



**Enacting a**  
**PUBLIC THEOLOGY**

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**Clive Pearson (Ed.)**

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— **Clive Pearson (Ed.)** —

SUN **MEDIA**

*Enacting a Public Theology*

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARIA	Australian Recording Industry Association
CANCC	Coalition of Low-lying Atoll Nations On Climate Change
GNPT	Global Network for Public Theology
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
ISRA	Islamic Sciences and Research Academy of Australia
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
PaCT	Public and Theology Research Centre
RCIADIC	Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody
WWSO	We Will Speak Out

## FOREWORD

One of the gifts of the Global Network for Public Theology (GNPT) is the formation of collaborative scholarly relationships and friendships among partner institutions. These partnerships and friendships enrich global public theological scholarship, while providing opportunities for theologians from diverse and varied contexts to engage with one another's work and revisit their own contributions in the light of differing perspectives.

The Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at Stellenbosch University, South Africa, was privileged to host the 2016 triennial consultation on the theme of *Democracy and Social Justice in 'glocal' contexts*. The term 'glocal' refers to the dialectic tension between 'global' and 'local' realities and how these inform and shape our identities, experiences and lived realities.

This was the first time that the consultation had been held on the African continent since its founding in Princeton in 2007. We were particularly pleased to have a large contingent of African delegates participating in the proceedings. It was equally encouraging to have such a large delegation of participants from the Oceania region, which has a vibrant and active group of GNPT member institutions. Of course, the second GNPT consultation had been held in the twin cities of Canberra and Sydney in 2010, after which it moved to Chester in the United Kingdom in 2013. The regular rhythm of the GNPT consultation is to alternate between hemispheres. The GNPT is meeting in Bamberg, Germany, in 2019.

It stands to reason that there is something of an affinity between the GNPT participants from the Southern Hemisphere. Many of our countries, and churches, in the Southern African and Oceanic regions are grappling with what it means to 'come home' to ourselves, our indigenous cultures and our post-colonial histories. As will be seen in this collection of essays, the particulars of our histories and geographies have some political and theological implications in common as we outgrow colonial practices and beliefs. Of course, there are also numerous differences in our histories and current lived realities. These differences help us to take a critical view of our regional theological and political commitments in the face of a plurality of values and aspirations. For the first time we are able to include a series of essays from public theologians in Oceania. This volume exemplifies the complexities, and the promise, of doing public theology in 'glocal' contexts.

In recent years we have had the honour of working with scholars from Europe, the Americas, Asia, Africa and also with colleagues from Brazil on volumes of essays in Public Theology. The Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology is honoured to include this book in our collection of publications. We are particularly grateful to Clive Pearson, one of the founders of the GNPT and the editor of this volume, for his initiative and hard work in this regard. Our hope is that this collection of essays will invite readers from Africa, and elsewhere in the world, to learn new ways of thinking about the contexts and concerns of theologians in the Oceania region, while also inviting the reader to reflect critically upon theology and public life in their own context.

**Dion Forster**

*Director of the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology  
Stellenbosch University, August 2019*

# SIGNING THE TIMES

## An Introduction

*Clive Pearson*

The theme for the triennial conference of the Global Network for Public Theology held at Stellenbosch during October 2016 was dedicated to the interrelated themes of democracy and social justice. For those gathering in South Africa, the immediate background was that of Fallism. The public space had become contested. For those coming from Australia, being in this particular space was a learning event that required some orientation in order to discern what were “the signs of the times” in this place that was not our own.

This invocation of signs is, of course, a familiar rhetorical device in the construction of a public theology. Its employment is a way of focusing attention on issues and grievances that require address. The public domain, a civil society, the common good – however these claims are to be understood – has, in some ways, been compromised. That there should be an act of discerning required is in itself a sign of how these concerns emerge: they have not always been present. They come to the surface with a sense of urgency and rupture. It is not necessarily self-evident why they should attract theological attention and, specifically, a particular form of theology that should concern itself with the wellbeing of a given society. This reference to the signs of the times is more complex than might first be imagined.

For those who were hosting the Stellenbosch proceedings, Fallism had become a present-day expression of dissent and activism. Its origins lay back in a deepening “critique of the ideals of the rainbow nation, Ubuntu, reconciliation and forgiveness” upon which post-apartheid democracy had been established in South Africa.<sup>1</sup> According to Lwandile Fikeni, the heart of Fallism was vested in “an insistence on moving beyond the boundaries of ‘civil’ discourse towards attacking the symbols of white supremacy through disruptive acts of rage”.<sup>2</sup> The temper of Fallism was thus marked with signs and symbols of outrage and anger.<sup>3</sup> The most provocative expression of this had been the decision taken by Chumani Maxwele in 2015 to hurl

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- 1 Headley, S & Sandiswa L. Kobe, “Christian Activism and the Fallists: What about Reconciliation?”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 73/3(2017):1-11 [<https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i3.4722>].
  - 2 Lwandile Fikeni, “Lwandile Fikeni’s Ruth First Speech on Rage in the Rainbow Nation is Indispensable”, *Mail & Guardian*, 16 August 2016, Online at: <http://bit.ly/2OruFr2> [Accessed 20 November 2018].
  - 3 Jakub Urbaniak, “Theologians and Anger in the Age of Fallism: Towards a Revolution of African Love”, *Black Theology: An International Journal*, 15:2 (2017) [<https://doi.org/10.1080/14769948.2017.131364>].

faeces onto the statue of Cecil Rhodes that stood in the grounds of the University of Cape Town.<sup>4</sup>

That one act was multivalent in meaning. It was rich and thick! Sizwe Mpfu-Walsh came to see five discrete messages in this one act of protest. The continuing presence of the statue bore witness to the “persistence of white supremacy and black exclusion” at the university; the faeces themselves were a symbol of “black pain, revulsion and disgust”; the seemingly unchallenged place of the statue testified to “the failures of the higher education system to dismantle the remnants of apartheid and colonialism”; the act itself represented a rising level of anger at the inequality to be found within Cape Town itself and the University, on whose grounds the statue stood, represented South African society at large where those who are “black [are] forced to assimilate to succeed”.<sup>5</sup>

The above act became a catalyst for student-based movements gathering around hashtags to do with “#RhodesMustfall” and “#FeesMustFall”. That there should have been some visible and audible representation of Fallism around the holding of the GNPT conference was entirely appropriate. The discipline of a public theology has now well and truly outgrown its original setting in North America and other Western liberal democratic contexts. It has become “glocalised” – in other words, it is a global flow or movement that expresses its themes and concerns in ways specific to local societies. More recently, a public theology has found itself engaging with the diverse insights of a polycentric world Christianity: it is now time to come to terms with and reflect upon what a public theology looks like, what its tasks and its vocation are, and how the public spheres are constituted in societies where diasporas are to be found and the indigenous host culture is not Western.<sup>6</sup>

For the sake of dialogue, coherence, cross-checking, there is a consequent need, then, for expressions of a public theology in one part of the world to be aware of what is happening elsewhere. In this way, a public theology possesses a capacity to contribute to discourses around a global citizenship and a common humanity.

The politics and cultural dynamics of Fallism are particularly South African. The perspective of particularity, however, does not mean that this protest and outrage has nothing to say to a society such as Australia. Quite the reverse. The mood of those theological protests levelled against the evident injustice suffered by indigenous Australians in the wake of the white invasion of country is not too dissimilar. In this collection of essays (Chapter 1), *Geoff Broughton* and *Brooke Prentis* have woven a description of the multiple forms of disadvantage into a reading of an absence of dignity, recognition and postponement of Aboriginal peoples’ justice. In this instance the anger and rage of Fallism are transmuted into a lament at mess, chaos and ruins. The equivalent of the Rhodes statue is the iconic status of Australia Day (26 January)

4 Chumani Maxwele Ignites the #RhodesMustFall Movement at UCT, *South African History Online*, 5 May 2017. Online at: <http://bit.ly/30YFYcU> [Accessed 20 November 2018].

5 Sizwe Mpfu-Walsh, “The Game’s the Same: ‘Mustfall’ Moves to Euro-American”. In: S. Boosen (ed.), *Fees Must Fall: Student Revolt, Decolonisation and Governance in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2016), 74–100.

6 Raimundo Barreto, Ronaldo Cavalcante & Wanderley P. da Rosa (eds.), *World Christianity as Public Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017).

and the question of whether or not it is more appropriate for it to be described as a day of invasion, survival or mourning. Through a retrieval of themes to do with “the great reversals” to be found in the gospel of Luke, Broughton draws upon some earlier research in order to represent a “public theology where history, politics and theology – storytelling, faith and the public square” walk together. The underlying assumption that theology might provide a counter-narrative that calls the dominant culture (both within the church itself and the public domain) into an alternative praxis is perhaps a little more optimistic than is to be found in the fragmented rhetoric and practices of Fallism; it arguably mediates the inward responsibility of the bilingual vocation of a public theology where there ought to be some explicit resonance with the images, symbols and beliefs of the Christian tradition.

This anthology based on the Australian experience is framed with an opening and a closing chapter (Chapter 10) by *Broughton* and *Prentis*. This framing is deliberate: it is designed to set the construction of a public theology in Australia within the recognition that all theology and Christian witness in this country takes place on “invaded space”. That is the argument posed by Chris Budden.<sup>7</sup> The practice of the theology is done primarily – almost exclusively – through the lens and experience of those who are “second peoples”. It is a reflection being done on Aboriginal land. The kind of white reserve that Broughton and Prentis have diagnosed has led Jione Havea to speak of “the unfinished business of theology” in this socio-geographic context.<sup>8</sup>

Broughton and Prentis’s second chapter builds upon their first. Its particular emphasis lies in its description of the “slow process” towards reconciliation which, Broughton and Prentis argue, should be accompanied by repentance. There is a need for a clear naming of issues to be addressed, often in the face of denial or apathy: there is also a need for the right remembering of what has happened to indigenous people through the course of the history of colonisation and dispossession. The journey they describe is an impatient one because of “a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale”. Now and then Broughton and Prentis are able to identify occasional steps forward while waiting for momentum to build. It has become an intergenerational journey: Broughton and Prentis name the present as the third generational wave – the other two being in the 1960s and the 1990s. Their current hope lies in the emergence of young leaders and the changing nature of the public sphere through social media that may act as a counter-voice to the mainstream media, which have often been portrayed as unhelpful. The putting into place of a National Curriculum that better educates all Australians on indigenous history creates the possibility of a more helpful civic sphere. In terms of a public theology, Broughton and Prentis repeat their indebtedness to the theology of “great reversals” to be found in the gospel of Luke.

In terms of timing, the Stellenbosch conference coincided with the 2016 election in the United States and the immediate wake of the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom. The election of Donald Trump and the dismay at the surprisingly poorly constructed referendum in the United Kingdom have raised profound questions to do with the

7 Chris Budden, *Following Jesus in Invaded Space: Doing Theology on Aboriginal Land* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009).

8 Jione Havea (ed.), *Indigenous Australia and the Unfinished Business of Theology: Cross-Cultural Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

implosion of the democratic system.<sup>9</sup> This crisis of confidence in democracy has also permeated Australian public culture. It has coincided with the appointment of so many Prime Ministers in so few years, with four of them (at the moment) not having seen their terms through before being deposed while still in office.<sup>10</sup> The cartoonists have had a field day.

It was in this kind of climate that *Peter Walker* made the case for a consideration of the relationship between theology and the emergence of democracy. Walker was well aware, of course, of the familiar practice of looking back to the Athenian origins of democracy. The purpose of his historical exercise, however, was to recover the critical and somewhat ambiguous roles played by the Christian faith in the development of later Western democracies. On the one hand, it was possible to cite a theologian such as Aquinas, who believed “the best of all polity” was “one of government by the people”. Walker also drew attention to subsequent conciliar, reform and nonconformist movements that reconfigured the life of the church in such a way that allowed for lay participation. But that is only one side of the story. One of the primary virtues of a later democracy is toleration. Its public expression came about through a disenchantment with extended wars of religion. It opened up further the possibility of the privatisation of religion that was, likewise, an effect of the Enlightenment, a growing secularisation – and for faith itself to become embedded within the phenomenon of denominationalism. All of a sudden faith becomes more personal, more intimate, more private.

What Walker does is draw out the often unknown role the Christian faith has played in the rise of democracy. At the same time he is noting that the democratic state in its overt secular form in the market state “has nearly devoured its parent”. In these circumstances what might be the role of a public theology? Walker argues that a public theology ought to concern itself with three tasks. The first is to be “a standing reminder, both as an academic discipline and a voice in the public square, that the modern democratic state itself has a theological foundation.” The second is to encourage the flourishing of some theological values upon which democracy thrives. Walker is indebted here to Max Stackhouse and argues the case for all people being “created in the image of God, covenantal love is the inner binding of democratic community, and the state is a protector against sin”. It is in the light of the contemporary crisis facing the practice of democracy that Walker concludes with his third proposal. In some ways his suggestion comes as a surprise. For some time now one theologian after another has recognised that the rhetoric of sin does not sit well with current understandings of self-esteem, human development and various notions of progress. Its life within the church itself is often rather subdued. And yet, in a world of “hyper-individualism, hyper-diversity, parochialism bordering on tribalism and acquisitive excess”, Walker poses the question: “[what] if the state no longer functioned as a means of restraining sin?” Is it not the case that one aspect of the vocation of a public theology is to “name the ways in which the democratic state in the modern West is *itself* sinful”?

<sup>9</sup> A.C. Grayling, *Democracy and Its Crisis* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Laura Tingle, “Follow the Leader: Democracy and the Rise of the Strong Man”, *Quarterly Essay*, 71 (September 2018).

The philosopher Martha Nussbaum has likewise sought to understand “our political crisis”. She has been particularly struck by the very deep divisions that the Trump presidency has exposed. Nussbaum is disturbed at the pressures these divisions are bringing to bear on the fabric of civil society and democracy itself. Rather than formulate a policy or programme, her strategy is to delve into the philosophy and psychology of emotions. Nussbaum is dealing with the power of feelings – and, in particular, the primal emotion of fear which plays itself out in diverse modes of anger and othering.<sup>11</sup>

This turn to the emotions is not far removed from *Stephen Pickard’s* diagnosis of a narcissistic society and the apparent decline of compassion (Chapter 4). For Pickard, the connection between the two lies embedded in his use of the term “twilight of compassion” in his title. Now, the rhetoric of living in the twilight is not new to readings of democracy. Back in 1994 Patrick Kennon, a former CIA analyst, wrote *The Twilight of Democracy*.<sup>12</sup> Pickard had himself written a critical review of this book, which claimed that “democracy is an outdated and doomed form of government that cannot keep pace with rapid change”. Kennon’s core thesis is that “only highly trained technocrats with enormous authority are capable to guide a nation”.<sup>13</sup>

Pickard rightly discerned that Kennon’s argument undermined the stock makeup of representative democracy. This arrangement requires a clear and delicate balance of power among and between the one (that is, the government which is charged with the common good), the few (those with particular expertise in a variety of areas) and the many (the general population).<sup>14</sup> With the passage of time, the crisis has become a metacrisis – so argue John Milbank and Adrian Pabst in their *The Politics of Virtue* in the light of the explosion of self-interest and a hollowing out of the desire for the common good.<sup>15</sup>

Pickard’s use of the twilight metaphor is bound up with a “compassion deficit” that he discerns both within a narcissistic culture and the missional rhetoric of the institutional church. In the case of a narcissistic culture, those most at risk of being dehumanised and becoming the victims of fearmongering and a “twisted in” political culture are asylum-seekers and refugees. In the case of the institutionalised church, it is seemingly weighed down by its “preoccupation with survival, rationalisation, re-structuring and internal management techniques”. In these circumstances, Pickard wonders what should become of the “church’s vocation to be a body of compassion in God’s world”. Here he makes use of one of Nussbaum’s earlier works, *Upheavals of Thought* (2001), in order to draw out the distinction between mercy and compassion.

11 Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

12 Patrick Kennon, *The Twilight of Democracy* (New York: Doubleday, 1994).

13 Ibid., 5.

14 Stephen Pickard, ‘Democracy and the Politics of Virtue’, The Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture, 16 June, 2017. Online at: <http://bit.ly/35pByPo> [Accessed 20 March 2018].

15 John Milbank & Adrian Pabst, *The Politics of Virtue: Post-Liberalism and the Human Future* (London and Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016).

The preference for compassion is rooted in the way in which it minimises any sense of wrongdoing and, according to Chris Marshall, “implies innocence”.<sup>16</sup>

Through a series of five theses Pickard makes the case for the practice of compassion. It is recognised that far too often both mercy and compassion are “transactional arrangements [that take place] within unequal power relations”. What is required in the current cultural and ecclesial state of play is more than this potentially arbitrary benevolence. Following Nussbaum, Pickard argues on behalf of the need to educate for, and nurture, “a culture of compassion and mercy where leaders can help to shape and guide the boundaries of compassion”. The example of Jesus’ own ministry furnishes “a scandalous account of compassion and mercy” that “breaks through the glass ceiling of transactional accounts of mercy”. It allows for the kind of Samaritan church envisaged by Jon Sobrino, where mercy is “a basic attitude toward the suffering of another” simply on the grounds that such suffering exists. In a time of cultural narcissism Pickard argues the case for an understanding of the church that seeks to be a “body of compassion in the world”.

This summons to compassion runs a range of risks that go beyond excessive self-interest and economic rationalism. One of the effects of the digital revolution has been the collapse of space and time. What happens in one part of the world becomes immediately accessible around the globe through social media and the 24/7 news cycle. The global public sphere – and, by extension, what it means to be a global citizen – has changed. The prevalence of moral and natural disasters – and where some of the former seem so intractable – can lead to the condition now diagnosed as compassion fatigue. The cost of caring for others and the risk of burnout in the service of pastoral care is well known.<sup>17</sup> Mary Francis Schjonberg has noted how a sense of caring can be lost in organisations and society at large. Empathy can dissipate in two ways. It is inclined to lessen as a matter of course with an elapse of time of about six weeks since news first breaks of a particular disaster. The second factor lies in the seemingly never-ending flow of one crisis after another and how that can exhaust the reservoirs of interpathy.<sup>18</sup>

*Katherine Rainger* (Chapter 2) is writing within the context of that potential risk. Her specific focus is on a cross-textual reading of the Gaza conflict of 2014. The story she seeks to tell is an episode in a conflict that extends right back to the origins of modern Israel and the continuing claims of Palestine. In the present political circumstances it is difficult to envisage a mutually acceptable resolution. In terms of a Christian theology, the conflict is situated within a well-defined representation of crisis. Back in 2009 Palestinian theologians and church leaders released into the life of the world church their concerns in *A Moment of Truth: Kairos Palestine*.<sup>19</sup> It was designed to be

16 Christopher D. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables on Law, Crime and Restorative Justice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 262.

