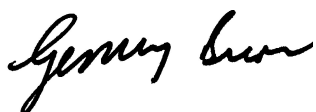


Land and Reconciliation in Australia: A Theological Approach

Submitted by Geoffrey Livingston Burn, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by Research in Theology, June 2010.

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.



Warning

This thesis may contain the names and images of deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons.

Abstract

This thesis is a work of Christian theology. Its purpose is twofold: firstly to develop an adequate understanding of reconciliation at the level of peoples and nations; and secondly to make a practical contribution to resolving the problems in Australia for the welfare of all the peoples, and of the land itself.

The history of the relationships between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia has left many problems, and no matter what the non-Indigenous people try to do, the Indigenous peoples of Australia continue to experience themselves as being in a state of siege. Trying to understand what is happening, and what can be done to resolve the problems for the peoples of Australia and the land, have been the implicit drivers for the theological development in this thesis.

This thesis argues that the present generation in any trans-generational dispute is likely to continue to sin in ways that are shaped by the sins of the past, which explains why Indigenous peoples in Australia find themselves in a stage of siege, even when the non-Indigenous peoples are trying to pursue policies which they believe are for the welfare of all. The only way to resolve this is for the peoples of Australia to seek reconciliation. In particular, the non-Indigenous peoples need to repent, both of their own sins, and the sins of their forebears.

Reconciliation processes have become part of the international political landscape. However, there are real concerns about the justice of pursuing reconciliation. An important part of the theological development of this thesis is therefore to show that pursuing reconciliation establishes justice. It is shown that the nature of justice, and of repentance, can only be established by pursuing reconciliation. Reconciliation is possible because God has made it possible, and is working in the world to bring reconciliation.

Because land is an essential part of Indigenous identity in Australia, the history of land in court cases and legislation in Australia over the past half century forms an important case study in this work. It is shown that, although there was significant repentance within the non-Indigenous legal system in Australia, the degree of repentance available through that legal system is inherently limited, and so a more radical approach is needed in order to seek reconciliation in Australia. A final chapter considers what the non-Indigenous people of Australia need to do in order to repent.

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Acknowledgements

The work of reconciliation is an open-ended process. Many have helped to make this contribution to the process of reconciliation possible.

I began this research whilst in St Austell, and Tim Gorringe of Exeter University agreed to supervise it. I came to Tim with a desire to work on a political theology of reconciliation in conversation with a real problem, and I am grateful to him for suggesting that I focus on land in Australia. When we moved to Kent, so that Helen could work full-time in the Eythorne Benefice and in theological training in the Diocese of Canterbury, Gareth Jones kindly agreed to take over supervision of my research, and he arranged for my fees to be waived by Canterbury Christ Church University College. The College's inter-library loan facility made doing this research possible. Besides Gareth, Stephen Barton and Robin Gill, members of my PhD panel there, gave valuable help. Ralph Norman, at Canterbury Christ Church University College, read through my disparate pieces of work and helped me see what I was trying to say. When we moved west again with work, Tim Gorringe took me back on again as a student. I am grateful for the way that he has steered this project to completion. David Horrell has kindly read and advised me on the New Testament material, more than once. Stephen Barton has pointed me towards some particularly crucial articles and books throughout my research. At critical points, Walter Moberly has been a helpful dialogue partner on some of the biblical material, particularly my reading of the Old Testament, and more generally on 'biblical theology'.

An important part of my research was the trip I made to Australia in 2005. John and Norma Brown, helped me organise my trip, suggesting people to visit, making some contacts for me, and provided generous hospitality when I was in Canberra. John has had many leading roles that have arisen out of his work in the Uniting Church, including co-Chair of the National Sorry Day Committee, co-chair of the Myall Creek Memorial Committee, and UCA (Uniting Church of Australia) covenanting officer. In Darwin, Pat McIntyre, barrister, leading player in establishing mediation in Australia, and part of the Mawul Rom project, was a generous host, gave me the use of his Chambers, told me who to see, and made many introductions for me. I greatly enjoyed our numerous conversations late into the night. I am grateful to all those who gave their time to speak me on the trip, including: Greg Anderson; Howard Amery (Aboriginal Resources and Development Services, Uniting Church of Australia); John Bond (Secretary to the National Day of Healing); Pru Phillips-Brown (Deputy Director, Department of the Chief Minister, Office of Indigenous Policy in the Northern Territory Government); George Browning (Anglican Bishop of Canberra and Goulburn); Mark Byrne (Project and Advocacy Officer, UNIYA Jesuit Social Justice Centre, Sydney); Barry Clarke (Media Officer of the Northern Land Council); Fred Chaney (Deputy Director of the Native Title Tribunal and former Federal government minister); Gillian Cowlshaw (anthropologist); Mick Dodson (Professor of Law at the ANU, key Aboriginal leader, on many national bodies); Sue Duncombe and Alan Ogg (leading players in establishing mediation in Australia, and part of the Mawul Rom project); Charmaine Foley (Queensland Coordinator for Reconciliation project from 1996-2000); Philip Freirer (Anglican Bishop of the Northern Territory); Norman Habel (theologian); Jackie Huggins (leading Aboriginal activist working for reconciliation, academic, and on many national bodies); Kimberly Hunter (Chair of ATSIC in Darwin); Jack Lewis (Barrister); Mike Lynskey (Director of Reconciliation Australia); Malcolm McClintock (part of a reconciliation group in Sydney); Michael O'Donnell (Barrister); Ian O'Reilly (Chair of the Northern Territory reconciliation group); Debbie Rose (anthropologist);

