



# ANVIL

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*The Emancipation of  
Indigenous theologies in light  
of the rise of World Christianity*

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# The Editorial

By Jay Mātenga

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Anyone who has been joined together with the Chosen One is now part of the new creation. For in the Chosen One the old creation has faded away and the new creation has come into being. It is the Great Spirit himself who has done all of this! Through the Chosen One, Creator has removed the hostility between human beings and himself, bringing all creation into harmony once again. The Great Spirit has chosen us to represent him in the sacred task of helping others find and walk this path of peacemaking and healing—turning enemies into friends.

First Nations Version (FNV), 2 Cor. 5:17–18

When the Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand ask the question “*He aha te mea nui o te ao?*” (What is the most important thing in the world?), the immediate response is “*He tāngata, he tāngata, he tāngata!*” (It is the people, the people, the people!). When answered in triplicate we look for the meaning behind the literal translation, and the answer can legitimately be interpreted: healthy relationships or community. This edition of ANVIL reveals this as a universally indigenous priority.

When my long-time friend and compatriot Cathy Ross invited me to collaborate on this edition with her and Colin Smith, I was deeply honoured. After many years without contact, Cathy and I reunited during COVID-19 lockdowns. She had seen some presentations I had made concerning the intersection of indigenous thinking and the environment and invited me to share on the subject matter across time and distance (my night, her day) online with the Pioneer Mission Training MA students at Church Mission Society. In 2022 I had the privilege of a reprise, in person in Oxford, with a new intake of students, who made a positive impact on me. Between the time Cathy left Aotearoa New Zealand to minister in the UK and our reconnection, I had grown from a young man struggling to meet the expectations of a *Pākehā* (white/European/Industrial) world to identifying with my indigenous heritage and stepping into the fulness of who God made me to be.

In my article, I briefly highlight the importance of being true to who we are created to be, while also remaining open to being transformed through interactions with those not like us. I identify two major ways of seeing, knowing and interacting with the world by the categories of Indigenous and Industrial, explaining them a little in footnote 7 of my essay. During more than 30 years of serving transcultural ministers, I have come to see that we desperately need a new framework for understanding how people from different worlds can better dwell interculturally; furthermore, *why* people from different worlds should better dwell together

interculturally. For it is in the dwelling together, in all the tensions of difference, that we witness to the fact that “Through the Chosen One, Creator has removed the hostility between human beings, and himself, bringing all creation into harmony again” (punctuation mine), and we all mature in the process.

Terry Wildman has given the English-speaking world a gift by translating large portions of Scripture into the thought patterns of North American indigenous people. In this edition of ANVIL we read how that came about. In the final product, a broad collaborative effort, we see beautiful evidence of harmony emerging from diversity. Once you have read Terry’s backstory, I encourage you to go and purchase his translation and step into the world of Scripture read with indigenous eyes. The First Nations Version (FNV) is something of a traditional translation, in that it accepts long-held Eurocentric assumptions about what the biblical authors meant, but Terry did not set out to write an Indigenous theological commentary on the New Testament. He has proven himself a skilful Bible translator and the FNV is a fine gateway into Indigenous ways of encountering the world of the Bible with direct relevance to the world in which we now live.

Further along the Indigenous spectrum we have an insightful reflection from Aunty Denise, a highly respected elder among the Aboriginal followers of the Jesus way in the land now known as Australia. It will be quickly obvious to the reader that her perspective carries the pain of her people, whose culture was straitjacketed by the settler church and those sent out from them. You might find it challenging, but sit with that pain as you read the entire essay. She speaks for a people who were invaded, occupied and continue to be oppressed by colonial settlement, a situation common to a large proportion of the Indigenous world including my own. In her contribution, Aunty Denise contrasts for us some of the differences between Western ways of viewing reality and that of the traditional inhabitants of Adnyamathanha country in what is now South Australia.

While it is inappropriate to assume that all Indigenous people think the same (it is far from the case!), there are many themes common to the Indigenous way of walking in this world. Aunty Denise speaks of the harmony between the light and dark; Māori have a similar view, East Asians also (represented by the ying/yang symbol). She confesses to struggling to read Scripture, as presented through the Western lens, but Uncle Terry’s FNV translation shows that that needn’t be the case. Furthermore, in my article I cast an Indigenous lens over theological themes in the New Testament that draw out principles that are too easily overlooked in the Eurocentric theological consensus. As I caution in my contribution, there are limits to faithfully interpreting Scripture; Indigenous theologians must beware of eisegesis as much as anyone. But who is to be the arbiter of orthodoxy beyond the foundational axioms that we all hold to? I contend it is neither the Indigenous interpreter nor the Industrial status quo, but instead the Spirit of God who teaches us as we each bring our perspectives into the global theological conversation. The gospel, once seeded in the heart of another culture, takes unique forms and Aunty Denise shows us how this can happen when Indigenous believers are freed to become guardians of the gospel for themselves, in dialogue with others’ experience of God in-Christ. If the Western Church does not acknowledge this and continues to buffer itself from Indigenous perspectives, they are, as Aunty Denise says, “missing out”.

Thankfully, the discipline of World Christianity that has emerged over recent decades is opening the West to Indigenous perspectives. Thanks to the pioneering work of scholars like Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh, among many others, the Western story of the global church is being decentred in favour of a polycentric mosaic of narratives. Each cultural expression of

the faith is being encouraged to tell their own story, as Aunty Denise has, with theological reflection on Scripture highlighted by values important to them, as Paul Ayokunle does.

Paul also chose to emphasise the importance of relationships. Relationships was not the intentional theme for this edition of ANVIL. We wanted to focus on the emergence of Indigenous theologies aided by the development of World Christian studies, but relationship harmony is so common a priority in Indigenous worlds that it is not surprising that it emerged. In Sarah Cawdell's article about Paul Tester's interviews with indigenous South American Christian leaders, a focus of strong relationships emerged too. The leaders' responses seem rather benign in contrast to Aunty Denise's critique of Western influence, and not as theologically crafted as Paul Ayokunle's or mine, but they are nonetheless Indigenously informed and Indigenous concerns and values stand out. They speak of freedom from fear of the spirit realm, which is very tangible to Indigenous people. Care for the environment is a deep concern we have in common. They note the importance of retaining as much of their culture as possible as they live out their faith, even as they incorporate the best of the knowledge of the West and Christianity, and as Christian faith challenges the assumptions of their traditional beliefs at critical points. The health and harmony of the community is a priority for all the South American indigenous leaders and they describe what this looks like in various ways — with the pursuit of peace a constant objective.

Paul Ayokunle dives deep into this value common to Indigenous people. Peace, harmony, reconciliation, consensus, honour, submission to the collective are all part of the same core motivator in Indigenous worlds. Each people have their own words for it. For Māori it is *kotahitanga* (integrated unity), which is attained via a whole range of value commitments like *aroha* (loving kindness), *manaakitanga* (honouring others through generosity, hospitality, nurture etc.) and *awhi* (to embrace, include, support, cherish), among many others. In my essay, I focus on the broader epistemological concepts of *whakapapa* (the creation of new generations) and *whakawhanaungatanga* (the art of weaving relationships) that result in harmony. In Zulu and what is described as the Bantu cluster of cultures, the broad concept of relational harmony is captured under the category of *ubuntu*. Paul launches from this better-known concept into his native Yorùbá expression of something very similar: *omolúàbí*, leveraging it as a principle for healthy church growth.

For Paul, World Christian studies have freed him to develop his indigenous concept into a strategy to multiply churches throughout the world. He shares a concern common to most Majority World missiologists – that Western missions paradigms are limited in their ability to enable the gospel to flourish in non-Western contexts. Rather, if we were to adopt Indigenous perspectives like *omolúàbí* (or *ubuntu*, *kotahitanga*, etc.), our efforts to establish the kingdom of God will be far more effective among Indigenous peoples (which, in my nomenclature, is roughly equivalent to people with a collectivist orientation). As Paul develops the concept, I recognise every aspect of *omolúàbí* by other names within *te ao Māori* (the Māori reality). I do not go into my cultural perspective as deeply as Paul does, but a similarity between the value sets explained should be apparent. Aunty Denise and I delve more into the Source of the values, but Paul identifies their contribution to healthy community superbly well for a short essay. The outcome of these values applied, empowered by the Spirit, can fulfil the hope expressed by Aunty Denise and the South American Indigenous leaders: a hope for strong community relationships, where knowledge is passed on in indigenous forms and the best of a culture is retained, celebrated and passed on. Where ancestors and ancient wisdom are honoured, where Jesus is seen with indigenous eyes, but also understood in conversation with the global church for the maturity of us all. May you be inspired with hope for the future of the

global church, World Christianity, and your own church, as you take time to digest this edition of ANVIL.



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# The blessing of diversity: Benefits of the emancipation of Indigenous theologies in light of the emergence of World Christianity

By Jay Mātenga

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## Introduction: clarifying the subject

“World Christianity” is the movement of Christianity as it takes form and shape in societies that previously were not Christian, societies that had no bureaucratic tradition with which to domesticate the gospel. In these societies Christianity was received and expressed through the cultures, customs, and traditions of the people affected. World Christianity... is not one thing, but a variety of indigenous responses through more or less effective local idioms, but in any case without necessarily the European Enlightenment frame.

– Lamin Sanneh<sup>1</sup>

Together with Professor Andrew Walls, Gambian scholar Professor Lamin Sanneh could be considered a godfather of World Christianity, a maturing academic discipline that is set to disrupt the trajectory of traditional Protestant theology, which I set among global theologies as the Eurocentric theological consensus.

As a hybrid Māori/European with deep roots in Aotearoa New Zealand, I am sensitive to the need for nuance in theological and missions debates. I am concerned more for harmony than dissonance. Therefore, I prefer to identify the theological and missiological concepts still dominant in missions discourse according to their ethno/geographic source: that is, the European context, in which I include the European diaspora in North America, Latin America, Africa, India, Asia, Australia and New Zealand.

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<sup>1</sup> Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 22.



Other commentators have started to favour the term “whiteness” to describe Eurocentric influences (including theological hegemony), whether inherited or adopted, but I find that it “otherises” the European schema in an unhelpful way.<sup>2</sup> I do, however, appreciate and identify with activists’ need to call out the injustice of systems that privilege such schema and marginalise the communities for whom such authors seek equitability. There is a time to focus on systemic racial bias in the church’s ecclesiological, theological and missiological discourse and praxis, and I do not want to dismiss that, but the emotion associated with racial issues as the focus of a discussion can hijack the opportunity for fruitful dialogue when the subject is not specifically about race. For this essay I want to acknowledge that issues of outright prejudice and unconscious bias exist, but they are not at the centre of this paper. Rather, I will show how a growing appreciation of theological difference, resulting from a major shift in the demographic epicentre of global Christianity,<sup>3</sup> has given new voices confidence to share their understanding and experience of God in Christ. Ironically, these voices are marginalised even as they are emerging from the new centre – or, more rightly, centres. The way for these voices to be better heard in the global Christian conversation has been paved by an emerging category of theological/missiological research called “World Christianity”. In terms of power differentials, I see a strengthening resistance to dominant and imposed Eurocentric theological assumptions from the burgeoning alternatives. As a result, in my lifetime I expect a greater balancing of influence between the dominant (but waning)<sup>4</sup> Eurocentric theological consensus and the plethora of indigenous theological (re)thinking gaining acceptance out of the “Majority World”. This is of significant benefit for the global church, forming a healthy “creative tension”<sup>5</sup> that will lead us to maturity in-Christ.<sup>6</sup>

## What we see: clarifying our lenses

Before I continue, I must locate myself in the conversation according to the custom of my father’s people...

*Kō Takitimu te waka* (my tribal canoe is the Takitimu). *Kō Te Waka o Kupe me Tuhirangi ngā maunga* (the mountains I belong to are known as the canoes of high chief Kupe and Tuhirangi, the sea serpent that Kupe chased along the Pacific in his discovery of Aotearoa

<sup>2</sup> The term “whiteness” can be traced back to sociologist W.E.B Du Bois’ 1910 essay, “The Souls of White Folk” (see: [https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du\\_Bois\\_White\\_Folk.pdf](https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Du_Bois_White_Folk.pdf)). Willie Jennings, among others, has adopted “whiteness” as preferred terminology, by which he means “not simply... a marker of the European but as the rarely spoken but always understood organising conceptual frame” (Willie Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 25) and more recently, “‘whiteness’ does not refer to people of European descent but to a way of being in the world and seeing the world that forms cognitive and affective structures able to seduce people into its habitation and its meaning making” (Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 9). Where Jennings refers to a conceptual frame and cognitive/affective structures, I prefer the more dynamic concept of schema (I also prefer schema over “world view” to describe human assumptions about ultimate reality).

<sup>3</sup> This reality should need no defence, but if the reader remains unsure if the majority of the world’s Christian population resides outside of the West, they need only refer to the work of the Center for the Study of Global Christianity. For example, see Gina Zurlo, *Global Christianity: A Guide to the World’s Largest Religion from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Scott Sunquist has also produced a very accessible overview of the shift of global Christianity and the associated decline of Western theological dominance during the twentieth century. See Scott W. Sunquist, *The Unexpected Christian Century: The Reversal and Transformation of Global Christianity, 1900–2000* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Creative tension is a concept also favoured by David Bosch as he comments on the missions implications of the New Testament. See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> I favour the hyphenated phrasing “in-Christ” as short-hand for the integrated singularity of covenantal community that Jesus established and the Apostles affirmed as the shalom kingdom of God, which the Holy Spirit manifests through allegiant followers of Jesus in the world.

New Zealand). *Kō Ruamahanga te awa* (my river is the Ruamahanga – it was in this river that I was baptised as a new believer in Christ in 1984). *Kō Ngāti Kahungunu ki Wairarapa, kō Ngāti Porou, kō Kai Tahu ōku iwi* (I have direct genealogical connections to these three tribes, which span the east coast of both the main islands of Aotearoa New Zealand). *Kō Ngāti Rākaiwhakairi tōku hapū* (my primary clan or family group name means to lift or hang in adornment). *Kō Kohunui tōku marae* (my clan's customary meeting place is called Kohunui – a physical piece of land on the outskirts of the village of Pirinoa, shared by our family group, with buildings for meeting/sleeping, cooking/eating, and keeping tools and supplies). *Ko Jay Mātenga tōku ingoa* (my name is Jay Mātenga), *kō Aperahama Kuhukuhu Tui Mātenga tōku tupuna* (descendent of Abraham Kuhukuhu Tui Mātenga). *Nō reira, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou, tēnā koutou katoa* (and so, three times respectful greetings to you all).

On my mother's side I enjoy largely English heritage traced back to the first settlers in Aotearoa New Zealand, with an Aboriginal great-great-grandmother of the the Woi-wurrung (according to family oral history) from my maternal grandmother's Australian line.

In spite of my English genetics (and Prussian via my paternal grandmother), I have come to identify as indigenous because the lens through which I see the world, understand myself and experience God is strongly influenced by an innate sensibility that resonates more with the indigenous world of Māori than the *Pākehā* (settler) context of my childhood upbringing with my English-heritage mother and stepfather. From my earliest memories I have lived with a dissonance of difference among my *Pākehā* family, friends and colleagues. Some African mentors I worked alongside in missions service were the ones God sent to help me quell the disquieting sense of being “other”. Over a decade ago, during the break time of an international missions leaders meeting, Ghanaian Dr Solomon Aryeetey turned to me and asked, “Jay! You have a white face... but you have an African heart! Why is this?” I could not answer on the spot, but I have concluded that my *Moananui* (Pacific Ocean) indigenous intuition resonates on a similar frequency to that of my African continent colleagues. We share a significant overlap of values and assumptions about reality. I can, to some degree, see the world as they see the world – which results in me often empathising with and defending “Majority World” perspectives to our Western colleagues in ways that seem to help. My darker-skinned brothers suggested that my pale features aid translation. One senior American missions leader likened me to a chameleon, but I suspect he expected me to act one way (as a white person) and was surprised when I understood and supported my Indigenous brothers and sisters' perspectives in ways that our Euro-descendant, or Industrial, colleagues did not.<sup>7</sup> While it remains hotly debated, I have become convinced that nature (genetics) is far more influential than nurture (upbringing, lived contexts) in determining how we interpret the world around us and, therefore, who we become.

In his book *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes*, American author Brad Vaughan, writing under the pseudonym Jackson Wu, takes the opposite view. Overstating the effect of external influences on the shaping of our understanding of the world, he argues that “People are not

<sup>7</sup> I hold to the United Nations' definition of indigenous, with a lower case i, but I capitalise it when distinguishing between Indigenous and Industrial as two distinct, global, epistemic ecosystems intersecting and overlapping on a spectrum, similar to the Collectivist and Individualist value sets continuum developed by industrial psychology researchers like Geert Hofstede. I capitalise Indigenous when referring to people who have a dominant collectivist orientation (Majority World, Global South, Developing World, etc.), and upper-case Industrial refers to those more inclined to be Individualist (Western, Modern, First World, etc.). This is a simplified explanation, but properly understood these terms helpfully enable reference to large groups of people according to shared innate values, wherever they live, more than some arbitrary geographic or economic identity. For example, “Global South” makes no sense to us who live “down under”, and Majority World typically includes Latin America, which I would classify as Eurocentrically Industrial, but closer to the Indigenous end of the spectrum than, say, the English or Germans.



born with cultural perspectives. They are learned and adjusted over a lifetime. Various experiences and relationships shape one's view of the world."<sup>8</sup> He uses this as a central foundation to legitimise an interpretation of Romans based on his acquired understanding of East Asian ways of thinking. But at critical points it is obvious to someone from an Indigenous background that he remains constrained by his Industrial schema.

It is hubristic to suggest that you can clearly see through the cultural lens of another. You can seek to understand and appreciate, you can learn to mimic and approximate, your person can be shaped in significant ways through encounter and prolonged experience, leaving you hybridised to some degree, but you cannot become what they are and you will never see what they see because you do not have the generations of genetic coding that predisposes Indigenous people to view reality as they do (or the inverse for Indigenous in Industrial contexts). Jesus was incarnate precisely because he was born (and genetically coded) into a specific time and place. It is a grand myth of missions to think that trans-boundary ministers can do the same – known as an “incarnational” approach to ministry. It is impossible. Thinking you can or have, or expecting missionaries to do so, can lead to undue stress and significant psychosocial problems, not to mention unjust appropriation and exploitation.

### What we know: clarifying theologies

The gospel can incarnate, missionaries cannot. Incarnational understandings and expressions of the faith (Christ-following covenantal communities) can, have and do emerge, but they cannot be imported, let alone imposed. A transplanted faith will not thrive for long in new soil. This is the tension emerging as Indigenous believers realise their freedom and gain confidence to express their unique values in their own voice, rooted in their assumptions about reality. The perspectives of expatriates/outsideers must submit to the right of insiders who follow “the Jesus way”<sup>9</sup> to guard and articulate the gospel in their midst, and their relationship with the triune God they encounter within the gospel narrative, on their own terms – all the while remaining biblically faithful and in dialogue with the global church (historic and current). This is the process of centring the local, recognising Indigenous believers as guardians of the gospel for their context,<sup>10</sup> and World Christianity studies are enabling this in unprecedented ways.

I deliberately ended my opening Sanneh quote where I did because he goes on to contrast World Christianity against “Global Christianity”, which (in 2003) he reserved for Western-influenced theological expressions. However, as Jehu Hanciles notes, such a conceptualisation fails “to recognize that Western Christianity is itself rooted in indigenous responses”.<sup>11</sup> This observation agrees with Stephen Bevans, who maintains that “There is no such thing as ‘theology’; there is only contextual theology”.<sup>12</sup> In other words, all (Christian) theology is rooted in and appropriate to the time and place it emerged, seeking to address questions relevant to

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<sup>8</sup> Jackson Wu, *Reading Romans with Eastern Eyes: Honor and Shame in Paul's Message and Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 9.

