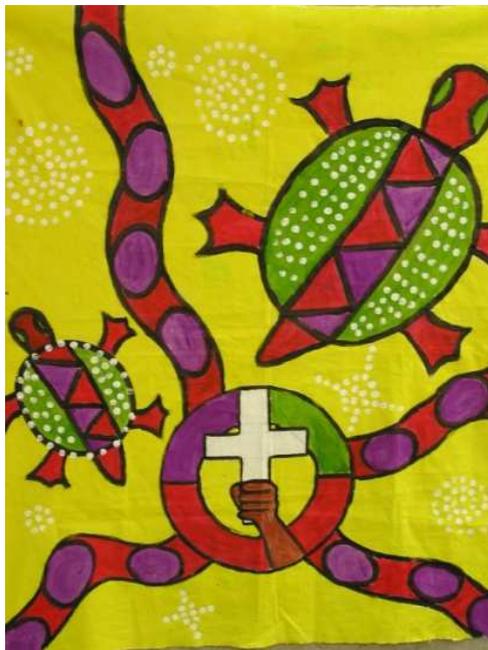


National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC)

Christ and Culture:

Indigenous Theology and Spirituality Conference



Artwork by Casino Public School

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

9th - 12th July 2007

Noosaville Qld.



National Council of
Churches in Australia
NATSIEC



Graeme Mundine – Foreward

In July 2007, a wondrous event took place, the inaugural Christ and Culture conference. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all over Australia, gathered to explore what it means to be a Christian and Indigenous.



The conference was an initiative that we had longed to do for some time and we were excited that it was such an outstanding success. We had ninety participants, the majority of whom were Indigenous, from all around the country and who were representative of many different denominations. We also had participation by other Indigenous peoples; Maoris, a Sami and a Dalit. We were particularly pleased that we had several young people who had come accompanying their parents, but who also participated fully in the conference program.

Participants found the conference to be a particularly enriching and invigorating few days. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive with participants feeling empowered, challenged, inspired to action and who returned to their communities with many new ideas taking shape.

There were fifteen workshops centred on the conference themes which were:

- Our Life in Ministry - what is it to be Indigenous and Church? What does inculturation and the Churches mean for us in our faith journey? How do we minister to fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in specific locations?
- Search for Meaning - Indigenous culture and how it relates to the bible. Who is this person Jesus through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eyes?
- Justice and the Gospel - Jesus came to bring good news to the poor and set the captives free; in our Australian context how does the gospel speak to us of Justice?
- Covenanting - God calls us to be one, what does this mean for the Churches today in Australia and how can we make this commitment to one another.

Key themes and outcomes of the conference were:

Relationship and family was a very strong theme; this came through in many of the workshops, the importance of family and of guiding the youth. Many of the families presented together and it was felt that it was a particular strength of the conference to have the different generations participating together. Delegates also felt that there was a greater need to support the women, encourage the men to participate more, and to provide opportunities to the youth to participate and develop more fully.

The use of story was a powerful component of many workshops and there was much discussion about the need to use stories about the things around us, to help us explain God and to let our stories be our theology. Several presenters shared their own stories, which showed their struggles, courage and initiative to overcome various hardships and to explain how they explored and experienced their relationship to God and their churches.

Throughout the conference we were reminded that we shouldn't get "hung up" on a White interpretation of Christ; that we need to trust in our own interpretations as we know that God was here before colonization. We need to be freer with our celebrations.

Culture and language was also affirmed to be vitally important, particularly in the area of weaving gospel and culture together. It was particularly uplifting to hear from those who minister in their own language and to know that they have been able to develop Indigenous language resources to support their ministry.

Participants also expressed some challenges which they thought the 'mainstream' Churches need to engage with:

- That mainstream church needs to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island life which can be used to show Jesus;
- That Christian and Aboriginal 'religion' can mix, but there still needs to be a rethink about the old mission style of ministering;
- That Indigenous peoples are not listened to and they need to be more actively encouraged and supported to take a stronger lead within their churches;
- That it would have been good to have had more Heads of Churches attending and they should be encouraged to attend future conferences;
- That Churches should work towards developing schools programs to provide Indigenous youth with free schooling in the Church education systems;
- That there is a need to convene a women's cultural camp and a request from delegates to develop a collection of Aboriginal women's stories linking to scripture and social change;
- That overall better training and formation is required.

The youth also had the opportunity to present at the conference and as part of their presentation they put forward a list of recommendations to the conference:

- All the youth agreed that they needed more travelling opportunities. To have youth camps where the youth from all over, and from different denominations, can meet and learn more about Christ and to share in our stories.
- The youth would like to ask Churches to make Church more user friendly and to accommodate people of all ages.
- The youth also asked that the ministers interact with everyone, so that they get a better understanding of the word of the Lord.

This conference was a huge success with all participants expressing a desire to attend another and to make it a regular event. NATSIEC will now look at all the recommendations and, where possible, facilitate their implementation. Planning is underway for the next conference in January 2009, which will build on the successes of this one and develop it further. We thank all those who attended and who made the event such an inspiring occasion for us all. We look forward to seeing you all at the next one!

Graeme Mundine
Executive Secretary
NATSIEC



Participants of the inaugural Christ and Culture Conference: Indigenous Theology and Spirituality

Contents

Graeme Mundine – Foreward	2
Keynote Addresses.....	6
Mrs Hera Clarke - A Place of Comfort and Compassion	6
Bishop Saibo Mabo - We are Eagles, Not Chooks	10
Summary of Workshops Without Papers	12
Murri Ministry - Our Life in Ministry	12
The Lutheran Churches of the Western Desert.....	13
Bill Symons- Ministry in the Block.....	13
Betty Pike – Women, Earth, Culture and Justice.....	15
Carmel Posa - Reconciliation – The Focus of a Catholic University	15
Kevin Torrens and Marj Hicklin – The Jubal Story	15
Hera Clarke and family – Te Kawa O Te Marae - Indigenous models of practice .	16
Youth Workshop.....	16
Hohaia Matthews - TJINATJUNANYI: <i>Providing a Pathway to Freedom.</i>	17
Ernie Trevaskis - Christian Faith Through Aboriginal Eyes.....	25
Grant Finlay - Mountains	28
Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (ACM) - Parramatta Diocese	39
Evelyn Parkin - Living a Dual Life/Faith with Jesus the Christ	46
Tracey Spencer - A Theology of Decolonisation for Australia: the Lives of Jim Page and Rebecca Forbes in the Adnyamathanha Community as Gospel for Decolonising Australia	53
Martin Wilson - At the Interface between Aboriginal and Christian Religions..	78
John Henderson – Speech - Launch of Ker Ker.....	82

Disclaimer: The opinions and viewpoints expressed in these conference proceedings do not necessarily represent the opinions, viewpoints or policy of the National Council of Churches in Australia or the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission.

Keynote Addresses

Mrs Hera Clarke - A Place of Comfort and Compassion

Hera Clarke's background and qualifications are in teaching and social work. She is currently completing a Masters Degree in Narrative Therapy at the University of Waikato N.Z



Hera Clarke is employed by the Anglican Church under the Tikanga Maori Member of their Constitution as the Director of Social Services. Her agency is called Te Whare Ruruhau O Meri, and she is accountable to a Board of Trustees who are Maori.

Currently, Hera Clarke is involved in a number of church activities within the Anglican Church Networks and the Ecumenical community of indigenous members. Te Runanga Whakawhanaunga I nga Hahi is the Maori Ecumenical Body that facilitates monthly meetings. As a member of this body Hera works alongside both hospital and prison Chaplains.

Mrs Clarke has also undertaken research on domestic violence for Indigenous peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand, which identifies the impact on women and children within the Community of South Auckland, N.Z.

Hera Clarke and her husband Dalray have four children. Both Dalray and Hera are qualified social workers and are actively involved in both church activities and politics. Their children also have an involvement in youth development arms of both their church and the agency Hera is employed by.

Hera Clarke identifies her pet projects as:

- 1- The advancement of Maori Language
- 2- Recognising and applying Maori Model of Practice
- 3- The Wellbeing of Whanau, Hapu and Iwi
- 4- Ecumenical relationships within Aotearoa New Zealand.

Hera Clarke also sits on the World Council of Churches Central Committee.

The title of my presentation today is based on a collection of ideas, experiences, history and future aspirations.

I want to firstly begin by examining the notion of 'Comfort' from the perspective of this indigenous person from Aotearoa, New Zealand. Historically, Maori or Tangata Whenua, like so many indigenous peoples throughout the world, have and continue to suffer the prejudices and racism that remains fit and well even in this new millennium.

As Tangata Whenua we have struggled over the years to maintain our sense of indigeneity as people of the land, caretakers of tradition, practitioners of natural medicines, orators of genealogy and spiritual believers in life after death. Often I ask

myself, what is it about being indigenous that keeps us marginalised, is it because of our colour, race or creed or is it simply because history has a way of repeating its self.

I would like to think that we, as indigenous peoples, throughout the world are becoming smarter, assertive and more sophisticated; many of us are reclaiming our power and sitting alongside mainstream non-indigenous peoples. Today it is not an uncommon sight to see many indigenous peoples holding positions of power. Some of us are even very good lawyers, doctors, politicians, land court judges and some of us are also very good sports people. (We won't talk about rugby, netball or League). So I guess my message in relation to 'comfort' is about remembering our ancestors, honouring their journeys by making a difference that advances our pursuit of self determination, in Aotearoa we call this 'Tino Rangatiratanga.'

Last year my husband, Dalray and I travelled to Brazil to attend the 9th World Council of Churches Assembly, it was there we met Bishop Saibo, Rose, Graeme and many others, we attended the Indigenous Peoples meeting beforehand. What an amazing experience being in the same room with up to fifty different Countries, and let's not forget the differing languages. As we all listened to each other's stories we soon began to form a connection with each other. Perhaps some might call it an indigenous connection; whatever it was it certainly gave us a warm feeling of familiarity with each other and this was obvious throughout the ten day Assembly.

The assembly opened our eyes to the shared voice of Indigenous peoples across the world. Your very own Graeme Mundine was certainly one of those voices that captured the attention of our brothers and sisters from America, Canada, Switzerland, Greenland and Bolivia. Graeme in my opinion gave hope and encouragement to the smaller communities including those of us from Aotearoa, New Zealand. The 'make indigenous poverty history' campaign was known to all three thousand attendees at the assembly because of his commitment and persistence to place information and wrist bands on each person's desk, this took lots of courage, charm and a good sense of humour all of which you know him to have.

These, and many other attributes, give us the confidence to make small but significant differences for our people, these seeds are what our ancestors planted generations ago. Our responsibility is to recognise these seeds and help them to grow so that the younger generations learn to be comfortable in themselves and what lies ahead. I am a little more optimistic about our future than perhaps ten or twenty years ago.

Compassion is the way in which we apply our comfort, it reminds me of the Holy Spirit, we know it's there but we just can't see it, compassion is a describing word that needs other words to determine how best we use it or where or to whom we apply it to. In Aotearoa, Tangata Whenua is often misunderstood because of our natural sense to live within an extended family environment. We are a tribal people and recognise the practice of Whanau, Hapu and Iwi which translates as follows:

- Whanau consists of: Mum, Dad, Grandparents, Children
- Hapu consists of: Uncles, Aunties, first cousins
- Iwi: inclusive of both, whanau, hapu and any other blood relative

Our natural environment relies on our relationship with Te Atua (God), all that we do daily begins and ends with our God understanding. Maori respect the demi Gods including:

Christ and Culture: Indigenous Theology and Spirituality

- Tangaroa – God of the sea,
- Tane – God of the Forest,
- Tawhirimatea – God on the wind,
- Tumatauenga – God of War
- Maui – God of the sun Rona – Goddess of the Moon.

The theme of this conference is about Christ and Culture - what does this mean in the year 2007? I would like to think that as Christ teaches us we learn to be compassionate towards each other; you know the terms, don't judge others, love thy neighbour, turn the other cheek and so on. How do we teach these values and principles to our children in a way that honours both our Christianity and Culture?

A little secret my father taught me when I was a child was to weave the two together and learn to get used to it - eventually it will become your strength. At ten years old I couldn't really understand the cryptic message, but as a parent I soon learnt the translation that quickly became part of a master plan. As parents we introduced our own children to the woven pattern commonly referred to as the gospel and culture, our children attended Kohanga Reo (Maori Language nest) as toddlers then into private Church Schools. Two of our children and our nephew are here with us at this Conference; they are keen to share their own stories and will do so later in our workshop on Wednesday.

The following is an example of how we weave our culture and Christianity in a way that has become a sought after Model of Practise when working with families who are struggling to raise their children violence free.

Before entering into a Wharenui there are a series of traditional protocols and practices that need to be carried out, this includes:

- Karanga – The welcome (only performed by women)
- Karakia – Prayers of welcome,
- Mihimihi – Speeches of welcome and acknowledgement to the ancestors
- Hongi and Hariru – The physical embrace between hosts and visitors
- Kaupapa o te ra – Purpose for the gathering on the day (agenda)
- Whiringa Whakaro – Brainstorming of ideas from the agenda, open discussions, follow up and contingency plans.
- Korero Whakamutunga- Closing speeches
- Karakia whakamutunga – Closing prayers and songs of praise
- Hakari – Shared meal to officially close the meeting.



Pictured left: The Bishop of Aotearoa, Rt Rev Brown Turei, with the Rev Cannon Lloyd Popata and Teina Clarke, student from Kings College Auckland

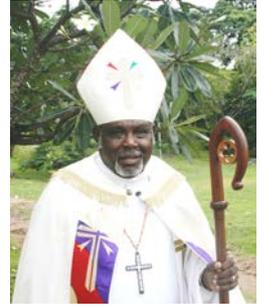
We teach the gospel by involving Rangatahi at a young age so that they learn from our elderly and watch their mentors and feel the holy spirit work its miracles by walking side by side as Christ did with his disciples. Kia Ora, Koutou Katoa

Closing prayer

Kia Tau kia tatou katoa, te atawhai O to tatou ariki a ihu karaiti
Me to aroha o te Atua me te whiwhingatahitanga ki te wairuatapu
ake ake ake AMINE.

Bishop Saibo Mabo - We are Eagles, Not Chooks

Bishop Saibo Mabo is from the Torres Strait island of Mer (Murray Island); he is an assistant Bishop in the Anglican Diocese of North Queensland and National Bishop to the Torres Strait Islander peoples. This paper was also published in *Ker Ker*, available from NATSIEC.



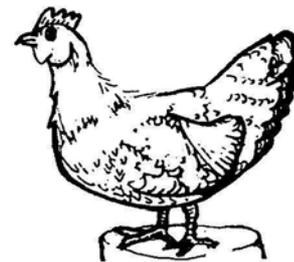
In Luke chapter 4, verses 16-22, this is the first time that Jesus carries out public ministry. He defines his ministry: to bring good news to the poor, to release captives, to give sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to give hope to everyone. Today, we Indigenous church leaders are carrying out ministry to our own people. We need to define ministry in our own way. Who are our poor, our captives, our blind, our oppressed? And how do we give hope?

As in Jesus' time, our people expect us to solve all the problems. They have an expectation of physical deliverance and freedom in our own land. Like Jesus, we stand up among our own who know us so well. When the people heard Jesus, they kicked him out. He did not do what they wanted, failing to deliver them from the Roman invaders and set them free physically. His aim was to deliver their whole souls rather than just their bodies. Our people also doubt our ability because they know us so well. When they see problems in the church, and feel we are not doing what they want, they want to kick us out and bring back a white man or a Solomon Islander to run the church.

Like Jesus, we must struggle to bring people to listen. We need to look at our people's spirits, not just their bodies. Help them listen to our theology of the land. The land is not our possession. It is borrowed from our children. As Jesus said, physical wealth and possessions are not important in themselves. It is the wealth of the spirit that counts. It will renew the whole world. Although we, like Jesus, are Indigenous like those with whom we minister, we need to teach them to see that we have been chosen by God to follow Jesus' footsteps and teach his message.

Let me tell the story of the Eagle and the Chicken.

A farmer found a wounded eagle one day out in his field. Not knowing what to do, he took it home, and nested it alongside his chickens to keep it safe. He kept the eagle with the chickens, and fed it, took care of it for a long time, until the eagle began to heal.



One day visitors came by his place, and saw the eagle. They asked the man what he was doing with an eagle in his chicken coop, but the farmer had forgotten the bird was an eagle. The bird had stayed so long with the chickens; even the bird had forgotten he was an eagle. The farmer simply replied that it was not an eagle: it was a chicken.

The visitors encouraged the farmer to take the bird out, to see if he could fly. So the farmer did. Of course the eagle was completely healed from his earlier life wounds, so he began to fly. Everyone watched as the bird flew with the magnificence that only the most elite of all flying birds could accomplish. The bird flew higher, and faster, than anything.

This story has many points for us Indigenous people, and for others. For the eagle was placed in that chook farm, and became a chook because he had no choice to become an eagle. He became a chook, shut away from knowledge of his true nature. Some non-Indigenous people have experienced this too. This certainly happened to us. We were placed in our own land and then others came up and put a fence around us and tried to make us like them. We became like the non-Indigenous chooks. When the farmer said 'come over here', we replied 'chook, chook, chook' (though you need to see this story acted and danced!). What they give to us is not good for us, not good food. Yet we still have the ability to be eagles. We have the eyes of the eagle: periscope, telescope and binocular eyes which can see far and wide, deeply and thoroughly into things. I know that people are not chickens. I know we are eagles. We just need to realise it. When we turn to God, he will be patient with us. He will feed us, teach us and care for us like the farmer, so that the wounds of our past life are healed and our spirit is restored. When we are ready, the Holy Spirit will come and challenge us. Let us listen to Him, trust and spread our wings so that we too, like the eagle will fly.

Summary of Workshops Without Papers

The Christ and Culture Conference was an excellent opportunity for people to present their thoughts, experiences and projects in whatever way they thought would best allow discussion, debate and engagement. As a result not all the workshop presenters produced publishable papers. However, in each workshop the Chair was asked to summarise the overall theme of the workshop and the key points that arose from the discussion. The following are those summaries.

Murri Ministry - Our Life in Ministry



Ravina Waldron is the coordinator of the ACM and has worked in the area for 14 years.

Murri Ministry, which is fully funded by the Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane, looked at what the Church has done in the time since the great walk on Reconciliation in 2000.

Murri Ministry work with many different language groups, as is the case all through Queensland. There are also many changes within the community, through marriage and so on. Part of the work of the ACM Qld is to help with funerals.

Talked about what Churches have done on key issues such as stolen generations, black deaths in custody, working on the Indigenous resources, e.g. arts and crafts. They believe that it's very important to resource the people. Training is very important, particularly as it relates to young people to develop and to be part of the church. Churches need to support the Indigenous people in issues in their communities. Murri Ministry needs to address the racism they encounter. Ravina Waldron also talked about her baptism and marriage certificates and her art in the ministry. There was great appreciation for the work of the Murri Ministry and workshop participants were encouraged that they continue their work.

Questions during discussion

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to move on in their lives e.g. what can we do ourselves, not relying on Church always?
- Why do we do what we do in the Church?



During this session, the participants also heard from Revd. Danny Paulraj who is a Minister from India, currently studying in Sydney. He talked about the influence of the Western Churches in maintaining the 'status quo' in India. Revd. Paulraj explained the Indian caste system and talked about how it is enforced by Western Churches. Revd. Paulraj made the comment:

"If you forget history you cannot create history; if you forget your leaders you cannot become a leader".

The Lutheran Churches of the Western Desert

Presenters:

- Pastor Jimmy Brown from Kiwikurra - 750 kms of dirt road west of Alice Springs
- Pastor Trevor Raggett from Haasts Bluff – 300 kms west of Alice Springs
- Mr Paul Traeger – Luritja Language Linguist, working for the Finke River Mission based in Papunya (300 kms west of Alice)
- Pastor Basil Schild – support worker and trainer with Finke River ministry based in Alice Springs.



The presenters talked about the Lutheran Churches of the Western Desert where ministry is conducted in the language of the people. The Churches are brand new, only one or two generations. The Churches are supported with Indigenous language resources by the Finke River Ministry.



Bill Symons- Ministry in the Block

Pastor Bill Symons spoke about his journey of faith. Through his powerful personal testimony he shared how God's heart transforms, and how he calls us to share our hearts with others.

Pastor Bill said that there is a need for a new spiritual heart in our lives and community. We need to offer prayer and support for those like himself, who should be powerful role models for those caught in addictions. We need to work together with God's heart to challenge what is wrong and offer the real choice of Jesus' love.

Through his workshop Pastor Bill made particular reference to:

1 Cor 15:56; 11 Cor 3:6-9; Gn 3:3; 11 Cr 3:6; Gal 6:7

11 Cor 3 1:3

We are letters of love from Christ. We are love letters to the world.
They read us – we have to be good letters in our community.

Prior to the conference Pastor Bill talked to many community organizations in Redfern to find out what the key needs of the community were. These are the results:

Redfern Community Centre

- Emergency accommodation o the old Murrawina site
- Health Center for babies and mums check ups
- Ceremony sacred place.

Koori Lighthouse ministry

- Drug and alcohol rehab on the block and anger management and counseling.
- Halfway place for inmates, for guys who just got out of jail.
- Place for youth – facilities, skills training, mechanics for the work place.

Community members

- Stop drugs in the community – reject drug addicts for housing, so they can build a community.
- Before school programs
- Parenting programs
- Build houses

Gail Hickey

- Park with toilets and a BBQ
- Lighting around park area
- Community hall

Margaret Blair

- Rebuild housing
- Stop drugs
- Education for children and mothers.

AHC

- Good housing
- Financial independence
- Connect families and communities together

AIMS

- Education – kids completing school
- Health – mental health and drugs and alcohol related in particular

Val Murphy

- BBQ

Cheryl

- Togetherness – Unity
- Activism in Caroline Street for Housing, jobs, respect for culture.
- Elders to be more responsible – role modeling.
- Kids to complete schooling
- Ongoing counseling for inmates.



Betty Pike – Women, Earth, Culture and Justice

Betty Pike is a Noongah woman, a writer, storyteller and ceremonial woman. The overall theme of this workshop was the connections between land, women in the bible (women of Samaria and Hagar) and Aboriginal women.

Key points to arise from this workshop were that we still have the storyteller within us and we need to nurture them. We need a collection of Aboriginal women stories that link to scripture and social change. We need to convene a women's cultural camp.



Carmel Posa - Reconciliation – The Focus of a Catholic University

The overall focus of this workshop was how people are working side by side and across all faculties. That there is a yearning to find out more about God. That we have freedom and choice and need a transformation of the heart. Also important to have a good grounding in our faith and culture to take on politics. Important, in this context that courses are vetted by Indigenous people.

The key points made during the workshop were:

- Relationships and interactions with people are important.
- The church should learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait life which can be used to show us Jesus.
- Transformation of the heart.
- Jobs are needed for students coming out of university.



Kevin Torrens and Marj Hicklin – The Jubal Story

Jubal, in Northern NSW is owned and run by the Jubal community. Jubal is a retreat place and a place of safety where people live and run programs such as retreats, church gatherings and school holiday camps.

Kevin and Marj talked about their experiences of poverty and discrimination and how they have worked together with their families to create Jubal.

Key points arising from the presentation were that Jubal is a place of healing where people can live traditionally i.e. they live 60% of the time on bush tucker and are teaching the kids how to hunt and gather. It's a place where there seems to be a higher power at work with the ancestors.

Participants commented that the Jubal members have shown courage in standing up to make a change and stand up for their rights - it's real neck on the block stuff. Participants also commented that this generation has had it easier. They forget what the Elders fought for. The question was – what should the youth be fighting for? The answer is culture and a better education.