John and Elaine Telford (NSW coordinators for the Reconciliation Project, and Elaine is also a key member of the Women's Reconciliation Network); Graeme Vines (Dean of Anglican students at Nungalinga College); Jessica Weir (formerly with AIATSIS and then a postgraduate student of Debbie Rose); Neil Westbury (Executive Officer of the Department of the Chief Minister, Office of Indigenous Policy, Northern Territory Government, and secretary of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation and advisor in the Prime Minister's department (96-99), and first CEO of Reconciliation Australia). Henry Reynolds took time out of his European tour to speak with me in London. Thank you to my parents, Jim and Joan Burn, who looked after Anna and Catherine at their home in Sydney whilst I travelled backwards and forwards, and also for looking after me when I was in Sydney. Also to my uncle, David Burn, who provided a car for me to use whilst I was in Australia.

The list of people who saw me when I was in Australia is testimony to the generosity and openness of Australian people to entertain and speak with someone who they had never met before. I hope that this piece of work is worthy of their generosity.

Early on in my research, Corneliu Constantineanu kindly gave me a copy of his literature review on reconciliation. The following people have kindly and helpfully engaged with me either in conversation, or by correspondence, or by sending me copies of their work: Anthony Bash, Dianne Bell, Cilliers Breytenbach, Douglas Campbell, Warren Carter, Rosemary Crumlin, Frederick Danker, Stephen Dawes, Barbara Hill, John Inge, Paul Joyce, Andrew Louth, Ian McIntosh, Margaret Mitchell, Roger Mitchell, Walter Moberly, Rachel Muers, Peter Oakes, Stanley Porter, John Ramsland, Murray Ray, Debbie Rose, Robert Schreiter, Anthony Thiselton, Miroslav Volf, Bernd Wannewetsch and Haddon Wilmer. Martin Graham put me in contact with Roger Mitchell, who in turn pointed me to the work of Brian Mills. I am grateful for the kind assistance given to me by the Sisters of the Love of God in Oxford.

This work was begun whilst I was in my final year as Associate Minister in the Parish of St Austell. The bishop and parish kindly gave me two days a week in that final year to begin this work. Since then, many people and organisations have helpfully contributed towards the cost of doing this research, including the Appleton Trust, the Tim Burke Memorial Fund, Ecclesiastical Insurance, the Diocese of Gloucester, the J C Green Charitable Trust, the Newby Trust Ltd, the Philpotts and Boyd Educational Foundation, the Bishop of St Germans, and the Henry Smith Charitable Trust. Graham Smith rekindled my connections with Computer Science, and kindly brought me up to speed with work on websites, employing me to do some work for him, and I was able to do some sessional teaching for the Computer Science Department of the University of Kent.

The following people, communities, and organisations kindly gave me permission to reproduce their work: Geoff Pryor (Figure 1-2); Catherine de Lorenzo (Figure 1-8); and the Yirrkala Community and the House of Representatives of the Australian Commonwealth Government (Figure 5-1).

John Brown and Pat McIntyre kindly read my thesis when it was approaching its final form, and I have greatly valued the extensive conversations that I have had with Pat about my thesis as a whole, and the legal material in particular. I am also very grateful to Joe McIntyre for reading the legal material, and for helping me to understand more clearly the working of the non-Indigenous legal system in Australia, and so helping me to untangle the argument that I was trying to make. Without Pat and Joe, this thesis

would have been considerably weaker than it is. Of course, any remaining errors are mine, but I hope that they will not obscure the force of my argument.