17 Daniël Louw, “Compassion Fatigue: Spiritual Exhaustion and the Cost of Caring in the Pastoral Ministry: Towards a ‘Pastoral Diagnosis’ in Caregiving”, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 71(2), 2015, Art. #3032, 10 pages [http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v71i2.3032].

18 Mary Francis Schjonberg, “One Disaster After Another: Coping With Compassion Fatigue Can Be A Challenge”, *The Episcopal Church*, 20 December 2017. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2M40u7r>, [Accessed 18 February 2018].

19 Kairos Palestine, online at: <http://bit.ly/33j8CXt> [Accessed 20 February 2018].

“a word to the world”, “a cry of hope”. Its authors were requesting solidarity with their people in the face of “oppression, displacement, suffering and clear apartheid for more than six decades”.

Rainger is writing self-consciously as an outsider. She is not from the Middle East: her exposure to the situation in Israel and Palestine was grounded in a visit, a tour. What follows, though, is anything but an example of what Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite and George Cairns once described as voyeuristic “theological tourism”.<sup>20</sup> It is also rather removed from Michael Grimshaw’s excursions in theological *flânerie* and wandering around a city with casual intent.<sup>21</sup> Rainger is responding to a continuing crisis that is crying out for reconciliation established in peace and justice. Her way of doing public theology here is mediated through a focus on the stories of those who have been caught up in the bitterness of violence and suffering. These narratives expressed through Facebook posts, poems and photographs represent a “hidden transcript” of personal lives caught up in a “public transcript” that can justify violence, collateral damage and retaliatory bombings. Rainger presents the Gaza conflict from the perspective of intimacy, innocence, childhood and the ordinariness of lives watching the World Cup football disrupted. These portrayals are placed alongside and illuminated by readings taken from the Book of Lamentations. That option is rather unusual, but not surprising. It is a book of the Hebrew Bible that is not often employed in the service of a public theology.

The situation in Gaza immediately draws attention to what has become a significant contemporary theme – where is home? The reasons for this particular focus lie partly in the major disruptions to life and wellbeing wrought by natural disasters and those geopolitical crises which have led to an upsurge in the numbers of refugees and asylum-speakers. How to respond to the oft-cited “humanitarian crisis” precipitated by refugees and asylum-seekers has become one of the abiding issues facing public theology worldwide. This concern for refugees and asylum-seekers – and where they may now call home – is about to take on a fresh slant. There is already some debate around the extent to which certain current wars bear the imprint of having been triggered by climate change. There is as yet no international legislation that might acknowledge the possibility and definition of being a climate “refugee” and what their rights might be. The current practice is to employ terms like “climate-displaced persons”. The likely prospects of those whose islands and river deltas become submerged in the not too distant future raise very sharply the issue of what constitutes home when your sovereign territory that embodied your cultural story and the remains of your ancestors has been lost to the sea.

The problem of “home” and the challenge of “homemaking” are explored by *Seforosa Carroll* (Chapter 5). Writing from a feminist perspective, she is wanting to “reclaim the notion of home as belonging to both the private and public spheres”. Of pivotal importance for her was the rejection of this notion of home as being related exclusively to the private sphere of women. That shift in meaning and use is partially enabled by the Greek word for home, *oikos*, which lies behind ecology and economics. Carroll’s argument rests on home being seen as a metaphor. The home

<sup>20</sup> Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite & George F. Cairns, *Beyond Theological Tourism: Mentoring as a Grassroots Approach to Theological Education* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Michael Grimshaw, *Bibles and Baedekers: Tourism, Travel, Exile and God* (London: Equinox, 2009).

is not simply a physical construction that can be simply equated with a habitation. The notion of home can become a highly contested political space that can play a part in determining access and even citizenship. That is nowhere more evident than in Australia, where one popular song used by the national air carrier would have us sing “I still call Australia home”. Through drawing on the work of writers such as Iris Marion Young, Carroll works towards an idea of home being a storied place of relationships. It should ideally be a place of safety and trust. The home becomes bound to “how we live”. It can become the nation or the household of creation itself. The task of managing this household – *oikonomia* – is as much, indeed it is more, a public task than a private one. Following Ernst Conradie (and others), Carroll emphasises further the metaphorical nature of home: it should be seen as a form of *oikeiosis* – that is, a journey that involves the making, doing and performing of home in a way that is transformative and leads to shelter, inclusion and reconciliation.

Carroll is not unaware of the shadow side of home. It can hide the evils of domestic violence. Home has not been a safe place for many women and children, as has become more widely realised and contested through the rise of the #MeToo movement. The route *David Tombs* (Chapter 7) takes into issues to do with domestic violence is rather unusual. It is established around the theme of Jesus being a victim of sexual violence. Tombs is well aware that this line of approach is seldom considered. The suffering and crucifixion of Jesus are often mediated through sanitised works of arts and readings of Scripture. The tendency is not to focus upon how often Jesus is stripped, for instance – nor is much effort spent on reflecting upon the types and levels of humiliations the Romans inflicted on those who were crucified.

Tombs’s reading of Jesus as a victim of sexual violence owes much to a South African pastor’s metaphorical claim that Jesus was HIV positive. Pastor Skosana’s sermon attracted international media attention and was condemned outright by colleagues who believed it to be offensive. The stigma attached to those who suffer from Aids as well as those who have suffered from domestic violence can lead to a striking discrepancy between what the church professes in terms of justice and the silence on and shunning of victims’ experience. The redemptive potential of the church is left untouched. The intention behind Tombs’s argument that Jesus himself was a victim of sexual violence has been made in the hope that it can serve as an exemplar to those within the life of the church who have been abused. In so doing, the plight of suffering from HIV and Aids as well as from domestic violence is lifted out of the sphere of the private and intimate, and becomes public in a striking way.

Tombs’s writing on HIV-Aids and sexual abuse has, if course, to do with the body. In diverse ways the body has been a substantial theological theme in its own right for several decades now. *Ryan Green* (Chapter 6) explores “the rights and recognition” of the body through a cross-disciplinary reading of Giorgio Agamben and Rowan Williams. At one level Green is addressing a tension expressed in either/or categories. Is the body simply to be seen in anonymous terms and as a means of survival – Agamben’s “bare life”? The refugee in flight, the inmate who is in detention or the concentration camp, the slave can come to represent survival. Or does the body signify something much more in terms of rights, speech (hence, communication) and a “mutual giftedness” that enhances life together? The public theology connection to these matters comes via Williams’s theological

retrieval. Through the sacrament of baptism theology becomes the bearer/“carrier of meaning”; it relates “the individual to its maker and saviour” and it becomes “the bearer of necessary gifts to the other”. For Green, this reading of Agamben (as well as Hannah Arendt), Williams (and the story of Sarai and Hagar) opens up the prospect of an understanding of being human that accommodates the citizen and the refugee, those in exile. Bodies are more than their “mere use” or bare survival.

This discourse to do with survival takes on a fresh relevance with the dawn of the Anthropocene. *Clive Pearson* (Chapter 8) has drawn upon the threats to the ongoing habitability of small island states in the Pacific to consider what kind of framework a Christian ethic for social justice in the Anthropocene might assume. It is a compounding dilemma which puts great pressure upon democratic regimes, global citizenship and inter-governmental governance. The Anthropocene itself is a sign of shifts in the Earth system, the relationship of humanity to creation and climate change. This is unprecedented territory: the scale of the problem opens itself to the descriptive rhetoric of being a “superwicked problem” that demands a transdisciplinary response. Low-lying islands like those of Tuvalu and Kiribati are faced with rising sea levels and the consequent effects of this. They are representative icons of the level of vulnerability and risk that will befall other much larger countries. These threats are being posed at a time when there is no international legislation that acknowledges the existence, let alone the rights, of climate refugees. For the expression and the practice of the Christian faith, the predicament of Tuvalu and Kiribati are heightened insofar as their peoples are overwhelmingly Christian – and “Bible conscious” – and are well justified in asking the rest of the world “Are we not your neighbours?” The geopolitics are like a Leviathan. It is arguably the case that, in the circumstances, a Christian social ethic must look beyond the immediacy of the vexed issue of what constitutes climate justice and situate the obvious concerns within a wider eschatological framework. However, if such justice is to be understood rightly, it is to be practised in the shadow of impending endings: it is to be considered not unlike the interim ethic of the early church, which likewise expected the end of human history.

This concern for ecological wellbeing in the Anthropocene is also addressed from a Muslim perspective by *Mehmet Ozalp* (Chapter 9). In the immediate past (and the present), the need to engage with Islam has more often been perceived as having to address matters of radicalism, terror, security, Western hegemony and contemporary science. Even where there is a contextual approach to Islam – as is the case with Abdullah Saeed – a focus on the care of creation is absent.<sup>22</sup> Now, however, there is a growing Islamic expression of concern for ecological issues. Ozalp is aware of this current trend and, accordingly, draws upon *The Islamic Declaration on Climate Change* (2016). Its strength lies in its bringing together Muslim theologians and scientists as they reflect upon what might be a Muslim response to the Anthropocene. It is a fine statement complete with a call – with reference to climate change and its likely consequences – to corporations, politicians and ordinary believers to act in a way that is consistent with a reading of the *Qur’an* in general, as well as a call to be a *khalifah* or caretaker and steward. The *Declaration* concludes with an ecological

<sup>22</sup> Abdullah Saeed, *Reading the Qur’an in the Twenty-First Century: A Contextualist Approach* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014).

reading of Muhammad. Ozalp employs this *Declaration*, which is barely known in Australia, and then goes on to argue the case for the care of creation based on the Islamic understanding of a religious obligation, *fard*.

Paul Ingram has made the theological case for interreligious dialogue and climate change.<sup>23</sup> This is an important debate in its own right. Ozalp has likewise noted the percentage of the world's population that is Muslim alongside that which is Christian. How these two faiths respond to the risks and uncertainties of the Anthropocene has considerable potential for good or ill for our common humanity.

This anthology of articles represents an attempt to discern of the signs of the times. That is a conventional feature of the practice of a public theology. These signs belong to the present moment. They touch on hot topics like the #MeToo movement that was for far too long latent and kept private in secrecy and fear. These signs of the times deal with a diverse range of issues crying out for address. They demonstrate an awareness of the planetary nature and scope of a public theology and the need for a variegated global citizenship. The Anthropocene and climate change loom large over the future. There is here an evident concern for the whole human species that engages all cultures as well as future generations. One of the contemporary habits of mind is well expressed by Mary Robinson, who held her new-born grandchild and her mind turned to 2050 and wondered what kind of world would then be in place. Her long-time concern for human rights had become a passion for climate justice.<sup>24</sup> What will home be like? How will we engage with the one who is other?

These planetary concerns raise questions for all faiths. They have emerged at a time when worldwide there has been a loss of confidence in whether democracies are sufficiently robust to make a difference in addressing these global concerns. Is democracy and the many virtues with which it is associated vulnerable? The doing of public theology at this present moment seems to be more urgent, more pressing than it has been at any point in the evolution of this discipline.

It is one thing to follow through on the intellectual task of a public theology. That exercise is, of course, not enough. The momentum of a public theology is liberative. It is designed to be enacted in both the life of the ecclesia, as well as the public domain. Each of these topics indicated has its own architecture of knowledge as well as its own praxis. The two belong together. The vocation of a public theology is to be "interruptive and imaginative", as Kjetil Fretheim has shown.<sup>25</sup> It is also called upon to be bilingual and evoke a much needed passion for truthfulness, integrity and civil discourse, especially in a time when fake news is too easily and too often trumped up. The purpose of public theology is also to express its concern for the public good in a way to be acted upon.

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23 Paul O. Ingram, *You Have Been Told What is Good: Interreligious Dialogue and Climate Change* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016).

24 Mary Robinson, *Climate Justice: Hope, Resilience and the Fight for a Sustainable Future* (London and New York: Bloomsbury 2014), 1-4.

25 Kjetil Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination: Public Theology in a Time of Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016).

# RECOGNITION WITHOUT DIGNITY

The Politics and Theology of Postponement of Aboriginal Peoples' Justice  
in Australia

*Geoff Broughton & Brooke Prentis*

The bread that is shared among Christians is not only  
material resource but the recognition of dignity.  
*Rowan Williams*<sup>1</sup>

I, Brooke, belong to peoples who have a Dreaming – a Dreaming that for over 60,000 years taught us and continues to teach us of the Creator, how to care for creation, and how to live in right relationship with one another. I belong to peoples who, for over 2,000 generations, have left footprints on these lands now called Australia. I belong to peoples who are the world's oldest living culture. I also belong to peoples, however, who understand what it is to live the politics of the postponement of justice in Australia, a people who have been crying out for justice for nearly 250 years in this land we are told is 'young and free', this land of the 'fair go' in this so-called 'lucky country'. As Aboriginal peoples we see a very different Australia to what many others see. We see an Australia that is in a mess, in chaos, in ruins. We see an Australia whose heart is sick, weeping, broken. It is a recognition of the reality of Australia in 2018. Somehow Australia seems to have been able to avoid and avert being held to account for injustices.

I, Geoff, am writing this introduction on 26 January. In 2018 this date is contested in Australian public life and there are various proposals as to what to call this national public holiday: Australia Day, Invasion Day, Survival Day, or Day of Mourning being among the more prominent. Stan Grant, an author and journalist, is unequivocal:

Australia still can't decide whether we were settled or invaded. We have no doubt. Our people died defending their land and they had no doubt. The result was the same for us whatever you call it. Within a generation the civilisations of the eastern seaboard – older than the Pharaohs – were ravaged.<sup>2</sup>

This history – our history – makes a mockery of the opening lines of Australia's National Anthem sung around the country on 26 January: "Australians all let us rejoice for we are young and free". As a consequence, 'change the date' is another grassroots campaign that has been gaining momentum in recent years, leading

<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, *Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life* (London: SPCK, 2016), 36.

<sup>2</sup> Stan Grant, *Talking to My Country* (Sydney: HarperCollins Publishers, 2016), 2. See also "Timeline", online at: <http://bit.ly/2AOFB9Y> [Accessed 26 January 2017].

one Australian city to change the date of its Australia Day celebrations.<sup>3</sup> These are just some of the reasons for me (Geoff) to avoid the complexities associated with achieving Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Australia. There are other significant impediments. I am not Aboriginal. I am an Anglican priest representing an institution with a history of misplaced presumptions and misguided policies in its dealings with Aboriginal peoples. The politics of postponement has frustrated social justice for Australia's first peoples, leaving many disappointed and disillusioned. A significant milestone in Australian democracy was achieved in the year of my birth (1967), when Aboriginal people were first counted as citizens of Australia in the national census. Over the next fifty years justice for Aboriginal people stuttered and had stalled by 2008, when Kevin Rudd, then the Australian Prime Minister, formally apologised on behalf of the government to the stolen generations.<sup>4</sup>

How has justice been postponed in Australian political life? Addressing that question is the purpose of this chapter. It will endeavour to outline a role for Christian thought and practice in analysing, and then addressing, the politics of postponement. It is thus concerned with a public theology that is marked by a recognition with dignity; it represents a public theology where history, politics and theology – storytelling, faith and the public square – must also learn to walk together.

## The Gap between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Peoples

One reason for the postponement of justice is the lack of engagement from non-Aboriginal peoples – that is, the majority or the dominant culture. An attempt was made by former Prime Minister Paul Keating to draw attention to the role non-Aboriginal peoples have in bringing recognition with dignity and ending the postponement of justice for Aboriginal peoples.

And, as I say, the starting point might be to recognise that the problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with the act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the disasters. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds. We failed to ask – how would I feel if this were done to me? As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us.<sup>5</sup>

I, Brooke, compiled a list of injustices and consequences of injustices facing Aboriginal peoples today to use when addressing non-Aboriginal audiences. It is not

3 For example, Kylie Beach, "Thoughts on Change the Date", online at: <http://bit.ly/2LX0oN2> [Accessed 26 January 2017].

4 The 1967 referendum succeeded through the campaign "Vote Yes for Aborigines", which indicated an emerging national mood in favour of reconciliation. For many non-Aboriginal people confusion continues regarding Aboriginal citizenship that had been gained previously in 1962 (or 1948).

5 Paul Keating, "The Redfern Park Speech". In: M. Grattan (ed.), *Reconciliation: Essays in Australian Reconciliation* (Melbourne, Bookman, 2000), 60.

an exhaustive list, but it is exhausting to name and recognise the scope of injustice. Invasion, dispossession, stolen land, stolen wages, stolen generations, lack of a treaty, slavery, the frontier wars, frontier violence, massacres, genocide, the loss of language, the lack of the return of ancestral remains, the lack of protection of sacred sites, the lack of the prevention of the sale of cultural items, the high rates of prison incarceration, the high rates of juvenile detention, denied access to medical treatment whilst in custody, denied access to an interpreter, initial denied release of CCTV footage of Ms Dhu's and Wayne Fella Morrison's death in custody,<sup>6</sup> the Northern Territory Intervention, paperless arrest laws, forced removal from homelands, nuclear waste dumps without proper and thorough consultation with traditional owners, coal mines without agreement from traditional owners, contravention of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, poverty, racism, the new stolen generation, and Aboriginal deaths in custody.

The list is long, overwhelming, traumatic – to engage with each injustice takes time. Many non-Aboriginal peoples continue to avoid and avert engagement with these issues. How should we even name them? Naming is important. The holocaust, segregation, apartheid – Germany, United States, South Africa – each has a name for such historic injustice. Aboriginal peoples have faced genocide and massacres, were put into camps and missions, were denied the vote and denied a wage. But these actions are never called by their proper name. Most non-Aboriginal peoples live with a vague sense of past wrongdoing. I do not have a suggested name, but the lack of recognition postpones justice.

A public theology of justice, grounded in either right order or rights, can never become a single or comprehensive ideal that can be promoted under the banner of God's justice in the public sphere.<sup>7</sup> Its value lies in offering an account of justice that takes seriously the histories of Christian communities: a theologically grounded concept of justice needs to avoid consciously endorsing the notion that the justice of the dominant is the dominant justice. A public theology of justice consistently rejects any account of justice that relies upon coercive force employed by those possessing power. Fundamentally, a vision of Christian justice has been revealed in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, and practised by Christians and their communities. Here we find the kind of justice that rejects coercion and domination.

Elsewhere I, Geoff, have argued that the justice of Jesus Christ – expressed as enemy-love – constitutes a distinctly Christian way of justice.<sup>8</sup> Following Christopher Marshall, the force and effect of the compassionate Jesus is reckoned to embody the way of reconciliation and justice together as mediated in and through in the parable

<sup>6</sup> Calla Wahlquist, "Family of Indigenous Man Who Died After Prison Incident Call For Coronial Process Overhaul", *The Guardian*, 20 October, 2016. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2opYZHH> [Accessed 27 November 2017].

<sup>7</sup> Both Christopher D. Marshall, *Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* (Telford: Pandora Press, 2001) and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008) represent a rights-based approach to justice. Oliver O'Donovan, *The Ways of Judgment* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005) [<https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400828715>]. and Emil Brunner, *Justice and the Social Order* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1949) proposed a right-order approach to justice.

