

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Ecumenical Commission



Christ and Culture:
Christ Through Culture

Conference Proceedings

February 2009

Ballina, NSW



National Council of
Churches in Australia
NATSIEC

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The centre spiral is where we are all drawn to the mystery of Christ. The white dots are those first believers. We (Aboriginal Peoples) are symbolised by the Jubal (witchetty grubs) and are also drawn into this mystery.

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Participants at the second Christ and Culture Conference in Ballina, 2009

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Forward

Jesus the Christ was a man of his culture. His stories and life were wrapped up around who he was and where he came from. His parables referred to descriptions from those things that were around him. He used this imagery to help show common human beliefs about life and about the Being which created us. He knew about oppression as he lived under Roman rule. He saw many of the hardships created by poverty and the lack of justice which existed in his community. This was how the Father placed Him on this earth and, like Him, God did the same to us Indigenous Peoples. The aim of this second Christ and Culture Conference was to explore where Christ's story can and does shine through our cultures just as the Father shined through His Son over 2,000 years ago in the Middle East.

The conference was held in Ballina in Northern NSW, in Bundjalung country. It was well attended by a variety of people, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous; from a cross-section of denominations and representing a wide variety of experiences.

The highlight of the Christ and Culture Conference was the interactive nature of the few days we had together. This was overwhelmingly a time to share, reflect and to learn from each other's experiences and thoughts.

In putting together these conference proceedings the aim has been to reflect the voices of those present. We have transcribed many of the talks, conversations and the mountains of butchers paper! The hope is that the conversations we had in Ballina will have resonance elsewhere and will assist others in their journey of reflection on these issues.

We also recorded many of the sessions which can be found on the accompanying CD-Rom

in MP3 format. Our two International guests, Wati Longchar and Limatula Longkumer, wrote papers which are also printed in full in this book. Other speakers simply told their stories and thoughts; some of which we have transcribed and others which we have included only as an MP3. To assist in relating the text to the recordings the name of each recording is noted in the relevant place in these proceedings.

Finally, I would like to thank those who attended the Christ and Culture Conference. It was their commitment that ensured the conference was interesting, thought provoking and which allowed us to explore where Christ's story and our cultures intersect.



Graeme Mundine
Executive Secretary.

Opening Speech

Graeme Mundine

Executive Secretary - NATSIEC



Listen to the MP3 - 1_Mundine

Firstly, I would also add my welcome to each and every single one of you, and welcome you into my home country, the Bundjalung Nation. I would like to pay my respects to the Traditional Owners who are present with us tonight, seated over here on my right. I also want to note that these people here on the North Coast, not to blow our own trumpet, are quite a significant group in Australia - I can go through and name quite a few. Something that the Aboriginal people here have been taught since they were very young is that we do speak out and we do not stand back and allow others to take the lead when we can be there leading the people. Of course, we have done it throughout our history. Good strong women and men have all come out of this North Coast of NSW and not only just Aboriginal people; there have also been some very strong non-Indigenous people from this North Coast region here in NSW. So I pay my respects to them; all those in the past, those today in the present, and I also would like to give due respect to the young ones who are coming through after us and hope that we are able to instil in them that same fire to bring about change for the better for Indigenous people, not only on the North Coast, but throughout this country.

Of course, we are here as the National Council of Churches of Australia which has 17 member churches who come together mainly to do two things - I think. Firstly we try and understand a bit about each other; to build relationships so that we are able to work together closely. We all have the same sights fixed on Christ and all of us have different ways of getting there but we do have a lot

in common that we can, and should, and do work together on.

Secondly, one of the important things about the National Council of Churches here in Australia is that it has always held Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in high esteem and recognizes them as holding great importance to the life of the Churches. This was true even as the old missionary society and of course as the Australian Council of Churches and now as the National Council of Churches. Throughout our history they have been very strong and outspoken on many of the issues that have involved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and I can honestly say that it is still, at this very moment, a very strong desire of the NCCA to walk with, and to stand in solidarity with, our Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander brothers and sisters.

One way that they enabled this to happen of course is through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission. This commission brings together at least six churches, the Uniting Church, the Anglicans, the Catholics, the Lutherans, the Salvation Army and the Churches of Christ. Those 6 churches have quite a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in them. We bring them together to discuss ways where we can be outspoken but also ways that we can work together into the future.

One of the most important ways of working together is to try to understand one another and it's important that we do have Aborigi-

nal and Torres Strait Islanders from around the country coming together to discuss their lives and their relationship with Jesus Christ. It is also important that non-Indigenous people of the Churches join us in that conversation; that they have the opportunity to learn and to share their faith with us. So that we all can journey closer to this light that is in front of us.

Do you know that there are approximately 375 million Indigenous peoples in the world. Do you also know that there some 267 million of these Indigenous people live in Asia. They live in developed countries; they live in underdeveloped countries; they speak over 5,000 different languages. 50% already live in urban areas. I say this to highlight a couple of things. Firstly, as you realize the majority of Indigenous peoples live in this region. It is, therefore, important that in this region we do develop strong networks of Indigenous peoples. Not only within our country, but also those networks overseas; those of our fellow Indigenous people who are on this journey with groups like the CCA (Christian Conference of Asia) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

It's interesting to know how much we do have in common. If I was to go and speak about land rights in Guatemala, which I did last year, or in India, or in the Philippines, I would find that they also struggle with this idea about land; and about colonization; about mining companies and about having the feeling that this is our land that someone is taking it away from us. They talk a lot about health, bad health in their communities; the suffering of the Stolen Generations. All these issues speak to a lot of Indigenous peoples throughout the land and throughout the world.

The one thing that keeps coming back as I talk to people here and overseas is the tie to land. Not just any land - but land that belongs to them. Yes, I am an Aboriginal per-

son, but even living in Sydney, as I do today, I quite often refer to myself as an economic refugee having moved out of my home country down to Sydney in search of opportunities for education and employment. This means that I also have to remember who I am - which is a theme that you will hear during this week. Who I am and where I come from. I have always been connected and it always has been instilled in me about this land that we are standing on today. It doesn't matter what non-Indigenous people do to this country that I am standing on. It is my land! I can walk this land from the Clarence River over the border into Queensland. From the mountain ranges to the ocean shores it is Bundjalung country and hopefully all of us Bundjalung people feel that way.

It was instilled in us that we come from the earth. We are not that far away from traditional living. My father not long ago passed away. I am getting all emotional. But he, my father, was born under a tree. The afterbirth of that birth is still lying out in his country. And that's how close we are to living quite a traditional lifestyle. He was taught Language as a young person but as he interacted further and further with the Western world his own language was hard to keep alive. We are very privileged to have at least some speakers of our language still with us today.

But to go further there are many many different types of Aboriginal people. Even in our little area we are quite diverse. We have those people who are of the saltwater, we have the people who are of the fresh water; we have those people who are on the plains; those people who are up in the mountain side; in the rain forest regions; the world heritage sites that are close to this place. Likewise, right across the country there are those of the desert; those who live in the hot, really hot climates, and those who live further south. These things have shaped the way that we have looked at life. They shaped the way that we have seen what God looks like in our

place. But again, there are many things that are common - land, water, air, animals, birds, trees are all held very close to us and all held very sacred to us. Because I believe that they reflect something of God in our lives. I quite often joke in my talks that some four thousand years ago Abraham was romping around in the desert thinking about this thing that was bigger than them. My people have been here in this land for over some 40,000 years and we knew about this thing that was bigger than ourselves. We had ceremony. We had song and we had dance which expressed our close relationships with this Being that's there. We had our symbols, we didn't know what this lamb was, but we do know what this eagle is, and we do know what this kangaroo is, we do know what this Jubal [witchetty grub] is, we do know the waterways, the mountain sides that reflect to us that beautiful spirit of God within our lives.

We, as Aboriginal people, are spiritual people, we've always been spiritual people and no one can tell us that we aren't. Quite often non-Indigenous people tell us that we are worthless; that we are hopeless; that what we say does not mean anything in their lives. But in actual fact it does mean quite a lot and we have had, and will continue to have, some powerful reflections about God and God with us.

I want to tell you a little story; some of you may have heard this story. I think this story is aimed more at Aboriginal people, but also the non-Indigenous people should be aware of it.

Woman kangaroo was out one day with her little joey and while she was out there on the green grass along came Old Man Wombat and Woman Kangaroo said "what's wrong?". And he replied "well I can't see too well and I can't hear but I need to find some good food, some good grass and some good clear water". So Woman Kangaroo said "come" and she took Wombat over to where the nice clean spring water was flowing. "Drink" she

said "and there is some green grass; feast on that green grass". She stayed with him for a while but then she realized "Oh I've got my joey, I had better go back". As she started to travel back to where the joey was she noticed Man; Man with spear, who was roaming about the place. She said "I had better do something because this Man might be able to find that Wombat and spear it and eat it". So she started to jump around and crack some twigs and eventually this Man noticed her and began to chase her. She raced ahead and she found a little hiding spot and hid there. Afterwards, she went over to find her joey, she said to her joey "stay there I need to go and see what Old Man Wombat is up to and make sure he is fine". So off she raced to see where Old Man Wombat was but when she got there she didn't find Old Man Wombat. But the Spirit said to her "I was here testing you, I was here looking for someone who would do good in this place. For this I will give you a gift. What gift do you want?" Woman Kangaroo said I do some travelling about the place and sometimes I have to leave my joey behind. It would be good to have something. The Spirit said "yes, I will give you an apron so you have something to hold your joey in when you travel about the country side. And not only that but because you have done well I'll give it to all your relatives; wallaby, possum, I'll give them all an apron as well to carry your children and to hold them close to you".

We, as Aboriginal people have to be always alert. We have to be able to see the signs to be able to do good. There are a lot of bad things happening out there but it is our role to see the goodness in every single one of us. Our stories tell us that. Our stories tell us that we are all created equal. It's strange that some years later when they sat down to write that Bible that the first book in Genesis also tells us that we are equal. That we are all created by something bigger than ourselves; that we are all created equal. Not only just us but the birds, the trees, the animals, the waters, the sky, the stars above are all part

of God's creation and we are just one part of that.

Over time we have tried to get people thinking about this from an Indigenous point of view. We come from a story telling oral tradition but it's pretty hard to get people to write things down. But that is one thing NATSIEC can do, well two things that NATSIEC can do.

One is that in recent years we have started a group called Munguddor Bi-Buya. The name Munguddor was given by our late elder Uncle Eric Walker and in Bundjalung means light. Bi and Buya come from the Torres Strait, the east and western languages and also means light. So we have started a group called 'light light light', to try and shine the light on us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We have had one meeting and have produced a book called Ker Ker which means it's time. The second one of the series we had here just last week and it was on healing. To be able to sit in the room and share with each other experiences of healing and thoughts on healing was so inspiring; so inspiring that we have to capture them on paper; so inspiring that we have to capture them on film. So this week we did and later on this year there will be a book released.

The second part is this - this conference. This is also the second one we have run. There are lots of us Aboriginal people out there doing lots of things. Like all of us we all get burnt out every now and then. It's important that we do take time to reflect - to stop and reflect and to know a bit about our relationship with this Thing called God. Yirranbul, Wandjina, Biami what ever you want to call this Thing; this Thing that is close to us. And to reflect on who we are culturally. I also say the same of the white fellas, if I can use that term. That you also have to take the time to begin to reflect upon who you are. Again, "I am" a theme that will come through this conference this week. Who are you? What is your

relationship with God?

We are very privileged to have with us two International guests from India who will spend some time tomorrow helping us to begin to explore what is this Aboriginal theology; how is it done in other places? Then we will have an opportunity to share how do we do it here, and look at what is the best direction that we need to go.

On Wednesday we want to spend some time looking at Mission. We are a very missioned people. Just about every church that you name has come along and tried to convert us. But Bishop Jim Leftwich also has a very good saying which is the theme of Wednesday *From the Mission Field to the Mission Force*. A lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are now standing up and beginning to take leads in this area and it is a good opportunity for us to reflect upon what we are doing well, how can we do it better, and what the future will look like for us.

On Thursday we want to delve a bit further into Christ through culture. How does Christ fit into our culture? It's always been a big question of mine. It's all well and good - we knew about God; but this person Jesus, he wasn't born here, he romped around in the Middle East. But where was he here? How does he come alive? How is he incarnated here in this country Australia? These are questions which we all can struggle with. These are questions which we will begin to scratch the surface of this week.

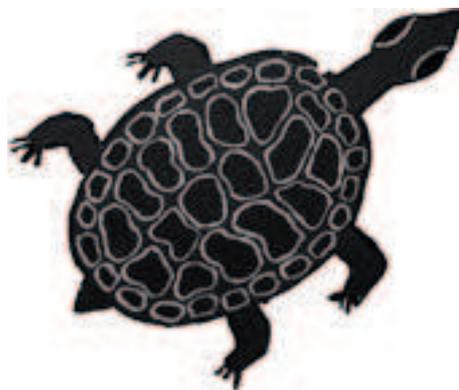
You will notice that this conference is different from the last one. The last one we encouraged people to give papers and to talk and to give us great dissertations and talk about where they found God in their lives. This conference is more participatory in that we have to share our experiences. God has touched each and every single one of you and touched you to the core otherwise you wouldn't be here. It's an opportunity this

week to share that light with those around us so that we can look closer towards having a better picture of the Christ. To have a better picture of who the Christ is for each and every one of us.

I have experienced that even in the last few days here with this group. I have learnt so much from the Munguddor Bi-Buya group and will continue to learn. This week will be another opportunity for that to happen.

I would probably like to end it there. Hopefully it gives you an insight as to where we are at the present time. A lot of good people. A lot of good speakers out there, a lot of good Christian speakers. We need to try and get some of this stuff on paper, we need

to share it. We learnt last week [at Munguddor Bi-Buya], Jesus was out healing and the reading last Sunday was about Jesus healing again. Quite often in those healings a couple of things took place, one thing that keeps coming through for me is the importance of touch and close relationships. But there always seems to be a command of Jesus when he heals he says *get up* – and that's what we also have to do. I know the Commissioners and the Munguddor Bi-Buya have been talking about this - that it's time for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to move and not to sit idle. We have a message, a message to tell to the world, and here this week is an opportunity for each of you to share and bring that message alive today.



Opening Ceremony Sermon

Paster Harry Walker

Listen to the MP3 - 2_Walker_Sermon



Aboriginal people have their own special gifts but we must now dare to repent and give to each other as well as find ways to understand each other so that we can share in a better way. Aboriginal spirituality seems to be increasing in strength day by day and we find ourselves closer and closer to our fellow humans. But there is a power beyond -greater than human power. The power of the Spirit. But when Aboriginal people lose appreciation of the sacred they lose appreciation of the sacredness of life. So both Black and White need to be organized for action. What have we got to do? Just the one group or both? Both Black and White, we must really be about the business. We need to be organized for action to participate in. Change our lives in ways that seem right to Aboriginal people and to ensure that change is in our interest because the change comes from power and where does the power come from? Black and White unity. The creator God, he does not dwell in houses made with human hands; the Creator God is out there where the people struggle for dignity, freedom and liberation. The Creator is out there struggling with them as God was with the Israelites when they were in bondage in Egypt. God was with them in their slavery; God heard them and when they cried out in their pain misery and anguish God was with them. God was with them when Moses went out of Egypt across the Red Sea and out of the wilderness. The Creator God led them into the Promised Land. That is where God really is, out with the people, out where the struggle is taking place against the Pharaohs of today.

For far too long Pharaoh has corrupted our minds and caused us to think that we are a zero, a reject, a nothing - well that's a lie! God doesn't check our bank account or our nationality or our education or our talent to see if he can use us. God will use us in spite of our broken health; in spite of our broken dreams; in spite of our broken homes. Don't let Pharaoh have your inheritance; don't let him have your future; don't let him keep you in Egypt another day. Come to God, the God of Israel who said "I have heard your cry and come down to deliver you". In Exodus 3:8 in the Old Testament book we find that verse. So watch what He does on your behalf, He brings Pharaoh down in your life, He opens the red sea and He makes the way out for you.

You know I like that word struggle. I am not afraid to say that I have been a struggler all my life. But I guess everyone else might know that word too. A struggle. But you know what it says to me? That I am still there that I haven't given in; that I'm on that road to recovery. Struggle is a kind of word that sometime people think you're out - you're finished. But don't forget struggle is the way that you have not been conquered you are still holding your ground, you are still fighting on.

So ok, let us have a look at the Baptist man. Somewhere along this line there might be some Bundjalung words coming in here. Because this man he is the way of the Aboriginal man, he dresses like one, he eats the food of the Aboriginal man; that's why I like

the Baptist man. For 400 years since the time of Malachite the Jews had no new prophet from God. Everybody was waiting. Everybody was waiting.

So do we remember hearing about Zechariah and Elizabeth? We hear that story - we know that story; we tell it to our children. Now God had given them a special son, just like his very own special son. God has given them a special son named John. He lived in the lonely desert where God was making him ready for his work. For food he ate locusts and wild honey that he found in the desert. And when the time came for him to start preaching God sent him down to the desert road near the Jordan River. Let us get back to see how God the Father was getting this man ready; somewhere out there in the desert. We think it might have been a lonely place, but there was something going on out there. There was a man being prepared; there was a man getting ready. He was going through the motions shall we say. Only the teacher he had was the Creator Almighty himself and He shaped him, did everything to him. Everything good about a man I believe that God the Father has done to John the Baptist. He prepared him; He had him ready to go out and to become one of the greatest preachers of all time.

So, on his appearance God sent him straight down to the Jordan River and there he had a marvellous time preaching and baptizing people. But first let us look back to the food that he had. He ate locust and wild honey. Let me have another look - there might have been some corned beef and pumpkin! No, I can't see it, he just had locusts and wild honey. To me, that's an Aboriginal diet. Now we are going to look at the locust. I suppose locust means a lot of different kinds of insects to a lot of different kinds of people. One day I preached on John the Baptist and was thinking about the locusts and the honey, after we had our church service an old grandfather, an old man, came up to me and he said to

me Nungya – you know that's a term in the Bundjalung language for grandson. He said to me Nungya, come here I want to talk to you. He said to me listen here do you know what you were talking about when you were saying locusts. Like some other scriptures say grasshoppers, but I just want to tell you what locusts mean in my own language what the old man was trying to explain to me. He said...[speaks in language]

That's our very own Jubal [speaks in language] that's our very own witchetty grub. And I said ok Grandfather, he said that wild honey [speaks in language] that's the little tiny native insect, you know the little tiny black... I don't know if you have any bush experience but they are little clump of things you only find them in dead stumps. Those are the things in that honey, it's a juice, you can get it in your hand and squeeze it, it's like squeezing plasticine or a clump of mud and all the juice comes out. That was the kind of honey that sort of was out there with John the Baptist. So you see he had Aboriginal stuff, or he might have been the first Aboriginal to do all this, I don't know but I can understand it.



You know when I was a young man I liked working in the bush doing bush work. Rubbing, I don't know if you know what I am saying there, ring barking, I'm sure you know what I am saying there. You know doing all this bush work. And from my little place up in Tabulam where I live I used to go up the river. Oh! one of the best rivers of all. It's called the Rocky River. It's a part of it flowing out there see. So I used to go up there and I worked as a young man. But the boss used to live in the next town see; way

up in Tenterfield. I used to go up the river and work for 5 days. I used to live on that doing this ring barking see and every tree that I used to come to which had the witchetty grub in I'd put it in my pocket. Then I'd look at the sun and think "oh yes I reckon it's dinner time". So I'd head down to the river, on the flat rocks and make a fire. And while that's cooling down I had a tin of sunshine milk with sugar in it that I'd brought from home. I'd make another separate fire and fill it up with water and boil it and with the sugar I'd pour it in the boiling water and stir it up -it's just like coffee, black coffee. I used to change its name - taffee tea. There are all sorts of tea. But I like making my own when I'm out in the bush it's called taffee tea. Then all the witchetty grubs I had in my pocket I pulled them out and threw them on the coals and that's all I ate for five days, witchetty grubs (Jubal) and taffee tea. I didn't get sick I was just as good as I was the first day. But finally come weekend I thought well yeah I've got to go and see the boss. I have to go and get that off him. But that's the way I used to be in the bush I used to eat our own native tucker.

