Barbara Ann Hill is the author of the thesis entitled:

‘The Identity and Autonomy of the Indigenous Community Within Christianity’.

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THE IDENTITY AND AUTONOMY OF

THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY

WITHIN CHRISTIANITY

by

Barbara Ann Hill, B.A., B.Litt(Hons).

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

August, 2004
"I leaped headlong into the sea and thereby have become better acquainted with the soundings, the quicksands and the rocks, than if I had stayed upon the green shore, and piped a silly pipe, and took tea and comfortable advice."

and for that fact I am profoundly grateful.

---

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful to the Aboriginal people who graciously responded to my questions and for their encouragement to write about issues that affected their local area. I did so as a non-Aboriginal woman looking at the interface between the institutional mainstream churches and Aboriginal Christian people and with a particular involvement with The Boomerang Meeting Place Ministry Centre, Mogo, as the people contextualise their Christian experience.

I am thankful also for a supportive family: husband David and children, Susannah, Matthew, Elisabeth and Sarah who have given me encouragement and been very patient.

WARNING

References in this thesis are made to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have died.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the issues that humankind seeks answers to is the question of identity: “Who am I?” and “Do I have any significance?” From the conclusion that an individual reaches in the process of this discovery of identity should come personal growth and an understanding of one’s place in the world. Aspects such as self-esteem, a sense of belonging and value are part of this identity. For a Christian, to know where one stands with God also gives identity and a role in community. To place one’s self in relation to God and what one perceives as God’s will in and for the world is to place oneself in a particular relation to another person. This relationship includes expectations of, and for, each person: that is, between God and each person and between persons. Do the churches’ interpretations of the message confirm and strengthen the message of the relationship between God and the person (one of love and grace) and between all people? Lesslie Newbigin admonished the Westernised church generally by saying that the way the church lives its life actually shuts people out rather than, and often at the same time as, preaching what should be welcoming. How does this impact on people who have a different culture and seek to be part of the Christian church community?

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one part of this thesis I look at the interface between the institutions of the mainstream Christian churches through their personnel and southern Australian Aboriginal Christians. I seek to determine whether Aboriginal Christians are being shut out, and in what ways. Secondly I seek to determine whether the movement for an Aboriginal Church is a reaction to a feeling of being excluded or a movement for a true contextualisation of the Gospel for Australian Aboriginal Christians. This thesis explores the issues facing southern Australian Aboriginal people as they attempt to be Aboriginal and Christian.

*Identity and the land*

When John Rudder, working with people in Arnhem Land, asked of one Aboriginal man, Rurrambu, “What is it that is of the most value to the Yolŋu people?” he was told “Knowing identity - where I fit, what and who I am.”

Another Aboriginal person stated: “If I do not know who I am, I am nothing.” For Aboriginal people the land represents much of a person’s identity. The link with the land of one’s birth is of prime importance and carries with it authority and obligations. The network of relationships formed by the association with one’s country helps to identify and locate each person. Identity as related to land is always emphasised. In his work with the people of East Arnhem Land, John Rudder also observed:

This combination of the focusing and networking of relations as a basis for identity is then analogous to the cosmological

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identification of human beings except in the one detail that humans gain their identity not from relationship with just a single site but from relationships with a networked set of sites and associated ritual elements, the unique combination of which forms the basis for human identity. Thus deprived of land the Yolŋu is deprived of a large portion of the basis of his identity and without affiliation with land is unable to adequately define that identity. 3

The people interpreted their role in the world through their cosmological knowledge and their process through life was guided by this understanding. When Christianity was related to the life of the Yolŋu people, the pathways through life followed the same phases or stages as the traditional beliefs indicated. However, land was, and is, still an important basis for identity.

Knowing one's land and one's relationship to another person is an important part of Aboriginal relationships in southern Australia as well, even though many people have been dislocated from their traditional lands. Many Aboriginal people still seek to travel to their own country if they are able to do so. Whether a person has traditional or Christian beliefs, the web of connection to the world comes from identity with the land. For many Aboriginal people the form of introduction to another Aboriginal person involves indicating where they are from, that is, their country, and what their relationship is to other people, so that a person new to an area may be defined by residents by their land and their relationship to other people. Acceptance often depends on where one has come from and this can cause great difficulty and problems for a person who is not from the same country, particularly if that person is in a leadership role.

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3 Rudder, p. 367.
Nevertheless, there are occasions when someone’s personality and efforts on behalf of Aboriginal people means that person is accepted to the point of being a spokesperson for another group. I know of one instance where a person ‘not from here’, that is, from a different Aboriginal country, was accorded the status of elder in the local group. Following that person’s death an annual memorial day showed acknowledgement by others.

‘Inside’ aspects of identity

Another defining point is that provided by ritual items and the ‘inside’ aspects these give to identity. This is more apparent in northern Australia. For example, in reference to the ranga (ritual items) of the Yolgu of Arnhem Land, Rudder wrote:

> As one man said to me it is not the wooden objects that are of the greatest significance but the invisible identity that they represent...they represent an identity which in its various transformations cross-cuts the different dimensions of existence.⁶

While the extent of these objects and rituals appears not to be as great in southern Australia, I have heard comments about the ‘inside’ aspects of life—that is, issues, attitudes, connections, understandings, things which are known to Aboriginal people but are not known to non-Aboriginal people. Sometimes this was referred to by Aboriginal people who spoke to me, as ‘protocols’ which Aboriginal people would be aware of but which would not be apparent to a non-Aboriginal observer.

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In the area in which I became involved some language is still known although the number of words is not high. There is a strong interest in locating tape recordings and other records [known by the people to have been made by non-Aboriginal researchers] which would enable a recovery — in part — of the language. There are a few children’s books written by local speakers that have been used in a local school. There is some art and craft that is specific to certain areas and a knowledge of native tucker and its availability. Certain totems are defined as well. There is a resurgence of interest in establishing those connections that are deemed to define a person’s Aboriginality and there is a developing pride in that Aboriginality.

Loss of identity

In many ways, therefore, these are indicators which point to a sense of being Aboriginal and which many non-Aboriginal people may not see as steeped in tradition and of importance to identity. Because southern Aboriginal people may have lost contact with, or connection in the sense of belonging and obligation to, their traditional lands, language is incomplete, traditions are limited and the phases of life are not marked in any apparent traditional way, non-Aboriginal people do not see Aboriginal people as having a need to identify independently. For many Aboriginal people socio-economic status is low, and issues such as education, employment, health and longevity are well below the national average. In most areas, Aboriginal people feel despair because of the way the future appears to them. The issues of identity and value are of great importance in the quest to build confidence and self-esteem amongst Aboriginal people who are struggling in their situation in the local
and wider community. For the people in the area with which I had most contact, an identity as Aboriginal and Christian was seen as a means of addressing these issues.

Another aspect is provided by the Dreamtime which has been recorded (by Fox) in Eddie Kneebone’s words that the Dreamtime gave people:

> A sense of a powerful identity, a sense of their importance, a belief that they are... valuable for what they are. Another aspect of the Dreamtime is cosmology. It is a realization that we have a place in the universe.  

That is, the Dreamtime gave identity: it answered “Who am I?” and “Do I have any significance?” The loss of identity that some Aboriginal people have seen in others, particularly those on the fringes of society and affected by substance abuse and other social ills, cause concern: “They see this loss of identity in part-Aboriginals and they are afraid of it.” Part of this loss of identity may be from loss of association with one’s own country for reason of trauma and dislocation and partly the loss of connection spiritually which defines one’s place in the world, and in creation. The loss of identity can also be part of dislocation from the network that honours the land, the history and the place in community. Thus self-esteem is affected, as is the ability to cope with change, the strength to remain true to oneself and one’s history, and one’s sense of value in society.

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8 *Free to Decide*, 1974, p. 86.
One aspect of the desire for an Aboriginal expression of Christianity in the part of southern Australia with which I had most contact was the chance to address disadvantage and lack of confidence issues of Aboriginal people. Many Aboriginal people stated that they were often uncomfortable if they had to attend what was seen as a ‘white man’s church’. Aboriginal people mentioned, in general conversations, that an important part of putting one’s Christian spiritual beliefs in to practice should result in an awareness of the needs of the disadvantaged, the suffering and the oppressed, and an active commitment to the liberation from social ills. Here are the seeds of a Liberation Theology. They felt this action of faith was often ignored by non-Aboriginal Christians in their contact with all people. I noted also a comment by Claire Day in a reflection on religion particularly from a woman’s perspective, in which she described religions as ‘control mechanisms’, ‘dogmas, (rather than) living experience’, in ‘a world unsympathetic to our spiritual needs’ in which God, humankind, nature and everyday life are compartmentalised.7 For an Aboriginal person these comments could also be made. Certainly compartmentalisation is thought to be inappropriate. One’s spirituality encompasses all of creation and all of a person.

Isolation

The sense of unease and being ignored and other such comments indicated to me that Aboriginal people often felt isolated from the Christian Church community. Yet it has been argued that the value of religious affiliation was “important for self-realisation: for affirming one’s identity and for

7 C. Day, A Spiritual journey. An account of one person’s creative influences, part of MA Deakin University, Victoria, 1995, p. 9.
experiencing a sense of counting for something”.
Religious affiliation can provide support and care and a platform for influence which may not be apparent in a person’s daily life or provide an association with a particular class or social grouping. Therefore it can also help integrate people into the community. In rural areas when a community is struggling the church can be a means of keeping the community together and helping the community to adapt in times of economic hardship and social and emotional stress. While a number of studies have thus affirmed that organised religion can fulfil needs of belonging, support, influence and identity, an opposite effect has also been observed: particularly that in rural communities churches tended to reinforce differences and inequalities in society. 

The feeling of isolation within the community and the sense of being on the outside of the church for Aboriginal people led to a felt need for Aboriginal people to meet separately so that they could counteract the feeling of isolation by providing a welcoming and supportive environment within which they could worship.

In the case of Aboriginal Australians, the dominant culture may invoke particular rules and expectations of its attendees where the clothes worn, the perceived educational status, the social standing and so on, impact on the acceptance of the Aboriginal person. A number of Aboriginal people mentioned that they felt that other members of the congregation would be

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11 Dempsey, p. 76.
‘looking over their shoulders’ at Aboriginal people if they came to church.

I have observed this happening. These feelings must affect a person’s sense of involvement, value and acceptance. One’s acceptance into the church as institution and by congregation members is often influenced by the particular class philosophy, expectations and politics that have permeated the institution even to the point of the ‘sacralization’ of identity which Mol identifies:

For, however universal the ecclesiastical messages are purported to be, they are concretized in social institutions, personnel, clientele, language and class structure. ¹²

Background to Thesis

Over eighteen years ago I began reading of the experiences of people following the Christian faith in Africa and Asia and the difficulties that were experienced in finding support for making the process of becoming Christian their own and not that of the colonisers or missionaries. Contact with people in various areas of Australia also raised questions as to whether the manner with which the Christian religion was still being brought to the Aboriginal people, the expectations and restrictions imposed by the Christian churches in general, really meant that the people were experiencing a culturally appropriate expression and practice of that faith. In many ways it still seemed a method of imposition particularly in southern Australia.

In my thesis I indicate the search for identity as Aboriginal and Christian for a small group of people living in south eastern Australia in Mogo, a small

village on the south coast of New South Wales. Although my focus is on the Mogo area I have however looked wider afield within Australia and have compared developments at Mogo with those in other southern areas and added some reflections from southern Aboriginal people on the practices of northern Australian indigenous Christians. As a comparison I have included issues that have arisen for indigenous people in New Zealand. Reference is also made to the historical material available concerning experiences among indigenous people in Africa, Asia, South America, Canada and among African-American people.

My involvement at Mogo

I became involved as a supporter of the initiative at Mogo. I had at that stage been part of the Koori Commission of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn – a group which was to inform the Diocese on Aboriginal issues including Reconciliation. Later that group was to become the support for a number of projects on cross cultural matters and the establishment of a ministry at Mogo. When I spoke with Koori people at Mogo about my interest in Aboriginal Christianity, I was asked to write their story. Therefore in the past seven years I have had an association with the ministries at Mogo and in the latter years with The Boomerang Meeting Place Ministry Centre, Mogo, to which I refer in this thesis as ‘Mogo’ or ‘The Meeting Place’.

Background to Mogo

The development of a centre at Mogo came as a response to, and by, a number of Aboriginal Christian people who felt a need to address the issues
of social dysfunction, poor self-esteem, lack of confidence and the general low social, economic and health status of the Aboriginal people within the area. These Aboriginal Christians believed that their people had lost a sense of value and relationship to others in society and to the land. Therefore there was a need to provide an appropriate way of healing members of the community. This healing, it was felt, would be best achieved by building an identity as Aboriginal and Christian and helping those people who had lost their traditional spirituality or had not sought spiritual development. By addressing these issues through a Christian focus these members of the Aboriginal community felt that healing and restoration would occur. In the process people would gain an Aboriginal ownership of their faith. Out of this would come a strength and an identity in Christ as Aboriginal people. This idea was first mentioned to me at Mogo in 1996. My thesis documents the process and struggle through which the people went in order to find this ownership of faith.

In 1997 some non-Aboriginal people in the area expressed the confusion that they felt regarding the desire of Aboriginal people to celebrate Christianity in an Aboriginal way with their own church within a mainstream denomination. In conversations I became aware that many non-Aboriginal Christian people reacted negatively to the proposition of an Aboriginal Church or a separate Aboriginal congregation. Aboriginal people in other areas of southern Australia were similarly expressing their desire to walk their own path of Aboriginal Christianity. Generally there was, and still is, little understanding in non-Aboriginal congregations of this need.
Conversely there were some Aboriginal Christians who felt that there was no need for a separation but who nevertheless had a strong desire for, and welcomed, the opportunities to share their faith with other Aboriginal Christians. There were very few Aboriginal ministers in mainstream Churches in southern Australia and at the time few opportunities to meet with other Aboriginal Christians on a regular basis.

The Boomerang Meeting Place Ministry centre at Mogo, which is my focus, was to be run by Aboriginal people specifically, but not solely, for Aboriginal people in a culturally appropriate manner and, as is appropriate holistically, was to be part of a cultural centre. Mogo is fairly central for the tribal Yuin group. The Yuin are resident from Wreck Bay to Eden across three Shires and are involved in various mainstream Christian denominations across different Dioceses, Presbyteries or Circuits, some minor churches (in relation to overall numbers) and a number of sects. The Shire within which the village is situated has a 4.2% Aboriginal population according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2001. While many Aboriginal people in this area are Christian, at least nominally, there is also a strong representation of traditional Aboriginal spirituality amongst a few people. Attachment to a particular denomination is not necessarily life-long with some Aboriginal people indicating they had spent periods within one denomination and then changed to another while others had continued to identify with a particular denomination with which they had had contact as a child although they did not now attend church. Some of the reasons for the withdrawal by past attendees are addressed later and are pertinent to the aims of their endeavours. Therefore there is not a high number of Aboriginal
people attending church on a regular basis. However there are large attendances at funeral services — often there are three to four hundred people present. Large attendances at funerals also occur in other areas.

The group of Aboriginal Christian people at Mogo on the south coast of New South Wales felt that there was a need to develop a worshipping Christian community in their own area as one way of addressing the disadvantage and sense of disengagement, experienced by the younger generation in particular, by establishing an Aboriginal Church and cultural area with a strong welfare and counselling role from a Christian perspective. Five or six years ago the need that was to be addressed by a specifically Aboriginal-led ministry was called simply a need for healing for all people.

This healing was to be addressed by ‘being there’ for everyone who needed the leader’s time and presence: counselling and spending time being with people was the main focus. There were also practical matters such as money and food to which the ministers attended. This healing and ‘restoration’ of all people, they believed, could be found through the power of the Gospel.13 Statements of The Boomcrang Meeting Place Ministry Centre’s mission include emphasis on the teaching of Scripture, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, utilisation and the recognition of each person’s gifts in the worshipping community, teaching on the authority of Christ and serving other people in a caring and sharing ministry. The emphasis was to be on being Aboriginal and Christian and practising this faith in a culturally relevant and appropriate way and in a holistic manner. Therefore a skills programme was to be part of the

13 Interview: Tape One, 1998.
overall development. The emphasis was to be on guidance from a Christian perspective,

building up the confidence and esteem of people through practical projects and building a servant Christian community, whom people can turn to for help, prayer and sustenance.\textsuperscript{14}

This, I understood, would involve a theology of reconciliation between Christians and a theology of servant-hood within the Aboriginal community which would draw on cultural approaches. This healing applied to older men and women and particularly to the young adults. One pastor said

My people are suffering from many pressures such as damaged relationships, young children at risk, high unemployment, severe health problems (many people dying at 30 and 40), youth suicide, children dropping out of school early and without an education, sexual abuse, drug and alcohol (substance) abuse, young offenders, imprisonment, and a general depression and laziness from long term dependency on the social security system.\textsuperscript{15}

While most of this study is centred on the Mogo area, it also became apparent that there were other issues including that of ignorance: that is, ignoring the seeking of Aboriginal people to manage their own faith and the practice of it, that is far more widespread. There is a deference to Nungalinya College in Darwin for training matters relating to Aboriginal Christian people rather than articulating a response that is appropriate to the particular local area – this could raise the question as to whether the denomination is excluding Aboriginal people generally, is unaware of the interests of southern Aboriginal people, or refuses to recognise the needs of Aboriginal people in

\textsuperscript{14} \textit{personal communication}. This also appeared in \textit{Anglican News} vol. 19 no. 4 May (June 2002) p. 3.

\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Anglican News}, vol. 19, no. 4, May/June 2002, p. 3.
Another concern was the involvement of an Aboriginal person at formal church functions where the person is part of a welcoming ceremony but thereafter no contact is maintained. This could be interpreted as a form of political correctness or a "show" if it becomes the last contact.

Methodology

For the purposes of this thesis I drew on material from published works and opinions, comments at public seminars, observations and responses to individual questionnaires and interviews. I spent time listening to Aboriginal Christians as they talked about their desires, visions, frustrations, and expectations for a culturally relevant expression of Christianity.

Conversations and informal interviews were conducted with twenty-eight people, thirteen of whom were Aboriginal (six living at Mogo plus three non-residents) and fifteen were non-Aboriginal (three living at Mogo plus two non-residents). All interviewees, with the exception of two, resided in areas where at least 4.2% of the local shire population\(^{17}\) were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people and where in one case 17.5% of the town population\(^{18}\) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and one had been resident in New Zealand but had had contact with Australian Aboriginal people.

Responses to questionnaires, discussions and interviews were recorded from late 1998 to mid 2001. The questionnaire is attached at Appendix I.

The respondents were Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people living in New

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\(^{18}\) Anglican Board of Missions Flyer
South Wales and one each from Queensland and Victoria and one in New Zealand. The respondents’ ages ranged from the twenties through to the eighties and involved both males and females. All were associated with a Christian Church. The denominations that the people attended included Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship, Anglican, Uniting and Presbyterian Churches. Some of the Aboriginal respondents had also had contact with a Pentecostal (Assemblies of God) Church and the Roman Catholic Church. Some were members of the clergy - both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members - with qualifications from theological institutions with recognised standing by the government, that is, were recognised for the purposes of Austudy and Abstudy, and by the Australian College of Theology, the accreditation body. Others had training through the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship and some had no formal training. One had post-graduate qualifications but no theological studies although practicing as a minister and others had no training other than ‘life experience’. Other interviewees were lay persons who were actively involved in their Church or in supporting Aboriginal people, and some held honorary positions in their particular church and therefore were assumed to be held in high regard by their particular denomination. Others were classed as interested and involved persons but had no specific role in religious matters. That is, they may have been more involved in practical issues. A few were involved in Bible Study but had no training for this and no schooling beyond secondary school.

Therefore the educational background of the interviewees varied from people who had literacy difficulties to those with tertiary degrees. The former
responded to my questions in a taped format or in conversation and the latter either had their responses taped, recorded by me as they spoke or completed the questionnaire in a written format themselves. Interviews were conducted with non-Aboriginal Christians in an effort to define the ‘sticking’ points of understanding and to identify areas where the need exists for a reconciliation of views. These it was assumed would be the points which would impact on the attempts by the Aboriginal community to develop an Aboriginal Church and on the outcomes for which they were hoping.

A number of issues were identified by Aboriginal people as having particular relevance to their efforts both in the need to bring their Christian expression within Aboriginal parameters and in their frustration with the lack of both support and understanding, and in the discrimination in the institutional systems of the various churches, amongst the clergy and within congregations.

My thesis, therefore, follows the process of the development of The Boomerang Ministry Centre Meeting Place (Mogo), to determine the expectations for such a ministry, the presuppositions on which the ministry is based and whether a contextualised expression of Christianity was being attempted as defined by historical definitions and what difficulties were encountered as this ministry was developed.

*Similarities within Australia and overseas*

In my reading and through interviews I found that the experiences of Aboriginal people within Christianity were similar across southern Australia. There were also some similarities with northern Australian Aboriginal
Christians in the sense of contextualisation. For comparison I also spoke to people in New Zealand who have experienced the challenge of addressing the issues of contextualisation so that the Maori can express Christianity in a culturally appropriate manner. The Australian Anglican Church in particular appears to be a long way from achieving, or even indeed addressing, some of the changes that the Anglican Church of New Zealand has been able to instigate.

The similarities across indigenous Christian experience in a number of countries, the involvement of indigenous Christians from a different culture in testimony and revival gatherings and the sharing of ideas in world-wide gatherings appear to have led to a consolidation of ideas and approaches and given strength to a movement towards an Indigenous expression of Christianity. Overseas indigenous people are witnessing to Australian Aboriginal people and Australian Aboriginal people undertake overseas visits for the same purpose to Malaysia or the Philippines under the direction of non-Aboriginal Christians. I wondered whether issues of contextualisation were not being approached in a manner that was clearly under the control of indigenous people. Therefore I refer to some comments by Aboriginal people on the involvement of non-Aboriginal organisers.

The Aboriginal people whose experiences I have followed challenge the mainstream church with their need to develop an identity as Aboriginal and Christian and to do this in a way, which in the Mogo case, may not be the traditional formal manner for the particular denomination. The structure for running the church, the service format, the way the leader was chosen, and the
practice of the faith would have a particularly Aboriginal input. The hope of the group of Aboriginal people at Mogo who were working towards an Aboriginal-led Church was that they might achieve an identity as Aboriginal and Christian so that they would have full ownership of the Gospel in a culturally relevant way. This was to be approached by modifying the expression of Christianity, that is, the manner in which it is practised, the structure which supports it, the identity which it embraces and the authority to which Christianity relates, without modifying scripture, but by incorporating an Aboriginal world-view, with that of the Christian Church as a whole, with a culturally identified leadership and a cultural approach to ministry. While these Aboriginal people do live a western style of life and the church services appear as a more informal service there are, according to their own admissions, elements of culture, which are ‘inside’ and known only to Aboriginal people. This is part of the process and is a factor in contextualising the experience.

The Aboriginal Christian people interviewed believe their sense of identity as Aboriginal and Christian is important to their sense of self and their corporate sense of community. It is also important to the unity which will come with the wider community. They also expect a sense of unity with the Christian Church as a whole and a recognition of their value in the total ‘unity in diversity’ that is the Christian Church. There is no expectation that this is a church in isolation nor is it exclusive of any person. In my thesis I discuss a number of issues and approaches which Aboriginal people have identified as necessary in order to achieve an Aboriginal expression of
Christianity.

*Struggle for Aboriginal Christians*

During the study period I became increasingly aware of the struggle Aboriginal people have experienced and are still experiencing in establishing a culturally appropriate structure of worship, the lack of understanding within the Christian church and in the wider community, and particular difficulties dealing with funding, authority and training issues.

As I proceeded it was evident that these issues were impacting on the Aboriginal people as they sought the process of contextualisation and these are referred to throughout this thesis as points of reference which need to be addressed by the mainstream Churches. Not only were these issues important for the maintenance of a ministry, an even greater need was for support on a personal basis. Too often interference or lack of support led to resignation or poor health status amongst ministers.

One of the issues raised by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents was that of training. Following comments by a number of Aboriginal people who were questioning training opportunities I undertook a survey of mainstream theological institutions to determine the ease with which Aboriginal people could access information or be supported in study at an institution.

*Survey*

I carried out a survey and collated information provided from institutions which for the purposes of this study were defined by the inclusion of these
descriptors in their title:

Bible College/School
Theological College/School
College of Ministry
College of Evangelism
Theological Education
Training College
Divinity

[excluding specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander institutions - because these are not necessarily appropriate for particular denominations - and lay education boards but including two specialist centres].

Under these criteria seventy-three institutions were thought to qualify however three were found not to, although these forwarded contact addresses. Another three had left the address and mail was returned.

On two occasions the main campus responded: one for three bodies that had amalgamated and the other for four campuses. In this case the information given was taken to apply only to the main campus.

One institution replied that provision of courses for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students came under Nungalinya and therefore it was not appropriate for them to respond. Another institution, known through personal communication to have had two Aboriginal students who had withdrawn, did not reply. The survey results were based on nineteen respondents from sixty-seven institutions deemed to qualify. This is a twenty-eight per cent response rate. The survey questionnaire is attached at Appendix II.

The gospel must always confront culture, always challenge people to change. How close to the demands of Christ then are the actions of the Church today? Do any changes need to be made within the institutions of the
churches in order for groups with specific needs or with cultural necessities to take ownership of their worship of God in full integrity with their culture and the message?

The thesis then is divided in to fourteen chapters.

Chapter One – *Introduction* gives an overview of the reasons for focussing on the area of study. It provides some material on the importance of identity and how it is defined by Aboriginal people and the need to raise the self-esteem and skills of a particular group of people.

Chapter Two – *Background* compares statistics about the population dissemination of Aboriginal people and the denominational break-down. There are also comments from leaders of a number of Christian denominations which give direction to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the approach to an Aboriginal contextualisation.

Chapter Three – *Contextualisation* provides a background as part of the process of determining whether the Aboriginal people of Mogo are approaching the Christian faith and its expression in a contextual manner. I look at the definitions of contextualisation and the reasons for such an approach. There is a brief history of Imposition, non-Imposition and Contextual methods including Authentic contextualization. The reasons given by an Aboriginal pastor for the development of an Aboriginal Church at Mogo are also included together with the presuppositions that appear to be part of the process.
Chapter Four – *An Aboriginal Church, Mogo* outlines the history of the presence of Christian pastors and clergy at Mogo from about 1985 to the present day. There appears to be have been an amount of confusion and certainly communication issues for quite a period. Funding, training, and authority are the main issues that have put constraints on the ministry. However there is belief that to build up a Christian community and approach concerns within the Christian context will help to build up the people.

In Chapter Five titled *Encounter* I indicate the differences in responses and the levels of understanding across the respondents. Clearly, one of the main concerns is to identify the terminology used. Differences in denomination and churchmanship meant different responses as did differences amongst Aboriginal people in their beliefs. Sadly [because it was apparent that the needs of Aboriginal people had not even been considered], some people responded with ‘I don’t know’, ‘I can’t comment’, ‘I don’t understand’ and similar phrases. This is important bearing in mind that all non-Aboriginal interviewees were involved in a Christian church and lived in an area with a significant Aboriginal population. There is still a great deal of apathy, ignorance, discrimination, ethnocentrism, prejudice and racism.

Chapter Six – *Expectations* gives a background to Aboriginal expectations of what an Aboriginal ministry could bring. It also includes impressions gained by observers and researchers in relation to the response to Aboriginal ministry.
Chapter Seven – *Finding the Way – Aboriginal Theology* looks at the background to writings on Aboriginal theology and the quest for true contextualisation. It presents the relationships to land, water, creation, sacred objects, ritual and ceremony, leadership and identity, and the struggle to have these approaches accepted by the non-Aboriginal community. The concerns for the future are also mentioned.

Chapter Eight – *Contextualisation outside of Australia* is included to give a comparison with the experiences of people in Africa, Asia, South America and with African-American peoples. A small section discusses Liberation Theology.

Chapter Nine - *Church and Change* explores the willingness to change of the mainstream churches in general. Christianity should be a moving, ongoing process reflecting the action within the individual and the community. If the only movement that is applauded is that which maintains or imitates the status quo then the outcome would be stultified with little credibility as an organization concerned for the world. If the church is preoccupied with its own life its encounter with the world is damaged and in fact may not even occur. Therefore there is a need to build a new Christian community.

Chapter Ten - *In what ways can the Christian Church reach out?* carries on from the previous chapter and explores ways that Aboriginal people in particular would like to see change made. It also includes experiences from overseas with other indigenous peoples, a discussion on uniqueness and unity and ministry models.
Chapter Eleven - *Identity and Unity* argues that religion has the ability to promote wholeness for the individual, the community and the wider church. This chapter looks at the various aspects of identity as defining people and communities in relation to the Christian message and the unity in diversity of the Church which is often mentioned. It also discusses the use of power and the power which can be used in the promotion of the Gospel.

Chapter Twelve - *Leadership and Training* identifies the familial culture of the mainstream institutionalized church theology, which gives the indigenous people the impression of superiority and hierarchial leadership of a church of imposition. The church is unaware of culturally appropriate leadership and has been accused of undermining the authority structure of the men in particular. The Survey of theological institutions is included in this chapter. This was conducted because of comments by Aboriginal people concerning the difficulties faced by Aboriginal people in the mainstream theological institutions. While Indigenous people from the south find some help in the Nungalinya programme, they also want a programme which relates theology much more closely to their experience of dispossession, marginalisation and other issues which confront them daily.

Chapter Thirteen - *Authority and Autonomy* relates to the previous chapter to a certain extent as it explores the issues of the leader’s authority, the community’s authority and the freedom to practise in a culturally appropriate way.
Chapter Fourteen – Conclusion

My conclusion is that a contextualised Gospel is being sought by Aboriginal Christians in southern Australia as they strive to achieve an identity as Aboriginal Christians, to own the Gospel and to find their own identity in Christ. Further, this contextualised Gospel is approached with similar presuppositions to those of Aboriginal people in northern Australia. This thesis indicates the effort by Aboriginal people to obtain full ownership of the Christian message as Aboriginal and a concerted effort to manage their identity as Aboriginal and Christian on their terms.

The issues that are highlighted by Aboriginal Christians are the emphasis on unity, the relationship between nature and the spirit, the approach to worship and the value of the community.

There are a number of areas which indicate restrictions felt at the community level and limits due to the established churches’ expectations and acceptance.
CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND

Statistics

At the most basic and fundamental level, the Australian census gives an indication of who is identifying as Christian and where. In 1992 Bouma quoted the following figures:

The religious composition of Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (227 600 in 1986) is slightly different from that of the rest of the people living in Australia (ABS 1991). According to the 1986 census, of those identifying themselves as of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island origin a higher proportion declared themselves to be Anglican (24.3 per cent) and fewer (20.4 per cent) Catholic.

There was a higher proportion of identification with the Uniting Church. While 66.7 percent of those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait origin identified themselves with some Christian religious group (compared with 73 per cent for the rest), 4.4 per cent identified themselves as ‘other non-Christian’ (double that for the rest) and 16 per cent did not answer compared with 11.9 per cent for the rest. Those who reported Aboriginal were coded as ‘other non-Christian’.¹

According to the 1991 census 74% of the 265,459 people who identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander professed Christianity: the distribution appeared to be 26% Anglican, 23% Catholic, 6.4% Uniting Church, 2% Presbyterian, 2.5% Pentecostal, 3.5% Lutheran and 3.55% Baptist with another 2,501 identified as Aboriginal Evangelical.”²


Drawing from the ABS 1996 census figures, 352,976 people identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin in Australia: of those, seventy-one percent identified as Christians.\(^3\)

At the 1996 census thirty percent of the Aboriginal population lived in capital cities plus a large number lived in rural and coastal townships that have mainstream churches operating within them. However many of those churches had few Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people in their congregations. There appeared to be a growth in the number of people who identified themselves as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander over the period but a proportional decrease in the numbers who identified as Christian. I have used this information in part to compare with that of the Census 2001\(^4\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total population</td>
<td>227,600</td>
<td>265,459</td>
<td>352,976</td>
<td>410,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>282,696...68.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Christian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8,274...2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(includes Aboriginal Traditional Religion 4,993)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No religion, Not adequately stated etc</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>119,033...29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There appears to be a further decrease in the percentage of people who

\(^3\) Australian Bureau Statistics Census 1996

\(^4\) Australian Bureau Statistics Census 2001 4705.0 Population distribution, Indigenous Australians
identify as Christian. It may however also reflect a more accurate identification in that people were more willing to clearly state 'no affiliation' or affiliation with a non-Christian group.

The denominational breakdown appears as

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anglican</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>95,182 ... 33.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>94,494 ... 33.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UC</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>24,379 ... 8.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presbyterian</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>6,336 ... 2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pentecostal</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
<td>9,679 ... 3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutheran</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>11,765 ... 4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baptist</td>
<td>3.55%</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
<td>12,046 ... 4.26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Evangelical</td>
<td>.94% (2501 people)</td>
<td>5,561 ... 1.97%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics

Other denominations in numbers of persons were as follows according to the Census 2001: Brethren 703 persons; Churches of Christ 2913; Jehovah's Witness 3149; Latter Day Saints 1295; Oriental Christian 20; Orthodox 514; Salvation Army 2757; Seventh Day Adventist 3547; other Protestant 1678; and other Christian 6678. 6

There are also estimated to be between 500 and 1000 Indigenous Muslims according to Karander Seyit (editor, The Australian Muslim News) as reported by Jopson. 7 There is a growth in the number of people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander but a decline in the number who record themselves as Christian. From comments made by Aboriginal

5 Australian Bureau of Statistics compilation from each census and particularly Census 2001, 107: Religious Affiliation by Sex
7 The Sydney Morning Herald, Feb. 27, 2003, p. 9. [article by Jopson]
people in my interviews and discussions, attention was drawn to the number of people who were felt, by the speakers, to be 'lost' between cultures. The incidence of indication of no religion, not adequately stated or inadequately described at 29% or 119,033 Australia-wide would underline concerns by the Mogo people, in particular, as well as by other southern Aboriginal people of the spiritual crisis affecting their people. These comments were made by a number of indigenous people in interviews and workshops.

From the ABS Census 2001 statistics, the breakdown for some southern areas as a total in number of persons is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>Aboriginal Traditional Religion</th>
<th>No religion</th>
<th>Inadequately described</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(ATR)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney</td>
<td>27,640</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>10,274...26.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newcastle</td>
<td>6,891</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2,643...27.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dubbo</td>
<td>2,776</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>530...15.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queanbeyan</td>
<td>698</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>202...22.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total NSW</td>
<td>89,949</td>
<td>437</td>
<td>28,308...23.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melbourne</td>
<td>6,104</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>5,487...45.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Vic</td>
<td>13,342</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>11,108...43.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brisbane</td>
<td>7,973</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>3,727...31.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Qld</td>
<td>81,928</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>29,887...26.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adelaide</td>
<td>5,410</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5,402...48.9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total S A</td>
<td>12,414</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>10,410...44.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth</td>
<td>11,304</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>8,431...42.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total W A</td>
<td>36,619</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>20,168...34.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasmania</td>
<td>9,703</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5,939...37.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. T.</td>
<td>36,377</td>
<td>2,384</td>
<td>11,900...23.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All figures from Australian Bureau of Statistics Census 2001

ABS Census 2001
Across Australia, that is of the 410,003 indigenous persons, those indicating Christian were 135,217 males and 147,479 females (4.3% more females); in ‘other religions’ there were 4323 males and 3553 females (4.5% more males). The numbers for ‘no religion’, ‘not stated’, ‘inadequately described’ indicate males (62,448) were about 4.9% higher in numbers than females (56,585). These figures represent 31.2% of indigenous males and 27.2% of females. For the total Australian population the figures for 1991 were 23.4% and for 1996, 25.6%.  

It is interesting to note the high percentages in the southern states of those people not identifying as Christian. The lower figure in the Northern Territory and Queensland, where northern figures would have influenced the result, may be a result of the presence of Aboriginal clergy and contact with mission groups. Dubbo, with the lowest figure of ‘no religion’, had the ministry of an Aboriginal Anglican woman for some time until ill health caused her to withdraw. Prior to her ministry, there was a male Aboriginal minister present.

| By south-eastern Shire in New South Wales:  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christian</th>
<th>ATR</th>
<th>No religion etc</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shoalhaven</td>
<td>819</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eurobodalla/ South Coast</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bega Valley</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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9 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Year Book 2000  
These three shires were chosen as they are within commuting distance of Mogo and represent the main area for this study. A further reason for listing these figures is to indicate the number of people who identify as indigenous in some southern areas and therefore suggest that such figures support the idea that there is a need to address the concerns and the needs of Aboriginal Christians.

_Awareness by non-Aboriginal Australians_

The level of awareness of non-indigenous Australians in relation to the need of Aboriginal people to express Christianity in a culturally appropriate manner is an issue that needs addressing. Given that it is now well over 200 years since colonisation began (or as some commentators say, one hundred to one hundred and fifty years of Christian contact since missionaries arrived to bring the gospel), the number of Aboriginal clergy is low, and quite often the conditions they endure are appalling. Maybe this has been due to ignorance or apathy on the part of mainstream church institutions but maybe also there are issues of power and control. This position is only slowly starting to change in southern areas but may not change much further unless major decisions are made regarding training, funding and authority. There is an issue concerning the level of general awareness of clergy in local churches, with the exception of a minority who are involved in areas of reconciliation and ‘one-off’ liturgy.

At one year 2000 gathering to which representatives - clergy and interested lay people - of a number of denominations were invited to discuss matters growing out of the Reconciliation movement, there was a lack of input
from some denominations and some were not represented at all. In this area however the Uniting Church has been a major force. On another occasion follow-up information was requested from church personnel of a particular denomination regarding implementation of decisions on Reconciliation made at a previous conference. Responses were received from only fifty-six percent of personnel. The comments varied from limited and general to detailed outlines on specific questions. Very few provided information directly on the topic.

There are, however, comments by particular, interested and concerned Roman Catholic, Baptist, Uniting Church, and Anglican leaders, which indicate a direction that could be taken by their own denomination but I feel that this has not impacted greatly at the grass-roots level. Of these leaders, a Baptist, the Reverend Thorwald Lorenzen, wrote powerfully of the church being a creation of God, called into being by God, through the power of the Spirit. He said "we affirm difference and otherness" and "the other is no longer the potential limiter of my own freedom, but the necessary human partner in the experience of freedom" indicating the broader well-being for the individual Christian and the overall Body of Christ that can be achieved by mutuality and acceptance. Lorenzen also described how the "beauty of the rainbow is in its coming together in a variety of colours" suggesting that Christian insights can be enriched by an openness to a variety of spiritual experience, understanding and

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12 T. Lorenzen, 'The church as koinonia', _St Mark's Review_, no. 172, Summer, 1998, Canberra, p. 11. [Italics are Lorenzen's]
expression. These comments are similar to those in the report to the Anglican Archbishop of Melbourne titled “A Garden of Many Colours”, to which I will refer later. It was noted that at a National Anglican Conference in 2002 there was no time-tabled programme for Aboriginal clergy or their representatives.

In 1970 Paul VI had said,

We know that you have a lifestyle proper to your own ethnic genius or culture – a culture which the Church respects and which she does not in any way ask you to renounce. 14

Sixteen years later in his address of 1986 Pope John Paul II stated

The gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ speaks all languages. It esteems and embraces all cultures. It supports them in everything human and when necessary, purifies them. Always and everywhere the Gospel uplifts and enriches cultures with the revealed message of a loving and merciful God. That Gospel now invites you to become, through and through, Aboriginal Christian. 15

Pope John Paul II also gave an address in which he indicated the direction that the Roman Catholic Church could proceed: granting to Aboriginal people an acknowledgement that God was already in their culture and that a truly cultural expression was appropriate to their expression of Christianity and commenting on the association Aboriginal people felt with the land. I quote a large portion here as it is appropriate to my thesis:

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13 Lorenzen, p. 11.

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to all human beings throughout the ages God has given a desire for himself, a desire which different cultures have tried to express in their own ways... during all this time, the spirit of God has been with you.

Your "Dreaming" which influences your lives so strongly that, no matter what happens, you remain for ever people of your own culture, is your own way of touching the mystery of God's Spirit in you and in creation...

Through your closeness to the land you touched the sacredness of man's relationship with God, for the land was the proof of a power in life greater than yourselves... You realized that your land was related to the source of life...

The silence of the Bush taught you a quietness of soul that put you in touch with another world, the world of God's Spirit...

the Church herself in Australia will not be the Church that Jesus wants her to be until you have made your contribution to her life and until that contribution has been joyfully received by others.\(^6\)

The emphasis here from Pope John Paul II is that Aboriginal culture is valid, and he accepts that God is in the Dreaming. In these comments there is acknowledgement that God has been in the lives of Aboriginal people from the beginning indicating an acceptance that God has always been in the culture. So too there is acceptance that the Dreaming is a way of addressing the mystery of God; that the relationship to the land is important, showing an understanding of the connection of God with nature in a spiritual sense; that the contribution that Aboriginal Christians make to God's kingdom and the important part that Aboriginal people can play in the wider church, is accepted. The statement indicates support for a culturally appropriate expression of God. The comment to note is the one in the last paragraph of the quotation which stated that: "that contribution has been joyfully

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\(^6\) Address to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders delivered at Blatherskite Park, Alice Springs, Northern Territory, by Pope John Paul II, 1986.[also in F. Stockton, The Pope in Australia, St Paul's Publications, Homebush, 1987].
received” by the wider church. Otherwise the church will not be what it should be. In a celebration at St James Anglican Church, King Street, Sydney, the litany ended with: “With grateful hearts we gather on the land of an ancient people. God was with them before we came.” 17 The indication here is of acceptance of the presence of God in the lives of Aboriginal people from the beginning of time and certainly before European settlement.

Here then, in at least three different denominations, acknowledgement of an Aboriginal ownership of the Gospel - the message received and acted upon in a culturally appropriate way - is publicly given. Some of these comments have not been accepted by other clergy and lay people in the areas studied, that is, in southern Australia. Some Christian people are slow in accepting the benefits of diversity of Christian expression and give the impression that the idea of Aboriginal Christianity and the desire for an Aboriginal Church as an entity of its own is neither necessary nor appropriate. As my interviews indicate many of these contextualised ideas are not widely held by active members of Christian denominations.

As a comparison and involving the concepts of religious association, context and place, people generally accept that the Vietnamese church provided an opportunity to maintain culture and a coming together for both Eastern and Western culture. 18 In the Hindu congregation it was emphasized that the presence of their own building gave context, pre-

17 Marker-Place, March 1999, p. 12. [article by C. Stokes]

text, presence and visible identity.  

Again this is accepted. I note that di Francesco wrote of her concern about the attitude of the Anglican Church in relation to the Italo-Australian community and the need for the Church to appreciate this "new sense of completeness [that could be] formed." di Francesco also expressed the belief that the value and diversity of each culture's gifts could be blended so that each person achieved their full potential, enhanced the kingdom of God, added to its richness and reflected a true image of God. If this is not done, then the middle-class Anglo-Saxon status quo is maintained. It appears that church members hold differing views on what is acceptable and, on the surface, it appears to be affected by race and involves a different code according to the race of the 'different' person. It seems, for attitudes towards Aboriginal people, there is still an element of the coloniser and ethnocentrism.

Throughout the thesis I refer to comments made by people in authority in the Christian church where these comments are made in public situations. If these comments are not acted upon then they may be seen only as token or 'politically correct' without a real concern for the needs of a particular community of people. Therefore I discuss the issues which appear to be at the forefront of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal comments and the direction that leadership in the churches needs to take so that Aboriginal people may have ownership of the Gospel.

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20 M. di Francesco, Festa. An invitation from the Italian Community to the unity in diversity in the Anglican Church of Australia, St Mark's National Theological Centre, Canberra, 1995, p. 12.
CHAPTER 3

CONTEXTUALISATION - BACKGROUND

As part of the process of determining whether the Aboriginal people of Mogo are approaching the Christian faith and its expression in a contextual manner, I now look at the definitions of contextualisation and the reasons for such an approach. This chapter looks at the various non-indigenous approaches to spreading the Gospel to indigenous peoples as a background to the discussion on the development of an indigenous theology and the establishment of an Aboriginal Church. The premise is that the style of expression, the structure, and language of Christian belief in Western practices is not appropriate for all cultures. This chapter argues that for all cultures the Christian belief and faith must be introduced, nurtured and developed within the particular cultural community.

Models of Imposition

Models of imposition - that is, where the Gospel is brought as is, with Western cultural appendages and the assumption that Western ways will be imitated - do not allow for contextualisation of the Gospel because the models do not encourage preparation of indigenous people to become church leaders through culturally appropriate training and leadership or recognise their identity as indigenous and Christian. These models reflect the transportation of the Christian faith in a European format in all aspects including dress, buildings, structure and art, as well as in language and style.
into the indigenous culture. These models are generally based in ethnocentrism and exude paternalism, triumphalism and racism – they are described by Luzbetak.¹ For Aboriginal people under a model of imposition, it became necessary to prove one’s self capable in many ways including living a western lifestyle, rejecting traditional ways and (in so far as training as a theological student) training as a western theological student. This training involved a period of up to six years away from family. Thus ordination in the mainstream churches became an impossible process in a culture where separation from family responsibilities proved difficult and relationship and culture issues were vital and often required the potential candidate’s involvement.

Non-Imposition models

The accommodation model was one approach in a “three-self” formula of mission theory. The establishment of indigenous churches was guided from 1840 to 1870 by the work of people such as the Congregationalist Rufus Anderson (1805 – 1855) and the Anglican Henry Venn (1796 – 1873) who described the process of “the three self” formula in which indigenous churches would be self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating. Too often, however, churches developed on these lines became imitations of the Western church. While this model does consider context, for example art and music, this approach did not address a culturally based emergent church. Beyerhaus and Lefever claimed their ‘offspring’ was more than achieving a self-governing and self-supporting

status or independence from another Church.² Beyerhaus and Lefever's
thoughts on autonomy drew on the work of Venn, Allen (an Anglican) and
Clark. Being autonomous did not mean free from the universal church and
did not imply that there is no overall unity with the universal church. Venn
expected any indigenous clergy and bishop, in particular, to be:

not a solitary figure, but an integral part of the responsible
leadership within the whole Anglican Communion³.

Venn's comments indicated an understanding of, and prospect for, a wider
church involvement and a respect for indigenous clergy as members of the
whole Body of the church. Concerned about the possibility of stifling the
indigenous expression of the church by too much emphasis on
institutionalism, Clark argued “the Church must be living, for only a living
thing has...sustaining and propagating power.”⁴ In other words, the church
must be a growing organism in order to survive, to conduct itself according
to the example it has been given and to support its adherents.

Nevius (1828 – 1893), a Presbyterian, used similar principles in China and
Korea but adapted them to incorporate economic independence, systematic
Bible study, indigenous outreach and evangelism and an indigenous
structure.⁵ Warneck (1834 – 1910), who stressed that a minimal outline of
belief should be introduced so that the church could develop without issues

² P. Beyerhaus and H. Lefever, The Responsible Church and the Foreign Mission,
³ Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 29.
⁴ Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 37.
⁵ H. Kasdorf, 'Indigenous Church Principles: A Survey of Origin and Development',
Readings in Dynamic Indigeneity, ed. Kraft C et al, William Carey Library,
of inappropriateness to the culture or the introduction of Western
denominational differences into mission churches, stated

No Church is autonomous in the sense of having its
given in itself; its faith has been brought to it from
outside, and it can become autonomous only by
making this faith its own.6

This made for a church that was spiritually autonomous 7. It may or may
not imply a church that is administratively and financially autonomous.
This is very important in the light of financial constraints on indigenous
congregations.

Another writer used the term the ‘self-hood’ of the indigenous church and
proposed that the gospel had to go to the heart and be evolved through an
‘indigenous rhythm’ led by indigenous people and confronting their daily
life.8 The importance of the scriptures and the movement of the Holy Spirit
are emphasised as is the importance of the indigenous church being rooted
in Christ but with its thinking and action flowing from its own inner being.9
A connection of relevance between the gospel and the community is vital
for the church to survive.

In 2002, a non-Aboriginal member of the clergy commented to me that
Christianity is the same everywhere so there is no point in pursuing an
Aboriginal Church. This could, if not carefully explained, indicate an

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6 Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 48.
7 Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 56.
8 Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 28.
9 Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 28.
ethnocentric, paternalistic approach. It may also indicate an unwillingness to understand that all theology is contextualised: though based in Scripture, it is also based in tradition, which is contextual for that period, and should be responsive to the contemporary period.

Bevans too stated that the content did not change but what made “contextual theology precisely contextual is the recognition of the validity of another locus theologicus: present human experience”.\(^\text{10}\) It is important to be prepared to accept that another theological position is valid and that that position is determined from human experience. If western Christians are unable to receive the gifts of other Christians in a way that is true to those Christians and to listen to their story, then there is a danger of promoting an ideology or closed system rather than an appropriate theological system.\(^\text{11}\)

For “it is when we refuse to listen to another story that our own story becomes ideological, that is, a closed system incapable of hearing the truth.”\(^\text{12}\) Then the full story is lost. These expressions of a local indigenous practice anticipate the criteria for a contextualised Church as expressed by Bevans\(^\text{13}\) and Schreiter\(^\text{14}\).


\(^\text{12}\) Cone, p. 104.


Bevan's models

The four foci of Bevans' description of contextual models are the message of the gospel, tradition, culture and social change and these apply to each of his five models to a greater or lesser extent. He also argued that in order for the process to begin there must first be decontextualisation of the message and a thorough understanding of the receiving culture so that the message can be contextualised in an appropriate way. The contextual models which Bevans described were: the Translation model, the Anthropological model, the Praxis model, the Synthetic model and the Transcendental model, to which the four foci relate.

The Translation model is described as one where emphasis is on Christian identity rather than on cultural identity. This model can maintain the status quo because it depends on the transportation of Western ideas and understanding and a translation, as the word implies, of words, ideas and structures, without consideration of context, into the indigenous context. It may imply translation of words in which the concept is also examined but go no further than parallels, as perceived by the missionary group, in the new culture. This church will have no intrinsic cultural presence although there may be an overt clothing of culture that is superficial.

The Anthropological model involves more than indigenisation and inculturation (that is, translation and accommodation) and includes a study of, and sympathetic identity with, a people's culture so that one finds the symbols and concepts with which to construct an adequate articulation of

15 Bevans, p. 39.
the people’s faith”. This involves finding God in the culture, looking for “God’s revelation and self-manifestation within the values, relational patterns, and concerns of a culture”. Actually building on what exists and drawing out from this a Christian faith that is appropriate to the setting is more than accommodation.

The practical theology model declares that real theology emerges out of action which challenges “the mainstream of both modern culture and the ecclesiastical tradition of triumphalism”. The Praxis, or practical theology, model implies a concern with the social, economic and political issues that face the culture and a need for action. This is the message in action and can, by taking its birth in context and its focus in radical social change, incorporate a liberation theology. That liberation theology involves a seeking of salvation and a sense of God’s grace. This is a model, which could well apply to the Mogo community. It is rooted in a concern for their own identity as Christian and the need to address their disenfranchisement in society.

The Synthetic model, as it suggests, blends the three previous models. It involves looking for themes in the culture to develop a local theology and creating a dialogue with the basic themes in gospel and tradition and is described by Schreiter’s model. Schreiter’s model is more apparent in

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16 Bevans, p. 48.
17 Bevans, p. 49.
18 Bevans, p. 73.
19 Bevans, pp. 86–87.
areas of multi-cultural involvement and evolves over a number of years. As it represents a blending of the first three it therefore appears to be a model which is used by the Mogo people. However Schreiter’s model tends to allow local theology to look like Western theology. It does not show a truly indigenous church.

Area 1 can be a time of confusion, rejection of previous understanding totally, re-clothing in new and ‘foreign’ ideas, and for the marginalised people who eagerly adopt these new attitudes, it may mean difficulty when

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20 Bevans, pp. 87 – 88.

21 Schreiter, p. 25.
the local theology emerges and the beliefs become inculturised. Area 2 depends on finding Christ in the culture through the people's understanding and tradition of the Bible. Area 3 explores the needs that are determined by the culture in relation to the wider world, for example social injustice, life crises and liberation based themes. Area 4 suggests the idea that tradition from a myopic or mono-cultural dominant culture is not appropriate although a sense of universality is important so that the local church can be part of the whole Church and therefore is recognisable as, and recognises that it is, part of the whole. Area 5 connotes the validity of local experience and its expression in the universal church in the sense of traditions. Area 6 explores similarities in other cultures and compares situations. Area 7 underlines the need for a genuine encounter with Christ in the forming of its tradition. Area 8 addresses the need for reflection on the colloquy between theology and tradition both locally and wider. Area 9 highlights “discerning the response to the presence of Spirit and gospel in the community”.

The Transcendental model is based on development from one's own experience and is something that is mentioned as valuable in understanding and promoting Christian growth by Aboriginal respondents in the area studied. The sense of ownership of the gospel has come from life experience and experience of the Holy Spirit. It is a model more usually associated with areas of multi-cultural diversity.

The last four models are useful in part and at different times can be seen in the approach that is being practised by the Mogo people as I indicate

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22 Schreiter, p. 35.
throughout this thesis. There is also some evidence of an element of imposition by non-Indigenous people.

Schineller’s model provides a description for inculturation: that is one in which the Gospel message is applied to the situation in which inculturation is happening however the agent is not a local person. Therefore it does not represent true contextualisation, that is, it is not by the people.

![Diagram showing the model of inculturation]

23 Graphic from Schineller p 62

The issues of indigenous leadership, unity with wider church structures, indigenous outreach, societal transformation under the Holy Spirit and spiritual autonomy are all of importance to the Mogo people. These issues underpin the drive for an Aboriginal Church, that is, a way of approaching and delivering and acting on the Gospel message in a culturally relevant way.

