

australasian  
pentecostalstudies

Issue 20 (2019)



# australasian pentecostalstudies

Issue 20 (2019)

Tanya Riches, Editorial: Spirit-filled Christianity and The Dreaming: Can Australia Create Space for Theological “Makarrata”? .....4

David Armstrong, Shane Clifton and Ingrid Ryan, Learning to Dream: an urban Pentecostal embraces his Aboriginal identity.....18

Monica Short and Karen Kime, Engaging with Aboriginal peoples: Challenging inequality in the rural Australian Anglican Church from a sociological, social work and theological perspective.....35

Anderson George and Rachel Borneman, Anderson’s View on Aboriginal Christian Spirituality: “Who are you putting first in your life?” .....55

## ***Interviews***

Sandra and Will Dumas, interview by Tanya Riches .....77

Ray Minniecon, interview by Tanya Riches .....86

Adam Gowan, interview by Tanya Riches .....100

Victor Joseph, interview by Brooke Prentis .....105

Davena Monro, interview by Brooke Prentis .....114

Robyn Ober, interview by Tanya Riches .....128

Glenda Ramsey, interview by Tanya Riches .....138

Christie Jacobs, interview by Tanya Riches .....145

***Book Reviews*** .....154

Roland Boer and Christina Petterson. *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017. Reviewed by Paul Oslington.....154

Nimi Wariboko, *The Split God: Pentecostalism and Critical Theory*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018. Reviewed by Amos Yong.....158

## **Australasian Pentecostal Studies 20 (2019)**

### **Editor:**

Shane Clifton (Alphacrucis College, Sydney, Australia)

### **Associate Editors:**

David Perry (Alphacrucis College, Sydney, Australia)

Adam White (Alphacrucis College, Sydney, Australia)

### **Special Issue Guest Editors:**

Tanya Riches (Hillsong College, Sydney, Australia)

Ingrid Ryan (Alphacrucis College, Sydney, Australia)

### **Editorial Board:**

Allan Anderson (University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK)

Denise Austin (Alphacrucis College, Brisbane, Australia)

John Capper (University of Divinity, Melbourne, Australia)

Jacqueline Grey (Alphacrucis College, Sydney, Australia)

Mark Hutchinson (Alphacrucis College, Sydney, Australia)

Matthew del Nevo (Catholic Institute of Sydney, Sydney, Australia)

Amos Yong (Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, USA)

Individual articles, ©2019, APS and the contributors.

All copyright entitlements are retained for the electronic and other versions of the contents of this journal.

Note: The opinions expressed in articles published in Australasian Pentecostal Studies do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors.

Australasian Pentecostal Studies is a peer refereed scholarly journal. Material for publication should be submitted online at <https://aps-journal.com/index.php/APS/information/authors>

Australasian Pentecostal Studies appears annually and in special additions as may occasionally occur.

## Editorial: Spirit-filled Christianity and The Dreaming: Can Australia Create Space for Theological “Makarrata”? <sup>1, 2</sup>

Tanya Riches

### Abstract

Within this special edition of *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* (APS), Spirit-filled Christianity played host for a much-needed discussion intended to recognise ways urban Aboriginal people continue their culture/s and negotiate spiritualities in the Australian context today. “The Dreaming” is growing in importance within Australia, in part due to the Welcome/Acknowledgement cultural protocols now officiated by the state and many organisations. However, this is largely a Western appropriation of diverse Aboriginal cultures, and spiritualities. Incorporation of The Dreaming is controversial amongst theologians, but even more so in many Aboriginal Pentecostal churches. Following calls for “Makarrata” (a coming together after a struggle) in wider society, this article outlines the need, and possibility, for respectful dialogue that prioritises Aboriginal voices within the church.

### Introduction: The Purpose of This Special Edition

This special edition of *Australasian Pentecostal studies* (APS) breaks new ground by seeking to explore and theologise on the intersection of Aboriginal “Dreaming” spiritualities and Spirit-filled Christianity. The primary purpose is to elevate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, not as mere tokens, but in order to learn from their deep reservoir of spirituality and faith. In this introduction, I write as a white Pentecostal participant of this dialogue, aware of my privilege and bias. However, I have sought to do my best to listen to the moving and challenging stories of Australia’s Black history and to learn from the profound theological insight of the Aboriginal Elders I have come to love and respect. The goal of this edition is to give readers a similar opportunity; to hear directly from Aboriginal Christians and thus gain insight for themselves, and thereafter, to work toward elevating Aboriginal leadership within Pentecostalism and Spirit-filled Christianity as a whole.

---

<sup>1</sup> This project was funded by ARTFINC (Australian Research Theology Foundation Inc.), which is an independent foundation that promotes theological research and education with an Australian orientation.

<sup>2</sup> This introduction does not and is not intended to necessarily represent the views of my co-editors, for whose involvement I am grateful for in this project.

Australian Christians express concern that the religious landscape of their nation is changing rapidly. The certainty by which Australia was proclaimed a Christian nation is now eroding, with most denominations on the sharp decline, while immigrant religions (most notably Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism) increase.<sup>3</sup> In the year 1901, Australian self-reported affiliation with Christianity was 96.1%.<sup>4</sup> Today, it sits at 52%. However, researchers at the National Church Life Survey (NCLS) estimate that only about 16% of the population attend a Christian church regularly (monthly or more).<sup>5</sup>

In response, some Christian leaders have attempted to draw the Australian national religious conversation back into its heritage. Recalling an identity forged in a convict past, and images of iconic tall ships sailing into Sydney Harbour, they cite the classic sermon text of the inaugural parson Richard Johnson. While proponents use this period of Australia's history to represent triumph over adversity, it is difficult to understand how the First Landing event could be anything other than divisive within a post-colonial Australian context. Aside from the invasion of unceded land, and genocide of pre-existing peoples, this narrative also speaks starkly of lower-class versus upper class realities, of families wrought from their homes, of violent punishment and incarceration, of greed and ambition, and environmental devastation. The question is, should such pictures of Empire offer a continuing rudder to the Australian church?

In contrast to this British-centric narrative, a North American alternative has been offered via amplifying celebrity voices. Parts of the Australian church today seek to enshrine the legacy of prominent North American evangelist (e.g. Billy Graham) crusades. Evangelists continue to be influential, now accessible in Australian homes through various on-demand multimedia technologies. McIntyre argues that Pentecostalism, more than any other Australian Christian movement, adopted and perfected methods of mass-marketing by materialising the gospel into what he describes as "a lifestyle product".<sup>6</sup> This worked to revitalise congregations, with the market affording an autonomy suitable for the multi-cultural nation. However, the rapidly diminishing relevance of the modern religious voice in the Australian secular sphere is clear. In an unanticipated shift, post-modernity presents a real challenge to the authoritative (particularly white male) preacher and questions many previously held cultural absolutes. Evangelical and Pentecostal leaders come under intense scrutiny in the global media landscape. Overall, Australian public opinion refuses the televangelist as a genuine expression of its national religiosity. However, all is not lost – research shows us that millennial culture longs for a deeper, less ostentatious, *spirituality*.<sup>7</sup> Therefore,

<sup>3</sup> "Religion in Australia," 2071.0 - *Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016*, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (Canberra: ABS, 2016), accessed 21 February, 2019, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2071.0>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Please note, however, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were famously excluded from the census until 1967, and therefore it is unclear as to whether this figure from the ABS represents all Australians; "1301.0 - Year Book Australia: Religious Affiliation," Australian Bureau of Statistics, (Canberra: Australian Government, 2006), accessed 20 September, 2016, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/0/636F496B2B943F12CA2573D200109DA9>

<sup>5</sup> Miriam Pepper and Ruth Powell, *Religion, spirituality and connections with churches: results from the 2018 Australian Community Survey*, NCLS Occasional Paper no. 36 (Sydney: NCLS Research, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Elisha McIntyre, "Brand of Choice: Why Hillsong is Winning Sales and Souls," *Journal for the Academic Study of Religion* 20, no. 2 (2007): 175-194.

<sup>7</sup> Aaron McAleese, "The Age of the Millennial," *Zadok Perspectives*, no. 137 (Summer 2017): 6-8; Andrew Singleton, Mary Lou Rasmussen, Anna Halafoff and Gary Bouma, *The AGZ Study: Press Kit*. (ANU, Deakin and Monash Universities, 2018): 1-13.

perhaps this provides Christians opportunity – alongside the post-modern search – to retrieve something more sacred, more holy.

Recently, The Uluru Statement From the Heart profoundly impacted the Australian national conversation. Released 27th May 2017, in this document, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders claim an inalienable, spiritual right to the continent of Australia.<sup>8</sup> Although largely ignored by leading politicians, recognition of this right has undoubtedly increased in popular imagination over the last decades, through a range of attitudinal shifts and the adoption of local rituals. Welcome to (and Acknowledgement of) Country ceremonies are now commonplace in all government, school, and university meetings.<sup>9</sup> Ironically, Nancy Akehurst acknowledges how smoking ceremonies have been used to rid the preeminent scientific CSIRO building of evil spirits.<sup>10</sup> With Aboriginal ceremonies taking centre stage, at least in many of our major cities, “The Dreaming” is fast becoming Australia’s contemporary public Spirituality.

Aboriginal Christian leaders made a public call to the Australian Church to adopt similar practices, with leading Pentecostal conferences taking part.<sup>11</sup> So, what do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders mean when they refer to “Spirituality”? Furthermore, how does that relate to their Christianity? The research that grounded this present edition of *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* intended to amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians; particularly regarding their view of the intersections and interactions between Christianity and their culture/s.

### **Makarrata and (Re)conciliation**

*The Uluru Statement* recognises a profound reality, that, to date, there has been no meaningful dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. Therefore, Aboriginal Elders ask whether the word “reconciliation” could possibly suffice for any revision of this relationship. In his interview in this journal, Uncle Ray Minniecon poignantly asks, “if we are going to go down that track, are we going to be reconciled to that history again? The White Australia policy... all that stuff?” Instead, the Uluru Statement introduces the concept of “Makarrata,” characterising the pre-existing relationship as one of “a struggle.” It acknowledges colonial dominance and power but does not suggest a passive response from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Makarrata also provides the possibility of a “coming together.” However, the spaces for this coming together

---

<sup>8</sup> “Uluru Statement From the Heart,” Referendum Council, (2017), accessed 20 February, 2017, [https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru\\_Statement\\_From\\_The\\_Heart\\_0.PDF](https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF)

<sup>9</sup> Kristina Everett, “Welcome to Country... Not,” *Oceania* 79, no. 1 (2009): 53–64.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Akehurst, “Smoking Out Evil Spirits at the CSIRO,” *Quadrant Magazine* 56, no. 1 (2012): 44–45. <https://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2012/01-02/smoking-out-evil-spirits/>

<sup>11</sup> Tanya Riches, “Acknowledgment of Country: Intersecting Australian Pentecostals Reembedding Spirit in Place,” *Religions* 9, no. 10 (2018): 287, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9100287>

within the Australian church are few and far between. Where do non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Christians “come together” for truth-telling, for engagement, for theologising, for learning?

To fail to acknowledge the history — Settler complicity in the destruction of rich Aboriginal cultures and the strength of Aboriginal resistance — would be a tragic loss. White Australians are prone to ahistoricism. However, a deeper understanding of our history is not only needed for Aboriginal justice but also has the potential to speak sincerely to today’s events and questions. This special edition makes it clear that Aboriginal Christians can lead a theological Makarrata.

During the work on this edition and with the assistance of Aboriginal leaders studying through NAIITS,<sup>12</sup> we were able to identify influential Aboriginal theologians and Christian leaders of urban communities. Key theologians listed by our Aboriginal contributors included Charles (Charlie) Harris,<sup>13</sup> Anne- Patel Grey,<sup>14</sup> Djiniyini Gondarra,<sup>15</sup> Galarrwuy Yunupingu,<sup>16</sup> Graham Paulson,<sup>17</sup> and George Rosendale.<sup>18</sup> Critical texts cited included the influential *Rainbow Spirit Theology* from The Rainbow Spirit Elders.<sup>19</sup> However, the omission of these texts within many of Australia’s theological libraries show that the many efforts to include Aboriginal voices in theological and biblical studies departments have been limited and inconsistent.

Other works also seem to have been forgotten (or ignored) by the Australian church. For example, in the basement of Sydney University’s library is a microfiche dissertation written by anthropologist Malcolm Calley.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Formerly North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies, an Indigenous-led college active in Australia via Whitley College.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Harris, “Guidelines for So-Called Western Civilisation and Western Christianity,” in *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, edited by Anne Pattel-Gray (Blackburn, Victoria: HarperCollins Religious, 1996): 66-78

<sup>14</sup> Anne Pattel-Gray, *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*. (Blackburn, Vic: HarperCollins Religious, 1996); Anne Pattel-Gray, *The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia*, American Academy of Religion Cultural Criticism Series (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998); Anne Pattel-Gray, “The hard truth: white secrets, black realities” *Australian Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 30 (1990): 259-266, doi:

<https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649993092>; Anne Pattel-Gray, *Through Aboriginal eyes : the cry from the wilderness* (Geneva, Switzerland : World Council of Churches, 1991); Anne Pattel-Gray, “The Aboriginal Process of Inculturation,” *Australian Religion Studies Review*, 17, no. 1 (2015): 13-19, DOI: <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/ARSR/article/view/9008>

<sup>15</sup> Djiniyini Gondarra, *Series of Reflections of Aboriginal Theology: Let My People Go* (Darwin: Bethal Presbytery, Northern Synod of the Uniting Church of Australia, 1986); Djiniyini Gondarra, “Father, You Gave Us The Dreaming,” *Compass Theology Review* 22 (Autumn/Winter 1988): 6-8; Djiniyini Gondarra, “Aboriginal Spirituality and the Gospel,” in *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, ed. Anne Pattel-Gray (Blackburn, Victoria: HarperCollins Religious, 1996): 81-98.

<sup>16</sup> Galarrwuy Yunupingu, “Concepts of Land and Spirituality,” in *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, 4-10; also see Nina Claditz, “Interview: Galarrwuy Yunupingu,” *Chain Reaction* 4, no. 1 (1978), 16-17.

<sup>17</sup> Graham Paulson, “Towards an Aboriginal theology,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006): 310-320, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1030570X0601900310>; Graham Paulson and Mark G. Brett, “Five Smooth Stones: Reading the Bible Through Aboriginal Eyes,” *Colloquium*, 45, no. 2 (2013): 199-209, <https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1672/>; Graham Paulson, “The Value of Aboriginal Culture,” in *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, 81-98.

<sup>18</sup> George Rosendale, “Aboriginal Myths and Customs: Matrix for Gospel Preaching,” *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 22, no. 3 (1988): 117-122; George Rosendale, “Aboriginal Spirituality or Theology,” *Compass*, 37, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 5-7.

<sup>19</sup> The Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*, (Blackburn, Vic: HarperCollins Religious, 1997). The Rainbow Elders included George Rosendale (the spiritual elder of the group), Nola Archie, Dennis Corowa, William Coolbura, Eddie Law, James Leftwich, and Jasmine Corowa (artist).

<sup>20</sup> Malcolm J. C Calley, “Aboriginal Pentecostalism: A Study of Changes in Religion, North Coast, NSW” (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 1955).

His 1955 study was written during the era of Australian segregation. It vividly describes two opposing Australian religiosities; the “old rule” of the Dreaming and the Christian religion that sought to replace it.<sup>21</sup> Calley outlined how the Bundjalung peoples of the New South Wales coastline gathered at bora rings (or ceremonial circles) for dancing (or “corroboree”), with their initiated *marugan* or “clever men” curating these sacred land sites. He paralleled these rituals against the local hymn-singing white congregations who dutifully listened to the “dogma” of their male clergy in their Christian worship services, and boasted similarly “righteous” and “authorised” missionaries with their curated religious outstations. Although he states, “The clever men are all dead,” their power lived on in the minds of the clergy who placed embargoes on “drinking, smoking and clever men” who were seen as “...[the] black powers of darkness, a rival force.”<sup>22</sup>

Calley’s observations were not only of religious struggle. He also describes a local space in which the two systems interacted, in the “mixed blood” Bundjalung Pentecostal churches that had existed on the East Coast since before the 1920s. It was an entirely new religious movement, about which he declares,

Aboriginal Pentecostalism is not merely a welding of Christianity onto a mixed blood community. It is an integration of a new religion into the social framework of the old... the new religion, like the old, is partly magical and aspects of both the indigenous and alien cultures has [sic] been verified.<sup>23</sup>

Here, it can be noted that the observed “magical” elements could have been from *either* the Pentecostal or the Aboriginal spiritualities. Pentecostalism has long offered a re-enchanted vision of the world.<sup>24</sup>

The influence of Aboriginal Christianity on the church in our nation has been profound, and Aboriginal theologising is not new. Neither is the effectiveness of their evangelism strategies and spiritualities for speaking into public space. So why are the voices of the Black Pentecostal/charismatics still hidden in Australia’s wider theological and secular discourses?

### **“The Dreaming” and Christianity: Amplifying Aboriginal Authors**

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 54% of Indigenous Australians self-identify as Christian. Thus, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christianity is *higher* than in the wider population.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics only around 2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples practice “traditional religions.”<sup>25</sup> However, the response “no religion” is increasing at a rapid rate. There

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 4, 47.

<sup>24</sup> Birgit Meyer, “Magic, mermaids and modernity: the attraction of Pentecostalism in Africa,” *Etnofoor* 2 (1995): 47-67.

<sup>25</sup> The percentage of those practicing traditional religion rises to 6% in some remote rural areas. See: “4713.0 - Population characteristics Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians,” Australian Bureau of Statistics (Canberra: Australian Government, 2006), <http://www.abs.gov.au>, accessed 20 September 2016.



are valid questions regarding the terminology used in surveys.<sup>26</sup> But famously, leading sociologist Nancy Ammerman has rejected the idea of “spiritual, not religious” as two binary systems opposed to one other.<sup>27</sup> She states;

Rather than assume that "religion" is best measured in organizational belonging and traditional belief, while spirituality is best seen as an individual experiential creation, we would do well to recognize that both have institutional producers.<sup>28</sup>

This allows for recognition of ways Aboriginal Christians continue their culture and negotiate their spiritualities today in the Australian context.

The largest Christian denominational affiliations are Anglican and Catholic, often attributed to the pervasiveness of their missions (whether measured by their historical presence, finance spent, amount of missionaries, or geographic spread).<sup>29</sup> But Indigenous communities' relationship with the missions movement was and continues to be complicated, and extremely varied.<sup>30</sup> As Aboriginal scholar, Vicki Grieves, states;

Aboriginal Australians today may live predominantly within one or the other of the ontological/epistemological systems, glossed as Aboriginal or Western. In either case, they have to contend not only with the existence and influence of the other but are continually dealing with a world in which these different ontologies collide. Aboriginal scholars, men and women of high degree, the inheritors of the lifeways, seek to preserve the philosophical basis of the culture and promote it as a possible and practicable way of interpreting our histories, explaining the present and moving forward into the future. Central to this philosophy is what Aboriginal people have come to refer to in English as Spirituality, the basis of our existence and way of life that informs our relationships to the natural world, human society and the universe.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> The ABS states, “‘No religion’ is equivalent to ‘Secular Beliefs and Other Spiritual Beliefs and No Religious Affiliation.’” For further details, see: *“the Census of Population and Housing: Census Dictionary, 2016 (cat. no. 2901.0),”* Australian Bureau of Statistics, accessed 20 September 2016, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/2901.0Chapter34902016>

<sup>27</sup> Nancy T Ammerman, “Spiritual but not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013), 32

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>29</sup> John Harris, *We Wish We'd Done More: Ninety Years of CMS and Aboriginal Issues in North Australia*. (Adelaide: Openbook, 1998); Peggy Brock, *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation, and Survival*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Noel Loos, *White Christ Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007)

<sup>30</sup> The spread of Christianity is often attributed to the Australian missions movement, however much was due to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evangelists. See: Peggy Brock, Norman Etherington, Gareth Griffiths and Jacqueline Van Gent, *Indigenous Evangelists and Questions of Authority in the British Empire 1750-1940*, Studies in a Christian Mission (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015) DOI: 10.1163/9789004299344

<sup>31</sup> Vickie Grieves, *Aboriginal spirituality: Aboriginal philosophy, the basis of Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing* (Darwin: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009), 2-3.

Nevertheless, Grieves warns against creating “Aboriginal theologies.”<sup>32</sup> This silences Aboriginal and Torres Strait perspectives, which in turn continues to perpetuate the view of Western European Christianity as opposed to Aboriginal spirituality. In many ways, rejecting Aboriginal theologies effectively rejects Aboriginal Christians.

Instead, this journal proposes prioritising Aboriginal explanations of how diverse theologies and spiritualities can co-exist, as representative of the many indigenous peoples who constitute the global church.

### **The Potentials (and Problems) of Pentecostal/charismatic Theologies**

Only 2.7% of Aboriginal people identify as Pentecostal, twice as many as the broader population (ABS 2011). This figure may seem only a small percentage. However, many of our authors note the movement as being influential on Aboriginal Christianity as a whole. For this reason, we devised the term “Spirit-filled” to indicate the synergies between Pentecostals and charismatics who worship within other denominations and churches. The idea that experiential “Spirit-filled” Christianity play host to a discussion on spiritualities and theology is potentially counterintuitive and certainly unexpected. However, Pentecostal scholars argue that providing such space is conducive to the Spirit’s creative work.

Although often presented as such, Pentecostalism is not a white religion. It is now a “global South” religion highly influential amongst indigenous Latin Americans and Africans.<sup>33</sup> In the West, similar discussions about the intersections of culture and faith have been documented amongst Alaskan Native Americans, Mexican Yucatan, the urban British Caribbean diaspora<sup>34</sup> and Hispanic peoples in New York City.<sup>35</sup> Pentecostalism and culture has been famously explored among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea.<sup>36</sup> In fact, according to Nimi Wariboko, Nigerian Christianity is now structured into two types, ‘non-African African Christians’ and ‘African Christians.’<sup>37</sup> This last category he splits further, into “Spirit-filled” or Pentecostal, and the African Initiated Churches (AICs) - both of which grew out of the indigenous Yoruba Aladura revivals.

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 18

<sup>33</sup> David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002). Paul Freston, Pentecostalism in Latin America: characteristics and controversies. *Social Compass*, 45, no. 3 (1998): 335-358; Dena Freeman, *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 21, 71, 84.

<sup>34</sup> Nicole Rodriguez Toulis, *Believing Identity: Pentecostalism and the Mediation of Jamaican Ethnicity and Gender in England*. Explorations in Anthropology Series. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997).

<sup>35</sup> Kirk Dombrowski, *Against Culture: Development, Politics and Religion in Indian Alaska*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), Kirk Dombrowski, "The Praxis of Indigenism and Alaska Native Timber Politics," *American Anthropologist*, 104, no. 4 (2002): 1062-1073; Christine A. Kray, "The Pentecostal Re-formation of Self: Opting for Orthodoxy in Yucatan," *Ethos*, 29, no. 4 (Dec 2001): 395-429; Samuel Solivan, *Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998)

<sup>36</sup> Joel Robbins, "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (October 2004): 117-143; Joel Robbins, "Pentecostal Networks and the Spirit of Globalization: On the Social Productivity of Ritual Forms." *Social Analysis*, 53, no. 1 (2009): 55-66; Joel Robbins, "Anthropology, Pentecostalism, and the New Paul: Conversion, Event, and Social Transformation." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (2010): 633-652.

<sup>37</sup> Nimi Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014)

Pentecostalism has its strengths, but also its drawbacks. For example, while traditionally it distinguished itself via the practice of glossolalia or “speaking in tongues,” in the Nigerian context there are few clear markers of commitment. Thus a Pentecostal “exclusive, superior religious identity” has emerged, and become a highly contentious topic within Nigerian communities.<sup>38</sup> Wariboko notes;

...they differentiate themselves from the mainline, “orthodox,” “dead” Christians. They are now ‘non-Christian Christians’ ...what the “identity politics” of Pentecostalism shows is the impossibility of any identity coinciding with itself or any believer (African or otherwise) coinciding with herself, and the impossibility of identifying any universal sameness... Pentecostalism renders all distinctions, divisional markings and classes inoperative without abolishing them.<sup>39</sup>

Throughout the formation of this edition, the potentials for dialogue became clear, but also the potential for conflict.

### **The Dreaming, “Syncretism” and “Synchronicity”**

As many of our contributors note, “The Dreaming” does not always sit well with Aboriginal Christians. The term itself was formed from the engagement of anthropologists with the Arrernte Central Desert peoples.<sup>40</sup> It can be thought of as an English “gloss” upon the vast diversities of spiritualities and cultures found across Australia. There is often confusion about local practice, and mystery about how Christianity relates to Dreaming Spiritualities, if at all.

For Aboriginal Pentecostals in particular, the interaction between Christianity and Dreaming symbols has been complex. This is epitomised in Sallie Anderson’s article “Rejecting the Rainbow Serpent: An Aboriginal Artist’s Choice of the Christian God as Creator.” She describes an interaction in Cairns between two Aboriginal artists and gallery owners, who negotiate and reinforce their identities within their local art market. When Norman, a Pentecostal pastor, chose not to display two pictures of the Rainbow Serpent due to connotations with local New Age practices, this offended his peers and created a media outrage. However, in his defence, Anderson writes:

The authors of many New Age books on Aboriginal culture and spirituality pick and choose characteristics from ethnographic descriptions of various rainbow serpent myths that seemingly support their comparisons with the Kundalini, electromagnetism, Vishnu, fertility and death, vibration and energy sources and various other themes.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 215

<sup>39</sup> Wariboko, *Nigerian Pentecostalism*, Kindle Loc 1815

<sup>40</sup> Eugene Stockton, “The Dreaming in Australian Aboriginal Culture,” *The Way* 40, no. 2 (2000): 148-156.

<sup>41</sup> Sallie Anderson, “Rejecting the Rainbow Serpent: An Aboriginal Artist’s Choice of the Christian God as Creator”, *The Australian Journal of Anthropology (TAAJ)*, 12, no. 3 (2001): 297

She concludes what many of our contributors also do about The Dreaming, that it is often an essentialising construct, and states;

I suggest that anthropologists have unwittingly established and contributed to the notion of the rainbow serpent as the pre-eminent creator figure in Aboriginal Dreaming myths and spirituality. As noted above, it is often difficult to trace the way anthropological analysis is incorporated into New Age literature due to a lack of thorough referencing in such books. If references are found, they are often incomplete or ambiguous as to which specific articles or books are being referenced. While this creates a difficulty for tracing the use of anthropological research in New Age literature, I attempt to identify the way rainbow serpent mythology has been transformed into an icon of Aboriginal spirituality.<sup>42</sup>

There are complexities to accepting white versions of Dreaming practice in order to conduct a wider conversation about Australian spiritualities. However, Eugene Stockton considers any desire to silence the other as a continuing impact of a lack of reconciliation;

In conflict one side sets out not to destroy but to contain the other, exacting only sufficient retaliation. In the face of outside threat, such as that posed by European invasion, there is a creative accommodation to test the limits of what one might salvage of control and advantage in an overall adverse condition.<sup>43</sup>

It is impossible not to note how Western voices control the discussion. But for listening allies and advocates, it becomes far more difficult when two *Aboriginal* artists conflict over images.

The clarion call from Aboriginal theologian Anne Pattel-Gray is for her contemporaries to move beyond a mere “hybridity,” and “to become fully Aboriginal through the inculturation of Christ into our midst.”<sup>44</sup> Graham Paulson agrees, but also warns in his watershed theological piece,

Of course it means that some parts of Aboriginal culture will be adopted, some will be adapted, and as is the case in all cultural developments, some may be rejected.<sup>45</sup>

It is important to note the diversity of Aboriginal cultures, and therefore the hybridities that exist. There is also distinction between the charismatic and Pentecostal approaches to the issue, as outlined in Fiona Magowan’s article in the same journal, which demonstrates the embodied or experienced “synchronicity” between Ancestral Law and Christianity for the Yolngu of Galiwin’ku; a “synchronicity” between land and being; between spirit and emotion; as well as biblical and mystical revelation.<sup>46</sup> The ongoing liberating dialogue (or “communion”<sup>47</sup>) amongst Spirit-filled Aboriginal Christianity in Australia is still unfolding.

<sup>42</sup> Anderson, “Rejecting the Rainbow Serpent,” 296.

<sup>43</sup> Stockton, “The Dreaming in Australian Aboriginal Culture” 154.

<sup>44</sup> Anne Pattel-Gray, “The Aboriginal Process of Inculturation,” 14.

<sup>45</sup> Paulson, *Towards an Aboriginal Theology*, 312.

<sup>46</sup> Fiona Magowan, “Syncretism or Synchronicity? Remapping the Yolngu Feel of Place” *TAJA*, 12, no. 3 (2010): 275-290

<sup>47</sup> Pattel-Gray, “The Aboriginal Process of Inculturation,” 15

### **The Process of This Special Edition**

A grant from ARTFINC assisted the project's aims of facilitating conversation about The Dreaming and Christianity (but particularly its "Spirit-filled" subcultures of charismatic and Pentecostal forms). The project has taken a number of forms – oral theologising, and written pieces.

In 2016 a one-day theological symposium was organised by Waka Waka woman and co-editor Brooke Prentis at the Grasstree conference in Sydney hosted by the Uniting Theological College, Parramatta. The editors addressed conference attendees, and symposium presenters included Adam Gowen, Ray Minniecon, Steve Bevis & Uncle Rex Granites Japanangka, David Armstrong and Shane Clifton, Safina Stewart, and Brooke Prentis. Feedback from attendees was that they appreciated the project, but especially how presenters engaged theological ideas and represented what was important to them as Aboriginal people.

Following this, a panel discussion was held in the yarn-up tent of the Surrender Conference in Melbourne. It was attended by a smaller group of around 40 delegates. Presenters included Adam Gowen, Brooke Prentis, and Anderson George. This led to a productive discussion about the difference between "The Dreaming" in rural areas, or "on country" and in an urban context. In particular, Anderson presented his view that he had broken completely with parts of Dreaming ceremony as "evil." The conversation that ensued helped urban Aboriginal attendees to clarify that "The Dreaming" represented everything of culture – including language. Anderson had not broken with all "culture" in his context, but only "men's ceremony." For urban and rural Aboriginal people from different nations to have a discussion that was not mediated by (but supported by) white Australian voices was extremely powerful.

Within this special edition, the published articles and interviews were intended to amplify the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Birripi woman and ordained Anglican priest Karen Kime and Monica Short undertake participatory research together to explore themes of colonisation, power, and injustice within Anglican churches in the Bush. Shane Clifton and Ingrid Ryan work with Wangkumara man and Pentecostal Pastor David Armstrong to document his journey in negotiating his identities and how that affected his ministry and life. Anderson George, assisted by Rachel Borneman reflects upon his decision not to attend men's ceremonies in the Katherine area of the Northern Territory.

Also, there is a range of interviews conducted with influential Aboriginal Christian leaders. Pastors Will (Birripi) and Sandra Dumas (Bundjalung) represent the Indigenous Initiative of the Australian Christian Churches denomination (formerly the Assemblies of God). They are senior pastors of Ganggalah Church in Tweed Heads and facilitate a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait pastors across the nation. From Darwin in the Northern Territory, this includes Yidinji woman Christie Jacobs who now serves at Hillsong Darwin, daughter of influential worship leader Robyn Green. Mamu sisters Robyn Ober and Glenda Ramsey represent another influential Darwin church planting family with leadership roles in Hillsong Darwin but also in Christian organisations including Women's Aglow and The Batchelor Institute. Pastor Ray Minniecon speaks as a prominent Christian elder with links to many Australian denominations, now running Scarred Tree Ministries from St John's Glebe, Sydney. Also in New South Wales, Wiradjuri man Adam Gowen speaks as an Apostolic pastor working in the South Coast region. There are two interviews from the ecumenical college Wontulp Bi Buya College in Cairns, Queensland.

Victor Joseph is Principal of this College and a Torres Strait Islander priest within the North Queensland Anglican Diocese. Davena Munro is Wontulp's RTO and Business Operations Manager and a Butchulla/Garawa woman from Fraser Island, K'gari, and the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north Queensland area.

In this brief editorial, I have deliberately shied away from attempting to summarise the perspectives of our numerous authors. Aboriginal spirituality was never a single thing, and the perspectives in this volume reflect its diverse spirituality, as well as that of Pentecostalism(s) in Australia and globally. Additionally, there is an inherent colonial danger in me as a white Australian attempting to summarise (and hence whitewash) Aboriginal voices. The goal of this project was from the beginning to allow spirit filled Aboriginal people to speak for themselves, and in what follows they do so powerfully. As one of the editors, rather than this being the conclusion of the project, I hope that this can be a new beginning of listening to Aboriginal Christians with new ears, as we together seek Makarrata.

### References

- Akehurst, C. "Smoking Out Evil Spirits at the CSIRO." *Quadrant Magazine* 56, no. 1 (2012): 44-45.  
<https://quadrant.org.au/magazine/2012/01-02/smoking-out-evil-spirits/>
- Ammerman, Nancy T. "Spiritual but not Religious? Beyond Binary Choices in the Study of Religion." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 52, no. 2 (2013): 258-278. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12024>
- Anderson, Sallie. "Rejecting the Rainbow Serpent: An Aboriginal Artist's Choice of the Christian God as Creator 1." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 3 (2001): 291-301.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). "4713.0 - Population characteristics Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians." (Canberra: Australian Government, 2006). URL: <http://www.abs.gov.au>. Accessed 20 September 2016.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). "Religion in Australia." 2071.0 - *Census of Population and Housing: Reflecting Australia - Stories from the Census, 2016* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2016). Accessed 21 February 2019. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2071.0>
- Bonino, Jose Miguez. "Pentecostal missions is more than what it claims." *Pneuma* 16, no. 1 (1994): 283-288.
- Brock, P., Etherington, N., Griffiths, G., Van Gent, J. *Indigenous Evangelists and Questions of Authority in the British Empire 1750-1940*. Studies in a Christian Mission, (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015) DOI: 10.1163/9789004299344
- Brock, Peggy. *Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation, and Survival*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Calley, Malcolm J. C.. "Aboriginal Pentecostalism: A Study of Changes in Religion, North Coast, NSW." (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 1955).
- Claditz, Nina. Interview: Galarrwuy Yunupingu. In *Chain Reaction*. 4, no. 1 (1978), 16-17.

- Claditz, Nina. Interview: Galarrwuy Yunupingu. In *Chain Reaction*. 4, no. 1 (1978), 16-17.
- Dombrowski, Kirk. "The Praxis of Indigenism and Alaska Native Timber Politics." *American Anthropologist*, 104, no. 4 (2002): 1062-1073.
- Dombrowski, Kirk. *Against Culture: Development, Politics and Religion in Indian Alaska*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001)
- Everett, K. "Welcome to Country... Not." *Oceania* 79, no. 1 (2009): 53- 64. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1834-4461.2009.tb00050.x>
- Freeman, Dena. *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) p 21, 71, 84.
- Freston, Paul. Pentecostalism in Latin America: characteristics and controversies. *Social Compass*, 45, no. 3 (1998): 335-358.
- Frost, Michael J. "Pentecostal Experience and the Affirmation of Ethnic Identity: Māori Experience and the Work of the Spirit in the Book of Acts." *Pneuma* 39, no. 3 (2017): 295-317.
- Gifford, Paul. *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).
- Gondarra, Djiniyini. "Aboriginal Spirituality and the Gospel" In *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, edited by Anne Pattel-Gray (Blackburn, Victoria: HarperCollinsReligious, 1996): 81-98.
- Gondarra, Djiniyini. "Father, You Gave Us The Dreaming." *Compass Theology Review*. 22 (Autumn/ Winter 1988): 6-8.
- Gondarra, Djiniyini. *Series of Reflections of Aboriginal Theology: Let My People Go*. (Darwin: Bethal Presbytery, Northern Synod of the Uniting Church of Australia, 1986).
- Gondarra, Djiniyini. *Series of Reflections of Aboriginal Theology: Let My People Go*. (Darwin: Bethal Presbytery, Northern Synod of the Uniting Church of Australia, 1986).
- Grieves, Vicki. *Aboriginal spirituality: Aboriginal philosophy, the basis of Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing*. Darwin: Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2009.
- Harris, Charles. "Guidelines for So-Called Western Civilisation and Western Christianity." In *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, edited by Anne Pattel-Gray (Blackburn, Victoria: HarperCollinsReligious, 1996): 66-78
- Harris, John. *We Wish We'd Done More: Ninety Years of CMS and Aboriginal Issues in North Australia*. (Adelaide: Openbook, 1998)
- Kray, Christine A. "The Pentecostal Re-formation of Self: Opting for Orthodoxy in Yucatan." *Ethos*, 29, no. 4 (Dec 2001): 395-429.
- Loos, Noel. *White Christ Black Cross: The Emergence of a Black Church*. (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007)
- Magowan, Fiona. "Syncretism or Synchronicity? Remapping the Yolngu Feel of Place" *TAJA*, 12, no. 3 (2010): 275-290
- Martin, David. *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

- Pattel-Gray, Anne. "The Hard Truth: White Secrets, Black Realities" *Australian Feminist Studies*, 14, no. 30 (1990): 259-266. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649993092>
- Pattel-Gray, Anne. *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*. (Blackburn, Vic: HarperCollins Religious, 1996)
- Pattel-Gray, Anne. "The Aboriginal Process of Inculturation." *Australian Religion Studies Review*, 17, no. 1 (2015): 13-19. DOI: <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/ARSR/article/view/9008>
- Pattel-Gray, Anne. *The Great White Flood: Racism in Australia*. American Academy of Religion Cultural Criticism Series. (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1998).
- Pattel-Gray, Anne. *Through Aboriginal Eyes: the Cry From the Wilderness*. (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1991)
- Paulson, Graham. "Towards an Aboriginal theology." *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006): 310-320. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1030570X0601900310>
- Paulson, Graham & Brett, Mark G. "Five Smooth Stones: Reading the Bible Through Aboriginal Eyes." *Colloquium*, 45, no. 2 (2013): 199-209. <https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1672/>
- Paulson, Graham. "The Value of Aboriginal Culture" In *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, edited by Anne Pattel-Gray (Blackburn, Victoria: HarperCollinsReligious, 1996): 81-98.
- Miriam Pepper and Ruth Powell, *Religion, spirituality and connections with churches: results from the 2018 Australian Community Survey*, NCLS Occasional Paper no. 36 (Sydney: NCLS Research, 2018).
- Pensoneau, Taylor. *Dapper & Deadly: The True Story of Black Charlie Harris* (New Berlin, IL: Downstate Publications, 2010).
- Referendum Council. *Uluru Statement From the Heart*. (2017) Accessed 20 February 2017. [https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru\\_Statement\\_From\\_The\\_Heart\\_0.PDF](https://www.referendumcouncil.org.au/sites/default/files/2017-05/Uluru_Statement_From_The_Heart_0.PDF)
- Reid, John. "'Only the truth will make us free' -Interview with Charles Harris." *Journey*. (Aug 1988): 19-21.
- Riches, T. "Acknowledgment of Country: Intersecting Australian Pentecostals Reembedding Spirit in Place." *Religions*, 9, no. 10 (2018), 287; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9100287>
- Robbins, Joel. "The Globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 33 (October 2004): 117-143.
- Robbins, Joel. "Anthropology, Pentecostalism, and the New Paul: Conversion, Event, and Social Transformation." *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109, no. 4 (2010): 633-652.
- Robbins, Joel. "Pentecostal Networks and the Spirit of Globalization: On the Social Productivity of Ritual Forms." *Social Analysis*, 53, no. 1 (2009): 55-66.
- Rosendale, George "Aboriginal Myths and Customs: Matrix for Gospel Preaching". *Lutheran Theological Journal*, 22, no. 3 (1988): 117-122.
- Rosendale, George. Aboriginal Spirituality or Theology. *Compass*, 37, no. 3 (2003): 5-7.



- Solivan, Samuel. *Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998)
- Stanner, William Edward Hanley. "The Dreaming (1953)." In *The Dreaming & Other Essays*, edited by W. E. H. Stanner. Melbourne, Victoria: Black Inc. Agenda, 2009.
- Stockton, Eugene. "The Dreaming in Australian Aboriginal Culture." *The Way*, 40, no. 2 (2000): 148-156.
- The Rainbow Spirit Elders. *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*. (Blackburn, Vic: HarperCollinsReligious, 1997).
- Toulis, Nicole Rodriguez. *Believing Identity: Pentecostalism and the Mediation of Jamaican Ethnicity and Gender in England*. Explorations in Anthropology Series. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1997).
- Wariboko, Nimi. *Nigerian Pentecostalism*. (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014)
- Yunupingu, Galarwuy. "Concepts of Land and Spirituality." In *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, edited by Anne Pattel-Gray (Blackburn, Victoria: HarperCollinsReligious, 1996): 4-10.
- Yunupingu, Galarwuy. "Concepts of Land and Spirituality." In *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future*, edited by Anne Pattel-Gray (Blackburn, Victoria: HarperCollinsReligious, 1996): 4-10.
- McAleese, Aaron. The Age of the Millennial. *Zadok Perspectives*, No. 137 (Summer 2017): 6-8.
- Singleton, A., Rasmussen, M. L., Halafoff, A.. & Bouma, G.D. *The AGZ Study: Press Kit*. (ANU, Deakin and Monash Universities, 2018).

## Learning to Dream: an urban Pentecostal embraces his Aboriginal identity

David Armstrong, Shane Clifton & Ingrid Ryan

*“At the start of every year, the pastor in a Pentecostal church says, “This is the vision for the day, for the year...This is our vision,” and they go with that Dream. They go, and the churches that they’ve built, have been built on a Dream. And in the Aboriginal world, the whole culture was actually built on a Dream.” David Armstrong.*

### Abstract

Providing a distinctly Pentecostal voice to the larger pool of literature on Indigenous Australian Christianity, this paper maps some unique relationships between a specifically Pentecostal spirituality and worldview shaped, in part, by the subject’s Aboriginal heritage. As such, the paper contributes to the growing field of studies in Australian Pentecostalism and, with its cross-cultural approach, participates in the larger dialogue on the denomination’s renowned cross-cultural ubiquity. Significantly, the content of the paper itself materializes out of the oral tradition, central to both Aboriginal and Pentecostal cultures. Written in narrative form, and interlaced with autobiographical material and supporting academic literature, the paper tracks the spiritual journey of Wangkumara Pentecostal, David Armstrong. David’s choir ministry, “One Good Day,” is the focal point of the narrative and is the material and figurative expression of the intersection between his two spiritualities.

### Introduction

This paper explores the spiritual journey of David Armstrong, a Wangkumara Christian man whose identity is shaped by his experiences and convictions as a Pentecostal and an urban Aboriginal person. It explores the ways that David navigates his two culturally distinctive spiritualities, documenting what he has learned about his own Aboriginal heritage and his growing appreciation for its sacredness. Especially significant for David has been the resonance between Pentecostal and Indigenous emphases on the spiritual realm. Inextricably connected to this, is the way that language, with its cultural and spiritual dimensions, has connected his two worlds. That is, the spiritual nourishment that emerges through the application of language in his charismatic worship (e.g. glossolalia or tongues) is similarly realized in the Aboriginal context, albeit through the restorative process of redeeming traditional language. Anna Hueneke’s study on the relationship between poetic language use and the integration of trauma provides a theoretical grounding for the paper.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, David’s work as founder of the Mount Druitt Indigenous Choir provides a case study and context for the exploration of David’s spiritual journey as an Aboriginal Pentecostal.