Hera Clarke and family – Te Kawa O Te Marae - Indigenous models of practice

A Marae is a special home or place and the meaningful structure of the house and order is symbolic of Marae, Working with kids program the youth are encouraged to work with the kids.



Youth Workshop

The young people present at the workshop who had accompanied their parents took up the opportunity to present to the conference. They were asked if they could suggest ways in which young people could be better engaged with the Churches. They came up with three recommendations:

1. All the youth agreed that they would like more traveling opportunities. To have youth camps where the youth from all over and from different denominations can meet and learn more about Christ and to share our Stories.
2. They asked the Churches to try and make the Church more user friendly; to accommodate people of all ages.
3. They asked Ministers to interact more with everyone, so that they could have a better understanding of the word of the lord.

Hohaia Matthews - TJINATJUNANYI: *Providing a Pathway to Freedom.*

Revd. Matthews is the only Maori Minister in the Uniting Church Congress. He is part of an International network of Black Theologians and is completing a Masters degree in Theology.



TJINATJUNANYI: *Providing a pathway to freedom.*

...darker skin people controlling the resources of their communities so all can share equally in food, shelter, land ownership, education, health, recreation and sports...when black people and nations are no longer poor and oppressed, they remove immoral and unjust systems that allow all peoples and countries to be simply human beings...Indeed, a better world is possible.

In land area, Australia is the sixth largest nation after Russia, Canada, China, the United States of America and Brazil. It has, however, a relatively small population. Australia is the only nation to govern an entire continent and its outlying islands. The Australian federation consists of six States and two Territories. The largest State, Western Australia, is about the same size as Western Europe. Australia is an independent Western democracy with a population of more than 20 million. It is one of the world's most urbanised countries, with about 70 per cent of the population living in the 10 largest cities. Most of the population is concentrated along the eastern seaboard and the south-eastern corner of the continent.

Australia's lifestyle reflects its mainly Western origins, but Australia is also a multicultural society which has been enriched by over six million settlers from almost 200 nations. Four out of ten Australians are migrants or the first-generation children of migrants, half of them from non-English speaking backgrounds. Aboriginal¹ and Torres Strait Islander peoples inhabited most areas of the Australian continent. Each people spoke one or more of hundreds of separate languages, with lifestyles and cultural traditions that differed according to the region in which they lived. Their complex social systems and highly developed traditions reflect a deep connection with the land and environment. However:

Since coming to the land of Aboriginals
White man thinks he is god
Poor Aboriginals has been rounded like sheep
Like on the sheep stations allotted to different paddocks
The paddocks are the states and different communities of this country
Named by the white-man Australia²

¹ The term 'Aboriginal' and Indigenous Australians have the same meaning in this paper. For grammatical purposes I will use either one those terms as the need arises.

² Mattingly, Christobel, and Hampton, Ken, eds., *Survival in our land. 'Aboriginal experiences in South Australia since 1836 told by Nunga and others, rev.ed* (Australia: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), xv.

“*Terra Nullius* stems from absolute ignorance of true Aboriginal society, and from racist English and Anglo-centric views of alleged superiority. The invaders simply “closed their eyes” to the facts of history.”³ It would prove to be the beginning of the end for Aboriginal people in Australia? After the discovery of Australia by Captain Cook the Colonisation juggernaut was set in motion once again to implement the necessary structures through the Church of Christendom. Its role was an ambiguous one, whereby it “structured itself to address mission beyond the Empire. That meant it built parish systems, regional structures, and national entities that could gather and deploy resources to the critical point on the missionary frontier.”⁴ Interwoven within all of this missional church structure was the incorporation of the law of the empire.

The law of the empire was masked within this whole process, and certainly its enforcement was implemented swiftly wherever the so called ‘natives’ had transgressed these foreign laws of the empire. Its role was critical to the cause of Colonisation for the betterment of the empire via the missional front. It became very clear who were to be the aggressor and oppressor of Aboriginal people. The taking of the so-called “empty land” also removed the livelihood of Aboriginal people. Coupled with the enforcement of foreign laws upon Aboriginal people did nothing more than reinforce the ideals of the oppressor. From all the historical material available one thing had become abundantly clear. There was no place for Aboriginal people in the grandiose plan of the British Empire. They were basically regarded as second-class citizens in their own country, who were only given the right to vote in 1967 after a change to the Australian Constitution had been made:

On 27th May 1967, 90.7% of Australian voters recorded a 'yes' vote in a Referendum to alter Australia's Constitution. Two questions had been asked of them:

1. Should the Commonwealth Government be allowed jurisdiction over Aboriginal people, a right hitherto given to the States?, and
2. Should people of Aboriginal descent be counted in the national census?

The change, after nearly two hundred years of white occupation and over fifty five years of Federation, finally enabled Aboriginal people, like white Australians, to be counted in the national census and to be subject to Commonwealth rather than just State laws. In this way the indigenous people of Australia were, belatedly, acknowledged fully as citizens of the nation. Many Aboriginal people considered that changing Sections 51 and 127 of the Federal Constitution was essential to their gaining formal recognition of the fact that they actually existed as a race of people.⁵

THE MISSIONS: THE SOUTH AUSTRALIA EXPERIENCE

The setting up of Aboriginal mission homes throughout Australia was a deliberate second attempt to the original plan that had obviously failed. Samuel Marsden noted with much regret that the great commission towards Aboriginal people was failing. He became less convinced that this was a people that could be brought about to the ways of a god fearing culture. Marsden concluded that the task of failing to convert the ‘matured aged natives’ was inevitable. In South Australia there were 15 Aboriginal mission homes that were set up by overseas missionary societies. Their role was simple but a disturbing one; if ‘mature aged natives’ weren’t going to be proselytized into the Christian faith, then how was the great commission going to be fulfilled? The target audience was now focused on

³ Anne Pattel Gray, *The Great White Flood, Racism in Australia* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998), 16.

⁴ Loren Mead, *The once and future church, Reinventing the congregation for a new mission frontier* (Virginia: Alban Institute, 1998), 58.

⁵ Australian Broadcasting Corporation, “Time Frame”, 1967...*Citizens at last*, available: <<http://www.abc.net.au/time/episodes/ep5.htm>> 07/04/2007

Aboriginal children who were institutionalized into various mission homes after being taken away from their natural parents. The children of those parents would later become known as the stolen generation. 'The missionaries usually saw their best opportunities to convert and Christianize in the children...'⁶ through religious education that served as a divisive tool that really masked the ongoing process of assimilation. Changing the ways of Aboriginal children to be like white children was now the priority. In Port Augusta, South Australia where I am currently ministering, the mission home was called Umewarra Nguraritja (meaning place or home). It was a mission home that was set up by the Brethren church in the 1930's. It would become home for many Aboriginal children from the surrounding areas of the mid-north region of South Australia.

With the closure of the Umewarra mission home officially in 1995 and with the ensuing retirement of the Brethren missionaries also, many of the children whom are now adults had to fend for themselves. Self reliance upon the missionaries was now no longer possible and the outcomes would prove disastrous. There was no infrastructure in place that would allow these children to mature into adults giving them some sense of hope. They were now subjected to:

- long term unemployment,
- breakdowns of the family group,
- suicides,
- substance and alcohol abuse,
- no leadership,
- no education.

At the Assembly of the Uniting Church held in Sydney 1985, the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress was fully recognised as an agency of the Uniting church in Australia, and was welcomed with much jubilation. In due course this newly established partnership will enter in a covenantal relationship. The mandate of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in Australia was to liberate Indigenous Australians from the bondage of imposed structures. Therefore, any structures that are created must be flexible and open for review as the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress grows and develops.

Historically the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress and the Uniting Church in Australia have had a relationship that extends back to 1891 when the Presbyterian Church established a work at Mapoon, Queensland. In 1916 the Methodist Church also established missions at Goulburn Island, Milingimbu, Yirrakala, Elcho and Croker Island in the Northern Territory. In 1965 the Congregational Church worked amongst the Aboriginal people in Alice Springs, Central Australia. With the advent of union in 1977 the continuation of ministry amongst the Indigenous Australian would soon become a formally within the Uniting Church in Australia. The idea of the having an Indigenous Church without revisiting the missional concept of the Empire had strong support from a prominent group of Aboriginal Christians that included the Rev. Charles Harris whom had gathered at Crystal creek in Queensland. From his visit to Aotearoa New Zealand with the Maori people Rev. Harris' vision of an Indigenous Australian church gained serious momentum with the eventual formation of the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress in Australia (UAICC).

The Port Augusta Congress Faith Community is a faith community that is under the aegis of the UAICC, and was formed in January 2002. From very small beginnings the worshipping community has grown so that it now includes a significant representation of

⁶ Mattingly page 175.

the diverse groups of Aboriginal people in Port Augusta. Right from its inception the Port Augusta Congress Faith Community has been actively involved in community activities, providing services to those in the community (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) whom government organizations have had difficulty reaching.

Education has become a central focus of the work being done by the Port Augusta Congress Faith Community. There are huge concerns as to its outcomes for Indigenous Australian children/youth, Nearly 1 in 10 (9%) Indigenous youth will not attend school or will leave school before the age of 14 (compared with 2% of non-Indigenous youth). Less than half (49%) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 15-19 year olds are attending school (compared with 90% of other youth). Only one third (33%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students complete year 12 (compared with 77% of other students). Children with poor levels of education have difficulty in finding employment as they are uncompetitive in the job market. In rural or remote areas with a depressed economy, employment opportunities are already severely limited.⁷

As a result of little or no education, thirty eight percent of Indigenous Australians are unemployed. Those figures are a damning indictment upon a country like Australia that prides itself on areas of economic growth; social development; and lifestyle. In 2007 there is little sign to indicate an improvement upon those figures. It only serves to strengthen the argument that the future for many Indigenous Australian children is bleak. The provision of a suitable education program for Indigenous Australian children/youth is problematic on two fronts. The first is developing a program that is going to work, and secondly working out the mechanics as to the delivery of such a program for the children/youth. Both these issues are fundamental to ensuring success to what is already a limited area of involvement for many Indigenous Australian Children: Education.

When Indigenous Australian children/youth are not engaged in education they become more disadvantaged than they and their families already are. Education is the main doorway to employment opportunities, improved housing and health. Employment is already limited for Indigenous Australians in Port Augusta, particularly with the demise of some key Indigenous Australians organisations which were the main employers of Aboriginal people in the town. Young Indigenous Australians in Port Augusta are over-represented in the juvenile justice system and not being involved in education is one of the reasons for this. Although this involves a relatively small percentage of the Indigenous Australian youth in Port Augusta, this makes things more difficult for young Indigenous Australians who are doing the right thing because they are 'painted with the same brush' in a town where racism is a fact of life for all Indigenous Australians. Lack of education means that many young Indigenous Australians do not participate fully in society as is their democratic right.

For Indigenous people education provides the means of empowering them to assert their knowledge and skills across the wider community, and to demonstrate to all Australians, and especially their own communities, that they deserve respect, that they are valuable contributors, valuable leaders. Success in education will have a flow on effect, like the successes achieved by Aboriginal sporting heroes. Education will also equip them to manage their own affairs, to administer the delivery of services in education, health, and community development...For the non-Indigenous community, education holds the key to expanding understanding of pre-European

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, 1994. Pholeros P., Rainow S. and Torzillo P., Housing for Health Towards a Healthy Living Environment for Aboriginal Australia, Health Habitat, 1993.

history and culture in Australia. In time it will lead to recognition, if not understanding, of the spiritual connection Indigenous people have with their land.⁸

The advent of the Tjinatjunanyi program is a means whereby Indigenous Australian children whom have become totally disengaged with any sort of education, now have a chance to learn. That learning process can take many forms in Tjinatjunanyi and that's what makes the program an exciting venture to be involved in. Loosely translated in English Tjinatjunanyi is the Pitjantjatjara words for "Footprints to freedom". It is foundational statement to the philosophical framework of Tjinatjunanyi that is based on Paulo Freire's model of transformative education where hope is experienced to bring about positive life changes. In the Tjinatjunanyi program the idea of hope will be expressed through a process that includes both action and reflection to bring about transformation. As an Indigenous Australian Christian organisation we [the Port Augusta Congress Faith Community] refuse to accept the status quo, "the way things are", in regards to education; it is not a satisfactory solution. Therefore, the Tjinatjunanyi program will focus on bringing about change, not only within the individual, but also within the connected community of the students.

Traditional western education was largely based on a process of banking knowledge which was supposed to address the needs of a person's future. In this context:

- Knowledge was seen as a ready made package of reliable information that needed to be passed on from one person to another;
- The teacher was seen as possessing all essential information;
- Pupils were seen as empty vessels needing to be filled with knowledge;
- The teacher provided the information;
- Pupils absorbed the information passively and regurgitated it when required.

Although the current emphasis on constructivism in the curriculum framework in South Australia has tried to change this, there are many teachers who still cling to this traditional western approach to education. Also, within the curriculum framework of education in South Australia there is relatively little emphasis on meeting the emotional needs of the students, an aspect of education very important for marginalised students. We appreciate that it is important to pass on knowledge; for us cultural knowledge is particularly important. However, if this knowledge is not placed within a meaningful context for students they will not engage with that knowledge. Also, not every student has the background or ability to learn things simply for the sake of learning, to achieve academic success or as part of planning for their future. Therefore, in the formal education setting they may be perceived as 'failing'. Tjinatjunanyi is a diverse program that recognises the energy and potential within each person and each community, and tries to empower individuals and groups to make a meaningful contribution towards meeting their own fundamental human needs. The attainment of those needs will be based on a problem-posing approach where:

- An animator provides a framework for thinking creatively and participants actively work towards finding solutions to what they identify as common problems;
- The animator raises questions: Why? How? Who?
- All participants actively describe, analyse, suggest, decide, plan and act;

At different times the animator may be the teacher, a community resource person, a community elder or one of the parents involved in the program with the students. All

⁸ The Hon John von Doussa QC, "An acknowledgement of Traditional Custodianship", *Occasional Address University of Adelaide Graduation Ceremony, 23rd December 2004*; available: <http://www.heroc.gov.au/about_the_commission/speeches_president/University_of_Adelaide>, 7/04/2007.

participants are learners, actively involved in the social construction of knowledge. We see the delivery of the Tjinatjunanyi program along the lines of Freire as an authentic attempt to embrace and empower those children who are marginalised by a system of education that is not compatible with their own lives. Another world is possible for these children/youth living in Port Augusta, South Australia. Tjinatjunanyi is providing a way forward. What follows is a brief outline of how Tjinatjunanyi came into being, and the immense task that is required to bring a program like this into reality.

TJINATJUNANYI (Footprints to Freedom) – ACTION PLAN

Pre October 2004

Many expressions of concern from the Aboriginal community, about the poor attendance of Indigenous Australian students in Port Augusta.⁹

October 2004

Discussions within the Uniting Aboriginal & Islander Christian Congress nationally: re the possibility of setting up a Christian School for young Indigenous Australian students in Port Augusta to address issues.

November 2004

Formal meeting of Aboriginal community members, particularly the Port Augusta Congress Faith Community and Davenport Aboriginal community members concerned about educational and social concerns related to Aboriginal students in Port Augusta. Special focus on exclusion and suspension rates and the lack of options for students when out of school.

January – April 2005

Fledging first attempt with the setup of the First Footprints program by the Port Augusta Congress Faith Community to support Aboriginal students at risk and being excluded. Setting up the program and working with DECS¹⁰ re how this could support them. First Footprints Coordinator appointed: Mrs. Denise Champion.

Term 2 2005

First students referred to the First Footprints program and Coordinator who worked with them and their schools.

August 2005

First Footprints Coordinator presented information on the literacy needs of the Aboriginal students truanting and/or excluded at the local high school. Opportunity for the family via the co-ordinator to express their own concerns. Coordinator started working with a trained primary teacher to plan learning programs for the students.

September 2005

Challenged a Parliamentarian Cabinet Meeting at a Community Forum on Education in Port Augusta, South Australia.

November 2005

Port Augusta Congress Faith Community proposal to the Premier re: how they could work with DECS to support Aboriginal students 'at risk'. Requested use of facilities. (Response Feb / Mar 2006 – not at this time.)

⁹ What is important here is that Tjinatjunanyi had its beginnings from the Aboriginal community and not from the government. It is owned by the community and run by the Port Augusta Congress Faith Community. All decision making is done by the community.

¹⁰ DECS is the abbreviated acronym for Department of Education and Children's Services in Australia.

December 2005

Further years funding for First Footprints Coordinator

January – May 2006

More students identified than the First Footprints program could cope with.

Areas of concerns needed to be addressed:

- Definite need of a teacher;
- Limited physical and financial resources.

The Port Augusta Congress Faith Community and the Davenport Aboriginal Community identified another group of students with more urgent need-chronic non-attenders, some students not even enrolled in school. Many meetings are involved in this process.

Program heading in another direction possibly?

May – July 2006

Many informal discussions about issues relating to these non-attending students, almost weekly. Included discussions with experienced educators who knew the town and had broad experience in Aboriginal Education. Developed a proposal to work with DECS to address this problem. Engaged the services of Dr Di Russell of Pipalya Solutions and the support of the Covenanting Coordinator of the UCA SA Synod (Peter Russell). Many meetings—most Sunday evenings.

19th July 2006

Port Augusta Congress Faith Community members, a representative of Davenport Aboriginal Community and support persons met with the District Director to discuss the viability of this proposal and the need for further research into the issues behind the non-attendance. Introduced to ICAN¹¹ funding possibility.

17th & 18th August

Members of the Port Augusta Congress Faith Community, Davenport Aboriginal Community and the Congress Education Consultant attended the ICAN Conference in Adelaide.

21st August 2006

Members of Davenport Aboriginal Community met with the District Director and some of his staff re the proposal from Congress to clarifying issues.

26th August 2006

Whole day consultation and working out the details of the program with representatives of the Port Augusta Congress Faith Community and Davenport Aboriginal Community and the Education Consultant. Letters of support where written by these organisations.

31st August 2006

Working on the funding submission, including meeting with the ICAN Manager.

8th September 2006

ICAN submission put in to funding body.

11th September 2006

Meeting of representatives of the Port Augusta Congress Faith Community, Davenport Aboriginal Community and DECS who will support the program.

¹¹ ICAN is the acronym for "Innovative Community Action Networks".

Rest of September 2006

Appointment of the teacher. Obtaining details of students to be part of the program. Checking their current enrolment status. Apply for Flexible Learning Option funding for these students.

Informal get togethers with the students and their families to prepare for the term 4 program. Steering committee gathering.

Communityship for administrative support for the program. Criminal history checks for adults to be involved in program (ongoing).

Consent forms for student participation in the program.

Start head hunting for a full-time teacher for 2007.

October - Beginning of Term 4

Tjinatjunanyi as a pilot program commences. Opening celebration.

Steering committee meeting.

Case managers appointed.

Individual learning programs developed for all students.

Rest of October 2006

Student and family gathering.

2007 planning and budget submissions.

Action research begins.

Continue head hunting for a full-time teacher for 2007.

November 2006

Steering committee meeting.

Student and family gatherings.

Participant case studies.

Interviews for new referrals.

Action research continues.

Continue head hunting for a full-time teacher for 2007.

December 2006

Discussions with case managers re what is next for each student.

Developing alternative programs for those:

- Transitioning to school in 2007 (support required, etc)
- For whom this program is not really working and whom we believe will never transition back to mainstream schooling.

Reviewing the current model and modifying it for continuing and new students for 2007.

Action research continues.

Induction of teacher to be appointed for the 2007 school year.

Reports for students and celebrations of achievement involving the whole community.

Steering committee meeting.

End of Term 4 2006

January – April 2007

Tjinatjunanyi students have just completed the first term for 2007.

90% attendance by Tjinatjunanyi students.

..the struggle continues.

Ernie Trevaskis - Christian Faith Through Aboriginal Eyes

Ernie Trevaskis works for the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry in Rockhampton. Ernie is also a NATSIEC commissioner. Ernie has been involved with the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Catholic Council Ministry since 1990. During this time he also had ten years with the Manalama and Nungalinga Indigenous Theology College in Darwin. Since 2000, Ernie has been a student at Wontulp-Bi Buya Theology College in Cairns, as well as being on their management committee. Ernie is married with four children and 6 grandchildren.



This land now called Australia is a very special country, in the many ways people might like to look at it, in its creation and the history of everything that is upon it, under it, around it, all the different life forms in creatures, animals, trees, water holes, rivers, mountains etc. The Creator placed Aboriginal people here first, with all of his creations. Then he gave all the laws on how the people were to live in their daily lives and the rituals to be done. Laws for the initiation of the children, adults taking on special responsibilities, for marriage, for death and the preparation of the deceased's journey to the Spirit Place. How all of his Laws were to be kept and passed on to each generation. They were given the knowledge of everything upon the land, what was good food for them, what was bad food, and what to do to make it safe for them, what was to be used as medicines, what was to be used for their protection in the living places (camps) and what was to be shared with all the living creatures. How to move around their land that they were to look after so that there would always be food for themselves and for the animals. They were also told how all things came to be, the mountains, rivers, trees, waterholes, animals, birds. We have stories on how the sun came to give light and heat, how water holes and rivers came to be where they are, same for mountains and hills.

Now not only do we have all these creation stories, but we also have the stories of WHY many things are the way they are, even today. Why the sun travels the way it does, why crows are black, how some birds have a special song or call, why others cannot fly, how others came to have special colours on legs or body, or a hump on their back. Each tribe, no matter where they lived, coastal, desert, rainforest flat or mountainous country were given their own language, stories and Laws to keep and pass on to each generation.

For breaking any of the sacred or ritual laws there were some very harsh punishments, and sometimes these did result in death. But these were given to help the people survive down through the ages if they were kept strong and were part of the daily life of the people. When punishment was suffered by someone, they were not ignored or left to themselves but were looked after and helped by their wider family, any wounds were treated, food was gathered and given to them until they were a healthy person again, and resumed their role in the tribes daily life. In some instances when a person was to be punished there was help available for them if they wished to choose it. A person who had a special gift of deflecting spears could be allowed to be in front of the law breaker and if no harm came to him from the spears then that was finished and put behind them.

So even TODAY there are tribal people who have still have their language, creation stories, and laws, marriage (totem laws) in their daily living (brother and sister not touching or sharing anything, even words, - husband and mother-in-law not talking) and

for the laws for death and funerals. These were accepted, believed and passed on with a very strong faith, and more importantly unchanged over that long time.

A little over 200 years ago a big change happened, a new people came and lived among us. They wore much more clothing, built these strange structures and lived in them. They had so many strange things, paper with marks on it, things that they dug the dirt with, so much that the Aboriginal people had never seen before, talked in a language with unknown words to us. As we learnt this new language and began to understand these people more easily we heard about this special book and the stories in it. They spoke about this Bible and told us we had to change so many of our ways of living, to become more like them, to live a more Christian life. We soon learnt the new language and began to read and understand the Bible and so heard about this fellow Jesus. A very interesting story begun to become clear to us, how Our Creator was called God, and how HE had placed this Jesus person amongst people as a human. This story told us how Jesus grew up and how special things happened to many people all over the land that he walked across. How powerful he was to heal many illnesses, to be stronger and have control over the bad spirits and demons, to have even the winds and seas obey him. We hear how there were many **Miracles** seen, felt or told by so many people, to have so much wisdom freely given where it was needed and told in a way that the people could clearly understand, no matter who they were or what part of the country they lived in. But not everyone who saw or heard these happenings accepted and believed them totally.

