

the conversations with my clients and our making, and then how it is received by their community. There is a sense of breathing, in and out, as the rhythm of the ceremony grows. The pulse of giving and receiving, as we do with trees, grass and flowers in the breath of life.

### **Secular liturgy: the work of the people**

When I had made and conducted a number of weddings, I thought that the emergent form could be called secular liturgy. *Secular* comes from the Latin *saecularis* meaning “of a generation, belonging to an age. A ‘*secular priest*’ was still a religious figure, simply one who participated in the ordinary world” Jack David Eller states.<sup>24</sup> Eller, a cultural anthropologist, says secularity is best understood, not as anti-religious, but as religiously neutral, since many activities in religious bodies are secular themselves and most versions of secularity do not lead to irreligiosity. He sees the sacred/secular dichotomy as, like most dichotomies, false. I don’t go along with the notion of religious neutrality, which I find rather bloodless. However I also find the dichotomy false. *Liturgy* comes from Greek: the customary public worship performed as a ‘*work of the people*’ by a specific religious group, according to its particular beliefs, customs and traditions. Technically, liturgy is a subset of ritual when it is enacted in order to assist a divine act. You see how intertwined the religious and secular are.

Any boundary between religious and secular is increasingly, from my experience, permeable. For example I began working with the adult children of a family on their father’s interstate funeral ceremony. Their first, united, statement was that this was *not* to be a religious ceremony. This is not unusual. I nodded acceptance and wondered what would ensue. After several hours of conversation I deemed I had enough to develop the first draft and asked where the ceremony would be held. In the Uniting Church. I suggested we all visit and consider how we would like to arrange things. I was not familiar with the community and

was keen to be as attentive to the local culture as I could. At the church the deacon whom they all knew greeted us, a very charming, helpful woman who was eager to be of service. As we busied ourselves with the choreography a voice sang out from the back of the church, “Do you want the organ or the piano for the hymns?” Without missing a beat, someone yelled back, “The organ.” I discovered that their mother attended this church every Sunday. It transpired the church congregation was hoping for a minister to be appointed soon and in the meantime the deacon was caretaking in a very full sense of taking care. Further, I discovered she usually conducted the funerals. My respect for her graciousness increased. I suggested to the family we ask the deacon if she would like to offer a prayer. She chose one on Eucalypts (the father loved them and planted them regularly), which was very beautiful and very much in tune with the family. I led the service from the pulpit, which seemed to me to be very bold, but was proposed by the deacon when I asked her advice. We sang “*All Things Bright and Beautiful*” and “*Morning Has Broken*”.

In Paul Cox’s film *Molokai: the story of Father Damien*, we journey with Damien as he becomes one with the people of the Hawaiian leper colony in Molokai. Clayton Strawn, thief and rogue and a virulent lapsed Catholic, comes to Father Damien, blind, helpless and close to death, asking to make his confession and to be married to his partner of two years. They are husband and wife in their hearts, he says. They were both married before and then divorced, and one of their former spouses may still be living, which would make it technically impossible for them to marry in the Catholic Church. Father Damien, who has lived the life of a devoted and faithful priest, refuses him reluctantly, adding, “*It’s a sacrament.*” “*Yes, it is a sacrament!*” yells Strawn, as he blindly stomps out on what is left of his feet. Of course, the sacrament, the sacred marriage ceremony, *is* what they want. Father Damien is very affected by his response, goes against church law and marries them with full ceremony in the church. Both he and Strawn, he tells his deacon, will be dead by the time his superiors can