<sup>9</sup> This way of describing “Christianity” was popularised by the North American indigenous Christian movement and has been adopted by indigenous believers in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere as preferred terminology, thanks to the influence of NAIITS (formerly the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies), a pioneer in world Christian thinking that centres indigenous perspectives, methods and forms of theological exploration and articulation.

<sup>10</sup> “Guardians of the gospel” is a phrase I coined and use frequently. The first published occurrence was in an online essay for the World Evangelical Alliance's Mission Commission in August 2020: Jay Mātenga, “Leader's Missions Forecast 2020” (21 August 2020), <https://weamc.global/lb2020-2/>.

<sup>11</sup> Jehu J. Hanciles, ed., *World Christianity: History, Methodologies, Horizons* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2021), 31 (Kindle Loc. 411).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology (Faith and Culture)* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), 3.

that particular context, and crafted in a way that is best understood by and for its intended audience. The findings usually reveal universal realities, because theology done by Jesus followers is an exploration of the ways of a universal God. However, the conclusions may not necessarily be applicable in the same way for every context.

This principle can be difficult for Eurocentric believers to grasp, so accustomed they are to the privileges of dominance. Reformed theology is a contextual set of theological doctrines, rooted in a particular place and time, addressing particular issues. Systematic theology is a contextual theological method rooted in a particular place and time, addressing particular issues. Examples like these purport to be universal, but although many of theological findings can be adopted and adapted, others can be outright detrimental to the flourishing of the gospel in other contexts. The Eurocentric theological consensus has been privileged in most Protestant theological educational institutions around the world but when Indigenous Christians begin to decolonise their faith, such education can be found wanting.<sup>13</sup> Doctrinal positions and theological propositions of the Eurocentric theological consensus might be appropriate for a certain Eurocentric audience,<sup>14</sup> but there are myriad other ways to understand God's purposes from Scripture that are more relevant to the pressing concerns of other contexts. Such is the dynamic of a living theology. We serve a living God who is present with us in every time and place revealing to us aspects of an unchangeable loving Supreme Being in surprisingly new ways. Missions, especially, need to understand this in the new era ahead of us.

David Bosch observed the dysfunction in transcultural gospel transmission three decades ago. He supported the view that:

We need an experimental theology in which an ongoing dialogue is taking place between text and context, a theology which, in the nature of the case, remains provisional and hypothetical.<sup>15</sup>

He rightly cautioned that "This should not, however, lead to an uncritical celebration of an infinite number of contextual and often mutually exclusive theologies [theological relativism]". But, he added, neither should it be restrained by an "absolutism of contextualism" where "theology, contextualised in the West, was in essence elevated to gospel status and exported to other continents as a package deal".<sup>16</sup> With Bosch, when I speak of the emancipation of indigenous theologies I am obviously not referring here to the dismissal of long-established tenets of our faith. Bosch maintained that we "have to affirm the universal and context-transcending dimensions of theology".<sup>17</sup> In other words, there are foundational axioms that are non-negotiable. There are boundaries to Christian orthodoxy, but there may not be as many non-negotiables as you might think.

I am not going to attempt to provide comparative examples here. Suffice it to say, the acknowledgement that we encounter God and understand God within certain contextual

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<sup>13</sup> For example, I taught a 12-session undergraduate paper called "Global Theologies" as an adjunct lecturer at New Zealand's largest Bible college, whereas Systematic Theology was a much larger course in all degree programmes at all levels simply called "Theology", with little awareness that it too was among many contextual global theologies.

<sup>14</sup> The new wave of former Evangelicals "deconstructing" their faith suggests that the Eurocentric theological consensus is breaking down even in the West, due to the lack of relevance to a rapidly changing context and rigid institutional commitments to increasingly outmoded theologies.

<sup>15</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2011), 437.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 438.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

constraints, “gospel in dialogue with culture”<sup>18</sup> if you will, liberates different perspectives to emerge from different contexts. As Andrew Walls attests, with reference to the cultural diversity of Christianity (and Christian thought), “The full-grown humanity of Christ requires all the Christian generations, just as it embodies all the cultural variety that six continents can bring.”<sup>19</sup> As we hold to the integrated singularity (unity) of the diverse global body of Christ, we grow fully. We collectively mature in-Christ, manifesting “the full and complete standard of Christ” (Eph. 4:13 NLT), by learning to embrace the experience and interpretations of the biblical narrative from other contexts as gifts from above,<sup>20</sup> allowing them to challenge – and enlarge – our way of understanding a barely comprehensible God.

## What we become: clarifying maturity

The Apostle James expresses something like this at the beginning of his epistle. In his case, the differences within the believing community were defined by economic and societal status. His audience was predominantly Jewish, as he states in his initial greeting (Jas. 1:1). Even so, he recognised that faith in Christ was a powerfully reconciling faith, able to bring together disparate parts of a believing community, which, for James, were poor and rich Jews. Paul develops this further with his Jew/Gentile teaching, but in arguably the earliest epistle written after the Resurrection, James already understood the power of sitting in the tensions of difference to mature us in-Christ. To read this in James you need to appreciate that the epistle is written to address issues *within* the fellowship(s), not to provide comfort from outside persecutors such as Peter’s epistles do. Keep that in mind as you read...

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing. (Jas. 1:2–4. NLT)

The great joy to which James refers is a vision of maturity (perfect and complete) in-Christ. This maturity should be the highest aim for followers of the Jesus way. It is a process otherwise known as discipleship. Community is the crucible that forges it, eternal reward is promised as a result of it, and it comes from holding fast to the faith over time (patient endurance, perseverance), allowing troubles to work a transformative miracle in each of us. The faith is in Christ’s ability, by the power of the Spirit, to form a covenantal community that witnesses to the reality of the (now/not yet) shalom kingdom of God. Furthermore, the troubles/testing emerge from within “the fellowship of difference and differents”, as Scot McKnight calls it: “a mixture of people from all across the map and spectrum: men and women, rich and poor. It is a mix of races and ethnicities.”<sup>21</sup> While James specifically addresses a monocultural expression of our faith at the time (diaspora Jews), they still had differences to address, hence the reason for his letter. He masterfully prefaces his address by highlighting the transformative action of the Spirit to mature us into Christ’s likeness,<sup>22</sup> as individuals and

<sup>18</sup> Andrew F. Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), xvii. This is also the intent of Shoki Coe, who coined the term “contextualisation”. See Shoki Coe, “Contextualizing Theology” in *Mission Trends No.3: Third World Theologies*, eds. G.H. Anderson and T.F. Stransky (New York: Paulist, 1976).

<sup>19</sup> Walls, *Missionary Movement in Christian History*, xvii.

<sup>20</sup> In keeping with the Ephesians passage, we could argue that these gifts are provided to the global church via apostles, prophets, evangelists and shepherd-teachers from other contexts – elders from indigenous theological perspectives.

<sup>21</sup> Scot McKnight, *A Fellowship of Differents: Showing the World God’s Design for Life Together* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 16.

<sup>22</sup> James does not specifically reference the Holy Spirit, but from the New Testament as a whole we can safely identify the necessary Agent of the transformative process.

as a group, as we are troubled by the expectations, preferences, privileges and behaviours of others within the fellowship, and as we trouble them in return.<sup>23</sup> In my faith background, we used to call this “sandpaper ministry”.

Endurance is the New Living Translation version’s interpretation of patient steadfastness, not wavering in our trust in Jesus because of the differences we experience with one another. If we hold fast, James suggests that we are positively changed (matured/perfected) by those troubling differences. Paul indicates a similar thing in Rom. 12:1–2 where he encourages us to be transformed (metamorphosised) by the renewing of our mind. How? Through our quiet times, Bible studies, prayer and corporate liturgies? No. While good and healthy and important, they are not the acceptable worship to which Paul refers. In the wider context of Rom. 12 (and the entire arc of the epistle and elsewhere in Paul’s writing), being a living sacrifice is the “kenotic” self-giving of ourselves to one another in covenantal community as the body of Christ.<sup>24</sup> It is through our interactions within the fellowship of male, female, eunuch, Jew, Greek, Barbarian, slave, free, rich, poor, young, old, etc. that we are transformed by our learning from one another, and making space for each other, empowered by the Spirit who is love. This kind of harmony-in-tension is non-conformance with the customs of this world, which loves to distinguish and separate “their kind” from “our kind”.

Modern science is providing us with confirmation of this ancient Christian assumption. Recent work in the area of interpersonal neurobiology is proving that we are who we are because of our social interactions.<sup>25</sup> Our genetics determine how we process the data that our brains/psyche receives from interpersonal stimulus, but the stimulus itself prompts the creation of the very synaptic pathways that make us uniquely who we become in the world. The wider our interactions, the richer our understanding of reality. So, ipso facto, homogeneity or socialising only with those like us who like us ultimately stunts our growth. In my reading of Scripture, through an indigenous lens assisted by World Christian studies, homogenous fellowship develops immature Christians.<sup>26</sup>

Returning to Rom. 12, only by dwelling together in the tensions of difference will we comprehend God’s good, pleasing and perfect will – which, as Jesus stated clearly in his John 17 prayer, is that we become an integrated singularity.<sup>27</sup> One of the biggest hindrances on our pathway to the kind of maturity that should bring us great joy is our assumption that unity should be on our terms – if only everyone aligned with our view, the church will finally be unified. In my experience, that is the evangelical pipe dream. Meanwhile, myriad denominations and ministries wrestle for dominance of and acquiescence to their perspective as the benchmark for unity. That is not what Jesus prayed for, but neither did he pray for the “live and let live” kind. I see this particularly in the ecumenical movement, where everyone is free and encouraged to express their faith on their own terms, and indigenous communities can thrive in such a context. Yet there seems to be little serious dialogue on points of

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<sup>23</sup> I extrapolate this from the rest of the letter, where James speaks specifically to the tension points in the fellowship: selfish desires, anger, judgementalism, hate speech, gossip, hypocrisy, prejudice (rich versus poor), laziness, jealousy and compromise, among other things!

<sup>24</sup> The best example of kenosis (self-emptying/giving up/giving way) is found in Phil. 2:3–11.

<sup>25</sup> If you wish to follow this “rabbit trail”, begin with Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010). Then dive deeper into the work of Dan Siegel, for example: Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> I do not speak here of cultural homogeneity, but of the tendency to fellowship only with those with whom we have a strong affinity. Obviously, within the same culture there are plenty of differences – as James attests.

<sup>27</sup> “... that they will all be one, just as you and I are one – as you are in me, Father, and I am in you” (John 17:21, NLT).

theological difference, let alone significant transformation from prolonged engagement in such tensions. Consensus can be gained on the core elements of orthodox Christian faith, and on certain social or political matters, but it is, by and large, each to their own doctrinally and theologically. While these generalisations are far too simplistic, in both the evangelical and ecumenical expressions, the Protestant Church remains largely buffered from difference. We pay little more than lip service to the kind of integrated singularity meant by Jesus when he asked the Holy Parent to make us one,<sup>28</sup> so that the glory of God (the manifestation of the Spirit, by trinitarian interpretation) might be revealed and cause the world to believe (consider credible) and know (experience) that the Ancient of Days lovingly sent the unbegotten Son.

But there is an alternative to the seeking of dominance or live/let live options. It is expressed throughout the New Testament (for those with eyes to see) and it is to simply live in the tensions of difference, holding fast to God in faithful loving relationships, seeking to understand one another's experience and understanding of God, as uncomfortable as those alternative perspectives might be to our current convictions and knowledge of God. Just as you cannot create harmony in nature without tension,<sup>29</sup> the shalom harmony of the kingdom cannot emerge without tension – the new creation is co-created by us all, in creative tension.

How did I come to see Scripture in this way? I did not learn it from my theological and missions studies, although what I did learn there has given me language to articulate my findings. At one level I intuited them from my own reading and thinking over the years, in dialogue with missions colleagues from the Majority World, but the framework for understanding Scripture and the purpose of God as a pursuit of integrated relational harmony (relationship in tuned tension) comes from an exploration of my indigeneity, seeking to understand myself – and, in doing so, asking highly contextualised questions of God in dialogue with *te ao Māori* (the Māori reality).

## What we believe: clarifying ultimate reality

Justice activist and pastor Tim Ahrens quotes theologian Robert McAfee Brown, who reminded his audience at Macalester College in 1980 that “1) where you stand will determine what you will see; 2) whom you stand with will determine what you hear; and 3) what you see and hear will determine what you say and how you act”.<sup>30</sup> This reads like a truism but it is only when you are exposed to a perspective different from your own that you realise that what you considered to be common sense or patently obvious is not so common or obvious to others – and, in fact, your view is probably a blinkered one. Proximity to difference makes a difference. The rupturing of our core assumptions can lead to maturity if we allow it to, taking the time to understand another perspective.

In contrast to the deep assumptions of Industrial ways of knowing, which are rooted in cartesian dualism and the subsequent Enlightenment, a traditional Māori schema, or understanding of reality, is fully integrated or holistic, without any of the separation of spiritual

<sup>28</sup> *Te reo Māori* (the Māori language) does not typically have gendered pronouns for parents – *matua* can mean either father or mother. For example, the Lord's prayer starts with *E te matou Matua e te rangi* (Our Parent in the highest place).

<sup>29</sup> I play guitar, so take for example an instrument string. You cannot strike a harmonic on an instrument string without it being under tension – and tuned tension at that. Similarly, our vocal cords need to be under tension for us to speak or sing. There is a resonant tension in all of creation. Even stones vibrate at different frequencies, which requires tension to create.

<sup>30</sup> Tim Ahrens, “Where You Stand Determines What You See” in *Reflections: A Magazine of Theological and Ethical Inquiry from Yale Divinity School* (Spring 2012), <https://reflections.yale.edu/article/seize-day-vocation-calling-work/where-you-stand-determines-what-you-see> (accessed 20 March 2023).

and material assumed in the Industrial world.<sup>31</sup> In *te ao Māori*, everything is interconnected, and the influence or action by one element is felt throughout the whole system. Nothing is autonomous and no aspect can be definitively examined without reference to the whole. New generations emerge from combinations formed by previous generations, like children from parents. They are not products but the latest iterations of a process. This is, in short, the paradigm of *whakapapa* (genealogy, heritage or lineage), which guides Māori in our understanding of the way the world is designed to work. Everything, everywhere, all at once,<sup>32</sup> is woven together.

Māori *tohunga* (spiritual authority) and Anglican priest Revd Māori Marsden provides us with insight into the deep assumptions about reality from *te ao Māori*. The traditional Māori understanding of reality might best be described in English as a woven universe,

a fabric comprising of a fabulous mélange of energies.... It was the preoccupation of the *whare wānanga* [centre of Māori scholarship and learning] to view the world as a music, a singing, as “rhythmical patterns of pure energy” that are woven and move with cosmological purpose and design. Our concern, therefore, should be to pay attention to how this fabric is woven and the nature of our place within it... The universe itself is a process or event within the cosmic process by which Io orders creation.<sup>33</sup>

Io in most Māori (and wider Moananui) traditions is legitimately associated with the God of the Bible, the Great Creator. Descriptions of Io’s character are biblically resonant, and our indigenous Io narrative adds a depth of understanding that Scripture omits in its brief accounts of creation. Anyone familiar with Tolkien’s creation narrative in *The Silmarillion* will recognise a similar concept of the universe being sung into being.<sup>34</sup> John’s account is also wonderfully resonant in concert with Genesis, where together we see that the Divine Thought or Consciousness (Logos) uttered life and light into being and sustains it still. From Paul’s majestic hymn in Colossians (1:15ff) we understand that Jesus the Christ is that Divine Consciousness incarnate, and there we see that Jesus holds everything together still. Industrials conveniently sidestep this concept. They are not quite sure what to do with it. They have dismissed what Māori instinctively know to be true – the “energies” spoken of by Revd Marsden are the life-force of the Creator sustaining the world, and we who live in it.

Where you stand determines what you see. When I speak of this to Industrial believers, especially in missions, I am often confronted with accusations of animism (and, by implication, syncretism). Accusers usually have little understanding that the concept arose out of the early pursuit of evolutionary biology. It is a construct that imposed a hierarchy of religious order upon the world – with rational Western theology conveniently in the supreme position (but

<sup>31</sup> The separation of spirit and matter is rooted in ancient Greek philosophies. Descartes’ philosophies were focused on the distinction between mind and matter, somewhat different. But he is credited with laying the foundations for what became Enlightenment rationalism, and subsequent “disenchantment” that relegated the spiritual realm to that of fantasy, which has dominated Western thought (and theologies) for over 400 years. For an introduction to Descartes, see: Ted Honderich, ed., *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 188–91. For more on the disenchantment of Western reality see Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Here I obviously borrow the title of the popular 2023 Academy Award-winning movie with East Asian perspectives. For Indigenous, even past and future are perceived as belonging to the perpetual present. “Ka mua, ka muri” is a well-known proverb that means we walk confidently into the future while facing the past. Unfortunately, Andrew Walls appropriates this concept incorrectly in the “What of the Future” section of chapter 5 of Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Appropriation of Faith* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> Te Ahukaramū Charles Royal, *The Woven Universe: Selected Writings of Rev. Māori Marsden* (Masterton, NZ: The estate of Rev. Māori Marsden, 2003), xiii–xiv.

<sup>34</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion* (London: Harper Collins, 1977).



since dethroned by atheistic humanitarian secularism).<sup>35</sup> Acknowledging life force, emanating from an immanent God, as the very fabric of the universe, need not mean worship of the force, as implied by those who would cry “animism!” Neither does an active relationship with the created order need to imply worship, any more than does a relationship with our pets. However, dismissing the life force that most of the world outside of Industrial influence accepts in various ways is a dangerous place to stand, and we are now reaping the whirlwind of sowing such a position because of the Industrial overreach that fails to recognise the gift that God has provided for us in creation, as an extension of God’s self.

Who you stand with will determine what you understand and do. When we join with those who recognise this gift of life, honouring the Source as revealed in Scripture, all manner of theological possibilities emerge with the potential to change the way we behave. The *tohunga* (Māori scholar priests) knew and understood “the power of relationships as the essential nature of all reality”.<sup>36</sup> In *te reo Māori* (the Māori language), the art of crafting/weaving relationships is known as *whakawhanaungatanga*. All Māori social concepts develop from understanding reality as the flow of life force/energy through the processes of *whanaungatanga* (weaving relationships) and *whakapapa* (to create new generations of the eternal process). As a brief example, in *te ao Māori*, all things consist of *mauri* (the life-force principle). When *mauri* is animated or given active life (by the *ha* or breath of the Great Spirit) it becomes *mauri ora* (living energy, with certain agency). When *mauri ora* is recognised by humans, it is attributed as *mana* (the positive attributes of living things, although *mana* can also be attributed to inanimate objects as well). *Mana* is to Māori something akin to social currency. So, a key objective of an individual (if brought up well) is to increase their *mana* through the right application of their personality, gifts, skills, talents, etc. for the flourishing of the community and thereby add to the *mana* of their people. *Mana* cannot be claimed for oneself, only given by the community – usually in subtle ways according to the customs of the people. It can be leveraged to bring positive influence, and it can be lost if one acts in a way that diminishes the community, with social consequences for the person and those associated with him or her.<sup>37</sup> Aside from death, excommunication would be one of the most extreme consequences because without community recognition you lose your *mana*, and risk becoming a non-person.