---

<sup>1</sup> Anna Hueneke, “From Politics to Poetry,” *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 10, no.1 (2012): 55-68, DOI: 10.1002/ppi.1250

There is a growing literature on Indigenous Australian Christianity, but few works are written from a distinctly Pentecostal perspective. Therefore, the primary (and culturally appropriate) resource for examining Aboriginal Pentecostal experience is oral. The content for this paper emerges from a series of conversations between David, Shane, and Ingrid, which began with a theological question in view; how has David understood the intersection between the Spirituality of the Dreaming and his Christian faith? It soon became apparent that David's answer was embedded in his biography, and so this was best explored by the telling of his story. Indeed, it seemed wise to convey what we learned by writing up this paper in the shape of its formation, as a story. In fact, this approach suits David's identities as an Aboriginal and Pentecostal man, since both worldviews elevate story. In the Pentecostal setting, testimony is given central place, and in Australian Indigenous culture meaning is explored through the telling of a "yarn."<sup>2</sup>

Aboriginal people are familiar with the power of story. Our culture is shaped around stories, our history transmitted through them. Stories spoken from the heart hold transformational power, they are a way for one heart to speak to another.... Listening to a story is a way of showing respect, a silent acknowledgement of what the speaker has lived through and where they have come from. Stories can also transform the speaker.<sup>3</sup>

Both a yarn and a testimony are not simply stories, but stories shaped by meaning; they are interpretations of the past and, as we shall see, express a vision of the future. Yet in telling his testimony, David is at pains to note that the journey upon which his yarn is based is a long way from the finishing line. Thus, the meanings he presently grasps are tentative. He needs more time, and many more conversations with Indigenous Elders and Christian colleagues and friends to flesh out those meanings and to give them depth and clarity. While David's voice is elevated to primary position, where appropriate, academic literature and the authors' extrapolations interlace his narrative. The outcome of this approach is a paper that brings story into the realm of the broader academic literary sphere. The first section of the paper provides some background on David's family and the early stages of his journey of assuming his Aboriginal heritage. The paper then progresses into an investigation of David's Choir Ministry and the role language plays in facilitating connections between Pentecostal and Aboriginal worlds. The final section of this paper offers deeper insight into David's personal navigation of Aboriginal Pentecostal spirituality, including some of the challenges he has and continues to face as he operates in this area. It is important to note that while a genuine attempt is made to represent both Aboriginal and Pentecostal realms in equal light, David's relatively recent ownership of his Aboriginal heritage makes it a work in progress, and his interpretation of Aboriginal world is very much shaped by his Pentecostal worldview.

---

<sup>2</sup> Henry Gooren, "Conversion Narratives," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 93-112; Lawrence Bamblett, *Our Stories Are Our Survival* (Canberra, ACT: AIATSIS, 2013); Mark J. Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology* (N.Y.: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Sally Morgan, Tjalaminu Mia and Blaze Kwaymullina, *Speaking from the Heart: Stories of Life, Family and Country* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2010), ii.

### **Does colour matter in church?**

While David was born in Rockhampton, 1969, he spent most of his childhood in Warwick, where, in 1970, his father planted a church. In 1980, David's family returned to Rockhampton and spent the next ten years attending a contemporary Pentecostal Church. Although there was general segregation between White and Indigenous congregations, David's early days at church were characterised by his family's belief in the unity of White and Indigenous churches, so his family chose to attend a predominantly non-Indigenous congregation.

Even with my Aboriginal background, we went to a White church. They had this idea of segregation back then; that there should be a 'Black' church and 'White' church. But my family just believed in the one church. I grew up as a Christian, and we used to say that we didn't see Black or White or whatever colour. Our church was focussed on people's souls and this is how my story, my spiritual journey, was shaped from the early days.<sup>4</sup>

David admits that his growing up in a predominantly Western cultural setting where, for him, neither 'colour' nor heritage had any bearing on 'soul-saving', meant matters of his own dual-heritage did not present a particular case for reflection in his early life. As a young adult, soul-saving was the primary objective, and following his father's course, David enrolled into a Bachelor of Ministries course which he undertook at Commonwealth Bible College, Katoomba, from 1990-1992. Nevertheless, it is possible that David's early experiences of attending a 'White' church as a person of mixed-descent sowed the seed for his long-term interests in cross-cultural ministry and his pursuit of the elevation of Indigenous culture within Pentecostal world.

In 1996, David moved to Canberra working in ministry roles in suburbs including Campbell and Chisholm. David's work "with almost every other culture" helped him learn "a lot about...different nationalities," and in part, prepared him for the many years of intercultural ministry that lay ahead. David recalls the following story when referring to his first significant experience of ministry with Indigenous peoples;

'Soul-saving' was the vision inspiring my early ministry and a high point occurred after intensive prayer. We had spent a year praying for our suburb and for our church to grow, and no one had come except a couple of people from other churches. I said, "go back to your churches, we want brand new souls!" Then we put up a jumping castle at the shopping centre and next thing, thirty or forty Aboriginal people turned up. The visitors made amazing connections with one another that day, saying to each other's families "you know our kids are related – we're related!" It was about 15 years ago now, and many are still in the church. We dedicated about thirty-five to the Lord in one day.

---

<sup>4</sup>David Armstrong, "Interview with David Armstrong part I," interview by Shane Clifton, Alphacrucis College, Parramatta, January 22, 2018.

As David began to work more closely with Indigenous people, David found himself navigating a complex ministry due to cultural difference and socially embedded disparity, a result being that neither he nor his fellow pastors felt that they were making real connections with Aboriginal people. Reflecting on his early experiences of working within an Aboriginal and Pentecostal cultural setting, he states;

My running away from it was because...it's a very difficult area and anyone I've seen as being involved in it has either been shot down in flames...it's just very, very difficult – there's so many opinions about how to help our Aboriginal world, and so few people who are really getting their hands dirty...

Despite feeling inexperienced, David felt a strong calling to seeing Aboriginal people come to the Christian faith. This calling was given new vigour when, in 2010, he moved with his family to Mount Druitt, situated in the western suburbs of Sydney. The move marked a material and symbolic beginning of a new era in his spiritual journey. Foremost, it represented the onset of an intentional seeking-out of his Aboriginal heritage and his exploration of the relationship between the Dreaming and Pentecostal spiritualities. A preliminary step in this process was David's study of demographic statistical data on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Communities;

When I came to Sydney I started doing a lot more research like in terms of statistics...I went to the chief statistician down there in Sydney and I talked with her and I started to get all of the statistics - the health statistics, the education statistics – all these things that I knew. I had basically grown up with it all, but I never realised it was so bad, and that deeply affected me.

Compared to most other suburbs in Sydney, Mount Druitt is relatively poor, and there are noteworthy socio-economic disparities between Indigenous people in comparison to the general population of the larger Blacktown precinct. According to the Blacktown City Social Profile 2016 Report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities,<sup>5</sup> ATSI people experience disparity across a spectrum of socio-economic areas. Housing security presents a compelling case for example, whereby 10% of the population owned their dwelling compared to 22.7% in the entire Blacktown precinct; 21.8% were in the process of purchasing, compared with 42.5% in Blacktown, and 64.1% were renting compared with the respective 29.4%. Low-income households are represented among 27.2% of the ATSI population compared with 17.9% in Blacktown City. A lower number of ATSI peoples hold formal qualifications (19.3%) compared with Blacktown City as a whole (39%). Other areas where ATSI populations experience relative disadvantage are in the areas of health (including life expectancy and addiction); homelessness, employment security and social security (including a lessened sense of belonging and sense of trust with others).<sup>6</sup>

Despite the obvious disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in the Blacktown precinct, and the area's overall socio-economic disadvantage, Mount Druitt is a neighbourhood where many feel

---

<sup>5</sup> Blacktown City Council, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities: A Social Profile*. (Blacktown: Blacktown City Council, 2016): 1-29.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

a sense of belonging and enjoy a distinct community spirit. Residents feel that they have ease of access to community facilities, work and services. Furthermore, there is a consensus that community centres and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups are sound, and cultural programs (such as those facilitated by the Blacktown Arts Centre) play a central role in the community.<sup>7</sup>

David articulates that his move to Mount Druitt, his subsequent exposure to the revelations of ATSI demographic data, and his real-life observations of social disparity, provided momentum for his pursuit of a deeper understanding of Indigenous culture and history. Interestingly, in the context of Pentecostalism's strong emphasis on the future, David's 'looking back' as a Pentecostal signified a unique approach in his ministry praxis. It was a step into the challenging territory of exposure to a world shaped, in part, by intergenerational displacement, trauma and cyclical socio-economic disadvantage.

David's 'looking back' revealed certain degrees of indifference and, in some instances, resistance from Pentecostal leaders. That is, on a number of occasions, David heard his colleagues say, "Look, I'm just trying to get [Aboriginal people] saved now; I want to deal with them now." Thus, David faced challenges navigating "the old stuff", because, in his words, "Pentecostals are so prophetic in terms of wanting the new thing, wanting souls, wanting to build, to actually deal with the Dreaming – and some of them may have dealt better with it than me."

David's quest to 'know' the Aboriginal world saw him traversing two epistemological traditions. Similarly, Roberta Dods' study on "Knowing Ways/Ways of Knowing," provides some context on the differences and resulting tensions between Traditional and Western Knowledge systems.<sup>8</sup> She argues that while Western cultures operate within the "world of 'learning'" paradigm in which knowledge is formulated in "a set of denotive statements", Traditional cultures operate in "notions of 'know-how'"... "knowing how to live," and knowing "how to listen." Thus, the emphasis in Aboriginal ways of Knowing, unlike its Western counterpart, is "*the way things are done.*" As such, Aboriginal ways of Knowing (as is true also in other contexts) is based upon practice. In this way, 'traditional', knowledge moves beyond the mere diagnosis and "application" of truth criterion and becomes a matter of "competence."<sup>9</sup>

Familiar with Western approaches to 'learning', David undertook reading about Aboriginal worlds pre-contact and Aboriginal-White encounter histories at Windsor Library and the University Library at Quaker's Hill. David describes this process as valuable, but "forced research." His preference for 'learning' is through experience, "I like preaching, I like just getting up, moving in the spirit, getting saved, you know...." It is important to note that while David's growing up in a predominantly Western cultural setting meant that he was naturally familiar with typically western approaches to 'learning', his natural preference for 'doing' aligned itself more closely with traditional notions of 'knowledge'.

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Roberta Robin Dods, "Knowing ways/ways of knowing: reconciling science and tradition", *World Archaeology* 36, no. 4 (2004): 547-557.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 547. For more reading on Indigenous knowledge systems, see D. Michael Warren, L. Jan Slikkerveer, David Brokensha and Wim Decherig, *The Cultural Dimension of Development: Indigenous Knowledge Systems* (United Kingdom: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995).

David points to his trip around Australia in 2010 as a significant starting point in his journey of knowing Aboriginal ways, particularly Aboriginal worldview as manifested in what is more commonly referred to as ‘the Dreaming’.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, David’s interaction with Dreaming worldview challenged him to think about how his Christian faith interacted with Aboriginal spirituality. During his travels, David grappled with situations where Aboriginal Pentecostal communities appeared to reject their culture because of their fervent commitment to the Pentecostal Christian faith. Consequently, David felt that his own work in this space would be seeking to explore how Aboriginal and Pentecostal worldviews might intersect positively. Back at home, David’s engagement with non-Indigenous Pentecostal leaders revealed that the general understanding of Aboriginal history, contemporary experience and disadvantage, and deep spirituality was underdeveloped (almost non-existent). Worse, there was a general sense (even among his fellow Indigenous Pentecostals), that Aboriginal spirituality was demonic. But David himself had begun to see deep meanings in some aspects of the Dreaming. David was unable to resolve contradictions in these outlooks overnight, but felt “God’s push” upon him to step into a space where he could facilitate genuine dialogue and interaction between Aboriginal culture and Pentecostal faith.

### **Is language redemptive?**

In November 2010, David and his wife, Angela, established Initiative Church in Mount Druitt, Blacktown. With a vision to see the Church embrace “Aboriginal culture,” David actively sought ways to embed Darug language into the fabric of his ministry practice.<sup>11</sup> A culturally significant starting point was David’s inviting Blacktown Elder, Uncle Greg Simms, to open Initiative Church with a Welcome to Country;

A guy [Greg Simms] got up, used clapsticks, did a bit of language, and someone said, “that’s not real language,” something like that. Like with Pentecostals, they say, “that’s not real, that’s just made up.” It was the same argument that they used against our Pentecostal language, “that’s not real language,” and so instantly, that got me thinking, ‘what is the real language and who are the real Darug people?’

David’s reflections on Uncle Greg’s ‘Welcome to Country’ marks something of a turning point in his journey. Until this time, David had not put much thought to the Welcome to Country nor the instrumentality of reviving traditional language;

Even [for] me... when I was in Canberra, I wouldn’t deal much with it...because it was a government speak, a bit like the sorry - the sorry apology - it was government speak; it seemed like the best the government could deal with.

---

<sup>10</sup> Bain highlights that while the Dreaming has been a topic subject to various interpretation, it is most commonly understood as ‘basic to understanding Aboriginal worldview.’ See, Margaret S. Bain, *White Men Are Liars: Another Look at Aboriginal-Western Interactions*, (Alice Springs: SIL, 2005): 18.

<sup>11</sup> Darug was the language spoken in what is now known as the Sydney basin. Some linguists have referred to it as the ‘inland dialect’ of Sydney. It has similarities to the Dharawal and Eora languages. It is likely that all dialects were slightly different versions of the same language. See Richard Green, “Reclamation process for Darug in Sydney using song”, in *Re-Awakening Languages: Theory and practice in the revitalisation of Australia’s Indigenous Heritage*, ed., John Hobson et al., (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2010): 182; Jakelin Troy, “The Sydney Language Notebooks and responses to language contact in early colonial NSW,” *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 12 no. 1 (1992): 145-170.

Nevertheless, in spite of David's reservations with this 'government' vernacular, David considered Uncle Gregs' Welcome to Country an essential first step in building a church that honoured Darug culture in a Pentecostal Christian setting. As illustrated, this particular Welcome to Country had demonstrated the agency in language to unite and divide. It encouraged David to think about how language would inform his understanding of the spiritual world and, in turn, how this would shape his ministry at Mount Druitt. David recalls how "illiterate [he] was on Aboriginal language back then," recollecting that he "didn't even know Darug was the Aboriginal language of the land." In the early days, somewhat ironically, David thought Darug simply referred to the suburb of Dharruk in which he was ministering (due to the phonetic naming of the suburb after the local language) and prayed that God would draw people to the physical area.

David's experience of hearing Darug language made him think about Pentecostalism and the Pentecostal practice of speaking in tongues. As a Pentecostal himself, David was aware of the spiritual dimensions embedded in language, its intrinsic connection to culture and its instrumentality in communication and connection. The link between language and culture is reinforced by the work of Anna Hueneker, who states that "language is a cultural system."<sup>12</sup> David's statement below reinforces the centrality of language in the Pentecostal context;

This is where spiritual dimension comes in; because my study on Azusa Street and Pentecostalism was that, Pentecostals have always believed in language. We speak in tongues, we believe in tongues of men and tongues of angels, we believe in static speech and tongues interpretation, but we also believe in languages and so when Paul went to different places and spoke to the Jews in Hebrew or spoke in Aramaic, he spoke in the languages of the area. It was for communication of the Gospel.

There are obvious and substantive differences between Aboriginal languages and Pentecostal glossolalia, not the least of which is that the latter is not generally considered to be a language, per se (although, as we shall see, David takes a different view). But David's emphasis on the commonality between the two derives from the importance of Aboriginal language and Pentecostal tongues for identity and spirituality. Pentecostalism in most parts of the world is a religion for people on the margins, and tongue speaking has its origins in African American spirituality.<sup>13</sup> While 'language' provided a figurative mechanism in David's exploration of the intersection between Pentecostal and Indigenous spirituality, its material application was realised in David's establishment of the Mount Druitt Indigenous Choir in 2010 – a subsidiary of Initiative Ministries. To this day, the Mount Druitt Indigenous Choir, comprising members between three to sixteen years of age from a mixture of Christian and non-Christian families, plays a formative role in the community of Blacktown and beyond – a statement of, and living testament to the enduring culture of the first nations people of the Western Sydney precinct.

As will be explored, David's choir ministry would operate within the interstitial space of his two worlds, figuratively and in real terms, bringing together two worldviews and their associated cultural practices. Music making provided a setting where language could be used poetically – a context for elevating metaphor and imagery

<sup>12</sup> Hueneker, "From Politics to Poetry," 66.

<sup>13</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, "The Making of a Black Liturgy: Pentecostal Worship and Spirituality from African Slave Narratives to American Cityscapes," *Black Theology: An International Journal* 10, no. 2 (July 2012): 147–68, <https://doi.org/10.1558/blth.v10i2.147>.



that would intercede beyond some of the cultural and political complexities of mediating between two spiritual traditions. With a vision to “empower people for one good day through dreaming, healing, leading,”<sup>14</sup> song writing emerged as an appropriate method providing “a common point of intersection” between his two identity markers.<sup>15</sup>

Written in 2010, David’s first song was inspired by his conversations with several Elders over his years of travel, and embodied a Dreaming vernacular that would undergird the choir’s unveiling vision and repertoire. His conversations had revealed, “It was unanimous that Dreaming was important” and thus, he “got on the piano and wrote the [following] song which [his] son Jonathan arranged beautifully.” In his words, the song was composed while he started “along [the] journey of dealing with the Dreaming of [his] past, Dreaming of [his] present and [his] future.”

Dreaming was about the Past.

Dreaming was being aware of the present.

Dreaming was about the connections between the past, present and future.

David’s journey of coming to know the Aboriginal world more deeply had so far revealed that Dreaming was “the answer to disempowerment,”<sup>16</sup> and second, that redeeming Darug language could facilitate deeper understanding of Dreaming worldview in his choir ministry. Nevertheless, this was no easy task for David, and, reflecting on the virtual extinction of Darug language, laments;

For an Aboriginal person looking at history it’s very difficult, because the last 200 years was total wipe-out. And they tried to, even with the Darug people there’s stories of them cutting out the tongues to stop the language, so it’s difficult research...

While the past was important in David’s understanding of the contemporary Aboriginal world, David actively sought to implement a culture of ‘future’ thinking in his choir ministry that would provide the basis for the creation of new ‘dreams.’ David’s emphasis on ‘dreaming of our future’ might also be considered an expression of his Pentecostal identity;

See most of our Pentecostal stuff, and even for me, I’m dealing with the present and the future and I think I try to, with my writing I tried to put that into context...that, even with the choir, singing 300 times we’re kind of building a new dreaming, from the Songlines and stuff that they’re singing on, from Thursday Island down to the Twelve Apostles ...they’re literally dreaming new dreams for their families.

<sup>14</sup> Tanya Riches, “Aboriginal Australian Pentecostals taking the initiative in Mount Druitt’s urban Songlines”, *Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith*, 2, no. 1 (2014): 45

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 38.

<sup>16</sup> Armstrong, “Deadly Wonders: Celebrating Positive Families”, (Pre-published Edition, 2017), 10

Several writers have highlighted the psychological importance of language as a tool for trauma recovery. Anna Hueneker, a daughter to Russian Jewish and German emigrants and immigrants, writes about the way in which intergenerational trauma can be integrated or transformed through the phenomena of language-based metaphor and imagery. Psychotherapists believe that the human psyche is configured around associative and imaginative process and responds most favourably to relationship and poetic communication. Language is thus the instrument through which trauma is “integrated”, and is most profoundly done so through one’s native tongue.<sup>17</sup> Obvious parallels between the writings of Hueneker and David’s choir ministry practice are observable. That is, by reviving a language intrinsically tied to culture (as with all languages), language, through restorative processes, becomes an instrument for healing. As such, David’s decision to sing in Darug language was deliberate, as articulated by him below;

The only reason we’re [singing in] Darug is because it is the language of the land, so we [decided upon using] the language of the land we’re on.... A lot of our choir kids aren’t Darug, and they said to me “*Why should we sing Darug?*,” and I said, “because we’re honouring our Elders past and present of the land we’re on.” I hope that it will be encouragement for them to learn their own language from where they are from. But, our kids are born [on Darug] land, they go to school on this land; they have probably lived on the land for most of their life, because our people do not travel that much.

On the other hand, David’s reflection on the spiritual dimension of language from a Pentecostal perspective implies parallels between the spiritual fulfilment that comes through speaking in tongues, and the spiritual fulfilment that David anticipated and later experienced through redeeming traditional language in his Choir ministry;

The Pentecostals - they believe when they speak in tongues, they would speak in languages. It is more recent that people have stopped somehow believing in speaking other languages and those interconnections it creates with the spiritual world. I suppose as Pentecostals we believe too. We believe in the supernatural, we believe to be following the Spirit....we believe that the Spirit is leading us and guiding us - it’s really cool.

At the outset of his choir ministry, David asked a Darug speaker to visit the choir to teach the children ‘one liners in language.’ While Darug provided a linguistic basis, the application of this traditional language in the choir was similar to David’s experience of language use in Pentecostal world. He recalls;

When we got a Darug speaker in, who worked with the education department doing some stuff in the schools...he taught our kids some language, just one-liners in language. One-liners are a common feature of our Pentecostal language...like when you hear tongues interpretation, or when you hear prophesies, a lot of them are one liners, “Go forth!” Alan Davies [an AoG National Executive member at the time] prophesied over me when I was about eleven or twelve and for about five minutes he said, “Go, Go, Go, Go, Go!” Just one word – for five minutes! And so the people tried to stop me. And I was talking to him

---

<sup>17</sup> Hueneker, 55-68.

the other day actually because he's involved in this Indigenous initiative fairly heavily and, I said, "you prophesied over me to 'go.'" So, when people try to stop me and say "hey just wait, just wait, just wait" I just keep going, I just believe that that is.... the power of Pentecost – the language and the communication of that...the word. I think that is why the Pentecostals have connected [with each other], because of language - that deep language and passion.

For David, the repetition of the word 'Go' saw its transformation from a simple word to a phrase embedded with spiritual meaning. David drew on this experience as a model for his song writing, whereby the repetition of words would elevate the agency of language as a vessel for spiritually loaded meaning-making, as in his song, "Giwawala Nulawala" (Stop and Rest Together);

Giwawala Nulawala

Giwawala Nalawala

Giwawala Nalawala in Jesus

Warami Wellamabamiyui

Warami Wellamabamiyui

The rhythmic structure of "Giwawala Nulawala" (Stop and Rest Together) is reminiscent of a typical Pentecostal worship style, where the repetition of single words or phrases emphasises the agency of language in its capacity to embody spiritually loaded meanings, and facilitate opportunities for genuine spiritual reflection. Gi Walawa Nalawala in Jesus means, "please stop here and rest in Jesus." The refrain Warami Wellamabamiyui means, "It is good to see you wherever you have come from."<sup>18</sup> By singing this welcome in Darug, the choir draws upon a vernacular that is inextricably linked with the land and the Indigenous spiritual realm, thus enabling the children to observe their shared Indigenous heritage;

There is a link with the language and the land. We're honouring the Elders past and present. There's a major link with honour. Language, land and the Spirit are all connected.

Building upon his original "Dreaming" composition, David co-composed a song with fellow Pastor, Greg Stigter. The song is written using both Darug and English words, thus creating a hybrid vernacular embracing both Indigenous and Pentecostal linguistic themes. The centrality of the 'Dreaming' theme is a mechanism to address disempowerment in relationships and a strategy to enable the choir children to "create meaningful cultural

---

<sup>18</sup> Tanya Riches expands on the meaning of this song and others sung by the choir in her chapter, "Dreaming Urban Indigenous Australian Christian Worship in the Great Southland of The Holy Spirit," in *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, eds., Monique M. Ingalls, Amos Yong (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015), 60-77.

connection...by enriching understanding of Indigenous cultural heritage and identity, and support the revitalisation of Indigenous language.”<sup>19</sup>

Nangami Buruwa

Dreaming – Nangami Buruwa – Dream long

Dreaming, Dreaming, Dreaming, Dreaming

Dreaming of my past, Dreaming of my present,

Dreaming of my future.

Healing, Healing

Leading, leading,

Nangami Buruwa, Nangami Barawul,

Nangami Buruwa, Nangami Buruwa.

David’s reflections on the song sheds light on meaning embedded in the language and the rich dialogue that emerges from a dual Aboriginal-Pentecostal worldview:

‘Nangami’ means ‘Dream’ and ‘Buruwa’ means ‘far’...dream far and lift. And so, when our choir sings that, they act like birds. Lifting, but dreaming far – a little bit like our Spirit, our Pentecostal spirituality, not just dreaming about today, but also dreaming of the future, but not just dreaming of the future, but what about eternity? It’s this bird’s eye view of ‘all of life’ because most people only live for the moment. A lot of people say “Aboriginals only live for the day” but when they’re really dreaming, they’re thinking about how things were made but also about death and dying and eternal issues.

Words such as ‘healing’ and ‘leading’ are central within the Pentecostal vernacular due to their prominence in Biblical writings. Many personal testimonies of individuals ‘coming to faith’ as Pentecostals feature some reference to divine ‘healing.’<sup>20</sup> Likewise, ‘leading’ in one’s church and community is a typical feature of an established Pentecostal believer. In the Aboriginal world, both ‘healing’ and ‘leading’ have strong application in reconciliation discourse. Thus, both ‘healing’ and ‘leading’ point to the applied relevance of language in the choir ministry as a restorative tool. David notes that the singing of Nangami Buruwa facilitates “positive interaction” amongst choir members and their families, along with “empowerment” for Elders who are consulted for language-use and cultural knowledge.<sup>21</sup> As such, the integration of Darug language and Christian themes facilitates the kind of restorative processes that Hueneker writes about in her text.

<sup>19</sup> Armstrong, “Deadly Wonders”, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Candy Gunther Brown, *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Armstrong, 4.

David's reflection on the song throws light on Aboriginal notions of Dreaming as an eternal phenomenon – a concept that is not bound by Western notions of time or space.<sup>22</sup> Although the song is not a traditional Dreaming in itself, David draws inspiration from “The Wonder of Dreaming”<sup>23</sup> through the vehicle of language as a poetic mechanism. David provides further reflection on the song's enabling power below;

It's like a one-word story. Buruwa implies the lifting of the evil spirit, because wherever we go to the kids...not just the kids but the adults are always talking about evil spirits...

### **What do we do with the Spirit and the spirits?**

One of the challenges that David has grappled with in trying to elevate Aboriginal culture in a Pentecostal setting has been the tendency for Aboriginal Pentecostals to associate ceremony and other traditional practices with ‘evil spirits’. David's studies of Pentecostal and Charismatic Ministry over the years had reinforced to him that “deliverance ministries were very strong in...Pentecostal world.”<sup>24</sup> Although, as a Pentecostal himself, David believes in the presence of evil spirits, his observations of the association of smoking ceremonies with ‘evil spirits’ caused him concern;

Smoking ceremonies seem to raise the biggest issues. Even still now. On Australia day, we are going to have a smoking ceremony next to our Choir and so I get blamed for all of the ‘evil’ that could happen to our choir after the ceremony, all because the smoke blows over them... And I've said, ‘listen, the kids got sick because the parents are smoking in front of them, and they're not just smoking tobacco - tobacco does bad stuff to their health - they're smoking ice, you know. That's the smoking ceremony I'm against.

When David hears the kids or others around him talk about ‘evil spirits’ he encourages them to also think about the angelic realm, arguing that in every culture there is ‘good’ and ‘evil;’

Wherever we go, the kids and adults are always talking about evil spirits. I've just said, ‘Okay there are evil spirits, but what about angels? There are angels as well you know.... for every demon, what about the angels? Why can't we celebrate them?’ Every time you talk about angels there this sense of angelic presence in the Holy Spirit.

To reconcile his own position on issues within Aboriginal Pentecostal world, David draws wisdom from

---

<sup>22</sup> Bain, *White Men Are Liars*, p.18

<sup>23</sup> Armstrong, 10.

<sup>24</sup> Pentecostals take the New Testament encounters of Jesus with demons literally, and their emphasis on healing is often associated with deliverance ministry. They tend to spiritualise psychological and social problems, and thus deliverance ministry is connected to their understanding of personal and social transformation. There has been a tendency to understand the spirits spoken about in animistic religions as being demonic. But there is also a more progressive stream within contemporary Pentecostalism that takes a more nuanced view of discerning of spirits, recognising commonality (and difference) between Pentecostal and other experiential spiritualities. See, Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, (Sheffield: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2000); Donald E Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007).

both Indigenous and Biblical principles. That is, by speaking to two or three Elders on any given issue, David engages in the Aboriginal oral tradition of ‘Knowing’ and situates this practice within the Biblical precedent of having two or three witnesses;

The Bible says two or three witnesses. So, I’ve tried to [talk with] two or three Elders, so whenever I’m talking about our Darug or our choir and what I think of their spirituality, I always try talk to two or three. I don’t just talk to one person, because everyone has different opinions about their spirituality. When I talk about spirituality and Dreaming, I have to go to specific stories – [for example], I talk about the Dreaming of our Elders.

David feels that the heightened preoccupation with ‘evil spirits’ in some Aboriginal Pentecostal contexts is an outcome of over simplistic understandings of Aboriginal world. Dodson, Elston and McCoy’s study makes a strong case for the pressures that Aboriginal Christians feel to become “assimilated” into typical forms of “faith expression” when they join the Christian church, making them feel “compelled to leave their culture ‘at the door’” and thus isolating them from traditional social, familial and spiritual values.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, David articulates that the act of superimposing Pentecostal “theology onto [Aboriginal] world” is detrimental to holistic understandings of both Aboriginal world and Pentecostal worldview;

There is a lot of stuff we can’t understand – it’s mystery. One of the problems was... one of the things I first saw when I started to research stuff were over simplistic attitudes towards our Aboriginal world and even the stories. Immediately, people try to make a correlation. ‘This is this’ and ‘this is this’, and so from the start I said, “this is an over simplistic approach.” Either, it’s all evil so keep away from it, or so simplistic that [it becomes] this story: ‘there’s a frog over here, and that must mean this.’ It’s basically putting our theology onto their world.

While David is at pains to avoid simple answers, he is a self-described ‘passionately, Pentecostal Christian’, and turns to the Holy Spirit for guidance on deciphering the complex intersection of his two cultural heritages;

We deal with the evil spirits but we [also] look to the Holy Spirit and deal with the Dreaming that way, in that the filter of all of those stories has to be...it can’t [just] be the pain and the sadness and the loss, even though they are living on the grief side. They are living in ...it’s...their world is so sad.

When asked how David differentiates between the Holy Spirit and ‘evil spirits’ he points to the spiritual gift of ‘the discernment of Spirits.’<sup>26</sup> While he feels this has guided some of his decision-making, David also states that there is “wisdom in the multitude of counsellors”<sup>27</sup> and therefore relies on the prayer of those around him for wisdom of discernment.

<sup>25</sup> Patrick L. Dodson, Jacinta K. Elston, Brian F. McCoy, “Leaving Culture at the Door: Aboriginal Perspectives on Christian Belief and Practice,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006), 250.

<sup>26</sup> Armstrong refers to the scriptural reference found in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10 “distinguishing between the spirits.”

<sup>27</sup> See: Proverbs 11; 14; Proverbs 15:22 and Proverbs 24:6.

### Reflections on David's Journey

Importantly, David admits that his understanding of these matters is still developing, claiming that, “for me, it’s still a journey. It’s still very early days.” Along this journey, a valuable lesson that David has come to understand in time, and a reason for his reliance on the Holy Spirit and conversations with numerous Elders, is that there is no ‘one-way’ to approach ministry outreach, considering the cultural, social, geographical and historical factors that distinguish various Indigenous people groups across Australia. While David admits that an ongoing factor for him is that he still “does not know how to deal with some things,”<sup>28</sup> he has sought to establish a ministry that he feels is “contextually appropriate to the Mount Druitt land” using music as a “common point of intersection” between Pentecostal faith expression and Darug culture.<sup>29</sup> As illustrated, David’s preliminary ‘learning’ journey provided context for his development of an “urban Aboriginal Pentecostal theology” that would speak into a Western Sydney suburban context.<sup>30</sup> David joyfully points to a scenario that for him, illustrated the embodiment of his Choir ministry fulfilled - “to empower people for one good day through dreaming, healing, leading;”<sup>31</sup>

We’re singing mostly uplifting types of songs; we’re singing ‘*Buruwa*,’ which means lift. Once, some of our choir children were interviewed. I did not know what they were going to ask them. The interviewer asked one of the girls, one of the eleven-year olds in our choir, “What does *Buruwa* mean?” and she said, “Lift! Everywhere the Choir goes we sing ‘*Buruwa*’ and we just believe we see all of the evil spirits lift off people!” It was so cool hearing her say this, because she was speaking to a national audience about the story in this song.

As a mixed descent Aboriginal person, raised in a predominantly Western cultural setting, David’s identity renegotiation from ‘Pastor’ to ‘Aboriginal Pastor’ has raised some resistance. He claims that some Aboriginal leaders have viewed him as ‘a ring- in’ – a perspective that he understands and admits to, since he has so much to learn. On the other hand, non-Aboriginal Pentecostal pastors have also struggled to understand his journey;

I worked with a lot of guys... but they never saw me as an ‘Aboriginal Pastor.’ But these last seven to ten years since, [as] I’ve specifically worked on this level, I’ve realised how difficult it is for our fellas, because I’ve just been a pastor, and so once I began to be seen as an Aboriginal pastor, I realised what these other guys have gone through.

Despite setbacks, David finds comfort in both cultures’ embrace of a shared openness to the spirit realm. He thinks that the wider church can learn much from an oft marginalised Pentecostal and Aboriginal spirituality;

<sup>28</sup>Armstrong, “Interview with David Armstrong part II,” interview by Shane Clifton at Alphacrucis College, Parramatta, February 13, 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Riches, 38.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 45.

Some Christians imagine spirituality as one hour on Sunday morning between nine and ten o'clock, or ten and eleven; you know, like a church service. Aboriginal spirituality is not a service; spirituality is actually a life. It's all integrated.... [Likewise] in Pentecostal spirituality, you don't stop being in the spirit, you walk in the spirit, you're continually in the spirit. And even with the didgeridoo playing, it's a drone, it's continuous. So I always think of the way they don't de-compartmentalise 'this is spirit, this is soul, this is body', do you know what I mean? Everything's spiritual.

David is upfront about the limits of his knowledge of Aboriginal history and culture, but nevertheless feels compelled to be an agent of healing. And while he knows Pentecostals share in the history of Aboriginal oppression, he believes that Aboriginal Pentecostals can take part in the processes of 'dreaming, healing and leading' that are needed to respond to the intergenerational trauma and cultural and spiritual disenfranchisement that resulted from colonisation.

David celebrates the fruits of the work he has done in ministering to Aboriginal peoples, including the significance of reviving a language that has been suppressed and silenced in decades prior to David's choir ministry. David notes that many in the Blacktown area have started identifying as Darug;

They used to say, the Darug language is dead, there's no more Darug people left, but in the last 20 or 30 years the Darug people started saying, "yeh I'm Darug," and they're probably Whiter than you!

David continues to face substantial challenges as he navigates differences between Aboriginal and Pentecostal cultural traditions. While differing worldviews and 'ways of Knowing' between the two cultures demand careful treatment, David is also at pains to ensure that he avoids paternalistic attitudes and practices, as is still the case in some areas of the non-Indigenous sphere. That is why it matters that David is an Aboriginal man taking a leading role, rather than White Pentecostal leaders. Similarly, David feels a strong urge to combat attitudes of indifference to Aboriginal suffering and loss, leading by example through his ministry to Aboriginal individuals and families. Reflecting on his journey so far, David emphasises the power in language to keep himself going, making a strong case for its powerful and enabling qualities in connecting people to the spiritual world, and for the spiritual nourishment that emerges through its use;

...When people try to stop me and say, "hey just wait, just wait," I just keep going, I just believe that's the power of Pentecost – the language and the communication of the word. I think that's why the Pentecostals have connected because of that language - that deep language and passion. You might find most Aboriginal fellows...quiet... [yet] they're not necessarily quiet but they're passionate – they've got passion in their spirituality.



## References

- Armstrong, David. "Deadly Wonders: Celebrating Positive Families", (Pre-published Edition, 2017): 1-34.
- Armstrong, David. "Interview with David Armstrong part I." Interview by Shane Clifton, Alphacrucis College, Parramatta, January 22, 2018.
- Armstrong, David. "Interview with David Armstrong part II." Interview by Shane Clifton at Alphacrucis College, Parramatta, February 13, 2018.
- Bain, Margaret S. *White Men Are Liars: Another Look at Aboriginal-Western Interactions*. Alice Springs: SIL, 2005.
- Bamblett, Lawrence. *Our Stories Are Our Survival*. Canberra, ACT: AIATSIS, 2013.
- Blacktown City Council, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities: A Social Profile*. Blacktown: Blacktown City Council, 2016): 1-29.
- Cartledge, Mark J. *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology*. N.Y.: Routledge, 2017.
- Dods, Roberta Robin. "Knowing ways/ways of knowing: reconciling science and tradition." *World Archaeology* 36, no. 4 (2004): 547-557.
- Dodson, Patrick L., Jacinta K. Elston and Brian F. McCoy. "Leaving Culture at the Door: Aboriginal Perspectives on Christian Belief and Practice," *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006): 249-262
- Gooren, Henry. "Conversion Narratives." In *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, edited by Allan Anderson, Michael Bergunder, Andre Droogers and Cornelis van der Laan, 93-112. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.
- Green, Richard. "Reclamation process for Darug in Sydney using song." In *Re-Awakening Languages: Theory and practice in the revitalisation of Australia's Indigenous Heritage*, edited by John Hobson, Kevin Lowe, Susan Poetsch and Michael Walsh, 181-187. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2010.
- Gunther Brown, Candy. *Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Healing*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Hueneke, Anna. "From Politics to Poetry." *Psychotherapy and Politics International* 10, no.1 (2012): 55-68. DOI: 10.1002/ppi.1250
- Miller, Donald E and Tetsuano Yamamori. *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.
- Morgan, Sally, Tjalaminu Mia and Blaze Kwaymullina, *Speaking from the Heart: Stories of Life, Family and Country*. Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2010.

- Riches, Tanya. "Aboriginal Australian Pentecostals taking the initiative in Mount Druitt's urban songlines." *Global Forum on Arts and Christian Faith*, 2, no. 1 (2014): 38-54.
- Riches, Tanya. "Dreaming Urban Indigenous Australian Christian Worship in the Great Southland of The Holy Spirit." In *The Spirit of Praise: Music and Worship in Global Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity*, edited by Monique M. Ingalls and Amos Yong, 60-77. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015.
- Troy, Jakelin. "The Sydney Language Notebooks and responses to language contact in early colonial NSW," *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 12 no. 1 (1992): 145-170.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/07268609208599474>
- Vondey, Wolfgang. "The Making of a Black Liturgy: Pentecostal Worship and Spirituality from African Slave Narratives to American Cityscapes." *Black Theology: An International Journal* 10, no. 2 (July 2012): 147-68, <https://doi.org/10.1558/blth.v10i2.147>.
- Warren, D. Michael, L. Jan Slikkerveer, David Brokensha and Wim Decherer. *The Cultural Dimension of Development: Indigenous Knowledge Systems*. United Kingdom: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995.
- Yong, Amos. *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal – Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*. Sheffield: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2000.

## **Engaging with Aboriginal peoples: Challenging inequality in the rural Australian Anglican Church from a sociological, social work and theological perspective**

Karen Kime and Monica Short

### **Abstract**

Nearly two thirds of Indigenous Australians reside outside capital cities. Several Anglican Churches in rural, regional and remote locations strive to engage with Aboriginal communities. A number of Aboriginal people are active and vibrant members of the Anglican Communion, faithfully ministering and sharing the Christian message. Two members of the Anglican Church, one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous, via a co-operative inquiry, explored the question: how do the inquirers perceive the Anglican Church engages with Aboriginal peoples in rural, regional and remote Australia? From a sociological lens this inquiry explored the impact of ongoing colonisation on church praxis. It challenged the rural Anglican Church to be courageous and proactive in role modelling for the world-wide church engagements with Aboriginal people that affirm Australian Indigenous culture, pastors and leaders' ministries. It outlined from a social work perspective the importance of advocating for justice such as fair wages paid in full. From a theological lens the inquiry discussed equality and formation for rural Anglican ministry. The discussion drew upon rural-themed Christian parables, in particular the parable of the sower, as well as faith expressed in action. This inquiry argued for the building of just relationships that are Christ-honouring, led by the Holy Spirit and person-loving. It upheld the reality that all Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are equal image bearers of God and are to be respected and have inherent dignity.

### **Introduction**

This paper outlines a co-operative inquiry into the research question, "How do the inquirers perceive the Anglican Church engages with Aboriginal peoples in rural, regional and remote Australia?" It aims to present a Spirit-led conversation between two female members of the Anglican church, one Indigenous and another non-Indigenous. The purposes of the conversation was: to facilitate justice and engagement, to affirm the many gifts and abilities of Indigenous Christians, to highlight the way in which Aboriginal cultures can enrich the faith journey of all Australians, and to consider what this means for ecclesiology.

### Literature review: Introducing the key inquiry concepts

Aboriginal peoples have experienced violence and conflict since the invasion of their lands in 1788<sup>1</sup>. It is widely recognised that Aboriginal people have survived economic exploitation, discrimination, genocide, marginalisation, slavery and social control, and that churches were directly and indirectly complicit in such actions.<sup>2</sup> Science, philosophy, and theology at times provided philosophical and theological justification to these injustices, as illustrated by Charles Darwin's argument that Indigenous Australians were 'too primitive to have a soul.'<sup>3</sup> Additionally, historians, Indigenous leaders and social workers have documented policies and social mores that, since the arrival of Europeans in Australia in 1788, have resulted in the forced removal of Aboriginal peoples from their lands and segregation of Aboriginal peoples from mainstream Australia.<sup>4</sup> These acts of colonisation have profoundly impacted the rural Anglican Church and its engagements with Aboriginal peoples. Indeed, as the official religion of the colonising state, the Anglican Church had a unique responsibility for the establishment of Christian relationships with Aboriginal peoples. Three key concepts for the research are introduced here to bring clarity to this discussion about engagement.