<sup>8</sup> Geoff Broughton, *Restorative Christ: Jesus, Justice and Discipleship* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014).

of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32.<sup>9</sup> The non-violent Jesus practises justice without retaliation – this time exemplified through the teaching of Jesus on enemy-love in Luke 6:27-45.<sup>10</sup> These references to the compassionate and non-violent are perceived to be responses to the core ongoing Christological question: Who is Jesus Christ for us today? For Dietrich Bonhoeffer Christ is the ‘man for others’ and so the type of justice that then ensues is the Jesus-for-others demanding justice with repentance. In this instance, the biblical core is witnessed to by the second wrongdoer on the cross alongside Jesus (Luke 23:26-49).<sup>11</sup> These three types lead into a Christology of embrace associated with the imagery of Miroslav Volf. This inclusive and embracing Jesus who enacts justice with repair is demonstrated by Saul’s encounter with the risen Jesus at Acts 9:1-6.<sup>12</sup> The underlying assumption is that these models/types lend themselves to a Christian theology of justice, grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that is able to name Aboriginal injustices properly, and provide recognition with dignity.

### The Concept of Recognition<sup>13</sup>

Of vital importance for this concern with restorative justice is the status and role of recognition. This refers to Charles Taylor’s well-known thesis that identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by a misrecognition of others. Taylor’s examples include women under patriarchy, ‘black lives matter’, and Indigenous and colonised people.<sup>14</sup>

Misrecognition shows not just a lack of due respect. It can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need.<sup>15</sup>

What has arguably existed in Australian politics from its historical beginnings is “not the need for recognition but the conditions in which the attempt to be recognised can fail”.<sup>16</sup> These conditions have become more obvious since the 1967 referendum – itself a crucial first step in recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Since the Rudd apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008 (another promising step in recognising past injustices), the failure to be recognised is that non-Aboriginal people never get further than these first steps. Justice, inevitably, is postponed. The politics of recognition is equally postponed because, in the analysis of Jürgen Habermas – in a response to Taylor’s thesis and focused more on the political issues of asylum:

<sup>9</sup> Broughton, *Restorative Christ*, 24-50.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-82.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 91-124.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 125-157.

<sup>13</sup> The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor was recently named the winner of the first Berggruen Prize that is to be awarded annually for “a thinker whose ideas are of broad significance for shaping human self-understanding and the advancement of humanity”. Berggruen Institute, 4 October 2016. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2lwH7BU> [Accessed 28 October 2017].

<sup>14</sup> Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 25-26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

as soon as we treat a problem as a legal problem, we bring into play a conception of modern law that forces us – on conceptual grounds alone – to operate within the architectonics of the constitutional state and its wealth of presuppositions.<sup>17</sup>

Will constitutional recognition alone address those injustices and consequences of injustice named above? The contemporary debates in Australia over 26 January as a commemorative date, such as the ‘history’ of the land now called Australia (is it 250 years old or 60,000 years old?), exemplify how recognition without dignity, or just a plain lack of recognition, has led to the postponement of justice for Aboriginal peoples. One of the first injustices an Aboriginal child will encounter within the Australian school system is this lack of recognition in Australian history. Until recent years the Australian school system and higher education system persisted with the abbreviated version of Australia as a continent ‘discovered’ and settled by Captain Cook. It was not until 2016 that the invaded-versus-settled debate made the headlines of mainstream media. The University of New South Wales corrected the widely misunderstood history, by asserting:

Australia was not settled peacefully, it was invaded, occupied and colonised. Describing the arrival of the Europeans as a ‘settlement’ attempts to view Australian history from the shores of England rather than the shores of Australia.<sup>18</sup>

Since 1788 Aboriginal people have been denied a treaty. This basic lack of recognition has resulted in Australia being the only Commonwealth nation, and one of the only liberal democracies, without a treaty with its first peoples. At the time of Federation in 1901 Aboriginal peoples were not recognised in the Constitution, as it was then thought that they would die out – either naturally or through extermination. On 26 January 1938 a group of Aboriginal leaders, including William Cooper, gathered on the ‘Day of Mourning’ to present a 10-point plan demanding equal rights as citizens, asking for recognition, pleading for the granting of dignity. Cooper stated that:

We, representing the Aborigines of Australia, assembled at the Australian Hall in Sydney on 26 January 1938, this being the 150th anniversary of the white man’s seizure of our country, hereby make protest against the callous treatment of the white man of our people in the past 150 years and we appeal to the Australian nation to make laws, new laws for the education and care of Aborigines and for a new policy that will raise our people to full citizen status, and equality within the community.<sup>19</sup>

17 Jürgen Habermas, “Struggles for Recognition in the Democratic Constitutional State”. In: A. Gutmann, (ed.) *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 110.

18 University of New South Wales, Diversity Toolkit, General Information Folios, Part 3: Appropriate Terminology, Indigenous Australian People. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2LYsQQK> [Accessed 3 February 2017].

19 National Museum of Australia, “1938: Sesquicentenary and Aboriginal Day of Mourning”. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2IGOW1o> [Accessed 26 January 2017].

Only recently have historians recognised Aboriginal ways of sustainable food and land management.<sup>20</sup> Others persist with a direct assault on Aboriginal heritage and dignity.<sup>21</sup>

For nearly 250 years Aboriginal recognition has been without dignity or denied altogether. Both political and ecclesial assumptions are culpable as churches in Australia have affirmed and assented to the politics of [mis]recognition rather than the recognition with dignity found in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Donna Hicks, in her landmark book *Dignity*, argues that the concept of dignity provides a broader and deeper framework for locating such injustice beyond the politics of identity or recognition. A paragraph describing the contemporary injustice towards Muslim people in the United States of America could have been written as a summary of the postponed justice for an Aboriginal person in Australia:

all of the essential elements of dignity were violated. He was excluded from being able to participate on the basis of his [Aboriginal] identity. He was not acknowledged and recognized as a significant political player, although he had been active in Washington politics for many years. It was not safe for him to be involved ... and it was grossly unfair that he could not participate. Because of the negative stereotype of [Aboriginal peoples], he was not given the benefit of the doubt, making him misunderstood and disempowered. His freedom was restricted, his concerns could not be responded to – no one took the time to listen to him – and finally, there was no public attempt to right the wrong. No one took responsibility for the injuries that he and other [Aboriginal peoples] were suffering from.<sup>22</sup>

Before identifying dignity as an essential, but often missing, element in the recognition of Aboriginal peoples in Australia, contemporary approaches to recognition need to be identified.

## Contemporary Approaches to Recognition

Contemporary discussion of Aboriginal recognition in Australian politics has a long history. It has been expressed under various guises, beginning formally with the 1963 Yirrkala Bark Petitions.

These are the first documents bridging Commonwealth law as it then stood, and the Indigenous laws of the land. These petitions from the Yolngu people of Yirrkala were the first traditional documents recognised by the Commonwealth Parliament and are thus the documentary recognition of Indigenous people in Australian law ... The petitioners unsuccessfully sought the Commonwealth Parliament's recognition of rights to their traditional lands on the Gove Peninsula in Arnhem Land ... Though these documents did not achieve the constitutional change sought,

20 Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Melbourne: Allen and Unwin, 2010).

21 Karl Quinn, "First Contact Review: David Oldfield's Verdict on 'Stone Age' Culture", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 2016, online at: <http://bit.ly/30SbBVf> [Accessed 18 November 2016].

22 Donna Hicks, *Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays In Resolving Conflict* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2011), 36-37.

they were effective in making a way for the eventual recognition of Indigenous rights in Commonwealth law.<sup>23</sup>

Thirty years after the Day of Mourning in 1963, the Yirrkala Bark Petitions paved the way for the 1976 acknowledgement of Aboriginal land rights and the 1992 overturning of the concept of *terra nullius* in the Mabo Case. In 1997 a report for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission of the Australian Government was released (HREOC, 1997, *The Bringing Them Home Report*), waking Australia up to the truth of the stolen generations – a government policy that forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their birthmothers. It was in this report that genocide was finally recognised.<sup>24</sup> Now, in 2018, many non-Aboriginal Australians do not understand that this apology was only to the stolen generations and there has still been no apology for stolen land or stolen wages. The politics of Reconciliation has followed this familiar pattern of postponement. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu identifies such national injustice, similar to what he experienced under apartheid in South Africa, as a situation where there ...

was almost always the loss of dignity that drove the perpetrators to the awful acts they had committed. It was dignity regained that enabled them to face their victims. And it was dignity – the perception of worth in the other – that made reconciliation possible. I could not but reflect there on my and others' experience of apartheid in South Africa. In those dark days it was in the consciousness of our own worth and the knowledge that right must prevail and evil be overcome that our dignity sustained us. It was our sense of dignity that brought us to democracy in peaceful transition.<sup>25</sup>

Aboriginal peoples, together with non-Aboriginal brothers and sisters, desire to celebrate their dignity and recognition as a gift. Dignity, for Aboriginal peoples, as the world's oldest living culture, is a wonderful gift to Australia – including the Australian churches – sharing knowledge of God and relationship with the Creator that pre-dates Jesus of Nazareth.

How might Australian churches receive these gifts? The next section will explore the notion of Kingdom reversals through Jesus' teaching and hospitality that shapes the sacramental and welcoming life of the Christian community. The relationships and rituals of the Christian community can satisfy the longing for the deep dignity of full recognition desired and deserved by Aboriginal peoples.

<sup>23</sup> "Petitions of the Aboriginal people of Yirrkala 14", 28 August 1963. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2VpsTb3> [Accessed 3 February 2017].

<sup>24</sup> Ronald D. Wilson, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, Report for Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission: April 1997. The report cites the *UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, 1948 where genocide includes "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" committed "with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group." Online at: <http://bit.ly/2LX8ib8> [Accessed 3 January 2011].

<sup>25</sup> Desmond Tutu in the Foreword to Donna Hicks, *Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays In Resolving Conflict* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2011), iii.

## Human Dignity, Kingdom Reversals and Eschatological Recognition

Theological approaches to justice often divide between advocates of rights (e.g. Marshall, Wolterstorff) and right order (e.g. O'Donovan, Brunner). Now a new dividing in theology is emerging between rights and dignity. One proponent of this view is John Milbank, who considers himself among “a small intellectual minority (myself included) [who] see dignity as a more valid alternative to rights”.<sup>26</sup> With his customary laser-like precision, Milbank identifies the theological problem of ignoring dignity and worth in relation to justice: “where worth is no longer regarded, only money retains any value”.<sup>27</sup> According to the Christian ethicist David Gushee, the divine gift of human dignity is the Christian account of human worth.

[T]he Hebrew Bible offers at least four bodies of material that bear witness to a sacredness-of-life ethic: (1) its creation theology; (2) its depiction of God's compassionate care for human beings, especially suffering people; (3) its covenantal/legal materials; and (4) its prophetic vision of a just wholeness for Israel and all creation.<sup>28</sup>

In Christian doctrine in the gospels sin is often portrayed as blindness, a potent metaphor reminding us that humans do not recognise God or each other, because we are finite, fallen and foolish. The gift of sight to the blind (seeing again) – seeing God, ourselves or each other (including our shared history) – is one significant dimension of the reversals of the kingdom. The promise of full recognition, according to 1 Corinthians 13:1, is eschatological in nature: “or now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known”. The apostle is referring to seeing Jesus and being fully known by Christ. Full seeing and full recognition – to both know and be known – in Christ is a promise for eternity.

The gift of sight, however, has ethical implications for life now in the Kingdom of God. The gift of seeing each other afresh animates reversals where guests become hosts, and hosts become guests. The mutual giving and receiving required by such reversals means that *both* parties must recognise something about themselves in order to recognise the other. The discussion of guests and host in the kingdom begins, naturally, with God as host surrounded by a large and diverse gathering of guests.

### Luke 13: God the Host Welcomes Many Guests at His Table

The saying of Jesus found in Luke 13:28-29 (and also found at Matthew 8:11-12) is commonly referred to as ‘The Feast of the Kingdom’. It describes the eschatological Kingdom as a feast or banquet where there will be full knowing and recognition, even as the participants will be fully known and recognised. The image of reclining “at table in the kingdom of God” (13:29) indicates a heavenly banquet where the

26 John Milbank, “Dignity and Rights: Fusion and Instability”. In: Christopher McCrudden, (ed.), *Understanding Human Dignity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 189.

27 Milbank, “Dignity and Rights”, 203.

28 David P. Gushee, “A Christian Theological Account of Human Worth”. In: McCrudden, *Understanding Human Dignity*, 278.

composition of those who will share in this life – those gathered and reclining with the patriarchs – is a surprising reversal of expectations. The common Jewish assumption was that it would compromise their descendants: “Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God” (11:28) who would be gathered around God’s heavenly table. Gathered instead – quite shockingly – are people “coming from east and west, and from north and south” (11:29). Most radically, the implications of such a reversal is emphasised: “behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last” (11:30).<sup>29</sup>

Ethicist Alan Verhey, who noticed this theme of eschatological reversal in Luke, found it so pervasive throughout the New Testament that he entitled his own book *The Great Reversal*.<sup>30</sup> Richard Hays has also noted that “this reversal motif is [so] built into the deep structure of Jesus’ message” that it validates the reversal theme as a foundational element of Jesus’ teaching.<sup>31</sup> Too often the church has been content to affirm the theological significance of Jesus’ vision, but stopped short of embracing it socially. Jesus’ practice of mixing and eating across ethnic and social divisions (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34) leaves no biblical warrant for this reticence. In fact, all the gospel narratives, but most noticeably Luke-Acts, witness to the radical embrace of God’s great reversal.<sup>32</sup> This is Jesus’ view of the Kingdom community to which public theology must bear witness. Within the Australian context, how might the church offer leadership and hope for a nation struggling with many forms of diversity and a dark past? Though Christianity has contributed to ignorance, silence and misrecognition of Aboriginal peoples, it can yet also be an ambassador of Reconciliation with repentance and recognition with dignity.

### Three Warning Parables

Luke 16-19 contain three warning parables about rejecting God’s great reversal. The first, beginning in Luke 16:28, is the parable of the rich man and his poor neighbour Lazarus. It can be read as a contemporary warning to rich, city-dwelling non-Aboriginal peoples eclipsing and ignoring the Aboriginal ‘Lazarus’ living at our national ‘gate’. The second, a parable of a religious leader’s piety, prayer and pride that fail to secure him the righteousness he desires, serves as a warning to people of faith whose pride displaces justice for Aboriginal peoples. The third (Luke 18:18-30) is the story of a rich ruler who wants to inherit eternal life; he is a man who tries to avoid the fate of reversal of the rich man in Luke 16; he departs sadly in a way that might warn rich Australians who love their acquisitions and accumulate wealth more than Aboriginal poverty and injustice.

<sup>29</sup> John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985), 15-45.

<sup>30</sup> Allen D. Verhey, *The Great Reversal: Ethics and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>31</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1996), 163.

<sup>32</sup> Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality*, Verhey, *The Great Reversal* and Hays, *The Moral Vision* contain extended treatments of the “reversal” motif in Luke and Acts.

## Encountering Jesus, Embracing Reversal

The first part of Luke 19 narrates Zacchaeus' encounter with Jesus. "Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich" (19:1-2). Zacchaeus, as a tax or toll collector, was driven by greed and became very rich. In the diminutive figure of Zacchaeus we have a window into privilege and entitlement. Leaders of governments, CEOs of large corporations as well as ordinary Australians, share Zacchaeus' addiction: power and greed become intoxicating. All is not well in Zacchaeus' world. He is so desperate to see Jesus that he races ahead of the crowd to climb a tree. Preachers, with more passion than precision, rush to offer amateur psychoanalysis of Zacchaeus' inner world. Luke instead compares Zacchaeus with the similar figures from the preceding chapters. In the light of the stunning failure of these anonymous rich men – their power and wealth failed to satisfy those deeper longings – as hearers we eagerly anticipate: what will happen to rich Zacchaeus? A profound reversal must take place in Zacchaeus' life. First, as a rich and powerful host, he must open his home and his heart to Jesus. Second, in his encounter with Jesus, the truly generous host, he discovers his own emptiness, his deep need for forgiveness, his obligation to make amends.<sup>33</sup>

When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today". So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him.

*Luke 19:5-6*

Zacchaeus was happy to welcome Jesus (*hypedexato*, literally 'to receive' Jesus). This responsive act must be interpreted and understood on more than one level. Jesus, the guest, invites himself to Zacchaeus' place. Zacchaeus the host receives Jesus as a guest in his home and in his life as the story confirms. Unlike the earlier rich and powerful 'me', this one receives and welcomes Jesus. A deeper, great reversal occurs as Jesus is encountered, recognised and known as the true host. Encountering Jesus as host, Zacchaeus encounters, recognises and knows his deep need. Jesus the generous host is a generous giver. Zacchaeus, receiving true generosity, is transformed by the one who says that "it is more blessed to give than to receive" and immediately sets about giving back to those from whom he had stolen. The two previous rich men could not be generous, because they had not learned to receive. They had only learned to take. Then Jesus said to Zacchaeus, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10).

Rich and powerful hosts – like Zacchaeus, like so many of the dominant culture – are used to being the hosts – that is, the ones in control. If freed from our greed for power and wealth by a truly generous host, we can become so transformed that we are able to give generously. Each week, as we receive bread and wine, we not only remember our own need and hold out empty hands, but we remember the world's need, becoming grateful and generous hosts in the redemptive and transformative process.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Robert J. Karris, *Eating Your Way Through Luke's Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 36-37.

<sup>34</sup> Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Strathfield: St. Paul's Publications, 2000), 150-152 identifies the same motif but prefers the language of "exchange" to "reversal".

## A Sacrament of Reversal: The Eucharist

Only a theology of dignity grounded in the hospitality of Christ can recognise people as hosts and guests as sacraments. Sarah Coakley rightly suggests that “the possibility of seeing and finding Jesus” is formed and shaped first by the narrative of the gospels and, as at Emmaus in Luke 28:35, the “rupture of expectation that the sacramental breaking of bread implies”.<sup>35</sup> True recognition of Jesus, of ourselves and the mutual recognition of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal brothers and sisters, the rupture of expectation is a Eucharistic reversal (or, according to Koenig, the ‘supper of discernment’).<sup>36</sup>

Each week, as an Anglican priest, I, Geoff, invite people to the Eucharist with words of reversal:

But here,  
at this table,  
he is the host.  
Those who wish to serve him  
must first be served by him,  
those who want to follow him  
must first be fed by him,  
those who would wash his feet  
must first let him make them clean.  
Jesus Christ,  
who has sat at our table  
now invites us to his.<sup>37</sup>

Gathering as the community of faith for the Eucharist, non-Aboriginal peoples are not merely welcoming hosts for minority ‘others’ (how easy it is for rich and educated white Christians to assume the role of hosts). At the Eucharist non-Aboriginal peoples must discover they are first guests. First person speech is required here, as I, Geoff, am named, interrogated, then forgiven by Christ the host. In remembering the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ through the liturgy for Holy Communion, I discover that I am not the centre of God’s story, but that Christ is. Receiving the wine, I discover that Christ, the true host, welcomes me into the very life of God. In Christ I am given my true name and dignity. Gathered around the table of Jesus Christ, I, as a non-Aboriginal person, recognise that I am not the host on *terra nullius*. The Eucharistic reversal means, in fact, that I am a guest in a country gifted to Aboriginal ancestors in the time of dreaming. I am no more the centre of the Australian story than I am the centre of God’s story. This is true confession.