Presuppositions

Bevans brought to the five models of contextualisation a number of
Presuppositions. These were: for the Translation model, the belief that the
gospel is supracultural, that is, it refers to the core of the gospel; for the
Anthropological model, a recognition that God is found in the culture; for
the Praxis model a process of reflection, action and reflection leading to
relevance and change; for the Synthetic model, a stress on uniqueness and
commonalities; and for the Transcendental model, working from one’s own
faith experience and relating to the world around in that particular cultural
environment.

After analysing the work of Bevans in relation to the Ngukurr Christians in
East Arnhem Land, Sandefur referred to the Ngukurr Christians’ seven
presuppositions as they contextualise the Gospel:

1. Christianity is a viable alternative.
2. Scripture is the revealed Word of God
3. Aboriginal identity is essential
4. The supernatural is real and God is the greatest
   source of power
5. Christianity is holistic and not just another ritual
6. God was always present in their culture.
7. Their theological heritage is of value.24

I believe there are parallels with Sandefur’s list of presuppositions
applicable to the way the south-eastern Aboriginal people at Mogo in
particular have determined their approach and I have numbered this in
parallel.

24 J. Sandefur, The Aboriginalisation of the Church at Ngukurr, PhD Thesis, La Trobe
The presuppositions appear to be:

1. Christianity is a viable alternative.
2. Scripture is the revealed Word of God
3. Aboriginal identity is essential and is a part of being Christian
4. The supernatural is real
5. The power of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the way to healing
6. Christianity is holistic
7 b. God was always present in their culture
7 b. The Aboriginal theological heritage is of value
and is based on ‘godly principles’

These presuppositions are acted upon by the local people as they develop a culturally relevant and contextually appropriate expression of Christianity, which they believe will enable Aboriginal people to address social issues and define their identity in Christ. In bringing these presuppositions to bear on the urge to develop their own Aboriginal ministry they hope to achieve an Aboriginal Christian expression of faith and a practical response to the growth and development and healing of Aboriginal people with whom they are involved in their outreach. I refer back to the Introduction where the reason for pursuing such a mission was seen as

building up the confidence and esteem of people through practical projects and building a servant Christian community, whom people can turn to for help, prayer and sustenance.\(^{25}\)

And

My people are suffering from many pressures such as damaged relationships, young children at risk, high unemployment, severe health problems (many people dying at 30 and 40), youth suicide, children dropping out of school early and without an education, sexual abuse, drug and alcohol (substance) abuse, young offenders, imprisonment, and a general depression and laziness from long term dependency on the social security system.\(^{26}\)

\(^{25}\) personal communication. This quotation also appeared in Anglican News vol 19 no 4 May (June 2002) p 3

This also indicates the perceived need to follow a praxis theology particularly – even a liberation theology. The process involves withdrawing from the mainstream local churches generally (although some people still attend other churches as well) and establishing an Aboriginal church.

Jarow, in interpreting and celebrating the new, which he described as a journey, a “pilgrimage through form” which was at once unique, and yet sprung from the nurturance of the world past wrote:

> The pilgrimage through form ... continues with its process of creation, opening to the new, the challenge of joyful responsibility.\(^{27}\)

And he added there was nothing to become, nothing to make, but by gathering together, a stage was being set for the coming of a new way of living, one which would be a work of art, a craft to be carefully mastered with patience replacing time, and with a sense of shared destination.\(^{28}\)

Jarow indicates an on-going process - growing, developing, evolving - something that is ‘hands on’ and nurtured as a community in a process that is responsive and exciting. This is the intention of the Mogo story. Agape, an openness and acceptance in fellowship, which is indiscriminate, bold, inconvenient, risky, takes time, is expensive and jeopardizes social status, needs to be embraced.\(^{29}\) Risks need to be taken. In this way, Christian people are encouraged to explore their own relationship with Christ within their own culture and in the knowledge that they are part of a universal faith. As the Vatican statement (Documents of Vatican II, 264) declares


\(^{28}\) Jarow, p. 211.

\(^{29}\) Jarow, p. 208.
The Church, sent to all peoples in every time and place, is not bound exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, nor to any particular way of life, or any customary pattern of living, ancient or recent.  

A positive process between various theologies and cultural environments called ‘creative tension’ would allow appropriate theologies to develop through discussion and understanding of a wide variety of viewpoints. By understanding the truths held by people of different cultural backgrounds, an understanding can be formed that allows what appear to be contradictions to be seen as “complementary truths held in tension”. While these theologies might be a challenge to one people’s understanding it is a positive situation which is not fragmentary but could add both to the overall understanding and to the whole message.

Another aspect, which Bediako addressed, was the understanding of where the church has sprung from because this affects the outcome of contextualisation. He inverted the old adage of 

\textit{ubi ecclesia ibi Christus} (where the church is, there is Christ) [saying] the deeper Biblical insight is that \textit{ubi Christus ibi ecclesia} (where Christ is, there is the church).

By addressing the issue of where Christ is and seeing that as foremost then the culture is looked at with a different focus and is addressed from the

\textsuperscript{30} C. McCormick, ‘Moral Theology since Vatican II’ \textit{Crosscurrents}, xxix, issue 1, Spring, 1976, p. 6. [Vatican statement (Documents of Vatican ii, 264)]


perspective of Christ seeing and being within the culture.\textsuperscript{33} This would support the action of the people of Mogo who say God has always been in their culture and that their culture is based on godly principles.

Fleming applied two caveats and a final common bond stressing that contextualisation did not “imply the fragmented isolation of peoples and cultures” but “an interdependence of contexts” and, therefore a positive outcome for all Christians would be that “contextualization contributes ultimately to the solidarity of the Lord.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Authentic contextualisation}

In order for Christianity to be viable it must not be isolationist but meet the indigenous culture freely - without being imposed. Gospel, faith and culture are vital elements.\textsuperscript{35} Reference needs to be made to the particular context before the mission is able to approach the text bearing in mind that the sharing of the faith is to be divinely guided. The outcomes of the reflection on the theology that is developed by the receiving people will be a process over time. That reflection most importantly must be authentic.

Authentic contextualisation must involve action, that is, praxis, and

\begin{center}
\textit{Authentic theological reflection can only take place as the theologica in loco, discerning the contextuality within the}
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\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Bediako, p. 165.
\item B. Fleming, \textit{Contextualization of Theology An Evangelical Assessment}, Wm Carey Library, Pasadena, 1980, p. 86.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
concrete context. But it must also be aware that such authentic theological reflection is at best, but also at most, theologica viatorum; and therefore contextuality must be matched by the contextualization which is an ongoing process.\textsuperscript{36}

Authentic contextualisation is both the “cultural and political perspective of discipleship”.\textsuperscript{37} Not only does the culture matter but so does addressing issues of injustice if contextualisation is to be authentic, that is, it has a praxis theological orientation. There was also a suggestion that contextualisation must be ecumenically oriented.\textsuperscript{38}

For an individual to find their identity, that is, who they are and what significance they have in relation to God, and their identity within their culture, the person needs to be involved in the process. It cannot be imposed. In order for that identity to be found the sharing of the gospel must be contextual. Through that process, dominance, paternalism, racism and superiority have no place but respect, equity, acceptance and a sense of journeying together must occur. In this way the Church as the Body of Christ will be stronger and made whole.

While there are many questions pertaining to contextualisation and indigenisation, and there is abundant literature on these topics - as some quotations in this chapter cover the period 1950 to 1999, others from the 1920s and some dated in the 1800s - there is still quite a discrepancy in


\textsuperscript{37} Coe, p. 26.

\textsuperscript{38} Coe, p. 28.
response to the vision of Aboriginal Christians. While indigenous theology could be seen as 'protest', it could also be seen as 'promise' as people move toward a new idea of church.  

The process of incarnation was also considered important and thus four issues were often raised in the discussion on contextualisation. These were theological method, theological orientation, criteria for orthodoxy, cultural identity and social change. and these are the issues that need to be addressed so that worship is contextual, incarnated, inclusive. Conn warned of

an ecclesiastical parochialism that inhibits [people] from seeing any good come from the Nazareths of the third World church’s struggle with its own culture, and which can fossilize the progress of dogma at the seventeenth or eighteenth century.  

This is recognised in the fear that ‘animism’ of Aboriginal spirituality will impact on Christianity or that there is ‘no way’ that Aboriginal spirituality and Christianity can come together. It is also apparent in the earlier comment that Christianity is the same everywhere and in the lack of understanding of the need to contextualise the Gospel in the broad sense. That is, contextualisation is more than a re-interpretation of the story to relate to today’s world. Without the application of the scripture to the reality

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42 personal communication
of life there is a risk of Christianity becoming irrelevant and ethnocentric. The pastoral focus of contextual theology and the on-going dialogue that could occur has been described as: “The contextual circle is drawn by who, and where, and when, and to whom”.\(^{43}\) These four elements, I believe, are the linchpins of contextualisation.

\(^{43}\) Conn, 1978, p. 46.
CHAPTER 4

AN ABORIGINAL CHURCH - MOGO

Case Study: the South Coast

In June 1996 I became aware of a new initiative in the development of Koori ministry on the South Coast. After preparation in the way of housing and staffing there appeared to be an encouraging start in 1999 but the process somewhat stalled in the year 2000. It was reactivated in 2001. However the process suffered again by delays in decision-making. This chapter documents the process that occurred at Mogo over a number of years.

Constraints - financial

In 2000 preparations had begun to develop this ministry under the umbrella of the Anglican Church. Some of the issues that needed to be addressed were: the recognition and approach of the Anglican Church, authority and financial support. It has been suggested that because of the income level of Aboriginal people and financial constraints of the community, the required numbers to sustain a ministry would be 200 – 300 people compared with 100 people in a middle-income group of church attendees. These general
figures were mentioned at the Time for Listening Conference, July 1998.\(^1\)

A National Church Life Survey indicated that in 1991, there was a 7.9% participation rate for Anglicans in their local church.\(^2\) This figure was estimated to be 5% in the NCLS1996\(^3\) and 2001\(^4\) surveys. The Australian Bureau of Statistics census 2001 indicated 20.7% of the Australian population was Anglican. Therefore, working on the basis of the 1991 figure, 7.9% of 20.7% of the population would be assumed to be supporting Anglicans. For a full-time ministry particularly in a rural area, a population base of 6,000 people would be needed to raise $100,000 in order to sustain a priest and the infrastructure.\(^5\) This would be impossible to achieve for a Ministry or Chaplainscy unit without some form of subsidy. For a part-time ministry the saving could be $20,000 to $30,000 if the person, drawing on a secure income from another source, resided in a church residence.\(^4\) The danger here is one of burn-out. If the residence is not church-owned but privately owned or is fully church-owned and only maintenance costs are required, then costs could again be lower. However the figures are similar – at around 94 people of a middle-income or mixed income group. For a low

\(^1\) *A Time for Listening Conference*, 10 July 1998, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown, for the Anglican Diocese of Western Sydney.


\(^3\) Kaldor, p. 17. (1996 estimate)


income group on an aged pension of $223 per week and giving 5% this would require 172 pensioners giving $11.15 each week to achieve $100,000. This figure of giving would in all probability be too high. If people gave 2.5%, that is half the above, then 344 people would need to contribute at that level.

The Boomerang Meeting Place Ministry Centre, Mogo, lies in an area of high unemployment and high numbers of people on a fixed income, mainly pensions. This then limits the amount of support able to be achieved by the local people. The people however are encouraged to tithe, that is, give ten percent of their income.

*History*

An historical background to the provision of a ministry at Mogo and the development in particular over the past six to seven years of the Ministry Centre, Mogo, is important to record because of the difficulties experienced.

The Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn established a Koori Commission in 1992/3. The group initially consisted of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from various Christian groups as well as ministers and lay people from the Anglican Church. This group met infrequently and did not meet at all during 1999. It recommenced in the year 2000 and with the exception of Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship Pastor Ossie Cruse, an ex officio member, was an Anglican group with eighty percent Aboriginal membership. Its main functions were to advise the Bishop of the Diocese of
Canberra and Goulburn on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and utilize the networks of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn; to have contact with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council; to develop Cultural Awareness programmes focusing on spirituality and to develop a plan of partnership between the Anglican Church and The Boomerang Meeting Place, Mogo. Most of these activities have been achieved including the development by the Reverend Karen Kime, an ordained Aboriginal Anglican priest, of a workshop programme, Crossing Cultures. This was trialled in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn with a few people and has since been used in the Anglican Diocese of the Riverina. In 2001 Crossing Cultures was trialled as the base of a weekend residential workshop with theological students from St Mark’s Theological Centre, Canberra. Women Elders from Wreck Bay were involved in the presentation. The final format was completed in mid 2003 with the manual available from the end of 2003. The availability of the workshop is vital in achieving an understanding of Aboriginal culture for the majority of students and an understanding of the needs of Aboriginal people in developing their spirituality. This workshop was part of the first subject on Aboriginal Spirituality available at St Mark’s Theological Centre for theological students.
Ministry at Mogo

The Anglican Church, Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, owned land at lots 54 and 55 Church St, Mogo. On this site was an old church building that was unused and over the years was vandalized to the point that the building needed to be demolished. An Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship Pastor and his wife felt led to begin a ministry at Mogo and to re-establish a building on the land. A Community Employment Program – employing six Aboriginal people - saw a new building open in 1985 [1986]. The Anglican Church had agreed to lease the land to the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) and the work was carried out under the support, sponsorship and guidance of both the AEF and the Anglican Church in Bateman’s Bay. The Pastor gave leadership to church services, Sunday school, kids club, community work programmes, support to families and youth and assisting homeless people. Many other people who cared about the welfare of others were part of teams helping people in need. An Anglican minister from a nearby town conducted services for a while on Sunday evenings and there was a Kids’ Club in operation for about six months. In 1990 [1991] the building was burnt down and the activities and programmes were suspended for a period of about four years.

The Anglican Church had had the building insured and the funds ($40,000) from the insurance were deposited with the AEF until other funds could be raised for the development of a new building. In 1997 the Sylvia and Charles Viertel Charitable Foundation, supported the project with a grant of
$50,000. The Anglican Church also generously contributed advice and time as well as funds given by the people through offerings and the Diocesan Foundation of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. The land was still owned by the Anglican Church and they offered the land to the ownership of the AEF.

The AEF then agreed to hand over the land to local ownership once a legal body was formed and incorporated. The building program commenced in late 1997 and was completed in August 1998. In 1998 two further lots of adjacent land (lots 56 and 57) were transferred from the Uniting Church to the Boomerang Meeting Place.

In the Koori Commission Report to the Anglican Synod, Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn in 1998, a vision for a ministry for Aboriginal people at Mogo was mentioned as "It would be a specific Aboriginal led ministry but with a partnership with other churches and community groups." This appears to indicate an attempt to avoid denominationalism but is more likely to have meant an attempt to be open to all people and to be in contact with all church groups and thus to seek spiritual support, at least, from all groups.

The combined residence and Meeting Place was officially opened on 13 September 1998 by the Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn and Senior Pastor Ossie Cruse of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship.

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Further buildings were envisaged to cater for a cultural centre including a Keeping Place for spiritual items and artifacts, community gatherings, youth housing, workshops and gathering areas for counselling, reconciliation and training. A local leader referred to the Mogo centre as a whole of life expression so the spiritual aspects of the Aboriginal people there were not going to be separated from the cultural or the training opportunities.

In April 2001 opposition by the community to the youth housing programme delayed the building programme and the general vision for the area. Later in April some aspects of the housing programme for disadvantaged youth were withdrawn. However no further building development had occurred by the middle of 2004 even though there was funding in place. There was a possibility of building commencing in July 2004 on the cultural centre.

During the period 1998 – 2001 I conducted interviews and had discussions with a number of people both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal in relation to the need for, and expectations of, an Aboriginal ministry at Mogo. There was great concern among a number of people that it had taken seven or eight years from the burning down of the church building until the establishment of a new building and the appointment of a minister.

An Aboriginal AEFP pastor and his wife commenced work from the residence in October 1998. The pastor's role was to visit families in the Mogo area and build up relationships, run services, work with others in
developing programmes for the community, especially for youth, and provide a culturally appropriate forum/meeting place where Aboriginal men could be counselled. The female pastor’s main role was to work with the women in setting up groups for activities and counselling, to set up a women’s craft group and run counselling sessions for women. She had completed training sessions in Clinical and Pastoral Education in Hospital at the Introductory and Basic Levels and was a vital part of pastoral care programmes in the local hospitals in two towns. Other training had also been undertaken and much of her time was spent in the counselling areas. In 2000 a Kids Club also ran with the support of non-Aboriginal people. The pastors’ tenure was only for two years and that restriction was felt to impact negatively on the expansion of the church. Nevertheless there were several activity groups formed which had a strong following. These were adversely affected when the pastor’s tenure was shortened from the two years to about eighteen months.

One group, which continues to do well (as at the end of 2003) is a Sewing group. Apart from the skills learnt, the women felt that they had developed a support group and a forum in which many issues concerning their lives could be addressed. This group had, in 2002, begun taking their skills to the local primary school students as well as educating the students in cultural matters and building relationships. Eventually this group hopes to be able to raise funds through their work for women’s ministry in particular. This group showcases the importance of the holistic approach – of practical,
cultural, and spiritual oneness.

1998 – 2000

The following was drawn from responses to my questionnaire and in discussions and relates specifically to Mogo.

Pre-Anglican commitment: Structure, funding, authority

When a question was asked concerning whether restrictions had been put in place in relation to doctrine or structure, the response was that there was complete freedom to do what was being done – even with ‘our spirituality’ there was complete freedom and good support by the Anglican Church. Nor was there any direction given in relation to authority. There was no need to report back or produce records. The belief was that as leaders felt they were being led then they would ‘fill them in’ but that there was no pressure to comply with institutional rules or doctrinal rules in any way. This meant that the people ‘felt good with one another’ and felt they could discuss any issues – this was termed a ‘good connection’. It is of interest that at this stage there was no formal agreement or commitment by the Anglican Church. The assumption, that there was, was held by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. It seems apparent too that the presence of Anglican Church representatives throughout the period of 1985 – 1998 led the community, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to the general belief that

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7 Interview: Tape Three, 1999

8 Interview: Tape Three, 1999
the Anglican Church was financially supporting, even responsible for, the pastor and the running costs. This belief was further compounded during the period 1998 – 2000 because of the presence of Anglican people at the Meeting Place and the connections by members of the Meeting Place congregation with other Anglican services. Because there was no formal authority, reporting was not required. These issues of funding and authority became important as time progressed. Later, training became an issue as well.

_Expectations for the Aboriginal ministry at Mogo_

_Healing_

One of the important issues was that of healing. This ministry, it was hoped, would bring restoration and healing to Aboriginal people because people would be able to go to a Koori minister. It was related to me that Aboriginal people felt unable to go to non-Aboriginal people for counselling because of the lack of understanding of cultural issues. It was felt that the possibility of being able to visit or be visited by Koori pastors would enable people to start talking and thereby start the healing process. One respondent’s belief was that God wanted to see a change within Koori people because suffering had gone on for too long. The concern was not completely for conversion although, it was stated, if three or four people had got ‘closer to the Lord’ then that was acceptable but the most important factor was that there had been “healings”.

The importance of healing and the churches supporting each other in the process of providing this pastoral care by working together was thought to be of value showing solidarity, reaching out to one another and sitting down (that is, listening), understanding and listening. This mutual approach did not occur.

One of the ways of achieving healing was through the Sewing Group referred to earlier. The Group was set up initially to provide a skill and to give the women a place to come and meet together. It was hoped that by this means there would be a positive outcome for the women in growth in their self-esteem and in dealing with any concerns they had. This was occurring within the ambit of a Christian setting and it was felt that was one of the reasons why the group was successful. The approach was one of sensitivity, respect, patience and gentleness, meeting the people ‘where they are at’, listening to their spirituality and culture even if it took months. This aspect was vitally important. The leaders knew of other groups which had attempted similar projects, but without this particular approach of doing it within Christianity, and these had broken down. Their belief was that others failed because the group was not operating within a Christian ambit. Here they were able to build up self-esteem, provide a support group and discuss important issues.

Because of their success the group was encouraged and responded positively and this showed at their meetings and in other gatherings where increased confidence allowed them to take on other roles and to take part in meetings.
There were connections between this group and an Anglican Women’s group at Moruya, a nearby town – this was in interest, gifts of fabric and sewing items and eventually visits between the two groups, albeit in a minor way. Here can be seen a praxis approach – the meeting of a need in a practical way, followed by the reaching out into the community both to teach a skill, teach culture and as an act of friendship and restoration – a means of reconciliation.

*Tradition*

Many Aboriginal people have underlined the belief that they are a spiritual people. Many Aboriginal people have also expressed the belief too that God was always there in their spirituality. Sometimes God has been absorbed into Aboriginal spirituality and become part of tradition in an Aboriginal way, but there is a firm belief that God has always been there.\(^{10}\)

Sometimes tradition is seen as evil and therefore having no place, however other people have seen a compatibility between the two. The approach at Mogo was to take that which was good in tradition and use it within Christian practices by ‘blending’ in order to allow healing to take place. The pastors believed that the Christian church and Aboriginal people could work together better to incorporate traditional matters and to follow traditional ways.

\(^{10}\) Interview: Tape Three, 1999, also Tape Five, August 2001.
Leadership

One other area of great importance was that of respecting elders. This was expressed as

Without their blessing I don’t think it’d be right for us to do things...It has always been part of our culture to go to our elders and tell them what’s happening and listen to them to what we can do better for our community. 11

The deference to the leaders in seeking advice or talking issues through was an important part of maintaining the cultural protocol. One of the areas where it was considered very important to use tradition was in leadership. It was deemed important that everybody ‘had a say’ and particularly the elders. The leader would listen to the elders. There was no sense of superiority or being ‘put on a pedestal’.

Area of visitation

The area from Wreck Bay to Wallaga Lake is one tribal group (Yuin) and this meant a considerable amount of travelling for the pastor and his wife. In fact the Yuin are resident as far south as Eden. It was also therefore a matter of contention because it meant that the pastors would be out of the Mogo area for considerable amounts of time. Non-Aboriginal people believed this was done because it was culturally important and the people appeared to accept the situation. However one of the issues raised [from a non-Aboriginal perspective] was that the ministry was not confined to

11 Interview: Tape Three, 1999.
Mogo.\textsuperscript{12}

Although that was considered good for those people away from the immediate area who were visited, it meant the church membership did not grow in Mogo. It was believed that the pastors covered an area from Nowra to Bega in particular meeting people wherever they were invited, providing a good ministry and generously donating time. Here the boundaries were not those of the contemporary church parishes of other denominations but were associated with the tribe and its distribution. If the pastors were needed, they went.

\textit{Service Format}

The structure of the services indicated two things – there was a limit to Westernised ritual and a strong emphasis on following up people in personal meetings and in fellowship groups. At one stage there were three fellowship groups which addressed the need for the caring, sharing, supportive approach. An emphasis also was made on a welfare system, which drew on tradition – Koori support for one another including towards the pastors when it was needed – and being blessed by the Lord, that is, gifts somehow arriving when needed and being blessed by the contact through working with people in the Lord’s name.

\textsuperscript{12} Interview: Tape Two, 7 September, 2000.
Non-Aboriginal understanding of Aboriginal culture

The understanding of Aboriginal culture of some non-Aboriginal church leaders varied from "very limited, in fact, nothing short of abysmal"\(^{13}\), (a comment which is repeated on a number of occasions by other people involved in church leadership) to a willingness to listen, to be supportive and to understand the need for an Aboriginal ministry, and from overwhelming support to complete rejection of any cultural need to cater for Aboriginal Christians. There appeared a great need for leadership in understanding and in reconciliation between the various people if the responses were any indication. These responses also indicated the difficulty Aboriginal people were having in being able to be Christian as Aboriginal people. The lack of awareness amongst some church leaders tended to show an ethnocentrism and an unwillingness to reach out and listen and learn.

One respondent spoke of the dilemmas of trying to find the balance between the essence of Christianity, and the essence of what is Anglican in this case, but also the freedom and the cultural expression of indigenous people at Mogo.\(^{14}\) That real balancing and tension is being worked out.

\(^{13}\) Interview: Tape Four, 10 March 2000.

\(^{14}\) Interview: Tape Four.
Training

Issues were raised by non-Aboriginal people as to where the pastor would be trained and whether there was a necessity to have a Bachelor of Theology degree from a theological college and how much the pastor would have to abide by the priestly structures of the Anglican Church. It was considered important by one respondent that there should be some ‘lining up’ and belonging or the ministry would not be ‘Anglican’. On the other hand there was an awareness by another respondent that imposing Westernised middle class ‘white’ theology and Anglican structures could destroy genuine cultural expression and leadership. This led to a concern for flexibility in the way issues were undertaken and careful listening to the cultural things so that white structures and theology did not destroy something which was a genuine expression of indigenous culture.

Another person expressed the hope that it would be an autonomous, indigenous operation that would showcase Koori culture and Koori spirituality, a place of which Koori people could be proud as their own expression amongst other spiritual and cultural groups. The vision was also that the Mogo ministry would be a great witness opportunity not only to Kooris but to the ‘white’ people as well.16

15 Interview: Tape Two, 7 October 2000.
16 Interview: Tape Two.
Mission / Awareness

One of the disappointments for the pastors was that they wished to go out to non-Aboriginal churches to raise awareness about their ministry and to also raise funds to keep the ministry supported. A committee was set up to promote the ministry as a mission, to work out how to connect with other churches and to appeal for support. This did not happen with the exception of two churches. A non-Aboriginal respondent commented that it seemed the door was almost shut on their efforts:

'There seems to be this cut-off, shut the door almost on them as a general thing. There are some areas where this doesn’t happen but generally there’s the white church if you like and then there’s the Koori community and there’s no connection between the two.'

The positives of a Mogo Aboriginal ministry

When asked about the positives of an Aboriginal ministry, a non-Aboriginal response was that “it was an indigenous ministry that wasn’t just something that was done in response to a white person’s initiative.” However it was indicated that some people believed that the appropriate people were not in place to have that ministry progress so that it could actually be autonomous and that there needed to be a more dynamic committee to oversee the process and envision the ministry.

Functioning of the facility became ad hoc in the year 2000.

17 Interview: Tape Two.

18 Interview: Tape Two.
Could this process of 1998 – 2000 be interpreted as failure, or was it that new directions were needed? Were the efforts deemed a failure because of European assumptions - because growth did not occur at a particular level, structures were not in-built and styles and management were different to that of the mainstream institution? Were those people observing the outcome really aware of the stresses and difficulties that were occurring? One issue that was difficult for some non-Aboriginal people was that the aim of the ministry was being directed at ‘broken people’ and the need for healing above all else. This was deemed to be a limitation on the type of ministry that non-Aboriginal people felt could be happening. Again, this is a matter of a non-Aboriginal viewpoint and an assumption of the needs of the people.

Some non-Aboriginal people felt that the structures should be there for the sake of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people: the aim of the ministry was therefore not recognised. While there were stressful situations, ground-breaking work did occur and some strong bases were laid.

*Expectations for the future of The Boomerang Ministry Centre Meeting Place.*

Again the non-Aboriginal respondents generally felt that a mainstream church – here the Anglican Church – needed to be involved. While some respondents believed that the Anglican church should not step in and define the process, structure and procedure of running the centre, it was thought that the Church could give some accountability, structure and training and supervision without being autocratic. One clergyperson suggested the first
century model referred to in Ephesians 3: 11 of having an apostle – a person responsible for leadership – and the whole structure working on accountability and liaison with other churches in the town: not on an hierarchical, denominational structure but more of a network than a structure was thought to be useful. 19

In what ways can the Anglican Church be involved in relation to the Mogo ministry.

At this stage the Anglican Church was not formally involved except for a small amount of funding in the first few months. Some non-Aboriginal respondents concerned about the loss of momentum in 2000 felt that such people as the Reverend Gloria Schipp [then Anglican Aboriginal priest at Dubbo] and Bishop Arthur Malcolm [then Anglican Aboriginal bishop in North Queensland but who retired in 2001] should be sought out to model the new partnership aspect. Administrative and financial assistance was also deemed to be needed. Emphasis was put on the need for authority and accountability structures within the Anglican communion so that autonomous did not mean ‘accountable only to themselves’. 20 This almost implies a mistrust of Aboriginal handling of the situation.

Again the non-Aboriginal comments were that the church should allow indigenous people to take their own initiative but it was felt that that was

19 Interview: Tape Four.

20 Interview: Tape Two.
still difficult. Here again is the assumption that the people needed 'white' help. A comment was made that the people would need to relate to a Bishop and the people would \textit{have} to be under the auspices of a 'white' structure.\textsuperscript{21} Otherwise the ministry would not be valid. One person [not an Anglican], who felt there was no difficulty created by the Anglican church structure that affected the ability of indigenous people to express themselves, believed that the indigenous people felt comfortable having a bigger organisation overseeing them both financially and in accountability to an authority.\textsuperscript{22} The involvement of the Anglican church was believed to be needed for resources, funding, provision of courses and 'protection' but not to take over the ministry, the structure or the organization.

\textit{Format of services - later}

The format of services held at Mogo was based on the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship and was rather informal. However this was seen to be a positive way for introducing newcomers to church. The style was welcoming. The consecration of the Eucharist was not formal though it was accepted by some more formal Anglicans that as long as it was 'covered by prayer' and it was the way Koori people wanted it, then that was 'the point'.\textsuperscript{23} There was some concern that the service was often carried out by 'other people' – this was difficult both for some resident Kooris and for non-

\textsuperscript{21} Interview: Tape Two.

\textsuperscript{22} Interview: Tape Seven, 9 August 2001.

\textsuperscript{23} Interview: Tape Two.
Aboriginal people. I think that in this circumstance authority was the issue for both groups of people.

Service times were interrupted and service days were interrupted due to commitments elsewhere. This was believed to be the reason that reduced the number of Aboriginal people attending services. The level of support by Koori people was not what was expected by some non-Aboriginal people. As perceived by non-Aboriginal people all the ministry activities were directed to the Aboriginal people and to develop the understanding of the Scriptures:

> taking into the consideration that they were our scriptures. They wanted to highlight the points of their religious life with our religious activities.\(^\text{24}\)

The use of the word 'our' in this comment, both in relation to the Scriptures and in religious activities indicates the attitude of ownership of Christianity by some non-Aboriginal people. In this case there would be no acceptance of God already being in the culture and of the Scriptures being for all people, and certainly the comment had ethnocentric and triumphalist overtones.

Along similar lines one respondent stated that

> They never lost their aboriginality at all. Everything that has been done there has worked along the lines that their culture should be integrated with the Christian culture.\(^\text{25}\)

\(^{24}\) Interview: Tape Two.

\(^{25}\) Interview: Tape Two.
One concern was that beyond the presence of the pastor and his wife, other groups operating from the Ministry Centre such as Kid’s Club, although supported by Aboriginal people, were not run or led by Aboriginal people. Occasionally, in the early stages of 1998 - 99, a non-Aboriginal clergyman would be present but he later withdrew so that there would not appear to be control or imposition. This clergyman’s presence however had given credibility to the - incorrect - belief of Anglican involvement.

Others were not very certain whether the presence of non-Aboriginal people was wanted but on reflection felt that all were welcome. The general impression was that the Aboriginal pastors wanted the freedom to minister to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and not to be set up separately or to be divided. However, it was understood that Aboriginal clergy wanted to set up an Aboriginal church so that Aboriginal people could find a base, their own security and then from there go out to another church in the community. This was also a comment mentioned to me by Aboriginal people in other towns.

In the process of providing a community gathering place and worship centre, a structure of a number of blocks of time for various activities was used – for example, blocks of Bible study, sewing group, a number of fellowship groups, counselling times as needed and meeting people in the community as needed through being at a location, sports venue or park. There was also time spent visiting in homes. It appeared effective. There
were between twelve and thirty participants in the Sunday service, with over fifty per cent active, and a few non-Aboriginal people present.

Funding

There had been some financial support for the first three or four months from the Diocese and some support from one Anglican church to help with a petrol allowance. However the funding was in a precarious position. There were certainly not the 200 – 300 people to support a ministry. Financially it was not self-supporting and the pastor had to apply for social welfare because the tithes and offerings, including the generous provision of money from one particular supporter, were not sufficient to keep the place operating. There was some awareness by non-Aboriginal people that the tithes from the local community would not be sufficient to keep the ministry operating. However there was always the expectation that the ministry would be supported by an external organisation but that never came to fruition. The female pastor had been able to obtain some needed items, for example, sewing machines, by accessing grants.

For some sixteen months the Moruya Anglican Church to the south set up a facility through Anglicare to fund the female pastor as a Koori Support Worker for women and children. This was of use because of transport difficulties for people resident in this area. It also provided an appropriate person in that of the female pastor to support these women and children. This process was also one way to help in the healing process both for individuals and for reconciliation.
A regular income and funding of infrastructure was critical for the centre to succeed and this was not achieved. The local community had raised about $100.00 per week in addition to other income mentioned earlier but the total amount could not sustain a family. There did not seem to be an adequate plan for funding nor an understanding that there was no agreement with the Anglican Church at that stage to provide funding. The congregation was not sufficient to support a pastor and the income from its members was limited as virtually all were on pensions. It was also recognized that the need for a permanent pastor resident in the area was vital to maintain a consistent presence and programme.

Confusion

Originally it appeared that the service was to be an Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) service and not Anglican therefore any financial input from the Anglican church would not have been expected. However confusion surrounded the whole issue because of the presence of Anglican clergy at various times over the years prior to the establishment of the Boomerang Centre. Once that Centre had been started the Anglican Church gave a short period of financial help as well.

The Pastors and the present leader and his wife attended a neighbouring Anglican Church as well as an Assembly of God church. Generally confusion centred on whether the church was Anglican or AEF and members of the congregation were not sure who was responsible for funding
or authority matters. The importance of training then became an issue as did structure. The need for occasional services such as baptisms, in particular, and marriages, and the authority behind these, also raised questions. The expectations of the non-Aboriginal community were shown in the following statement:

You need a parish structure not just for the Aboriginal people but for the whites who turn up because the whole thing has to run properly and I do hope the church becomes a place where the Aboriginal people can take a leadership role.  

and

I think it should be Aboriginal based and Aboriginal run. But I do think there needs to be a qualified minister.  

For these respondents the qualifications did not necessarily mean a three or four year course especially if the pastor had already completed an Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship course. Some respondents felt that a shorter course was acceptable to Aboriginal people but not if the person wished to minister to a non-Aboriginal congregation.

A New Beginning

In 2001 meetings were held with the Anglican Church, Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, and the people of Mogo as the Aboriginal people sought ordination for the Aboriginal pastor. The process involved advice from Aboriginal Christian Elders, discernment that the calling to vocation was

26 Interview: Tape Two.
27 Interview Tape Two also a similar comment in Interview: Tape Six, 14 August 2001.
from God and investigation of the skills and experience of the pastor as well as requirements for training, support and resources. Ordination would be expected in September 2001 if all requirements were met. This was delayed. Similar approaches to approval for ordination had been taken in the Newcastle Diocese of the Anglican Church with the ordination of the Reverend Di Langham.

Vision and Mission

A handout provided in June 2001 concerning the Boomerang Ministry listed the following vision and mission [bulleted sentences are those of the handout] for the centre and the requirements for the minister and that person’s role:

The Vision

➢ To be a place that welcomes people into praise and worship, prayer and action.

The emphasis is on welcoming and is thus based on the awareness of one another and creating an environment in which people feel valued and accepted. This is a social and an outreach focus. Secondly, there is an emphasis on encouraging people into ‘praise and worship, prayer and action’, that is, the focus is on the celebration of Christ both in ceremony, as a community and individually, and by serving each other and the community in Christ’s name. This was the servanthood or servant community that was espoused in the plan for the Aboriginal Christian community. It indicates an approach that says Christianity is a viable
alternative and the model being used is a praxis model centering on dealing with injustice and disadvantage. It underscores the value of prayer and worship. It thus puts forth the following presuppositions: that Christianity is an appropriate approach for healing; that it is a viable alternative; that the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is a source of power; and that Christianity is holistic.

**The Mission**

- To be energized and guided by the Great Holy Spirit in serving God and the people.

  The intention is to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit from which comes growth, strength, guidance, power and healing. The outcome is for a servant style as a church community which will extend to the wider community. This presupposition identifies the power of the Holy Spirit.

- To create a welcoming environment so that people feel free to gather together and worship God.

  The welcoming environment is stressed again – this reflects also on the uncomfortable feeling many Aboriginal people have in non-Aboriginal environments. The worship of God and attitude to that worship is important. Worship is not considered entertainment.

- To live and communicate Faith in a way that challenges people to change and grow.

  The acting out of Christian values is important because the action directs
the attention of people to God. By living life based on Christian values and attitudes they are able to communicate their belief and trust in God in a way that is not at odds with their daily lives. It is true to themselves and God. It is an holistic approach as God and the Faith are part of the everyday life. The challenge is made that leading such a life will create positive benefits to individuals and the community and is also part of the healing which it is believed will occur. These are presuppositions involving the power of God, and the inter-relatedness of Christian life.

➢ To develop youth and children's ministries in a caring environment which encourages them to grow in Faith.

The healing, nurturing environment is specifically pointed to in ministry to young people. The youth were a great concern because of an apparent sense of not having a place in society or being able to sense a healthy attitude to the future.

➢ To be culturally sensitive

This was specifically mentioned because it was felt important to have an Aboriginal ministry, which respected traditional elements, particularly in relationships and in acknowledging a common history and culture.

This presupposition emphasises the importance of Aboriginal identity and reflects the essential Aboriginal identity.

➢ To teach in a way that meets the needs of the people.
Again this refers to the presupposition that the teaching is culturally appropriate in method and style and in application to Aboriginal concerns and identity. It takes into account a particular approach with which the people are familiar and comfortable. This might include a story-telling approach, a greater emphasis on fellowship meetings, more Bible Studies and a practical activity which allows support groups to form. Teaching may take place in special groups in home situations. It is also in part the presupposition which sees Christianity as applying to all parts of culture.

- To recognize and utilize the different gifts given to each person in the worshipping community.

Involvement of every member of the community and valuing their gifts and talents contributes to the overall health of the community and the individual. Seeking and using those gifts helps in the growth of self-esteem and acknowledges the God-given gift. It also means that each person has a role in the community. Its extended use also means that leadership is not focused on one person but spread among many. This fits the cultural pattern.

- To teach the importance of our authority and position in Christ and the changes the Church can make as it declares the authority in the spiritual.

This is a combination of presuppositions: Scripture is the basis for authority and is revealed through the Word, Christ gives direction, and spiritual life is based on God the Father, God the Son and God, the Holy Spirit.

- To respond to the needs of the people through healing and counselling.
Another presupposition lists Christianity as holistic and this means impacting on every part of life. The need for healing and the prevailing sense of injustice and difficulties with issues of health, education and employment mean that the Church group need to take a lead and provide facilities and time and personnel to reach out to those affected. To do so in a Christian environment is believed to be the only viable way, because it is by the love of God and within the love of God as expressed through others, that healing can occur.

- To serve the people in love by being a caring and sharing ministry.

Serving, caring and sharing is culturally appropriate and is a Christian outreach. This needs no elaboration as a traditional concept and a Christian concept.

The Minister

The minister of the Boomerang Ministry is appointed by the Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn in consultation with the leaders the Boomerang Ministry Church.

Role

- To give leadership and conduct worship and other pastoral services
- To organize in consultation with the Council, prayer, bible study, teachings and other services during the weekdays.
- Conduct pastoral visits in Mogo and other areas as needed.
- Give leadership to develop an effective Children’s Church and Kids’ Club ministry.
- Attend court sessions and support Kooris at Court.
- Attend Christian Conferences and meetings of other indigenous leaders.
➢ To be actively involved in the Bateman's Bay Ministers Fraternal.

➢ To develop and give leadership to evangelistic missions to other Aboriginal communities e.g. Wallaga Lake.

➢ To develop a visitational service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the Goulburn prison and other gaols.

Other duties were also to be included as agreed with the Church Council.

By not necessarily being the one person in charge or conducting all these duties personally, it means the Minister can draw on the skills, gifts and talents within the community as required and to delegate. This sharing of gifts relates back to the mission statements. However one major issue revolves around the dearth of older men to take on some roles particularly ones relating to cultural matters and for leadership amongst male youth and young adult men.

A further requirement was that the Minister work in partnership with the Boomerang Ministry Church Council comprising elders and Church members of which three are chosen each year by the worshipping Community. Deference is thus given to the elders as is culturally appropriate. There is also a position for a neighbouring Anglican church minister as invited.

Belief

Once the community began an association with the Anglican Church, the commitment to Anglican belief and practice was spelt out.
Thus further comments by the Minister stated:

At the Boomerang Ministry, Mogo, the four main themes of Anglican belief and practice are respected.

- Authority of the Scriptures in that the Word of God brings salvation.

Authority comes from the scriptures. It is a salvific theology drawing on the healing from God, the restoration of people with God, between God and people and between people and the promise of the resurrection. There is not so much direct emphasis on judgment.

- Sacraments of Baptism and Communion.

(There was agreement that baptism through the traditional Anglican form of service would be offered and dedication of children (AEF) could also be offered).

- The apostolic succession

This involves an Anglican understanding of the three forms of ministry handed down from the apostles.

- Authority through the Church

The ministry at Mogo acknowledges the Anglican tradition handed down may not at time be relevant to Indigenous ministries and therefore should be allowed to be flexible and have freedom to express Christian faith through Indigenous culture.

It was acknowledged that

The ministry is to all people but emphasizing the particular ministry to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a recognition that the ministry at Mogo will be predominantly an Indigenous leadership.

The ministry based at Mogo is under the authority and protection of the Anglican Church, Diocese of...
Canberra and Goulburn and approved by the Bishop-in-Council as a Ministry Unit.

There would be an affiliation with the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship, which would provide support, advice and guidance.

*Proceedings in 2002*

In early 2002 it was agreed that the present minister would be made a deacon in the Anglican Church on 5th October 2002 in a service at The Boomerang Centre, Mogo, at which the Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn and the Anglican Aboriginal Bishop of North Queensland, the Reverend Jim Leftwich would be present. Shortly after, the candidate would be ordained at the Goulburn Cathedral as an Anglican priest with a special ministry to the Koori people within the Diocese. This occurred in November 2002.

*Training 2003*

Part of the candidate’s training for this ministry involved one to two week periods of time spent at a number of parishes within the Diocese learning about various aspects of ministry, an overview of the Anglican Church with its styles of churchmanship, ceremonial and service formats, and legal procedures and specific ministries. The candidate had also spent considerable periods with Aboriginal clergy of other denominations in the process of his training with the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship and his own interest in fulfilling the requirements of a minister. However the programme ran into difficulties when family matters, the lack of direction
from some supervisors, and the considerable absence from family impacted on the candidate's time to fulfil requirements. The requirement of written responses also caused difficulty.

This type of training is only appropriate for the priestly formation and provides no input for hermeneutics, history of religion, and subjects such as psychology, ethics, and others as are found in tertiary degrees in theology. Generally the programme did not work for either the candidate or the supervisors.

Funding 2003

Funding was to be provided by pledge over a period of three years from some of the parishes of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn as well as individual donations, a pledge from the Diocese itself, an input from Anglicare, Canberra and Goulburn, and local giving. Further approaches were made in 2002 for assistance with funding through mission agencies. An agreement was reached for support from Bush Church Aid and Australian Board of Missions for a three year period from the beginning of 2003. Hence funding comes from a number of sources. This also then involves the minister being made available for deputations and testimonials as well as regular reports and up-dates on the progress of the ministry.
CHAPTER 5

ENCOUNTER

Every cultural encounter is an opportunity for deep mutual enrichment.¹

The following is derived from the general statements (that is, not only specifically relevant to Mogo) which were made during interviews, discussions, conferences and in replies to the questionnaire. A full questionnaire is at Appendix I. The title ‘Encounter’ meaning ‘to meet with’ refers to the conversations which occurred between me as the investigator and a number of people both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal who were attempting to formalize thoughts about the difficulties Aboriginal people were having in their desire to worship God in a culturally appropriate way. Some of these discussions were referred to in the previous chapter in the particular context of Mogo but are now elaborated on in their context as general statements. One of the main issues appears to be that of terminology as well as an understanding of what Aboriginal people are attempting and why.

In relation to mission outreach to Aboriginal people many non-Aboriginal church members believed that that was something that happened far away, ‘up north’ or ‘out west’. Encouraging Aboriginal people into the church as it exists or in an Aboriginal Church in southern urban and rural urban areas was not needed. Many did not see the need for a culturally appropriate

¹ R Cameron, Opala: A search for desert water, St Paul Publication, Strathfield, Australia, 1997, p. 59.
expression of Christianity or an environment that was supportive of Aboriginal Christians. A number of non-Aboriginal members of a Christian denomination made the statement to me on a number of occasions: “Well, why can’t they just join us?”

Some people, as one Aboriginal respondent mentioned, still ‘manage’ the Christian process for Aboriginal people and for others any contact is a ‘one-off’ event. Some leaders, too, think there is no issue now, it has been dealt with: witness the Walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge and other places, the establishment of Nungalinya and the presence of a few Aboriginal clergy. Other non-Aboriginal people, according to some Aboriginal respondents, make promises which are not fulfilled and therefore cause hurt and loss of trust.¹

One comment mentioned to me by non-Aboriginal people in my interviews was that southern urban and southern rural Aboriginal people live in a Western culture and have little left of their own culture. Therefore it is pointless to venture into the area of the establishment of an Aboriginal Church within a particular denomination. Besides “all Christianity is the same”!² These comments came from people representative over a wide educational and socio-economic status and occupational backgrounds as well as clergy of various denominations. There appear three main discriminations here: the first denied that the message of the Gospel is confused with the medium, the culture, which was ‘white’, western, middle-

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² Interview: Tape Five.

³ personal communication

⁴ personal communication
class; the second is the denial of a particular group's needs for a culturally and contextually relevant Gospel and the third is the conviction that there are no Aboriginal people resident in a particular area despite people identifying as Aboriginal. This last comment indicates a lack of awareness of the needs, culture and identity of Aboriginal people and has been said both directly to, and in the presence of, Aboriginal people.

I hope to show that Aboriginal Christian people have a desire, need and conviction that a culturally appropriate following of the Gospel - that is, in a contextual manner - is their right, in the pursuit of an identity in Christ. This is the only way the Aboriginal Christian people see to provide the help for, and building-up of, their people and to achieve restoration and reconciliation.

*The desire of Aboriginal people for an Aboriginal church.*

Pastor Neville Naden (employed by a special grant for Aboriginal ministry passed by the Sydney Anglican Diocese in 1996 and later ordained deacon in the Anglican Church in 2000) said

> It is exciting that the church has taken up the concept of allowing Aboriginal men and women to become a mission force, to take the gospel to our people... We basically view this as a joint ministry.  

It is a pity the word 'allowing' was used here as it implies a paternalistic approach - that with the church's permission Aboriginal people can undertake their own mission to their own people. It may, of course, not be what was intended, but indicates that the church was supporting the ministry. Pastor Naden explained the style of worship or meeting was that

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5 *Southern Cross*, October, 1998, p. 18. [article by J. Halcrow]
of home fellowship or 'cottage meetings' to which extended family and friends were invited: "It will be just us sitting down with them and talking to them about the things of the Lord. And perhaps singing a few songs." 6

This approach is used in church meetings in other areas as well because many Aboriginal people felt uncomfortable in a 'white' church. A number of non-Aboriginal lay people were aware that Aboriginal people might feel uncomfortable in a 'white church' though they were not able to offer a reason why – their understanding may have arisen based on an assumption of the church services being too 'book oriented' and of tensions between people based on history. A comment was made too that because Aboriginal people had an oral tradition then a church service based on the style of Pentecostal services was thought to be more appealing particularly because there was less reliance on literacy, more movement and action and therefore less formality. Pentecostal churches were also thought to be more family-oriented and therefore would be more appealing for this reason. These would still be 'white' churches however.

Another non-Aboriginal person believed that whether Aboriginal people attended church depended on the clergyman. One person told of a minister some years ago who went to the Aboriginal people in the town but eventually stopped doing this because the 'white' congregation withdrew from him. The congregation would not come to church because he was active with Aboriginal people and because Aboriginal people were included in fellowship nights. It finally reached the stage where the minister's children were being persecuted and therefore the minister left the

6 Southern Cross, October 1998, p. 18. [article by J. Helcrow]
area. Aboriginal Christians, however, in an Aboriginal church indicate they are welcoming of all. Although, as Neville Naden pointed out, when non-Aboriginal people attended his church, they were in a minority and would, he expected, experience a degree of discomfort because of that.\footnote{A Time for Listening Conference, Session One, University of Western Sydney, July 1998. [comments by N. Naden]}

There was some comment by non-Aboriginal church-goers who felt that, in their case as Anglicans, the average Anglican was exclusive of Aboriginality and was middle-class Anglo-Saxon in environment even though many would have “signed the Sorry Book” and some had taken part in special liturgies of a once-off nature.\footnote{Interview: Tape Two.} As an attitude that was sustained therefore, this was still exclusive. One Aboriginal person explained that if an Asian person or a Polish person was Anglican and came in to church there would be more tolerance even though they might not speak English. But, as referred to earlier, people would be ‘looking over their shoulder’ and ‘not be accepting’ of the Aboriginal person.\footnote{Interview: Tape Five.} Another comment was reported to me in the year 2002 concerning a Koori youth worker who was told by a clergyman of a mainstream denomination that his ‘type was not wanted at this church’ \footnote{personal communication}.

One concern expressed by non-Aboriginal respondents was that this separation would be a form of apartheid where Aboriginal Christians would be barred from ‘white’ churches or vice versa. A number suggested that an Aboriginal Church, that is, where the majority of worshippers were
Aboriginal people, would not be divisive if no one were excluded, and the Church was open to all. Apart from this, one respondent thought it was fundamentally desirable for people of different cultures and race to be able to express their Christianity within the context of their own cultures, idioms and thought forms: therefore for Aboriginal Christians to have indigenous context to their worship was deemed a “very wonderful thing”.

This particular respondent, who had clearly thought deeply about contextual issues, saw the difference as one between pluralism and uniformity with the Body of Christ, the Church, being about pluralism. That is, there are different ways of worshipping God and “being church”. This allows very clearly for difference. It affirms difference and yet at the same time it says all people can be one in Christ, that the different cultures, the different races, and the different gifts can each find their own form of expression. At the same time there is an essential unity which is provided by Jesus Christ who makes all Christians part of that broader family where indigenous and non-indigenous can celebrate their own lives separately and yet still know that unity in Christ that binds them together with the wider Church.

The Aboriginal people, however, felt they were neglected in ministry by the mainstream denominations. The mainstream churches were not seen to be targeting Aboriginal people for ministry. Because the people felt neglected and that they were not being supported by the churches, some Aboriginal respondents felt that was good reason to allow those Aboriginal people who were concerned for their own people to reach them by involving Aboriginal pastors in Aboriginal churches. The belief was that if the

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11 Interview: Tape One, July 1999.
12 Notes: Nine, 31 March 2000
mainstream churches were reaching Aboriginal people and the people were attending those churches then there would be no need for Aboriginal churches. The reasons this was not happening were believed to be varied but were not identified by the respondent possibly because the answer was critical of the churches. Others, in public seminars, have been more outspoken. However the situation indicates that there is no allowance for the concept of indigenous agency.

It was recognized by a few that church services and meetings could be too middle-class without sufficient understanding of how different Aboriginal culture was from the mainstream culture. Expecting the Aboriginal Christian to be the same as the non-Aboriginal member of a congregation could lead to feelings of inferiority according to one comment. The sentiment that all people should be treated equally and Aboriginal Christians can join ‘our’ congregation can mean an unwillingness to accommodate the other person’s needs. Often there was a reluctance to recognise the difference between cultures because, as one respondent said:

if they did then they would have to make some changes to be more conciliatory. And because whites are the dominant culture they don’t think they have to. The Aboriginal Christian doesn’t think he should change either.

The question whether Aboriginal people should have their own committee in church created a quandary for some who insisted that that would be outside the structure and would be a personal matter relating to the minister and not to the whole body. This still left the majority as the main governing body with no formal structure or place for the Aboriginal people and no

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13 Interview: Tape Two.

14 Interview: Tape Two.
place in the structure of the mainstream church.

Other comments about Aboriginal people in a predominantly non-Aboriginal church included that it depended on what the person was like in other areas of life in regard to acceptance. It seems to suggest that these particular people were comfortable in a church environment of like souls—a club atmosphere with rules of clothing and presentation and material success...a middle-class member.

Others were not aware of anyone struggling or of any areas of difficulty. As these comments came from people in an area where Aboriginal people had expressed difficulty, this is of concern for it suggests the sensitivities of the clergy and congregation are not open to what is happening around them either within the church environment or in the wider community.

While many non-Aboriginal church-goers thought all Christians should worship together [which raises the question as to whether this meant ‘our way’ as given in earlier comments], others believed it was right to provide a separate church for indigenous people if they needed it, but not forever. The reason given for this was that the ‘white’ churches were poorly educated about other cultures. But eventually both could come together. However there was no real suggestion of change on the part of the non-indigenous members and no suggestion of a means whereby a better understanding could be achieved. The implication from the non-indigenous commentator was almost that once the indigenous people had had a chance of worshipping separately then they would want to ‘join us’. However the indigenous response was that as the people became established in their own church they

15 Interview: Tape Four, 10 March, 2000, and by personal communication
would 'usually' begin to worship further afield (having gained confidence in
the church environment):

Every one will scatter themselves to their choice. I don't
think it's divisive at all. I think it's probably healthy to
have different types of ministries in the town.¹⁶

The implication was that the people would have grown in confidence and
might continue involvement in their own church as well as worship
elsewhere.