So, John ate locusts and wild honey that he found in the desert and when the time came for him to start preaching God sent him down to the desert road near the Jordan River. Travellers on the Jordan road heard John's voice and they stopped to listen. They saw a strange looking man; he was dressed in a rough cloth made of hair and a leather strap around his waist like the prophet Elijah. There never was a man dressed like John, a real native man. No collar and tie, no Sunday's best. Just with that leather strap around his waist he was dressed in a rough cloth made of hair.

So John shouted "get ready for the Lord, the Kingdom of God is coming". So travellers talked about the new prophet. They talked about the new prophet in the desert. And

everybody in every town and village heard about him. Great crowds of people came to the Jordan to hear what John had to say. They came from Jerusalem, and all Judea and Galilee and even from the other side of Jordan and John told them all "put away your sins and be baptized because God forgives your sins and the Kingdom of God is coming". So when we look at all the people that went out to see John and I think they are still doing the same thing today. People go out just for a looksee, just to see what's going on, just to see what's happening. This must have been a very busy road, with people stopped along the roadside; caravans were parked all along the road. And people were getting out and seeing how strange this man was dressed and the words that he was preaching and the words that he was saying. So people are going to take notice of how you are dressed too. People are also going to hear what kind of words that you speak. They are going to look for faults.

Travellers talked about the new prophet in the desert. People in every town and village heard about him and great crowds of people came to the Jordan to hear about John. Many people confessed their sins and John baptized them - but hey! Listen to this - but some people came to look only. That is the way with people today, like to think they don't sin - they come only in judgment - especially the Pharisees and the priests. They were the ones who liked to think they had no sins, but John told them - I am just looking at the words that John said. He said, "you snakes, God's judgment is coming, who told you that you can run away from it"? See I believe too that when God was preparing this man there were invisible guns that he put on him, not only with that leather belt, but he was just like a cowboy coming out to walk the streets with his guns blazing - you can see what I mean? He was the fastest and the quickest draw in his time. He could outshoot, or outgun, or outdraw

any one that was before him. You know what I am saying? He was a very brave man and when he preached to the people to say just that one word to a whole bunch of people. Another one, remember, that when he faced up to a couple of men and told them how wrong you are living - so he drew his gun there and blasted him. John was a very straight forward preaching man. And John told them, "you snakes, God's judgment is coming and who told that you can run away from it"? For he said "change your ways and show that you have put away your sins". And the people asked him "what should we do? What should we do"?

John said, "change your ways. Be kind, if you have two coats give one to a man who has none and share your food with someone who is hungry". Leaders in Jerusalem sent men to ask John. "Who are you"? John told them "I am not the Christ". They asked "Well are you the prophet that God promised to send us"? "No", John said, "no I'm not". "Well who are you? Tell us so we can tell the men who sent us". John said "I am just one voice shouting; just one voice in the

wilderness; in the desert to make the way straight for the Lord, as the prophet Isaiah said". They asked "Well then why do you baptize people if you are not the Christ, or Elijah or that prophet"? John said "I baptize you with water but there is a very great person who is coming after me, he is the one who will baptize people with the Holy Spirit". John went on preaching to make the people ready for that great person who was coming. Until finally the day came.

God made ready in Man so when this Man came to John. John said "I need you to baptize me, why do you ask me to baptize you"? Jesus had said to him let me be baptized now. Jesus answered "for this is the proper way for us to do what is right". I can see the Lord Jesus getting up and walking out back on to the sand at that time and here was John the Baptist, his heart was focused on the Lord Jesus, when he looked at him and said "behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world". There are a few things that would come out of that in the sermon for tonight but I think a time of reflection now.



Annabelle Walker dances into the opening ceremony with the Gospel

Keynote Address

An Exploration of Indigenous Theological Framework

Wati Longchar



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Introduction

This paper discusses primarily Asian realities and issues. The paper is divided into three sections: first, we will try to understand our common historical context for understanding one's own context is the starting point of theology. Second, we will review some of the dominant theological frameworks and see how far they are relevant or irrelevant for indigenous people. We will analyze this from an historical perspective. And finally, we will make an attempt to suggest a theological framework for indigenous theology exploring our own spiritual traditions.

I. Indigenous Peoples in Today's World

Let me start with a story –

A group of indigenous theologians assembled in a consultation from 21-26 October, 2008 at Baguio, Philippines. When we arrived at Baguio city, we were informed that one of our indigenous brothers, James Balao was abducted for speaking for justice. Balao is an active researcher and trainer of Cordillera People's Alliance (CPA). He was engaged in research work of Oclupan clan and he was able to trace as far back as nine generations on two of the clan's family trees. This research gave them a sense of identity and solidarity among them. Balao's research fed into the work of the Cordillera People's Alliance campaigns against multi national companies to expose government misdoings

and to assert the land and resources rights of the indigenous people. As a result of his research and active involvement in community organization, Balao was seen as a threat by Government. The family members and friends of Balao believed that his disappearance was perpetrated by the State. The CPA also believes that Balao has been targeted especially because of his vocal campaigns against the government's anti-people and anti-indigenous people's policies.

Some of us joined the International Solidarity Team in surfacing the abducted advocate of indigenous' rights, James Balao. We were surprised to discover the community were so afraid of the police and military because of the long history of Philippine leaders using the State security forces as a tool of repression which has bred deep mistrust amongst the population. In Lower Tomay this mistrust has been further compounded by suspicious faces in the community since the abduction, assumed to be plainclothes intelligence officers. It was shocking to see how real the fear of retaliation is within the community. We were even denied of meeting by Military Intelligence Group (MIG) even after prior information, which suggests an arrogance and a feeling of impunity which is unhealthy within the state security forces of a democratic country. After meeting several officials - PNP officials, Baguio City Councilors, Governor, Mayor, Commissioner of Human Rights Cordillera Adm. Region – we found that some of them were not willing to

provide the facts, sometimes contradicted each other and wilfully ignored the facts in order to protect the State.

This is not an isolated incident. The global history of human rights abuses against indigenous peoples and indigenous people's activities has always been an element of corporate and government collusion. Such things are happening everywhere when indigenous peoples stand up for their individual and collective rights.

Whether they are in Australia, Taiwan, India, or United States, all indigenous peoples experience similar stories. We need to accept the fact that indigenous people are a defeated community all over the world. Their history is a history of defeat, suffering, and oppression. Their foreparents have suffered discrimination, genocide, exploitation and alienation in different stages of their history. The invasion began even earlier than European invasion in some countries, for example, the history of defeat of dalit and adivasi (tribals) began in the hands of Aryan invaders almost 3,500 years ago. In the course of history, the indigenous people became hewers of wood and drawers of water, and the nomads became kings and princes, masters and aristocrats. In some contexts, it began with the wave of European contact, then the wave of Western colonization, waves of Western religion and education, wave of militarization, wave of constitutional democracies, wave of aid dependency and wave of economic globalization. They are a defeated people in all spheres of life. Today they are further marginalized through the processes of global capital regime.

The global empire and the greed of global capital are making tremendous impact on geo-politics of the world, and destroying and threatening all life, especially the poor and marginalized like the indigenous communities. In today's world, 'growth' is con-

sidered as the only principle for liberation. The concepts of 'care for one another', 'just economy' and '(sabbath) rest for creation' (Det. 25), are considered as non-productivity and the root of all human problems from poverty to sickness to political instability. Any attempt to slow down economic growth is labelled as immorality. The global market turns indigenous peoples and our cultural activities and earth's resources into commodities for profit. The weak, namely the migrant workers, farmers, consumers, small entrepreneurs and the whole eco-system are the victims of globalization. The barbaric atrocities, human rights violation, ethnic conflict, poverty, injustice, low self-esteem, inferiority complex, alienation from earth-centred life and spirituality are all interconnected. Let me cite some examples:

1. *Denial of Religious Rights*

Many governments do not recognize indigenous people's religion as 'religion'. They are considered people without religion or sometimes they are clubbed together with a dominant religion. The Government think that to be recognized as religion it must have temple, mosque, cathedral, scripture, priest, saints, images of god or goddesses. Though indigenous people's religion is the oldest religion with distinct spirituality, it is still considered as the lowest form of religion and is not given due recognition. In Medan city in Indonesia, an indigenous community known as Parmalin is struggling to construct their worship place. They are being denied the right to worship. They are denied on the ground that their religion is not registered under the Government and their traditional worship places are forest, not cities or towns; so they should go back to forest. Interestingly, people who are opposing the construction works are mainly Christians. The construction of a worship place still remains half done. Again, there is a minority religion called Sundan that belong to the indigenous

Sundanese people. Because the government does not recognize the religion, they do not get official marriage certificates and their children are seen as illegitimate. The indigenous religion is still considered as “animist” and that is why in many countries it cannot be registered under the government as “religion”. It is offensive to indigenous people and an act of ignorance. In some countries like India, indigenous people are being denied of propagating and professing one’s faith. Majority group can involve in re-conversion, but minority cannot do it. In India, indigenous religion is still considered as upshot of Hinduism, though tribal people have distinct culture and religion. Conversion to Christianity is seen as threat and justified re-conversion.

2. *Disappearance of language.*

A major function of language is to act as a reservoir of people’s identity and self-expression. It helps people to dream their dreams and assists them to articulate their hopes and visions of new future. Language is also one of the most important social agencies that create feelings of community by providing identity. Indigenous peoples languages are fast disappearing. Today a native American language known as Euchee language is spoken only by 5 persons. In the name of national integration, the military junta does not allow children to be taught in their ethnic languages in Myanmar. Children are being denied learning, writing and speaking in their own mother tongue. Some indigenous communities have intentionally adopted the language of the dominant community out of fear of discrimination. Adoption of four or five personal names corresponding to the different colonial masters by Taiwanese people is a good example. In Australia alone some 500 languages have been lost since Europeans arrived on the continent. Even the names of the towns, cities, street names have been

changed to Western names, especially to English names. Confiscation of the Bible in local language and prohibition of the printing of the Bible in local languages as a contravention of the policy to promote the use of the National language in Taiwan testify how dominant society attempts to destroy people’s right to language. The use of local languages was not only forcefully denied, but people were also led to believe that the use of and command of a local language exposed an inferior position in society. Can we expect the survival of indigenous people’s cultures and value systems without a language? With the loss of language, the indigenous people have lost their distinct social, cultural and spiritual values.

3. *Denial of ancestral land*

Most indigenous people have lost their land due to illegal legal system, development activities and political manipulation. The land struggle of the Aboriginal people in Australia has a long history. The ongoing conflict in Mindanao is a struggle of the right of the Bangsamoro people to self-determination and the right to their ancestral lands. The rights taken away from them have become a historical neglect that has been passed on from generation to another. Likewise many indigenous people are forcefully evicted; sometimes fear and tension are created to drive them away. The minority, especially Christians are always on the run. Today land has been forcefully taken away from them and many people do not have land for cultivation. With the lost of land which is the main source of their livelihood and culture, they constitute now the biggest labour force today. Many of them are the illegal or unaccounted migrant workers in different countries, and they constitute the poorest section of the society.

4. *Denial of Identity*

The Japanese Govt. has declared that there is only one homogenous community in Japan denying the existence of indigenous people like Ainu and other indigenous communities. Japan is yet to recognize that the Ainu “are an indigenous people with distinct language, religion and culture.” Ainu people are expecting recognition of the indigenous people’s status. In the name of national integration the first settlers’ existence is being ignored and denied. More than 10 tribes in Taiwan who have been living in the island for more than 2000-3000 years, and more than 100 tribes with distinct culture and tradition in Nepal are being denied their identity in the name of national integration. More than 500 adivasis and dalits communities in India are categorized as Hindus. Likewise, most of the indigenous people have been assimilated into dominant society in the name of national integration - Chinese culture in Taiwan, Hindu caste system in India, Burmese culture in Myanmar, Hinduism in Nepal, Islamic culture in Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, etc. Many indigenous people fear to disclose their identity. A friend of mine wrote an excellent article on Indigenous people’s struggle in Myanmar. I sought permission for publication in the Journal of Tribal Studies. He wrote back to me saying “You are permitted to publish but change my name to an Indian name. Otherwise, I will be arrested.” People fear elimination when they raise a critical and constructive justice voice, particularly to speak about minority rights and justice like our brother James Balao. The people once rich with cultural tradition are now reduced to “NO” people in many countries. They live in fear and uncertainty. Many people are now reduced to people with NO culture, spirituality, morality, identity and dignity.

5. *Sex Trade*

In Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Nepal, India, etc more than 40% of indigenous girls and women who migrate to cities, work in the sex trade. The majority of females trafficked across states borders in Asia are from indigenous communities. Being reduced to abject poverty, many of them have no option except to sell their bodies.

These are just a few examples. This is our common history and indigenous people continue to struggle with all these challenges. We are talking about people who are being crushed and denied their land, culture, language and identity. We cannot do indigenous theology without addressing such individual and collective oppression, denial and abusive of power.

Theological Development: An Historical Overview

Do we address those issues in our theologizing? The history of Christianity among the indigenous peoples is between 150-250 years old. The Christian missionaries were the first people to come and work for the liberation of the people. They transformed the society by abolishing some evil practices such as slavery, headhunting, lavish feasting, etc. Many modern institutions were first introduced by the church - the first school, the first hospital, the first translation work and the first printing press among many others. These all changed traditional societies. However, Christian missions, no matter which denomination or society, all considered themselves ‘superior’ and consistently maintained an exclusive attitude towards indigenous religion and cultures. They came with a strong view to conquer the ‘other world’ by Christian faith. Conversion was understood in terms of replacement of the

old ways of life which include rejection of traditional cultures and value system. Today many people have forgotten and have been uprooted from their traditional value system.

Roughly, we may divide the history of the development of Christian theology among indigenous people into three stages:

Receiving stage (1800-1950s): During this period, the churches were under Western missionaries. All the decision making, material and human resources for mission-work were controlled and came from the 'mother churches'. Churches were required to implement the policies or decisions that were made thousands of miles away. In their effort to contextualize theology, the missionaries pursued the 'Translation Method' of doing theology. Perceiving that the Western culture is superior and the only valid expression of Christian faith, they attempted to translate the theological formulations of the 'mother' churches abroad in appropriate native languages by means of adopting and adapting local terminologies, idioms and categories. It was thought that Christian faith developed in the west is the unchanging truth for all ages and for all contexts, and should be accepted without any question. Therefore, native culture and traditions were never considered valuable resources for doing theology. Christians who participated in traditional festivals were excommunicated from the church. Drums, traditional songs, dances and value systems were condemned as evils and prohibited among the believers. There was very little or no awareness of the religio-cultural experience of the people. Theology was alien to the people; it spoke an alien language and ideas. Theology was outside of the people's reality. God's revelation was accepted in a very narrow way reducing indigenous people's religion and culture as mere preparatio evangelii. It was a period of receiving without any question. Theology

was formulated elsewhere, imported from outside and taught by outsiders. The church and its theology was a stranger in the society.

Learning stage (1950s-1980): During the 1950s and 1960s, the national movement, post-independence reconstruction, nation-state secular democracy, fight to end poverty, and development of infrastructures were some of the major concerns in the Global South. The struggle for self-identity of the church, unity of the church and mission and indigenization or enculturation of theology became a priority for the churches. During this period many Western missionaries left or could not continue their mission work because of political reasons. This caused painful experiences of leadership transition within the church. The churches who were still struggling to stand on their own feet were left without trained leaders. However, the absence of Western missionaries created more space for local people to exercise their rights, responsibilities and leadership in the church. The legacies such as education, health care services were continued under the leadership of local leaders. The propagation of the Gospel among different communities or groups by their own initiative, the importance of promoting well being and social justice and safeguarding human rights are noteworthy as are three other theological developments or models of theology.

The philosophical model was borne out of the wake of nationalism, particularly during 1940s, in which many theologians in the Global South became critical of missionary theology. They began to use freely the concepts, doctrines and symbols of other religions, especially Hinduism, Buddhism, etc in doing theology. They tried to work out theological hermeneutics in terms of Hindu/Buddhist philosophical thought pattern and thus, theological language became highly abstract and rationale. Unfortunately, like

the other dominant theological reflections in the West, such a theological approach became abstract and intellectual exercises unrelated to the real life situation of the people. It gave a notion among Christian thinkers that the indigenous people's spirituality is not philosophically deep enough to articulate theology. The indigenous peoples' view of life and spirituality were undermined and discarded in doing theology. People studied indigenous culture and beliefs simply from the traditional missiological perspective as a dark world to be conquered. People did not think or could not imagine that cultural values and spirituality of indigenous people can also enrich and help in understanding and contextualizing Christian faith in the cultural setting of the people. Such a one-sided theological paradigm again alienated indigenous people from their own religion and cultures.

In 1970s and 1980s the advocates of inter-faith theology made significant contribution with the employment of the dialogical model to do theology. A central theological claim of this model is that without taking into account the unacknowledged riches of God's work with the whole of humanity and other segments of God's creation, Christian theology cannot become authentic and liberative. Theology is seen as a product of creative and active engagement in dialogue with people of other living faiths and ideologies. Dialogical theology is to be celebrated for liberating God's revelation from the monopoly of Christians. Although the advocates of dialogical method were not always sympathetic and sensitive to indigenous people's spirituality, culture and religion, the affirmation of God's revelation and lordship over the world, in all cultures and religions widened the understanding of the mystery of God. In spite of the ambiguous nature of culture, God works in and through all religions and cultures. This understanding has

created awareness to appreciate and respect the differences of others and also one's own spirituality, religion and cultures. Though some of the evangelicals are very critical of the dialogical method, arguing that it sacrifices the uniqueness of Christian faith, there is a growing awareness among younger scholars that we should go back to the roots to make Gospel rooted and meaningful.

Initially, liberation theology in Asia was greatly influenced and shaped by the Latin American liberation methodology. The indigenous communities, women and the other marginalized movements have widened the horizon of liberation theology from its Latin American impetus. Along with economic and political issues, the cultural and religious dimensions of discrimination are taken seriously in liberation theologies. It has influenced people to reread the Scripture from the perspective of the poor and oppressed in their struggle for justice and freedom. Commitment to the victims, the oppressed and struggling poor as the basis and the starting point of theology has inspired the alienated indigenous people to discover their identity, right and dignity. It has motivated people to engage themselves in new ways of doing theology by relating the Gospel to the socio-political-cultural realities.

After the departure (even during missionary era in some churches) of missionaries, the three self-movement (self government, self supporting, and self propagation) in the church was launched by many churches. The contribution of Chinese churches is significant in this movement. Today we can proudly say that many churches are able to stand on their own feet in terms of support and mission. However, one important aspect was left out e.g. 'self-theologizing'. Self-theologizing was never considered as an important component for the self identity

of the church until recently. This period of self-theologizing is now a dominant model of theological undertaking. In it scholars from the other regions/contexts can help to widen the theological perspective of a people. However, there is a difference between sympathetic and empathetic theology. The indigenous people themselves must do their own theology relevant to their context. In other words, indigenous people themselves must take the healing of indigenous communities into their own hand. We must work for our own liberation and transformation. It was only in 1980s that many churches recognized the importance of 'self-theologizing' to make the church and its mission rooted in the actual life of the people.