The very old stories in this Bible tells of the times the Lord, GOD, talked to his people he had placed on this Earth. How some of them listened and others did not. He used Prophets to tell them how to live special lives, to prepare themselves for what was to come and why, but again many did not listen and kept on with their sinful lives and false idol worship. There was so much evil around then that even many of these Prophets were killed. We heard of a fellow called Moses who sat with the LORD and was given Ten commandments (LAWS) to be told to the people to live by, but before he came down from the mountain they had made a idol of gold and were worshipping it. The very strong Faith and belief God wanted was not growing much at all. Now as Jesus was traveling around the country teaching and trying to prepare the people for what was to come, what was happening. At the many places where he stopped to heal the sick and teach the scriptures people not only heard, but saw him physically healing, saw leprosy disappear completely from a person's body, (Matt. 8 1:4) saw a crippled man stand up and walk away (Mark 2: 1-12;) the ones who came to him had strong faith, as did the people who brought others to him for healing. It is very interesting that in Luke 7: 1- 8 a Roman centurion sent word for Jesus to heal his sick servant but that he did not have to go to the house to do it. This man strongly believed that Jesus had the **Authority** from **GOD** and only needed to give the word from afar and the person would be healed. There were many others of strong faith; the woman who believed that even touching his clothing would heal her. As he traveled around the crowds grew bigger with more people of strong faith looking for healing or bringing people to be healed. The whole time right up to the death and then the Resurrection of Christ, many still did not fully believe or have strong Faith, they were still asking to be shown something physical as definite proof. Even one of his disciples still had to see something real (holes in Christ's side) before fully believing and accepting.

As we read and study the ACTS of the Apostles we learn that the very beginning of the Church was not an easy one. The Apostles faced many persecutions and trials as they began the journey of spreading the Good News and bringing people of strong faith and belief together. Jesus gave them one very sacred ritual to be placed in the Church they were to bring together, the Eucharist and the sharing of His Body and Blood.

Questions for Discussion and reflection:

Where is this sacred ritual today and how is it treated?

What is today's church like?

How much is Aboriginal Spirituality part of the church's regular life?

Has Aboriginal Spirituality been accepted into the church - freely and joyfully?

What do we, Aboriginal people, have to offer today?

1973 Eucharistic Congress Melbourne- the Aboriginal Eucharistic prayer was put together to be part of the mass **thirty three years ago**. How freely is this accepted now?

Aboriginal Stations of the Cross Mirriam Rose's emotions and feelings are shown in the artwork. It was first shown in 1974, again over 30 years ago. How well known and used are they today? Or Matthew Gill's stations with the Bush Turkey.

Aboriginal Our Father—simple words but very honest not changing any part of Jesus prayer. Put together over 20 years ago. How often is this prayer used?

So where has the Christian faith been the strongest and who with?

Grant Finlay - Mountains

Revd. Grant Finlay is a Uniting Church Minister and has been part of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in Tasmania for twelve years.



Introduction:

I would like to acknowledge Gubi Gubi country and offer apologies from Auntie Eva Richardson for being unable to attend.

I write as a non-Indigenous ordained Minister who is part of the ministry of an Indigenous Christian community, the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress in Tasmania. In offering something to this “Christ and Culture” Conference I think it’s important to say something of my context in contributing to conversations about Australian Indigenous theology. Firstly, I write as a non-Indigenous person. I was born on Gaurna country, grew up in Wauthaurong country and Wurrundjeri country, and now live in Palawa country. (For those not so familiar with those clans, it’s Adelaide S.A., near Geelong and in Melbourne in Victoria and now in Tasmania.

Secondly, I personally, am not doing ‘Indigenous theology.’ To me, Indigenous theology is what the Indigenous people of our congregation, and other Indigenous Christians, engage in when they feel, think, reflect, test, listen, experiment, sing, talk and live as Indigenous Christians. But fortunately I, and some other non-Indigenous people, have the opportunity to share in some of those conversations and experiences. Through close relationships I am able to empathically feel some similar kinds of feelings and experience some of the freedom and anxiety of this awakening Indigenous Christian praxis. So what follows is from my perspective as a non-Indigenous companion rather than that of an Indigenous person.

In the fourth chapter of Genesis is the primal story of Cain’s violence against his brother, Abel. Abel’s blood cries from the ground and Cain wanders from home, a marked man for the rest of his days. In some ways a non-Indigenous clergy person writing an article about ‘Indigenous theology’ is a bit like a ‘child of Cain’ writing ‘Abel-ian theology.’ There is something inappropriate, even offensive, about it given the history of the church’s involvement in much of the harm done to Indigenous people through the colonising of this land. So in this exercise of writing, it is sobering to remember the conscious and unconscious history into which I, a non-Indigenous clergy person, have been born and schooled.

In another scripture story, the writer of the book of Hebrews says that Levi, and the priestly order descendant from him, were in the loins of the ancestor Abraham when the patriarch offered a tithe to Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, King of Salem (Genesis 14:17-24; Hebrews 7:9, 10). One might refer to Melchizedek as an Indigenous Elder to whom Abraham offers tribute in local Indigenous currency, recognising the local ‘law of the land.’ So in this context of writing something about Indigenous theology, perhaps I too was ‘in the loins,’ as it were, of those few Christians who ‘paid the tithe’ to Indigenous people in earlier times, respecting Indigenous lore, language and who engaged with their Creator Spirit as present here.

These two stories express in biblical metaphor some of the larger community experiences and some of the currents that stir within my spirit and swirl around conversations I have with Tasmanian Aboriginal people. The experience in Tasmania of colonial frontier violence, the trans-generational suppression of Indigenous identity, along with the many other affects of colonisation call for a deeper and patient Christian listening. The practice of listening long, carefully and deeply in order to converse in the first language of the first peoples, or at least attempt to, is an essential starting place for a non-Indigenous would-be companion of Indigenous theologians.

For our Congress community, we feel we are in a tentative stage of this practise and reflection. Although there have been numerous Indigenous Christians throughout Tasmania over the last 200 or so years, rarely have Indigenous people been the primary speakers in the conversation of interpreting Christian scripture and traditions, or bringing cultural beliefs and practices into dialogue with Christian gospel and traditions. Walter and Mary Arthur and Thomas Bruny at the Wybalenna settlement on Flinders Island in the 1830's and 1840's, Fanny Cochrane Smith in the early 1900's at Nicholls Rivulet south of Hobart, and past and present members of our own congregation are among the few.

[Power point 1] The UAICC was established across Australia by the UCA National Assembly in 1985, with a Tasmanian congregation forming from early 1987. Our Sunday gatherings comprise about 25 people, 8-10 of whom are Indigenous. Therefore, our conversations, our 'theology in the making,' arises from a mixed group rather than one that is exclusively Indigenous. Various Christian traditions have formed and shaped each of us, even though Congress is part of the Uniting Church and I'm an ordained UCA clergy. Some might call our gathering itself a sacrament of reconciliation. It is a community where Indigenous voices are primary or at least encouraged to be heard first of all. One or two people have been more involved in other churches, with one completing a course at a Bible College. So the academic traditions of biblical exegesis and theological analysis are neither revered nor practised in the way they are in other places, nevertheless the same or similar questions arise from people's lived experience.

[Power point 2] Tasmania's Indigenous community, broadly speaking, comprises families associated with the Furneaux Islands off the north east coast, and families from the southern part of the state. **[Power point 3]** A number of Islander families are descendant from Manalargenna, a key tribal leader from the north east. Various women from the same clan group, including some of his daughters, lived with sealers in the islands of Bass Straits from the late 1790's, and others, like himself moved to the Wybalenna settlement on the west coast of Flinders Island in the 1830's as part of negotiations with the colonial government's 'conciliator,' George Augustus Robinson, for Aboriginal people to move from mainland Tasmania.

[Power point 4] Families from the southern area are generally descendant from Fanny Cochrane Smith, an Aboriginal woman who was born at the Wybalenna settlement, and had some childhood years at the Hobart Orphan School before marrying and living at Nicholls Rivulet south of Hobart on land she was granted by the colonial government in several allotments, during the late 1800's. Our Indigenous members are from both these broad strands of the community and have some similar but also different experiences of family life, sub-culture and community.

[Power point 5] A couple of years ago we participated in an interfaith celebration as part of the Mountain Festival on Mt Wellington on the edge of Hobart. The invitation to participate prompted some reflections in the preceding months on the theme of mountains. **[Power point 6]** We used as our guide for reflection the book, "Rainbow Spirit

Theology”¹² in which some of our Congress colleagues in Queensland participated. In particular we followed the methodology suggested in the book of the four directions in the land: the south representing Indigenous culture/traditions; the north representing Christian scripture/traditions; the east representing looking into the face of Christ; and the west representing our turning toward the future. We modified the process to spread the reflections from each ‘stream’ over a number of weeks.

[Power point 7] Firstly, to introduce the theme we reflected on personal experiences on, or involving mountains.

Secondly, we reflected on and shared stories of mountains in Tasmania that are important to Indigenous people and the Indigenous community collectively.

[Power point 8] Thirdly, we read several scripture passages in which mountains feature, particularly in Jesus’ ministry, and we heard about mountains as they are present in the wider Christian tradition, particularly in song.

These three streams were shared over the course of two to three months and toward the end of our time focussing on mountains I wrote some new verses using the Christian gospel song, “Go tell it on the mountain.”

[Power point 9]

Song - Go tell it on the mountain

Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills and everywhere.
Go tell it on the mountain, that Jesus Christ is born,

[Power point 10]

In Preminghana country, I carved the rocks and stone,
The circles of the Spirit, they are my guide and home.

The hills alight at Christmas, tell us that Christ is born,
The people sang the old times, today we hear their call.

[Power point 11]

I walked the hard road higher, sometimes I thought I’d fall,
But when we walked together, the promised land we saw.

On a nearby mountain, came Christ one night and prayed,
He sang this land’s Great Spirit, and we sing as one today

Each verse focuses on one or two of the streams in our conversation and the following reflections are an ‘exegesis’ of the song seeking to highlight some key issues in practising an Indigenous theology, some questions for an evolving Indigenous Christian community and some challenges for the Christian church more broadly.

[Power point 12]

In Preminghana country – **[Power point 13]** *preminghana* is a large hill/mountain in the north west of the state, colonially and commonly, known as Mt Cameron West. The naming of *preminghana* is a tentative beginning at using *palawa kani* (Tasmanian Aboriginal words/language) in an explicitly Christian song. The reclamation/ regeneration of language is a sensitive experience among the community with diverse views and practices. The original nine languages of the island exist, if at all today, in fragmentary form in Indigenous oral and written use and in non-Indigenous colonial records. The *palawa kani* program at the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre researches oral and written recordings of words and undertakes community consultations in both teaching *palawa*

¹² Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology* East Melbourne: HarperCollinsReligious, 2000. pp 15-27.

kani and determining how widely it will be shared. The current priority is on teaching Indigenous families and community. People from the wider community might hear it spoken at a 'welcome to country' or if they attend the funeral of an Indigenous person where the language is spoken.

Our Indigenous Christian Community has a number of non-Indigenous participants so the use of *palawa kani* is guided by Indigenous Elders, who hold a variety of views about the use of *palawa kani*. There may come a time, when a whole song from our Congress community may be written in *palawa kani* but at this stage of the language development, and community sensitivities about who may speak, or sing, the language, the single reference to a place name is where we are up to.

The legal title to *preminghana* was transferred by the State Government to the Aboriginal community via newly formed statutory body, the Aboriginal Land Council of Tasmania, in November 1995. (Just as an aside, it happened on the weekend following the first hearings of the HREOC's Inquiry into the removal of Aboriginal children from their families). The area near *preminghana* has been the site of a number of conflicts including pushing 30 – 40 people off a cliff now called Cape Grim. There have also been more recent conflict, but not as violent as that, since the early 1990's over 'recreational access' to the foreshore and the protection of Indigenous heritage sites. On several occasions Indigenous petroglyphs (rock carvings) have been cut out of rock by vandals using high quality rock cutting equipment, or daubed with paint in the form of a swastika. To name *preminghana* is also to recall the various stories and aspects of the site, past and present, as part of the story, the 'spirit' of the place.

[Power point 14]

I carved the rocks and stone – this links today's community with the earlier pre-colonial communities. This is an important part of the cultural regeneration occurring among the community today. This mythic (in the positive sense of the word) connection between people in today's situation alongside community ancestors in the colonial era and alongside pre-colonial people is part of what we see as the role of an Indigenous Christian community. This is an 'identity-defining' lyric in that it explicitly confirms people's intuitive or implicit link in self understanding with their understanding of particular ancestors and general community ancestors. By saying "I" it posits the intention with the singer today desiring that deeper psychic/spiritual communion (communion of saints, we might say) with those who carved the rock, and who are also themselves 'ingesting' the mythic symbolism of the petroglyphs into their own psyche/spirit/self understanding.

However, it is not possible to return to a 'pre-colonial' Indigenous spirituality. There is only the land as it is today, with the stories and experiences that are part of time since creation. What an Indigenous theology might seek to do is something akin to a 'second naivete,' one that acknowledges and somehow incorporates the colonising experiences and influences yet which nevertheless draws its primary inspiration from a source other than the dispossession, attempted genocide, destruction of kinship and other disintegrative affects of that experience. For beneath the urban bitumen and the genetics of a lighter coloured skin lie remnants, signs, yearnings and pathways into a profound mystical Creator Spirit still breathing within people and the land. It is a way of ensuring that in cultivating an Indigenous Christian identity people are not actually defined by various colonial eras (whether pre-colonial, colonial, or post-colonial) as though people are less Indigenous today than a thousand or more years ago. In theological language, it is like the way the crucifixion is incorporated into the being of God, yet is not the single definitive description of God's triune identity.

The original languages, beliefs and engagement are not known in their fullness today since those storytellers who knew the land, their meaning of the rock carvings and other artefacts were killed or died without being able to pass most of those deep stories, those 'meta-narratives', on to others. So today's engagement is in today's languages, today's experiences and interpretations. The conversations with earlier traditions are primarily through archaeological survey and interpretation, information from neighbouring sources (such as mainland communities) and discernment through long associations with sites.

[Power point 15]

Circles of the Spirit – the “circles” are the petroglyphs (rock carvings) at *preminghana*. There are various designs with different people interpreting them, some quite specifically and others more generally. To name them as “Circles of the Spirit” is firstly to begin to name the spiritual nature and meaning of the place, and the whole island. Secondly it is to say the act of carving was a ‘sacramental’ act by the original designers/carvers of the stone, whereby particular ‘ordinary’ implements and symbols were imbued with deeper cultural-spiritual significance. One of the ways toward a richer experience for people in being Indigenous in Tasmania today is to re-member the practises of earlier generations. As people sing the words, sometimes in their imagination they are there at *preminghana*, with stone upon stone, carving a circle in communion with their Creator.

The use of the word “Spirit” is intentionally ambiguous. In seeking and engaging in conversation, dialogue and communion in a cross-cultural interfaith colonising context, these words with ambiguous meanings, and double entendres are essential in keeping the conversation open enough for further and deeper conversation, dialogue and communion. In non-Christian Indigenous interpretation, the “Spirit” can be Creator who is not at all associated with the Christian God. In Indigenous-Christian interpretation “Spirit” can be Creator / Holy Spirit present in creation and community life in the formation of the circles.

[Power point 16]

Hills alight at Christmas – The hills refer to some of the hills on Cape Barren Island. Cape Barren is part of the Furneaux group of islands north east of Tasmania in Bass Strait and lies between Flinders Island and mainland Tasmania. Many of today's community are ‘islander’ families. The Tasmanian Government ran a reserve on Cape Barren from 1912 – 1951. The Reserve was located at a place known as “The Corner” which has some hills to the east. Over the years a practice grew into a tradition whereby on Christmas Eve a fire was lit on the highest hill and then other fires were lit progressively closer to The Corner where children's excitement was building with the words, ‘See the fires? Santa's coming!’ This Christmas Eve custom continues today. A reference to Santa seemed inappropriate in our mountain song, so the fires tell us of the birth of Christ rather than the particular imagined arrival of one, S.Claus.

[Power point 17]

This point illustrates one issue of contemporary interpretation in our context for an Indigenous Christian community. In re-memorising community traditions, how much do we replicate word for word, line for line, and how much do we adjust in the translation, and what shall be our guide in deciding? Among our Christian community, even those with family links to Cape Barren felt it was preferable to sing of the birth of Christ than the arrival of Santa, all the while remembering their own childhood excitement at Santa and later knowing the particular men who lit the fires.

It is also a reminder that through the colonising experience a number of English customs and beliefs have been adopted and adapted by Indigenous families, all whom have a non-Indigenous parent or ancestor. A family's Aboriginality is not diminished by singing ‘Jingle

Bells' nor by celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ, but it does raise questions for Indigenous Christians about the association of Christ, and the practice of being Christian, with particularly English church traditions and practices.

The people sang the old times – on Cape Barren there is a tradition of music and for a time it was quite strong among one or two particular families. These 'boys' built up a repertoire of their own songs and developed a distinctive musical style. They provided the music for the regular dances in the Island's hall each weekends. Many contemporary funerals for Islander families often feature this music.

Some families still sing lullabies passed down through generations from the Aboriginal women who were living with the sealers in the straits many years ago. It is these two kinds of music from the 'old times' that is in mind here, both the oral tradition of songs from a very long time ago, and the creation of music over the last century.

Today we hear their call – This line seeks to be a 'communion of saints,' to 'keep them alive' in the lives of today's community. Like the 'circles of the Spirit' being 'my guide and home,' it links today's community with generations past and the symbolism of those times in the stories told today. Heeding the call of those generations involves honouring their experience, the independent island life, remembering the forgetfulness of government, removal of children, muttonbirding seasons and the life that identifies today's community as Indigenous.

One characteristic of the Islander community is an independent spirit, in the sense of asserting rights, continuing cultural activities, and, at times, challenging laws in the face of mainstream opposition and indifference. This quality has spurred a number of people and families into the political arena and has led to legislative change including the Living Marine Resources Act 1995, Aboriginal Lands Act 1995 and further amendments in 1999 and 2006; as well as regulatory changes such as licensing tags for Indigenous families to be able to collect certain shellfish and catch muttonbirds for family. The formation of community organizations, the purchase of properties for job creation and economic development as well as the cultural camps and community gatherings are other ways in which today's community heed the call or follow the example of earlier generations.

[Power point 18]

I walked the hard road higher sometimes I thought I'd fall – came from a personal story of a family walk that was a difficult challenge, one of those childhood 'are we nearly there yet' experiences. It is also symbolic of what life can be and the possibility of failing, falling, getting it wrong, of walking alone. The personal destruction wrought by the breaking of kinship bonds is widely known. Separation from family, incarceration in solitary confinement and the Anglo focus on individualism are just a few of the isolating forces that can disintegrate a person's spirit and make the road much harder. Many people fall into various forms of self-destructive behaviour, such as substance abuse, sometimes as an attempt to anaesthetize themselves against the painful consequences, the shame, of their 'fall.'

But when we walked together – contrasting the loneliness of the hard road with the call to kinship, friendship and promise. It is about us as a local Congress community of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, of people with non-specific as well as designated 'disabilities' and being together and all that that can symbolise as people in this land. It speaks of our well-being when we are part of a viable kinship network that includes family, land and friendships. It is about the gift of companions, and suggests our companion in Christ and the inferences of walking with Christ and Christ with us.

The promised land we saw – a reference to Moses on Mt Nebo looking out over the ‘promised land.’ It is also what ‘promised land’ represents as a symbol, of the promise/hope/vision of what lies before us as we grow together in community, in Christ, the promised land of the fulfilment of all things, our life, our community, of our vocation.

[Power point 19]

On a nearby mountain – this is a particular reference to Mt Wellington which rises to the west and south-west of Hobart. Its contemporary Indigenous name is *kunanyi*. This song was inspired by our participation in an interfaith gathering as part of the Mountain Festival that celebrates Mt Wellington and the many different ways people engage with it.

These words seek to bring our attention geographically and spiritually closer to where we are now in Hobart’s northern suburbs. We began at *preminghana* and ancient rock carvings, we sang of Cape Barren Island and activities of the twentieth century. Singing about this ‘nearby mountain’ is intended to counter balance the temptation to keep the symbolism at a distance. Each of the other verses refer to stories from places and times further away from today. This verse is ‘on our doorstep.’ It brings the song’s desire into our experience. Only a few have visited *preminghana*, a few more were born on, or have visited Cape Barren Island, yet all of us know ‘the mountain’ in our own unique way.

Came Christ one night and prayed – this line remembers gospel stories of Jesus praying on mountains, and it particularly imagines Jesus coming here to our home, to this mountain near us and praying.

We name this mountain as a place of prayer. We do not know of earlier Indigenous stories of this mountain, yet the Mountain Festivals point to its mythic role in the lives of Hobartians today.

So when did Christ ‘come and pray’ here? Was it the post-resurrection Christ universally present, or was it when colonial Christians came telling the gospel stories on this island? Here we meet the ‘double-dialectic’ of the pre-existent Word through whom all things came into being, the Jesus of history with his particular life in another land, the Christ of faith to whom Anglo-Christians bore witness here beginning in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries during French, but predominantly English, colonial expansion, and also our personal encounter with Christ within our own lives and among us as community.

We can set aside the idea of the ‘Jesus of history’ actually praying on this mountain. We are not suggesting an apocryphal story of a ‘juvenile Jesus’ visiting this island prior to his baptism. Nevertheless it is important to know of Jesus’ experiences on mountains in first century Palestine. Gospel references to Jesus in prayer on mountains stirs our thoughts to imagine Jesus praying on this particular mountain in a similar way. The gospels sometimes fill out the content of Jesus’ prayers, and other times not (Matthew 14:22; Mark 6:46, etc). This songline is simply to imagine Jesus in prayer here in this land.

The ‘Christ of faith’ coming within the Christian witnesses, such as they were, in the nineteenth century when Christianity first came to this island, entangles Christ in the realities of the history of colonial expansion and the church’s direct and indirect participation in that, including the brutality, friendships, racism, dispossession, betrayal, couplings, survival, etc. Some Indigenous people here have spoken of the church ‘coming with a gun in one hand and a Bible in the other,’ so to sing of Christ coming in prayer is to offer an alternative witness, not unlike the alternative “Jesus Christ Liberator” in a Latin American context. To sing of Christ ‘in prayer’ is to sing of spiritual transformation. It is not to restrict or limit our interest to peoples ‘souls for heaven.’ In an Indigenous context, and

perhaps also an authentic Christian context, spirit-prayer is engagement in and with all of creation.

The pre-existent Word / post-resurrection Christ is not limited by incarnational particularities. This opens a way within Christian theology for saying the pre-existent Word was present here on this mountain from creation, indeed in the creation of this mountain (John 1:1-5), as well as post-resurrection Christ being read back into creation's beginning (Col 1:15-20) or back into the story of Israel (1 Cor 10:4; Hebrews 5) or perhaps into the story of this group of islands.

In an Indigenous-Christian dialogue one aspect of the engagement is 'origin stories,' the formational myths of how creation came to be. A perhaps more intriguing aspect is the post-resurrection Christ present to all creation prior to the incarnational arrival in this land of Christian witnesses among British colonisers. This at least opens the possibility of imagining/discerning one way in which Christ is present here yet not limited to, or enclosed within, the colonisers and colonising experience.

