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## Christian Faith and Aboriginal Culture

### Bishop James Leftwich NATSIEC 'Hearts are Burning' forums in 2005



Today most Aboriginal people are practising their Christian Faith through the understanding of their own Cultural way of life and the background of their current Spiritual Journey. This has been an interesting Spiritual Journey, having come from a Culture that is steeped in Spirituality. We look at Aboriginal Dream Time and the Stories that come from the Dreaming. Today we are making connections with these Stories to the Bible, and they are like parables to us.

Aboriginal People have a rich Spiritual contribution to make to the Church today because of the richness of this Cultural understanding and lifestyle. In recent years, Wontulp-Bi-Buya College has increased understanding by developing a Theological working group looking at the notion of Aboriginal Theology. This has created a whole new outcome for practising our Faith, in that we are now able to present the Gospel and Worship, looking through our own Cultural eyes. This has opened up a whole new way for Education and Training for Indigenous Ministry. We must endeavour to try to incorporate more of the Cultural aspect into our Worship and understanding of Christ and what he means to us, so that it may be more appropriate to the Ministry of Indigenous People. Recently ABM (Anglican Board of Mission) funded a trip to the southern states by Aboriginal People from Yarrabah, led by the Reverend Wayne Connolly and his wife Val Connolly, with the team also made up by young Aboriginal dancers. A couple of years ago, Father Wayne was given the Vision to incorporate Aboriginal Culture into the Worship and the expression of the Gospel. The young men and women do Corroboree to Gospel songs and to our Gospel Stories by doing a skit. This has had profound effect, especially on the young people of the community. To us this is Liturgical Dance Aboriginal style.

We pray that this form of Worship will begin to address some of the stigma that has been left from the old Missionary contact from the early days in Aboriginal communities, including the pain of the 'Stolen Generations' and Aboriginal People taken from their land, siblings and tribe. We praise God for Nungalinya College in Darwin and Wontulp-Bi-Buya College in Queensland. This work began over 25 years ago. Prior to that there was not any Training for Aboriginal People in Ministry, much less real encouragement and support for Aboriginal people to develop their own Ministries on their communities. Today there are vast numbers who have completed their Certificate and Diploma through these colleges who have now moved on to become successful Ministers in their own right in their communities. Thus we have become the Mission Force rather than the Mission Field.

Incorporating Culture in our Worship and Gospel has begun to do away with an old expression of a lot of Aboriginal People that Jesus Christ is a White Man God. This was due to the way in which Christianity was brought to Aboriginal People by White Missionaries. As Pastor George Rosendale, who is a Lutheran Pastor and a Tutor for Wontulp-Bi-Buya and Nungalinya Colleges, has often said, that the Gospel did not come as Good News for Aboriginal people, but rather came as bad news, was due to the notion held by Missionaries that all of Aboriginal Culture was demonic. Thus began a Ministry of oppression and degradation, in trying to turn Aboriginal people into White folk. So today the Christian faith of Aboriginal people is endeavouring to Aboriginalise the Gospel and Christian teaching.

Some years ago, Wontulp-Bi-Buya was involved in the development of a book called Rainbow Spirit Theology. This was the first attempt at the notion of Aboriginal Theology. The book was quite controversial with some theologians, who were very critical about some of our Dream Time



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Stories. However, having explained to them that these Stories were symbolic, their minds were eased as to what was trying to be done in order that our Aboriginal People can see God in their own Culture. Wontulp-Bi-Buya Theology working group was established to develop text books for their courses, by collating information from other Aboriginal Theologians and Church Ministers. This has resulted in the development of a book called 'Milbi Dabaar', which means, in Aboriginal language, 'Good News'. This book is available through Wontulp-Bi-Buya as a Resource Book for Churches and Ministry in general. Pastor George Rosendale has also launched a Resource Book for Sunday Schools and Children's Groups. This is called 'The Peacemaker' and tells the Dreamtime Story of the Emu, Brolga and Jabiru. This book is also available through Wontulp-Bi-Buya College in Cairns.