a nation, increasingly value the social, spiritual and cultural contributions of all people who have come to this land and of the first inhabitants of this land, let us pray: **Lord hear us.**
- May the leaders of nations give up the senseless race for arms and set aside their hunger for power in order to seek genuine and lasting peace, especially in Syria, Iran, Palestine, Iraq, Yemen and Afghanistan, let us pray: **Lord hear us**
- In a world of injustice and inequity, may we answer the daily call to work for justice; provide food to the hungry, give consolation to the prisoner, make a space for the voices of those rarely heard, let us pray: **Lord hear us.**