Gathered together at the table of Jesus Christ, I am deeply transformed by becoming the guest: I am welcomed in Christ by the ancient hosts of these lands, its culture and its dreaming. Such welcome is true forgiveness. Rowan Williams affirms that to share in the Eucharist means “to live as people who know that they are always guests”.

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Coakley, “On the Identity of the Risen Jesus: Finding Jesus Christ in the Poor”. In: B. Gaventa & R. Hays, (eds.), in *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids, MN: Eerdmans, 2008), 316.

<sup>36</sup> Koenig, *Hospitality*, 65-71.

<sup>37</sup> Wild Goose Worship Group, *A Wee Worship Book: Fourth Incarnation* (Iona: Iona Publications, 2009), 83.

Sacramental discipline demands both ‘honest repentance’ (naming, confessing) and the gift of forgiveness through the risen Jesus for the Eucharist to be seen in this ‘globally transforming way’.<sup>38</sup>

## A Proposal for Recognition with Dignity for Aboriginal Peoples

Any public and practical proposal for recognition with dignity for Aboriginal peoples feels like a repeating of many voices, making many calls, over many decades, indeed over two centuries. The question of a treaty (or treaties) necessarily involves political processes, but successive federal governments have lacked the will to debate the merits of a treaty with its first peoples.<sup>39</sup> I, Brooke, also put on the public record in 2013 that:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices all over this state need to be heard and listened to – in this state and in this country. When a government has the courage to do this our way with proper, authentic, far-reaching and face-to-face consultation, then just maybe we might actually come to build a state and country for all Australians based on respect, kindness and harmony.<sup>40</sup>

History repeats itself as Aboriginal voices are ignored, silenced and not recognised, such as those represented by ‘Concerned Australians’:

We are Sovereign Peoples who have never ceded our land. We want to take control over our lives and determine our futures, through legal agreements, compacts, covenants or treaties established in law and enforceable through the courts. The time is long overdue for Government to sit down with Aboriginal Peoples across Australia and to negotiate agreements and return to us our rights.<sup>41</sup>

A call for recognition with dignity requires the first step of beginning negotiations for a treaty (or treaties).<sup>42</sup> Any treaties would confirm the 1988 Barunga Statement and promise of then Prime Minister Bob Hawke.<sup>43</sup> The statement recognises the dignity of Aboriginal peoples’ “prior ownership, continued occupation and sovereignty and affirming Aboriginal peoples human rights and freedom”.<sup>44</sup>

Recognition with dignity reaches back 250 years, possibly 60,000 years, which has direct implications for the Australian church. The call of Uncle Rev. Neville Naden is urgent:

Over the past 226 years, since colonisation, the First Nations peoples of this land have fought for the recognition of land custodianship ... Respectful Relationships are needed if we are going to forge a future of equality for our people in this country. There are many ways this can be done, three of which are outlined below:

38 Rowan Williams, *Being Christian: Baptism, Bible, Eucharist, Prayer* (London: SPCK, 2014), 51-60.

39 <http://bit.ly/2lvAa4b> [Accessed 4 February 2017].

40 Brooke Prentis, Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee Public Hearing, *Youth Justice and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2014* (Brisbane: Transcript of Proceedings, 3 March 2013), 31-32.

41 <http://bit.ly/2LT4Pu6> [Accessed 4 February 2017].

42 The Treaty Interim Working Group, <http://bit.ly/2lxhTUa> [Accessed 4 February 2017].

43 1988 Barunga Statement, <http://bit.ly/2lxLMU3> [Accessed 4 February 2017].

44 1988 Barunga Statement.

Recognition of the need for First Nations People to be invited to sit down at the (Church Denomination) table when issues regarding land and property are discussed.

That when distributing the resources and assets of the church, priority be given to First Nations People of this country. (After all, this is still their land!)

That in church seminars, conferences, Synods, General Assemblies, Indigenous Christian leaders be given roles as key-note speakers so that non-Indigenous audiences might be better informed.<sup>45</sup>

Based on Genesis 2, which teaches a “primal human kinship, unity and equality by narrating a story in which all human beings come from one common ancestor, or couple”, recognition with dignity can be deepened and extended.<sup>46</sup> Australian churches ought now to embody the Eucharistic reversals in local treaties such as the treaty between local Aboriginal leaders and the St Mary’s in Exile Church in South Brisbane.<sup>47</sup> Other practical reversals from hosts to guests for the Australian church can include displaying an acknowledgement of country plaque, or holding a service of prayer and lament on 26 January. Recognition, with dignity of Aboriginal peoples means hosting a celebration service for NAIDOC week,<sup>48</sup> hosting an Aboriginal speaker at least once a year, and treating all Aboriginal people in its neighbourhood with dignity.

## Conclusion

A robust, public theology defines precisely such prophetic roles for Christian thought and ecclesial practice in addressing the politics of postponement in Australia. It is time for a theology of recognition with dignity, where Eucharistic reversals are enacted in the public square as we learn to walk together as guests and hosts. To see an end to the postponement of justice, it is crucial that we walk together.

## Postscript

In late April 2018 Gurrumul’s posthumous album *Djarimirri* became the first Indigenous language release to reach No. 1 in Australia’s ARIA album charts.<sup>49</sup> What does this remarkable achievement mean for the recognition of the dignity of Australia’s Aboriginal peoples? It would be a serious mistake to claim too much. There is a long

45 Neville Naden, “The Issue of Land and Australia’s First Nations Peoples”. An edited version of this chapter “Colonization has Many Names”. In: J. Havea, (ed.), *Indigenous Australia and the Unfinished Business of Theology: Cross-cultural Engagement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 1-7. See also Peter Adam, “Australia - Whose Land? A Call for Recompense”, paper presented at *The Second Annual John Saunders Lecture* (Morling College, 2009) and Broughton, *Restorative Christ*, 158-166.

46 Gushee, “A Christian Theological Account”, 279.

47 Uncle Dennis Walker, <http://bit.ly/2A0GYWI> [Accessed 1 November 2018].

48 NAIDOC Week is observed in July on an annual basis. The week is designed to celebrate “the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”. The term NAIDOC originally referred to the “National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee”. Online at: <http://bit.ly/33aTIYJ> [Accessed 1 November 2018].

49 Ben Smee, “Gurrumul’s Album *Djarimirri* Is First Indigenous-Language Chart-Topper”, *The Guardian*, 22 April 2018. <http://bit.ly/35gGyWE> [Accessed 22 April 2018].

and regrettable history of ‘first steps’ in Australia regarding the recognition of, and Reconciliation with, Aboriginal peoples (see further our “Reconciliation without Repentance” chapter in this volume). Non-Aboriginal Australians are always eager to claim real, grassroots progress is being made for Aboriginal peoples by appealing to important (but largely symbolic) gestures. Conversely, it would be a mistake to overlook the seismic shifts in Australia since the chapter above was first presented in November 2016. This postscript briefly addresses some of those issues and the way forward.

The *Uluru Statement From the Heart* rejected the Government’s preferred model of constitutional recognition that was drawn up on their terms, which many assumed would be the mere inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a preamble.<sup>50</sup> The *Statement*, instead, articulates a deeper, fuller recognition of Aboriginal peoples – more closely resembling a joint partnership.

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* emerged from the Referendum Council’s selection of 300 Aboriginal leaders from across Australia – an historical moment for our nation as such a large gathering is a rarity. This gathering, and the process adopted, faced difficulties and divisions from the beginning. For example, only 13 regional forums were held across Australia to select the 300 delegates from more than 300 nations of Aboriginal peoples. Only those selected people were allowed to participate, meaning grassroots Aboriginal community leaders, and even the Anangu peoples, the traditional custodians of the land where the Referendum Council was conducted, were excluded from the process. The name Uluru was used without appropriate consultation and approval of the Anangu peoples.<sup>51</sup>

The final <http://bit.ly/31X88Gm> contained the following calls:

- an acknowledgement and explanation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples sovereignty;
- the establishment of a First Nations voice to the Federal Parliament; and
- the establishment of a Makarrata Commission for agreement making between First Nations peoples and Government (e.g. treaty/treaties) and for truth telling (e.g. A truth-telling commission).

<sup>50</sup> Uluru Statement From the Heart. Online at: <http://bit.ly/31X88Gm> [Accessed 22 April 2018].

<sup>51</sup> Kirstyn Lindsay, “Anangu Tribal Elders Ask For The Name of Uluru Statement From The Heart To Be Changed”, *SBS*, 12 December 2017. Online at: <http://bit.ly/35dEnTG> [Accessed 22 April 2018].

# TO WITNESS A TIME OF CRISIS

A Cross-Textual Reading of the Book of Lamentations and Testimonies  
from the 2014 Gaza Conflict

*Katherine Rainger*

They cry to their mothers,  
"Where is bread and wine?"  
as they faint like the wounded  
in the streets of the city,  
as their life is poured out  
on their mother's bosom.

*Lamentations 2:12*

It doesn't matter that you have children.  
You live in the wrong place  
and now is your chance to run  
to nowhere.

*Running Orders*  
Lena Khalaf Tuffaha

The aim of this chapter is to hear ancient and contemporary voices respond to crisis in their own contexts and in dialogue with each other.<sup>1</sup> I have chosen the five poems of the Book of Lamentations and three testimonies from the Gaza conflict in July 2014. In the immediacy of the Gaza conflict I collected testimonies from social

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<sup>1</sup> My method of cross-textual reading resonates with Tod Linafelt's study, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book*, particularly the final section where he interprets Lamentations alongside the novella *The Shawl* by Cynthia Ozick. Tod Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations: Catastrophe, Lament, and Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press). For further examples see: Archie Chi Chung Lee, "Engaging Lamentations" and *The Lament for the South: A Cross-Textual Reading*. In: *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (ed.), N.C. Lee & C. Mandolfo (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 125-138; Nancy Lee, *The Singers of Lamentations: Cities Under Siege, From Ur to Jerusalem to Sarajevo* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); Jeanette Mathews, "Framing Lament: Providing a Context for the Expression of Pain". In: *Spiritual Complaint: The Theology and Practice of Lament* (ed.), M.J. Bier & T. Bulkeley (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 187-204. Biblical scholar Walter Brueggeman argues that scholars "have a critical role to play in connecting ancient texts to contemporary crises". Walter Brueggeman, "Lament as Wake-Up Call (Class Analysis and Historical Possibility)". In: *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (ed.), N.C. Lee & C. Mandolfo (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 236.

media.<sup>2</sup> In June 2015 the United Nations Office of the Commissioner of Human Rights presented its report on the conflict.<sup>3</sup> Together these accounts of the conflict between Israeli and Hamas forces make for sobering reading. The impact of each air strike, mortar attack and ground operation reverberated in the lives of those living in the Gaza strip and Israel, causing untold suffering.

The 50-Day War (7 July to 26 August), also known as *Operation Protective Edge*, resulted in huge loss of life and destruction of property. The United Nations Report stated that 2,251 Palestinians were killed, 1,462 of whom were civilians. A further 73 Israelis, 6 of whom were civilians, were killed along with one foreign aid worker.<sup>4</sup> The United Nations has accused both sides of war crimes. Alongside the toll on civilian lives, there was enormous destruction of civilian infrastructure in Gaza. "18,000 housing units were destroyed in whole or in part; much of the electricity network and the water and sanitation infrastructure were incapacitated; and 73 medical facilities and many ambulances were damaged".<sup>5</sup>

The impetus for undertaking my study can be traced back to July 2014. A year earlier I had been in Israel and Palestine and, as the conflict intensified, I began to read the testimonies that were being shared on *Facebook*. One piece stood out: the article by Esther Han, "Palestinian boy clings to paramedic – story behind the viral photo". It contained testimony by a junior doctor, Belal Dabour.<sup>6</sup> The article contained the words and images of a boy who, after being caught in artillery fire from Israel, was severely wounded and was then brought to Gaza City's Al-Shifa hospital. The second of the three texts chosen is "Humans of Gaza, Humans of Tel Aviv" by Josie Gladiusz.<sup>7</sup> She is a Jewish mother living in Ra'anana, north of Tel Aviv. She described running to a bomb shelter with her twins in a stroller and grieving for the deaths of Israeli soldiers as well as Palestinian civilians, whom she names. She lamented the situation as she sought for an honest response as an Israeli national amongst the many competing claims for truth. The poem "Running Orders: A Poem

2 Stephen Garner argues that new media have changed the rules around control of and access to information. These media can also provide a transitional space for lament and complaint as individuals move "from orientation to disorientation to reorientation". Stephen Garner, "Lament in an Age of New Media". In: *Spiritual Complaint: The Theology and Practice of Lament* (ed.), M.J. Bier & T. Bulkeley (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 233-245. See also Shelly Rambo: "The rise of social media has also transformed engagements with trauma. Social media can facilitate connections, offering a collective network of care that has not been fully conceptualised theologically". Shelly Rambo, "Introduction". In: *Post-Traumatic Public Theology*, (ed.) S.N. Arel & S. Rambo (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 12. [[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40660-2\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40660-2_1)].

3 "Report of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict", online at: <http://bit.ly/2OuTJ0i> [Accessed 6 April 2017].

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Esther Han, "Palestinian Boy Clings to Paramedic – Story Behind the Viral Photo", online at: <http://bit.ly/2p0W743> [Accessed 15 October 2014].

7 Josie Gladiusz, "Humans of Gaza, Humans of Tel Aviv: I Do Not Want My Children to Grow Up to Kill or Be Killed in a Senseless War that Has No End", online at: <http://bit.ly/30YL5tk> [Accessed 15 October 2014].

for Gaza”, by a Palestinian-American, Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, is the third text.<sup>8</sup> This response is closest in form to the poems of Lamentations. Tuffaha puts the reader in the place of an evacuee in Gaza who is forced to flee upon receiving warning that a bomb is about to be dropped and “Your house is next”.

In April 2016 the Australian photojournalist Darrian Traynor travelled to Gaza and spoke with families who are still living with the physical and emotional scars of having bodies and homes destroyed in July 2014.<sup>9</sup> In this complex and fraught geopolitical context the need for lament, truth-telling and bearing witness continues.

## Speaking the Unspeakable

The disorientation, dispossession and devastation portrayed by the voices in the five poems in the Book of Lamentations are responses to their own circumstances. The destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem was an event without precedent and became a turning point in Jewish religious development.<sup>10</sup> Lamentations is a collection of poetic laments which fixes the reader’s gaze directly on the event itself.<sup>11</sup> “It marks, with untempered immediacy, the focal calamity of the Bible, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BCE”.<sup>12</sup>

The images of loss and grief also convey a universal story. Kathleen O’Connor writes that “Lamentations hardly needs interpretation for peoples who live in the ruins of destroyed cities, whose societies are decimated by genocide, or who barely subsist in the face of famine and poverty”.<sup>13</sup> Throughout the twentieth century both the Jewish people and the Palestinian people have faced untold suffering and this legacy has a direct impact on the present situation in Israel/Palestine.<sup>14</sup>

In ancient times the land also knew trauma. The cry from Daughter Zion upon the destruction of Jerusalem, and the plight of those who survived the crisis continues to echo through the centuries. Prayers of lament are unlike other biblical prayers of praise and thanksgiving; “laments announce aloud and publicly what is wrong right now” as they “name injustice, hurt and anger”.<sup>15</sup> To lament is to put the unspeakable into words in response to a situation of crisis and trauma. O’Connor argues that laments enable pain and injustice to be seen, heard and acknowledged. When the truth-telling inherent in lament is heard by compassionate listeners, “the work of

<sup>8</sup> Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, “Running Orders: A Poem for Gaza”, online at: <http://bit.ly/20wc4tM> [Accessed 15 October 2014].

<sup>9</sup> Darrian Traynor, “Comment: Life in Gaza – Two Years on From Operation Protective Edge”, online at: <http://bit.ly/33fEvA6> [Accessed 6 April 2017].

<sup>10</sup> Adele Berlin, *Lamentations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Lundy cited in Berlin, *Lamentations*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> Kathleen O’Connor, *Lamentations and the Tears of the World* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), xiv.

<sup>14</sup> For an analysis of the creation of the State of Israel, see Ariella Azoulay, *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947-1950*, trans. Charles S. Kamen (London: Pluto Press, 2011); Marc Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 31-75; and Ilan Pappé, *A History of Modern Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>15</sup> O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 128.

witnessing” occurs. Lamenting and receiving lament are “the beginning of action and the rejection of passivity and therefore a necessary precursor for individual and collective works of justice”.<sup>16</sup>

Lament in the Hebrew Scriptures often contains the elements of grief, complaint and penitence, and hope in the faithfulness of God, but variations are not uncommon. Each instance of lament in the Psalms, the Prophets, Job and the Book of Lamentations should be read on its own terms. The focus of this study is the Book of Lamentations and the way literary constructs of lament are used to respond to the crisis of Exile. Hebrew liturgical practice places Lamentations among the *Megillot*, the five liturgical scrolls read at important festivals.<sup>17</sup> Christian usage has largely been restricted to Holy Week liturgies. Observing Holy Week and Tisha B'av remind us that mourning and lament are part of the human condition, even as we would wish for a time when lamenting is no more.<sup>18</sup>

## The Book of Lamentations

### Lamentations 1:1-22: The Woman in Mourning has Found No Comfort

The first poem begins with an exclamation of surprise. “How lonely sits the city that once was full of people! How like a widow she has become, she that was great amongst the nations!” (1:1). The first word ‘*eka*, ‘How’ conveys the sense of disorientation, surprise and perhaps pity which the narrator feels for Zion.<sup>19</sup> As a statement it resonates throughout the entire chapter. How has this city gone from the majesty and prosperity of royalty (1:1, 6) to starvation and groaning at the hands of the enemy (1:4, 8, 11)? The extreme contrasts between prosperity and destitution are conveyed through the personification of Daughter Zion. Images of daughter, lover, widow and mother intersect in this chapter with the effect of adding to the chaos and conveying the notion that the victim is also responsible for her plight. It was her sin which turned the Lord against her and her folly in entertaining lovers which led to her destruction, for her lovers deceived and betrayed her (1:2, 19). The image of a widow weeping bitterly in 1:1-2 is one of vulnerability, destitution and abandonment. As mother, she suffers, “her children have gone away, captives before the foe” (1:5) and as daughter “all her majesty has departed” (1:6).