#### a) Colonisation, Christianity and the Church

Colonisation is an important issue for the Christian church. There are mixed opinions about the Church and its engagements with Indigenous peoples, as illustrated by the following comments and testimonies. Stan Grant states that Christianity and the missions "helped give rise to a greater sense of our rights and our equality and our humanity, yet facilitated the destruction of culture and the denial of tradition."<sup>5</sup> Government reports have found the missions and related institutions were based on ideologies of racial superiority,<sup>6</sup> where every aspect of life for the 'inmates' was regulated.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, Aboriginal Pastor and social activist Ossie Cruse, Indigenous

<sup>1</sup> "Historical Context – The Stolen Generations," Bringing Them Home, accessed March 8, 2019, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/timeline-history-separation-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-their-families-text>

<sup>2</sup> Frank Brennan, *Sharing the country: The case for an agreement between black and white Australians* (Melbourne, Victoria: Penguin Books), 1991; Michael Dodson, "The End in the Beginning: Re(de)finding Aboriginality: Dodson (1994)", March, 8, 2019, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/end-beginning-redefining-aboriginality-dodson-1994>; Henry Reynolds, *Dispossession: Black Australians and White Invaders* (Sydney, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1989); Isabell Reid and Katie Murrell-Orgill, "Isabell Reid" in *Social Work: Engaging Indigenous communities*, eds., A. Anscombe et al., (Wagga Wagga, NSW: CSU, 2005), 18-19; Murray Wilfred Seiffert, *Refuge on the Roper: the origins of Roper River Mission Ngukurr* (Brunswick East, Victoria: Acorn Press, 2008), 36-37.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex* (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1889)

<sup>4</sup> Laura Rademaker, *Language and the mission: Talking and Translating on Groote Eylandt 1943-1973* (PhD diss., Australian National University: Canberra, 2014), 27; Reid and Murrell-Orgill, 17-18.

<sup>5</sup> Emma Halgren, "Stan Grant – 'Christianity gave us a divine sense of equality,' The Melbourne Anglican, March, 8, 2019, <http://tma.melbourneanglican.org.au/news/stan-grant-190416>

<sup>6</sup> Patricia Anderson et al., *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Contexts: Report for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* (Sydney: Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse; Telethon Kids Institute, 2017) [https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/research\\_report\\_-\\_aboriginal\\_and\\_torres\\_strait\\_islander\\_children\\_and\\_child\\_sexual\\_abuse\\_in\\_institutional\\_contexts\\_-\\_causes.pdf](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/research_report_-_aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_children_and_child_sexual_abuse_in_institutional_contexts_-_causes.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Charles Dunford Rowley, *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970), 248.

sociologist Dr Maxine Knapp and Indigenous leader Aunty Jean Philips, testify to the immense barriers, exclusion and opposition experienced by Aboriginal Christian leaders from the churches in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>8</sup> The spirituality of Aboriginal people may have been respected in some cases, but this was not always so, and too often Aboriginal spirituality and culture was rejected as naïve and pagan, an attitude that undermined civil, cultural and human rights.<sup>9</sup>

In more recent times, Karen Kime holds that churches in Australia continue to marginalise Aboriginal people, even if indirectly; through the lack of payment for Indigenous ministries, the absence of Aboriginal people in senior ministry positions, and its silence on matters of injustice.<sup>10</sup> A notable symbol of this marginalisation in Anglicanism is that it was not until 2009 that the first traditional Aboriginal Anglican woman, Yulki Nunggamajbarr, was ordained.<sup>11</sup>

#### b) Defining the rural Anglican Church of Australia

The Anglican Church of Australia is part of the worldwide Anglican Communion and is organised into 23 Dioceses which contain both urban and rural parishes.<sup>12</sup> The amorphousness of spirituality as expressed by Anglicans in their every-day life in Australia makes it difficult to describe. Pickard argues that this spirituality is rooted in the incarnation of the Word become flesh dwelling amongst us in solidarity, and that it underpins the life of communities of faith, hope and discipleship in local contexts.<sup>13</sup> In regards to the rural Anglican Church, it is connected to the challenges faced by its non-urban communities such as declining populations, loss of infrastructure, climate change and churches without clergy.<sup>14</sup> Rural Anglican churches also retain many strengths associated with rurality, such as the inter-personal nature of communities.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, rural churches can appear oblivious to the rich cultural heritage and the needs and history of their local Aboriginal community.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Ossie Cruse, "Introducing an AEF Founder: Pastor Ossie Cruse," in *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, Testimonials, Indigenous Theology, Sermons and Bible studies*, eds., Kathryn Naden et al., (High port City, Victoria: Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship Australia, 2017), 11; Maxine Knapp, "A story of hope, struggle and achievement: Laying the foundations of the AEF, 1960-1970" in *A celebration of God's faithfulness*, eds., Kathryn Naden et al., 34; Jean Philips, "Jean Philips' Testimony," in Naden et al., 50.

<sup>9</sup> *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Sydney, NSW: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997)

[https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social\\_justice/bringing\\_them\\_home\\_report.pdf](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/bringing_them_home_report.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Karen Kime, *Time for change: Inequality in the Church*. (Unpublished conference paper, Belgrave Heights, Melbourne: Surrender Conference, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Yulki Nunggamajbarr, "Yulki: Arnhem Land Priest", Interview by Geraldine Doogue et al., *ABC Religion and Ethics Broadcast*, November 2010, <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/watch/compass/yulki-arnhem-land-priest/10141134>

<sup>12</sup> "About Us", Anglican Church of Australia, accessed March, 8, 2019, <https://www.anglican.org.au/about-us>; Monica Short, *Anglican churches engaging with people living with disabilities* (Sydney, NSW: The Bush Church Aid Society of Australia and CBM Australia's Luke 14 Program, 2018), 35.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Pickard, *Spiritual Life on the Anglican Verandah* (Barton: St Mark's Theological Centre, 2003), 8.

<sup>14</sup> James Collins, *Four Rural Anglican Communities of Faith: An Ethnography of Hope* (Phd diss., University of Tasmania, 2010); Philip Hughes et al., *Building stronger communities* (Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press, 2007), 181; Jessica K. Weir, *Murray River Country: An Ecological Dialogue with Traditional Owners* (Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Hughes, *Building stronger communities*, 181.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Leigh, *Disconnected* (Sydney, NSW: The University of New South Wales Press, 2010), 152.

c) Engagement, solidarity and the Church

The Anglican Communion has undertaken steps to improve relationships with Aboriginal peoples - such as apologising and repenting of its role in the removal of Aboriginal children from their parents<sup>17</sup>. Nevertheless, theologians like Broughton argue that the Anglican Church 'has wronged' Indigenous Australians<sup>18</sup>. Broughton states this is 'because Anglicans are either ignorant or neglect wrongs committed in the past by the church'.<sup>19</sup> This paper responds to such wrongs by challenging rural Anglican Churches to fully recognise the heritage of Indigenous peoples and to engage with Aboriginal peoples accordingly. Indigenous leaders call for such engagement, which is described by the United Nations as "a two-way process: by which the aspirations, needs, strengths and values of citizens and communities are incorporated at all levels and involve all stakeholders in the process."<sup>20</sup>

Wiradjuri woman, Katrina Fanning, posits that engagement with Indigenous communities can be rewarding for all parties, and allow for fresh perspectives and new ideas.<sup>21</sup> There are historical examples of the church engaging such as offering refuge during times of violence, as at Roper River Mission.<sup>22</sup> There are also some contemporary examples, such as Noel Pearson referring to the positive role the Church had in relation to land rights in Queensland.<sup>23</sup> Currently, there is an increasing documentation of the spirituality, leadership and service of Indigenous Christians in the church, even if this leadership is too often informal and unrecognised.<sup>24</sup>

### Methodology

In order to better promote engagement, this co-operative inquiry draws on Indigenist research principles including the contestation of colonisation and privilege; the ensuring of respect, reciprocity, equality and equity in all aspects of the research; deep listening so as to hear one Indigenous voice amongst the many dominant voices describing Australia; community engagement; and yarning.<sup>25</sup> Yarning is 'an informal and relaxed

<sup>17</sup> "Chapter 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice," in *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission: Annual Report 1998-1999* (Sydney, NSW: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1999), 59-61.

<sup>18</sup> Geoff Broughton, *Restorative Christ: Jesus, Justice, and Discipleship* (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 159;

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> *Brisbane Declaration* (Brisbane, QLD: International Conference on Engaging Communities, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Katrina Fanning, "Engaging with Communities: Key Success and Learning" in *Social work: Engaging Indigenous Communities* eds., A. Anscombe et al., (Wagga Wagga, NSW: CSU, 2005), 30.

<sup>22</sup> Seiffert, *Refuge on the Roper: the origins of Roper River Mission Ngukurr*, 133.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Catt and Noel Pearson, "Anglican Church enters Wild Riders debate," Interview by Melinda Howells, *ABC PM*, April 2010, <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2010/s2885131.htm>

<sup>24</sup> Fiona Magowan and Carolyn Schwarz, *Christianity, Conflict, and Renewal in Australia and the Pacific* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Judy Atkinson, "The Value of Deep Listening – The Aboriginal gift to the Nation," *TedX*, June 2017, <https://tedxsydney.com/talk/the-value-of-deep-listening-the-aboriginal-gift-to-the-nation-judy-atkinson/>; Australian Government National Health and Medical Research Council, "Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders," accessed March, 8, 2019, <https://nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/ethical-conduct-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-communities>; Donna J.M. Phillips, "Resisting Contradictions: Non-Indigenous Pre-Service Teacher Responses to Critical Indigenous Studies," (PhD Diss., Queensland University of Technology, 2011).

discussion...that requires the research to develop and build a relationship that is accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research.’<sup>26</sup> Such Indigenist principles facilitate cultural safety in research with Aboriginal people. An integrated lens with an epistemological base in theology, social work and sociology (a critical lens) also assisted us in exploring the narratives about the topic, please see figure 1.

This paper presents Karen’s perceptions about and engagement with the rural Anglican Church. To achieve this we undertook participatory research as it is a recognised approach for investigating themes around spirituality and religion.<sup>27</sup> Participatory research breaks the monopoly of privileged knowledge.<sup>28</sup> It is research where all involved can ‘contribute both to the thinking that informs the inquiry and the action which is its subject.’<sup>29</sup> Co-operative inquiry, which is described below, was chosen because it would facilitate the presentation of both Karen’s and Monica’s emic (insider) and etic (outsider) knowledge and perspectives.<sup>30</sup>

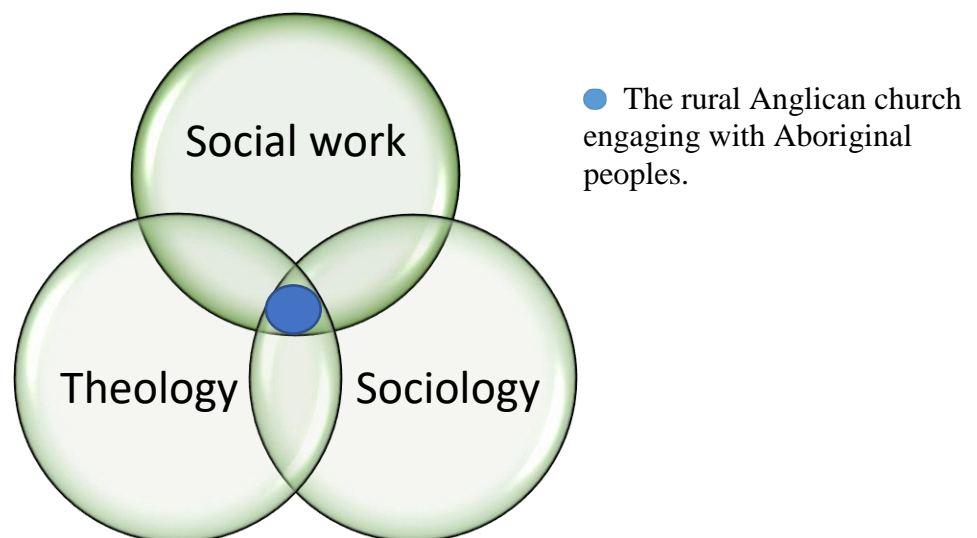


Figure 1. An integrated lens: theological, sociological and social work concepts informed the investigation.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Dawn Bessarab and Bridget Ng’andu, “Yarning About Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research,” *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 38; Alison Laycock et al., *Researching Indigenous Health: A Practical Guide for Researchers* (Carlton South, VIC: The Lowitja Institute, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> James R. Dudley, *Spirituality Matters in Social Work: Connecting Spirituality, Religion and Practice* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 295.

<sup>28</sup> Marja Liisa Swantz “Participatory Action Research as Practice” in *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research: Participative Inquiry and Practice* eds., Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (London, UK: SAGE Publications, 2008): 45.

<sup>29</sup> Reason and Bradbury, “Introduction,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*, eds. Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury (London: SAGE Publications, 2008), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Buckley et al., “A Linguistic and Philosophical Analysis of Emic and Etic and their Use in International Business Research,” *Management International Review* 54, no. 3 (2014): 307-324.

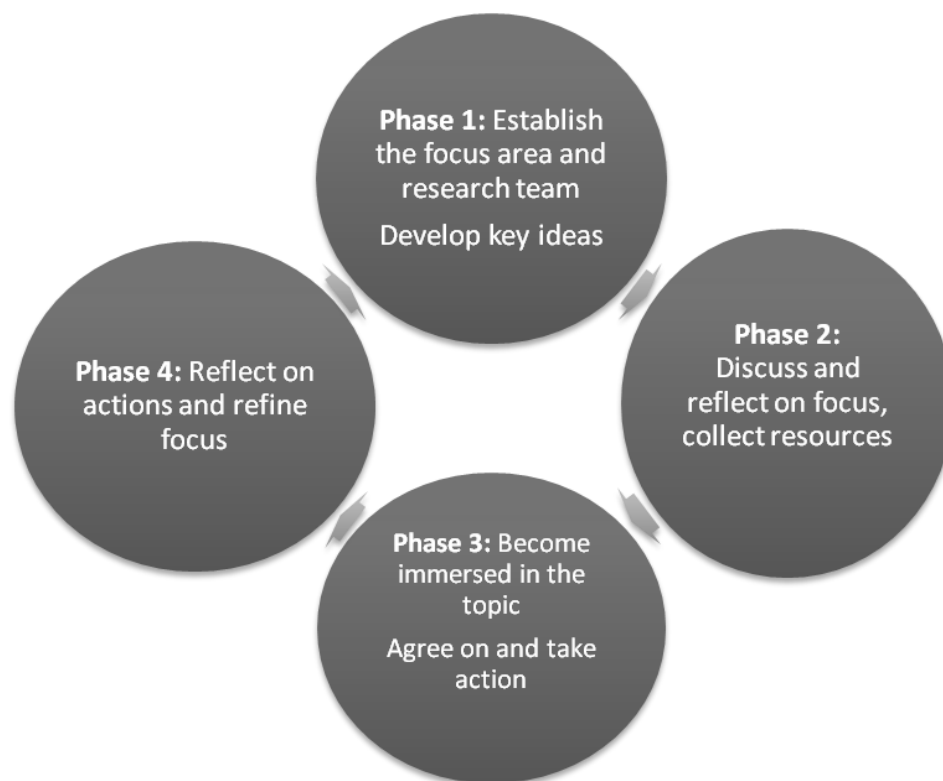
<sup>31</sup> Monica Short, *Anglican Churches engaging with people living with disabilities* (Sydney, Australia: The Bush Church Aid Society, CBM Australia - Luke 14 Program, 2016), 28.

This inquiry was conducted by two Australian-born female academics, both studying PhDs and over 45 years of age, who have shared experiences of living in non-urban settings. Each of the participants were co-authors, co-researchers and co-subjects and subsequently the project did not require ethics approval.

The Reverend Karen Kime is a Biripi woman whose family come from Dingo Creek Country near Kempsey, NSW. Having lived and worked with Aboriginal communities in south-eastern Australia for thirty years, she is proud of her heritage and immersed in the spirituality of people and Country. Karen believes there are many similarities between Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity, particularly in the use of story, and the teachings which arise from both traditions. Karen is a social activist, passionate in living the Gospel.

Monica Short is non-Indigenous social worker. She has lived in both rural and regional Australia. Monica is a Christian and a member of the Anglican Church of Australia. Monica has learned much from her Aboriginal colleagues and friends over many years. Quite a few have told her that Australia often does not hear Aboriginal voices, and she thus wants to elevate Karen's stories about engagement with the rural Anglican Church.

According to the co-pioneer Heron, a co-operative inquiry involves two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it.<sup>32</sup> The preference for small groups of people allows an individual to be heard, to generate knowledge from their own experience, and to both participate and control what is being generated.<sup>33</sup> It cycles through four phases, which are summarised in figure two.



<sup>32</sup> John Heron, *Co-operative Inquiry: Research into the Human Condition* (London: SAGE Publications, 1996), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Sonia Ospina et al., "Cooperative inquiry for learning and connectedness," *Action Learning: Research and Practice* 5, no. 2 (September 2007): 132, 137-138.



*Figure 2. Co-operative inquiry phases.<sup>34</sup>*

In phase one, Karen and Monica as co-inquirers decided to share perceptions about rural Anglican church engagements with Indigenous peoples<sup>35</sup>. It was established from the inception of the research that the Indigenist Standpoint, cultural safety, relationship and trust were integral to the inquiry. For these reasons the research team was kept small and female, with an auto-ethnographical incline. Auto-ethnography is a research method that ‘opens a door for those of us interested in offering accounts of professional practice that are committed to acknowledging a human-ness to the work.’<sup>36</sup> This method ‘may enable voices previously silenced to speak back’ with the aim of moving others ‘to ethical action.’<sup>37</sup>

Karen and Monica conducted weekly telephone conversations over a period of two months and took turns minuting the conversations which would subsequently form the basis of their data.

Karen and Monica manually interrogated the data through yarning rather than by computer generated programs or white sociological principles<sup>38</sup> to ensure cultural safety and respect Karen’s Indigeneity.

In phase two Karen and Monica undertook two key actions. Becoming co-subjects they reflected on the focus area<sup>39</sup> and collected resources such as newspaper articles about church engagements with Indigenous peoples. Second, the researchers affirmed through conversations the axiom that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are equal image bearers of God and Indigenous Christians in Anglican Churches are to be respected and have inherent dignity. Weekly tasks were identified and allocated such as conducting literature searches about research themes.

Next, the researchers cycled into phase three and became fully immersed in the topic.<sup>40</sup> Reason and Heron describe this phase as the ‘touchstone’ of the research methodology because it facilitates the generation of new knowledge and understandings.<sup>41</sup> Karen and Monica reflexively and critically reflected on their emerging knowledge, and its application to the understanding of others’ perspectives.

In phase four Karen and Monica resumed being co-researchers, reflecting on the action—and started drafting this article.<sup>42</sup> To ensure rigor, the researchers cycled once more fully through the inquiry cycle – comparing inquiry themes to current literature. Throughout the writing process, both researchers identified themes that were underdeveloped. Karen and Monica re-cycled over these themes until strong connections were made

<sup>34</sup> Peter Reason and John Heron, “A short guide to co-operative inquiry”, *South Pacific Centre for Human Inquiry*, accessed March 8, 2019, [www.human-inquiry.com/cishortg.htm](http://www.human-inquiry.com/cishortg.htm); Monica Short, & John Healy, Writing ‘with’ not ‘about’: Examples in Co-operative Inquiry In, *Sharing Qualitative Research: Showing Lived Experience and Community Narratives*, edited by S. Gair & A. V. Luyun, 188-203. London: Routledge, 2017.

<sup>35</sup> Reason and Heron, “A short guide to co-operative inquiry.”

<sup>36</sup> Tai Peseta quoted in Sally Denshire, “On auto-ethnography,” *Current Sociology Review* 62, no. 6 (2014): 838.

<sup>37</sup> Denshire, 833; 842.

<sup>38</sup> Joyce A. Ladner, “Introduction” in *Death of White sociology: Essays on Race and Culture*, ed., Joyce A. Ladner (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1973), xix–xxix.

<sup>39</sup> Reason and Heron, “A short guide to co-operative inquiry”

<sup>40</sup> Reason and Bradbury, *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research* (London: SAGE Publishing, 2006)

<sup>41</sup> Reason and Heron, “A short guide to co-operative inquiry”

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

between ideas and their lived reality of the rural Anglican Church engaging with Indigenous peoples<sup>43</sup>. Overall, this inquiry enabled Monica and Karen to clarify their own perspectives about rural Anglican churches engagements.

This inquiry has certain limitations. It is very small, dependent on the experience and knowledge of two people and has an auto-ethnographical incline towards macro and meso Indigenous cultural issues. Therefore, the themes are a glimpse into, rather than a representation of the field. They cannot be generalised and do not statistically represent the rural Anglican Church or Indigenous people groups. Regardless of these limitations, it is possible to make the following observations about rural Anglican church engagements.

### **Themes (findings)**

#### *Theme I: Challenging colonisation: Sociological insights leading to engagement.*

For Weber, part of the task of sociological investigation is to analyse the influences that can satisfactorily be explained in terms of reactions to environmental conditions<sup>44</sup>. Karen believed that the analysis of the influence of colonisation in society and the church from a sociological perspective needed to precede the inquiry conversation about the rural Anglican Church's engagements with Indigenous peoples. Karen states;

I see the church as 'a tool of colonisation' and as having benefitted from it. For instance, instead of speaking out against the violence of dispossession, the Church tolerated it. This enabled them to appropriate Aboriginal land without reimbursement. Indeed, it was often their own parishioners participating in the hunting parties that looked for, and massacred Aboriginal people.

Colonisation gave non-Indigenous people power over Indigenous people<sup>45</sup> and land, and this power resulted in exploitation. Karen furthers her sociological interpretation of colonisation and power by connecting it to the ignorance of non-Indigenous people about Country and her kin. Early colonisers were ignorant about the centrality of Country in the spirituality of Aboriginal people and disrespected Indigenous peoples' family life. Karen explains below what many early colonisers did not understand;

The term 'kin' for us includes those in the human and non-human world; it includes reciprocal relationships that require us to care for kin, including the land itself. It is a system of belonging, made up of a rich cultural and social matrix of relationships and obligations. For us, the cosmos is penetrated with connectedness; penetrated with relatedness, with everything having the intrinsic right to exist.

---

<sup>43</sup> Monica Short, & John Healy, Writing 'with' not 'about': Examples in Co-operative Inquiry In, *Sharing Qualitative Research: Showing Lived Experience and Community Narratives*, edited by S. Gair & A. V. Luyun, 188-203. London: Routledge, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Max Weber, *Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. (New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2001), xxvi.

<sup>45</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977 by Michel Foucault*. (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd, 1980), 90.

Karen's comments above about colonisation emerge out of her personal experiences and observations about life in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia. Karen knows that colonisation continues. Throughout the inquiry, Karen pointed to the currently high rates of incarceration of Aboriginal people, the increasing removal of Aboriginal children from their parents and the attempted closure of remote Indigenous communities as current examples of colonisation.<sup>46</sup> Karen also believes the implementation of the Northern Territory Intervention and the dismantling of the Racial Discrimination Act are human rights abuses against Indigenous Australians.<sup>47</sup>

The literature supports Karen's observations about colonisation and power. In reference to the Anglican Church, for example, Connie Nungulla McDonald's autobiography described instances of her facing violence, discrimination, having her abilities disrespected and minimised, and her dealing with mistaken colonising beliefs including an instance when she was told by an Anglican parishioner, "Now that you are a Christian you should give up your Aboriginality"<sup>48</sup>.

Karen's own experiences alongside Connie's autobiography lead her to posit that there are two reasons colonising concepts need to be understood by the rural Anglican church. First, colonising concepts result in a lack of recognition of Aboriginal peoples' gifts and talents within the church and second, result in the exploitation of human rights and another's country. Karen provides examples of how this occurs. With regards to gifts and talents, she states;

Our strengths continue to be unrecognized by the Church. I have applied for mainstream parish positions where the selection committees could not understand why I had even applied – as if an Aboriginal person could have any relevance to their faith journey...I dream of the day when I see an Aboriginal person as Bishop for non-Aboriginal people.

With regards to Country, Karen explains;

'Country' for Aboriginal people is deeply personal and resonates with the sacred. In contrast, non-Indigenous Australians, perceive land as having a predominantly economic value; something which is to be exploited...Jesus constantly revealed how important Country was to Him as he often visited rural locations - mountains, lakes and deserts so as to connect with the Father.

<sup>46</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Prisoner characteristics Australia", accessed March 8, 2019, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4517.0~2017~Main%20Features~Prisoner%20characteristics,%20Australia~4>; Australian Government, & Australian Institute of Family Studies, "The growing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care", accessed March 8, 2019, <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/2018/05/07/growing-over-representation-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-care>; Cass Madden, "Forced closures of Aboriginal communities in Australia", accessed March 8, 2019, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/forced-closures-aboriginal-communities-australia-continue>

<sup>47</sup> Emma Partridge, "Caught in the same frame? The language of evidence based policy in debates about the Australian Government 'Intervention' into Northern Territory Aboriginal Communities", *Social Policy Administration*, 47, No. 4 (June 2013): 399-415; Ben Schokman, "Sorry about the Intervention: The Government's Intervention in Northern Territory Aboriginal Communities", *Alternative Law Journal*, 35, No. 1(210), 2-3.

<sup>48</sup> Connie Nungulla McDonald, *When you grow up*. (Broome, WA: Magabala Books Aboriginal Cooperation, 1996), 227.

Karen believes from a sociological perspective that the rural Anglican Church can take a leadership role in challenging contemporary colonisation by affirming and utilising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' gifts and talents, and by recognising the importance of Country. The church can be an active partner with Indigenous peoples in the renewal of God's beloved creation and in engaging with Indigenous peoples.

*Theme II: Challenging others for justice: Social work insights leading to engagement*

The Australian Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics<sup>49</sup> and the International Federation of Social Workers' Global Definition knowledge section<sup>50</sup> aim to position social work so that it stands in solidarity with Indigenous peoples, challenges impositions on rural Indigenous communities and seeks to redress both historic and ongoing Western hegemony by honouring, listening to and learning from Indigenous peoples. Social workers are challenged by their profession and by colleagues to hear and respond to calls for justice for Indigenous peoples, as illustrated in the following examples. Karen is a social activist and through forums such as her writing of social work subjects at Charles Sturt University, she has been calling for justice for Indigenous communities. Karen also calls for rural Anglican church engagements to demonstrate social and economic justice. Similarly, Indigenous activist Brooke Prentis stated to Tanya Riches: "This land and our peoples, both black and white, need truth, need love and need justice....then our land can start to heal and we will be building God's kingdom here on earth."<sup>51</sup> Indigenous Pastor Ray Minniecon calls for churches to share the resources and economic advantage that they received through grants of stolen Indigenous peoples' land<sup>52</sup>. As a Christian and a social worker, Monica stands in solidarity with Karen, Minniecon, Prentice, Riches and others as they call for justice, and advocate that all Christian engagements are Christ-honouring, Holy Spirit led and person-loving.

During the inquiry, Karen built upon the conversation about justice in her stance that that justice needs to be understood from an Aboriginal perspective - one which has an emphasis on relationships. This raises the question of how justice in relationship can be achieved. One way proposed by Karen, is through economic redistribution in loving relationships. Both Monica and Karen had noted that over the last few decades several rural Anglican churches have been closed and sold. In response, Karen proposes the following strategy to the Anglican Church of Australia:

A portion of the funds obtained through the selling of church properties be put aside for Indigenous ministry ... It is about sharing what you have with your brothers and sisters. It is about sharing funds to support ministry.

This then raises the question as to whether there are other reasons to implement an economic redistribution strategy, as suggested by Karen. Many Indigenous peoples live outside cities. Non-urban churches

<sup>49</sup> Australian Association of Social Workers, *Code of Ethics*, (Canberra, ACT: AASW, 2010);

<sup>50</sup> "Global definition of social work," International Federation of Social Work, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>

<sup>51</sup> Tanya Riches, "Redeeming Australia Day: How Aboriginal Christians are Challenging Australian Spiritually", accessed March 8, 2019, <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2016/01/25/4394002.htm>

<sup>52</sup> Kylie Beach, "Christians call to share land profits with Aboriginal people", Eternity News, accessed March 8, 2019, <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/christians-call-to-share-land-profits-with-aboriginal-people/>

are vulnerable to social and rural isolation and rural poverty.<sup>53</sup> The Bible states that people are to be paid their wages (Deuteronomy 24:15; Leviticus 19:13, Jeremiah 22:13 and 1 Timothy 5:18), yet many rurally located Indigenous Christian leaders are not remunerated for their work with many dependent on welfare payments. Social commentators such as the Anglican minister, The Reverend Phillip Zamagias testify to this, ‘Sadly, Aboriginal Christians don’t have many paid ‘ministers’ to care for them. Even the large denominations rely on volunteers and retirees to run churches.’<sup>54</sup> Another example is Brook Prentis’ statement;

‘The churches continue to reduce funding to Aboriginal ministries, close down our churches, have us operating in derelict buildings, not fully employ Aboriginal pastors, Aboriginal youth pastors, Aboriginal prison chaplains, Aboriginal court chaplains, and not support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Leadership development’.<sup>55</sup>

Karen’s conclusion about this lack of remuneration for the work conducted by Aboriginal peoples is that “many Indigenous peoples are not paid. The church needs to come to terms with this.”

### *Theme III: Challenging the church: Theological insights leading to engagement*

Theology is the study of God and includes such fields as ecclesiology – which is the study of the church.<sup>56</sup> One aspect of ecclesiology is the formation for and the recognition of ministry. Formation was an affirming experience for Karen.

I was ordained in 2000 and was initially inspired by [Anglican] Bishop George Browning who had a passion for social justice and a love of Country. I recalled he did not shy from leading on these issues throughout the Diocese. Bishop George was proactive in recruiting and nurturing Aboriginal clergy, even though such strategies were outside the norm; outside the way things had ‘always been done’. I then had the privilege of working with [Anglican] Bishop Doug Stevens in the Riverina diocese. Both of these Bishops enabled my ministry and understood the importance of establishing trusting and supportive relationships with Aboriginal clergy.

Similar to Karen’s above commentary on the ordination of Indigenous clergy as being outside the norm, Murray Seiffert notes that the Anglican Church since 1788 has been slow to ‘identify and empower’ Indigenous Christian leadership.<sup>57</sup> For example, Seiffert states, ‘while there were Aboriginal Christians from the earliest days of the Roper River Mission, none were ordained for sixty five years...The Anglican church across Australia was

<sup>53</sup> Collins, “Four rural Anglican communities of faith: An ethnography of hope.”

<sup>54</sup> Philip Zamagias, “Indigenous Ministry: Now You See It; Now You Don’t”, The Gospel Coalition, accessed March 3, 2019, <https://australia.thegospelcoalition.org/article/indigenous-ministry>.

<sup>55</sup> Brooke Prentis, “A call to Australian churches”, Common Grace, accessed March 3, 2019, [https://www.commongrace.org.au/a\\_call\\_to\\_australian\\_churches](https://www.commongrace.org.au/a_call_to_australian_churches)

<sup>56</sup> Michael Bird, *Evangelical theology: A Biblical and systematic introduction* (Michigan: Zondervan, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> Murray Seiffert, *Gumbuli of Ngukurr: Aboriginal Elder of Arnhem Land* (Australia: Acorn Press, 2011), 217.

consistent in its refusal to promote Aboriginal leaders'.<sup>58</sup> This is also evidenced by the fact that Australia's first Torres Strait Islander Anglican priests were possibly The Reverend Joseph Lui and The Reverend Poey Passi who were ordained on 18<sup>th</sup> October 1921 and Australia's first ordained Anglican Aboriginal person was The Reverend James Noble ordained deacon in 1926.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, Karen points out that the church has often been neglectful in ensuring culturally safe pathways in ministry development. For example, significant Christian leaders like The Reverend Canon Michael Gumbuli Wurramara of Ngukurr (1935-2018), an Anglican minister who was the first Aboriginal priest in the Northern Territory, Australia's senior Aboriginal priest for more than forty years and the architect of the Kriol Bible translation project, was never made Archdeacon or a Bishop.<sup>60</sup>

Today, a small number of Indigenous Anglican leaders have been ordained in the Anglican Church. However, as Sharon Minniecon, states, 'there has been little progress in the mainstream churches in supporting and developing Indigenous leadership across our nation'.<sup>61</sup> Sharon Minniecon bases this observation on her experiences of advocating in various meetings with Anglican leaders over many years for opportunities for Indigenous Christians<sup>62</sup>.

Alongside this, Indigenous people in rural Australia undertaking ordination face many cultural and social hurdles, such as the need to leave their Country and kin for studies, alongside the lack of Indigenous content in theological training, limited financial resources and few employment opportunities available once they graduate. Karen too, has jumped hurdles to minister. She outlines below an example of supportive engagement and its aid in helping her overcome these barriers;

Not only was it challenging to be a woman within the church, but being black makes it that much harder. Dealing with patriarchy and racism on a regular occurrence was managed in firstly believing God has led me to that place – and secondly, being given the opportunity to do so. Bishop George Browning and Bishop Doug Stevens [both non-Indigenous] had faith in my abilities as a priest and ensured they expressed that to me often, as they did with others. Their ministries were strongly enabling, based on the relationships they actively built with their clergy. For me, this included an occasional phone call – just to see how I was going; a visit to spend the night with my family or simply staying over on a Sunday afternoon to 'watch the cricket'.

Karen's statement above highlighted for Monica the importance of episcopal leadership being both Biblically informed about hospitality and relationships, (Luke 12: 12-14, Romans 12: 13-20, Matthew 25: 34-40), and Spirit-led in sharing love and time. Karen and Monica also contend that rural Anglican Church engagements with Indigenous peoples require culturally competent hospitality that has an authentic understanding of equality.

This then prompts the question, why 'authenticity' in understanding equality? This is because authenticity, as a contemporary moral ideal, can involve a 'picture of what a better or higher mode of life would

---

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 270.

<sup>61</sup> Sharon Minniecon, "Sharon Minniecon's testimony" in *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, sermons and Bible studies*, ed. Kathryn Naden, Francine Riches and Monica Short (Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017), 69-70.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 70.

be, where “better” and “higher” are defined not in terms of what we happen to desire or need, but offer a standard what we ought to desire’.<sup>63</sup> Authenticity is a complex concept and according to seminal thinker, Charles Taylor, involves ‘(i) creation and construction as well as discovery, (ii) originality, and frequently (iii) opposition to the rules of society and even potentially to what we recognize as morality’.<sup>64</sup> Authenticity, is self-referential.<sup>65</sup> However, the content of authenticity is not so necessarily self-referential because people through authenticity can find their fulfilment in God.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, Karen and Monica believe that God through His Holy Spirit can shape people so they can have an authentic understanding of equality.

Monica and Karen considered authenticity to be important for this conversation because as Charles Taylor argues, it is possible to pay lip service to equal recognition, but this does not necessarily translate to an understanding of equality.<sup>67</sup> For Monica, authentic contextualisation of Christian ministry and activities are not to be determined by colonisation, rather they are to be expressed as faith and deeds defined by Biblical concepts such as the fruit of the Spirit, the two greatest commandments and the parable of the Good Samaritan (Galatians 5:22-23, Matthew 22:36-40; Luke 10: 25-37).

Karen’s positive example of engagement described above contrasts with Indigenous Theologian Naden’s description of Indigenous frustrations with the church;

“What frustrates Aboriginal people is the that the churches of Australia are so quick to accept the cultures of other peoples’ groups of the world, but stand in defiance and judgement when it comes to the first nations peoples of this country...If we are to contextualise God’s word into our thinking, then the Bible itself has to be the final authority of things pertaining to the topic of Indigenous contextualisation. If we are to grapple with the Christian faith of Aboriginal people then it stands to reason that the issue of theology is of vital importance.”<sup>68</sup>

With the existence of stories like Karen’s and comments like Naden’s, Broughton’s claim that the Anglican church can be more engaging and hospitable by offering friendship to Indigenous people and overcoming ignorance and neglect of Indigenous issues, is timely.<sup>69</sup>

To reinforce her own personal point about positive engagements and hospitality, Karen shares a childhood story of how a priest showed her hospitality and in doing so, attracted her to Christianity;

I would visit the Catholic church every day, sometimes twice a day, on my way to and from school. My role model was Father John, who I remember as a man always in prayer, yet always made time for a curious kid at his presbytery door.

<sup>63</sup> Charles Taylor, *The ethics of authenticity* (London, England: Harvard University Press, 1991), 16.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>68</sup> Neville Naden, “Towards an Indigenous Theology” in *A celebration of God’s faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, sermons and Bible studies*, ed. Kathryn Naden, Francine Riches and Monica Short (Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017), 134.

<sup>69</sup> Broughton, *Restorative Christ: Jesus, Justice, and Discipleship*, 164.

As a child, the church for Karen was engaging, hospitable and culturally competent because it was welcoming and always open. In a world that is increasingly full of distractions, the peace found within an open church is a place of solace and time spent with God. In addition, Karen recommends that clergy and leaders are taught cultural competency skills of engagement as part of their ordination and training so that all ministers can have the confidence to both welcome and affirm Aboriginal cultures within their ministries.

Pastor Max Wright, who was part of the stolen generation, also advocates for cultural competency, such as in, for example, evangelistic materials containing comments and pictures of Indigenous people (not just non-Indigenous people) responding positively to the gospel.<sup>70</sup> Wright's and Karen's advocacy for cultural competency highlight that it is time to initiate new stories about engagement, where everyone is doing God's work together and where Indigenous people can be leaders throughout the church.<sup>71</sup>

### Last Comments

The themes outlined above reminded Monica of two quotes she had recently read. In regard to colonisation, power and justice, Monica thought of Bonhoeffer's statement, "Christianity stands or falls with its revolutionary protest against violence, arbitrariness and pride of power."<sup>72</sup> With reference to Indigenous theological discussions about church engagements, Monica draws upon Tjitayi's view, "Our next generation has to take the good news to the world about the Lord Jesus Christ. God has a good place for our generation to go".<sup>73</sup> These two quotes and the inquiry themes led Monica to consider how Karen engages with the rural Anglican church and vice-versa. In reply, Karen raised three points that together define her engagement, ministry and leadership in the rural Anglican church. First, theologically she strives for both faith and action (English Standard Version, 2016, James 2: 17). Second, Karen achieves faith and action through engagement with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in their community. She states;

For us, family and community are almost the same thing. In ministry, I was able to bring that to my work.

Third, the particular Biblical image that inspires Karen's faith and ministry is in the person of Jesus as the sower:

In my ministry the image of Jesus with a basket at his side spreading the seed is central. That is the heart of my ministry and what I am called to do.

<sup>70</sup> Max Wright, "Introducing: Reverend Max Wright" in *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, sermons and Bible studies*, ed. Kathryn Naden, Francine Riches and Monica Short (Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017), 88.

<sup>71</sup> Rosemary Dewerse, "Finding our soul, finding my soul: Walking the long journey of reconciliation in Australia" in *We are pilgrims: Mission from in and with the margins of our diverse world*, ed Darren Cronshaw & Rosemary Dewerse (Victoria, Australia: UNOH Publishing, 2015), 63-64.

<sup>72</sup> Paul Marshall, Lela Gilbert, & Nina Shea, "Persecuted: The global assault on Christians" (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2013), 306.

<sup>73</sup> Katrina Tjitayi's, "Katrina Tjitayi's Testimony" in *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, sermons and Bible studies*, ed. Kathryn Naden, Francine Riches and Monica Short (Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017), 75.



The parable of the sower, (Mark 4: 1-20) was told by Jesus to his disciples. It talks about the seed as the word about the Kingdom of God and how some will accept it and bear fruit.<sup>74</sup> One way Karen abides with Jesus as He spreads the seed, is through advocacy and facilitating the provision of spaces for Aboriginal people across all areas of the church.

### **Recommendations**

We make the following recommendations:

1. Christian leaders advocate alongside Indigenous Australians on issues of social justice.
2. Dioceses be proactive and develop pathways into ministry that build on the strengths of Aboriginal people.
3. Where an Aboriginal person feels called to mainstream (non-Indigenous) ministry, church leaders enable opportunities for this to occur.
4. The redistribution of resources, where Indigenous ministries within dioceses receive a portion of the funds from every Anglican property sold.

### **Conclusion**

This circular inquiry concludes where it started, with the question of how the Anglican church engages with Aboriginal peoples in rural, regional and remote Australia, Historical and prevailing colonising ideologies have impacted the church and have stunted engagement and enfeebled Indigenous Christians' gifts and opportunities within the church. The significance of this inquiry is that it presents the perceptions of two people - one Indigenous and one non-Indigenous - who together call for all rural Anglican Churches throughout Australia to role model just social and economic engagements. This involves the churches viewing ecclesiological praxis about formation, the distribution of resources and the episcopal polity through a Biblically informed, person-loving, Holy Spirit led, kin-focused and Christ-honouring lens. The researchers believe that such a lens would ensure that colonisation is not the dominate word for rural Indigenous ministry – rather that the final one is God's word about justice and relationship.

---

<sup>74</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *The gospel of Mark* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002), 92.