If we restrict ourselves to speaking of Christ coming to, or being present in, this land exclusively within the witness of Christians, we both severely limit our Christology, and we are left with a dominant image of a colonising Christ. Try as we might to focus attention on the modest efforts of the few Christians through history who have been alongside or worked respectfully with Indigenous people, the overwhelming experience is of an institutional heavyweight antagonistic, or at best indifferent, toward Indigenous people. To speak of the post-resurrection Christ present in this land for the 1800 or so years of history prior to the arrival of 'Christians' in the last 200 or so years, might open an alternative vision for Indigenous, and non-Indigenous, people to imagine Jesus Christ present here distinct from the story of the church here, or which at least puts the church in that larger and longer context.

He sang this land's Great Spirit – this is a theologically rich metaphor. It suggests communion, harmony, and dialogue between Christ and 'this land's Great Spirit.' The 'Great Spirit' is a symbol, albeit interim, imperfect and incomplete, of Indigenous spiritualities present here. As well as suggesting communion this line raises some questions, such as the identity of this Great Spirit within a Christian theological worldview/paradigm, or the mutual question of Christ singing this land's Spirit within an Indigenous Tasmanian's worldview/paradigm.

While in the previous section I began to articulate a possible way of imagining Christ present here apart from colonisers, it is important to acknowledge that in the thoughts, opinions and experience of virtually every Indigenous person whom I have met around this group of islands, Christ is seen as coming with the colonisers, as part of the 'moral' justification for the dispossession/colonisation of this land and its people.¹³ Therefore to imagine Jesus singing the land's Great Spirit is a contrasting image/symbol to the forced rote learning of catechisms at Wybalenna¹⁴ or some irrelevancy such as that represented in Jim Everett's poem 'Flinders Island preacher'¹⁵ in which the Christian witness is utterly disconnected from the experience of people or their interpretation of the person of Christ. In this context, including this time in history, it seems to me preferable to distinguish Christ, at least to some extent, from the Spirit of this land, as well as from the colonising church, including elements of the contemporary church.

¹³ See also, James Boyce, *God's Own Country?* Hobart: ISW, 2001. pp. 21-31.

¹⁴ Clive Turnbull, *Black War* Cheshire: Melbourne, 1948. p.56.

¹⁵ Jim Everett & Karen Brown *The Spirit of Kuti Kina* Hobart: Eumarrh Publications, 1990. p.9.

It is also a metaphor seeking to curtail the predominantly 'white' Christian church's assumption of aspects of Indigenous spirituality into its own life, but which are kept marginal to the church's identity as Christian in this land and used, perhaps abused, as some peripheral trendy theological or liturgical novelty.

This distinction also imagines some different and more creative questions and suggests a potentially healing song. Some of the questions are: whose melody and words are sung? Does this land's Spirit teach Christ the Spirit-song of this land? Or does a cosmic Christ teach the song? In which language is the song sung? Have human voices, or are human voices articulating this song? Where, with whom, are we more likely to hear it today?

To imagine a space between this 'Christ' and the 'Spirit of this land' is to suggest the need for listening and learning. That songs of this land would be unknown to Christ, respects the diversity and plurality of creation and what has evolved here since the beginning, with unique characteristics that are distinctive from that which came to be around the land of Israel. It also suggests that within the Godhead there is, amongst the 'mutual indwelling,' potential for our resurrected and ascended Christ to learn a new song.

It symbolises a different kind of Christology, a different power dynamic in Indigenous / non-Indigenous relationships. Rather than coming on the coat tails of colonial power with an Anglo/European church tradition, Christ comes in prayer, learning the Spirit-song of this place. It suggests a starting point of 'not knowing,' rather than an assumed knowledge. Hopefully it calls for respectful dialogue, for cultivating trust and relationship. Perhaps as Christ listens and learns, Christ's voice begins falteringly, and gradually sings in a new and different voice, a different language here from the voice, language, symbols, and liturgical colours of other lands. As this song learning and song-lining grows, new and different Christologies are more likely to emerge, thereby enriching the whole 'body of Christ.'

This symbol of Christ learning the 'song of this land,' singing the Spirit, has within it the mutual possibility of the Indigenous Spirit singing a 'new' Christ into being who is markedly different, perhaps not even named as 'Christ' at all, with that title's particular origins and ideology. This is the 'pointy-end,' the liminal threshold, where we potentially lose, or discard, any and all connection with the Jesus of history (and perhaps so-called orthodox theology), yet also where we potentially enter a far deeper, profound communion of Spirit, a being present here in this land, a communion we are not able to discern in another way.

There is the potential that an emerging Australian Indigenous Christian theology may not look, sound, smell, taste or touch in a way familiar, or even recognisable, to non-Indigenous. Not recognisable as 'theology,' nor, perhaps, as 'Christian.' Rather than tinker at the edges with an Indigenous voice reading Christian scripture, or a piecemeal pseudo-'smoking ceremony' in a church building, or even writing some words to a Christian gospel song, perhaps the millennia of spiritual practise in this land is a path through which Christ would like to be transformed.

It is a way of saying that the millennia of Indigenous spiritual/cultic practise in this land, the millennia of 'brooding of the Spirit' here is enormously significant, significant enough to be, at least for a while, our primary interpretive vision. Great effort has been put into 'discerning Christ within Indigenous culture-spirituality' perhaps as much effort could be put into 'discerning Indigenous within Christ,' in a mystic sense, to appreciate that being Indigenous in communion with Christ, also changes who Christ is, and indeed, alters the being of God.

The mutuality of this singing symbol also suggests that what it means to be Indigenous may also change. The experience of the past two hundred or so years has already

significantly altered, some would say, scarred, what it is, and means, to be 'Indigenous.' Perhaps an encounter of spirit in the mystic communion of prayer, of song, might alter being Indigenous in a healing, transformative way.

For while acknowledging difference and imaging space between, we also pray that there is a resonance between the land's Spirit-song and a song Christ might sing. While it could be a boring monotony, a domineering 'inclusiveness' if it was one and the same song, perhaps 'this land's Great Spirit' is another way of referring to the Holy Spirit. However, I am reluctant to jump to this neat inclusion of 'this land's Great Spirit' into a Trinitarian theology or Christian pneumatology, for this would ensure that the dominant Christian theology would remain the 'default theology.' Our community is, in this time, tentatively exploring ways and words in which being Indigenous-Christian might be different, perhaps fundamentally so, from being non-Indigenous-Christian. Our actual practise is not that radically different, at this stage, nevertheless it is possible that the Indigenous Christian theology that emerges from this group of islands will express some unique features in a way not unlike the distinct cultural features that characterise Tasmania's Indigenous community.

Nevertheless, this singing suggests a harmony, of 'deep calling to deep,'¹⁶ where both willingly give of themselves, honouring, loving, serving the Other that the song might be all in all. A song that is most deeply authentic for each, yet is beyond either, or even both together. A number of Indigenous writers, such as Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr,¹⁷ Djiniyini Gondarra¹⁸, the 'Rainbow Spirit Elders'¹⁹ and others have written of the spirit deep within Indigenous people as the Spirit of God, of Christ.

I am encouraged, inspired and challenged by their experiences and writings. My personal reluctance, or more accurately, my slowness, to name Christ as the Spirit of this land, is principally two fold. Firstly, I hear among the community here the overwhelming identification of Christ with the deluge of a colonising church. So this distinguishing is an important step, or buffer, from projecting a further insidious colonisation in the guise of Christian theology. To speak of Christ slightly apart from Indigenous spirituality is to respect the otherness, to restrain, or at least attempt to, the church's paternalistic politics in relating with Indigenous Christians. One consequence is that it may become useful to speak of various Indigenous theologies around the country, with each growing from the local context yet in dialogue with others.

Secondly, I am wary of the ways in which the reverse of this understanding of a union can be manipulated by non-Indigenous Christians to say that because I am 'in Christ' I am therefore 'in the Spirit of this land,' I am engaging deeply with Indigenous spirituality. Just as it is unavoidable for Indigenous Christians to engage entirely with Christ apart from non-Indigenous people, it is impossible for non-Indigenous Christians to engage with Christ present in this land, present within Indigenous spirituality, without being engaged with, present with, Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous Christian people. The invocation of 'deep calling to deep,' of mystical union, is at least equally as much a call to deep interpersonal communion, which is were the final songline call us.

We sing as one today – this could be we people together and/or Great Spirit of this land and/or Christ singing as one, sharing. It is an invitation to continuing Indigenous culture in Christian praxis, to continuing Christian praxis in Indigenous culture; to living a deeper, growing Indigenous-Christian identity into further expression, to deepen our vulnerabilities

¹⁶ Psalm 42:7.

¹⁷ Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, *Compass Theology Review* 1-2, 1988. pp 9-11.

¹⁸ Djiniyini Gondarra, *Father, You Gave Us The Dreaming*

¹⁹ Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology*

with each other in the context of spiritual (and therefore social, economic, political) communion. I believe Christ yearns to be someone new in this place, where songs not heard by the trees for hundreds of years might be carried on the breeze again, where 'Christ,' and we and local saints from millennia ago and millennia to come might break open food from the land and sea.

It invokes a hope that within our own selves, among us as community in creation, we too desire to be sung into being, into transformation, by our Creator in this land, with Christ, to sing Christ into being here in the immanence, the particularities, of our day, in our flesh and blood relationships with one another in our undeniable diversity.

As we gather each Sunday, our singing comes from our own heart-breath, such as it is. As mentioned earlier we are a community comprising Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The underlying respect, familiarity and friendship can be interpreted as gifts of the Spirit. Our genuine humanity also means our spirits are sometimes discordant. Sometimes our conversations seem to, and actually do, go nowhere, or Indigenous and Christian stories/traditions conflict, even violate one another. Our community is fragmentary, there are disintegrative spirits among us, yet we yearn for wholeness, for union with our Spirit Creator. To sing of harmony of the land's Great Spirit with Christ, is to sing of our own growing reality, of our persistent yearning for spiritual-cultural well-being. For the questions, gifts, struggles, and transformations of this call are embodied in our lives and relationships. We hear this songline as a call to deeper relationship with one another, to deeply know our selves, particularly as part of creation's kinship, to open our selves hospitably, and our traditions fully, to one another, to the Spirit, to the One indwelling Christ.

This 'Indigenous theology' is new and old, it is incarnationally eternal, evolving and restoring. It is being in places where the spiritual-cultural depths within a person are most readily evoked, where the silenced spirit murmurs, where genocided lives are resurrected. It is in the ambiguous space between culture/identity – faith/spirituality – church/community, between history and eternity, between Self and Other that we live and cultivate an Indigenous Christian Community. It is in the dynamic of honouring the 'space between' and discerning the 'union of' that we live and move and have our being.

Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (ACM) - Parramatta Diocese
1987 - 2007

Prayer of the Aboriginal People

Father of all, You gave us the Dreaming,
You have spoken to us through our beliefs,
You then made your love clear to us in the person of Jesus
We thank you for your care.
You own us, you are our hope.
Make us strong as we face the problems of change.
We ask you to help the people of Australia
to listen to us and respect our culture.
Make the knowledge of you grow strong in all people,
So that you can be at home in us and we can make a home for everyone in our land.
Amen
(Prepared by Aboriginal people for Pope John Paul II's visit to Alice Springs 1986.)

Our Life in Ministry— what is it to be Indigenous and Church?



My name is **Jenny** and I am one of the team members. I came to the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (ACM) some years ago. I find that for me the ACM plays a very important part in my life. My reason for being here is that I enjoy the company of the people and am becoming more involved in community. I am learning new things and enjoy the various arts and crafts. Also the ACM I feel is for my spirit because it builds me up when I am down and I find a lot of encouragement from this place. I also get peace here. It has done a lot to restore my confidence. Being a part of the ACM has made me want to become an Aboriginal Catholic and since being one it enriches my life.



My name is **Christine Kennedy**. I am a Kamilaroi woman. I come from the North-Western slopes and plains of NSW. We are Murriss. My mother, Ruby Dodd was Muninju, my father Don Kennedy (Wanaki) was Eulalee. Mother's Day for me is a day of living in denial. All that pain and sorrow – I release it with my art—silk scarves, canvas painting, and mosaics. I am a jack-of-all-trades in the art world and I am still mastering various skills. Not only my art, my faith and my spirituality pulled me through. Without it, I probably would have committed suicide years ago. The Aboriginal Catholic Ministry (ACM) at Penrith has supported me every way they can and now it is my turn to support others going through similar things. The ACM is a gathering place for Aboriginal and people from the wider community. I am doing a computer course, learning how to do art therapy, and helping to run workshops on domestic violence.



Dianne Brooks - time for me to share my story!

My involvement: I shared the message stick journey with 37 different locations. We visited Primary schools. We visited Secondary schools. We visited Community centres. We visited Churches and Congregations. We shared Pope John Paul 11 message.



Janice Brown says: I must say that the ACM is a special meeting place for Aboriginal people. Also for anyone who calls in for a cup of tea or yarn. All of us women here look after this place and won't see anyone disrespect or damage it. We do some great pieces of art such as painting, sewing, mosaics, dyeing scarves, bead making and of course dancing. We have Mass on Sundays with Fr Phil. All are welcome and we share sandwiches

and tea. The ACM is a home away from home for all of us women who gather there. It is place to be ourselves.



Our Life in Ministry— what does inculturation and the Churches mean for us in our faith journey?



Margaret says: "At Nungalinya we have groups coming in from remote parts of the territory; we all come together as one, to share stories, songs, paintings and fellowship. We reflect on the scriptures together and do role plays. We complete course work books while we are there.



Rhonda Randall: I have known Sr Naomi for a very long time. Through her, I have found what the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry is all about. Sr Naomi is so loving, kind and caring. Through her, I have learnt to believe in a loving and caring God. I have also met others who have helped me through my sadness and pain. We thank God for these precious people.



Sharon & Numen gave a workshop to PALMS Lay Missionaries. Sharon says: “The PALMS people told us where they were going, like Papua New Guinea. They were going overseas to help other people. Some of them hadn't met an Aboriginal person before. I realised that we weren't just there for a talk we were there to educate people that we still exist today and our culture is very much alive. I told them that I live my culture through the ACM.”

Our Life in Ministry—how do we minister to fellow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Western Sydney?



Janice K. says: “I am an elder in the community. I've been a member of the ACM for the last six/seven years. I would like to share my involvement with the Domestic Violence Programme, which I have been doing for two years now. We did two workshops at the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry at Penrith, which were very successful. I work with Elaine and Sue who are the facilitators.”



My name is **Daisy Barker** and I am a Yorta Yorta woman and an elder in this community. I like coming to the ACM because everybody I know comes here. We do scarves, computers, paintings and when we are down we talk to the Counsellor. In 2006 we went to Campbelltown in April to build up relationships with Aboriginal people and Pacific Islanders. We met everyone we know and felt welcomed there. We danced and it was worth it because we have been asked to come again to dance because all the ladies were moved by our dancing.



My name is **Allison Nicholls** I am a team member here at the A.C.M. I have been involved with them for about 5 yrs now. I enjoy coming here for many reasons. Last year the highlight of being involved with the ACM was that we all went for a trip to ULURU. We also have spiritual weekends away. We have been doing many courses all of us involved here. I enjoy learning and getting new skills eg. Advocacy, Diabetes Program, Parenting skills, group Forums. Each of us has our own field of tasks, which we are able to help each individual as the needs arise.

Search for Meaning— Indigenous culture and how it relates to the bible?

Margaret - "At Nungalinya, we reflect on the scriptures together and do role plays. We complete course work books while we are there."

Indigenous People find God in everyday things. The Bible shows God working in everyday life.

Sharon: "When my mother died, I was very angry towards God. I didn't want to talk to anybody. Coming to the ACM and talking to the women encouraged me to keep on coming to mass. I listened to Fr Phil talk about two ways of looking at God: as a gentle GOD and as cruel god. Fr Phil believes that the cruel image of god is wrong. He believes in the Gentle God who loves us as we are. The ACM women talk to me all the time about their lives and how they cope helps me. I found that by doing my scarves was a way for me to express my grief through my Aboriginal art."

Daisy: "When my grandson was very sick I prayed every night and I felt a lot of God's spirit in me. I pray every night not just for my family but for all my friends' families and I pray for all children, poor children and people in the war."

Janice B: "Years ago I used to sit and listen to my aunties and uncles talking. They used to say that before the white man came to this country God was here first. Some Aboriginal people called God Biaime and others called God Birrikin. It didn't matter what names the tribes called him because the people knew who they were referring to. They believed in a Higher Power. According to our Ancestors Biaime or Birrikin walked through the rocks and caves and left an imprint on the caves. But when the European people found out they got rid of the imprint because they didn't want it to be known that Aboriginal people had a religion. I find my meaning in life in nature and in people. I couldn't go through my life without God being with me. He's with me all the time he eats with me, sleeps with me and helps me all the time. I believe God is with each person from the moment of creation. God gave us our life and walks with us to guide us."

Search for Meaning—Who is this person Jesus through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eyes?

Christine Kennedy: A Moslem was trying to tell me that Jesus was only a prophet, but I said this doesn't sit with me, because I know deep down about Aboriginal spirituality, the Dreaming. Our ancestors prepared the way for the special Spirit to come. I know that it is scientifically proven that Aboriginal people were here long before the pyramids and the father Abraham. God never left us – has always been with us.

Margaret: I'm doing Certificate 3 in Theology in Darwin at Nungalinya College and learning about Jesus in an Aboriginal Culture. I learnt how Jesus chose the twelve Disciples. We are like them today he chose me to learn about the meaning of our faith and ministering to our community.

Daisy: I really believe that God is true, there is no lying in God. One night when I was praying I felt I was sitting with Jesus. This really true. I felt him sitting right there beside me.

Jenny: I've been aware of God since I was very young. Poppa Duncan and Nanna Ferguson used to pick us up for Sunday School, so I always knew of Jesus and the Church. I always knew that I could turn to Jesus and always prayed to Jesus but since being involved with the Catholic Church there is more meaning to this belief. I always

knew that I could turn to Jesus and always prayed to Jesus but since being involved with the Catholic Church there is more meaning to this belief. I am not good at expressing my faith but in my heart I know that the only way a person can go any further is through Jesus.

Janice K: “I grew up an Aboriginal Catholic and that church guided me through my life and helped me to understand not just being Aboriginal but being Catholic that Jesus died on the Cross for everybody. I’ve come closer to everyone at the ACM through coming to Mass. I’ve learned a lot because of the way Fr presents Mass. He talks to us and explains the Bible to us which I didn’t understand before. He teaches us during Mass. Through Mass I feel closer to God being an Aboriginal Catholic. I keep my culture and I accept God in my life so I lose nothing. I am happy being an Aboriginal Catholic.”

Justice and the Gospel— Jesus came to bring good news to the poor and set the captives free; in our Australian context how does the gospel speak to us of Justice?

Christine: At the Sisters of St Joseph at Baulkham Hills they hosted a Cross-Cultural Summer School from 5th to 26th January 2007; the subject I really enjoyed was Human Rights. We were watching film clips of some people in Africa. This reminded me of what my people would have gone through in the early days. Now it is recognized that God gave us human rights, but man became greedy and took rights away from the little people.

Sharon: “There are some of the women from the ACM that are sitting on the Circle Sentencing. I see them giving justice to the Aboriginal community in a loving and caring, honest, humane way. These women bring such hope to people. You can see the gospel in them by the way they live and work.”

Janice K: “I look back to when I was young and I question why did the Catholic Church allow racism in our little school in Bowraville. We were segregated by a long fence and had our own school. In the Church we sat at the back because we didn’t feel we belonged. We lined up last for Communion. We felt misunderstood.”

Margaret: “The Church teaches us to accept one another and our differences. An example of this is respecting other religions and different faiths. I do Social Justice Workshops with high school students giving them an insight and understanding into our history, culture and our background.”

Daisy: “I help others because I know they need help. When I am on a train and I see a family on drugs with little ones, I feel really sad for them and I want to help them. When I am at the ACM, I know that I want to help anyone who comes in and needs help.” Aboriginal people speak of broken spirits. Let us all advocate on behalf of the unfed. Bishop Chris Saunders quotes: You marginalized people, you leave them on the outer, you don’t nurture them, you don’t nourish them; it is no wonder these things are happening. Society has no right to be surprised.

Jenny: “I think that justice is being fair and honest and believing in the equality of all people. In our Aboriginal culture we have not had justice since the coming of the white people. Through our work at the ACM rather than being bitter we can do our part in making the world a better place. We do this by attending social justice groups, talking to school students raising awareness of the unjust way Aboriginal people have been treated. Even though we are oppressed and at the end of the social ladder, we still show great care and feelings for our fellows.”

Janice B: “If you treat others the way you want to be treated that is justice. Caring is very important and part of life. Everybody has his/her own story. I think you only have to look at the world in general and notice different seasons and different people. In areas of devastation and misery we must try to do something to help. We are committed to show that we care. We are like a tapestry, we are woven in. We might be only one stitch but we are all connected in some way or another through events, sadness, disasters, celebrations etc we are all connected. When I was on the mission at Nambucca Heads, if one family went out and got a haul of fish every house on the mission had fish for tea. That is the same if someone shot a kangaroo. When I was young if I was seen on the road after school hours my Aunty would tell me to go home. We would all look after each other’s children.”

Covenanting— God calls us to be one, what does this mean for the Churches today in Australia and how can we make this commitment to one another?

Sharon: “God loves us unconditionally. He sent his only son to die for us .I believe at the ACM we are committed to one another through good and bad times. The ACM women have a dance, ‘One People, One Land.’ Through their dance they are able to express love that calls us to be one. ” JOHN PAUL II’s speech tells us to keep our Aboriginal culture and talents alive and never lose them. We express our beliefs and values within the church. ”

Margaret: “Aboriginal people are there for one another, and my family support each other and the community. The members of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry are committed to supporting all communities.”

Daisy: “I do not like disagreeing with others. I say to myself that I do not know how long we have all got to live on this earth. We are only here for a short time so it’s best to respect one another while we are here. No-one is better than anyone else. We are all God’s children and we are all equal. One of my favorite passages from John Paul 11 speech: *Take heart, stay closely united. You are like a tree in the middle of a bush fire. The leaves are scorched and the tough bark is burned, but inside the tree the sap is still flowing, and under the ground the roots are still strong. Like that tree you have endured the flames, and you still have the power to be reborn. The time for this rebirth is now! What we ask for now is a new heart that can admit past injustices while looking to a new future with hope, a new heart that seeks individual and national reconciliation.*

Jenny: “We make commitments to each other by giving every person loving respect. Respect goes a long way. If you don’t have respect you don’t care for anyone. We commit ourselves to be there if someone needs some assistance. We must not let envy or jealousy block what we want to see happen in our community. This is the Jesus thing to do. I praise the Catholic Church because it allows us to still carry our culture and hold on to our spirituality.”

As John Paul II addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 29th November 1986:

The Gospel now invites you to become, through and through, Aboriginal Christians. It meets your deepest desires.
You do not have to be people divided into two parts, as though an Aboriginal had to borrow the faith and life of Christianity, like a hat or a pair of shoes, from someone else who owns them.

Jesus calls you to accept his words and his values into your own culture. To develop in this way will make you more than ever truly Aboriginal.



2005: TENT EMBASSY



2006: ACM Meal



2005 Meal



2006: PILGRIMAGE

- Culture is family. Culture is life as handed down by tradition. The symbols point to values that offer a people meaning to life.
- As John Paul II addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 29th November 1986:
- “*Your culture, which shows the lasting genius and dignity of your race, must not be allowed to disappear.*”
- As John Paul II addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 29th November 1986:
- Do not think that your gifts are worth so little that you should no longer bother to maintain them. Share them with each other and teach them to your children.
- As John Paul II addressed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, 29th November 1986:
- Your songs, your stories, your paintings, your dances, your languages, must never be lost.”