The narrator describes Daughter Zion’s pain and condemns her role in causing it. After a series of accusations in 1:1-9, Daughter Zion interrupts, “O LORD, look at my affliction, for the enemy has triumphed” (1:9). The narrator describes Zion’s outer world of pain and suffering. Her inner world is described in verses 11-22 as

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Delbert R. Hillers, *Lamentations: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>18</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 143-144. For an account of a contemporary observance of Tisha B'av, which includes traditional rituals such as breaking the fast and burning the Tisha B'av liturgy followed by singing and dancing, see Naomi Seidman, “Burning the Book of Lamentations”. In: *Out of the Garden: Women Writers on the Bible*, (ed.) C. Büchmann & C. Spiegel (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994), 281.

<sup>19</sup> Kathleen O'Connor, “The Book of Lamentations”. In: *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes, Vol. VI* (ed.), L.E. Keck et al., 1011-1072. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 1029.

Daughter Zion cries out to the Lord. Her cries are immediate and focus on the pain in the present situation, “Look, O Lord and see how worthless I have become” (1:11). She is met with silence from God and so turns to those who pass by to witness her pain (1:12). The irony is that the Lord, to whom Daughter Zion initially cries out for relief, is also the one who has inflicted her pain.

Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?  
 Look and see  
 if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,  
 which was brought upon me,  
 which the LORD inflicted  
 on the day of his fierce anger (1:12).

Weeping and groaning with no hope of comfort dominate this bleak landscape. No one is spared in this calamity, “All her people groan as they search for bread; they trade their treasures for food to revive their strength” (1:11).

### Lamentations 2:1-22: What have We Witnessed?

Chapter 2 is closely related to Chapter 1 and the discourse between Daughter Zion and the narrator continues. This time, however, the focus is not on the desolation of Zion; rather 2:1-10 focus on the destructive actions of the Lord.

How the Lord in his anger  
 has humiliated Daughter Zion!  
 He has thrown down from heaven to earth  
 the splendour of Israel;  
 he has not remembered his footstool  
 in the day of his anger (2:1).

Daughter Zion’s sin is no longer the focus of inspection, rather is it the Lord’s actions which are on display and come under scrutiny. The fury that the Lord has unleashed has turned him into Israel’s enemy (2:4-5). The path of destruction the Lord embarks upon has no boundaries: all are legitimate targets of his rage. “The Lord has destroyed without mercy all the dwellings of Jacob; in his wrath he has broken down the strongholds of Daughter Judah; he has brought down to the ground in dishonour the kingdom and its rulers” (2:2). Places of worship are also a target (2:6-7) and the gates of the city can offer no protection (2:9). His fury is like fire (2:4) and his anger is fierce (2:3). “God has lost control, turned into a mad deity whose rage destroys even the divine home”.<sup>20</sup>

O’Connor divides Chapter 2 at verse 11.<sup>21</sup> After describing the Lord’s brutal actions, there is a change in tone and focus. The narrator, speaking in the first person, begins to lament for Zion. The previously uninvolved observer now weeps with Daughter Zion, moved by her situation and especially the plight of the children. In language that closely mirrors Daughter Zion’s speech in 1:16 and 1:20, the narrator now enters her world of suffering and pain:

My eyes are spent with weeping;  
 my stomach churns;

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 1038.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 1039.

my bile is poured out on the ground  
because of the destruction of my people,  
because infants and babes faint  
in the streets of the city (2:11).

This scene of children growing faint with hunger is so devastating that the narrator becomes a participant in the suffering. In verses 13-19 the narrator for the first time speaks directly to Daughter Zion. The question, “What can I say for you, to what compare you, O Daughter Jerusalem? To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you, O virgin Daughter Zion? For vast as the sea is your ruin; who can heal you?” (2:13) is full of empathy as the narrator searches for the words with which to express the ‘unsayable’.<sup>22</sup> Her characterisation changes from that of a guilty woman to an innocent virgin Daughter. The narrator becomes the witness to Daughter Zion’s suffering. The narrator urges her to express her distress to the Lord (2:18-19).

Verse 17 contains a reference to the Lord carrying out that which he had promised to do. Set alongside the description of violent rage in 2:1-10 and the expression of grief in 2:11-16, however, the emphasis on the Lord’s righteousness justifying his deeds is greatly diminished. Carleen Mandolfo identifies a new theological discourse emerging in Chapter 2. The theological assumption behind the prophet’s warnings and behind many readings of Lamentations is that Jerusalem is justifiably punished for her sins.<sup>23</sup> Mandolfo argues that this reading is often privileged as the normative voice. The narrator challenges this position in Chapter 2 by understanding the supplicant’s situation from her perspective. Drawing on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Mandolfo recognises this phenomenon of juxtaposing two utterances on a semantic plane as “unintentional dialogicity”.<sup>24</sup> This reading has the effect of repositioning the didactic/divine voice that is embodied by the narrator.<sup>25</sup> The didactic voice is redeployed through the narrator, as the narrator enters the world of Daughter Zion’s distress and weeps with her (2:11-12).

This realignment of the dominant discourse continues in verses 20-22, when Daughter Zion speaks again. In speaking she does not tell a new story; rather she “reacts to the terror God’s story is responsible for inflicting on her”.<sup>26</sup> Again, she implores the Lord to look and consider her situation (cf. 1:11c, 20). This time, however, her tone is accusatory. God has gone too far and Daughter Zion calls his actions to account by noting the abuse and the obscenities that have occurred. Those whom she has nourished have fallen in the most atrocious of circumstances:

Look, O LORD, and consider!  
To whom have you done this?  
Should women eat their offspring?  
the children they have borne?  
Should priest and prophet be killed  
in the sanctuary of the Lord?  
*Lamentations 2:20.*

22 Ibid., 1041.

23 Carleen R. Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets: A Dialogic Theology of the Book of Lamentations* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), 84.

24 Ibid., 68.

25 Ibid., 68.

26 Ibid., 81.

Here the equation of guilt and suffering presented by the prophets is challenged. Daughter Zion re-contextualises the prophetic word to express her own truth about the violence she has experienced. Mandolfo argues that the certainty of causality proposed by the prophets, as in Jeremiah 2:17 where sin resulted in guilt and suffering, is undermined by the perspectives offered in Lamentations. "It is no longer possible to speak an easy truth about God's justice or meaningful existence".<sup>27</sup> Daughter Zion's resistance is radical. "She is tearing the very fabric of the retributive theology that the prophets propound. 'I have sinned – you have no right to treat me this way' is not what the prophets had in mind".<sup>28</sup> Mandolfo's thesis is relevant to this overall study. After hearing from Daughter Zion herself, we cannot simply listen to the prophets' pronouncements about her in the same way. A counter-narrative has emerged in the same way that the testimonies from Gaza and Israel also present a counter-story to the dominant discourse about what it means to be Israeli and Palestinian.

### Lamentations 3: 1-66: Hope Where There is No Hope?

Chapter 3 contains yet another voice, the 'Strong Man', and contains stark imagery of being confined as well as the juxtaposition of hope and despair.<sup>29</sup> The chapter concludes with a petition for justice and revenge. The Strong Man does not come to a resolution about his circumstances. Rather, faith (3:32), hope (3:22-24), communal repentance (3:40-48), grief and distress are all present as valid responses to the crisis (3:49-51). The hope that has emerged remains tentative, dependent on the action and response of Yahweh, the untameable deity.<sup>30</sup>

### Lamentations 4: 1-22: Surveying the Disaster

In Chapter 4 the poet adopts a detached tone for the narration as the reader becomes party to a chilling scene of despair and depravity. 4:1-10 are devoid of emotional outbursts and cries to the Lord. Instead, a desolate wasteland emerges, where "the tongue of the infant sticks to the roof of its mouth for thirst; the children beg for food, but no one gives them anything" (4:4). The chapter concludes with the retelling of the attack using first-person plural forms. This rhetorical feature adds to the drama and indicates that this narrator was a witness to the calamity or that the community has interrupted the narrator.<sup>31</sup> Verses 17-20 convey the surprise of the attack and the strength of the invaders. The circumstances are indeed dire and certainty becomes confusion as not even the Lord's anointed was spared (4:20). The final verses (21-22) reveal a glimpse of a future where the fortunes of Edom and Zion are reversed and Zion's punishment is completed.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>29</sup> O'Connor translates *geber* as "Strong Man" to reflect the semantic range of the word, which also connotes soldiers, especially those who defend women, children and other non-combatants. O'Connor, "Book of Lamentations", 1046.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 1057.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 1059.

## Lamentations 5: 1-22: Survival in the Land.

Chapter 5 contains the most conventional form of lament. It begins with a petition (5:1), followed by a long complaint about the suffering that the people are enduring (5:2-18). This section is followed by an assurance that Yahweh rules forever (5:19-20) and it closes with another petition (5:21-22).<sup>32</sup> Yet the conventional petition and hope of restoration are subverted in 5:22 and the chapter ends on a pessimistic and tragic note.

Restore us to yourself, O Lord,  
that we may be restored;  
renew our days as of old –  
unless you have utterly rejected us,  
and are angry with us beyond measure  
*Lamentations 5:22*

## Testimonies from Gaza and Israel

In the following cross-textual reading of three testimonies from the Gaza conflict and the Book of Lamentations I am focusing on thematic links and the interaction between the voices presented in each text. Biblical lament is characterised by the lament either being addressed to God, or with the implicit understanding that God is part of the worldview of the author and audience. None of the texts from social media necessarily have this implicit understanding and God is not mentioned; however, as commentators like Marc Ellis, Naim Ateek and Jean Zuru attest, religion is as much an inherent part of the makeup of Israel and Palestine today as it was in ancient times.<sup>33</sup> These texts emerge, therefore, from a context where religion and politics, as well as history and culture, integrally construct identity and power.

### Palestinian Boy Clings to Paramedic – Story Behind the Viral Photo

This harrowing text includes both the newspaper article and the accompanying photo. The photo of the unnamed boy had gone viral and the article itself aims to provide the background story. This is a deeply moving piece that focuses on one personal story to humanise the overall situation. As well as statistics about the number of children who have died (73 Palestinian children in the previous 11 days), the reader is introduced to a boy and his three siblings. The narrator, a junior doctor Belal Dabour, is both witness and participant (cf. Lamentations 3:1). The rhetorical power of the article comes in the speech from the boy as he clings to the paramedic with “every ounce of his strength”. His cries, “I want my father, bring me my father!” are the reverse of Daughter Zion and the narrator crying for the fate of the children of Zion (2:11, 12, 19, 20, 21, 5:3). Here the boy’s screams are heard along with those of

32 Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation*, trans. Charles Muenchow (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 211.

33 Naim Stifan Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2010); Marc Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Theology of Liberation* (Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2004); Jean Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2008). God’s voice is the missing voice in all four of the texts I am using. O’Connor argues that this honours the human voices of pain and expresses their sense of abandonment “with full force”. O’Connor, *Lamentations*, 15.

his older brother, "Save my little brother!" Where adults are not physically present to cry out, the children of Gaza City do so instead.

The father is represented in this text both in his presence and his absence. For his son – whose screams elicit his presence – he is the source of comfort and security, the one to cry out for when terror strikes. His absence is demonstrated in the immediate crisis; he is not in the emergency room, and the unknown fate of the boy and his father is recorded by the doctor, "I do not know whether he was reunited with his father, or even what became of the rest of his family". The doctor could not even find out the boy's name as too many people arrived to be saved, "some arrived torn to pieces, some beheaded, some disfigured beyond recognition".

Presence and absence are a theme in Lamentations in relation to Yahweh. Yahweh is referred to as the source of both destruction (2:17) and redemption (2:18). He is invoked throughout the five poems and yet he is absent in speech and in any immediate restorative action on behalf of Zion.<sup>34</sup>

Atrocities against children of a different nature, although equally distressing, are recorded in Lamentations (Lamentations 4:4, 4:10).<sup>35</sup> The reader of "Palestinian Boy Clings to Paramedic" who, up until this point, may have witnessed the conflict objectively as another spate of violence in a long line of violent actions, risks personal involvement as one child's story is told. Lamentations 2:11 is a turning point for the narrator. No longer the objective observer, his eyes "are spent with weeping and his stomach churns". Linafelt argues that it is the fate of the children in Zion which has so moved the narrator as the children cry for their mothers and "faint like the wounded in the streets of the city, as their life is poured out on their mother's bosom" (Lamentations 2:12).<sup>36</sup>

Against a background of 'collateral damage' and words of defence from those who have orchestrated the conflict, his screams pierce through with a personal account of suffering. In the long history of the Israel/Palestine conflict the 'sins' of the Palestinians are held against them. In Lamentations 1 the narrator convicts Daughter Zion of her sins of rebellion and Daughter Zion repents (1: 8, 20). By Lamentations 2 the distress and destruction are such that both the narrator and Daughter Zion are pleading for mercy from Yahweh. Regardless of the sin that has been committed by Daughter Zion, the violence and rage of Yahweh are not justified. Similarly, this contemporary text offers a voice of resistance to the retribution of the artillery fire from Israel which is killing innocent children. No matter what has gone before, this attack on children cannot be condoned. The voice of the child, like the voice of Daughter Zion, alerts us to the injustice that has taken place.

The hopeless ending of this article mirrors the pessimistic ending of Lamentations. Dabour concludes, "But there's one thing that I know for sure, which is hundreds

<sup>34</sup> Lamentations 4:21-22 provide a glimpse of the possibility of restoration.

<sup>35</sup> These verses are grotesque whether we interpret them in a metaphorical or literal way. Miriam J Bier, "The Unique Contribution of Lamentations 4 in the Book of Lamentations: Metaphor and the Transition from Individual to Communal!" In: *Spiritual Complaint: The Theology and Practice of Lament* (ed.), M.J. Bier & T. Bulkeley (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 27.

<sup>36</sup> Linafelt, *Surviving Lamentations*, 49-58.

of children just like him suffered similar or worse injuries, and up to the moment of this writing, nearly 80 children just like him have been killed as Israel's merciless attack goes on".

Humans of Gaza, Humans of Tel Aviv: I Do Not Want my Children to Grow Up to Kill or to be Killed in a Senseless War that has No End.

The voice in this text is that of a Jewish Israeli woman, Josie Glausiusz. This voice overlaps with the previous text as Glausiusz speaks of the "bandaged and dying children lying in hospitals in Gaza". The sense of connection through the witness of the suffering of another is the lens through which Glausiusz views her own suffering in this conflict. This text was chosen to present an Israeli experience of the conflict. The reader is given a glimpse of what life is like on the other side of the border. The setting of this text immediately presents a contrast: three-year-old children happily being pushed in a pram on their way to their nursery have their morning dramatically altered by a siren and the sound of explosions. The children's laughter is juxtaposed with their screaming. Childhood innocence is once again contrasted with the reality of war. The use of contrasting images as a literary device is seen throughout *Lamentations*: for example, "The precious children of Zion, worth their weight in fine gold – how they are reckoned as earthen pots, the work of a potter's hands!" (*Lamentations* 4:2).

This text is a lament, because Glausiusz names the overall injustice, suffering and tragedy of a cycle where children on both sides "grow up to kill or be killed in a senseless war that has no end". Her lament is also an exercise in truth-telling. As the truth is told to compassionate hearers, a chance for a change in circumstances emerges. Glausiusz describes her wrestling with and search for truth, and the conclusions she draws: they include the claim that civilians are used as human shields is misleading, which has the effect of humanising the Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip.<sup>37</sup>

This text conveys a mother grieving for the present and future reality of her children living in a conflict zone. Daughter Zion also grieves for her children (2:20-21). After getting her children to safety amidst the sounds of their screaming and the explosions, and on hearing the children in the nursery sing a song about peace, Glausiusz states, "Then I began to weep".

Glausiusz, however, goes further than any of the voices in *Lamentations* in her witness and empathy for the other, in her case the "Humans of Gaza". Glausiusz sees herself running through the streets with her children as the sirens wail. At the same time she knows that "there are mothers in Gaza doing the same, and they are not so different from me, and that they probably have nowhere to go for shelter".

Glausiusz tells a personal story. Samar Al Hallaq, the coordinator of the Palestinian History Tapestry Project and her two children, aged 2 and 5, were killed on Sunday 20 July 2014. The reader is informed of the location of the attack and the fact that Samar was pregnant with her third child. Through naming Samar and her children,

<sup>37</sup> Glausiusz once again uses the image of a mother and child to provide the common link: "I find it impossible to believe that any mother, Palestinian or Israeli, would willingly run to a roof with her child when an attack is imminent".

Glausiusz is blending her own story with the tragic story of another mother and, in the process, mourning the loss of innocent life and protesting the injustice.

In her study of Lamentations 4, Miriam J. Bier notes that scholarship, while listening attentively to the rhetoric of the text in vilifying Daughter Zion's plight, has largely ignored the imagery associated with the personification of Daughter Edom (4:21-22, cf. 3:64-66), who is also exposed to the wrath and punishment of Yahweh in graphic ways. "It seems that even as commentators protest the rhetoric of the text in vilifying Zion with imagery associated with female abuse, they are happy to accept that female nakedness and shame are appropriate when it pertains to an enemy's punishment".<sup>38</sup> O'Connor states that the desire for vengeance is a normal response to trauma, catastrophe and oppression.<sup>39</sup> It is only if these desires are acted upon that an ethical dilemma appears. Glausiusz, however, transcends retribution in her quest for understanding, justice and peace. She defines her enemy as Hamas and describes their threat, but she refuses to equate Gaza with Hamas.

Unlike the poets of Lamentations, Glausiusz does not see the future as entailing the redemption of one people at the expense of the other; Daughter Zion or Daughter Edom, Israelis or Palestinians. "I want to believe ... that there can be peace and equality and human rights and respect for both Israelis and Palestinians wherever they are". Although her final sentence describes "a senseless war that has no end", it is Glausiusz's quest to recognise the "Humans of Gaza and the Humans of Tel Aviv" that contains a note of hope for a peaceful and just future.

Daughter Zion is chastised for her sin (1:5) and repents (1:14). Regardless of the sin that has been committed, Mandolfo has alerted us to the fact that there is also another voice that arises in Daughter Zion which states that the suffering that the people are experiencing is beyond justification.<sup>40</sup>

Robert Williamson describes the 'public transcript' and the 'hidden transcript' that exist within interactions where there is a discrepancy in power relations between two parties.<sup>41</sup> Lamentations 5 is ambiguous as to where the fault lies in the broken covenant. There is a tension between 5:7 ("Our ancestors sinned; they are no more, and we bear their iniquities") and 5:16 ("The crown has fallen from our head; woe to us for we have sinned!"). This tension over whose sin has caused the downfall allows the communal voice of Lamentations 5 to protest its own innocence (5:7), while "appearing to adhere to the officially sanctioned interpretation of its suffering" that is found in 5:16 and 2:17.<sup>42</sup>

Glausiusz also addresses the notion that sin and wrongdoing justify punishment. She begins with the 'public transcript':

38 Bier, "The Unique Contribution of Lamentations 4 in the Book of Lamentations", 22.

39 O'Connor, *Lamentations*, 69.

40 Mandolfo, *Daughter Zion Talks Back to the Prophets*, 76.

41 Robert Williamson Jr, "Lament and the Arts of Resistance". In: *Lamentations in Ancient and Contemporary Cultural Contexts* (ed.), N.C. Lee & C. Mandolfo (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 71.