## References

- Anderson, Patricia, Muriel Bamblett, Dawn Bessarab, Leah Bromfield, Sharni Chan, Gabriel Maddock, Karen Menzies et al. "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and child sexual abuse in institutional contexts Report for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse." Telethon Kids Institute. Accessed March, 8, 2019. [https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/research\\_report\\_-\\_aboriginal\\_and\\_torres\\_strait\\_islander\\_children\\_and\\_child\\_sexual\\_abuse\\_in\\_institutional\\_contexts\\_-\\_causes.pdf](https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/file-list/research_report_-_aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_children_and_child_sexual_abuse_in_institutional_contexts_-_causes.pdf)
- "About us" Anglican Church of Australia. Accessed March, 8, 2019. <https://www.anglican.org.au/about-us>
- Atkinson, Judy. "The value of deep listening - The Aboriginal gift to the nation." *TedX*, June 2017. <https://tedxsydney.com/talk/the-value-of-deep-listening-the-aboriginal-gift-to-the-nation-judy-atkinson/>
- Australian Association of Social Workers. *Code of Ethics*. Canberra, ACT: AASW, 2010.
- "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population". Australian Bureau of Statistics. Accessed March, 8, 2019. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/2071.0~2016~Main%20Features~Aboriginal%20and%20Torres%20Strait%20Islander%20Population%20Data%20Summary~10>
- "The 2016 Census of population and housing." Australian Bureau of Statistics. 2016. <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1001.0~2016-17~Main%20Features~The%202016%20Census%20of%20Population%20and%20Housing~10009>
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. "Prisoner characteristics Australia." Accessed March, 8, 2019. <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/4517.0~2017~Main%20Features~Prisoner%20characteristics,%20Australia~4>
- Australian Government, & Australian Institute of Family Studies. "The growing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care." Accessed March, 8, 2019. <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/2018/05/07/growing-over-representation-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-care>
- Australian Government National Health And Medical Research Council. "Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders." Accessed March, 8, 2019. file:///D:/Users/mshort07/Downloads/Indigenous-ethical-guidelines.pdf
- Australian Human Rights Commission. "Historical Context- The Stolen Generations." Bringing Them Home. Accessed March, 8, 2019. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/timeline-history-separation-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-their-families-text>
- Beach, Kylie. "Christians call to share land profits with Aboriginal people." Eternity News. Accessed March, 8, 2019. <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/christians-call-to-share-land-profits-with-aboriginal-people/>
- Bessarab, Dawn and Bridget Ng'andu. "Yarning About Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research." *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010): 37-50.
- Bird, Michael. *Evangelical theology: A Biblical and systematic introduction*. Michigan: Zondervan, 2013)

- Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. Sydney, NSW: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997.
- Brennan, Frank. *Sharing the Country: The Case for An Agreement between Black and White Australians*. Melbourne, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1991.
- Broughton, Geoff. *Restorative Christ: Jesus, justice and discipleship*. Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014.
- Buckley Peter, J., Malcolm Chapman, Jeremy Clegg and Hanna Gajewska-De Mattos. "A linguistic and philosophical analysis of emic and etic and their use in international business research." *Management International Review*, 54 no 3 (2014): 307-324.
- Catt, Peter and Noel Pearson. "Anglican Church enters Wild Riders debate." Interview by Melinda Howells. *ABC PM*, April 2010. <http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2010/s2885131.htm>
- Collins, James, A. "Four rural Anglican communities of faith: An ethnography of hope." PhD diss., University of Tasmania, 2010.
- Cruse, Ossie. "Introducing an AEF Founder: Pastor Ossie Cruse." In *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, Testimonials, Indigenous Theology, Sermons and Bible studies*, edited by Kathryn Naden, Michelle Wighton, Francine Riches and Monica Short, 10-15. Highport City, Victoria: AEF, 2017.
- Darwin, Charles. *The descent of man, and selection in relation to sex*. New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1889.
- Davidson, Karl. "But is it church?" in *We are pilgrims: Mission from, in and with the margins of our diverse world*, edited by Darren Cronshaw & Rosemary Dewerse, 127-137. Dandenong, Victoria: UNOH Publishing, 2015.
- Denshire, Sally. "On autoethnography". *Current Sociology Review* 62, no. 620 (2014): 831-850.
- Dewerse, Rosemary. "Finding our soul, finding my soul: Walking the long journey of reconciliation in Australia." In *We are pilgrims: Mission from, in and with the margins of our diverse world*, edited by Darren Cronshaw & Rosemary Dewerse, 127-137. Dandenong, Victoria: UNOH Publishing, 2015.
- Dodson, Michael. "The End in the Beginning: Re(de)finding Aboriginality: Dodson (1994)." Accessed March, 8, 2019. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/news/speeches/end-beginning-redefining-aboriginality-dodson-1994>
- Dudley, James R. *Spirituality matters in social work*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016.
- English Standard Version. *Bible: Crossway Bibles*. 2016.
- Fanning, Katrina. Engaging with communities - Key success and learning. In *Social work: Engaging Indigenous communities*, edited by Bill Anscombe, Katie Murrell-Orgill, & Monica Short, 30-34. Wagga Wagga, NSW: CSU, 2005.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings 1972-1977 by Michel Foucault*. Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press Ltd, 1980.
- Halgren, Emma. "Stan Grant - 'Christianity gave us a divine sense of our equality.'" Accessed March, 8, 2019. <http://tma.melbourneanglican.org.au/news/stan-grant-190416>
- Heron, John. *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. London, UK: Sage Publications, 1996.
- "Historical Context – The Stolen Generations." Brining Them Home. Accessed March 8, 2019, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/timeline-history-separation-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-their-families-text>

- Hughes, Philip, Alan Black, Peter Kaldor, John Bellamy, and Keith Castle. *Building stronger communities*. Sydney, Australia: University of New South Wales Press, 2007.
- “Chapter 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice.” In *Annual Report 1998-1999*, edited by Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 59-61. Sydney, NSW: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1999.
- “Global definition of social work.” International Federation of Social Work. Accessed March, 8, 2019. <https://www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work/>
- Kime, Karen. *Time for change: Inequality in the church*. Paper presented at the Surrender Conference, Belgrave Heights, Melbourne, 23-25 March 2018.
- Knapp, Maxine. “A story of hope, struggle and achievement: Laying the foundations of the AEF, 1960-1970.” In *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, Sermons and Bible studies* edited by Kathryn Naden, Michelle Wighton, Francine Riches, & Monica Short, 15-38. Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017.
- Ladner, Joyce A. “Introduction.” In *The death of white sociology: Essays on race and culture* edited by Joyce A. Ladner, xix-xxix. Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1973.
- Leigh, Andrew. *Disconnected*. Sydney, NSW: University of New South Wales Press, 2010.
- Local Community Services Association. “Brisbane Declaration.” Paper presented at the International Conference on Engaging Communities. Brisbane, QLD, 2005.
- Madden, Cass. “Forced closures of Aboriginal communities in Australia.” Accessed March, 8, 2019. <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/news/forced-closures-aboriginal-communities-australia-continue>
- Magowan, Fiona, & Carolyn Schwarz. *Christianity, conflict and renewal in Australia and the Pacific*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2016.
- Marshall, Paul, Lela Gilbert, & Nina Shea. *Persecuted: The global assault on Christians*. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc, 2013.
- McCrindle Research. *Faith and belief in Australia: A national study on religion, spirituality and worldview trends*. Baulkham Hills: McCrindle Research Pty Ltd, 2017.
- McDonald, Connie Nungulla. *When you grow up*. Broome, WA: Magabala Books Aboriginal Cooperation, 1996.
- Minniecon, Sharon. “Sharon Minniecon's testimony.” In *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, Sermons and Bible studies*, edited by Kathryn Naden, Michelle Wighton, Francine Riches, & Monica Short, 69-70. Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017.
- Moloney, Francis J., *The gospel of Mark*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002.
- Naden, Neville. “Towards an Indigenous Theology.” In *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, Sermons and Bible studies*, edited by Kathryn Naden, Michelle Wighton, Francine Riches, & Monica Short, 129-134. Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017.
- New International Version. Holy Bible: Biblica Inc, 2011.
- Nunggumajbarr, Yulki, Peter Gundu, Keith Hart, Kerry McLean, Joy Sandefur, and Greg Thompson. “Yulki: Arnhem Land Priest.” Interview by Geraldine Doogue. *Compass*, November 7, 2010. <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/watch/compass/yulki-arnhem-land-priest/10141134>
- Ospina, Sonia, Waad El Hadidy and Amparo Hoffmann-Pinilla. “Co-operative inquiry for learning and connectedness,” *Action Learning: Research and Practice*, 5, no. 2 (2008): 13-147.

- Partridge, Emma. "Caught in the same frame? The language of evidence based policy in debates about the Australian Government 'Intervention' into Northern Territory Aboriginal Communities." *Social Policy Administration*, 47, no.4, (2011): 399-415.
- Philips, Jean. "Jean Philips' Testimony". In *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, Sermons and Bible studies* edited by Kathryn Naden, Michelle Wighton, Francine Riches, & Monica Short, 50. Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017.
- Phillips, Donna. "Resisting contradictions: Non-Indigenous pre-service teacher responses to critical Indigenous studies." PhD diss., Queensland University of Technology, 2011.
- Pickard, Stephen. *Spiritual life on the Anglican verandah*. Barton: St Mark's National Theological Centre, 2003.
- Prentis, Brooke. "A call to Australian churches." *Common Grace*. Accessed March, 8, 2019. [https://www.commongrace.org.au/a\\_call\\_to\\_australian\\_churches](https://www.commongrace.org.au/a_call_to_australian_churches)
- Rademaker, Laura M. "Language and the mission: Talking and translating on Groote Eylandt 1943-1973." PhD diss., Australian National University, Canberra, 2014.
- Reason, Peter, and Hilary Bradbury. *The SAGE Handbook of Action Research*. London: Sage, 2006.
- Reason, Peter and Hilary Bradbury. "Introduction". In *The SAGE handbook of action research: Participative inquiry and practice* 2nd edition, edited by Peter Reason & Hilary Bradbury, 1-10. London: Sage, 2008.
- Reason, Peter and John Heron, "A short guide to co-operative inquiry." *South Pacific Centre for Human Inquiry*. Accessed March, 8, 2019. [www.human-inquiry.com/cishortg.htm](http://www.human-inquiry.com/cishortg.htm)
- Reid, Isabell, & Katie Murrell-Orgill. "Isabell Reid". In *Social work: Engaging Indigenous communities*, edited by Bill Anscombe, Katie Murrell-Orgill, & Monica Short, 15-23. Wagga Wagga, NSW: CSU, 2005.
- Reynolds, Henry. *Dispossession : Black Australians and white invaders / compiled by Henry Reynolds*. Sydney, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1996.
- Riches, Tanya. "Redeeming Australia Day: How Aboriginal Christians are Challenging Australian Spiritually." *ABC Religion*. Accessed March, 8, 2019. <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2016/01/25/4394002.htm>
- Rowley, Charles Dunford. *The Destruction of Aboriginal Society*. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1970.
- Schokman, Ben. "Sorry about the Intervention: The Government's Intervention in Northern Territory Aboriginal Communities". *Alternative Law Journal*, 35, no.1 (2010), 2-3.
- Seiffert, Murray. *Refuge on the Roper: The origins of Roper River Mission Ngukurr*. Brunswick East, Victoria: Acorn Press Ltd, 2008.
- Seiffert, Murray. *Gumbuli of Ngukurr: Aboriginal Elder of Arnhem Land*. Australia: Acorn Press, 2011.
- Seiffert Murray, "Pioneer pastor leaves a rich legacy." *Eternity News*. Accessed March, 8, 2019. <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/pioneer-pastor-leaves-a-rich-legacy/>
- Short, Monica. *Anglican Churches engaging with people living with disabilities*. Sydney, Australia: The Bush Church Aid Society, CBM Australia - Luke 14 Program, 2018.
- Short, Monica, and John Healy. "Writing 'with' not 'about': Examples in Co-operative Inquiry." In *Sharing Qualitative Research: Showing Lived Experience and Community Narratives*, edited by Susan Gair & Ariella Van Luyun, 188-203. London: Routledge, 2017.

- Swantz, M. L. "Participatory action research as practice." In *The sage handbook of action research: Participatory inquiry and practice*, edited by P. Reason & H. Bradbury, Second Edition, 31-48. London, UK: Sage Publications, 2008.
- Taylor, Charles. *The ethics of authenticity*. London, England: Harvard University Press, 1991.
- Laycock, Alison, Diane Walker, Nea Harrison, and Jenny Brands. "Researching Indigenous health: A practical guide for researchers," *The Lowitja Institute*, Carlton South, Victoria: The Lowitja Institute, 2011.
- Tjitayi, Katrina. "Katrina Tjitayi's Testimony." In *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, Sermons and Bible studies* edited by Kathryn Naden, Michelle Wighton, Francine Riches, & Monica Short, 75. Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017.
- Weber, Max. *Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*. New York, NY: Routledge Classics, 2001.
- Weir, Jessica. *Murray River Country: An ecological dialogue with traditional owners*. Canberra, ACT: Australian Institute Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2009.
- Wright, Max. "Introducing: Reverend Max Wright; Reverend Max Wrights message - The broad path and the narrow path". In *A celebration of God's faithfulness: AEF history, testimonials, Indigenous theology, Sermons and Bible studies*, edited by Kathryn Naden, Michelle Wighton, Francine Riches, & Monica Short, 15-38. Highpoint City, Victoria: AEF, 2017.
- Zamagias, Phillip. "Indigenous Ministry: Now You See It; Now You Don't". The Gospel Coalition. Accessed March, 8, 2019. <https://australia.thegospelcoalition.org/article/indigenous-ministry>

## Anderson's view on Aboriginal Christian Spirituality:

### “Who are you putting first in your life?”

Anderson George and Rachel Borneman

#### Abstract

This paper explores the faith of Anderson George – a Wuagalak Aboriginal man who now lives on Jawoyn country, Wugularr community (also known as Beswick). Anderson's Christian experience is foundationally shaped by his convictions of the Holy Spirit in his reading of the Bible. The paper unpacks Anderson's experience of culture, and the way in which it has informed his spiritual life and navigation of Christian and Indigenous traditions. While the primary objective of this paper is to allow Anderson George to speak on his own terms, some supporting literature enables the authors to frame Anderson's position on navigating both cultural traditions, both in terms of presenting the nuances embedded in anthropological notions of indigenisation along with Anderson's, and the “One Way” movement's theological distinctives. As such, these conversations distinguish the argument in this paper from one *purely about culture* to one that is directed by Anderson's active *discernment of the spirit/s*.

The interaction between Dreaming and the Christian faith is often contentious in communities. For example, in Beswick,<sup>1</sup> some respected community men have taken a stand to say, “no more sacred ceremonies.” As one of these men and as an Aboriginal Christian leader from this community, Anderson George shares his view on the way in which the Holy Spirit has convicted him about sacred and smoking ceremonies (particularly worshipping other spirits). While Anderson's particular approach, which involves a rejection of Aboriginal ceremony, is contrasting to those who express a desire to “redeem” Indigenous culture, including by those who also profess a sincere Christian faith, Anderson's perspective contributes a unique voice to this discussion, representing the diversity of spirituality within Aboriginal world. In so doing, he challenges some of the presumptions about Aboriginal spirituality that often underlie the surface of such discussions.

#### Introducing the Authors and our Method

Anderson is an Aboriginal man who originated from Ngukurr, with some time spent in North East Arnhemland, but now resides in Beswick community. In Ngukurr he had a strong Christian grandmother who would read the Bible to him. Anderson gives thanks to the Lord who healed him from witchcraft in 1998. Since then, Anderson has had a heart to share and preach the Gospel. He is married to Emeriah and has two sons, a

---

<sup>1</sup> Beswick is 110 kilometers east from Katherine, Northern Territory.

daughter and an adopted son. His extended family also live in Beswick, a place where their identities are deeply established.

Rachel grew up in the Northern Territory and serves with Wycliffe Bible Translators along the Central Arnhem Highway — a Kriol speaking area. She has come to know Anderson and his family over many years and has often heard him share his view on culture and Christianity, reflecting upon the impact of the Holy Spirit's revelation in his life. When Rachel heard from Brooke Prentis about this project that would explore the intersection between Indigenous and Christian spiritualities, Rachel knew straight away that she would recommend Anderson for his insight on the topic, as he had experienced traditional ceremony and worked out what he believed. (However, as Rachel is not indigenous, and has not experienced traditional ceremony, she does not hold an opinion as to which view is wrong or right).

As such, Anderson and Rachel began work on this paper at the annual Surrender conference in Melbourne in March 2018.<sup>2</sup> Both had attended this conference for at least seven years and so when Anderson was provided the opportunity to share his story as part of a panel, it was an open door to his involvement in this project. This panel, facilitated by Tanya Riches, was recorded and forms the basis of this paper. Rachel transcribed the panel and gained some help from the editorial team to turn this into an academic paper. Rachel and Anderson also met and talked at various times (including out at Beswick). He has provided comments and approval throughout the process. The priority throughout has been Anderson's voice and perspective. Sharing stories orally is the way that people from Anderson's background present their views on life. This paper therefore draws heavily upon Anderson's verbal account. So, boil the kettle and grab a cuppa as Anderson would have you do if he were sharing his story face-to-face with you.

This paper begins with a thank you, shaped in a manner that reflects Anderson's priorities. Following this, Anderson then shares the story of his journey to the Christian faith and his understanding of the heart of God regarding his participation in traditional ceremonies. The scope of the discussion then broadens by considering perspectives on the meaning of 'culture' and intersection between Christianity and Dreaming world views in the Northern Territory, with special reference to ceremonial practice. Anderson's views are woven throughout, and the important relationship between 'place' and 'story' is elevated within the discussion. Literature produced by and for ministers operating within the Indigenous-Christian sphere is provided for context, followed by a brief review of some helpful academic literature. As the paper draws to a close, Anderson's opinion on 'closing the gap' is presented before his concluding statement inviting his readers to put God first in their life.

### **Acknowledgement of Country**

Anderson opened his talk with a 'thank you' to acknowledge the traditional owners of Belgrave Heights, Victoria, the land on which Surrender was held. In this context, the 'thank you' is also a significant protocol to acknowledge how *place* has formed this article, along with Anderson's own knowledge on the matter being discussed;

---

<sup>2</sup> Surrender is one of the few Australian Christian conferences that elevates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander faith and spirituality.



I want to thank the Lord Jesus Christ for [this opportunity and also] I want to say thank you to the Traditional Owners. I have shared with a lot of people [individually] but this is the first time to share it with a lot of people at Surrender conference and now in this paper.

### **Anderson's Testimony**

Like many Aboriginal people, Anderson's conversion took place in the form of a string of events. He recounts;

I was blessed and privileged to have a grandmother, so devoted to the Lord, who read the Bible. It was a bedtime story for us. As a kid I saw a vision of an angel coming and taking my soul... Jesus used my Christian cousin in the mid '80's to come visit me in Berrimah Prison.

God said, "Wake up Anderson, wake up" to stop sinning. My sister Loretta kept praying for me, even when I was an alcoholic, sniffing petrol. In 1998 I was saved, and had a faith in Jesus, as small as a mustard seed. I knelt down and was praying in my language, Kriol. The Lord just spoke clearly, "Anderson, do you want a good life or a bad life?" [I accepted Christ] and just cried more than I had ever cried. My sister and brother-in-law laid hands. I was delivered from witchcraft, drugs, gunja, petrol sniffing, cigarette. He is a forgiving and loving Father." <sup>3</sup>

I [had been] dying slowly of witchcraft. I had a Grandfather who was a witch doctor and I would question, "how come he didn't heal me?"

[But] there is counterfeit healing, and true healing only comes from Jesus Christ. The Lord came and healed me and ever since then, I have been preaching and sharing about Jesus.

I have not been to Bible College, but through the journey growing up as a Christian, I had to really focus on the Lord. The Holy Spirit has revealed to me, because he is the teacher, comforter, counsellor, helper and He knows the Word. I didn't have time to be a baby Christian. God just raised me up. It has been 19 years. Being a Christian means being part of the largest tribe of the world.

### **Anderson's Relationship with Ceremonies**

The topic of being in and practicing the ceremonies was burning on my heart as an Indigenous man. The Lord really put on my heart [in 1998] to ask Him a question. Reflecting back to when I was a teenager in 1982, involved in a sacred men's ceremony. I spoke in Kriol, "Dedi God gin ai weship la yu en weship main serramoni? Bikos main old pastor weship yu Sandei en wen det serramoni bin on imbin weship det serramoni, gin ai dum lagijjat?"

---

<sup>3</sup> Living Stones Media Foundation "40 stories - Anderson George Beswick NT 40 Stories - Jesus Moments" 1 March 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHqj5JI-2rE>

The translation in English is, "Can I worship you Father God, can I worship you and worship my ceremony? My old pastor back in Ngukurr where I come from - he worshipped you on Sunday and when the sacred ceremony i.e. secret men's business was on, I saw him worshipping [i.e. dreaming spirits/totems/ ancestor animal spirits]. Can I do that? Can I serve God and serve Ceremony?"<sup>4</sup>

For Anderson, Joshua 24.15, speaks of the secret men's business that uses idols and totems to honour the Dreaming ancestor and animal spirits. Reflecting upon this Scripture Anderson says;

God made me realise, when I was being initiated ... that the ceremonies [promoted] a wooden object and that in these ceremonies we were worshipping idols. From [that point I thought], I didn't want to believe and be involved in the old way or interfere with them. It has led to total transformation, freedom, healing and blessing. [Now for] 19 years I have been healed from witchcraft... I give thanks to the Lord and give Him the glory for it. Amen.

Anderson notes the pressure and role that ceremonies play, particularly for men who have not participated in ceremonies;

Blackfella jealous saying, "You're still young men because you haven't seen ceremony." They think that you need to go into the ceremony to be a man. I could boast about taking you to the business-men or lawmen [Traditional Aboriginal Sacred Ceremony leaders]. I choose to speak "blessings" to you rather than to take you to worship the ceremony. Because what good will it do to you? The Bible talks, "what good will it be for someone to gain/profit the whole world and to lose their own soul?." [Matthew 16:26]

Here, it is important to note that Anderson's observations of ceremonial practice, including the participation of Christians in sacred men's ceremony, mainly took place as he grew up in the late 70's and into the 80's in Ngukurr, prior to his conversion to Christianity.<sup>5</sup> But as his family is from Ngukurr, he still visits from time to time. Anderson says that he did not talk this over with his former pastor, Gumbuli, or have direct conversation about matters of ceremony, or understand that Gumbuli later expressed concerns about ceremony and maintaining that nothing stands in the way of recognising God as creator and worshipping of certain spirits.<sup>6</sup> Gumbuli was later to reject<sup>7</sup> the ceremonies he had previously been involved in, which is similar to Anderson. Unlike Anderson (after he became a Christian), Gumbuli would still be involved in some ceremonies such as 'camp', 'the village,' happiness, and circumcision ceremonies. Gumbuli saw these ceremonies as "‘good,’ ‘clean’ ceremony and

<sup>4</sup> Christian leaders hold a variety of views towards ceremonies. Some attend both public and sacred ceremonies, some attend public ceremonies but not sacred ones and some reject them altogether.

<sup>5</sup> Anderson became a Christian in 1998, which was two years after he left Ngukurr.

<sup>6</sup> Seiffert, *Gumbuli of Ngukurr: Aboriginal Elder in Arnhem Land*, (Brookvale, New South Wales: Acorn Press, 2011), 329.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 338.

dancing – the ‘honest way’ ... It's nothing [being] worshipped there. Nothing to be frightened [of].<sup>8</sup> Anderson, on the other hand, will sit and watch public ceremonies but won't be painted up or become involved.

Gumbuli also supported circumcision ceremonies, including those for two of his grandsons, mainly because “[it] might contain good teaching of the law.”<sup>9</sup> Anderson, however, will not encourage his sons or other Christians in town to participate in sacred ceremony, including circumcision ceremony. He will not let his own boys participate because of his reference to the scriptural passage, “but for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” [Joshua 24:15]. He has chosen to take his boys to the hospital to be circumcised because of health issues and will teach them at home.

Anderson also acknowledges that “not everyone [or all Aboriginal Christians] has come to the same conclusion [revelation or] approach...between ceremonies and the Christian faith.”<sup>10</sup> By this, he is not only referring to Gumbuli but also any of the Christian leaders whom he knew at Ngukurr. For example, he reflects on a particular scenario where this is the case;

I was sharing with my cousin-sisters<sup>11</sup> who have been serving the Lord for years and brothers, where I originally come from. They said, “God gave us ceremony.”<sup>12</sup> I said, “show me in the Bible, maybe I am reading the wrong Bible. God showed me [what I now believe about ceremonies and], I will stick with it.”<sup>13</sup>

He continues;

But for me as an individual person, I believe God at his Word. I won't add to the Word I received or take out of it. Because in the book of Revelation 22:18-19 [the] word of God says, 'If anyone adds anything to what is written here, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book. And if anyone removes any of these words from this book, God will remove that person's share in the book of life and in the holy city described in this book'. There is a warning in the book of Revelation that comes out from there. That's what really scares me. I am not afraid to die from witchcraft. I don't care what people do to me. I am more afraid of God's judgment.

Reflecting on his years growing up in Ngukurr, Anderson notes in contrast to this, “I remember an [Indigenous]

---

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 325, 328

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 329.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 336.

<sup>11</sup> In Indigenous skin system, the children of a mother's sister (often referred to as cousins in western contexts) are called 'sisters.' As such, sometimes the term 'cousin sisters' is used by Indigenous people amongst a western audience, to capture both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous terminology.

<sup>12</sup> Seiffert provides this definition, “For Christian Aborigines who follow the ‘two-way’ approach, a central idea is that ‘God gave us the Dreaming,’ finding God-given merit in the old ways, which should not be discarded without good reason. Thus, the ‘old ways’ were reviewed for consistency with the Bible, resulting in some practices being discarded. See: Seiffert, 326.

<sup>13</sup> It's important to note, that Anderson's aversion to ceremonial practices being observed by other people “is about exposing the devil, not so much the church leaders.”

deacon, my Aunty,<sup>14</sup> sharing that a whitefella missionary had told her [the deacon] that it was okay to worship ceremony and daddy God.” Additionally, in the 1960s, about the time when Anderson was born, a missionary who was enthusiastic about attending ceremonies, arrived at Ngukurr. This attitude was quite different from most, if not all of the early missionaries at Roper River, as until then, the mission had not endorsed traditional ceremony along with their associated activities and beliefs.<sup>15</sup> This missionary may have been the influence on the deacon who later talked with Anderson.

Anderson explains the revelation that he has received from God about who to serve and his refusal to participate in ceremony;

“In Mathew 6:24, Jesus says, *“No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money and man's things.”* That's why we need to think about who we are serving and what we are doing. That's been on my heart.”

This, Anderson says, is “One Way,” which means you need to leave all traditional ceremonies.<sup>16</sup>

### **Skin system**

Anderson also refers to other situations in which he has felt the need to break with culture. For example, in the Indigenous Australian skin system law in Arnhemland, you cannot talk directly to your mother-in-law or look at each other, and [need to] avoid being in the same room together.<sup>17</sup> This is still followed and respected as priority. He describes an encounter where skin system law and Christian culture came into conflict;

My mother-in-law and her son approached me for prayer, because I was preaching about looking unto Jesus - He is the healer, not me – and because she was sick (with an asthma attack) and needing prayer. I was put on the spot to pray for people and my mother in-law was one of them. Her son stood in the gap [to mediate] between us, as she was wanting prayer. I walked towards her cautiously and respectfully to pray for her. I then said, “today when I lay my hands on you. I will no longer call you mother-in-law (gajin/poison cousin) but your son in Christ and you will be my aunty in Christ.” She nodded her head to give approval. She was healed that day.

By keeping the same skin name, but swapping to the alternative role as aunty, it helps to break down spiritual barriers and make it more open, so I can approach her safely including to pray for her, talk to her and ask for things. Whereas if I still saw her as my mother-in-law, I could not have laid hands on her.

---

<sup>14</sup> Through Aboriginal Skin system.

<sup>15</sup> Seiffert, 325

<sup>16</sup> However, Seiffert makes it clear in 2011 that it “appears that ordained leaders will not be [traditional] ceremony leaders... and it seems that “one way” is the only way for a leader in the church in Ngukurr’ See: Seiffert, 338

<sup>17</sup> Joy Sandefur, *“The Aboriginalisation of the church of Ngukurr”* (PhD diss., Latrobe University, Bundoora, 1998) 249.

Anderson is not alone in this view. Respected anthropologist Joy Sanderfur<sup>18</sup> states that;

Some feel that as Christians, it is better to show respect by over-riding the avoidance relationship and relating to the person in a way that does not exclude them. When this happens in the church or in the community, the relationship is traced back by a different route. In one case I know of, it was changed from mother-in-law and son-in-law to aunty and nephew... When one person wants to change and other does not, it is not changed.<sup>19</sup>

### **Sorcery**

Anderson now regards Jesus as the 'true healer' and has therefore rejected local forms of healing practice;

I have seen some people being healed throughout the Territory with witchcraft, with some family paying for clever man to come to Darwin to heal family at the hospital. In a couple of days, they will get sick again. But Jesus is the true healer and free one. What we receive from the gospel freely we give [to others], free.

### **Traditional Worship in the Church**

The same principles that guide Anderson's decision not to participate in various ceremonies, also flow into his choices regarding worship in the church.

I don't use the didjeridu for Christian worship because it conveys meanings that are incompatible with the Christian message when played in my community. I do not want to put up "any stumbling block or obstacle" [Romans 14:13] to people that have seen the didjeridu being played in cultural corroboree, which supports idol worship.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note that Anderson does not expect this to be true for an urban setting;

To play didjeridu in Darwin (in an urban setting) ... if it's going to reach out to the person then great. If it's for your own pleasure (to benefit you) then it is not right. Ask God for wisdom... Once, I heard a Christian non-Indigenous man playing the didjeridu with a Christian Indigenous man who was playing the guitar and there was an anointing.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Joy Sanderfur lived in Ngukurr from 1976-1989 and was involved in Bible Translation.

<sup>19</sup> Sanderfur, 249 – 250.

<sup>20</sup> Rachel Borneman, personal communication with Anderson George, 12 February 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 15 October 2017.

Murray Seiffert who authored *Gumbuli of Ngukurr*,<sup>22</sup> notes that in South Eastern Arnhem Land, didjeridus and clap sticks are not used in Christian services. This is probably because of their association with traditional ceremonies and the desire to not mix them with Christian ceremonies.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Men Negotiate 'The Dreaming' and 'Christianity'**

Anderson says that Beswick was the first community in the Northern Territory in which three respected community men, got up and said, "no more [sacred] ceremonies." It was a big thing for the community of Beswick. Now other Christian men are making the same stand in other communities.

This debate affects how often men attend the church. The old people told me that the ceremony in our area, up in the Ngukurr and Beswick area was run by women a long time ago...ancestral time, but men fell in love with this thing because there was a totem of women spirits in the sacred ceremony. So, I asked this old man, 'how come there is a woman in the ceremony?' He told me, 'this ceremony was run by a woman in the old days, and men fell in love with the ceremony'. It gave me an understanding to look back with a Christian point of view. How Satan came in and bounded up the men. That's why I believe for me personally, there's not a lot of our men in the churches throughout the Territory, you hardly see many men in the church. Or men strong in their faith in the Lord getting up to preach about these things. But you see a lot of the women in the church.

Seiffert illustrates that it is seemingly more common for women to disassociate themselves from ceremony than men. His suggested explanation for this is that for men in particular, participation in ceremony attributes personal status derived from particular ceremonial roles, and that they are reluctant to lose this status.<sup>24</sup> Anderson laments the imbalance of men to women in church attendance. He continues;

I told you that story, because the Lord reminded me Satan came to bring deception on the men to keep them bound up. Somewhere along the line [Satan] must have known that one day the gospel was going to reach Australia. That's why a lot of men don't speak when they come to church. When I am getting up to preach about ceremony throughout Arnhem Land, the women put their heads down. This is because they are not allowed to hear these things [under Aboriginal Law]. Because being a Christian, getting up boldly because of what God has given me, I am not getting up to make a fight, I am getting up to preach the truth. I am here to expose the devil.

<sup>22</sup>Seiffert had significant contact with the missions, especially during his time as Academic Dean of Nungalinya College, Darwin. See: Kara Martin, "A great man, and an inspiring Aboriginal Christian story" Sydney Anglicans, January 5, 2012, <https://sydneyanglicans.net/blogs/books/a-great-man-and-an-inspiring-aboriginal-christian-story>

<sup>23</sup> Seiffert, 331

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 327.

I was getting ready to go to this meeting. And yet these men got up and said, "we won't have any more ceremonies." We also don't participate in ceremonies, because of our fathers before us. For example, my brother-in-law's father told him to give up worshipping ceremony and dream time belief system. You have to draw a line, between who to worship. That's why I have been blessed today. I am there [Christian and alive and healed and set free from witchcraft] because of my brother, brother-in-law and sister.

### **Leaving Your Land, Family**

Anderson's Christian faith has reoriented his position on land and family. It is important to note that the essence of the biblical passages upon which Anderson George draws, are about putting God first and foremost in one's life, after which all other things follow. Anderson states;

Even my land I gave up. It's biblical because in Matthew 19:29 it says, "If you leave your mother, father, brothers, sisters, husband, wife, even your children, and your land for my sake, you will receive one hundred-fold." Giving up your land is one of the things God knew about Indigenous people in this country of Australia.

I had to tell my mum and my wife, 'I love you, but from now on I love God [more]. I cried because I meant it from my heart'. The Bible speaks about the two commandments, here is the first commandment that Jesus said, '*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind and all your strength*'. We say in Beswick '*Mainbun*' which comes from the Mayali language. *Mainbun* means 'honour him, worship him' with all your being. The second commandment is '*Love your neighbour as you love yourself*'. It has nothing to do with ceremony or dream time. That's how I can worship God as an Indigenous person, or [at least, that's] how I look at it.

Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then these things will be added to you [Matthew 6:33]. [This happens when] we put the Lord first and are willing to sacrifice. I have a picture of why Jesus died for me and I can't thank him enough. There is nothing I can do but serve him with humility.

### **Smoking and Welcome Ceremonies**

Anderson George outlined some of his own beliefs about ceremonies, including smoking ceremonies, which are often 'to discourage the dead person's spirit from hanging around [where they lived and died].'<sup>25</sup> Here he talks about his decision not to participate,

With non-Christians who participate in ceremony, or smoking Ceremony, [they are] still family, and ask for things from each other, but when they participate in ceremony I do not get involved. I stand away

---

<sup>25</sup> Sandefur, 239

from them. If I run into them in the community, I don't ask them anything about ceremony, but if they talk to me about ceremony, I say, "it's for you and not for me. I do not want to serve any other gods [Exodus 20:3]."

Having lived in Ngukurr, Sandefur reflects on the response of two other Ngukurr Christian Aboriginals in relation to death and smoking practice;

When a Christian woman died, her son and daughter-in-law, who were also Christians, saw no reason to have their house smoked, where she had died. They believed her spirit had gone to be with God and that the house did not need to be smoked. However, the grandchildren who did not have the same Christian convictions insisted that the house be smoked. The Christian couple went bush for the day and had nothing to do with the smoking. They moved back into their house the same day."<sup>26</sup>

The particular theology of Christian Aboriginal people like Anderson has created conflict in the community and so he has often felt the need to clarify and defend his worldview. Furthermore, Anderson's views are comparable with those of well-known leaders like Ewan Martin, Aboriginal Elder from Weemol NT, Cairns-based artist Norman Miller, and Graham Paulson, Brisbane-based Aboriginal Elder. It is important to note the central place of testimony, or story, in Anderson's articulation of his navigation of two cultural heritages, including his engagement with the spirit realm. Anderson desires that his adoption of the Christian faith is understood as God's providence in his life, and a conscious decision on his part to embrace it;

Some people have criticized me over the years, but this story is not about myself but how God came into my life and healed me. I was going with people on a mission trip and there was a smoking ceremony happening. The other non-Indigenous walked into the ceremony but I didn't want to. As a non-indigenous it seems like a harmless act, but as Indigenous, to my knowledge, it's about sending the dead spirit back home to his or her country to make it peaceful for people to not get attacked [by the dead person's spirit].

It's connected to spiritual things [and] that's why I don't join in. Because in Hebrews 12:2 Jesus Christ is the author and the finisher of our faith. When we die, our spirit is not going back to our own homeland but to God's Homeland (heaven), a better place.

When I am down South, and the mob perform Welcome to Country with a smoking ceremony, it's a spiritual thing. It's not a good thing. I would not participate or attend but go walkabout instead and go to the football - but then I need to be careful not to be worshipping football as well!

Because of Anderson's worldview, he is uncomfortable with the smoking ceremony, where "smoking gum leaves are held in their hands," after someone dies. This is "to discourage the dead person's spirit from hanging around."<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 242

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 152



It is important to note that Anderson's position is not really about *rejection* of these ceremonies, but a demonstrated allegiance to his Christian faith as an Aboriginal man. His participation in certain events and decision not to participate in others, demonstrates Christianity to those observing, and declares who he is 'putting first in his life.' Seiffert explains that there is a difference between encouraging culture in a setting of "young families who have been long removed from their traditional ceremonies" as to a community setting where "the culture has the potential to move into practices such as sorcery and the exploitation of women - the very things that Barnabus Roberts' generation discarded."<sup>28</sup>,<sup>29</sup>

### Defining Culture

Given his interactions with Western tradition and worldview, Anderson has an understanding of the broader definitional nature of culture, but in an Indigenous context, the equivalent term for "culture" is "lore" (law). Anderson often begins conversation on culture by drawing upon the definition of law in Kriol.<sup>30</sup> As noted below, "Ceremony and Dreaming" are key aspects of Indigenous lore. The Kriol term "Serramoni" means (ceremony; corroboree).<sup>31</sup> The definition of law in Kriol is as follows:

*n.* law.

1 • traditional Aboriginal law, religion and culture.

2 • law; custom; culture.

It is easy to confuse Western and Indigenous uses of the term 'culture.' Within the non-indigenous context, the term 'culture' is commonly used in a more *general* sense. Robert Koons, for example, writes that 'culture' has been typically defined by professional anthropologists in terms that "every group of human beings has a culture," which is distinguished by "a pattern of interrelated activities."<sup>32</sup> This differs from its use in the Aboriginal (Andy's and most remote Indigenous) contexts as a *particular* reference to sacred traditional ceremony. However, in wider Northern Territory indigenous community life, the term 'culture' also refers to the kinship,

---

<sup>28</sup> Seiffert, 334

<sup>29</sup> Smoking ceremonies can have different meanings in different parts of Australia. (Rachel Borneman in Personal Communication with Joy Sandefur)

<sup>30</sup> Law is 'lore', in Kriol and is Anderson George's everyday language.

<sup>31</sup> AuSIL Interactive Dictionary Series A-9, eds., Charles E. Grimes and Maarten Lecompte (Nakara NT: Australian Society for Indigenous Languages, 2014)

<sup>32</sup> Robert C. Koons, "T.S. Eliot: Populist." *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 288 (December 2018): 15. For further reading on defining "culture," see: John R. Baldwin et al., *Redefining Culture: Perspectives Across the Disciplines*, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, 2006), 1-259.

law, language and etiquette. In addition, Anderson reflects on other aspects of his culture, which are embedded in skin-system law and relationship with the land;

I can still go fishing and hunting, I can still give a skin name [kinship system<sup>33</sup>], that's part of the culture. If we have an accident in the bush, we can survive there, it's in my blood. [But it is different when it comes to sacred ceremony and] worshipping other spirits. Culture is also the skin system where I can't talk to my mother-in-law, daughter-in-law and some sisters.

Within the community, sacred ceremonies must not be talked about, upon threat of the person who ignores this rule, being 'sung' to death. As such, Anderson recognises how serious the issue is. Reflecting on this in his presentation at Surrender, he stated;

It is not easy for me to [share publicly]. I had a target on my back. It is like you are marked for dead, especially speaking [about] and exposing sacred men's business. That is why I don't take it lightly to [share] to you. I come humbly to share what God has given me.

It doesn't worry me if we are going to die. We are all going to die one day. We might as well preach the Gospel and start preaching the truth. That what I told one of the communities. If you sing me, go ahead, if it works you will send me home earlier to heaven. But if not, I will still preach the Gospel here.

Here, Anderson refers to the traditional 'Bunggul' or dance and rituals, which include the application of body markings, the handing down of ancient stories orally, singing songs dancing, and talking to old people for understanding.

### **Place: Significant to the Story**

Anderson George mainly grew up on the banks of the Roper River, but now lives in the Beswick community (also known as Wugularr). The origins of the Roper River Mission (also known as Ngukurr) are outlined in *Refuge on the Roper*.<sup>34</sup> Various other historical books tell of some of Andy's family and the history of Ngukurr community including, *We are Aboriginal*<sup>35</sup>, compiled for the celebration of 100 years in 2008 since the

<sup>33</sup> The kinship system is a regular part of Top End Indigenous life and most Indigenous people will have a skin name (i.e. a place in the relationship system). Traditional Aboriginal societies have complex systems of kinship rules which divide people into groups such as moieties, sections and subsections, totemic groups, and clans. In Arnhem Land there are 16 different 'Skins' in the two sides of Aboriginal society, Yirritja and Dhuwa.

See Rachel Borneman and Chris Garner, "Welcome to Indigenous Ministry in the Top End: Cross Cultural Insights" (NT: NT Indigenous Ministry Awareness Network, 2013 [https://www.missionsinterlink.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Indigenous\\_Ministry\\_in\\_the\\_Top\\_End-Cross\\_Cultural\\_Insights.pdf](https://www.missionsinterlink.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Indigenous_Ministry_in_the_Top_End-Cross_Cultural_Insights.pdf))

<sup>34</sup> Murray Seiffert "Refuge on the Roper: The Origins of the Roper River Mission – Ngukurr," (Brunswick East, Victoria: Acorn Press, 2008)

<sup>35</sup> Peter Berthon, *We are Aboriginal: our 100 years: from Arnhem Land's first mission to Ngukurr today* (Ngukurr, N.T.: St Matthew's Anglican Church, 2008).

first CMS missionary to Ngukurr. In this book, Silas Robert's testimony from 1968 is particularly significant, as it represents a similar view to that held by Anderson, "...We don't believe as they [Old folks] did. We believe in a spiritual god, the True One. I believe in the True One, not because I'm saying this in front of you, but I'm saying this before God, from my heart."<sup>36</sup> As such, with over 100 years in the region, Christian worldview has formed a central part of Aboriginal culture and identity.

*Gumbuli of Ngukurr* is the story of Aboriginal elder, Michael Gumbuli Wurramara. Originally from Bickerton Island (which is in the Gulf of Carpentaria), he later moved to the Roper River Mission and became known to Anderson George. Gumbuli then became the first Aboriginal Anglican priest in the Northern Territory, where he was challenged with the tension between traditional Aboriginal culture meeting Western culture and Christianity.<sup>37</sup> Gumbuli was determined that the local response to the Gospel was authentically Aboriginal, one hundred percent Aboriginal and yet, one hundred percent Christian. Nobody experienced the worlds he faced, especially as he lived in Arnhem Land where traditional culture was still very much alive and practiced.

Seiffert wrote of Anderson's old minister, Gumbuli, twenty-four years after Anderson recalls him being in sacred ceremony. It captures Gumbuli's particular stance on 'not worshipping idols' and although Gumbuli's approach to navigating Aboriginal ceremony and Christian worship is different to Anderson's, there are some observable similarities. For example, Seiffert goes on to say that Gumbuli and his fellow leaders often faced questions of the relationship between traditional ceremonies and Christian theology. Gumbuli would say that Christians needed to be suspicious of anything which challenged God's role as Creator. However, he wanted everyone in his community to read the Bible and make up their own mind about it.<sup>38</sup> Joy Sandefur points out in her thesis that, "where there is disagreement about what should happen, there is respect and tolerance for each other's customs and beliefs rather than confrontation."<sup>39</sup> Seiffert's book won Australian Christian book of the year in 2012,<sup>40</sup> and Gumbuli passed on to glory in 2018.

### Other Approaches to Ceremony in the Northern Territory

A consideration of other approaches to ceremony in the Northern Territory provides a larger context into which Anderson's views can be situated. A non-indigenous Australian Bishop Greg Anderson (formerly an enthomusicologist who received a PhD from Sydney University for his thesis on Murlarra, a clan song series from central Arnhem Land) proposes that in a similar way that European Christians have, over time, introduced Easter eggs and Christmas trees in Christian ceremony, and Jesus put new meaning upon the Jewish Ceremony of Passover, it is perhaps possible for some elements of Aboriginal ceremony could be practiced within a Christian context.<sup>41</sup> This possibility, for example, has been adopted by the Warlpiri, who have taken the traditional form of their music and dance and created a new corroboree demonstrating the Bible story of Easter, performing it to the

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>37</sup> Seiffert, *Gumbuli of Ngukurr*.

<sup>38</sup> Murray Seiffert, "Pioneer pastor leaves a rich legacy," *Eternity* (August 3, 2018), <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/pioneer-pastor-leaves-a-rich-legacy/>

<sup>39</sup> Sandefur, 242.

<sup>40</sup> Seiffert, "Pioneer pastor leaves a rich legacy."