Evelyn Parkin - Living a Dual Life/Faith with Jesus the Christ

Evelyn Parkin works with the Catholic Ministry and amongst the community. She has a MA in Theology, and lives on Stradbroke Island. Evelyn is married to Allan and has 4 children and 6 Grand children.



Overview of presentation:

Some Scripture concerning Christ as the Head of all creation – John 1: 1-14; Col 1:15-17; Eph 1:15-16.

Setting the scene – Sitting with Jesus around the sacred campfire, a place where God makes himself evident, Rom 1:19-20 See (Ex 3:2)

- Prayer; the Fire Blessing
- Power Point Presentation
- Introduction
- Living a dual life/faith with Jesus the Christ

Jesus the Christ

There are around three hundred titles describing Jesus²⁰, my understanding of Jesus known as “The Christ” is the anointed one who was born into the world in the human form as the only Son of God (Jn 1:14-16). “The Christ” also relates to the “Word” who had existed before all creation and sustains all creation together in God and the Holy Spirit. The continuity of Jesus the Christ is in his own words “I am the Alpha and the Omega who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” (Rev 1:8).

Introduction

I would like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional owners, the Ancestors who have passed into the Dreaming and to the people who are still live on this land today.

These are three sources that my Catholicism maybe traced to; the arrival of four Passionists Fathers in 1843; my great-Grandfather Dick Martin who came from New Caledonia and my Grandfather and his siblings were taken away and put into the Nudgee Orphanage.

Presently I live at Hendra with my husband Alan and Stephanie youngest of four children. My home is Quandamooka Country the Moreton Bay area specifically Stradbroke Island which is just off the coast of Brisbane. I left home in 1980 at this stage I am gradually working my way back.

²⁰ The Lockman Foundation, ed., *Master Study Bible - New American Standard* (Tennessee: Holman Bible Publishers, 1981), "p. 31".

My upbringing on the Island and the memories I have of that time are absolutely wonderful. I was raised at a small Aboriginal Community called "One Mile." We lived by a flowing fresh water creek which meandered its way down to the salt water where there was a swimming hole for all of us to swim.

There is so much to talk about this beautiful place and its beautiful people, but today I am focusing on the beginnings of my spiritual life as an Aboriginal person who walks in harmony with Christianity.

It is here I wish to acknowledge and honour my Mother, Bethel Delaney, my great Aunt Bethel Murray, Auntie Rose Borey and Auntie Mabel Brown. These strong powerful women had passed on their love of our Lord Jesus Christ by being women of action. By that I mean, they nurtured my spiritual life as well as other children, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

When I think of Auntie Bethel now, I remember how she took care of the priest who came to the Island to celebrate Mass for the Catholics at least once-a-month. Auntie provided meals for him, dedicatedly took care of the altar, the flowers (gathered bush flowers that grew on the Island) and the linen cloths (which were white as snow and so stiff from starch). Auntie also assisted the priest in Mass by ringing the bell and making sure all the children were very quite with reverence (that's what I remember most of all, the reverence that was lovingly instilled in me). My Mum and Aunties also prepared us for the Sacraments, Sunday school, the Rosary and the Lenten seasons by attending the Stations of the Cross after school, including Easter eggs for each one of us.

Every weekend and school holidays, she would take me and my nephews and nieces out into the bush. The walks were always spiritual and meaningful. This practise kept us in touch with the environment and God's Spirit. When I think of Mum and those times I remember her face and how happy and contented she looked. One of my earliest memories was of Mum taking us on a picnic in the bush and I remember so vividly thinking to myself, "I can't see anything" because all around us was this long grass and Mum just put us all on a blanket in the middle of this place, that seems ok but this was long grass way over my head. Mum was in her glory once again because I remember the expressions on her face, they told me a great deal of the depth of her own Spirituality with God and His bush environment. She didn't have to preach it because it was just her way of life and she left me this wonderful legacy.

Some times Mum would tell us stories, other times we would walk silently along the sandy bush tracks (or wherever we were), with our own thoughts, while listening to different sounds of the bush and the mangroves (the many birds, the trees swaying, the running creeks that were in the swamps). There was also the smell of the wildflowers, the smell of the salt water, of fire burning, as well as noticing the animal's tracks lefts on the tracks where we walked. The snake tracks reminded us that they were there but somehow we never came across them (I always believed that our Lord was watching and protecting us).

During springtime, we would go to pick wild flowers at the edge of the swamps and walk on a bit further to tend to the old mission peoples' graves at the Myora cemetery. There we would clean and tidy the graves and leave some of the beautiful flowers that we had just gathered. We had to keep some of the flowers to take onto the Dunwich cemetery where other members of our relatives were buried. It would take us a whole day to do this, arriving back home late in the afternoon.²¹

²¹ E. Parkin, "A Personal Story of Christianity and the Inner Spirit," *ejournal Australian Catholic University* (2007): "p.47".

The introductory gives a brief overview of being raised as a Catholic and living in harmony with the Spirit of the bush.

I am reminded also of the parables that Jesus used to get his message across to the people of that time some of these included the birds, wild flowers, water and many other examples belonging to the land.

Spiritual Growth

It seemed that during the course of my spiritual direction I became confused and many questions began to arise within my inner being. The confusion seemed to have become much worse as my relationship with Jesus began to grow.

Amidst all this, I heard these words of Jesus say to me "Go and find who you really are" I felt I had been spun around like a bottle and was sent in another direction.

Now why would Jesus say these words to me when I thought I'd been practising my faith as most Christians?

Along the way, I found myself involved with Wontulp-Bi-Buya College and it is here that my eyes were opened to a wonderful and exciting experience of rediscovering self as an Aboriginal Christian. It was as though the scales had fallen off my eyes once again and I began to focus on both spiritualities that work in harmony with each other

Living a dual life/faith with Jesus the Christ

By this, I mean adapting to Christianity as an Aboriginal person and not from a western point of view. It is also trying to make things culturally appropriate to present a holistic and fullness approach to life.

In that sense I'm trying to bring the western thought of Christianity and the Scriptures (the way I was raised) into my ancient Aboriginal culture, allowing the message of Jesus to resonate with myself and with my people. I do this along side of my brothers and sisters who are involved in the same discussion.

After contemplating my walk with Jesus as an Aboriginal Christian, I am sure this is what he meant when he told me to go and find my true self. Now I feel at peace and satisfied with my identity as I stand before my Lord. So we continue to search for similarities with Christ and culture

In the interest of all, Aboriginal Christians acknowledge that the God of the Hebrews is the same one who reveals himself to the Aboriginal people of Australia; though, he is known by many names.

Following, is Christ in culture on parallel with Christianity, one only needs to look into and beyond to see the Holy Trinity working within Aboriginal culture. We may experience it with the power of imagination.

Aboriginal Culture	Christianity
Creator Spirit known by many names; Rainbow Spirit, Wandjina, Biame, Yiirmbal	God known by many names; Yahweh, Lord, Supreme Deity, Elohim, Adonai
Creation – Dreaming stories Creator Spirit, Culture heroes - law and order. Giving purpose and oneness to people, land, sea and sky	Creation – Genesis stories God, The Word, Holy Spirit - law and order holds all things together giving purpose and unity to the Cosmic Universe
Christ in Aboriginal culture- when experiencing the Creator Spirit in the land, sea and sky, we experience Christ	“Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in me The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own initiative, but the Father abiding in me does his works (Jn 14:10)
Sometimes Aboriginal people meet with Christ around the campfire- he radiates light that gives comfort and protects against the darkness where the evil one lurks.	Jesus is the light of the world (Jn 8:12) God reveals himself to Moses in the Burning bush conversation (Ex 3:2)
An Aboriginal story that speaks about ‘a good man’ called Mirrabooka could symbolically be seen as Jesus caring for his people. (attached)	Jesus is a defender for the suffering, the marginalized, the poor and tends to men, women and children who suffer many kinds of injustices in this world
The Dreaming ceremony that is a re- enactment of the Culture Heroes and Ancestor Spirits re-creating creation. It is a place where the past of long ago is also happening at the present time to sustain the people into their future. Life for the Aboriginal people is one of ceremonies keeping their stories alive.	When we participate in the ceremony of the Eucharistic meal, we re-enact the life, death and resurrection of Jesus – In a sense we are part of the past that is brought into the present time which also continues to help us into the future

The above is an example of the similarities between the Scriptures and Aboriginal culture. We know that Jesus Christ came from God and the world as a human not only for a select few people but for the whole world including its environment. As we are told in the Scriptures, God makes him-self evident to all people (Rom 1:19-20) and it is up to us to recognize him, right within our own culture. I believe that the co-existence of the Aboriginal Christians dual faith sanctifies the person. This is in align with the late Pope John Paul statement,

“Some of the stories from your Dreamtime legends speak powerfully of the great mysteries of human life, its frailty, its need for help its closeness to spiritual powers and the value of the human person. They are not unlike some of the great inspired lessons from the people among whom Jesus himself was born. It is wonderful to see how people, as they accept the Gospel of Jesus, find points of agreement between their own traditions and those of Jesus and his people”²².

Pope John Paul has been a wonderful supporter for Aboriginal people and their faith, he sets a fine example for others to catch up and recognize the importance of Aboriginal Christians contribution to the church. There is a challenge to the wider church to see this contribution comes to fruition in the efforts towards an Australian theology. A theology that

²² Department of Aboriginal Affairs, ed., *The Address Given by His Holiness Pope John Paul II* (Sydney, N.S.W: St Paul Publications, 1986).

needs to belong to this ancient land, that will reveal a story of continuity with God/Creator Spirit dwelling here for thousands of years.

Also the story about Mirrabooka from the Quandamooka people of Stradbroke Island could be seen along side the story of Jesus Christ and his ways as a loving, caring and compassionate man. With further study this story of Mirrabooka could demonstrate that it is possible to have an Indigenous Christology.

Mirrabooka (Southern Cross)

Biami the Good Spirit was kept very busy, guarding the tribes as they roamed throughout the earth, and he was much troubled from them. He found that he could not watch over all of them at once; he knew he must have help to keep them from harm.

Among the tribes there was a man called Mirrabooka, who was much loved for his wisdom, and the way in which he looked after the welfare of his people. Biami was well pleased with Mirrabooka, and when he grew old, Biami gave him a spirit form and placed him in the sky among the stars, and promised him eternal life. Biami gave Mirrabooka lights for his hands and feet and stretched him across the sky, so that he could watch for ever over the tribes he loved. And the tribes could look up to him from the earth and see the stars which were Mirrabooka's eyes gazing down on them.

When in later times white invaders came from across the sea and stole the tribal lands, they did not know that this group of stars across the southern sky was Mirrabooka, and they renamed them. They called Mirrabooka by the name of the Southern Cross. And the eyes of Mirrabooka they called the Pointers. But it is really Mirrabooka there, stretched across the sky; he will be there for ever, for Biami has made it so.²³

Reflection on Jesus the Christ in Art-work

Introduction

I have selected two pieces of artwork reflecting Jesus' crucifixion. One is taken from the booklet, "Australian Stations of the Cross,"²⁴ the other is from, "His Face- Images of Christ in Art".²⁵

The first piece of art, "Jesus dies on the Cross," has a dual interpretation and is painted by the gifted artist Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann of the Daly River Aboriginal Community. This piece reflects Miriam's ancient culture as well as contemporary storylines of Jesus the Christ.

The second piece is called "The Crucifixion with St. Jerome and St. Francis" it was painted by an Italian artist, Francesco di Stefano Pesellino. Francesco's art reflects the Western ideology of Jesus Christ e.g.: the blond hair and Western features.

²³ Kath Walker, *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (North Ryde, NSW: Angus & Robertson Publishers, 1972).

²⁴ Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann. *Australian Stations of The Cross* (Victoria, Australia: Dove Communications, 1984), 26.

²⁵ Francesco di Stefano Pesellino (1422-1457). *His Face- Images of Christ in Art* (New York: Chameleon Books, Inc, 1988), 91.

Miriam- Rose Ungunmerr- Baumann



“And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last.” (Mark 15: 37)

Miriam- Rose’s art may seem to the naked eye that it is all dots and dashes. When contemplating and decoding the artwork, the viewer will see the manifestation of an ancient culture and contemporary art experience. He/She will also notice that the markings that are expressed on Jesus body also continue onto the Cross, Jesus is nailed to the Cross and they now stand together as one.

Each marking represents the inner- being of Jesus, they tell the story of the concealed sufferings of pain and agony that he had gone through.

Just before Jesus’ death, he let out a loud cry (Mk 15: 37) perhaps all that he had contained inside was expressed in that loud cry and at the same time feeling triumphed in the Fathers will.

The circles in the center of Jesus’ head are eyes that represent the Father. It tells the viewer that God was always in the inner-being of his Son, who, with the Spirit directed, supported, strengthened and

loved his Son Jesus throughout. The thick circle that is without a beginning or end represents the divinity of Jesus this sign takes Jesus back to the beginning the Creation with God (John 1: 1-5) this is the Mystery of Jesus’ Christology from above. The dots represents all humanity, Jesus let’s his love flow onto all people, especially to his Mother and the others around him.

In the Aboriginal Culture the markings on the outer body are signs of someone who has gone through an important ceremony. Jesus of the Hebrew tribe was a warrior for God’s people, he gone through a significant sacrifice for the love of humanity. He was nailed to the Cross. The scars that are on Jesus’ feet and hands remind all Creation of his sacrifice.

Francesco di Stefano Pesellino



“And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.” (Luke 23:46)

Francesco's artwork of Jesus brings the viewer up close to Jesus' body that highlights his near nakedness, although there are no outwardly signs of the physical punishment that he had endured (only the piercing). The stark black crown of thorns on Jesus' head protrude out of the picture, they are a reminder that tells the story of the mockery and the humiliation that he suffered. As the viewer looks down from the thorns he/she will see how Jesus hangs his head and by the frown upon his face, a glimpse of his inner pain comes through. This is the reality of the Christology from 'below.'

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Tracey Spencer - A Theology of Decolonisation for Australia: the Lives of Jim Page and Rebecca Forbes in the Adnyamathanha Community as Gospel for Decolonising Australia



Revd. Tracey Spencer is a Uniting Church Minister in Alice Springs. She has been a Minister in the Flinders ranges for seven years.

SYNOPSIS

Research into the lives of Jim Page and Rebecca Forbes, two English immigrants, who lived with the Adnyamathanha community of the Northern Flinders Ranges in the 1920-50s as missionary and wife of an Indigenous man respectively, suggests relational models of decolonization for Australia. Life writing of these two subjects and the Adnyamathanha community, reconstructed through oral histories, archival research and speculative fiction, set within the context of postcolonial studies, reveals ways in which these lives negotiated the host-stranger relationships in a colonial setting, to arrive at new subjectivities that deconstructed the colonial relationships.

This workshop asks whether the emergent subjectivities of white Australians like Jim and Rebecca can become a model of decolonized relationships in postcolonial Australia. If so, the 'gospel' that is the story of their lives with the Adnyamathanha community may become the basis for a theology of decolonization for Australia.

'They came and camped with us': incarnation in a theology of decolonisation

INCARNATION AS EMIGRATION OF SUBJECTIVITY

Acknowledge the Gubbi Gubbi traditional owners of this place, and that I speak on their country.

I was in the Alice Springs Post Office a week or so ago, where I ran into Uncle Pete Turner. Uncle is an Arrernte man I got to know at the swimming pool over summer, where we yarned about the state of the world every morning as we did our laps. Uncle is part of the stolen generation, and made his career in the Australian Defence Forces.

'So what do you think about all this?' he asked, referring to Howards announced measures for NT communities in the wake of the Little Children are Sacred report.

'An election stunt, something that's got everyone jumpy, and perhaps some parts of it will get a real focus on whats needed in the remote communities, like policing and basic services,' I said.

'Yeah, but you know what's really going on?' He said. '40 years ago we got rights, but we never really got equality. So now he's making plans based on race: if you're going to start quarantining welfare, its got to be the same for everyone, Indigenous or non-Indigenous. If you're going to do medical checks, its got to be for everyone, there's sexual abuse going on in all parts of society. You can't keep making one set of rules based on race...or you know what will happen? There will be an uprising. Because this country was never conquered. There was no treaty. It was colonized and the Indigenous people never said

yes to that. And maybe they won't take it for too much longer. You know it was 200 years in America before the Indian wars happened? We came close to an uprising in the 70s you know, and under Howard we've been set back years. Australia is one of the few countries that was colonized, that hasn't yet become decolonized. But it could happen.' All while I got a stamp for my letter. If you think that decolonization is an academic idea, you're wrong. The conversation about how and whether non-Indigenous Australians should be here at all is alive and well in our communities, on our streets, in our homes. Deborah Bird Rose, a non-Indigenous anthropologist in Daly and Victoria river country, has put the dilemma this way:

'...many of us really search to understand how we may inscribe back into the world a moral presence of ourselves... We cannot help knowing that we are here through dispossession and death. What does this mean, for us and for country? What alternatives exist for us, and what I asked of us?'

She answers this question by quoting Hobbles Dabayarri who she worked extensively with, who said 'We can come together join in, make it more better out of that big trouble. You know, before Captain Cook bin make a lot of cruel you know. Now these day, these day, we'll be friendly, we'll be love [one another], we'll be mates. That be better. Better for make that trouble.'²⁶

For Christians in Australia, we need a way of thinking about this ongoing dilemma, and asking if and how Australia can be home to non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous people. Its like the way that Christians in Latin America in the 1970s and 80s needed a way of thinking about God in the midst of political oppression, and they came up with a theology of liberation. I think that in Australia, we need a way of thinking about God in the midst of an unsettled not quite post- colonial situation. I think we need a theology of decolonization.

And so I have looked hard at the stories from my research into the lives of Jim Page and Rebecca Forbes in the Adnyamathanha community of the Flinders Ranges in the 1920s – 50s: this is the boat that Rebecca immigrated to Australia from England on in 1909. Pp: Jim emigrated some time later, and this is Adnymathanha country where he is buried. Nganga Mr Page, Adyanathanha yuras say still today, expressing their sorrow at his death in 1935 The way Jim and Rebecca came to live among Adnyamathanha yuras suggests models of decolonized relationships in Australia that have social and theological implications. Its these ideas I'd like to explore in the workshop today. For me this workshop is a fantastic opportunity to build up with you a theology of decolonization.

Story Theology

PP

My research is primarily about telling stories: stories of the lives of Jim Page and Rebecca Forbes in the Adnyamathanha community. These are their graves, at Nepabunna in the Flinders Ranges, which was where I first encountered their stories, when Cliff Coulthard an Adnyamathanha man and cultural tourism guide at Iga Warta showed me their graves and told me their stories and said 'You, you're like Jim Page' because me and my partner Murray were interested in Aboriginal land rights. 'And you're like Mrs Forbes: she was only small like you, and she came and lived with my people.'

The stories I tell are based on oral histories, stories that have been told to me, mostly by Adnyamathanha yuras who lived with or knew the stories of Jim and Rebecca. And this is an important starting point for me, as a white researcher. Indigenous commentators like

²⁶ Deborah Bird Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2004).p6

Jackie Huggins have challenged white researchers to be accountable to Indigenous people, and particularly for their research to be grounded in ongoing friendships with Indigenous people.²⁷ I am lucky enough for this to be the case, and want to acknowledge the very many Adnyamathanha people who have supported my research, and become friend and family to me (and especially want to acknowledge the presence of Denise Champion at this conference, Adnyamathanha minister with UAICC. The stories I am working on are postcolonial stories, intentionally drawing Adnyamathanha and non-Indigenous cultures together 'so that experiences in one are experienced within the lens of the other'.²⁸ This is more than a literary task: this I think is the task for living in a truly postcolonial Australia. We often hear people talking about Indigenous people living 'in two worlds': in a sense I think that all Australians should live in 'two worlds'...and in the process, as Jim and Rebecca and many Indigenous people have experienced, a third world might emerge that can accommodate us all. That is what can be created in writing stories: a 'world in front of the text' into which readers can step imaginatively, and so begin to imagine new lives new choices for themselves as well.²⁹

Life Writing

The stories I tell conform to a hybrid genre called Life Writing by Canadian Marlene Kadar³⁰, combining as they do oral history with archival and historical material, autobiographical sections that describe my own relationships in the process of research, and speculative fiction to flesh out imaginatively the lives of the protagonists, but throughout, it is oral history – primarily the voices of Adnyamathanha – that are the strongest voices in the text.

Stories based on Oral History

Further, Indigenous academics like John Maynard have claimed that oral histories 'give the full story by filling in the other side of the written account'³¹ and even that oral history represents an Indigenous epistemology or way of conveying meaning. ³² The 'credibility of oral evidence lies not in its fact but its subjective truth'³³ so that oral history seeks to make sense of the past, in order to serve the present.³⁴ We tell stories of the past, now, because there is something that we, today, need to hear in them.

Story Theology from the Christian Tradition

Looking to stories as a source of theology is not new to the Christian tradition, although it has been overshadowed by the more philosophical approach of Western systematic theology. Yet even from that culture, theologians like Sallie McFague from England, Denham Grierson in Australia, James McClendon and TW Tilley from America have all argued for the primacy of story as a vehicle for theology, and drawn on early church writings like the autobiographical Confessions of St Augustine or hagiographic work *The Life of Antony*, as well as contemporary biographies of people like Martin Luther King Jr

²⁷ Jackie Huggins, "Respect Vs Political Correctness," *Australian Author* 26.3 Spring (1994).

²⁸ E Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000). P186

²⁹ Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995). P221

³⁰ Marlene Kadar, ed., *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

³¹ Victoria Haskins and John Maynard, "Sex, Race and Power: Aboriginal Men and White Women in Australian History," *Australian Historical Studies* 126 (2005).p194

³² Maynard, "Sex, Race and Power: Aboriginal Men and White Women in Australian History." p193-4; Jessica Hutchings, *Decolonisation and Aotearoa - a Pathway to Right Livelihood*, 20052005.; TRoderic Lacey, "Whose Voices Are Heard? Oral History and the Decolonisation of History: Pacific Voices.," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal: Crossing Borders* 19 (1997).

³³ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford University Press, 1988). p139

³⁴ Bain Atwood, Burrage, Winifred, Burrage, Alan, and Stokie, Elsie, *A Life Together, a Life Apart: A History of Relations between Europeans and Aborigines*. (Melbourne University Press, 1994).

and Oscar Romero³⁵ as examples of theology presented through the story of a life, where a central metaphor of Christian faith lived in a new context injects traditional doctrines with new meaning.³⁶ Third World theologians – and in particular I would mention CS Song and the Rainbow Spirit Elders - have located their theologies within folk stories, cultural mythologies and stories from their history and experience,³⁷ and found in those stories new perspectives on Christian doctrines that simultaneously enrich Christian theology and affirm the wisdom and divinity present in these cultures and traditions.³⁸ The very choice by the gospel writers, and then by the compilers of the canon, to privilege life writing about Jesus as a vehicle for a theology about God, established Christianity as an essentially incarnational religion, enfleshed in lived experience and conveyed by stories of life rather than by abstract doctrine or philosophy. Narrative theologians make the claim that humans experience their lives as narratives³⁹, and that the early Christians choice of bios as a genre for expressing their theology – that is, a narrative of a life – indicates the suitability of narratives of human lives as a genre for knowing something of the life of incarnate God⁴⁰.