42 *Ibid.*, 76.

I have heard all the arguments in favour of bombing the Gaza strip: that Hamas is a terrorist organization; that it builds tunnels in order to infiltrate Israel and carry out terror attacks within Israel; that Israel has no partner for peace (we do: the Palestinian Authority); that they started the war.

She then describes further elements of the public transcript. Her commentary mirrors Williamson's 'hidden transcript' or Mandolfo's insight that the 'didactic voice' of the narrator can be sympathetic to the plight of the victim, even if the victim is 'sinful' Daughter Zion or 'sinful' Gazans.

I have also read all the 'blame-the-victim' arguments: that Gazans voted for Hamas (as if that justifies their death) and most notably that Hamas uses people as 'human shields', sending them up to the roofs of buildings, or, as one Facebook friend claimed, "pushing them to stand in front of bombs when they are warned beforehand by Israel" about an imminent air strike and told to evacuate.<sup>43</sup>

As a Jewish Israeli, Glausiusz critiques the validity of the claims of human shields by providing other voices from Gazan and Israeli human rights organisations. The inclusion of these voices gives validity to her desire to present another side to the story, a story where a common humanity triumphs over a cycle of retribution and injustice. She also critiques the military strategies of her own government.<sup>44</sup> By utilising a hidden transcript, Glausiusz is providing a direct challenge to the dominant discourse of her government. Her lament has created the space for a new way of seeing and being to emerge even during a time of suffering and atrocity.

#### Running Orders: A Poem for Gaza

Glausiusz remembers the mothers and children of Gaza who have nowhere to run from the Israeli bombardment. The poem *Running Orders* by Lena Khalaf Tuffaha takes the reader directly into the position of a Gazan evacuee who has nowhere to run. The power in Tuffaha's poem is the perspective of one whose humanity is directly threatened.

It doesn't matter what you had planned.  
It doesn't matter who you are  
Prove you're human.  
Prove you stand on two legs.  
Run.

A certain irony features in the last line. You are human if you stand on two legs; however, in the present situation your humanity is only worthwhile in that it allows you to run. This reduction of the value of a life is contrasted with the images Tuffaha presents of family life '58 seconds' before terror hits. They were watching the World Cup with their children, sharing the scarce bread and preparing for power cuts. References to a wedding album and a son's favourite blanket remind the reader of the humanity of the Gazans and the innocence of childhood. The potential of youth on the cusp of adulthood is also threatened. The "almost completed" college application conveys the fragility of the moment between hope and destruction. Like

<sup>43</sup> My emphasis.

<sup>44</sup> Glausiusz critiques an aspect of Israeli military practice: the periodic "mowing the lawn", otherwise known as "flatten all of Gaza" in the words of Ariel Sharon's son Gilad Sharon.

the communal lament of Lamentations 5, those aspects of life which lead to human flourishing are diminished. The reader of Lamentations 5 is faced with a scene of deprivation. Deprivation take hold when the conditions are sub-human as starvation (5:9-10), rape (5:11), torture (5:12) and oppression (5:13) prevail. Dispossession of land and water also means that, “Young men are compelled to grind, and boys stagger under loads of wood” as they work for a future that is not their own (5:13).

In both the ancient and the contemporary poetic responses to a dire situation, other aspects of life that bring joy, such as watching the World Cup or dancing and music, no longer have a place.

The old men have left the city gate,  
The young men their music.  
The joy of our hearts has ceased;  
our dancing has been turned to mourning  
*Lamentations 5:14-15*

Tuffaha’s refrain of “It doesn’t matter” conveys a sense of powerlessness as the oppressor can act without restraint and without considering the circumstances of the victim.

It doesn't matter that you can't call us back  
to tell us the people we claim to want aren't in your house  
that there's no one here except you and your children.

The word ‘run’ is repeated throughout the poem and the use of this literary device conveys a sense of terror and hopelessness within the poem. Largely because there is nowhere to run. A feeling of being hemmed in is developed by the image of narrow alleyways and closed borders. The metaphor “a life sentence in this prison by the sea” juxtaposes two conflicting images, one of confinement and one of freedom.

It doesn't matter that  
There is nowhere to run to.  
It means nothing that the borders are closed  
And your papers are worthless  
And mark you only for a life sentence  
In this prison by the sea  
and the alleyways are narrow  
and there are more human lives  
packed one against the other  
more than any other place on earth  
Just run.

The Strong Man in Lamentations 3 also conveys a sense of being imprisoned. As one who has seen both captivity and exile, the Strong Man describes the actions of God’s wrath in highly metaphorical terms.<sup>45</sup>

He has walled me about so that I  
cannot escape;  
he has put heavy chains on me;

<sup>45</sup> Berlin, *Lamentations*, 89. It is possible to construe the metaphors as inspired by the exilic experience, such as being chained and imprisoned.

though I call and cry for help,  
he shuts out my prayer;  
he has blocked my ways with hewn  
stones,  
he has made my paths crooked  
*Lamentations 3:1-9*

The Strong Man feels walled in and locked up in a dark place from which there is no escape, “a graphic, physically concrete metaphor for captivity”.<sup>46</sup> Tuffaha conveys the sense of captivity for the Gazan evacuee because of the physical surroundings and papers being worthless. The physical environment becomes symbolic of a deeper entrapment in a life of deprivation. Similarly, the Strong Man is suffering physically; however, it is also his mental and emotional anguish which are conveyed in *Lamentations 3:1-9*.

## Conclusion: To Witness a Time of Crisis

Is it nothing to you, all you who  
pass by?  
Look and see  
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow ...  
*Lamentations 1:12*

A multitude of voices from ancient Jerusalem and modern-day Gaza and Israel have spoken and have been heard. The lament is open-ended and the grieving is unfinished – the suffering continues in Gaza and Israel.<sup>47</sup> By voicing lament and naming the injustice and despair, however, a space is created for witnessing which can lead to change. As these voices rise from the ashes of bombardment and dispossession of homes, childhoods and identities, we listen and respond. “Once lament has been heard, the Christian’s responsibility is to lament as well”.<sup>48</sup> Lament is an important Christian ministry which we ignore at our peril. In hearing the testimonies of survivors, we are then able to stand “at the beginning of the transformation of religious and civic consciousness”.<sup>49</sup>

In undertaking this study, I wanted to offer the voices from Israel and Gaza another chance to be heard long after my newsfeed had forgotten them. The ancient form and themes of *Lamentations* can speak alongside the voices from below whom we hear through testimonies which appear on social media. In a fusion of Scripture and testimony we validate the voices of those who are suffering. We who are called to witness can hear and see, and then be sent anew into the world to respond, with eyes that have wept and borne witness to pain, injustice and truth.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>47</sup> See Kathleen D. Billman & Daniel L. Migliore, *Rachel's Cry: prayer of lament and rebirth of hope* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 9.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>49</sup> bid.

# PUBLIC THEOLOGY AND THE MODERN DEMOCRATIC STATE

*Peter Walker*

The world watched with fascinated horror as Donald Trump ‘fever’ infected some portions of the population of the United States of America during 2016. Democracy’s most closely observed process, the election of the President of that country, had provided an overdose of both entertainment and despair in that year. Interestingly, Christian social media sites were choked with statements by Christians protesting either Trump’s candidacy *in toto*, or some of his policies in particular. The proposed wall at the Mexican-United States’ border and the suggestion that certain Muslim-majority countries be excluded from United States’ immigration programmes were two examples that come immediately to mind. Clearly, some Christians were using the virtual public space of social media – the fifth estate – in the hope of influencing opinion against Trump and those of his policy proposals that grated against their faith.

This public display of faith-based protest aroused by the election in the United States almost inevitably elicited a wave of conversation at the Stellenbosch conference. That is unsurprising, given those protests were particularly relevant to a conference focused on the nature of a public theology in modern democratic societies. One step that may prove helpful in answering the question posed by those who posed the conference theme question – “What is the task of public theology in a modern democracy?” – is to remind ourselves of the origins and evolution of the modern democratic state. My aim is to do that, and then offer three proposals on the basis of that historical survey for the role of public theology in contemporary Western democracies. Elections are an indicator, perhaps the indicator *par excellence*, of democracy at work – flawed though those processes may be. We will use the electoral theatre in the United States as a catalyst to arrive at a better understanding of how we got to this point and what public theology may offer in response.

## The Modern Democratic State

We should not move to discuss modern democracy without first acknowledging its emergence in the Greek city-state of Athens around the fifth century BCE.<sup>1</sup> A recent article has argued that the preconditions for that emergence were a combination of several enabling factors, most intriguing among them being the development of a novel military tactic, the phalanx, which gave rise to a new kind of warrior who individually owned property that would allow him to finance that weaponry. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Cahill narrates this much-traversed terrain with charm in his *Sailing The Wine-Dark Sea: Why The Greeks Matter* (New York: Random House, 2003), 108-119.

a new type of warrior and the emergence of individual property rights brought about a military revolution and, so Kyriazis and Paparrigopolous (2014) argue, the attitudes and structures made necessary by this new type of warfare morphed into the civic values and virtues that shaped the earliest democratic commitments and institutions.<sup>2</sup> The military state and the democratic state were hard to distinguish from the start, and were to remain so even when governments were formed by the people.

Government by the people, the core idea of what we now call the modern democratic state, can be traced to thinkers in the church. It was Thomas Aquinas who wrote, as early as the thirteenth century, that “the best of all polity” was one that included an element of democracy. “[T]hat is”, Aquinas wrote in his *Summa Theologia*, “government by the people”.<sup>3</sup> And not only was the idea but also the activism toward installing government by the people in the modern West a product of the church, for the origins of modern democracy are found in the public expression by people of Christian faith of the will to reform the way they were governed.

Enthusiasm for government by the people began to gain traction during the fifteenth century among Christians who saw an opportunity to trump both papal and princely interests in one swoop. It is a story that would not seem out of place if set alongside the election sagas of 2016. A series of ecclesial rifts following the death of Pope Gregory XI in 1376 had left the church with an Italian Pope seated in Rome (Urban VI) and a French Pope seated in Avignon (Clement VII). This Franco-Italian squabble over succession split the church for forty years; “two popes, two sets of cardinals, and two papal courts, each supported by its own taxation”.<sup>4</sup> Yet, even then, another Pope emerged from Pisa in 1409 (Alexander V), bringing the sum total of leadership options before the church to three. The election in 1417 of a fourth, compromise candidate (Martin V) finally seemed to resolve the Great Schism, as this period came to be known. That false dawn was again darkened, however, by the appearance of another ‘antipope’ soon after. Clearly it was getting hard to keep track of this parade of papal contenders and so, given the prevailing instability, it is unsurprising that a movement known as Conciliarism gained strength within the church. It was notable for its advocacy for the appointment of a representative council of the people to frame ecclesial laws and take charge in times of papal crisis. Alas, for the Conciliarists, the Great Schism was not to be their moment. The church rallied during the 1450s around a new Pope, Eugenius.

As we come to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, those we would today call *the* Reformers contributed fresh ideas on the nature of authority and government, within and beyond the church. The Reformers rejected the absolutism of papal authority, in particular, and promoted the inclusion of the laity in church decision-making and authoritative bodies, not to mention the church’s worship, preaching and charitable work. Martin Luther’s treatise on *Temporal Authority – To What Extent It Should Be Obeyed* began circulating in 1523 and is the foundation of what came to be called Luther’s doctrine

2 Nicholas Kyriazis & Xenophon Paparrigopolous, “War and Democracy in Ancient Greece”, *European Journal of Law and Economics*, 2014, 38(1):163-183 [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10657-012-9352-1>].

3 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia* I/II (New York; Cosimo Classics, 2013), Question 105.

4 Bard Thompson, *Humanists and Reformers: A History of the Renaissance and Reformation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 53.

of the two kingdoms.<sup>5</sup> Here we see the signs of a significant separation of powers. In essence, the treatise argues that the authority of civil law, and even the sword, is founded in the will and ordinance of God and, therefore, should be obeyed in the temporal realm.<sup>6</sup> However, temporal authority did not extend so far as to encroach on God's kingdom and its government by the church. Luther argued for faith as a free act, which could be neither coerced nor enforced by any temporal ruler. Furthermore, and perhaps seeking to establish a counter-balancing charity in the light of the theological authority he had conferred on princely power, Luther advised princes that their proper business was the protection of their subjects. While evildoers were to be punished, certainly, it was the responsibility of the princes to use force with reason and discretion. Luther's line was that it is better to punish too little than too much.<sup>7</sup>

It is also important for this brief sweep through history to mention the non-conformism and lay societies of the English Puritan Movement of the 1640s, the English Civil war of 1642-1646 and the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688. These movements became an inspiration to the American (1776) and French (1789) revolutions, where liberty – equality – fraternity were 'born'.<sup>8</sup> This broad overview is nothing more than a cursory survey, of course, of centuries of agitation, protest, debate and defiance by the Christian clergy and lay people who began writing a reform programme across the pages of history in the name of their religious commitments. They set in train a process that eventually brought liberty, equality and fraternity to life as the three founding pillars of modern liberal democracy. Sadly, we know those pillars were realised only selectively and the exclusion of sections of the population from those rights is maintained in most democratic states to this day. We also know, and state with lament, that the church still has much for which it must repent in that failure to make these democratic rights available to all people. Yet without diminishing this point, we can also note that people of the church made their mark on the dawn of the modern democratic state.

There is another side to this coin. On its obverse side the democratic state has returned serve by making an indelible mark on the church; it has done so both in terms of its structures and the manner in which people express their faith. Nathan Hatch has indeed argued that recognising the phenomena of democratisation is central to any understanding of the forms of Christianity in America.<sup>9</sup> Among those marks of democratisation on the church are the rise of individualism and the privatisation of faith. Thus, ironically, Christian advocates for public reform were pivotal to the rise

5 It should be noted that the first evident use of the term "two kingdoms doctrine" in relation to Luther's thought is by Karl Barth in 1922. Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1999), 154.

6 This summary of Luther's treatise and its implications is drawn from Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology*, 151-157 and Donald McKim, *The Cambridge Companion to Martin Luther* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 132-133, 180-181.

7 Martin Marty, *Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin, 2004), 94.

8 A.G. Dickens, "Puritanism: A Brief Anatomy", and "Toward a Longer Perspective". In: *The English Reformation* (London: Batsford Press, 1989), 367-377, 391-396.

9 Nathan Hatch, *The Democratisation of American Christianity* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 1989).

of modern democracy, and yet that which gave birth to the democratic state, namely people of faith agitating in the public square on the basis of their beliefs, has been in decline ever since.<sup>10</sup>

## The Beginning of a 'Private Religion'

The modern democratic state is the child of faithful protest in the public square; it was born of the church. And yet it appears as if the child may have nearly devoured its parent. How did that come about? How did the modern democratic state bring religious reformers to yield in such a way that in the West we now speak of religion as a private matter? Stephen Toulmin's classic study of the birth of modernity, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, is worth revisiting here.<sup>11</sup>

Toulmin argued that modernity had two distinct origins; the first is to be found in *humanism*, epitomised by Michel de Montaigne and grounded in a return to classical literature. The second has its origin in *science*, epitomised by René Descartes and rooted in 17<sup>th</sup> century natural philosophy.<sup>12</sup> Toulmin further argued that the development of modernity had been marked by the victory of its scientific origin and the eclipse of its originating impulse in humanism. He demonstrated that the West is much poorer as a result. In making his case, Toulmin pointed out that the appeal of the scientific and rational was understandable, given the context in which people lived during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. The 'quest for certainty', a quest which drove innovation in science and philosophy, was a quest for neutral methods to settle disputes, which is to say a quest for non-violent methods. Rational neutrality had developed great appeal by the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century as a response to the horrific bloodshed of the Thirty Years War of 1616-1648. Doctrinal disputes had issued into bloodshed in the name of defending and encoding a *correct faith*, and this brought immense suffering to Europe. The church was seemingly unable to settle differences of faith without resorting to violence.

How then could peaceful relations among people of faith be fostered in Europe? How could truth be established over falsehood in the realm of faith without recourse to weapons or, worse, to warfare? The answer was deemed to be rationality. What Europe needed was a method to establish truth which was passionless, so to speak, and neutrally verifiable. A calm, stable, non-violent future depended on it. Therefore, it was not only the cause of *rational certainty* but also the cause of a *politics of certainty*, as Toulmin names it, that Descartes served with such distinction. Church head-butting over doctrinal differences had been responsible for so much violent conflict; it was now necessary to grab the guilty party by the collar and pull it into line in the interests of a stable future. "All the protagonists of modern philosophy ... insisted equally on the need to find foundations for knowledge that were clear, distinct, and certain".<sup>13</sup> Stability was the agenda of a new polis, of the new

<sup>10</sup> Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 105. D'Costa's "Whose Religion and Which Public Square" is an interesting discussion, *ibid.*, 105-127.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Toulmin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

politics, of the new cosmopolis in what was increasingly being named as Europe. War, motivated by the passions of faith, was the catalyst for this drive for stability.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century philosophers' 'Quest for Certainty' was a timely response to a specific historical challenge – the political, social, and theological chaos embodied in the Thirty Years War.<sup>14</sup>

The powers of the church and of the nobility were diluted over the following centuries by the march of a new rational politics in Europe. The power of professionals, city merchants, political reformers and journalists grew. After the 1648 Peace of Westphalia, a system of sovereign nation states emerged in Europe.

## Public Theology

Now it is time to leap over the intervening centuries, as I would like to focus on Max Stackhouse's 2004 Templeton Lecture on Religion and World Affairs, which he titled *Public Theology and Democracy's Future*.<sup>15</sup> Its critical section reads:

No civilisation has yet endured that did not have a religious vision at its core ... One cannot imagine trying to understand the politics of China or India without reference to Confucianism or Hinduism, or the systems of government in Southeast Asia or the Middle East without understanding Buddhism or Islam, or what is going on in the European Union without reference to the legacy of traditional Christendom. Nor can we understand the United States without an awareness of Protestantism's historic influence ... It is not the duty of religious organizations to make public policy, as some try to do; but it is their responsibility to seek to influence people's consciences so that their political decisions will be informed by moral and spiritual convictions.<sup>16</sup>

In describing the responsibility of religious organisations as 'influenc[ing] people's consciences', Stackhouse palpably offered a perspective that reflected his time and location. His statement is emblematic of a context that bears the unmistakable imprint of the history we have quickly surveyed, that is, the erosion of the public authority of the church, the marginalisation of the public expression of religion, and the consequent privatisation of religion. Stackhouse's context is our context: populated by private citizens, with individual rights and, if those private citizens with individual rights hold to religious faith, they do so privately. According to Stackhouse's definition – yet also well before him, of course – it is the conscience of the private citizen and not the public policy of wider society that has become the sphere of religious influence. It should be noted that 'religious' and 'religion' are words that locate us in a particular period of history as well, and we will address that further in a moment. For now Stackhouse prompts us to ask the question: How did we get to this place where an eminent advocate for public theology considers the church to be *out of place* if it seeks to influence public policy, but *in its place* when content with influencing only the individual conscience?