One comment by an Aboriginal person was that the media perception of
an Aboriginal person through the years was one of Aboriginal people always
having their hand out.¹⁷ That meant, for this Aboriginal person, that going to
a church which was not predominately Aboriginal would have him
wondering what the other attendees were thinking about him and he would
have a feeling of not belonging: 'You become like a duck out of water'.¹⁸
At the Time for Listening Conference one speaker referred to being "frozen
out of two local churches", "being marginalised and pushed to the edge" and
of a craft group for children which was "not for Aborigines".¹⁹ The speaker
went on to say that it was what she described as racism that meant Koori
people needed to have their own church because

you can't ask people who are Christian or who have just been
confirmed to come in to a congregation which is supposed to
be the body of Christ, which is supposed to represent love, ...
unity, that comes through being in Christ and know that they

¹⁶ Interview: Tape Three.
¹⁷ Notes: Nine (also noted by another Aboriginal respondent in Interview: Tape
Five, 14 August, 2001)
¹⁸ Notes: Nine
¹⁹ 'Time to Plan' session of Time for Listening Conference Anglican Diocese of Western
People would be...coldly polite.²⁰

The fact that little hospitality was shown in the churches and that people appeared to be in little cliques meant that the Aboriginal person felt that they did not fit in.

The history of relationships between Aboriginal people and all later comers has made it harder to maintain Aboriginal identity and yet contribute to the local community. Therefore one comment was that specific attention and energy should be directed towards indigenous people to make them feel at home, giving them space to contribute while maintaining their own space. ²¹

The response by some Aboriginal Christians was that an Aboriginal church gave the opportunity to begin restoration and healing. The power of the Holy Spirit and the emphasis on ‘The Word’ within an Aboriginal cultural environment was at the heart of the belief that Aboriginal people would be healed spiritually, emotionally, socially and physically. Once that had happened then people could worship anywhere but this “first step for one broken person was to take them into freedom with Jesus so they can move on in their journey”.²² There is a strong belief that this can and will continue to happen. Belief in the power of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit to heal and restore people individually and as a community was one of the presuppositions held by Aboriginal Christians at the Mogo Ministry Centre.

²⁰ ‘Time to Plan’ session of Time for Listening.

²¹ Interview: Tape Six.

²² Interview: Tape Three.
At a conference in Melbourne in 1997, one non-Aboriginal respondent recalled speaking to other people in attendance about Aboriginal matters and receiving the response from one listener that they could not do anything because their congregation had no Aboriginal people in it. The interviewee responded with the comment that a woman in that person’s congregation was known personally to be Aboriginal, only to be told that that person was not a real Aborigine “because she’s not black”. A similar episode was related to the interviewer by an Aboriginal clergyperson ministering in the year 2000 who spoke of a conversation with other clergy about the desire to minister to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. One clergyperson responded: “There are no Aboriginal people here”.

Certainly there was no indication in these comments of any awareness of different needs, culture or background. As noted earlier the response by other non-Aboriginal ministers in their comments of “I don’t know”, “I don’t understand”, “I’ve not really thought about it”, “My knowledge is appalling really” indicated that they were generally unaware of any particular needs or desires on the part of Aboriginal Christians. How then do the various denominations minister to Aboriginal people in an effective manner, if there is not an attempt to listen and to hear the people?

*The benefits of an Aboriginal Ministry*

One Aboriginal respondent told of the process of ‘coming to know Jesus’ through an Aboriginal ministry. Through this experience came the conviction that this was the way to bring people in to a church, particularly a

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21 Interview: Tape Six.

21 personal communication
mainstream church, allowing people eventually to approach a non-
indigenous church community mainly because mainstream churches are
seen as authoritarian, or “just full of white fellas” and are not seen as
welcoming to Aboriginal people. However, it should be noted that the
congregations may not have been particularly welcoming towards new
members. There was an awareness by some Aboriginal people that South
Coast Aboriginal people were very reluctant to fully mix in with ‘white
fellas’ in the community. Part of this may be due to a feeling of non-
acceptance and mistreatment in the past and the concern that they might not
be accepted now. Therefore the people withhold themselves. There may
also be a desire to be ‘on our own together’.

In the situation of the afore-mentioned person who came ‘to know Jesus’
through the availability of an Aboriginal minister, there was no desire to go
to any church on the person’s part, but the presence of an Aboriginal-led
church service meant that this person found an opening, or way in. The next
impression that was made on this speaker was that it was possible to relate
to the Aboriginal people there. Further, there was the opportunity to sit and
listen to the people present. The church itself did not appear any different
from any other small church from the outside but what impacted on the
speaker was the feeling that came when he went in there. He spoke of the
attitudes, the welcoming and the relevance of people who, once they were
engaged in conversation, “knew you, your background and they would
relate to your background and they would know some of the issues that


26 Interview: Tape Five.
were important to you as an Aboriginal person". On the outside the church appeared no different from any other however on the inside it was very culturally appropriate - this would not be apparent to any non-Aboriginal person. Here are intimated the sense of belonging, the shared history, the knowledge of, and connection to, other people which is the stuff of identity, of knowing who you are. So the atmosphere, the welcoming and understanding were valued. At that time the services did not include traditional dance or the use of the didgeridoo. Some of the elements that were important and based on cultural ways were: the way of welcoming people; the protocols of talking where no-one is more important than another including the minister (although the pastor was respected); and the importance of family.

Outreach - that is, seeking out people and encouraging them to take part in church and talking to others about Jesus - was considered difficult for some Aboriginal people because of fear of rejection and therefore it was more comfortable to go where there were family and friends attending. There are occasional large Christian Aboriginal gatherings but generally house-church style meetings are popular. Experience is more important than doctrine and therefore informal, freely participating meetings where testimonies are used rather than prepared teaching are the format for some people. At Mogo however there is a strong emphasis on the teaching of the 'Word'. Acoustic accompaniment and choruses are used in preference to electronic music though older people love old hymns. This style has ties with Canadian, Maori, Mexican and Indian Christians. One comment that was made was

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27 Interview: Tape Five.
that women elders in authority found it difficult to submit to men in authority in church. At Mogo the church committee is mainly made up of women elders who presented a man to be their leader. In religious practice there is a belief in baptism for children, a works-based religion and a Pentecostal style.

Identity

One of the issues which was mentioned in discussion with Aboriginal people was that of identity and the belief that Aboriginal people must separate out for a time so they can find their identity. I will refer more to this later however I mention it here because it forms an important background to the belief in helping their own people. This was also identified by one non-Aboriginal respondent who addressed the relevance of context:

Ministry must be contextual if it is to inspire, encourage and help people. Sometimes worship is offered out of an experience of pain, sometimes alienation, sometimes joy, sometimes fear, sometimes oppression. Unless the worshipping community is sensitive to the experience of a minority among them, then the alienation and pain and sense of meaninglessness are increased. So until the alienation is recognized it may be necessary to worship apart. Sometimes it is essential to worship together, and on those occasions care must be taken to hear all the voices and give expression to the variety of experiences. If well prepared, such united worship is an extraordinarily powerful and inspiring experience.²⁰

The elements here are understanding, respect, concern, the ability to listen ‘with both ears’, an openness to hear everyone and a genuine sharing of the gospel.²⁹ While some non-Aboriginal people believed there might need to

²⁰ Interview: Tape One.
²⁹ Interview: Tape One.
be limits on the expression of identity within the Christian context others
were concerned for issues such as devil worship and revenge. For example,
if expressing identity meant some involvement with devil worship which is
contrary to Christian worship or involved the obligation for revenge and the
lack of forgiveness, then that would be unacceptable. One statement was:
"Forgiveness and compassion are hard because their culture had no place for
them." 30 Others, even those who work amongst Aboriginal people in areas
not of the extreme north of Australia, believe that Aboriginal people are
animists and therefore need to reject 'Aboriginal tradition'31.

One non-Aboriginal person believed there was no need for Aboriginal
people to classify themselves, believing, 'you are what you are'. 32 Another
statement that was similar was that everyone needed an identity but that
a pride in their race was more the issue and this respondent was surprised to
think that having an identity as an Aboriginal Christian was important. 33

These responses were spread over a very wide range of understanding.
This seemed to be an indication of how difficult it was for the people to find
support as they sought to express themselves as Aboriginal and Christian.
The basis of their need was the welcoming environment, the lack of
discrimination, the understanding and the knowledge of how people are
related to each other, the importance of family and the shared history.
The people share things in common; they understand the struggles that each

30 Interview: Tape Two.
31 personal communication
32 Interview: Tape Seven.
33 Interview: Tape Seven.
has with racism, stereotyping, prejudice and other negative issues and, knowing that, are able to feel comfortable in meeting others with shared experiences.\textsuperscript{34}

Within this context indigenous people use music, dance and some prayers which are specifically indigenous. When asked whether there were other areas where indigenous people could express their identity, the response from one Aboriginal Christian was that cultural contextualisation can play a big role in allowing indigenous Australians to express themselves through music, dance and prayers. But the complexity of culture makes it difficult to express the identity of the indigenous church because of the “three hundred or so different groups that incorporate various aspects of their culture in worship”.\textsuperscript{35} A non-Aboriginal response to the areas of worship where indigenous people could express their identity was that coastal people in southern areas had not retained as much active culture as the people in desert areas so when it came to a display of culture by Aboriginal Christians in the life of the church, there was little to speak of and there was little too because the people were very much in a minority.\textsuperscript{36} This statement obviously indicates that the majority maintain the status quo and minority groups are not encouraged to have an input. It is also indicative of the lack of knowledge by non-Aboriginal people. The implication is that any potential input can be ignored. Any developments beyond art, dance, music and one or two prayers that have been accepted and the once-off liturgy for certain celebrations were all that was deemed to be needed.

\textsuperscript{34} Notes: Nine.

\textsuperscript{35} Notes: Nine.

\textsuperscript{36} Interview: Tape Four.
However, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the way of relating to another person is important. The length and style of services, and the type of music are all important. One respondent suggested that prayers are one area that could be improved with more prayers that express the Aboriginal dreamtime spirituality, culture, faith and beliefs not just so that indigenous people can have a stake, or feel they have got a stake, in the Prayer Book but so that the other Christians can be 'so genuinely enriched by that cross-over'. Other liturgies have been written for special occasions but often need careful presentation to present the concepts of Mother Earth and being born from the earth to the general congregation.

_Concerns of non-Aboriginal people_

Making the service more appropriate, according to some non-Aboriginal respondents who felt positive toward the idea, could be achieved by having indigenous people in control either by having a 'trusted' indigenous person leading worship, or at least organising the worship in such a way that indigenous people had a controlling role in determining content, style, place and décor of worship.\(^{38}\) The word 'trusted' suggests control on the part of the non-indigenous people.

Further thoughts were offered but always with a proviso, with the exception of one respondent who had had experience of indigenous worship in New Zealand and a strong feeling for the Aboriginal people which was developed during contact while in Australia. This respondent expected that there

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\(^{37}\) Interview: Tape One.

\(^{38}\) 'A Time to Plan' Session of _A Time for Listening_
would be included an exposition of Scripture which addressed reality as indigenous people experienced it.\footnote{Interview: Tape One.}

There was concern expressed by non-Aboriginal people about politicization of addresses or sermons given. Some respondents felt that it was important to underline the need to follow the format of worship so that it did not depart from worship as praise, adoration, confession, listening, interceding and dedication of oneself to the service of God. As well, the traditional sacraments of the church should be observed. But language, symbolism and content \textit{could possibly} be contextualised. It seemed that music, dance and prayer were the only areas acceptable to non-Aboriginal people in which Aboriginal people could have an input.

\textit{Teaching style}

For non-Aboriginal people denominationalism and tradition of the particular branch of Christianity was seen as necessary whereas these seemed of much less importance to Aboriginal Christians. Some Aboriginal Christian speakers have seen denominationalism as divisive in Aboriginal lives.

One concern addressed by an Aboriginal pastor was that the method of presenting the Scriptures from the Bible was reading dependent in all churches whereas the preferred way for Aboriginal people based on an oral tradition was by telling of stories.\footnote{Notes: Four, 1998.} Aboriginal Christians in one area preferred the Pentecostal style of worship with its emphasis on being led by the Spirit and spiritual gifts and being less time conscious. This church style
allowed for a service with plenty of people and activity.

Many Aboriginal people still see God as belonging to the ‘white man’, and though some believe Christ was already in their culture this alarms many non-Aboriginal Christians. Some Aboriginal people state a clear distinction between traditional and Christian ideas; some see the two existing side-by-side, others incorporate traditional ideas within Christianity and still others see the two belief systems as “multiple manifestations of a single reality”.\footnote{Rudder, 1993, p. 112.} The Christian tradition, I was told by a non-indigenous New Zealand respondent, was that all cultures redeemed by Christ brought their cultural gifts into the Kingdom of God, that language and culture were gifts to be treasured and that cultural identity should be affirmed in the church.\footnote{Interview: Tape One.} This did not appear to be happening in many places. There was also awareness that culture changes. But basic to Christianity is the requirement of love, respect and justice in mutual relationships. It appears that this interpretation is sometimes lost.

Even when there is an Aboriginal minister present there are difficulties. Some Aboriginal ministers felt it necessary to have a separate office if the ministry were part of a mainstream church because of the shyness and need to build trust of the Aboriginal people. But the most important approach that was identified by Aboriginal people was that of taking the church to the community. This style did not achieve much acceptance with the non-indigenous personnel.
As recently as the 1990s and 2000s any moves by Aboriginal people to achieve decisions or develop new initiatives were carefully controlled, decisions were not allowed to be made, and the Aboriginal people were dictated to and had to do what they were told.\textsuperscript{43} In regard to authority, one respondent said “it felt like being reeled back like on a fishing line”.\textsuperscript{44}

Often what members of the church hierarchy see and what the Aboriginal minister sees as his or her role is quite different. In many ways Aboriginal church bodies are kept dependent with inadequate funding, limited freedom to change structures and make independent decisions, no firm financial base or resources and often limited input from cultural decisions in denominational ritual and practice. Aboriginal people need to determine their leaders [this is starting to happen], the churches need to recognize and affirm that leadership which may be quite different as well as the style of structure in the form of conduct of meetings, organisation and decision-making. Though many groups insist that handouts are not what are asked for because this perpetuates the welfare cycle and keeps dependence, there must be recognition of the need for support for training, resources and sponsoring of leadership.\textsuperscript{45}

\textit{The role of the minister}

Many Aboriginal people believe that no one person is more important than the other one, though there is deference to elders. Each person has a role. If

\textsuperscript{43} Notes: Eleven, 12 April, 2000.

\textsuperscript{44} Notes: Three, 1999.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{Time for Listening Conference} also Interview: Tape Five.
the Bible states that there are different gifts and talents that are given to each
then there is seen to be a parallel in Aboriginal society where "We live in
unity but we all got different gifts."^6

An Aboriginal respondent emphasised the need for the minister to listen to
the "cries [of the people and show] God's love and healing."^7

Another person described the minister's role as:

His role is to shepherd the flock. This is achieved through
preaching, visitation, teaching, praying and in some cases
evangelism."^8

The non-Aboriginal people's understanding of the Aboriginal people's
expectations of the role of indigenous clergy are as teacher and pastor.
setting an example socially, doing and being 'right' in every situation. It is,
a very high expectation of the clergy person. However the emphases were
different as Aboriginal people described their needs – they felt that the
important things in an indigenous pastor were that the pastor be able to
relate to their people out of a sharing in their own experience of life, and
that he or she should have the ability to articulate the Gospel in relation to
their experience of life and history. This actually showed one of the first
indications of a contextualized approach in the particular area where the
interview was undertaken. There was some expression by non-indigenous
people of the need for a 'man teaching biblical things' from an Aboriginal
point-of-view and finding things in the Scripture that were very relevant to
Aboriginal people. However one non-Aboriginal respondent was concerned

^6 Interview: Tape Five.

^7 Interview: Tape Three.

^8 Interview: Tape Five.
that indigenous clergy were expected to be able to involve all the people and often be expected to work as well as perform any religious and pastoral care tasks and not just be supported by the people. In other words, the perception was that indigenous people expected their clergy to work outside the church environment as well. These comments highlighted a concern by a few that too much was expected of an Aboriginal clergyperson. Other non-Aboriginal people expressed an almost despair stating that it was hard to know what the people wanted.  

There was an awareness that the role was broader than teaching because Aboriginal people have had a time of exclusion, discrimination and ‘all that sort of thing’ which ‘doesn’t go down with Christ and I think they need to know that’.\textsuperscript{50} The role of a clergyperson was seen to include that of preacher, pastoral visitor, friend, community and political leader. One non-Aboriginal person rather tentatively said that Aboriginal people needed to see Christ as an Aboriginal person. Stating that this was a roundabout way of answering the question of an Aboriginal approach, this respondent thought that women saw Jesus as a person who understood women and men saw Jesus as somebody who understood men and therefore Aboriginal people would need to see Jesus as a person who understood Aboriginal people and what their needs were so that their needs would be met.\textsuperscript{51} Again there is an indication that this lay person who had had contact over a few years with the Aboriginal community in the area understood that something specific was required by Aboriginal people.

\textsuperscript{49} Interview: Tape Two.

\textsuperscript{50} Interview: Tape Two.

\textsuperscript{51} Interview: Tape Two.
These statements however are rather emotion-less compared to the Aboriginal response: that the clergyperson should listen to the cries of the people and show God’s love and healing; and to shepherd the flock through preaching, visitation; teaching, praying and, in some cases, evangelism. There was considerable emphasis on the role of healer – something which was mentioned time and time again.

A non-Aboriginal person’s understanding of the role of clergy also included the training of the ‘priesthood of all believers’, teacher, preacher, a broader duty to talk to people about their problems not necessarily related to church, a community and political(!) leader and a pastoral visitor and friend.

A non-Aboriginal response to the question of whether an Aboriginal minister was seen as a worker socially - as welfare worker, as a healer, a physical and spiritual healer - was that the Aboriginal pastor should be a social worker because “socially, they work on a one-for-one basis, they’re very active with each other”. Whereas an Aboriginal respondent replied that “definitely they’re healers because...the Aboriginal spirit needs to be healed”.

Generally the requirements of a non-indigenous minister were the same as the ones indigenous people had for their minister but were related to context. However the response of the congregation was worth noting in that Aboriginal Christians tended ‘not to go and sit back and enjoy the singing and go home and not learn anything’. In other words there was a greater

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52 Interview: Tape Seven.
53 Interview: Tape Three.
54 Interview: Tape Six and Interview: Tape Seven.
expectation of being taught and being involved, of the clergyperson actively working for the people and no expectation that church was some sort of club which was comfortable, non-exerting or a social duty. All these factors indicated the presupposition that Christianity for Aboriginal people involves an holistic and praxis approach.

Some indigenous ministers saw their work as just for indigenous people but the majority saw the need to build relationships between both indigenous and non-indigenous peoples. However where – and most indigenous congregations have non-indigenous members – they minister to both, the ministering would be in contexts of the particular indigenous experience and non-indigenous people in those congregations would need to have an empathy with that experience if the ministry were to meet their needs.

In other words they may be in a similar position (unless the indigenous people were aware and many suggest that they are) as that of minority indigenous people in a non-indigenous church.

Quite often the wider church looks at the numbers of people who come on Sunday morning to the services. For one indigenous minister that was not the consideration:

That’s not the church. For me to do the ministry well my church is going out to people, visiting them, sitting down with them, talking through their things, praying with them, encouraging them. They will come to church occasionally. But they won’t come every week.55

Whilst some non-indigenous leaders were thought able to minister to indigenous people, there was an emphasis on meeting the cultural and spiritual need of the people with a sense of integrity and spiritual

55 Interview: Tape Five.
understanding and therefore there would be few people capable of doing this. There was a need to be sensitive to the history and experience of the people and to have an ability to act in solidarity with the people in their current struggles.

While indigenous people were thought to minister effectively to non-indigenous people there was concern that an indigenous minister should not be ‘out on their own’ in a non-indigenous environment without support mechanisms and relationships with other indigenous people. As Christians, indigenous ministers want to serve their own people first because they see their needs ‘as dramatic’.

This necessity for a support mechanism for indigenous clergy was highlighted in a number of instances of Aboriginal clergy resigning early or dying early and I pursue this in a later chapter which explores a number of issues which impact on the lives and ministry of Aboriginal clergy.

A comparison with the Maori emphasized the need to be careful for the sake of the Maori members because leadership within Maoridom was so stretched that to take Maori ministers and put them in a pakcha (white) settlement diminished the leadership capacity and resource within Maoridom:

We elected a Maori as an assistant bishop in Wellington and he did a lot of really good things in the pakeha parishes but it created great grief in the Maori community because as they said he was one of our leaders amongst the Maori people and he’s irreplaceable, you’ve taken him and we understand your sentiment and desire to be inclusive but you’ve deprived us of a great leader.

50 Interview: Tape Five.

57 Interview: Tape Three.
Therefore it is important that indigenous people are trained for leadership amongst their own people and indigenous people must decide the placement of their leaders. If the indigenous community felt that there was value in having an indigenous leader leading in a non-indigenous parish, then that would be a decision to be made by the indigenous community.

A further concern is the level of call on some leaders, those with wide skills, who are constantly being required to attend to the demands of a variety of requests from non-indigenous people. While indigenous people are willing to assist, the level of requests is often excessive.

The differences in leadership requirements (as described by one non-indigenous minister) between, for example, an Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) pastor and a minister of a mainstream church appeared to the respondent to be that the former was mobile with a lot more demand over a wide area and therefore maintained a friendship role. The AEF pastor was also seen to have a more conservative theological orientation with a belief in the inerrancy in Scripture and personal salvation and perhaps a tendency to exclusiveness. The mainstream church ministers were thought to have a broader theological orientation. One matter of agreement amongst many interviewees was that a non-indigenous minister would need to have an understanding of Aboriginal culture, be sensitive to Aboriginal history and experience and be able to act in solidarity with Aboriginal people in their struggles in order to be an effective pastor. One non-indigenous minister in particular stated that there was nothing different in the services conducted at his church and he was not aware of Aboriginal people having a

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38 Interview: Tape Four, 10 March, 2000.
struggle with the format or style – there were at least two Aboriginal people who attended the church. However, he noted he knew nothing of Aboriginal culture. There was a considerable Aboriginal presence in that particular area.

**Training**

Pastor Ossie Cruse (Church of Christ) says of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF)

The AEF is firmly based constitutionally. The original concept of AEF was that it would develop into a denomination, an organized church. Its ministers were registered so they could conduct marriages and funerals. It would preach the Gospel to all Australians. It would embrace the needs of Aborigines all over Australia...But as members of other denominations how can we become members of an Aboriginal denomination? It was clear that the AEF must remain as a fellowship.39

Because of AEF training there were people available to start a ministry at Mogo.

One of the issues concerning training is the approach so often taken by ‘white’ theological colleges. One impression of the training was that it was based on learning a “whole white theological superstructure almost as a corpus of knowledge that is totally distinct from real life.”60 For example, not being taught that reconciliation was not only an individual’s personal redemption with God in Christ but that there were implications in terms of reconciliation with the individual and other people and reconciliation with other cultures. With white dominated structures too it is often difficult for indigenous peoples to absorb the essence of the Christian faith and to see the

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60 Interview: Tape One
"crossovers between the faith and their own culture and find ways of seeing the faith within the parameters of their own culture."

The non-Aboriginal response varied from not really being in a position to comment about the effect of structure. However all interviewees came from areas of involvement in churches potentially available to Aboriginal people – to some who believed that structure presented no problem and another who gave a well studied response. This last respondent who provided the New Zealand comparison indicated that there were very clearly difficulties for indigenous people.

Maori people in New Zealand who were placed into the ordinary theological college in Auckland would have had to learn the curriculum as understood from a Western perspective. The students would have had to pass examinations which may not have been the Maori way and no emphasis was given to Maori culture whatsoever. They were indigenous people trained within a white Western system and they were regarded as successful if they learnt to be good, ‘white’, Western priests. This was a "sheer denial of their whole culture, spirituality, theology, faith values and was culturally most insensitive" and obviously posed a great difficulty in encouraging Maori people in their own faith and appropriate expressions of that faith.  

In Australia, a frustration spoken of by a number of Aboriginal clergy was the expectation that they would attend a theological college and follow the programme that commonly exists. The concerns centred on poor literacy skills for some, the difficulty of providing written work when the culture is

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61 Interview: Tape One.

62 Interview: Tape One.
mainly oral and poor education levels to a response that a student felt essays were unfairly marked because of an indigenous content and perspective.\(^5\)

One non-Aboriginal clergyperson identified the distinction between disjunctive and conjunctive theology which is an issue for ‘white’ people as well. Theology must be interactive with society, to be seen within the context of ‘white’ culture and life because it is ‘white’ culture which has contributed to the experiences of Aboriginal people. On a broader scale the presence of the gospel within the context of western culture is not always apparent in the sense of lifestyle, in critiquing those things in the culture which are against the gospel, and in asserting life-giving rather than death-dealing dimensions of society which is practising conjunctive theology rather than disjunctive theology. That is also contextualised praxis theology.

The Uniting Church took the initiative to establish Nungalinya College, and to set up a special course in the Presbyterian Church to equip elders to take leadership roles in their local churches, and to establish in 1982 the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress within the Uniting Church. The Congress had control over planning ministry and mission in all Aboriginal congregations of the Uniting Church; it had responsibility for supervising education of candidates for the ministry, for appointing and overseeing ministry, controlling its own budgets and funds, its own destiny, policy and decision-making authority. Concerns of southern Aboriginal Christians in relation to Nungalinya are recorded in the chapter on training.

However, the response from indigenous southern people was that the

\(^5\) Interview: Tape Five; also Notes: Four, 2002; Notes: One, 12 December, 1998.
mainstream non-indigenous institutions were difficult on a number of grounds – one was the poor literacy skills, the tertiary environment when there was no support group and the difficulty of getting acceptance for cultural approaches and responses in assignments. It was generally agreed that there needed to be a base from which to work but generally the colleges did not provide a relationship base. This is believed to be based on the Word of God but includes the ability to ‘walk alongside’ people, to have ‘life experience’ and the experience of God and the Holy Spirit. Training is elaborated on in a later section.

Understanding family obligations

There is a misunderstanding about an Aboriginal person’s role in ministry as mentioned earlier. It was described as not rigid and confined to a set area but able to move flexibly. It can require involvement over a wide geographical area instead of being structured and fit a formal pattern. The boundaries of involvement and responsibility for caring and sharing are not defined by parish boundaries but by the family unit and the tribal group. Commitment to family will take precedence over other commitments and commitment to family pastorally, that is beyond a non-Aboriginal church parish boundary, is seen as part of the minister’s overall commitment. The length of time needed to be with family, and here is intended, the Aboriginal sense of family, is considerably greater than would be spent by a non-Aboriginal clergyperson in the event of bereavement or family crisis. This is often not understood and the Aboriginal clergy are often not given the support through this period that they feel is needed. Expectations of the non-

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64 Interview: Tape Five.
65 Interview: Tape Three.
Aboriginal clergy or church is that the ‘job’ comes first so the family aspect is affected. Although I believe this is changing particularly in accepting or rejecting appointments and being ‘on call’.

Terminology - church and fellowship

One area of confusion that became apparent when I was speaking with both indigenous and non-indigenous people prior to commencing this thesis and which led to the formation of the questionnaire was that of terminology. While I discuss the ‘whiteness’ of the gospel and ‘black theology’ under a separate heading, I mention here the misunderstanding of the terms ‘church’ and ‘fellowship’, their roles and constitution. Many Aboriginal Christians referred to a fellowship group as an extension and important part of the worship and community structure and as a means of expressing Christianity. Although it was also emphasized that there was no difference: the church group always incorporated fellowship and fellowship always constituted church quoting the Bible in reference “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst”.

For Aboriginal Christians, the strengths of the fellowship group were common to those of the Aboriginal church group in many cases. These were a non-threatening, family atmosphere with opportunity to share and be heard and the opportunity to contribute to the music with some instrument or voice. Intimacy and informality were two strengths as was the fact that it was seen as an occasion for all people to make a contribution. Fellowship groups were seen as non-threatening and inclusive although two comments on this were made.
One observation by a couple of non-indigenous respondents was that some families could be ‘pushed to the back’ and not be involved or included for various reasons or one particular family could dominate. One non-indigenous person’s suggestion was that church groups by their nature would seem, or want to be, inclusive of all and would therefore be better than fellowship groups. This does not always hold true as some people may feel even more isolated in a church group particularly if their family group was not seen as part of the group. It is obviously not true for indigenous people in a mainly non-indigenous church environment.

The Aboriginal people presented a holistic approach to Christian involvement as Aboriginal Christians spoke often of the importance of the fellowship group. While some Aboriginal Christians liked ministering to a large congregation, most felt shy and would prefer to share in a small group. A fellowship group was thought to also allow for a freer expression of feelings and allow people to be more open to support mechanisms where it was needed.

Non-Aboriginal responses suggested their purposes were different. Certainly the definitions of church and fellowship did not present an holistic approach when the description of the church group was one of having a defined function with regard to the context of a meeting in the name of Jesus whereas a fellowship group might be a mutual support group operated by Christians but with no overt Christian expression or purpose. For some non-Aboriginal Christians therefore the fellowship group was an additional social group. Although for one respondent it reflected a select

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66 Interview: Tape Seven also Notes: Five 5 March 1999.

67 Interview: Tape Seven
group who were ‘more religious’ than the main congregational group.68
One non-Aboriginal person working within an Aboriginal church stated that
the fellowship group was said to be liked for its intimacy, and opportunity
to bring ‘unsaved’ Aboriginal members who may be ‘threatened’ by ‘big
church’. 69 Further comments indicated the respondent was viewing the
Aboriginal members in a childish relationship and that there were ‘grades’
of Christians.

One respondent described the difference between the two as: fellowship was
a prayer meeting held in a house in a quiet, interruption-free environment
and church [that is, services] and Bible study were held in a church
building. The prayer group, because of the bonds shared through their
activity developed a close fellowship.

Another felt that there were no differences between church and fellowship
groups so the key issue was not whether it was a fellowship group or a
church group, but leadership and therefore style and content. It was possible
for both to be relevant and welcoming; it was also possible for both to be
alienating.

In relation to non-Aboriginal churches many Aboriginal people commented
that the congregation appeared to be individuals rather than an inclusive,
welcoming, sharing group of people. Fellowship groups had a loose cohesion
which was more fluid with people flowing in and out whereas in a church
group there was an expectation on membership of how to behave and what
constituted membership of the church group.

68 Interview: Tape Seven.
69 Interview: Tape Seven.
One non-Aboriginal respondent’s understanding of the Aboriginal Christian definitions was that the church group allowed people to ‘melt into the crowd’ and not be put on show.\textsuperscript{70} It was also an opportunity for those who were able to lead, to receive recognition. As well, the church group provided a wider group for support in prayer and leadership.

Non-Aboriginal responses ranged widely from the comment that the church group was a larger group of people that was not necessarily spiritually mature compared with a fellowship/prayer group - where this person saw churchgoers as at different levels and that ‘going to church is sort of more mild’\textsuperscript{71} - to others who defined the strengths of the church group as solemnity, the consciousness of participating in a wider group in both space and time, the experience of reverence and the holiness/otherness of God and an articulation of the faith which it was hoped would be in a way that connected with the experience of the worshippers. \textsuperscript{72}

While non-Aboriginal understanding of Aboriginal fellowship groups drew the comment that fellowship groups gave opportunity for leadership and serving others, there could also be a weakness in that the group may become dominated by particular people, see themselves as a select group and could also lose the focus and purpose for which they gather. These concerns could be considered because the emphasis was more on religious or spiritual matters than social interaction whereas a non-Aboriginal fellowship group was more likely to have a stronger bias towards social involvement. Another weakness considered by a few non-Aboriginal

\textsuperscript{70} Interview: Tape Four.

\textsuperscript{71} Interview: Tape Seven.

\textsuperscript{72} Interview: Tape One.
respondents was that the Aboriginal fellowship type of fellowship group might not have available leaders with adequate training in worship and liturgy, theology and Bible study. This comment also applied to non- Aboriginal leaders of Aboriginal groups.

The mainstream fellowship group could be quite unconnected with any wider community. The weaknesses of the mainstream church group may include a lack of opportunity for people to share their experiences, struggles and insights. So it is possible for the liturgy, content and reflection to be quite remote from the experience of the participant. This would highlight the isolation of the Aboriginal Christian in the church community.

A suggestion was made that indigenous people should have fellowship amongst Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (AEF) members and also maintain a connection with a church group. Some respondents answered this by saying that the AEF provided the mission approach and the church was a mainstream group therefore attending both would help with building better relationships between church leaderships. This would also allow for recognition of indigenous leaders. Some indigenous members participated in both. People had connections and relationships with people in both, and the maintenance of relationships was of supreme importance. But also they had experiences of spirituality in both – sometimes different dimensions of the spiritual, which they wished to maintain. This allowed the opportunity to develop Aboriginal Christianity and to fellowship with and learn from exposure to non-indigenous Christians.

Basically the two organisations, that is the AEF and mainstream churches, enabled people to maintain different sets of relationships where there were
elements of participating in the familiar and the different; the traditional and the stretching; the indigenous and the wider community; the intimate and the wider community. Thus, therefore, they still maintained Aboriginal identity. However such an approach also gave non-indigenous Christians a means to opt out of reaching out to indigenous Christians in an inclusive way.

Spirituality and beliefs

Non-Aboriginal respondents felt that there was a conflict between traditional beliefs and Christian beliefs though few recognised that this could cause suffering. A number agreed there was a conflict but could not comment or elaborate on it. One person felt Aboriginal clergy ‘probably’ needed to meet their own Aboriginal spiritual expression. This however was not described as the respondent was unable to expand on this. One respondent commented on how ‘very easy’ it was for western style Christians to have their “neatly defined Trinitarian doctrines, which are western and Greek based” to measure Aboriginal or other indigenous thought-forms alongside them and to decide that, because these thought-forms do not conform to the way they have been defined in the west, therefore they are obviously heretical and need to be condemned.73

An important comment was that there needed to be a search for bridging points between different philosophies. For example, the Aboriginal and the Maori cultures have a very high emphasis on community beliefs, community living, mutuality, reciprocity, responsibility for the well-being of all. This is a gospel value. Prior to the presentation of Christianity this was expressed in indigenous cultural terms but can now also be expressed in Christian terms.

73 Interview: Tape Three.
The acceptance of these attitudes was previously ruled out in terms of Christian doctrine because it was not presented as such. The criticism has been put by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that the practice of the Western lifestyle which emphasises individualism, self-centredness, materialism and other anti-Gospel attitudes may be a very long way away from the Gospel. So one respondent argued that the Maori and the Indigenous people may well have appropriated the true meaning of the Gospel.\textsuperscript{74} Other issues centred on the confusion between the trappings of a society and the Gospel and the assumption that power and an economy-driven society bringing wealth equate with Christianity.

One non-Aboriginal lay person expressed horror when it was mentioned that some Aboriginal people believed God had always been with them from the beginning of time. One example which I quoted was that of Charles Harris who prayed

\begin{quote}
God of Dreamtime, you who are with us for these 40,000 years...you who gave us our ceremonies, and the law, and our stories, and our sacred sites. You who gave us our dreaming, you who gave us our land...\textsuperscript{75}
\end{quote}

An Aboriginal woman said “Our people are born spiritual people and have a strong discernment” stating also “my spirituality belongs to God and he was there all the time”\textsuperscript{76}

A New Zealand respondent stressed the importance for non-Aboriginal people to “listen, and listen and listen” including going and “sitting on their

\textsuperscript{74} Interview: Tape One.


\textsuperscript{76} Interview: Tape Three.
territories” by invitation, with respect, listening to their concerns, absorbing their culture, learning more about their spirituality and the Dreamtime and “listening with ears wide open” for the presence of God: “For God surely was in this land and in their culture just as surely as God is in our culture and other people’s culture”. Listening would need to go on for a very long time before any judgment should be made about indigenous people. The value of this was pointed to with a reference to the church in New Zealand where a Church denomination - Anglican - was seeking to build a better partnership with Maori people and sent out a commission from the church to go and sit on Maori marai or meeting places all over the country and listen to the culture. An observation that was made by this respondent was that those people came back changed people. They would have been classed as very western when they went out and for some of them “perhaps even a bit red-necked” but they came back as

people who had been totally converted by what they absorbed in travels around in indigenous meeting points. These types of discussions, or more importantly listening time, are vitally needed so that there is a better understanding and acceptance of each other and of the history that is shared.

An Aboriginal respondent was concerned how the word ‘spiritual’ was defined and drew on an interpretation of Ephesians, chapter 2, verse 1 - “you were dead through the trespasses and sins”- saying a person outside of Christ is dead spiritually: this person felt that Aboriginal spirituality was

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77 Interview: Tape One.
78 Interview: Tape One.
difficult to define even for an Aboriginal person.\textsuperscript{79}

Others said that it was for a while popular to deny the spiritual side of life and that modern Aboriginal people are not spiritual at all. Yet a number of older people, even when they came to church, would say they knew something would happen because they had had a dream about it.\textsuperscript{80}
This was considered ‘spiritual’.

Sally Morgan, speaking on the relationship between the spirituality of Aboriginal heritage and Christian beliefs, said

I think one can enhance the other...Having that [Aboriginal spirituality] in you tends to make you sensitive to other forms of spirituality.\textsuperscript{81}

Certain comparisons were made by non-Aboriginal people regarding the different approaches to life which included a number of areas where Aboriginal people were deemed to be more naturally like the biblical model of a Christian than people of a western culture. For example the emphasis on being more group oriented rather than being more individualistic; the greater interest in sharing and giving compared with the non-indigenous preference for saving; the honouring of the aged [although this was diminishing] instead of honouring youth; having a low property value compared with valuing property highly. Indigenous people are seen to be less time conscious; more co-operative than competitive. Aboriginal people

\textsuperscript{79} Notes: Nine 31 March, 2000.

\textsuperscript{80} Interview: Tape Five.

\textsuperscript{81} A. Rutherford, ‘A Fundamental question of identity: an interview with Sally Morgan’ \textit{Aboriginal Culture Today}, 1988, p. 106.
emphasise 'being' rather than doing. All these things and more would be valuable attitudes for other cultures to experience. And most of these, if followed, would cause considerable differences to the way the Church is run and maintained.

Some non-Aboriginal people referred to the spirituality of non-Christian Aboriginal people in the area as one of involvement in the spirit world, which sometimes involved respect by the Aboriginal people but more often fear. Others believed the people to be animists. It was believed children were still being taught to fear the spirits, avoid certain places, especially at night, and fear the dark. This was therefore another reason why Pentecostalism was thought to appeal because the teaching had an emphasis on how to defeat the Devil. The name of Satan is often used when there are difficult times and obstructions – there is consistent use of the term ‘Spiritual Warfare’.

The sensitivity to the natural world and creation and renewal through spending time in the quietness of the bush and spending time in one’s own country was also seen to be part of Aboriginal spirituality where signs and messages were seen in the natural world. Included in this spirituality was a perceived stress on relationships, rather than agenda, and the resonance of Hebrew scriptures with the Aboriginal experience. These mixed comments underline the misunderstandings in terminology between what ‘spiritual’ means to an Aboriginal Christian and a non-Aboriginal Christian. One non-Aboriginal respondent indicated a sensitivity towards the Aboriginal culture:

Many Indigenous people are sensitive to the natural world/creation. They are renewed by the quietness of the bush. They see signs and messages in the natural world.
They are revived by spending time in their own country. 83

The impact of individualistic Western thinking

The whole philosophy of ‘you are your own boss,’ which is prevalent in Western society, runs counter to traditional ways and impacts on the sense of community. This is one aspect that some Aboriginal church leaders felt was compromising many young people and showed in the lack of respect towards elders and the community. The comment expressed here is an interpretation of the thinking of young people:

you can do what you choose to do, it’s your choice, ...there’s no obligation to any body else, the obligation is to you not to anyone else, the obligation is to you, the individual. You’ve got a right if you want to choose. 83

Here, where the attitudes are counter to community, traditional culture breaks down. Where the traditional culture has broken down and has not been replaced with a philosophy which protects the community and supports the mutuality and responsibility of the community as a hedge against an overly individualistic and materialistic society, people are lost in between. So society deteriorates, roles are lost, discipline, both communal and individual, break down and appropriate punishment is not meted out. Basically moral guidelines are not in place. The expectation of pursuing Aboriginal Christianity at Mogo was that this Aboriginal Christian presentation would offer healing, growth, self-esteem and guidelines for living.

83 Interview: Tape One.
84 Interview: Tape Five.
Structures

The initial response from Aboriginal Christians was that structures of the Christian churches were difficult because indigenous people liked to feel free and be led by the Spirit because it was felt that by following the Spirit there is freedom and liberty. 84

However as explained in Chapter Four, Mogo, the people felt a sense of security in being under the protection of a particular denomination. The concerns included whether people who were baptised were properly baptised and the need for a banner under which the group could operate that would give religious, legal and financial protection.

Within the Anglican Church in Australia a major issue occurred in 1995 following the General Synod in Melbourne where the Aboriginal Bishop was not a member of the Synod. A special motion was passed to give the Bishop the right to speak, if the president asked him to, but not to propose motions or to vote. He was asked by the President to speak during a thirty-minute period one evening which one listener likened to a missionary slot as if he were ‘home on furlough from darkest Africa’: “he spoke cap in hand, talking of the great challenges that were going on out there”. 85 Membership of the Anglican General Synod ‘as of right’ came in to effect in 1998 but was not able to be used until 2001. The whole question of representation on the General Synod was an important but only a tiny step and in some ways it was only a token step.

84 Interview: Tape Three.
85 Interview: Tape One.
In New Zealand, for example, the Maori members of the Anglican General Synod now have equal partnership rights with the pakeha or the ‘white’ Diocesan representatives. Although the Diocesan representatives are many more times in number than the Maori any decision has to be reached with both groups: the Maori and the pakeha both agreeing as two distinct groups within the church, or cultures, irrespective of the numbers. The Diocese of Polynesia representing the Pacific Islands is a third and equal partner. This is a whole new way of ensuring a genuine partnership within decision-making structures which is not done on a Westminster democratic basis of one person one vote but by recognising that there are three different peoples each of whom has to agree together before there is a decision to be made concerning the church.

The Anglican Church in Australia is led by bishops and governed by Synods that have a limited geographical range though this is being modified. The Aboriginal Bishop in North Queensland has travelled across Australia for appropriate celebrations, for example, the ordination of Aboriginal clergy. In relation to decision-making one comment was that in Aboriginal society the debate or discussion system does not have a ‘yes’ vote and a ‘no’ vote. Everybody is bound by the decision and talk continues until everyone has reached agreement. The Westminster system of running meetings and the use of quorums in this circumstance is not appropriate.

While both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people refer to practices that they consider satanic and believe that Aboriginal Christians should not be involved in any form of traditional beliefs or culture, others believe that there are many things of value which may be re-interpreted or expressed
within Christian parameters. Some of the traditional ways, which the church thought was evil, were probably not fully understood and partly this was because non-Aboriginal church people had had little informed contact and were not fully engaged with Aboriginal people. With all respondents' comments, the Bible as God’s Word was the examining criterion so that parts of Aboriginal culture were deemed acceptable if they did not go against what is said in the Bible. In this belief it was stated that if it was not against God’s word it was not going to be bad but if it was against His Word whether or not it was very important traditionally it was against God’s word: ‘He is the final one’. This comment was from a literalist Christian.

Decision making

The Right Reverend Richard Randerson wrote

Indigenous people have the right to participate fully, if they so choose, at all levels of decision-making in matters which may affect their rights, lives and destinies through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their Indigenous decision-making institutions. 

In Christian terms such a partnership is consistent with the understanding of the Body of Christ “different gifts and backgrounds but one through the unity we share in Jesus Christ”. Reference was made by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents to an incident in an Anglican church in Brisbane involving the Reverend Alex Gater, an Aboriginal woman. Alex Gater’s congregation was divided with some elders supporting the non-

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80 Interview: Tape Seven.
81 flyer Natstac Publication undated
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83 Notes: Eleven, 12 April, 2000. also Interview: Tape Five.
Aboriginal minister [those elders were possibly brought up in the church structure assumed one respondent] and those who followed Alex Gater who was brought up in the church but wanted to reach out to her own people in a different way from that which the normal church structure would allow.  

There were a number of lessons for the Anglican church, in particular, and many other churches to learn from in this experience, the respondent said. The first was that Alex Gater was not resourced properly. She was also not given the freedom to do the ministry that she had identified and that she felt the Lord would have wanted her to do and because her role was being defined within the Anglican context and structure there was difficulty when she felt led to pursue her role in a way which was not understood. There was also conflict over who had control over her role. In other words she should have had a sense of autonomy, and access to resources but still have a defined accountability. There appears to be a misunderstanding about an Aboriginal person’s role in ministry and how it is much more ‘flexible’ in the locale of influence and in the responsibilities and reciprocities that are cultural particularly in relation to families and that when there is conflict, there must be talk not discipline or heavy-handedness or taking over. Other Aboriginal clergy have also noted similar difficulties. In another setting, a clergy member of a church hierarchy noted that an Aboriginal clergyperson had no understanding of ‘church culture’. Again, this has overtones of imposition and an expectation that the clergyperson would ‘fit in’.

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90 Notes: Eleven and Interview: Tape Five.

91 Notes: Three.

92 personal communication
Identifying the heart or centre of lifestyle, beliefs and stories and looking for ways that express the real essence of what the Gospel is about, is vital for both indigenous and non-indigenous Christians. Simply defining the culture by western style credal formulations and then dismissing or excluding the culture because it is different from that which a Westerner is accustomed to can mean that the message is ignored. Thus issues of triumphalism, denial of another’s identity and imposition of another culture on the receiving culture shroud the message of the Gospel.

Convergence and bridging points, where there was clearly similar intent, and looking for a development in spiritual and human understanding could be addressed. Some examples about looking for convergence and perhaps ‘accommodation of doctrines’ included a comment that for Aborigines the taking of blood from another person was an important part of seeking justice and punishment, even revenge, where an injustice had been committed: this was a ‘kind of an eye for an eye’ type situation which could be paralleled with Old Testament scripture.\footnote{Interview: Tape Five and Interview: Tape One.} That, it was felt, could then somehow be merged with the Christian concept of the Blood of Christ poured out in a redemptive manner. Maybe, it was suggested, the indigenous revenge and punishment type doctrine could be subsumed into the Christian reconciliation and forgiveness one which was exactly the same path that was taken through Christ in the movement from the Old Testament to the New Testament concepts. One non-Aboriginal respondent understood the desire of Aboriginal people to parallel Aboriginal beliefs particularly those from the Old Testament which had similarities to Aboriginal Dreaming.\footnote{Interview: Tape Two.}
Another respondent, who said that Scriptural truths needed to be taught as they were “very relevant to Aboriginal people”, believed that Aboriginal people related their “Dreaming time to our acceptance of the Holy Spirit”. Describing Aboriginal traditional beliefs, one Aboriginal respondent said that he believed in “all the godly principles and I line them up with what’s in the Bible”.

Aboriginal people believe that God will bring the Word but there was a concern that all Aboriginal people were doing was copying non-indigenous ways. However one respondent claimed it’s almost you get a sense that God’s been with our people forever because the principles that they apply and how they deal with nature and how they deal with one another, are all godly principles.

For one Aboriginal person the Aboriginal spirituality included belief in one God, the creator God and a belief that there is a devil. For both belief systems there are different cultural beliefs and names and both God and the devil are identified by their own particular names. In traditional belief if a person does good things then the person, on death, would reside in the place of the good being and if one does evil then one would end up in the place of evil, in the dark. The emphasis is on the Law – it was put in the terms that “our theology is that the Law rules”: in this case the Law is not a written Law but is one of knowing right and wrong “in your heart”.

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95 Interview: Tape Six.
96 Interview: Tape Five.
97 Interview: Tape Five.
98 Interview: Tape Five.
99 Interview: Tape Five.
wrong is committed there is always a consequence, a punishment. The parallels are drawn that that is also in the Bible. Within Aboriginal society there is an “inbuilt theme of redemption”: if a person commits an offence then there is a punishment so that the person is “redeemed”.¹⁰⁰ For redemption to occur there is always blood spilt. Even the payback system is still practised in a subtle way in the south. In the north it can still be seen in a dramatic way.

This was explained by one Aboriginal man with reference to an event in which a young man was killed in an accident. Those who believed in payback sought the cause of the accident by going back through the chain of events from the person who provided the alcohol, where the alcohol came from, through the history of events to determine the blame so that then the elders could execute the punishment. That process was understood. Some Christian men explained that there was no need for retribution because it was an accident and the deceased had been drunk. But also, said the speaker, for Christians payback is not necessary because Jesus died for him and paid the price.¹⁰¹ So while the ‘blood for blood’ was very strong in the past when the knowledge of Jesus came, responses could be changed. However it is often found that Aboriginal Law is still invoked particularly with male offenders, as well as any punishment by ‘white law’ and there is sometimes an element of a Christian response. The speaker explaining this ended “See our whole theology is God based”.¹⁰² Punishment in both ways allows for dignity to be kept. In some court systems juvenile

¹⁰⁰ Interview: Tape Five.
¹⁰¹ Interview: Tape Five.
¹⁰² Interview: Tape Five.
offenders are now having to face the circle of elders and victims as well as court representatives.

Aboriginal people believe that there is a spirit world and that the whole world hangs together because it has a spiritual dimension. Aboriginal people believe in their responsibility and obligation to each other and that they have responsibilities to care and share. There is an inherent obligation that where someone is seen to be in need then they are helped regardless of who they are.

_Hermeneutics_

It was related to me that one Aboriginal Christian woman

had a struggle because she found it difficult to believe the Bible that the earth was only six thousand years old. She believed the Aboriginal had been here 40,000 years. She couldn't reconcile the two. She only believed parts of the Bible.

This was considered not acceptable by the speaker and therefore meant denying the Bible. Another non-Aboriginal person expressed concern too of the emphasis on 'fundamentalism' which I understood to mean a literalist approach. This approach limits the Gospel and the implications mean that people, growing in their pride of an ancient peoples, are required to make a choice between the two or reject both. Where a literalist or fundamentalist approach was taken to the Bible and to Bible teaching then there is an immediate negation of the value of the Aboriginal person. The above respondent did not see that dichotomy. This respondent believed that once

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103 Interview: Tape Five.

104 Interview: Tape Seven.
people had been able to deal with their past, been healed and 'got over it' they didn’t need to 'cling to the past' or 'mix the two'. This way of understanding the scripture caused much distress to Aboriginal people. Another issue relevant to this was the presence of non-Aboriginal persons in positions of leadership and those who had no formal training, no understanding of cultural matters nor any study of biblical exegesis. These persons are deemed by other non-Aboriginal people to be good teachers. However on each account this is contrary to contextualisation and can also be extremely misleading in teaching. Interestingly too, though non-Aboriginal people expect Aboriginal clergy to have the same training or at least a comparative training as non-Aboriginal clergy, the same expectations do not always occur for the non-Aboriginal lay person, who acts as teacher, that is, that the person should have undertaken a certain level of study. Certainly to have an understanding of the culture in to which the clergy or lay person is going and the presuppositions that are held should have been considered necessary however it was apparent that this was and is not always the case.

Pastor Cecil Grant, a Wiradjuri man, who trained as a pastor in a non-indigenous setting set out to discover his culture and research Wiradjuri belief. He discovered parallels with Christian belief starting with the initiation ceremony and the Dreamings, the Dreaming tracks, where people walked and the stories and found these all 'lined up' with matters in the Bible, which he had learned in the Christian context. Then he went through the initiation ceremony and looked at the elements of the initiation ceremony and discovered that the way that blood was used had parallels.

105 Interview: Tape Seven.
with how the blood is given importance in the Bible. One respondent recommended that people such as Pastor Grant should be involved in using the information they have to address Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people about Aboriginal spirituality and the principles on which it is based.\textsuperscript{106}

As an example, one of the best descriptions of unity in diversity came from New Zealand when \textit{A New Zealand Prayer Book (He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa)} was produced with sections of it bi-lingual, that is a page in Maori, paralleling a page in English.\textsuperscript{107} The common understanding of those who only spoke English was that the Maori was a translation of the English but the Maori explained (at the Synod at which the Prayer Book was passed) that it was not just a translation of the English into Maori but in true contextual form some of the English ideas were expressed within Maori idiom – that is, Maori concepts and context. So whereas in the Prayer of Forgiveness the English says ‘Christ is unity for all the human race’, the Maori words say ‘Christ is the hitching post where all the canoes tie up’. This reflects the history and tradition of Maori coming in different canoes across the Pacific in their different tribes and coming together at the unifying point or hitching post which is Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{108} This description indicated to English speakers that the culture of Maori people and their land had significant capacity to enhance pakeha understanding and make for a very indigenous expression liturgically and a shared richness. To look for such points of convergence in Aboriginal culture would strengthen and enrich the non-indigenous culture.

\textsuperscript{106} Interview: Tape Five.

\textsuperscript{107} \textit{A New Zealand Prayer Book: He Karakia Mihinare o Aotearoa}, The Church of the Province of New Zealand, William Collins, Auckland, 1989.

\textsuperscript{108} Interview: Tape One.
The most important part of Christian beliefs for Aboriginal people appeared to be the Biblical truths, the healing and restoration of all people and especially that salvation is available to all people, and that this comes through faith and faith alone:

Ephesians 2:8,9 For it is by God's grace that you have been saved by faith. It is not the result of your own efforts, but God's gift, so that no one can boast about it.  