Therefore, similar to other Indigenous ways of knowing and practicing healthy community around the world, Māori strive for harmonious relationships, with high tolerance for tension in the process of forging and being forged by relationships with others. We are obligated to work for the flourishing of relationships, for in addition to the benefits for our groups it also works for the benefit of us as individuals, increasing our *mana* and therefore our influence in the community (but always for the community’s benefit, not our own) – not just for today but for future generations and the honour of our ancestors. As I exhibit in conclusion, the weaving of relationships, and repairing of torn weaves, is a spiritually charged process.

<sup>35</sup> I develop this further, albeit briefly, in a blog post here: “Confronting Animism” (7 June 2019), <https://jaymatenga.com/animism/>.

<sup>36</sup> Royal, *The Woven Universe*, xiv.

<sup>37</sup> To widely read missions thinkers: beware that I am not talking about honour/shame here. Take care not to overlay trite and outdated Industrial concepts on the sacred reality of Indigenous people. It is a much deeper and more spiritual process than any outsider can comprehend. The artificial honour/shame et al. constructs in current missions thinking are not helpful in allowing Indigenous theologies to be articulated on their own terms (without having to reference borrowed concepts).

## Conclusion: clarifying our future

My aim for this essay was to explain how studies in World Christianity have created freedom for Indigenous theologies to participate more effectively in global church conversations about our understanding of God, the Parent, Son and Spirit. It is not an essay about race, but it does recognise that Indigenous theologies have been silenced by the dominant Industrial voice in the global church conversation until recently. Researchers in the study of World Christianity (historic and current) have exposed this.

I located myself and explained why location is significant. It is important to humbly acknowledge who we are, where we come from and the limits of our ability to understand others. After all, Jesus did. It was only because he knew he was “in very nature God”<sup>38</sup> that he could give of himself (kenosis) and become a servant, which resulted in his full status (ascendence to complete authority). So too, the Apostles teach us, our discipleship is a process of transformative kenosis in our relationships with one another in-Christ. This is for our great benefit, our joy, and embracing Indigenous theologies can increase that benefit if we choose to prioritise healthy relationship-making as God’s ultimate purpose for humanity. For Māori, the very act of perpetual reconciliation, required for enduring relationships, repairs tears in the woven universe, with every participant in the integrated whole seen and given honour for who/what God has made them to be and become – co-creating a new creation, the shalom Kingdom of God.

Māori see the universe as a weave resonating under constant tension, for only therein can we produce harmony – an equal influence of unique contributions added in appropriate measure, like ingredients in a recipe. Recalling a conversation that global Christianity demographer Todd Johnson had with a senior Ghanaian church leader, peacemaker Uchenna Anyanwu notes that Indigenous followers of the Jesus way deserve “an invitation to the kitchen of global Christianity, not just to its table”.<sup>39</sup> Being entrusted with access to the kitchen, bringing theological ingredients harvested from their garden-walk with God, alongside ingredients contributed by followers from a diverse range of contexts, provides space for a wonderfully unique co-creation. Not autonomous creation in separate parts of the kitchen, not piecemeal selection of ingredients to subtly flavour an otherwise preset recipe, but an all-embracing fusion of full flavours – a meal of all peoples for all people. I can imagine this being served at the banquet Jesus hosts for us, who have been brought in from the highways and the byways.

Keeping with the cooking metaphor, I close with a reflection from Māori Christian elder and veteran missionary Arthur Baker,<sup>40</sup> one of my doctoral research respondents, who reflected on the process of developing relationships and observed:

You know, (referring to [the stew] pot [on the stove]) all the components put together make the whole. Leave the doughboys [dumplings] out of the boil-up and you don’t know what you are talking about, it isn’t even a boil-up bro. Don’t pour that fat out of the water, I don’t care what the doctor said, you’ve got to let that meat cook in that oil, a bit of mutton brisket and whatever. Let that grease go through the *puha* (watercress) and have those Dakota Reds or Rua (potatoes) because they are firm, and

<sup>38</sup> Phil. 2:6, NIV.

<sup>39</sup> Uchenna D. Anyanwu, “Invitation to the Kitchen, Not Just to the Table: Todd M. Johnson’s Motif of Global Christianity,” in *Portraits of Global Christianity: Research and Reflections in Honor of Todd M. Johnson*, ed. Gina A. Zurlo (Littleton, CO: William Carey Publishing, 2023), 49.

<sup>40</sup> All of the respondents to my doctoral research permitted their names to be known. The knowledge I was gifted belongs to them and they deserve the honour of acknowledgement as the source of treasures such as the quote from *kaumatua* (elder) Arthur.

they are good for the third or fourth boil-up. That's the boil-up in its essence. You can't take anything away from it otherwise its only in part. You can't have it in part, this thing is the whole thing, you know? You have the action of the *rewena* (yeast, fermentation) amongst all those that are gathered here. And the *whanau* (relationship) thing begins to activate, and it permeates the whole. It's a spiritual thing, you know? This principle, it's spiritual.<sup>41</sup>

When the heat comes on, rejoice! Stay in the pot and be transformed.



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<sup>41</sup> Jay Mātenga, "Mutuality of Belonging: Toward Harmonizing Culturally Diverse Missions Groups" (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2017), 133.



# Anaditj: the way things are. Knowing of God in Australia

By Denise Champion

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This article is extracted from the prologue and chapter 2 of Denise Champion's book *Anaditj*<sup>42</sup>.

It was the United Aboriginal Mission that took care of the spiritual development of Adnyamathanha people [in South Australia]. Sadly, though, the missionaries said, "You can come into church, but you must leave your culture at the door."<sup>43</sup>

I don't sit easily with Western theology. It is only recent in Australia – 200 years old. In that 200 years, though, it has been a pressure cooker of teachings. The Western faith tradition of Christianity has been forced on us. It is so different to my Adnyamathanha understanding of Anaditj, the way things are.

2020's NAIDOC week theme was "Always was, always will be".<sup>44</sup> That's true when I think about our spirituality: "always was, always will be." We've always been a group of people with a strong belief from the beginning of who we were and our connection to creation. Our understanding has survived the test of time. Thousands and thousands of years it has survived, albeit we've got bits and pieces of it now. Mind you, the compilers of the Bible also only had bits and pieces. They put that together and retained knowledge of God, largely through stories. Stories have been keepers of knowledge. It is the same with us. Our stories have been keepers of knowledge. They have relevance for life today even.

Why is our understanding so important that I don't let it go?

For me it makes sense of the world – of my world – to know that Adnyamathanha world view hasn't ended. It still does continue and live on. And it's okay. We don't have to be ostracised and looked at as heretics, people who are bringing a new gospel or an "ism" or syncretism.

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<sup>42</sup> Denise Champion, *Anaditji* (Port Augusta: Denise Champion, 2021). The book can be obtained at <https://www.mediacomeducation.org.au/shop/anaditj/>

<sup>43</sup> Denise Champion, *Yarta Wandatha* (Adelaide: Denise Champion, 2014), 17.

<sup>44</sup> NAIDOC is an annual celebration every July in Australia of the cultures and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## The wisdom of Dark Emu

*Wadu matyidi Arrawatanha nguthangka kenjaranha tha Yarta nguthangula Yarta vadiangha vanhi ukiangka watga. Arrawatanha wangkanangka milyurangha awi mangungha, milyara wangkanangka. Arrawatanha ngawarla muyu wanganaka.*

In the beginning when Arrawatanha created the sky and the land, there was no flat land even. Arrawatanha spoke on the face of the waters, the wind was talking. The breath of Arrawatanha was speaking. (Gen. 1:1–2)

The way we've been brought up, very conservative Western evangelical thinking was about division between light and dark. There were huge stereotypes. Born-again Christians lived in the light. They were children of light. Anything associated with light was the accepted norm but anything you did in the dark was bad. Black people were not the accepted norm.

We have to get a really healthy understanding of light and of darkness. We need the darkness.

I've come to read the Scriptures in a new way. I had only ever read the Scriptures going immediately to "God said let there be light". But the other is very important: "Darkness, formless and void." There's something in the notion of light and darkness being equal partners.

In Aboriginal spirituality we have Dark Emu. It's about the constellations. Western scientists look at the stars and the brightness of the Milky Way, but Aboriginal people have stories that include the dark spaces between the stars. One of those is about Dark Emu. It's very sacred. You need the stars to see the Emu, but you can only see the stars in the dark.<sup>45</sup>

It's a great thing, eh? We see the other in the picture, the dark alongside the stars. It's a deep theological concept that invites us all to see the whole that is both.

People conveniently forget. We have only the one narrative of Australia: the understanding of a new Australia in which Aboriginal Australians were not identified as human. There are people who are still out there who think Aboriginal people are descended from apes, the missing link, proving Darwinian evolution. It was convenient that people didn't see us because then "the land didn't belong to anyone".

I find it really difficult to read the Bible. After the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, bringing a return of Greek and Roman thinking, things were split. The Western world has that dualistic thinking that can be seen in the New Testament. The Old Testament is easier for me to read in terms of world view but I've grown up accepting that it's all about Abraham. You only ever hear the Abraham narrative. That's all that matters. "Father Abraham had many sons." He may have been the father of many nations, but you don't hear the story of the nations that his story is in. What are their stories? A lot is hidden. The story of the people of Canaan, for example, the indigenous peoples, is always told from the perspective of the victor. They are bad; they have many gods.

<sup>45</sup> "Emus were creator spirits that used to fly and look over the land. To spot the emu, look south to the Southern Cross; the dark cloud between the stars is the head, while the neck, body and legs are formed from dust lanes stretching across the Milky Way." ABC Radio Sydney, "Aboriginal astronomy the star of Dreamtime stories," ABC News (5 April 2017), <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-05/aboriginal-astronomy-basis-of-dreamtime-stories-stargazing/8413492>.

Tongan biblical scholar Jione Havea once asked a group I was part of, “Was it right that God’s people – the children of Abraham – went in and were given the order to slay all the people in Canaan?” I remember feeling angry about that because I identify with the children of Canaan, the indigenous people. That was one of the first times I found myself questioning how I felt about this story.

We are actually presented the biblical story in such a way that somehow we’re supposed to, or we should, accept it without any question. And we do! It was the voices of power abuse and spiritual abuse that would continually raise their voices higher and above ours, saying that we weren’t allowed to change anything in Scripture. Nothing. They would quote Rev. 22:18–19 at us:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book... God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city.

We certainly weren’t allowed to question the Bible. But Jione’s question was a good way for me to start thinking critically about Scripture. As soon as I started asking questions, I was able to form my own opinions. Up until then we always had to just accept the voice of the missionary.

Uncle Bill Hollingsworth, the first chair of the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress at the time when Congress and the Uniting Church in Australia entered into Covenant, would always talk about us as a royal priesthood, a holy nation after the order of Melchizedek. I never quite understood why. But that’s one story that is “other”. It’s the first reference to an indigenous person in the land of Canaan and he is the king who “was priest of God Most High” (Gen. 14:18). When Abraham comes into this land, he’s met by this mystery man from another culture who blesses him in the name of God. And this man Melchizedek is not only priest but king as well. He was king of Salem, the city of peace, so he was a righteous king.

There’s something important about why he has been included. He holds knowledge that is older than Abraham’s story.

And then I could never figure out why the story of Melchizedek figures in the Jesus story. You have to look all the way over in Hebrews for that: “Jesus... designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb. 5:7, 10). Of course, it’s a much older order. It was not of the Levitical priesthood, the chosen priesthood of the children of Israel. I have a sense that it is the priesthood of all Creation.

## Echoes of familiarity

In *Eternity in their Hearts*, Don Richardson tells of the way cultures from around the world had already been prepared to receive what we now know as the gospel.<sup>46</sup> Because they were prepared, they recognised it as good news. They made the connection themselves; they didn’t have to wait for missionaries to tell them. The indigenous people made the connection.

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<sup>46</sup> Don Richardson, *Eternity in Their Hearts: Startling Evidence of Belief in the One True God in Hundreds of Cultures Throughout the World* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1981).

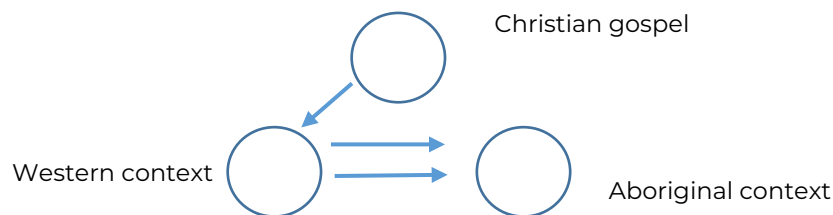


Vincent Donovan in his book *Christianity Rediscovered* tells the story of the Masai people.<sup>47</sup> There had been 100 years of missionary activity among them. Nothing. Suddenly, after 100 years of trying, Donovan builds a relationship and they make the connections. The Masai embraced Christianity, making it their own. They didn't have to change anything; they heard the story and told it in their way.

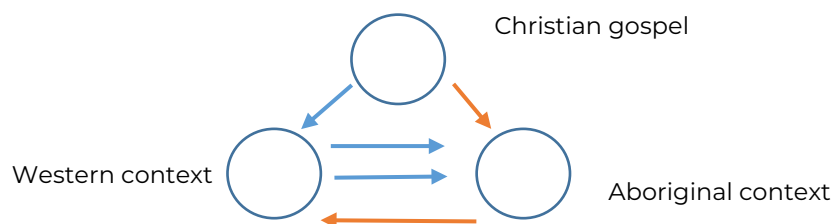
It's the same with the people up in the Top End in Western Australia – First Nations peoples. Because ceremony and dance is so much a part of their culture they will sing the gospel. Some of them do try to translate the Christian story into their culture, but there is also an old belief in the Wandjina, the Rain Maker – their most significant Creator spirit. Wandjina were spiritual beings that were superior. They are characters with funny shaped heads, and no recognisable facial features; the people are trying to visualise spirit. That was thousands and thousands of years before missionaries came. In *Our Mob, God's Story*, it is noted that "when the missionaries came to the Kimberley to share the Bible with the people, the old people responded that they already knew these stories".<sup>48</sup>

I speak about religion as being stories of Creator – and as I understand Creator – because I think that sums up very closely what indigenous wisdom is. Our Adnyamathanha word for it is Ngalakanha Muda – Big History of Deep Wisdom.

In the United Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress we had the following diagram:



Essentially the Christian gospel came via the Western context to the Aboriginal context. But our old people argued that there was always a connection between God and our Aboriginal context. God was always able to speak to us through our own culture.



I like the story of Paul in Athens (Acts 17:16–34). There he spoke in Mars Hill at the altar to the unknown god, but Paul didn't follow the usual Greek practice in logic of starting at the beginning. He started the story of Jesus assuming that they'd heard the first part, so he doesn't tell the story of Jesus' earthly ministry but starts with the risen Christ. He told the story, and some asked him back again.

<sup>47</sup> Vincent J. Donovan, *Christianity Rediscovered* (Chicago: Fides/Claretian Press, 1978).

<sup>48</sup> Kirsty Burgu, "3 Tribes, Wandjina," in *Our Mob: God's Story: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Share Their Faith*, eds. Louise Sherman and Christobel Mattingley (Sydney: Bible Society Australia, 2017), 208.

For Aboriginal people we've always known that there's someone bigger who made the visible world around us. For a long while we weren't able to tell of it, but God does speak to First Peoples in our context. It means we can go back a lot longer than 200 years ago, and even older than the invention of the printing press. Our oral knowledge and presentation of Creator in our stories enables us to go back before historical timelines.

There's a much older story that has stood the test of time in this land. I recognise the story that's told in the Bible because I've heard it somewhere before. It's the echo of the much older story, of the universal Christ and the birth of the universal church.

## The lesson of Big Boss Emu

If you don't want to own your past history and there's just a vacant vacuum there, it's quite easy to start with a small reference and not bother looking beyond. The church is happy with one-liner explanations of the church and of God in Australia. What would be the point of looking at "pagan" peoples' understanding?! It's something the church would rather not have to do. Let's keep our status quo. Let's stay with the norm. But if I'm part of the other I want to explore what Christianity might look like from another perspective – from my perspective.

There is a Narangga story of how Spencer Gulf in South Australia was formed.<sup>49</sup> Port Augusta, where it is located, sits at the very tip of Spencer Gulf. We have lakes outside Port Augusta where the sea doesn't quite come right up because they blocked it off down near the powerhouse. It belonged to every kind of bird and animal you can think of. They would drink at the water, which was fresh then. (Fresh water does come up from underground rivers here – only indigenous knowledge knows where these points are.) Every kind of animal and bird coexisted until one day the old Emu thought to himself, "I'm a bigger bird than everyone else. I can own this for myself." So that's what happened. He took the leg bone of a kangaroo and threw it and opened up the gulf. All the sea water came splashing in. It filled the fresh-water lakes and no one else could drink from the fresh water. Only the big boss Emu remained. This place that was a shared place became a place that no one else gets to own and share.

I love that little story because it talks about the way that people could live as one, live in community, but the actions of the Emu meant that nobody can drink from that beautiful water again. There's no fresh water around here now.

Emu's story makes me think of Rainbow Spirit Theology, where the elders spoke of a strangler fig seed dropped on a kauri branch by a bird and slowly over time reaching down fine hair-like roots that thicken and strangle the host.<sup>50</sup>

This is where I question, "What is the truth?" For generation after generation we had our stories told to us. That was then interrupted through colonisation. Then we were told that this other story – a completely different story – is truth. In the same breath we were told to cease telling our stories, to get rid of them. That was really hard to do, so we kept doing it in secret.

There has been talk over the years about finding an Australian spirituality but the spirituality we have is still not inclusive enough. Our ways are still regarded as "other". In the parable of the Sower, the environment that seed is scattered over is really important. If you get the environment right, the seed will take root. From a Western point of view nothing else matters than the Western Christian gospel – the Western way has taken over everything – but the soil

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<sup>49</sup> The Narangga are Yorke Peninsula people (near Port Elliot) in South Australia.

<sup>50</sup> Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology*, 2nd ed. (Hindmarsh: ATF, 2007). First published 1997.

for an Australian spirituality lies in our stories, songs, customs and ceremonies and in our world view.

I really believe that the Western church needs to listen. They're missing out.

The parable of the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8–10) is representative of all the things we have lost. We Aboriginal people have lost so much – land, language, children, self-worth and dignity. For us we thought we'd lost them forever. But now I'm finding that the Lost Coin is not only a story about the one lost coin but the story of the other nine. The community of faith cannot be complete until that one lost coin is restored. The church is never ever going to be what it was meant to be without indigenous knowledge. It's so important to God who leaves the "household of faith" and goes out to look for the ones that are lost and to restore them. In the parable of the Lost Coin, however, I realise that God who has always been looking for us has diligently swept the house and the lost coin *was always in the house*. We were always in the house. "Oh, let's send the missionaries out to save the lost out there." But we and our knowing of God were already in the house!

As Aboriginal peoples we bring things to this community. We bring knowledge. We bring understanding. We bring wisdom. But the community is not complete until it is there. If the Western church thinks they can get along without us, they will never be complete.

The tricky thing is how do you tell this to a people who have been told and think they are lost?

And how do you tell this to a people who think they are found?

## God in my language

*Arrawatanha – Most High*

The Bible begins, "In the beginning, God..." (Gen. 1:1). But what does that name mean? Why **that** name?!

Two words are the root of "God": *gudān* of Germanic origin and the Indo-European *ǵhau(ə)*. They both mean "to call upon".