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Max Stackhouse, "Public Theology and Democracy's Future", *Society* (March-April, 2005):8-11 [https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02802979].

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 8.

It is helpful at this point to step from Toulmin's account of the context that gave birth to modernity to Dean Drayton's analysis of Philip Bobbitt's *The Shield of Achilles*.<sup>17</sup> Drayton's interest lies in an exploration of another phenomenon associated with the rise of the nation state, namely the separation of church and state.<sup>18</sup> Through Bobbitt and Drayton, the evolving place of religion *within* the state can be mapped. That can be done in a way that allows for three proposals to be made about the role of public theology in the market state. Bobbitt has argued that the market state is the current form of the state's gradual evolution in the West.

## Religion and the State

Drayton's analysis has pointed out that "the emergence of public theology in the last half of the twentieth century is an indication that the market state has given rise to a different sort of public realm". Drayton was referring specifically to the digital revolution. He argued that the opportunity for theologians to influence public discourse is more promising today than it has been for some time because of that revolution, which has seen the birth of a new and readily accessible public 'space'. The social media activists rallying against Trump tell us the same. Yet will the potential made available to public theologians by this dynamic digital realm lead to a deeper engagement with public policy and the public square, or will they stop at the attempt to influence the conscience of individuals?

The separation of church and state during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the emerging democracies of France and the United States delivered a radical new context for both church and state. The state had become, for the first time, an entity with authority that rivalled the church and, in some senses, exceeded it. The church had been the dominant authority in the West for centuries. Only in the latter part of the fifteenth century did the six hundred year rule of the Holy Roman Empire face a serious challenge. The Pope had hitherto claimed ultimate authority under the power of God and outsourced to kingdoms and city states the right to rule in his name. However, the bell tolled most resoundingly against the church's dominance when Constantinople fell to Muslim Ottoman forces in 1453. The presence of the Ottoman threat at its eastern door, along with the need to renew its armaments with more sophisticated (and expensive) weaponry, saw the city states of Europe 'radically upgraded'.<sup>19</sup> Military forces grew and, by necessity, so too did the state's bureaucracies and taxation regimes. In pursuing this upgrade to meet new threats, principalities and city states were becoming more powerful than the church.

Bobbitt has taken a different view of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century religious wars than did Toulmin, who saw those conflicts as strongly instigative in the emergence of the modern state and its 'politics of certainty'. Bobbitt, along with William Cavanaugh, argued that these wars were not, in fact, simply a matter of "Catholics

17 Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace and the Course of History* (New York: Random House 2003).

18 Dean Drayton, "Public Theology in the Market State", *International Journal of Public Theology*, 2(2008):203-222 [<https://doi.org/10.1163/156973208X290044>].

19 Drayton, 205.

and newly-minted Protestants” slogging it out “in the name of doctrinal loyalties”.<sup>20</sup> Rather, those wars were part of a process whereby the new states were flexing their muscles and putting religion in its new place. The religious wars were an aggrandisement of the emerging state over the decaying remnants of the medieval ecclesial order. The new states were reversing, violently, the medieval order of authority. The church no longer stood over the princes and kingdoms; princes and kingdoms, which were now increasingly taking form as nation states with sophisticated bureaucracies and armies, stood over the church.

A new concept called *religion* helped. We take the word religion for granted, yet it has a history.<sup>21</sup> The Italian humanist Marsilio Ficino is thought to be the first to write of *religio*, doing so by describing it as a “universal human impulse common to all”.<sup>22</sup> Of interest is the way in which Ficino has interiorised the idea through this description of religion as an impulse. The lie of the land is being set for the emergence of privatised belief. Cavanaugh rightly observes that:

Religion is no longer a matter of certain bodily practices [baptism, Eucharist, communal worship] within the body of Christ, but is limited to the realm of the ‘soul’, and the body is handed over to the State ... The creation of religion was necessitated by the State’s need to secure absolute sovereignty over its subjects.<sup>23</sup>

Belief in and about the divine was interiorised as an impulse; that is, an instinct, an urge, a wish. ‘Religion’ as a concept, and now a much studied phenomenon, was born.

The increasing influence of Enlightenment reason in the eighteenth century gave rise to a further new idea – religious toleration. For all the obvious merits of religious toleration, we should nevertheless also understand that its promotion as a virtue subtly strengthened modernity’s agenda to ensure matters of faith were kept private matters. To tolerate was to sublimate differences, to sweep them under the carpet. Matters of religion should be kept to yourself lest its public expression lead to intolerance. The role of the church has been dramatically affected by religious tolerance.<sup>24</sup> For example, the state’s decision to allow free religious association in England in 1828 was revolutionary and marks an important, yet easily missed, reversal of authority. The responsibility of the individual citizen was now to support the state which, in turn, allowed the citizen freedom of individual religion. First allegiance was to the crown and the state rather than to the church.

Bobbitt argued that the modern nation state fully blossomed, after a period of gradual evolution, in the period between 1861 and 1991. It is during this period that the state enshrined individual rights for private citizens, fostered the free flow of information, and opened up mass media by way of newspapers, radio and television, which in turn gave rise to mass marketing, constituencies, lobbies

<sup>20</sup> William Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination* (London: T & T Clark, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> See Brent Nongbri’s excellent study *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept* (New Haven, NJ: Yale, 2013) [<https://doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300154160.001.0001>].

<sup>22</sup> *De Christian Religione*, cited in Cavanaugh, 33.

<sup>23</sup> Cavanaugh, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Dickens, “The Origins of Religious Toleration”. In: *The English Reformation* (London: Batsford Press, 1989), 378–380.

and clienteles. These are all features that today we associate with modern society. Polling of public opinion, now an endless activity, began in earnest and we came to speak of something known as ‘the public mood’. As Drayton has highlighted, the period between 1861 and 1991 also witnessed an historic shift in the nature of religious association. That shift was marked by a movement away from individuals holding membership of a particular Christian denomination to individuals holding a commitment to a particular set of personal beliefs – perhaps Christian, or another religion, or perhaps a personal spirituality.

The relationship of the church to the state had shifted one-hundred-and-eighty degrees in just a few hundred years. Stackhouse’s role of “influenc[ing] people’s consciences” was now the permitted space of religion. The church had fractured long ago into different communions and denominations, and even different religious persuasions within a denomination. There is no longer anything akin to a unified religious authority. Religions have become atomised. The only unified voice is the nation state.

In Bobbitt’s analysis there are six epochs of the modern state. The sixth and current epoch is described as the market state. Since the market state subordinates culture to the market, there is an inevitable tension in the relationship between culture, justice and morality, on the one hand, and business and government, on the other. It is the latter that now directs the concerns of the state. The market state commits itself to protect the rights and maximise the possibilities of its private citizens, certainly. It also mitigates, and even legislates, against collectivity; it may enact laws against expressions of a communal voice and action. The supremacy of the economy, and the economic health of the market state, is epitomised when private citizens are cast as individual investments.<sup>25</sup> This practice is seen, for example, in metrics for deciding whether or not to allow a person immigrant status and, by extension, the possibility or otherwise of citizenship. Bluntly, the criteria revolve around whether or not the person is a good financial investment in the state’s economic future. Do they have the education and skills to contribute to the economy?

An intriguing feature of the market state is the vast public digital realm which is expanding around us, the (paradoxical) world of public social media networks in which individuals participate very privately. Individuals own multiple devices, and homes are replete with multiple screens and platforms, all in order that we may access mass information and entertainment delivered *privately*. Drayton cites a comment from Margaret Simons, who has written so aptly in *The Content Makers* (2007) “a new generation seeks to live out their way of life in a fuller way in the public arena from within the safety of their private world”.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Alistair Hannay, *On the Public* (London: Routledge, 2005), 79 [https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203390764].

<sup>26</sup> Drayton, 217.

## Public Theology and the Market State

What could we learn about the responsibilities of public theology and public theologians from this historical tour and the attendant analysis? I suggest there are at least three important tasks for public theology in modern democracies. In drawing these conclusions, I want to be careful in locating myself in the West. I am very conscious of the imperative of contextuality. Reading the work of Nico Koopman and Rothney Tshaka, for example, on the future of public theology in South Africa is a timely reminder that public theology is obviously and always necessarily *contextual* theology.<sup>27</sup>

Firstly, an important task for public theology today is to be a standing reminder, both as an academic discipline and a voice in the public square, that the modern democratic state itself has a theological foundation. This stance should not be taken with any hubris, for that is not warranted; it should be taken in humility. The beginnings and development of modern Western society, and its form of government, were seasoned by the reforming public activism of people of Christian faith. Stackhouse concluded his 2004 Templeton Lecture by arguing that it is a mistake to think of democracy as merely “a mechanical and statistical procedure for following the will of populist sentiment, registered by voting to determine leaders and policies”. For, in fact, “democracy does have a theological base”.<sup>28</sup> Stackhouse argued that the theological base of modern democracy is threefold. First, all people are created in the image of God. Second, love is the inner spirit of a covenantal binding that undergirds democratic community. Third, the state is a bulwark against sin, understood primarily as crime. Rowan Williams made a similar case for the presence of a Christian theological scaffolding within the structures of the modern West in his discussion on the obligation on the West to uphold religious tolerance, and maintain respect for diversity, precisely because of its Christian ‘core’.<sup>29</sup>

Public theology has a responsibility to stand as a reminder of the presence of Christian faith at the origin, and at various significant moments during the evolution, of the modern democratic state. The quest for a ‘politics of certainty’, to engage Toulmin’s phrase again, was itself a product of an evolving intellectual culture in Europe seeking stability in the wake of the religious wars, along with the quest for *stability* in governance, in the attempt to settle doctrinal conflicts away from the battlefield. The state arose as a bulwark against this sin of violence. Carl Raschke can even comment in his fascinating book, *Force of God: Political Theology and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy* that “The State exists ... in order to preserve individuals from the intrinsic consequences of their fallen condition”.<sup>30</sup>

27 Nico Koopman, “Some Contours for Public Theology in South Africa”, *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 14:1 (2010):123-38 [https://doi.org/10.1515/ijpt.2010.9]. Rothney S. Tshaka, “A Perspective on Notions of Spirituality, Democracy, Social Cohesion and Public Theology”, *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 35:3 (2014):1-6 [https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i3.1336].

28 Stackhouse, 9.

29 Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), particularly “Europe, faith and culture”, 62-74, and “Religion, Diversity and Tolerance”, 75-84.

30 Carl Raschke, *Force of God: Political Theology and the Crisis of Liberal Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 159 [https://doi.org/10.7312/columbia/9780231173841.001.0001].

Secondly, if Stackhouse is correct that hard-wired within the infrastructure of democratic societies are the aforementioned theological motifs – that all people are created in the image of God, covenantal love is the inner binding of democratic community, and the state is a protector against sin – then these core values “need to be made conscious for democracy to flourish and spread”.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, a second task for public theology in the democratic state is to be an instrument by which these theological values can indeed flourish. All people are equal citizens because all people are equally precious to God. Covenantal love is the binding agent of the democratic state, and so our interests and commitments should be for the collective wellbeing of the community, not for ourselves alone. Sin is real, whether we prefer that particular word or another to describe those actions that distance our way from God’s way. Sin is found in all aspects of society. The state also exists to protect the community against the dehumanising presence of sin. In fact, within these three theological motifs is an inviting *systematic* and *doctrinal* agenda for a public theology.

Thirdly, to address the final task for public theology in modern democracies, allow me to pose a question: What if the state no longer functioned as a means of restraining sin? In fact, what if the state supported and even promoted sin? And what if the state did so under the guise of promoting a virtuous cause? That cause might be the seemingly virtuous agenda of ensuring the legal rights of the private citizen, for example. It may be one of placing individual rights within the realm of that which is inviolable in any modern, enlightened, democratic society. What might a theologian have to say in such a situation?

Assumptions about the state’s neutrality and stability, and even the state’s virtue, can be dangerous. Nevertheless, those assumptions have been filtered through to us relatively free of criticism – particularly in the West. Those very assumptions may, in fact, create the conditions in which a corrupted state can flourish. What might that look like? Perhaps individuals would come to be viewed as commodities, with their economic utility trumping all their other capabilities and relationships. And the ‘bewildered herd’ (Noam Chomsky) might either be led to agree with this view, or at least benumbed by those who manipulate assumptions and public opinion. That might happen in such a way that we no longer care about the way individuals are categorised.

It is here that public theology has a third crucial responsibility, and perhaps its most important responsibility. It is called upon to name the ways in which the democratic state in the modern West is *itself* sinful.

If there is one point on which Calvin and Marx agree, it is that an affirmation of private virtue without the discipline of community ... readily degenerates into acquisitive excess. Acquisitive excess has, in fact, become the destiny of liberal democracy.<sup>32</sup>

The modern democratic state is at risk, perhaps now more than at any other point in our lifetimes, of degenerating into a corruptibility and authoritarianism not seen for generations. It is at risk of degenerating into the kind of sinfulness, we might even say, that the state was thought to prevent. At the core of this present degeneration

<sup>31</sup> Stackhouse, 11.

<sup>32</sup> Raschke, 161.

may be the loss of contact with those core theological values that are one part, and we might affirm a very significant part, of the democratic state's origins. Modern democracy has succumbed to hyper-individualism, hyper-diversity, parochialism bordering on tribalism, and acquisitive excess. All these are aspects of life that have been accelerated and extended in this age of the market state, where the freedom of individuals has usurped the notion of covenantal community bonds, in which love and human dignity are honoured. Public theology's presence as a voice of correction and hope in the midst of that degeneration may provide a vital contribution at this particular moment in history.

# TWILIGHT OF COMPASSION

## Narcissistic Society and Ecclesial Vocation

*Stephen Pickard*

The emergence of self-interest as the supreme value in Western democracies has a major impact on the character and quality of personal and institutional life today. Democratic ideals and the orientation towards the common good may remain attractive political aspirations, but they are difficult to achieve in a consumerist environment that privileges the interests of the individual before all else. This trend is symptomatic of a deeply embedded cultural narcissism. It is a trend that infects public life and institutions, including the church. One consequence is a deficit in compassion. Yet in the church this problem often remains masked by a missional rhetoric that is at odds with its preoccupation with survival, rationalisation, re-structuring and internal management techniques. This incongruity redirects and depletes energy, with the result that little is left for engagement with God's world. One consequence is that democratic societies and the churches struggle to enter sympathetically into the plight of the 'other'. While compassion remains an aspiration, there is often little energy or, indeed, will to embed this fundamental principle of the gospel into the structural and strategic life of the church. What then becomes of the church's vocation to be a body of compassion in God's world?

The purpose of this enquiry is to examine such matters in terms of the twilight of compassion, with special reference to my country of Australia. Other examples around the world could just have easily been chosen. Current Australian government policy in relation to refugees and asylum seekers is a prime example of a deficit in compassion and the deep injustices that flow from this. The gospel of God offers a radical counter-proposal for the vocation of the church focused on compassion and mercy as the touchstones of authentic public faith and action. In what follows I offer five theses on compassion within the context of modern Western liberal democracies.

### Thesis One

We may be Living in the Twilight of Compassion in Modern Western Liberal Democracies

The theme of compassion offers a window into some of our contested and complex issues as a society and as a church. Compassion is a quality that we rarely hear much about in our everyday lives, let alone in the political and economic life of my own context of Australia. Competition, cut-throat activity, making money,

accruing as much as possible, all driven by self-interested rational autonomous agents, hardly represent an environment that would welcome compassion. We are more familiar with the voices that proclaim reward for achievement and effort, for conforming to the rules of the game for advancement (with little regard for ethics or moral responsibility). These same voices also speak of punishment for failure, for not conforming, for transgressing rules, or for criticising sacred symbols. Listening to our political leaders on matters of importance for the wellbeing of a just society makes me wonder if we are not living in the twilight of compassion. The world can appear a merciless place at times; a world where people are cast aside on the highways of life; where inequalities grow, and more and more people are denied opportunities because of gender, race, religion or economic situation.

The litmus test for compassion in Australia is current government policy and action in relation to asylum seekers and refugees. It does appear these days that the way forward for a supposedly lucky country, to ensure that it can remain lucky, is to make sure that we do everything in our power to keep unlucky people out; they remain invisible, silent or ignored. We are living in times that exalt self-interest both at the personal level and nationally. A certain cultural narcissism expresses itself in our official policy on asylum seekers and refugees. This policy is almost entirely determined by a narrow, indeed morally shameful understanding of the national interest. The largest island continent expends billions of dollars on securing sovereign borders, crafting narratives of illegal boat people who represent a threat to the security of the nation – all the while forgetting that Australian society, as we know it, has flourished only because of an earlier open and generous policy towards the refugee and the stranger.

A cruel and barbaric offshore detention system has incarcerated hundreds of people in a life of misery and mental disintegration on the pretext of ‘stopping the boats’ of illegals from Asia. In this system the ends justify the means. The ends are political survival shored up by fear mongering, dehumanising of refugees and asylum seekers, and crass manipulation of popular sentiment. A great deal of effort is expended in harnessing and manipulating a generally passive nation driven by popularism. This is the very antithesis of representative democracy – the very thing that Western democratic traditions were designed to counter. In such an environment public compassion can never rise above local acts of kindness that remain trapped within an enclosed self-absorbed society. We are pressed to ask: how do we live with ourselves? Our national consciousness has, it seems to Australian historian Alan Atkinson, been forged through two centuries of struggle, violence, sacrifice and blood.<sup>1</sup> The question of the stranger from another shore is another version of indigenous dispossession and brutality. To the extent that we are a sacrificing people, we have locked ourselves out of the house of compassion.

Nor is it just a people issue. The earth our home cries out for mercy. As Catholic theologian Elizabeth Johnson notes, “the tree of life now depends on one twig”.<sup>2</sup> That twig is none other than human beings exercising responsible care of a planet that is

1 Alan Atkinson, “How Do We Live with Ourselves: The Australian National Conscience”, *Australian Book Review*, September 2016:34-46.