Conflict – traditional beliefs and Christianity

Asked whether Aboriginal Christians suffer because of the conflict between traditional beliefs and Christian beliefs, the question generally was answered by Aboriginal people as that there were no clashes because either traditional beliefs were not appropriate or they were paralleled in the Bible. One non-Aboriginal person did not understand that there was 'validity of Aboriginal culture and need' but surmised that 'probably' Aboriginal clergy needed to meet their own spiritual expression. Another spoke of the cultural difference in that the Aboriginal spirit, culture and way of life is "all one thing" whereas for non-indigenous people it is "almost quite easy for us to live a dual life, a triple life and we compartmentalize aspects of our being." This approach of compartmentalisation was referred to in an earlier chapter as not part of the Aboriginal culture. Another described a triumphalist, superior attitude: "once they become spirit-filled and they see the ramifications of old beliefs, I don't think they suffer." Therefore

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109 Notes: Nine 31 March, 2000 and The Bible New Revised Standard Version

110 Interview: Tape Four.

111 Interview: Tape Two.

112 Interview: Tape Seven.
discussion on the following statement holds some relevance.

*Indigenous people have a great deal to offer the church.*

The responses from Aboriginal people generally emphasised the desire to encourage listening to one another to make situations better for all Australians; to encourage the caring and sharing roles and an active expression of Christianity. The non-Aboriginal expectations were varied from:

I think that’s a bit patronising. I don’t know whether that’s any more true for any group in the community. I welcome and include them in my congregation like I do any people in my congregation. I’ve my doubts about it. I don’t make any special dispensation I don’t think that’s what they want but I recognise that I have a certain limitation in communicating the Gospel to them like I cannot communicate to everybody across the whole socio-economic or cultural sphere as well but I seek to communicate in the best way I can and trust God in the Holy Spirit to do His bit too.113

...to an opportunity for enrichment and giving non-Aboriginal people a sense of the land, a sense of community and reciprocity and a concern for the well-being of every person which has been severely eroded by the individualistic, materialistic lifestyle and philosophy which Westerners hold. From some people there was a recognition that every person is endowed with gifts from the Spirit for the building up of the community so listening to one another in order to recognise these gifts is crucial as is acknowledging the gift of emphasis on people and relationships that indigenous people could offer to a church obsessed with busy-ness and programmes. The Indigenous sense of stewardship of creation is an important understanding the church could also regain.

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113 Interview: Tape Four.
How can the gospel be freed from its "whiteness"?

Again this question raised a variety of comments from one person who said that Jesus was not white, therefore the Gospel isn't; to the fact that the pastor was not white therefore the teaching was not; to criticism that the question was confusing the gospel with colonialism and that white people were pure. This last comment ended with

That's something we need to get rid of - that whiteness means something in Christianity but it doesn't. Christianity belongs to all people regardless of the colour of their skin.\textsuperscript{114}

The lack of understanding of contextualisation was apparent in this response as the person was referring only to skin colour and not to cultural context.

A contextual approach was offered by another person in the comment that the gospel can only be freed from its whiteness by Indigenous people reflecting together on how the Gospel is or becomes Good News to them in their contexts. Attempts have been made at contextualisation in reflections in the book \textit{A Rainbow Spirit Theology}\textsuperscript{115} and in \textit{Indigenous Australia - a dialogue about the Word becoming flesh in Aboriginal churches}.\textsuperscript{116} In fact, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal interviewees commented that \textit{Rainbow Spirit Theology} had not been received well, both by Aboriginal people who felt this was an area to keep away from, and by non-Aboriginal people who were highly critical of the reflections and could not see any validity to the

\textsuperscript{114} Interview: Tape Seven.


Another opinion from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people was that they felt *Rainbow Spirit Theology* had been “dumped on” unfairly. While others commented that the white community has no more right of control or a premium on the interpretation of the Gospel than the Indigenous community. Contextualisation is about taking control of the interpretation of the Gospel for one’s own context. Indigenous Christians have a responsibility to do this just as over the two thousand year history of the Gospel, the Gospel has been interpreted in various contexts across the globe. The responsibility of non-indigenous people who have the skills and tools is to put those tools in to the hands of Indigenous Christians.

*How would you describe Black Theology?*

The idea of Black theology was little understood by the majority of interviewees. In the environment of the United States in the late 1960s, there was a black power movement which was about liberation, freedom from slavery and bondage. Not just literal slavery and bondage but general socio-economic bondage of poverty and unemployment, from the bondage of cultural impression and mono-cultural white systems that did not take account of ‘black’ situations. One main aspect was the freedom from oppression which was the hallmark of Liberation Theology and is epitomised by the South American experience. Black theology expresses the desire to have the freedom to be oneself, to be one’s own people, to celebrate one’s own culture, to have the freedom to make the decisions that are in accordance with the interests of one’s own people and give expression to one’s own culture and beliefs and finally a degree of self-determination.

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117 Interview: Tape Six.

118 Interview: Tape Five also Interview: Tape Six.
when that is achieved. For one interviewee the term 'Black Theology' was thought to be a very appropriate term for Australian Indigenous Christians however concerns were raised that it could become confused with theology from another country and another time which then might not be helpful. However the essence of what it involved is very appropriate because all the issues – socio-economic status, participation in decision making, freedom to develop their culture on their own land - are the issues of which Aboriginal people are being deprived. Black Theology was also seen as a contextual Christian liberation theology articulated by African Americans reflecting on their experience of being betrayed, kidnapped, enslaved, oppressed and exploited for centuries and therefore was not a reflection on the specific experience of Australian Indigenous people and therefore could not be simply 'transposed' on to the Australian context. However there were some similarities of experience between the two peoples and other injustices which African-Americans had not experienced. Black Theology as a model of liberation theology could raise questions and be used as a model to articulate a theology of liberation for Aboriginal people because it is based in the context of an experience of oppression.

Addressing social injustice, community affairs and social ills must be a direct action of faith. One Aboriginal respondent told of the need for Church and the State or government to work together in order to address these issues because he believed that government-only action failed due to not involving a spiritual dimension. The preferred option, it was thought, would be for government agencies to fund chaplaincies in prisons, and in areas of high Aboriginal unemployment, poor health and substance abuse in

a partnership in order to achieve better outcomes. The example for this was given as:

government has poured millions in [small town] and there is nothing to show for it. Then two Christian people went up there three years ago and the last report is that 60% of the petrol sniffers have given up; drugs and alcohol the total is 50% with dramatic changes and there’s been a church developed. The thing that came through to me was that they had made a dramatic change in that community because they have been dealing with the spiritual issues with the people as well as the practical issues too.\textsuperscript{120}

It was seen that the spiritual dimension helped the community and “all it took” in this situation was two church-funded Christian people not “millions of dollars over ten years” which failed.\textsuperscript{121} This respondent felt that if the government assisted the churches to go in to communities then the chance of an improvement in the lives of Aboriginal people would be greater: “if their spiritual welfare is looked after and people are there to genuinely care about them spiritually then that changes, that changes everything.”\textsuperscript{122} This underlines the holistic approach to life and the intertwining of spiritual well-being with daily life and practical issues. Secondly, as was mentioned in relation to New Zealand Maori clergy, similarly Aboriginal clerical workers, policy makers and others are often not out in the community but are inside offices in large cities working for the government instead of being with the people.

\textsuperscript{120} Interview: Tape Five.

\textsuperscript{121} Interview: Tape Five.

\textsuperscript{122} Interview: Tape Five.
Taking over

Another issue was the sense of non-Aboriginal people taking over and fronting events, gatherings and conferences instead of, perhaps, being behind the scenes. It was deemed that this was possibly happening because of a perception that Aboriginal people did not have the “gift of administration” or organisation whereas they were gifted in public speaking, healing, prayer and discerning spirits for religious events at least.\(^{123}\) Non-Aboriginal leaders who take over in religious events could be considered to be “making things happen” instead of allowing revival or growth to occur under the direction of Aboriginal people. Sometimes this frees Aboriginal people to do what they are best at but what happens is that they start making decisions without consulting; there are schedules, deadlines and that sort of stuff and Aboriginal people don’t really worry sometimes about deadlines. So the white fellas get themselves locked in a position where they have to make decisions, make it and go forward and criticism comes, and sometimes they’re seen in a bad light… I just don’t think they know when to pull back… I think some of these white fellas who are probably seen as controlling have been burnt in the past, have sort of taken a risk with Aboriginal people saying ‘okay, go with it we’ll give you full support, just call us when you need us, just go for it’ and things never happen or something has gone wrong so the way they get involved again [is] they take much more direct control of things to ensure that they get what they want. I don’t think they have ever learnt how to operate in partnership fully.\(^{124}\)

It is apparent that there is a desire on the part of Aboriginal people to be in control of their own lives and make decisions but there is a recognition also that in order for that to happen there needs to be a partnership in which there are common goals and support.

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\(^{123}\) Interview: Tape Five.

\(^{124}\) Interview: Tape Five.
What is needed

One of the biggest issues is that of funding.

The issues of finding the right person, housing and funding need to be carefully thought through so that the establishment of a ministry is not ‘here today and gone tomorrow’ due to lack of long term arrangements.

Aboriginal Christians ask for support to allow them the freedom to develop their ministry in their own way.

Although non-indigenous people are prepared to act on social justice issues often they are not seen as “releasing Aboriginal people in to the community and saying here’s the resources, develop, you create the networks”125. One criticism was that what the churches were seen to be doing was trying to ‘keep you in a box’.126 It was perceived that a certain role had to be performed according to the tradition of the church and there was a lot of control. In fact it was believed that “they [the non-Aboriginal church leadership] are very fearful about losing control”.127 Aboriginal Christian leaders were prepared to take a risk but there was still a certain group within the mainstream church who were unsure about an Aboriginal Christian approach. There was another group who were happy to let Aboriginal people develop their own ministry and are prepared to support that but in most denominations these people are in the minority.

In order to encourage a really active and life changing ministry in the Aboriginal community, people needed to be released with the freedom to

125 Interview: Tape Five.
126 Interview: Tape Five.
127 Interview: Tape Five.
proceed as they determine. One other criticism was that some denominations that have indigenous councils which encourage indigenous people to take a role, become involved in social justice issues and making statements about what should be happening for Aboriginal people but do not release Aboriginal people in to the community, provide the resources and allow the people the freedom to develop or create the networks themselves. The reason for this was said to be because Aboriginal people would break down denominational barriers and this was not in the interests of the various denominations so the churches were thought to be ‘wary’ because they wanted to ‘keep their little tag on us’. This would lead to a very different type of church in Australia:

Our language and culture are gifts to be treasured. It is right that our cultural identity be affirmed in the church. But our cultures grow and change. They are not set in concrete. Basic to Christianity is the requirement of love, respect and justice in our mutual relationships. Cultural traditions such as racism which offend against these have no place in genuine Christianity.

There is a perception held by Aboriginal clergy that there is a wariness on the part of the mainstream churches about how Aboriginal people would minister, whether they could maintain and develop a ministry and support the community, about the validity of the worship format and a need for funding which could be seen as a drain on other church communities. The financial aspect was certainly a difficulty because of the socio-economic status of many Aboriginal people. Another insight expressed was that:

a lot of ‘white fellas’ are trapped in a way. They are unsure about how to approach Aboriginal people, they’re unsure of

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128 Interview: Tape Five.

129 Notes: Nine.
how far they can go in helping Aboriginal people because they don’t want to be seen as paternalistic. They don’t want to see themselves as being in the front and I think ...[there’s] a lesson a lot of white fellas are learning now whether in the church or not in the church that Aboriginal people do things differently.  

The non-indigenous community has failed to see a place for indigenous people in society - Asian and European people have provided new cooking styles and worker skills, and immigrants were accepted on the basis of skills (although there were times when even this was not enough to be accepted and derogatory comments were prevalent as were inappropriate working and living conditions) - and this surely has at its roots the history of dispossession, ethnocentrism, paternalism and racism.

Follow-up, on-going contact and putting the effort in to building relationships were seen as vital support mechanisms. Being involved because ‘doing it and being seen to be doing it’ is easily seen through. The ministry required is not one of counting numbers of people in attendance at church on Sunday. For many Aboriginal ministers to do the ministry well means their church is going out to people, visiting them, sitting down with them, talking through their issues, praying with them, encouraging them. Aboriginal people need support to allow freedom to develop their ministry in an Aboriginal way.

The Christian churches, if they are to reach out to Indigenous people, must recognise and acknowledge the points of pain, injustice and alienation in Aboriginal history and take steps to make restitution: they must listen to Indigenous people respectfully and act in solidarity. One response was that there were barriers from past mistrust and rejection and therefore acceptance

130 Interview: Tape Five.
was a difficulty. This needs to be addressed.

This chapter has shown the opinions of people in various places rather than Mogo alone and it confirms a common story in southern Australia. While this chapter has been quite long I felt it important to show the differences in responses and the levels of understanding across the respondents. Clearly, one of the main concerns is to identify the terminology used, and the direction which Aboriginal people want to take.

However the indications are that the main emphasis must lie heavily on

meeting with,
listening to,
and sharing extensive time with Aboriginal people.
‘Listening, listening and listening’ as one person put it.
Then walking with,
in partnership,
using resources together and
learning together.

Words most often used to indicate areas or issues of concern were:

- relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people,
- lack of resources,
- little willingness by non-Aboriginal people to listen,
- lack of support,
- the need for freedom,
- the need for relevance,
- the desire for sharing,
- the desire for partnership and working together,
- misunderstandings or lack of understanding,
- control by non-Aboriginal people, and
- the need to express their own identity as Aboriginal people and as Aboriginal Christians.
The most common words heard in my Encounter related to

- the Aboriginal person's positive understanding of their own strongly held Christian beliefs;
- their positive attitude to their own Aboriginal leadership;
- the value of the elders and family;
- the value of the Law;
- the parallels of traditional belief with Christian belief;
- the importance of culture;
- the belief that God was always in their culture
- the belief that their culture is based on godly principles;
- the healing that can take place through being able to share and lead in a culturally appropriate way in a Christian environment;
- relationships between God and people;
- relationship between God and the environment;
- relationships between people;
- relationships between people and the environment and
- most importantly a theology based on relationships.

From these identifiers which indicate the presuppositions that Aboriginal people are using in their search for an Aboriginal Christianity, it can be seen that what is being sought is a contextualisation of Christianity as is appropriate to Aboriginal Christians.
CHAPTER 6

EXPECTATIONS

My own dear people, let us not become handicapped by the strange tradition, culture, and theology of our white brothers and sisters, but let us with faith, exercise our true identity as people of God, who has given us true names, languages and cultures.¹

Djiniyini Gondarra, a northern Australian Aboriginal Uniting Church minister, spoke in the above quotation encouraging his people and reinforcing the need for, and expectation of, a Christian Aboriginal identity. This chapter draws out some more specific issues from the previous chapter.

Pastor Ray Minniecon, then State Secretary (NSW) of the World Vision Indigenous Program, member of the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship executive and at the time Chair of the Sydney Anglican Diocesan Indigenous Committee stated at The Time for Listening conference in July, 1998 that the “church in this country is more tribal than we are”.² Minniecon believed the church had failed Aboriginal people because there was no evidence of an Aboriginal church after 200 years of contact. All denominations had failed in this, he believed. He saw The Time for Listening conference as a starting point to address issues but felt that the


² *The Time for Listening* A one day conference held at University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown, July, 1998, under the auspices of the Anglican Diocese of Western Sydney.
failure of the churches to date needed to be acknowledged before a new pattern was started. The lack of Aboriginal Christian leaders and bishops was questioned by him although he later acknowledged the presence of an Aboriginal Bishop of North Queensland. [There were however Aboriginal clergy in northern and outback areas of Australia, though there were very few in southern areas.] He commented on the fact that in New Zealand there were Maori bishops and Maori clergy in the Anglican Church and there were also indigenous clergy and bishops in other countries. Minniecon believed that the attitudes of Christian people towards indigenous people needed to be changed otherwise the failure would be perpetuated. The importance of relationships between people was stressed at this conference. If relationships between people were healed - and this is an aim of Aboriginal ministry – then there would no longer be issues of reconciliation. This is echoed by the approach at Mogo where the people believe that healing will occur through the power of the ministry through the Word and the Holy Spirit. Minniecon also stated that the responsibility of Aboriginal people as Christians was to minister to the whole world not exclusively to Aboriginal people. But the first priority was to encourage Aboriginal people to “grow in grace and the nurture of the gospel of Jesus Christ”.  

Minniecon believed the reason why an Aboriginal church had not happened was based on cultural views or world-views - the Aboriginal culture, the Western culture and the Christian culture. Most of the failures he felt were due to how people perceived each other - he referred to the

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3 *The time for Listening* conference.
early 1800s when the Reverend Samuel Marsden made the statement that the Aboriginal people were the most degraded human race and needed to receive the great blessing of civilization and the knowledge of Christianity: “I still think of that particular perception of us as if today”\(^4\). Minniecon spoke of the need to seek a new direction that acknowledged the past perceptions and failures but not to forget the past because “The past is a part of our present reality and also a part of our future. We have to understand it in order to move on”\(^\text{5}\). What then are the expectations of an Aboriginal Ministry.

*Addressing cultural marginality*

Minniecon described the importance of the cultural approach: the sharing, the initiatory phases and their status, belongingness, relationships, identity, the apprenticeship model of learning and growing, relationship with the land and the power base of kinship. These issues are perceived differently from those in the non-Aboriginal society. He emphasized the social effects of being on the outside and of being marginalized, and considered the effects of stereotypes and how that guides people’s perceptions of each other. Aboriginal people needed to hold firm to their culture to safeguard their “heritage not to mention what is left of their dignity.”\(^6\)

\(^4\) _The Time for Listening_ conference.

\(^5\) _The Time for Listening_ conference.

Rediscovering identity and dignity

An Aboriginal sense of identity and independence are being rediscovered. This awareness must be considered in church organisations. If the model used is the one that Jesus provided then it must be one of justice, mercy and faith which empowers. The effect of Jesus’ ‘constructive relationship’ with people, particularly those who were disadvantaged, was to build them up:

The low status of these people in society induced them to believe themselves socially unacceptable...He encouraged disadvantaged people to assume and maintain their new identity – his acceptance of them was to be their constant reassurance.

and

The call to all Australians including Christians is to LET THEM, ENABLE THEM, TO BECOME WHO THEY ARE; to unshackle them from our restricting prejudices and sense of superiority in every sphere of life, be it education, housing, medicine or religion.

There was an even greater demand on Christians and that was to “assist the re-growth of the self-identity” 9 In other words Christians needed to do more than token efforts to support and encourage Aboriginal people in religious matters and also in matters relating to health, education and employment. The most important focus should be on encouraging stronger communication.

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7 Aborigines and Australian Christianity Part 2, Zadok Series, no. 1, Paper no. 8, Zadok, ACT, p. 15.

8 Zadok, Series, no. 1, Paper no. 8, p. 16.

9 Zadok Series, no. 1, Paper no. 8, p. 16.

10 A Time for Listening conference.
Minniecon referred to four major attitudes, shown in reactions in the dominant society: ‘I don’t care’ which indicates ignorance and needs to be addressed through education; ‘I don’t care’ which means ‘apathy’ and indicates the need for the gospel words of ‘love your neighbour’ to be drawn out; ‘I don’t care’ which is bedded in arrogance and needs leading out to humility and ‘I don’t care’ which shows hypocrisy and needs to be opened to truth and integrity. All of these can be drawn on by the Gospel and the practice of ministry, as both Minniecon and a Mogo pastor have said, in the developing of relationships. By approaching relationships this way, then attitudes towards tradition and diversity can be addressed with a common base – that of Christ.

Schreiter stated faith was something always ‘heard’ from others, the gospel incarnate and fleshed out by culture and local theology, unable to exist without the connection and contact with the wider church as anchor and the unity with other Christians through Christ. Unity and uniformity, though not identical, are however recognised as connected. Schreiter also stressed the importance of tradition because it reinforced identity, defined the limits within a community, as well as set a pattern and provided the basis for resourcing new ideas.

I contend one of the main concerns with tradition is expressed by those who are seen as protectors of tradition for the possibility of tradition being denied or changed or corrupted. Changes are sometimes equated with

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12 Schreiter, 1985, p. 105.
negativity, an unthinkable break with the past, the risk of undermining foundations or the loss of power. However tradition must have credibility, intelligibility, authority and affirmation. To establish Christian identity Schreiter proposed five criteria: “the cohesiveness of Christian performance”; “the worshipping context and Christian performance”; “the praxis of the community and Christian performance”; “the judgment of other churches and Christian performance”; and “the challenge to other churches and Christian performance”.13 He also explored the signs of syncretism and dual systems and argued that they “are ultimately not about theology...They are about the entirety of the religious sign system.”14

Promoting reciprocal benefit

If Christians see the struggle of Aboriginal people and see the need to help as part of their own survival then the rewards would be reaped for both

While Kraybill recognised that each different group of believers was needed to build a mature expression of Christianity, it is also recognised that people need to be with others who were like-minded:

Although we must unlatch the doors that shut us off from others, we do need social boxes for our emotional well-being. We need caring networks of others who listen to our frustrations, doubts, and hassles. We usually find acceptance among those like us. They understand and care best because they identify with our problems...We too need the close fellowship of similar others as we use our special gifts to minister to the whole body. 15

Though this could be interpreted as an argument for separateness it needs

13 Schreiter, pp. 118 – 121.
14 Schreiter, p. 157. [for expanded reference see pp 144 – 157]
to be emphasized that this can still occur within the whole body, within the overall unity because “A gospel which only attracts similar people blurs the good news bonding Jew and Gentile, male and female, black and white.”

If staying with only like-minded people or with people of similar needs there is danger of a stunted growth, a club-like atmosphere, a comfortable unchallenging environment and an incapacity to act in the world.

Another writer commented on the social self: “on that identity which binds him to others, rather than separates him as individually unique.” Group cohesion and solidarity are important. The comments by Tatz are very applicable to the felt needs for an Aboriginal Church at Mogo: “Thus, in order to join the open society on anything like equal terms, black people should first close their ranks...for the time it will take to realize their immediate aspirations.” In order to find identity as a community and develop an awareness of strengths and weaknesses in that community it might be necessary sometimes to ‘separate’, build up political, social and economic strengths, find their own identity, then ‘on their own terms’ participate in the general society. The Aboriginal Christians at Mogo appear to be following this idea by developing a Church organisation of

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16 Kraybill, p. 229.


19 Tatz, p. 387.
their own and pursuing a cultural and skills centre as an active part of an holistic approach in accordance with an Aboriginal sense of community. They have not however excluded non-Aboriginal people from involvement or from being part of the process.

*Life experience*

Life experience is a term often used to explain the validity or authority of a leader. Aboriginal Christian leaders base their teaching on powerful biblical preaching emanating from life experience. Again this term, ‘life experience’, is often referred to by indigenous people world-wide. It is uncomplicated, direct - in the sense that it looks straight at issues and their effects – and underscores the assumption that to have undergone similar issues as the people whom the leaders are teaching places them in a position of understanding.

This approach has been apparent in many aspects of the Mogo situation. There is importance stressed on the ‘Word’, preaching is strong and energetic and there is much emphasis particularly in relation to authority based on life experience. It also appears to include religious experience, particularly an experience of the Holy Spirit.

Calley, writing in the 1950s and at the time commenting on Aboriginal Pentecostalism, noted what appeared to be an integration of the new on to the “social framework of the old”. He noted also that “the features of the old culture most likely to be retained are the structural or organisational

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It appeared that a large section of the older generation was willing to reconcile Christianity with the old rule and Christianity was seen as complementary: “Christianity is like the cult of another tribe into which one might be initiated but which would not imply the rejection of one’s own local cult”. However in his study this was in a Pentecostal style church which emphasized a rite of initiation - in the Holy Spirit - rather than acceptance of a credal belief. Calley’s interpretation was that the gift of the Holy Spirit was an individual “solitary” experience “comparable to the quest for ‘wiun’ under the old rule” and that there were levels, that is, “those who are saved, those who are baptised, and those who have received the “gift of the Holy Ghost”.

While this style is perhaps more associated with the Pentecostal movement and is to a certain extent obvious among some of the worshippers of the Mogo community, and more particularly among some non-Aboriginal members, this is contrary to the sentiments expressed in the Arnhem Land understanding that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are for all people and not a select few. At Mogo there is a Pentecostal element and a fundamentalist one and I will mention this in more detail later in this chapter. However there is emphasis on life experience and experience of the Holy Spirit.

In Aboriginal communities there is an importance placed on travel of long distances for funerals, possibly imitating cultural travel to ceremonics, revivalist style meetings, itinerant preachers, reciprocal visitations, conventions, emphasis on salvation, and initiatory practices.

21 Calley, p. 3.

22 Calley, p. 7.

Stephen Harris mentioned the changes apparent in Kolig’s observations from:

Aborigines themselves have progressively taken the initiative and been creatively revising the old religion and shaping it into a new structure ... with its importance to Aborigines remaining unimpaired ... Aboriginal religion is booming, gaining in elasticity and fluidity all the while. 24

to the change in the traditional emphasis of religion: “Its cosmic significance has diminished...while its social relevance is increasing proportionately”. 25 Aboriginal religion in the southern areas is showing a slight increase both in traditional religion and in identification with other religions. In northern areas there is still a movement between traditional spirituality and Christianity and this is often indicated by fear believed, by some southern Aboriginal people, to be due to ‘sitting on the fence’ and not making a firm commitment to Christianity. 26 It may be due to fear emanating from traditional beliefs and/or a fear of loss of security. In southern areas, too, emphasis is made on “spiritual warfare”. So often this is an emphasis of Pentecostal religions and it is the leading of non-Aboriginal people and preachers who have brought their style of Christianity to the Aboriginal people. This approach has overtones of imposition firstly, and more so, implies a belief that Aboriginal culture, that is, tradition, is evil. However there is a positive result which is sometimes seen as a “black” response of Pentecostalism based on

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25 S. Harris, p. 42. [ ibid E. Kolig 1981, pp 177-8, 180]

26 Interview: Tape Five
- orality of liturgy;
- narrativity of theology and witness;
- maximum participation at the levels of reflection, prayer and decision-making and therefore a form of community that is reconciliatory;
- inclusion of dreams and visions into personal and public forms of worship; …
- an understanding of the body/mind relationship…; the most striking application of this insight is the ministry of healing by prayer. 27

Used appropriately, Aboriginal Christianity can draw on the movement toward a proudly emerging sense of identity, the need to find that identity as a means of supporting the people, and a means toward freedom and empowerment of the people. This fits well with the presuppositions of the Aboriginal people at Mogo.

All of these approaches are part of the essence of Aboriginal identity and Aboriginal Christian identity and show a developing Aboriginal style of worship that incorporates traditional styles of singing and dance, art, music, shared leadership and an emphasis on the Holy Spirit.

In 1998 the comments of Pastor Neville Naden (Anglican deacon to the Western Sydney Aboriginal Ministry from 2001) and Pastor Ray Minniecon underlined the shared leadership and common style that was developing in Aboriginal ministry. These are also important presuppositions in contextualising the Gospel at Mogo.

Reconsidering boundaries

To provide a sense of belonging boundaries are useful. Within

traditional Aboriginal community identity was related to:

personal involvement and experience, on actual participation, on ways of thinking and acting, within an integrated and closed system which provided maximal security.  

Therefore it is apparent that any system that, by virtue of being that of a different cultural group, undermines the sense of security and particularly the sense of power and control over one’s life, runs counter to that which is culturally appropriate and advantageous to the community. It is also apparent that Aboriginal Christians need to find their own identity as Christians in order to strengthen and encourage each other. This was mentioned to me in Canberra by an Aboriginal Christian person in the year 2000 and again when people heard of the intended ordination of an Aboriginal person on the South Coast of New South Wales in 2002. The comments were: ‘that’s what we need’ and ‘why can’t we have that here’. Erica Kyle reflected on the need for an Aboriginal church for the same reasons that are still being heard: “My desire is to see indigenous churches throughout the country, because our people are very frightened to worship in white” churches.

Determining their own future

One of the presuppositions the Ngukurr Aboriginal Christians held was the importance of retaining their identity as Aboriginal in contextualising the

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29. Personal communications.

gospel:

Their claim that they are Aboriginal and Christian rather than imitation White Christians, is handled by examining the domains of illness, death, social relationships, ceremonies and the spirit world and how they relate to the discourse of Christianity at Ngukurr.\textsuperscript{31}

At Mogo Aboriginal Christians are approaching identity and social dysfunction by addressing these issues within a Christian approach that is focused on a cultural parameter. Through Christian healing with an Aboriginal understanding and application of Christianity to their environment, Aboriginal people hope to address the reasons for early death and suicide, and social, emotional and economic issues.

Sandefur underlined the emphasis on Aboriginal people needing to be in control of their own growth in Christianity. She referred to Luzbetak’s table of differences between accommodation and inculturation\textsuperscript{32}:

\begin{quote}
Inculturation is something that should occur naturally wherever the gospel is lived and shared. It is the best and most natural way to live and share one’s faith as Christian in a particular cultural setting. It includes how the church is organized, the liturgy, the music, language, the many and varied activities of the church and the life style of its members. \textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

This inculturation does not appear to be as inclusive of hermeneutics as the


\textsuperscript{32} Sandefur, p. 119.

\textsuperscript{33} Sandefur, p. 125.
term 'contextualisation'. Of course there is no point in carrying all this out if there is no effect in the community, that is, if it is mere words. Nor if it is led by non-indigenous people will it become true contextualisation. For this to be the outcome would be counter to the expectations of Aboriginal leadership and particularly for the insights of the people to be expressed.

_Educating non-indigenous society_

Pattel-Gray [a Uniting Church member] who was involved in Aboriginal Spirituality issues, healing, empowerment and ministry dealing with oppression, justice and human rights listed some steps, which she believed should be taken, some of which were:

recognising the gifts and talents of Aboriginal Christians and expanding their input with workshops and dialogue on Aboriginal Spirituality; ...massive education and awareness programmes with non-Aboriginal Christians and churches, so as to build greater understanding and to break down fears; ...building a commitment and partnership between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians and churches 34;

[and]

clarifying the accreditation of existing theological education for Aboriginal people (academic, ecclesiastical, etc) 35

In relation to this the Koori Commission of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn encouraged one of its members, an Aboriginal female priest, to undertake the development of a workshop programme, _Crossing Cultures_, to be made available in the training of clergy and


35 Pattel-Gray, c. 1991, p. 3.
amongst lay people to help in providing greater understanding of cultural issues. As mentioned earlier it has been trialled in the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn, the Riverina Anglican Diocese and with students from St Mark’s Theological Centre Canberra where it was combined with a stay at the Wreck Bay community at Jervis Bay, New South Wales. The partnership being developed between the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn and the Mogo Ministry Centre has resulted in a financial input by the Diocese as well as a commitment by the Aboriginal people to the authority of the Anglican church but with an Aboriginal structure and leadership. Part of this partnership involves commitment by non-Aboriginal churches within the Diocese for funding. Education of the leader has been a matter of reaching a common agreement on style and progress through a plan which I will discuss later in a section on Training. However one Aboriginal pastor recently commented on the attitude of non-indigenous people which indicated that they saw Aboriginal people as children saying:

> there is still that sense of controlling the Aboriginal people, ‘They’re our children, we can’t let them go.’ But children need to grow up, and we need to have a big vision.

and

> Aboriginal Christians are being led by God’s Holy Spirit, but too many Westerners still look at them as children and fail to recognise and encourage His leading among them.\(^{36}\)

Bishop Arthur Malcolm of the National Aboriginal Anglican Council, spoke (particularly in relation to the Anglican area) of the need “to affirm and celebrate the contribution which Aboriginal culture can make to the

\(^{36}\) Patel-Gray, c.1991, p. 3.
Vicky Walker of the Catholic Aboriginal Community looked forward to a day when Christianity expressed through Aboriginal culture would no longer be regarded with suspicion but welcomed for its enrichment of the life of the church.  

Diversity can be celebrated for its unique contribution and the sense of community can be strengthened, as can the sense of value of a community group within the wider population.

Diversity, divisiveness or deculturisation – how this is interpreted is the ethnic precedent in the Christian church. If diversity is valued then the outcome must be positive.

The Uniting Church has done much to promote the Aboriginal leadership of Churches as well as work on the social justice front. There are still difficulties however.

Charles Harris’s vision was of black Christians in Australia united, in control of their own organization, setting the agenda for mission among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It would be a body that was concerned with people’s lives in a holistic way, committed to minister to them in their daily experience of racial discrimination, dispossession of the land, oppression by structures imposed upon them by Australian Government and church institutions, poverty and despair. It was a vision of a church preaching a gospel of hope and liberation, and living in solidarity with their people as they struggled for justice.

This still appears to be a dream for many Aboriginal Christians. The

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desire is not for leadership under a non-Aboriginal person, not just for the inclusion of Aboriginal music, dance, art and prayer, but all aspects of liturgy, not just a building extension attached to another church building or a meeting place held at a convenient time so that it fits around non-Aboriginal settings but a place that is appropriate in space and shape and size and time. It is not a borrowed theology and an imitation of structure but one that is culturally relevant. Yet the opening is also there for non-Aboriginal people to join in worship.
CHAPTER 7

FINDING THE WAY - ABORIGINAL THEOLOGY

This chapter considers issues including: the relationship between traditional Aboriginal belief and practices and the recognisably ‘Western’ Christian belief and practices; the development of Aboriginal Christian theology; and the future of Aboriginal Christian theology in Australia. This chapter draws on literature, seminars, personal communication and anecdotes.

The traditional and ‘Western’ spiritualities

In the 1920s according to Henson, there were indications that Aboriginal people believed that their own spirituality and Christianity could not be combined in any way and that the God of Christianity was revealed as the one true God.¹

The Aboriginal Christian people who took part in the conversations with me held a wide range of views towards traditional spirituality. For some, traditional belief could not be part of a Christian’s life, for others the two could be used side-by-side, for still others elements of traditional belief could be re-interpreted by a Christian experience.

Many indigenous people reflected on the early books of the Old Testament, especially the books of Deuteronomy, Exodus and the Law

books as parallel to their own history, cosmological or dreamtime wisdom and spirituality. Some people actively worked at what could be considered as bridging practices – a link with the past and an expression in a Christian environment.

Pastor Bill Reid (Gamilaroi, Bourke) was recorded as saying that he had “dual spirituality” and “has learnt to juggle his love for a white man’s god with his religious devotion to his native land”. 2 Eileen Morgan, an Aboriginal elder and committed Anglican member, referred to her dual spirituality:

the spirit of the mountain and the spirit of the belief in Christ. They are really the same thing. You can put the two together and it becomes one, whichever way you want to take it. 3

Mrs Morgan would relate stories, which involved sensitivity to the land and awareness of the ‘spirit world’ as an innate part of an Aboriginal inheritance. One writer (Boori) wrote of the influence of Deacon Boniface Pridot: “He’s a tribal man from Daly River, he’s in the Catholic church. He brings together the two beliefs so beautifully”. 4 Boori also remembered his mother saying:

We will seek out that spirit, whatever form it takes…until we find where that spirituality really is for us… [God’s] been my strength. All the things he stands for, love for each other, the Truth and being responsible for your own actions…I feel he is there all the time in my life… By ‘God’ I mean the Creator through Aboriginal law…I see that same God in the Christian church. It’s our same God, a caring God, that was always with our people. 5

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5 Pryor, pp. 188 – 189.
Boori also mentioned an understanding that many Aboriginal people held that they were already practising what was being preached to them of Christian law but that those who were preaching could not see it.⁶

Agnes Palmer, too, reflected

I am starting to pull pieces, the stories from the Bible, into our way of living...pulling those stories, relating them to our way of living, our lifestyle, our culture, our language, putting those pieces together. Both give me that peace...to me. God is in every person. The Ngkarte is there, the Spirit is there.⁷

Mr Pat Dodson, an Aboriginal clergyman, made a break with the Roman Catholic Church in 1981 when he found that his approach was not acceptable to authorities:

What I was suggesting was that they go back to what was dormant in their culture and find ways of integrating it with Christian celebratory practices. I thought many of the practices had the same intent as the Catholic sacraments.⁸

In his thesis Rudder quoted Gondarra

The missionaries said we have to leave the Yolgu way and follow Jesus but that cut people off from their identity. The Spirit challenged Paul about whether he was living like a Jew or a gentile. People respect my leadership because I separate between what the gospel says and wrong practices. For example, I enjoy traditional dancing and Christian dancing but I will have nothing to do with the Gunapipi ...and its sexual immorality.⁹

Other people worked through these issues too:

⁶ Pryor, p. 189.
⁹ Rudder, p. 76.
In 1989 there was continuous effort on the part of at least some Yolŋu to assess the relationship between what the old people did in the "first revival", their experiences of the "bringing outside" and in a sense the desacralising of previous "inside" elements. The new experiential knowing of the revival is now being freely and openly placed alongside the earlier knowledge of the ancestral beings.\textsuperscript{10}

\textit{Aboriginal Christians and Western Christian theology}

Delphin-Stanford and Brown described the gospel as often being "hostile"\textsuperscript{11}, saying even if Aboriginal Christians preached that same gospel then they would feel that they were "alienated".\textsuperscript{12} This I understand, from what has been described to me, was due to the "whiteness" of the Gospel presentation - descriptive messages which preach a theological construct that is Anglo-Saxon in outlook and understanding - and not the Gospel message per se.

Pattel-Gray and Trompf wrote

the Australian Aboriginals, whereas they generally rejected the white-packaged Christianity foisted upon them, they absorbed "Aboriginalized" versions of it into their bones, as new means of spiritual strength.\textsuperscript{13}

However they believed that the "white" expressions of Christianity took away various aspects of Aboriginal personhood, sociocultural identity, and indigenous religious being. They betray a direct, interventionist, white, European, "missionized" theology.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{10} Rudder, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{11} Delphin-Stanford and Brown, 1994, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{12} Delphin-Stanford and Brown, 1994, p. 15.


\textsuperscript{14} Pattell-Gray and Trompf, p. 174.
These are the issues being addressed by the Mogo community - who I am, and what is my identity and value as Christian and Aboriginal - which can be denied in the non-Aboriginal church communities.

The emerging theology

In relation to Aboriginal theology Djiniyini Gondarra has said that the Gospel always challenges culture and that it must be left to Aboriginal Christians to determine what should be retained from traditional culture and what could be let go. At a public seminar in 1998 one speaker was asked how he reconciled his Aboriginal spirituality with his Christian spirituality. The speaker replied:

We know God. We know His Word. We know our culture. We know what’s good and bad in it and we can determine how God speaks through that to our people.

He challenged the non-Indigenous people present to assess their Western culture and find God in it, emphasising the belief that theology must be associated with the practices, structure and experience of God working in the lives of people.

A number of writers have noted the tie between theology and ritual and the grass roots relevance: “New theology does not come out of erudite lectures, published monographs or learned sermons. Theology is not a

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16 *The Time for Listening* Conference, Ray Minniecon
purely intellectual enterprise.”

John Harris noted:

an Aboriginal style of worship is emerging, more consistent with Aboriginal world view and custom. Some of the distinguishing features are a non-European notion of time; forceful, biblical preaching; more shared leadership; a great love of movement and singing; and an emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The incorporation of traditional Aboriginal forms of art, music, movement, drama and other indigenous expressions is increasing.

The approach to time, leadership, music and dance, and the emphasis on the Word and the Holy Spirit are important aspects of the developing church at Mogo. While these aspects are important, a culturally relevant and contextually appropriate hermeneutic with a biblical theology based on the land, relationships, freedom and liberation is also developing amongst Aboriginal Christian people.

Aboriginal approach to creation

One of the clearest explanations of the creation story and the Aboriginal approach to life was told by Kevin Gilbert in an interview with Caroline Jones:

Right from our early beginnings we were taught of the sanctity of the total life around us. There’s a difference in the white appreciation of creation. Their belief is that man was created from clay, and out of this substance he took an ascendency, or a superior position, over all other things. The Aboriginal way is that everything created is equal and sacred: that the soil, the clay, the rocks are sacred; ...I had the strength of knowing that my creator is not above me somewhere, but is always with me; that, whatever the substance around me, that creation flows to me, through me, within me; that the universe is part of me, as I am a part of it. And I think that, once you know that, there is no fear... there

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18 J. Harris, One Blood: 200 years of Aboriginal encounter with Christianity, Albatross, 1990, p. 862.
is complete belonging, and life and death is just a constant flowing...a continual renewing. So, this presence is an overflowing thing with me.\(^{19}\)

Compare this with the usual interpretation of the Genesis story, which presents humans as in a position of being in charge of creation, as dominant. This version does not emphasise the role of protector. The Aboriginal version states all are equal, being both infused with the creator and all creation, and imbuing all creation. Yet the Genesis story also implies that while humans are ‘superior’ they are to care for, to husband, creation as guardians and protectors, even as servants. A far greater role than that of being the ‘dominant’ species. This unity and inter-relation of all matter including the spirit was described as the “inner landscape is in communion with outer, and both are answering to their Source” \(^{20}\) The description of the ‘inside’ and the ‘outside’ is an important aspect in Aboriginal life and traditional Aboriginal spirituality. It can also be seen in the interpretation of a person’s relationship with the Christian God and the symbolism of much of what happens in the Sacraments and ceremonies of the Christian Church particularly the Roman Catholic Church and the Anglican Church. This infusion of a person in God and God in a person can be seen in the following quotation as well:

> If someone were to ask me whether I believed in God, or saw God, or had a particular relationship with God, I would reply that I don’t separate God from my world in my

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\(^{20}\) Jones, p. 278.
thinking. I feel that God is everywhere. That's why I never feel separated from God or feel I must seek God, anymore than a fish in the ocean feels it must seek water. In a sense, God is the “ocean” in which we live.\(^{21}\)

This is similar to Gilbert's “this presence is an ever-flowing thing within me”. Therefore all people in God are equal, irrespective of culture and language and race and all people are, or can be, submersed in God.

*Aboriginal approach to the land*

Nganyinytja (a Pitjantjatjara woman) commented: “People need to realise that we all share the same spirit that comes from God and from the earth”.\(^{22}\) Here, again, there is no sense of antagonism between God and Mother Earth or Christianity and traditional spirituality or the spirit of Christianity and that of traditional belief because the spirit is deemed to flow from the same source. Aboriginal people did not separate all living things but saw all as equal. This included the living being of the earth, the nurturer, life-giver, which was referred to as the Mother. In his interpretation of the Dreaming, Cameron argued:

> It is the experience of the sacred (God) on the human journey. It is insight into the great mystery which surrounds all human awareness. It is a statement of the human condition as actually lived in time touched by eternity (God) and not lived only in time... It is the reading of the story of the land. It is the reception of revelation through the land.\(^{23}\)

He understood the Dreaming to be “the way into the mystery of God”.\(^{24}\)

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\(^{24}\) Cameron, 1997, p. 65.
This is not just anchored in the past. The obligations to the future credibility of creation impacts on the present and the human understanding requires a reciprocity on the part of the current custodians to maintain the fertility of the earth and the integrity of creation.

Land and water are important doctrinally and ritually. The importance of the land for Burnum was expressed as

> In Australia, the land itself is the cathedral and worship is not confined to any four walls. Each step is a prayer and every form in the landscape — and everything that moves in it — were put there specifically for the people to use and manage.  

This belief in the value of all living things and the respect given to them echo statements the previous statements.

George Rosendale wrote that “We belong to the land as we belong to the Creator Spirit” [and] “in Christ ‘the spiritual presence in the land becomes flesh and camps among us’ “. An Aboriginal elder, Mary Duroux, wrote a poem to the land in which she addressed the land as ‘Mother’ and in which she seems to suggest that the lack of care of the land (by non-Aboriginals and maybe, by failing to undertake their duty as custodians, by Aboriginal people) had been just as the crucifixion of Christ:

> My mother, my mother  
> what have they done?  
> Crucified you  
> like the only Son.


Prayers in Reconciliation liturgies refer to Mother Earth and being born of water. Land, as exemplified in the Australian Prayer Book prayer by Lenore Parker, is referred to as ‘Mother Earth’. Non-Aboriginal people often felt uncomfortable with both of these ideas. Yet the earth is the nurturer, both physical and spiritual, of humanity.

Aboriginal approach to water

Water is also a symbol of life and spirituality and one expression of its significance came in a conversation between Wilf Douglas and Dooley where Dooley [Binbin], seeking the source of things both natural and manmade (from natural products which had once been living), determined that all had had their birth in water and in a time of reflection he had seen “at the head of the universal fountain was the Cross of Christ.”28

Aboriginal approach to sacred objects

When the Adjustment movement came to Arnhem Land in 1957 issues such as the use of secret-sacred objects were handled in the light of a Biblical understanding of graven images and the movement of the Holy Spirit. Rudder quoted Burramurra (Berndt 1962 p 40) who talked of bringing the ranga into the open - this as a result of a feeling of ‘shame’.29 Dayŋumbu, in an interpretation of the revivals of Arnhem Land and bringing out of the ranga described the difference as between the knowledge that a few had, that is those “who got the madayin (sacred objects) and the liya-narramirrwalal (the ones having understanding of the


29 Rudder, p. 74.
secret ceremonial ground)"
and the blessing that everyone received,

"Dhuyu Birrimbirmirriy (by the action of the Holy Spirit).” 30 In other
words the ranga were for a few, the Holy Spirit was for everyone.

John Harris noted Paul Albrecht’s comments concerning the retention of
the tjurunga as cultural artifacts; the Lajamanu, Yuendumu and Kalkaringi
church using “Christian purlapas (corroborees), Christian iconography and
indigenous music, notably the use of ‘old law songs’ as a medium for
credal statements”; and other examples such as Miriam–Rose Ungunmirr’s
(sic) stations of the cross at Daly River and Matthew Gill’s Stations of the
Cross based on bush-turkey dreaming at Balgo, Western Australia. 31

Gularrawuy believed that the “church at Yirrkala [should be made] more
accessible to Yolgnu by using Christian ritual and tradition to reinforce
aspects of Yolgnu society.” 32 Here it is recognised that theology must be
associated with the practices, structure and experience of God working in
the lives of people and as a process it is indicated by involvement and
reflection, interaction and response to the situation of today predicated by
events of the past. The statement indicates the importance of the cultural
tradition of the Yolgnu, that is, Yolgnu society is being strengthened
rather than using traditional aspects in Christianity.

Gondarra saw the value of storytelling as important for creating an
Aboriginal theology. He believed also that non-Aboriginal people needed

30 Rudder, p. 75.

31 J. Harris, 1990, p. 863.

32 N. M. Williams, Two Laws – managing disputes in a contemporary Aboriginal
community. Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies, 1987, p. 34.

33 D. Gondarra, ‘For us Everything is life: Aboriginal Spirituality in Australia’,
to be part of the process wherein Aboriginal people were empowered to
own their own ministry and mission and to follow Christ’s holistic
approach.\textsuperscript{33}

Williams recorded that

\begin{quote}
In a discussion of the supernatural properties of certain
natural objects of which each clan had a repertory,
Galarrwuy said that he had tried to understand how the
power of certain rocks and sand works, he thought that he
had found the answer: natural objects were put here by God;
they were gifts of God. Each clan had its own special
natural things. Christ made use of natural things in healing
people...Galarrwuy said that he always combined prayer
with the use of sand in treating people. It was the prayer, he
added, that cured.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

Galarrwuy used the elements around him in the process of contextualisation.

Gondarra and Rosendale, both Aboriginal clergy, showed the development
of the hermeneutical process by their use of Aboriginal “symbols and
metaphors to translate Aboriginal Dreaming stories in Christian terms.... to
convey the essential moral messages”.\textsuperscript{35} Rudder also recounted Danataja’s

\begin{quote}
I can help...if he is hurt with a spear or a gun shot. That’s
the outside [warranjal] that’s hurt but I can’t help if hurt on
the inside [djinawa]. Only Jesus can see the inside and help
him on the inside.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{quote}

This indicates the traditional understanding of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ matters
that are brought to bear on the understanding of Christian belief and faith.

\textsuperscript{33} N. M. Williams, 1987, pp. 33 - 34.

\textsuperscript{34} L. Hume, “The Rainbow Serpent, the Cross, and the Fax Machine: Australian
Aboriginal responses to the Bible”, in Ethnicity and the Bible ed M. G. Brett, Brill,

\textsuperscript{36} Rudder, 1993, p. 28.
There is a parallel with the inward and outward signs of the sacraments in the Anglican and Roman Catholic denominations – the outward sign of the gift and the inward sign of the healing. The significance of Dhulmu ḃārra (the important ceremonial place) and its interpretation in relation to God was explained:

I went there and kneeled down inside [near the rounded stone] and prayed to God, “God I’m here with these secret symbols that you gave us. Help me God”. I got better then. 37

This appeal is not to a ‘graven image’ but directly to God through something acknowledged as God-given. The emphasis on healing and the power of Jesus and the Holy Spirit are often mentioned at Mogo. The Mogo people believe too if the ‘inside’ spiritual side is healed then the people will be able to achieve healing in other areas: all areas are considered connected. The people expect healing and restoration as a community.

The Gālpu explanation of Burralku was given as

I think Burralku is something like heaven, but here on earth, an unseen place. Sometimes we call it an island. The bible talks about the final judgement. Burralku, that’s the place for waiting. 38

All of these writers therefore express the desire to build on what is already part of the culture, not throwing aside that which is good, but responding creatively to the present and the presence of new openings and with a concern for the future.

37 Rudder, p. 216.

38 Rudder, p. 314.
There are cultural differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people: in the approach to life; in the emphasis on maintaining proper relationships; in the belief that education is life, continues through life and gives value to age; in birth-defined relationships, kinship obligations and group membership; in the preference not for intra-group competition; and in the significance of the environment with the emphasis on the relationship to land. These generally continue to have importance to southern Aboriginal people. The interpretation of spiritual beliefs is made within the parameters of these criteria.

The equilateral triangle has been used as a symbol of the interdependence of the responsive community of believers, that is, the relationship between the meeting with Christ, the meeting with one another and the meeting with the world. All three components are connected and inter-related. The circle is another symbol that is used whereby each of the three components are described on a perimeter with movement each way: a > b, b < a, b > c, c < b, a < c and c < a. I prefer concentric circles with Christ at the centre permeating through to the outer edge so that along the way all people are in His presence as they are embedded in their own culture. In this sense God is in all cultures and therefore available to all — God is the ocean, to use previous quotations — in which each person and each culture can be infused by His grace. This means the inter-connections between peoples are possible, ready to be drawn on, as is the connection with God. God/Christ is always constant, always there, only to be accessed. 

Along the way the culture is affected by God/Christ/Holy Spirit and as the people express their faith within that cultural process then the faith becomes contextualised. The impediments are the non-contextualised issues and the
impact of secular society.

The connection between Aboriginal spirituality and God was exemplified in
the prayer of the Reverend Charles Harris used in part earlier:

God of the Dreamtime, you who are with us for these 40,000 years...you who gave us our ceremonies, and the law, and
our stories, and our sacred sites. You who gave us our
Dreaming, you who gave us this land...Show the people that
you are a God of justice and Lord be praised the God of the
Dreamtime. 39

The connection with the past, the traditions, the history and the spirituality
are identified in this statement.

Ritual and ceremony

Ritual and ceremony in Aboriginal life are still considered important to
address the need to strengthen the community and the individual:

Because of their rich heritage of ceremonial life, Aboriginal
Christians are deeply aware of the power of ritual in shaping
the participant’s fundamental orientation to reality. As a
consequence the whole community is involved in creating
theology and affirming its truth.40

Here is indicated the Aboriginal approach to structure and decision making
as a community focus and the importance of ritual.

Rosendale expressed the conviction that “Aboriginal laws are the same as
those given by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai.” 41 While commenting on the

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40 Bos, p. 7.

41 G. Rosendale, ‘Reflections on the Gospel and Aboriginal Spirituality. Part A Law &
Forgiveness in Aboriginal Culture. Part B The Relationship of Aboriginal Myths and
customs to Gospel Preaching’, Occasional Bulletin, Nungalinya College, Darwin,
purpose of law, and its presence in all religions and life, he then said that
the gospel “has given man freedom from the law. It did not destroy law
but fulfilled what law demanded of man.” 42 This appears to be
contradictory and the use of ‘law’ may appear ambiguous but it appeals to
the power of the Gospel (New Testament) teachings to complete God’s
law.

Gondarra, an Aboriginal Uniting Church minister, described the attitude to
sacred sites in the spirituality of the Aborigines as more like a recognition
of ancient moral imperatives than a kind of worship. 43 Gondarra also
believed that Aboriginal ceremonies could be baptized and given a new
meaning. Yet Williams wrote of the awareness

of conflicts that resulted from subscribing to Christian
dogma and ideology while retaining their own... Galarrwuy
Yunupingu had apparently long wrestled with the syncretic
problems faced in considering the decision to become a
candidate for the Christian ministry. 44

Funeral services, ordinations and ordinary worship services combined some
facets of both traditional life and Christianity. In Rudder’s thesis he
mentions a funeral service, which included a Christian service with the
dead man’s clan symbols decorating the church and coffin, Christian singing
and dancing, a sermon and at the grave, Christian affirmations and Yolŋu
ceremonial, Christian singing and traditional wailing. Rudder used
Rurrumbu’s description of the passage of life through to death with the
example of the metamorphosis of a butterfly in the terms of the

43 Gondarra, 1986b, p. 33.
44 Williams, 1987, pp. 33 - 34.

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inside/outside characteristics to which I referred earlier:

He says that the butterfly does not change what it is, only its outside form, and then observes that its identity is not only butterfly but that it is simultaneously each of its other transformations. In these ways the passage through life represents the process of identity gradually transforming from an almost unformed state to its full expression as it enters death; the whole being a justification of the presupposition that identity does not change. 45

The identity does not change. However, an interpretation of the state of the soul after death was illustrated with reference to a butterfly: after death the spirit goes to a place of healing [as in Burralku] "from which it emerges 'as a butterfly from a cocoon' – that is, in a state of pristine beauty." 46

This is a wonderful description of the future after-life for a Christian.

The late Guboo Ted Thomas, elder of the Yuin nation, and who died at Moruya in May 2002, had spoken about the re-burial of an Aboriginal skeleton that took place at the Wallaga Lake Aboriginal cemetery on the south coast of NSW. The reburial was conducted using a combination of traditional knowledge, contemporary improvisation and recorded ethnographic details to "know that our people's spirit is at rest and that Darama, the Great Spirit, is working" [Thomas 1978]. 47 Other funeral services have been conducted either at the graveside or in a church using the liturgy of the church in the formal way. Occasionally it is accompanied with wailing but certainly with many reminders of the person's life in the

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45 Rudder, p. 126.


way of song, poems and story. They are generally services of great dignity showing honour and respect to the deceased. Sometimes the funeral services are occasions to remind people of the impact of social upheaval, the Stolen Generations, substance abuse and so on. I also recall one service for a baby. The priest had been called but no discussions or arrangements were made until the elders arrived. The service - a celebration of this child - was uplifting in presentation, format and expectation of faith.