Parabolic stories

In addition, the form of theology taken to be most likely that used by Jesus himself – telling parables – is itself a form of storytelling rooted in real life experience, in which the juxtaposition of familiar life situations, with unfamiliar images or activities of redemption, creates ‘room for God to move’ to quote John Dominic Crossan⁴¹, as new possibilities open up for the reader, who is presented with the imperative for urgent and decisive action.⁴²

Jesus’ parables, Paul’s stories, St Augustine’s Confessions, and more recently ‘Third World’, ‘Asian’ and ‘Story’ theologies all articulate theology through the medium of parabolic story itself, not as allegory, or illustrative, but as theology essentially rooted to the specificities of the textual artefact and its production. Paul Ricoeur has argued that the literary form of parable cannot be reduced to abstractions, and Dodd concurs, arguing from Julicher that even the Biblical evangelists were incorrect in inserting allegorical explanations of Jesus parables, as in the case of the redaction of the parable of the sower.⁴³ Sallie McFague argues that parables are extended metaphors, and that

³⁵ Sobrino J ‘Archbishop Romero: Memories and Reflections’ Orbis books 1990 p58

³⁶ Jr. James Wm. McClendon, *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1974, 1990 (New Edition)), TW Tilley, *Story Theology*, Theology and Life Series (Delaware: Michael Glazier, 1985).

³⁷ C.S. Song, *Tell Us Our Names: Story Theology from an Asian Perspective* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984).; R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology* (St Louis: Chalice Press, 2003).; G W Trompf, ed., *The Gospel Is Not Western: Black Theologies from the Southwest Pacific* (New York: Orbis, 1987).

³⁸ Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology* (Blackburn: Harper Collins Religious, 1997).

³⁹ Grierson, D in *Uluru Journey: an exploration in narrative theology* 1996 JBCE

⁴⁰ *The Journal of Theological Studies*, April 1995 v46 n1 p428(3) Theology and Narrative: Selected Essays by Hans W. Frei. (book reviews) *David Fergusson*. Oxford University Press (UK) 1995

“Several features of Frei's theology now appear in sharper relief. His repeated emphasis upon narrative as the hermeneutical form of the Gospels was borne not from a general philosophical conviction about the narrative structure of human existence but rather from the christological conviction that the evangelists intentionally depict Jesus as the incarnate, crucified, and risen Lord.”

⁴¹ John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story* (Allen, Texas: Argus Communications, 1975). P171

⁴² Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 1954). p159

⁴³ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961). p3

'Metaphors don't 'have' a message, they are the message.'⁴⁴ Using ordinary language that evokes the familiar world of the audience, the parable does not 'point to an unknown God'...but 'itself includes both the ordinary and the transcendent in a complex interaction in which each illuminates the other.'⁴⁵

DISCUSS: So my first question to you is: what do you think about doing theology through story? Not using stories as illustrations of a concept, or an allegory that is explained away, or even as a morality tale or fable – therefore you must do this – but as a story that works as a parable in and of itself to present a challenge to readers to decisive action within the Australian context?

Story theology from Australia

Pp A parable subverts the myths we live by...

So having justified stories as the location for theology, let me present to you the stories I am hearing and telling in my research:

[Set images of Becky's homes going]

For you, I will start the story of Becky Castledine when she is migrating from England to Australia on the SS Oruba in 1908.

Flinders Ranges, 2003

On the back step of a house in Hawker, I heard the story of Rebecca's trip from an elderly Adnyamathanha woman, recalling the 'Mrs Forbes' she knew when she was a girl.

She came from a big family – maybe 9, 10, 12 kids. Her Mum and Dad said, like white way to send them off when they're grown. She trained as a nurse and then came out with her friends looking for nursing jobs. She worked in the children's hospital in Sydney. I think she said 1906 she came, six weeks it took.⁴⁶

The English archives documented that both Becky's parents had died. Two siblings were in Canada, and her youngest sister in a Children's home. Another sister would follow her to Australia later on, but they did not meet again. I corresponded with that sister's daughter in Tasmania, passing on addresses between Adnyamathanha cousins in South Australia, and Canadian cousins searching out their genealogy.

Flinders Ranges, 2001

Becky lived in a verandahed dwelling in Leichhardt in Sydney – one of those single fronted terraces where the verandah makes the house colder and darker than it might otherwise have been. Picture Becky on a train, zigzagging over the Blue Mountains, making a slow arrow across the high plains, until the fence lines drop away and a line of dark soil and messy eucalypt crowns signal a muddy river, somewhere over and down from the lip of its high banks. 'Back'o'Bourke, in the 'outside' country of New South Wales, where she found work in the homestead on Winbar Station, on the banks of the Darling River. A central corridor joined the front verandah to the kitchen which opened to a back

⁴⁴ Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1975). p71

⁴⁵ McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology*. P46

⁴⁶ Sylvia Brady, "Conversation with Sylvia Brady," ed. Tracy Spencer (Hawker SA: 2003), vol.

courtyard area also called a verandah, near which the workers ate, and where Becky boiled clothes in the copper.

When I asked her granddaughter, Daisy Shannon, why her grandmother might have come to Australia in the first place, and then travelled inland, she said:

*'My grandmother Rebecca reckoned, if she meets her first Aboriginal man she's going to marry one. I think she done that! Yes, so she knew what she was coming out for.'*⁴⁷

Imagine Becky and Jack meeting at the branding yards where Jack was breaking in horses, dressed flash, and his dark skin shiny with sweat.

They married in front of the Registrar in Bourke 1914, with two police as witnesses, where Jack made 'his mark' with an 'X' and gave his name as Jack Forbes.⁴⁸ They married again Aboriginal-way in the camp Jack took her to, receiving their firesticks, and listening to the corroboree that went all night.⁴⁹

Western NSW, 2004

Jack took Becky back to his own country, 'Corner Country' where NSW, Queensland and South Australia meet. While Becky kept to herself on the stations where Jack found work, she was common gossip in the white population. 'Ah well', said an old timer at Tibooburra, as I shared a cold meat salad with him and his wife, 'there was a Mrs Witchetty who went off living with the blacks and eating what they ate and that sort of thing...I reckon there might have been a newspaper article - they only got news once a month up here back then - and she had the long dress and everything, come out from England. She wanted to marry a pure Australian: she wanted to marry a pure Aborigine. She was a real Australian and she got a real Australian all right.'⁵⁰ On expedition through that region in 1938-39, anthropologist Norman Tindale found a news clipping about Becky headed 'White Woman lives as a lubra in blacks camp', and pasted it into his field journals.⁵¹ By then, Becky was long gone; Mrs Forbes travelled further west with Jack and their two sons to the Flinders Ranges of South Australia, where the Forbes' family joined the Adnyamathanha community.

In 1932, journalist Ernestine Hill travelled to 'a blacks camp in the heart of the Flinders Ranges' to interview 'The most astounding human document in the annals of the outback.'⁵² 'The Strange Case of Mrs Widgety' was published in *The Sunday Guardian Sun*, and later in Hill's book, *The Great Australian Loneliness*.⁵³ The United Aborigines missionary at Nepabunna mission where Mrs Forbes now lived - one Reg (RM) Williams who would later become an outback icon - was angry that Hill had posed as Mrs Forbes' sister to obtain an interview with the otherwise reclusive widow.⁵⁴ Hill writes the interview in 'Mrs Witchetty's' own voice, so that her account of her life ends with:

⁴⁷ Daisy Shannon, "Transcript of Interview 1," ed. Tracy Spencer (Quorn SA: 2001), vol.

⁴⁸ Marriage registered in New South Wales, Australia. No. 3726

⁴⁹ E Hill, *The Great Australian Loneliness: A Classic Journey around and across Australia* (Potts Point: Imprint, 1940). P175

⁵⁰ Bill Thomson, "Conversation with Bill Thomson," ed. Tracy Spencer (Tibooburra: 2004), vol.

⁵¹ Norman B Tindale, *White Woman Lives as a Lubra in Native Camp*, Field Journals, Harvard and Adelaide Universities Anthropological Expedition Journal 2, Adelaide Museum Archives.

⁵² Ernestine Hill, "The Strange Case of Mrs. Widgety," *The Sunday Guardian Sun* Dec 18th 1932.

⁵³ Hill, *The Great Australian Loneliness: A Classic Journey around and across Australia*.

⁵⁴ RM Williams, "Conversation with Rm Williams by Phone on 13/08/01," ed. Tracy Spencer (Phone: 2001), vol.

*'I don't worry. The path has led into strange places, but I have no regrets. If, as they say, a wife always takes her husband's nationality, I am an Australian, actually the only real white Australian there is.'*⁵⁵

Flinders Ranges, 2002

An Adnyamathanha woman produced a sketch for me that she had made of Mrs Forbes hut at Nepabunna mission. Then she reiterated for my tape recorder a story she had told me first over the fruit aisle in Woollies at Port Augusta, how Mrs Forbes used to invite her and other young girls inside for 'a cup o tea and a lump o cake', and how the tea was sipped out of white enamel mugs with pink flowers printed on them.⁵⁶ The sketch showed that Mrs Forbes' hut had no verandah: Mrs Forbes had a box she sat on outside, moving it with the moving shade cast by the hut. The shadow reaching marks on the swept ground told her when the mailman was coming, when the store opened, when her son would be riding his pushbike home for the weekend.

Flinders Ranges, 2001

Mrs Forbes life was not remarkable: '[she] read, crocheted, visited her friends, and looked forward to visits from her sons who worked on stations.'⁵⁷ She retained her Cockney accent, wore black stockings, stockpiled government ration blankets, and participated where she was able in the initiation ceremonies when her sons went through the Law. Granny Dolly, one of the oldest Adnyamathanha women, remembers 'Mrs. Forbes used to catch her own kangaroo and rabbit – and bush tucker – she used to go out with the old ones and learnt that way. She was a good one.'⁵⁸ She also learnt to deliver babies: many of the older Adnyamathanha people I interviewed crowed 'Mrs Forbes, she got me!'

PP dolly

But Granny Dolly's face clouded when I asked her about where Mrs Forbes was buried, on a hill opposite the current Nepabunna cemetery, with only one other grave laid at right angles to her own. 'Mrs. Forbes should have been buried this way', she said, indicating a direction with her hands which I later discovered was the appropriate burial position for those of the south wind moiety, the Mathari. 'I told her son that. And she should have been buried with our people (in the Mathari cemetery) because she grown up with us, was one of us.'⁵⁹ Rebecca had asked to be buried with Jim Page, the first white missionary to establish the community at Nepabunna.

Pp gertie

I had the light weight of a squirming child on my lap as Granny Gertie looked wistfully beyond her great grandchild and out the window to the bare slopes where the old huts used to be. 'She was really good help for the people. They taught her a lot of other [things]. Yes, she was good woman - a white woman - to come and stay with us.'⁶⁰

Pp grave

Murraylands, 2004

You can read the epitaph placed on Mrs Forbes grave by her grandchildren and great grandchildren in 2004: 'A true friend and companion of the Adnyamathanha.'

Pp daisy

⁵⁵ Hill, *The Great Australian Loneliness: A Classic Journey around and across Australia*. P175

⁵⁶ Margaret Brown, "Transcript of Interview," ed. Tracy Spencer (Leigh Creek: 2002), vol.

⁵⁷ Tracy Spencer, "'White Woman Lives as a Lubra in Native Camp': Representations of 'Shared Space'," *Journal of Australian Studies* 82.Colour (2004). p74

⁵⁸ Dolly Coulthard, "Conversation with Dolly Coulthard 16701," ed. Tracy Spencer (Copley: 2001), vol.

⁵⁹ Coulthard, "Conversation with Dolly Coulthard 16701," vol.

⁶⁰ Gertie Johnson, "Transcript of Interview 17701," ed. Tracy Spencer (Nepabunna: 2001), vol.

We are accustomed to reading parables, as above; originally they were told. And so I will also 'tell' you a parable of Jim Page, the other subject of this research. It also follows the ancient Jewish chiasmic structure, where the climax is at the centre of the text and pairs of contextual frames that interpret the climax set up before and after this. It is taken from life, as all parables are. And like all parables, it sets the central revelation

a-Us arriving at Iga Warta a homeland where Cliff making his fathers dream come true of a cultural tourism facility

b- Cliff saying we were like Jim: land rights quote So anyway, then Page said "Well, that's what I'm trying to do; I'm trying to get land for these people".

c-briefly what I know of his background and coming to Australia: origins

d Jim's arrival: speculative fiction based on host-stranger in other parts

e But Page said things to my people: he made a comment to the Adnyamathanha people saying that "You people got your own God, like you worship a God, and I worship the same God as you do, but only you do it in a different way. You have your ceremonies, and you do dances for your God, on this land, earth and so on". James Page knew that they were worshipping the same god and we always say 'Araada watna', [meaning] 'the person up there, looking down'.

D2- solidarity/incorporation through negotiating for Nepabunna, going away, allegations,

c2-death: symbolic life and death

B2- didn't want to leave them

-a2 This feller here, he's still arguing for us you know and he got us our promised land you and he bought us to this promised land".⁶¹

Pp: Show structure of the two parables

In these parables, like in the biblical parables, we can see traces of various units from other sources: quotes, memory, some autobiography, some references to other texts and echoes of Biblical motifs like Moses, and Ruth. It is impossible to tell stories without this kind of intertextuality, and in fact the many connections of the stories add to the richness of meanings we can find in them.

The Biblical parables are made in similar ways.

The two central revelations of the parables - Christians and Adnyamathanha worshipping the same God in Jim's parable, and Rebecca becoming 'a real white Australian' in Rebecca's parable - Both parables establish an interpretive context for the central revelations - are both situated within a host-stranger relationship between immigrant and Indigenous in Australia.

In the story of Rebecca, it is her choice to join with Indigenous people, and then to stay with Adnyamathanha, that is of primary importance, and which forms a context for the central revelation that she became a new and unique sort of 'white Australian' in the process.

⁶¹ Cliff Coulthard, "Transcript of Interview 191001," ed. Tracy Spencer (Iga Warta: 2001), vol.

'She was a good woman to come and stay with us' said Granny Gertie. In the newspaper article submitted by Ernestine Hill in 1932, Hill is clearly incredulous that Mrs Forbes chose to stay in the camp, even after her husband's death. She quotes Rebecca saying: *'The policeman said that if I would come out of the camp and put my name on the electoral roll, he could get me the regular rations, but I would sooner sit down here, where my boys are among their own people. Besides, the neighbours might get jealous if I were on whitefella tucker and I don't like to make bad friends after all these years'*⁶².

Not only did Rebecca live with Adnyamathanha, but unlike many white missionaries or government workers living in Indigenous communities, she intentionally shared the same living conditions and lifestyle as her Adnyamathanha neighbours and people.

My memory of Cliff's interpretation of Jim's suicide as 'he didn't want to leave us' resonates with the same theme: Jim came, and chose to remain with Adnyamathanha, during which he came to affirm that they worshipped the same god as him, only in different ways. This also set him apart from the majority of missionaries. Ken McKenzie, an Adnyamathanha Christian, described to me his belief:

*'that in the Dreamtime, they also spoke about an encounter with the Lord. That's what I believe....Had to be. I mean, the only one [who] could create water, food and that: it was the Lord. So it must have been the same person - disguised - you know.'*⁶³
I asked 'Did you think any of the missionaries saw that?'
*'I don't think they saw it, I don't think they saw it. But I saw it today. I mean, when I become a Christian, I went back to the drawing board again. And some Aboriginal people said "What about the Dreamtime?" And I thought "Yes, there is something in the Dreamtime". You know, there is. Like the Aboriginal people talked about a 'wunkiwuga bee', means the evil spirit. They talked about the 'ulbadulbada', the wicked one. The 'wunkiwugabee' was the leader, according to Dad - was the Satan, you know. And they said there was another they called was 'Arra wathanha': means 'the man in the highest', you know. 'Arra wathanha': highest. And we believe that it was Jesus, you know... Yes, so it's the same person.'*⁶⁴

As a United Aborigines Mission missionary in the 1930s, Jim Page would not have arrived with such a theological understanding. There's was a theology that sympathised with the plight of Indigenous people, and who saw conversion to Christianity and away from traditional beliefs and ceremonies as a way to save the souls, and hopefully the bodies of Aboriginal people.⁶⁵ Their theology was expressed in a poster from the 1950s called The Two Ways, and I'm sure several of you would be familiar with it. For Jim to move from this position, to the kind of theology expressed by Ken, implies an openness to learn, and to change, and to be able to see through Adnyamathanha eyes.

Question: Where do you see and hear metaphors of Christian faith in the stories of these lives?

Camping with us: INCARNATION and decolonised relationships

The first of the three major theological themes I see in these stories comes from the host-stranger relationships we see modeled in these Australian parables. Jim and Rebecca come to 'camp with', live with their Adnyamathanha hosts. This image from their lives

⁶² Hill, "The Strange Case of Mrs. Widgety."

⁶³ Ken McKenzie, "Transcript of Interview 150801," ed. Tracy Spencer (Hawker: 2001), vol.

⁶⁴ McKenzie, "Transcript of Interview 150801," vol.

⁶⁵ AE Gerard, *Coming of Age of the United Aborigines Mission (Sa) Incorporated*. (Adelaide: Hunkin, Ellis and King, 1944).

resonates very strongly with the key metaphor that the Rainbow Spirit Elders use when they describe God as 'camping among us' as a foundation for understanding the incarnation of God in humanity. For them, God is incarnate in this land, in Indigenous cultures, and as an Aboriginal Australian. So I want to explore this idea of incarnation, and then see what the coming to belong of Jim and Rebecca with Adnyamathanha might add to our understanding of this doctrine.

Pp aboriginal child

*'When the lifegiving Creator Spirit took human form, God camped among us as a human being; God became one of us in our land, and became part of our culture.'*⁶⁶

Pp aboriginal child

'By camping among us as a human being in a form common to all of us, God has become one of us. As one of us, Christ is in our camp, in our land and is part of our culture.'... 'if Christ is one of us then for Aboriginal Australians Christ is an Aboriginal Australian. 67

PP aboriginal child

They interpret John 1:14 - *'The Word (logos) became flesh and tabernacled among us and we beheld his glory' writing... 'In Aboriginal terms, God camped among us. God built a humpy among us. And God's camp among us is human flesh.'*⁶⁸ This becomes the basis for asserting Christ's affirmation and presence in all cultures, including Indigenous culture, and within all histories.

PP rainbow serpent

Some of the Rainbow Spirit Elders even claim that the creator spirit in their land, imaged by many as the Rainbow Spirit, became flesh, became Jesus Christ and camped with them.⁶⁹

PP wilpena

In Adnyamathanha culture, this insight could become something like the spirit of the arkara's becoming yura, living among them.

And to affirm Christ in culture, also includes Christ in history. Rainbow Spirit Elders say: *[we] 'need to declare that the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ are not only acts of history in a distant land, but living realities in our land. Christ suffers, dies and rises among us.'*⁷⁰

PP Copley kids

So if the universal incarnation of God in humanity lives in all times and places, then Christ is present in the shared contact history of Australia as well, and not only within Indigenous experience. Our Christian creeds affirm that Christ 'became human', and so suggest a process in time and in transforming identity that enabled this radical reconceptualisation of the second person of the Trinity to occur. And so I am suggesting that in the relationship between Jim and Rebecca with Adnyamathanha, we can see a metaphor for the process of incarnation, of the stranger entering into the country and intersubjectivity with the host,

⁶⁶ Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*. P59

⁶⁷ Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*. P60,61

⁶⁸ Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*. P59

⁶⁹ Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*. P90

⁷⁰ Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*.

that enriches our understanding of this Christian doctrine and informs our practice of decolonization.

Meeting together

PP graves

Elsewhere I have explored notions of how hosts and strangers meet, and enter into a process of incorporating the stranger into the host community, while preserving the strangers difference to enable their innovation to enrich the host community.⁷¹ The missiologist Antony Gittins, following the anthropologist Marcel Mauss, argues that the relationship of host and stranger is mediated by gift giving which creates reciprocal obligations between the parties. The 'gift is the extension of the giver into the possession of the receiver.'⁷² The stranger brings the gift of their innovation and difference; the host offers the gift of hospitality. In another paper, I have argued that the gift Jim had to bring was his whiteness; in return the Adnyamathanha gave him the resources he needed to do his job – bring rations to the community – and a place to stay.⁷³ Rebecca's gift is the more traditional alliance formed through marriage, and in return she becomes incorporated into the Indigenous universe through kinship. In addition she is remembered for her midwifery skills – She got me! was a frequent exclamation amongst those I interviewed – and in return was claimed as 'one of us': 'she should have been buried with our people', said Granny Dolly, 'because she grown up with us, was one of us.'⁷⁴ Meetings between host and stranger conform to cultural scripts, by which each judges the others actions. Maria Nugent has argued that in the 'meeting of histories' at Botany Bay between Eora people and Capt Cook, no meeting actually took place, because the actions of the strangers – firing guns in response to the opening stances of Indigenous meeting protocols – did not approximate appropriate behaviour and so the Eora broke off attempts to meet and engage in the host-stranger relationship. They avoided the strangers instead. Nugent derives her schema for Indigenous meeting protocols from the work of Sylvia Hallam, who in turn bases her interpretation of Indigenous meeting protocols in WA on the observations made by Spencer and Gillen in Central Australia in 1901 between two Arrernte groups, which they have grouped into nine specific stages.⁷⁵ I in turn have written similar moves in the meeting between hosts and strangers into my scene of Jim's arrival at the Adnyamathanha camp at Minerawuta.

Angepina station, near Copley, April 1930

Becky has heard the news racing like wildfire around the camp. The missionary, the missionary is here at last! Jack and Raymond have run off with the other children, to see this marvel their mother has told them about. A teacher! Learning to be educated! Writing like their Mum! Old Rachel Johnson is setting her fire to rights, ready to join the crowd; May Wilton too, with a swarm of children at her skirt. Jean Clarke lifted back the blanket that served as door to Becky's hut. 'You coming? He's here, you know, just like you said he'd be.' But Becky feels suddenly exposed, after months of waiting. The thought of a white missionary at Minerawuta is like a mirror to her, and she sees herself in frayed clothes, hair cut roughly as

⁷¹ Tracy Spencer, "Getting Off the Verandah": Decolonising Australia," *'Something Strange' CRNLE 2005* (Kangaroo Island: 2005), vol.; Tracy Spencer, "'We Had to Give Them Everything': Adnyamathanha Agency in the Economy of 'Whiteness'," *'Historicising Whiteness'*, ed. Kat Ellinghaus (Melbourne University: Department of History, University of Melbourne in association with RMIT University Press, 2007), vol.

⁷² Anthony J Gittins, *Gifts and Strangers: Meeting the Challenge of Inculturation* (New York and Marwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1989).p92

⁷³ Spencer, "'We Had to Give Them Everything': Adnyamathanha Agency in the Economy of 'Whiteness'," vol.

⁷⁴ Coulthard, "Conversation with Dolly Coulthard 16701," vol.

⁷⁵ Sylvia J Hallam, "A View from the Other Side of the Western Frontier: Or 'I Met a Man Who Wasn't There.'" *Aboriginal History* 7.2 (1983). P134-136

she could reach it behind her back, her cheeks coarse and showing spidery red veins. Most of all, she sees herself framed in a tin and sapling hut, dirt for floorboards, cooking on the ground. 'I'll be there directly', she says, non-committally, and sees Jean shrug as she drops the blanket and leaves Becky alone, in the dim light.

Becky hears him, though. Not words, not a strong deep voice lifted above the rabble of children, but something as sudden and hidden as a birdcall, lilt of London in dry, shifting air. A Londoner! Becky does what can only be called peering, holding up a corner of the blanket to watch, unseen, as filigrees of Home trace their way into her camp.