I don't like the word "God". I don't understand why the English translations use that word. When I speak a word in my language that is used to describe who God is, it usually is a doing word – God-in action. God didn't just exist to be called upon; God was at work. That's a different concept completely. Or why not the Hebrew word or another of the Old Testament words, all those other words that talked about God's character and attributes? Like Elyōn, God Most High, a really precious insight. Originally it was a blessing from King Melchizedek, priest of God Most High, in his indigenous language, upon Abraham (Gen. 14:18–20).

In Adnyamathanha we have a name for Most High, and that is Arrawatanha. Arrawatanha is One who watches over everything and who creates, though the word we use is "make" – Nguthanha, Maker.

In the Genesis account of creation God spoke and things happened, things were made. It wasn't just the speaking of them into being, it was the way they were made, which is where our stories come into play. It was the Red and Grey Kangaroo making the plains and the hills. It was the giant Serpents – Akarru – making the walls of Wilpena Pound, a synclinal basin in the Flinders Ranges. You see the rising up of land or the appearing or coming into being of land. It was always a rising up into existence. The very thought of it was the breath. God thought, spoke and it came into being.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in the Flinders Ranges, there's a depression in the land where in wintertime the *adatamadapa* (ice) falls and forms on the ground. Women let down their silver locks from the stars and the long threads of their hair formed the ice on the plain. This is our connection in our stories to the Ice Age. It figures in the Muda (deep wisdom) about Artunyi, the Seven Sisters (Pleiades). Artunyi began their journey at Top End and travelled through all Aboriginal groups. From up north they visited places. When they spoke, their words formed the wind and things came into being. In many stories the Seven Sisters created. They didn't procreate; it was begetting – *nguthangkadna* (the action of making/doing).

For us as Adnyamathanha we say things like *ngami na ngapula nguthangka* – our mother made us. (*Ngami* is our word for mother.) We have many mothers in our matrilineal society. They are creating and acting in community, enabling us to know where we belong, where our safe space – our home – is so that if we ever get lost, we know where to go.

In many other stories there are different names for who did the making. They can be female and male. When it comes to spiritual things there's no importance placed on gender. There's male and female. You could be talking about God as mother or God as father. None is more important than the other, but each image has its own place. For Adnyamathanha our stories operate like that too. Some stories only the men tell, others only the women. But there are sacred sites where Creator was female.

The way we were taught Christianity, God was always male. Everything was from a male perspective because when the missionaries came their picture of God was male and the strong leader in the community was a white male minister. That became the norm and Adnyamathanha feminine understandings were silenced because Adnyamathanha culture was silenced.

In the Australian church today we should all have the freedom to name God in our own language and not feel a constraint of only using the English name for God otherwise it's not Christianity. That's why I deliberately use the name "Arrawatanha". I feel affirmed in being made in the image of God. God has made me Adnyamathanha so why not speak in Adnyamathanha?

For our Adnyamathanha people this is very important. For Aboriginal groups around Australia and any indigenous peoples around the world, our cultural identity hasn't been affirmed.

When I speak and use language I feel affirmed.

When my culture and language is affirmed that is Good News.

*Ngalakanha Muda: The Word (John 1:1-14)*

I have done a little bit of work on Christologies and wondering what does it have to do with my theology? The old missionaries would teach us about who this Jesus was. But if Jesus is over there in Israel what does Jesus have to do with us over here, in Australia?

If we listen to the opening of John's Gospel (John 1), however, all that we have to recognise is that Christ is here and always was here.

1. Wadu nguni wadu *Ngalakanha Muda* ikanga. *Ngalakanha Muda* ikangka Arrawatanhangha. Idina watya *Ngalakanha Muda* ikangka.
2. Vanhi ukiangka watja *Ngalakanha Muda* ikangka Arrawatanhangha.

3. Inhawatanha *Ngalakanha Muda*, Arrawatanha urru wirti nguthangka. Utanha wirti nguthangkulu *Ngalakanha Muda* vadiangka urrunha.
  4. *Ngalakanha Muda* ardla nungkangka urru ipi ikandyadna.
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1. In the beginning was the one who is called the *Word*. The *Word* was with God and was truly God.
  2. From the very beginning the *Word* was with God.
  3. And with this *Word*, God created all things. Nothing was made without the *Word*, everything that was created
  4. received its life from him and his light gave life to everyone.

In Adnyamathanha culture *Ngalakanha Muda* is a very big concept. It's the most important framework and foundation and has always been there. It didn't just begin 200 years ago.

In our stories, our *Muda*, we have these agents of creation helping to make things. Each *Muda* reveals *Ngalakanha Muda*, the big story of Creator being present. "In the beginning was the one who was called the *Word*" (John 1:1); Christ was Creator present in our stories – *Ngalakanha Muda*.

Our wise ones didn't give away what they knew. They didn't give out their knowledge freely. They would affirm things when they saw it and they understood it as special knowledge. They'd say, "That's *ngalakanha muda anadi*" – that's big wisdom that, big knowledge. As the Bible teaches, wisdom existed before anything else came into being (Prov. 8:22–31). That's *Ngalakanha Muda*. If you begin with wisdom that becomes your compass. If you acknowledge that wisdom was there in the beginning it becomes guidance for your journey, and the eschaton – your end.

#### *Undakarranha*

*Undakarranha* is the one Adnyamathanha have recognised as the Christlike person. The one who has come back from the dead. He is a particular appearing.

Our understanding the resurrection is very important for bridging between Christ and Jesus.

I was trying to translate John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

"Have eternal life." What does that mean? Eternal life? When is life not life? When it's dead; *Muyu vandendai* – no breath. What would be the opposite – of having breath? Breath that lasts forever, that doesn't die. Well, that's got to do with spirit, so *wangapi muyu* – spirit breath. Christ enables us to live in the spirit because he is the one who has come back from the dead. That story is very important – someone who has come back from death and allows life to come back in a different form.

We have *Muda*, a story, that speaks to that. It's about *Aramburra*, the trapdoor spider, and *Artapudapuda*, a grub. They have a conversation about what will happen when the body dies. *Artapudapuda* believed that once the body dies it returns to the ground where it came from and there it stays. *Aramburra* believed that once the body dies it returns to the ground but after three days the spirit would rise again. After many conversations they realised they

needed to make a decision; they went with Artapudapuda's version of the story. But as time went by, they began to miss their loved ones and regretted the decision they had made. To this day Aramburra can be seen but Artapudapuda cannot because he's ashamed of the consequences of his version of the story.

In our language the word *unda* speaks of a deceased person. Undakarranha is our word for a person who comes back from the dead. So we held ancient knowledge of this idea. Undakarranha was a word that our elders identified Jesus as. They understood that he was the one that fitted that description so we as Adnyamathanha have embraced that.

Why did Jesus have to come back? So he could be universal.

Yet that night when Jesus rose from the dead the two who walked on the road didn't recognise him. The ones at the tomb missed him. Jesus means "one who saves". He was the one they were looking for but even when he came, they didn't recognise him. They didn't recognise Christ among them. They were still looking through their physical eyes, but Christ is not something you can see just through your physical eyes. Recognition requires spiritual sight also.

I heard an African proverb that talks of mothers using material to tie their babies on their backs. The proverb pointed to the fact that the gospel or Jesus or Christ has become like that picture because we have wrapped Christ up in so much wrapping that we can't see him anymore. We need to unwrap – decolonise – to be able to see. It's much easier for me to think of Christ as Ngalakanha Muda than to think of Jesus Christ. We've been taught you can't have one without the other, and in a sense it's true, but who is it true for? The challenging bit for us is being able to be brave enough to look at Scripture and read it through our own eyes.

It's been very problematic for aboriginal peoples the world over when the missionaries have quoted that verse where Jesus talks about being made known, and he says, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). In Australia us Aboriginal people have been caught up in wanting to see Jesus. But of course, Jesus was that one-moment-in-time revelation of who God is in flesh. And that was to a very specific group of people. For us to try and copy that, we can't. Because it only happened once.

So what does it mean to be a follower of Jesus here in Australia? You obviously can't go around walking in his footsteps. That's where the idea of the universal Christ is important – not just Jesus.

Jesus came to his own and asked the question, "Who do you say that I am?" And they had to answer that, just like we are having to answer that. Who do you say that I am? That question is not a trick question that someone has the actual answer to. It's an invitation to enter into a journey to discover who Christ is.

Our response is, "*Nina urtyu Ngalakanha Muda*. You are the Christ. *Anaditj*. You are Big History." The beauty of that is that Christ has always been here. He didn't need to come and be introduced to us. Christ is everywhere and in everything and in our story and always has been and always will be!

That almost sounds like a creed that could be repeated.

What would we therefore call ourselves? Would we call ourselves Christian? I think we would call ourselves *Arrawatanha yura urapaku* or *Undakarranha yura urapaku* – followers of the Most High, followers of Christ.



## Our stories, our lens

Light was created first and then the sun was created. What is light? It's what helps us see. It helps things grow. It helps new things come into focus, into being. Light needs to be shining all the time. The sun can't shine all the time; half of the world is in daylight and half in dark. It has its hours of the day when it shines. But light is something different. It's shining continuously – maybe in a different time and space.<sup>51</sup>

For us, when the Word becomes flesh, out of darkness something becomes light. Our stories, sacred and thousands of years older than the biblical record, are our lens through which we can clearly see.



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<sup>51</sup> "Light is not so much what you directly see as that by which you see everything else." Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope for, and Believe* (New York: Convergent Books, 2019).



# Leveraging indigenous theologies for church growth in light of the emergence of World Christianity

By Paul Ayokunle

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## Introduction

The call for recognising indigenous theologies cannot be more appropriate and urgent today, with Christianity continuously booming among diverse non-Western cultures and regions. Indeed, over the last hundred years, the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted from the Global North (North America, Europe, Australia, Japan and New Zealand) to the Global South (the rest of the world, especially Africa, Asia and Latin America) with unprecedented growth in the same latter regions.<sup>52</sup> For instance, in 1900, there were only 9 million Christians in Africa while 300 million were present in Europe.<sup>53</sup> By 2021, over 600 million Christians were now in Africa and a much lower figure of about 500 million in Europe – a difference in excess of 100 million.<sup>54</sup> This sort of watershed in the history of World Christianity, Ola notes, is only comparable to the Protestant Reformation of about 500 years ago.<sup>55</sup> It is only fair for the voices of those who now demographically represent the Christian faith to receive attention and affirmation in theological circles and church growth endeavours as their Western counterparts do.

To solidify its argument for the validation of indigenous theologies for church growth, this paper presents an *omolúàbí*-shaped ecclesiology (OSE),<sup>56</sup> an African approach to church showcasing the riches and potential benefits of grassroots theologies for church growth when they fly. The OSE builds upon the norm-setting dimension of personhood among the Yorùbá

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<sup>52</sup> Harvey C. Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*, American Society of Missiology, no. 51 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2014), 9.

<sup>53</sup> Gina A. Zurlo, Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021: Questions about the Future," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 45, no. 1 (2021): 23.

<sup>54</sup> Zurlo, Johnson and Crossing, "World Christianity and Mission 2021," 23.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Ola, "Strangers' Meat is the Greatest: African Christianity in Europe" (2019): 1, [https://www.academia.edu/41993424/\\_STRANGERS\\_MEAT\\_IS\\_THE\\_GREATEST\\_TREAT\\_AFRICAN\\_CHRISTIANITY\\_IN\\_EUROPE](https://www.academia.edu/41993424/_STRANGERS_MEAT_IS_THE_GREATEST_TREAT_AFRICAN_CHRISTIANITY_IN_EUROPE).

<sup>56</sup> I have developed the concept of *omolúàbí*-shaped ecclesiology as part of my doctoral research, at Liverpool Hope University, for promoting church growth and multi-ethnic congregations. While I am aware of the more comprehensive meaning it has in theological discourse, I have applied the term ecclesiology loosely in this paper to refer to the lifestyle of the church: a way of doing or being church. I have taken this approach to avoid any theological argument that may be associated with the concept and retain the focus of the paper.

people of south-western Nigeria.<sup>57</sup> The Yorùbá concept comes to the fore to suitably represent an African indigenous theology in the paper for at least two reasons. First, I am of Yorùbá ethnicity, so I am considerably familiar with key concepts within the culture. Second, *omolúàbí* as a moral aspect of personhood in Yorùbá cosmology perfectly dovetails with the common theme of *ubuntu* in discussions of African identity.<sup>58</sup> One may even conceive of the *omolúàbí* framework as a Yorùbá rendition of *ubuntu* social ethics and ideology because of their non-dismissible similarities.

## The need for indigenous theologies in church planting and growth

I understand that even though non-Western regions now host most of the world's Christians, intellectual, economic and political dominance remain in the West.<sup>59</sup> Yet, to continue to theologise and do missions from Western paradigms almost solely with little or no recognition of other voices is unhelpful for the body of Christ, and church growth in particular, for at least two reasons. First, the practice sustains the empire mission model that sees church growth and planting proceed from an elevated position of power (in terms of culture, wealth, nationality, literature or other positional advantages), consciously or unconsciously. Since the hotbed of Christianity has often been the centre of empires (beginning with the Jewish dominance to the Roman, British and American empires), it has been the case that mission agents advance to other cultures with the power and advantages of the empire, including dominant theological standpoints and church-planting models.<sup>60</sup> They often fail to see God already at work among the unprivileged recipient to lead them to partner with him however he wants. Consequently, they unconsciously establish churches that must theologise and do church like them to be authentic – a result of the subtle pride that comes with power (2 Tim. 6:17).

In the end, the new plants struggle to grow since they are unfamiliar with the foreign concepts about God and the church from the privileged mission agents. Indeed, as the Irish missionary to the Gold Coast (present-day Ghana), James McKeown (1900–89), who planted the Church of Pentecost in Ghana, observed: “It would be difficult to grow an English oak in Ghana. A local ‘species’, at home in its culture, should grow, reproduce and spread: a church with foreign roots was more likely to struggle.”<sup>61</sup> However, where there is room for indigenous theologies to emerge, the people will be more inclined to better comprehend the faith they have received and find it easier to proselytize. Plus, it is in every culture contributing their own theological reflections that the church can truly mature into the “full stature of Christ” (Eph.

<sup>57</sup> The Yorùbás are arguably the largest ethnic group among Black Africans with historical consciousness and widely researched history. Famous for being the most literate group in Africa and having an impressive rate of urbanisation, the Yorùbá people have a well-established traditional structure and religion. For more about the Yorùbás, see S. Adebajji Akintoye, *A History of the Yoruba People* (Dakar: Amalion Publishing, 2014), 12.

<sup>58</sup> *Ubuntu* is from the popular Zulu maxim of the Nguni people, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means that a person is a person through other persons. As a concept, *ubuntu* stresses that no one is self-sufficient, and that interdependence is a reality for all. In essence, *ubuntu* implies that a person only discovers his/her own human qualities, behaviours and traits through bonding and interacting with fellow human beings. For more details, see Barbara Nussbaum, “African Culture and Ubuntu: Reflections of a South African in America,” *World Business Academy: Perspectives* 17, no. 1 (2003): 2; Dan J. Antwi, “Koinonia in African Culture: Community, Communitality and African Self-Identity,” *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* VI, no. 2 (1996): 68; Augustine Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa* (Rondebosch, South Africa: University of Cape Town Press, 1993), 46.

<sup>59</sup> Lazarus Phiri, “Mission Without Empire,” podcast audio, *Mission Shift* (April 2022), accessed 13 February 2023, <https://www.cru.org/communities/city/episode/ep6-mission-without-empire/>.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Christine Leonard, *A Giant in Ghana: 3000 Churches in 50 Years – The Story of James McKeown and the Church of Pentecost* (Chichester: New Wine Press, 1989), 69.

4:13) since God has incarnated his truth in different cultures that it both affirms and seeks to transform.

Second, retaining western theological hegemony, for instance, without much appreciation of perspectives from the non-Western worlds, despite the explosion of the church in such regions, slows down the realisation of God's multi-ethnic agenda for his church,<sup>62</sup> as Rev. 7:9 suggests.<sup>63</sup> It is in every culture listening to one another as they theologise without the sense of a teacher–student relationship from any that the church would dwell together more honestly in unity. This is the way new plants in indigenous communities can feel included in the multi-ethnic body of Christ as they become members. Of course, the idea of inclusion is inherent in the concept of catholicity, one of the four basic marks of the church.<sup>64</sup> The implication of inclusion, and thus, multi-ethnicity, is that supremacy mindsets or other acts of marginalisation would reduce in the church, whether along racial lines, social class or any other caste. The church, despite its diversity in composition, would then be closer to attaining “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). It is in the atmosphere of unity that church growth is more prone to happen. Indeed, as the Psalmist wonders in Ps. 133:1, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred [regardless of their differences] live together in unity!” In this state of oneness, as he concludes in the third verse, “the Lord ordained his blessing”.

The next section presents *omolúàbí*-shaped ecclesiology. I briefly discuss African ecclesiology in relation to church growth to reveal some of the potential gems of indigenous theologies when they find a louder voice and receive a wider embrace.

## ***Omolúàbí*-shaped ecclesiology**

OSE derives from the African (Yorùbá) concept of *omolúàbí* to formulate a theology of the church for growth. This sort of productive dialogue between the Yorùbá moral dimension of personhood and Christianity is not forceful because the “African moral system has a religious foundation”.<sup>65</sup> In fact, *omolúàbí* values broadly overlap the attributes constituting the “fruit of the Spirit” in Gal. 5:22–23.<sup>66</sup> The *omolúàbí* principles also form a cultural portrayer of 2 Pet. 1:5–7, which lists some necessary additives to the lives of believers in Christ.<sup>67</sup> As a preliminary to understanding OSE, in the following conversation I summarise the *omolúàbí* construct and its key principles.

### ***Omolúàbí* concept**

Many African cultures' moral sense of identity implies that an individual is not considered a person by just being human, but by necessarily acting in ethically acceptable manners and in

<sup>62</sup> In a broad sense, a multi-ethnic church connotes a gathering of believers in Christ, where members come from various backgrounds without one culture asserting itself over others.

<sup>63</sup> “After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands” (Rev. 7:9, NRSV).

<sup>64</sup> Graham Cray, ed., *Mission-Shaped Church: Church Planting and Fresh Expressions of Church in a Changing Context* (London: Church House Publishing, 2004), 96–97. Catholicity refers to “the universal scope of the church as a society instituted by God in which all sorts and conditions of humanity, all races, nations and cultures, can find a welcome and home.” See more in Paul Avis, *The Anglican Understanding of the Church* (London: SPCK, 2000), 65.

<sup>65</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Books, 1969), 62.

<sup>66</sup> The qualities are “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23, NRSV).

<sup>67</sup> Here Peter notes: “For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with endurance, and endurance with godliness, and godliness with mutual affection, and mutual affection with love” (2 Pet. 1:5–7, NRSV).

tandem with social responsibilities within society.<sup>68</sup> The *omolúàbí* concept is a highly valued philosophical and cultural construct concerned with the moral aspect of identity among the Yorùbás.<sup>69</sup> Social scientists Grace Akanbi and Alice Jekayinfa rightly submit that “the end of Yorùbá traditional education is to make every individual ‘Omoluabi’”.<sup>70</sup> Philosophically and culturally, *omolúàbí* represents someone who possesses good virtues. The concept provides a yardstick for determining the morality or immorality of any act in society.<sup>71</sup> To refer to someone as *omolúàbí* is to recognise and affirm that such a person is well-cultured, mannered, honourable and respectful – a well-behaved person.<sup>72</sup> An *omolúàbí* embodies all virtues that facilitate the sound expression of wisdom, knowledge and skills for his or her betterment and society by necessity.<sup>73</sup> The following virtues are foundational for *omolúàbí*, among other desirable qualities.