*Church structure mirroring life*

Rudder in his chapter on the stages that had developed in the worship services of the Arnhem Land Revival Church (ALRC) stated that they appeared structurally that through which the Yolŋu passed in traditional passages of life. He wrote:

The three phases of the [Arnhem Land Revival Church] meeting do not appear to have developed as a result of conscious choice, but...there is an almost exactly analogous structure in the qualities of these three stages and in the three major stages of transformation through which the Yolŋu progress in the passage through life.\(^8\)

The first stage is one of preparation with singing of choruses [a fairly free stage with general teaching], the second stage involves a more ‘worshipful’ approach with readings and teaching [a time of more serious teaching and being observed as to whether the person, particularly young men reacted to the teachings] and then the ‘experiential’ stage of being open to the Holy Spirit [the time of initiation and responsibility].

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\(^8\) Rudder, p. 73.
Arnhem Land Revival Church services in North Australia took place at night in the open air, were visual and participatory rather than verbal or read, sacramental (dedication, healing or spiritual strength through laying on of hands) and with an emphasis on healing. This style occurs in southern areas as well.

The Mogo building, which at present contains a worship area on the ground floor, opens out onto an area that can allow for meetings around a fire, in a circle configuration. On the property is also an open sided roofed area for other meetings. Though both of these could be modified as other buildings are established the concept is likely to remain. Some services have already been held outside in an area to the side of the present house when large numbers of people have been in attendance. Other meetings that are not religious meetings are often held in the open rather than inside even when accommodation is available: these include committee meetings, general gatherings, reconciliation gatherings and storytelling. The preferred sites for secular meetings are usually under trees in an open area.

*Church leadership and authority*

The Mogo people are following their own process in respect to church organisation but they have accepted a formal designation for their leader and a less formal liturgy on occasions though there is strong emphasis on the Sacraments and a worshipful approach to services. It was also made definite by the pastor that the Lord’s Supper or Eucharist is the time to worship God and that church services are for worship and not for entertainment. There is considerable emphasis on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The services,
when not following an Anglican format, generally begin with songs as people arrive, move in to teaching and Bible reading, then dance or songs, followed by prayer, a time of healing ‘under the power of the Holy Spirit’, then closing songs.

Rosendale, one of the Rainbow Spirit Theology authors, declared

I see the Aborigines churches dying, and they will continue to do so unless the Aborigine Christians are given the chance to be able to grow from “within” their cultural setting.  

Rosendale drew attention to St Paul’s approach saying that he ‘pointed’ people to God and Christ as Lord and Saviour then “What he taught and said was left to the Holy Spirit; then Paul moved on to other people and places”.

Struggling to find an Aboriginal identity as Christians

Djiniyini Gondarra, a Uniting Church minister, who felt Aboriginal Australians were struggling to maintain their identity, mentioned how the Western churches’ denominationalism and its therefore fragmenting of the message “created disunity among Aborigines and contributed to their powerlessness”.

On denominationalism, Aboriginal pastor, the late Ron Williams, quoted ‘one of the tribal fellas’ saying: “Well too many rivers no good, we want one river ...and we don’t want to be divided, we want to be together as

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49 G. Rosendale, Occasional Bulletin, Nungalinya College, Darwin, 1989, p. 4. [Bold print is Rosendale’s]


Bos also quoted Pastor Bill Hollingsworth:

Aboriginal Christians are sadly divided by the
denominational loyalties... It has weakened the stance of
Aboriginal people as Aboriginal Christians, torn between
positions of various denominations, which have spoken with
competing voices. 53

Gondarra believed that an Aboriginal theology would help achieve
solidarity amongst Aboriginal Christians. I assume that is because of its
power to unite and to provide ownership. However some division occurs
amongst Aboriginal Christians too as to what can be incorporated into
Christianity. It has also been noted by at least one writer that the
Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship was “an extreme Christian body
diametrically opposed to Aboriginal traditional beliefs” 54

In the same way that some Aboriginal churches were coming together and
Aboriginal people were expressing their attitudes to different
denominations, so the Maori also approached the Maori local church:

The living faith experiences which have been the starting
off points for this theology have been with groups of two or
three people to communities of a hundred people, or more,
coming together for particular occasions. Usually they have
belonged to different religious denominations, but they are
mainly Maori and 'family'. 55

54 R. Bos, ‘The Congress: A New Movement in Aboriginal Christianity’ in
The Cultured Pearl: Australian Readings in Cross-Cultural Theology and
Utrecht, 1988, p. 258.
56 M. Shirres, Ko Toou Manawa, Ko Taaku Manawa – Your Heart, My Heart, Accent
57 Shirres, Ko Toou, p. 11.
For the Maori, the overall importance was one of 'dialogue with' and 'unity in Faith and Love without uniformity and which fully respects Maori culture'. The emphasis is on family. So one would also find at Mogo, Aboriginal people with an association with the Aboriginal Evangelical fellowship, the Anglican Church, the Roman Catholic Church, and the Assembly of God. [Non-Aboriginal members have Anglican, Roman Catholic, Uniting Church and Pentecostal backgrounds]. In a colourful comment Kelly claimed

\[\text{differences can be respected, promoted, celebrated, rather than flattened into uniformity... Even a little insect can be important in the ecology of the billabong; without it, the setting sun would see no Brolgas dance!}^{37}\]

One aspect was that, in a local contextualised setting, control of the symbols was in the hands of the local culture and not in a super-ordinate power.

While Aboriginal people do not like the term 'ethnicity' applied to them they do believe in their own unique identity and that this identity can be based in Christ. In 1986 Gondarra wrote

\[\text{I believe that the Aboriginal Church should not always be a branch of Western churches and tradition, culture, style, structure and theology. It must be a Church that organizes herself in her own context in structure, tradition and theology which is our own.}^{38}\]

He went on to say that clergy are "called to plant Christ in this Aboriginal Australian 'fertile soil' rather than transplant our western forms of"

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Christianity.” Similar sentiments were expressed eight years later when, in 1994, Reita Mason quoted the Reverend Stephen Williams that the Christian church was still a ‘white fella’ church and “we really ought to be supporting them as they discover their own way of being Christian.”

Pastor Ron Williams said

> there is still that sense of controlling the Aboriginal people. ‘They’re our children, we can’t let them go.’ But children need to grow up, and we need to have a big vision. Aboriginal Christians are being led by God’s Holy Spirit, but too many Westerners still look at them as children and fail to recognise and encourage His leading among them.

Reflecting on the impact on Arnhem Land Aboriginal people, Djiniyini Gondarra said

> I am trying to contextualise Christianity into Yolŋu society. The white contextualisation of the gospel becomes a bondage to Yolŋu. The Lord opened my eyes to see that hidden context.

Referring to Ngukurr Aboriginals, Sandefur claimed that “Their concern to retain their Aboriginal identity is an important presupposition for them in contextualising the gospel”. This is one of the presuppositions that Mogo

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60 Church Scene, 764, Sept 2, 1994, p. 10.


62 Rudder, p. 76.

63 Sandefur, p. 3. [also see p. 273 and p. 358.]
Aboriginal people are bringing to their contextualisation of the Gospel.

Djiniyini Gondarra spoke of the process of awareness and distinction required of Aboriginal people in travelling the paths of Aboriginal spirituality and tradition and finding the way in a culturally relevant Christianity:

First, you look at yourself as a Christian. You live by faith in Christ: you’re a new person in Christ; you’re not bound by the law but by grace. Then you look at your old ceremony. You see elements that contradict the biblical gospel, and you are ready to give those up. But you also see elements where the gospel will speak, and you encourage that. You look for the way ceremonies can become new places of worship, places to communicate the gospel. We don’t go to a lot of ceremonies; many of them contradict our faith. We’re not happy to attend them – and we have to sacrifice, even suffer. But as an Aboriginal person I can see the places where our ceremonies can be baptised and given a new meaning. Some people think Aboriginal Christians don’t know how to do this, but we know how to go about it. 64

The Future

The areas where contextual application can be given priority are worship, hymns and songs, prayer, the scriptures, evangelistic terminology, preaching style, liturgy, dress and vestments, quotations and theology.

What is expressed by the people is the desire to build on what is already part of the culture.

A description of indigenous theology is that it is pastoral, apocalyptic, prophetic, and dynamic and presents a challenge to Aboriginal people that they are on a journey in which each person responded, evangelised and acted the gospel according to their culture being both the “subjects and

protagonists of our own development and evangelization.” There are nine challenges to determine if contextualisation is being met according to Cook - the challenge of identity, of being specific, being relevant, of linking past and present, of modernity, of communication, of intercultural dialogue, of inter-religious dialogue and of ecclesial identity. Encouraging contextualisation is not encouraging fragmentation but allows people to follow their unique pathway to Christianity while walking alongside, that is, being supportive.

Another approach to understanding contextualisation was that indigenous theology needed to be in the language of the people [much of language itself however has been lost in most southern Australian areas] including “culturally founded conceptual categories and/or imagery”; it must be procedurally appropriate; it applies itself to issues of importance to the people whether or not those issues are of importance to the wider church (however in order for changes in the socio-economic environment to occur and issues of disadvantage to be addressed the wider church must be made aware and must act); literary forms must be appropriate and may be in the form of story-telling; indigenous theology must come from within the community; it must be holistic, that is, involved in life of the people. These approaches strengthen the individual, build up the community, find a core in cultural history and ensure a conversation between cultures and religions. They provide for an authentic interpretation that is based on a

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65 G. Cook, pp. 140 143.
common truth and therefore is valid.

The idea that this process should come from outside should be rejected, that is, it should not be imposed. The response of 'vernacular theology' by Christians to life circumstances, reflecting 'biblically' on one's own situation and environment and helping to place people in the context of their daily lives is often done 'intuitively'. All Christians need to use their faith rather than protecting themselves from those issues. Mogo people are acting in the faith as they address disadvantage and injustice in their involvement in the community by addressing social issues.

Aboriginal theology according to Pattel-Gray and Trompf is characterized as:

A radical movement in theology, towards the creation of an indigenous theology, leaning heavily towards biblical justice. It is autonomous (post-western, post denominational), and emphasizes liberation, prophetic obedience, and action. It treasures traditional Aboriginal religion as the divine grounding for contemporary faith and identity.

Schreiter identifies areas of concern for indigenous theologies, for example: social concerns, issues of identity, traditional relationships and finding biblical correlations,

the need to reconstruct an identity and dignity that has been denied or considered inferior....

maintaining some semblance of traditional family connection and ritual in the midst of dislocation....

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69 Pattel-Gray and Trompf, p. 176.


finding echoes in the biblical witness in order to understand the struggle they are engaged in or to find direction for the future.\textsuperscript{72}

no local theology without the larger church, that concrete community of Christians, united through word and sacrament in the one Lord.\textsuperscript{73}

These issues are the ones for which the Mogo people are seeking a response: identity, strengthening family and basking their church and community structure on family, interpreting the scriptures in relation to Aboriginal experience and recently, acting in partnership with the wider church, particularly the Anglican Church.

Gondarra's three marks of Aboriginal theology indicate an overall consistency between northern and southern Aboriginal people:

(a) Biblical. I believe the Bible is the word of God and the Holy Spirit speaks to our people through the scripture;
(b) Spiritual. God is Spirit and Aboriginal Christians will struggle to put into Aboriginal language this spirituality and speak about God correctly. Our people have always been a deeply spiritual people.
(c) Prophetic, one that can challenge our culture; what in our culture needs to be kept and built up in Christian faith, and what part of our culture needs to be condemned and done away by the gospel of Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{74}

Gondarra emphasized that Aboriginal Christians all hold fast to the authority and inspiration of the Holy Scriptures and to basic holistic - evangelical convictions such as: the personality, love and justice of our sovereign God; the uniqueness and finality of Jesus Christ; the

\textsuperscript{72} Schreiter, 1985, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{73} Schreiter, 1985, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{74} D. Thompson, 'Aboriginal Christianity in the North', Nelen Yabu, 32, 1987, p. 32.
These aspects are asserted by the Mogo people: they are firm about these statements also and these presuppositions of faith that Gondarra has mentioned are actively used in the contextualising of their Christianity. A further consideration is one given by many Aboriginal Christians and mentioned by the Reverend Cedric Jacobs when asked about the important contribution of Aboriginal Christianity to Australia – he replied without qualification that it was to redirect the church to the unembellished message of Christ.\(^{76}\)

The urgency to implement contextualisation was apparent in Rainbow Spirit Theology and was highlighted by Rosendale’s words: “Behind the tragedy of many Aboriginal communities ... lies a deep spiritual crisis”.\(^{77}\) Therefore I refer here back to the Introduction (page 14) and particularly to the comments of the pastor regarding the crisis within the people of the shire and in the southern areas studied. Aboriginal people have a sense of the spiritual and of the presence of the divine and there is a danger in keeping God in a Western image by the trappings of the Western Christianity. The presentation of the Western Christian message in such a way that it appears to be the only valid message epitomizes the model of imposition. A perceptive and perhaps damning analysis was that “Our

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\(^{75}\) Gondarra, 1986, pp. 20 – 21.


paternalism is not only a paternalism toward other peoples. It is also a paternalism towards God." 78 The risk in making God conform to the institution and its accoutrements may, in the process, close out His mystery. 79 Very few people, I suspect, would consider that this is what a paternalistic attitude within religion implies.

One of the reasons for providing so many quotations and comments from various sources is to underline that it seems to have taken an unreasonable amount of time to achieve a level of understanding that allows Aboriginal people to worship God and have ownership of the gospel in an Aboriginal way and to restate the needs of Aboriginal Christians.

As expressed by Lalara Gayangwa on Groote Eylandt:

We don't need people who will do things for us, but who will stand beside us and empower us to do things for ourselves. 80

Perhaps the final messages should come from two Aboriginal Christians who stressed the patience, the stillness and the listening that is so much a part of Aboriginal culture, as an important part of the expression of Aboriginal Christianity. Both indicate a willingness to allow God to enter and an openness to Him. The first is from Kevin Buwathay, who commented:

Jesus is the Tree of Life for us! We are like the seeds. We cannot jump into action too quickly in our Christian life.

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79 Brady, 1988, p. 90.

Like the cycad seed in the sun and then in the water, we need to wait on God's time to act.  

The second is from Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, and is one of the most deeply moving and beautifully descriptive passages concerning waiting on God and being open to God's presence:

Quiet listening and stillness – *dadirri* – renews us and makes us whole. There is no need to reflect too much and to do a lot of thinking. It is just being aware ... My people today, recognize and experience in this [Nature's] quietness, the great Life-Giving Spirit, the Father of us all. It is easy for me to experience God's presence. When I am out hunting, when I am in the bush, among the trees, on a hill or by a billabong, these are the times when I can simply be in God's presence ... The word of God finds a home here [in *dadirri*]. Jesus renews and enriches our culture. He gently stirs our inner stillness... We wait on God, too. His time is the right time. We wait for him to make his Word clear to us. We don't worry. We know that in time and in the spirit of *dadirri* (that deep listening and quiet stillness) his way will be made clear. We are River people. We cannot hurry the river. We have to move with its current and understand its ways. We hope that the people of Australia will wait. Not so much waiting for us -- to catch up -- but waiting with us, as we find our own pace in this world.  

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CHAPTER 8

CONTEXT – THE HISTORY OUTSIDE OF AUSTRALIA

All of these descriptions in the last three chapters - *Encounter*, *Expectations* and *Finding the Way* - related to Australian Aboriginal experience and some Maori experience. I would like to refer now to other experiences of Indigenous Christians in overseas countries as they sought to contextualise the Gospel and show relevance in their situations. In many ways these parallel the experiences that have happened to Australian Indigenous people.

*Experiences of sharing the faith*

Referring to the question of African identity, Bediako wrote not on the Africanisation or indigenisation of the Christian faith and Gospel but how African Christianity, employing Christian tools, might set about mending the torn fabric of African identity and hopefully point a way towards the emergence of a fuller and unfettered African humanity and personality.¹

Having full ownership of the Christian faith, the African people hoped to achieve an empowerment and a healing of African society using their faith in practice. Aboriginal Christianity resonates to the same beat and, as my listening to the local Aboriginal Christians indicated and as mentioned in the preceding chapters, similar distinctions are made. On the

interrelationship between each society over time and its response to the Gospel, Bediao claimed that the process develops along a line which evolves and that "universality, translatability, incarnation and indigeneity belong in a continuum and are integral to the warp and woof of the Christian religion." The emphasis here is on the message of the Gospel being the one message that can be received from persons of another culture, taken by the receiving culture and born anew being made truly of that culture. Out of this is woven a true canvas of great strength and colour. It is the message that is the same, not the carrier or the context.

The differing expectations that African Americans had of the church and the issues that were relevant to them rather than those of other Americans has been described as:

White theologians built logical systems; black folk told tales. Whites debated the validity of infant baptism or the issue of predestination and free will; blacks recited biblical stories about God leading the Israelites from Egyptian bondage...
White theologians argued about the general status of religious assertions in view of the development of science generally and Darwin's Origin of Species in particular; blacks were more concerned about their status in American society and its relation to the biblical claim that Jesus came to set the captives free. White thought on the Christian view of salvation was largely "spiritual" and sometimes "rational", but usually separated from the concrete struggle of freedom in this world. Black thought was largely eschatological and never abstract, but usually related to their struggle against earthly oppression.³

African American theology related to life as it was lived. Academic degrees were not emphasised in indigenous context, rather teaching was

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² Bediao, p. 123.
embedded in the oral system of story-telling and experience. Therefore there was a re-working of the telling of the information over a period of time so that history was understood both as past experience and present need. An emphasis on doctrinal issues could detract from an emphasis on Christian action in the present, so that doctrinal issues could take precedence over the precepts of Christ which honour God and care of one’s neighbours. The African-American people concentrated on the conditions of the here and now of an oppressed people and the message of the Gospel that was read was one of freedom and respect. These are the praxis, anthropological and synthetic models of contextualisation. The Western approach to the message has been classed as “too mental, abstract, juridical”.

Koyama also wrote of this in relation to Third World theology when he quoted from the “Ministry in Context. The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund (1970-1977):

Authentic contextualization is always prophetic, arising always out of a genuine encounter between God’s Word and his world, and moves toward the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment (p.20).

Koyama identified the starting point for Third World theology as beginning “by raising issues, not by digesting Augustine, Barth and Rahner.”

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6 Koyama, p. 3.
Indigenous church and the definition of autonomy has been described as meaning its own ordained leadership and ministry, financial independence and evangelism, that is, the preaching of the gospel. Koyama warned that “enthusiasm for one’s own contribution can become a polite religious imperialism”. That is, the contribution can be imposition.

A number of metaphors have been used in relation to contextualising the Gospel such as the peeling of the husk of culture and leaving the kernel and the blowing away of the coat of culture and imposing one’s own coat which destroys dignity, particularly in the case of the model of imposition. A person may never be able to fully understand the message of the text because it is always veiled by another’s context until the message is contextualised. That is, the message needs to be de-contextualised first.

In one article Kraft affirmed that when the Gospel was interpreted in a different culture or generation

the essential message will be the same. The formulation of that message and the relative prominence of many of the issues addressed will, however, differ from culture to culture.

This implied that the foci of contextualisation were essentially those addressing relevance and change, and finding the manifestation of God in the culture.

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7 Koyama, p. 74. Here Koyama refers to the work of Hodges, Nida and Sundkler

8 Koyama, p. 198.

Bevans reflected on a number of practices, which raised questions concerning their relevance in the community in Africa:

How can the important symbol of baptism express cleansing inclusion when, in the Masai culture of Africa, pouring water over a woman’s head is a ritual cursing her to barrenness? Christianity’s insistence on monogamy and condemnation of polygamy ignores an important structure for women’s security in African societries where women outnumber men and kinship and obligations differ significantly from those of Europe.¹⁰

Highlighting that not all symbols are experienced successfully in other cultural contexts, Schreiter also described how the use of bread in countries without cereals products became magical, and the effects of the practice of celibacy among the clergy in cultures where this action was tantamount to cursing one’s parents - because it removed the possibility of support in old age - and how refusing to allow polygamy where it was a support mechanism, an economic security for women in rural Africa, caused significant social, personal and societal dysfunction. As a result, a theology, which presented these outcomes and symbols as vital, did not address context, procedure and history.¹¹ Awareness of the inadequacies of western culture for bringing the Gospel to people of other cultural backgrounds were expressed in the words that:

western culture has been a very limited ‘earthen vessel’ to contain the gospel and that genuine cross-cultural mission involves a deeper task of alternative cultural incarnation, which must also include critical reflection on assumptions about the relationship

¹¹ Schreiter, pp. 2 – 3.
between western culture and the gospel.  

The praxis and anthropological models affirm that Christian theology and its concomitant action must emanate from the culture, acknowledging that God is already in that culture. The response to the Gospel from that culture was particular because the Gospel was only met in each culture by the individual and the community. As well, the way the culture is impacted on depends on the way the individual and the community interpret that Gospel. While culture defines humanity it is also that within which God and humanity meet. Keeping the faith within one's own "minds and hearts for our own sacred story" is important because only from there can come the owned sacred story and one's own expression and practice of the faith within one's own environment. This allows worship to be authentic.

Perhaps a simplified answer to contextualisation is that it meant expressing "the Christian faith in new ways which are meaningful in the local context, respectful of culture, and relevant to the local people." The working definition for contextualisation and contextualised theology

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of the Theological Education Fund was that it was to be a progressive theology based on the capacity to respond meaningfully to the Gospel within the framework of one's own situation.\textsuperscript{17}

Therefore requirements listed by the Theological Education Fund in order to obtain support were

1. There is evidence of contextualization in \textit{mission},
2. There is evidence of contextualization in \textit{theological approach},
3. There is evidence of contextualization in \textit{educational method},
4. There is evidence of contextualization in \textit{structure} (pp 20\textsuperscript{f})\textsuperscript{18}

Bowe described the reaction of Filipino people to Jesus' death and resurrection. To Filipinos Jesus’ death was ultimate shame and the resurrection was restoration of honour. Following a praxis model, to lift up the “dignity of humiliated people is to give the resurrection intelligibility”\textsuperscript{19} as “they encounter God’s vindication of Jesus in terms familiar to their own struggle for life”: such contextualisation affirms the people.\textsuperscript{20}

McGavran in his statement “\textit{what changes in our} embodied Christianity ought we to make so that (while remaining truly Christianity) it becomes

\textsuperscript{17} B. C. F. Fleming, \textit{Contextualisation of Theology An Evangelical Assessment}, William Carey Library, Pasadena, 1980, p. 36.

\textsuperscript{18} Koyama, p. 21.

\textsuperscript{19} B. Bowe, ‘Reading the Bible through Filipino Eyes’, \textit{Missiology: An International Review}, vol. xxvi, no. 3, July 1998, \& J de Mesa, “Resurrection in the Filipino Context”, \textit{In Solidarity with Culture: Studies in Theological Re-Rooting} Maryhill School of Theology Quezon City, Philippines 1987, pp. 102 – 146 on p. 131]

\textsuperscript{20} Bowe, p. 349.
their embodied Christianity?" implies that the changes come from outside the culture of the people to whom the Gospel is being preached and not from within the culture using the indigenous people - contrary to the flowering of a truly indigenous seed.²¹ In this comment there appears little place for indigenous agency.

Hermeneutics and the Gospel

The place of hermeneutics, its value to the community and the practice that this interpretation affects in the Christian community is referred to by Hiebert quoting Kraus: "The authentic community is the hermeneutical community. It determines the actual enculturated meaning of Scripture."²² Factors affecting a person's understanding of the gospel included attitude to the gospel, culture and denominational background and the culturally responsive interpretation of the gospel message.²³ How this interpretation or hermeneutic influenced the response in the culture, and the reciprocal response of the culture on the interpretation, identified the truth or lack of truth in the Christology. That is, the interpretation must be based firmly and faithfully on the Gospel however "diverse ways of access are possible, and ... each one reveals an aspect of the landscape. A text does not have a

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single door nor a single key."²⁴

Kraft defined the contextual model as based on dialogue between the scriptures and the culture with "the receptor's frame of reference as the context for communication".²⁵ His interpretation was that the message of the Bible was more on purpose and action than form.

Coe provided an almost motto-like statement "Faithful to the text, relevant to the context".²⁶ Brownson followed similarly cautioning that the text had to be read, interpreted and shared in such a way that it was faithful to the text and to the context in its various embodiments.²⁷ A missional hermeneutic includes the awareness that the reality of God is not exhausted by any particular culture's way of naming and worshiping God and it involves the sanctification of each cultural setting so that it may offer a fuller and more perfect praise to God.²⁸

What changes have happened then? There are similar thoughts to those of Pope John Paul II in an Apology to Native Congregations –

United Church of Canada General Council August 15, 1986 -


²⁸ Brownson, pp. 237 – 238.
which stated

Long before my people journeyed to this land your people were here, and you received from your elders an understanding of creation, and of the Mystery that surrounds us all that was deep, and rich and to be treasured. We did not hear you when you shared your vision.

In our zeal to tell you of the good news of Jesus Christ we were closed to the value of your spirituality. We confused western ways and culture with the depth and breadth and length and height of the gospel of Christ. We imposed our civilization as a condition of accepting the Gospel. We tried to make you like us and in so doing we helped to destroy the vision that made you what you were.

As a result you, and we, are poorer and the image of the Creator in us is twisted, blurred and we are not what we are meant by God to be. We ask you to forgive us and we ask you to walk with us in the spirit of Christ so that our peoples may be blessed and God’s creation healed. 29

I would underline the phrase “not what we are meant by God to be”. It appears that some leaders proclaim these words though references to them amongst other clergy are rarely apparent apart from a handful of concerned people. I would like, though, to reflect on the words “walk with us”. The words “walk with us” can appear to be patronising and triumphalist, that is, it claims that ‘we’ have the right way, knowledge, structure and so on, so follow us, and we will show you the way. The idea of indigenous agency is again hidden. I propose the use of the words “that we may walk together” – in which there is no sense of one group being the leader or superior to any other and that each might learn from the other.

John Kadiba, a Papuan theologian, addressed the processes of contextualisation by suggesting that the important agents are the Holy

Spirit which is already present in the community and the local people who develop theologies that are relevant. One of the most important aspects of this development is trust: without trust there will not be freedom to be culturally relevant and appropriate nor will the indigenous identity within Christianity be free and accepted within the Christian body. Importantly each church is part of the universal Christian faith as related by the Reverend Maya of the Cameroons:

From this sacred charter in the Book [Genesis], his own people and church receive their recognition. They are no longer a dry little branch, 'independent' and cut-off. They belong to the original tree of Life, being grafted into it and receiving its reviving sap.

The statement here implies one not of division or disunity but one of diversity in unity.

*The Gospel and liberation theology*

In stating "religious conservatism and white racism are often two sides of the same reality," Cone forcefully stressed that Jesus must be seen as liberator of the oppressed. The community of Christians must act on Christ’s message to the poor and suffering, argued Cone, who called anything less than that heretical.

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32 J. H. Cone, 1975, p. 50.

The violent South American experience and the movement to Liberation Theology from about 1968 has perhaps been the most dramatic and as a stand against inhuman regimes has impressed on those Christians willing to serve fellow human beings, to the point of their own death, the example that Christ demands. South American experiences have also pressed home the need for Christians to adopt a praxis approach to seek respect, equity, and freedom for others.

Referring to the African-American theology Fleming looked at ‘blackness’ and liberation theology and using a Mbiti quote portrayed a theology, not joyful and redeemed, but:

full of sorrow, bitterness, anger and hatred ... asking for what black Americans should have had from the start freedom, justice, a fair share in the riches of their country, equal opportunities in social, economic and political life.\(^{24}\)

These are the same benefits for which the Aboriginal people are calling.

This politicized theology based on social injustice was often referred to particularly at funerals. Some eulogies given on the death of Australian Aboriginal people have referred to the Stolen Generations, the influence of alcohol and drugs and the general disadvantage and impoverishment of the Aboriginal community. However those services, which I have attended and at which a politicised theology was expressed were not so much angry and bitter but expressing forcefully a statement of fact that they felt needed to be addressed. A contextualised theology is often a theology of

\(^{24}\) J. H. Cone, 1975, p. 28.
liberation as well as a culturally appropriate expression of Christian faith and belief.
CHAPTER 9

CHURCH AND CHANGE

Missionaries and many lay Christian people, both past and present, have not seen God as already existent in the indigenous cultures that they have encountered and to whom they have sought to introduce the Christian faith. I have mentioned earlier the response from some interviewees to the idea that God was already in the Indigenous culture. Kraft also quoted the words of a Liberian man:

> When missionaries first came to my country, they spoke of the God who created the world as if he were a different God from the one we already knew about. We listened and compared what we heard and read in the Bible about this God and discovered that he is the very same God we had always known about. We received many new insights from the missionaries and especially we heard that we could come to know God personally through Jesus Christ. But everyone except the missionaries realized that your God is the same as our God. In other words, our God had brought the missionaries to add to our understanding and commitment.¹

In this passage appears a recognition that the God of the missionaries was already known although by another name. Is this also a wish to align the traditional spirituality to that which is new as a means of stamping the old with something thought to be valuable? Or is it a genuine contextualisation of the new to claim it with full ownership assuming that the traditional was

¹ Kraft, 1979, p 21
the ground in which the new was rooted? This passage implies that the creation stories and those of the fall of mankind, on taboos and prohibitions and a responsibility to creation, follow similar paths. Whilst the speaker acknowledged the exposition of the missionaries and certainly the introduction to Jesus Christ, the passage indicates a lack of understanding on the part of the missionaries: “everyone except the missionaries” is a telling comment on the limited view of the missionaries and the limiting construct placed on God - this God, the one the missionaries speak of is not the same God of which the Liberian man speaks. The missionaries could not see God in the Liberian situation, the relationship with God, the expectations of God’s role in the universe and mankind’s response are the same though sometimes clothed differently. The statement “our God had brought the missionaries” proclaims an ownership of the relationship with God and that God was responding to the needs of their own people. Mogo Christians too hold the belief that God was always in Aboriginal culture and that Aboriginal culture is based on godly principles. This presupposition is one that is part of the contextualisation process.

This many-faceted approach to the Gospel, which comes from having different cultures approach the Gospel, and through the process of finding what is relevant to them in the Gospel and applying it to their situation, could achieve a greater understanding of God.²

Rene Padilla reflected on the idea that one theology is sufficient for the whole world or, as it was mentioned to me by people discussing the need for an Aboriginal Theology, “but there is only one Christianity”. In other words theology must be the same for all people. This approach then limits the Biblical message to that of the dominant culture or the missionaries’ interpretation. Such an approach can keep Third World churches dependent on Western Church thought patterns. This may have developed from fear of unorthodox practices and doctrinal changes but in the process “cut off at the roots any creative reflection that goes deep into native cultures.”

It also precludes change.

In researching the interpretations of the Maori as to what was indigenous church, Michael Shirres was told a story:

The story is told of Tawhaki, one of the great characters of Maori mythology, that one day he decided to climb up to the heavens with his brother. To enable them to do that their grandmother showed them a vine hanging down from heaven, but clearly warned them not to climb by the vine that was hanging loosely, but by the vine which was firmly tied down to the earth. Tawhaki’s brother, in a hurry, tried to climb by the vine hanging loosely. When he had got so far, the winds seized him and he was blown from side to side right across the heavens till he lost hold of the vine, fell down to earth and was killed. A church, or a theology, that is not tied down to the earth, that is not inculturated, is like that.

The loosely hanging vine, while leading to the goal, that is, heaven, is not

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1 Padilla, p. 299

anchored in the truth of the Gospel as it is not embedded in the culture. The link is there but it is not solid or safe and by climbing the loose vine there is a risk of failure, even death. If the vine is firmly anchored to the earth, that is, the theology is grown out of the culture, then the message, the understanding and the practice of the adherents will be nurtured and grow and will truly speak to the people. By rushing in to deliver the message, to convert people, without due thought, leads to disaster. The message becomes a weak and incomplete version or may even become meaningless.

A fear of loss of control over interpretation - and perhaps loss of ownership of the Gospel message - which insists on uniformity, limits the Gospel. An acceptance of diversity that opens the Gospel to expression in a variety of cultures also opens people from many cultures to the fullness of the message – in fact, it gives the Gospel freedom and in that freedom it can fly.

In their work on Gospel and Culture, Hunsberger and Van Gelder raised the question of churches seeking out their own identity and how they related to culture.\(^5\) This would, they determined, encourage a deep stirring of needs, direction and a credo irrespective of the ground of being in which individuals were immersed. Hunsberger expressed concern that raising mission awareness often became a matter of reinforcing existing mission “logistic superstructures”\(^6\). The approach often used by missionaries did not “build solidarity and offer salvation” but rather indicated “paternalism and

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patronage”.

In the foreword to Christianity in Culture, Ramm remarked that all people were affected, both internally and externally, by the environment in which they lived therefore the church needed to relate the Gospel to that culture being aware that this does not necessarily relativize Scripture but acknowledges the influence of culture on authors and those to whom the message is given.⁸

One term devised for cross-cultural engagement was “cultural acuity” which was described as an active and critiqued awareness of one’s own culture and a willingness to enter into the world of an other.⁹ Explaining that, by acting in this way and being prepared to put aside all the baggage and trappings of one’s own theology, casting away any unnecessary clothing and thus re-incarnating one’s theology, there would be a positive outcome leading to a revived evangelism: that is, expressing the Christian message and reaching out to others with a willingness to allow the message to be clothed in another’s culture.¹⁰ This identifies a two-way benefit that is also suggested by Aboriginal Christians. But it also suggests a benefit to the person who re-incarnates personal faith by gaining a greater understanding of the message for their own faith by this stripping of it as far as possible of his or

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⁹ Scechtner, p. 160.

¹⁰ Scechtner, p. 160 - 161.
her own culture, addressing the message in its bare essentials and re-
clothing it in a considered manner.

Being open to the experience of change means an awareness of what is vital
and necessary and "a greater appreciation of the distinction between what is
time-conditioned and able to be dispensed with and what is enduring and
essential." 11

One way do this is by listening as is often said by Aboriginal Christians.
Although the following reference was to ecumenical discussion it applies
equally to contextual matters in that Christians should be

listening to Christians in situations different from ours –
...so that by reflecting together we can both see what are
the limiting factors in our separate visions and come
through such exchange to closer approximation of the
real vision. 12

Following the way of Christ and not the way of ethnocentrism leads to a
different relationship because when "ethnocentrism becomes wholly
identified with the gospel, a pattern of enslavement ensues." 13 However
when challenged by change one author observed that generally Christians
react in two ways: either, resolutely holding on to what is usual and known
and familiar or giving it all up. 14 To Mayers

11 J. Thornhill, 'The Christian Vision of John Bede Polding and its Intimations of
Concern for the Establishing of an Authentic Local Church', Australasian
Catholic Record, 54, 10, 1977, p. 6.

12 Koyama, p. 171.

13 M. Mayers, Christianity confronts Culture. A Strategy for Crosscultural Evangelism,

14 Mayers, p. xiii.
Biblical Christianity is a dynamic process born in a changing setting and since it introduces change in the life of individuals and society, it resists being bound by the narrow ethnocentrism...and restricting legalism that often characterize the established church.  

Failure to act on this could indicate a protectionist attitude, a policy based on fear of change and a sense of need for self-preservation. There is also a need to accept that no one group has a full understanding of God. Schillebeeckx acknowledged that neither individually nor collectively do theologians have a full grasp of the Christian belief but only see in part. As Theology is bounded by the context from which each person perceives and receives it.

One facet of contextualisation was seen as Christians reaching out on the basis of reconciliation: as for example in the work of Knapp who highlighted incarnational thinking: the reaching out into the world away from "personal salvation towards the accomplishment of reconciliation, humanization, and more recently, liberation, in the general historical process." As a factor in contextualisation, incarnational thinking performs a self-propagation action. When reaching out into the world in acts of reconciliation instead of concern for personal salvation and combining

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15 Mayer, p. xii. (italics are Mayer’s)


17 Fleming, p. 40.
this view with the thought that just as Christ represented
God in the world after his incarnation, so Christians
incarnate God in today’s world, a radical change from
evangelical missiology and theology is effected.¹⁸

Thus there would be a departure from the prevalent missiology and the birth
of an incarnated theology.

Acknowledging that societies change over time Kraft quoted Monica
Wilson (1971:5):

I ideas are not necessarily untrue because they have been
shaped by the society in which they emerge. What is
false is to suppose they can escape reformulation as
societies change [and] Christ specifically taught
that his revelation was not complete... Jn 16:12-13. ¹⁵

At Australia’s first ‘Religion and Cultural Diversity Conference’ Melbourne
July 28-30, 1997, Anglican Bishop, the Right Reverend David Silk gave a
paper titled “Leicester lessons” in which he highlighted dialogue and
worship saying: “dialogue begins when people, not ideologies, meet each
other”, it requires listening and “sharing in the worship and prayer of the
other” for

In worship we may draw, by different yet adjacent wells,
from a single water table of spirituality. In worship we
may tap into the spiritual resources of the indigenous
peoples and thus be the ‘soul’ of Australia. ²⁰

¹⁸ Fleming, p. 40.

¹⁹ Kraft, 1979, p. 11.


²¹ Church Scene, vol. 5, no. 8, Aug 8, 1997, p. 11.
The emphasis is on listening and performing according to one’s culture.

At the same conference Dr John Bodycomb proclaimed “Good religion fosters inclusiveness, justice, equity and well-being for all”.21 Many alienated, disadvantaged and indigenous people would be helped if this were the case.

Other attitudes too need to be addressed so that words such as these by Eunice Makundika would not be written:

Black priests in the Anglican church in Zimbabwe have alleged that they are not allowed to baptize, marry or bury white parishioners... The Dean, Mutamangira, said “We have very capable black priests in the country, but appointments to the key positions are rare,” he told FNI, adding that he had been a victim of the segregation in the church after suggesting the use of traditional African musical instruments in church services. Some parishes had become the ‘preserve of whites’...

Another priest, Godfrey Tawonezvi, told a weekly newspaper that he had ministered at one parish for three years, “but I never baptized a white child, married white couples or buried any white person”. He added that whenever the white rector was not available, white parents would hire white priests from other parishes...

Tawonezvi said that for a baptism a black parent had asked for a hymn in Shona, the language spoken by most Zimbabweans, but the white rector refused, saying it was not his usual practice. Another priest, Josaphat Muzami, said he had attended a church wedding in a wealthy suburb of Harare and had been forced to move to a back row in the church. He said that “as a priest I had to attend the wedding, and took one of the front seats. When I did this, my senior priest, who was white, then kindly told me that the wedding couple, who were also white, did not want a black face to appear on their video”.22

In this statement are a number of issues. One is the discrimination against indigenous priests that appears to be racist in origin – not being permitted

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22 Market-Place, Dec 1999, p. 11.
to baptise, marry or bury non-indigenous people, not being able to sit where they wish or appear in photographs of non-indigenous people and not being offered higher appointment. Where does the church see Christ in this? The utter humiliation that must be felt by indigenous clergy when a ‘white’ priest is brought in to minister to ‘white’ people. Here is the practice of a religion whose adherents are exclusive, isolationist, and do not appear to put in to practice the servant-hood of Christ. There are so many actions within this passage that are antithetical to Christianity yet they are interpreted by non-indigenous people as a Christian response. The Church appears to be exclusivist yet sends out missionaries all over the world to many different cultures to introduce Christ. Who or what are they introducing?

While this exclusivity might not be the case in Australia, Anglican Bishop John Reid believes that the “Anglican church is mono-cultural in the midst of a multicultural nation, and this implies the need for a very significant change”²³ Farran felt that this particular denomination, as well others might be, is isolationist because church congregations tended to be places where people retreated from the general socio-economic environment rather than search for other ways of doing things or affecting the environment.²⁴

All of these statements act as a reminder as to where discussions should start: it was not often that people looked to the connections and similarities between themselves and others which could enhance involvement with each

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other but rather they looked to the negativities and thus created discomfort, distrust even hatred. Yet “It is our union with Christ that makes all ground holy”.  

Just as authors such as Avis spoke of creative tension, Pattenden too wrote of the development of contextual theologies indicating the ‘tensions between Gospel and culture’.  

To pursue this point – if Christianity is meant to, and does, change people, then followers should expect that there would be a changing, dynamic process which would reflect this. In fact all Christianity should be a moving, on-going process reflecting the action within the individual and the community. If the only movement that is applauded is that which maintains or imitates the status quo then the outcome would be a stultified, ethnocentric monolith with little credibility as an organization concerned for the world. While past and tradition are present for reflection, and against which an interpretation can be assessed, the presence of a moving, active, power of the Holy Spirit, working in people must indicate a need for a fluid, malleable process.

God’s truth cannot be corrupted though the method of communication with which an individual meets with God, uniquely, validly, independently may be different. That communication would be culturally sensitive, guided by the Holy Spirit and based on Biblical knowledge, and in this way people will be affirmed to come together and minister in their own way to each

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other and to enrich the whole. In so far as the institutional life of the church is concerned, this should be seen as an organisational structure which provides a service to the whole structure but which should not restrict the organisation, only influence it.

McCoy querying the response of the church to mission concluded

our practice of evangelism is too individualistic, our approach to mission too compartmentalised, our understanding of faith too rationalist, our liturgy too West European, our leadership patterns too hierarchical and status-conscious, our vision of the church too rigid, conformist and competitive.25

To address this, the people of Mogo are attempting to undertake a method of proclaiming the gospel in a community based manner true to their cultural pattern, sharing the process as people are able. The Anglican Archbishop's Report described it another way:

This is not apartheid, since fellowship and communion continue within the one body, but the co-existence of separate cultural congregations provides security for their members to grow in a Christian context which is not alien to them. At the same time other congregations need to recognise the cultural diversity existing between their members and make provision for it in worship, teaching, pastoral care and government.26

A meeting c.1965 between Rt Rev C Warren, Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn with the late Mr Charles Perkins, then Manager of the Aboriginal


Foundation, was recorded with Mr Perkins saying:

He contended that Aborigines feel that the Churches are interested only in their souls and not their bodies... Many clergy give the impression of having too many other things to do to be able to give their time to Aborigines.  

Today too Aboriginal Christians are asking for support from the churches as they seek answers and practical ways to help their own people address issues of disadvantage and disempowerment. The desire of Aboriginal people for an Aboriginal Church also means the need for the Churches to support and encourage an Aboriginal approach to Christianity. Included in this should be an awareness, for example, that Anglican services “are too formal and their language too difficult to satisfy the spiritual needs of Aborigines”. This comment is one that was mentioned to me on a number of occasions as a concern of contemporary Christians.

If “theology of the future is the theology of where Christians are” as Kwame Bediako has said what role are Australian Christians taking in the development of an outward-looking, cross-cultural understanding of the Christian message and Christian responsibility in society? Where then does the movement for Aboriginal churches lie in this? For some Western Christians, the changing trends have led to an identity crisis for those who

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31 Lawton, p. 47.
see themselves as the “locus of mission”. The need to ‘take over’ must be addressed. The need to address the core values of Jesus and Christianity, freeing them from ‘dominating theological constructs’ and from the suprastructure of the Churches’ control of the message were identified by some writers. Not seeing God as already existent in a pre-missionised culture was, and still is, a factor affecting the understanding by non-indigenous people.

Another aspect of spreading the Gospel where change needs to be considered was mentioned by Ebert as he reflected on the Early Church practice of St Paul. Ebert approached the establishment of indigenous churches in what he saw as Paul’s way: by only being in one place for a short time before Paul left meant the church developed as it would naturally for that area and therefore as appropriate to that culture. Newbigin also argues that approach drawing reference from St Paul who

as soon as there was an established congregation of Christian believers, he chose from among them elders, laid his hands on them, entrusted to them the care of the church, and left.

In referring to contextualisation, Newbigin believed that true contextualisation gave pre-eminence to the gospel, giving it the freedom and right to

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32 Abraham, 1990, p. 27.


34 Newbigin, 1989, pp. 146 - 147.
permeate the culture using the tools of thought of that culture. In many communities people needed to see God reflected in that community, in the reality of their lives particularly among those who were dispossessed, oppressed, disenfranchised so that these people so often on the edges of society were seen “as the true center”. This is very much part of the Mogo approach and is seen to be relevant to their healing and providing of support for their people. Galatians 3:28, is a passage which is quoted often in relation to difference and therefore in the need for contextuality:

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.

Uniting Church minister, Dr J Brown wrote that to force uniformity on a diversity of cultures to make them like the Anglo-Saxon church was “to fracture the Body of Christ”.

Church and Culture

In their discussion on conflict and integration McKay and Lewins examined the use of centrifugal and centripetal goals. Dominant groups can force

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36 Newbigin, p. 152.

37 Bevans, p. 92.


compartmentalization on subordinates by using centrifugal goals and assimilation when using centripetal goals. In the first of these strategies when the dominant group underpins pluralism or the subordinate group concedes, then the process is ‘integrative’. In the second of these strategies the result can also be integrative. A struggle results when the subordinates wish to be autonomous but must assimilate or when access, or acceptance, is denied in a variety of ways. Opposition to the establishment of an Aboriginal Church was expressed vocally and also in subtle ways by lack of support, tardy support, withdrawal of financial help and unhelpful comments.\(^4\)

Lesslie Newbigin noted that in England, and in other places with people of an Anglo-Celtic background, “evangelical Christianity can easily slip, can become centred in me and my need of salvation, and not...in the glory of God” and it can become a private matter.\(^5\) Negative or with-holding statements also occur in such comments as that the church at Mogo needed to follow a particular format for the sake of the ‘white’ attendees, or that there is accountability – in this sense, referring to checking money.\(^6\)

In one article Randerson expressed concern that the church was preoccupied with its own life and, in so doing, its encounter with the world was damaged.

\(^4\) personal communication


\(^6\) Interview: Tape Two.

and in fact might not even occur.\textsuperscript{34} This observation has been made by Aboriginal Christians - that the expression of Christianity is not always obvious. And Martin Boyd in \textit{Nuns in Jeopardy} commented

\begin{quote}
‘Look at all the water’, he said, ‘full of darting phosphorescent light. The Spirit has been compared to fire, but I think that it has been compared to water too. The Church now seems to me like someone guarding an antiquated and crumbling aqueduct, through which a little stagnant fluid trickles, while the great bulk of water rushes wildly about the land, eroding of the aqueduct still affirms that he possesses the only existing water supply, and he won’t change his opinion, even if the flood washes away his aqueduct’.\textsuperscript{35}
\end{quote}

Does this indicate a protectionist attitude, a sense of need for self-preservation or a policy based on fear of change?

\textit{Style/worship}

With reference to Maori people belonging to Pakeha congregations, Mol stated that few Maori were comfortable in the 1960s and that was still apparent in the 1980s: Maori clergymen and people who worked amongst Maoris believed it was best to have separate services though it was not preferred particularly by the Roman Catholic church.\textsuperscript{46}

The following reasons were given as to why:

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{34}] N. Brown, ‘Church, Culture and Australian Society’, in \textit{Faith and Culture Bicentennial Reflections}, eds M. Press and N. Brown, Catholic Institute of Sydney, 1988, p. 45.
\end{itemize}
The Maoris are naturally shy and the Pakeha congregations are fairly individualistic. Maoris prefer more informal types of worship... There is need for development of stable, self-respecting Maori religious life before the Maori folk can expect to move calmly into an integrated church life...Maori services are the best medium for effective communications. Maoris respond better to Maori services.  

Aboriginal people express the same reasons - a shyness, particularly in the presence of non-indigenous people and observation of a relationship protocol, a style of leadership and an appropriate form of communication. However comments that if the church does not follow a certain pattern, for example, develop a theology appropriate to a culture, that God will pass by do not fit in with statements that God is a God of grace and mercy and is faithful to the human world. One writer mentioned:

In Australia though if we do not find our own vision of Christ we are forced to settle for the portrait of Christ presented by British, Irish and American culture. If we do not see him with an Australian image I am afraid we might find he has moved by and out of reach.  

The opinion that Australians were still looking for an Australian form of religious expression was expressed and that "It seems each country and each age needs to create the sort of visual image of Christ that makes it possible to relate to him". It seems to me that there is more than a visual image that Aboriginal people and other indigenous people are seeking and that it is more to do with a relationship that expresses a care and concern for their

49 Millikan, p. 57.
place in the world. In fact to have merely an appropriate visual image
minimizes Christ and the biblical message. The comment of the Australian
image parallels that of one non-Aboriginal respondent who thought that
maybe Aboriginal people needed to see an Aboriginal Christ. Trenoweth
also highlighted the need in the West to go to the core of the Gospels and
rediscover the base of Christian belief, which would be the principle for
seeing all people as one in Christ for all people are made in the one image.50

A New Christian community

Clark suggested there should be a move from ‘isms’, that is, from
clericalism...to an appropriate, genuine dispersal of
authority and responsibility; from parochialism to new forms
of community not tied to territory; from congregationalism
to genuine encounter and solidarity; from the divisions of
denominationalism to unity with autonomy.51

Allowing these types of changes within the Christian community
particularly to such as Aboriginal Christian groups would give diversity
and allow support over tribal areas rather than by non-indigenous parochial
or ecclesial areas. The benefit in this for the tribal group would be in
relationships and for seeking financial support. These are approaches that
would support and honour the move to an Aboriginal Christianity as well as
showing awareness of another’s needs within churches where a minority

50 S. Trenoweth, The Future of God. Personal adventures in spirituality with thirteen of
51 M. Britt, In Search of New Wine-Skins An exploration of models of Christian
cultural group attends. Authority, autonomy and community are important
issues for the Aboriginal community.

Farran commented on new Anglican services, which encouraged all
baptized people to minister: he drew on Lewis Mudge’s comments that "our
considerations of ecclesiology should begin from a theological and not an
organisational premise – namely, what the message of Jesus Christ means as
expressed in the form of a community." 32

A Christian’s identity must be in Christ by its very nature and therefore
Christians must determine if their faith and the practice of that faith in the
community is “in harmony with its source”, its identity. 33 That is, does it
have relevance to the life and teachings of Christ? The church may need to
venture outside the safe harbour and to make changes in its structure and
ways of being and doing church if it is to be responsive to God’s call in the
community in which it exists. The church is people. If the church (the
people) is responding to its own needs and not the needs of other members
of the community, if it maintains steadfastly to an age-old regimen and
regime is it responding to God’s call and to the presence of the Holy Spirit
in the needs and desires of the marginalized? If it disallows an alternative
expression of the man-made structure that responds to the needs of the
disadvantaged is it ignoring an expression of Christianity that is God-driven
and Holy Spirit-guided? If the Church wants to be seen to be relevant it
must also be unwilling to ignore the cries of the Aboriginal Christian who

32 Farran, *Intermission*, 3, (2,) 1997, p. 15. [refers to The Sense of a People – Toward

fervently believes he or she is called to witness and spread the love of God to other Aboriginal people in a culturally appropriate way. This is the desire and concern of Aboriginal Christians. Further, Christian insights can be enriched by an openness to this variety of spiritual experience, understanding and expression.

Contextualisation and change is sought in other communities too. It was of importance to the Maori church. Church buildings have been ‘handed over’ to the Chinese community, the Vietnamese, Korean, Turkish communities and many others in order that they might express their culture within their Christian worship and leadership. I have included here a comment by a member of the Italian community when they desired to incorporate more cultural practice into religious observance. di Francesco wrote

\textit{festa}. This is not a ‘party’, but an extension of a sacrament of initiation, and part of the religious celebration, not an addition to it. In this way, the sacrament that is received in the church is grounded in the ordinary shared events and exchanges of human life; food, family, hospitality and friendship. This concept of \textit{festa} is a symbol of what the Italian community has to offer the Anglican Church in Australia today... with this invitation comes new symbols and the opportunity to see the world through ears, hearts, minds and eyes softened by the Gospel and enriched by the two different cultures coming together to find expression and life.\textsuperscript{34}

The indication was that there was a lack of understanding and support for this concept. This denied a need to contextualise by using community practices in the sacred nature of worship in a way that connects church practice and community life. A further dimension was the challenge of the

\textsuperscript{34} di Francesco, 1995, p. 2.
blending of gifts so that each person used their full potential and “so we are then able to reflect the image of God.”55 Opening up to practices of other cultures is again mentioned as an enriching experience. This approach highlights the two-way value seen by other cultures.

The conversation then becomes one of the church, the culture and Jesus as Shirres suggested was happening in Maori practice: a triangle, a three-way dialogue which occurs between God already in the culture, Jesus revealed and being revealed as the Son and the living Word of God, and the issues faced by the people at present – where the praxis occurs.56 An added dimension for some denominations is the third part of the Godhead and that is the importance of the Holy Spirit particularly being ‘led by the Spirit’ – a phrase often used in the Mogo congregation. The church may need to venture outside the safe harbour and to make changes.

55 di Francesco, p. 4.
56 Shirres, Ko Tautu, p. 3.
CHAPTER 10

IN WHAT WAYS CAN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH REACH OUT?

Most Aboriginal people in one area where I had contact were considered by non-Aboriginal people to be shy or not confident in discussing their beliefs. One respondent to my questionnaire stated: “I have yet to meet a local person who is good at articulating their belief” [and, the person added] “we just have to pick up the bits and pieces as we go along and try to put them together.” Both comments are very patronizing. Firstly the comments beg the question why should the person talk about their beliefs - they may not feel comfortable discussing beliefs with that particular person. Many non-Aboriginal people are not confident and articulate in talking about their beliefs. Secondly there is an overtone of confusion that what the person has heard does not fit in with that person’s beliefs. Therefore there is a suggestion that what is heard, how it is heard and what is expected to be heard, is coloured by the expectation of a particular answer. This is even more so if one is looking for an answer in overview or specific answers to specific questions. These comments underline earlier comments that there does not appear to be acceptance of the answers given if there is an Aboriginal interpretation rather than a Western one.