The above mentioned theological paradigm is very limited. They are not capable of addressing the issues of indigenous people. We need to explore new ways of doing theology.

What kind of theology do we need?

We need a people's centred theology, a theology centred on the vision of our Lord Jesus Christ. The past and present dominant theological discourses have supported and continue to support imperialism and anthropocentric orientation of biblical interpretation. Theological concepts developed in dominant theological discourses legitimized a religion for the one who is the master and the ruler and also sanction to exploit and manipulate all segments of God's creation for extraction of maximum profit. There is no place for the people and land who have been ruled and oppressed for centuries. We may cite three examples: (1) The concept of God. Theology is God-talk, a discourse on God. The discourse is based on a language which is symbolic and metaphorical. Metaphors are constructed out of a cultural or social environment and context. The domi-

nant images of God developed in Christian traditions are images such as Ruler, Lord, Master and Warrior. They are all patriarchal, political and military images. These images have made Christianity a religion of, and for the ruler, elite and the upper-class. The theological concepts or images of God which we uphold today are in deep crisis because they are not capable of liberating the poor and marginalized people like indigenous people from unjust system and practice and unmindful destruction of God's creation. Such ruler's theology supported colonial governments, war, invasion and unprecedented exploitation of earth's resources. The world is now confronted with the fact that the imperial construct of the concept of God will not be able to liberate the people and nature who are the victims of power. (2) The understanding of mission. The discourse on God as ruler and master has reinforced a success oriented or triumphalistic mission. The languages like "Mission Crusade", "Mission Campaign", "Home Penetration", "Mass Evangelization" etc. are all military language and concepts. Christians, by and large, engaged in denominational expansion rather than God's mission. Success in mission is measured by how many churches have been planted, converted and baptized. Mission has been very exclusive and never recognized God's revelation in other religious traditions and cultures. Mission is God's mission. God is the owner of the mission, but not the churches. But Christians have manipulated and acted as if we are the owner of mission. (3) The understanding of creation. Dominant Christian interpretation of creation is anthropocentric – human is the reference point of all realities. Nature exists for human. Apart from rational beings, the other segments of God's creation cannot come under the scheme of salvation. There is no sacred and mystery in nature, but it can be manipulated and controlled for the benefit of human beings. To

exploit nature is divine will. This one-sided theological interpretation again justifies expansion of colonial power and exploitation of nature. The ideology of globalization and the expansion of global capital market are deeply rooted on this interpretation. The unprecedented exploitation of nature and present ecological crisis testify the failure of the Christian understanding of creation.

Discourse on indigenous theology can make a difference in our times by turning and rerouting to Jesus of Galilee movement. In Jesus' movement, we see a decisive reversal from empire and money to people in pain, from ruler to ruled, from oppressor to the oppressed, from individualism to cosmic vision of life. Jesus' movement was a people-centred and cosmic centre movement against the power of destruction and death. He stood for a different value system - peace, love, service and liberation of poor were the message of Jesus, but not the power, sword, military and mammon. Jesus became the voice of the oppressed and voiceless. Jesus' paradigm was people-centred theology. The option of, and for the "people in pain" as the locus of indigenous theology requires sacrifice and radical departure from the power, institution and mammon. We must reroute indigenous theologies in the context of people in pain and groaning of God's creation.

Indigenous Theology – Can we take a Liberation Paradigm?

In the recent development of liberation theologies, we see a decisive paradigm shift in doing theology. For example:

1. The context: not the rich but the poor and marginalized - The dominant theologies are considered as science of faith drawn from scripture and tradition. It takes the realities of the context of dominant

groups and communities. The perspectives of the rulers and the elite become the paradigm for doing theology. Whereas in contextual theologies, the experience, hardship and spirituality of the poor and marginalized people like the indigenous people, women, the poor become the vital source for doing theology. It is a theology from 'below' and the 'underside of history'. The marginalized and the abandoned people are the locus of the divine. The people are no longer treated as the objects but as subjects of history. We can apprehend God by what he has done and is doing for the people in the concrete historical context. The focus on the ochlos is the critical principle in contextual theologies.

2. The sources: not philosophy, but people's stories - In dominant theologies, the language, content and framework of theologizing are drawn from the philosophical insights and categories. A notion in dominant theologies is that theology must be rational, critical, logical and scientific in form and content. To do so, one must take the philosophical system and fit in the received theological concepts into that philosophical system. For example, we have a brilliant exposition of the existential philosophy by Bultmann, Tillich and the process philosophy by John Cobb. In this theologizing process, both God and the world are somewhat abstract concepts and, therefore, there was a serious failure to relate the Gospel to the concrete reality of brokenness, oppression and dehumanization. In short, theology became mere abstract and intellectual exercises unrelated to the real life situation of the people. However, in contextual theologies, the sources are drawn from the experience of the people themselves. For Minjung theologians it is socio-biography of collective people's suffering in oppressive regime. Stories can also mean people's symbols, stories, myths, songs, dances and other

forms of expression become the source of doing theology. Contextual theologies draw more insights from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, economic and other forms of reflective expression for the analysis and articulation of the experience of people.

3. The Aim: Not defending faith, but liberation: A major focus of the dominant theologies is to engage in systematic constructions of timeless theological concepts (that claims to be) beginning from the doctrine of God, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, the problem of Evil, the Creation, Human, Sin, the Atonement, the Church and Ministry, the Sacraments, Salvation and Christian Hope. The primary objective of theologizing is to help people understand and interpret God's act i.e. to give a rationale for their faith. Whereas the primary objective of theological reflection of contemporary contextual theologies is to help people in their struggle for transforming their situation of injustice and oppression. Theologizing is a process that empowers people to transform their situation in accordance with the utopia or the vision of the gospel. In this sense, the aim of contextual theology is liberation. It aims to provide a vision for the future, and empower people to change the existing values and relationship. Liberation theology is integral to people's on-going search for their identity and struggles for justice.

4. Method: not theory but liberative praxis - in dominant theologies, the pattern of theologizing as in many other disciplines has been, first to enunciate a theory (as in Biblical Systematic theology) and then apply it (Practical theology, Ethics, etc). The assumption in this procedure is that pure and true thought about reality can occur only when it is removed from act and practice; doing is an extension of knowing.

However, in contextual theologies, liberative praxis is the method of doing theology. They make a distinction between theory and practice on the one hand, and praxis on the other. This is praxis-theology. It involves rigorous theoretical reflection, but it insists that it should emerge from the practice that is oriented to transformation.

Indigenous theology is a newcomer and this emerging theology among the alienated minorities may be called 'Indigenous peoples theology'. It is a people's theology born out of the experiences of various forms of injustice and exploitation in the context of their assertion for right and identity. It is a theology that attempts to express Christian faith in socio-cultural, religious, traditional and liturgical thought patterns of the people. Indigenous peoples theology is a liberation and resistance theology - resistance to affirm justice, identity, dignity and wholeness of land and all its inhabitants. The experiences of oppressions and hardships, and their traditional stories, myths, symbols, dances, songs, and their connectedness to land and environment become the vital resources for doing theology. It reflects on the issue of ethnic, cultural and political identities of people from the subject of people, land, and the sacred power to give them hope.

What is the distinctive identity of indigenous theology?

As the indigenous people's theology is a contextual theology, a theology from 'below' and the 'underside of history'. It aims to liberate them from their inferiority complex, from oppression and discrimination by attempting to rediscover the liberative motifs in their cultures and religion, and by reinterpreting the Bible and Christian traditions from the perspective of people. Hence, the focus and goal of the indigenous theology is liberation and transformation. It

aims to restore their self-identity and dignity by creatively engaging the Gospel and culture in their struggle for social, economic, religious, cultural, political and ecological justice. In the process of working for their own liberation and transformation, and creative participation in wider society, the indigenous people work for the liberation of both the oppressors and the oppressed. It is, therefore, a theology that includes liberation of the whole humanity and of the entire God's creation.

Methodologically speaking, the point of departure of the indigenous theology from the other contextual theologies is that, the indigenous theology seeks liberation from the perspective of 'land' because it is the land that sustains and nourishes people and give them an identity. Among the indigenous people, their history, culture, religion, spirituality and even the Sacred Power cannot be conceived without 'creation/land' or 'space'. The land and its inhabitants are two aspects of one reality. Human liberation will be void and empty without affirming the integrity of the goodness of land and its resources. Liberation without land is not liberation. It will lead to slavery and destruction. Therefore, the land and its resources that sustain and nourish all beings and give them an identity and self hood is not merely a justice issue to be set alongside other justice concerns. It is the foundation of history, existence and identity. Poverty, war, oppression, ethnic conflict and identity problems cannot be understood or solved without relating to integrity of creation/land. Justice to creation/land becomes very central to liberation and human dignity and fullness of life.

*When all the trees have been cut down,
When all the animals have been hunted,
When all the waters are polluted,
When all the air is unsafe to breathe,
Only then will you discover you cannot eat
money.*

That is why doing justice to 'land' is the starting point of the indigenous people's theology and their search for liberation. Commitment and dedication to the harmony of creation/land springs forth in love, nurture, care and acceptance. This methodological priority of justice to land is essential not only because of their 'earth-centred' world view

and tradition, but because of our contemporary ecological crisis, misuse of resources, market culture, war for oil and survival crisis of many people. This methodological priority of doing justice to totality of creation is the primary departure from the other contextual theologies.

Our Theological Perspective

No person or community can have a monopoly over theology. To express our knowledge of God in one's own way is the inherent right of all human being. We can apprehend God by what he has done to our fore parents even before the arrival of Christianity and is doing for the people in the concrete historical context. Therefore, we are called to articulate our faith journey with God and community in our own way.

a) Biblical Testimony of Creation

The indigenous peoples communities recognize several 'scriptures', including oral traditions to apprehend God. The Bible is the book of indigenous people. It speaks of people's relationship in society, cultivation, animals, nature and encounter with the Divine power in their search for liberation. The Hebrew Bible starts with creation of heaven and earth, and then moves on to creation account of humanity as created from the ground/land, that humanity is created in God's image and that each race and nation was assigned a space in God's world (Deut 32: 8). The land, from whose womb humanity was formed (Gen. 2:7), is also viewed by the Bible as really alive. It is not a mass of dead matter, but a living, pulsating organism. From our land-centered lenses, the mountains and hills and trees do sing and clap their hands. These are not mere metaphors or poetry. The land or the whole creation is alive, and it is so intimately weaved with the lives and struggles of the indigenous communities that the former groans in travail (Romans 8: 19, 22) whenever we, the people of the land, suffer displacement, alienation, exploitation, exile and persecution. The New Testament Gospel, too, proclaims how central the redemption of the margins is in the divine economy. Jesus always located his ministry within the farming or fishing context and world view. Jesus' language, metaphors, symbols are drawn from day to day experience of the

farmers, fisher folks and their struggle for justice against the empire. In other words, the Judaeo-Christian gospel of the reign of God is affirmative of our indigenous world view and spirituality that constructs our understanding of who we are and what we struggle for.

b) God in creation

Creation is the first act of God's revelation. God cannot be perceived without water, wind, trees, vegetations, sky, light, darkness, animals, human creatures. In this first God's act of revelation, God revealed himself/herself as co-creator with earth. The most striking aspect in this first act of God's revelation is "God is present in creation". The presence of God makes this earth sacred. That is why God entered into covenant relationship with all creatures. There are many stories, myths, parables, and even fairy tales of how the Sacred Power and the land sustain life together. This makes "the whole earth is full of God's glory" (Isa. 6:1-3). People always conceive of God-world very much attached to them in their every day life. Totem, taboos and other customary laws tied them together as one whole. To perceive God detached from creation/earth or mere transcendental being who controls life from above is not the biblical faith. We believe in God because God as the creator is present and continues to work with the land, river, sea to give life and hope. This affirmation is the foundation for life. The major problem in theology is faith articulation of human history without other earth's family.

c) Liberation and Integrity of Creation

The Bible is the book that affirms life from destruction. The most striking one in the Bible is the institution of Sabbath and Jubilee. Jubilee, in the Biblical tradition, is an invitation to participate in the dreams and designs of the Divine to recreate relations among living beings through restoration and renewal of history. Jubilee epitomizes the hope for an eschatological possibility in historical terms, creating systems that are free from the possibilities of exploitation and oppression. Ancient seers introduced the concept of Jubilee through principles of economic, political and social justice within cosmic framework which inherently

negates marginalization of any living beings. To actualize this vision, God revealed himself/herself as the liberator in Exodus event. More precisely, God is revealed as the God of liberation of the oppressed. "I am Yahweh your God, who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6). Israel as a people came to know God as liberator through the exodus. By delivering the people of Israel from Egyptian bondage and inaugurating the covenant on the basis of that historical event, God is "revealed as the God of the oppressed, involved in their history, liberating them from human bondage." In exodus event, God took the side of the oppressed community; the people who have been denied the human dignity and earth's resources.

The Nazareth manifesto of Jesus reaffirmed liberation by proclaiming the Year of the Lord's favor. Jesus reiterated the importance of Jubilee tradition for liberation (Luke 4:18 ff.). The proclamation of the Year of the Lord is a message of liberty to those who have lost their land, personhood or status that they could return to their former position and ancestral land; both the rich and poor, master and servant, the empowered and the weak and even nature itself were all return to their original. The conflict with Satan and the powers of this world, the condemnation of the rich, the insistence that the kingdom of God is for the poor, and the location of his ministry among the poor for liberation threatened the oppressors which cost Jesus crucifixion. In the absence of a reorganization of life prescribed by the values of Jubilee, a just community is only an empty word. The spirituality of Jesus is martyrdom and that is why it is "costly discipleship". The resurrection conveys hope in God. That is why Jesus becomes the symbol of struggle for justice for indigenous people. To fight and resist against the new empire of global market, anti-people development activities of the present time is justified and it is the Divine mandate to participate in God's liberative act in history.

d) Our Ecclesial Vision

The church is a house of prayer for all nations, races and language. There are no barriers and discrimination in the house of God. The indigenous people, women and persons with disabilities are

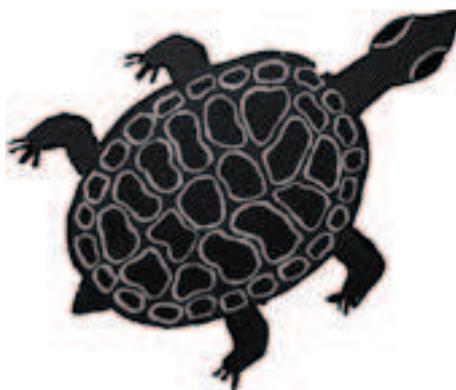
all invited to celebrate and share their gifts for common good.

We need to understand the household of God on the basis of the richness of God's creation. This is expressed in the plurality of his creation. Attempts to exclude others' form of expression are denial of God's richness. No culture, no community is excluded from this God's structure of creation. All are unique in their own ways and, therefore, no one has the right to dominate and suppress the other. Life is protected and it can grow to its fullness only by affirming of the beauty of diversity.

Christian missionaries have done immense work for the liberation of indigenous people. Recognizing their genuine interest in the well-being of the oppressed people and commitment to bring the people to the gospel message of salvation, many oppressed people converted to Christian faith searching for a more dignified life. While acknowledging many dedicated and selfless works rendered by the missionaries, we also recognize

that the church has been an ally or agent of empires in the marginalization, oppression, exploitation and even obliteration of indigenous peoples communities. It became the Trojan horse of empires, and to this day continues to be an instrument of subjugation of indigenous people's communities. The church has consistently played her role as the cultural partisan in our colonization, consistently breaking our will to resist subjugation and domination, and tragically standing in silence in the face of the destruction of our habitat, our livelihood and culture.

Indigenous peoples affirm a people-centred church, ecumenical unity but not a church of power, hierarchy, expansion, extension and conquest. What we envision is a church that respects, recognizes, affirm, support, promote, advocate for us in our struggle for self-identification and self-determination. We envision a church that goes deeper in the indigenous peoples experience, not only as object of study but especially as subject of ecclesiological and theological elaboration.



Group Discussion: Exploring Indigenous Theology...

What is Indigenous Theology?

- ◇ It has always been understood, by Indigenous Peoples, that God the Creator Being was always, and is always, with us.
- ◇ Starting point is different from White theology.
- ◇ It reads scripture through cultural eyes.
- ◇ It is global.
- ◇ By not imposing theology – theology speaks to others.
- ◇ The land is the scriptures.
- ◇ Within one there are many.
- ◇ It emerges from creation culture – the cosmos.
- ◇ It links Dreaming stories with philosophy and scriptures.
- ◇ Expresses.
- ◇ Says.
- ◇ Reaches out.
- ◇ God is everywhere – not just in churches – wherever we happen to be.
- ◇ It intermarries culture and scripture.
- ◇ It looks at the “whole” – time and place.
- ◇ Culture is not static.
- ◇ Values/mores are not static.
- ◇ Spirituality is not static.



Indigenous Theology...

- ◇ is rooted in connection with the land.
- ◇ is respect for the land, for one another and all creation.
- ◇ is land and culture.
- ◇ is respect for Elders.
- ◇ is respect for Aboriginal law.
- ◇ is shared with others.
- ◇ is our beliefs.
- ◇ is connections to sacred sites.
- ◇ rises from the land.
- ◇ is innate – coming from within.
- ◇ is about the whole of life and the everyday experiences.
- ◇ is a grounded spirituality.
- ◇ is inclusive of creation and all humanity.

- ◇ draws on specific places and consists of stories of creation/beings.
- ◇ is stories and symbols reflecting and pointing to the life and love of God.
- ◇ is diverse – e.g. in some places Rainbow Spirit is revelatory, in others it is seen as demonic/inappropriate.
- ◇ is ceremonial laws e.g. bora rings.
- ◇ is traditional mens' and womens' business.
- ◇ is Rainbow Spirit theology – Milbi Dabaar.
- ◇ is liberationist.
- ◇ is suspicious of academic theology which is non-contextual.
- ◇ is a reversal of how it was done in the past, invites people to now take the time to listen; to learn and understand Indigenous theology rather than impose dominant culture theology.

Traditions–Unity–Ceremony/Religious–Landscape–Stories–Songs/dance–Animals–Art–Sites–Camping–Bush tucker–Bush medicine – energizes–Clans/tribes–Languages–Walk country –Hunting/fishing–no waste–“enough.”



It's dancing–storytelling–painting–song–dreaming –land–animals–traditions–sharing and caring –survivors–acceptance –forgiveness–community–stolen generations –kinship–coolamon–message sticks–drums–clap sticks–didgeridoo–shell shakers.



Connection to Land is...

- ◊ I feel a belonging to the land and experience my ancestors calling me by name, it has started a search of understanding what it means for me.
- ◊ I was born under the gum tree.
- ◊ Land is me vs. land is mine.
- ◊ Land is mother.
- ◊ Land is life.
- ◊ Land is identity.
- ◊ God is revealed through the land and creation.
- ◊ The dreaming place calls Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
- ◊ Land is holy sacred; it is created by God.
- ◊ Connection to God is through the land because it is God's land.
- ◊ The importance of the spiritual connection to the land needs to be taught to new generations.
- ◊ Symbols are in the landscape.
- ◊ Land is the MOST important of all.
- ◊ It is the mother and father source of all we have.
- ◊ Birth places and burying of after births.
- ◊ Hunting, fishing and gathering food.
- ◊ Physical /sensual/spiritual experiences e.g. connections to living water.
- ◊ Language.
- ◊ Totems.
- ◊ Connection is to ancestral land rather than the land inhabited now.
- ◊ New discoveries and appreciation of land.
- ◊ Greater awareness of where I step and how I treat the land and creatures.
- ◊ All of Australia is a sacred site, there is a strong spiritual connection when I return to my own "country."
- ◊ Land and mob are inseparable.
- ◊ Different connections to different environments e.g. desert or coastal.
- ◊ Knowing where things are e.g. water, or gold in WA goldfields.
- ◊ Knowing when things happen—when to stay and move and when to do things.
- ◊ Land is like a bible.
- ◊ I feel the connection most in and at the sea; I feel like I am in my mother's womb.
- ◊ No one can remove you from that spiritual connection to the land.
- ◊ When people are disconnected there is a sense of loss, trauma resulting in conflict, violence, and loss of identity.
- ◊ For non-Indigenous there is a sense of connection to land that grows; through relationships and faith in Christ.
- ◊ Connection spiritually to the land is always there – even when you go away, or it's suppressed stolen or other reasons and it can be rejuvenated.