<sup>41</sup> Greg Anderson, *Ceremonies in the Bible: Ola Serramoni Langa Baibul*, 31-34.

glory of God (see Warlpiri Easter Corroboree example).<sup>42</sup> Yet Greg Anderson prioritises not making Christians stumble, and, for example, Anderson would not be using the didjeridu in community, as it could be a stumbling block to new Christians. Anderson is happy for the didjeridu to be used in the urban setting though.<sup>43</sup>

Miliwanga Wurrben<sup>44</sup> who is also from Beswick but now lives in Katherine, does not see traditional ceremony as 'idol worship,' and therefore takes on a completely different point of view to that of Anderson's;

Aboriginal people traditionally did not have idol worship. They didn't bow down and put food or some sort of gift or sacrifice. We place food, water or flour at graveyard. But that's response to the person, not idol worship.<sup>45</sup>

Views of other Indigenous Christians in the Northern Territory that align closer to Anderson's own include the Bunumbirr Marika from the "Yolngu for Jesus" group, which believe all Ceremony is worship to false gods (other spirits other than the Holy Spirit) and so, as followers of Christ we should put all that behind us. Ewan Martin from Weemol describes himself as once being "a cultural law man" but his life changed as a result when he left the "Old Ceremony" and chose "the New Ceremony - God's Ceremony." In this New Ceremony, Ewan experiences a life of love, peace and joy. He says:

I've been handed all those cultural laws to give to my sons and grandkids, but [will not pass them on as] it is not the one that we should be worshipping.<sup>46</sup>

Anderson says Old Ewen is the last person in line. It stops with him, the ceremony doesn't pass onto his children, because he made that choice. Like Anderson, Ewan expresses a strong sense of ownership over his commitment to the God of the Bible and observes worship to Christ whilst maintaining aspects of his Aboriginal cultural heritage (such as language, fishing and hunting). Ewan's approach to Christian worshipping outdoors and in language reflects "cultural adaptation" and the "relationship between biblical truths and Aboriginal experience."<sup>47</sup> Ewan states;

<sup>42</sup> Frank Tucker, "Warlpiri Easter Corroboree," produced by the *Australian Baptist Missionary Society (now Global Interaction)*, last modified March 16, 2011, <https://vimeo.com/21106031>.

<sup>43</sup> Rachel Borneman, Personal Communication with Anderson George 15 October 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Miliwanga's surname is also Sandy.

<sup>45</sup> Rachel Borneman Personal Communication with Miliwanga Wurrben, 2017; David Clark, "Sharing Culture Advisor: Miliwanga Wurrben," *Sharing Culture*, November 4, 2015, <http://sharingculture.info/davids-blog/-sharing-culture-advisor-miliwanga-mel-sandy>; Miliwanga Wurrben "An Indigenous View on Oneness," *Uplift TV*, February 13, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DG4ipqQMXqI>

<sup>46</sup> Ewan Martin, "God's New Ceremony," *Australians Together*. 2014, Weemol, <https://www.australianstogether.org.au/churches/listen-to-indigenous-voices/ewan/>

<sup>47</sup> Graham Paulson, "Towards an Aboriginal Theology," *Pacifica* 19 (October 2006): 312

I like to reach out and encourage family and friends, and white fella as well. You know, how we worship is to have open services [anyone can come], out in the open air and share God's word from our lingo [language].<sup>48</sup>

### Ceremonies and Literature

People in Beswick do not turn to theological or anthropological literature for insight regarding matters of whether to participate in ceremony, or, for greater understanding of the forces at play. As an oral culture, it is generally participation (or not) that is considered important, rather than any view one holds about these events. As such, Anderson has decided not to participate in any spiritual ceremony except on one occasion when he needed to show respect to his eldest brother at a funeral, by walking alongside those doing corroboree to the coffin box.

However, there are a number of resources used by local Christians, ministers and mission workers that deal with Dreaming and Christian worldviews and with which Anderson can relate. A discussion of a couple of these texts provides context on the way in which the interaction between Christian and Aboriginal culture is navigated in the Northern Territory, and provides an opportunity to showcase where Anderson sits in relation to such texts.

*God's Dreaming* is an illustrated book produced by a team, including Anderson's friend Roger Latham, who organised several Indigenous and non-indigenous people to come together to participate in the project.<sup>49</sup> Reflecting on the book, Anderson explains, "Many blackfella talk about dream time stories but this book is about God's dreaming stories, how God created this world and the fall of man." One participant is Norman, a Cairns Pentecostal Pastor and gallery owner, and an Aboriginal man who similarly upholds a Christian God as Creator. Norman's position was put into public display when he made the choice not to display a painting of the Rainbow Serpent, because of the "conflict between the Aboriginal image of the rainbow serpent and the Christian understanding of a creator figure."<sup>50</sup>

The representation of "Fallen Angels" in *God's Dreaming* is of particular interest to Anderson. Aboriginal people have a keen interest in 'angels' because of the centrality of the supernatural worldview. In the culture with which Anderson is familiar, the supernatural worldview helps to explain or solve the cause of situations, including illnesses. For Anderson speaking from a Pentecostal Christian perspective, the supernatural world also explains the presence of evil or 'fallenness' in the present world. Anderson reflects;

As I grew up, I was taught that Satan was kicked out of heaven, with one third of the angels. I have now found Biblical references to back it up, Luke 10:18 and Isaiah 14:12-15. Also, the Bible stories of Eve being tempted by the snake, and Jesus tempted by the devil, shows Satan and demonic spirits [are] active on this earth.

---

<sup>48</sup> Martin, "God's New Ceremony."

<sup>49</sup> To read more about the origins of this project, see: "About", *God's Dreaming*, accessed June 7, 2019, <http://www.godsdreaming.org/about>

<sup>50</sup> Sallie Anderson, "Rejecting the Rainbow Serpent: An Aboriginal Artist's Choice of the Christian God as Creator," *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 12, no. 3 (2001): 292.

*God's Dreaming* encourages Aboriginal Christians to make a choice, as summarised in the question formed by Anderson himself, "who are you putting first in your life. Will it be the one true God?" This question has been very influential in Anderson's life, and is reflected in the title of this article.

*Ceremonies in the Bible* by Northern Territory (non-Aboriginal) Anglican Bishop Greg Anderson presents what the Bible says about ceremonial practice in biblical times and how these practices might be applied in today's context. It uses accessible language and was made available online in both English and Kriol. When speaking about this text, Anderson prefers Rachel sharing it orally by reading it out to him. Anderson speaks in Kriol and prefers to listen than to stop and read. When Anderson does read, he prefers to read English. Indigenous people from Anderson's cultural context prefer a story, chatting around the fire, more than reading a book.

The booklet presents what the Bible says about ceremonies, both in biblical times and today. Additionally, in terms of Aboriginal ceremony, the booklet explains that Aboriginal people have different views. That is, while some say God gave Aboriginal people culture (ceremony), others believe that God "wants them to leave those ceremonies when they change their lives and follow Jesus."<sup>51</sup> Some Aboriginal people state that "they don't know where those ceremonies come from."<sup>52</sup> The booklet also reflects Anderson George's view on idol worship which asserts that we need to use what God tells us in the Bible about other ceremonies to help us think about Aboriginal ceremonies.

In line with the views of Bishop Greg Anderson, Anderson George asserts that the Bible is clear that, "we must not worship anything except God. So, this means we must not join in with any kind of ceremony that worships another kind of spirit or where people think that ceremony is making things grow." Anderson George draws upon a scriptural reference in Isaiah 44:6-20 which informs his understanding of what he deems 'idol worship,' and in so doing, reveals his adherence to the Holy Spirit;

I was asking the Lord; the Holy Spirit reveal to me the scriptures of Isaiah 44:6-20. This passage can be summarised as, 'Idolatry is Foolishness'. [It] speaks about manmade objects, about the gold and the silver. But the [verses] that really captured my eye, are where it talks about cedar and the pines, the carpenter made the image out of wood. And how they bow/fall down to the block of wood.

Not a big idol like buddha, etcetera, but the objects are light weight...they do not know we are worshipping idols. In the ceremony we kneel or lie down to the block of wood, as the object is there next to them. The object is to be carried as a protection for them. They cannot see it because their ears and heart has not been open[ed].

### **Academic literature: Establishing an Indigenous Theology**

A brief consideration of various academic reflections on the relationship between Christian and Aboriginal faith traditions provides a context within which Anderson's personal views can sit. Pentecostal theologian, Amos Yong, for example, draws links between the reception of Pentecostalism in oral-based cultures, which are also often characterized by their pneumatic spirituality. Extrapolating upon his observation, Yong

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

details that, “amidst cosmological worldviews populated by many spiritual entities, not to mention layers of spiritual realities, Pentecostalism’s pneumacentric religiosity interfaces more organically with indigenous beliefs, practices and sensitivities.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, Anderson’s worldview cannot be fully grasped in isolation from his specifically Pentecostal Christian experience, driven via the Spirit’s work in its interpretation of the Bible, along with his cultural preference for the oral tradition and emphasis on the spiritual realm. As discussed, the spirit-realm is intimately woven into the fabric of Anderson’s worldview and provides a vernacular through which he navigates and articulates his experiences of the Christian faith as an Aboriginal person.

Anderson’s reflections in this paper paint a general picture of his unique position on his navigation of both Aboriginal and Christian cultural heritages and while, for some, Anderson’s *rejection* of many aspects of Aboriginal culture might be uncomfortable, it is important to note that Anderson does not *disclaim* his Aboriginality altogether. As alluded to previously in the paper, Jirrbal artist, Norman, presents a similar position, rejecting what he considered an “essentialised concept of Aboriginality” when presented with a painting of a rainbow serpent by another Aboriginal artist.<sup>54</sup> Motivating this rejection was Norman’s strong convictions of a Christian God as creator, and thus, he considered it his right as gallery owner to decide on the inclusion or rejection of certain artworks. Yet, in a similar vein to Anderson, while Norman rejects what was perceived to be “the appropriate representation of Aboriginal spirituality,” similarly he did not *disclaim* his Aboriginality altogether;

Unfortunately, some Aboriginal people have been told they have to leave their culture behind when they become Christians and live like Europeans. This is not true. When a person anywhere in the world becomes a Christian, they re-examine their lifestyle and maybe reject some aspects of their culture if it does not line up with their faith.<sup>55</sup>

Similarly, Anderson’s rejection of ceremony needs to be helpfully situated in relation to a nuanced anthropological view of indigenisation involving both redemption *and rejection* of culture, along with his right to self-determination to decide for himself how his Aboriginality and (Pentecostal) Christian faith are navigated.<sup>56</sup>

Indigenous Elder Graham Paulson presents an alternative position to Anderson’s, providing a rationale for an Aboriginal Theology that “can hold together...both Indigenous and Christian identity.”<sup>57</sup> That is, while Anderson’s (and Norman’s) Christian faiths inform their response to their Aboriginal spiritualities, Paulson presents an Indigenous cultural framework as the starting point through which the Scriptures (and Christian faith) are subsequently interpreted. Importantly however, Paulson’s paper helpfully identifies the inherent difficulties of promoting an Aboriginal Theology, the first being the pervasive assumption that “Christianity is inextricable from its Western cultural frameworks” with the resulting implication being that an adherence to the Christian faith

---

<sup>53</sup> Amos Yong, “Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatics: A Difficult Relationship or Promising Convergence?” *Fuller Studio*, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/evangelicals-pentecostals-and-charismatics/>

<sup>54</sup> Anderson, “Rejecting the Rainbow Serpent: An Aboriginal Artist’s Choice of the Christian God as Creator,” 291.

<sup>55</sup> Norman quoted in Anderson, “Rejecting the Rainbow Serpent,” 295.

<sup>56</sup> See also: Kirk Dombrowski, “The Praxis of Indigenism and Alaska Native Timber Politics,” *American Anthropologist* 104, no. 4 (2002): 1062-1073.

<sup>57</sup> Paulson, 310.

undermines the coherence of Indigenous cultural expression and identity.<sup>58</sup> The second impediment is the notion that Christian spirituality “undermines [Aboriginal] dignity and self-worth.”<sup>59</sup> Paulson argues that so long as this view is upheld, Christianity is simply no more than a “demeaning ‘whitefella’ religion,” requiring indigenous people to leave their culture on the basis that it comprises an “inferior spirituality.”<sup>60</sup> As such, Paulson importantly establishes a precedent for the legitimacy of the “Aboriginal Christian,” and makes a case for indigenisation as a phenomenon involving both the redemption *and* rejection of culture<sup>61</sup> – a central characteristic of Anderson’s lived experience.

### **Anderson’s Change since Conversion**

Anderson is clear that any change in him has not been imposed, but has occurred, “from the Holy Spirit convicting [him], when [he] asks, ‘can I worship you Father God? Can I worship you and worship my ceremony?’”<sup>62</sup> He reflects;

I am not denouncing my culture or my identity, but of worshipping ceremony, my Dreaming. I turn my focus from worshipping ceremony to worshipping God. I will always be an Aboriginal person. I will die as an Aboriginal person.

This decision is controversial, and causes him conflict within various relationships;

It affects me, even when I was a young Christian, as a young pastor. Being criticized by the preaching ministry I have been doing... it's a journey that I have learnt to do. Not only that, I have been criticized by my own family, my brothers and sisters [in] debate about sacred ceremony and God.

Even by my own full blood family I have been called a white man, 'bible basher.' I have been criticized by [those] calling me everything under the sun. I am not trying to make myself a white man. I will always be a black man. I will always serve Jesus. It is Jesus Christ the son of the living God, it is him who I am preaching about. I am not preaching about Anderson. I am preaching about Jesus Christ; he is the author and finisher of our faith. He is the one who saved us. That's why we are all here, because of Jesus who came and died on the cross 2000 years ago. He came as a man and died for our sins and rose again. That's the only reason why.

It should be emphasised that Anderson, like other Aboriginal Christians, is at pains to articulate that his acceptance and practice of a Christian faith should not imply that he is trying to be a ‘white man.’ Rather, he

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 310 - 311.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 311.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 312.

<sup>62</sup> Anderson has presented his testimony as the Spirit’s work which interprets the Bible. As such, by situating his worldview within the context of his Pentecostal cultural tradition, the article moves beyond an argument *purely* about culture to that which is directed by Anderson’s active discernment of the spirit/s.



demonstrates his agency in his unique articulation of faith and navigation of two spiritual traditions, grounded within a particular cultural context, without renouncing his Aboriginality. While Anderson's particular position, some have met with disagreement, Anderson's story helpfully alludes to the diversity of opinion, spiritual identity and experience in the Aboriginal Christian world of the Northern Territory and provides a forum for further discussion about matters of 'legitimacy' and 'authenticity.'

### **The Challenge**

For Anderson, continuing his walk in the revelation of the Gospel is about ensuring that he is faithful to the Christian message, not only for Aboriginal people but for all Christians. He states;

I like what the speaker at Surrender was saying, "a lot of people like to make Him Saviour. But no one wants to make him Lord of their life." This is very true for Indigenous people. No one wants to make Jesus, Lord of their life. We need to put aside the differences, not just for others but for Indigenous people, and to worship the one true living God, and serve him and only him.

### **On Closing the Gap**

Anderson's opinion in relation to 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in reconciliation terms, is;

Everyone needs to reconcile to God first and foremost in humility (including putting Jesus in our life) and then we can be reconciled to each other and the land.<sup>63</sup> As Indigenous Christians we need to stand up on behalf of our non-Christian family. We want to see kingdom of God come! Ceremony is a blockage to see the kingdom come.

Anderson notes that from his perspective, much of the political will to 'close the gap' in the non-Christian context, ends up doing the opposite and does not empower Aboriginal people. Anderson continues;

People throughout Australia think learning culture, [finding identity], which includes learning traditional ceremony, is the answer to the Indigenous issues today. Munanga [Whitefella, non-indigenous] give money to black fella to make TV traditional cultural programs. This is how non-Christians think they are closing the gap. But to me from my point of view as a Christian Indigenous man, I see it as putting us in bondage. This blocks the way for the Christian gospel to go out, [our] true identity. Bondage is all the things of this world. People will give money for culture but not Christian things. Like a friend who is a Christian and wanted to start a drug and rehab place, but because he was teaching Christian values, the government would not support him. The government wanted him to run it, how [they] wanted it. This [is] like bondage.

---

<sup>63</sup> Here Anderson cited 2 Chronicles 7:14 "*If my people will come and humble themselves, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal them and heal their Land.*" I think God will then work wonders through us as a nation.

Anderson concludes;

I want to thank our Lord Jesus Christ and thank the Holy Spirit for helping me. I want to give all the glory to our Heavenly Father. What I have shared with you in this paper, I do not share lightly. I will always be an Aboriginal person, even with this view on sacred ceremony. I could die for it, but God's truth, the Gospel, is worth preaching about. God's word is alive and active. We serve an awesome, almighty God. Are you making Jesus, not just your Saviour but your King? God bless you.

## References

- Anderson, Greg. *Ceremonies in the Bible: Ola Serramoni Langa Baibul*. Ngukurr: St Matthew's Church, 2007.  
<https://missionsinterlink.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Ceremonies-in-the-Bible-2018-MI.pdf>
- Anderson, Sallie. "Rejecting the Rainbow Serpent: An Aboriginal Artist's Choice of the Christian God as Creator." *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*. (2001), 12:3, 291-301
- Anglicare NT 'The Right Reverend Dr Greg Anderson' Accessed 10 July 2019, <https://www.anglicare-nt.org.au/team-member/bishop-greg-anderson>
- AuSIL Interactive Dictionary Series A-9, edited by Charles E. Grimes (Series Editor) and Maarten Lecompte (Editor). Nakara NT: Australian Society for Indigenous Languages, 2014.  
<http://ausil.org/Dictionary/Kriol/index-english/index.htm>
- Baldwin John R., Sandra L. Faulkner, Michael L. Hecht and Sheryl L. Lindsley. *Redefining Culture: Perspectives Across the Disciplines*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Laurence Erlbaum Associates, 2006.
- Berthon, Peter. *We are Aboriginal: our 100 years: from Arnhem Land's first mission to Ngukurr today*. Ngukurr, N.T.: St Matthew's Anglican Church, 2008.
- Borneman, Rachel and Chris Garner. "Welcome to Indigenous Ministry in the Top End: Cross Cultural Insights." NT: NT Indigenous Ministry Awareness Network, 2013. [https://www.missionsinterlink.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Indigenous\\_Ministry\\_in\\_the\\_Top\\_End-Cross\\_Cultural\\_Insights.pdf](https://www.missionsinterlink.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Indigenous_Ministry_in_the_Top_End-Cross_Cultural_Insights.pdf)
- Clarke, D "Sharing Culture Advisor: Miliwanga Wurrben." Sharing Culture Last modified 04, 2015.  
<https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/the-dreaming> Common Ground, "The Dreaming" Last Accessed 25th May 2019 (<https://www.commonground.org.au/learn/the-dreaming>)
- Clark, David. "Sharing Culture Advisor: Miliwanga Wurrben." *Sharing Culture*. November 4, 2015.  
<http://www.sharingculture.info/5/post/2015/04/-sharing-culture-advisor-miliwanga-mel-sandy.html>
- God's Dreaming. "About." Accessed June 7. 2019. <http://www.godsdreaming.org/about>
- Koons, Robert C. "T.S. Eliot: Populist." *First Things: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life* 288 (December 2018): 14-17.
- Living Stone Media Foundation "40 Stories - Anderson George, Beswick, NT," video interview by Sue Tinworth, 2016, <http://40stories.com.au/devotions/author/karen/>
- Living Stone Media Foundation "40 Stories - Anderson George, Beswick, NT." 40 Stories - Jesus Moments. Last modified 1 Mar 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHqj5JI-2rE>
- Martin, Ewen. "God's New Ceremony" *Australians Together*. 2014, Weemol,  
<https://www.australiantogether.org.au/churches/listen-to-indigenous-voices/ewan/>
- Martin, K. "A great man, and an inspiring Aboriginal Christian story' Sydney Anglicans, January 5, 2012  
<https://sydneyanglicans.net/blogs/books/a-great-man-and-an-inspiring-aboriginal-christian-story>
- Paulson, Graham. "Towards an Aboriginal Theology" *Pacifica* 19. Last modified October 2006.
- Sandefur, Joy. *The Aboriginalisation of The church of Ngukurr*. PHD diss, Latrobe University, Bundoora, 1998.
- Seiffert, Murray. "Legacy of a Pioneer." *Top Centre: The Anglican Diocese of the Northern Territory* 18, no. 3 (October 2018): 6-7. <http://www.ntanglican.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Top-Centre-18.3.pdf>

- Seiffert, *Gumbuli of Ngukurr: Aboriginal Elder in Arnhem Land*. Brookvale, New South Wales: Acorn Press, 2011.
- Seiffert, Murray. Blurb for, "Gumbuli of Ngukurr: Aboriginal Elder in Arnhem Land." *Top Centre: The Anglican Diocese of the Northern Territory* 18, no. 3 (October 2018): 8. <http://www.ntanglican.org.au/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Top-Centre-18.3.pdf>
- Seiffert, Murray. Blurb for, "Gumbuli of Ngukurr: Aboriginal Elder in Arnhem Land." *Acorn Press*. <https://acornpress.net.au/publications/gumbuli-of-ngukurr-aboriginal-elder-in-arnhem-land/>
- Seiffert, Murray. "Pioneer pastor leaves a rich legacy." *Eternity*. August 3, 2018. <https://www.eternitynews.com.au/australia/pioneer-pastor-leaves-a-rich-legacy/>
- Seiffert, Murray. *Refuge on the Roper: The Origins of the Roper River Mission – Ngukurr*. (Brisbane East, Victoria: Acorn Press, 2008).
- Tucker, Frank. "Warlpiri Easter Corroboree." *Australian Baptist Missionary Society (now Global Interaction)*. Last modified March 16, 2011. <https://vimeo.com/21106031>.
- Wurrben, Miliwanga. "An Indigenous View on Oneness." Uplift TV. February 13, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DG4ipqQMXqI>
- Yong, Amos. "Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Charismatic's: A Difficult Relationship or Promising Convergence?" *Fuller Studio*. Accessed 21st May 2019, <https://fullerstudio.fuller.edu/evangelicals-pentecostals-and-charismatics/>

## **Interview with Sandra and Will Dumas by Tanya Riches**

### **Tweed Heads, New South Wales**

#### **Abstract**

Pastors Sandra and Will Dumas are senior pastors of Ganggalah Church in Tweed Heads, NSW. They are also the Australian Christian Churches' (ACC) national Indigenous Initiative leaders. Pastor Sandra Dumas is a Bundjalung woman and Pastor Will Dumas a Birripi/Dunghutti man. Within this interview they discuss their testimony of how they came to faith, outlining the significant leaders Amelia and Alan Watego in Tweed, and Dick and Yvonne and their experiences in the Australian church, as well as their understanding of The Dreaming and how it interacts with their faith. They explain the historical reasoning behind why Aboriginal leaders in the Pentecostal church today promote revitalising cultural forms.

#### **Interview**

Tanya: What are your names for this transcript?

Sandra & Will: Sandra Dumas and William Dumas.

Tanya: Fantastic! And what nation do you identify as?

Sandra: I am Bundjalung I come from the Tweed – the Fingal area. So Bundjalung is a huge nation but the Goodjinburra is my clan, the coastal people of Fingal.

Will: I am from Birripi country that is on my dad's side and my mum's side is Dunghutti which is on the north coast. But I was more reared up, urbanised in the city - but proud to be a Birripi and Dhunghutti

Tanya: So when did you become a Christian? Could you tell us a little about your testimony?

Sandra: I became a Christian in 1980 or 1981, I was brought up in Fingal, a very closed community back in my day. so we attended church the AIM (Aboriginal Inland Mission) - a church for the Indigenous community. We were all brought up in church. But I did not know Jesus. I knew Sunday school stories, and I knew right and wrong stuff like that.

But I went on my own journey... and I was 17 just going on 18 when I got saved. So the church that we pastor today is the church that I was saved in – so Auntie Amelia and Alan Watego were my pastors when I got saved. It was very much through my Auntie who was the matriarch in our family who the Christian and had been for a long time. She was the one that led me to the Lord and brought me into the life of the church.

Will: I think I got saved in 1980 and received the Lord in Sydney in Redfern - around about September or October. So that was a great experience and a huge transformation. I was saved under the ministry of Sandra's uncle, Uncle Dick Blair and his wife sister Yvonne. Their denomination was Jesus Only. but then when I got saved and then we got married in 1981 and I was 20 and she was 18 so that was a good time and life.

Tanya: So now, what is the role of the Holy Spirit in your Christian life?

Sandra: Well, as the Word says, He leads us in all truth (John 16:13). He is our guide, our teacher. Will just preached this morning about the role of the Holy Spirit - that you must be born again and be led by the Spirit of God. Without the Holy Spirit I would find it very difficult to live out this Christian walk ... because the Holy Spirit comes beside you and convicts you of life in general but your attitudes; where you can see narrow-mindedly, the Holy Spirit will just come alongside and help you see it is a bit bigger. So the Holy Spirit is really active and alive and our life should depend upon His leading.

Will: Jesus said after the resurrection to the disciples "I must ascend so that the Holy Spirit can come back" (John 16:7). He's a part of the Trinity – Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. He empowers the church - I believe it is not just in the intellectual way but also in the supernatural way. I think the church was birthed in the supernatural ... and it brings transformation and that shift.

You can always know when the Holy Spirit is present. In Ephesians 1:17 Paul says that the Holy Spirit gives you that spiritual revelation and understanding. Not to know what you've seen only but to know what Christ has done for us, 'cause he came with grace and truth. The Holy Spirit never ever praises himself, he always comes to praise Jesus - because Jesus is the one that set the foundation and brings glory to the Father.

Tanya: What does The Dreaming mean to you if you were to put it in your own terms?

Sandra: The passing on of stories. So we learn about not only our own family but our land and our language through the stories, which are passed on. I think some people associate The Dreaming spirituality with demons and it doesn't sit well with a lot of [Pentecostals] but it is just a passing on of knowledge and stories.

It's the knowledge that we needed to know in caring for our land and people, caring for our country. It is passed-on knowledge. That is what I have to do with my kids – pass on not only the knowledge of Jesus Christ as their Saviour, but also the knowledge of who they are and what people they were born into; their land, where they come from – our heritage.

Will: Dreaming is, just like Sandra was saying, the passing of oral stories – small stories, but also about certain events; there are some major stories about events that need to be told. God speaks in the Bible; the terminology is expressed in different ways. It might be a pain or telling someone that appears to him (like Abraham) about something. Our forefathers in the Bible – many times they have annals and messages which reveal to them – and they pass those stories on. Angels tell the stories or a person gets a visitation and they then pass it down to the next generation because it is really important.

We all have different ways how we express our Dreaming ... 'Cause it isn't just about a culture of race ... God says in the book of Joel that old men should have dreams and young men should have visions, so that explains to us. It is exactly telling stories, the things that our kids need to know – what is right and what is wrong.

Tanya: Are there any significant traditions or cultural celebrations from The Dreaming or from Aboriginal culture that you consider really important and that you would want your children and the church to continue?

Sandra: One of the things we've learnt was our five "principles" or our five "stones" - which is language, law, kinship, identity, and the dances. We need to pass that on that to our kids.<sup>1</sup> But we're always weighing up, whatever cultural practice, weighing it up with the Spirit of God.

Dance is what we do as ceremony. It's important to know what they are doing – or what they are entering into - what is this ceremony about?

Tanya: Would Welcome to Country be one of the ones that you want to be part of?

Sandra: Definitely! Always respect, always acknowledge, when you are on your own Country - but also in other people's Country as well. [We] don't go in there thinking just because [we] are Aboriginal, [we can] walk on someone else's land. You have got to be honourable no matter where you are. We had one instance (and I won't say any names) where a person came into another person's land and saw some cutting of trees and made comments. But the people of that land said "no, we have had permission to do what we do." The other person didn't like it and

---

<sup>1</sup> This is listed as "family, land, law, language, and ceremony" within Brett, Mark and Paulson, Graham. *Five Smooth Stones: Reading the Bible through Aboriginal Eyes*. Colloquium, 45 (2). pp. 199-209. Available at Link: [https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1672/1/Brett\\_M\\_Five\\_Smooth\\_Stones\\_BUV\\_edit.pdf](https://repository.divinity.edu.au/1672/1/Brett_M_Five_Smooth_Stones_BUV_edit.pdf)

actually put a curse on these people ... it was dishonourable. You just don't go doing that. It is their land, they have been entrusted to do the teaching and conduct the practices they have on their land.

You can't apply what we learn or do here on to someone else's Country. So we would pass on to our children respect, really - you not only honour your local Elders but honour those in other lands and other Countries as well. And don't apply what you know to someone else's land. Because what is permissible there might not be here.

Will: Yeah. And I think having the didjeridu is one of the good customs from our traditional way of doing Christianity. Playing the didge. Certain places have different traditions in relation to that but still, the didjeridu is a great custom to have.

Tanya: Mainly for men?

Will: Yeah. It is not any way demonic because it comes down to the person who plays it! If they are Christian then they are expressing God with that sound that comes through. I believe the instrument brings healing to the soul and to the land. It reinforces what God has given. That instrument can prophetically really bring a change and bring reconciliation.

Sandra: We bought [our son] Malachi a set. He has learnt some dancing from here from our [Bundjalung] area but we bought him a set of clap sticks from Wills' area from Dunghutti and we said to him this is the sound of the comfort of Dunghutti. This is what you have got to respect as well, this is part of who you are.

Tanya: So the didjeridu is often considered more national and then you have local sounds as well. Are there any things that you wouldn't want Christians to naively take into church worship; that you would be more concerned about?

Sandra: I think a lot of Indigenous people are still quite scared of smoking ceremonies. We haven't got a problem with it - as long as what they are doing is honourable or honouring back to God. I recently got asked could a smoking ceremony take place in a church? I explained the essence of a smoking ceremony as where they gather local produce (whether it be pinecones or trees or leaves) from that land, and they burn it. It is part of a Welcome and creates a connection to the land. Then the smoke, they say, is to scare off evil or quarrelsome spirits. So at the end of the day, so in that sense, they are honouring God by saying "devil we don't want you here in our midst, we want a good meeting (or whatever it might be)."

But the church has looked at it and thought "oh this is demonic." Well no, it is not. But anything can be distorted; anything can be brought into demonic practice. No matter what we do. So I



opened their eyes a bit more and said well if a man stands in a white robe and swings a cantor around - that is okay?

Will: Yeah in a Catholic context.

Sandra: Yeah. But he can swing that around and it is acceptable but yet an Aboriginal man who has a smoking ceremony, this is called “demonic,” – but what is the difference? They are both saying the same thing. One is saying we want the Spirit of God in this house and he swings the cantor around. The Aboriginal man is saying we don’t want a quarrelsome spirit.

Tanya: Perfect.

Sandra: Yeah, that is what I think. It is not an evil practice. So have a look and see what the practice is. What is happening - is it honouring? Is it dishonouring?

Will: What could be considered “bad” doesn’t mean to say it is “evil.” Like when the Lord told Adam he could touch every tree and acknowledge good and evil, He said but this is the one that you eat. So he always pointed out, somethings can be “good” but it doesn’t mean to say it is right to do.

Tanya: Do you think blood ceremonies would be one ceremony that you would be more nervous about?

Sandra: Yes definitely.

Will: Look, I think once [people] start going deep into sacrificial things... I think it has to do with atonement. So in the Old Testament they did those ritual things - and in other cultures or foreign countries as well - they worshipped their gods through sacrifice. So in other words they originally got it from the truth; God gave sacrificial practices. Everything came from the main vine. God taught Abraham. All that was a shadow for every culture - until Jesus on the cross provided that sacrifice. So cultures use those similarities. But then Satan gets in or evil gets in and corrupts it and it reverses itself. Instead of giving worship to Jehovah or God the Father or Jesus it actually goes to their foreign gods. Where Satan corrupts it, it becomes a curse instead of a blessing.

Tanya: Because it doesn’t result in freedom, it results in being bound?

Will: Well it’s something that they worship you see. So everything stemmed from the beginning. It should be a righteous and pure and beneficial practice; [used] to get man to come to God and give praise and adoration. Jesus was that perfect lamb.

- Tanya: So ... how do you think about the relationship between your culture and your Christianity?
- Sandra: I think one of the biggest journeys I have been on personally is growing up in the AIM church. They were the church for the Aboriginal community and believed they were missionaries to the Aboriginal community. They were all over the nation. But one of the things they taught was that when you walked through the church door you left your Aboriginality - you came in and you were a Christian. So it separated things - it was like a dancing act - we are one foot in and one foot out. So you lost your identity and that sense of who you are.
- [But] Christ called you - no matter what culture you come from, background, ethnicity, he created you who you are and he expects that you will express who you are. You give glory back to him in language, in song, through your land, and through your people. But we weren't taught that. So it has been a relearning of my identity as an Aboriginal Christian.
- I am very much Aboriginal but I am also very much a Christian woman as well. And you can't separate that. For a non-Indigenous person [often] they don't understand. Recently a person said to me "I heard this message about this black women in America who said that I am not black, I am a Christian, I am a child of God, I am a woman of God and that is how it should be. Christ doesn't see colour."
- And I said yep, okay. That is true. But you know what? I wouldn't say that because of my journey and where I have come from. I am an Aboriginal Christian woman and I will say it proudly because I gain my identity back in who I am in Him. I am very proud of being an Aboriginal woman and want to express that because half our problem in our nation, is lost identity... A whole intergenerational trauma has been passed on because of lack of identity.
- Tanya: Pastor Will, do you have anything that you would say in regards to how you think about the relationship between your culture and your Christianity?
- Will: Well, for example, Moses was taken from his roots. He was a Hebrew boy and then he was taken to a foreign country land. It is like the Stolen Generation. Being grafted into that Egypt lifestyle and culture. If nothing has been stolen from you (from who you are) you actually don't understand. But when something is stolen from you ... if you have never experienced something being stolen from you, you can never understand reconciliation in that context.
- Sandra: Even our Elders in the church were brought up under that banner - their identity was very much Christian. "Oh no, we can't have the didge in the church" or "no we can't do this or that" ... and it was because it was taught to them that it was evil. No, it is not evil to be born who you are. It is who you are in Christ. And without that identity there is a shortfall in your life, there

is a big shortfall. Moses went back and actually, he felt a connection with the Hebrew people and knew that they were his people. It is so very much like us.

Will: It is regaining who you are to actually discover that God made you who you should be. It is not what the institution tell you about the way you should form yourself. 'Cause you can get lost in that and become what they want you to be instead of what God tells us to be.

You know Moses was considered a race of people that he shouldn't have been, yet God still turned that around for good. So everything lost can be turned around for good. Really, when we understand the journey that we are all in, we begin to gain our identity. Once Moses understood his past or where he was from - because there was a crisis situation that hit his life - but God was actually causing that to happen. Once he began to discover that he wasn't Egyptian that is when he really began to go into the strength of the calling of his life.

Tanya: Did your church have a similar approach to Aboriginality, Will? Did you all leave your Aboriginality at the door? Was that the kind of the way they framed it, or was it different?

Will: I don't think I left any of my Aboriginality. I didn't much understand those dynamics. But I think what really helped me to become pretty much who I am was Jesus, and what he became to me. Like the woman at the well - she was a Samaritan "half-caste," you know, yet Jesus never said that. Looking from the natural point of view, from a traditional custom, they weren't allowed to mix between a Jew and a "half-caste" Samaritan.

But he went to her and said "the water you drink, you will always thirst all the time" - and what he is saying is, if you keep living the way you are, you are never going to know who you are or where you should be or where you should be going. But with the water I give you, you begin to discover what your true identify and purpose is. I think everybody has got to come to Jacob's well. You know, to have an encounter with God. Once they have that, they never forget where they have been - but they discover their destiny and their plan of life and where they should be going.

Tanya: So maybe if you could share a little bit about the ACC Indigenous Initiative?

Sandra: So roughly eight years ago, the ACC formally pulled Aboriginal missions out of the missions department and said this is our nation and these are the first nations people of this country, they are not a mission. The Indigenous Initiative was formed under Pastor Wayne Alcorn's leadership with the hope that they would have an Indigenous representative from every state who would then be able to work in their communities, and work with their states towards bringing reconciliation, closing the gap and being a resource. All those type of things.

So Pastor Will and I are now the national leaders and we have an Indigenous rep in just about every state. We haven't got one in Tasmania but the one that we do have is brilliant and will certainly step aside when we have a leader down there. So we come together twice a year to formulate strategies on how we are going to influence and resource the ACC. We have really stepped up our marketing in the sense of doing videos and bringing in awareness and understanding of Indigenous Australia.

So last year we did a NADOC video which was so well received, it went nationwide, not only in our church or movement but was actually used as a resource in other churches. We explained the intent of NADOC and that it was birthed out of the justice movement, and how the church was very much involved in it. There was a man of God that led it, William Cooper, who brought it to fruition. Then we challenged our church, and put it back to our movement and our people that it was the church back then – so why is the church silent now? The church needs to step forward in closing the gap on many areas.

Will: We hope that in the future, it can raise up another generation who have a different focus and approach, which is cultural awareness. The Initiative helps non-Indigenous people to understand and embrace the importance of Aboriginal leadership.

We are looking at the next 10 years in our movement, and asking what is it going to look like? So this is a starting point to try and get some education and understanding for our next generation leaders to actually grab a hold of what is in this nation.

The gaps are pretty wide, because of our people's education in our ACC movement. It is over 100 years as a movement but the sad thing is it never really gave our Indigenous and Torres Strait Island people the initiative to take leadership roles.

But we're saying now: Be on executive boards. Be in all those major positions and take roles in our movement. Back in the 60s and 70s they never allowed all that. Even though they are the most faithful people supporting our churches in Queensland and different places. But so why can't we have Indigenous people on the executive leadership?

That is what is going to bring a real shift and change.

Tanya: OK! What knowledge would you want to pass on to Aboriginal Christian leaders say in 5 -10 years if they were reading this transcript, what would you want them to know?

Will: We would want them to know that we have people that have foresight. We have our historic women and men that laid the foundation in the 60s and 70s and made the change in our government political arena as much as within the churches. I would like them to see that we are

part of history making. I would like them to know that sometimes people that are the forerunners don't get understood properly. This is only a platform, a foundation we can lay, to let those people know in 5-10 years' time that there were people labouring, working and ploughing, bringing a change, you know, for the coming future generations.

Tanya: Oh and for women - you know - if there is an Aboriginal Christian leader reading this in years to come in the library somewhere, what would you want her to know?

Sandra: That she can be all that she has been called to be. There have been lots that have gone before us who have laid their life down, paid the price, for where we are even today.

Even like my Pastor...even though she didn't identify herself as an Aboriginal leader, she was very active in our community. She was consistent, she was always there, she was faithful and she is known for that. Mention her name today and she is known for her consistency and faithfulness in our community. She was a leader that went before us. So, for those who might read this in 5-10 years I pray that we have been the leaders that God has called us to be. Inspirational to so many younger ones that they would choose life, that they step into the calling that God has for them.

Will: Hope for the future. When they face whatever challenges in their world.

We can learn from our ancestors and those that have been around for a long time. This can encourage them for the future. It gives our women the faith to be courageous and to stand up for righteousness. They can have that liberty - of being a voice, not just as mothers but actually as the backbone of the church! Traditional culture (our custom) or even our denominations can limit the women from actually being in the top. So I would like to see that.

Sandra: One last thing I would say ... even in the frustration or in a time where things aren't happening or moving, remain kind, remain sweet, remain loving. Even during those times of frustration where you are not being heard or you can't see the change happening. In five years' time we pray that there would be great change. But if not, then remain humble, remain in God, be kind. Yeah.

Tanya: Awesome, thank you.

## **Interview with Pastor Ray Minniecon by Tanya Riches**

**Sydney, NSW**

### **Abstract**

Pastor Ray Minniecon is a descendant of the Kabi Kabi nation and the Gurang Gurang nation of South-East Queensland. Ray is also a descendant of the South Sea Islander people with connections to the people of Ambrym Island. He runs the “Scarred Tree” ministries at St John’s Anglican Church Glebe. His pastoral ministry has included supporting members of the “Stolen Generations,” a term which refers to the tens of thousands of Aboriginal children who, from the late 1800s until the 1970s, were forcibly removed from their families by government agencies and church missions. His father, Sterling Minniecon, was the first ordained Aboriginal Pastor in the Assemblies of God denomination, Australia.

### **Interview**

Ray: My name is Pastor Ray Minniecon. On my fathers’ side I’m from the Kabi Kabi nation in south east Queensland. On my mothers’ side, from the Goreng Goreng nation, which is around the Bundaberg area. I also have connections to Ambrym Island, Vanuatu, from my grandfather who was taken from west Ambrym. Actually my name “Minniecon” comes from that island. So it’s very tribal over that way. Oh and finally, I also have a great-grandfather on my mother’s side who was taken from Pentecost Island. So that’s my heritage.

Tanya: So that’s Aboriginal and South Sea Islander? Where is Pentecost Island?

Ray: Yeah. Pentecost Island is also in the Vanuatu area, Melanesia. He was forcibly removed, like my other grandfather, and brought over here to work in the sugar canes, as a “blackbirder;” the name given for the slave workers of Queensland, Australia, there. Over sixty thousand South Sea Islander people were taken from all of those major islands in Melanesia and Polynesia and brought here to Australia to help in the sugar Industry.... To develop the economic development of Queensland. They owe us big time!

Tanya: So I guess we've covered your country and land. When did you become a Christian, and could you tell us a little about your testimony?

Ray: Yes. I was brought up in a Christian home. My father was an itinerant evangelist and a pastor amongst our people. To understand that, you have to understand that we were brought up under the Aboriginal Protection Acts - and they were quite brutal acts. I don't think this country's come to grips with the brutality of those acts. But so in my understanding of my journey, I'd be a third generation follower of the teachings of Jesus.

There was a young white female Christian, I think she belonged to the Brethren church, I'm not quite sure, but her name was Florence Young. She came from New Zealand, [along with] her two brothers - her family had a cane farm in Bundaberg, my mother's country. And this farm had around about two hundred Aboriginal and South Sea Islander people. My grandfather could have been a part of that, one of the number of slaves they had on their farm.

And she decided she would bring the gospel to our people at that moment. I can only call it a sovereign act of God, rather than something that came out of a Christian rally, or a Christian event or service or anything of this nature. But she came amongst us, my people there in Bundaberg, and the sovereign act of God took place, and many of our people in that area became Christians, followers of Jesus. And through that she actually began to teach them how to read and all that kind of stuff, she had an education program there too. So that's where, I guess, where my father learnt to read and write, 'cause we didn't have access to good education in those days. And she started the South Sea Evangelical Mission.

It started in Bundaberg. And it went all the way through Queensland. She was quite an astounding lady, one of those, you know, young white females that never get recognised in this country by the church. And she also established in the Solomon Islands in particular, the South Sea Evangelical Church.

Tanya: Right. Wow.

Ray: All because of this missionary work that started here in Bundaberg, in my country.

Riches: Amazing.

Ray: So when I look at that history, I say that's when I was born again. That's when I became a Christian.

Riches: Yeah.

Ray: She didn't do all the justice things, telling the government they shouldn't have slaves, and all that sort of business. But, once again, the sovereign act of God - in His own way, His own journey - He worked in very mysterious ways to perform His will amongst the South Sea Islander people of that time. They look back to that place in Bundaberg as the birthplace of Christianity amongst a lot of our people.

Riches: That's beautiful. So, you mentioned your father, Sterling Minniecon?

Ray: That's right. He was the first Aboriginal pastor to be appointed under the Assemblies of God... to a little mission up in far north Queensland on the Atherton Tableland, at a little place called "Pinnacle Pocket."

Tanya: Oh, okay! And, so, was he pastor during the revivals?