The assumption too that the spirituality of Aboriginal people is not valid because it is based on animistic fears indicates a limited

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1 Interview: Tape Two, 7 September. 2000 and Interview Tape Two: 7 October. 2000

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understanding of that spirituality and perhaps a heavy dose of

triumphalism. One approach is in comments like:

they have had exposure to Christianity for most of this
century and they are now very urbanized with little
remains of traditional belief. But as a person begins to
interact with God and the Bible they see that some
aspects of their culture are acceptable to God and some are
not. And I would counsel them that God is not opposed to
their culture because he made it but that some parts have
become unhelpful and they should let God restore it to the
way he wants it.  

So often the Aboriginal Christian response was that there was a need for
understanding, listening, reaching out to one another. This was a two-way
relationship and involved openness, readiness and a willingness to listen,
respect and an attitude that meant learning went both ways. The Christian
churches, if they are to reach out to Indigenous people, must recognise and
acknowledge the points of pain, injustice and alienation in Indigenous
history and take steps to make restitution. They must begin to listen to
Indigenous people respectfully and act in solidarity. One of the most
valuable forms of outreach is to provide Indigenous people with resources
and equip them to reach out to their own people.

Aboriginal people were not denominationalist. There was a common
respect for one another. It was the church that was dividing the Aboriginal
church, one person stated and he quoted from the Bible:

Paul puts it, "There is neither Greek nor Jew, bond nor
free, male nor female." It could be well phrased, there is
neither Anglican, nor Presbyterian, AOG, nor Baptist,
Church of Christ nor Uniting. We should be all one in
Christ. The question then is, what about the different
doctrinal views? Fellowship is based upon sharing with

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2 Interview: Tape Four 10 March 2000
one another in relation to our faith in Christ. That should be the basis of fellowship.  

Is the Church open to offerings of the indigenous community?

When asked to respond to the statement of Aboriginal people that “Indigenous people have a great deal to offer the church”, people expressed a wide range of attitudes again. Listening, coming together and making things better for all Australians was a consistent Aboriginal response. One non-Aboriginal respondent thought the statement quite patronizing saying “I don’t know whether that’s any more true of any group in the community” and claimed that the statement had probably been said but that he was doubtful that it had been. He went on to say that he included Aboriginal people [though they were very few] in his congregation, made no special dispensation for them believing it wasn’t what they wanted although he recognized that he had a ‘certain limitation in communicating the Gospel’ to them in the same way that he could not communicate to everybody across the whole socio-economic sphere. It is noted that the description related to the ‘socio-economic’ area and not a cultural area.

Other responses stressed that differing cultural forms can enrich and give a sense of the land of which all people are a part. The sense of community, reciprocity and concern for the well-being of every person that was a part of indigenous life and which was severely eroded within ‘white Western

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4 Interview: Tape Four.

5 Interview: Tape Four.
circles' by the individualistic, materialistic lifestyle and philosophy, was valued and seen as an example of what could be offered. Another comment was that every person is endowed with gifts from the Spirit for the building of community so listening to one another in order to recognize these gifts was seen as crucial. An appeal was for the use of spiritual gifts. Indigenous people with their emphasis on people and relationships were seen to have a great gift to offer a church obsessed with 'busy-ness' and programmes. Their rapport with and sense of being part of creation can be a reminder to the church of some parts of its own tradition which seem to be overlooked in a culture which has a human-centred and developmental world-view. The indigenous sense of stewardship of creation was underlined as an important understanding that the church needed to regain.

*Freeing the gospel from "whiteness"*

The idea that the gospel may be perceived as 'white' was rejected by some respondents on the basis that this confused the gospel with colonialism, that whiteness meant something in Christianity and that where the Gospel was being taught by Aboriginal people, in one particular case, then it was not 'white'. However in all these cases the implication was that if Aboriginal people received the Gospel and preached it without any difference at all as perceived by the listener then it was not 'white'. Another comment was that "Jesus wasn't white therefore the Gospel isn't".  

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Others understood the freeing of the Gospel as the reflecting by indigenous people on how the Gospel is or becomes ‘Good News’ to them in their contexts. This has happened and resulted in two books – *Rainbow Spirit Theology*; *towards an Australian Aboriginal theology* \(^7\) and *Indigenous Australia - a dialogue about the Word becoming flesh in Aboriginal Churches* \(^8\). The first of these drew considerable negative comment from mainstream churches. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal respondents commented that *Rainbow Spirit Theology* was not received well by some non-indigenous people. Those who were attempting to pull ideas together were criticised by a few evangelical Aboriginal Christians as well. There were still many Aboriginal people who believed this was not appropriate and that everything to do with culture should be taken lightly. This reaction was thought by others to be due to being trained through the ‘white structure’. Since then the book *Rainbow Spirit Theology* has challenged some Aboriginal people about where they are in theological thinking. However there also seemed to be a silence on the topic which, I understand, was due to the criticism given when the book was published.

The contextualising of the Gospel meant taking control of the interpretation of the Gospel for one’s own context. For one respondent this was considered not only a right but also a responsibility. According to this respondent those theologians and religious thinkers who have the tools of interpretation have a responsibility too to put those tools in the hands of


indigenous Christians. The Gospel would therefore be relevant to the hearer’s situation. For Aboriginal people there were many parallels with the Old Testament and the Dreaming particularly in relation to the Law.

It was important, given that church structures were white dominated, that indigenous peoples were able to absorb the essence of the Christian faith but also to see the crossovers between the faith and their own culture and thus find ways of seeing the faith within the parameters of their own culture. In this way they were not being drawn into a white theological superstructure. It was necessary for indigenous people to distinguish the essence of the gospel from the structure and to define its meaning and the cross-over points with their own culture.

There was a distinction between disjunctive and conjunctive theology and that same issue was a problem for non-indigenous people too. One non-Aboriginal respondent reflected on his theological education where he learnt a white theological superstructure almost as a corpus of knowledge that was [and is] totally distinct from real life. For example reconciliation was taught in a way that theological students always understood as a personal redemption between them (personally) and God in Christ. It was not taught that there were implications in terms of reconciliation with them as individuals and other people or with reconciliation with other cultures, for example, as mentioned in the South

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9 Interview: Tape Three.
10 Interview: Tape Three.
11 Interview: Tape Three.
African Truth and Reconciliation Commission or in reconciliation with indigenous peoples in one's own country.  

Theology was learnt without there being any real attempt to see it within the context of the student's own culture and life. Therefore the church needed to work with indigenous people so they could discover the essence of the Gospel within their own culture. So also Westernised Christians need to do this. The criticism was made by Aboriginal Christians regarding where the Gospel was within the context of western culture.

There were signs of the Gospel being alive and well but critiquing the things about western culture that were contrary to the gospel, in so far as they were not life-giving but death-dealing dimensions of our society today, were needed, that is, conjunctive theology. The disjunction between a body of knowledge and real life as it is lived today needs to be addressed. So, the respondent added, just as indigenous people do theology conjunctively within their own context, exactly the same for others must occur within western culture. This conjunctive understanding of theology would ensure it was contextualised.

Awareness and understanding of Black theology

One respondent who had studied in the United States in the 1960s understood the black power movement in the late 60s was about liberation, freedom from slavery and bondage. Not just literal slavery and bondage but general socio-economic bondage of poverty and unemployment, from the bondage of cultural impression to mono-cultural white systems that do
not take account of black situations. Black theology, the respondent believed, could well be a very appropriate term for Australian Aborigines:

thinking of the general essence of what it involved is a very appropriate thing because under all those issues – socio-economic status, participation in decision making, freedom to develop their own culture on their own land- all those sorts of things Aboriginal people are being totally deprived and still are, and massively so.\textsuperscript{12}

Black theology was considered absolutely essential if it meant liberation to allow the reverse of all those things to happen. However if it became confused with theology from another country and another time, it may not be helpful. Another said Christianity was

what it’s about anywhere and if black theology is being Christian and being free through it then I don’t see any problem with it.\textsuperscript{13}

The understanding, or lack of, of the particular terminology resulted in an inaccurate interpretation on the part of some respondents although they believed they understood.

Black Theology was described by another respondent as a contextual Christian liberation theology articulated by African Americans in reflecting upon their experience of being betrayed, kidnapped, enslaved, oppressed and exploited for centuries. It could not be seen as a reflection on the specific experience of Australian Indigenous people and therefore could not be simply transposed on to the Australian context. This, of course, would not mean authentic contextualisation. However, some

\textsuperscript{12} Interview: Tape Three.

\textsuperscript{13} Interview: Tape Six.
experiences were similar and some other injustices were experienced. Therefore Black Theology could provide a model of liberation theology which asks many questions and which can readily be used as models for articulating a theology of liberation for Aboriginal people.

Black theology was seen as a relevant line of thinking, by one respondent, who believed all theologies of liberation by their very essence are articulated in a context of an experience of oppression. Aboriginal people in addressing the issues affecting them need to be freed from various constructs both in the wider community and in the church community. The Mogo Ministry Centre hopes to address the effects of disenfranchisement through the strength of their faith and the building up of others through the use of the Gospel.

One Aboriginal response to ‘black theology’ was that due to their training and ‘mindset’ a lot of Christian leaders still thought things such as the Rainbow Serpent and the Dreamtime stories were evil. Black theology was confused with traditional spirituality. It was believed by one non-Aboriginal person that people talking about black theology were thinking about the Dreamtime theology and were trying to discover the relationships and the Dreamtime connections. Terminology was not always understood.

Britt presented a fourfold challenge: to pursue a new Christian community by defining sociological, theological, missiological and ecclesiological approaches which would have Christ as the ‘paradigm’ for ‘being

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14 Interview: Tape One.
among’\textsuperscript{15} Britt referred at length to Clark’s descriptions that clericalism ‘cramps the ministry of both clergy and laity’; parochialism ‘devalues skills and competences’ to only those needed; privatising faith ‘ignor[es] the Christian’s call to transform society’; congregationalism restricts participation and refers to dominance of secondary group over primary group; and denominationalism wastes resources and ‘restricts communication to vertical channels’\textsuperscript{16}.

The freedom of the Anglican Communion to develop creative responses to the issues of difference because the system of episcopal guidance, care and supervision allows diversity within the unity of the Church and by so allowing gives credence and empowerment to the other\textsuperscript{17}. While this may be the situation now in New Zealand, it appears not to be as flexible and affirming in Australia even though some diversity does exist. It also counters Bishop Reid’s comment quoted earlier about the monocultural Anglican church. I suggest that Bishop Reid’s comment is accurate for Australia and that Carrell’s comment may apply as a wider statement but not so far as it is applied to individual churches or certain Dioceses. Variety exists between church parishes not necessarily within.

I recall here the comment, “Why can’t they be like us?” - where having a different language may be the only reason given for why it would be appropriate for a service to be held specifically for a particular cultural group. So if people speak English then they should be ‘with us’.

\textsuperscript{15} Britt, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{16} Britt, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{17} Britt, p. 8.
Community needs

The Reverend Dr Bruce Kaye argued the importance of church structure and institutions as a means “to serve the values of the community which creates and facilitates them.” He expressed the opinion that the whole community has ownership and he reiterated Luther’s approach that the church structures should not smother the gospel and that structures are “attempts to provide continuity in relationships between people and or things because of the values implicit in those relationships.” Following this argument then it would be appropriate for Aboriginal Christians to be developing their own structure which represents their community. Whether this is in addition to another structure or as a section of an existing structure depends on the desires of the community. The Mogo community has modified its approach over the past two years.

Uniqueness and unity

If the Christian Church does not accept a contextualised response to Christianity then religion will become a source of division. An acceptance of ‘unity in diversity’ will have a cohesive effect. According to the national Anglican Minimum Standards for Ordination document “for the 95% of the ordained who are priests or transitional deacons, the study of Australian society is an optional extra”. This implies that little emphasis is put on the fact that “The individual lives in a web of relationships that

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18 B. Kaye, *Church structure for the New Millennium - A National Perspective*, Diocese Canberra and Goulburn, 1998 n 4


reaches out to every other person, and to the earth itself". Thus, not to teach theological students topics such as cultural issues, social awareness and social justice and so on, makes the training invalid for a vocation that is meant to act on Christ's words in the community. Randerson continued

While globalisation is driving us together in the McDonaldisation of culture, yet family, social, racial, cultural and religious differences are driving us apart. We are challenged to develop a shalom in which the integrity and value of every person is enshrined, and where there is a unity which not merely affirms the culture and history of others but in actual fact is enriched by contact with their culture and spirituality.

In order to find an answer to this dichotomy, Randerson quoted the words of the Church of England's Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, who stated

The Copernican revolution I am proposing would call for the suspension of all normal church activities to enable a start from a wholly new perspective. That is: not to seek the survival of the institution but to aim to be the Church of Jesus Christ in His world.

That is, the emphasis would be more on doing and being rather than worrying about issues of an institutional nature. The future, Randerson thought, would be that the church would have smaller congregations and alternative meeting places built around unique needs. This approach would cover the Aboriginal Christians' needs and the desire for their own meeting place.

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22 Randerson, 1999, p. 3.

23 Randerson, 1999, p. 6. (bold type is Randerson's)
Another Anglican, the Right Reverend George Browning spoke of the policy that the Gospel – the ground of being – must be addressed as the primary fixed issue but that the methods of addressing it give life, structure and definition and need “to be shaped by and respond to context. A tendency to give too much weight to structure over against policy leaves today’s Church struggling to adapt”. 24 He acknowledged that while the Church “in the Christendom era … was primarily about institution, structure, hierarchy and authority” it may in the future need to be an episcopal function which is more needs based. 25 Again, Carrell comments on this throughout his book

Ministry model

Reference was made by various authors to ‘ubi Christus ibi ecclesia’ - where Christ is, there is the Church - and the sense of servanthood. Servanthood is the approach to which the Mogo people were aiming for both the priest and the people. This involves being where the need is and attempting to address the needs of people. It may mean that the style of ministry and the structure of the priesthood is different from the usual, because - and in a general sense of the disenfranchised and disadvantaged - particularly for Aboriginal Christians the formality, structure and middle-class appearance of the parish church building and services and clergy presentation does not always project an open, welcoming and attractive


25 Browning, Sept 1999, p.2. [see op.cit Carrell]
environment. Another consideration is that people in need, prefer to be in a nurturing community where rules and structure are not imposed because quite often the rules and structure have disenfranchised the very same people. The church institution at parish level often appears exclusive, a club, and, as was referred to earlier, not welcoming of Aboriginal people and those people who are different in some way. In a non-Aboriginal context these issues were noted by Mills.\textsuperscript{26} However in all these points Aboriginal Christians have indicated the comments are appropriate. Therefore the approach to ministry and the ministry model is important. Theological orientation and mission emphases, congregational resources, programmes, group life, leadership, identity are all issues which have a relevance to the Aboriginal ministry because of the differing approach to the style of leadership, the manner in which decisions are made and how, and by whom, the decisions are carried out. Therefore there is a need to grow congregations to care for people with specific needs and these small groups may be more appropriately held in homes or small meeting places. This allows for a less structured and less formal environment which may have a more supportive atmosphere. I have noted these approaches in earlier comments by Neville Naden and in the design for the Mogo Meeting Place which was specifically not called “church” for these reasons. It may mean that these groups operate as a satellite meeting attached to a central church which would allow for validity and authority initially and later to extend a welcome whenever the satellite group members felt comfortable about attending. The reverse should be true too, that is, the central church

members should be able to join the satellite group as they feel the need or wish to extend the hand of friendship. Either way this flow to and from should be done in honest friendship and not be controlling or judgemental. When risks are taken then new vitality can be gained and the outcome may be even greater than any expectation.

In his foreword to The Reverend Dr Bruce Kaye's book, the Most Reverend Peter Hollingworth referred to an Anglicanism of Dr Kaye's vision that was "a 'church in society' type of church, which is neither imperialist nor Congregationalist, but which operates through a dispersed style of authority" and "is also an incarnational type of church, believing that God embeds Himself and works in human history".27 In his introduction Kaye described the Anglican Church of Australia as a "reasonably loose institutional system".28 The 39 Articles and particularly Article 36 does not define the threefold order of ministry apart from the fact that ministry must be "duly authorized":

The Encyclical Letter of the Lambeth Conference of 1908 stated "If the Anglican communion is to render that service to the... needs of mankind to which the Church of our day is especially called, regard must be had both to the just freedom of its several parts and to the just claims of the whole Communion upon its every part."29

For the Anglican Church, the form of ministry may be changed but Kaye also stressed that the tradition of Anglicanism was of importance for


29 Kaye, 1995, p. 7. (refers to General Synod of the Diocese in Australia and Tasmania Determination no - Session 1921, Oct 11, 1921, p. 8.)
individual and group identity. Discussions about training and authority of Aboriginal Christian clergy still hinge on whether the right studies have been undertaken and the 'correct' process taken. The ministry formation for the candidate at Mogo was developed to meet his particular situation. However it was not particularly successful.

The importance of Aboriginal ministry in community work

Addresses have been given at funerals of Aboriginal people which were highly political and involved references to the Stolen Generations, the Invasion, the imposition of alcohol and the general low socio-economic status and education of aboriginal people. Other addresses directed the people to ally their experience with the Bible stories of oppressed people. That, in many ways is what is happening – it is political. Aboriginal church is cultural, spiritual and political. It is holistic and aimed at highlighting needs.

One direction that people wanted to be taken that was mentioned by an Aboriginal respondent was in the area of community support. This included the need to seek funding from both State and Church to develop things like chaplaincies in prisons [which is provided by a few indigenous people], and in areas of high social unrest, unemployment, substance abuse and deprivation. However it was envisioned as a partnership between Government and Church. The belief was that there would be better outcomes gained by funding church groups to do social justice issues than giving community organisations the funds because there is a loss to the
community when Aboriginal people move in to non local organisations.\textsuperscript{30} People are believed to be ‘sitting behind pens and computers’ when they could be more effective with their people.

One example that was related was the end result in one town where the ‘government has poured millions in there and there is nothing to show for it’ after about ten years.\textsuperscript{31} After the arrival of two Christian people and within three years 60% of the petrol sniffers had given up, drugs and alcohol use reduced by 50% with dramatic changes and a church established.\textsuperscript{32} The dramatic change occurred in that community, it was believed, because the couple had been addressing spiritual issues as well as practical issues. By dealing with spiritual issues the whole community benefited. Perhaps, the respondent suggested, recognition should be given that when spiritual welfare is looked after, by people who genuinely care and are present, then changes occur. This same person believed that those people who have not got the issues of drugs and alcohol and can care for their children and have developed a spiritual change can move on in life – while still retaining some traditional custom they are strongly Christian.\textsuperscript{33} This outcome provokes in the minds of other Aboriginal Christians, particularly those involved at Mogo, that restoration and healing of their people would be found in the power of the contextualised Gospel approached in a culturally relevant way. The power of the Father, Son

\textsuperscript{30} Interview: Tape Five.

\textsuperscript{31} Interview: Tape Five.

\textsuperscript{32} Interview: Tape Five.

\textsuperscript{33} Interview: Tape Five.
and Holy Spirit is believed to be the way to healing.

There was a concern that fear – because of certain traditional spirituality – can also control people and cause them to be indecisive spiritually and leave them unhappy was also mentioned. This was described as people ‘having their feet in both camps’ and was seen as counter-productive because it was difficult to serve two masters.

_Taking Over_

Another area of contention was the presence of non-Aboriginal people organizing Aboriginal Christian events. One respondent said that a lot of non-Aboriginal people should have been behind the scenes but instead took places of leadership partly because of their belief (as perceived by the Aboriginal respondent) that Aboriginal people did not have the gifts of administration.25 This respondent believed that non-Aboriginal people identified the gifts of Aboriginal people as gifts of public speaking, gifts of healing, gifts of prayer, gifts of discerning spirits but it was believed they did not have the gift of organization and administration.

So non-Aboriginal people would make decisions on behalf of Aboriginal people. However the comment was made by an Aboriginal respondent that sometimes the Aboriginal people did not have all the information – they did not read or research requirements or did not investigate the needs of the event. It was recognized that sometimes the non-Aboriginal organisers were judged harshly though there were some, it was felt, who

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25 Interview: Tane Five
became involved because (it was surmised) that the organisers felt it was good to be seen to be involved and it made them feel good that they had done something for Aboriginal people. Most non-Aboriginal people, it was recognised, genuinely wanted to draw alongside and help.

Some of these non-Aboriginal people were believed to hold the idea that a revival was ready to come to this country and that it would come through Aboriginal people. And the non-Aboriginal people were seeking this end. That is the way their motives were seen to be.

Therefore in some arenas there was an implicit concern that Aboriginal people may be being orchestrated into roles. While some Aboriginal people believe that a revival will come and come through Aboriginal Christians there was a concern about the amount of control. So it was implied that non-Aboriginal people were in the forefront trying to make it happen. This raised the question of whether they were making it happen irrespective of the feelings and needs of Aboriginal people or whether they were allowing it to happen freely. It also raised the matter of respect. The respondent thought Aboriginal people let non-Aboriginal people organise events because then they were released to do what they do best. However the decision making process was then done without consulting, and schedules, deadlines and other constraints were imposed. This resulted in the non-Aboriginal organisers being themselves locked in a position where they had to make decisions and make things happen and then to be subjected to criticism. Perhaps even more than achieving their own agenda and making an event happen with all good intentions, the difficulty was

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36 Interview: Tape Five.
that many non-Aboriginals did not know when to withdraw.

A corollary to this was the statement that ‘white fellas’, who were probably seen as controlling had been burnt in the past, have taken a risk with Aboriginal people by agreeing that something could be organised, offering support if and when needed, only to find that nothing eventuates or something has gone wrong. So any future involvement becomes one of much more direct control to ensure that the outcomes are what are wanted. The comment was “I don’t think they have ever learnt how to operate in partnership fully”.\textsuperscript{37}

This is helpful when thinking about the arrangement that the Anglican Church is to have at the Meeting Place. Issues of respect, valuing worth, courtesy, deference and recognition are essential in relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and even more so between Christian people. However the indications are that the main direction must lie heavily on meeting with, listening to and sharing extensive time with Aboriginal people. ‘Listening, listening and listening’ as one person put it.\textsuperscript{38} Then walking with, in partnership, using resources together and learning together.

\textit{Beliefs}

The Dreaming is referred to as a searching about life - a lot of the Dreamtime stories, the stories about creation, are stories of questioning, of searching. It was accepted that the creator God made, for example, this

\textsuperscript{37} Interview: Tape Five.

\textsuperscript{38} Interview: Tape One.
river. But still there was the unanswered question about what is ahead after this life. While people believed there was something after death, rather than nothing, the search was to find an explanation for after death and how people were formed and the cycle of life. These beliefs were seen to parallel those in the Bible.

One respondent believed a lot of cultures had a belief in "someone coming" and "that's why a lot of people grab on to Jesus. He's the one that's come." Further discussion encouraged the definition that 'a lot of cultures' rather meant a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures as the speaker referred to the "Coming of the Light" in the Torres Strait and other stories throughout Australia. This person who is coming, is coming to the rescue to save the people spiritually.

Reference was also made to the Old Testament because of the lists of genealogies and the emphasis on blood ties, to whom one is connected.

The emphasis on names in the Bible indicated that genealogies are important – that it is 'godly' that a person maintains to whom they belong.

Further the sense of belonging to country and to homeland is a part of Aboriginal religion that is very strong. Even though there are not the corroborees and some of the law-making ceremoonis in the south, there are still rules, that also speak of a belief in the celebration of life.

Part of the process of contextualization is allowing the receivers of the message to ascertain, given the right preaching of the Gospel, what part of indigenous practice or belief needs to be addressed. There ought not to be

39 Interview: Tape Five.
any demand to give up any part of the culture by others but space to contextualize the Gospel within their own world-view. This means that Indigenous people will decide for themselves in ways that enable them to maintain their own integrity in the changes that they make in traditional belief and practice. If changes are imposed the process will inevitably be destructive. The decision as to what is evil and what is good has to be made each day by Aboriginal people, as it has for all people. It was recognized that alongside the preaching and teaching there must also be an accompanying total acceptance of the Indigenous people concerned as part of the family. 40 One respondent recognized that all cultures go through periods of change and that they change particularly by interaction with other cultures: it was also acknowledged that Aboriginal culture is changing. 41

Healing was emphasized as a very important part of Christian belief by other southern Aboriginal Christians and that salvation is available to all people, and that this salvation comes through faith and faith alone: Eph 2:8,9: [For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.] 42 This salvation is an important aspect of the faith.

‘Liturgical crossovers’ was a term employed by one non-Aboriginal respondent and involved a practice of using parts of liturgy that were inclusive of different cultural approaches. They were important

40 Notes: Two. 20 December, 1996
41 Notes: Two.
42 Notes: Two. Quotation from NRSV Bible
particularly in the light that there was only one Australian contextual prayer within the Australian Prayer Book – an Anglican service book – and that Prayer was one developed by Lenore Parker, an Aboriginal woman, and titled *A Thanksgiving for Australia*. It is not specifically an Aboriginal context: it is an Australian context. There is another prayer written by the now retired Aboriginal Bishop Arthur Malcolm and this is a prayer for unity between peoples and not written specifically in an Aboriginal context. There is also another prayer “Prayer of the Aboriginal People” which says:

Creator of all, you gave us The Dreaming.  
You spoke to us through our beliefs.  
You then made your love clear to us  
In the person of Jesus.  
You own us. You are our hope.  
Make us strong as we face the problems of change.  
We ask you to help the people of Australia  
To listen to us and respect our culture.43

This prayer written by Aboriginal Catholic people and revised by Aboriginal people also expresses the wishes and the presuppositions of the Mogo people as they seek to express their Christianity and address disadvantage in a culturally appropriate Christianity.

In February 1998 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Australia changed its rules to guarantee voting synod seats for indigenous bishops. Archbishop Keith Rayner and Adelaide’s Archbishop Ian George washed the feet of the then indigenous bishops Arthur Malcolm and Ted Mosby, in a symbol of service and closer relationships. In this way the church gave

indigenous people a voice in decision making, with Bishop Clyde Wood of North Queensland claiming it "introduces a process of partnership". Archbishop Peter Hollingworth spoke of "their empowerment coming from their wishes and desires and their capacities not something that is imposed in a patriarchal ... way". Bishop Wood flagged a plan to ask the next General Synod session in 2001 for major funding for two new indigenous diocese:

I intend to bring a motion to this synod to set aside an endowment from its existing funds of four million dollars – two million for an Aboriginal diocese, two million for a Torres Strait Island diocese."  

I am unaware of this occurring.

Taking Risks

Lorenzen (a Baptist) referred to the metaphor of a ship which is built to move out of a safe harbour and battle the wind, the storms and the currents and it is built to do so. If it is sturdy it will survive, if not it will be destroyed. If the church is compared to the ship does it have relevance to the life and teachings of Christ? The church may need to venture outside the safe harbour and to make changes in its structure and ways of being and doing church if it is to be responsive to God’s call in the community in which it exists.

46 Marketplace, 1 July, 1998, p. 4
Many years ago the Right Reverend Ernest Burgmann (Church of England) [Address 28.5.36, Box 15] commented

Churches are always a danger to religion. They get interested in themselves, in their own aggrandizement and power, in countless things that keep them too busy to live close to the life of the people. Churchmen get interested in a world beyond a world largely to escape the trouble of setting right the wrongs that afflict the human race. 50

On a later occasion, and in a general sense, Burgmann stated

When the Christian religion becomes indigenous to the Australian soul and soil and no longer an import from another clime, we shall seek to consecrate our yearly work by festivals that ring true to our seasons. 50

As is apparent that has still not happened.

In a book published in 1983 Bruce Wilson (Anglican) referred to the shallow theory of Australian “indigenization” of Christianity in which ‘indigenization’ or ‘Australianizing’ of Christianity appears to be a way that

churches should be more informal (like pubs) as befits the Australian character, that religious language should be more Australian or ockerized, that Christianity should draw on symbols from the Australian bush in order to express its beliefs, that Christians should be more earthy and matey in their personal relationships, and that we should try to develop artistic images of an Australian Christ. 50

He later states that an “ocker” Christianity would “betray” God by nationalizing him. He comments on the acceptance of some thinkers that

the sketches of native plants on the Australian Hymn Book are


49 Hempenstall, p. 254. [Address 4.7.37, Box 17]

'Australianising' or 'indigenizing'. It is sad that the expression here did not include a discussion of the issue of the contextualisation of Christianity in Australia (rather than 'indigenizing') and particularly of an Australian Aboriginal Christian contextualisation. The author seemed to ignore the possibilities seen by other clergy of a re-invigoration of the Australian church in the light of God working in the Australian culture and the possible enrichment by contact with non-Anglo-Saxon Christian theologies.

Bruce Wilson commented on the "vanishing role of clergy" –

The majority are simply bewildered and don't really know the causes of Christian decline. More liberally minded clergy have sought accommodation with the new Australian consciousness by playing down the spiritual aspects of their work and emphasizing the human-caring side of it. Others have merely rationalized their situation and accommodated their ministry to their own diminished flocks. Some have sought to import techniques, often modeled on American marketing methods, to promote the growth of their congregations. The more conservative clergy have actually aided the erosive process, building higher barriers around their churches by stiffening the rules relating to whom they will baptize, marry, bury and visit...[and] most of those who train clergy, despite their often profound theological knowledge, do not have the skills to relate centuries of Christian wisdom to the great social upheavals. 51

These comments point to an apparent lack of awareness of the circumstances of the every day lives of Australian people. The use of the word 'accommodation' here almost implies a cynicism or, at least, an affected change that is done for convenience and not rigorously validated. He claims liberal clergy have 'played down' the spiritual side of their Vocation. One cannot achieve for Christ without acknowledging Him.

51 B. Wilson, p. 141.
Again, to fit in with the existing congregation’s comfort and not to stretch and keen their spiritual side is counter-productive. The Aboriginal Christians are willing to attempt both the caring and the spiritual extension.

Wilson’s comments on the fence-building and barriers are certainly appropriate to the Aboriginal experience as are his comments on the training to deal with social crises. As I indicate in the section on Training, little of this latter education occurs. In other words, contextualisation is missing. Aboriginal Christians at Mogo are aiming at addressing social upheaval and disadvantage using a Christian focus and building people spiritually.

At the Anglican Synod Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn in 1999 Bishop Browning spoke on the passage from John 3.8: “The wind blows where it will, you hear the sound of it, but you cannot tell where it is coming from, or where it is going, so it is with everyone who is born of the spirit” and the need for the church to plan and “to be open to the surprising wind of the Spirit.”52 Here again is an emphasis on the risks that could be taken. Whilst his comments were related to change on a different front, it could be applied to Aboriginal theology and practice. He deplored the tendency to favour structure over policy and the struggle the church is left with in order to adapt to today’s world. The message should stay the same but the practice may be different in order to respond to the world. However, the church should not adapt to the world rather it

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should reflect Christ in the world. Bishop Browning valued the doctrine of
Trinity, which he saw as diversity and as part of a partnership:

it is about finding identity in communion rather than
identity through exclusion, it is about relationship rather
than ownership, it is about energy rather than imperium,
it is about risk rather than certainty, organism rather
than organization, theologising rather than theologies.\textsuperscript{53}

Whilst he stated that people needed a structure in order to locate
themselves he believed that the Church could provide those structures to
close connections while also seeking something new. He indicated that
one way this could be discovered is by determining the skills and abilities
of people and then developing structures that will nourish such
development.\textsuperscript{24} This ministry would take place in communities through
which people were empowered and led, which was beyond institution,
involving "community beyond present boundaries, connection beyond
membership and being beyond institution."\textsuperscript{33} The article did not specify
Aboriginal communities. Nor did it specify the financial cost or how that
cost would be met. However here is a starting point.

Relationship, energy, risk and organism reflect the Aboriginal emphases as
they see it and as it should be between the institutional church and the
growing Aboriginal church. Browning’s use of the word ‘theologising’ if
used in the sense of ‘to render theological’ or ‘to conform to theology’
appears to be in a sense which diminishes the object however if used as
‘to treat theologically’ the term may have some credible application.

\textsuperscript{53} Browning, 1999, p. 100.

\textsuperscript{24} Browning, 1999, p. 101.

\textsuperscript{33} Browning, 1999, p. 104.
Nevertheless to use that as obverse to theologies demeans the many Christian theologies. The term does not underscore the belief that God is in all cultures and the approach that the indigenous peoples can use - just as non-indigenous people also can do - to locate God in their culture.

Structure

The Reverend John McIntyre, an Anglican in the Diocese of Sydney, spoke of the Crossroads Aboriginal Ministry in Redfern where three brothers - Ben, Bill [an Anglican deacon and later priest] and Peter Bird - served as pastors. Discussions were planned in 1994 to separate from St Saviour's with culturally appropriate worship space and structure and an ordained Aboriginal minister.\(^\text{50}\)

Peter Bird stressed that any indigenous parish structure once in place would remain under the auspices of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney. The proposal has gained the full approval of Mr McIntyre, who sees it as a step in a direction to a truly self-managed church for Aboriginals, to help them become... “a group of people who are able to determine their own future and be accountable within their own autonomy”, much like any other Anglican parish.\(^\text{57}\)

The article referred to the need for their own structure: because Aboriginal Christians struggle to recognise their validity within a church which provides them with little ministry infrastructure or resources, or if so, only within the European framework.\(^\text{58}\) Perry referred to Gondarra’s statement of the effect of church life on Aboriginal Christians prior to the Revival as

\(^{50}\) Church Scene, Aug/Sept 1994, Church Press Ltd, Glen Huntley, p. 1.

\(^{57}\) Church Scene, Aug/Sept 1994, p.1.


Aboriginal people who remained in the Christian churches were reduced to silence and passivity by alien forms of theology, leadership, decision-making and spirituality in which they were unable to participate.  

Bishop Arthur Malcolm commented on the 'marginalisation and loneliness' felt by Aboriginal people in the churches and the importance of the National Aboriginal Anglican Council which, he believed, would "make our people feel part of the structure of the Anglican Church".  

Whilst some people might see separate bodies as divisive Clayton argued that "The thing that all the great reformers have in common is that they seek not to divide, but rather to return to the gospel". Leadership, structure, decision-making and approaches to theology are important.

Denominations making changes

The aims of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress [UAICCC] were evangelism, which included practical issues, and Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal unity within the Church and freedom in the ministry were also important issues. The formal covenant between the Uniting Church of Australia and Aboriginal members caused concern for some members including issues of paternalism, boundaries and finance. Stockton (Roman Catholic) also considered "there needs to be a specialised ministry to Aborigines, overlapping if necessary the general pastoral ministry of a parish, or of a diocese, without being confined by its boundaries." Stockton further quoted the 1987 Aboriginal and Islander

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Catholic Council [AICC] conference:

At all spiritual gatherings, that the celebration of Masses, funerals, baptisms and weddings be handed over to Aboriginal people as far as possible, by recognizing the abilities of local Aboriginal Christian Communities.\(^{63}\)

While another, Brother Cletus Read (1985), argued strongly for an Aboriginal Church, a *Catholic Weekly* editorial (6/5/87) suggested an “Aboriginal eparchy on par with that recently set up for Melkites in Australia”.\(^{64}\) Neither, to my knowledge, has occurred. Stockton (Roman Catholic) offered as a solution:

An Aboriginal expression of Church, lead by a lay ministry, supplied with specialised ministry of white co-workers subordinated to that leadership for as long as there was need, would be possible if Aboriginal people wished it.\(^{62}\)

This sounds rather patronizing – no Aboriginal clerical leadership, no Aboriginal agency. Although subordinated ‘white’ co-workers would be possible, this is still showing signs of control, power, lack of trust both in Aboriginal ability and the movement of the Holy Spirit. A sub-ordinated ‘white’ priest was appointed to work with an Anglican Aboriginal priest in the Northern Territory: this also allowed for training. However Stockton built on the Pope’s

embodying the Gospel into their culture, the fullest realisation of that appeal would be in an Aboriginal Church with its own forms of ministry, liturgy, catechetics, theology, spirituality \(^{66}\)

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\(^{63}\) Stockton, 1988, p. 169. (Press and Brown 1988)

\(^{64}\) Stockton, 1988, p. 169.

\(^{65}\) Stockton, 1988, p. 170.

\(^{66}\) Stockton, 1988, p. 170.
and indicated an understanding of the difficulty of expressing themselves in a different cultural format. Yet there does not seem to be recognition of the ability of Aboriginal Catholics to minister as ordained people. He suggested that non-Aboriginal persons could be seen as co-workers or helpers and resource persons. Yet this again appeared to limit the extent to which the church opened all orders and doors to Aboriginal people because these helpers were seen as ‘necessary and useful for the time being’. How long then does ‘for the time being’ stay in force? Stockton said: “When there is an electrical malfunction we call in the electrician for his expertise, but he does not take over the household.”

How long does it take to show the willingness to train the electrician aside from the length of time the training takes. How long does it take to allow a spiritual, enthusiastic, member of the community who is brought by the community for leadership in religious matters to train as the person is able? The expertise is still granted by the established church in its own culture not the Aboriginal culture. The Christian church then has been exhorted to follow the Spirit’s leading, to evoke new models of ministry among all baptized people, though many see the metaphysical need for the ordained ministry.

A new style of leadership and ministry was explored by Britt: one which operated on the abilities of each person and the gifts each person brought, caring and sharing responsibly, acting on needs with the control and power and leadership coming from those people who are familiar with

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the environment and intimately involved. Here is the praxis model: the actual building of the Kingdom of God in a prophetic way. The emphasis is on pluralistic ministry and a modification of hierarchical leadership.

The strength of the church could be “in the power and mobility of smaller groups of dynamic Christians”, laymen and in “tentmaking” ministries. As later indigenous pastors have said in a similar fashion:

belonging to a foreign structure and foreign theology is to be like a plant in a hothouse, secure and comfortable but not related to the soil. Only a life in the open field, with the cold of the nights, the heat of the days, and the storms, will help the church grow steadily with deeper roots.

This metaphor is similar in ethos to the ship that sets out to sea and survives the storm as quoted earlier.

The dangers of the replication of churches, the duplication of structures and the training in a westernized format which led to a delay in an indigenous ministry being formed are also identified. Edwards, among others, stated that the New Testament does not indicate a priestly hierarchy but rather a group of people using gifts and talents to carry on God’s work in the world. The hierarchy of clergy is not seen as scriptural but is seen as a societal response of an authoritarian body whereas a community based organisation would choose its spiritual leaders differently.

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68 Britt, pp. 43 44.
69 Elwood, 1980, p. 79.
70 Elwood, 1980, p. 80.
Denominational barriers

Pastor Bill Hollingsworth commented on denominational differences:

Aboriginal Christians are sadly divided by the denominational loyalties ... It has weakened the stance of Aboriginal people as Aboriginal Christians, torn between positions of various denominations, which have spoken with competing voices.  

Hollingsworth stated that denominations created barriers and these divisions are not an Aboriginal way. By such division those who are marginalized are further weakened both individually and as a community experiencing greater isolation and powerlessness. The other divisive issue is the situation that Aboriginal people find themselves in when they feel unable to attend a non-Aboriginal church where, in fact, they feel uncomfortable and excluded.

Worship must be acknowledged as not to do with the power or supremacy of an institution but, with the way life is lived; that recognition must be given to others who may be bearing witness to God in their lives; that the Word of God is not exclusive, is not owned by any one group; that the Word of God enacted in the community must challenge the status quo not support it, in particular, in the practice of the Church, that is, the church members in the world.

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What then are the limits put on changes? When surveyed in an article to see what some Anglicans thought, the following comments were made: Greg Clarke stated “Anything in the church is negotiable, except the gospel”; and Karin Sowada believed “Church structures, liturgics, and ministry patterns must be re-examined to ensure that the gospel is ministered more effectively to others”\textsuperscript{75} Elizabeth Foord emphasized that “The gospel of Jesus Christ never changes, but the packaging may: in fact it must”\textsuperscript{76} and Graeme Cole argued “A church that knows and embodies the love of God will take risks in ministry and move beyond the culturally secure and known”.\textsuperscript{77}

Maggie Helass reported on a Bush Church Aid meeting of May 17th, 1998, at which John Harris made comments that “attitudes and policies in the colonial church ... had actually stunted the growth of an indigenous church” claiming that

the church waited to ordain Aboriginal clergy until they were going to have to minister in situations so complex, so demeaning and sometimes so antagonistic that their very survival would be threatened.\textsuperscript{78}

Unfortunately no date is given for this period, although obviously pre-1988. However how much more difficult is it now given the economic climate which impacts on the ability to support and provide for a clergy leader; the social ills that cause stress amongst Aboriginal people and

\textsuperscript{75} Southern Cross, Dec 1993, p. 12.

\textsuperscript{76} Southern Cross, Dec 1993, pp. 12 – 13.

\textsuperscript{77} Southern Cross, Dec 1993, pp 13 – 14.

\textsuperscript{78} Marketplace, June 1998, p. 9.
social injustices. This needs to be remembered in the light of the attempts to establish an Aboriginal Church.

McIntosh recorded events of the fiftieth anniversary of the community which coincided with the 1992 Revival at Elcho Island. Those present included Harold Shepherdson and many of the missionaries from the early days and I quote a large part because it seems to indicate a reluctance to let go, to acknowledge the gifts of the Aboriginal people, and to welcome Aboriginal people as brothers and sisters in Christ:

On the opening Friday night, the Aboriginal Ministers called for the old missionaries to come forward and to pray the way the Aborigines do, following a charismatic style. Of the hundreds of visitors, no-one came forward. On the second night, only Harold Shepherdson and a few others joined the circle of prayer. On the Sunday, the last day of the Revival, the Ministers berated the audience. Djiniyini Gondarra said, ‘In the old days we followed you. We kept our heads down because we were ashamed. Now we walk with our heads up and we look at you in the eye and say, ‘We can be brothers and sisters together. You must pray the way that we do. Come forward’. Virtually all the visitors came forward, joining hands with the Aboriginal congregation.”

In 1971 the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship had been formed by people with United Aboriginal Mission (UAM) Inland Mission (AIM) background, who were frustrated by the failure of the missions to acknowledge and encourage Aboriginal Christian leadership.80

In the year 2000, nearly thirty years later, Marion Willey reported on Ms Di Langham’s Ordination in the Anglican Diocese of Newcastle. The

79 McIntosh, The whale and the cross: conversations with David Burrumarra MBE, Historical Society of the Northern Territory, Darwin, 1994, p. 112.

80 McIntosh, p. 112.
Elders of the Koori community had earlier approached Newcastle’s Bishop Roger Herft, regarding her ordination. ‘For some time now’, Bishop Herft said, ‘the Anglican bishops have acted on a covenant principle of equality that has enabled Bishops Arthur Malcolm and Ted Mosby to travel into our respective dioceses to minister to their people.’ Bishop Arthur Malcolm had earlier met with the Elders to determine their support for Di Langham. These Elders presented Di Langham to Bishop Arthur at the ordination Service: “Our Examining Chaplains and our process have not been used in determining Di’s vocation”, Bishop Herft said. 

This I believe was the first time in southern Australia that an Aboriginal person had been brought forward or raised up by the community and the community had approached the bishop to have the person ordained in southern Australia. It was also an approach which I suggested for use at Mogo. However, there the candidate was brought by the community in an ecumenical gathering to a non-Aboriginal panel which sought confirmation of the person’s suitability. Later the panel examined the candidate before allowing the person to proceed to ordination. At ordination, an Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship pastor from the southern area and the Aboriginal Anglican Bishop of North Queensland took part in proceedings as well as the local Diocesan Bishop.

Previously some clergy in northern Australia had included cultural components into their service of ordination but the ordination of Gondarra

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drew comment. The church’s understanding of the role and appointment of
the minister in the culture of the appointee was not shown during the
service of ordination. Although the service commenced with a small part
of the Djang’kawu ceremony

At the ordination of Terry Djiniyini, the church
authorities used the liturgy authorized by the genera,
Conference of the Methodist Church. Much of its
language was in a style of English hardly
comprehensible to the majority of the congregation, who
use English as a second language. Apparently the church
dignitaries were not willing to modify the Western ritual
form in any way; the form was more important to them
than effective communication. 83

Another issue developed in Northern Australia with the break away by the
Torres Strait Church from the Anglican Diocese. In an article by Maggie
Helass on this separation she reported: “Bishop Hankin describes the
Church of Torres Strait as an autonomous indigenous church that will not
go away: ‘We have a culture and a tradition and we want to use that for
God’. 84 Indigenous leaders stressed the Aboriginal approach was one of
powerful Biblical teaching, brought forth simply and with personal
experience. The structure was to be culturally appropriate, in meeting,
service style and organization. One writer in referring to the Gospel of
Mark stated that the way Mark described Jesus portrayed him as one who
showed that boundaries and rules did not delimit the holy but rather it is
God’s presence that defines. 85 One needs to be reminded again of

83 R. Bos, ‘Fusing Aboriginal and Christian Traditions’ in The Shape of Belief,
Christianity in Australia Today, eds D. Harris, D Hynd, D. Millikan, Lanier
Homebush, NSW, 1982, p. 137.

84 Market-place, April 2000, p. 3.

85 B. Byrne, ‘Home-Coming: Scriptural Reflections upon a Process of Reconciliation’,
in Reconciling our Differences A Christian approach to recognizing Aboriginal Land
Bediako's "theology of the future is the theology of where Christians are" and ask what role are Christians taking in the development of an outward-looking, cross-cultural understanding of the Christian message and Christian responsibility in society.\textsuperscript{80} Lawton quoted McAllister:

Many of our churches have been neutralized by the effects of modernity...At the theological as well as the ethical level, the gospel has been shrunk to be an individualized, internalized and privatized message.\textsuperscript{87}

The difficulty, if theology is so privatized, is in what way can a reconciled approach be taken across a community and how can a contextualised theology be understood and accepted for the benefit of the community as a whole. This requires willingness to be aware of culturally appropriate approaches that may be valuable to a particular section of the community. However for some Western Christians, the changing trends have led to an "identity crisis" because they have seen themselves as the centre of the mission, the focal point, the locus, and find it hard to let go of the role.\textsuperscript{88}

An interesting difference in the understanding of roles was shown in Bos's statement that

\begin{quote}
In October 1981, Nungaliinya College in Darwin and Aboriginal Advisory and Development Services (A.A.D.S.) an agency of the Uniting Church, Northern Synod, arranged for six teams of two Arnhem Land people to go to each of the other six Uniting Church Synods in Australia. The sponsoring agencies saw the
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{80} K. Lawton, "Faith without Borders How the developing world is changing the face of Christianity", \textit{Christianity Today}, May 19, 1997, p. 43.

\textsuperscript{87} Lawton, 1997, p. 48.

\textsuperscript{88} Lawton, 1997, p. 47.
Thompson defined a series of approaches that need to be considered if the church were to discover the right kind of mission partnership with Aboriginal Australians. The church needs to turn upside down its structures, learning to think from the bottom up developing from the community-based structures, that is, from the clan; its patterns of ministry need to be based on the gifts and talents of the people; and ways of being church need to be based on levels from the small clan-based to community-based to wider church. He, in fact, called it 'bi-cultural' rather than diverse or multi-cultural and therefore again the make-up of congregations is limited. Importantly too it implies that one group cannot be independent of another and raises the question of control and power and freedom to be culturally appropriate. Remembering again the necessity not to stay one day longer than is necessary and keeping the mission as temporary then moving on.

Margaret Waterhouse, Project Officer, Aboriginal Awareness program, Diocese of Melbourne wrote

I am in awe of them as they battle constantly within the church with distrust and the unwillingness to let them develop ministry in ways they know will meet the needs of their people.

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89 Bos, 1988, p. 121.


91 D. Thompson, p. 3.

Non-Aboriginal clergy could reach out to Aboriginal people by a purposeful attempt to develop relationships. It was suggested that simple things such as saying ‘hello’ to people who are seen regularly, for example, neighbours and then an effort made to spend time with those people in order to learn customs and ways. Fishing, hunting or sports were good activities in which to participate. In fact Aboriginal clergy reach out particularly to men in this way. But it can be seen here that these are traditional activities and traditionally mainly male activities for both cultures. The church could provide Aboriginal people with the resources to reach out to their own people as another way to improve relationships.

Another way to improve relationships was followed by St Augustine’s Church, San Remo, Westernport Bay, which invited a Koori Dandenong Church under Aboriginal pastor Ricky Manton and wife Kaylen to visit. They had a “wam and social response to our invitation contrasted with the more formal individualistic approach assumed by members of the non-Aboriginal community.”7 The church groups kept in touch through letters and visits and supported each other in prayer. There was some financial support. However the Koori minister had expressed sadness at the lack of continuity of support from other people who had expressed interest.

The dangers of security were in structures which “once created seek their own legitimation” where

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The one-time spontaneous expression of love solidifies as an organization grows in size and age. The constitution gets longer. The red tape grows thicker. The symbols are idolized. Procedures rigidify. Evangelism yields to ethnicity. Openness to new deeds gives way to maintaining the status. Policies, structures, and bureaucrats smother the way of love.⁹⁴

A comment was made that “While a distinctive Aboriginal church is emerging, Aboriginal Christians value the style and tradition of the churches which brought them the gospel” and this now seems apparent in urbanised Aboriginal churches as well as some areas in Torres Strait.⁹⁵ It is apparent that there was no attitude of throwing away that which seemed appropriate from the Westernised Church but rather taking what was appropriate and placing it within their own culture. But, Raeilestone Smith cautioned:

As Delphine Stanford says in the June 1990 edition of *Voices from the Silence*: “There is still a lot of handout mentality within the churches instead of standing by our people and allowing them to be self determining.”⁹⁶

This was also apparent in the area under study for this thesis both in the secular and church environments.

A powerful picture has been painted by Grierston who graphically described a journey from the edge to the centre, the return to the edge and the sense of ‘abandonment and loss’ and through this discovering ‘a relocation and redefinition of the centre for all time’.⁹⁷ By letting go and

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⁹⁴ Kraybill, p. 174.
⁹⁵ J. Harris, 1990, p. 864.
allowing, by opening oneself to new directions one can experience a greater wisdom, a new centre. Grierson also referred to the centre as a place of safety, comfortableness which draws us back from the vast unpredictable edge.\footnote{Grierson, p.xii.}

Grierson used this centre/edge correlation of power and powerlessness and direction/ lack of direction drawing on the work of John Dominic Crossan.

Once upon a time, there were people who lived on rafts upon the sea. The rafts were constructed of materials from the land from whence they had come. On this land was a lighthouse in which there was a lighthouse keeper. No matter where the rafts were, and even if the people themselves had no idea where they actually were, the keeper always knew their whereabouts. There was even communication between people and keeper so that in an absolute emergency they could always be guided safely home to land.\footnote{Grierson, p.xii. [quoting from J. D. Cross, *The Dark Interval*, Argus Communications, Chicago, First Edition, 1975, pp. 41 – 42]}

and now

There is no lighthouse keeper. There is no lighthouse. There is no dry land. There are only people living on rafts made from their own imaginations. And there is the sea.\footnote{Grierson, p. xii. [quoting Crossan, p. 44.]} 

The first part explores the depth of love of God wherever humans are and irrespective of their knowledge of God: “God was always in our culture”. God was always there to guide those who sought His support. Then people stopped listening to God, to God in other people and made assumptions about each other’s place in the spiritual world. When that happened then people lost contact with God, with His commandments and were rudderless. They were no longer concerned for the other in the
world but only their own desires.

Secondly, I believe the light-house keeper was and is always here and the lighthouse is always available but it is the interpretation of God’s love and the Word that appears to be hidden because of mankind’s self-centredness. The raft should be shared together so that humankind can journey together. That raft can be human existence, the earth, or any other conversation involving ‘vulnerability’, ‘boundaries’ and ‘thresholds’ but here it is being Christian and being part of the church of believers.

Journeying together involves talking together, walking together so that each person engages with the other. If God is the centre then it is “our ministry, to proclaim, to liberate and to heal as we contemplate following Jesus to the edge” 101 For it was Jesus who went to the edge to help those who were lost and to achieve salvation for all people. And it is the job of the Christian to imitate Christ. These are the wishes of the Aboriginal Christians in their journey. Christians should be showing in action what being made in the image of God means and the call that Christ makes to all Christians to love one another, to seek out the poor and the oppressed, the hungry, the sick, the disadvantaged, to transform the world:

There is that power which nurtures as a mother a child, a call to possibility, to becoming, to tomorrow. There is that power which centers the world, integrative, whole and free. This is the power we forge together from the act of loving the world. 102

101 Grierson, p. 2.

102 Grierson, p. 6.
Are the churches prepared to look at a different process that will enable others to seek God in their culture and to address Him accordingly and to accept that this is not a matter of dividing the Body of Christ, fragmenting the whole, but adding to it with a richness from which all Christians can gain?

At the same time there must be a willingness to put aside preconceived notions and judgments, relegating notions of dominance and power to a place where they cannot be used. If people stand at the centre and not go out into the world - to reach the edge and experience what the disempowered experience - they cannot hear what Christ wants and cannot truly be Christ’s Church in the world. They cannot hear Christ. It requires a voice to be heard, an ear to really listen and a noise to be made. That listening must happen where the greatest need is and where Christ commanded the work to be done. Therefore conversation must happen and a partnership developed. In return a new partnership, an enriched life will keep the whole Christian community dynamic and growing.

While this may have been aimed at the Church for failing to take new risks for the sake of the Gospel generally, it is even more important in relation to supporting Aboriginal people in their Aboriginal journey in Christianity. As Aboriginal people explore their identity as Aboriginal and Christian and they meet in partnership with other Christians each will strengthen the other through the sharing of their own stories. The church needs to be an incarnational church in society. Attitudes of ignorance, apathy, arrogance and hypocrisy need to be rooted out and replaced by education, love,
humility, truth and integrity. A partnership without strings but with recognition, support and an awareness that the struggle of the Aboriginal church is part of the survival of the whole church.
IDENTITY AND UNITY

A correctly understood theory of rights requires a politics of recognition that protects the integrity of the individual in the life contexts in which his or her identity is formed.