### Relationship dynamics

*Omolúàbí* showcases a sound understanding of the workings of relationships so that they are beneficial to everyone involved.<sup>74</sup> Maintaining harmony in all relationships, whether at work, school or home, is essential to an *omolúàbí* in attaining individuality, identity or self-actualisation.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, an *omolúàbí* operates by two guiding principles in social relationships: *àjobí*, meaning blood relations, and *àjogbé*, which translates as co-residence.<sup>76</sup> To an *omolúàbí*, everyone relates together from the viewpoint of “shared humanity”.<sup>77</sup> Harmony in social relationships also extends to the spirit world since African cosmological understanding accommodates the interaction of the spirit world and the physical world.<sup>78</sup> Hence, *omolúàbí*s maintain equilibrium in their relationship with the spirit world.

### Inú rere

The second fundamental virtue of *omolúàbí* is *inú rere* (goodwill, having a clean and good mind towards others), which is both a moral and mental quality.<sup>79</sup> *Inú rere* pushes *omolúàbí* to give easily to the community in deeds and actions.<sup>80</sup> It readily finds expression in the principle of hospitality, which creates “the desire for a welcome without reserve and without

<sup>68</sup> Polycarp Ikuenobe, “Good and Beautiful: A Moral-Aesthetic View of Personhood in African Communal Traditions,” *Essays in Philosophy* 17, no. 1 (2016): 128.

<sup>69</sup> Olusola Victor Olanipekun, “Omoluabi: Re-thinking the Concept of Virtue in Yoruba Culture and Moral System,” *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 10, no. 9 (2017): 219.

<sup>70</sup> Grace Oluremilekun Akanbi and Alice Arinlade Jekayinfa, “Reviving the African Culture of ‘Omoluabi’ in the Yoruba Race as a Means of Adding Value to Education in Nigeria,” *International Journal of Modern Education Research* 3, no. 3 (2016): 15. See also Akintúndé Akínyemi, *Orature and Yoruba Riddles* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 231.

<sup>71</sup> Bosede Adefiola Adebawale & Folake Onayemi, “Aristotle’s Human Virtue and Yorùbá Worldview of *Omólúàbí*: An Ethical-Cultural Interpretation,” *African Philosophical Inquiry* 6 (2019): 32.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Babalola Osoba, “The Nature, Form and Functions of Yoruba Proverbs: A Socio-Pragmatic Perspective,” *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 19, no. 2 (2014): 49.

<sup>73</sup> Adebawale and Onayemi, “Aristotle’s Human Virtue,” 31.

<sup>74</sup> Dolapo Adeniji-Neill, “Omoluabi: The Way of Human Being: An African Philosophy’s Impact on Nigerian Voluntary Immigrants’ Educational and Other Life Aspirations,” *Irinkèrindò: A Journal of African Migration* 5 (2011): 4.

<sup>75</sup> M.W. Payne, “Akiwowo, Orature and Divination: Approaches to the Construction of an Emic Sociological Paradigm of Society,” *Sociological Analysis* 53, no. 2 (1992): 180.

<sup>76</sup> Akinsola A. Akiwowo, *Ajobi and Ajogbe: Variations on the Theme of Sociation* (Ile-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1983), 10.

<sup>77</sup> Shared humanity refers to the nature or attributes common to all human beings. Howard Grace emphasises that these shared behaviour and qualities are not necessarily positive, but also include negative aspects of human nature. See more in Howard Grace, *Vision of a Shared Humanity: Being Aware of Shared Human Nature* (2019).

<sup>78</sup> Marius Nel, “The African Background of Pentecostal Theology: A Critical Perspective,” *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 53, no. 4 (2019): 6.

<sup>79</sup> Wande Abimbola, “Iwapele: The Concept of Good Character in Ifa Literary Corpus,” in *Yoruba Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance and Drama*, ed. Wande Abimbola (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1975), 389–93.

<sup>80</sup> Adeniji-Neill, “Omoluabi,” 1.

calculation, an exposure without limit to whoever arrives".<sup>81</sup> To emphasise the importance of *inú rere* evident in hospitality and benevolence, the affirmation of personhood among the Yorùbás does not occur without considering deeds linking individuals with their families, friends, community and others.<sup>82</sup> In essence, *inú rere* is responsible for the love, care, kindness and concern that an *omolúàbí* shows towards other people instead of overly focusing on himself or herself.

### Cultural integration

*Omoluàbí* is culturally aware and integrated.<sup>83</sup> The uncultured is an *omo lásán* or *omokómo*, suggesting a worthless child. *Omokómo* is socially unincorporated, culturally deviant or a misfit in the community or set-up.<sup>84</sup> Chief among the implications of being cultured is to have *ìteríba* (respect).<sup>85</sup> An *omolúàbí* has self-respect (including recognition and setting boundaries) and honour for others, including parents, elders, other authority figures, peers and even younger ones.<sup>86</sup> *Ìwàpèlè* or *ìwàtútù* (gentleness or gentle character) also comes to the fore as a vital element of being cultured. *Ìwàpèlè* expresses itself in "being mindful of the individuality of others, treating others gently and being tolerant and accommodating of the peculiarity of the existence of others".<sup>87</sup> An *omolúàbí*, who has high regard for culture demonstrates *ìwàpèlè* in communications, business, musical constructions, religious actions and other aspects of life.<sup>88</sup>

### Òrò síso

The spoken word (*òrò síso*) is so significant among the Yorùbás that it forms another key characteristic of *omolúàbí*.<sup>89</sup> *Òrò*, meaning "words", can convey disrespect or hurt to others when used frivolously or unguardedly. *Omoluàbí* has this understanding and therefore uses *òrò* with dexterity. It is admirable for *omolúàbí* to demonstrate intelligent use of *òrò* by engaging Yorùbá proverbs (*òwe*) in communication. Indeed, without *òwe*, "speech flounders and falls short of its mark, whereas aided by them, communication is fleet and unerring".<sup>90</sup> An *omolúàbí* is that cultured person who can "optimize the efficaciousness of speech",<sup>91</sup> leveraging proverbs amid other communication tools and consequently demonstrating cultural appreciation and awareness.

<sup>81</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Principle of Hospitality," *parallax* 11, no. 1 (2005): 6.

<sup>82</sup> Adeniji-Neill and Ammon, "Omoluabi," 2.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Yunusa Oyeneye and M.O. Shoremi, "The Concept of Culture and the Nigerian Society," in *Essentials of General Studies*, vol. 2, ed. O.O. Odugbemi et al. (Ago Iwoye: CESAP, 1997), 253.

<sup>85</sup> Abimbola, "Iwapele," 389.

<sup>86</sup> Adeniji-Neill, "Omoluabi," 1.

<sup>87</sup> Sunday Olaoluwa Dada, "Aristotle and the Omoluwàbí Ethos: Ethical Implications for Public Morality in Nigeria," *Yoruba Studies Review* 3, no. 1 (2018): 267.

<sup>88</sup> John Ayotunde Isola Bewaji, *Beauty and Culture: Perspectives in Black Aesthetics* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2004), 159.

<sup>89</sup> *Òrò* is a composite of *ogbon* (wisdom), *imo* (knowledge) and *oye* (understanding), the creative companions of Olodumare, the supreme being in Yorùbá cosmology. *Òrò* is the source of speech, meaning and communication, potent enough to "create order out of existence". It finds utterance primarily through *owe* (proverbs) and by implication, other range of communicative properties of the Yorùbá people viz: "sculpture, *àrokò*, dance, drama, song, chant, poetry, incantations like *qò*, *ògèdè*, *àyájòpè*, *odù*, *èsà* and many others". See more in Rowland Abiodun, "Verbal and Visual Metaphors: Mythical Allusions in Yoruba Ritualistic Art of *Orí*," *Word and Image* 3, no. 3 (1987): 254–56; Ayo Opefeyitimi, "Ayajo as Ifa in Mythical and Sacred Contexts," in *Ifa Divination, Knowledge, Power, and Performance*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona and Rowland Abiodun (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 25; Abimbola, "Iwapele," 389.

<sup>90</sup> Oyekan Owomoyela, *Yoruba Proverbs* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*



## Ìwà

The fifth hallmark of *omolúàbí* is *ìwà* (character). Even in *omolúàbí*'s etymology, *ìwà* is central.<sup>92</sup> *Ìwà* can either make one more valuable when exhibiting *ìwà rere* (good character/moral goodness) or less desirable when demonstrating *ìwà buburu* or *ìwà ibaja* (bad/terrible character). Good character may not be the sole determinant of personhood, but it certainly attracts a lot of admiration for the Yorùbás. In fact, they often link good character and *ewà* (beauty). For them, moral goodness acts as the "normative necessary condition for a person to be truly and strictly considered beautiful, and to be a person in the robust sense".<sup>93</sup> Bad character, however, receives condemnation and reduces an individual's personhood or humanness to the level of "ordinary things" such that one attracts the tag *èniyàn lásán* (worthless fellow) or *eranko* (animal).<sup>94</sup> As African philosopher Ademola Fayemi concludes, *ìwà* is the "fulcrum of human personality".<sup>95</sup>

## Isé and akínkanjú

Another set of connected central qualities of *omolúàbí* is *isé* (hard work) and *akínkanjú* (courage/bravery).<sup>96</sup> *Omolúàbí* puts a lot of care and effort into work because, without a strong work ethic and diligence, a person attracts the tag of *òlè* (lazy/indolent person), making other *omolúàbí* qualities meaningless.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, Yorùbás hold that *isé l'ogun isé, eni ti ko sisé yio jale*. This popular saying literally translates as "hard work is the panacea for poverty; whoever does not work hard will become a thief or robber". *Isé* and *akínkanjú* virtues ensure that an *omolúàbí* courageously navigates tough times and develops *ifaradà* (fortitude) to endure and rebound when knocked down.<sup>98</sup> Rightly so; life is not a bed of roses and can be unpredictable. As such, without the extra virtue of *akínkanjú* to support *isé*, it may be difficult to remain hardworking or exhibit other core qualities of *omolúàbí*. *Akínkanjú* is opposed to "escapism, self-condemnation, abandonment and indulgence in vices to circumvent life obstacles".<sup>99</sup>

## Òtító

*Òtító* (truth), integrity and honesty are a compendium of related, basic characteristics of *omolúàbí*.<sup>100</sup> Integrity conveys a sense of wholeness or completeness from the Latin word *integras*.<sup>101</sup> Likewise, *omolúàbí* exhibits coherence and consistency in principles, values, thoughts, speech and actions. *Omolúàbí* is honest, straightforward, incorruptible, truthful and accountable.<sup>102</sup> Thus, he or she becomes "a good and dependable person who stands above board at all times".<sup>103</sup> *Omolúàbí*'s integrity and *òtító* reflect in his or her private and public endeavours that such an individual does not indulge in or support fraudulent activities.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Abimbola, "Iwapele," 393.

<sup>93</sup> Ikuenobe, "Good and Beautiful," 129.

<sup>94</sup> Ademola Kazeem Fayemi, "Human Personality and the Yoruba Worldview: An Ethico-Sociological Interpretation," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 2, no. 9 (2009): 170.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Adeniji-Neill, "Omoluabi," 2.

<sup>97</sup> Dada, "Aristotle and the Omolúwàbí Ethos," 267.

<sup>98</sup> Oyebade Oyewole and Azenabor Godwin, "A Discourse on the Fundamental Principles of Character in an African Moral Philosophy," *African Journal of History and Culture* 10, no. 3 (2018): 48.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> Abimbola, "Iwapele," 389, 93.

<sup>101</sup> Alan Montefiore and David Vines, eds., *Integrity in the Public and Private Domains* (London: Routledge, 1999), 9.

<sup>102</sup> Patrick Dobel includes many of these attributes among values accommodated within integrity. For further details, see J. Patrick Dobel, "Integrity in the Public Service," *Public Administration Review* 50, no. 3 (1990), 354-66.

<sup>103</sup> Akanbi and Jekayinfa, "Reviving the African Culture of 'Omoluabi'," 15.

<sup>104</sup> Oyeyemi Aworinde Oyerinde, "'Omoluabi' – The Concept of Good Character in Yoruba Traditional Education: An Appraisal," in S.F. Ogundare, *Andrian Forum* 4 (1991): 200.

Truth and integrity are central to being an *omolúàbí* because, ultimately, they are the “stuff of moral courage and even heroism”.<sup>105</sup>

## What *omolúàbí*-shaped ecclesiology would look like

I believe that the church can enhance its growth through the interaction between *omolúàbí* principles and ecclesiology. The resultant indigenous ecclesiology would have the following expression.

### Recognition of and harmony with the Spirit

Perhaps OSE's spiritual emphasis is its most crucial element. Just as an *omolúàbí* is conscious of the participation of the spiritual world in the physical, engaging OSE would imply that the church recognises the influence and necessity of the Holy Spirit in its life. The church cannot be “unidimensional” in its orientation, as with the Western interpretation of life events, but multifaceted, acknowledging spiritual reality alongside the physical.<sup>106</sup> African Pentecostals are confident that church growth is spiritual and passionately demonstrate this belief in the supernatural, in alignment with the African world view. Thus, it should not be strange that Pentecostalism has taken over the face of Christianity in Africa.<sup>107</sup> The global church can learn from *omolúàbí*'s multidimensional worldview. In practical terms, OSE's supernatural emphasis would imply that the church believes, permits and projects the Bible teachings on divine healing, angels, visions, miracles, prophecies, dream interpretation and other spiritual possibilities through the Holy Spirit's power. Then, the church can truly begin to “live by the Spirit, [and]... be guided by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25).

Also, OSE would insist that the church maintain peace and fellowship with the Holy Spirit. This “communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor. 13:13) will more than likely require a vibrant prayer life since prayer is a vital channel to “truly connect with God [or His Spirit]”.<sup>108</sup> Unity with the Holy Spirit will also see a church mature in the fruit of the Spirit and grieve him less every day (Eph. 4:30). Such a church will experience more productivity as it deploys various growth strategies, for the Holy Spirit remains the enabler of biblical church planting and growth principles.<sup>109</sup>

### Relationship-building

OSE expects that the church operates with a rich knowledge of relationship dynamics. Being the church in this way would undoubtedly help its social growth. Living by the *omolúàbí* ethos of *iwàpèlé* and *ìteríba* would translate to congregants respecting themselves regardless of age, social status, race or other classifications. By implication, the youths would find it more convenient to contribute to the church's development without being disdained or silenced. The adults would also enjoy the benefits of learning from the younger generation besides the opportunity to pass down their much-needed wisdom in an atmosphere of respect for individuality. Consequently, the cross-pollination of ideas and learning would increase, culminating in church growth.

Relationship dynamics awareness would also mitigate conflicts and misunderstandings in the church, as more forbearance would characterise social interactions. The other's attitudes,

<sup>105</sup> George G. Brenkert, ed., *Corporate Integrity and Accountability* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 5.

<sup>106</sup> Samson Olasupo A. Ayokunle, *Communities of Faith in Diaspora: Elements and Liturgy of Worship* (Ibadan: Baptist Press (Nig.) Ltd, 2021), 69.

<sup>107</sup> Kwiyani, *Sent Forth*, 113.

<sup>108</sup> Stormie Omartian, “Foreword,” in *Power through Prayer*, ed. Edward M. Bounds (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 9.

<sup>109</sup> Eddie Gibbs, “The Power Behind the Principles,” in *Church Growth: State of the Art*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1986), 125.

behaviour and actions would filter through the consciousness that pluralistic cultures comprise the church. As such, the tendency for offences would reduce. Leaders and members would engage more effectively without distrust, bitterness, anger, hypocrisy, pride or prejudice as they respect relationship etiquette and boundaries and operate in love with one another. Congregants, regardless of their divide, would also be able to serve more lovingly together as they apply the social principles of *àjobí* and *àjogbé*. Indeed, high-handedness would find faint expression in the church that models *àjobí* and *àjogbé*. As with the Early Church, everyone would live as comrades and a true family. Luke describes the brotherly love of the Early Church thus: "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need" (Acts 4:34–35).

### ***Stress on social ministry***

Third, OSE would mean that the church gets involved socially in the life of its members and community. It would not measure its growth by spiritual contributions only. Rather, it would equally be aware of and deliberately seek to address its members' needs and social justice. This imperative for the church's social engagement derives from *omolúàbí*'s virtues of hospitality and benevolence – both offshoots of *inú rere*. The leaders of a socially involved church will be cautious to prevent their professional backgrounds' formality from impeding the church's social commitments. Indeed, there is the tendency for ministers with professional experiences to style their congregations as business environments, preferring their highly skilled membership, to which they focus most of their efforts, including social ministry.

OSE is opposed to such bias and segregation, which prevents social interaction and opportunities for congregants to meet one another's material and immaterial needs. Instead, the *omolúàbí*'s goodwill implicit in OSE would ensure that church leaders put away preferences in administering the church and its resources. By implication, the body of Christ would be open to all and show concern and care, even to the marginalised. As in Luke 4:18, the poor, prisoners, blind, oppressed and other overlooked groups in society will find aid through the church's social services. As the church becomes more intentional in its social engagement, especially beyond its congregants to strangers, it would begin to live up to its expectation as "the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14) instead of a shining light to itself. The acts of love would open up possibilities for the recipients to join the church, increasing its numerical strength.

### ***Excellent leadership***

OSE also demands effective leadership, which pastors keep evolving through *isé* (hard work) and *akínkanjú* (courage) to remain relevant in a fast-developing and changing world. More specifically, church leaders may need to add to their ministerial training, both formally and informally. David not only led the Israelites by integrity or personal charm but also with skills (Ps. 78:72). The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the need to acquire some technological expertise, an unusual field for many church leaders. Learning an unfamiliar skill would likely require *ìteriba* (humility and respect) from the pastors since the facilitators may be young professionals or pew members. Leaders must similarly extend training or discipleship to their congregations. Only after investing in training their church members would pastors be ethically correct to expect improved lifestyles, patterned after Christ, from them. A methodical discipleship process is helpful in this regard. The systematic training would be in addition to ministers' exemplary lifestyles modelling Christ's life to their congregations, just as trainers do with their trainees.

OSE would also ensure that through excellent leadership, delivered on the platform of *isé*, leaders apply themselves to the thorough and consistent study of the Scriptures and other helpful materials for their ministries. Doing the above would align with Paul's advice to Timothy to "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15 (KJV)). Demonstrating *akinkanjú* would also imply pastors courageously speaking out when they feel helpless, lonely, depressed or discouraged. Asking for help would no longer look like a sin or abomination. Of course, when ministers have support systems, they will be fresh. The church will enjoy them at their best and, thus, enjoy better nourishment and growth.

### Holistic salvation

OSE seeks a comprehensive or holistic salvation experience. Just as *omolúàbí* provides a system for validating personhood from a moral viewpoint in Yorùbá culture, Christian identity would only be more meaningful, recognised and whole with a complementary ethical life. Titus 3:8 affirms the same truth that Christians must not be lacking in moral goodness or "good works".<sup>110</sup> While the advocacy here is not for perfectionism, it would only be awkward for anyone to claim membership in the church and yet be morally deficient. Jas. 2:18 re-echoes it this way: "But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith."