How can we link Indigenous theology to Western Theology?

- ◊ Listening walking talking together telling and exchanging stories.
- ◊ Through education.
- ◊ Through stories, symbols, sharing culture in connection with scripture.
- ◊ As e.g. Wontulp Bi Buya has tried to do.
- ◊ Through sharing life fully together relationships, resistance, respect, reaching out.
- ◊ Through theology in action.
- ◊ Through dialogue.
- ◊ Listening.
- ◊ Humility.
- ◊ Resistance to oppression.
- ◊ Look back on European Christian theology for points of connection with creation - e.g. St Francis of Assisi, Hildegard.



Keynote Address

The Uniqueness of Indigenous Spirituality

Wati Longchar

Listen to the MP3 - 4_Longchar_Uniqueness



Spirituality is a deeper dimension that touches the life of a community. It is a socio-ethical principle that governs life. People understand spirituality in different ways. For some it is a life of contemplation and mediation, for some self sacrifice for the sake of gospel and for some commitment to struggle for justice. While an anthropocentric spirituality is strongly emphasized in other traditions, a cosmo-centric spirituality is affirmed by indigenous peoples. The indigenous peoples around the world understand spirituality in different ways, but they share many common spiritual heritage. The most striking common spirituality of indigenous peoples is their cosmo-centric perception of spirituality.

Who are we?

It is good to start by asking “who are we?” How are we defined by others? How do we define ourselves? Indigenous peoples constitute about 5-8 per cent of the world population. People have confusion over the identity of indigenous people. There is no universally accepted definition of ‘indigenous people’. They are identified as tribals, ethnic minorities, native, aborigines or ‘Indians’. These names are given by colonizers, western missionaries and anthropologists. Sometimes indigenous people are also identified as cultural minorities, hill tribes, mountain peoples, forest/remote area dwellers and so forth. All these identities are given by the dominant society especially people who live in an urban or semi-urban context.

However, none of the indigenous community identified themselves with those names. They are all imposed identities by western missionaries, anthropologists and colonial administrators, urban settlers, and later by the respective Governments. Such categories are never accepted by the people concerned as a generic term applicable to them. Indigenous people identify themselves by their own names, e.g. Hakka, Amis, Thao, Aos, Chin, Laos, Mizos, Khasis, Ainus, etc. When we say ‘Indigenous People’, it means the first people or the original settlers of the land who gave names to their mountains, rivers, rocks, etc. Naming of a child is the right of the parents. Naming is always connected to ownership, caring and parenting. Each name is associated with an event and identity. Those name givers are called indigenous people.

A Common Heritage: Space - A Foundation of Indigenous People’s Spirituality

Despite their cultural and ethnic diversity, the indigenous communities all over the world uphold a special relationship with their land. Land, for them, is more than just a habitat or a political boundary; it is the basis of their social organization, economic system and cultural identification. The understanding of indigenous people’s land is expressed in different ways:

“The land is the Supreme Being’s land”
“One cannot become rich by selling land”
“Do not be greedy for the land, if you want

to live long”
 “Land is life”
 “The one who does not have land always cheats others or cannot become a good citizen”
 “The land cries in the hands of greedy people”
 “The land never lies; do not lie to the land”
 “Anyone who takes another’s land by giving false witness will not live long”
 “The land is like a bird, it flies away soon in the hands of greedy people”
 “You can sell other things, but not land”
 “You are a stranger without land”

Is it not the whole creation declares the glory of God!

An Australian Aborigine, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, maintains the community’s relationship to land, thus:

Land gives us value, and our spirituality is in the land. The goodness that is in the land – in the trees, in the water, in the rocks, in the beauty of the landscape and nature itself – enable us to breathe, live and enjoy.

They all expressed the spiritual relationship between the land and people. The land is very complex spiritual component and occupies a very central place in indigenous people’s worldview.

Our identity is radically related to the land, to mountains, rocks, the entire cosmic universe and everything therein. Contrary to the colonizers description of the land as ‘wilderness’ or ‘empty space’, the land is our temple (cathedral), our university, our hospital, our market, the vast hall where we congregate and celebrate, our parent, our life. It is in the land that we worship, we heal the sick, educate our children, and feed our people. The loss of land and the destruction of the indigenous peoples’ environment is

an affront to our identities, the loss of our spirituality and our self-determining existence. If the land is lost, the family, clan and village and the tribe’s identity too will be lost. A person who is not deeply rooted in the land cannot become a good citizen. He/she is like a stranger without an identity and a home.

The indigenous people’s myths and rhetoric speak of the land as belonging to the Creator. Like the Hebrews, [“the Earth is the Lord’s and fullness thereof” (Ps.24:1)], indigenous people also affirm that the land belongs to the Creator. The village, clans and individuals may own the land, but within the wider understanding that the land belongs to the Creator. The Creator alone is the ultimate owner of the land. Thus, the land equally belongs to all with equal rights and freedom to live in it, and no one can claim it exclusively for himself/herself nor can one sell it as though it is one’s own exclusive property. In the true sense, human’s ownership is only temporary. The whole land is the home of the spirits and humans are only members in it. Hence, the ownership of land by village, clans and individuals has to be understood within the greater recognition that the land belongs to the Creator.

Even the Sacred Power is understood in relation to land/space. For example, the Aos and Sangtams of Nagaland (India) call their Supreme Being, Lijaba. Li means ‘land’ and jaba means ‘real’. It means the Supreme Being is ‘the real soil’. Sometimes people call the Supreme Being Lizaba. Li means ‘soil’ and zaba means ‘enter’, meaning ‘the one who enters or indwells into the soil’. People believed that the Supreme Being enters into the soil with the seeds and rises again along with the crops. Thus, the blooming flower, bearing of fruits and rice signifies the presence of the Creator. The

Sacred Power is present in every iota of creation and the whole creation becomes the manifestation of the Creator. This understanding reminds us of the Prophet Isaiah's vision. The Prophet heard God's messengers announcing that "the whole earth is full of God's glory" (Isa. 6:1-3). For indigenous people, there is no concept of the Creator without the land; the land and the Creator are inseparably related. The Creator indwells not only in human persons, but also indwells in the soil.

The land is also understood as the symbol of unity of all living creatures, the spirit(s) and the Creator. The land is the basis that enables them to co-exist with other living beings, their ancestors and the Creator. The land is the foundation of unity.

Many indigenous communities further perceive the land as mother. Their myths speak of their fore parents emerging from stones or emerging from a big hole of the earth. All these myths symbolically tell that the land is the mother; we are born out of the earth. It upholds and sustains life. It owns people. Thus they compare the land as mother. The land not only sustains the individuals, village, clans and tribe, but it also unites the Creator, spirits, ancestors and living beings as one family. The land is the symbol of unity for all life.

The experience of time and history is also related to land. According to the indigenous people's concept, it is the land that creates time and history. People intimately move along with the soil cycle and surrounding environment. All the festivals and religious activities of the people are centred on the soil cycle. When the land and surrounding environment are destroyed, people experience a vacuum; the rhythm of life is seriously jeopardised. The whole universe is also perceived as a religious universe. Rocks and boulders, trees and rivers are not just empty objects, but religious objects; the voices and songs of ani-

mals speak of a religious language; the eclipse of the sun and of the moon are not simply a silent phenomenon of nature, it speaks to the community that observes it, often warning of an impending danger and misfortune. It is in this milieu that people experience history and time. Thus, the concept of history and time is inseparably interlinked and rooted in the soil.

Unlike other great religions of the world, the indigenous religion does not have any founder(s) or reformer(s) or guide(s) nor do people dance and sing adoring a divine historical person(s). They too have traditions of divine births and manifestations, but they are not worshipped. They have priests, officiating elders, diviners and other famous men and women in the body of beliefs, and mythologies which are respected and which form an integral part of their religious milieu, but they are neither worshipped nor adored as divine representatives. Instead, people dance and sing along with the cycle of land. A peculiar feature of the indigenous religion is that the whole religious systems, ceremonies, rituals, festivals and dances are all centred and deeply rooted on the land itself. We may make random comparison between the indigenous and the dominant Christian view of life:

Our Cosmology

Indigenous peoples perceive their cosmology in an organic way. In this organic understanding everything is organically related to each other. Everything is linked together, values everything. All creation, including the Sacred Power, affects each other. Humans see themselves as an integral part of the total cosmic life. Though the Sacred Power and the Spirit(s) are understood as the Creator and Sustainer of all living beings, they are also perceived, though distinct, as part of the total cosmic life. This organic relationship is possible because of the earth. The earth is the foundation of cosmo-centric spirituality.

We recognize that indigenous people understand their cosmology differently; however, the following traditions and values are common to most indigenous peoples all over the world. To make our focus clear, we make comparison with traditional western Christian view of life - see Table 1 opposite.

Such indigenous view of life and spirituality is not primitive and uncivilized. It is just a difference of emphasis and priority. Indigenous people give more priority to community and preservation of land/space. This is the distinctive spirituality of indigenous people. These values are also not mere abstract concepts, but part of people's life and existence. The earth is always brought in the centre of their life. For example, in some societies offering a traditional shawl is the greatest honor to be offered to a guest. It was never given person to person directly, but the giver places it on the ground and the receiver takes it from the ground. Meaning, it comes from the soil and you take it from the soil. When a person is offered a drink, a few drops are first dropped on the ground giving honor to the ground. It connects the person with the mystery of the earth. The space always brings in between the persons. This is called spiritual connection to space. The space is always acknowledged in their religious and ethical life. These values were not mere abstract concepts, but were part of people's life and existence. This provides a vision of life not based on the conquest of nature, people and their culture, but rooted on harmonious relationship with nature, preservation and protection of people and their culture. Liberation theology or third world theologies have missed this vital aspect in doing theology. Indigenous theology affirms progress, development and liberation as important components for human life, but without neglecting their spiritual connection to earth's family. One of the major roots of today's world crises is the negligence of the

spiritual connection with space/earth/creation for human liberation.

The Neglect of Indigenous People's Spirituality

Interestingly, the majority of Christian communities in the global south are from an indigenous background. For example, 95 per cent Christians in India are tribal and dalit origin. Majority of the Christians in Myanmar, Thailand, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Nepal, etc. belong to ethnic minorities. But in terms of numerical size, Christian community especially in Asia is an absolute minority compare to other religious communities. Indigenous people were the first communities to welcome Christian missionaries and embraced Christian faith in mass. Their option to Christian faith has both political and social reasons; they opted for Christian faith in search of liberation and new identity. In fact, Christian missionaries were the first people to show love and care. Therefore, the church in Asia is predominantly a church of indigenous people.

If the missionaries had not come and work among the indigenous people, what would be the condition of the indigenous people today? I am sure, we will be worst than what we are today in terms of education, health services, economic situation and social status. The missionaries were the first people to work for the liberation of the people. While acknowledging many dedicated and selfless works rendered by the missionaries, we need to admit the fact that they secularize the mystery of God's creation and alienated the people from earth centred spirituality. We can point out two factors:

(i) Non-theological factors

(a) The colonial power and Christian missionaries affected all areas of indigenous people's society. The colonizers with intro-

Table 1 - A Comparison of Western Christian Views and Traditional Indigenous views

Traditional Western ‘Christian’ View	Traditional Indigenous View
Humanity is the ontological basis of all realities. Perceives everything from anthropocentric perspectives	The land is the basis of all realities – human selfhood and identity. Perceives all realities from creation perspectives
Realities are perceived dualistically. A sharp distinction is maintained in understanding life. Dichotomic in thinking.	No sharp dualism. There is no clear cut distinction between sacred and secular, religion and non-religion, etc. Holistic in thinking.
God’s self is seen in history, especially in human history.	The self of the Supreme Being is seen in creation and an inseparably relationship is maintained
Jesus Christ is the focal point of reference of all religious activities.	No historical person in which their religion is centered. The earth is the focal point of reference and all religious activities are centered on the soil.
There are written creeds, scripture, etc. Scripture is sacred and central for faith.	Though oldest religion, there is no scripture or creed. They have only oral tradition. The earth is sacred and central for life.
Nature is something detached or outside of God.	We cannot perceive the Supreme Being apart from creation. God is in creation
Task orientation. A person is measured by what he or she performs. The task is the focal point. Very much achievement focus and competition oriented. Saving over giving. Rich means accumulation.	Person orientation. Relationship between individuals in society is more important than the simple performance of tasks. Cooperation is valued more. Giving over saving. Rich means giving.
Manipulation of environment. There is no sacred in God’s world. Exploit as much as possible to extract profit.	Adaptation to environment. The world is sacred. It is our mother. How can we sell and exploit our mother!
Highly individualistic.	Highly community-oriented.

duction of a unified nation-state political system, brought a wider nation-state political dimension. This contributed to the erosion of traditional customary laws and customs. The customary laws and practices which were very much geared towards the protection and care of nature as well as community as a whole were replaced by the new laws developed either in the west or in other urban context. Consequently, the indigenous people were slowly alienated from the land and community centred customary laws and customs.

(b) The indigenous people lived and worked with the soil. It was the soil that gave them not only identity and culture but also sustenance. However, through the introduction of money economy, people were forced to opt for the non-traditional avenues of work, that is work unrelated to the soil, and to work for money in all sorts of employment. This new economy introduced the concept of time as a commodity to be sold and bought; it also involved earning and spending money with all the inherent dangers, temptations, difficulties and risks that go with it. Through this new money economy system, the indigenous people gradually alienated themselves from their soil and community centred way of life, tradition and culture.

c) The indigenous people's contact with outsiders and western people brought new tools and materials. Gradually, people began to acquire factory made goods and things for improving amenities for living and for personal security. People slowly discarded those traditional things and goods. This material changes contributed to neglect of their tradition and culture.

d) The converts were asked to adopt new social attitude and values. They were not allowed to wear ornaments or dressed that were associated with the traditional prac-

tices.

e) The introduction of modern schools phased out the youth dormitory institution, an institution common to many indigenous communities. It was a training institute where young boys and girls were enrolled and underwent training in different aspects of life until they got married. It was here that young people learnt traditions and cultures under the supervision of elders. When young people became Christians they were asked to give up going to the dormitory and the customs associated with these institutions. The loss of this institution is considered as the root cause of the disintegration of indigenous people's culture.

(ii) Theological factors

The theology that brought to us was deeply rooted in and shaped by the Enlightenment rationality. The nature is seen in terms of mere utility. The scientific method of reductionism took away the mystery out of their theology. People began to perceive that there is nothing amazing about the world; it is merely a sum-total of many material components and energies. Humans are able to understand, predict, and control everything relate to the world; we are separated from, and masters of, the earth. Natural resources are given value only in so far as they are useful for the development of science and technology. We see three theological perceptions quite contrary to indigenous view of life which contributed to the neglect of earth-centred spirituality.

a) Hierarchical structure of creation: Christianity brought a structure of hierarchy. People began to see society, human community and even Christian ministry within hierarchical order. The most problematic one is the explanation of land and God's creation within this hierarchical structure. God, the Creator, in the beginning, simultaneously created a hierarchy of creatures, ordered ac-

ording to their degree of perfection. There are perfect and imperfect beings. The imperfect being are created to serve the needs of more noble beings, for instance, plants draw their nutrients from the earth, animals feed on plants and these in turn serve human use. Therefore, lifeless beings exist for the sake of living beings, plants for animals and animals for humans. The other non-human creatures are protected, preserved, sustained by God to serve human needs. This theology gives justification for manipulation and exploitation of other segments of God's creation. In this understanding how do we perceive God's revelation in creation?

b) Anthropocentric view of creation: Christianity gave a notion that humanity as the point of reference for everything. The whole creation of God exists for the benefit of humans. The ultimate purpose of creation is for the service and benefit of humans. God is not known through His creation, but only through Christ. Salvation history begins from the incarnation of Jesus Christ, but not from the creation. For the sake of election, nature is sustained, protected and upheld. Creation is merely a 'show place'. It has no history, not redeemed, but merely used.

c) Heaven and Hell: Christianity brought an understanding that this world is not our world. The evangelicals came with a strong emphasis on "the Second Coming of Christ". They believed that this world is coming to an end, all materials will be destroyed, but only those who believe in Christ will be saved. Only the soul will live eternally. This kind of teaching made many people to think that this world is not our home. If this world is not our home and perishable, why should we take care of it!

Today we realize that such theologies are destructive to life. The mindless destruction of earth's resources, and marginaliza-

tion and subjugation of indigenous peoples through war, cultural genocide, alienation, denial and suppression are deeply rooted in such view of life.

With the coming of Christianity, modernization and now globalization, we have inherited a culture of individualism. We work for money, live for money, die for money. Indigenous people have suffered many losses.

Before modernity

We were owner of the land
We were sustained by forests
We were sustained by shifting cultivation
We did not sell land
We never buy fire wood and water
We respect elders
We were bound by customary laws
Our clothing, songs had something to say
We did not know that we had to sell culture

Many more

After modernity

We have lost our land
We are denied of forest products
Shifting cultivation is declared illegal
We have no choice except to buy
We no longer respect elders
We no longer care for customary law
We commercialize them
We now sell our culture

Absence of Spiritual Connection with Earth's Family

A crucial element missing in Christian theologies today is the spiritual connection

with the mystery of the earth's family. The students of School of Peace in Bangalore wanted to plan a program for the International Earth's day. The students came up with many suggestions, some of them were:

- Appeal of all people to use bicycle for a day, including people in high position.
- Organize program to plant each person a tree.
- Organize street drama on environmental issue.
- Painting of arts in T Shirt on environmental protect.
- Essay competition on environmental protection.
- Encourage to write and publish articles, poems, stories related to environmental protection.
- Organize concert, along with public lectures.
- Organize social work.
- Encourage people to take public bus rather than private car.
- Create awareness campaign about the danger of plastic bags, etc.
- Organize youth an environmental awareness bi-cycle tour for a week.
- Eat vegetables only, etc. etc.
- Art competition for children.

These are excellent programs and ideas but appear to be very commercially oriented.

What is missing is the spiritual connection with the earth. I started thinking about how the indigenous people observed the Earth's Day in the past. The whole activities were deeply religious. Some of the indigenous communities used to observe upto 3 to 6 days. The earth was given complete rest and treated with much respect by observing the followings:

- No one was allowed to cut firewood lest the earth be shaken;
- Use of axe, knife was prohibited;

- No one was allowed to poke the earth by spear or by any pointed materials;
- No one was allowed to make noise;
- No one was allowed to spit on the ground;
- No one was allowed to stamp on the ground harshly;
- No one is allowed to make fire on the ground;
- No sex;
- No killing of animals;
- No cutting of tree;
- No one is allowed to go to the field;
- No merry making, e.g. dancing, singing, etc.