In this chapter I look at ideas of identity and how positions of power can affect a minority people. Identity as Aboriginal is an important part of the process of contextualisation as Aboriginal and Christian.

Notions of peripherality

The position of Aboriginal people politically, economically, socially and in religion could potentially be drawn on in terms of the peripherality of those called the Fourth-in-first World peoples who achieve a sense of meaning in their lives by exploiting their peripherality and practising “assertive marginality”. Aboriginal people however describe themselves as First Nation people and see themselves as unique and all later comers as invaders. Therefore there is a different orientation but Aboriginal people have a number of similarities with Fourth-in-First World people. This exploiting is not apparent as a fully grown activity but there appear tendencies towards this with a growing interest in promoting Aboriginal


Fourth World groups within the liberal democracies accept that they are members of these nation-states but they will no longer accept being recognized as anything less than distinctive members with special rights. They resist encapsulation.³

Encapsulation was a term of imposition, subjugation and domination, a position which makes another subordinate or subservient.⁴ This denies identity, diversity and indigenous agency. It is indicated by attitudes of religious conservative institutionalism and ethnocentrism. Encapsulation suggests engulfed in but another term, 'nesting', suggests maintenance of identity, individuality, separateness of entity, which can be nourished while being protected by the nest and the nurturer.

One aspect of 'encapsulating' power was that of centripetal and centrifugal goals (which I have mentioned earlier) used by dominant groups in order to compartmentalize, subordinate or control, for the benefit of the dominant group:

In some cases dominant groups specify centrifugal goals, which sustain various degrees of social and/or cultural compartmentalization between themselves and subordinates. These can range from acceptance of multiculturalism through to enforced apartheid. At other times, dominant groups have centripetal aims, which overtly or covertly force subordinated to assimilate into dominant institutions.⁵


⁴ Paine, p. 54.

These approaches can be inclusive or antagonistic. In order then for a community or a group of individuals to counter such approaches - whether they appear overtly or not - the non-dominant people need to be assertive, to enhance the cultural conditions, to be persuasive in valuing their culture, to be ‘noisy’ in being. Thus identity can be strengthened. If the dominant culture in society does not allow the definition that a minority group holds of itself but rather continues to define that group within the parameters of the dominant group then the view is racist. It denies identity and precludes agency.

For a non-Aboriginal person maintaining a sense of identity is linked with having a clear understanding of what aims and goals are in their life and what responsibility they believe there is, if any, to the local community. Identity and purpose are seen as necessary to give direction and describing ‘who and what we are about’. Imposed identity, that is, one that is placed on a person by other people denies identity. Aboriginal identity is drawn from the sense of history and background and by its location within the Aboriginal community and, most importantly, by relationship to the land.

One response from an Aboriginal person was that being involved in an Aboriginal-led church meant being able to relate to the people there. The feelings roused developed from the attitudes and the welcome of the people, the relationship of the people based on their knowledge of where a

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person fitted in, their background, their understanding of issues that are important to an Aboriginal person and in the relationship with the land. For the Aboriginal person membership of the group is integral to identity. Kinship relationships and obligations are important. The sense of identity must be accepted by others of the group for which that identity is relevant. Identity is based on the values, attitudes and beliefs of the community in which the person derives a sense of belonging and then, by exhibiting certain behaviours, the individual aligns with the culture. One’s sense of identity is also dependent on the acceptance of others. The flow to and from the community into the dominant culture, and the perceptions held by the dominant culture about the minority group affects how the minority group fits in or is perceived to fit in. All of these are of importance to the status of Aboriginal people and particularly of relevance to their sense of inclusion or exclusion within the Christian churches.

Although the construction of Aboriginal identity must come from within - and not as a response to non-Aboriginal perceptions - Aboriginal identity is sited within the wider identity of the general community. This wider identity impacts on Aboriginal identity both creatively and by the presence of boundaries, which may need to be modified. A relevant point is also argued by Vasta and Castles, who wrote of the continuously forming and reforming of identity dependent on life experiences.²

The location of self or identity must be credible to the individual and to others and provide continuity for the individual and the individual must

² Vasta and Castles, 1996, p. 72.
recognise that others see it too.  

Gondarra, a Uniting Church minister in the Northern Territory, stated his belief about the need for an Aboriginal Church and the requirement to hold on to identity:

When the Lord calls Aboriginal men and women out of this world to do His work he does not take away their culture or language and their true identity as Aboriginal people. He blesses them and gives them His word of commission to go into the world and preach the gospel to all mankind.  

He does not see the ministry of Aboriginal people as only to Aboriginal people, as exclusive, but to all mankind. And Gondarra went on to say Christ uses all men to be his disciples and He wants His disciples to communicate His words in the context of their own culture, so that the people can understand and make their response to the gospel in their own understanding (Matthew 28:16-20)

Gondarra recognised the gospel as “a gospel of Salvation and love and unity” but added “I must discover that God is not only for the white person; I must find he is for me, too, as an Aboriginal”.

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9 Gondarra, 1986b, p. 15.

10 Gondarra, 1986b, p. 15.

Religious association and cultural identity

From the Christian religious perspective two important issues are that the Word of God is universal and that it impacts on the believer through experiences within God’s design and in the encounter with the Holy Spirit in the market-place, so that God becomes dynamic within that person and community. Uniting Church minister, the Reverend John Brown, warned the gospel is a powerful force for the strengthening of cultural identity. Yet it may not be used to strengthen cultural identity at the expense of the community of the body of Christ. 12

Brown also noted that some Aboriginal Christian people held negative attitudes to their own culture but that they would need to find for themselves how “they could relate the Christian gospel to their culture.” 13 These negative attitudes were apparent in the answers to some of my interview questions. However other Aboriginal Christians actively address the relevancies between the two spiritualities.

Identity, unity or co-opting Aboriginal heritage

Stockton listed a number of areas of significance in ceremony including the fact that Aborigines today love to travel long distances for big occasions, for example, funerals. He referred also to the Mass which, in

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New South Wales,

is commonly performed outdoors, in a bush setting where possible, around a camp fire with the simplest of elements. The vessels which may be baler shell and coolamon, are placed straight on the ground. Damper may be made for bread. The liturgy begins with a smoking ceremony; green gum leaves are placed on the fire and participants walk through the smoke, washing the smoke over their faces with their hands; this gives a sense of purification and wholeness.\textsuperscript{14}

This smoking process has been used on a number of occasions when the function is formal or special, for example, at ordinations or inductions but not always at regular church services. This is really a superficial approach to contextualisation with little reference to the form of liturgy, leadership, story and song - in all other respects the liturgy may have been straight from the formal service-book. I query Stockton’s comments that:

Our Aboriginal forebears too, though of different stock, are yet also our spiritual forebears if we are willing to be grafted onto their spirit. Then we can read our story as the fuller history of human presence on this continent. We have been here 50,000 years or more ... The sacred story of the firstcomer becomes the sacred story of the latecomer, awakening the sacred memory of the land so it becomes for both their holy land.\textsuperscript{15}

I am not sure that non-Aboriginal people can co-opt an Aboriginal heritage (if this indeed is what is meant), though there is no question regarding moving forward together in faith. Many Aboriginal Christians believe that they have a commission to bring non-Aboriginal people, including Christians, closer to God, particularly in the expression of Christianity in daily life. An appropriate understanding of the land and responsibility to

\textsuperscript{15} Stockton, 1995, p. 11.
the land and the land’s connection as Mother and nurturer are other aspects that Aboriginal people believe are important for other Australians to address.

When Roman Catholic clergy were asked about their attitudes towards migrants and the migrant involvement within the church and what the clergy felt should be done for migrants, they commonly replied: ‘we want to make the migrant feel at home within the parish’ or ‘we want the migrant to feel that he belongs’. The implication was that the migrant should want to ‘belong to our parish’; as one Sydney parish priest put it, ‘I am just amazed that migrants don’t want to belong’.

From the responses to my questionnaires this attitude, though towards Aboriginal Christians, was similar: ‘why can’t they join us?’ In relation to Australian Catholic migrant members:

The norms of PM [Pastoralis Migratorum] apply to ‘all those who live outside their homeland or their own ethnic community and need special attention because of real necessity (PM 1:15)’ [but], ‘The Australian Catholic laity also see the ideal situation as one where the migrant will become indistinguishable from the Australian’.

Comments such as these imply homogeneity, uniformity, blindness to another’s needs particularly in the quest for contextualisation and indigenous agency and an ethnocentric approach. Certainly the previously

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17 Lewins, 1978, p. 70.

mentioned centripetal and centrifugal goals are indicated.

Newbigin argued that the text (the Bible) can only be interpreted within the framework of the contemporary society and if that is one of oppression, alienation or being on the outside or on the fringes, then that impacts on the interpretation, the understanding or the reasoning of the message. This raises the issue of boundaries, of exclusiveness and inclusiveness. Foulcher claims

Concern about boundaries and identity is clearly a product of our current post Christendom, pluralist situation. But unity based on the defence of boundaries is exactly what Jesus opposed in his own culture.

Protecting what the church has against any changes both in structure and authority, in churchmanship and dogma may lead to a stagnation of the church and an exclusive, club-like arrangement which does not reach out in to the world. This would be comfortable in the short term but eventuate in a diminishing organisation with no relevance. Unity is strengthening and supportive and the united body provides a standard point, or a quality against which the principles on which the organisation operates can be measured. The overall body provides the canon or law under which all operate and the criteria for the wise counsel and the approved teaching in order to ensure teachings are in accordance with the whole body.


Reconciling the church and Aboriginal identity

Biernoff reflected on the changes that he understood were associated with a new strength being felt by Aboriginal people and the need for them to share and to provide security and support for one another in the secular arena. At Mogo the definition of identity as Aboriginal and as Christian is deemed to be important and is seen as a supportive means to promote self-esteem and a pride in their heritage. Deborah Rose wrote of the effects of Pentecostalism on Aboriginal people in her study where the interpretation of the people's 'spiritual and social ties to the land' which are fundamental to the sense of self were decried as the 'work of the devil' according to this particular Christian group:

I knew that the preaching of Pentecostal Christians in the area had posed a dilemma for Aboriginal people: if they were to become Christian, according to this sect, they must abandon "Dreaming law" which incorporates many aspects of Aboriginal culture, including marriage arrangements, trade, ceremonies, attachment to country, protection of Sacred Sites, and beliefs about the origin of the world, the nature of the soul and the afterlife [and] I found ... that almost all the people who had converted had "gone back" to Aboriginal culture.

Rose spoke of the positive way Aboriginal people in Northern Australia felt about their culture. A choice was made by the people, even though it was contrary to the direction given by the missionaries. It was important to the people to take care of 'country' so that a person had a place in the world therefore they were concerned that "Every person who drops out of

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22 D. Rose, 1985, p. 58.
Aboriginal culture leaves a vacuum that must somehow be filled if the whole is to continue.\textsuperscript{23}

Another message often received by Aboriginal people from Christian people was that their culture had no value and therefore the people had no value. Rose explained

\begin{quote}
Yarralinn and Lingarra people’s rejection of [the Christian] message was clearly based on the brutality of the condition that they could not retain their Aboriginal identity and still be accepted into heaven.\textsuperscript{24}
\end{quote}

The earlier mentioned difficulty with literalist Bible interpretation also underlines this. It is human interpretation that creates the dilemma and a sense of righteousness and ethnocentrism that encourages the response that there is only one right path.

A Bush Church Aid booklet \textit{The Real Australian} contains the following information about the St Luke’s Koori Community Church in Dubbo and its Anglican leader, the Reverend Gloria Shipp and Eddie Shipp:

Dubbo has a population of 40,000 of which 7,000 are Koori people. Gloria and Eddie trained at Nungalinya in Darwin where Gloria “reconciled her Aboriginal identity with Christ”, “that Christ accepted her Koori identity”… Her vision for Aborigines is “to be self-sufficient and to have leaders in the church and community. This can be done by discovering and using their gifts, to know their identity, and most of all to know Christ as their Lord and Saviour.\textsuperscript{25}

Eddie produced “the art that speaks of Christ among Koori people” that is,

\textsuperscript{23} D. Rose, 1985, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{24} D. Rose, 1985, p. 60.
\textsuperscript{25} \textit{The Real Australian}, The Bush Church Aid NSW (Secretary G Thompson) p. 4.
in decorating the church building. Comments were made on the use of clapstick and didgeridoo and the “profound gift [of Koori people] in expressing faith stories through creative means”.26 Sadly, I believe this ministry ceased in 2002 due to the Reverend Gloria Shipp’s ill health. In the same way that Gloria Shipp spoke of her experience, Djininyini Gondarra also appealed:

If I am to have my true identity before God, you cannot lock me into your ways. You must give me the freedom to be me. 27

*Unity – Collective identity*

The Church is a living, growing thing, and it is that because the life of Christ is in it... That is the nature of the Church; it is the instrument of Christ’s personality.28

Maintaining an identity as Aboriginal, for those of the Aboriginal Christian community who also wish to identify as Christian, is important. Even so, is the setting up of Aboriginal Christian churches divisive for the Christian church as a whole? Biblical references indicate a unity in Christ. If the church is responsive to the life of Christ, the church must be evolving, responding, doing – all active words that imply a movement, a vitality. Three passages from the Bible draw attention to the Body of Christ:

*Colossians 1 verse 18*

He is the head of the body, the church;

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26 *The Real Australian*, p. 5.


Ephesians 1 verse 22b-23

him the head over all things for the church, which is his
body, the fulness of him who fills all in all;
and Galatians 2 verse 20a

and it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. 29

Wand wrote of the concept of the Church as the Body of Christ and other
bodily images, for example, as the Head, and concluded therefore, “the
church’s unity is not that of an organisation but of an organism” which
carries out its business in a particular manner with people living and being
managed in a particular way in the pursuit of a common interest. 30

Unity and diversity within the Body of Christ

Diversity within the body of Christ is mentioned in many places in the
Bible, for example, 1 Corinthians 12:12 -13

For just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many, are
one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we
were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks,
slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of the
one Spirit;

verse 20: As it is, there are many members, but one
body;

verse 27: Now you are the body of Christ and individually
members of it.

This is repeated in Romans 12:4-5:

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the
members have the same function, so we, who are many, are

29 The NRSV Bible
one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Ephesians 4:4 and Colossians 1:24 also speak of the church as being Christ's body. While each and every part of the body is necessary to fully experience life and to contribute to the well-being of the whole; also by being part of Christ's Body, each member is absorbed in and filled by Christ.

Each person is by association a part of another if all are within Christ. Therefore to deny another the chance to be one with Christ is also denying oneself. Even more so to deny the unity that Christians have within the Body of Christ is to deny Christ. If by Christ’s death every barrier was broken down between people whether by gender, race, language, politics, whether slave or free, but then this is denied then Christians deny the sacrifice given.

If Christians are the body of Christ with every barrier broken down, then the Christian church (that is, the people) should be without barriers, without walls, vulnerable to Christ’s message and the action of the Holy Spirit. All Christians are therefore one in Christ and their identity is in Christ. Again the verse, referred to earlier, is highlighted by other passages:

Colossians 3:11b: but Christ is all in all;

Galatians 3:28b: for all of you are one in Christ Jesus;

Ephesians 2:22: in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God;

and John 10:16: so there will be one flock, one shepherd.
The essential ‘unity of being’, so long as it is not broken by absence from Christ, comes about from a common purpose to continue the work of Christ. Within that continuity lies a sense of identity and that continuity is necessary for identity. \(^{31}\)

Many Aboriginal Christians believe that there can be a sharing and strengthening of each other, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. From interpretations of these Biblical passages it appears that there should be no barrier between Christ and those who profess him, nor should there be amongst his followers. Therefore all followers of Christ should be one in relationship under Christ. In that process of sharing and learning from one another and opening oneself to ‘the other’, individuals can grow and find new heights and depths within themselves and new understanding:

The Christian faith speaks of a God who cares especially for the poor and dispossessed, and who holds before us the constant possibility of a renewed community. It calls us not to fear but to hope, not to suspicion but to trust, not to division but to fresh discovery of all people as our brothers and sisters in the human family. \(^{32}\)

Charles Sherlock in Many Flowers – One Fragrance the Scriptural Witness to Multiculturalism stated:

The vision of God’s garden, with its many colours yet one fragrance, has not only its inspiring, but also its unsettling side. \(^{33}\)

Perhaps this unsettling side refers to the changes that need to be made - the

\(^{31}\) Wand, p. 39.

\(^{32}\) Fouleher, p. 39.

\(^{33}\) di Francesco, p 49.
reaching out and listening - the connection that Christians need to make with one another irrespective of colour, race or culture. One way to approach this difference is to start listening to the other’s story and by many stories being told and really heard then the larger picture of God’s story can be told:

To be a Christian is to be joined, to be put into connection with others so that our stories cannot be told without somehow also telling their stories. Through such telling and retellings we believe that God makes us part of God’s story.24

Perhaps in this sense Stockton’s argument is appropriate.

From that telling must come an understanding of each person’s and each culture’s unique value to the unified Body of Christ and each part of this must be envisioned as part of a harmonious whole which allows diversity within unity. The institutional church needs to respect the need of a member of Christ’s body to express their Christianity in an appropriate way and to still be part of the whole – the unity - remembering ‘Wherever Christ is, there is the church’: as Matthew 18: verse 20 states “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them”.

Unity under Christ

David Bush interviewed John Harris in an Encounter programme entitled The Churches and the Stolen Generation (Encounter ABC 10 Dec 1997) with particular reference to the Anglican Church of Australia. John Harris indicated that there were four levels at which unity needed to be addressed:

unity at the level of the structure of the Anglican Church; unity at the level of church leadership; unity at the level of the congregation and unity at the level of the individual. At the level of the structure of the Anglican Church, Harris stated the church found it very difficult to change: it still appeared very much the colonial church (still the ‘white fella’ church). In his comments on unity at the level of church leadership, and in reference to training of Aboriginal people for leadership, Harris said: “the mainline churches withdrew from any interest in Aboriginal people here in this state [NSW] more than 100 years ago.”

It was, in his words, only the Aboriginal Inland Mission and United Aboriginal Mission who looked after “the ones next door, the ones in the slum...the fringe dwelling community.”

On unity at the level of the congregation he indicated that in urban Australia the church had been least successful in training ministers and many Aboriginal people “have had to turn to the AEF”: the “Anglican church in Australia has not been a church that has openly welcomed Aboriginal people and visibly welcomed them into its life and its activities”. He continued:

the old CMS mission at Wellington in NSW in 1830s and 40s has left [the perception in] Wiradjuri people in Wellington that they are in some sense Anglican but this has not meant that the church membership has been nurtured...or elsewhere in central west NSW in the past 150 years... The truth is there are very few places where Aboriginal people have generally felt welcomed and

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36 Harris with Bush.

37 Harris with Bush.
accepted and comfortable and belonging in Anglican churches. In some places they were actively discouraged, refused communion for example on the North Coast of New South Wales.\textsuperscript{38}

This again underlines the feelings of many Aboriginal people in this study. Harris also declared that all mainline churches projected this stance.

However, there were some instances where this was not the case as recorded by Eileen Morgan. She wrote of her experiences in the Bermagui-Cobargo Anglican parish of New South Wales: of her involvement teaching Sunday School, her children’s attendance at Sunday School, her sons as altar boys and her on-going involvement in women’s groups.\textsuperscript{39}

Harris’s fourth level was that of unity at the level of the individual, that is, people’s attitudes to each other. In an effort to address this issue it is important to discover what the churches are doing to encourage awareness of Aboriginal people and their beliefs, difficulties, concerns and gifts and so on. A few churches are pursuing workshops and encouraging members to be part of reconciliation groups but the real need is for all people, clergy and lay alike to greet, meet and listen.

Unity does not mean uniformity but rather being of the one mind and spirit. Philippians 1:27 states “I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel”. As a people there were many stories but, for Christians, there was one story that united and gave identity. The churches’ life was based on God and that was its identity. For the Christian the unity of being with God in

\textsuperscript{38} Harris with Bush.

Christ, the reference to the Bible and the presence of the Holy Spirit
should reflect the ground on which all meet. For as Garrett has said:

[we] must learn to listen as much as to speak, to be
corrected as much as to correct, both within the life of the
believing community and in interaction with the wider
world. The word of God may be alive in the community at
worship but it is not within its ownership. Voices other
than our own may well be bearing witness to it.  

In these areas tentative conclusions include the need for a more definite
response from each individual church member, a greater freedom to
explore and experience faith, hope and love and a sensitivity for providing
an appropriate context for worship that recognises another's culture. Then
worship is focused not on the church, not on ceremony or ritual or
comfortable images and exhortations or pleasant addresses. Nor is it
entertainment but it is a worship of God. All Christians have their identity
in Christ and all are united in the one Body of Christ even though they
are different parts of the one Body but each part must not view itself as the
part that defines the whole. This would allow for contextualisation,
indigenous agency and respect for one another.

Unity and uniformity in message

"Christology affects every branch of Christian theology as the sap of a tree
affects the quality of its foliage".  
Perhaps an interpretation of this could

40 G. Garrett, ‘Worship and the Life of the Church in a Postmodern Age. A Discussion
Paper’, Diocesan Symposium, Diocese of Canberra & Goulburn, 13 – 14 March
1998, Jamieson House, Canberra, p. 38.

concerning Christian understanding ed A. R. Vidler, Cambridge University
be that the foliage is the actions and expressions of Christian belief in the community. Whether that foliage thrives or withers depends on the understanding of the message and the physical manifestations – that is, the actions of the believers – of that message in relation to the expression of Christ-like living in the world. Divergence seems to start at this point with comments on the expression of Christian living in the lives of some church people and the expectations of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Christians as to what is true Christian expression. If the foliage withers then the tree will die. What is needed is not uniformity but authenticity, faithfulness to the word of God and "consistency between what is said and what is read."\textsuperscript{42}

In a collection of writings which make up a book on the Torres Strait Island Mission for which J J E Done worked from 1915 a reference was made to a letter where he expressed his opinion that

\begin{quote}
The white man can do a great deal, but he cannot get to the real understanding of the native mind as one of his own can, besides which the people must learn that the Church is not something imposed by the white people from the outside, but really their own Church, being an integral part of the Church Catholic established in the world, for the world by Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{43}
\end{quote}

It seems that there have been many comments made which indicate an understanding of the rights of Aboriginal people to have a contextualised Gospel, but these are not generally heeded and if they are it is mainly in


\textsuperscript{43} compiler B. Stevenson, \textit{Wings Across the Sea}, Boolarong Publications, Brisbane, Qld, 1987, p. 102.
the north of Australia.

Unity and cultural diversity

The Archbishop of Melbourne’s Report stated “the Trinity itself enshrines the principle behind true multi-culturalism: unity in diversity, diversity in unity.”\(^{44}\) It then observed:

We should not expect to see a complete social and racial mix in every congregation. But it is not good enough for world wide churches to content ourselves that somewhere else across the city there is a congregation where other ethnic and class groups feel at home. God’s calling to every local Church is to reach across human barriers, as far as lies within their power... The dangers of condescension and dependence can be avoided: each can find ways of giving and receiving.\(^{45}\)

Furthermore the report, quoting Max Warren (former General Secretary of CMS), stated that in reaching out to the other:

Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on man’s dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was here before our arrival.\(^{46}\)

The report advised of the number of congregations which meet in association with the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne such as Persian, Tamil, Asian, Chinese and Maori as well as ecumenical groups which included Tongan, Fijian and Aboriginal. However, not all congregations have contact with the Diocese. And that, particularly, is the point – the


\(^{45}\) Archbishop’s Report, p. 38. [from D. Shephard, Bias to the Poor, Hodder, 1983, p. 39.]

\(^{46}\) Archbishop’s Report, p. 40. (Max Warren was originally cited in A. Race, Christians and Religious Pluralism, SCM, 1983, p. 3.)
body to be a whole needs contact between its parts.

The report explored methods of inclusion, of incorporation and co-operation including having a multilingual Sunday service; a monthly service in a non-English language; a completely ethnic congregation meeting week by week for which people come from a wide area, and so the ministry could cross all parochial boundaries but which would need to be “affirmed and permitted, perhaps by the issue of a special licence under the direction of a bishop or archdeacon who has a particular responsibility.”\(^47\) It reported also on a Sri Lankan congregation which separated from the Anglican Church so that they could meet their own needs “in terms of language, custom and welfare”, which they found were not being met by the Anglican Church. The Sri Lankan congregation was not involved in decision making, nor at higher levels, that is, at Synod, therefore they were effectively not being heard.\(^48\)

In New Zealand, the Maori Anglicans did not wish to separate, just as the Uniting Church Aboriginal congregations did not and the Boomerang Meeting Place does not. So these congregations are not creating a divisive situation, in that they belong to the wider denominational church and the universal Church.

Whilst some clergy were sensitive to the fact that there were people from different cultures in the church community and that these ethnic and Aboriginal people needed their particular needs to be acknowledged,

\(^47\) Archbishop’s Report, p. 67.

\(^48\) Archbishop’s Report, p. 68.
ethnic and Aboriginal clergy still felt isolated and not really involved when they attended clergy meetings. The Archbishop’s report also suggested that ethnic clergy needed to be provided with special pastoral care because of their isolated position. A recommendation was made to the Ecumenical Affairs Commission to “call a conference on the Structural Incorporation of Ethnic Congregations into Established Denominations” and a Consultation for Ethnic Community Leaders to look at “needs of small and often vulnerable Christian communities”. 49

In order to be dynamic, Christianity needs to involve a number of traditions and many cultures. In fact if it were truly dynamic it could not reside within any one tradition or culture because it would be forever stretching and growing, seeking and developing in response to the communities it encounters. There would need to be a control on this to ascertain validity and this would be reference to Scripture and the acceptance and overview of an appropriate institution with which the group is affiliated. That would then imply a contextual Christianity. If by being open to the presence of God in the various communities diverse responses to God’s presence and message in the world are accepted then a diversity within the unity of the wider or universal church occurs. ‘The churches’ role is to be the leaven not the lump.’ 50 By lifting boundaries, by being open to the presence of different approaches, new understanding and expression, new interpretation and a willingness to align itself with the ones Christ saw as important in the

49 Archbishop’s Report, p. 103.

world - the poor and suffering, the alienated - and to lose cultural baggage, the churches can begin to address issues of relevance. The churches must focus on the need for a person's identity - personal, communal or ethnic - to be an important part of the relationship with God because it is that identity that gives an individual and a community, a place, a sense of belonging and an acceptance as a member of that community. Being Aboriginal and Christian for the Mogo people enables them to have a base to formulate programmes to improve the social, economic, spiritual and possibly political outcomes for the community. Religion has the ability to promote wholeness and to positively impact on the fragmentation or formlessness which is less than whole. 51 It is worth noting the comments of the Reverend Stephen Williams of the Anglican Church of Ascension, Alice Springs, who stated "Aboriginal Anglicans are almost completely absent from the normal worship life of the church". 52 He went on to express concern for the local Aboriginal people and fears for their future:

Though many believe the gospel, in order to be Aboriginal they courteously decline the church’s mothering. Some of the people say that the church’s main contribution has been to inculcate a sense of shame about almost everything, and especially about being Aboriginal...

Essentially our church is still a ‘white fella’ church. We really need to be supporting them as they discover their own way of being Christian, and as they discover what the good news of the gospel is for their own culture.... There is some urgency for us in that the influence of the church declines with succeeding generations, and it is the older


folk, who are dying off, who are needed to give cultural legitimacy to the proclamation of the gospel.\textsuperscript{53}

Here at least there is recognition of the value of the elders. But there is also an emphasis on reaching out to Aboriginal people in such a way that they are able to achieve an identity as Aboriginal and Christian in a culturally appropriate way.

\textsuperscript{53} \textit{Church Scene}, no. 764, Sept 2, p. 10.
CHAPTER 12

LEADERSHIP AND TRAINING

Leadership and training were two of the issues spoken about by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people throughout my interviews. Awareness of cultural backgrounds and understanding of multicultural ways and perspectives were referred to little in theological colleges generally. Ridley College, Melbourne, in 1985 was to include one unit on multicultural ministry. St Mark's Theological Centre, Canberra, has a small elective unit which commenced in 2002 on Aboriginal spirituality and culture run by an Aboriginal member of the clergy.

Edwards, among others, made reference to the New Testament stating that it does not indicate a priestly hierarchy but rather a group of people using gifts and talents to carry on God's work in the world. The hierarchy of clergy was not seen by Edwards as scriptural but as a societal response of an authoritarian body whereas, he felt, a community based organization would choose its spiritual leaders differently. (The Newcastle and Canberra and Goulburn Anglican Diocesan approaches were to ordain people raised up by their communities.)

Anglican Bishop Richard Appleby's comments to Synod concerning Aboriginal ministries raised a number of issues. After commenting on the number of clergy ordained as part of an "indigenisation" process – one in 1973 and others during 1985 – 1990 and the outcomes of this ordination he

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deliberated that the ‘priestly formation’, that is, the preparation which the six candidates needed to fulfil both before and after ordination was inadequate. He commented on the “fear, fragility and persecution” which was apparent in all but two of the incumbencies and he questioned the on-going training and support and how it should be given. I wonder whether, in the process, much had been discussed concerning cultural differences, social issues and recognition. I noted earlier that some churches are characterised by fear possibly due to elements of traditional spirituality and having ‘a foot in both camps’.

Fear is an issue in some areas. Further training is probably necessary. But an understanding of cultural protocols may bring a better understanding of the situations in which indigenous clergy find themselves.

Bishop Appleby rejected, and objected to, the formation of an Aboriginal Church because he believed it was “driven by the ideological self determination agenda”. His first objection was based on a territorial ecclesial base, that is, a bishop is defined by / has a marked territory. This has nothing to do with the establishment of an Aboriginal church per se. So the implication is that an Aboriginal church will mean an Aboriginal bishop. This will limit the number of Aboriginal churches if that is what is needed. He did suggest that an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander bishop would be agreeable if the membership of that diocese were not restricted to the bishop’s race or tribe. There have subsequently been appointed


\(^3\) Interview: Tape Five.

\(^4\) Church Scene, June 23, vol.4, no. 802, 1995, p.2
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bishops – that is, bishops with particular oversight.

Bishop Appleby’s second objection invoked the quotation so often used that all people are one in Christ. The implication here is one that there is no need for specific people for specific needs – clergy are provided already. There is no acceptance of indigenous agency in this statement but there is a sense of “join us”. The westernised church meets all needs:

Given these two principles, I contend that it is absolutely unacceptable to even contemplate the development of a unit of the church on racial or tribal lines. Such a diocese or bishopric would be a fundamental denial of the gospel.  

The implications of Bishop Appleby’s comments are reminiscent of those of Gribble. In a book on James Noble, Aboriginal missionary (born 1876), a letter by Ernest Gribble to the Archdeacon commented on how valuable Noble’s involvement was: “Now that James Noble has come, things will be better all around.” (22 April 1914).  

A letter the following year from Robert Swinnerton (10 June 1915) to the Archdeacon said:

“Thank God we have such a fine missionary (James Noble) amongst us”. Yet the impression in Gribble’s book “Forty years with the Aborigines” (James Noble worked with him) portrayed Noble as little more than a messenger. There appeared no account of his talks (sermons, addresses)

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5 *Church Scene*, no. 802, p. 2.


7 Higgins, p. 34.

8 E. Gribble, *Forty years with the Aborigines*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1930.
to the Aboriginal people. The attitude of the period was apparent in the comments on Gribble and his approach:

Dad Gribble was very strict, and even when the people were grown up they had to go to church. Nobody stayed home. If there’s a man missing in that church Dadda Gribble will look around to see if everybody is in the church. If he missed one person he would go out in his surplice and all and pick them up and bring them in to church. He would make them walk from where he found them. As soon as he got near the church he’d carry them, and put them in the church where they had to sit.  

These comments indicate the paternalism which was part of the attitude of the era, and the approach of some missionaries to the Aboriginal people as children. This attitude is still commented on by some Aboriginal Christians as an attitude that is present today. Although there may have been great concern for the people by the missionaries there was little indication of acceptance as equals in the sight of God by many missionaries or a confidence in the ability of Aboriginal Christians to give the message of Christ. Some Aboriginal Christians would suggest not much has changed given the difficulties experienced in training, acceptance, funding and responsibility.

In their research on Aboriginal Australians and missions, Edwards and Clarke, found that after no longer being responsible for the administration of mission in the 1970s the Presbyterian and Methodist Mission Boards were able to put more time into the training of ministers and the development of an Aboriginal church: the ministers needed to contend with issues of distance and being unable to attend to the educational requirements for ordained ministry therefore the Boards developed a

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programme in 1973 for Mowanjum, Ernabella and Queensland missions for a six week course which allowed them to administer the sacraments and, in fact, became local ministers. This is something that is currently being addressed in some non-indigenous Anglican country parishes where the lack of sufficient clergy or funds makes it difficult to maintain full-time clergy but still allows the full range of ministry including the sacraments to be available to the people. The candidates proceed through an academic course while studying at a pace compatible with their secular work commitments and under close supervision of an ordained person. This format may have some application to indigenous clergy.

A new approach was also started in the North Queensland Anglican Diocese with a policy of encouraging Aboriginal people to join ministry where theological or college training is waived and personal training from the, then, Bishop Arthur Malcolm and his wife, was deemed to be acceptable. Training of people for ministry in the congregations of the Anglican Church has now become a practice in some dioceses.

It was also noted that when Aboriginal people have Aboriginal leaders in church matters and see

\[\text{one of their own kind who has the undeniable authority and backing of a large institution; one whose language and socialization is their own, and yet who has the outward manifestations of a large and powerful institution}\]


they are affirmed. This has the signs of contextualisation: acknowledgment of the people as Christian in their own right, reflecting their history, and in unity with the wider church. This refers to developments in Northern Australia. This was also the case in Mogo. One member of the congregation at Mogo expressed pride in the fact that the Anglican church had anointed one of their own people.\textsuperscript{15}

Avis also addressed this issue [albeit in an article on ecumenical theology between Roman Catholic and Anglican] which implied that the church has the freedom ‘to decree rites and ceremonies’ and to “employ its ‘authority in controversies of faith’ providing that its teachings are not incompatible with the tenor of biblical teaching.’\textsuperscript{14} Here the Word is given precedence. Again this is a sentiment, which is appropriate for Aboriginal Church development. Bishop Browning expressed the Anglican approach in an article stating Anglicans emphasise the involvement of all people in pastoral care and the programs

developed have affirmed the communal and non-hierarchical nature of the Church given to us in Baptism and celebrated at Eucharist… there are just a few elements reserved for the priest.\textsuperscript{15}

This should allow greater freedom for the leader not to be part of a hierarchical nature. Particularly on the issue of lay presidency, that is, lay people celebrating the Eucharist, Chislett wrote regarding the motion at an

\textsuperscript{12} personal communication

\textsuperscript{14} Avis, 1986, p. 51.

Anglican Synod “to affirm that only a bishop or an episcopally ordained priest could be the celebrant of the Eucharist” even though “the Appellate Tribunal’s surprising opinion [was] that nothing in the Constitution of the Anglican Church of Australia precludes the possibility of deacons or lay people presiding at the Eucharist.”16 The possibility, even the surety, exists that lay people or deacons can administer the sacrament. Again, this adds emphasis to the delay that has occurred in encouraging Aboriginal Christians to come forward and to be upheld by the Church. Change is difficult.

Religious association and cultural leadership

One of the questions that was used in my discussions was whether there were areas of traditional beliefs that must be adhered to in order to maintain identity as Aboriginal. Most respondents replied that there were none. However one respondent replied that

some of the customs about responsibility and obligation to your people, what status in life they’re in and family comes first and that has to be seen as part of your whole ministry, probably the important part of your ministry. The traditional customs, the caring and sharing and reaching out and being available for people which, I suppose, is what a man of God or a woman of God is supposed to do. That’s our tradition.17

For this person relationships were most important. One of the other things that was mentioned as important was the wisdom of the elders: “Without

16 Anglican News, Sept 1998, pp 5 - 6

17 Interview: Tape Five.

18 Interview: Tape Three.
their blessing I don’t think it’s right for us to do things.”  According respect to the elders is important even for the leaders. Having the agreement of the elders is important. Even so, a leader needs to show a caring that is culturally appropriate and an awareness of obligation and responsibility to the people and the land. These are traditional customs.

The other area of importance is training of leadership in theology and here there are a number of difficulties. There have been issues about what training is for when it seems to maintain the structure of the organisation rather than achieving a growing church or an effective outreach amongst the people.

Coe, in an effort to define an approach to theological education that was culturally appropriate, used the word “contextualization” which he expressed as located in the future rather than the past.¹⁹ The design for education based on the second Mandate of the Theological Education Fund was one he promoted, that is, one where thought, culture, church and environment are seen as inter-related and reflected on so that there is a more effectual encounter within the life of the society.²⁰ Responses to the type of training to be offered to indigenous clergy reflected some quite patronising attitudes over the years including Bayton’s

there would be great difficulties to be faced if Torres Strait Clergy were Inducted into livings in those places [capital cities and parishes of the mainland Diocese][and]


²⁰ Coe, p. 236.
Then there is the problem of education and the inability of the Island Clergy to cope with the normal situations of parish life.21 He noted that The Reverend Scriba Sagigi, a Torres Strait Islander, held a curacy in Darwin. The comment was also made that more full time ministry would happen if people were prepared to accept ‘an Island’ priest. Another controversy was over the length and type of training that would lead to ordination including the confrontation between the Church Missionary Society and the Anglo-Catholic Bishop of Carpentaria over the type of training for candidates. The bishop’s stipulation that theological training be undertaken away from the mission for six years prevented James Japanma from being ordained.22

In the 1950s, Capell noted the few converts and the almost complete absence of Aboriginal clergy particularly in those denominations which required years of training.23 Capell also noted that there were relatively few converts over the years and an almost complete absence of Aboriginal clergy.24 He mentioned that some smaller groups had preachers but if long courses of training were required then this meant “no” Aboriginal clergy. This has changed since but only slightly with few Anglican Aboriginal clergy graduating from mainstream theological institutions; and some clergy being accepted with Nungalinya training (in the North) and Nungalinya training and Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship Bible College

24 Capell, p.145.
or other Bible College short courses. Some southern clergy have training other than theological studies, for example, in social work, and workplace training.

Harris outlined the method of clergy selection as:

After some training in Nungalinya College in Darwin, Aboriginal Christian leaders, recognised and chosen by their communities, began to receive formal and positive acceptance by the Anglican Church of their leadership and vocation.\(^{25}\)

Nungalinya is not always appropriate for residents of southern Australia who are concerned about the distance and separation from family and the appropriateness for them of the courses provided. However, some Aboriginal clergy have fulfilled longer periods away at various establishments. Never-the-less the number of Aboriginal clergy in southern regions is still low.

Thompson also recorded a number of issues relating to clergy training: one being the issue of celibacy in the Roman Catholic church; another the years of formal training at theological establishments which involve six years of training and separation from families and was therefore not acceptable to Aboriginal people. The development of places such as Nungalinya and Wontulp-Bi-Buya went a long way towards dealing with this issue in North Australia and certainly provides occasions for Aboriginal people from southern areas to learn more of Aboriginal culture but do not always provide the means for southern people to study long-term. Associations have been formed in South Australia between Flinders

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\(^{25}\) J. Harris, 1990, p. 860.
Nungalinya and with an Aboriginal support group, TACL. Khesed Ministries (non-mainstream) in Perth is also investigating links with Nungalinya. Bimbadeen College at Cootamundra had an association with the Baptist Union of Australia. However other issues were

the closeness of extended family ties in Aboriginal society, the maturity of real leaders and their family and community commitments, and the importance of locality and kin to Aboriginal identity and well-being. Another important reason was the lack of fit between Aboriginal styles of leadership, based on kinship authority within family groups and consensus between groups, and the individualistic hierarchical leadership structures of the Churches. Hence an individual Aboriginal leader was not necessarily accepted widely in a community of mixed groups. 26

These issues all apply to Mogo. Family responsibilities take the minister away from the area for extended periods. Community commitments mainly demanded by the non-Aboriginal community impact on the minister's time. The minister was from another area and this affected the commitment of some of the wider Aboriginal community.

Apart from these organisations, if a student wishes to study at a theological institution in southern and eastern Australia there appears little support (in comparison with general university support networks) and little chance of completing a qualification at a level accepted by the mainstream church institutions. Very few theological colleges and Bible colleges provide multi-cultural studies and even less give background studies in Aboriginal spirituality or in studies to aid in pastoral care and support of Aboriginal

26 Thompson, 1987, p. 28.
people. The teachers of those subjects are rarely members of the particular ethnic group or an Aboriginal person.

In a review of John Harris’s *We wish we’d done more* [Open Book South Australia 1998] Bishop J Wilson wrote “are we any wiser down south today as we desire to push the requirements for ordinands even higher without recognising other leadership that God raises up?”

There may also develop a plethora of small organisations all trying to achieve the same end and thereby accumulating costs beyond reasonable ability to handle – given the number of students and length of time involved in courses, stretching resources of personnel and facilities. A balance needs to be achieved and a willingness of existing accredited organisations to facilitate the needs of indigenous students also shown. An awareness of multi-cultural needs and courses for clergy trainees on cultural awareness should be a compulsory part of training.

Houston wrote about the decision to implement a project on the multicultural role of Church under the auspices of the Victorian Council of Churches - Intercultural Theological Education in a Multi-Faith Society (ITEMS) - in 1984-5. He stated:

> The dissonance between the theological training of white Anglo-Celtic clergy and the diversified social experience of the community is now so serious that we run the risk of becoming an ‘ethnic church’ of the Anglo- Australian middle class – that is, a minority group church.\(^{28}\)

\(^{27}\) *Market-place*, March 1999, p. 13. (J. Wilson)

\(^{28}\) J. Houston, ‘Towards a Multicultural Perspective Theological Education. The ITEMS Project in Melbourne’, in J. Houston, 1986, pp 208 - 9
He drew a further conclusion that such an ethnic church cannot offer its spirituality and worship to the wider society, nor speak out with prophetic voice on issues beyond its experience. No longer can the world be its parish: it settles for the family and its own domestic concerns, while the stream of life flows endlessly past.  

He also argued that the attitude to clergy training needs to be changed to address issues facing a multicultural society or clergy training will be deemed to be culture-free - albeit within the bounds of Anglo-Celtic culture particularly for Protestant churches. The course was to be conducted in 1986 at Trinity Theological School for Anglican, Uniting, Jesuit and Melbourne College of Divinity students. The following statement was also made: The Archbishop's Working Group on Aboriginal Matters (WGOAM) recommends a National Anglican Aboriginal Secretariat and desires, inter alia.

47 That at every level of educating Anglicans for ministry, contact and interchange with a variety of cultures be undertaken...That the Education for Ministry program incorporate multicultural perspectives...
54 [all ordinands and clergy] take courses on multiculturalism such as I.T.E.M.S...
55 (a) That field education be broadened to include specific multicultural placements.

And in Aboriginal Matters

85 That a concerted education program among Anglicans, especially involving Anglicans meeting and listening to Aborigines, be undertaken...
86 That real and sacrificial acts be made by the Church in the transfer of funds and property to Aboriginal groups to demonstrate our sincerity to Aborigines and the wider community...
89 That support be given to Christian Aborigines in ministering to their own communities and help be given in

30 Working Group on Aboriginal Matters Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, p. 144.
Anecdotaly this appears not to have been general and any time spent on such courses is short and limited. The issue of 'institutional racism' needs to be addressed: this was described as an expectation that the norm of the 'white', middle-class, 'educated-elite English' in the British environment would prevail irrespective of the make-up of the congregation. Few mainstream clergy training establishments have courses other than broad, introductory style multi-cultural courses of limited time and generally the courses are aimed at Anglo-Saxon men and women serving in Anglo-Saxon churches. In-service workshops are not well supported. Some Bible Training colleges fare better. Reliance is left to Aboriginal specific colleges to train Aboriginal people. When Aboriginal people attend a mainstream college there is often difficulty with the style of presentation of information, the requirements pertaining to the course, support, and sometimes, the lack of awareness by other clergy members that the person identifies as Aboriginal (physical identifiers are stereotyped). There may be different cultural expectations:

To do theology in the light of this black truth, we black theologians must recognize the conceptual limitations of white academic categories -- whether in theology, philosophy, or history of religions.

Another approach was taken in 1998 in the Northern Territory when Steve Etherington, a non-Aboriginal, was ordained by Bishop Appleby as a

31 Working Group on Aboriginal Matters, p. 147.
33 Cone, 1975, p. 244.
deacon to the Reverend Peterson Nganjimirri at Emmanuel Church of Kunbarllanjinja (Oenpelli): “The ordination took place to fill a specific and urgent need that of raising up and training new Aboriginal church leaders and clergy.”

The training of Aboriginal leaders is vital to the Aboriginal church because “The crisis of the Aboriginal Church is the crisis of leadership.”

Where the church has its focus is important with regard to where and how it functions: is it God-centred, is it pastoral, is it culturally sensitive? If it is these things and the people express these approaches in the practice of their faith, then it will be easier for the disadvantaged, the culturally different and those on the ‘outside’ of society to find a home.

At the Diocesan Symposium for the Anglican Church, Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn (13th and 14th March 1998) Graeme Garrett referred to the God “whose word is freedom, whose action is justice and whose being is radical love.” Through worship the church meets with God and the way the life of the church interacts in the wider community expresses its reason for being. While the church community withdraws to celebrate and affirm its beliefs, it must also go out into the world to put forth and enact the commandments of Christ. In this way it focuses on God and not itself.

The model of clergy is best described as a “priestly model, in which the

34 The Anglican Messenger, Dec 1998, Western Australia, p. 18.


ministry is exercised towards God on behalf of the people... [and] the pastoral model, in which the ministry is exercised towards the people on behalf of God.”

Wheeler wrote of the necessity to make certain that the invitation to Aboriginal Christians to contribute in services of worship is not gimmicky, not token, not politically correct, but valid. In *Khesed News* it was reported:

Ron [Rev’d Ron Williams, an Aboriginal Christian leader, died on October 30th 2003] spoke quietly about a belief he has had for a long time, but not spoken out because this wouldn’t have been accepted by most Australian Christians: that Aborigines are the ‘priests of the land’ in Australia and must stand up and perform their priestly role.

Sensitivity is another issue that demands comment. One Aboriginal clergy member mentioned that “it’s just that too many clergy already see it as ‘our responsibility’ – a wonderful excuse not to do anything”. That is, matters to do with Aboriginal people are the responsibility of Aboriginal clergy and therefore other clergy do not need to address the situations, yet when an Aboriginal clergyperson tries to address matters in an Aboriginal way conflict often arises.

I commented earlier on the difficulties experienced by the Reverend Alex Gater. Mavis Rose wrote of these difficulties experienced between the

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40 personal communication, August 2000.
Reverend Alex Gater, an Aboriginal Anglican woman who trained at
Nungalinya College, Darwin, and was ordained to the diaconate in 1997,
and Reverend Malcolm Bell, a non-Aboriginal, stating that the Reverend
Malcolm Bell

overruled the authority of an elder, the deacon in charge of
the Brisbane Murri Fellowship, the Rev'd Alex Gater ...
Recently the sad situation developed where both Malcolm
Bell and the Rev'd Alex Gater called two separate Annual
Meetings of the Anglican Murri fellowship"... "One
could argue that in Church law, as a priest linked to the
Murri Fellowship, Malcolm Bell is of higher rank than a
deacon. But he is not an indigenous person, he is not a
Murri elder, and Alex Gater, is the designated leader of
the Brisbane Murri Anglican Fellowship. 41

Rose asked

Where is the justice and sensitivity to the law and culture
of our indigenous people in this action? The structures of
our church are yet to begin to wrestle with the cultural
reality of the leadership of elders within indigenous
communities. 42

The Reverend Alex Gater resigned on March 15, 2000 but subsequently,
around July 2000, withdrew her resignation when plans were put in place
to review the situation. In discussion the following comment was passed
on to me by a third party who mentioned issues of training and under-
mining of her leadership: "What hurt ... most is Bell's assumption of
leadership of the Fellowship when he is not an elder ... this smacks too
much of dispossession by white people". 43

There are few Anglican Aboriginal clergy in New South Wales —
excluding one retired member, there are two in the Diocese of Sydney

42 M. Rose, p. 6.
43 personal communication
(for over 40,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), one in the Diocese of Bathurst, one in the Diocese of Newcastle, and two (one of whom was ordained in 2002) in the Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. However one of these latter two moved to the Diocese of Riverina in December 2003. The Diocese of Brisbane has one member and there are a few in other southern states.

In *The Australian Anglican Directory 2001* NATSIAC lists fourteen clergy (one of whom has retired plus one member who has since been made a deacon) of whom four are listed in the paragraph above and eight are from North Australian areas, that is, Diocese of North Queensland, Cairns Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Ministry, Torres Strait Island Ministry and clergy in four or five other parishes (about eight people) and one in the Northern Territory. There is an Aboriginal bishop and a Torres Strait Islander bishop.

In the southern states the Diocese of Adelaide lists as a parish ‘Aboriginal Ministry’ and the Diocese of Brisbane lists ‘Murri Anglican Fellowship’. In 2003 was added The Boomerang Meeting Place, Mogo. No other readily identified listings were made. One Aboriginal priest in the Bathurst Anglican Diocese from 1989 - 1991 (who died October 13, 2002) had been ordained priest in 1986. He had worked in the Koori community of Dubbo funded by the Brotherhood of the Good Shepherd but without sufficient support structures. A subsequent incumbent also experienced issues of poor support structures and resigned on the grounds of ill health.
The wider church needs to be continually challenged in order to respond to the needs of the Aboriginal people within their culture, particularly with leadership issues. While the mainstream institutionalized church theology grows from the familial culture, in the indigenous environment the impression of superiority and hierarchical leadership appears to lead a church of imposition. The church is unaware of culturally appropriate leadership and has been accused of undermining the authority structure of the men in particular. As it is a church of imposition, it cannot grow true to the culture nor to the message that is brought. The growth must come from within with indigenous leadership and ownership.

*The Torres Strait Church*

With the break away of the Torres Strait Church a number of expectations were raised by a number of people. Fr Hankin said that he “hopes the Torres Strait Church will have developed its own indigenous liturgy within two years, but expects to retain essentially traditional Anglican worship”.44 Father Passi said “the January move freed the indigenous church from the colonial baggage of the Anglican Church of Australia” and he was “strongly critical of the ethnocentric ACA”.45 Bill Hollingsworth feared the new schismatic church may be used “as a tool to promote indigenous Islander rights and autonomy”.46 Hlassen wrote in her observation that

44 Market-place, April 1998, p. 5.
45 Market-place, April 1998, p. 5.
46 Market-place, April 1998, p. 5.
the Church of the Torres Strait is an independent church, responsible for its own oversight and governance. All funds for the new church, including clergy stipends will have to be found by the people of the Torres Strait themselves. Integration of Torres Strait culture and spirituality into new indigenous liturgies will chart a new course in the life of the Australian church as a whole — one fraught with danger without the vast theological resources of a mainstream denomination.47

But “nothing can stop progress, under God, of the Church of the Torres Strait”.48 How proud and defiant that sounds. And how sure of the basis of belief.

Attitudes of ignorance, apathy, arrogance and hypocrisy need to be rooted out and replaced by education, love, humility, truth and integrity. A partnership without strings but with recognition and support and an awareness that the struggle of the Aboriginal Church is part of the survival of the whole Church.

Studying

Indigenous students have limited finances and in theological institutions do not often have support services. Many indigenous students do not have the prerequisite knowledge for the course they are undertaking or the study skills or the educational background to enable them to study at the level required at University or tertiary level. Sometimes there is a poor understanding of the university structure and requirements. Aboriginal clergy have stated that their culture is an oral one and therefore to provide written assignments is difficult. Family responsibilities, illnesses, deaths

and the requirement for the student’s presence at home impact on the time spent at study. A sense of isolation affects the student socially and emotionally if there is no support group to which the student can relate. Further isolation is felt when assignments are marked down because (as the student perceives the reason) comments on Aboriginal approaches, spirituality and cultural matters are not acceptable.

Nungalinya College in Darwin has a programme which had been developed in response to the needs of and in negotiation with the people of Arnhem Land, the Centre, North Queensland and the Kimberley. The programme has a style and a content developed for people upon whom modern urban western culture has not yet impacted greatly. Many of the people still live on or in proximity to their traditional lands. The people have been more in control of the changes to their culture than people in the southern half of the country who have been dispossessed of their land and moved around by governments for two hundred years. The programme uses language and symbols with which they are familiar. It is an ecumenical programme involving Anglicans, Catholics, Lutherans and Uniting Church people, and so tends to unite Aboriginal people across the denominational traditions. Many of the programmes are short courses and some are lifestyle oriented.

While Indigenous people from the south find some help in that programme, they also want a programme which relates theology much more closely to their experience of dispossession, marginalisation and other issues which confront them daily. Therefore they find it helpful to
undertake studies in Adelaide and Sydney in special programmes designed with and for them. Those who have been brought up with the AEF and Baptist traditions find the theology and style of Bimbadeen College at Cootamundra to be more helpful. While there has been some interchange between the Bulayu House programme within the United Theological College in Sydney and Bimbadeen, this has been fairly minimal. Both sides agree it should increase ". There was some contact between Flinders University and Nungalinya and some discussion with Khesed Ministries in Perth to pursue a partnership. However for Aboriginal clergy in southern Australia who may wish also to serve in a mainly non-indigenous ministry there is still a requirement that clergy have a certain level of training which is generally expected to be at particular denominational centres.

THE SURVEY

Because of comments by Aboriginal clergy regarding training expectations of various denominations, I carried out a survey collating information provided from institutions which for the purposes of this study were defined by the descriptors:

Bible college/School
Theological College/School
College of Ministry
College of Evangelism
Theological Education
Training College
Divinity

[excluding specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander institutions and lay education boards but including two specialist centres].