Ray: Oh yeah... but, you know, it wasn't only in that particular place. Everywhere we went, we had church. Dad always had that evangelical passion and that zeal to bring the gospel to our people right throughout the country. So I was brought up on the gospel - in our lounge room, in the backyard, on the streets, or in the communities. Wherever the Lord had led my father, we were there, to do his will.

So that's...how we became Christian, and that's where Dad had his biggest impact in terms of the ministry, while we were under the Aboriginal Protection Act at that time.

Tanya: Right, wow.... Am I allowed to ask... what did that mean for you, practically, to be under the Act?

Ray: Well, I would suggest you read the Aboriginal Protection Act as a policy, in terms of what we could and could not do, because it was a very restrictive Act. It placed us on these missions and on these reserves. Because of the Act we could not interact with our people, we couldn't...



... speak our language. We were, you know, forced to live in these places without adequate resources or adequate... other things. Yeah. So you need to understand that Act, in order to understand the power of God working amongst us... 'cause [God] is all we had... the government wasn't there, the church wasn't there... the whole of the community was against us, the only person that was for us was God himself.

Tanya: Yeah. Amen. So that kind of leads into the next question - what is the role of the Holy Spirit in your Christian life?

Ray: Well I mentioned that move of His Spirit...to me, when I look back on that moment, I think it was the birthing place of the Holy Spirit's movement amongst the people... particularly through Queensland... because you have this incredible spiritual move of God throughout that particular state in all of these Aboriginal communities. Not all of them, but, you know, most of them anyways had what you would call a charismatic or a Pentecostal influence through there. That's the flavour that a lot of those people took. In those days, in my memory anyways, it was people like Billy Graham, Oral Roberts - it was more the Pentecostal side of things. And so these people, like my father, and all the others, were trying to get as much understanding of those things as they could. So that they could preach the gospel adequately 'cause we didn't get to go to Bible College or anything. But they... just knew the Bible, and they knew the Spirit.

Tanya: For sure. So, now, what is the role of the Spirit in your Christian life?

Ray: I mean, you can't do what I do, I can't do what I do if it wasn't for the Holy Spirit. That's just simple, that's it. It's that real, it's just that raw. If it wasn't for the Holy Spirit, I mean, if ... I used Aboriginal rationality, who would want to be a Christian, as an Aboriginal?

After two hundred and thirty years of rejection and exclusion and racism and all from the church, who'd want to be an Aboriginal Christian? It's just dopey, it's a foreign religion, and still is. If it wasn't, I think, for that lady, and the ways in which the Spirit moved at that time...I think if a denomination came then, we might not have had the same, same experiences... with God, rather than with an institution like the church. Because the church was really not part of our life, at that time. Missionaries [were] amongst us, but not the denominations that they came from.

Tanya: So, moving to Aboriginal culture – what, does The Dreaming mean to you? And is 'The Dreaming' even a term that you would feel comfortable using?

Ray: No, it's an English word. It really demeans the incredible depth of the Aboriginal spirituality, its theology. It's something that, you know, jars against the, realities of what we experience as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who practiced our... I wouldn't call it a religion... but practiced what we believed in terms of our relationship with our land, of our relationship with each other, our relationship with our environment, and our relationship with our Creator. If that's what The Dreaming can be summarised as, [then] perhaps, that's what The Dreaming means. But I just find the word difficult.

Any English word that tries to describe this incredible spiritual - as well as political, as well as philosophical - understanding, it just doesn't come anywhere near to explain it, or to understand it, or to comprehend its power, its grace.

But biblically, you could almost say, for me, The Dreaming could be taken from John 1:1. In the beginning was the word, well in the beginning was the dreaming. The Dreaming was God, was with God, and The Dreaming became flesh and dwelt with us. That to me would be an easier way to express that, in terms of a biblical or theological juxtaposition, I guess.

Tanya: Sure. Is there a word in your language, so from Bundaberg or from Kabi Kabi country - is there another better way to say it on land?

Ray: Once again the translation back into English is always a big challenge. So once I say a word then I've got to explain the word, or...

Tanya: Yeah, okay yeah, so it kind of needs to be referenced with Aboriginal concepts.

Ray: It needs to be referenced. That's why I like to use the biblical reference because it does have those theological deeper understandings.

If I was to choose an English word that would be much more appropriate and more inclusive, I would use the word 'story.' And then story becomes much more - what we would call community orientated or relationship orientated, because we're all part of the big story, and we all have a story... and we all participate in the story.

So in the beginning was the story... the story was God, the story was being told by God...so that would be a much deeper theological understanding from an English translation. But it has to come back and reference itself through that particular scripture, because I haven't found any other... notion, or any other book, or any other philosophy that can come anywhere closer to my understandings of what The Dreaming is trying to explore or explain.

Tanya: So, this is really a bit controversial within the Pentecostal community. Less so I imagine for someone like yourself, perhaps. Are there significant traditions or cultural celebrations that you consider important to participate in as an Aboriginal man and as a Christian?

Ray: I wish there were, but you've got to understand the Aboriginal Protection Acts... demolished a lot of those traditional practices, and we're now trying to recover that which has been destroyed. I can go onto someone else's land... I mean [participate in] some of our more traditional cultures which have got a lot of these ceremonies. But that's *their* ceremonies not my ceremony. I can participate in those... but they're not from my country. All of our traditions, ceremonies, are really land-based. They're about making sure that we [are] true custodians of the land in which our Creator has given us, and it's our responsibility to look after that.

... But, that's the reality of it. We just can't go into someone else's country and practice their traditions and ceremonies, unless they invite us in to participate. Usually those bigger ceremonies are places where you share your ceremonial understandings and traditions and theologies and all of those kind of things ... we call them corroborees today but they were really big ... you know, if you wanted to use the language, that was church.

Tanya: Yeah sure, maybe our modern-day conferences!

Okay.... And are there any of those traditions or cultural celebrations that you wouldn't expect, or you would advise Christians not to participate in? ... And why?

Ray: The question is loaded, really, it's a very arrogant question. Because it puts Christians onto some kind of higher plane here, that we can't participate in all these "paganistic" kind of things. So I find it a little arrogant. The question really is "why *don't* Christians participate in those kind of things, and what's the problem they have?!"

Whatever it is that we do, that wouldn't be [the problem]. And the Bible does, you know, give us some understandings around some of those things there.

But once again, the Bible is written for a different, for a different group of people, it's not our book. Our bible is already there in the land, it's written and created for us. But, look, yeah like I say, it's not a question that would be easily, you know...

Tanya: It's a hard one to answer well. But have you ever come across community pastors ... so Aboriginal pastors that would recommend their congregation not attend or participate in cultural ceremonies?

Ray: I've heard of some of those kind of restrictions, and that's sad to me. And once again it depends upon the particular pastor. It's not him that really bugs me, it's the person who has come in here, the outsider that's come in there and influenced that person, and saying, look, your culture's bad, your language bad. We've had two hundred and thirty fricking years of that, you know.

Tanya: Yeah.

Ray: And, we've never heard the other side of it, in saying, look at all these Christian rituals and things here, why do we have to participate in that?! ... Easter is a pagan ritual.

Tanya: Yeah.

Ray: So too is Christmas!

Tanya: Easter bunnies, and Santa Claus.

Ray: Yeah, and that to me is a real desecration ... of the death and resurrection of Jesus. You know, we worship bunnies, eat chocolates. And I find that just absolutely, you know, totally irresponsible of the church, to actually make these pagan rituals a part of the Christian ceremonies.

Tanya: Sure.

Ray: So there's lots of stuff in that one little question there that needs to be re-examined in the light of whose asking the question? And what are the reasons behind that question? That's why I'm saying it's a little arrogant to ask an Aboriginal Christian, you know, what, there... when we have to be, we're forced to do, these other kinds of rituals and ceremonies that the white fellas have, without allowing us the opportunity to even question whether we should participate or not.

Tanya: For sure. And you're definitely able to ask that here. So, I guess the ... reason we did the journal is to ... actually listen to Aboriginal Christians on this issue, as to how *you* think about the

relationship between your culture and your Christianity, as opposed to the external voices that try to weigh into that?

Ray: Yeah once again... we've already done our... analysis of what gospel is, and what culture is, and we'll continue that journey. We're pretty content with the ways in which we have done that analysis over a short period of time really, we've done that without theological training, and we've done that mainly because, we've been forced to, by the church ...which is arrogant, again, and totally criminal, as far as I'm concerned. Because when you consider, like again, the Aboriginal Protection Act and all those others acts, they didn't end until 1967.

We've only had this short period of time - my generation - to be asked this incredibly deep question without the tools or the equipment to actually examine what the question is, nor [the right] to question the examiner or the questioner ... who's asking, that particular question, and the reasons why.

Most of the time I find with Western Christianity, they ask questions so they can know you're on the cross again, and slaughter you.... But, once we've done our own examination ... we're now realising that we've come to the conclusion that the Bible, for us, is tribal. It doesn't belong to the church, it doesn't belong to these white fellas. It's not their story, it's not their history.

We know who we are, we know where we come from, we're in our country, and we've got all our traditions, and that's what we're looking at in terms of this book. We know that Jesus was a tribal man, he came from the tribe of Judah. We know that the greatest theologian on the planet, Paul the apostle, was a tribal man, he came from the tribe of Benjamin. And so all of these elements of the Book become real when you look through, through a tribal origin.

Tanya: Yes.

Ray: It's *all about* land, and land rights. And also about individualism; as well as corporatism; as well as nationalism. I don't think that God wanted them to become a nation, if I'm reading the book correctly. I think where Samuel said, if you go down this track of wanting a King and to become a nation and all of this kind of stuff ... then these are things that will happen. You'll lose your crops, you'll lose your children, you'll lose all your things, and you'll be paying taxes for the rest of your life. And, but, God said if that's what they want... the grace of God.

If you look at that particular era, and that particular period, and that particular story in Samuel, how they were judged, you'll also understand how Aboriginal people operated. We call them judges, but there were a council of elders ... it's very similar, the ways in which those twelve different tribal groups came together and formed themselves into a society that looked after each other and respected each other.

God gave them the laws - to look after the land, to look after each other, to look after their animals, to look after their crops, to look after the environment, to look after everything. We had those, we've had those for the last sixty thousand years. My question is, how does the church fit into the gospel? How does Western culture fit into the gospel? Because it doesn't. It's pagan to the gospel.

And it needs to be examining its own culture in its relationship to the gospel. Not as individualists but as a collective. And once you start to unravel your own culture in relationship to the gospel, then perhaps you might get to a point where you'll understand what repentance is. Fast. You're trying to take us all down that same stupid path. And perhaps there could be repentance there in a turning away from all that, but, I, I have my...

Tanya: Does that mean that Aboriginal culture can provide another reference point, another example, of how the biblical text puts these things into practice? In order to critique Western culture?

Ray: Critique Western culture? Yeah. We had to interrogate the message...we had to interrogate the messenger...and we had to interrogate his methodologies, in order to understand what and why this message came to us, and whether we would then be able to accept its tenants and believe...this is the way in which our Creator has chosen - one tribal group, to reveal himself to the whole planet.

And if that's the case, then, you know, praise the Lord, we're there! We've got no problems with that. But when the white fellas come here, they thought they were the ones called by God, that they're the ones who should be doing all this stuff... and they're not.

Tanya: Yeah, thank you. Okay, so, we've talked a lot about denominations and churches in putting the Aboriginal history together ...particularly some of the stories that aren't told in the theological libraries...what churches or denominations have been significant in your journey as a Christian?

Ray: Yeah once again, it's the history of the *neglect* of the church, really. That is, that's the most significant part of this story.

Tanya: Sure.

Ray: Because here I am in Sydney, two hundred and thirty years on, and we're still asking "where's our Aboriginal pastors, where's our Aboriginal church, where's our Aboriginal bishops, where's our Aboriginal Archbishops, where is our Aboriginal land?"

Tanya: Yeah.

Ray: So, taking that into consideration ... which denomination has had a major influence on us? None of them. And, if it ever had an influence, it was always in a negative way.

The one who has made the most significant influence on Aboriginal spirituality and culture and people would be the Catholic Church... because they're more open to these kind of explorations and experiences. The Western tradition ... [as in] the evangelical churches, are still trying to battle amongst themselves as to who they are, let alone what they're doing on the planet.

You know, there's, just, to me, if there was something that I would be begging the church to do in this country, would be to destroy, to break open, the [denominationalism]... the Australian church is more tribal than we are.

They've got their own God and they call him Jesus - and *these* are the rules by which we will worship him. And if you don't like that, there's the door, see you later. So that's tribalism at its best... And how do you then break down that tribalism?

Because, you know, when this reconciliation business come amongst us... through political social developments... which is a good thing - but it's also challenging... when the churches came amongst us and said you know, we want to reconcile with you...well ...we never had a relationship in the first place, so reconciliation is the wrong word. And if we are going to go down that track, are we going to be reconciled to that history again? The White Australia policy... all that stuff?

But ... the other problem is, if we do go to any of these churches... work inside the structures and systems... do we have to also take upon ourselves the biases, the racisms, the culture, the persona of those particular systems? ...Because in our observation, you know, the Baptists don't get on with the Penties, don't get on with the Catholics, don't get on with the Anglicans.

So if I go inside that denomination...and I have to become a part of them, [but] my brothers and my sisters are in the Catholic Church over here - then I can't have a relationship with them. Because of this tribalism, these silos.

So the more serious thing for me, isn't our people. The more serious thing is to look at this church and say what the heck are you doing here?

Tanya: So then, maybe the opposite - which have Aboriginal people contributed to?

Ray: Well... what really is significant, you did mention the AEF.

Tanya: Yeah.

Ray: When you look at the relationship between Aboriginal people and the gospel and the church.... If you take that fifty years' experience ... fifty-two years really, since 1967... one of the first things that happened in terms of a Christian movement that was Aboriginal owned ... a movement of God, would have been the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship. It gathered together all the significant Aboriginal Christian leaders of that era, of that time...who gathered together to say "we're Aboriginal, we're Evangelical," and what we must do is create fellowship... we're not here to create church.

We're here to create *fellowship* for our people, where we can encourage them, bring them into a place where they can be encouraged in their faith, and then send them back into their systems and structures. We don't want to be taking them away from that, we're not sheep stealing ... all that kind of silly stuff.

So, ... I'm so thankful to the Lord that I'm a part of that, in terms of those old Elders of ours, those wise old Elders, who came up with this incredibly ingenious way of us enjoying our Christian experiences, is the fact that they emphasised the fellowship... it took us back, it took me back anyway, to Acts. Straight after the coming of the Holy Spirit they gathered together and they had fellowship with [one] another.

And that, really, was very significant. Once again, where was the church? Wasn't there, and that's okay. But the fellowship began. And it's still there, turns fifty this coming year.

Then, there was another movement that came through after that, the only denomination that actually took Aboriginal people seriously, was the Uniting Church. And what they did was, when they formed the Uniting Church of Australia, they said we can't miss [or] neglect, we can't exclude the Aboriginal people from our story. And so they have in their constitutional preamble, the recognition of Aboriginal people as First Peoples. They've also the notion of inclusiveness for congress - the Uniting Aboriginal Christian congress - as separate but a part of. And they've also come up with a covenanting process.

So this is the only structure, the only denomination that's actually done some serious work, and tried to be more inclusive. They've got a long way to go... they're far from where they should be, and they've only been thirty years in operation.

All denominations still look at Aboriginal people as a mission field...and we're sick and tired of being a mission field, an evangelistic training ground for...all the up and coming evangelists, or some other kind of training ground. We're just sick and tired of being a training ground. They come and get trained by us, but we get nothing out of it. All the other denominations have really... just been absent from dealing with the issues here.



I trained with the Assemblies of God, they had nothing for us... I would love to see some kind of significant change. But the moment you go into a charismatic or a Pentecostal church and start talking land rights, there's the door, see you later. Change the date, there's the door, see you later... Aboriginal culture, there's the door, see you later.

It's gonna' be a significant job to confront... the system. Because I do remember when I was in Bible College up there in Katoomba... I went to a church that was built by our people up there in Bowen, Aboriginal owned, Aboriginal governed, all that stuff... Aboriginal money built it, but the AOG would never put an Aboriginal pastor in charge. And I actually remember hearing from that pulpit there, this visiting white fella ... said very clearly to all of us black people, you know, he told us about the curse, oh yeah, the Hamite curse that was on us. And I looked at me missus and said "well that's the end of us, we're not going to get anything in this particular structure, if that's how they see us - as their servants and their slaves." South Africa was based upon that Hamite theory... and that came from the AOG minister. I thought well there you go... that's the end of me.

Tanya: So, if someone was in the theological library in Alphacrucis in twenty years' time, reading this, what would you want them to know? What knowledges do you think are important to pass onto younger Aboriginal Christians?

Ray: I would want them - any young person - to know who they are first and foremost, in terms of their own identity. That's not just... that's a biblical edict. Because every Jew knew [who] they were ...Even Jesus. He could trace his heritage back... fourteen generations. Now that's very indigenous. Because we want to know who we are, before we can know what we can do. So that history, that genealogy, knowing who you are, is one of the most important things to understand.

In spite of the fact we've been forcibly removed, we've had stolen generations, from the year dot onwards, there is always some skerrick of evidence you can connect to. You know, for me, myself, I know who I am, I know my heritage, I know exactly where I come from and I can go back to those places and know, I'm from here, this is me. And I can go to a little place in Queensland there, the mountain, and go "yeah, this is me."

It's not my mountain, but *this is me*, I'm part of this, this is where my ancestors came from, this particular part of the country - so that's who I am. Or up into Goreng country, I can go there, and I know exactly where my great-great grandfather was buried, he's buried there on my country. I have that history, I connect to him, and my grandmothers and all that stuff.

If you don't know who you are, then you're kind of lost... and for indigenous peoples, one of the facets of our culture is the fact that we like to walk backwards into the future. We need to know where we came from, more than where we're heading. The moment you turn your back on that story, then you've lost yourself, you've lost your way.

If we follow the Westerners, that's what they've done, they've turned their back on their history, and they don't know who they are. They're lost, poor fellas. They don't even know where their spirituality comes from. It doesn't come from the Scriptures, 'cause I know that. It comes from, well, a whole range of other sources... sadly, materialism and all those other kinds of things they brought into the country, things they worship.

Tanya: What is your future hope for the church in Australia?

Ray: Yeah... when you look at Jesus' life, one of his greatest challenges politically wasn't the local drunks, but the religious sector, and the political sector. He said ... some very, very powerful things to the religious sector - called them hypocrites, and vipers, all this kind of stuff. That's true even today, for the church. I can look around the churches here, and say they're all hypocrites, they're all vipers. It irks my spirit.

That's what Jesus faced in his time, with his own religious sector, his own people. And he actually said "I've gotta' destroy this, I've gotta' tear it down, in three days I'll tear it down, it's gotta' be destroyed."

But that's what we worship, we worship our systems and structures, we don't worship the God who IS over all, everything. That's, I think, the radicalness of Jesus. We don't know who we're preaching sometimes. He's too radical for us. We actually have to bring him into our own tribal religion... and make him into something that we can own and control.

Tanya: I know that I've heard you say before that your hope for the Australian church is that it is planted in Australian land... so is your hope in moving towards a spirituality of Christ?

Ray: Well, I don't know how it's gonna get there - particularly with this crop of leadership ... and the kind of structures we have. I don't think it's got the capacity or the desire to move away from what it's created for itself. So, it is only something an act of God could do, "...in three days I will raze this thing to the ground."

Tanya: Are there moments of hope that keep you going?

Ray: Aw yeah, there's always hope! You know, I wake up with a pulse every day! It would be nice to see more respect for our people and more respect for the challenges that we face, from the church. [But] I'm not going to expect that, I'm not even going to hope for that, because I doubt if that will ever take place, in this generation, in my generation. It might take place in about another three or four or five generations down the track, but we've lost so much territory and so much ground ... maybe that's when the Lord will bring it all to an end and say okay I'm gonna have a go now.

In my readings of things anyways, and my experiences, of seeing that the Lord has moved more outside of these structures... than he has moved inside the structures. I think he will continue to do that, try to shake the church up a bit, like he used to do with the people of Israel, "I'll make them jealous for me." And, that might come when they lose interest in their landholdings and their monies, and their investments, and their positions, and prestige, and privileges... all this silly stuff. Maybe, when all of that is gone, they might start to look to Jesus. That's my hope.

Tanya: Amen.

## **Interview with Adam Gowen by Tanya Riches**

### **Ulladulla, NSW**

#### **Abstract**

Adam Gowen is a Wiradjuri man currently living in Ulladulla on the New South Wales south coast. He has completed his Bachelor of Arts Honours degree at Wollongong University. He is a pastor with ACTS global churches and currently attends Highway Christian Church, which is a part of ACTS Global Churches (formally the Apostolic Church of Australia).

#### **Interview**

Tanya: Would you like to introduce yourself for the transcript?

Adam: My name is Adam Gowen.

Tanya: What nation do you identify as?

Adam: I'm Wiradjuri. So my ancestral connection to country is out Wagga way on Wirradjuri country.

Tanya: And where are you living at the moment?

Adam: I live in Ulladulla on the Country of the Murramarang people of the Yuin Nation, on the south coast New South Wales.

Tanya: When did you become a Christian? ...And could you tell us a little bit about your testimony?

Adam: I became a Christian probably at about the age of seven or eight ... so my family...took a year where we travelled around Australia in a caravan [with] a Toyota Landcruiser and...God made himself known to me particularly – but also my family through that experience...coming back to Canberra we had many encounters and experiences with God's Spirit, in terms of provision, but also miraculous things happening. They were too often and too crazy to be normal so we concluded that they must have been God.

... So... I was friends in primary school with someone really involved in [a Canberra] church and he invited me around to come to Sunday school (and youth group eventually). So I went along with him and then my family started getting involved in church and became part of the community. Then when at Sunday school the opportunity was given for anyone to accept Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, I just thought it was something that everyone did. I didn't think it was a big deal and I thought "yeah! I haven't done that yet, I'd better to do that" and so I put my hand up. That was really the start of my journey of discovering faith and what it means to live the Christian life.

Tanya: Were your family travelling for fun? ...I'm just curious.

Adam: My mum and dad's marriage was a bit rocky. So they took a year out to kind of try and resolve [it]... some of the things resolved but their marriage ended up breaking up a little while after that. In a lot of ways that actually solidified and really grounded my faith - when I had the world falling apart around me [it] was something that I could hold on to. I might have been a Christian before but my faith really became real in that testing time.

Tanya: How would you describe the role of the Holy Spirit in your Christian life?

Adam: I think the Holy Spirit is a part of everyday life for me and is someone who helps me, someone who guides me, someone who reveals things to me, someone who also is the Creator and who is evidenced in all creation, who is all around. Someone who I feel a connection to in myself, in my Spirit, but also through creation.

Tanya: In your presentation at Grasstree you talked about the insights that you'd gained from the bower bird... I wondered if maybe you could [share] a bit about that?

Adam: I actually used that analogy in my thesis as well. The bower bird is "Nguram-bula" in Wiradjuri language and "Nguram-bula" literally means "homes, two" or "two-homes" - so having a home [in] the bower where courtships displays are presented [and] also having a nest where eggs are laid and chicks are reared. So that symbolism to me is really pertinent because I feel at home in the "mainstream" Australian world, but I also feel at home in the Aboriginal Australian world. It's actually [about] bringing those two things together for me. They're indivisible, part of one whole. It's not separate but it's actually two parts of the same - which informs my life world and who I am and where I live, in that sense.

Tanya: Do you think that the Spirit helps you to get insights from creation like that help you to navigate in life?

- Adam: Definitely! I think one of the big roles of the Holy Spirit for me is that of someone who reveals, that giver of revelation... I think those revelations can come in different forms and through different means. With that whole image of the bower bird ... it is actually a revelation from the Aboriginal world but it's also something directly relevant to other parts of my life.
- Tanya: What does the term "The Dreaming" mean to you and do you feel comfortable using it?
- Adam: Sure. The Dreaming to me is something that I'm still exploring. So I didn't really grow up knowing or being in touch with my Aboriginal identity. I kind of grew up as a white fella - and so I'm kind of coming late to the party, I guess, in terms of understanding what The Dreaming is and what [it] means to me personally. But I think The Dreaming is something that is so precious and so sacred. It has so many facets to it.
- I think a lot of people don't understand how multi-faceted The Dreaming is - and how special it is. It's kind of seen as just Aboriginal religion but no, it's actually something more than that, [it] actually informs all of life for many Aboriginal people, and something that actually is constructed or created by Creator God. That's something that I think is often missed.
- Tanya: Are there any significant traditions or cultural celebrations that you consider important from The Dreaming and want to participate in?
- Adam: ...there's a lot from Aboriginal culture that I want to participate in. The Dreaming encompasses some of that. But there's actually, I think, a wider cultural reality. Yes, I do want to participate in Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal events, Aboriginal communities. That's not always encapsulated by just The Dreaming, I think it's probably wider than that. It's something I definitely want to participate in and I don't see that as antithetical to my faith, but actually a core part of it.
- Tanya: Sure! I guess the reason I'm asking is because some Aboriginal Christians, but particularly Pentecostal Christians, distinguish between culture that they would comfortable participating in, and others that they feel they wouldn't participate in. Yeah I just wondered if you make that distinction?
- Adam: I think the thing to be conscious of there is that *all* cultures have things that are inspired by kingdom culture. And all cultures have elements that are actually opposite to what Creator God has as his intention and heart for us. All cultures have things that are actually amoral so neither good nor bad. So I think that we're [often] actually applying a harsher scrutiny to Aboriginal culture than we do to the mainstream Western culture that the churches are generally positioned in.

So I think that Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal theology in particular has a really important role to not only say “here’s the good things about our culture” but hold up a mirror to Western culture and go “actually, there’s some stuff in Western culture that’s pretty wrong too and it’s actually just accepted as part of church culture when it probably shouldn’t be. We really need to look at that and address that.”

Tanya: How do you explain the relationship between your culture and Christianity? We’ve kind of covered it, but if you have anything to add?

Adam: I’ll just say that my culture is both Western and Aboriginal. So there are as many Aboriginal cultures as there are Aboriginal people... when thinking about Aboriginal culture, it’s not just one monolithic, huge, big, indistinguishable thing - but there are actually so many different Aboriginal cultures. That’s something that I think gets lost as well. What was the question again?

Tanya: How do you think about the relationship between your culture and Christianity?

Adam: I think we’ve covered that in what I said about how there’s good stuff and bad stuff in both Western and Indigenous cultures. We just really need discernment to see what we need to take away and emulate [so that we are] drawn further into the culture of the kingdom of God and less into the bad stuff.

Tanya: What churches or denominations have been significant in your journey as a Christian?

Adam: I’m a Pastor with the Apostolic Church Australia which has just actually changed its name to ACTS Global Churches. It’s actually the denomination that I was saved in so I’ve not gone anywhere else. I was saved in and I’ve been a part of the Apostolic Church Australia since my salvation. So that’s been the only church denomination really. I have had encounters with other churches but not really belonged to any other churches.

Tanya: What knowledges do you think are important for younger Aboriginal Christians?

Adam: I think it’s important that we understand culture generally... [meaning] what culture is, so that we can be informed [about] what we’re participating in. This includes how we form the cultures of local churches, the cultures of denominations but also the culture of our nation. As we actually understand what culture is and particularly the individual cultures that different individuals come from. I think it’s important to understand them so we can grab hold of the good stuff and run with it and also critique the stuff that is not so good or productive - in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures.

I think [it's] really important that we actually understand the whole dynamic... it's important to understand your own culture but I think it's maybe even more important to understand what culture is and how it works so that we can actually progress forward into something that's beautiful.

Tanya: Speaking about the future - what is your future hope for the church in Australia?

Adam: I hope that the church in Australia really values Indigenous perspectives of theology. So I hope it really values the stuff that Aboriginal cultures have to say about who God is and what he's doing. I think that as we start to accept those perspectives not as "other" or "demonic" but as really valuable and vital, the church in Australia [will be] well positioned to actually lead the way and show the world what's possible in terms of true reconciliation, meaning reconciliation in the Spirit, not just in practical or external stuff but reconciliation...that goes so much deeper than any of that exterior stuff.

Tanya: That's so great. Amen!



## Interview with Rev. Victor Joseph by Brooke Prentis

### Cairns, QLD

#### Abstract

Rev. Victor Joseph is the Principal of Wontulp-Bi-Buya College and a Torres Strait Islander priest within the North Queensland Anglican Diocese. Wontulp-Bi-Buya is a college for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders that offers courses in the areas of theology, addictions management, community development, and mental health. The ecumenical college also offers a cross-cultural awareness course for non-Indigenous students.

#### Interview

Victor: I'm a Torres Strait Islander, born on Thursday Island, and I spent most of my life up in the Torres Strait. I lived on St Paul's community, Moa Island in the Torres Strait, but I have grandparental connections to Murray Island through my grandmother on my Mum's side, and also to Mabuiag Island as well.

But since moving to Cairns, I also have a connection to the Wuthathi tribe on Shelburne Bay in Cape York.

Brooke: Is there anything you wanted to say about their location?

Victor: [Well] Murray Island is in the eastern part of the Torres Strait, and Mabuiag is in the near western cluster.

Brooke: Great. And when did you become a Christian? Can you tell us a bit about your testimony?

Victor: Okay ... I think I became a Christian about 1997. It was around that time that my youngest daughter was born. She was born on Thursday Island, but she had complications when she was

born, so she had to be medically evacuated here to Cairns. It was about that time that the helicopter was leaving the hospital... I had some solitary time on the beach and I was seeing the helicopter go off, and I sort of made a commitment to God at that time that if he was to heal my daughter I was going to give him my whole life and do my best to serve him, as much as possible.

Brooke: Wonderful. And what has been the role of the Holy Spirit in your Christian life, I guess today ... and even also in the past?

Victor: I think the Holy Spirit plays a very, very important role. I think [as] the helper... as scripture tells us the Lord Christ said to his disciples - and keeps saying to us today. You know, we sometimes refer to [the Holy Spirit] within Indigenous circles as the Creator Spirit. Within the Torres Strait we refer to it as Magi Mari, which means "Holy Spirit," and it becomes central to all we do and say, and how we live.

Especially as Indigenous people... you think about creation stories, that the Spirit was with us, that God walked with our people through the Creator Spirit, or Holy Spirit Magi Mari (Western language) or Lamar Zogo (Eastern language). Only Christ was more revealed to us when the missionaries came. That's probably the best way I can sum up in regards to the Holy Spirit in my Christian life.

Brooke: Okay.

Victor: That's usually said in prayers or in hymns and choruses within the Torres Strait Islander church.

One of the songs that includes the Holy Spirit was written by the late Miseron Levi of St Paul Community, Moa Island, Torres Strait. It is available in various versions on YouTube and Soundcloud.

*Baba waiyar ninu maigi mari*

*Baba waiyar ninu maigi angelal*

*Ngalmunia kaimel inub kubil nu*

*Inub kubil nu kurusika goiga*

*(Repeat)*

*Father we ask you please send us your Holy Spirit*

*Father we ask you for your Holy angels too*

*Please come and stay with us all through this night*

*All through this night until the morning light*

*(Repeat)*

*Inub kubil nu*

*Inub kubil nu Kurusika goiga*

*Baba waiyar ninu maigi mari*

Brooke: What does the Dreaming mean to you?

Victor: This was a tough question for me to think about and answer, especially from within the Torres Strait. I mean, when, when the word Dreaming comes up, I think the perception, the normal perception, is that it talks about the Aboriginal spirituality, more than the Torres Strait.

I think for us within the Torres Strait it's all about the creation stories. Even as we spoke about - there's a similarity there in terms of the Dreaming, it talks about creation. But I think for me, there's a strong connection in terms of places of significance and also the traditional spiritual connections to who we are (whether an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person) and of where we come from.

That we were born first and foremost as an Indigenous person, before we ever became a Christian, and so therefore it's important for us to always maintain that connection with our Indigenous spirituality wherever we are.

Brooke: Related to this track - how do you think about the relationship between your culture and cultures, and Christianity, and even spirituality?

Victor: Okay. Well, I was born first and foremost as a Torres Strait Islander person. I didn't become a Christian straight away. And, not until I was [in my] early twenties. So, I lived my life as an Indigenous person, especially as a Torres Strait Islander person. I grew up within the culture and the tradition, understanding the basic languages that were spoken, so therefore my relationship with my culture is, is important for me. Then I became a Christian, because as I said, I wanted to commit my life to God.

So that relationship between my culture and my Christianity is, is strong. Because when we think about the Christ himself, who had a culture... had his culture... but at the same time had his commitment to what he was sent to do by his father. So, that relationship for me as a Torres Strait Islander person, and then becoming more in tune with my Aboriginal heritage, it's still strong, in terms of who I am. I'll die as a Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander person - but I'll die as a man that has given his whole life over to God through my Christianity.

Brooke: And so, as we just explore culture a bit more, are there some significant traditions, cultural celebrations that you consider important?

Victor: On the islands within the Torres Strait, we have church days [celebrating] the particular saint of the local church. So, on those particular days, it's a significant event within the communities that we come from. It's a church and community celebration, and there's feasting and traditional dancing. And it's acknowledgment of our forebears or our Elders who established the church within the community when the missionaries came - it was there for a purpose and that, and we reap the fruits today of the acceptance, and the decisions and the commitment and faith of our forebears. So, there's strong cultural celebrations surrounding that.

But the most common one up in the Torres Strait is July the 1<sup>st</sup>, when the missionaries came in 1871, so, and that's celebrated very strongly by the whole Torres Strait, regardless of church or denomination, because of what has happened on that day, on Erub, on 1871.

Brooke: And that, cultural celebration for the purpose of the recording is called? "The coming..."

Victor: "The Coming of the Light." Yes, yeah. Sorry, I have to acknowledge as well that even though coming of the light came to Erub, each particular island had their own unique coming of the light as well. If I could just share that. Because the missionaries landed... on 1871 on July the 1<sup>st</sup>, we acknowledge that as a region within the Torres Strait, but each particular island had their own as well, of when the missionaries first visited those villages back then, and brought the missionaries to each particular island. So I wanted to say that, because, July 1 is like a national celebration within the Torres Strait... not only within the Torres Strait [but] wherever Torres

Strait Islander people are, around Australia, all over the world, we have a strong significance of connection to July the 1<sup>st</sup>.

Brooke: And so you talked about church days, did that mean each of those islands celebrating their own day of missionaries coming, or are those other church day celebrations that are recognised on particular islands?

Victor: Each island has their own special, I suppose, Coming of the Light. Those church days that I mentioned were actually when the church was consecrated on that particular day, so, [it] becomes the church day for that particular community. But also, you know, they have their own special day as well, when the missionaries arrived there as well, at a different time.

Brooke: And in the Torres Strait Islands, or the ones that you've had connection with, through your own journey and identity, is there a direct connection between the creation stories and the Christian faith and practice? I guess my question is, are they integrated, or still separate?

Victor: The creation stories and Christianity? I think it's... a hard question for me to answer, because the only very common creation stories up there which I know [are on] Murray Island... and again I can't speak on behalf of any other island because my knowledge is very limited and I probably don't have the permission anyway to speak about [it].

So ... you probably would have heard the story of Malo<sup>1</sup> before, so ... Malo was like that forerunner for the missionaries, of the traditional laws that were established on Murray Island. So, back to your question - I think there is some separation but also there is some connection there. There's a connection, you know... depending on the creation story. And as I said, Malo is the only one that I can actually [speak to] in regards to that connection.

Brooke: Are there any cultural celebrations, or observances, that you wouldn't expect Christians to be able to participate in?

Victor: I suppose. Depending on the event, you know. The culture within the Torres Strait has evolved a bit over time. You know, we as Torres Strait Islander Christians, we will participate in any cultural occasion, any cultural event - we have to acknowledge that. There could be some

---

<sup>1</sup> Please see pages 112 -113 for the story of Malo.

occasions where I suppose Christians may not participate, that depends on the event, but I don't know of any celebration or observances ... but the majority always have a presence of Indigenous Christians in all cultural events. Because at the end of the day, you know, our nation is before, that, you know. I knew my cultural traditions first, before I knew Christ. So, I can't do that away.

Brooke: Which churches or denominations have been significant in your journey as a Christian?

Victor: Okay. I grew up Church of England from my grandparents, on my mother's side. It had a strong, very strong presence in the early years. And then we had the Pentecostal movement in the 50s and 60s. So there [has been] a very strong ecumenical presence since then.

In saying that, you know, I grew up within the Church of England that became the Anglican Church. But I gave my heart to God, and accepted Jesus as my Lord and Saviour in a Pentecostal church. So both denominations have had a significant impact on my life to this very day. Especially within my role here as the principal of this college, of Woltulp-Bi-Buya, we have a very strong ecumenical presence here. So therefore ... I am open to all Christian faith that acknowledges the Holy Trinity and Jesus Christ as Lord, yeah.

Brooke: How have you found that the churches or denominations that you've attended, related to local Torres Strait Islander or Aboriginal culture...

Victor: Yeah. I'm a locum of Cairns Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ministry within the Anglican Church here in Cairns. So our church is unique in [a] sense, because our congregation is very much Indigenous. [It] was established years ago when there was a need for an Indigenous church within the Anglican Church here in Cairns. So, an Indigenous church... no doubt there's gonna be a very strong presence of culture and tradition within it.

And so we acknowledge that in everything that we do in the church - in terms of traditional instruments, singing in language, worshipping in language, and at times praying in language. All that resonates strongly within the church that I'm associated with. And I think it's good for the church as a whole, the national church as a whole. Because I'm sure the national church could learn a few things from the way we as Indigenous people come together, and worship.

Brooke: What knowledges do you think are important to pass onto younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians?

Victor: I think it's important for us to not disconnect from culture and tradition first. The way society is today, that, and, especially where, especially where he or she may be living, is to keep the connections strong with your culture and tradition, first and foremost. Our elders, our Christian elders need the younger people to rise up, because for the sake of maintaining a strong Indigenous presence within the church as a whole. And, and I think that, for we, we need to continue to encourage and support our younger generation to have a platform to voice. They'll may mistakes, they'll learn, and then they'll pick themselves up, we support them and we'll continue to move forward, and I, I think that's going to be very, very important for us. But I think that at the end of the day, our younger generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to maintain a strong link back to their cultural tradition from where they come from.

Brooke: What is your hope for the church in Australia?

Victor: My hope is that the church as a whole will have strong Indigenous men and women in leadership, and to be in a position where they can be a voice to make change and to contribute as a whole, not only to the church, but to the whole as a nation. That's my hope. And, we gotta start somewhere, and hopefully this research that you're doing will help encourage that.

Brooke: Do you have any final thoughts that you wanted to share at all?

Victor: I think it's been a long time coming to have a research done on this particular subject. I think this will challenge the national church as a whole in terms of where they are right now, what are they doing [for] Indigenous people? Can they do more? ...or are they not doing anything? What do they need to do?

Sure, they can have a reconciliation action plan, that's all good, but in that it takes more than just words, it needs a lot of action and support along the way. I don't doubt for a moment that we have strong spirit-filled vocal Aboriginal men and women out there that need a platform.

We all need each other within the church. It's just not one race of people, it's a multicultural race of people. Because at the end of the day, as I think back to John in the Book of Revelation, he said in that vision he was standing before the throne of God [with] the whole race of people... all clothed in white, with palm leaves in their arms, singing hosanna, giving their praise to God.

So that's a multitude of people from different backgrounds, and for me I think, that's to come, but we've gotta' have that right now, within our national church.

### **The Story of Malo**

#### **Excerpt from "Indigenous Spirituality and the Church: A Cultural Faith"**

**Presentation by the late Bishop Saibo Mabo, Assistant Bishop to the NQ Anglican Diocese.**

**Darlington Centre, University of Sydney, 8th July, 2003**

On my traditional homeland of Mer Island (Murray Island) in the Torres Strait, this mysterious power and presence was experienced through the ancestor "god" of Malo. Creative powers were expressed through this "god". Malo is a symbol of the mysterious power and presence of Creator God revealed in the Bible. He was also present in pre-Christian, Indigenous cultures. Our Mer Island spirituality is linked with the coming of Malo...

Malo and three of his brothers came from the direction of PNG, from a place called Tyogere. The three brothers were named Segar, Kulka and Sieu. They rowed their canoes from Toogere to the Torres Strait Islands, but they decided to go separate and go to different islands. Malo decided to go to Mer Island.

A woman fishing on the shore witnessed and experienced the coming of Malo. We can say that Malo used this woman to make himself known to the people. This woman's name was Kabour. Kabour looked towards the horizon and she saw a lugger boat sailing towards her. But, when she looked again, instead of the lugger, she saw a meido, a variety of palm growing on the riverbanks of PNG. It was floating towards her, then somehow it changed into a gugur pod, a variety of bamboo and continued to float towards her. But then something happened! She looked down and saw an octopus, stretching its eight tentacles towards her. Kabour grabbed a spear and speared the octopus. ... She put the octopus in her basket and took it home with her. Later that night, Kabour told her husband, Dog, the mysterious things that she saw and experienced before she speared the octopus.

Later that night, while they were looking at the basket, they saw a light appearing from the octopus' eyes. Then they saw a man jump out of the basket and with the light from his eyes showing the way, the man walked out from the house. He walked all over Mer Island. When the man returned at about 3 or 4 in the morning, Kabour and Dog were still awake and they watched as he jumped back in the basket and the light in the man's eyes went out.

A few days later, Kabour's cousins- two brothers – came to visit them because they had heard that something special and mysterious was in the house. The two cousins stayed up late and saw the same thing that had happened previously. They decided to steal the basket and take it to where other tribes



lived. The light and movement of the man, Malo, made them aware that he was a special kind of man. As they travelled to the place of other tribes, they danced and worshipped Malo. The place where they worshipped him was called “Las.”

To our ancestors, Malo was clearly a supernatural being. He came to Mer Island in the form of something which was familiar to our people – the octopus. This is the island context. The eight tentacles of the octopus represent the eight tribes of Mer Island. Malo strengthens the Mer Island tribes by giving laws and bringing social order. Malo established respect for living things. Malo was not needlessly destructive, so he walked on tiptoe to avoid treading on any plants.

Since my childhood, I have been taught to respect my traditional ways. I was taught that Malo never stretched his hands to steal what belongs to other people, he keeps his feet way from trespassing on other people’s land. The spiritual foundation laid down by Malo has helped my people to live together and these laws have helped our culture to survive.

Malo was the supreme being that my people worshipped before the Coming of the Light of the Gospel in 1871. The Gospel pointed us to the Father and Creator revealed to us in Jesus. We believe that God used Malo to establish Mer Island spirituality. Malo is the bridge to our understanding of God revealed to us in Christ.

That is the story of Malo.

## **Interview with Davena Monro by Brooke Prentis**

### **Cairns, QLD**

#### **Abstract**

Davena Monro is a Butchulla and Garawa woman from, K'gari (Fraser Island) and the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north Queensland area. She is currently the RTO and Business and Operations Manager with Wontulp-Bi-Buya College. Here she is interviewed by Brooke Prentis.

#### **Interview**

Davena: My name is Davena Monro. I'm a Butchulla and Garawa woman, with bloodline connection to my Grandmother's Country K'gari (Fraser Island), as well as blood connection to my Grandfather's Country situated in the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north Queensland region. I am currently the RTO Business and Operations Manager with Wontulp-Bi-Buya College.