It was true Jim had been found. Topping a rise, children had streamed towards him, and he had held up a hand shakily above the handlebars and called out 'Hello!' They inexplicably turned tail and fled back the way they had come. None were fully dressed, although all had some piece of clothing draped about them. So the debate preceded even the well intentioned ladies of Peterborough. Suddenly the fire in his thighs becomes too much and he dismounts his bicycle, and wheels it. The children are nowhere in sight now, but a still group of men in trousers, shirts and hats are observing his slow progress towards the gate closed across the track. Jim wonders if he should wave again, or call out some religious sentiment like Will Wade would, but opts for neither. He is as silent in his approach as they are in their waiting.

Jim can see that the men are standing on the other side of a fence line, beside the wide farm gate he must pass through. He is sweating now, with nerves, thinking 'How can I open the gate without my bicycle falling and me looking like an inept fool?' So he halts before he reaches the gate, steadying the bike with one hand and a hip, and raises the other arm high in greeting. There is no way they haven't seen him, yet there is no movement, no responses. Having stopped and waved, Jim can't go any further, and he feels rooted in indecision, some fear, and an overriding politeness.

'That one's there now. You gonna get him?' Ted Coulthard's camp is close to the road: he and Winnie and their nine children are often the first to meet visitors travelling through the Ram Paddock Gate. But this time Ted addresses the senior man, Fred McKenzie, and Winnie has tucked the younger children back into their hut behind her. Fred's movements are measured, testing the thin, pink man standing awkwardly on the track, switching at flies in sudden jerks. Fred pokes at his fire; packs his pipe. Squats down at Dick Coulthard's fire, where the two men watch the ashes in silence. Dick breaks the reverie, talking low in quick yura ngarwala.

'How do we do this? What's he coming for?

'He's the Missionary. He can teach the kids udneyu ways.

'What for?'

'Get those other udneyus off our back. Let us keep this camp here. Get those rations for us.'

Fred looked across the gate, where the shining man was still waiting. 'Doesn't look much, innit? This still yura place. He'll be a right one for us. Look, he's waiting for us already!' With discreet movements of their heads, they were both able to see the white man, whose clothes were the same musty colour as the dirt, except for where large dark circles had formed under his arms, and around his crotch. He was standing awkwardly leaning against the frame of his bicycle, balancing its

uneven weights, quite still. Quietly waiting. Dick scowled back at the fire, but a series of shrugs, and hand movements, gave Fred the sign he was waiting for.

'You'll see. I'll tell the others.' Fred stood up, and moved on to where Ted stood outside his hut.

'Time to meet that fella. We'll send our boys out, while the others get ready. Tell Winnie too.' Ted moved off, throwing a glance towards his son Walter, who came over to him quickly. Another young man, Steve, appeared beside them, carrying thin spears. The two talked intently over the spears for some minutes, while nearby Winnie took up a wailing song that rose and fell among the trees. She did not look at the white man, standing rigidly holding his badly balanced bicycle beside him. Jim hears only sound and some sort of rhythm like stones being tumbled in a river. He sees a woman stout as a gatepost herself, her body swelling out under her chin and falling with her skirt. She sways slightly, on thin legs, like she is making the breezes herself.

And then she stops, and the sudden silence is filled by the two young men, stamping towards the gate, each holding reedy spears nonchalantly pointing at the single figure on the far side of the gate. They bark into the air, and Jim no longer wonders how he might open the gate. He is content to stay where he is all day, he thinks, if need be. The young men are pointing at him now, making loud sounds, and he thinks he hears the word 'name' amongst them.

'Jim. Page. Mr Page. I'm the missionary...from...'and he felt very feeble. From where? Of all the places he might have said, his birthplace was the only one that made sense. 'England.'

A number of men are forming up behind the two young ones, and one has come forward to open the gate. Now they wait, watching Jim. He moves into the space they have made, limping as the bags tied to the bicycle thud into his shin as he tries to walk beside his flimsy badly-laden machine. He risks letting go one handlebar to hold out a hand in greeting, and the metal contraption clatters to the ground and he stares at its ruins in dismay. Hoots of laughter go up from the small crowd of men as they move to surround him, and someone has dragged the bicycle away, and others are shouldering his bags and grinning as they move with him towards the small fire where the two old men are waiting, joined now by other old men standing with collections of spears and long boomerangs held loosely in their hands. Bike, bags and Jim are all deposited before the two leaders, Mathari and Arruru. Fred is grinning broadly now, and even Dick has risen to his full height, like a slender mulga unbending. Jim sees his bags and belongings are rapidly disappearing now on thin brown legs, as the children reappear, and then disappear again, but he is more surprised by the soft green fruits being pressed into his hands, and now one of the young men pushes his spears against him too, willing him to take them. ⁷⁶

'Nangga' the old man with the tipped felt hat extends his hand to Jim, and Jim cannot shake it for the fruits in his hands. He puts them down at his feet, wipes his hands on his trousers, and takes a deep breath while he does so. When he offers his hand in return, he is composed again. When he takes it, Fred's palm is warm and dry, and his grip floods a kind of hope through Jim's body.

'Nan-ga' he tries. More laughter, and the soft rattle as spears come to rest on the ground where their owners have let them fall.

⁷⁶ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies.*, trans. W D Halls (London: Routledge, 1990). P70 describes a ritual of visitors to a Corroboree calling out where they came from, throwing away any weapons and being gifted with weapons by their hosts.

'Fred, Fred McKenzie. You'd be our missionary.'

'Yes', is all Jim can say, before the spears are taken away from him again, and one of the young men is standing in front of him, pointing at the bicycle, with a grin splitting his face.⁷⁷

'Hey man, you fella going to need a donkey. They never lie down, just bugger off up them hills!' Jim laughs with him, and they shake hands.

'Jim', says Jim with relief, into this smiling face.

'Walter. Walter Coulthard,' says the young man, clapping Jim on the shoulder.

In the process of mutual giving and receiving between hosts and strangers, new subjectivities are born between them. Stephen Muecke has written that 'something new begins' when the Indigenous host is not forced into using the visitors epistemologies; when the visitor has to invest something of their subjectivity into learning to belong; when 'strangers begin to accept their implication in a network of indigenous rights and obligations.' He says:

*'Since the Aboriginal person accepts every stranger as a part of his world, the stranger must accept that her world too must be forever changed, in consequence, and according to this local philosophy.'*⁷⁸

David Turner has also argued that Aboriginal Australians sought not to dominate but to accommodate, incorporating strangers as 'a part of the one embedded in the other and vice versa without affecting the integrity of either'.⁷⁹

Both Rebecca's claim to have become 'a real white Australian', and Jim's recognition of his God in the Adnyamathanha God, are evidence of the embeddedness of these two colonial English immigrants in Adnyamathanha culture and world view. Sir Eric Wilmott in the 1986 Boyer Lectures also works with this image of embeddedness, suggesting that Australians become 'embeddlings', different cultures embedded in each other, not like a melting pot, but more like a matrix where the distinctive parts continue to contribute to a thing that changes and evolves as a whole.⁸⁰ For Jim and Rebecca to have become 'embedded' they have achieved what Simone Bignall and Mark Galliford have called 'becoming-minor' resisting the common codes of colonialism where colonizers projected their antithesis onto Indigenous people, creating an unbridgeable 'us' and 'them' opposition.⁸¹ They are both coming to define themselves through Adnyamathanha concepts of subjectivity – kinship and culture – so that cumulative with their identity as immigrants, they are becoming something new. Elsewhere I have argued that Rebecca was remembered by the Adnyamathanha people she lived with as living 'an ordinary life' among them:

Rebecca was the last to leave the Ram Paddock gate camp for Nepabunna, grieving the death of her husband in 1931-2. At Nepabunna she continued to help at the birth of babies, cutting the cord and checking up on them the next day. Later she became the old lady who lived by herself: reading a lot, making clippings from the newspapers she got from the missionaries when they finished with them. These she stuck on the walls of her hut and read out to visitors, or tucked away in the tea chests she brought on the steam ship 'Oruba' with her from England in 1908. She always had a whole wall stacked with wood for the fire that she cooked over at the door of her hut. She gave vegemite

⁷⁷ Hallam, "A View from the Other Side of the Western Frontier: Or 'I Met a Man Who Wasn't There.'"

⁷⁸ Stephen Muecke, *No Road (Bitumen All the Way)* (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1997). p184-5

⁷⁹ Deborah Bird Rose, "Ned Kelly Died for Our Sins.," *Oceania* 65.2 (1994).

⁸⁰ Eric Willmot, *Australia: The Last Experiment. 1986 Boyer Lectures* (Sydney: ABC Enterprises, 1987). P21,22

⁸¹ Michael Dodson, "The End of the Beginning: Re(De)Finding Aboriginality.," *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians*, ed. Michele Grossman (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003). P37

water soup to hungry children at her door; others remember wishing she'd offer them a bit of her 'lump of cake and cup of tea', as she called it in her strong Cockney accent. She was grateful when other families bought her a rabbit or two, and she loved kangaroo tail cooked in the coals when her son and daughter-in-law and grandchildren came to visit. She refused to apply for 'white rations', instead remaining on 'black rations' so she wouldn't cause jealousy with her neighbours in the camp. Some of her habits were strange, like cooking her meat in milk, or talking about snow in the country she had come from. She wore the same style dresses as other women of the camp, long like Daisy Bates, but with well darned black stockings. She never threw away shoes, and gathered quite a collection. While her hut at Nepabunna was a little way apart from the main camps, she went visiting other camps, especially her in-laws, and went out with the women collecting bush tucker. When her boys went through initiations, she took part as a mother, although her boys' aunts also performed some roles for her, which they understood she had not been trained to do. She went up to the missionaries store on Saturdays for her rations like everyone else, and to church on Sundays; otherwise, she had no special relationship with the missionaries until they nursed her in her final years. Children growing up in the camp knew she had come from England, but also thought of her as simply 'one of the people there; one of us'. She was given Mathari moiety as her husband was Arruru, yet when it came time to be buried, she was buried next to the other udnyu (white person) grave, and not in the Mathari cemetery. Apparently this was at her request; some thought she should have been buried 'with us'.

In fact I argued that the ordinariness of her life was what gave hope to other ordinary Australians:

If they had met Rebecca, there would be no more to report other than that she read, crocheted, visited her friends and looked forward to visits from her sons, who worked on stations. Like the journalists who interviewed her, they would have found a woman with ordinary concerns. She was not exotic, nor eccentric, nor an activist, like her contemporaries Daisy Bates or Olive Pink. Her life, as those who inquired into it reluctantly discovered, did not conform to a romantic adventure, a captivity narrative, a hagiography of a saint, or even to ideas of a 'good whitefella Missus'. In that, there is great comfort for 'ordinary Australians'. If this ordinary Rebecca can make choices to share her domestic life with Indigenous people and communities and to allow a synthesis of cultural practices and beliefs to occur through the experience, then so can we all.⁸²

'Becoming-minor' is a term that can be read into the Christian doctrine of 'kenosis', expressed in the hymn fragment in Philippians 2:6-11 where Christ

'emptied himself taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are and being in every way like a human being.'

Like the second person of the Trinity, Rebecca and Jim placed themselves and were received into locations and relationships where their 'border identities' or intersubjectivities are created and transformed 'by critically shifting the alliances that constitute these spaces.'⁸³ The process of 'becoming' implies a radical transformation from what was. In incarnation, the second person of the Trinity takes humanity into the Trinity...there can never be a separation or even duality of human and divine again. Something new has happened that changes the identity of God and of humanity forever. And yet our Christian tradition has struggled to understand or articulate this something new which is both human and divine. The Council of Chalcedon in 451AD wrote its creed over this very

⁸² Spencer, "'White Woman Lives as a Lubra in Native Camp': Representations of 'Shared Space'."

⁸³ Simone Bignall and Mark Galliford, "Reconciling Replicas: The Second Coming of the Duyfken," *Cultural Studies Review* 9.2 (2003). P56

issue, and in asserting that Christ be acknowledged 'in two natures', rather than 'from two natures' as the Orthodox churches protested.⁸⁴ These days one is understood as a restating of the other and so the ecumenical split has been overcome, but for my argument, this debate may be relevant again, as I argue that intersubjectively, two natures cannot remain unchanged in proximity to each other. One plus one equals three. Divine plus human equals Christ. English plus Adnyamathanha equals something new, a 'real white Australian'.

In the discourse of decolonisation, 'becoming-minor' is a movement towards 'indigenous-becoming' of an immigrant settler/stranger engaged in decolonization.⁸⁵ In the remaining colonies of Britain, like Australia, Canada and New Zealand, decolonization is figured not so much as a return of political power to the Indigenous population and a 'return' to the country of origin for the colonising peoples⁸⁶, but rather as an 'unmaking of regimes of violence' which continue to encode colonising practices on colonized and colonizer.⁸⁷ After all, the history of 'welcoming strangers' in Australia is one that bears out Gittins' warning that 'Trusting strangers can indeed be dangerous to health and life...and that 'It is one thing to want to show hospitality to the stranger; quite another thing is it to cede one's initiative and expectations.'⁸⁸ He advises missionaries to 'allow themselves to be contextualized as strangers'. And this is precisely how I have written Jim's arrival and incorporation into the Adnyamathanha community, and precisely how I image God coming into human lives. As the stranger, who knocks at the door but does not force entrance; as the stranger who brings a gift to us, and in return receives hospitality; as a stranger who comes to share our life and experience, not to judge, overwhelm or deride it. This is the movement of Christianity in contextual theology: to come as a stranger and become transformed into a subjectivity existing within the culture. CS Song has criticized the modern agenda of Neibuhr when he proposed varieties of relationship between Christ and Culture as 'against, for, above or in paradox with' and even 'transforming' culture and instead claims that Jesus agenda was to bring out the best of the religious culture in which he found himself and urge the reconstruction of community from that basis.⁸⁹ Christ does not judge cultures externally, but participates within them as this unique entity, a stranger

⁸⁴ Creed of Chalcedon, 451, in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chalcedonian_Creed

We, then, following the holy Fathers, all with one consent, teach men to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in Godhead and also perfect in manhood; truly God and truly man, of a reasonable [rational] soul and body; consubstantial [co-essential] with the Father according to the Godhead, and consubstantial with us according to the Manhood; in all things like unto us, without sin; begotten before all ages of the Father according to the Godhead, and in these latter days, for us and for our salvation, born of the Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, according to the Manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets from the beginning [have declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the Creed of the holy Fathers has handed down to us.

⁸⁵ Galliford, "Reconciling Replicas: The Second Coming of the Duyfken."

⁸⁶ Benita Parry, "Problems of Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Oxford Literary Review*, vol. 9 (1987).

⁸⁷ Hutchings, *Decolonisation and Aotearoa - a Pathway to Right Livelihood.*; Deborah Bird Rose, "Love and Reconciliation in the Forest: A Study in Decolonisation," *Hawke Institute Working Paper Series 19* (2002).

⁸⁸ Gittins, *Gifts and Strangers: Meeting the Challenge of Inculturation*. P115

⁸⁹ C S Song, *The Stranger on the Shore: A Theological Semantic of Cultures*, The Cato Lecture (Melbourne: The Joint Board of Christian Education, 1992). P26

who has come to belong, fully human, and fully divine simultaneously if our creeds are to be believed.

Discussion: God's incarnation in a postcolonial world

You worship the same god: acknowledging the divine in all cultures

In Jim's parable, the central revelation is the recognition of the one god in both English Christianity and Adnyamathanha religion. This is interpreted in the context of a life intentionally lived in solidarity through gradual incorporation/migration of identity into the yura community, which sits within a framework of Jim working to secure land for the community, which also becomes the land he is inextricably tied to through his death. The outer frame for the parable contrasts the current day making of the 'promised land' at Iga Warta by Cliff fulfilling his fathers dream, with the community casting Jim in the role of Moses in their history. The tradition of leading people to promised lands is carried on by Adnymathanha, who, as the central revelation tells us, are as much in touch with God through their culture as the missionary was. Such a life story may also be considered part of the literary genre of 'gospel' since it also conforms to the conventions of ancient bios/life writing: a focus on one human subject, scant information about early life, the character is shown through deeds rather than psychological influences, use of diverse literary sources, and a theological intent through the narrative. 90 , 91

Recognising the one God in other cultures and religions presupposes an encounter between two groups of people.

In Australian contact history, two people's meet: the Indigenous peoples who live in their place, and whose culture and religion was essentially rooted in place; and an immigrant people whose heritage was formed by centuries of immigrations, including a religion itself derived from an experience of being landless. The dominant religious tradition which the British settlers brought with them supported colonization: this was the tradition of claiming the promised land through conquest that Norm Habel has described as the Joshua traditions⁹², and which are found repeatedly in colonial texts that image Australia as 'the promised land' for the colonizers.⁹³ Elsewhere I have argued that the explorer tradition in Australian history was understood through a framework of a providential God making water, country, and women available to the 'chosen race', understood to be white Caucasians according to the then popular Darwinian theories of the Great Chain of Being.⁹⁴ Look at this for an example of Christian theology on the frontier from Constable Willshire in 1896!

⁹⁰ Richard A Burrige, *What Are the Gospels: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, ed. GN Stanton, vol. 70 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). P120 Sources can be: written historical documents, archives, letters, treatises, histories, biographies, inscriptions, collections of sayings, anecdotes, philosophical writings, dialogues, discourses, speeches, memoirs etc; and oral traditions (highly respected in less literate scoeity) including family memories and precedents, stories, eye witness accounts, personal memories, tradition of a shcool or group, anecdotes etc.

⁹¹ **Richard Burrige**, *Four Gospels, One Jesus? A Symbolic Reading*. (London: SPCK, 1994). P7

⁹² Norman C. Habel, *The Land Is Mine: Six Biblical Land Ideologies*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995).

⁹³ Roland Boer, *Last Stop before Antarctica: The Bible and Postcolonialism in Australia*, *The Bible and Postcolonialism*, vol. 6 (Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).; Tracy Spencer, "White Journeys into Black Country: Biblical Journeying to and within Australia.," *Landscapes, Exiles, Belonging, Home conference* (New Norcia Monastery, via Perth, Western Australia: 2005), vol.

⁹⁴ Gustav Jahoda, *Images of Savages: Ancient Roots of Modern Prejudice in Western Culture*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

*'men would not remain so many years in a country like this if there were no women, and perhaps the Almighty meant them for use as He has placed them wherever the pioneers go.'*⁹⁵

Swain and others have found in this colonial theology 'dislocated utopian traditions' that have grown out of landlessness, and subsequently fuel an obsession with obtaining land, and exclusive possession at that.⁹⁶

*"History, associated quintessentially with the Hebrews, was something that intervened when the Israelites had lost their place. The covenant, Gods promise, was to reinstate place, but this was only feasible by the Godhead entering a world given over to time. From the moment God said to Abraham 'Leave your country', instead of their place, the Hebrews had history and a promise of land - and zakhor, remembrance."*⁹⁷

God becomes imaged as a universal omnipotence rather than localized deity, inhabiting the sky rather than specific locations on the earth, who is 'other' rather than immanent, and which underpins the kind of dualistic thinking that sets up difference as a problem. But the Joshua narratives are not the only tradition within Christianity that address the entry of an immigrant or landless people into another people's country. Norm Habel, and the Rainbow spirit elders, make much of the Abrahamic narratives as a more appropriate tradition for our circumstance,

*'We believe the story of Abraham offers a better way.'... 'for him the land is a host country, not enemy territory. Abraham respects the peoples of the land and they, in turn, welcome him into their land.'*⁹⁸

PP Abraham coming

Abraham still represents a landless peoples travelling in the promise of finding land to call their own – and he certainly looks very familiar to us in Australia with his various livestock etc - and yet his openness to take on the traditions, culture and religion of the indigenous people create for him a very different entry and sense of belonging in the land. In the stories of Abraham, he makes alliances that bind their participants into obligations to each other, he buries his wife according to Canaanite traditions, he receives blessings from Melchizedek and worships his god with him.

Pp with melcizadek

Mark Brett has expanded the reach of this tradition further through the Hebrew scriptures, claiming Amos 9:7 and Isaiah 19:25 also affirm Yahweh's liberating presence within the history and cultures of other peoples.⁹⁹ Clearly Jim's parable can be read in this tradition. Deborah Bird Rose has examined Indigenous stories that contrast these two traditions of conquest and co-existence in the stories told of Ned Kelly and Captain Cook in the Victoria River district of northern Australia. Ned Kelly is seen as a white fellow and an Indigenous person simultaneously who, in the stories, helps to make some of the land features, and fights for Indigenous people against white invaders. He is analysed and found to be a 'purely moral' white man and therefore an 'equitably social order that

⁹⁵ Deborah Bird Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human: Life and Land in an Aboriginal Australian Culture* (Cambridge, NY, Sydney: Cambridge University Press, 1992). P14

⁹⁶ Tony Swain, *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being*. (Cambridge University Press, 1993). P128

⁹⁷ Swain, *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being*. P27

⁹⁸ Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*. P82

⁹⁹ Mark G. Brett, "Canto Ergo Sum: Indigenous Peoples and Postcolonial Christianity," *Pacifica* 16 (2003).

includes Europeans can be established as an enduring principle of life.' 100 In contrast, Captain Cook in these stories stands for the immoral European, the invaders who have no enduring place here. Other versions of the Captain Cook stories assert there were two Cooks, the first who brought good things and was moral, but the second came to invade and was immoral.¹⁰¹ In another paper, I have discussed the concept of a 'proper white man', based on an article that appeared in the Observer in 1925 from a Capt Wilkins at Milingimbi, where he observed: '...blacks had three classifications of white men: missionaries, white men and proper white men.'¹⁰² Missionaries gave food which wasn't theirs but belonged to Jesus so they didn't know why it ran out sometimes, because missionaries had told them 'Jesus sent it to the blackfellow'. White men 'humbugged' all the time and make trouble 'longa camp' and only gave a bit of food. Proper white men had to earn what they share so they are generous when they share their food and tobacco. These stories indicate that as Indigenous cultures found ways to incorporate the novelty of colonization into their world view, the possibility of non-colonial relationships with Europeans could be imagined, and occasionally, experienced. As Rose says of the Yarralin people, 'They tell stories which open up possibilities,'¹⁰³ – as a good parable should - and in this case, the possibility of an Abrahamic approach to co-existence rather than the dominant history of colonial conquest. Adnyamathanha stories of Jim and Rebecca's ways of entering and affirming Adnyamathanha culture and community can be interpreted through this muted tradition of the Hebrew scriptures, and also open up 'possibilities' for non-colonial relationships between hosts and strangers.

Discussion: How would indigenous hosts advise non-Indigenous people to find a way of belonging in this country?

A real white Australian: a new hybrid identity through incarnation

PP rebeccas parable

Rebecca's parable can also sit within the genre of gospel: a parabolic story of a life. The most outer frame addresses the audience with the challenge of how they will be remembered. The next frame – b – again emphasizes Rebecca's migration of belonging from England to Adnyamathanha yarta, Adnyamathanha country. For her, this is achieved through domestic and kinship relationships: hers is an 'ordinary' story. The central revelation is that this kind of ordinary and domestic life sketches out a whole new way of being an authentic white Australian. It's what we might call becoming a hybrid identity. Elsewhere I have argued that hybridity is the only possibility in a postcolonial worldview, where even the subaltern voice must speak into the dominant discourses to critique them, and where processes of transculturation have enabled colonized groups to select from the colonial culture to serve their own cultural objectives. 104 105 106 107 Mark Brett has

¹⁰⁰ Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human: Life and Land in an Aboriginal Australian Culture*. P201, 202

¹⁰¹ Chips Mackinolty and Paddy Wainburranga, "Too Many Capt Cooks," *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies*, ed. T Swain and DB Rose General Editor Victor C. Hayes (Bedford Park SA: The Australian Association for the study of religions, 1988).

¹⁰² Capt GH Wilkins, "Observations at Millingimbi," *The Observer* 4/6/1925 1925.