The earth is honored and treated as sacred. It was on these days that peace and reconciliation initiative took place between individuals, clans, villages and communities. The Earth's Day(s) was also a day of prayer and contemplation. This was/is the culture of tribal people. Rejection of this spiritual connection with earth's family in development activities will be a serious mistake for the future survival of the world.

Unless we rediscover our spiritual connection of people with the earth's family, it is not possible to talk about liberation and a community where all people are treated justly. It is like attempting to liberate oneself after killing one's mother. That means from the indigenous people's perspective an authentic Christian theology is possible only in relation to protection of the land.

Group Discussion: What is the unique contribution of an Australian Indigenous Spirituality?

The unique contribution of an Australian Indigenous Spirituality...

The church in Australia will not be truly the church that Jesus wants it to be until you (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) play your part and it is joyfully received by others.
(Pope John Paul II)

- ◇ Values, laws, spirituality.
 - ◇ Ritual and ceremony as part of identity.
 - ◇ Australian Indigenous Spirituality is the traditional way of setting the foundation for the way of knowing and relation to God.
 - ◇ It is born out of the depths of the soil, this land is ancient, it is uniquely OURS!!
 - ◇ Welcoming people to country.
 - ◇ Presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in church.
- ◇ What family means.
 - ◇ Diversity / contributions belief.
 - ◇ Art.
 - ◇ Leadership.
 - ◇ Sharing/caring.
 - ◇ "uncluttered" strong faith.
 - ◇ Stillness.
 - ◇ No time constraints.
 - ◇ Mindfulness as a disposition.
 - ◇ Individualism vs. us (community).
- ◇ Language, hymns, songs (challenge when God speaks through language because there are many).
 - ◇ Language is key because it was there always – hymns in language, worship in language.
 - ◇ Language encompasses all aspects of life, it makes you stronger.
 - ◇ People who are not using their own language are not as confident.
 - ◇ Indigenous languages – prayer – song can enrich churches everywhere.
 - ◇ Education sector – the challenge is which language to teach, pronunciation is also an issue.



The unique contribution of an Australian Indigenous Spirituality...

- ◇ Symbols like fire, water, honey, locusts have many different levels of meaning that enrich understanding.
- ◇ Story telling from Indigenous perspective but there are many various meanings e.g. rainbow serpent.
- ◇ Dancing – Indigenous ceremonial dancing is a unique contribution.
- ◇ One way to communicate between tribal groups and clans is through common symbols – water, fire etc.
- ◇ Traditional ceremonies and initiation and the bora rings that can be integrated into Christian ceremonies.
- ◇ Invitation to non-Indigenous people to own / explore their spirituality – get centered.
- ◇ Relationships with people with all creation – the church has lost some of it and we need to return to this. The Australian Church needs to embrace this.
- ◇ Everything is connected – cosmos and land and we need to reflect this.
- ◇ Balance – is Australian Indigenous spirituality in balance with Western spirituality?
- ◇ When Aboriginal people contribute sometimes the churches never fully embrace Indigenous contribution (e.g. in liturgy) – cultural contribution such as smoking ceremony – in some areas.
- ◇ Bring a deeper understanding of connection and belonging to the land as a whole of life experience.
- ◇ Unique contribution is land and that God is everywhere; that God is not from above but from the land.
- ◇ A living sacred relationship with the land (land and sea).
- ◇ contentment with what is provided – taking only what is needed – trust that there is enough.
- ◇ Holding our roots (as Australians) as sacred.
- ◇ Where are the points of dialogue? This [the conference] is a rare environment.



Keynote Address

Bringing Culture Back to the Centre of our Ministries; Developing Our Stories

Evelyn Parkin



Listen to the MP3 - 5_Parkin_ Bringing Culture Back to the Centre

Evelyn Parkin delivered a very personal account of exploring her identity as an Aboriginal Christian. Using stories from her personal history, as well as those handed down from her ancestors, Evelyn talks about finding Christ in culture. Evelyn talks about how she looks for the unseen, the beyond, and draws guidance from what the Ancestors did. Evelyn talks about how she believes that every Aboriginal person has direct lineage to thousands of years of culture and that Aboriginal people must claim this culture. She goes on to say that no one really knows about the Mystery of God and where He is in culture; only Indigenous peoples can search for and find their culture in Christ.

Evelyn also talks about finding her identity, she talks about finding a verse in the Bible that says to her “I am Black and I am Beautiful” (Song of Songs v.5). She challenges us to look at who Aboriginal people are with two cultures inside of them.

This address has not been transcribed due to the nature of the presentation, the use of images (which are not reprinted due to permissions and copyright) and her story... rather it is better to listen to what Evelyn has to say.

Evelyn leads into a group workshop that asks each of us to look at Who am I? and Who are We?



Group Discussion: Who am I?

I am ...

- ◇ Stolen Generations.
 - ◇ We are strong women who tell our stories we have a common thread through our connection to land and community.
 - ◇ We are all children of God.
 - ◇ We are part of the unfolding story:
 - ◇ The family story.
 - ◇ Community story.
 - ◇ Christian story.
 - ◇ God's creations or parts of creation.
 - ◇ I am God's image/likeness.
 - ◇ Collection of life experiences.
 - ◇ Gods' gift to earth.
 - ◇ Shared goals.
 - ◇ Different and diverse.
 - ◇ We have core beliefs
- ◇ Aboriginal.
 - ◇ Mother.
 - ◇ Father.
 - ◇ Teacher.
 - ◇ Learner.
 - ◇ Human.
 - ◇ Hunter.
 - ◇ Mentor (uncle/aunt).
 - ◇ Keepers (grandparents).
 - ◇ Unique.
 - ◇ Christians.
 - ◇ Colonial – daughter.
 - ◇ Christians.
 - ◇ Friends.
- ◇ Family.
 - ◇ Dreamers.
 - ◇ Powerful.
 - ◇ Courageous.
 - ◇ Hopeful.
 - ◇ Justice.
 - ◇ Listened.
 - ◇ Faith filled.



What has our experience of 100 years of mission been?

In 2010, an event to celebrate the centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference is being held in Edinburgh, Scotland. According to the organisers, this event is a time to provide new perspectives on mission for the 21st Century and is seen as a suggestive moment for many people seeking direction for Christian mission in the 21st century.

“As we celebrate the centennial of the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh, 1910, we seek to deepen and strengthen its prophetic vision of worldwide, multi-cultural Christian unity - a unity marked by shared passion to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ. The memory of Edinburgh 1910 reminds us that we are ambassadors of hope, confident in the power of God’s love despite our limitations in a world of pain and injustice.” Dana L. Robert.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have long been missioned to and, as Bishop James Leftwich says, are now part of the mission force. In the lead up to Edinburgh 2010 we thought it would be valuable to look back at our experiences and understandings of mission over the past one hundred years and then look forward to what we would like the Community of Church to look like in the next one hundred years.

The first session on this theme was facilitated by Graeme Mundine and focused on the past 100 years. The participants were split into two circles. To begin with all the non-Indigenous people were asked to sit in the inner circle and all the Indigenous people to sit in a circle around them. They were switched half way through the ses-

sion. The process was simple, but profound, those in the centre circle were invited to speak in conversation with each other and in response to questions asked by Graeme. Those in the outer circle were asked to only listen and to make no response. Two people in the outer circle were asked to make notes about what they heard the inner circle say.

The experiences the participants brought to the conversation were varied. They were a cross section of denominations, Religious and Lay, clergy and educators, men and women, young and old, married and celibate. Some had experiences of being missionaries to Aboriginal communities and elsewhere and others had experience of living on missions and being educated by missionaries. Some participants were Stolen Generations who had been taken from their families and were raised by missionaries.

Many shared deeply personal thoughts and experiences which they were happy to share in the context of this gathering but who may not feel it is appropriate to be identified to a wider audience. For that reason we have not attributed names to the comments. At times the session was challenging and emotional, but its strength was in the willingness of the participants to engage fully and honestly, and for that we thank them all.

The questions asked of the inner circle were what do you understand about the past of mission? What is your experience of mission what you’ve read, what you’ve understood?

Non-Indigenous participants.

- The word mission has many layers and one of those layers is that the Anglicans arrived in Yarrabah from Melbourne in 1908 and they picked three Aboriginal missionaries. Angelina Noble was one and James Noble and they arrived in the Roper River. They did that because of the stories of atrocities happening in Arnhem Land. The many killings that went on for decades. That first mission was sent there to rescue and to provide sanctuary. The killings didn't stop and as people made their way to the Roper Mission they were shot and killed on the way. So part of that story about mission is of course a sanctuary. There are other layers.
- **When Mary MacKillop started her Brother was a Jesuit and he went up the Daly River: he wanted Mary to go there but the Bishop and some of the sisters didn't want that to happen. And it did not happen for about 100 years when the sisters went to the Kimberley. And we never thought of ourselves as missionaries we just thought of ourselves as teaching the little children to know their reading writing and arithmetic. We were Christians and Catholics it was a pretty wild scene there in Australia and we never saw ourselves as missionaries until ...**
- We taught under the trees in sheds and in the caravans and the people asked for it and the people built it.
- **Everything was done in language the people led whatever was going on. Whether it was the Catholic side or their own cultural side.**
- I have two thoughts of mission. One was from my childhood and was probably the least pleasant one, because I was reared to a large extent by an Aboriginal woman. But my parents were in business and I was seeing some people come from the mission to get clothes and see some people sign with their thumb print and see that they didn't have the opportunity to be as clean as they wanted to be and to be really sad and sick in the stomach about it. It's probably one of the least pleasant memories of my childhood to see what happened. And then one day having to deliver parcels with my father out to the mission and being really upset with what I saw. I was only about 6 or 7 at the time.
- The other one was for us as Good Samaritans and Polding sending over the missionaries to Stradbroke Island. He called and said we're on a mission he used that term on mission. His understanding of being on a mission was being with people so we were at home in the community or whether we were out visiting people or were on the streets of Sydney in the 1850s. He said that wherever you are with people you are on mission. That's what he called it.
- **My mission for fifty years was to teach in the interior. And when that completed I offered to come to Wilcannia. I am in my 15th year at Wilcannia. I am a presence there and being a support for Aboriginal people. Encouraging them by giving and helping where I can in the house, in the community in the schools.**
- When I think of mission I lived at Roper River for fifteen years. It's very much about the language because early Aboriginal work did not learn the Aborigi-

nal languages and at Roper there were the remnants of eight tribes that came in and the children picked up the Pidgin English and made it their mother tongue - the Kreole. When I lived there in 1976 the people wouldn't admit it was their mother tongue because of the way that people had put them down for speaking their mother languages and I was mainly involved in that [working in languages].

- After we left in the early 1980s the Aboriginal people decided they wanted the bible translation to continue. They had a meeting with the Bishop and the Bible Society and they said we want the whole Bible and we are going to do it and you White people are going to organise it. And a couple of years ago it was published and it was all done with Aboriginal translators. To see people proud of their language was quite interesting. When I went there it was a Government town - the Christian Mission Society had handed it over in 1968. When I went there I still heard stories of people – the first person to come in 1911, the young girl was still alive and she used to tell what it was like there.



- **Since we are talking historically, my personal experience I have it in a foreign country in PNG, but if we are talking about mission history it would seem from my reading that “mission” has very negative connotations. From talking to Indigenous peoples from this land and others that it has a very negative connotation and I can see why. Because for me, and talking to people who have been involved in mission till maybe 2000, it seems that missions**

have become the tool of the Church and sometimes the Church itself has become the tool of secular institutions and governments to force expansions. Unfortunately that expansion has come and shed a load of Indigenous blood in this country and other countries. And if not blood, a lot of sorrow and a lot of pain, a lot of suffering, dispossession, rape and murder. So, unfortunately, that religious element got transferred to secular institutions and why it is seen so negatively.

- Principally my impression of missions in the past was the Good News was proclaimed in words but not often lived out in practise and I see many Indigenous people today who bear the scars and feel resentment towards Churches because of those past practices where the Good News wasn't lived out in practice and all it meant was dispossession from kin and country and culture and spirituality.
- **Facilitator: There are those people who have been out there as missions working on the ground but some are saying maybe it isn't a good thing. I am hearing some terrible stories of things that are happening on missions. But what about those people who have been out there on the ground what has been your experience of mission?**

- There are bad stories and experiences. But last year I was at the 100 year anniversary of the missions in Roper and it was organised by the Aboriginal people. It was very interesting to hear the Aboriginal people say “you know if the missionaries hadn't come we wouldn't be alive and here I am very grateful that the missionaries came and brought the Gospel and we have our churches they emerged from”.

- Without missionaries they wouldn't have Aboriginal clergy now and they choose that. I remember an Aboriginal man saying, "if the missionaries hadn't been here I wouldn't be here, I'd be dead because they saved our lives and we were interested in what they had to say". Now I am sure these same people could tell you all our faults as missionaries but to hear them stand up and say that publicly and even people who never darkened the doors of Church were being grateful and I don't think it was just politics because they saw their roots back when the Church came with the Good News of the Gospel.
- **I bring a different experience because I went as a missionary to a church in Malaysia. It took me 2 years before I could even have a reasonable conversation. 4 years before I could preach. 6 years before I could be really creative. So six years while I had to learn. And in some ways I think it's sad that missionaries don't go for a long time. I was there for 12 years - 6 years learning and 6 years doing something. If missionaries really want to succeed that degree of really entering into the language and culture and then you can serve as I did. It's very different in Australia.**



- **Facilitator: the sisters and brothers etc were there for the long haul but is it different today?**
- I think mission's gone through a whole history throughout the Christian era. Up to the seventeenth century there really wasn't a huge missionary movement. The missionary movement started or emerged

at the time that some of the European powers spread their selves across the globe. I think what we've got in the last few decades is again a radical evaluation of what mission is. Now mission is more about (in the Anglican tradition) it's been about transformation rather than an imperialising colonial message.

- **Historically the missions emerged at time when European powers grew to an extraordinary extent; they destroyed rural communities as well. They closed the land in Scotland. A lot of the stuff that was done in the rest of the world was actually done first to the Irish, in particular, and also to the English, Welsh and Scottish and it was gradually worse when it came here because of the power of the Industrial Age. There was also a sense that because they had the message of Christianity they could go out to the whole world and that we could soon see the end of time because once the Good News had been preached to everyone that God would wrap up the world.**
- So that gives a very powerful theological and religious drive to things and it's only 99 years ago that we have the International Mission Conference where Churches first realised that they were making a huge mess of this. They had lost sight of the Misseo Dei (Mission of God). They had been confused with certain ideas of Church instead of about the Kingdom of God. The King is so much bigger and God is so much bigger than Church. We look now around ourselves and ask where is the God in our work? Not just us in the Church. Certainly not only in the non-Indigenous Church - but in all kinds of places. Theologically speaking that's what we are missing. Even God work-

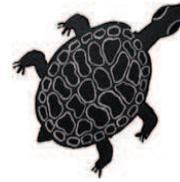
ing in many other places that's a bit challenging for some people.

- I hope most of those people went out there with a sense of mission and care. I've seen a change even in the 25 years since I left school; when we used to get flogged. But I've seen changes of our whole understanding of God I think I've seen that move forward. I don't think we make the same mistakes of the past. I hope we are not stupid enough to make the same mistakes of the past. But I am very wary as a modern man to look back on somebody there to say that they would have the same understanding of the world that I have now.

Facilitator: I haven't heard about God; only glimpses ie sanctuary. We were there to bring up good Christian people, to educate them. Does this mean it didn't necessarily have to be about God?

- It was because there were Christian people who believed that Aboriginal people were human. That they needed to be treated with respect as human people in an age of the nineteenth century where students of Darwin were still saying they weren't human. There were many people, and Henry Reynolds says the land rights movement started with missionaries, who worked for the rights of Aboriginal people to have rights to their land. So God was at the heart of that because it was the sense of the image of God in Aboriginal people.
- That's not to say that in amongst that there were some mixed up missionaries. But there seems to be a sense that they were out there because they were different than a lot of the other groups. Long term you can go through and name some who were there long term and who worked side by side with Aboriginal people in the gardens tending the flocks

then would celebrate on Sunday. It wasn't really a story of going in there and showing God down their throats.



- **I remember when I thought we were on mission there was something proselytizing about that which would get under my skin until I realised it was about describing the kinds of relationships that should exist, describing the kinds of relationships of the Kingdom. It was about the kind of God, also about the quality of relationships that should be there.**
- Was very much about learning about Aboriginal culture bringing out but there are stories about forcing it down your throat.
- **The history of the Church should not be put in one box; within Christianity there are always those who will struggle with different sensibilities; those who have had a more feminine aspect and understanding of God. Those who have had a more community understanding of God; those who have resisted a sort of hard doctrinal hierarchical Church. I think we see some of those aspects in some missionaries but in terms of moving forward we have to try and reconnect with some of those things. Christianity in a Western form had many strands that would resonate very closely with Aboriginal spirituality. For myself, brought up in the Celtic tradition that would be very much the same and I think we should honour those things as well.**

- We've said little about God but to my mind everything we have said is God. We wouldn't have been asked to do any of these things that we have done if we didn't have God. So God is really in all that we are doing and saying.
- **I just want to say that the old sense of mission does still exist in some places. That the people who are here are here because they want to be and come out of a sense of "mission" which is much truer and healthier. Those days are not completely over.**

Facilitator: To summarise the Non-Indigenous understandings: although there have been hardships they tried to do the best they could; they tried to express God by sharing in those experiences and lives. Some were good at it, some weren't good at it. God is there and God was there.



Indigenous participants

Facilitator: What's your knowledge and experiences about "mission".

- Very briefly when we talk about mission there were two things to me what a mission is. Mission is where we live and a mission is what we are talking about. Can you understand me? I might be a blackfella! Every Aboriginal community I guess are called missions but I think there might be two ways I might think about it. I remember as a boy in our first mission, or the second mission I think, we never had that attitude... we never knew what Church was. The second mission we call it the old home. I remember the missionaries who came there were a church group. They sat around like this. They were singing songs and talking like this and I remember thinking they're fun! But they sort of came once a month or something like that. They used to bring ice creams in those big old containers and bags of apples or something for the adults. They had a picnic sort of day.
- And when we were booted out of the old mission to where we are now, the other community used to come along there too and take us down by the river and have a picnic – sport – that sort of thing. Racing in the sand and apples in the bucket. It was all fun. But the people that were doing this were called missionaries. I used to think, yeah it was good, but others had their ups and downs with these missionaries. But to me it was good because nobody was preaching in those times in those days, but gradually things change. Then later on they tried to convert people to be Christians and a lot of people started freaking, especially our old people. They were the ones then who were the strong foundations of the mis-

sion. They didn't come from outside anywhere. They were strong and they were raised up in our community and they became serious ministers of the Gospel and they had a church there. But then in the name of development the Government knocked it down and gave us new houses and when they did that they knocked everything down ministry and all. So today it's hard to... we got to look back to the days when those missionaries came around.

- At the moment there's only my wife and myself who are Christians now. Things have turned around since the Church was knocked down. This is right back in the past. It's before Captain Cook. You know what the old fella used to tell us... (speaks in language). He said "Long time ago, God was here with us. Before Captain Cook and before the missionaries came He was here way back a long time ago. Long before – right back with the Creator and He was here with us Aboriginal people from the beginning of time. That's why Aboriginal land here – that's why it's so important because there He is. Look out there at the trees, at the rocks. He's there everywhere so sacred to us. That's why the mountains and everything are sacred to us. Because from when time began God was with us.

Facilitator: It was good and during that time they instilled something in us that created very strong leaders for the future.