To church leaders, holistic salvation would, for instance, translate to a balance in presenting God's ability and desire to provide for his people as Jehovah Jireh (Gen. 22:14) so that such negative tags as the prosperity gospel would become extinct.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, God "has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant [or people]" (Ps. 35:27). Humanity's excesses in revealing this truth should not result in the total rejection of God's power and eagerness to supply all needs (including material). Moreover, this dimension of God cannot but be particularly emphasised in regions without adequate social amenities or other physical needs. Africans do not even consider a religion (or God) that does not meet their multifaceted needs besides the salvation of their souls as meaningful.<sup>112</sup> In essence, Jesus' moderate lifestyle would be the yardstick for presenting God's willingness to prosper his people. Indeed, Jesus is the pinnacle of *omolúàbí* and "the pioneer and perfecter of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

Holistic salvation also concerns spoken words. OSE suggests that church leaders demonstrate tact in using words for their communications and sermon delivery to be more positive and less offensive. The dexterity with words stems from *omolúàbí's* grasp of *òrò*. Paul also understands the importance of sound speech and lists it among the crucial qualities young men must exhibit in Titus 2:6–8. Indeed, pastors must never forget that words are delicate; they must always proceed with discretion to achieve their intended purposes and minimise

<sup>110</sup> Titus 3:8 (NRSV): "I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone."

<sup>111</sup> Critics tag this gospel that attests to God's power to provide and his willingness to display the same grace towards its people as the prosperity gospel. They consider it as a mono-directional exportation of North American Christian-oriented movements. Moreover, to the critics, it is a post-war or Cold War Pentecostal reinvention that originated within the Pentecostal faith particularly of United States descent, with a tendency towards materialistic orientation. See more in Stephen Hunt, "'Winning Ways': Globalisation and the Impact of the Health and Wealth Gospel," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 15, no. 3 (2000): 331; see also Andreas Heuser, "Religio-Scapes of the Prosperity Gospel: An Introduction," in *Pastures of Plenty: Tracing Religio-Scapes of the Prosperity Gospel in Africa and Beyond*, ed. Andreas Heuser (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2015), 21; Eric Z.M. Gbote and Selaeo T. Kgatla, "Prosperity Gospel: A Missiological Assessment," *HTS Theologies Studies/Theological Studies* 70, no. 1 (2014): 6.

<sup>112</sup> Ayegboyin and Ishola argue that this is one of the rationales for the emergence of AICs, a desire to make Christianity speak to African world view and concerns. See in Deji Ayegboyin and Ademola S. Ishola, *African Indigenous Churches: An Historical Perspective* (Bukuru, Nigeria: African Christian Textbooks, 2013), 14, 21–22.

offences.<sup>113</sup> In all, where holistic salvation marks a congregation, the church would experience growth. The necessity of complementary moral life to spiritual experience for affirming Christian identity will result in more spiritually mature Christians. These congregants would make the church attractive to outsiders through their moral goodness, thus leading to a numerical increase for the church.

## Conclusion


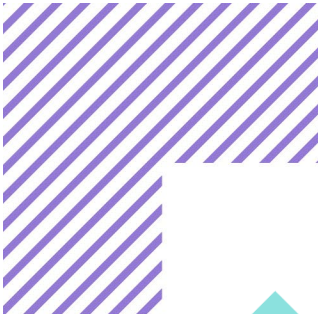
The recognition and affirmation of indigenous theologies are, indeed, important and helpful for *missio Dei* (the mission of God). In the same way that “God so loved *the world* that he gave his only Son,”<sup>114</sup> he has revealed himself within different cultures and people. No culture is more loved or privileged over others for exclusive access to God’s wisdom. Neither is any group of people the sole curator or steward of God’s revelations. The variety in creation and its complementary design attest to God’s love for diversity and the wholeness that comes from interdependencies. No matter how seemingly trivial or massive the insight is, the church must begin to acknowledge sound theological reflections from all cultures. Validating some and looking down on others or attempting to make them conform to the dominant voices reduces the chances of the church to know God more wholesomely and deeply, and to grow. Indeed, the OSE hints at how resourceful indigenous cultures can be in theologising and for church growth, if and when they find wings to fly. Indigenous theologies are necessities for advancing God’s mission as the church continues to seek ways to contextualise the Christian faith so that it may be more productive to its recipients. The emancipation of indigenous theologies is inevitable and urgent.



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<sup>113</sup> Tactical use of *òrò* certainly includes the awareness of key elements of rhetorical theories in communication as identified by Aristotle, the Greek philosopher. There is the Logos, which refers to the logic or rationality of the message. Ethos concerns the credibility of the speaker, while Pathos refers to the state of the listeners – their psychological state, language, mood and others. See more in “Aristotle’s Rhetoric,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford University: Center for the Study of Language and Information, 2002). <https://plato.stanford.edu/>.

<sup>114</sup> John 3:16 (NRSV). Emphasis mine.



# Reflections from three indigenous leaders in Latin America

**Compiled by Sarah Cawdell, CMS mission partner**

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In January 2023 Paul Tester, CMS manager in Latin America, interviewed three Christian leaders from among the indigenous people groups of the region with a view to drawing out something of the unique voice of each group in Christian theology. The following is an attempt at a collation of those voices with a view to developing an awareness of the way in which the gospel is both universal in its appeal to all people and all times and places, and at the same time is uniquely experienced in particular places, and within the voice and culture of each people group. I hope that it will allow us to examine again the voice of the gospel within, and challenging, our own cultures and people groups.

Each of these individuals is a second- or third-generation Christian in the Anglican Communion, still uniquely placed within their own culture and people group, with responsibility for serving the church in that place. They are:

Elvio Cabañas, an Énket Christian living in Paraguay  
Mirna Paulo, a Wichí Christian living in northern Argentina  
Joel Millanguir, a Mapuche Christian living in Chile

Most of the populations of the South American nations have a dual, or more, heritage. They may trace their heritage from the Spanish or Portuguese colonial past (including West Africa from the transatlantic slave trade) and indigenous people. There are however some particular people groups that, for reasons of history and geography, are still recognisable and function as distinct groups with distinct languages, dress and cultural practices.

Each of these individuals interviewed by Paul Tester has come to faith through the witness of their families and the work of the Anglican Church in their country. Each of them speaks with warmth and appreciation of the fellowship of the missionaries who drew alongside their parents and grandparents, sharing the gospel and living in company with those among whom they ministered.

Paul asked each one in turn about their journey to faith and in faith, and in particular how the Christian faith challenged their own indigenous culture, and where the culture was affirmed and maintained by those who are disciples of Christ.





## **Mirna Paulo, a Wichí Christian living in northern Argentina**

Mirna, who is from the Wichí people, in the north of Argentina, appreciates her faith learned from the example and teaching of her parents and grandparents. She particularly draws strength from the ever-present Jesus, who is not confined to place, as “idols” might be, in whatever moment and whatever place she can pray to him. She says, “I needed to choose to always walk alongside Jesus and invite him to change me.” She describes how the presence of Jesus comes against the fear that inhibits others in her community, and protects her and all Christians. She speaks of those who know Jesus as being able to maintain strong community relationships, which builds up the community and brings hope to the people. “If someone doesn’t have Jesus Christ in their lives there’s no way forward for the indigenous people, the world is a disaster, there is no way of thinking about looking to the future.”

Mirna goes on to describe how this Christian hope has enabled her people, and other indigenous people groups in the area, to work together for the rights to their land and their cultural heritage, saying, “I couldn’t walk away from the joyful, eternal life.” Recognising that missionaries were not always viewed as safe people or welcome in her culture, she also recognises the benefits of health and education that the missionaries brought along with the gospel. For example, learning from the value that the nation of Israel had for land enabled the Wichí people to value the places they inhabit in the face of government and multinationals’ attempts to purchase the land, and thereby disinherit indigenous people. Mirna says, “Many times hope is what is missing, or it’s very weak. Being with Jesus gives a lot of encouragement and my communities value whatever is happening in the churches.” (It is helpful to know that for these Christians much of life centres around church activities, so that the Christians are always living and working together, encouraging one another in faith.)

A valuable lesson the Wichí offer to the Christian faith is a true appreciation of stewardship of the land: not taking too much of a supply, even when there appears to be plenty, but only taking what is needed, and respecting the times when certain meats or fruits are not readily available. Mirna observes, “Just take what you need. Because there are those who also need to take what is needed. And nature itself requires it. So for the men who hunt animals, there are certain times when you should hunt those animals. And there are certain times when that’s not the case. They’re not at the times when they have young... And so that’s when you shouldn’t touch them, shouldn’t go near them. But there are times when yes, you can, when it’s allowed, that you can go and hunt, and catch the fish in the rivers as well. You’ve got to respect the times and everything that has to do with the care for nature.” Similarly, when something is taken as a food stuff, for example fish, it is important to use every part of it, even the skin and the bones, and not to waste or dishonour any part of it. Again, she says, “In the search for honey, you mustn’t exaggerate what you take, however easy it might be to find, and however plentiful it might be.”



## **Elvio Cabañas, an Énxet Christian living in Paraguay**

Elvio Cabañas is a pastor in the Chaco region of Paraguay, where a number indigenous groups live. He lived on a cattle ranch that had been bought by the Anglican Church as a place for the Énxet people to live safely. He grew up in the church there and learned enough languages to be able to work in the church as a Bible translator. He speaks particularly of the value of music in transcending literacy as a way of discipleship and development. He says, “For people who didn’t know how to read, at least they could hear and learn to play music, and we still continue to do that sort of thing.” Elvio learned leadership and pastoral skills from his youth, working within the church and with his father. He went away for further studies when he was already trained as a minister of the gospel and had done some valuable translation work on the New Testament.

Reflecting on the Énxet culture, Elvio recognises the valuable place of local plants in healing and medicine. He describes how his grandfather was a herbalist within the Énxet community and how his practices changed when he became a Christian, a time he describes as when “the moment of God had arrived among the indigenous peoples”. While rejecting a practice of “fermenting the plants to see which spirit it’s for, whether it’s to heal people or to damage or hurt people”, Elvio speaks of the ongoing value of this botanical knowledge to treat various sicknesses. This was particularly true during the recent pandemic but was practiced in ways that are different to those of his forebears. He says, “We just squash the plants, we don’t fast and we don’t ferment them now. We are guided by the elder as to how much of it to use... Not working like a shaman but sharing knowledge.”

Elvio speaks warmly of the extraordinary unity the love of Jesus gives across cultural boundaries, so that “through the gospel we all integrate, we become one person if you like” and that the “unity through the gospel that unites us should strengthen us as well, to respond to challenges”. Speaking of the work of the missionaries, Elvio values their accompaniment: “That they came and lived with us, and weren’t afraid of the cultures. That’s why we identify the gospel with relationship, the accompaniment and the work that the missionaries did.” He goes on to speak of the next generation becoming missionaries, reaching out to others in the Chaco and accompanying them as they were accompanied.

Elvio speaks of the value of cultural understandings, a good diet and right care in pregnancy, and stresses the importance of learning from the culture, including for those in the medical profession. He says, “The doctors need to know and to consult what is the indigenous way of treating people: the indigenous norms and rules.”



## Joel Millanguir, a Mapuche Christian living in Chile

Joel Millanguir, a Mapuche Christian living in Chile, again began by first honouring his parents and family for their part in his own coming to faith and growth in discipleship. He describes how coming to faith can bring opposition from within his community. He notes, "When a Mapuche accepts Jesus as Lord and Saviour, they [some other Mapuche] consider him a traitor. They say they have their own culture and we have our own religion, why do we have to accept religion that has come from outside?" At the present time in this particular context there is a move to a radical, and sometimes violent, expression of Mapuche culture in order to reclaim the particular language, dress, music and other cultural traditions of this people group and the land. While many Mapuche are content to live peaceably in some Mapuche regions, there are those who advocate violence against the colonial past to such an extent that recently both Catholic and Protestant churches have been burned down. Speaking as a Mapuche Christian in this context, Joel recognises the need for courage and faith among his fellow believers. He says, "A few years ago we brought out a book called Mapuche and Anglicans, which talks about how the Mapuche took on the Christian faith." Reflecting on the book, Joel speaks of the challenge of determining where the gospel might lead him to affirm or to challenge and reject aspects of his culture. He describes how Christians can maintain Mapuche language, dress, foods, musical instruments, art and working together as a community. Joel remembers a great tradition: "When someone had a job to do and when it needed a lot of work doing, the whole community would join together and help that individual, that family in the work... That desire to help those who are in need, that's good." But a point of conflict with the Mapuche religion and culture is in the Mapuche understanding of God. "There's a male god and a female god and different spirits that they invoke at different moments."

Joel speaks of the value of Christians among the Mapuche people continuing to work missionally, preach the gospel and speak out in advocacy for peace and unity, believing that "the Lord can change lives, families and communities. We had the highest rate of alcoholism in the country. The church used strategies to help people come out of alcoholism, which was consuming a lot of communities and leading families into poverty. The gospel wasn't just about talking. It was something that was practical." He goes on to say that "where the church has continued to grow and to be faithful," the pastors have spoken out in advocacy for "peace and unity". He also speaks of the church as a non-violent mediator between government, multinationals and the Mapuche people in the acquisition of land and the methods of reforestation.


Joel describes the reconciling work of the gospel, evidenced in the missionaries not coming with a Bible and a sword, but with concern and love for those who are most marginalised: installing hospitals and schools, bringing people out of extreme poverty. He notes that "when the Anglican Church arrived at another community, that becomes a community of peace, as Paul says, not with the sword and the shield but with the Word of God".

In summary, these three each expressed the particular blessings that the coming of Christianity has brought in in their own place and among their people, feeling that the gospel

gives dignity, hope and unity within and across their cultures; by giving cross-cultural experience, it has enabled the potentially disenfranchised to find their voice in the wider community.

In writing this piece I have been helped most considerably by Cristóbal Cerón, presbyter of the Anglican Church in Chile, and temporary resident at the CMS community house in Oxford.

To hear more indigenous voices from Latin America, you can find a selection of videos from a landmark Indigenous Peoples Mission Congress held in Salta, Argentina in October 2022 here: <https://churchmissionsociety.org/blog/experience/indigenous-mission-congress-day-by-day/>



**In August 2021 InterVarsity Press published the First Nations Version (FNV) of the New Testament.** It is said to be the first English translation of the New Testament “done by Natives for Natives”, offering a remarkable gift not only to the First Nations peoples but to the wider body of Christ. In this short article Terry Wildman, a First Nations American, tells some of his own story of what inspired him to produce this translation and how he, working with a translation council of 12 Native Americans, brought this very distinctive version of the New Testament into being.



## Story of the First Nations Version project

**By Terry Wildman**

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Boozhoo Nijii bimadazig, Terry Wildman nindishnakaz.

Hello my friends who share this life together with me. My name is Terry Wildman. I was born and raised in Michigan. My ancestry includes Ojibwe from Ontario, Canada, Yaqui from Sonora, Mexico, as well as English, German and Spanish. As a US Veteran, I completed two years of honourable service in the US Army at the end of the Vietnam era. I am married to Darlene Wildman and have five children, eight grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. My wife and I currently live in Maricopa, Arizona, on the traditional lands of the Tohono O'odham and Pima.

Christian ministry has been my life for over 40 years, with over 20 years' pastoral service, 5 years' missionary work among the Hopi, 10 years travelling in cross-cultural evangelism with Native Americans, and over 5 years in Bible translation in partnership with [OneBook of Canada](#). My education has been eclectic and informal, combined with some formal college classes. I have been serving with [Native InterVarsity](#) as the director of spiritual growth and leadership development since June 2020.

The seeds for the First Nations Version were planted in me nearly 20 years ago while living on the Hopi Indian Reservation and serving as a pastor with the American Baptist Sunlight Mission on Second Mesa. I found a Hopi New Testament translation in storage at the church building but soon learned that almost no one could read it. A little later I discovered this was true across North America for all the tribes. While the missionaries were translating the Bible into Native languages, the government, with the help of church organisations, was stripping our Native peoples of their languages through the boarding schools. Adults were not taught to read in their language, and in the boarding schools, children were forbidden to even speak their languages.

After much research on the internet and with different mission organisations, I soon discovered that there was no English translation specifically for Native people. I began to

experiment with rewording portions of Scripture and using them in small groups and in jail ministry with Hopis and Navajos. The response was surprising and encouraging. The men and women began to interact more with Scripture, asking meaningful questions and relating more to what they were reading.

Since my wife and I were recording artists, with two music CDs at that time, I decided to record a spoken-word CD retelling the Biblical story in a Native way, as a condensed story from Creation to Christ. We called it *The Great Story From the Sacred Book*. We submitted it to the Native American Music Awards in 2008 and won the award for Best Spoken Word.

After that, my wife and I began travelling. We shared reworded portions of Scripture at Tribal centres, Native churches, powwows and more. The response was overwhelmingly positive. The CD became one of our best online sellers. As we shared these reworded Scripture portions, we kept getting requests for more. One Native elder told us, “You say it in English the way we think it in our language.” Many kept wanting to know which Bible we were reading from.

Finally, in November 2012 my wife and I attended a meeting on the Torres–Martinez Reservation, in Southern California, to explore reconciliation. Several organisations were involved. I was asked to share some of my Scripture rewordings. I also asked for prayer regarding the need for this kind of translation. After prayer and much encouragement from others, I finally became convinced that I was the one called to do this translation. I put out a request to our supporters and soon a significant sum came in that would cover me working on it for six months.

Beginning with the Christmas story, we soon published a hardcover children’s book, [Birth of the Chosen One](#), to raise awareness of the project. Then, in 2014, we published [When the Great Spirit Walked Among Us](#), a harmony of the Gospels told in the style of the FNV. Finally, in January 2015, I began the verse-by-verse translation of the New Testament. Early in my efforts, on 1 April 2015, we received an email from Wayne Johnson, then CEO of [OneBook Canada](#), a Bible translation organisation. He had discovered our FNV project website from a Google search. In June 2015, after several phone conversations and a meeting together, Rain Ministries, our non-profit, entered into a partnership with OneBook to produce the First Nations Version of the New Testament.

I was encouraged to form a translation council to help guide the process. We formed a council of 12 from different tribal heritages and geographic regions, both elders and young people, men and women. In September and October of that year leaders from OneBook and Wycliffe Associates gathered our council together for a week in Orlando, Florida, and then three weeks in Calgary, Canada. These gatherings helped us determine the method of translation and establish over 180 key terms used in the New Testament.

It was decided that since I had been developing the translation style for several years, I would do all the initial translation, and then other First Nations volunteers would review and make suggestions. More detailed information can be found on our website: [www.FirstNationsVersion.com](http://www.FirstNationsVersion.com)

In the first two years of this project, Rain Ministries produced two paperback books, [Gospel of Luke and Ephesians](#) and [Walking the Good Road: The Gospels, Acts, and Ephesians](#). Several ministries have adopted and adapted the use of these for their Native departments, including Foursquare Native Ministries, Lutheran Indian Ministries, Montana Indian Ministries, Native InterVarsity and Cru Nations. The response has been greater than we expected. The FNV New Testament has been published by InterVarsity Press and was released on 31 August 2021.



On 1 July 2022, InterVarsity Press agreed to publish the First Nations Version of Psalms and Proverbs. We anticipate a two-year time frame and have formed a new translation council to launch the project.

More information about the Psalms and Proverbs project can be found here:

<https://firstnationsversion.com/about/fnv-psalms-proverbs/>

As far as we know, this is the first English translation done by Natives for Natives. Our prayer is that it will open Native hearts to Creator Sets Free (Jesus) and that it will be a gift from our Native people to the dominant culture in the US and to the body of Christ in English-speaking nations worldwide.

Miigwech Bizendowiyeg (thank you for listening)



# Anvil Book Reviews

## **Stephen Spencer, *Archbishop William Temple – A Study in Servant Leadership*, (London: SCM, 2022)**

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Ask either of the two main political parties in the UK to identify their outstanding example of leadership in the twentieth century, and they will likely choose Winston Churchill and Clement Attlee, respective prime ministers for the daunting period of the Second World War and its aftermath. Ask the same question of the Church of England, and plenty would identify a leader of much the same era: William Temple – Archbishop of York, then Canterbury until his untimely death in 1944.