¹⁰³ Rose, *Dingo Makes Us Human: Life and Land in an Aboriginal Australian Culture*. p234

¹⁰⁴ Sugirtharajah, *Postcolonial Reconfigurations: An Alternative Way of Reading the Bible and Doing Theology*. p15 Spivak asserts, a 'pure subaltern' voice cannot be heard because of the necessary constraints that hybridise the subaltern voice in order for it to be heard in the dominant discourses. See also Fiona Probyn, "How Does the Settler Belong?" *Westerly* 47 (2002). p84; Muecke quoted in Michele Grossman, ed., *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2003).p181

¹⁰⁵ Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992). p6

¹⁰⁶ Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983). P77

argued that postcolonial interpreters of Pauline treatments of ethnicity – in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile – reveal not a universalizing or erasing of cultural specificity, but instead an embrace of the hybrid nature of Christian community.¹⁰⁸ Anglo Australians need to understand themselves within this tradition, grafting on to the spiritual inheritance of Indigenous Australians and forming a hybrid community. 'This is not to suggest a self-negation on the part of any group, but rather a receptive incorporation into the life of God' which he suggests occurs through 'kenotic listening'.¹⁰⁹

Rebecca retains elements of her English heritage and her life prior to marrying Jack: her accent, her trunks from the ship journey, newspaper cuttings. And she also participates in ceremony for her sons when they went through the law. Elsewhere I have argued that the newspaper clipping found in Norman Tindale's field journal

PP lubra

'White woman lives as lubra in native camp' indicates that she was no longer easily classified according to non-Indigenous categories...white woman and lubra were mutually exclusive terms, and yet both applied to her.¹¹⁰

Earlier I looked at the Abrahamic traditions in the Exilic literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. It is useful to remember that many of the books of the Hebrew scriptures were written during, or in regard to Israel's exile from their land, their traumatic experience of becoming landless as a nation. As such, these books are very much concerned with the question of who and how to be in a land not your own. Several, like Jeremiah, Ruth, Esther, are parabolic stories that encourage their readers to imagine making a home and coming to belong in the new country. The revelation of Ruth is the stark reminder that even the great Jewish king David is of hybrid ancestry, relativising others calls for racial purity. Esther reveals her own hybrid identity as a Persian princess and a Jewess, asserting a composite of these identities is possible. These traditions counter the calls for racial purity in exile in other books like Ezra and Ezekiel. And yet it was notions of 'a chosen race' and fears of miscegenation that accompanied the colonizers to Australia. 19th theories of race were endlessly concerned about 'admixture of blood' and how to categorise the resulting offspring. Racial purity was one of the overriding concerns of empire. Yet these traditions in Esther and Ruth suggest alternatives that embrace the creation of hybrid communities, and identities.

Rebecca's way of belonging was through marriage, and therefore through kinship. One of my Adnyamathanha friends reminded me that I could not overstate the importance of Indigenous kinship obligations operative in every aspect of Indigenous lives. In the same way I cannot overstate the strength of Rebecca's incorporation through kinship. While a major project within my research was to explore the kinship connections between her husband Jack and Adnyamathanha, moiety and relationships established through the marriage of her son Jack to Joyce Coulthard means that every Adnyamathanha person can work out their relationship, and reciprocal obligations, with Rebecca. Adoption into Indigenous family creates such strong incorporation. I remember being bewildered by my first encounter with Indigenous kinship when I arrived in Ramingining on an About Face programme in 1987, being surrounded by children arguing with each other about who was my mother, sister, brother, aunt until they had it sorted and told me. Throughout contact history, many whitefellas have been adopted into Indigenous kinship, although few

¹⁰⁷ Tracy Spencer, *'Getting Off the Verandah': Contextual Australian Theology in-Land.*, Proceedings from the Australian Missiology Conference 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Brett, "Canto Ergo Sum: Indigenous Peoples and Postcolonial Christianity."

¹⁰⁹ Brett, "Canto Ergo Sum: Indigenous Peoples and Postcolonial Christianity."p256

¹¹⁰ Spencer, "'White Woman Lives as a Lubra in Native Camp': Representations of 'Shared Space'."

perhaps lived out the obligations this placed upon them. Rebecca did, remaining with 'her people' until the end of her life, even though her husband had died and her sons had moved away. Finally she was in the bizarre situation where she lived on an Aboriginal mission, and her son Jack had received the permit, or 'dog tag', enabling him to live and work off Aboriginal reserves, in return for formally renouncing his Aboriginality. When he came to visit his mother, he had to apply for permission from the missionary to enter the community!

Jim Page, on the other hand, is not remembered as having a moiety within the Adnyamathanha community. His relationship is described like this:

Page wasn't like a boss. He'd sort of work with people, not go there and say "You got to do this"

L: Well I think he used to treat them better, mainly. You know, whether they go and ask him whatever they wanted, you know, he'd give it to them, but Mr. Eaton used to knock them back too. He got harder and harder with the Yuras see. But I reckon because Dad and Mum used to say that he wasn't a bad man, Mr. Page: he was very good.

The Rainbow Spirit Elders said:

*'What the creator spirit was doing in Jesus Christ was becoming fully one of us. The Creator Spirit hunts with us, shares our food, camps with us, speaks our languages, dances our ceremonies and sleeps by our fires. This Christ is not a foreigner but an Aboriginal person like us. The Creator Spirit belongs to our country. For us, Christ is not European but one of our own, from our land, and present wherever our people are struggling, sick or suffering.'*¹¹¹

Becoming 'fully one of us' and at the same time the Creator Spirit means that God does not redeem Indigenous people out of their situation, but is a creating or life giving presence with them in it. The story of Jim and Rebecca's commitment to stay with the community – Rebecca living out her life, Jim's in his death choosing to 'stay' rather than be relocated by the UAM – does not climax with any events we might recognize as achievements. Jim dies before the relocated community at Nepabunna can even find water to sustain them and qualify as a permanent reserve; Rebecca ceases to be a midwife after the missionaries begin to transport women to Leigh Creek hospital to have their babies, and does not take up any other role within the community. But their continuing presence – in life and in death - both affirms the community and confirms their loyalty to it.

I have been continually challenged by a story Dean Whittaker passed on to me from the top end, around the time I was planning to leave Adnyamathanha country. A Yolgnu man said to the patrol minister 'Plenty of you fellas come here to work with us. When is one of you going to die with us?'

Incarnation is how we explain God being present with us, forever, never leaving us, never forsaking us. A God who has come to become part of us makes the kind of commitment we see in the lives and deaths of Jim and Rebecca. It is a challenge I contend that few white Australians have been willing to face up to, as we go about our landless and itinerant lives. Decolonised relationships that enter into Indigenous culture will demand ongoing obligations that embed immigrants in place and in relationships. An example of such a relationship is that between Charles Duguid and the Pitjanjatjara people of Ernabella.

¹¹¹ Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*.

PP grave

It reads...

'He called us and we became his. So we called him here to lie in the peace of our land.'

Who knows where I will be buried!

**Question: What reciprocal obligations do hybrid identities create in Australia?
What does this mean for those of us who work with Indigenous communities?**

Conclusion

So these two stories of Jim and Rebecca – which in the larger research intertwine, of course – each offer a key theological insight: the recognition of God in diverse cultures and religions, and the creation of a new hybrid identity in Australia. Both these insights are delivered within the context of an appropriate – even moral – host-stranger relationship between the English settler and Adnyamathanha.

Rainbow spirit theology has been bold enough to claim an Indigenous Christ as 'one of us' and develop a theology for Indigenous Australians that affirms indigenous culture and locates the suffering God among them and their history. This is absolutely true, and essential. This is a theology not of liberation, as much as one of affirmation, and inclusion. What I have tried to do, as a white Australian, is follow the lead of Indigenous theologians and ask what Christ looks like as one like me...I have found in stories from our shared history images of Christ in white Australians Jim and Rebecca, showing me from within my own culture and religious heritage traditions of decolonized relationships that offer alternative ways to understand and live out Christian lives in C21st Australia.

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Macquarie re chalcedon and incarnation of 1990 Jesus X in modern thought
Hebrews: someone who understands us
Transformation of god through the ascension...humanity incorporated into the trinity through resurrected Christ/second person of the trinity...
Ref Barth Humanity of God

What the Rainbow Spirit Elders envisage is divinity in the process of 'becoming-minor'. Their language echoes the dynamic of John 1:14, where logos enters into and becomes one with humanity. There is a process by which the dualism of divinity and humanity is overcome. Rather than explore this movement through the systematic categories of adoption or incarnation, the stories of Jim and Rebecca becoming-minor in the migration of their subjectivity into intersubjectivity with Adnyamathanha suggest a new understanding of Emmanuel, Christ being with us. If Christ is figured as the stranger, and humanity as the host, then we fundamentally experience divinity as transformed into something new in the process of becoming human. Christ the stranger will become something new as Christ enters human life. Not the creator standing outside of creation, but creator being recreated through engagement with creation. Further, Christ arrival to hosting humanity is not one experienced as overwhelming and dominating, the paradigm for dramatic conversion. Christ the stranger who engages with the meeting protocols of the host, who exchanges gifts and becomes obligated to the host, proceeds from a position of humility and respect before humanity. Christ solidarity with humanity in this metaphor both brings innovation to humanity, while also affirming humanity. Christ genuinely becomes one of us, and yet different to us, simultaneously. Christ does not come to colonise humanity, but to decolonize and 'unmake the relationships of violence'¹¹² that have segregated humanity and divinity. Not by transforming humanity, but by sharing it. In the process, both become something new.

Martin Wilson - At the Interface between Aboriginal and Christian Religions

Fr. Martin Wilson msc is an anthropologist and works with the Nelen Yubu Productions at the Chevalier Resource Centre.



Around Campfire at Peppimenarti

In 1976 I spent a few months in an Aboriginal homeland village in Northern Territory called Peppimenarti. It was early in the Homeland or Outstation adventure, and we felt that it was important for the Catholic Church in the NT to understand the dynamics of the homeland movement. For that reason, I asked permission of my church superiors and of the Aboriginal homeland village people to spend some time living with them, so as to understand better their aims, methods and goals. I came armed with a background in philosophy and with a degree in social anthropology gained at the University of Papua New Guinea. I had a particular interest in the relationship between Aboriginal religion and Christianity. During my months at Peppimenarti I learnt about quite a few things, but particularly about dreaming, the skin system, many aspects of life and work on an Aboriginal cattle station, but very little about Aboriginal religion. One night toward the end of my stay I and some of the older and middle aged men were talking around the campfire at night. I approached the subject of religion. They were all living in effect the Christian way of life. In those days Peppimenarti prided itself upon being a Catholic village. Much to my surprise, when I first arrived at the village, as a researcher, not as a priest – their leader insisted that everybody attend mass in the village when they came home from work in the afternoon whether they were baptized or not. Their Aboriginal religion existed in a parallel, but submerged sort of fashion. The only public demonstration of it that I witnessed during my stay was a burring of the clothes ceremony. I had been invited to attend it, but while I was sitting down with the mob, a group of men from Port Keats arrived, and one of them known as a dedicated Catholic man proceeded to tell me that as Catholic priest I shouldn't be attending such a pagan ceremony. At any rate on the night in question, sitting around the camp-fire, I suggested that we might talk about religion, with the aim of stating a search for a more integrated way of being both Aboriginal and Christian at the same time. We wanted to find the food way, what I was later to describe as the '*nelen yubu*'. The men nodded their heads, and said yes, that would be a good idea. Meanwhile, another old man approached: he was known to be the keeper of the traditional religion. When one of the men of the campfire group told the old religious leader what we wanted to talk about, he shook his head and said 'No, not yet'. So I saw that I would have to wait for a later time to approach this important subject. That really is what I am doing today.

A Simple Approach

Let us take a very simple approach. Let us look at the main basic features, first, of Aboriginal religion, and then of Christianity. Just the main basic features. Then let us see how well they might be able to fit together.

Aboriginal Religion

In the opening chapter of his survey of Aboriginal religion Fr. E A Worms wrote thus:

The cult implements of the Australian mainland are very diverse in kind, but they are all grounded in the religion of... nomadic hunter gatherers. They believe that these objects, and the associated liturgy, bring about the permanent presence of supernatural beings, reactivate the invisible forces that emanate from them, and exercise a mythical influence on the fate of humans and the cosmos. For making these objects the Aborigine regards every material to be suitable and holy, be it wood or stone, bone or hair, bark or grass, shell or fruit. When used in ceremonies with song, proclamation, and drama, the decorations and traditional motifs on the sacred objects express in an original way the Aborigine's beliefs religious sensibility, and attitude towards life. They are the Aborigine's secret, his mysterious weapons the emblems of his sacred rank and of his far-reaching power. His creative talent, marked by strong regional characteristics, invents ever new variations of liturgical objects from which – with ever greater certainty – an even closer contact with the spiritual world and his natural environment is expected to come. In spite of this variety of sacred objects, *the fundamental idea behind them is the same throughout the continent and reflects the surprising unity of Aboriginal spirituality*. Even external influences have been so completely absorbed that their origin is hard to detect (Worms-Petri 1998:6 my italics).

In brief, underneath the great variety of local differences there is remarkable unity of spirit in Aboriginal religion throughout the continent. The best exposition of this spirit in Aboriginal religion throughout the continent. The best exposition of this spirit in some detail that I know of is an outline that Dr W E H Stanner developed over the years as he reflected on his experiences in Aboriginal societies. It is anchored in the Wadeye or Port Keats – Daly River area of the Northern Territory but penetrated so deeply into the Aboriginal spirit, I believe, that it contacts and reflects that “surprising unity of Aboriginal spirituality” that Worms spoke of. This version appeared in 1976 (at the AASR conference in Adelaide).

Some years ago I tried to sum up in about half a dozen propositions the understanding I then had of Aboriginal religion. There is nothing in them that I now want to unsay. But there is much that I could wish to have said better, so as to bring out the strength and beauty of the outlook I was trying to express...

1. The Aborigines universally believed that ancestral beings had left a *world full of signs* of their beneficent intent towards the men they had also brought into being. The wisdom about living given to men, cherished by traditional experience, could interpret these outward and visible signs as saying that men's lives had to follow a perennial pattern and, if they did so, men could live always under an assurance of providence.
2. The *human person*, compound of body and several spiritual principles or elements, had value in himself and for others, and there were spirits who cared.
3. The main religious cults were concerned to *renew and conserve life*, including the life-force that kept animating the world in which men subsisted and with which they were bonded in body, soul and spirit.
4. The material part of life, and of Man himself, was *under spiritual authority*, and the souls of the dead shared in maintaining the authority and the providence over them.
5. The core of religious practice was to bring the life of a man under a *discipline* that required him to understand the sacred tradition of his group and to confirm his life to the pattern ordained by that tradition.

6. The underlying philosophy of the religion was one of *assent* to the received terms of life; that is to say, it inculcated a strong disposition to accept life as a mixture of good with bad, of joy with suffering, but to *celebrate* it notwithstanding.
7. The major cults inculcated a sense of mystery by symbolisms pointing to ultimate or metaphysical realities which were thought to show themselves by signs.

The Christian Life

To express the main basic features of the Christian religion is not as daunting a task as one might be tempted to expect when one considers the great variety of churches with their complicated histories of controversies and disagreements over the past 2000 years. I want to get back behind the historical developments that have occurred since Christ's time. I want to look simply at what Christ himself proposed when he spelt out the fundamental characteristics of what following him as disciples might mean. Let's look at the gospels themselves.

Negatives

For the foundational documents of a new religion, the gospels are remarkably devoid of the sort of details one might expect.

- a) There is no book of *rituals*. In fact Jesus only outlined one simple prayer, and only after being more or less forced by his disciples to teach them how to pray (Luke 11:1-4' Matt.6).
- b) There are no rules about special days of prayer or the *Sabbath* day. If anything, Jesus kept on offending the pious Jews with his free interpretation of Sabbath rules. Cf Mark 2:27 "The Sabbath was made for the good of man; man was not made for the Sabbath."
- c) There are no special times of *fasting* enjoined. Jesus rather sidestepped the issue (Matt. 9:14-15).

Positive

Jesus did give his disciples one identifying command: "And now I give you a *new commandment* to love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples" (Jn. 13:34-35)

Jesus did enjoin those precepts from the Mosaic Law that we know as "The 10 Commandments" (Matt. 22:34-40) – which was really a codification of proper interpersonal relationships common in the ancient world. They simply spelt out the implications of being a human being among other human beings. It is probably worth remarking that when Jesus elsewhere outlined a short list of the important Commandments, he made no mention of the legalistic third, the keeping of the Sabbath day, which the scribes and Pharisees prized so highly (LK 18:20).

The so called "golden rule" about loving one's neighbor as one's self was already a part of the standard Jewish law (Lev. 19:18). Jesus made it a new commandment by adding a special motivation and scope to it: to love one another as Jesus himself has loved us, that is, even to the point of death. That type of love would become a distinctive mark of Jesus' followers, that is, of the people who wanted to walk in the new "way" (cf. Acts 9:2).

That, in effect, is the essence of Christianity.

Concluding Comparison

Can these two religious schema fit together?

My contention is that they can. Christianity when viewed at the basic level that I have proposed contains no particular rules or regulations to clash with the culture of Aboriginal or other peoples. If implemented, it would have an immense affect in practice. If an Aboriginal society took on Christianity, it would be expected to allow the Christian spirit of love for one another to work as a cleansing leaven between it. Customs and practices that would be judged as opposed to eth Christian way of love would be modified or even abolished or just drop off life dead branches. Customs that enhance human persons and human life in society would be reinforced and receive a new power and intensity. That sort of Aboriginal Christian society would become a wonderful thing to behold!

What a pity it is that when the Christian missionaries first approached Aboriginal societies they carried with them so much extra baggage. They were seen and saw themselves as agents of Western Culture and even of specific governments. In the Northern Territory the Jesuits described their role as, first to “civilize” and later to “evangelize”. What a pity it wasn’t the other way about! But I am pretty sure I will be told that that was impractical.

What do you think?

John Henderson – Speech - Launch of Ker Ker

Revd. John Henderson is the General Secretary of the National Council of Churches in Australia. During the conference NATSIEC launched its publication *Ker Ker*, a book of theological reflections by Indigenous people. This is the speech given by Recd. Henderson at the occasion.



I begin by acknowledging that I am a visitor in this place and I have not met the local people. I am grateful to be a guest in their country.

Secondly I want to acknowledge my partnership with you on the Gospel, and my commitment with you to our common faith in Jesus, and the community of faith gathered by the Holy Spirit.

It is good to be here with you. Thank you, Graeme & NATSIEC, for arranging this event, and the publication of *Ker Ker* – ‘Time Now’. What you as a group is doing is important, even more so in times like this of immense challenge. I hope you continue, despite the difficulties and lack of understanding with which some might greet your work. I know there have been major set backs in the past. Western models of theology have been so dominant for so long that many people have forgotten that Jesus did not come from the West, nor was he European, but, as Ray Minniecon rightly points out in his essay, Jesus was from the East, a member of the local indigenous people in his land of birth. So much of the Bible is indeed a tribal story – of community identity, of opportunity and risk, of oppression and the oppressed, of want and plenty, of land and dispute, of the ways of one people coming into contact, for good or for ill, with the ways of another. In the pages of the Book, most of which was first a collection of oral stories, we meet these people as they identified and learned to love the God who was among them.

Some people use this concept to discredit the Bible. They think that somehow story equals untruth. It started when we were kids. If Mum or Dad thought we were lying, they would say, “Don’t give me that story” – meaning, don’t tell me fibs! In my early ministry, when I once spoke about the Bible as story, an upset parishioner chastised me. “Don’t call it a story,” he said, “because you’re saying it’s not true.”

Somehow Western theology, and along with it, Western culture, became detached from the story, not only of the Bible, but of life itself. As the investigation of the natural world took over, and with it a sense of dominance or control, so scientists and society began to imagine we were more than human and had somehow reached a higher state. To be held within a human story was somehow too limiting. They wanted freedom. Suddenly everything existed to serve that freedom of the self, to treat the story of life as though it were inconsequential, and there was no longer any harmony, and the stories of God, the world, and its people, were left to the superstitious masses.

You experienced the dislocation of this outcome of the Western enlightenment. It’s the only way the fiction of ‘Terra Nullius’ could have been invented. It’s why these essays ask the question, “Did God come off the boat in 1770?” This volume says an emphatic “no”. Now you are working to recover the story of faith in Indigenous culture, at the same time as valuing the good things that did come off all the boats that have arrived since 1770. We

all have this responsibility. Just as the Bible story is intertwined, so your story and my story are intertwined. God is in that intertwining of our stories, and we must walk together to discover what God means by letting our stories mix. Perhaps we will find a new story to tell, a new reality to unpack. It has always been my belief, and my dream, that here in Australia we can do something really special, something new, something to give hope to the world as we learn to live together well in this place.

Perhaps theology itself is part of the issue. Semantically theology is made up of two words: God, and Word. It is literally words about God, or God talk. Graeme Mundine makes the point in the introduction to the book that, “the essays ... do not emerge from high academic discourse.” He is quite right – and the best theology never does. The world of the academy is a construct, the world of life and story is a given. Academy, while useful, is not superior to life. At its best theology is away of being – its thought, language, and practice must incorporate our being, and explore our relationship with God. Who we are is totally relevant to theology because it can never be done in the abstract. Our identity gives us our sense of perspective, and helps us understand our starting point. In the academy there is sometimes a theory, possibly derived from philosophy that we can arrive at some sort of pure thought about God. This book, Kerker, will have none of that, embedded as it is in the life and experience of Indigenous people in the real world in Australia today.

Today we are all becoming more aware of our origins, and how those origins skew our perspectives. This is being brought to light by the current emphasis on Christian / Muslim relations. I would say that you, however, knew this long ago. You have seen Western theology promote its positions as absolute and as a result become blinded to the wealth and wisdom of others. This theology you are doing is risk taking. It is a new path. It is struggle. It can land you in conflict with religious authorities. It can be discredited among your own people. It is an act of courage.

The grace and fortitude of the Indigenous people of Australia is legend. Your patience has been sorely tried. Through work such as you are doing here, and publications like this little book, ‘Kerker’, things are moving in the right direction. We are grateful to Mick Connelly, Valma Connelly, Wally Fejo, Joan Hendriks, Saibo Mabo, Ray Minniecon, Graeme Mundine, Elizabeth Pike, Ray Welsh and the team from NATSIEC for contributing and putting this work together. I hope that the Churches listen. This is a contribution, a step, to our growing together in Christ, and our living together well as Australians, Indigenous and others. Through it we reaffirm this country as a really special place, and of those who live here as fellow travellers in life, and the story of faith.



The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission (NATSIEC) is the peak ecumenical Indigenous body in Australia. It is part of the National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA). With NATSIEC's guidance, the churches are working together for a fair deal for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and for the healing of our nation

All the Commission members of NATSIEC are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the first peoples of this land and sea. They represent a cross-section of church-related Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups from the Anglican Church of Australia, the Churches of Christ, the Lutheran Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Salvation Army, the Coptic Orthodox and the Uniting Church in Australia.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission shall:

- Provide a forum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to speak and take action on issues of faith, mission and evangelism; of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality and theology; of social justice and land rights.
- Serve as a unified voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as they relate to member churches and international ecumenical bodies.
- Help rebuild self-esteem, pride and dignity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Promote harmony, justice and understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider community.
- Provide a basis for further political action by church-related Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and the member churches of the National Council of Churches in Australia.
- Administer all funds of the National Council of Churches in Australia relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Share in furthering the objectives and promoting the programmes of the National Council of Churches in Australia.



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