- I'm a stolen generation I was taken away by Government and Police when I was six months old and put in a mission. I thought that the White missionary lady was my mother. Now the Missionaries came; some, because they felt the call of God, they went out. I'm talking about WA but people who genuinely felt that the call of God in

their lives. These guys definitely said we felt the call of God on our lives to come to a particular situation in a particular town to help protect the Aboriginal people from the welfare system that was going around at the time. We were put under the protection of the Welfare Protection Act and every single person was a ward of the State. I am not sure about the Torres Strait Islanders, but we were all wards of the State. We couldn't move unless we received permission from the welfare.



- Let me tell you an example. My mother had me out in the bush and come back and we were put in the mission. My name should have been ... my mother's maiden name. So when I was put in the mission the mission wrote to Mr Mills in Perth and said to Mr Mills we have a "White" boy come into our mission with no name. I am seeking your permission to name this child... Mr Mills wrote back and said yes, you have my permission because he is a ward of the State to name this child. Poor old mum was devastated. Mum couldn't say no you can't name him that because he already has a name. That was disregarded - it was put aside. While they had the intentions of doing things, some things they did were wrong. Family names - we had a system of who we were related to, that was disregarded. We had a kin system. That was disregarded. We find today they are trying to resurrect that system. And once they came in and destroyed it people were marrying their first cousins and having children with their first cousins – a brother and a sister with

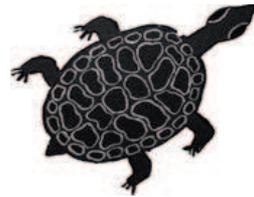
their son and daughter. Disrupted the whole thing. So therefore, my experience from mission is that they did a good job in one sense. They looked after our welfare they did all that but at the same time they destroyed what we knew as community.

- I want to defend missionaries in some sense because we haven't got any missionaries here from the Churches of Christ. So my experiences of mission are good and the other part is bad. They didn't take time to understand our culture, how we work, what our community was like and so in that ignorance they did what they did. But the second part is that the government said to them we will give you a dollar for every child you have in your care. So instead of saying no God will supply the needs they said yes we will take the dollar. When they said that then came the dictation to say to those guys well if you are going to get money from us then you must do it our way. So out went the mission; out went their goals that they meant to do. In their care us boys worked like "niggers" if I could use the phrase. Honestly, from 6.00 in the morning to 6.00 at night when we were let out of the room we had to chop wood, we had to go and do all sorts of things for the missionaries. The missionaries did not do a thing; they just sat and waited for us to do their stuff. If we didn't fill the water buckets by breakfast we'd possibly go without breakfast. Come back after breakfast fill it up and if we didn't milk those goats for the missionaries we'd have no breakfast. We worked all the time. 6.00 was the time to come in to the dormitories. If we didn't we'd get a hiding, no questions asked. So my experience as a Stolen Generations per-

son - you can see me shaking here... My experience under the care of missionaries was not good.

Facilitator: So there is a distinction between Government policy and mission although some of the missions did fulfil government policy but there was a distinction.

- Yes but the Governments saw the good work and said yes let's use this to implement our policy. Let's use the mission to implement the policy and so they offered them money and endowments and all sorts of things and the missionaries were silly enough to say yes we'll take it so now it becomes what the government are dictating to missionaries. I felt sorry for them, the missionaries, I've got a lot of good friends who are missionaries. But I've got a lot of bad friends too.



- Mission, to me, saw our people as lost and so they began to do the work of the Christian gospel with it. But the way they did their work was the problem. It created huge problems for Aboriginal people. Particularly in understanding our culture and the lack of understanding and this is even felt today by a lot of our people. I was never brought up in an Aboriginal community or mission but my mum was born at Yarrabah and my grandmother was raised there and had a lot of contact with Yarrabah in my early days. We heard a lot of stories about how the missionaries treated our people particularly the women. Although at Yarrabah that wasn't that bad.

- **Like Pastor Bill Hollingsworth said thank God for the missionaries because his mother was on the brink of extinction when they brought her down. She went on to have ten children. I feel the same way. There were good things and bad things. I praise God because my Grandfather learnt the Christian gospel – Church of England, and I believe that where I am today is because of what he gave me and Christianity. And so there are a lot of things I can be thankful for but not forgetting there's a lot of things perpetrated on Aborigines.**
 - I thank God for the blessings that sent the missionaries to us across the oceans. We were also under the Protector. The protector used to come and we would welcome him. We would put the mats out and everybody would go out to meet him. Then he used to give us boiled lollies. he gave them to the grandparent's; to the children. We all got boiled lollies. But it made me think that those boiled lollies were like what the Government did for us. It was sweet for a little time, but then we were left with nothing. The sweetness didn't last.
 - **Over the years I had the thought – I had an Uncle who wrote about the missions. He called it the Silent Church - like a puppet on a string from the Government. That's how they'd seen it. If the Government said something and something needed to be done they did it. If an Aboriginal kid needed to be moved or a marriage had to take place the Government had to authorise it and they were like a puppet on a string. I thought that was quite sad. This really states the problem for a lot of people through South of Australia. A lot of people connected but the impact of the Missionaries was really really negative. The missionaries used to tell us**
- why are you complaining? You've got a shirt on your back and you've got a roof over your hard. But we said if you haven't got a family all those things are irrelevant.**
- My dad was born in Yarrabah. I think about having your culture taken away and it's only now through studying theology that I am coming back to it. He'd say he was too White to get into the Dormitory and they would be outside starving. He had to depend on the men in the community hunting. They used to pick up [fruit] peels and live on them. They would bring green meat over on the barges and he had to live on them. That was the other side – of not being in the dormitory.



Facilitator: It was a mixed time. But where was God in all of this? Obviously something good came out of it because you are all here, obviously something unique and special came out of it.

- I was preaching the other day and all of a sudden these words came out of my mouth "I hate Missionaries" they are strong words. My people cringed after what I said. I need to clarify what I said. I don't really hate Missionaries I just hate what they did to me. For me being a Pastor at this moment is because of one of our Aboriginal Pastors from Western Australia. He came to Bible College and he came back with a friend and had a week of Mission and preaching the gospel. This impact on me was really... there's a guy who really knows what he's on about and can stand up in our community, he had a friend who was tall dark and handsome. Talked really good, used

long words. I said why are you so different? He said it's because we are Christians and putting the Gospel in culture. He was able to preach in Language. He said the way you can be like this is to change your way of thinking and make a commitment and God will change your life. I made that commitment and found my life changing and went to college and have now been a minister for a while. But that was the whole turn around because someone was able to relate the Gospels to my culture.



- **I didn't grow up with Missionaries but my mum did. But I think about the land which has been granted to the missionaries for the benefit of the Aboriginal people over the years and I've often wondered about what benefit Aboriginal people are getting back from those lands. We only have to look at the books of our Churches to know what lands are owned around Australia. I often think of God sending his Son down to right the wrongs in the world and I often wonder if there are any missionaries today who are going to right some of those wrongs and return some of those lands to Aboriginal people around Australia and I don't mean small pockets I mean right around Australia. I also think about when you read the Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report. The reason most of those cases was because of the way that our people were treated in their missions in the early days which led to committing suicide. When I listen to the stolen wages issue and I listen to ... talking about**

being a slave. When are the Churches ever going to pay for the slave labour of development work that Aboriginal people did on these properties on the land? Then you've got the Stolen Generations. There isn't one story in that report that doesn't reflect the treatment that people received in the dormitories. There are a lot more issues. Missionaries brought a lot of good things. Many wouldn't have survived, many of our ancestors wouldn't have survived, but it's time for Justice in this land.

- I am a member of the Aboriginal Catholic Elders' Council in our Diocese. There are others who could have spoken more about being raised on a mission. I am finding with the people working on the Elders' Council that they are just wonderful people just trying to work with the people around them for reconciliation and harmony. They know their history was bad and yes we won't forget that but we are moving on. This Diocese is doing some great things... The Elders really want to work together with people of all cultures and all denominations and I feel that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the most forgiving people of any group even though the atrocities that are being done, and are still being done, through the deaths in custody and stolen wages we still have a long way to go but here we sit willing to listen and talk about God and listen to your point of view and we thank you for listening to us.
- **Have the Aboriginal communities improved their situation since the missionaries were removed? Are there communities in a better situation now than they used to be?**
- The ramifications of people growing up is disgusting in the way people have been

treated. The percentage of people incarcerated, especially young people, is very hard. It's very hard to work in the area of Church and still dialogue with the community because of what they've all gone through. It's really hard to make up for past wrongs and that is not my responsibility but it is the Churches' obligation I feel. The ramifications of the people in those communities is alarming. When we look at other communities and get some recognition that these communities actually employed Aboriginal people underneath the State government. Here we are fighting but when are the Churches coming together and say "Yes we were party to that and Yes we need to acknowledge all that pain and hurt in the community" instead of always thinking of money and compensation instead of thinking we need to heal the hurts of the past.



Non-Indigenous people listening to Indigenous People

Summary of what the non-Indigenous outer circle heard the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people say...

The picture that emerged is complex with a mix of positives and negatives; of consequences that are still being lived and of opportunities for the future.

The Creator was with Aboriginal people since the beginning of time, before Missionaries came.

The Missionaries came and “bribed” the community by giving them “ice cream and apples” and involving them in various activities to get them involved.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the most forgiving people.

Some of the positives are:

- “The Mission” – the place in which people lived, regardless of how they ended up there, became home; at least for some Aboriginal people. It was the place where family and community existed and where tradition and culture continued in whatever ways possible.
- Some people alive today are only alive because the missionaries came, set up the mission and protected them from being slaughtered with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- In a world where traditional means of living had been taken away by squatters etc. the provision of food, clothing, shelter was good.
- Missionaries (generally) genuinely came because of a call from God and the fact

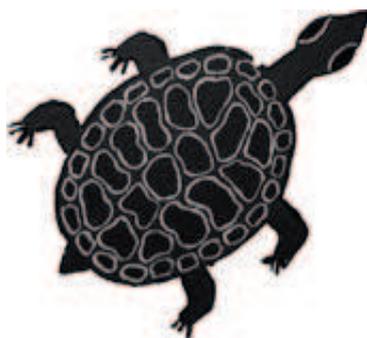
they brought knowledge of Jesus Christ is/was good.

Some of the negatives are:

- A misguided implementation how to spread Christ’s word led to:
 - Destruction of Culture;
 - Loss of Language;
 - Loss of Family.
- Loss of tribal relationships and traditions.
- People who were ‘not black enough’ were left on the margins of society, unfed, and separated from those who could care for them.
- Aboriginal People were treated like slave labour and were never paid for their work on missions. Churches need to acknowledge and compensate for these stolen wages.
- Government policy rendered mission organisations and missionaries as ‘puppets’ to policy; seeking permission from, and doing what, Government requested. They became the “silent Church”.
- Implementing the taking of people from home.
- Implementing the stolen generations policies that came later.
- Doing what they were told because of the money that came through government funding.
- The fallout has carried forward to today: suicide, anger, alcoholism, fractured families;
- A trans-generational hurt that still needs healing.
- There are untold and unresolved personal/family stories which still need to be told.

There are challenges for Missionaries and Churches today to: **Hopeful signs for the future**

- Be transparent and play their part in issues such as land, stolen wages, compensation.
 - Pay fair back wages to those who worked in Mission situations the churches were responsible for; even where this was done under Government auspices (and seek recompense from the government).
 - Return much of the land which they own to the original Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island traditional custodians.
 - Put in (significant) resources to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island needs.
 - Recognise leadership – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders have told Church since the 1960s/1970s that they are ready for leadership but keep being knocked back.
 - Some communities would like a Church presence.
- There is still respect for elders.
 - There is recognition of the need to develop leadership skills in young people and hand over leadership to them (even if ‘we don’t think they are ready’).
 - The stories are being told and people are listening to all sides of the story (not all people, not all stories but much is happening).
 - Individuals and communities feel called to ‘cross the line’ and follow what Christ calls them to do.



Indigenous People listening to non-Indigenous people

Summary of what the Indigenous outer circle heard non-Indigenous inner circle say...

There were many layers to Mission.

Missionaries were moved by compassion they heard of the terrible killings that were taking place in the NT around Roper River in 1908. They were rescuing and providing sanctuary from murders and killings.

Many saw themselves as teachers and some worked to understand the culture. Some of the less pleasant memories were seeing the Aboriginal people come into town to shop.

The missionaries felt the language of the people didn't seem important to keep. Language was put down by White People.

Mission had negative connotations "expansion of pain and suffering".

The Good News was proclaimed in words but not lived out in practice.

Missionaries meant disconnection, dispossession of land. Stories of violence and sadness.

Some Indigenous people had a deep affection for the missionary people in the 100 Year celebration of the missionaries in Roper and a man named Andrew said that if the missionaries had not come he might have been dead.

Some felt ,sadly, that the missions were the tool of the Government.

Remembered the emotion of seeing Aboriginal people signing with their thumbprint for clothes and rations and the deep feelings she felt as she was driven through their community and to see their living standards.

Catholic sisters to Daly River and the Kimberleys didn't feel that they were missionaries they just had a heart content to help the young ones to read and write and to encourage as much as possible the use of their own language.

People felt we needed to learn the culture and language to walk alongside in a journey of unity.

Missionaries should enter into culture and language and be able to serve.

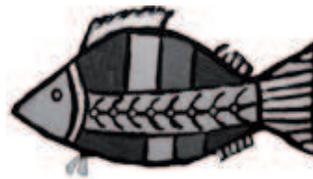
Radical re-evaluation of what "mission" is, need transformation.

100 years ago Churches realised that they made a mess of the mission of God.

The big challenge is God working with other faiths.

Missionaries were sometimes long term who were part of the community.

Some experiences were negative some were positive and they shouldn't be "boxed". God is present in all mission work – they tried to do the best they could. Some were good, some weren't.



Reinventing the Community of Church

What will the Community of Church look like in 100 years?

Having spent the previous session exploring past experiences of church, in particular Missions, this session was more about looking forward and creating a church of the future. This session was facilitated by renowned futurist Tony Stevenson. Tony introduced the concept of “futures” by explaining the benefit of exploring possible futures. Tony explained that as we can learn from our past including our heritage, so too can we also think about the future of the earth – the time-space where we are still to live and our children and future generations, including unborn generations. The future is not set in stone and thinking about the future can change it. We can reclaim and rescue it. We can create alternative futures.

Creating the future

Tony asked us to consider whether the future is imposed; has it already been colonized? In addition to divine guidance, the aspects left to human agency are in our own hands at least partially. It is ours to reclaim. To understand this concept we were asked to look back a generation and to think about the changes in that time, then to look forward 10 or 20 or 100 years and think about what changes would take place during those time periods.

As Tony explained, we can't predict the future but we can actively anticipate the future by thinking of the range of possibilities, probabilities and desirabilities that lie ahead. We can learn how to work with others, in our community and around the world, to try and create our preferred future. Working back from a compelling long term vision

produces change.

“It is an ideal time to rescue the future; to rethink the global political and economic system based in fairness, equity and justice – where love is valued higher than money; where land and community are valued more than accumulating possession. Let us start today by reinventing the Community of Church.” Tony Stevenson.

In groups, the participants were asked to think of different scenarios. One was “more of the same”, what would the Community of Church look like in 100 years if we continued on in the same vein, if nothing much changed.

Participants were then asked to imagine the future of the Community of Church in 100 years time; what would it look like, what would they like to see. There was no attempt in this session to come to one point of view, a consensus on what church must look like. Indeed, for some participants their Church already had aspects of what others desired, such as women clergy, whereas others wanted no clergy at all in the church of the future.

The dreams, wishes and desires are a starting point for conversations and the diversity of thoughts with their contradictions and challenges follow with no attempt to synthesize them into a neat package. The aim of the session was to challenge us to think about what kind of futures we want to create.



More of the same...

Opinions about what the Churches would look like in 100 years, if things did not change, ranged from oblivion to irrelevance. Several “lacks” were identified; lack of church unity, lack of women’s full potential.

The Community of Church of the future under this scenario has continued to use imperial language, titles, structures and operations. There is patriarchal, monarchical hierarchal, male dominated and aging leadership. Denominations have continued as we keep talking to ourselves.

There is an increase in exclusivity of extremes and fundamentalism.

The First Peoples have continued to survive and Aboriginal ministry and dedicated places has grown. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ministers have continued to be under resourced and many continue to be supported financially by Government programs such as CDEP.

The Churches have retained their resources and wealth, in particular the “best sites to build on” and they are still owners of many properties.

Many local churches have lost people who have walked from God and Church. In general people are be spiritually deprived.

Justice issues are largely unaddressed. Reconciliation justice remains unfinished and climate change is unmanaged. Inequalities and prejudice have continued. There are still arguments about who has the power to speak and to take action. The church is invisible and silent on some issues. There is still

a threat of nuclear catastrophe which would impact on the future of church.

There have been some positive changes. More voices from the margins are being heard. The church is focused on the Gospels and is a praying worshipping church with good preaching and teaching which connects theology with Indigenous theology. The church is there in a crisis.

In 100 years... New thinking...

Having looked at the ‘more of the same’ scenario, the task was to look one hundred years ahead, to dream, to envision and to give voice to different ideas; whether they are logical progressions from where we

are now or ‘way way out there’ ideas. The odd wild card was thrown up, like having a female, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Pope. But mostly, people wanted to create a truly Australian church of the people with open doors.

An Australian Church...

The Community of Church of the future is a spiritually enriched church of people proud of the traditions and spirituality of this land which recognizes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality. There is a decrease of former cultural influences and an increase of influence of our location in Australia - “where we are”. Indigenous theology will be joyfully embraced. Culture and language is alive in the stories, gospel, music and dance. Rituals will be simple and tie ritual and ceremony to meaning in life.



Christ Centred...

The Community of Church of the future goes “back to basics” - to Jesus’ teaching. It is Christ centred and land sourced and is grounded in the lives and experience of people (not Christ from above, but below). Rituals and symbols connect to Christ and land. There is a focus on the gospels and the kingdom. It is church that is connecting and prophetic – “We are the salt of the earth, a bit of salt makes it tasty – making it tastier makes church more appealing and understanding”.



An open and inclusive reformed church...

The Community of Church of the future is an inclusive church with praying, listening, contemplative and inclusive worshippers. Women and men are equally involved at all levels and the church has the full involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities. The church is welcoming with doors open - the invitation is out to all to “be part of me, the body”. Young People, youth and children are more engaged. There is acceptance of the Gay community. Age old crusty, rusty structures have been demolished. There is flexibility and de-denominationalisation. Individuals do not feel marginalized and everyone is involved in creating church. The church is of the people, for the people, by the people and is not limited to buildings but is more orientated around sacred spaces.

A Just and caring community...

The Community of Church of the future is one of just communities serving all and speaks to my friends, the outcast, and the excluded. The church recognizes the marginalized and actively works towards reducing their marginalization. The church is Prophetic.

Leadership...

The Community of Church of the future is not hierarchical rather it is collaborative with decentralized power and authority. There are ordained women across all denominations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders are recognized as equal and they are ministering across the churches. There is new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership who have been well trained.

Sharing...

The Australian Churches shares their resources including clergy and church buildings. For example, they share clergy for funerals. There is also increased sharing of theology.

Healing...

This is a healing community. There is healing of disunity through diversity. Churches repent their role in Stolen Generations and hand over land and financial capital for repatriation.



Education...

Church schools are accessed freely.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Church...

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander church is self supporting, self governing and self propagating and autonomous.

Justice...

The Community of Churches recognize and act on climate change and catastrophe. They recognize human ecology and are in harmony with all of creation.

Disheartened and discouraged clergy have been reinstated.

Interfaith...

The community of Church in the future is in dialogue with others.