Brooke: Thanks, Davena. So, we're doing an interview today on the Dreaming and Spirit-filled Christianity. First question - when did you become a Christian, and could you tell us a little bit about your testimony?

Davena: Okay. It's been about fifteen years since I have actually been walking with the Lord. I know that my turning point in seeking God was when I lost a very close friend of mine to suicide. I recall this was a very spiritual period of my life... there was a strong spiritual pull, and a desire in my heart to go back to my grandfather's Country for women's business. I now know, that God really intervened, as I was in a very dark and vulnerable state. However, in saying that I know that I will be required to go back to my Country. However, I believe it will only happen in God's perfect timing. Looking back now, I don't feel that I was truly ready to take in the true essence of God and my culture. I say this because I feel that undertaking women's business is not a lighthearted thing to do. Rather it is a very spiritual ceremony. I also needed to be prepared to know exactly where our Lord was in this process. I now know that at the time, I was searching for answers. I wanted to know more about what I was actually experiencing. This was because my life was changing and becoming quite spiritual. I was drawn to what I thought

was my most spiritual connection, which was to return to my grandfather's Country up in the Gulf.

It was in this same period that a Murri Christian woman, who out of the blue started to visit me. I didn't know her personally, and even though I didn't invite her, she continued to visit me every day. Through it all I never stopped the visits either, as I became very interested in her spiritual walk. Her journey was resonating well within me and this was being exposed through our yarning. The spiritual realm was being opened up to me. It was intriguing in a sense, as my inner thoughts were saying, "oh! really, is *that* how Christianity is?"

I must admit I had been exposed to Christianity my whole life - attending churches as a child and youth. Different people came in and out of my life. Whether it was through family, friends or friends of friends, to attending Girls' Brigade. I still recall vividly when I was around the age of nine, when my mum and dad had me baptized, in the Bulimba Baptist church (or Christened when I was younger) and then I actually attended various Sunday schools, so I was always around and exposed to God.

Looking back, I see that the Lord had me in 'His Hands' from as far back as I can remember, yet it was only in the last fifteen years that I really found the Lord and started to be aware of where He is in my life and what my purpose in life is.

Brooke: When you went to church as a young girl, was there significant influence from particular people in your family? Like from your mum or your nan? ... Or was it just community?

Davena: Well ... I feel that I have had this spiritual knowing ever since I was a little girl, the knowing that there was something bigger than I, or any other. I recall, when I was about four or five, I would spend a lot of my life outside, in the open spaces. As kids in those days, we would be outdoors playing every minute we had a chance. It was often in these times I would be continuously talking to God ... I knew him, but obviously, I didn't know him like I do today... but I still believe I knew Him, and I fully believe all children do.

My mum, Euriel Mackey (nee Dawson), along with my aunties, Violet, Dianne, Marsha, Aileen, Elsie and Glenda, grew up on the Cherbourg mission. It was due to their mother, my Nana (Winnie Tanna Dawson, nee Gala), that each one of them come to know our creator as God. It was her walk with the Lord and the transition of knowledge that was passed onto us, her future

generations. Even though this seed sprouted later in our grown years, I fully believe there was a Godly spiritual seed that was planted while I was in my mother's womb. This would explain why as a very young child I was fully aware of His presence in my life. I knew he was all powerful! I believe that all human beings are born with this same knowledge and knowing.

Brooke: What is the role of the Holy Spirit now in your Christian life?

Davena: I believe the Holy Spirit is my guide. He takes me where He needs me to be – or where God needs me to be. Even though at times, I'd rather go. However, when I allow Him, He directs my path. He reveals to me many different things, both good and bad. I believe this is reflected through a gift of discernment I have for people. I feel that the Lord shows me many spiritual situations around people. I see this is an awesome gift, as I have the ability to understand where people have come from in their life. I try to always utilise this gifting when it comes to ministry or counselling-He helps me through! So, I fully believe this gift complements my roles, traditionally and culturally. God just gives us all gifts we can use, and I am continuously using mine today, and I believe it's led fully by the Holy Spirit. So, He plays a very important part in my life.

Brooke: And what does "The Dreaming" mean to you?

Davena: This is only my interpretation; I fully believe it means *order*. It was meant to keep everything in its rightful place. I believe it was a God given system. It kept everybody knowing where their place was, traditionally. Everyone had a good idea of the plans the Creator Spirit had for them, as it was passed down. In their lives, traditionally people had roles, and they had a purpose. That kept the vision and purpose for the tribe and clan group alive. It ensured and enforced our people into sharing what they had with the next generation. So, it was a strong transitional system. I believe 'The Dreaming' was more about capturing that relationality and the connection of every living entity – 'Land, Sea, People' (Monro, 2014), - this is a topic that I have undertaken in my Masters of Education and still building on in my research through my PhD.

Brooke: Are there any significant traditions or cultural celebrations that you consider important?

Davena: Well ...everybody coming together. I feel that relationality is a necessity in keeping a group together or alive. We as First Australians, are required to continue to allow cultural knowledge to transition to the next generation. So "celebrations" these days ... in modernistic times is a

race of people who still share and spend time together. Today we see our people getting together and coming from miles away to participate in Murri Cups, Murri Carnivals, Musgrave Park in Brisbane and Fogarty Park here in Cairns, and many other locations around the nation, for NAIDOC. So, Celebrations are very significant in keeping our cultural alive.

But it's also very important to [gather with] family. For instance, my mother has her weekly "nana's day," ... it is her way of transferring knowledge onto her grandchildren. That is something that is really important... This is ceremony in itself.

Our traditional [owners] getting together for Native Title... even though there are many issues in this process, which in turn have contributed to much division and detriment to family and clan groups. It is still a collective... It still can be observed or marked as a celebration of people coming together. Connecting is a necessity, so when we stop connecting this will only cause cultures to be diluted and dissolved. Inclusion is very significant, and the celebration of First Nations People is required ensure the survival of our culture.

Brooke: Are there any traditions or cultural celebrations that you wouldn't expect Christians to participate in and if so, why?

Davena: Honestly? I believe... since colonization... many sub-cultures have been implemented and adopted into our culture. So, like all aspects of today's society, there are many practices that should not be entertained by Christians. However, in saying that I feel that we need to be sensitive and use our discernment. Many believe through the early church that non-Indigenous people have created a box where Christianity has been kept. So, to follow God, people have been required to jump into the box, and then and only then can we truly be walking with our Lord and Savior. Over the years I have actually observed many of our Aboriginal and Islander brothers and sisters in Christ... expecting the same, -we need not imitate, as this could also be seen as forced subcultures.

Realistically, God should be shown and shining through everything! I actually find it funny that people do not understand God's word. It is clearly written in His scriptures that "He will use the foolish things of this world." We as people on this earth do not know the plans of God. Most times we as humans are totally unaware, that we are judging others and the things they do. You know what? I have witnessed God using people in the most unusual ways. Ways in which we have been taught to believe, is totally unethical. However, He has given them the grace to walk

into dungeons, and into places where not everyone can tread. This is why I believe our God says do not judge anyone, because only 'He knows the plans that He has for His people'.

It has been laid heavily upon my heart, to never try to judge who's who... and I fully believe that all people should never be frowned or looked down upon. I believe that, if people come together with respect for each other as individuals, whether we believe they are right or wrong. Or if we feel they are in the wrong, we should first pray, unless you know that it is totally of God to share with them, then I suggest we just revert to praying... but that's just my opinion.

Brooke: Thank you. What do you think about the relationship between your culture (or cultures) and Christianity?

Davena: I think they actually complement one another. I fully believe that Christianity is very similar to our culture. In today's society, the way in which science has led and directed research, is both good and bad. It has taken humankind and knowledge to the point where by... everything needs to be proven first. Either through the physical and natural...or by reading or written evidence. Many of our First Nations People around the world did not record their histories in this way, but rather through the narrative (oral stories, yarnings). In fact, it has taken a such a long time for Indigenous, Aboriginal, Torres Strait, First Nations people all over the world to be recognised and acknowledged for their wisdom, ... and still to this day there is a fight to be recognised. In many areas of society, our knowledges it is not truly accepted or taken seriously.

It is my thinking, that God had to come through a culture. He needed to leave a precise message, and it was required to be written down significantly, and in depth. So, He chose the Israelites, He chose them as his people, it was all in His master plan. Prior to colonisation, I fully believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people walked with God. We walked with Him ... when we look back [at] traditional foods, the way in which our land was looked after... we nurtured our children and people, we cared for the land, it was a culture of caring and sharing, which could only come from a higher power.

The same with the Butchulla people - our three laws. One of them is what is good for the land. We need to ensure that we do... the first rule, look after the land. The land is, essence to every living thing. Every element needs the land - the animals and people are only two. It can be likened to my traditional story of the Butchulla People. It is orally recorded that God the Creator, the Highest Spirit, sent down two spirits to beautify the land. It was around my area, that one spirit, named K'gari, said, "oh gosh, I'm really really tired." Yendingie saw that she was weary

and suggested K'gari rest. K'gari saw that the cove, (of the Hervey Bay Community) was such a beautiful area." She, (K'gari) decided to lay down and had a long sleep.

After a little while the other spirit, known by Yendingie, spotted K'gari lying there fast asleep. When K'gari awoke, she pleaded with Yendingie, to stay in the beautiful cove in which she had awoken. First, Yendingie, said "no" because K'gari was a spirit, but realizing how beautiful K'gari looked in the spot and hearing her plead, Yendingie Yendingie turned her into an island. Biral the Great Spirit agreed. So, she was not alone Biral agreed to give [her] people, to keep her company. He also gave K'gari the birds and the animals to care for and nurture. This dreaming tells us that we do not own K'gari. K'gari owns us Butchulla mob, given to us by Biral, our Creator Spirit.

Brooke: That's beautiful! So, if you don't mind answering this question ... which churches, denominations have been significant in your journey as a Christian?

Davena: No, I don't mind! I feel as though I am not one denomination. Since growing up, I recall going to the Baptist Church - I even remember going to a Seventh Day Adventist Church. I have also attended a Jehovah's Witness church, Lutheran, United, you name it - I've been there. Today I am the same, I feel comfortable with attending any church to feel the love of God. I do not personally believe that God is contained within the four walls.

When I do go to church, this is more for fellowship, because ... I meet God everywhere. He talks to us all in amazing and unexpected places. He'll speak to you even when you're in the shower ...or in the loneliest and darkest places ...It's places that He can be alone with you and actually capture your attention. So, it is my thinking the church (the four walls) is more about fellowship and this is a necessity, to come together as the body of Christ.

Brooke: How have you found that the churches and denominations you've attended or had relationship with, related to the local Aboriginal culture?

Davena: Okay, this is only my opinion, but I feel that there are still many issues in regard to the church and how it connects with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There is actually a really good story in one of the units at Wontulp... It's outlined [in] one of the workbooks. I believe it

is a story passed on by Ps George Rosendale. It talks about a pot plant ministry. I recall sitting in one of Reverend Victor classes, in which he gave a really good interpretation on colonisation and how it could be seen as a pot plant. So, when first settlers came to our country, they brought their ministry also, they brought their beliefs and their church, which the ideology of a pot plant, is implemented. I briefly touched on this same method earlier in this interview. If someone was wishing to be part of this type of ministry, they would be required to jump into the pot plant. However, on the other side of the scale, the best method to successfully transplant an established plant, is to ensure it has a healthy root system. The plant must be pulled out of the pot, roots and all and in turn placed into the soil.

Another amazing way to achieve this is by actually burying the whole pot, and the plant, into the system or into the dirt. The roots will end up cracking the pot and taking root within the soil. And I think that's where, the church is really failing and falling. We as the church need to shift our mentality and start growing together as one and with one body. So, going back again.... colonization, when they first came, instead of just placing that pot plant on the top of First Nations structures and system. Because there was a good system in place, which was established and embedded into the soil (nation) and its people for thousands and thousands of years. If this was done correctly and allowed their roots to grow through, I fully believe the cultures would have been able to be entwined and grow together.

So, by observing the analogy of the pot plant, [we] can imagine how today's society and the Church are *actually* relating to Aboriginal culture. In many churches it is still very taboo to do corroboree or dance - even though it is our way of praising and ushering (Welcoming) in the presence of the Lord. Or even, the didgeridoo, which is similar to utilising any other cultural instrument. However, I find that quite hard to understand, because basically, the instruments that are being used today and throughout history are made of the same type of materials. It's all wood... like the wood [of] flutes or little whistles - even the guitar is a wooden instrument. It's okay for those musical instruments to be utilized in the church, so why not our cultural instruments? Even the horn, when you think about it... in God's word, they used a ram's horn. If we didn't know any different, we'd think "oh that would be barbaric!" with no disrespect intended.

So, I believe people need to have an open mind. It really comes back to that judgmental-ness spirit again. Many times, there still appears to be very big division between mainstream Christians, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Christians. It is reflected in all things we do. I've been in churches where I've also been subdued to people who have not wanted to connect and talk to me. I think, sometimes to myself, well, come on! I'm an educated person,



why are you doing this to me? It obviously comes back to the colour of my skin. So again, they don't know me, it still comes down to that judgmental way in human beings.

It comes back to if, we are seriously wanting connection and relationship, and there is always talk around reconciliation within Australia. We, the Church, need to be the forerunners; we need to continue to strive and find new ways to achieve it. However, it speaks in book of Revelation, regarding the different churches, in the last days, not all [being] perfect. So, I suppose we should not expect everyone to be. We need to just pray and accept and love each other for what we are and allow the Lord to make the changes in the hearts of men. But, yes, there is still a lot of disconnection. [But] there is also a lot more people wanting that connection... this is a lot better than what it has been in times past. Let's keep raising awareness and pushing together as a nation of Christians.

Brooke: What knowledges do you think are important to pass onto younger Aboriginal Christians?

Davena: Well honestly, I still think it is important they know our culture and our traditional ways of the land. I fully believe our people walked with God. And the way in which our environment is going, the way our Country and land is being treated, it is obvious that our land is really sick in many parts. We really need to instill within our children the importance of going back and researching other ways of doing things to help or heal the land. We can actually try and rectify the past, we need to bring a little traditional culture into today, and that's through both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous people. It's becoming a multicultural society. So, the more that we educate our children, they will fight and work for what is right. More importantly, adapting to ways of persevering the land and our cultures within this space, within our Australia, within our Country.

[Also] learning the language. Not necessary speaking it all the time, but to keep the language alive. We need to continue to take our children back to Country and land, and ensuring they have that connection. It is all about God. God is in the mountains, God is in creation, and people are forgetting about it.

I get really scared for the future of my children, my grandchildren. The biggest reason is disconnection. I remember when trying to call my son. It was my grandson who was only about two years old at the time and spoke very well for his age. He answered the phone, he said, "Hello nan, I gotta go," and I said, "where you gotta go to?" And he said "I gotta go bye nan," and he hung up on me. I recall thinking to myself "hey, look out!" Anyways, I got back on the

phone to call my son, however my grandson answered, and again he stated, “oh I gotta go nan I gotta go,” and again I said to myself, “hey look out where are you going, what’s going on?” And it happened about three times. He kept on hanging up on me. And then I rang my daughter-in-law, to find out “what’s going on?” and she said, “oh he’s watching a little cartoon.” And I said, “oh my goodness”. I ended up ringing him a third time and I remember saying “don’t you love nan?” and he said, “oh I love you, love you, love you, but I gotta go.” That experience felt like a real disconnection... our family is a very important aspect to who we are, and the connection is everything.

Every aspect of society is having connection and is developed through technology and social media... a lot of it can be utilised for good, but then a lot can really be destroying our culture. I feel that Christians... and our Aboriginal children, when able, need to go back to their Country. This is so important as one day they will be required to lead this nation, whether people see it right now - they are our leaders. It is so important to have access and connection back to Country, both in the natural and on a spirit level. They need to start finding funding for more First nations Rangers, to care for and nurture their land, giving them the opportunity to take care of and control their God given lands. I think this is a really important process that needs to be implemented for our Aboriginal children of today and future.

Brooke: And the final question... what is your future hope for the church in Australia?

Davena: Well, I honestly feel...I hope, and I pray for unity. If many mainstream churches could witness where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people come together, like our college and our space at Wontulp. It is where all denominations come together as one and it’s amazing to see the worship and praise. It’s so powerful and the presence is so strong. I sometimes feel that the church has not got the full revelation or not the full understanding of the impact that this can make on the whole of society. I know there’s a lot of churches out there, trying to network. However there remains division, which creates barriers. There is awesome power when students come from all around Australia to study theology together. The doors and windows are open wide when all people from different denominations, and cultures come together. It creates multiple blessings. But I don’t see it very much.

Even though I feel comfortable within myself to visit any church, I truly understand why it would be still very hard for other First Nation People to connect, let alone in other denominations. There has been fear placed upon God’s people and fear of diverse doctrines. This is a real barrier with churches of today and not wanting to interlink or interconnect. I believe it is due to fear of stealing other church members. At the end of the day we just need to

reinforce that Jesus - is the head, we are [all] the flock and the body. We don't necessarily need to belong to one particular church, and we do not belong to a man or a pastor. We need to see ourselves as the church in Australia, being one body!

I think there are a lot of things that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people can show the mainstream churches. But they need to trust that we have skills. We also have wisdom, and knowledge, which we can contribute. Unfortunately, in many churches today there is underlining fears and racism. The scary business is the way in which the enemy has come into all areas of society, like a wolf wearing sheep's clothing... The spirit of Pedophilia has raised its ugly head, this type of horrific stuff has not only been revealed in the whole of society but has been running rampart within the church. It has and still is affecting people through all cultures and in turn, people are becoming anti-church.

Again, there is judgmental-ness over the nation, and it is affecting everybody, [when] realistically we need to be concentrating on coming together. We need to be identifying ways to filter, or stamp out, the enemy of our church! We can do this through unity and coming together as one. We can stay in our safe spaces or hide from the fight, but the only way is stand true and strong to overcome and to fight the enemy in name of Jesus' name! We need to stand on the enemy's head. We need to join forces and make the enemy flee, with the strength of the Lord. That is what will happen if we come together. It is written, that where there is two or three gathered in his name, the impossible will be made possible.

Brooke: Can I ask a question... what does that unity look like? Physically look like?

Davena: I believe it is all about ...relationality. So, good relationships between people and churches... I don't have the answers, but God does. How do we start? Well I believe we need to either meet monthly or fortnightly. Just ensuring that we come together in one way or another. It may only start with a few different denominations, first of all, but it's a start. I know there's still that division within the churches. There needs to be no judgmental-ness, no one looking over someone else's fence. We need to take that into consideration - pull that log out of our own eye before we go pointing the finger.

We need to all step back and support the minority groups more. We need to understand that God gave us diversity in all areas of creation. We all need to accept each other for who we are. We need to admit our past wrongs and except our futures, but we need to be prepared to walk with the downtrodden and underprivileged. We as the church are required to be the leaders and

this also includes our politicians. I speak again of First Nations People of Australia, and their promised land, which stripped away. This is also with little recognition and acknowledgement.

I recall years ago, when I first started my grown-up walk with God. I attended a service whereby hundreds of people came to watch and listen to a guest speaker. The majority of people were non-Indigenous, with the exception of myself and aunty Aileen. Everyone was standing and singing, “we are one, we are Australia.” It was in this service that I felt my first experiences and the disconnection of the body the Christ. It was after a full sermon on how non-Indigenous people, or as we know them, the first settlers, came to Australia to do the Lord’s work, by reclaiming and by destroying all the Amorites, to gain the promised land. So, it was in the service that the Pastor was identifying Aboriginal people as the Amorites. I believe there is still this mentality within some of the churches today. We need to seek the truth and with the fact that the land was not actually promised to the settlers but to the First People of this nation. God gave custodianship prior to colonisation. This is an important discussion that needs to be addressed within the Church.

I feel that we as Indigenous people, are not able to take over everything and the powers within this land has made this impossible. However, I feel it [starts with] acknowledgment. True acknowledgement of Australian’s First People as being the custodians. It needs to be given back, not just through native title, there needs to be more identified positions in the running of this Country. Whether it be identified elected positions, not hand-picked or tokenized. I recall watching a series of transformation stories which had been documented and collected from all across the world. It gave insight into the power of God and our prayers. Many communities have prayed for renewal and transformation. They are to this day so powerful, as it brought healing and renewal!!

There is one story that stood out for me. It was pictured on this beautiful island, and for a couple of centuries there were no fish, nothing could grow on the island, it was just... really devastated. But there was a secret, which had been harboured for a couple of centuries, [although] it was still very untouched. Historically there had been a killing of a missionary in the community and there was no true revelation or chance for apology and forgiveness. It was only until there was true forgiveness of peoples and family, and the handing back to God in repentance. The process of Sorrow and Forgiveness opened the door... for God to transform that whole community. The fish returned to the waters. The vegetation and the plants grew back. Everything was revitalised and restored.

It's like in His word, "if my people will humble themselves and pray, I will heal their people and, I will heal their land." It's exactly the same thing. Until this occurs with the right spirit, Australia will not truly heal. We will not fully unify ... God said, let my Kingdom on earth be done as it is in heaven, then He will come. Now, I think, and in all honesty and believe our Lord is at the door and waiting to enter but is holding off as we as the church have not reached the full revelation.

As Christians we need to come together and strive to humble ourselves. It is a necessity to pray, and ... we as Aboriginal people need to forgive, as many times there is still harbored unforgiveness. There is also the fact that many non-Indigenous people do not believe that they should say sorry, due to them not personally playing any part in the atrocities afflicted on First Nations People centuries ago. Which is a fair statement, however, the word of God outlines the spiritual connections and binding that needs to be broken, from the sins of all our forefathers, and that by denying the truth, things will fester to the point they are at now.

I attended a conference recently and there was a lot of talk around unity and reconciliation. Through a group discussion I met an older lady, she might have been about seventy or eighty. Our group was discussing situations around disunity in the church today. It never surprised me when the dear older lady stated, "we do not have disunity, as we have a family of Aboriginal people and they come every week and we all accept them into our church." But again, unity is not only about being accepted, and I actually tried to explain my thoughts [on this.] She did not seem to grasp or understand what I was trying to get across. Then there was another gentleman... who spoke about a choir from the community of Hermannsburg, in the Northern Territory ...he shared how amazing, it was to gift back to society especially Germany. This was through song, which the community was taught and was given the opportunity to sing gospel in the German tongue. Again, this is only my opinion, but I must admit this was a beautiful gesture, however, it still does not address unity in this country. For me, that does not show unity, it still indicates that we as First Peoples are required to accept everything at face value and except what we are given, and that is acceptance. Our First Nations People are continuously taking on western and other cultures. Many that were in attendance at the conference were leaders. They too had issues with grasping, (whether through lack understanding, or lack of responsibility) that even though there were physical acts, there also remains unseen issues that need to be addressed. I'm thinking, well, that doesn't reflect the *unity* that needs to occur. Unity is coming together and loving each other and excepting everyone for who they are and their purpose, gifts and talents. It's like a relationship, with a husband and a wife when they have a disagreement or quarrel. Only when [they find] true forgiveness to break any type of cycle and express *sorrow*, then that is when God can come through and work.

It is a hard journey sometimes being First Nations People, because realistically we too can also be very constricted, by our own mob. There is a crab mentality, which is still happening in the community and also within the church. It is very sad but very true that some people just do not want others to succeed, and this type of behavior needs to stop. We need to love each other like we love ourselves. God's first command is to love God, then to love each other. So, more love, more understanding, more compassion, is going to take us a long way. Forgiveness, and understanding is the key in this situation and how I believe unity will and can happen.

Brooke: Thank you. Do you have any final thoughts about Dreaming and Spirit-filled Christianity?

Davena: I think we as First Nations People need to push in and ensure our culture lives on. If not, we will leave so many of our people behind. Many of our people are hurting and they need to understand that Christianity is not there to hurt them. The enemy has come into this country, like a wolf in sheep's clothing, and there have been horrific acts imposed on our beautiful people, who were raped and pillaged. This is also an excuse for a lot of our people to say, "nah that's not our culture, it's a white man God." The enemy has had a field day with our people both past and present. So many have been hurt by the church in the mission days and they continually push Christianity away.

But that's why we as First Nations People need to show our people out there that Culture and Theology go hand in hand. Aboriginal theology is a key...there has been so much colonisation throughout the world. The Israelites have also experienced this, as they too were dark skinned people and it is written clearly in the word. However, similarly to many cultures colonisation happened... the structures and the systems have been damaged and dismantled and the powers that be, have been colonized to the point where people over in the Lord's land, are also needing to come back to their promised lands.

So, at the end of the day we need worry less and ensure that we keep our culture alive... More Indigenous theologians need to rise up and undertake research and contribute to piecing together the missing pieces. By giving their snapshot and particular lense into our theology... by also giving their thoughts into the findings and interpretation of the Word. This will help our First Nations People and hopefully their future and expectations of the church of today.

One important aspect our First Nations People need to grasp is remembering that our God is a living God, and He has been there since creation and the dreaming. He is our creator God who was also known as Great Spirit/Creator Spirit. Our God has many names, especially within First

Nation's dialect. Our giftings and our talents come from God the Creator... even a lot of our traditional knowledges. Many of our cultures have been pushed down by the western churches. With many suggesting that our ways are evil. Many subcultures have also formed, which I discussed before. It has come into this nation through the gates of colonisation. There is a lot of culture that God gifted First Nations People with, and they survived for thousands of years.

I sometimes reflect and wonder why it would be so hard for First Nations People to understand, or even comprehend or believe stories in the bible? It spoke many times in the word of the connection and relationality it had to humans and animals. One story was when the donkey spoke, and other animals had their part. It also talks about supernatural occurrences in the times of old. In saying all that, many people could not even comprehend or actually believe it can happen or is still happening today. So, if we cannot believe the scripture, which are the oldest and most sold piece of literature ever, which is always under condemnation, what can we believe?.

Personally, I have and continue to see the scriptures lining up with my life, past, present and future. Our culture lines up and one was the fact in which our people talk to the animals. Our people co-existed with the animals, but to others outside our culture see and suggest... it is the enemy. There are people in the church today that believe we worshiped the enemy. We need to find ways to steer people right away from that sinking thinking. We need to also reinforce to our First Nations People that our culture is not an evil culture. Our culture is good. Our culture is healthy. That is what we are required to instill back into our children... not just our children but people from all walks of life... their identity is important. And without identity, without Country, land and spirit, I reinforce that we are nothing. That's why the enemy needs to rob us of our Country and connection. It is the enemies plan to rob the humankind of their connection with the true and living God. As it is written in the word, the God's Sprit resides in every bit of creation and every living thing. It is through the understanding and a strong Indigenous Theology that the First Nations People have survived for thousands and thousands of years, hence the importance of reconnection to Country and land, which is the Spirit of God.

Brooke: Well thank you very much.

## **Interview with Robyn Ober by Tanya Riches**

### **Darwin, Northern Territory**

#### **Abstract**

Robyn Ober is a Mamu woman and an Indigenous educator and Research Fellow at the Batchelor Institute, Darwin. She is also a service pastor at the Hillsong Darwin (Palmerston) campus. Here she discusses the way she navigates cultural protocols when in community, in order to be respectful in her work. From her extensive knowledge of the Top End she outlines some of the significant Christian ministries in the Darwin region, and speaks about her own leadership from a uniquely Pentecostal perspective.

#### **Interview**

Tanya: Can you tell us your name for the transcript?

Robyn: My name is Robyn Ober.

Tanya: Thank you! And where is your country?

Robyn: My people are from North Queensland. My mother's people are from a little town called Innisfail just south of Cairns and we're the Mamu Bagirgabara people. But we also have connections to the Tableland Djirrabul people through my mother's father and my father's people are up near Hope Vale so Guugu Yimithirr people.

Tanya: You're very much a Murri!

Robyn: Yeah, I'm a Murri or Barma people, those two words are used, yeah. I guess we don't have as strong a link with the Hope Vale families or the King River Station (I think it's called), as we do with the Innisfail families, because they were taken, when I think grandmother was quite young.

Tanya: So can you tell us a little bit about how you became a Christian, a little of your testimony?

Robyn: Yes! Well I actually grew up in a Christian home. My parents were ministers, they still are. My dad is an Assemblies of God pastor. So a very strong Pentecostal home and I was born into that.



I just stayed with the Lord through those years growing up. I was really in that church family ... that environment ... so it was just a natural course for me.

I think when I made my own commitment to Jesus was probably in my teenage years when I was at that age of understanding. I remember there was an evangelist who came through our town and it was like a mini revival amongst young kids, amongst the youth and ... there was a whole group of us that made our commitment to the Lord and never looked back.

Tanya: What was the evangelist's name do you remember?

Robyn: I think it was Pastor Andrew Watters yeah ... and Merle was his wife.

Tanya: And your parents are pastoring in Innisfail?

Robyn: My mum has passed away now, but my dad Pastor Lawrence Ramsey and his wife June they're in Cardwell, North Queensland and he's semi-retired. He's 84 but he oversees the church... just until they can get a pastor. I think that's how it is, I'm not quite sure. He's still in ministry at his age which is good.

Tanya: And you're now attending Hillsong Darwin. What's your role here?

Robyn: I'm service pastor for the morning service... yeah that's my main role here... looking after everything for our AM service and overseeing everything that comes out of it for the new people's network. I look after our Connect groups, the midweek follow ups, and roster people on the front doors and in the foyer... So just making sure everything is running smoothly which is a big job. I'm still learning!

Tanya: It would be one of the bigger churches in Darwin wouldn't it?

Robyn: It is yeah, absolutely, and that's my role. Tonight Ilija Jacobs is on. Quite a few people come out in the evening services too.

Tanya: How long have you been service pastor for?

Robyn: About two years. So, Hillsong's being going for about two and a half years here I think. I'm just learning all the time. Always looking at how I can improve and do things better with the team of course. We're all together.

Tanya: And you also work at Batchelor Institute?

Robyn: I do.

Tanya: What is your role there?

Robyn: I'm an Indigenous research fellow. So I'm finishing off my PhD which is about Aboriginal English as a social cultural and identity marker in Indigenous tertiary education. So it's a big, big area and I'm just finalising my thesis now.

But I also teach. I've got an education background, I'm a primary school teacher trained through Batchelor Institute. At the moment I'm teaching our Indigenous knowledge unit. Also, I'm co-teaching with another lecturer [on] Indigenous ethics and protocols within the Indigenous context. Challenging Paradigms of Education is another unit I teach.

I'll do two units [each semester] plus I'm involved in research projects, probably three at the moment that I'm either co-researcher or on the research team in an advisory committee, so there's a lot going on in my life! But it's all good.

Tanya: I guess one of the things I'd love to hear a little bit about [is] how Aboriginal people engage with Hillsong Darwin - maybe you can speak from your role as service pastor? How do you see that happening?

Robyn: I was really interested in your statistics there - about 73% of Aboriginal people identify with Christianity - we find that true. Most of the people who come here, our Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander people they've grown up in a Christian home or have a Christian background from their community. So they know the Lord and they've been... invited by family or friends.

We still have a long way to go! But ...yeah, I would say the people I've spoken to just keep coming back and that's, I think, a part of the Hillsong culture...making it welcoming for whosoever, it doesn't matter. Darwin (and Palmerston) is such a multi-cultural city, just like Sydney ... it's very multi-cultural but the difference up here is the high population of Indigenous Australians. Not only locally - they come from everywhere.

So [we have a lot] of Northern Queensland people; a lot of Western Australian and Kimberley people; we have a growing population of Torres Strait Islanders who kind of congregate here. Darwin is appealing, it's quite laid back and casual and I find people are more accepting of other cultures. It's the gateway to South-East Asia and that's reflected in our church attendance and our population.

You look around and you see the different nations and cultures and things. That's a good thing! I think the ones who do come feel that they are accepted and belong and they do feel welcome. We really, really try hard.

As service pastor or as a leader here, I try to make those connections with everybody but we've just got that bit of an "Indigenous advantage" because like the lady you met downstairs. I know her, I know her family and as you know, with Indigenous Australians we just have to say a family name, and we connect.

So with our mob there's that element of trust and security. "Okay, Aunty Robyn knows my family" and so there's that little bit of, "I feel okay, I feel safe" so there's that side of it too. I think that's got to be more appealing, if you like. Because we have such a high population we kind of don't think so much in black and white - it's so multicultural. Even downstairs I had to look around and think. Half the time it's there, but we don't think about it too much.

Tanya: Are all churches in Darwin welcoming to Aboriginal people?

Robyn: St Martin's Catholic Church have their own Aboriginal service - so they have Aboriginal leaders in their church. I kind of know that you know, because again, we know people...so I think they specifically reach out to their community (as in, Catholic people) and they have people who come to Darwin from Port Keats, from the Wadeye Catholic Mission and also Daly River...so they seem to congregate all together there.

We have other little churches such as the AIM (Aboriginal Inland Mission) on Sabine Road, that's mainly all Aboriginal folk - again, because of the missions. Yeah and the Anglican, Uniting Church with Nungalingya College.

But there are also little spots like in the Bagot community they actually have a little fellowship, a church. I think that's under the ACC. We've been there a couple of times when we were in Batchelor, when my dad was a pastor there. They'd often invite him up to speak - that was all local people from the Bagot community and I think people from the Minmirama town community would come across. Yeah that was flourishing quite well.

And there's a lady named Annette Sharman... She started a little work out here at the Indigenous village. We call it "Eleven Mile" - if you were to drive out to Batchelor you would have seen a little community on the left, if you went out on the highway, so that's the "Indigenous village" they call it. We call it Eleven Mile so there's little kind of churches and little ministries around.

And there's one down here at Gray, you know there's little fellowships that open up like outreaches to the community and things like that.

Tanya: It's good to know that they're around. A bit of a different tack - what is the role of the Holy Spirit in your life as a Christian?

Robyn: As a Christian...yeah well, I've been in the Pentecostal church for all my life - and so we've seen a lot of things as kids. We hear the speaking in tongues and the prophetic words and the words of knowledge. I've been around all of that all my life, so it's something I'm comfortable with.

Through church and in my studies I've learnt that the Holy Spirit is my friend and he's my helper. I love how Pastor Emma Cooke says he's my "unfair advantage," I love that! Just learning that I'm not alone and that I have a comforter and I have a helper.

I've learnt now to rely upon the Holy Spirit in times when I maybe have to do something - especially in a service - if I've got to get ready to speak or get ready for a prayer meeting or something, I say "Oh, Holy Spirit just help me, I can't do this in my own strength, I really need you" - and then he always comes through, you know. So it's like my helper, my friend and you know...over time I've been able to do things and people say to me "that was different. What website did you go to?" I say "No, I asked the Lord... because, truly, I can't do it in my own strength, I need God." You know, the Father has left [us] the comforter - the Holy Spirit.

So that's become really real to me. Also the anointing! We need the anointing in everything we do. I wouldn't [be] able to do it. It would really be in my own strength which wouldn't be nice, it would be so plastic you know... I know who to go to when it's like "oh gee this is a bit hard!"... So I've got to go down South and I've been praying, "Lord just give me an opening; just soften the peoples' hearts." It is that unfair advantage, it's like "God go before me, I don't want to offend people, but we need to get this project off the ground!" He's interested in all aspects of their life so that's how I...that's my relationship with the Holy Spirit.

Tanya: One thing I find really interesting...you're involved in much research about language and culture. So, what does "culture" mean to you?

Robyn: That's a good question. We all have a culture. We all have a lifestyle, we all have a way of being. Even when I'm talking to my students, I try to break it down like that. Culture doesn't mean exotic people who act differently. We often have this romanticised view of cultural people. [But] we all have a culture. It's part of our identity.

Right up front, I don't speak my own language. I don't have traditional culture or traditions that I know of. It's probably there but I have limited knowledge in that area. So culture for me, is

that I identify as a strong Aboriginal woman, I'm proud of my identity. I tell people who my people are.

Culture for me is how that Aboriginality is expressed in the different aspects of my life. I think the main thing is our way of being and our way of making meaning. All that epistemology stuff - our morals and our values and all of that. A lot of it comes from my Christian upbringing, but then a lot of it comes from my Aboriginal cultural identity, my Aboriginality, who I am.

When you stop and talk about it, it doesn't kind of make sense - until you're with people who you connect to, or who are like you - you know, when black fellas get together ... we're on the same page. Like I know their family, I know their background and we joke and laugh and we tease and all of that, but we've got this common understanding. We've got a shared understanding, a shared cultural base that we come back to.

I will always talk about the diversity, multi-diverse nationality of Aboriginal Australia. We're all from different places and even tonight you'll see that we have Nyoongars we have Murris, and Koories. We have people from Broken Hill and we've got Torres Strait Islander people. So we have a whole group - but we have that commonality.

So I guess for culture ...yeah it's ...who we are, our ways of being, our ways of knowing, our ways of doing. I keep saying I can't pretend I'm somebody else. I can't pretend I'm a person who can speak my language and do ceremonies and things like that - because I'm not! And if I try to be that we say "gammin" - you're not real, it's pretending, you're just trying to be somebody you're not and that's not a good look.

Tanya: Is a lot of that the disconnection through the history of your area, and the way the government separated families?

Robyn: Absolutely! All of that! The historical policies, assimilation, Stolen Generation - all of that has great impact. There's even diversity within the stories, because it's not all cut and dried. It's so complex. People often think oh the missions were bad - or this or that was bad. For some yes, atrocities and abuses happened. But then for others they say if it wasn't for the missions, we wouldn't have survived... if we weren't taken to that mission - because it was so bad in those days.

So yeah. Sometimes ... our people can go silent on that because they're not saying what people want them to say. People want them to say [certain things]... but we've got a different story. Yes, there was racism. Yes, there was horrible stuff. Even throughout the church there was white privilege stuff - all of that. That happened. It still does in some cases.

But my thing is that there are *many* stories. So we have to listen to the many voices and stories - and sometimes these may be contested spaces. Sometimes there may be tensions and things like that - but that's what you've got to navigate through.

A lot of our people hate Christians and churches. I've just got to listen and I've just got to love them. I don't understand, I can't imagine what [they've] been through. You can't even say "God loves you," you've just got to love them; you've got to let them talk. I have many people who just come to my office and I just let them talk. "Oh Robyn come and have a cup of tea," ...and they say "you kind."

"But look, you know, I'm here just to be your friend and listen." So you see the Holy Spirit at work again [through] the fruits of the Spirit... I can't say I have a lot of understanding but I've got some ... because of my own family and what they've been through.

Tanya: So ...you've travelled a lot, you've been in different communities. So when you're out on Country, how do you negotiate your involvement in culture?

Robyn: It depends on the purpose of the visit. Yeah every context is different. Every community is different. Every situation is going to be always slightly different and I guess for me as an Aboriginal person a lot of times I've got my foot in the door and when I say foot in the door, I know people. I've got contact. I've already got relationships so straight away I'll go to my contacts and I talk about it.

Initially I might ring up and say, "Is there anything I should know? Me and a non- Aboriginal researcher, we're coming out for a visit. Anything happening on community? Death ceremonies? Anything?" ... and they'll tell me because I've got a relationship. They'll tell me. Even as an Aboriginal person I'm always going to be a visitor. I'm not from there. But we've got a connection.

I've just got to be respectful and a lot of times there's no issue, I just go in, do my job and come out, again touch base with the people I know. You've got that being respectful and considerate. Going around and talking to the TOs (Traditional Owners), telling them that we're here. Sometimes when there's deaths or ceremonies going on they'll tell us not to go down that end because they have the body there. They'll have ceremonies every night, we can hear them - but they'll let us know. They'll say you can go anywhere in the community but don't go there. And we usually don't participate because it's a closed ceremony and I don't really feel comfortable a lot of times.

Like spiritually too ... there's a lot of stuff going on spiritually that I don't feel comfortable participating in. I'll go if it's an open funeral and they've got a service and I know the person. But otherwise I don't think that's being respectful. Most of the time I haven't had an issue, and

I think there's this understanding where they know you're there to do your job and if you're just being upfront they're fine. We tell them "we're just here to do this at the school and that's all and then we'll go out."

Sometimes you're not allowed to say people's names if that person has died so they'll tell us that's "Kuminjay" or that's "Kunmanara" ... or we just use the person's initials.

The beauty of me being here so long is that I can talk to my contacts and my friends and they will just let me know... I'm very conscious of that especially in the Top End... I think I've just learnt how to navigate that space now and I've learnt when to move forward and when to come back.

... In my spirit I might just feel 'don't go there, there's just something not right.' So there's that spiritual stuff too, the cultural stuff that our mob know about. We've seen things where people have been really broken or destroyed by the enemy in the name of culture. And we've seen things in the spiritual. My fathers had to do a lot of praying and deliverance over people who've been tormented by stuff. I'm aware of that. I'm not naïve to that, you know.

Tanya: You've touched on some of the darker sides. Is there a good kind of culture that intersects with your Christianity?

Robyn: Our Hillsong Pastors Emma and Jared just came back from Hall's Creek, have you been there?

Tanya: Not yet.

Robyn: You should go because you'd talk to a lot of the local people ...but one of the Aboriginal pastors there, I think it was Gerard Killer - he said that when you look at Aboriginal law, it's very similar to the Ten Commandments. There's right and wrong. So I believe that is inspired of God. Because ... in the beginning people knew right from wrong.

Traditional way - you take that girl, wrong skin for you, you get speared in the leg. There's no doubt about that. I guess the other side of that is that element of fear around that - and I think sometimes that's where the tension happens. Yeah.

We've seen people tormented by stuff that not only happens in Aboriginal cultures but in all societies. The enemy is alive and well and he uses things like Ouija boards and séances and things like that. If you open yourself to those things ... but I think with our mob, they know. When we were in Batchelor they would have a lot of seeing things in cabins or the accommodation, and they'd know who to come to. They'd come to my father, and ask him to

come and pray... “There’s something looking at us.” I mean they’ve got that Christian upbringing but they also know that other side too.

Tanya: There are a lot of people who I think would really appreciate hearing your view on what you think are the important knowledges to pass on to young Aboriginal Christians?

Robyn: For our young Indigenous Christians? ... For our mob... just be true to yourself. Just be who you are. Don’t try to pretend to be anybody else or don’t try to exaggerate your Aboriginality. You can go the other way too and just make it all, “look at me.”

But I think just be proud of who you are. Proud of your identity. Proud of your upbringing. Remember those things that were taught to you. You know right from wrong and your grandmothers and mothers taught those things to you. Family is so important for our people. We make those connections, we look after each other. We know those protocols and we know the values. We know those roles. A lot of that is getting fragmented now. But ... with our mob...we know the family connections and values, looking after each other. Yeah just remember your upbringing!

It’s so different everywhere. Like I said the diversity ... but there’s common threads right through all of us. Like when I was at the colour conference, I was missing my mum. All I could see was a sea of white faces. I didn’t think it would bother me but I was like, I’m really missing my mum. But then I see Auntie Gail Sellman and the mob there and I was like, hey it was so good! It does something to you. You don’t realise you miss your own mob until you’re away from your people for a while.

That’s part of who we are, our being, and you know our ways of doing and our ways of thinking, our ways of processing knowledge and information. For young people, just developing that and those Christian principles of treating others with respect. Treat others how you want to be treated like how the Gospel says. A lot of those things have been taught to us about the right way of doing things, so I guess that’s all I can say, just be the best person you can be.