Under these criteria seventy-three institutions were thought to qualify however three were found not to, although these forwarded contact addresses. Another three had left the address and mail was returned.

On two occasions the main campus responded: one for three bodies that had amalgamated and the other for four campuses. In this case the information given was taken to apply only to the main campus.

One institution replied that provision of courses for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students came under Nungalinya and therefore it was not appropriate for them to respond. Another institution known [by personal communication] to have had two Aboriginal students who had withdrawn did not reply

The following survey results were based on nineteen respondents from sixty-seven institutions deemed to qualify. This is a twenty-eight percent response rate.

Survey Results: Summary and methodology

The questionnaire was conducted as a postal questionnaire, which may have affected the low response rate. The questionnaire was generally filled out by Directors or their nominated person at the educational institutions and comprised 26 short answer qualitative questions. These qualitative questions were converted into quantitative information for the benefit of
this thesis.

Table 1. Denomination of educational institution

Table 1 indicates that the majority of respondents were from non denominational (27.8%) or Interdenominational institutions (22.2%). CMA is mission based. Note: Some denominations did not respond; others felt that the questionnaire was not appropriate for them.

Table 1.1 Course type outline

Table 1.1 indicates that the majority of institutions offer courses that contain core subjects (31%) and electives (21%). Furthermore 17% of respondents indicate that they offer correspondence courses. However it is of concern that 13.4% of respondents indicated that the description of the components of the courses offered was not applicable to them. Duration of course subject impacts on ease of attending for Aboriginal students - how many hours, once or twice weekly, over one semester or two. Specific requirements in order to undertake courses may mean extra work or an extra load. Short courses and summer/winter courses may be easier to attend. This graph shows a preference by the organisations for a more formal study pattern which may not be appropriate for Aboriginal students.
Table 1.2 Educational pre-requisites for course acceptance

Table 1.2 indicates that 32% of respondents require pre-requisites for its courses of a Year 12 level, 27.8% of respondents indicate that no pre-requisites were required to undertake courses at their institution whilst 24% indicate that their pre-requisites are matriculation. Subjects with no pre-requisite are probably available to a wider range of people particularly to those who have been educationally disadvantaged. These courses though do not have a long study period eventuating in a pass requirement for conferring of an award that offers many vocational opportunities in themselves.

Table 1.3 Mode of course assessment

Table 1.3 indicates that the majority of course assessments are conducted through an examination (31%) or written assessments (24%) and multiple choice at 6.9%. However 20.7% of respondents did not indicate the modes of assessment utilised at their institutions. Written examinations are often a difficulty – oral examinations are a preference for many Aboriginal students.
Table 1.4 Duration of course subjects

Table 1.4 indicates that the majority of courses conducted at the respondent's educational institutions consist of one semester courses (39.3%) or term long courses (21.4%). 14.2% of respondents indicated that there was no set time limit on the duration of courses. This latter situation obviously benefits students with family commitments and distance concerns. However these subjects did not generally provide the qualifications that allowed for the award of a degree or diploma which would enable a broader range work opportunities.

Table 1.5 Duration of courses

Table 1.5 indicates that the majority of courses offered by those surveyed are one-year courses (33.3%). These relate more to particular expertise subjects, short courses etc. Three-year courses make up 16.7% of the responses.
Table 1.6 Level of Awards conferred

Table 1.6 indicates that the majority of awards conferred are certificates at 27.3% and diplomas at 21.2% followed by degrees at 15.2%. However 15.2% did not indicate the level of awards conferred. This may represent institutions which are not currently under the banner of an approved institution or are for single subjects or non-award courses.

Table 1.7 In-service training offered by institution

Table 1.7 indicates that 47.4% of respondents offered in-service training whilst 31.6% of respondents do not offer in-service training. 21.1% of respondents did not indicate whether they offered in-service training. This in-service training may represent only one subject of a weekend or a term in duration or a few hours per course. Rarely was such a course offered as a compulsory component unless it was for a specific mission teaching group.
Table 1.8 Type and contents of training

Table 1.8 indicates that the majority of respondents offer both lectures and tutorials in their training, with each receiving 31.3% of responses. However a large percentage of respondents did not indicate (18.8%) the type of training offered or felt that it was not applicable (9.4%) to them. Lectures may present a difficulty to Aboriginal students – presentation is too formal, compared with small group discussion.

Table 1.9 Institution’s availability of multi-cultural courses

Table 1.9 indicates that 41% of respondents offer multi-cultural courses. It is of concern that 29% of respondents did not indicate whether they offered multi-cultural courses. This did not include courses on Aboriginal spirituality.
Table 1.10 Multi-cultural subjects and to whom they are offered

Table 1.10 suggests that it should be of concern that 36.8% of responses indicated that this was not applicable to them (though this could be affected by previous question and response) and that 15.8% of respondents offer multi-cultural courses only as electives.

Table 1.11 Multi-cultural courses as a compulsory unit

Table 1.11 indicates that 32% of respondents offer multi-cultural courses as compulsory units, however it should be noted that 36% of respondents did not indicate whether they offer compulsory multi-cultural courses and 21% of respondents said that such a course was not applicable to them.
Table 1.12 Contact hours per term

Table 1.12 40% of respondents did not indicate the total course hours per term.

Table 1.13 Course provided on Aboriginal spirituality

Table 1.13 indicates that 48% of respondents do not offer a course on Aboriginal spirituality. Plus a further 26% did not indicate their position. This totals 74%
Table 1.14 Course provided on Aboriginal culture

Table 1.14 indicates that 58% of respondents do not offer a course on Aboriginal culture plus it is assumed that N/A and N do not have a course. That totals 82%.

Table 1.15 Subjects on Aboriginal topics taught by Aboriginal people

Table 1.15 indicates that 16% of respondents have Aboriginal people teaching Aboriginal topics whilst 21% of respondents do not, furthermore 21% indicated that Aboriginal courses are not always offered and taught by Aboriginal people. The table indicates that 26% of respondents did not indicate availability and 16% said it was not applicable (this could be due to not offering the course as indicated in previous table). Another suggestion was that it was not appropriate because of the existence of Nungalinya College.
Table 1.16 Ethnic subjects taught by ethnic people

Table 1.16 indicates that a high percentage of respondents (37%) did not indicate whether ethnic subjects are taught by ethnic people possibly because the course was not offered. 26% indicated that ethnic subjects are not taught by ethnic people.

Question 17 asked institutions to indicate the number of Aboriginal graduates per year. 39% of respondents have 1 to 5 Aboriginal students graduating per year. Some of these students may be pursuing short courses only and therefore the term graduate does not refer to degree or certificate/diploma courses. 27% of respondents indicated that no Aboriginal students graduate and when the other n/i and n/a figures are included this figure reaches 56%.

One institution indicated that two students completed studies over a ten year period. This I feel is very supportive.

Table 1.18 Qualification with which Aboriginal students graduate

Table 1.18 shows that 61% of respondents did not indicate the level at which Aboriginal students graduate. These may be short courses or single subjects.
Table 1.19 Number of Aboriginal students to complete a subject per year. Further information indicated that the stage of withdrawal is generally in the first year with a very few in the final year.

Table 1.20 Number of Aboriginal students who withdraw from courses before completion. Further information indicated that the stage of withdrawal is generally in the first year with a very few in the final year.
Table 1.21 Percentage of students who identify as an Aboriginal. 43.4% of organisations were unable to indicate the percentage of students who identified as Aboriginal. This may be because organisations do not seek this identifier – although this would be required for the purposes of Abstudy/Austudy.

Question 22 asked for the type of support strategies that were in place for Aboriginal students. 42% respondents indicated that there were no support strategies for Aboriginal students; a further 16% did not indicate whether there were any support strategies in place for Aboriginal students and 4% felt the question did not apply. Of the few who did provide support this was in four categories, financial, academic, personal assistance and other assistance. Personal assistance was the most often provided, followed by academic and other assistance.

Table 1.23 Institution actively seeks Aboriginal Students

Table 1.23 indicates that 47.4% of respondents do not actively seek Aboriginal students. 26.3% did not answer the question and 10.5% felt it was not applicable. That is, only 15.8% actively seek Aboriginal students.
Table 1.24 Reasons why students leave prior to completing their course

Table 1.25 Pro-active attempts to retain Aboriginal students who intend to leave prior to course completion

Table 1.25 shows that 38% of respondents did not indicate any pro-active attempts to retain Aboriginal students with those not indicating etc that is a total of 77%. Basically only four organisations indicated that they provided broad support.
CHAPTER 13

AUTHORITY AND AUTONOMY

AUTHORITY

God bestows the deliberate gift of diversity as a creative step for the enrichment...of humanity.¹

The definition of authority, within the ecclesiastical organisations, comes under three headings and are sourced in 'tradition, reason and emotion' according to Bouma: with authority in episcopal churches drawn from tradition; authority in presbyterial systems based on 'rational authority' and congregational systems relying on 'charismatic authority'.² However the most effective leadership should use all three forms and should be based on the Bible and life-experience. There are a number of ways that authority (legitimacy) is sought and gained. These are evident in both the established 'western' church as well as the developing indigenous church. There is the authority of the world-wide church, the authority of the denomination, the authority of the national body and the authority (for Aboriginal people particularly) of the leadership.

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Authority through tradition

With reference to Anglicanism the authority of tradition comes from three sources and these are: the value put on Scripture, the reflection on a history of tradition and the use of reason. The Right Reverend B. Kyme, Anglican bishop, listed the essentials of Anglicanism as “scripture, the sacraments of baptism and eucharist, and the historic ministry of bishops” stating that authority comes from scripture and from the historical interpretation based on tradition.³

I would query whether this interpretation is sufficient to allow for contextualisation of the message and rather should have an elaboration on ‘interpreted by tradition’ because this could be a white Anglo-Saxon tradition, which was in itself an interpretation. However, part of the acceptance of each church congregation must involve compliance with the universal body of the same truths and the essence of the message. Anglicans also appeal to the use of liturgy and, when it is changed, reference is made to the authority which enforces it. Division within the wider Anglican communion becomes apparent when lack of conformity is accepted by some Dioceses and not others. However Sykes emphasised

There is only one source of authority which is the freedom and love of the Triune God. In human life, in scripture, in the creeds, in the decisions of councils, in the liturgical order and canon law, in church leadership, there is only the discovery of authority, not its embodiment.”


Authority through stewardship

Another interpretation drawn from the New Testament was that the members of the group bringing Christ’s message to the people were using their own God-given gifts for the sake of the whole group and each was recognised as serving Christ in their own particular way. Kraybill described Jesus’ approach to his ministry listing the following: “Jesus uses his authority in such a way that clearly points to God” and Jesus saw himself as a steward of God’s power. It was God who gave him the right to speak. (2) He was careful to use his authority in a way that didn’t bring personal prestige... (3) He used his authority to serve and help others.

These guidelines help determine what is good and responsive to the Word (the Bible) and what is not. The emphasis is on the ‘inverted’ kingdom or the ‘upside-down church’ where service to others is of prime importance, stress is placed on looking from the bottom up not the top down and empowering other people. Humbling of the leader in servant-hood freely given is the most vital and viable form of leadership and will also deflect from the bureaucratic style. Though the style must be functional and relevant to the culture it must also be based on the Jesus approach. This should always be the approach for a dynamic action of the faith in the world. This would seem to be the approach of the Aboriginal church – to meet people where they are spiritually, physically and socio-emotionally

5 M. Green M (Rev’d E.M.B.), Called to Serve Ministers and Ministry in the Church, Hodder and Stoughton, 1964, p. 30.
6 Kraybill, p. 239.
as a servant.

**Authority through elected representation**

The Right Reverend R. Randerson wrote in an article titled *The Indigenous Australian Anglican Membership of General Synod: As of Right*:

Indigenous people have the right to participate fully, if they so choose, at all levels of decision-making in matters which may affect their rights, lives and destinies through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their Indigenous decision-making institutions stating that in Christian terms such a partnership is consistent with our understanding of the Body of Christ: “different gifts and backgrounds but one through the unity we share in Jesus Christ”.⁸

McCoy wrote of the movement in American Indian communities under the Roman Catholic church where married men were ordained to the permanent diaconate and as a means of fulfilling the need in two Ojibway communities and both the deacons and the communities wished to have them ordained as married priests.⁹ The diaconate model was not appropriate in all communities and that model was a dependent model requiring particular functions to be observed by others, for example, a priest. One of the comments made on the appointment of deacons concerned the church’s attitudes to appointment of persons were:

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⁸ NATSIAC Flyer *(National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglican Council)* undated

A few years ago a priest in Alaska mentioned to a community that it would be possible for someone to be nominated and trained to be a deacon... [but when] the priest explained the criteria for selecting such a person, the people replied that they had already made their choice. Significantly, their choice was not what the priest had predicted.\footnote{McCoy, p. 11.}

This is reminiscent of the process required by the two Anglican Dioceses which asked that the people bring forward a candidate rather than one being chosen by the institution. Although there probably would not have been any question from the hierarchy regarding these two candidates, the community needed to validate the offering and take responsibility for the ministry and support it.

I have heard comments that attitudes by non-Aboriginal clergy towards Aboriginal clergy changed once the latter were ordained or made priest when many doors opened. There was however the concern that some non-Aboriginal clergy held about the validity of the candidate’s training. However for many Aboriginal people it was not a requirement to have ordained clergy but rather someone whom they had raised up who could lead in worship. Once the clergyperson was ordained then the Aboriginal congregation members felt proud that their leader was recognised by the wider church.

\textit{Authority through recognition of roles and gifts}

McCoy argues that every community has its own leaders with particular roles whether it was in ‘leadership, teaching, healing, hunting and
protecting' and these talents or gifts could be used in the church in an appropriate way which would break the nexus of dependency and allow for a truly appropriate expression.¹¹ This reiterates the earlier comments of the upside down church and the use of all members in accordance with their gifts and talents. The need for healing and the need to "offer a life-giving and life-sustaining identity for those being Native and Christian".¹² In indigenous ministry often husbands and wives equipped themselves for ministry by undertaking courses together.

However Aboriginal women are taking positions of authority in post-traditional communities generally and "many Aboriginal men have lost both their status and their self-respect".¹³ This leads to difficulties in providing role models for young male persons. However West claims that "Female leadership in spiritual matters has always been strong in Aboriginal culture" and therefore the rise of women as leaders 'from the 1930s' on was not surprising.¹⁴ In some areas concern was expressed by Aboriginal people at the presence of women in spiritual leadership roles and the lack of men fulfilling those roles. Other Aboriginal people, both male and female, indicated that substance abuse and incarceration were issues that prevented the men from taking positions of authority. Aboriginal people represented twenty percent of the Australian prisoner population (4,445 indigenous prisoners at 30th, June 2001) and a national

¹¹ McCoy, p. 13.

¹² McCoy, p. 18.


¹⁴ J. West, Daughters of Freedom, Albatross, Sutherland, Australia, 1997, p. 39.
rate of imprisonment for Aboriginal persons of 1,829 per 100,000 adult Aboriginal people with the rate of imprisonment fifteen times higher than non-indigenous persons.  

Another factor was the reduced life-span which affected indigenous men more dramatically than women. The high unemployment rate – which also affected self-esteem, health and well-being – was 38% in 1994 compared with the overall Australian rate of 10%.  

The total number of unemployed indigenous people was 40.2% of which 50% were long-term unemployed.  

The 2001 statistics show that the unemployment rate in urban and capital city areas for indigenous persons was generally three to four times that of the non-indigenous persons and three times the national rate.  

The authority to lead depends on a number of premises. However, these premises are not always appropriate to, or relevant to, the indigenous community. A hierarchical model may not be appropriate for Aboriginal people.

Consensus is an important outcome in Aboriginal decision-making as Bos describes in the process of a discussion on ritual

Aboriginal Christians are deeply aware of the power of ritual in shaping participants' fundamental orientation to reality. As a consequence the whole community is involved in creating theology and affirming its truth... New forms were not imposed by one forceful individual; they are

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15 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Statistics 2003, Prisoners in Australia 2001 (4517.0)

16 AusStats, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, 1994.


suggested and explained by the minister and elders, then considered and, if accepted, implemented by the group as a whole.\textsuperscript{19}

This approach has been used at Mogo - the ritual is being developed with the involvement of the elders and congregation. However there are influences of fundamentalism as well as the range of Anglicanism in churchmanship with some input from people of Uniting Church and Roman Catholic background. Therefore leadership in a culturally appropriate style would include shared leadership depending on skills and gifts, an exposition on the Word by the minister relating the Bible passage to Aboriginal life today, singing and sometimes dance led by one who had ability in that area. There is a different sense of time amongst Aboriginal worshippers with people arriving when they are able, moving away and returning during the course of the meeting and the length of meetings run to two or more hours. Bible Study is not always led by the minister but sometimes by a lay person.

Traditional Aboriginal forms of art, music, movement, drama and other indigenous expressions are incorporated often using guitar, didgeridoo, clap-sticks, traditional dance at more formal gatherings and interpretative dance on other occasions.

\textsuperscript{19} R. Bos, 'Fusing Aboriginal and Christian traditions', \textit{The Shape of Belief} eds D. Harris, D. Hynd, D. Millikan, Lancer/Zadok, 1982, Canberra. p. 137.
Authority through culturally appropriate roles

Within the Aboriginal communities

What is emerging is that setting aside one person to be a ‘jack of all trades’ minister who does everything is totally foreign to their lifestyle and culture. They are starting to talk about how different people have different roles in life, dependent on their clan and skills. And in community life and in ceremonies, different people lead different parts - there is not just one ceremonial leader.²⁰

Hume noted Passi’s comments of the connections between the old Malo leadership as in the old cult and the ‘initiation of priests in the old cult and the ordination of priests in the Anglican Church ... as being similar.²¹ Hume also referred to Gondarra’s comments that

The people of the bible understood the significance of the sacred place... Their understanding of places where the law was retained and remembered is very close indeed to the understanding the Aboriginal people have of sacred sites.²²

Rudd, as indicated earlier, had commented on the parallels between the order in traditional rites of passage and the approach used in Christian practice among the Yolnu.

Leadership and outside involvement

Outsiders have the resources and expertise (though the latter is culturally

dependent) but in the final instance the indigenous community must have the task of leadership. Using Biblical terms, Schineller pointed to the presence of three aspects: the salt preserving the culture, the leaven acting from within to transform and the seed either present within the culture as Aboriginal people attest or brought from outside the culture.  

If the seed is brought from outside it must not be imposed but freely offered and be planted by the indigenous people.

Brockway, and others, were firm in their belief that there was never real encouragement for Aboriginal Christians to develop their Christian spirituality on their own terms:

Among the more serious errors of Christian mission in Australia has been the long failure to recognise the depth of faith and level of Christian maturity of many Aboriginal men and women, and the failure to encourage, train and empower such people for leadership

[and]

Aboriginal Christians were never ‘ready’, never good enough, never sufficiently Europeanised to cope with the missionaries’ demands for a European model of ministry which had little to do with what Christian ministry actually is. Indeed, it is painfully obvious that Australian churches, represented by their missionary societies, did not really want Aboriginal leadership.

From the Aboriginal Christian point of view, ministry belongs to Aboriginal Christians as the best equipped to minister to their own people.

I referred to comments similar to those in earlier chapters and note the belief of Father Gayai Hankin of St Paul’s College, Thursday Island, who

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expressed "gratitude to the Anglican Church of Australia for taking care of us in the past" but said that "the time has come for us to take responsibility for our own leadership". The approach of the Uniting Church towards Aboriginal ministers and ministry was one of "dispersed authority and shared responsibility". Again these movements were almost always in northern Australia or remote areas.

The authority to lead is now needed to be granted to, and by, the people but the expression that this leadership takes together with the resources is largely dependent on the funding and training resources available and the extent of autonomy which is given. In the case of the indigenous community (which is largely financially dependent on the non-indigenous community), these resources are not so readily available. However I will first consider autonomy.

**AUTONOMY**

Warneck believes that there can be no autonomy in the Church except on a firm biblical foundation, a life firmly rooted in indigenous culture and with the leadership of steadfast, trained and committed people.

Autonomy must include grounding in the Bible, and a strong foundation in the culture in which it is displayed and a trained leadership.

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26 Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 48.
Warneck deplored the introduction of Western denominational differences into mission churches, and believed that these churches should be taught only ‘basic creeds’ like the Apostles’ Creed, plus some simple but distinctly Protestant statement of faith for only in this way could the faith become autonomous:

No Church is autonomous in the sense of having its origin in itself; its faith has been brought to it from outside, and it can become autonomous only by making this faith its own.²⁸

The Church’s unity and continuity was described as in three stages: ‘the gathering of believers’; ‘the forming of congregations’ and ‘the joining of local congregations into a communion with an Episcopal head’. This did not indicate a structure outside that of the mainstream church, nor an authority outside that of the mainstream church. Church autonomy was termed a spiritual not an administrative concept and this appeared so particularly for Anglo-Americans.²⁹ Concepts such as ‘the immanent divine activity in the Church’, ‘the power of God indwelling the Christian community’³⁰, ‘inner freedom to be ruled by the Word of God’³¹ and ‘autonomy in Christ’³² were noted. These relate to the spiritual aspects that are seen as synonymous with autonomy.

An awareness of religious isolation, a denial of the focal point of Christ

²⁸ Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 48.
²⁹ Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 56.
³⁰ Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 57.
³¹ Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 85.
³² Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 124.
and a lack of surety of Christ’s redemptive act were considered to be indications that would lead to failure. The church becomes indigenous by its action in the world of the community in which it is, by identifying with the people on the basis of God’s direction and by responding to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the local situation as the Gospel is made known.

According to Beyerhaus and Lefever, the unity of the church and the autonomy of its members had three aspects:

the local aspect, namely the relation between the local congregation, the regional Church body and the Universal Church. Secondly, there is what may be called the historical or genealogical aspect, that is, the relation between the young Church and its parent Church or Mission. The third aspect is the denominational one, affecting the young church’s attempts to find the right relation with other denominations, especially in its own country.\textsuperscript{33}

These three aspects all need to be validated for the Aboriginal Church: each one must have its position clarified and be prepared to honour and support the new church community. The lines of communication need to be specified and the matter of authority and autonomy addressed. There is no doctrinal autonomy in the Church, in so far as the Church relies upon the authority of the Bible.\textsuperscript{34}

Donovan, in his work on the Masai, listed a number of conditions which should guide the action and approach of others bringing the Gospel to

\textsuperscript{33} Beyerhaus and Lefever, p. 151.

\textsuperscript{34} Beyerhaus and Lefever, pp. 160–161.
indigenous people.\textsuperscript{35} These conditions included giving respect to the
culture because it represents holy ground wherein salvation lies;
approaching community not individuals, that is, respecting the culture and
the social order. In the method of promoting the Gospel it should be given
as a supracultural message only so that the people can determine the
cultural response. Therefore the people can develop their own mission
using the Bible and connections to the wider church, for support. He
further stressed the importance of baptism and use of the gifts of the Holy
Spirit. And then finally leave.\textsuperscript{36}

Autonomy does not mean dismissal or non-involvement with a wider
group nor does it allow for ignorance or lack of responsibility but it
assumes a freedom to develop in a particular way independently from the
wider group in control, management, direction and judgement and it
"assumes that there are no final winners or losers" and "no part is
dominant nor subservient to another" but there is balance as all parts "act
upon each other so as to contain, not destroy, each other."\textsuperscript{37} There is a
freedom to explore and develop a relationship with God as an Aboriginal
and as an Aboriginal community that is independent of another's
determination. And there should be symmetry –

\begin{quote}
In order that the parts be balanced, they must be of equal
power; [and in order to] maintain balance and to counter
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{35} V. Donovan, \textit{Christianity Rediscovered An Epistle from the Masai}, SCM Press, 1982,
p. 163.

\textsuperscript{36} Donovan, p. 163.

\textsuperscript{37} Stockton, 1995, p. 61.
the potential for chaos in autonomy, each part of the system must pay attention and respond to the other parts.  

While Stockton refers to 'equal power', I would suggest the word respect is also valid and 'pay attention and respond' implies listening and acting and again, listening. The word is often used by Aboriginal Christians. Listening and really hearing and then responding. However in the manner in which the act of worship is constructed, leadership, structure and use of their own gifts, being self-sufficient, in knowing their own identity as Christian and Aboriginal, there needs to be autonomy. There cannot always be financial autonomy because of financial constraints.

Aboriginal Christianity is an important aspect of Aboriginal life. Bos referred to comments by Barwick [1981:82]:

Christian beliefs are not accorded equivalent respect as cultural markers. The acceptance of Christian religion by Aboriginal communities is either ignored or lamented by anthropologists and historians.  

Funding

Funding of course becomes an important issue if leaders are to maintain a consistent contact with, and programme for, people and an ability to consolidate a ministry.

When referring to an Italian Catholic migrant community Lewins pointed to fears of the existing parish that there might be a reduction in finance impacting on parish revenue from separate loyalties if another church body

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is organised within the parish to support an ethnic group. Archbishop Mannix commented in relation to the Scalabrians that they must be financially independent of the diocese if they wanted their own parish.\textsuperscript{40} Lewins believed that the Australian Roman Catholic priests were concerned that the ability to maintain a parish might be compromised if there were a loss of ethnic groups to their own congregation and therefore a diminution of funds in the parish.\textsuperscript{41} Funding, and raising funds, is so often an issue and similar sentiments occur with funding Aboriginal ministry. Setting up of an Aboriginal Christian church community, because of low income status generally, would cause a great impact in the area of raising funds by a small group and there would need to be significant involvement from other bodies financially or a spread across a broad area which many are not willing to consider. A percentage of Diocesan funds could be earmarked for Aboriginal ministry as I believe is now happening in the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.

In 1985 the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia adopted the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) and committed to a share in ‘building community’. Though covenanting did not seem to mean financial support, the South Australian region of UAICC had taken on some financial support in Eyre Peninsula through Frontier Services even though these Aboriginal people were not part of the Congress.\textsuperscript{42} Thus resources could be shared. However, Charles Harris felt

\textsuperscript{40} Lewins, 1978, p. 57.

\textsuperscript{41} Lewins, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{42} D. Delphin-Stanford, J.Brown, \textit{Committed to Change covenanting in the Uniting Church in Australia}, Uniting Church Press, Melbourne, 1994, p. 86.
disappointment at the response of the rest of the Uniting Church to the congress during the first few years of its life. He had many ideas for placing Aboriginal and Islander Christian pastors in Indigenous communities all across Australia... He was frustrated by a number of things – the shortage of money that the Church was making available to the Congress to fund these various ministries; the shortage of trained Aboriginal and Islander pastors.\(^{43}\)

Charles Harris had experienced the frustrations of poor funding, or lack of funding, himself:

Charles developed a ministry with the youth in Ayr. But when the money ran out and he was expected to continue his ministry without pay whilst the white pastor received full pay, he felt the injustice burn deeply into his soul.\(^{44}\)

Funding is a major concern for Aboriginal clergy. Lack of funding or inadequate funding impacts on the ability to undertake training and support family as well as undertaking a ministry as a full time position.

However John Blackett, of Khesed Ministries, emphasised the need to go on in faith and

pointed out to these brothers who were struggling even then with financial constraints on their ministry, that when they perform their priestly function, then the tithes will come to them.\(^ {45}\)

While this may be a commendable approach in areas where income is steady or reliable and sufficient for people to meet their daily needs, and while one would hope that members of the congregation uphold the same view, such an exhortation could culminate in a depressing outlook and a discouraged leadership. Too often, income is not sufficient and many of

\(^{43}\) Delphin-Stanford and Brown, p. 9.

\(^{44}\) Delphin-Stanford and Brown, p. 40.

the congregation are on social security benefits. Sometimes Aboriginal clergy receive grants from a number of sources for which extra work, in the sense of representation at functions, deputations and addresses to supporting congregations is undertaken. While this is valid and necessary in order to raise awareness and financial support it is also another cost in time and funds. Some clergy are expected to undertake their roles on an honorary basis with no financial support even for travelling, phone calls or attending conferences. This has been distressing for the clergy and impacts on their ability to function effectively. One figure mentioned in 1998 (and referred to earlier) for Aboriginal ministry to sustain itself was that there needed to be a core of 200 – 300 people because of financial constraints based on low incomes whereas 100 people might be sufficient in ‘white society’, that is, middle income Australia. In some cities, rural and rural urban southern Australia this figure of 200 – 300 people would be impossible to achieve in any one denomination. In June 1999 a group meeting in Canberra identified three areas of concern for indigenous people: a united voice, qualifications together with authorization, and resources.46 The meeting reported:

> Stories were told of Aboriginal pastors and evangelists driving worn-out vehicles with grass stuffed into shredded tyres, struggling to finance fuel and food for their ministry and families.47

In an address as a part of reflection on mission which mentioned the history of Bush Church Aid, Dr John Harris (Anglican) stated

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47 *Khesed News*, no. 44, p 1
in the last ten years BCA has had a shift in thinking in
the way it resources Aboriginal ministry. In 1994 it
produced its first written policy on Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander ministry. In January of this year it has
taken on a one hundred percent support of the Rev.
Gloria Shipp in Dubbo and has allocated over $100,000
dollars each year over the next four years to direct
support of indigenous services. This money is not from
government grant or church grants but is raised from
concerned, prayerful individual Christians across
Australia. People who desire to see strong Gospel–
hearted indigenous churches led by their own people.48

The use of the words ‘one hundred percent’ leads to an assumption
that the amount for ministry was acceptable. My understanding was
that the income for the Dubbo ministry was raised from a number of
sources but only provided an income of about $10,000 per year. Reference
was also made to the ordaining of a deacon at the Mogo Boomerang
Centre. This did not occur at the time indicated, 1998. It did occur in
2002. Such inaccuracies glide over difficulties and delays with which
Aboriginal Christian ministry suffers. Even then the funding for the
Mogo incumbent comes from the Australian Board of Missions, Bush
Church Aid society, Canberra and Goulburn Anglican parishes, the
Diocese itself, and individuals. The house is unencumbered and a car is
provided. The salary for 2002 was $15,000 and for 2003 was $18,000 plus
car, telephone and utilities.

I am aware through interviews that some Aboriginal clergy were not
provided with a car, or telephone costs and these people were receiving
about $10,000 per year.

48 J. Harris, Ministry with Indigenous People, Institute of Public Theology and Bush
Church Aid Lecture, St Mark’s National Theological Centre, Canberra, 23 Sept 1998.
An organisation with the purpose of developing partnerships with other denominations (non mainstream) to be located at the Kyogle Conference Centre was also being developed:

The vision of Australian Indigenous Christian Ministries is to: Establish a covering for indigenous churches and Christian leaders who are without a covering; Provide ordination and credentials for ministry, including wedding ceremonies; Provide education through indigenous Christian schools and training colleges; Equip and release effective Indigenous Christian administrators, managers, government and community leaders. 49

The development of the Australian Indigenous Christian Ministries by Pastor Peter Walker arose because Aboriginal ministers have not had the resources needed to provide for their ministry. However it was not explained how the funds would be obtained for both the centre and each minister.

Mrs Jean Phillips, an Aboriginal elder, commented

one of the problems we have as Aboriginal pastors and full-time workers is a lack of resources to be able to minister adequately...Many Aboriginal pastors and Christian workers do not receive a wage, or are only on half a wage. This restricts the ministry God has called them to. But I admire a lot of folk who, in spite of this, manage to keep going...Because most of our churches are low income people, or people on the pension, they are not able to resource the pastor or the ministry, although some of them try. All of this takes its toll on our people. 50

This criticism applies to Aboriginal ministry in both mainstream and non-mainstream churches and is a major cause for concern in being able to


adequately and effectively carry out their vocation. While indigenous ministers find difficulty with funding this can also apply to ethnic ministries – one Korean Christian minister at St Aidan’s Church, West Epping, worked as a cleaner to support himself and his family.\textsuperscript{51}

One suggestion put forward was that an amount be set aside from Church rent income to pay for indigenous ministry.\textsuperscript{52} One full-time indigenous minister was funded – to a total of $12,000 per annum (a figure mentioned by a number of Aboriginal clergy as income) – from three different sources. Although Press and Brown see dependence on a single source of funding as limiting.\textsuperscript{53} There would be much less to draw on if that were the case. They did mention that the limited resources meant little chance for developing Aboriginal initiatives. Seeking funding – in small amounts from a number of different sources – is frustrating, time-consuming, even humiliating. Not being adequately funded at all – certainly if a minister has a family – and having to resort to government assistance or another earned income must raise issues of what value the church institution holds of their work. What value their work has in the eyes of the people to whom they are ministering is also a question as is the perceived value the congregation sees that the church organisation has towards Aboriginal ministry.

The lack of resources, the low-income base of the community to which they are ministering and the poor remuneration make ministry difficult to

\textsuperscript{51} Market-Place, Jan 1999, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{52} D. Hannah, ‘Year of Indigenous People – Can the Christian community rise to the occasion?’, Zadok Perspectives, no. 40, April 1993, Zadok, Kew, p. 10.

sustain. Yet many are willing to try.

Hart quotes Pastor Neville Lilley:

We try to get our churches to be self-supporting. It will take us a while...our church has been going now for thirteen years and our average weekly offering would be one hundred and fifty dollars...But at the moment we really need financial support and most of this comes from the major denominations - Baptist, Churches of Christ, Anglican and the Uniting Church. 34

Funding is still a major problem and interleaved with it are authority and autonomy issues.

CHAPTER 14

CONCLUSION

If Christianity is rooted in the past at the time of Bethlehem it means nothing. If it is not responsive to the Cross it is nothing. If it does not act on the Resurrection it is all lost.

Gerard Bissainthe wrote:

From the despair of our cry,  
The heart's intensity,  
Out of death and dereliction  
In the land of uprootedness,  
We shall one day give birth to our Christ,  
A Christ made flesh of our flesh,  
Our dark flesh of the black people.

These words of Bissainthe echo the words of Australian Aboriginal Christians who stress the need for a theology that is grown in the indigenous clime:

belonging to a foreign structure and foreign theology is to be like a plant in a hothouse, secure and comfortable but not related to the soil. Only a life in the open field, with the cold of the nights, the heat of the days, and the storms, will help the church grow steadily with deeper roots.

The aim of this thesis was to identify the presuppositions which were being brought to bear on the process of developing a culturally appropriate

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1 J. H. Cone, 1975, pp. 16 - 17.
2 Elwood, p. 80.
expression of Aboriginal Christianity and to determine whether these confirmed a process of contextualisation. The hypothesis was that Aboriginal Christians, particularly at Mogo, were approaching the process of ownership of the Christian message in a way that would contextualise the Gospel in a culturally relevant and appropriate manner.

In particular, I identified that the process related to Bevan’s models of contextualisation specifically the Praxis and Synthetic models, and to nine presuppositions, that is:

1. Christianity is a viable alternative;
2. Scripture is the revealed Word of God;
3. Aboriginal identity is essential;
4. The supernatural is real;
   4b The power of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is the way to healing;
5. Christianity is holistic;
6. God was always present in Aboriginal culture;
7. Aboriginal theological heritage is of value
   7b and is based on godly principles.

Seven of these presuppositions were identified by Sandefur in relation to Ngkurr Aboriginal Christians in Arnhem Land as mentioned in chapter three.

The issues that are highlighted by Aboriginal Christians are the emphasis on unity, the relationship between nature and the spirit, the approach to worship and the value of the community.

A comment expressed a number of times was that diversity enhanced rather than detracted. An awareness of affinities rather than a concentration on differences was underlined. There are diverse ways of
doing and being church.

In addressing ministry to Aboriginal people, the ministry of the Gospel in a Western context is not effective to Aboriginal Christians; its packaging must change and the church, based on Christian principles, will be prepared to take risks. The very survival of Christianity is dependent on learning what others have to offer. The church should focus on the understanding that it is God through the Holy Spirit who “calls the church into being.” Insights can be enriched by an openness to the variety of spiritual experience, understanding and expression.

The churches therefore need to be looking at smaller groups which are able to support, encourage and present the gospel to others and to use lay people in the process. These forms are ones that Aboriginal Christians employ to greater effect even more so because the time is not limited to one hour.

The Scottish minister Ferguson related this stepping outside of the rigid structures and ways of the current make-up of church congregations (and that were apparent in his local congregation) and the difficulty of seeing the bigger picture and thinking beyond boundaries to the Wild Goose, to letting go and following the Spirit, taking risks:

Our greatest need is to release the wild goose [the Celtic symbol for the Holy Spirit] presently locked up within us, and to follow where it leads. In following the wild goose, we take big risks... Yet to go with the Holy Spirit, with all the attendant risks, is the only way. If we are to save our life, we must lose it.³

³ Elwood, p. 9.

⁴ eds P. Kaldor , J. Bellamy , R. Powell , K. Castle , B. Hughes, Build my Church Trends and Possibilities for Australian Churches, NCL S Research, 1999, p. 94.
To run that risk is what the Aboriginal Christians ask so that their vision for Aboriginal Christianity and an Aboriginal church might be answered. On an Encounter programme, Aboriginal Christian Scalin Garnett said what "they could never ever touch was the union our spirit had with family". Scalin Garnett referred to a poem "The Silent Church" written by an Aboriginal man from a mission:

If there is anybody who should have been the voice for the Aboriginal people in the early sixties and the years before it should have been the church. If there is anybody on the face of this earth who should have understood about the family structure of life and the deep meaning that that can have for an individual it should have been the church.

Though this was in relation to separation of families, the emphasis on the importance of family, kinship and relationship is still present. The relationship basis of the culture is profound. The expectation is also there that the church should have been aware of the impact of such policies.

Jesus expected the church to be involved in the issues of society and be out amongst the difficulties, working towards the development of the kingdom on earth:

[Jesus] was not interested in a triumphalist Church standing impregnable against the world. He was interested in the force of a new life which could split rocks and move mountains.  

The understanding by some non-Aboriginal church leaders at both parish level and higher of Aboriginal culture varied from 'very limited, in fact,  

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nothing short of abysmal’ to a willingness to listen, to be supportive and to recognise the need for an Aboriginal ministry, and from overwhelming support to complete rejection of any cultural need to cater for Aboriginal Christians. In the provision for inclusiveness which imitates Christ, the Christian Church needs to tolerate diversity and yet find unity. It may need to let go of rigid institutional structures and restrictions that hinder spiritual growth in the development of a Christ-like community within any given culture. Yet it still needs to provide a global ‘cover’ or umbrella that disallows fragmentation but maintains a common belief system. The Church needs to act on its commission to go into the world not only as an evangelising outreach but as a concern for the disadvantaged and the disempowered so that its actions help fulfil the needs of the Aboriginal community.

If the church sees the kingdom of God as an on-going process and applies tolerance, encouragement and support to the developing Aboriginal Church, Christians could proceed with excitement, new knowledge, new relationships and a greater understanding of each other. This is what the Aboriginal Church seeks.

There are a number of areas, which indicate restrictions felt at the community level and limits due to the established churches’ expectations and acceptance. The desire to maintain integrity both of the church and of Aboriginal identity is the point where divergence occurs and where Mogo people in particular are attempting to achieve coherence.
There are three main issues that cause concern. These issues relate to training, funding, and authority. How these three issues are addressed, I believe, determines the identity and autonomy of the Aboriginal community within Christianity. Funding, the need for a sense of identity and the belief that Aboriginal Christians have much to offer the Christian community are issues that were apparent in 1998 – 2002 and still in 2004.

The issues of finding the right person, housing and support need to be carefully thought through so that the establishment of a ministry is not ‘here today and gone tomorrow’ due to lack of long term arrangements. Sensitivity to issues such as the feeling of some Aboriginal ministers that it is necessary to have a separate office if the ministry were part of a mainstream church because of the shyness of the people needs to be addressed as is the need to build the trust of the Aboriginal people.

The most important approach is to take the church to the community.

A change in focus needs to be addressed to counter situations where any moves by the people to achieve decisions or develop new initiatives do not present as carefully controlled, where decisions are not allowed to be made, or the people are dictated to so that they feel powerless. Otherwise this signals an ethnocentric group unwilling to share or act in partnership. As mentioned before in regard to authority, one Aboriginal clergyperson, said “it felt like being reeled back like on a fishing line”. Often what the hierarchy sees and what the Aboriginal minister sees as his or her role is quite different. This needs to be addressed.

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7 Personal communication
In many ways Aboriginal church bodies are kept dependent with inadequate funding, with limited freedom to change structures and make independent decisions, no firm financial base or resources and often limited input for cultural decisions in denominational ritual and practice.

Aboriginal people need to determine their leaders (though this is starting to happen), the churches need to recognise and affirm that leadership which may be quite different, as well as the style of structure in the form of meeting, organisation and decision-making. Though many groups insist that handouts are not what are asked for because this perpetuates the welfare cycle and keeps dependence, there should be recognition of the need for support for training, resources and sponsoring of leadership and a recognition of the low economic base of many Aboriginal communities.

Many Aboriginal people still see God as belonging to the 'white man', though some believe Christ was already in their culture. Many Aboriginal people find it difficult to attend services in a non Aboriginal environment and cite the structure, the format and the attitudes of other worshippers as part of the difficulty.

In an empathetic way - putting oneself in the place of the other person - the other person is given dignity and respect and it must be remembered that venturing into the arena of another's spiritual world is stepping into holy ground. To approach the other as if entering holy ground keeps the dialogue focused on God.

To insist that 'the other's' ability and goodness be proven in order to be part of the Christian Church denies Jesus' approach in which he walks
with people on their journey. Rather than seeking ‘worthiness’ as still so often occurs (and certainly did occur in the early missions) and judging another’s spiritual development, the philosophy should be one of walking together, mentoring each other, based on trust, value and respect so that each is enriched. Valuing and respecting each other is a two way process which allows each person to see the benefits of the other and to grow. Not the faith but the practice of the faith must be thrown into disarray.

Being willing to receive must be acted on:

> When the white man first came to this country we showed him where the water holes were. Now we will show you where the spiritual water holes are.\(^8\)

Survival of the Christian church will depend on input from indigenous groups just as survival for ‘white’ Australians depended on the knowledge of the Aboriginal people of the availability of water. Issues of respect, valuing worth, courtesy, deference and recognition are essential in relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and even more so between Christian people. However the indications are that the main direction must lie heavily on meeting with, listening to and sharing extensive time with Aboriginal people. ‘Listening, listening and listening’ as one person put it.\(^9\) Then walking with, in partnership, using resources together and learning together.

Religion can provide support, consolation and reconciliation, authoritative teaching, therefore security and order; it has a prophetic function, it

\(^8\) R. Williams, *Australia’s New Day*, no. 35, March 1984, pp. 34f (also no. 38, June 1984, pp. 6 – 7).

\(^9\) Interview: Tape One.
sacralizes the norms and values of society, that is, it has a social function linking the individual to the past and the future. The individual, as one thread in the web of society, acts out the rituals that strengthens the basis of that community, sustaining it and integrating its members into a cohesive whole. This enhances the survival of the society and provides identity with the group and between groups. Religion can orient, strengthen and order a believer in society. The individual religious experience is bound up with the conditions of the times and can only be interpreted within the context of the time. The belief and approach that should signal the attitude of all Christians is that it is union with Christ that makes all ground holy. If the conversation with the ‘other’ is based on the pattern of Christ, as an equal and with respect, then comes something far more freeing, engaging and valuable for all.

My conclusion is that a contextualised Gospel is being sought by Aboriginal Christians in southern Australia as they strive to achieve an identity as Aboriginal Christians, to own the Gospel and to find their own identity in Christ. Further, this contextualised Gospel is approached with similar presuppositions to those of Aboriginal people in northern Australia.

An emphasis is made on the expectation of the healing power of the Gospel as a means of restoring the people and restoring the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in a way which is God-centred. There is also an expectation of a restoration between God and humankind. The presupposition is that under the guidance of the Christian perspective, healing and growth of confidence and self-esteem can occur.
This will then lead to a restoration of a people under a servant Christian community. This development would be expected to take place within the cultural context of the local people.

Healing is emphasized as a very important part of Christian belief by other southern Aboriginal Christians and another aspect is that salvation is available to all people, and that this salvation comes through faith and faith alone: Eph 2:8,9: For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God – not the result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ This salvation is an important aspect of the faith.

Christianity is seen as a viable alternative. Not only from the point of view of healing people in social relationships, in health and spiritually but also as providing a practical response to an uneven world.

One important focus is to use the Christian message as a means to achieve a positive outcome in addressing disadvantage and other social issues – in God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit the people believe they have a creator, a guide, a helper and a healer. In relation to Bevans' definitions, this is therefore a praxis model, although this is not exclusively used, as there are elements of the four other models evident. The power of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is the means to healing. The people look to a changed social outcome amongst other results. The people believe that the Scripture is the revealed Word of God and that God has, is and will be always in their culture. The culture contains many godly principles particularly in the approach to Land – its origin and the

¹⁰ NRSV Bible
custodianship of it - and in relationships and the emphasis on the caring and sharing of one another: a synthetic model. The emphasis on the Holy Spirit and ‘life experience’ both in a religious and experiential sense indicate a transcendental model.

Christianity for these people is holistic. The practical programmes and fellowship and outreach into the community puts into practice an expression of faith and builds self-esteem and confidence.

The establishment of an Aboriginal Church is based on the assumption that the world has a spiritual dimension, that all of nature and all beings are inter-related and directed by God. The use of space is patterned on traditional approaches as is time.

Relationships are important and take precedence over meetings, work or other plans and the length of time involved may be considerably longer than for a non-Aboriginal person. Authority is still very important with emphasis on the contribution of the elders and deference to them - here, mainly women.

There needs to be a growth in understanding of both what is important in relation to the practice of Christianity by indigenous people and of the ways in which the structure of the churches and role and model of its clergy could be re-assessed to allow for full expression of indigenous identity.

I have seen great acts of generosity and kindness on the part of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in order to have the Mogo ministry
established. The willingness of the Aboriginal people to share and reach out to others in the community and their determination to continue in the light of financial shortages has been remarkable. This strength comes from the belief that they need to build a servant Christian community to whom people can turn for help, prayer and sustenance and to build one that is culturally appropriate.

Mainstream non-Aboriginal Christians need to ensure that there is an open mind, open ears and a willingness to listen, and engage in dialogue and a deeper understanding of ‘unity in diversity’. I put forward an approach to be considered: that there is a need for crossing boundaries in cultural awareness, in intra-parish, inter-parish and inter-Diocesan or Circuit boundaries for the strengthening and support of the Church as ‘One Body’. This may also involve a need for cross-denominational support. By understanding the need to contextualise the Gospel and the efforts put into the process by Aboriginal Christians, non-Aboriginal people may gain a greater understanding of Aboriginal culture and of the Gospel.

The process is an on-going one and changes have occurred since this study commenced and since the establishment of The Boomerang Ministry Place Meeting Centre, Mogo, as a Ministry Unit of the Anglican Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn. The Aboriginal minister was ordained an Anglican priest in November 2002 and the cultural and training centre called the Walbundja Skills Centre, which is part of the holistic approach, was to commence in early 2003. This did not occur and still had not in mid 2004 but the minister was hopeful that this would occur
in mid to late 2004. Two young Aboriginal men have commenced study at a mainstream institution at their request. Their needs must be met if this is to have a good outcome.

For the Mogo people their desire to locate some records of their language (through the efforts of Dr John Harris) has meant that they are now able to say the Lord’s Prayer in their own language.

The hope for Aboriginal ministry generally including the area of study was to be able to locate resources, to function without bureaucracy, and to have community control.

In a discussion on Amerindian communities, McCoy referred to the comment of John Hascall, Ojibway and Capuchin priest, at the 1986 Tekakwitha Conference: “Before we used to wonder if we could be Indian and Christian. Now we know that we can only be Christian if we are Indian.” 11 The Aboriginal Christians can say likewise. Another sentiment was expressed by Lalara Gayangwa on Groote Eylandt who said “We don’t need people who will do things for us, but who will stand beside us and empower us to do things for ourselves.” 12

There is a sense of urgency to bring lives under a banner with Aboriginal Christian identity

- in practice
- in ownership
- as a means of social change
- as an expression of life — culturally
- with a strong belief of their own identity in Christ

12 Southern Cross, Dec 1988, p. 6.
- as local agent
- in time
- in being
- in authority, ritual and kinship
- within a sense of continuity, that is, maintaining Aboriginal ways as far as possible.

At Mogo the style, the meeting format and time are in the control of Aboriginal people. Music, dance, song, dress, architecture are designed by Aboriginal people. Religious knowledge in which experiences of life are very important, as are the putting in to practice of the moral environment and improving health and healing. There is some local agency and partnership with the wider church. However there needs to be a broader approach to the understanding of scripture particularly by the non-Aboriginal Christians who are part of the church community.

In late 2003, a member of one denominational hierarchy commented on the lack of understanding of the culture, that is, the church culture, of certain Aboriginal clergy. This comment must raise questions about the understanding of contextualisation, of culturally appropriate practices, of hermeneutics, when the culture of the church takes precedence over the culture of the person or community. In early 2004 I was asked by another member of a church hierarchy how a person could be Aboriginal and Christian. And another, in the paramedical field, expressed surprise that people could be Aboriginal and Christian.

This thesis indicates the effort by Aboriginal people to obtain full ownership of the Christian message as Aboriginal and a concerted effort to manage their identity as Aboriginal and Christian on their terms.
APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Indigenous people use music, dance and some prayers that are specifically indigenous. Do you feel that there are other areas of worship where indigenous people could express their identity?

2. Is there a difference between a fellowship group and a church group in how indigenous people can express their Christianity?

3. What are the strengths of the fellowship group?

4. What are the strengths of the church group?

5. What are the weaknesses of the fellowship group?

6. What are the weaknesses of the church group?

7. It has been suggested that indigenous people have fellowship amongst AEF members and also maintain a connection with other churches. Would you comment on this?

8. What are the benefits of belonging to AEF and a church group?

9. For some indigenous people there is a struggle to maintain their identity in the church group. Do you agree? Could you identify areas of difficulty?

10. It has been said Aboriginal Christians suffer because of conflict between traditional beliefs and Christian beliefs. Do you agree?

11. Are there areas of Christianity that are very difficult to embrace because of traditional beliefs and customs?

12. Are the structures of the Christian church, that is, the man-made rules and hierarchy, a difficulty for indigenous people?

13. Some people have said traditional ways are evil, others that indigenous people can embrace both traditional and Christian beliefs side-by-side. Do you agree? Can you explain?

14. In what ways can the Christian church reach out to indigenous people?

15. It is often said indigenous people are very spiritual people. In what ways do you think this is?

16. Indigenous people have a great deal to offer the Christian churches. Can you describe what you feel about this statement?
17. I would like to talk about training for ministry in the Christian church. Where do you think is the best place for indigenous people to be trained? What are the reasons for this?

18. What requirements do indigenous people have for their minister?

19. What requirements do non-indigenous people have for their minister?

20. Is an indigenous minister’s role exclusively for indigenous people?

21. Are indigenous ministers able to minister to non-indigenous people?

22. Are non-indigenous ministers able to minister effectively to indigenous people?

23. What do you understand the clergy model to be?

24. What are the differences between an AEF leaders and a minister of a particular church?

25. Do some Christian denominations have rules which are difficult for indigenous people to accept?

26. What parts of Christian beliefs are important to you?

27. What parts of traditional beliefs are important to you?

28. Are there areas of traditional beliefs you must adhere to in order to maintain your identity as Aboriginal?

29. Are there areas in the Christian churches where changes could be made to enable you to express your Aboriginality more?

30. Some people believe an Aboriginal church is divisive. They feel all Christians should worship together. Do you agree? Please explain your ideas.

31. Are there limits to the expression of identity within the Christian context?

32. How would you describe black theology? Is it an appropriate term for Australian indigenous people?

33. I am particularly interested in the structure of the Anglican church and whether the structure limits or affects the ability of indigenous people to fully express their identity. Could you comment on this?

34. Does the hierarchical nature of the church structure create difficulties and is it necessary?
35. The issue of training, expectations, style and place appears to be important. What is expected in this area from the church's point of view and is it the same as that expected by indigenous people?

36. How can the gospel be freed from its "whiteness?"

37. Could you address the issues of identity of indigenous people and autonomy of indigenous people within Christianity?

38. Could you consider the above questions also in relation to New Zealand? {for a particular respondent}

39. I am also interested in the rationale behind the setting up of the Mogo centre, the expectations of and for the ministry there and the involvement of the Anglican church in the way of training, finance, pastoral care etc.

40. If you feel there are other issues in this area that ought to be discussed please feel free to make those comments.
APPENDIX II

SURVEY

Name of institution

[This identifying information will be deleted on aggregation]

Denomination

[This identifying information will be deleted on aggregation]

1. Please provide an outline of the types of courses and subjects provided by your institution for all students. If available, enclose brochures.

2. What are the educational pre-requisites necessary for students to undertake each course?

3. What type of examination/assessment is held per course?

4. Please indicate the duration of each subject and the duration of each course.

5. Define the level of each course e.g. certificate, diploma, degree.

6. Does the institution provide in-service training?

7. Please describe the type and contents of this training.

8. Does the institution provide multi-cultural courses/subjects?

   For whom?
   If so, is this a compulsory course/subject?
   How many hours per term/year?

9. Does the institution provide a course on Aboriginal spirituality?
   Give details.

10. Does the institution provide a course/subject on Aboriginal culture?
    Please provide topics and duration.

11. Are subjects on Aboriginal topics taught by Aboriginal people?

12. Are subjects on ethnic cultures taught by ethnic people?
13. How many Aboriginal people would graduate from the institution per year? 
   At what level?
14. How many Aboriginal students would complete a subject 
   per year?
15. How many Aboriginal students withdraw from a course before 
   completion? 
   At what stage did the student withdraw?
16. What percentage of candidates per year identify as Aboriginal?
17. Please describe support strategies that are in place for Aboriginal 
   students.
18. Does your institution actively seek Aboriginal students?
19. If students leave prior to completing their course can 
   you identify the reasons why? 
   Please list them.
20. What proactive responses are made to retain Aboriginal 
   students who consider leaving before course completion?

Thank you for your time
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