Sharing our stories of Ministry: Perspectives from the Field

**Rev. Colleen Mamarika and
Rev. Dr. Joy Sandefur**



Listen to the MP3_6_Mamarika and Sandefur

Rev. Colleen Mamarika, from Groote Eyelandt is in conversation with Rev. Dr Joy Sandefur about the importance of language

and culture in her ministry. Colleen explains the importance of using symbols in their Church which have meaning to them as Aboriginal people. Symbols such as clam shells, fire, stone and candles.

Colleen also talks about the importance of teaching and preaching in her own language. For example at funerals they conduct the service in language so that people feel that God is speaking to them. Colleen also talks about using their own stories to teach about Jesus and God, and tells us a creation story from her own language. Colleen reminds us that language was here before we were born and it makes us powerful and strong.

Tahniah Mossman

Listen to the MP3_7_Mossman

Tahniah Mossman is the Lutheran representative on the NATSIEC commission, she is also the youngest Commissioner. Tahniah tells us about her experiences as a young person growing up and the importance of the Elders handing on their knowledge to her.



Keynote Address

Folk Stories and Traditions: Sources for Doing Indigenous Theology

Limatula Longkumer



Listen to the MP3_8_Longkumer_Folkstories and Traditions

Limatula is a feminist theologian from Northeast India. Limatula explains that Northeast India comprises of eight States- Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura. It is bounded by China, Myanmar, Bangladesh and Bhutan and connected to the mainland India by a narrow bottle neck. Northeast India is the homeland of many tribes and ethnic groups. It is a nation within a nation where about four hundred tribes live with diverse socio-cultural and ethnic make-up and speaks hundreds of different languages and dialects. Each tribe speaks a different language. They are indigenous people of Mongoloid race but they are called as “tribals.” The term “tribe” or “tribal” does not originate with those people who are identified as tribals but imposed by colonizers, anthropologists, missionaries and later by the Constitution of India. The term “tribal” was used to denote ‘ a group of people speaking a common language, observing uniform rules of social organization, and working together for some common purposes such as trade, agriculture, or warfare. But the word “tribal” has a pejorative and derogatory meaning in India. It implies backward, primitive and uncivilized people living in the hills and forests. In the Constitution of India the term Schedule Tribe is used for indigenous people. It says that they must be a homogenous community who belong neither to the Hindu nor the Muslim communities and they must be economically

poor and socially marginalized. That is why, though the tribals do not come under Hindu caste structure, they are always treated as low caste people who are poor, illiterate and impure; and so suffer the stigma of being untouchables. Hence, the story of tribal people has a long history of suffering, humiliation and alienation. They suffer discriminations because of their ethnic and geographical isolation. On the other hand, they also experience discrimination and racism from the dominant Indian culture. They are at the periphery in the minds of the mainland Indians. The search for identity is a serious issue that Northeast people are concerned with. Today, Northeast India is a melting pot of conflicts and wars due to historical, political and socio-cultural reasons.

Limatula gave a paper on the importance of stories and maintaining culture, particularly in a context of colonization and now modernization and globalization. Limatula explains that the Churches brought Western liturgies, hymns and theology, but says that Tribal people want Jesus clothed in tribal dress. Christ through culture is the need of the hour. In this paper Limatula talks about the importance of Indigenous stories and culture and how to recover the important elements.

FOLK STORIES AND TRADITIONS: SOURCES FOR DOING INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY

Limatula Longkumer

Introduction

Indigenous societies are shaped by oral traditions. Orality shapes the way a community interacts, the way the sacred is experienced and the way the self is understood. There are liberative elements in our oral traditions- stories, folklores, myths, poems, songs, etc., which can be used as a source of inspiration to develop women's rights, values and status in our society. Reading and re-reading of the oral traditions or oral literatures can provide insights to empower women for transformation

A Story of the Deity who visited the village in disguise

Lijaba came disguised in the form of an old man, almost naked, having sores all over his body. He went from one door to door requesting for shelter but everyone gave their own excuses saying, "Behold we wait for the coming of Lijaba," some would say "We are observing anempong (taboo) because a child is born to us today and so we cannot have you here." Again another person said, "We have taboo because of the delivery of a calf today and we cannot allow you to be our guest." None welcome him. At the end of the village there were two orphan sisters living in a small hut. They were Yarla and Asatula. The old man asked them for shelter. At first, they thought of refusing him because of their poverty and their house was a tiny thatched home and they also knew that the old man was not carrying anything with him. Thus they said, "We do not have enough food to entertain you grandfather."

The old man answered, "I am carrying enough food for three of us." The two sisters invited him to their little hut. The old man asked them to put the pot on the fire. He took the grain of rice from his head and put it into the pot. To their great amazement, it turned into a pot full of rice. In the same way, he peeled a small piece of skin from his knee and cooked in another pot. It also turned into a pot full of meat. Three of them had a delicious meal that night.

The following morning, the old man casually looked towards the village paddy fields and asked the two sisters to identify the owners of the fields. They named the owners of each field except theirs because their field was too small to be disclosed to others. But the younger sister disclosed it while the elder sister went to get the comb that has fallen. However, her embarrassment was turned into a great blessing. The old man cursed all the fields that belonged to the villagers and blessed the field of the two orphan girls. He said, "Let there be a good harvest." The old man instructed them to cut string or rope out of their basket when they have enough harvest. Having blessed them, the old man left them and disappeared out of their sight. The two girls kept the old man's word in their heart. The harvest time came. The field belonging to the two girls had a good harvest whereas others have not. Yarla and Asatula had rich and abundant harvest that they had no place to store their grains. Then, as instructed by the old man, they cut their basket-strings and to their surprise the harvest was completed. When the villagers came to know what had happened to their

harvest, they realized that the old man who visited them was none other than Lijaba.

This story provides a profound understanding of God and human relationship. Each conversation is pregnant with theological insights but I mention only three aspects.

(a) A guest at home: God is merciful to those who accept him (worship him), but bring wrath to those who do not worship him. God is seen as person who is involved in every affairs at home, and know every need of the family. God is a family member. He particularly chooses a home at the end of the village. In Ao villages, home at the end of the village is normally unprotected and vulnerable from enemies. The poor and rejected villagers occupy the end of the village. God chooses them.

(b) A co-worker with the earth: God is believed to enter the earth just as the vital seed which gets buried beneath the soil and germinates as the life of the plants. God enters the soil with the seeds and rises again along with the crops. People see the face of God in vegetation and the vegetation becomes the exegesis of God. The vegetation signifies the presence of God.

(c) Cut the basket-string: Rice is life for many indigenous people. Rice cultivation was and is their very way of life; it is the focal point of their activities. Rice is gathered and carried in the basket. A basket without a rope is useless and one cannot carry the rice home. Cutting of basket-string (rope) implies that one should have a limit of wants. Unlimited accumulation of wealth is dangerous for society.

A Song of Creation (Free translation in English)

Oh, emerged from the six stones,
All the birds came for the meeting,
the Owl said, if there is darkness,
let there always be darkness.
To satisfy the feeling of all,
The Impang bird said,
let there be light and dark alternatively
let that process be repeated.

Oh, emerged from the six stones,
In Chungliyimti village
The children of the three phratrics,
We worship big stones and trees
Let the future generations continue
to worship this Great God.

Oh, in the range of Chungliyimti,
Called a village meeting,
In the platform of warriors,
Assembled all the people.
Having all people assembled,
They decided to go to Ongangla, a woman
of God
Who told them to worship the new spring
well
And after having worshipped the new spring
well
To erect the head-centre
And perform ceremonies to the village
head-tree.

A part of the song in Ao version

(O Chungliyimti kong nung
Mongdang ayimer
Arr salang pangnung
Nutsung temang senden angne
Nutsung temanger sendener
Tsungram kumer Ongangla dangna
Amdok amsu wane
Tzusen tzuba kulemangta
Orung saku agi
Yimrong so sang tuden ngane)

Explanation of the terms

1. Lung trok (six stones): The Aos believe that the three phratries emerged from the six stones.
2. Ongangla: She is believed to be a diviner. She is the only diviner who is remembered till today by the Aos.
3. Head-centre or head-tree: In every Ao village, there used to be a sacred place at the heart of the village to keep human head.

This song tells how the Aos conceive the reality around them. It explains the origin of the universe, of the Ao tribe, and of the Ao religion and culture. The first part of the poem explains the origin of the universe. Like the ancient Babylonian, Greek, Jewish, Chinese and Hindu mythologies, the song also says that there was chaos, with no night or day. All creation was in a dilemma. It was the birds who decided to have the process of the day and night. The wisdom of Impang bird brought peace, harmony and order out of chaos. The decision makers were birds.

The next part of the song tells us about the Ao religion. God is present in the big rocks, trees and rivers. The younger generation should continue to worship this great God.

The third part describes how people of the village assembled on a particular platform. Having assembled, people decided to go to the diviner named Ongangla to consult her about the suitability of the place for the establishment of a permanent village. She told them to worship the well of the new spring and then make a head-tree at the centre of the village for the heads brought from war and also perform certain ceremonies to their head-tree.

Distinctive Features of the Song/Stories

1. A peculiar characteristic of the traditional song, poem, story is that it always begins with “O, lung trok ko poker” (Oh, emerged from the six stones). It refers to the mythical age of origin, the primordial time of beginning which gives meaning and significance to all the fellows. Affirmation of one’s origin is the starting point of history and identity. It also implies that history and time are not separated from the cosmic realm. There is no history, ethics, and culture without the land, trees, animals, flowers and spirit. One cannot make a clear cut separation/distinction between the world of nature and the world of humanity.

2. In many of the great religious traditions, it was God who brought the day and night. But in the Ao tradition it was the birds who decided the process of the day and night. This clearly indicates that creation is the centre and the key in understanding of all realities in Ao worldview. The whole reality is approached from the perspective of creation.

3. The stories/songs personify animals. According to the traditional Ao worldview, animals also possess a sense of gratitude and love. They exercise a certain degree of care and love. The songs and stories symbolically explain that human are not superior or above the animals. All are equally important and valuable.

Characters of Folk Stories and Traditions

Folk stories and traditions include folktales, songs, myths, proverbs and riddles. They are transmitted orally from generation to generation. They are the foundation of religion. They teach how the Sacred Being works and reveal his/her mysteries through creation; it uncovers the place of the animal

kingdom in this universe and place and role of human in society. There is a myth/folklore behind every object, every event, every name, every character, every sound, every shape, every sickness, joy and sorrow. Some folk stories are long, some are medium, and some are short and some may be just one sentence. Yet they all convey meanings to the community. Till today oral traditions have a very strong influence among the people. However, if we apply modern scientific method of interpretation to understand oral indigenous traditions, their true meaning will be dissipated. The use of modern hermeneutical tools are crucial in the discernment of the truth, but this is not adequate to uncover the full truth.

As writing has become more popular, many think that oral tradition is ‘doomed’ to irrelevance. Unless we reduced them into written literature it will be gone sooner or later. But this is not true. As long as people dance, sing and tell stories, the oral traditions will continue. The oral tradition is transmitted in a very personal and community centred medium. They transmitted mainly through four mediums: (a) Many traditions are expressed through dance, rituals and symbolic act; (b) Some are expressed in the art like in shawl (e.g. Tsungkotepu); (c) some are expressed through song, poem riddle, jokes, proverbial form, and (d) some are presented in story style. To take out the oral tradition from its context and placed it within the written context is more dangerous. If we attempt to do so, the richness of oral tradition will be lost. Another peculiar character of indigenous oral tradition is that it does not have an individual creator or actor. It is a collective creation of the folk. People themselves are interpreters of it; people do not depend on the experts to interpret for them. It is a common people’s property and folk themselves control over it. Thus, indigenous people traditions will loss its credibility when it undermines its

communitarian character. It is the collective memory of the people and they are expression of faith, beliefs, struggles, sufferings, fears and hopes of the people themselves.

Unlike written text, the oral traditions of indigenous people are never a static and fixed. It was told or performed to the context and audience. It is narrated in multiple variations. One story, but many ways of expressions. Plurality is the one unique character of indigenous people’s traditions.

The indigenous religion does not have a written scripture like other religions. Though we do not have a written text, which could be called ‘holy scripture’, the oral traditions and customs could be considered as holy and authoritative for the faith and practice of the people. The religious ethos is contained in the people’s hearts, dances, songs, oral stories, myths and rituals. Community and the whole cosmos are the living sacred scripture. Rather than reading written scriptures, people depend on the experience of the encounter with our environment in day-to-day life.

How have Oral Traditions have been disregarded as myths by modern society or tempered by Christian missionaries as myths and evil without understanding?

(i) How Bible was received by indigenous peoples?

Missionaries brought the Bible to us claiming that it is the only revealed authoritative Word of God and they condemned our living traditions and spirituality as devilish and that our religion and culture as inferior, “heathens”, and a religion without any system of thought, devoid of morality and spirituality. They imposed western culture and Christianity. The missionaries presented the Bible and taught us to abandon the old religion and its practices. They taught us what to

do, and what to think. The Bible has power to transform personal life and community. However, the present reading of the Bible is otherworldly, pietistic and male centred which has failed to address the present realities of the people. It is very much one-sided interpretations which emphasizes too much on the born again, saving soul and life after death. Thus, the Bible continues to alienate indigenous people from our culture. The indigenous theologians should resist traditional interpretation of the Bible which tends to be an integrationist approach. God does not speak to us first and foremost through western theology. God accepts us as we are. God has spoken to our fore parents and even today He/She is present with us. Our people need to be free of the terrible burden of believing that they need to think and believe like Westerners. We need to hear the Gospel expressed in our own language and culture. God the Creator Spirit was/is already here. God was already speaking to us through different means in our indigenous land.

(ii) The Outsider's View of Indigenous Peoples and Resources

Until recently the interpreters of the indigenous resources were outsiders. The outsiders came, extract and claim ownership of the indigenous ways of knowing through their little research in the surface level, condemned and rejected utterly our people as incapable to be the creators of our cultures and communities. Most of the outsiders doing research on our indigenous people and culture ignored everything we own-indigenous likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, struggle and aspiration, intellects, values, tradition, etc-but at the same time assumed to know everything possible about the indigenous people, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of the indigenous peoples.

Most of the outside researchers, came to our indigenous land with an attitude of western

scientific method as 'serving good for humankind', or with 'saving them', and 'rescuing them' attitude. However, in such works one see how outside researchers look at the research problems through the eyes of the invaders. This is so because whether it is travellers' tales or other academic research, all have contributed as much to the West's knowledge of itself as has the systematic gathering of scientific data, without having even an iota of how damaging their research and records are for our indigenous peoples' dignity and history.

From the outsiders' view, one of the supposed characteristics of indigenous people was that 'the indigenous peoples could not use their minds or intellects', 'the indigenous peoples could not invent things', 'the indigenous peoples could not create institutions or history', 'the indigenous peoples could not imagine' - in short, we could not and cannot produce anything of value and therefore nothing worth can be learned from us. In other words, for outsiders, the indigenous peoples did not practice the arts of civilization. Since human is measured from such biased worldview and standards, and by lacking such virtues, our people disqualified themselves in terms of indigenous peoples values, indigenous peoples standards, beliefs, language and worldviews, etc. In short, we were told and we too believed that we were not 'fully human' In this regard, indigenous peoples religion was called "Animism", "Primitive religion". This type of popular western value judgment places the indigenous peoples religion at the bottom of the supposed line of religious evolution and creates inferiority of indigenous peoples religion as underdeveloped and primitive.

In this context, it becomes imperative to consciously acknowledge and study how research on the indigenous peoples has been done in the past and see how the outsider frames our indigenous peoples traditional

value and experiences. Thus, in any interpretation process of indigenous peoples' resources we need to ask: 'Whose interpretation is it?' 'Whose interests does it serve?' 'Who will benefit from it?' 'Who will interpret it and for whom?' 'How will its interpretation be disseminated?' It is crucial to re-read, re-right, and to re-write, i.e. to set right the indigenous peoples history, resources from the position of the indigenous peoples. The indigenous scholars must write our own versions of history, interpret resources in our own ways, for our own purposes. It will not be the same as done by the outsiders. We need to decolonize the research methods.

How as indigenous feminist we can revive the oral traditions and folk stories and use it as a hermeneutics for indigenous feminist theologizing?

(i) How to revive?

We can revive the oral traditions through critical reading and re-reading of oral stories, folklores, myths, songs and interpret them from the perspectives of women, the roles played by women can be rediscovered and those values may help us to rediscover a new vision for our society.

We have cited the story of Ongangla, a woman whose contribution could not be erased from Ao (one of the tribes in Nagaland) history. She was a diviner and a woman with high wisdom. Her story is almost lost and it is very difficult to trace her origin, clan, family and the typical role she played. Only in some songs and fragmented stories her role had slightly mentioned. The song referred above highlighted some of her contributions.

1. In the indigenous society where I come from, women are not allowed to participate in the decision making of the village administration till today. The song reflected a village meeting where only menfolks were assembled. But they could not find a final decision; they did not know how to offer worship. Finally, they decided to go and seek the wisdom of a woman. They went to Ongangla, the diviner. That shows that the wisdom of Ongangla was above the wisdom of men. But her contribution is not recorded at all in the history due to patriarchal culture and male dominated role.

2. The song also expressed about the origin of worship and sacrifice in our primal religion. People realized that there is a Creator God whom they wanted to worship, yet they did not know how to worship. This woman taught the menfolks about worship, indeed she was the founder of Ao religion. But in the course of time religious functions were confined and limited only to male priests.

3. The head tree was usually erected at the centre of the village. Head tree is where people hung the human heads (during the time of head hunting in those days). This place was regarded as a holy place by indigenous people because in those days human head was regarded as a highest value- a symbol of power and blessing. Normally women were not allowed to go near the head-tree. But the one who instructed the men to erect the head-tree was a woman- Ongangla. This shows how patriarchy undermined women's participation in the religious life of the people.

This story reveals how a woman played a significant role in the traditional Ao society. Sex was not a barrier. If such a role could be played by a woman in the past, why not today? I am sure similar stories may be found

in other indigenous societies, liberative roles that women played in the past which can be used as a toll to transform women today.

Belief in the existence of God, the creator, sustainer, nurturer, caring and loving God is common to all the indigenous peoples. There was no gender tag attached to God in the past. God was never explained and perceived in genderized form. God as a male deity was fully described only in the later period after the coming of Christianity. With the use of western language and idea now we have inculcated a God who is a male deity. God in my language is called Tsüngrem which is a neuter gender but now interpreted as a male God. Ukepenuopfü in Angami view is a female deity but interestingly enough, she is evolving into a male deity. The Garos called their God as Ma'gipa Jagring, means mother image/shadow. This mother God was perceived to have given birth to all creations, animates and inanimate is now understood as male deity. Likewise, all the Christian values are interpreted from patriarchal point of view.

(ii) Hermeneutic

Biblical interpretation is still dominated by western model of historical-critical approach. However, one should realize that we are not dealing with mono-scriptural hermeneutics but with multiple scriptures and religious traditions because ours is a context of multi-culturalism and multi religions. The Bible, scriptures and traditional sources both the written and oral traditions - it could be folklores, myths, dances, songs, ritual, etc., are developed within a social location, cultural background, economic environment and political situation. Therefore, in our attempt to interpret the Bible, one should take the other faith scriptures and indigenous resources seriously to make the Bible contextual and meaningful to our people. How can the traditional sources and the Bible il-

lumine one another to understand the truth of the Bible?

It's a fact that the Biblical interpretation is influenced by western culture. The Bible has not only been constructed as a western text and used as an instrument of colonization, but also that the predominant method of Western biblical interpretation since the Enlightenment, historical criticism, has itself colonized the Bible by constructing the books of the Bible as western texts. Bible reading and interpretation are never a value-neutral but reflects the values of its readers. Since both the text and its readers are social products manifesting the ideologies encoded in their respective social worlds, reading of the Bible cannot proceed in a detached and singular manner.