Temple is perhaps best remembered for coining the term “welfare state” and spearheading the Anglican contribution to wartime debates about the kind of society Britain should become once peace came. Yet, Temple’s leadership extended into numerous fields of both ecclesial and national life and did so over several decades. He played an important role in the development of synodical governance in the Church of England and in the pre-war ecumenical movement that led to the World Council of Churches. Temple was also a reforming diocesan bishop, a popular theological writer and missionary, and further negotiated many of the legal requirements for religious instruction and provision in state schools still in place today.

The questions of what makes a good leader and why have long animated the fields of business and politics. Latterly, churches, mission organisations and ministerial training programmes have begun to ask them too. Among existing models and theories of leadership, “servant leadership” – popularised by Robert K. Greenleaf since the 1970s – has obvious appeal for Christians, arguably because it sounds most like “what Jesus would do” or has a ring of appropriate humility for his disciples. There is, of course, far more to the theory than that. According to Ken Blanchard, servant leadership involves both “the leadership part” – providing vision and direction from the way things are to what they can become, and “the implementation part” – personally providing the support to realise that vision, typically through caring, listening and serving everyone else below and around the leader in an organisational hierarchy.

For Stephen Spencer, currently Director for Theological Education at the Anglican Communion Office, William Temple’s life and achievements are a rich and engaging example of the full theory of “servant leadership”. Spencer has consciously written his biography of Temple both to illustrate this theory in modern Christian practice and to examine whether Temple’s experience in the corporate life of the Church adjusts, enriches and deepens the insights of the secular theory.

Spencer has been writing on Temple for many years, and here narrates his life, thought and illustrious career with masterful clarity and poise. The book's structure combines chronological and thematic approaches by both charting Temple's career progression and giving focused attention to his contributions to different dimensions of church and national life – including as a pastoral and spiritual leader, a political leader, an intellectual leader, a wartime leader. Spencer utilises Blanchard's distinction between "leadership" and "implementation" across his study and concludes most chapters by deftly drawing together the threads of his preceding discussion, showing its relevance to the theme of servant leadership.

For some Anvil readers, William Temple may be warily associated with theological liberalism and an overly "social" gospel. Yet, as Spencer reveals, Temple was more consistently engaged by mission, a love of the Bible and evangelistic preaching than such a reputation implies. Temple's theological convictions also evolved, particularly across the 1930s, increasingly emphasising themes of redemption, justification and conversion. This book is therefore recommended to anyone intrigued either by what servant leadership can look like in a hierarchical Church and society, or simply by Temple himself, and how an outstandingly gifted disciple chose to lead in daunting times.

Philip Lockley, Cambridge

### **Roger Schroeder, *Christian Tradition in Global Perspective*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2021)**

This is vintage Roger Schroeder and you will not be disappointed. Obviously in 300 pages he cannot cover the whole of the Christian tradition and choices have to be made. He discusses this in his Introduction and situates the book within the field of "new church history". It attempts to have a polycentric perspective and to focus more on Majority World stories and movements, which have not often featured in the more traditional accounts. He includes the lived experience of Christian communities as well as official councils and tries to place these within the wider historical and political context. There are eight chapters that divide history up in a recognisable way. What gives this book a particular flavour is its framework of focusing on six primary threads of Christian tradition: Scripture; liturgy, sacraments, and art; ministry and organisation; spiritual, religious, and social movements; theological developments; and mission, cultures, and religions. This structure emerged from a course he had taught with Dr Amanda Quantz at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, so in a sense the book has been tried and tested.

The book does what it says it will do. I found the framework a helpful and, for me, a new way to navigate the thousands of years of Christian tradition. Using the same structure for each chapter does inevitably involve some limitations but it also offers a familiarity and an ability to compare and contrast across the ages. There were familiar stories as well as stories I did not know, and so it has certainly expanded my knowledge and appreciation of world Christianity. Did you know that Patriarch Timothy I consecrated a bishop for the Tibetans in the eighth century and that "he assisted a growing number of churches, monasteries and episcopal sees across what are now the nations of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan." (pp.73–4)? Two hundred years later there were 200,000 members of the Kerait Turks ready to be baptised in Northern Mongolia; the gospel having been brought to them by Christian merchants. Stories

like this are found throughout and leave us to ponder what might have been, or indeed what the role of “Christian merchants” might be today.

I particularly appreciated the mission, cultures and religions thread at the end of each section. This thread integrated many of the insights of the chapter in ways that were appropriate for the context of the time but also offered challenges and suggestions for us in our contemporary context. The story of Dominic in an all-night conversation with a Cathar, and Raymond Llull’s mission to Muslims offer us insights into the power of listening and the worth of good conversation. Llull even convinced the King of Aragon to assist in founding a school for training missionaries in the thirteenth century.

Schroeder has also made an effort to tell some less well-known stories and to reframe others. He explains that Catherine of Siena expressed Aquinas’ ideas on redemption in a more experiential way and was one of four women to be named a doctor of the church. He names two Native American Christian women as people important for First Nations Christianity in the seventeenth century. Sadly, he does not tell us more about them. Maybe no more is known about them, but it is good to read the names of these women, as women were so often written out of or ignored in mission history.

The final chapter on the post-Christendom West and non-Western Christianity introduces us to several major reversals in the twentieth century, notably the growth of the church in the Majority World. He quotes Sunquist, who believes that the single most important transformation in the twentieth century was the “rise of the ‘fourth-stream’ churches: those that are independent and rise up, or suddenly spring up, in local context.” (p.274). These are churches that emerge through the inspiration of the Spirit and can be found on every continent. He explores the tremendous growth of the churches of all denominations in the Majority World, the involvement of women in mission and changing attitudes towards culture in this century.

While the coverage is inevitably brief, I found this an informative and helpful overview and appreciated the tracking using the threads of Christian tradition. Liturgy, Sacraments and Art was the briefest thread in each section – I would have liked to read more on art especially, but I was pleased that this was acknowledged and tracked. I would recommend this book for those who want a broader and more global perspective on Christian tradition.

Cathy Ross, Church Mission Society

### **Dale C. Allison Jr., *Encountering Mystery: Religious Experience in a Secular Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2022)**

A mentally healthy young man, staring into the night sky, has a profound numinous experience. A loving, Divine (he supposes) presence briefly engulfs him, accompanied by intense light and leaving a sense of deep calm. He decides to commit his life to Christianity both personally and in academic study. This story, and the whole first chapter, was, like that teenager’s epiphany, both unexpected and beautiful. I cried.

The young man’s difficulty was that neither academia nor the church felt safe places to unpack his mystical experience. They had no room for his reality; he must be wrong, mistaken or freakishly unusual. And yet the evidence Princeton theologian Dale Allison presents here is

that these types of experience are surprisingly common. Self-censorship and uncoordinated research obscure the reality. The book is woven through with many more stories and testimonies, from studies conducted in various times and places, illuminating Allison's argument that to experience what he calls the "metanormal" is far from unusual.

Allison leads us through just a few common categories of encounter, perhaps with an eye to the word "religious" in his subtitle. His research takes in the blissful (as in chapter one) and the less common terrifying encounters; angelic interventions, then pre-death (in the room) and near-death (on the "other side") experiences. He makes the point that while patterns emerge time and again, such occurrences are no respecter of religious faith, moral character, emotional fragility or intellectual capacity, considering that some on their deathbed have little or no brain tissue intact.

*Encountering Mystery* does not divert into the already theologically well-trodden arenas of Christian spirituality or the charismatic, but Allison does take a detour into people's experience of prayer. Why is there so little study of the inner mechanics of praying? What occurs in the mind's eye? His own straw poll shows vast discrepancies.

Any inquiring mind should enjoy Allison's exquisitely academic and engagingly human style. The author's hope, though, must be that this book is picked up by the sort of theologians and church leaders who had nowhere to put the experiences of that teenager on his starlit rooftop. And not least because that young man was Professor Allison himself.

With such readers in mind, then, he moves on to discuss some of the rational, epistemological, theological and, finally, pastoral questions posed by this material. Our church and community leaders, who so often either dismiss the inexplicable or too quickly explain it, would do well not just to read this book, but to hear and hold our own people's stories. We might at least, with Dale Allison, or Mary in Luke's gospel, find space to treasure all the words and ponder them in our hearts.

Simon Baigent, Pioneer mission student, South London

### **James K. A. Smith, *How to Inhabit Time*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022)**

Smith describes *How to Inhabit Time* as an invitation to an adventure, a book to dwell in, a text to contemplate, rather than merely read. His central thesis is that "knowing *when* we are can change everything" (p.xiii). We must learn to inhabit history, recognise that we are temporal beings; in the words of his subtitle, understanding the past, facing the future, living faithfully now.

In his introduction, Smith makes a convincing case for the spiritual significance of timekeeping, and argues against what he calls "nowhen Christianities" which do not understand the time they are in.

The book is divided into six main chapters, interspersed with three meditations on sections of Ecclesiastes. The first meditation is on Eccles. 3:9–15. Smith discusses the ambiguity of 3:10. Is it "I have seen the burden God has laid upon the human race" (NIV) or "I have seen the business

that God has given everyone to be busy with" (NRSV)? Is being in time a burden or a gift, or both?

Chapter one explores what it is to be a temporal creature, critiquing the Christian tendency to nostalgia and discussing how to engage with the fossils of history. Chapter two then examines how to learn from ghosts. There are some particularly powerful short reflections in this chapter, including on the spiritual lessons to be learned from the different growth rates of tropical and arctic trees, and the migration of the monarch butterfly. Smith notes we're neither blank slates nor robots, but God's creatures in the flow of time.

The second meditation is on Eccles. 7:10–14, on the dangers of nostalgia and the march of time. Chapter three then explores time as *kairos*, noting how Jesus calls followers, not simply eyewitnesses, and that Christianity can collapse time, interweaving the lives of the saints regardless of their chronological placement. Chapter four builds on this with an invitation to embrace the ephemeral, urging us to learn to love what we'll lose. One way Smith recommends we do this is to leave our phones at home and simply savour the moment. He asks, "What if enjoying mortality means we stop chasing the wind and learn how to hoist a sail?" (p.103).

The third meditation explores Eccles. 11:7–12:8, noting even the mist and vapour that obscures is a gift of God. Chapter five then invites us to inhabit our now. Through meditations on gardening, Smith discusses the importance of living in whatever season of life we are in, which requires Spirit-filled discernment and the courage to let go. While the Bible may not change, the way we hear it does, depending on what season we are in. Chapter six encourages us to not live ahead of time, reflecting on Augustine's *City of God*, and 1 Thess., among other texts. We should be orientated to the future, but living in the present, crying both "how long Lord?" and "maranatha!".

The Epilogue contains a beautiful post-Communion prayer, including the line "We thank you that in you we are kept safe forever, and that the broken fragments of our history are gathered up in the redeeming act of your dear Son" (p.171). This sums up Smith's point in *How to inhabit time*, that God holds us, cares for us and sends us out in his service.

*How to Inhabit Time* is a text to treasure; to read right through, but also to dip into. To take your time with, to savour. Highly recommended for anyone looking for a thought-provoking exploration of what it means to live a faithful Christian life.

Tom Wilson, St Philip's Centre, Leicester

### **Mark Scanlan, *An Interweaving Ecclesiology: The Church, Mission and Young People*, (London: SCM, 2021)**

The book is billed on its back cover as offering "a fresh vision of Christian community as constructed for and by participants as potential ecclesial spaces" to create church. Its focus is on youth ministry, but it has wider appeal as a result of Scanlan's helpful analysis and suggestions for how to establish a faith community. Scanlan himself declares that the book is about church, mission and young people.



The book is in three parts. The first part is more theoretical, providing a theological and sociological platform for his argument. One of his key missional arguments here is that we must be willing to be led by the young people themselves. We must challenge our own assumptions as to why young people do not affiliate themselves with the church. These are important missiological principles – be attentive to the context, listen to and learn from the locals! The second part develops what Scanlan calls “an interweaving ecclesiology” by presenting us with case studies of two Christian youth groups. This is important work because it is always interesting to see what is happening on the ground in real life, or the lived experience as we now call it. He explores how these groups already have an ecclesial imagination and how that can blossom into a fuller ecclesial life. However, this will be on their terms and with their leading. The final part is a more general analysis and critical conversation between Fresh Expressions, pioneer ministry and the church more generally.

The second part is important for developing his metaphor of an interweaving ecclesiology which I like – it is evocative, visual, and dynamic. It suggests a kind of movement and even disruption as interweaving happens. Scanlan resists setting or creating “solid boundaries” (p.157) perhaps picking up Pete Ward’s metaphor of liquid church. In her recent book, *Disclosing Church* (Routledge, 2020) Clare Watkins writes about the “edgelessness” of church; she wants to see church as a kind of verbal expression of what church could be rather than in the more static noun form. This is what Scanlan seems to be articulating – that there is a hidden ecclesial discourse within these youth groups that can disrupt and interrupt our usual ways of thinking about church. He argues that church has an inherent fluidity in its very nature, is dynamic and will always be emerging in new spaces, and so requires a kind of ambiguity and porosity. He suggests a kind of reversal in ecclesiology so that instead of beginning with an idea of what church might look like, we wait for the ecclesial life to emerge with the aid and discernment of the Spirit. This begins by people coming to know Christ within that community and allowing the ecclesial space and form to emerge. Scanlan goes on to discuss in some detail the outworkings of these ideas.

The third part takes these ideas further in a conversation around Fresh Expressions and pioneering. I was especially interested in his insights around pioneering, which he believes could release creativity and allow both attentiveness and ambiguity to be embraced. He defines pioneering “as the ability to live in the ambiguity of the interaction of church and not church, in the definitional uncertainty of potential ecclesial spaces” (p.233). He claims that the pioneer can remind us of our own fragility and ambiguity and is one who can bring to light those hidden discourses and spaces where Christ is at work. Scanlan is a fan of ambiguity and picks up on Jonny Baker’s writings on ambiguity and imagination. Baker believes that ambiguity creates space for imagination and that the church needs much more of this. Scanlan agrees and believes that it is through exercising imagination and living with ambiguity and fragility that “new threads might be woven into the tapestry of the church” (p.234). This is an ongoing process – it is never finished.

So, while this is a book born out of experience of being with young people, it has much wider resonance and challenge for all of us. Of course, there is much more. Scanlan looks at the nature of the institution, the role and place of sacraments, the importance of relationships, the place of Scripture, pastoral care and prayer brought into conversation with the practices of actual youth groups. I warmly commend this to anyone interested faith, mission and wondering just what church might be in our times.

Cathy Ross, Church Mission Society

## **Anthony Reddie, *Introducing James H. Cone: A personal exploration*, (London: SCM Press, 2022)**

This is Anthony Reddie on top form. It might seem unusual to talk about a theology book as a page turner, but this certainly was for me. Reddie's passion for James Cone, Black theology and racial justice come through clearly and powerfully. This book is not a simple introduction to either the person of Cone or his work but, as the subtitle expresses, it is a very personal exploration for the author, and one which benefits from this autobiographical approach. It is no easy task, but Reddie somehow manages to tell his own story in a way which draws you in to his love and appreciation of Cone. This is a world that Reddie knows intimately and he deftly weaves history, personal stories, Cone's writings and life, and a wealth of other writings into a coherent and engaging read. It is a book written for its time, with references to Covid-19, Trump and of course George Floyd, who was murdered by a policeman in Minneapolis in May 2020, meaning it is also a rich cultural commentary with a strong challenge to turn words to action.

The book is made up of two parts, the first part exploring Cone's work through the theological themes of God, Jesus Christ, the Church and anthropology (Black people and Black power), and the second introducing key texts of Cone as chosen by Reddie. In the first part Reddie begins with an introduction to Cone's "theological persona", looking at the challenges of being a Black person in academic theology and the way Cone has navigated that world. Each of the following chapters pick up the key themes bringing challenges and insights that disrupt the status quo, confront dominant assumptions present in theology, churches and society, and draw out the liberative themes present in Cone's theology. This book is deeply rooted in Cone's work but does not provide a systematic account of Cone's arguments, rather it weaves together stories, theological accounts and contemporary events to show how Cone's Black liberation theology works. For this reason I would actually recommend this as a very good introduction to Black theology as a whole, not just the work of Cone. Reddie draws from a wealth of voices and accounts and on reaching the end of the book I had a growing list of authors I wanted to explore further.

Part two takes a deeper dive into key texts, maintaining the story-telling style and continuing to locate Cone within a broader landscape of Black theology and academic theology as a whole. This is certainly no hagiography and Reddie is balanced with his account, taking critical voices seriously and developing his own critiques of Cone. The chapter focused on Cone's book *The God of the Oppressed* was a particularly powerful chapter that laid bare the problem with "whiteness" as a way of viewing the world and the prophetic challenge Cone offers.

There are a lot of things this book does not do: it is not an in-depth biography of Cone, and it is not a systematic account of his theology, but it is pretty clear that Reddie never intended it to be so. It is a passion project, which I think draws the reader into the world of Cone and his significance for today in a way that a more straightforward biographical or theological account could not. I highly recommend this book on multiple levels: as an introduction to Cone, to Black theology and to Reddie's own life and work. It is a challenging read due to the way Reddie calls those of us with privilege, particularly those who benefit from "whiteness", to recognise that privilege and to confront systemic injustice which we have been conditioned to not see. As one would expect from Reddie, he does not pull his punches. He presents a clear and direct critique of whiteness in theology and church through the work of Cone, and

yet remains generous, welcoming everyone to participate in the world in a more liberative and just way.

James Butler, Church Mission Society

**Kwok Pui-Lan, *Postcolonial Politics and Theology: Unraveling Empire for a Global World*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021)**

Kwok Pui-Lan wrote this book during the ongoing protests in Hong Kong and in the middle of the coronavirus pandemic. As she reflected on these and other major world events, she struggled to find theological resources to help her make sense of what was going on in the Asia Pacific region. Much of the political theology that she found remained immersed in a Eurocentric mindset, so she decided to use a postcolonial approach to reflect on these issues. She claims that we also need imagination to do this, so she defines postcolonial imagination as “a desire, a determination and a process of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome, which takes many forms and guises.” (p.10). She goes on to critique the classic understanding of political theology and proposes a transnational and multicultural articulation of the origins of political theology to try to avoid a Eurocentric bias. She remains true to this throughout the book where she draws on a broad range of scholars and theologians to decentre the West.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part is a historical and sociological analysis of Empire with particular reference to race, religion and the role of American Empire. Much of this may be familiar, but to see it through the eyes of a feminist Hong-Kong Chinese theologian is illuminating. For example, the explanation of the concept of *tongzhi* with reference to identity can be seen as a postcolonial “gesture” that challenges homogeneity and binary classifications.

The second part explores decolonising theology by looking for different images and sources. She claims that we need to understand how many Christian symbols have been borrowed from imperial cultures and how this has reinforced Empire, so we need to look for alternative sources – the forgotten, hidden or silenced voices. Too often theology has been done by elites, clergy, the academics (I note the irony here of reviewing such a book), while we need to hear the voices of lay people, women and those outside the gilded circles. There are informative chapters on Asian feminist theologies and a fascinating case study of the Hong Kong protests and civil disobedience.