Sometimes with our mob... we’re looking, because we forget we’re just all family. I say that at [the pre-service gathering] we’re all family. I don’t like cliques, you’re going to have move out of your cliques, out of your comfort zone. Go and approach people and befriend them because we can’t have “welcome home” as rhetoric. It has to be reality and so I talk to everybody in that way because I’m the service pastor and I want my service to be welcoming. I don’t want it to be cliquey.

Tanya: Just a final question. What is your hope for the church in Australia?



Robyn: It has to be that we move out of the four walls, move into community. Be the hands of Jesus, being real. Get out. We do a little with Aglow... just going to the old people's homes and singing to them and seeing their faces and the joy it brings. I think we can be too inward looking if we're in the church.

Of course - salvation, salvation, salvation! ... But we can't just say that unless we do something. So breaking out of these four walls and getting out there. It's going to get messy. It's going to get dirty... you will be offended. All of that will happen. Isn't that what Jesus did, isn't that what the Lord did?

He was always out with the lowly and the unlovable and most unlikely to succeed; our street people, our itinerants. Last Christmas we went, just my family. We do this little thing. I made a big stew and rice, and we took bottles of water. My daughter and my family went on the streets and said, "it's Christmas Day ... we just want to wish you a Merry Christmas and bless you with a lunch and a bottle," ... and then we talk. "Where are you from, brother? Oh Timber Creek! Oh you know my father Pastor Ramsey!" ... Yeah so connections.

It doesn't take us long. Once we know families and that we can connect. But there's a lot of work to be done. My heart is for the people out on the streets and I [hope] for all churches to break out of their four walls. There's a lot of people who will come ... but there's a lot of people who won't ... you're going to have to go to them. So that's my prayer for the church.

Tanya: I love it, that's so great. Thank you for the interview!

## Interview with Glenda Ramsey by Tanya Riches

Darwin, NT <sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Glenda Ramsey is a Mamu woman from the Bagabara clan. Formerly a government worker, she is now a volunteer at Hillsong Church in Darwin, and the recently appointed leader of the Christian association Aglow in the Northern Territory. She is the daughter of Pastor Lawrence and Mary Ramsey who planted churches in Mt. Garnet, QLD, Kununurra in WA and Batchelor, Northern Territory. Here she reflects upon her own journey into leadership, and the value of being bicultural in assisting reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

### Interview

Tanya: What's your name for the transcript?

Glenda: Glenda Ramsey.

Tanya: And where is your country?

Glenda: My country is in Innisfail, North Queensland. I am Mamu and our clan group is Bagabara.

Tanya: Is it your daughter Frances Ramsey who is over in Western Australia?

Glenda: She's my daughter-in-law.

Tanya: And she did the first Welcome to Country at Hillsong in Perth?

Glenda: Yeah! I believe she spoke in the local language. I didn't even know that she speaks language ... but yeah ... Frances shone that night.

Tanya: Yes! Everyone said it was really beautiful.

---

<sup>1</sup> This interview took place on 26<sup>th</sup> August 2018 and the transcript was edited by the interviewee on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2019.

Glenda: Frances is now inspired since the Welcome to Country Hillsong experience to go to the next level, of facilitating her language. I think that she has already started.

Tanya: So you've been coming to Hillsong church for a while?

Glenda: I've been attending this church since 2016, after I moved back to Darwin, from Katherine.

Tanya: Before it was Hillsong church, you were at this congregation, is that right?

Glenda: Yes that's right. The church was then known as Hope City. I was still fairly new to the Hope City fellowship, when the news came through that Hillsong was taking over Hope City.

Tanya: And where did you get saved, can you tell me a little bit about your testimony?

Glenda: I was saved in the mid-1990s at the church where Hillsong Malak campus stands today. I was brought up in a Christian family, but I didn't really commit myself to the Lord, and deliberately walked away from him for many years. I found it difficult to come to terms with a whole generation of Australia's Indigenous people's lives being disrupted under the assimilation policy and I blamed God for generational losses of identity. I now thank the Lord for praying parents and because of their prayers I eventually gave my heart to the Lord. My Dad and Mum never failed to invite me to church. I always made the excuse that I was studying for my course and couldn't go with them. One night, I decided to take a break from studying and I turned the television on, as I wanted to watch 60 minutes. The first story was about the war in Bosnia but I didn't feel [like] watch[ing] it. So, I laid on the couch and I closed my eyes and started to doze off to sleep. From a distance it seem[ed] [that] I heard Jana Wendt introduce the Bosnian Minister of Foreign Affairs, with words like... "*so, you're prepared to lay your life down for your people.*" I jumped up as it reminded me of Jesus willingly laying down his life for us... for the Bosnian Minister, the question I pondered on was, 'where will he spend eternity?'

I looked at the Bosnian Minister on television, and he was sobbing, and he responded to Jana with "yes, I am prepared to lay my life down for my people." His words gripped hold of me and for the first time I understood how much Jesus loves me. Before you knew it, I began to pray for the Bosnian Foreign Affairs Minister and for the war to end. Several nights after that I felt a peace. Shortly after, the war had ended between Serbia and Bosnia, [and] about a week later I gave my heart to Jesus. Today, I am still serving him.

Tanya: Were your parents pastoring at Malak?

Glenda: No, [at that time] dad was pastoring a small church at Batchelor, which is located only 100 kilometres from Darwin. My parents pastored that church for over 10 years. Most of the people attending the Batchelor church were Indigenous students, transients and some locals. The population [at Batchelor] at that time was 500 people. We had a lot of good things happening in the Batchelor community, which included Royal Rangers, all night prayer meetings, fund raising, catering for the Parachute club for international events, and so on.

Tanya: In this project we're really interested in the role of the Holy Spirit in your life, and how as a Christian [you] interact with the Holy Spirit?

Glenda: More so than ever before, it has to be a lifestyle with me. It is necessary for me to rely on the Holy Spirit. I am now in a position of leadership, and I don't do anything in my own strength. The reason is that the Holy Spirit is my helper, my guide and my mentor. Things begin to happen when I put my trust in the things of God. God is the spirit and they [who] worship him shall worship him in Spirit and in truth. The Holy Spirit is another level, whereby, things begin to break over our lives as we begin to put trust and have the faith in him. I am all for change - wherever there is oppression there is always the need for the Holy Spirit to come in his strength and his power and to change the atmosphere and uproot those things that [try] to obstruct us from achieving change.

The Holy Spirit is powerful, and he is Jesus. He teaches us how to pray, he reveals things, he breaks chains of oppression and gives us understanding, which unfolds revelation.

In the role I'm in at Darwin Aglow, I really have to stand on the Word and take the step of faith and to trust the Holy Spirit to help and guide me in everything. I do have a Vision and that is to see the Aglow movement established in every major city, town and community throughout the Northern Territory. I understand that I am the first Australian Indigenous woman to become the President of Aglow in Darwin. What an honour to be chosen for such a time as this.

I'm wanting to get to the next level in the Lord where I continue to be hungry and thirsty for him, and to be able to develop competently in my gifting. I don't want to miss out on anything to do with my relationship with God. Aglow's focus is on *Crossing Over*, and it so important that I need to become strong in the ways of the Lord, and disciplined in the things of God, if I am to lead the way in Crossing Over.

Tanya: So, you're a volunteer at Aglow?

Glenda: Yes, I am a volunteer at Aglow and I am enjoying it so much. I also think that there is a difference between being a volunteer and being chosen by God, and yet it goes hand in hand. God has chosen me to take up this leadership position for such a time as this. I would never

volunteer for such a role, because I would not be confident to do it. But what an honour and humbling [it is] to actually be chosen by God for such a time as this. My passion is to reflect *his Kingdom Come*, by outreaching the “who-so-ers”, such as those in prison, the long grassers, the sick, the aged, lonely and broken-hearted, and with the mindset of setting the captives free.

Tanya: So you volunteer here as well?

Glenda: Yes, I am a volunteer at the Next Step stand on Sunday morning. I am also on the doors at Sisterhood every Thursday morning, and maintain the updates on the screens of connect leaders located in the Palmerston area.

Tanya: That’s great! OK... what does culture mean to you and also what does the Dreaming mean to you? Is it the same?

Glenda: From an Indigenous perspective it seems that Dreaming is as one with culture. I was brought up in a Christian home and not the traditional ways. Yet to an extent I do [share] experiences with policies for Indigenous people. Yet, there are pockets of cultural ways [we have] that are similar to [people who live more traditionally] such as community gatherings, and some hunting/gathering activities, and our behaviour to each other in family.

Culture is very important to me, particularly if one comes from the position of the loss of identity. For many years, I grieved over the culture I didn’t have. The loss of identity really got to me, but now I am accepting the Indigenous contemporary culture I have today.

Overall, I believe that there is good and bad in every culture. Dreaming is associated with what is spiritual, however, if it does not align with the Word of God, then for myself, I walk away from it. Besides, I was not brought up with the concept of Dreaming. Like other cultures, if one thinks that what is good for one’s well-being - keep it, and if not good - simply leave it out! I think that in contemporary Indigenous culture, we have the capacity to do just that.

Overall, I am comfortable with contemporary Indigenous culture. It allows me to be who I am, what I believe in, and at the same time I respect and learn from other Australian Indigenous cultures, whether from those that live in the desert or those that live by the sea. It allows for diversity ... yet we are still connected on issues that impact us in the wider society.

Tanya: And how does your culture fit with your Christianity?

Glenda: I think here in the Territory, Indigenous women tend to be the ones that attend church more than the men. I know in the Batchelor church where my father pastored he relied on my mum and

his daughters to help with church activities - such as playing in the praise and worship band, cleaning, co-ordinating activities and so on. Several of my sisters were given the opportunity to preach, and with one of them actually running the church for two years.

It seems within Batchelor, Indigenous women were given the opportunity to use their giftings. I think ... we felt empowered to have this opportunity to experience different roles in a much more meaningful way, than ever before.

Indigenous people love gatherings and are very strong on Christian rallies, conventions and retreats. The diverse groups all love to come together for these special times. They will travel long distances to join as one for several days' events. Additionally, Country and Western, and Gospel tend to be the music preferred in the Northern parts of Australia. All look forward to fellowshiping one with another. Such fond memories.

We do have a sense of humour and events are the best time for us to act ourselves and add humour to stories around cups of tea. I've noticed that where there is an Indigenous congregation [or] Indigenous preachers and praise and worship leaders, they tend to speak Aboriginal English or Kriol when they are ... at the front. They tend to also talk within the congregation's experience as well. I often [do] this in conversations or when I used to facilitate workshops with Indigenous people in attendance.

Tanya: Do you think you draw some of those things into your roles at Hillsong?

Glenda: Most definitely the opportunity is certainly there to do so. It amazes me though when you see the local "Territorians" integrating some Indigenous culture into their lifestyle; it is so good. To me they're already there with their relationship with [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] people. This certainly makes [them] people feel at ease. I'm always interested in who they are, what group they come from, who are their families, as to seek some connection with them. At the end of the day we want to reflect "Welcome Home" but do it in a way that finds common ground.

Moreover, it is also a way of searching for family we do not know exist. I often think that features are important as it gives me the sense of what region that person comes from. The Hillsong foyer is an excellent place to be, as it allows for time to spend with people that can only be gold, should we find that we are family.

Tanya: Being bicultural you can do great things.

Glenda: Definitely, for sure. It's amazing to see, though, an Indigenous young woman from a remote community, on the journey to achieving bicultural ways. At first, she was shy, and her

conversation was very limited. As she knew our family from Kununurra, she hung out with myself and my sister...until she got to know other people. Little by little she began to grow in confidence, and one day she was asked to volunteer for the kitchen. She kept on saying, "they really want me, and only me to volunteer for the kitchen?! Why didn't they ask anybody else?"

Tanya: She was amazed that she was being invited to participate?

Glenda: Yes, for sure she was amazed, and I guess overwhelmed as well. I can only imagine that she must've felt very valued. It made me realise that what I may take for granted ... others may view as ground breaking stuff for them.

I was so happy for the young woman to be able to work alongside [church people] from another culture and to enjoy what she was asked to do. I noted that in a short space of time she became more relaxed around non-Indigenous people! Overall, it seems to make life easier for those...from remote areas - when they are able to adapt to another culture or environment that is different from [their home]. It's people like this young woman...you get the feeling may succeed in what seems alien to them, and I think they will with the right support behind them.

Tanya: I don't know whether there's a lot of cultural ceremonies in the Darwin area [but] some of the really big ones in Sydney are Welcome or Acknowledgment to Country and other ceremonies people put on. How do you decide on what you participate in and what you don't as a Christian? ... Do you find that you can participate in everything? Or not so much?

Glenda: You mean outside of church?

Tanya: Yeah, outside of church.

Glenda: As I said before, if such ceremonies are beneficial to one's well-being then keep it. However, if one is filled with the Holy Spirit then it is going to be through discernment that one can pick up [the spirituality of] ceremonies and [ask myself] in particular, "will [this] line up with the Word of God?" In a government [area] I once worked, they had a smoking ceremony for the opening of its new building. However, this ceremony did not sit right with me. Besides, some people suffer health problems, and any smoking can trigger off an asthma attack.

Tanya: So you'd feel okay participating in a government ceremonial moment like Welcome to Country but not so much in a smoking ceremony - or does it depend?

Glenda: I am totally in favour for the Welcome to Country and the Acknowledgement to Country. I use to do the Acknowledgement to Country in Canberra, when I co- facilitated the Cultural Appreciation Program for my former workplace. I guess if one is in a workplace where it is

mandatory that one attends Smoking ceremonies, then I have no choice but to attend. It seems that there is a spiritual aspect added to the smoking ceremony. For the Christian, this maybe of a concern, and may possibly cause disharmony due to the different values between the diverse groups.

It seems to me that Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement to Country is more common in the other states than here in the Territory. I've seen very little of these ceremonies here. I understand that the speaker for Welcome to Country is not qualified to speak on behalf of other sub groups [within] their overall group, and it seems that this causes conflict among them. For this reason, I think that it is [kept] low key.

Tanya: It's a bit different up here for sure! ... So you talked about being an Aboriginal Christian before you got a bit lost and had to come through a journey. What do you think is important for young Aboriginal Christians to know or that you could pass on, I guess, to people who might be reading this?

Glenda: I think for young Aboriginal Christians I believe that it is important for them to be grounded in the Word of God. Pursue a strong foundation in him, our Lord and Saviour. Surround oneself with people that are going to speak life into you. Position yourself where you are going to be influenced, so as to influence others. Be a role model for others, in the ways of the Lord. Live the Christian culture which embraces the fruits of the Spirit, and above all love others as Christ loves us.... don't walk away from your culture but give up on those things that are bad and are not good for your walk with the Lord, as you are a new creation; a brand new person! Old things are passed away [and] you are born again.

Tanya: Final question...so you've taken on this role of women's Aglow, you're an Aboriginal leader in Darwin - what's your hope for the church in Australia?

Glenda: I should've mentioned before that Aglow is not just for women anymore. It has a new title which is Aglow International-Australia, and we just added Darwin Aglow to it. God is coming back for a pure bride, and I believe that in order for the church to get ready and to become that pure bride, wrongs are needed to be put right.

I believe that God is giving the church the opportunity to do this so that breakthroughs can come, and revival breaks out before the coming of the Lord. I see churches in Australia in unity and getting behind each other to reap the harvest.

Most churches are multicultural, and we can learn from one [another] and share our culture(s) in praise and worship, food, or in cultural workshops that are going to impact the future for us as individuals, and as diverse groups and leaders.

Tanya: Thank you



## Interview with Christie Jacobs by Tanya Riches

### Darwin, NT

#### Abstract

Christie Jacobs is a Yidinji woman, the granddaughter of well-known Aboriginal musical evangelists Peter and Eva Morgan, and the daughter of Australia's best known Aboriginal worship leader, Robyn Green. She regularly leads worship at Hillsong Darwin and with her husband is a service pastor at the Palmerston campus. Her passion for the local church is matched by her desire to see the local Aboriginal children that she pastors grow in forgiveness and grace, as well as being proud about their heritage and past, after the atrocities of the Stolen Generation.

#### Interview

Tanya: What's your name for the transcript?

Christie: My name is Christie Jacobs.

Tanya: Where is your country?

Christie: My country is in Far North Queensland, I'm Yidinji and I'm part of the Mullunburra tribe.

Tanya: Could you tell me a little bit about your how you became a Christian?

Christie: Well I was privileged enough to grow up in the church. I had very strong Christian beliefs. My grandfather, he started a few of the churches up here in Darwin. He actually moved the whole family over in, I think it was 1968, just before Cyclone Tracy. He got the word from God and came over here to Darwin from mountains and rain forest and rivers, to desert ... and they started churches.

So I grew up in a church because his daughters were serving the Lord... it was something that I always did. But I made the decision to make Jesus my personal saviour when I was eight. That was when I really truly felt the presence of God.

It was at a camp meeting that mum and [the family] were running and I felt the presence of God. From there, I've never looked back... [I've] served and sung ... and done youth in the church - I just love it.

Tanya: You're now attending Hillsong Darwin - what is your role here?

Christie: We're service pastors. I also oversee all regulars on the Hillsong Darwin Creative roster. I also do [some] other things like decorate on Father's Day, Mother's Day and Kid's Fest and all that kind of good stuff. I love it! It's a passion of mine.

Tanya: And you worship lead!

Christie: Yeah! I worship lead and run Connect Group.

Tanya: I'd love to hear a bit more about the churches your grandfather helped build in Darwin and just a little bit of the history because as I understand it, he was very involved in how the church came to be. I'd love to hear a little bit about [that].

Christie: Yeah what is now the Hillsong Malak campus, my grandfather started as a church with the family.

Tanya: Oh I should have asked - what were their names for the transcript?

Christie: Peter and Eva Morgan.

He also helped to set up Potter's House as well - and then handed that one on and then went to what is now Hillsong Malak. So he always had a huge heart for the Indigenous people, going out to communities. So that's what we grew up with, on the road and preaching on street corners.

Wherever he had the opportunity or the platform to do it, he was telling people about Jesus. He was one of those guys that made you want to give your heart to the Lord [even] during the tithes and offerings messages. He was so convincing, and so convicting.

I remember being at one of the camp meetings out at Maningrida - and when you go out to the communities they sit in the dark, so you can't see [when] you're preaching or singing. You know that [the people are] there but you just can't see them ... and he was just giving one of the best altar calls I'd ever heard, and we were all listening... and then he said, 'if you want to give your heart to the Lord come down right now,' and these two dogs came out from the darkness and walked right down the aisle and sat just right in front of him.

He did one of those sneaky little peeks that a preacher does to see if anyone has come down the front, and when he [saw] the two dogs, he was just killing himself - he just started giggling. The dogs were convicted enough to come down the aisle and give their heart to the Lord.

Tanya: He had a lot of itinerant ministries through the Top End...

Christie: Yes!

Tanya: And was your grandma also a vocalist?

Christie: Yes, so - my nana actually played nine instruments. Her main choice was accordion. Everyone in my family plays an instrument and sings, and either preaches or does something like that.

We were just so fortunate to grow up and see God really move ... before our eyes ...miracles and that absolute [sense] that God is so real. This has really cemented me. Even through the hardest times - like even in losing my dad, where I couldn't make sense of it. I didn't want to be friends with God after that happened. But then came back to [remembering that] God is still God I've still seen him moving. Yes, we don't understand why he didn't heal my dad - like this will always be in the 'too hard basket,' but God is always still God.

I've still seen him. He still created the heavens and the earth. I've still felt him move, I've still seen him move with my own eyes and that's really kept me in the faith ... actually really experiencing him for myself.

Tanya: So your mum and dad - they did a lot of ministering as well, did they?

Christie: Yeah. My mum still ministers to this day. The whole family actually travel. We used to travel around Australia on a bus called Jezariah...well that was what our van name was...so the Jezariah bus... and we actually travelled around Australia. The whole family would be on this bush.

Tanya: And you'd all perform?

Christie: We'd all perform! ... so my Aunties and the kids would do the worship and my dad played the bass and the guitar ...and then my granddad would preach, and my nana would do the tithes and offerings. So it was just a whole family affair! We didn't know anything different but telling people about Jesus. That's how we grew up. Even through all the breakdowns and ... all the things that happened.

From a very [young] age we were taught to pray for people. I can remember when I think I was seven years old ... because they used to call us over and say “Alright, we’re going to pray for this person.”

They’d actually model how to pray. There was a little boy with a club foot and it actually grew before our eyes...like it just came back to normal shape - and I just remember being so excited! I was just bouncing around because I was so excited. I could feel the presence of God myself [as] this young boy was being healed.

I always tell the guys here in the worship team, I say ... “I don’t envy you guys at all because I got to grow up in a time when we were just out there praying.” My mum [Robyn Green], she’s on the prayer lines even to this day for three hours ...on a prayer line, praying for everybody. She still sees miracles.

So every time we go back to be with them, they are always still ministering together. It’s just what we love to do, just to serve people and serve the church. Everyone [in community] is doing it tough and [it’s a good thing] to be able to share the message of Jesus with them and [tell them] that he does heal.

Tanya: You do a lot of travelling, you’ve been around the country a couple of times, like you would have gone almost everywhere right?

Christie: Yeah pretty much.

Tanya: To lots of communities.

Christie: Yes, lots of communities.

I don’t know why they have so many healings take place in the communities. I don’t know ... I think it’s that childlike faith...None of the business of life is in the way, they’re so receptive ... whereas in today’s society our mind gets in the way. Then actually, we become faithless. Whereas they just believe what they believe - that Jesus is going to heal them. They can be coming up drunk to the prayer line but they’ll get instantly healed - it’s something that just blows my mind. They’re just so open to what Jesus and God can do in their lives.

Tanya: And maybe God is really close to the hurting or broken as well. I’m really interested in the role of the Holy Spirit in your Christian life. You talked a little bit about that but - just as a leader, what role does the Holy Spirit play for you?

Christie: Oh wow. A huge role, especially in terms of leading worship. I'll be a nervous wreck before I get up. I just cannot handle it. I'm like sweating and it doesn't matter [how long] I've been singing for ... years ... I've sung on big stages and what have you, [but] I'm still as nervous to get up on a platform at church!

It's not until the Holy Spirit actually comes over me that I just become [released] of fears and [realise] that he's got the control of what happens. All I am is a vessel. So I just lead to where he wants to go. When I was younger it was prophesied over [me] that when I sing, the Holy Spirit actually carries every single note, and ministers to the people that are needing it, and directly to what they need - whether it's sickness or depression. So that single note actually ministers to them in the way that they need to feel the presence of God.

So I've always held onto that, and I always pray that every time before I worship lead or before I sing. Even when you're leading people you just have that, like the word for them ...like the Holy Spirit gives you a feeling or a word for that particular person that can be so in season and actually pull them through. If you're not sensitive to Holy Spirit then you're going to miss speaking into that person's life.

I think also running a connect group you've got to be open and able to speak into people's lives. But I just love it, I love to worship in the house, I love to have the presence of God, the Holy Spirit in the house wherever I'm singing and worshipping all day long pretty much.

Tanya: OK! To change topic a little... Culture means a lot of things to different people in Australia. What does culture mean for you? And I guess where I'm going with this is, what does Dreaming mean for you - and are those two things the same or are they different?

Christie: For me, Dreaming has a different meaning [than culture] ... only because with my family ... my grandfather and all his siblings were taken away when my grandfather was two. There was a massive massacre [and] a lot of the Elders were killed off. [So] language and culture, a lot of it was lost.

My grandfather was only two and he couldn't remember much. So it was like a loss and [we've] slowly been trying to regain some of that [culture] through other channels. Lately we've been really connecting with Country.

For us, Dreaming goes hand in hand in with Country (where you come from) and your ties to the land. For us it's [questions] like ...why are these sites important? What are the stories they tell about our family and our culture? Even down to the bush tucker - what do we eat? What did they eat back in those days? Just learning those stories, just the significance to your tribe, and how they actually tell the story - [for example] about how those people were born. My

grandfather, and all the siblings were born in caves. [Also] the stories of, you know, how the white people came to be...

So for me, Dreaming - it's a story of what's important about your family. People have memories, but for us we've actually got a name to it, "The Dreaming" - you're telling the story about how you came to be, how your family came be and what's important.

Tanya: And so is 'culture' broader than 'Dreaming?' Or do you see the two as the same?

Christie: Hmm. I don't really know ... I would put them in the same bucket!

Tanya: Culture is Dreaming?

Christie: Yeah. Even when [we] say "Country" like white people don't understand. They think we mean a country overseas, but there are so many countries within Australia. I think The Dreaming actually shapes your culture because your Dreaming might tell you the different foods you might eat and that actually become part of your culture - the fish you eat or the dances you do, the songs you sing - are all shaped through that Dreaming, which is actually just passed down from generation to generation. That's basically where it comes from.

Tanya: That's beautiful, such a good way of saying it! So in terms of ceremony, what do you as a Christian decide to participate in, and what do you decide *not* to participate in, in regards to culture? Do you feel there's areas where your Christianity and culture are in conflict or more complementary?

Christie: I haven't really found anything that's conflicted....like we're just starting to really dig deep into things and the kids are learning the stories at the moment. The only thing I guess could conflict sometimes is the forgiveness for what's happened in the past. It's only since I've gotten the age that I am that I really appreciate what my grandfather actually went through, and how he could be a man of so much forgiveness and grace. That was only because he found God. Whereas, there are a lot of families that haven't found God and they still have that hurt, that generational pain and suffering that's passed on.

Whereas with my grandfather, the moment he became Christian it was ...severed. He said "we've got to keep moving forward, we can't do anything to change the past" ...he was always preaching that to us. So I grew up kind of naïve I guess ... I didn't really appreciate [the depth of] what had happened in the Stolen Generation.

My grandfather he found God and he was just so sold out for Jesus. He was all about forgiveness. It wasn't until I was older that we've really gotten into the story of our family, and gone back

to Country. And now that I'm working in the schools and I'm in Indigenous education, I've got to actually do stuff on the Stolen Generation.

My grandfather was actually an amazing man. I don't know how he had so much just grace and forgiveness. He was taken and never saw his mother, all that kind of stuff. I just ... that's only what God can do.

He became a better man because of the religion, because of finding Jesus, it actually made him a better Aboriginal man, where he was actually a role model and somebody that actually inspired us to be better, just in the way he walked in forgiveness.

Tanya: Before I forget, you said that you're an Indigenous educator... I didn't ask you what you do for work but I'd love to hear that as well.

Christie: I actually work at a Catholic school called Sacred Heart Primary School. I've been there for 15 years so I'm part of the furniture. I love the job. I could be a teacher but I choose to, [take] a role that includes a lot of pastoral care. I deal with mainly the Indigenous kids.

I deal with their attendance and their pastoral care needs, such as hygiene. I'm the link between home and school, so I deal a lot with the parents. On top of that, I do a lot of things in the school because I've been there for so long.

I love being the bridge between home and school which is such a big thing in Indigenous families. They have a lot of shame that holds them back ... [but] I have not grown up with shame at all, just because of how my grandfather brought the family up. I'm able to just encourage them. They've seen me on big stages [and] I encourage them because I have no shame.

I can talk to white people, I can talk lingo as well, yeah ... just communicate on those levels and then seeing the kids actually go through the stages and see them achieve every year and go into high school. I like seeing the growth in them.

Tanya: Do you have people from out of area at school or is it mainly local people from Darwin?

Christie: There's a couple of communities around Palmerston that they come from ... they'll come and they'll stay. So they're classed as community kids.

Tanya: And they've kind of got links back to a community?

Christie: Yeah so often they'll go back and board. It's a huge job, I love it.

Now I've got the rapport it's usually pretty good. Most of the kids are either in the care of their grandparents. So they're from that generation where I can go "Who you mob?" and they say back "Who you mob?" ... And I say "my grandfather is Peter Morgan," and they're like "Oh! Peter Morgan" ... because they remember my mum and my grandfather. So already they know that rapport and that I'm coming from this family. We believe in Jesus and we encourage them [and their kids and] lift them up - they can trust us. Straight away, that's usually how I start the conversation with new families because they all know. I've never met somebody that doesn't know Robyn Green or Peter Morgan.

Tanya: That's so beautiful! What do you think is really important for people like yourself to pass on to the younger generation of Christian Aboriginal leaders, what do you think you'd like to say to them?

Christie: I think for me it's finding the balance between being proud and being just over the top... like learning to be proud - but still being able to walk in forgiveness and grace and to love our people. I get around a lot of people my age and they just have so much negativity regarding all the white people. Whereas we've got the opportunity to wipe the slate clean and be able to move forward and make life better for everybody and to not hold people in that condemnation.

[It] is hard because some people have never been able to move on and you've got to realise that as well. But for me...whenever I get together with people that [have] the same position as myself, I'm always trying to get them to see forward rather than labelling white teachers. I say "you know they're all doing a hard job!" So I'm trying to get them to see the bigger picture - that it's about us helping to move forward.

Not forgetting about what's happened and where we've come from! ...But hey let's move forward because that's the best thing we can do, show people that we're getting on with life and surviving or thriving despite where we've come from.

My Indigenous kids that I work with, a lot of them don't have an understanding of the world. They only see their community and their family and that's it. They don't have big dreams and aspirations. Some of them want to play footy - but they don't know what that actually entails. [They have to] leave the family to go and play down south - but that's where a lot of them get stuck and they can't handle it. Whereas every time I go away ... I'm always showing the kids the world. Like what's out there, and what they have to do to get to that point. There's so much more to see than just your community.

A lot of them come in for boarding school and ... the pull of family is so strong. It's the generational cycle - it just goes through the kids and the families. So one of the things I want



to pass on is to shift the generational... I don't know... it's like a curse. It's just [trauma] from the Stolen Generation, it just keeps cycling through, unless there's that shift. With a lot of people you can't say it's Jesus that [causes the] shift because they don't understand ... but something's got to break and that's why I just want to be a part of that shift.

Tanya: I think you answered my last question then because I was going to ask what your future hope for the church is ... but you've said - breaking that generational trauma.

Christie: Yeah. That's always been my goal working with kids. I just want to break that generational cycle. I want them to be the first person in their family [to be] a sports captain leader. Just those little things that they wouldn't have aspirations for - but they can actually do it. I've always just wanted to be part of making a difference in their lives.

Tanya: Thank you so much for talking with us!

**Review of Roland Boer and Christina Petterson *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017).**

Reviewed by Paul Oslington <sup>219</sup>

This book follows Boer's earlier work on the Sacred Economy of Ancient Israel, previously reviewed in *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* (see Volume 19 (2017)).

One of the great weaknesses of recent work by biblical scholars on early Christianity is using vague or incoherent theoretical models (Oslington 2015). Boer and Petterson attempt to remedy this weakness. After dismissing a caricature of neoclassical economics as "individualizing, desocializing, and dehistoricizing" (p3), some rude remarks about Adam Smith, and then a longer discussion of the works of Rostovtzeff, Finley, Polanyi and Weber, the authors opt for a Marxian theoretical model of early Christianity that is essentially Franco-American Regulation Theory plus insights from the classical Marxian scholar Ste. Croix. Boer and Petterson do not linger over its history, aside from a brief comment about origins in debates about Marxian economics, and the influence of Althusser, Kalecki, and the Annales school. Readers can find more background in Boyer (1990). They do emphasise that they "use the term *régulation*," in its French form, and not "regulation," since the latter suggests juridicopolitical regulation (for which the better French word would be *réglementation*). By contrast, *régulation* designates the social, institutional, and ideological factors that determine the stabilities and transformations of a system as a whole." The greatest strength of this work is its attention to economics and application of regulation theory to early Christianity.



*Roland Boer, Xin Ao Distinguished Overseas Professor in Philosophy at Renmin University of China.*

The authors confront the issue of anachronism in theoretical models head-on. "All of the approaches we use are anachronistic. Far better, then, to develop an approach that is constantly aware of such anachronisms, so much that it is built into the approach itself" (pxv). However, Boer and Petterson claim of achieving this through a "narrative of difference" (pxv) is unconvincing. We are left I think with the economists' side stepping of the issue on the grounds that they are providing an outside explanation of ancient economies, not the insider understanding sought by historians and anthropologists.

As Regulation Theory is the basis for this work, and it is important for readers to appreciate its main features. Boer and Petterson begin their account of Regulation Theory by identifying four commitments:

---

<sup>219</sup> Paul Oslington is Professor Economics and Theology, Alphacrucis College

“economic activity is inescapably social; contradiction and therefore crisis is the norm; temporary stability is the exception and needs to be analysed; stability is enabled by institutional, behavioural, and ideological practices” (p40). The key theoretical categories are the regime and mode of regulation. As they explain “Each regime is constructed by units or building blocks called institutional forms. These forms are codifications of the fundamental social relations that underpin economics. They may be quite discrete... Or they may overlap in significant ways... Usually, one institutional form dominates regime with the other forms finding a place within that structure... The relations between the institutional forms produce much of the tensions and potential crises of a regime... At times the contradictions become too much and the regime into is a structural crisis, collapse, and the replacement with another regime” (p45). The institutional forms Boer and Petterson use are subsistence survival, polis-chora (loosely urban-rural), tenure and the slave-relation. The other key theoretical category is mode of regulation which is “an emergent ensemble of norms, institutions, organisational forms, social networks and patterns of conduct that contemporarily stabilize an accumulation regime despite the conflictual and antagonistic character” (p45). Modes of regulation are “constantly adjusting to temporarily stabilise, in three ways: “1) compromises and constraints such as laws and rules; 2) learned and established assumptions about the world and acceptable patterns of behaviour; 3) mechanisms of socially reinforcing and indeed challenging such assumptions behaviour patterns and compromises.” The most important theoretical move that Boer and Petterson make is to identify Christianity as “a highly effective and supple mode of regulation” (p45) in the ancient world. They sum up “The key question is, therefore, how specific economic systems stabilise crises in order to establish continuity for certain periods. Thus, and economic system (mode of production) is made up of key building blocks (institutional forms) that come together in unique formations (regimes) to provide very limited continuity for a time within the larger scale of a mode of production. Due to internal contradictions, these regimes face constant tensions and crises. In those efforts at continuity, a whole series of compromises have to be made, which are enabled and sustained by cultural assumptions, social forces, and above all, religious beliefs (mode of regulation).” But this is a dialectical situation where “regimes generate their own instability” (p45-46)

This summary raises the difficult question of the mode of production within Marxian theory. Boer and Petterson write: “We understand mode of production is the most inclusive of all economic models, incorporating economic matters (the traditional Marxian base or infrastructure), relations of production (the questions of class and class conflict), and the crucial role of ideologies, cultures, beliefs, and ways of being (the traditional superstructure, or what we prefer to call the mode of regulation). Modes of production are measurable only across centuries. Follow the conventional Marxist terminology and call it the “ancient mode of production” (p150). They argue the ancient mode of production encompasses the slave, colonial, and land regimes they have described in the terminology of regulation theory. They suggest it ran from fifth century BCE increase to the fifth century CE, preceded Southwest Asia in by the “sacred economy (at times known as the Asiatic mode of production)” that stretched over almost four millennia, and was followed by the feudal mode of production, whose precursor was the land regime of the ancient mode of production. This attempt to relate their regulation theory categories to the categories of classical Marxism is not wholly successful. In my review of their earlier book on the sacred economy of ancient Israel I criticise the ambiguous and question begging identification of the sacred economy with the Asiatic mode of production. Here they identify the Greco-Roman economy with the classical Marxian ancient mode of production, which unlike the Asiatic mode of production progresses through feudalism to capitalism. Is the distinction between the economy of ancient Israel and the Greco-Roman economy really that sharp?

Aside from the question of the relationship of regulation theory to classical Marxism, is regulation theory appropriate for their task of explaining the economic background of early Christianity? I have argued that contemporary mainstream economics offers the best set of tools for this task (Oslington 2015). Despite Boer and Peterson's significant theoretical achievement of relating regulation theory to the Christianity, I remain unconvinced that it is superior even to classical Marxism. They claim "regulation theory is notable for not being a Procrustes bed on which one attempts to force the various pieces, but rather for its flexibility, in terms of developing its categories from the data available and ensuring that such categories remain supple." (p45). However flexibility and suppleness can just mean that we have a language for describing the economic background of early Christianity, rather than something like classical Marxist or contemporary mainstream economics which offer strong causal accounts (their similarity discussed by Seers 1983).

Having outlined this theoretical model in chapter 1 the book proceeds to describe the institutional forms of subsistence agriculture that emphasises diversity to minimise risk and facilitate long term survival (chapter 2), polis-chora relations and land tenure (chapter 3) and the slave-relation (chapter 4). These are rich discussions, with some large claims made. Perhaps the largest is in chapter 4 where Boer and Peterson argue that slave markets were the origin of markets, and slaves the origin of the institution of private property. I'm unconvinced by both these claims and there are better explanations in the existing literature.

There is a shift in chapter 5 synchronic to diachronic analysis, where they describe successive transitions in the Greco-Roman economy from a slave regime to the colonial regime, to a land regime. These transitions were not clean, with the slave and colonial regimes coexisting for periods, and there been considerable regional variations. The endpoint though of the land regime where peasants were tied to particular plots of land was definite, and prefigured the transition from the ancient mode of production to the later feudal mode of production.

The chapter that perhaps will attract most discussion from biblical scholars and theologians is chapter 6 which expands on the previous claim that Christianity operated as a mode of regulation in the Greco-Roman economy. The early part of the chapter gives examples of how Christianity operated in this way, undergirding the slave and colonial regimes, and assisting in the transition to the land regime. It gets more interesting when Boer and Peterson pose the question of "why did Christianity so quickly become part of the early Roman urban setting?" despite its ostensible Galilean rural origins (p154) and their observation that "Everything about Jesus stands against the deeply held values of the Greco-Roman ruling class, almost uniquely in the literature of the ancient world" (p156). Boer and Peterson's controversial answer is that the Gospels are actually urban documents in their language and interests despite the ostensibly rural setting. They read the Gospel accounts of rural subsistence life as "responsive metaphorisation" (p160) which when examined closely display an "ambivalence" to such a life (p162). They examine John who they claim is the most urban of the Gospels, then Mark, then discuss the parables. The most substantial reading they offer is of Parable of the Wicked Tenants in Mark 12 (and Mt 21 and Luke 20), questioning the traditional identification of God with the owner of the Vineyard. Their general point about attending to the urban background of the gospels is well made, though each of the readings they offered of biblical passages I found ultimately unconvincing. I wonder whether the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25 and Luke 19) might have been a better major example. Provocation continues as they argue that slavery was essential to early Christian mission, that Paul owned slaves, and "the Gospels propagate the slave-ethos" (p177).

Overall this is a well written and thought-provoking book, but one which is in the end unconvincing in its advocacy of Regulation Theory as the best framework for understanding the economic background of early Christianity, and unconvincing in many of its specific arguments.

## References

- Boer, R. (2015). *The Sacred Economy* Louisville, Kentucky, Westminster John Knox.
- Boer, R. and C. Petterson (2014). *Idols of Nations: Biblical Myth at the Origins of Capitalism*, Fortress.
- De Ste. Croix, G. E. M. (1989). *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests*. Corrected edition Ithaca, N.Y., Cornell University Press.
- Boyer, R. (1990). *The Regulation School: A Critical Introduction* Translated by Craig Charney. New York, Columbia University Press.
- Oslington, P. (2015). "Economics and Biblical Studies" in *Oxford Bibliographies* edited by C. Matthews. New York, Oxford University Press. <http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/>.
- Oslington, P. (2017). *Political Economy as Natural Theology: Smith Malthus and Their Followers* London, Routledge.
- Seers, D. (1983). *The Political Economy of Nationalism* Oxford, Oxford University Press.

**Nimi Wariboko, *The Split God: Pentecostalism and Critical Theory* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2018).**

Reviewed by Amos Yong <sup>220</sup>

*The Split God* will be challenging for most readers of this journal, not least because the author operates here in a primarily philosophical key – in contrast to the ministerial perspectives foregrounded in these pages usually – and even then, his interlocutors derive mostly from the European continent, especially French and poststructural arenas, rather than from working in English speaking languages. Further, if that were not enough, our author deploys as his primary pentecostal lens West African forms of the movement rather than the Euro-American or Australasian versions more familiar with those who frequent this periodical. Finally, we are also dealing with a prolific and trans-disciplinary thinker who traverses not only the broad scope of pentecostal studies but also works deftly in the arena of social ethics, particularly at the nexus of where this primary discipline of his encounters economics and economic theory (he spent, after all, ten years of his life working in the financial sector of Wall Street, while pastoring a West African diasporic pentecostal congregation on Manhattan). This means that those who have not read his prior works – including but not limited to *The Pentecostal Principle: Ethical Methodology in New Spirit* (2012), *Nigerian Pentecostalism* (2014), and *The Charismatic City and the Public Resurgence of Religion: A Pentecostal Social Ethics of Cosmopolitan Urban Life* (2012) – will be ill-prepared for the interdisciplinary analyses of this book.

Nevertheless, perhaps the most important thing to know about *The Split God* is its central theological thesis and its main methodological proposal. The latter is Wariboko's claim that much of formal pentecostal academic theology has operated at the more abstract discursive level, perhaps consistent with the thoroughfare of the theological traditions upon which emerging pentecostal theologians desire to attain recognition, but this is not only inconsistent with but also dismissive of the sociality of pentecostal practices in the everyday domain that sustain the life and catalyze the growth of the movement. Hence the wager is that attentiveness to the intersubjective sociality of embodied pentecostal praxis pushes forward the discussion in ways that pentecostal theologians have yet to mine. One might say that Wariboko springs off the phenomenology of pentecostal sociality in order to think theologically about and with the movement. Methodologically, this would be a consistent "next-step" for pentecostal theological work.

So, what is the resulting theological claim at the material level from this more formally re-oriented approach? Succinctly, Wariboko urges that pentecostal praxis – e.g., its prayers, its exorcisms, its attitudes toward and confessions about prosperity, its singing and worship, its spirituality of miracles, dreams and visions, including visions of the divine manifest in and through mundane daily life – is suggestive of the *split-ness* heralded

---

<sup>220</sup> Amos Yong is Professor of Theology & Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary

in the book's title. There is a split between pentecostal realities and pentecostal aspirations, desires, and hopes, and this split, consistent with the pentecostal imaginary that sees God more or less straightforwardly as manifest in these prayers, rites, and practices, persists ontologically and theologically: thus God is also split, between who God is as manifest to pentecostal believers and in Godself, between what God is as apparent in the present and the God who is coming, between the reality of God perceived in the ordinary and the promised deity that delivers us into the super-ordinary, etc. Wariboko makes sense of this theological thesis in conversation with continental philosophers and critical theorists.

Even if most Pentecostals who pick up this book will not be familiar with the critical theoretical apparatus central to the dialogue, I suggest that we ought to stay with *The Split God* as long as we can. Doing so will extend our philosophical horizons, will stretch our theological considerations, and will deepen our appreciation of how our pentecostal spirituality is rooted primordially in West African and sub-Saharan sensibilities as unveiled in this book. Critical engagement with Wariboko's arguments, methodological and theological, can arise only through, not around, *The Split God* (not to mention its predecessors). Toward this end, I recommend this book and its thought-provoking author.