God speaks to different people in different contexts. It must be recognized that the sacred text is culturally conditioned by socio-religious traditions of a given context. So, there is no absolute and only one way of interpreting the scripture, no single reading strategy and interpretive method which can be applied to all contexts in all time. Each context needs a particular method for a particular people. Each context needs to read the Bible from his/her own perspectives.

In a multi-religious cultural setting where biblical text, other faiths scriptures and oral traditions are existed together. Recognizing the dissonance between the kind of biblical interpretation we inherited and the reality we are facing, we need to develop new hermeneutical principles to connect between the Bible and our lives. All readings and interpretations are contextualized and perspectival that multiple voices, mult centered and multilingual must be emphasized. Hence, biblical interpretation must create a two-way traffic between our own traditions and that of the Bible. Kwok Pui Lan says, "If the Bible is to work for liberation instead of

domination, biblical themes can be allowed to interact with Asian resources in a process of “dialogical imagination.” Folk tales and legends cultivated for centuries among the indigenous people “have the power to illumine many biblical stories.” Our fellow indigenous persons who have other faiths must not be considered as our missiological objects, but as dialogical partners in our ongoing search for truth. This can only be done when each one of us takes seriously our reality, the suffering and aspiration of our people, so that we can share our religious insights to build a better society.

Resources in Traditional Religion

Indigenous spirituality has provided and continues to provide spiritual support and ethical guidance to millions of their adherents till today. One cannot ignore the spiritual heritage of indigenous people if we have to look for a new way of doing theology in the context of globalization, poverty, economic injustice, gender issue, fundamentalism, ethnic crises and ecological problem. Two steps need to be considered in the interpretation strategy:

Use of myths, legends and stories in biblical reflection: Myths, folk tales, and legendary stories shared from generation to generation among the indigenous people, have the power to illuminate many biblical stories and other theological motifs. C. S. Song said that indigenous peoples resources can provide a very rich impetus to understand the depths of humanity and God’s action in the world. Using our own resources can radically appropriate our own history. Use of one’s cultural and religious tradition indicates the respect and pride of one’s heritage. It is authentic to draw as a source for theologizing.

Appropriating Culture: “Culture” is the worldview of the people. While the Gospel

frees people from their bondage, it is culture that sustains and nourishes people’s identity. In spite of its ambiguous nature, the work of God is imminent in all culture. God’s presence is manifested in land and in every culture, albeit differently and imperfectly. There are no people and culture without God and every culture possess some forms of divine manifestations. Therefore, culture is one of the most important resources for doing theology. There is no authentic theology without culture. Like other communities, the indigenous people also uphold a very distinctive cultural value system. Culture has both liberative and oppressive elements. The task of theology is to challenge and transform the oppressive elements, recover and affirm, and integrate the life affirming values into our life.

Cross-cultural Interpretation

In a multi-cultural, religious context where we have both sacred written scripture and non-written scripture, Archie Lee proposed “Cross-textual interpretation”. I would prefer ‘cross-cultural interpretation’ since it will undermine non-written scripture traditions. Besides putting two cultures side by side, also denotes the enlightening of one culture by using the point of view of others. Through ‘encounter’ and ‘interaction’, new meanings can be discovered. Such meaning and view-point may never be found by reading or listening only one text or culture alone. Archie Lee further noted that “interpretation will not stop at one ‘crossing’ for there can be many crossing, nor will it start from only one text (culture) and end with another.” The use of multiple crossings does not aim at merely comparative studies but to reach transformation and enrichment. In this, the transformation of the whole life is involved, a process of self-discovery. The end result turns out to be an “enrich-transformed existence.” By doing so, the vitality and spiritu-

ality of indigenous Christians be made more distinguished in their context, which in turn provide the resources for coping with social and political complexities and help to humanize our societies and beyond.

Biblical interpretation from indigenous perspectives must not be a mono-scripture oriented hermeneutics. We need to develop a cross-scriptural approach that allows “scriptures’ or even unwritten traditions to inter into dialogue to facilitate the transformation of the two or more `scripture’.

The interpretation of the Bible will take a different shape and be enriched by the effort to take into account the scriptures and oral histories of other living religions. This calls us that Biblical studies cannot be separated from the study of indigenous religions and culture. Kim Yong Bock suggests Kairotic reading of the Bible. Cultural Reading of the Bible- reading of other faiths’ texts. Kairotic reading is life-centred, people-centred reading of the Bible. It is the people who are the

readers and hearers, not the preachers and theologians and church authorities. Kairotic reading of the Bible cannot be held prisoner by religious traditions and doctrines. It is faithful to life-to the fullness of life. Kairotic reading of the Bible resists any sort of Christian monopoly or containment of the biblical message. It is a geo-political, socio-economic and political reading.

Conclusion

Critically assessing and acknowledging the significance of oral experience is not simply a matter of cultural sensitivity. Oral experience offers important criticisms to Christian traditions grounded in literacy. It also offers new avenues for encouraging Christian believers to live out their faith in world around them. Oral experience is not without its limitations. Like literacy, orality is a two-edged sword. It can be oppressive or liberating. Liberative elements need to be upheld. Traditional sources and Bible should illumine one another to bring out meaningful interpretations.



Walking Together - How Can Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work better together?

Bishop Greg Thompson



Listen to the MP3 - 9_Thompson_Walking Together

Bishop Greg Thompson introduced a session on the challenges and experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples working together in partnership, particularly to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership.

Greg started by recalling some words of Archbishop Rowan Williams who said at a retreat prior to the 2008 Lambeth conference in England that Bishops, as leaders, are “unreliable allies”. He then referred to the idea in Hebrews that as Christians we are both friends and strangers. That we need to be a friend to the culture and land, and yet we are also strangers. We must be prepared to speak the strange word that may challenge the way things are. Greg explained that this can be a challenge and cause tensions for Bishops.

Greg then talked about his own journey using the imagery of two trees.

The first was the Weeping Willow which was prevalent in Muswellbrook where he grew up; Greg talked about his family background and his own journey of searching.

The second tree is the Pandanus tree and he recalled how when he first went to the Northern Territory the women would

come and collect the leaves to weave into baskets. As they reached in to get the young leaves amongst the spiky outer leaves Greg was struck by the image; which spoke to him of Indigenous spirituality and its ability to weave something wonderful amongst the hard issues all around.

Greg then talked about the humble and impoverished beginnings of the Anglican Diocese of the Northern Territory and explained the influence of what are known as ‘Roland Allen’s Principles’ in the Diocese’s formation over the past three decades. Greg also talked about the more recent ‘Fresh Expressions’ program which provides an opportunity to reflect on how the Church can be the church of culture and place and to think about what kind of partnerships will enable this.

Finally, Greg left us with a question for the small groups. What kind of partnerships did we want for Indigenous Church leadership to grow and be strong?

Group Discussion

Walking together – how can Indigenous and non-Indigenous people work better together?

The aim of this session was to think about how Indigenous and non-Indigenous can work better together in the context of church. To consider what kind of relationships we want for Indigenous and non-Indigenous church? Alongside this question was a secondary consideration about how to strengthen Indigenous leadership.

A SWOT framework was used to consider these questions. A SWOT analysis considers things in terms of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. The Strengths and Weaknesses tend to be issues that are internal to the organization being considered,

in this case church. Whereas, the Threats and Opportunities tend to be those things that are external conditions and influences. Internal issues might be capabilities, people, experience, culture, attitude, leadership, management. External issues might be political, networks, finances and doctrine.

The SWOT analysis is presented on the next two pages.



STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Strong proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ◇ Supportive partners. ◇ Willingness to share. ◇ Commitment of many people. ◇ Resources and support of churches Indigenous bodies and organizations. ◇ Listening /sharing with fresh ears. ◇ Formal agreement between Indigenous groups and churches. ◇ Defining roles and autonomy – renewing covenant. ◇ Ready for next generation. ◇ Greater tolerance of other faith groups. ◇ Different energy; freedom, sense of real humour. ◇ We gather as God’s people. ◇ Only one true God. ◇ One faith. ◇ Awake arise and shine. ◇ Calling of the Holy Spirit. ◇ Issuing statements on social justice. ◇ Communication through places like this – NATSIEC. ◇ Growing use and availability of language and liturgy. ◇ Growing and developing Indigenous ministry. ◇ Existing support ministry structures. ◇ Presence. ◇ Unity. ◇ Articulate and passionate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. ◇ Good will and desire for better relationships. ◇ Vision. ◇ Strong meaningful gifts and symbols. ◇ Compassion. ◇ Spirituality. ◇ Fresh expressions of the Gospel. ◇ Within culture. ◇ Belonging ownership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Male domination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. ◇ Lack of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. ◇ Lack of support by some churches’ hierarchical leaders for ATSI bodies such as Conference. ◇ Multiplicity of church agencies working in the same places. ◇ Fragmentary nature of denominations and variety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. ◇ NATSIEC – lack of resources. ◇ Lack of respect for the already ordained. ◇ Disrespect cultural protocols. ◇ Lack of consultation with community. ◇ Lack of dialogue. ◇ Bloody complacency. ◇ Fear of change /modern. ◇ Lack of culturally appropriate structures and conditions. ◇ Communication. ◇ Tokenism. ◇ Lack of work opportunities within churches. ◇ Non-Indigenous nepotism. ◇ Aging clergy. ◇ Youth involvement. ◇ Stronger voices in pastoral councils needed. ◇ Lack of commitment from top. ◇ Ignoring or nonresponsive to Aboriginal ministry. ◇ Paternalism. ◇ Lack of supporting resources provided to ATSI church bodies from non-Indigenous sources. ◇ Control of the church – Father looks after the children. ◇ Lack of recognition of Indigenous deacons and those studying towards ministry.

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Keeping the elders' stories in our life today. ◇ Deepening education about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and issues. ◇ Educate the clergy/bishops on culture. ◇ Government policies which favour multiculturalism. ◇ The post 'Apology' political climate. ◇ Close the Gap Campaign. ◇ Visionary church statements for us to follow – eg Pope John Paul II. ◇ Rich cultural heritage. ◇ Richness of culture is nourishing. ◇ Tremendous desire of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to keep their culture alive. ◇ Willingness to share our culture. ◇ Bringing culture to church. ◇ Environment/ creation /sacred land. ◇ Churches need to mature- look to models such Anglican NATSIAC/Uniting Congress. ◇ Look to growth of church in Asia/Africa rather than Western model. ◇ Partnerships based on "two way" sharing of other gifts as well as finances. ◇ To have a ground up model rather than a top down of church. ◇ White fellas being fair dinkum. ◇ Building relationships /partnerships. ◇ Leadership opportunities for Indigenous peoples. ◇ Finding leaders able to service our community. ◇ For justice and to live Christ's message. ◇ Sharing of resources. ◇ Growth of NATSIEC. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◇ Aging church. ◇ Shrinking income for churches. ◇ Insufficient resources/funds. ◇ Financial crises–conservatism and individualism but also an opportunity? ◇ Global economic crisis undermining funding. ◇ People thinking "they [other people] will do it!" ◇ Indigenous population size – needs others to make political noise. ◇ Perception that church is more inclusive than it is. ◇ Block of racist people/black armband/ignorance. ◇ Racism. ◇ Apathy. ◇ Diversity. ◇ Division amongst churches. ◇ Tokenism. ◇ Paternalism – old and new. ◇ Absence of hierarchy (Catholic). ◇ Suppression of a call. ◇ Non-Indigenous bureaucracy. ◇ Expectation Indigenous People will provide services for free. ◇ Age. ◇ Burnt out Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders. ◇ Repetition of hierarchy (same people). ◇ Non-Indigenous belief in giving /serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for self gratification. ◇ Nuclear destruction/war on terrorism. ◇ Energy given to denominational survival. ◇ Assimilationist viewpoints within churches and structures. ◇ Negative media – opportunity to protest. ◇ New well funded proselytizing groups who ignore culture and difference. ◇ Failure to monitor church statements/promises. ◇ Expectation to raise money to support ministry. ◇ Vulnerability of religion.

Group Discussion

Working Together - Moving Forward

Having listened to each other's experiences and identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats the question remained, what can we do to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ministries and leadership? What can we do to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together? The previous sessions had identified several areas for attention, but rather than only focus on the big picture, or what Churches could and should be doing, in this session the question was more about our own spheres of influence, what was it that we could do in our own lives and ministries? Some of the ideas that came from the group were general in nature, and others were personal statements of commitment and action.

- ◊ Take prophetic action.
- ◊ Stand together in places of injustice.
- ◊ Speak with the media – work with church leaders who will.
- ◊ Utilize existing Church media resources – develop links and good examples with communications and other staff in churches.
- ◊ We are going to have to commit to God.
- ◊ To be in for the long haul.
- ◊ To be speaking out through proper channels (protocol).
- ◊ We are going to educate the broader church and engage in awareness raising.
- ◊ We will train the next generation of leaders – pass on the baton – Through our synod and representation on various committees (Anglican) or various church systems.
- ◊ We will celebrate Indigenous festivals together as integral to church life – church leaders, liturgists, event planners. E.g. Reconciliation week; Coming of the Light.
- ◊ We will share and promote good practice such as NATSIEC and other Indigenous Christian and ecumenical networks and willing church leaders and structures.
- ◊ We will support existing organizations such as NATSIEC, NATSICC, NATSIAC and Congress etc.
- ◊ We will use mind mapping to enhance collective leadership amongst church leaders.
- ◊ We will encourage and increase the involvement of young people and women – all can play a part.
- ◊ We will make sure we get our share of resources to implement our ideas.
- ◊ We will work for equity and social justice.

- ◊ We will ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will administer any funds they are lucky enough to receive.
- ◊ We will keep our culture of place on the agenda.
- ◊ We will fight for recognition of our leaders and elders and equal partnerships.
- ◊ We will work at local/national level with organizations / schools / church bodies.
- ◊ We will educate and empower church schools to take on Indigenous students.
- ◊ We will work on cultural policies for all church based schools.
- ◊ We will link with justice groups and services.
- ◊ We will encourage our church bodies to give increased funding for ecumenical training, leadership, ministry e.g. for Wontulp - Bi - Buya, Nungalinya and all the other centres of training.
- ◊ We will support and encourage communities to identify potential leadership.
- ◊ We will be an advocate for justice.
- ◊ We will be culturally competent by respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by ecumenical inclusion and actions such as acknowledging country and welcoming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and supporting self determination.
- ◊ I will be Christ like in setting a good example and being a role model for the community by giving up alcohol and/cigarettes.



Group Discussion

Building Networks of Support - Where to From Here?

The final session was focused on what we can do to strengthen our networks? The conference had highlighted the strength and power of coming together to share and learn and inspire each other. The Challenge now is to continue to strengthen our networks and alliances.

- ◇ Share a contact conference list with small biographies of participants.
- ◇ Share with each other about organizations – and send info to NATSIEC for website.
- ◇ Commissioners to take more responsibility to feed back to NATSIEC about Churches' activities.
- ◇ Let NATSIEC know about useful contacts.
- ◇ Encourage Ministers and service workers to work together to attend future conferences.
- ◇ Use the conference email list as a means to encourage each other in our commitments.
- ◇ Investigate ways to make better use of new technologies such as Facebook.
- ◇ Rather than create new lists look at how we can better use what already exists.
- ◇ Connect better to existing organisations such as NATSIEC.
- ◇ Find software to link email and fax .
- ◇ Encourage Churches to make resources available to all – i.e. use of phone and fax in parish offices or the NATSIEC desk in Sydney.
- ◇ Need to encourage friendly faces in parish offices – problems of discrimination were reported.
- ◇ Talk to principals of Catholic Schools – about AEWS who can be isolated in the school system.
- ◇ Ensure that Churches and schools are held accountable to their agreements regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- ◇ Think outside your usual group when planning events make an effort to include others.
- ◇ Tell NATSIEC! We need to know the good things that are happening.
- ◇ More Forums.
- ◇ Encourage Ecumenical bodies.
- ◇ Travel as a group to support each other.
- ◇ Work ecumenically to raise common issues.

Keynote Speakers - Biographies

Dr. Wati Longchar

Dean of Extension Programs of the Senate of Serampore University, India.

Dr Longchar is an Ao from Nagaland in North East India and is a renowned Indigenous Theologian. He has more than two decades experience in ministry and teaching theology. Dr Longchar has published books on Indigenous Theology in both English and Regional languages. Dr Longchar has held numerous representative positions in various church and ecumenical organizations including the World Council of Churches Faith and Order Plenary Commission. Dr Longchar is also a leader in the field of theological education and has held various academic positions at the Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam. Dr Longchar is married to Dr Longkumer and they have three sons.

Dr. Limatula Longkumer

Vice Principal,
Eastern Theological College, India.

Dr Longkumer is an Indigenous Feminist Theologian from Nagaland. Her academic expertise is in the area of Christian Ministry and Feminist Theology. She is an Ao woman from Nagaland. Currently she is the Vice Principal of the Eastern Theological College (Jorhat, India) and has many years experience in theological education. Also, Dr Longkumer is active in Indigenous and Women's issues in India and the region. Dr Longkumer holds many positions including General Secretary of the Association of Theologically Trained Women of India (ATTWI) and Core Com-

mittee Member of the Indigenous Women's Alternative Leadership Development program (IWALT) of the Christian Conference of Asia. As well, Dr Longkumer is a published author. Her most recent book is called No More Sorrow: Tribal Women Doing Theology (2007).

Ms. Evelyn Parkin

Theology Teacher,
Wontulp-Bi-Buya College, Cairns.

Ms Parkin was born and raised on Stradbroke Island in Queensland. She is married to Alan and has four adult children and six grandchildren. Ms Parkin says one very important aspect of her life was being raised in the Catholic Church and learning about the love of Jesus Christ. At the same time co-existing within the natural environment of the smell of the sea, the silence of the bush and the flow of the fresh water creek that meandered its way past her home.

With this as her background she became very passionate about her Aboriginal Spirituality and Christianity. Later, she went on to further study, gaining a Masters of Theology (Australian Catholic University) and a Diploma of Theology. Ms Parkin is now teaching Theology at Wontulp-Bi-Buya College for Indigenous Church Leaders.



MP3 Contents

Opening Speech - Graeme Mundine	1_Mundine
Opening Ceremony - Pastor Harry Walker	2_Walker_Sermon
Keynote Address: An Exploration of Indigenous Theological Framework -Wati Longchar	3_Longchar_Exploration of Indigenous Theology
Keynote Address: The Uniqueness of Indigenous Spirituality -Wati Longchar	4_Longchar_Uniqueness
Keynote Address: Bringing Culture Back to the Centre of our Ministries: Developing our Stories - Evelyn Parkin	5_Parkin_Bringing Culture Back to the Centre
Sharing our Stories: Perspectives From the Field - Colleen Mamarika and Joy Sandefur	6_Mamarika and Sandefur
Tahnia Mossman	7_Mossman
Keynote Address: Folk Stories and Traditions: Sources for Doing Indigenous Theology - Limatula Longchar	8_Longkumer_Folkstories and Traditions
Walking Together : How Can Indigenous and Non-Indigenous People Work Better Together? - Bishop Greg Thompson	9_Thompson_Walking Together

Please note: These recordings are in MP3 format. They may not play on some older CD players.

CD-ROM

Keynote Speakers and Presentations

About NATSIEC...

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

NATSIEC's Mandate

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ecumenical Commission shall:

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



NATSIEC

www.ncca.org.au/natsiec