I found the final section on practices the most helpful. Her chapter on “Teaching Theology from a Global Perspective” is a must read, where she raises questions of pedagogy, approach and what it actually means to teach theology from a global perspective. These are questions with which we wrestle constantly as a teaching team at CMS. How do we avoid treating Majority World students as representatives of their entire culture? How do we help Western students feel they have something to share? She begins this chapter with a compelling quotation from African American scholar and activist bell hooks, “As a classroom community, our capacity to generate excitement is deeply affected by our interest in one another, in hearing one another’s voices, in recognising one another’s presence” (p.141). That is the dream. There are chapters on postcolonial preaching, inter-religious solidarity, peacebuilding and

finally a postcolonial critique of mission. These chapters are full of practical examples and stories. If you want idea on how to decolonise preaching and worship, you will find some here.

I warmly commend this book. It is a book that engages theology with our current issues such as #BLM, climate change, the political struggles in Hong Kong, the ongoing injustices of the pandemic. These are the issues that we need to discuss and reflect on theologically and she brings a perspective and insights that will be challenging for some Western readers. It is not an easy or comfortable read but these are the books that stay with me and force me to ponder and reconsider a Eurocentric mindset that needs constant disruption.

Cathy Ross, Church Mission Society

### **Miranda Harris and Jo Swinney, *A Place at the Table: Faith, Hope and Hospitality* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2022)**

I found *A Place at the Table* to be a beautiful book that deftly defies literary categorisation. It is edited and part-written by Jo Swinney, together with gathered writings of her mother, Miranda Harris, who tragically died in a car accident along with two friends and colleagues in South Africa in 2019.

This book, arising out of that time of grief and loss for Jo and her family, is a combination of memoir, biography, lived-theology, Christian discipleship and a missional reminder to all of God's ever-welcoming love. Jo describes the content as a "smorgasbord". This is apt, as the rich variety of writing is arranged to correspond with a meal's structure: hunger, preparation, welcome, at the table, the clean-up, the forever feast.

Each chapter has the following aspects crafted through it:

- theological and explanatory content from Jo.
- notes gleaned from Miranda's writing: over 20 years of drafting about community and belonging, notes of talks, newsletters and more.
- creative retelling of meal-based Bible stories.
- edited sections of Miranda's journal entries from 1983–2019.

The last of these was recovered from the river following her fatal accident, which is extremely moving and worthy of reflection as she quotes 2 Tim. 4:18: "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory ..."

Peter and Miranda Harris were the pioneer founders of A Rocha, which describes itself as: "a global family of conservation organizations working together to care for creation" [www.arocha.org](http://www.arocha.org). Through her collated writings in this book, Miranda paints a compelling picture of their family life, rooted in A Rocha communities in Portugal and France, detailing the way they lived out A Rocha's founding value of community (one of five values beginning with the letter "C"). Jo Swinney has become the director of communications for A Rocha International, so naturally the history and heart of A Rocha's eco-narrative permeate this book, and important details of her own life story are included among Miranda's writings.

Jo sets out her hope that the reader of this book will gain a deeper personal understanding of the hospitality God offers each of us, and be moved to experience the joy and wonder of

hospitality by practically reaching out in welcome, especially beyond our comfort zones, to build significant relationships in community.

The variety of sources of writing give this book a vibrant and reflective feel, and the editors have tried hard to clarify the different voices using distinct fonts and illustrated page breaks. However, personally I found the multi-faceted structure confusing at times, being unsure whose voice I was reading, especially if I dipped into the book. In trying to tie so much material together, I also wondered if the opportunity to dive deeper into each topic was lost, for example drawing out learnings about hospitality across more diverse cultures, or greater critical discourse into justice and equity for the growing number of people in food poverty within the UK and across the world.

In a similar way to Miranda and Jo, my passion for welcome and hospitality began when I lived in a missional Christian community in London. Through a ministry of presence, we wanted to learn to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbours as ourselves” Luke 10:27. We invited many people into our home, which initially developed into a weekly bring-and-share drop-in meal with neighbours and friends, and subsequently became a Fresh Expression congregation called The Table.

For this reason, I resonate with very many aspects of this book, but would recommend it to a wide audience because it is readable and accessible. Both for those new to considering God’s welcome, and for those of us for whom hospitality is a foundation of faith, this book offers an inspirational life story, with basic theological background and practical “how-to” pointers. For example, the bibliography includes recipe books! I loved the simple points of challenge, and the sparkling creative prose. This may also be a book to gift to others, as I am sure that Jo also hopes that those undecided about Christian faith will be impacted by her mother’s testimony of a God who loves each of us, and longs to transform us, with the ultimate assurance that Miranda is now celebrating the “forever feast” of the “best meats and finest wines” (Isa. 25:6) with Jesus.

Idina Dunmore, Pioneer Curate at St John, Southall Green

### **Delroy Hall, *A Redemption Song: Illuminations on Black British Pastoral Theology and Culture*, (London: SCM Press, 2021)**

This is a book that offers a much-needed exploration of Black British pastoral theology from Delroy Hall, lecturer in counselling and psychotherapy at Leeds Beckett University. Hall draws on his pastoral experience and practical examples in this important work.

From the outset, I found myself glad that Hall returned to a childhood ambition to become a writer. I cannot help but wonder what other gems he might have written over the last 50 years had his talent been encouraged when he was a child (p.ix). It is too late to answer that question. However, in this book, he has proven that he brings an important voice for this generation, as he skilfully and with empathy shows how Black men can help themselves through self-love in his chapter *Towards a Theology of Black Men*.

I must confess, early on I wondered why his focus was on men, being a woman reading this text. It did not take long for me to understand why, and I commend him for it. *A Redemption*

*Song* is a book I want to put in the hands of every Black man I know, in my own family and wider circles.

Hall does not shy away from the horrific history of the transatlantic slave trade, and he casts a forensic eye upon the disastrous impact it has had on those brutally wrenched from their homelands, and their descendants. If you want to gain an insight into the history and some of the impact of the historic slave trade, this is an excellent and accessible way to begin that journey of learning, as Hall brings a corrective focus to earlier, more sanitised narratives. The author powerfully interrogates this hard history. His handling of “The Good Friday of the Middle Passage” (p.18) is masterful – he brings truth telling, and an unflinching examination of the violence done to enrich and “advance the industrialisation of the British empire” (p.18). He does not shy away from clearly making the link between the terrors experienced in Africa and the Caribbean, and the tortuous journeys in between, with the fortunes made in the UK.

Hall deftly interacts with other Black British theologians like Kate Coleman, Robert Bedford, and Anthony Reddie, as well as African American theologians like James Cone. It is as though he gathers some of the greatest thinkers into a room and begins to carefully engage with their offerings. I felt richer for it, and eager to read more of their works. Examples that he has woven in from history include the voices of those who paved the way for the emancipation of their people, such as the revolutionary Baptist deacon Sam Sharpe, and writer and abolitionist Equiano. Such accounts cause this reviewer to want to revisit these stories, these histories, looking through the lens of resurrection.

Suffering and hope are pivotal themes, and I was thankful for how Hall embeds the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection throughout the text. His chapter titles give some clue: *The Middle Passage as Existential Crucifixion; Body Broken Eucharistic Violence and the Sam Sharpe Revolt; Eucharistic Encounters, Towards an African Caribbean Diasporan Pastoral Theology*.

The provision of questions at the end of each chapter plus a wealth of resources will help the book spark much needed conversations. I can imagine a group of Black men using this as a book to study their way through history, their own stories and the passion story of Christ. I believe they would not be the same as they were at the beginning as they encounter the suffering and sacrificial Christ in its pages. Hall sets out to offer a Black theology in his quest for the care of souls, minds and bodies, and he does it well.

Delroy Hall has served his readers well with his book, and I encourage people to read it – to get an insight into Black British pastoral theology. It is a book of hopeful redemption, in the words of Bob Marley (p.92). It is an ode to the “resilience of the African spirit... and the enduring belief in the creator and its enduring legacy for people of African descent” (p.11).

Rosie Hopley, CMS MA student

### **Kelly Brown Douglas, *Resurrection Hope: A Future Where Black Lives Matter*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2021)**

This book is divided into two parts and, as Brown Douglas says, traces her own journey of faith. The first part traces and explores what she calls America’s corrupted moral imaginary with respect to African Americans and race. The second part is a kind of theological testimony



where she considers what it would mean to free the moral imaginary from a white knowing. She explores the ideas of reparations, “defunding the police” and the implications for the white community. She concludes by meeting the resurrected Jesus in Galilee as she did at a #BLM protest.

In the first part of the book, she argues that our moral imaginary has been corrupted by whiteness. She argues this compellingly with detailed examples of an anti-Black narrative from Aristotle through to Origen and Jerome, the slave trade, Jefferson and Lincoln, Woodrow Wilson to the MAGA narrative, where she sees “great” as a euphemism for “white”. She claims that Aristotle associated cowardice with the colour black, that in early Greek thought blackness was associated with hypersexuality, and that Origen associated a sinful soul with blackness – so, we begin to see where some of these tropes about blackness originated. Fast forward to the fifteenth century and the insulting and graphic description of the first captive Africans on European soil in 1444, then to the anti-black notions in Shakespeare and Kant’s racial theory, where he considered “the Negro race” the lowest in the human hierarchy. Jefferson, the father of America’s democracy, was a slave holder and held white supremacist convictions – extraordinary when he penned the self-evident truth “that all men are created equal”. Then we have the Jim Crow laws and President Woodrow Wilson who showed an anti-black film in the White House that presented the Ku Klux Klan as heroes. And then Trump. And this is just the first chapter. In the light of current discussions in the UK, I found the second chapter fascinating, where she argues that monuments and statues are not innocent. She is writing about Confederate statues and monuments and claims that they are powerful symbols of social memory that reify white privilege. This caused me to think about all the statues that celebrate Empire in Britain, not to mention the tiny percentage of statues that are women. The next chapter looks at the concept and legacy of white silence and the harm that has done to both Black and white people.

Part One sets the scene and paints a stark picture of what it means to live as a Black person in USA today. Part Two is more hopeful despite this bleak portrait. Brown Douglas claims that social memory can be reconfigured by remembering correctly, and here discusses in some detail the concept of anamnesis, which can change the gaze through which history is viewed. She also calls for proximity, essentially friendship. 75 per cent of white Americans have entirely white networks, and faith communities are equally segregated. Genuine friendship is needed that can begin to understand, see and feel the blatant racism and fear that Black people experience. She calls for a “defunding” of the police whose violence towards Black men is so hugely disproportionate.

Each chapter begins with a text from her son recounting some horrific incident or explaining his despair and lack of hope. Her final chapter deals with this: Where is the hope? Ultimately, she finds it in the Jesus of Galilee. She claims that Jesus’ invitation to his disciples is to go back to Galilee to return to a life-giving ministry. She discovers this, as well as the gift of laughter, which is subversive, at a #BLM protest. You will have to read the book to see how this happens.

I recommend this book, not only to gain a deeper insight into the American context of racism, but also because it throws light on our own prejudices, sacred cows and our own racism. You will be uncomfortable, challenged, informed and hopefully enabled to make a difference.

Cathy Ross, Church Mission Society

**Eve Parker, *Trust in Theological Education: Deconstructing “Trustworthiness” for a Pedagogy of Liberation*, (London: SCM Press, 2022)**

I have rarely felt so ill-at-ease as I did when I found myself at theological college. I was reassured repeatedly (primarily by white men) that I would “adjust”, but it was only when I was able to articulate for myself the cause of my dis-ease that things started to fall into place. For me, it was the realisation that patriarchy was, as I expressed it, “mortared into the walls” of the august institution I attended; for Eve Parker, it is the colonisation of theological education that alienates, excludes and diminishes those who do not fit into the male, Western model of ministry that theological education promotes.

Parker’s book is a clarion call for systemic change in theological education, and therefore should be read by theological educators, decision makers in Ministry Division and those within dioceses contributing to the conversation around discernment, vocation and formation. But it would also be usefully read as a salve for those who have felt the discriminatory sting of ministerial formation located within an androcentric, Western, white norm.

Eve Parker’s forensic deconstruction of theological education arrives at a time of an overarching debate around trust in institutions. Following the damning conclusions of the IICSA (Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse) report into sexual abuse, and simmering polarisation around issues of sexuality and gender, the Christian church is no longer a place that necessarily engenders trust.

Parker suggests that this lack of trust reflects systemic failures in theological training, which are grounded in colonialism and patriarchy, and which ultimately fail to fully equip “students with the skills to bring about God’s kin-dom on earth.”<sup>115</sup> Her central question in the book is whether theological education has “the capacity to help the Church bring an end to racism, sexism and classism, abolish socio-economic inequality, gender violence and environmental degradation?”

This core question is why, for me, the book is so important. Parker’s thesis is not merely an identity polemic arguing for comfier spaces for women, LGBTI+, non-binary, Black and brown people, but a total unearthing and inspection of the foundations of theological education. She encourages the reader to engage with epistemological questions and suggests that our white, Western, androcentric ways of knowing have colonised theological education to the detriment of wider social justice.

Parker argues that theological education has an epistemological problem, which requires a paradigm shift. The existing paradigm is that white/Western (predominantly male) theologies are the “norm” and world theologies are contextual. Parker argues that, by shifting world theologies from the periphery of theological learning, we may begin to decolonise our thinking and practice. Furthermore, she suggests that the division between “systematic” and “contextual” theologies is an erroneous one: that, in reality, all theologies are contextual and should be acknowledged as such in theological institutions. “Segregating theological voices

<sup>115</sup> Parker, along with other feminist and liberation theologians including mujerista theologian Ada María Isasi-Díaz, preferences “kin-dom” over “kingdom” stressing the egalitarian nature of the gospel preached by Jesus, as opposed to the more hierarchical structures of a patriarchal society.

into contextual theologies enables the continuation of white supremacy theology because the norm remains unchallenged, whereas decolonising the curriculum challenges the dominant culture” (p.152).

Possibly I am projecting my frustrations onto her, but I hear Parker’s voice as one of righteous anger at the damage and limitations perpetuated by too narrow a vision of theological education, which marginalises the voices, experiences and theologies of those outside of the Westernised academy to the detriment of the church and society as a whole.

I suspect that Eve Parker’s book will be intensely polarising. Those of us who have experienced theological training as somewhat traumatising due to an inescapable feeling of “I don’t belong here” will celebrate Parker’s ground-breaking book, which dissects theological education with a decolonising eye. But those who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo will likely regard Parker’s challenge as an existential threat to the orthodoxy that helps maintain their privileged positions.

Sue Hart, Vicar Holy Trinity, Tidworth

### **Colin Smith, *Using a Missional Framework: How to Discern a Missional Approach in Different Contexts*, (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2023)**

As vicar of a rural benefice, this booklet is a perfect source of missional inspiration as we seek to reimagine and re-energise our post-pandemic priorities. What is God calling us to be across our four villages and new housing developments, across the generations and with the primary schools? The Cynefin framework that Colin Smith imaginatively explores will help us to discern where we are across the things we are already doing – collectively, individually – and to identify the gaps that God is inviting us to step into with him. Some of our mission is simple, some is complicated, but much is complex. There is no ready formula or solution to these “wicked” problems and “fantastic” opportunities. As Colin writes on page 4, God is encouraging us to “remove our shoes, place our feet on hitherto unknown ground and just walk, reliant only on the leading of the Spirit and the company we find along the way.” We don’t currently have any pressing decisions or burning platforms that require us to solve a chaos with God’s help, but you might have.

If you are looking to re-invigorate the life and witness of your church and discern how God is calling you to use your God-given gifts, this is a great place to start. In the introduction, Colin uses a powerful metaphor from Anthony Doerr’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *All the Light We Cannot See* to get his reader thinking about how, as a leader, they might be constraining God’s creative Spirit. Where are we, as a Church, being held back by existing and new models of mission and ministry? Where is God inviting us to walk out into the unknown with him and have a go? It is a highly energising idea. Perfect if your church needs a refresh after the constraints and challenges of the Covid-19 years.

Chapter 4 provides a template for a mission-discerning workshop. I can see myself using this in my own benefice to affirm what we are already doing, identify things that we could stop and explore the complex areas where we can take some fresh steps under the Spirit’s guiding. As part of this, I’d look to see who God is inviting to join these creative ventures – which

church members have the gifts and/or the heart to go on an uncharted walk. Learning by doing feels so right at this stage of the Church's life and evolution, as we seek to be "Simpler, Humbler and Bolder".

Do take a look at this Grove booklet. And may the Spirit give you the courage and creativity to step out into the unknown. It is a place full of possibilities!

Revd Katrina Hutchins, Vicar of Mears Ashby and Hardwick and Sywell with Overstone

### **Victoria Turner (Ed.), *Young, Woke and Christian: Words from a Missing Generation*, (London: SCM Press, 2022)**

Victoria Turner curates an array of thoughtful reflections from 13 young contributors, who come from a variety of church backgrounds and traditions, offering boundary pushing views on a range of subjects including purity culture, feminism, ableism and mental health, and maybe something new and distinct on climate, racial inclusion, trans identity, food poverty and homelessness. Some of the contributions from the 168-page collection really clicked with me, others didn't.

The word "woke" in the title needs to be addressed, as it is powerfully charged with a rich history and can often be misinterpreted. In his prologue, Anthony Reddie highlights the intention of using the word "woke" in the title, articulating that "wokeness" is used here with a progressive intention. Reddie talks of a new line of action in liberation theology with its focus on the experiences of the young.

A chapter that stuck out for me is Nosayaba Idehen's, "Racial Inclusion: Guidelines to Being a more Racially Inclusive Church" where the advice is for the church "not to welcome the black family with tales of mission to some distant African country, which could be interpreted as micro-aggression. Instead involve them with church leaderships creating inclusivity through affirmative action and attention to the micro-aggressions that permeate church culture. Be direct." Don't just ask for volunteers to do the flowers, that will only ever attract the same five people! Although I liked this chapter, I am not sure how "woke" it is, even using the book's definition of the word.

Another interesting chapter is Josh Mock's, "Queer, Christian and Tired". Here Mock emphasises that "As a queer Christian we must be unapologetic in our queerness" and act from a place of "queer celebration". He explores the frustrations of dialogue with oppressive institutions, which seems more relevant than ever with LLF and the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Church. Josh Mock alludes to the turning over of tables, by Jesus, to justify radical action, saying, "His overturning of the tables was a demonstrative action, designed to challenge economic exploitation and a 'provocative assault on the priesthood and aristocracy'." He says Jesus' transgressive act offers a model of transgressive practice for queer Christians, going on to say that he views the oppression of queer Christians as blasphemous to the gospel message. Personally, I am uncomfortable with what I would call a "hermeneutic of convenience".

I think my absolute favourite chapter is Shermara Fletcher's chapter on homelessness. She offers a good theological reflection that seems so obvious and yet most of us aren't doing it. Under a subheading, "radical Inclusivity", she says "The Church should practise Christian

diakonia, which is a deeper type of koinonia that describes a community that ‘works for the welfare of all its members as well as helping to build the reign of God throughout the entire world’”. This implies that homeless and hungry people should be wholly inside the structures of established churches.

I both loved and hated this book. The chapters are wide ranging with an assortment of authors raising issues and addressing them from a theologically reflective viewpoint. Each author owns their chapter, and each chapter is written from their place, their time and in their own words. The varied styles could be a strength or a weakness. For me, at times a weakness, as I like things to be ordered and methodical. That said, the author of each chapter shows what some of the social justice issues are and offers a possible solution. It’s up to us to respond in our own context, in our own time and in our own words. The book title suggests that young people are “the missing generation”. We need to ask ourselves if that’s true. Are they missing from God’s mission, or are they just missing from church? The issues presented in this book need to be addressed, not because they are popular with youth but because they are the gospel!

Vicki Gale, Frontier Youth Trust



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