2 Elizabeth Johnson, “At Our Mercy: The Tree of Life Now Depends on One Twig”, *Commonweal*, 7 February 2014:13-16.

‘at our mercy’ as the globe warms. This same theme of human responsibility for the planetary future has a dark scenario, according to Australian author Clive Hamilton in a provocatively entitled book, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene*.<sup>3</sup>

In our particular context, Australia, domestic politics with regard to the environment and people migration suggest that, as a society, we fail the compassion test. Reward and punishment, not compassion and self-giving, are the natural default for human behaviour. We are, it seems, DNA encoded for reward and punishment. It is the air we breathe; and we are easily offended, angered, indeed scandalised when this rule of life is ignored or rejected. Yet the parables of Jesus repeatedly invite us to choose an alternative to reward and punishment: a way of life and self-giving. But is compassion part of our DNA? Perhaps we extol the virtue of co-operation, but more often – apart from the response to disasters and tragic events – cooperative behaviour arises out of purely pragmatic utilitarian motivations. In an increasingly security-conscious time associated with the prevailing emotions of fear and anxiety in relation to threats (real and imagined), the voice of compassion (and its sister, mercy), like wisdom itself, is a muted voice at best. Perhaps my concern is a perennial one. Perhaps compassion is always in danger of being washed away in a flood of fear. Perhaps this ever-present risk is what led the great Bard to write those well-known lines on mercy, but in my view they are equally applicable to compassion:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd.  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven.  
Upon the place beneath.<sup>4</sup>

In cruel and brutal times the gentle rain of compassion is truly heaven-sent and absolutely essential for our social wellbeing, both personally and institutionally. Cultivating compassion may indeed be a prophetic activity. The ecclesia of God may well be called to be a body of compassion for the broken body of the world.

## Thesis Two

Compassion Belongs to a Rich and Complex Ecology of Self-dispossession for the Sake of the Other

How might we speak of compassion? How does it relate to mercy and other associated terms such as pity, sympathy and empathy? In the biblical tradition there are a number of relevant words. The Greek word *eleous* is at times translated as ‘compassion’ or ‘pity’ or ‘mercy’. The emphasis goes beyond affective disposition and attitudes, and involves physical tenderness and concrete care.

In this respect I suggest that Michelangelo’s *Pietà* in St Peter’s Basilica, Rome is probably the most powerful sculptured form of compassion we have in the Western tradition. In the biblical tradition this outwardly directed care for the plight of another arises from an upheaval within described as a “gut-wrenching surge of emotion”

<sup>3</sup> Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene*, (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act IV, Scene 1.

(Greek, *splangchnizomai* – Luke 10:33; Matthew 18:27).<sup>5</sup> This powerful response arises from that part of the body thought to be the seat of the natural passions, i.e. the intestines (Greek, *splangchna*). Hence the phrase the ‘bowels of mercy’ (*splangchna eleous*) could be applied to the movement of God towards the world (Luke 1:78), though rendered in the more familiar phrase “in the tender mercy” of our God. Importantly, on this view compassion is more than a series of singular acts; rather it identifies one’s habituated dealings with others. On this account compassion is a virtue embracing “a comprehensive way of life”.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly mercy and compassion are closely related. But how? The distinguished American philosopher Martha Nussbaum in her remarkable book, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions*, comments in her discussion of mercy and revenge that

Mercy does differ from compassion: for it [mercy] presupposes that the offender has done a wrong, and deserves some punishment for that wrong... Nonetheless ... It [mercy] has much in common with compassion as well – for it focuses on obstacles to flourishing that seem too great to overcome. It [mercy] says, yes, you did commit a deliberate wrong, but the fact that you got to that point was not altogether your fault. It [mercy] focuses on the social, the natural, and familial features of the offender’s life that offer a measure of extenuation for the fault, even though the commission of the fault itself meets the law’s strict standards of moral accountability. In order to do this, it takes up a narrative attitude toward the offender’s history that is similar to the sympathetic perception involved in compassion.<sup>7</sup>

For Nussbaum it is the sympathetic narrative scrutiny of the plight of the other (in this case the offender) that links mercy to compassion and in the case of mercy moves us to a more lenient penalty. This disposition involves a merciful attitude and, like compassion, it involves “the sympathetic imagining of the possibilities and obstacles that the other persons’ life contains”.<sup>8</sup> In short “the very exercise of imagination that leads to mercy seems closely linked to compassion”.<sup>9</sup>

Chris Marshall recognises the close nexus Nussbaum identifies between compassion and mercy, since both involve “a sympathetic and imaginative engagement with the painful experience of others, and both seek to alleviate human distress”; the difference is that the compassionate reaction ‘implies innocence’, whereas mercy’s response to wrongdoing “confirms guilt, yet moderates punishment”.<sup>10</sup> Marshall is surely right, though, in noting that such a distinction will eventually succumb to the complexities of human behaviour, “of volitional freedom and circumstantial constraint”. He advocates setting aside the criterion of blameworthiness in distinguishing compassion and mercy and, “along with the New Testament writers, [understands]

5 Christopher D. Marshall, *Compassionate Justice: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue with Two Gospel Parables on Law, Crime, and Restorative Justice*, (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012), 120.

6 Ibid., 132. Marshall is drawing attention to the present continuous sense of Jesus’ command to the lawyer in the parable of the Good Samaritan, “Go and do likewise” (Luke 15: 37).

7 Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of the Emotions*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 396 [https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511840715].

8 Ibid., 397.

9 Ibid.

10 Marshall, *Compassionate Justice*, 262.

mercy as the active expression of the underlying response of compassion, in any situation where authority or power may be exercised or withheld to another persons' detriment".<sup>11</sup> Marshall puts it nicely: "compassion without merciful deeds does nothing to help the needy party. Merciful action without compassion does nothing to transform the helper".<sup>12</sup> In such a relation, compassion as 'empathetic concern' remains incomplete without concrete action. Marshall's focus is on 'doing mercy'; the action is at heart a movement towards the victim. From this perspective the Samaritan story embodies a "reckless compassion for the pressing needs of an actual human being"; "he feels compassion and practices mercy". This rendering of parabolic mercy suggests a basic habituated pattern of 'restorative mercy' as "an essential individual requirement for entry to the age of salvation".<sup>13</sup> Marshall locates compassion within God's covenantal faithfulness at first to Israel, then extended to all through Jesus Christ. Importantly, he draws attention to the cost of compassion as a claim upon the giver<sup>14</sup> – that theme is largely ignored by Nussbaum. For both Nussbaum and Marshall, the compassionate life is a fundamental element of human self-giving in response to the needs of others.

The theologian Oliver Davies develops the fundamental feature of compassion as self-giving by referring to "the very process of dispossession which is itself integral to the phenomenon of compassion".<sup>15</sup> As such, compassion entails a voluntary undergoing of displacement and dispossession for the sake of another. "Thus in compassion we can say that the self re-enacts the alienation and dispossession of the one who suffers through a voluntary act of displacement and dispossession".<sup>16</sup> Moreover, "it is this act, entailing self-risk for the sake of the other, which yields the possibility of enhanced existence or being"<sup>17</sup>; "a self-dispossessive attitude of mind which makes the particular virtues possible".<sup>18</sup> Davies follows Nussbaum's conclusion that compassion "is the basic social emotion", stating that "without such a principle of self-emptying for the sake of the other, enacted in some degree by a myriad people in countless different ways, most human societies could not keep at bay the violent and selfish tendencies of the human spirit".<sup>19</sup> Social life would flounder without this kenosis at the heart of altruistic behaviour.

### Thesis Three

In the Western Philosophical Tradition Compassion Remains more or less a Transactional Arrangement within Unequal Power Relations

Nussbaum highlights two traditions in the Western philosophical tradition – that is, the 'anti-compassion' and 'pro-compassion'. Both embody visions of the ideal political community, the good citizen and notions of wellbeing. Both are susceptible

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 110, 132.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>15</sup> Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 17.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 231.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>19</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 21.

to the corrosive effects of a self-absorbed, populist culture that continues to undermine the great strengths of liberal democratic traditions.

The Stoic anti-compassion tradition focuses on the inviolable human dignity of every person that cannot be diminished or obliterated by external circumstances. It presupposes that human beings are rational agents with moral purpose. Accordingly, the good person needs no one and all are equal. The life of the community is best served when emotions (the passions) are not permitted to intrude into the functioning of social wellbeing for free responsible human beings. In this tradition the purpose of the community is to assist each other by judgments purified of passion. The emphasis is on internal freedom and dignity as the source of political equality.

On this account acts of compassion and mercy are an implicit recognition that ‘external goods’ and particular circumstances do in fact impact on human agency and dignity. As such, acts of compassion undermine human dignity and agency. In this environment compassion finds its rationale in the idea that it is hard to be good. Accordingly, it focuses on the fault, but mitigates the punishment. When it is offered it is essentially a negative act, a cancellation or leniency that confirms the power of the dispenser and confirms the social status quo. Nussbaum argues that this presumes that the emotions are bad guides;<sup>20</sup> pity (mercy) must be expunged for it “is an insulting kind of benevolence”.<sup>21</sup> This view was crisply articulated by Nietzsche in the phrase: ‘wipe your own nose’.<sup>22</sup> Evidently there is something humiliating or demeaning in being the recipient of compassion and mercy. This consequence is a powerful legacy that lies not far below the surface of a great deal of political rhetoric; it is perhaps no better exemplified than in the commendation of the Australian government’s policies on asylum seekers and refugees, and the dismissal of opponents to this policy as ‘bleeding hearts’ and ‘misty eyed’.<sup>23</sup>

The ‘pro-compassion’ tradition desires the same things as the ‘anti-compassion’ tradition – freedom and equality. However the pro-compassion tradition regards human beings as both rational yet subject to their passions; they are discerned to be aspiring, vulnerable, worthy and insecure. As such, freedom has to be actively fostered. The task of community is to provide for the needs of the weaker to ensure that all have equal opportunity to be free and responsible. Compassion and mercy on this account function as ethical guides and have a positive contribution to make to communal flourishing. Yet they are painful emotions, because they involve an awareness of another’s undeserved misfortune.<sup>24</sup> Yet this requires a feeling for another’s misfortune. Rousseau reckoned that “to see it but not feel it is not to know it”.<sup>25</sup> Hence compassion is more than ‘human concern’, which is simply paying ‘lip service’ to need and insufficient “for the upheaval of compassion”.<sup>26</sup> Compassion involves a sympathetic imagination to engage with the experience of others. An

20 Ibid., 298.

21 Ibid., 378.

22 Ibid., 364.

23 Peter Brent, “Politics of Asylum Seekers has Poisoned the Policy”, *The Drum*, ABC News, online at: <https://ab.co/2Vsh18j> [Accessed 1 December 2017].

24 Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 301.

25 Ibid., 323.

26 Ibid., 334.

empathy-less environment is not amenable to acts of compassion. On the other hand, where compassion and mercy are alive, other emotions may become impediments: such emotions might include envy, shame, disgust, confusion and scandal.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, Nussbaum argues for an educative approach to the development of compassion and mercy. What is desired is a culture of compassion and mercy where leaders can help to shape and guide the boundaries of compassion.

Western liberal democracies are inheritors of two streams of thought when it comes to the exercise of compassion. The anti-compassion tradition is at times inconsistent and opens loopholes that indicate care and empathetic concern for the plight of others against its best principles.<sup>28</sup> Yet the anti-compassion tradition remains the dominant voice. Compassion remains locked in a rigid framework based on unequal power relations. Compassion is an unwarranted excess of self-giving; it conceives mercy, at best, as a way that is lenient, a moderating reduction in punishment, or a benevolent response to a person's particular plight. It emanates from one who has power over another.

Mercy, on this account, is essentially a transactional activity that confirms existing power differentials. While it might generate a form of gratitude from the recipient, it is one embedded in fear of the other's capacity to withdraw arbitrarily or modify the conditions or quality of mercy. The offer of mercy may make the giver of mercy feel good or enhance their sense of power. Critically, mercy within this framework is never able to lead to a transformation of the relationship between recipient and giver in the direction of genuine mutuality. It is at best a truncated and impoverished form of mercy. This practice is not conducive to social wellbeing. As such, while mercy is extended to another (and is an other-directed movement), it proceeds from a controlled and 'calculating mercy'. As a result, it is never able to fully participate in the very thing that is offered. This outcome is well captured in the words of the Liberation theologian Jon Sobrino writing out of a Latin American context: "we have awakened to the fact that a heartless humanity manages to praise works of mercy but refuses to be guided by the mercy principle".<sup>29</sup>

The pro-compassion tradition offers what seems to be a more hopeful environment for altruism and self-giving. The reason is that "compassion invites the sort of narrative scrutiny of particular lives that is likely, as well, to reveal extenuating circumstances in cases where there is culpability".<sup>30</sup> On this account, the pro-compassion tradition, argues Nussbaum, is more conducive to producing a good society providing "an essential life and connectedness to morality, without which it is dangerously empty and rootless".<sup>31</sup> Yet, she notes, that it is only "within the limits of reason" that compassion "proves worthwhile rather than quirky and unreliable".

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 300, 320.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 398, where the point is made that "compassion creeps, unnamed, into Seneca's account, due to his preoccupation with the obstacles to good actions and associated concern with the fact that the offender got to be immoral and blameworthy was not fully that person's own doing".

<sup>29</sup> Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1994), 10.

<sup>30</sup> Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*, 398.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 399.

At this point the principle of compassion, even within the pro-compassion tradition, appears to be calibrated in terms of legal, economic and social criteria. Compassion (and mercy) are evidently not able to generate a genuinely restorative and healing power for social wellbeing. To this extent the philosophical tradition of compassion lacks genuine reciprocity between the giver and recipient of compassion. What results is a somewhat truncated version of compassion's true restorative and healing dynamic in the development of the good society. The democratic ideal of the common good remains elusive. Overcoming the pressure of self-interest requires something more radical.

## Thesis Four

The Gospels Offer a Scandalous Account of Compassion and Mercy that Nullifies Transactional Approaches based on Sacrifice and Opens up Possibilities for a Just Society Directed to the Common Good

It is difficult to overestimate the significance of the radical account of compassion and mercy that comes into sharp focus in the ministry of Jesus. In the gospels the compassion and mercy of God enacted in the ministry of Jesus and the parables scandalises human understanding of the ways of God with the world; they challenge deeply what is commonly counted as just and merciful. In relation to the issue of scandal, Jesus' call of Matthew is a case in point:

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, 'Follow me.' And he got up and followed him. And as he sat at dinner[a] in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting[b] with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners".

*Matthew 9:9-13*

The cause of the Pharisees' immediate offence at Jesus' behaviour is the fact that he not only associates with those considered sinners; but that he actually calls them to become disciples. Jesus' response to the Pharisees, however, reveals a deeper scandal. They are unable to understand Jesus' actions, because they are mistaken about who God is and what God desires. The Girard scholar, Jeremiah Alberg, comments that the Pharisees need to reread their own tradition and learn that God desires a mercy that extends into compassionate action in relation to sinners; they are summoned to discover that mercy is nothing less than "extending forgiving fellowship to those regarded by others as sinners".<sup>32</sup> In other words, Jesus does not call the righteous to follow but instead calls sinners; and furthermore, God does not require sacrifices and burnt offerings. This way of obedience to the divine initiative is scandalous for those who presumed to possess the competence and power to distinguish the sinner from the righteous, and to identify those deserving of mercy and compassion. It is scandalous for those who consider themselves righteous to be told that God does not

<sup>32</sup> Jeremiah Alberg, *Beneath the Veil of the Strange Verses: Reading Scandalous Texts*, (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 2013), 76.

call them, and moreover that they, too, are proper subjects for God's compassion. Moreover, unless the Pharisees learn this upside-down lesson, they will be unable to hear Jesus' call to discipleship.

What scandalises the Pharisees, and thus blocks their path to true discipleship, can be transformed into the bridge to fellowship with God. The kind of compassion and mercy with which God is concerned contains these twin features of scandal – that is, of being both a block and the means of overcoming it.<sup>33</sup> The Pharisees have to allow themselves to be constituted as sinners and this volte-face evidently can only occur when they hear the call of Jesus. Alberg states it crisply:

It is not so much that one must be an obvious sinner – a tax collector such as Matthew – to be called, but that by being called and forgiven people are fully constituted as sinners. ... In other words Jesus doesn't call because one is a sinner and therefore has a certain claim to be called; instead, his call includes God's love and forgiveness so that the person called becomes a forgiven sinner.<sup>34</sup>

God's mercy draws others into a new relationship with God and each other, and necessarily involves forgiveness, and a response of repentance and gratitude. God's mercy is embedded in the dynamic of call and response; God's mercy is other-implicating, gracious and a scandal to be overcome.

This turn in thinking leads to the second issue – that is, the juxtaposition of mercy and sacrifice. In response to the scandalised Pharisees' challenge to Jesus' disciples – “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” – Jesus responds in part quoting the prophet Hosea, “Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy not sacrifice’” (Matthew 9:12-13; Hosea 6:6). It is not immediately apparent how these two might be so diametrically opposed. For Alberg, the call of Matthew encapsulates, “the movement of the whole bible: a movement away from sacrifice toward mercy or love”.<sup>35</sup>

What is unfolding here relates to the deeper scandal of God's mercy; it entirely overturns received notions of what God desires. How exactly does this work? Following the argument above, we note that to be constituted as a sinner is to be constituted as a sacrificer in need of forgiveness.<sup>36</sup> To be bound by the dynamic of sacrifice is to remain trapped in an essentially cruel dialectic that splits people into insiders and outsiders, good and bad, righteous and sinner, worthy and unworthy, guilty and innocent.<sup>37</sup> Such a sacrificial system necessitates victims who (a) are the means for the maintenance of the split and (b) provide the condition for the possibility of harmony and stasis. From this point of view the sacrificial order blocks the flourishing of a compassionate society. The reason is that God's compassion and mercy dissolve either/or categories and render them of no account. A compassionate society fostering social justice and personal wellbeing is reconstituted on an altogether different basis, namely on the gracious call of God in Christ to all. For

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>37</sup> This reversal is the burden of so many of the parables of Jesus and his encounters with the religious rulers. See Alberg on the Good Samaritan, 85-86.

those who respond, they discover that they are forgiven sinners. What appears as a blockage (the scandalous offer of mercy to the most unlikely by a human account) becomes the bridge for a radical new appreciation and acceptance of restored life.<sup>38</sup> The consequence is that the mercy that we receive is precisely the kind of mercy that is to be the mark and pattern of our following of Jesus. In effect this is the great insight of Luther whose phrase (from his Lectures on Romans), “we are all in the same swamp”, has always echoed in my mind.

This radical approach to social life driven by acts of compassion is fundamental to the gospel. God desires not sacrifice with its attendant splitting and victims, but mercy and compassion for all. This radical conception is what has to be learnt in order to be able to hear the call of God. God’s mercy to sinners, so brilliantly explicated in the parables of the gospels, is the antithesis of sacrifice. In the gospels Jesus tells stories about dodgy characters, the most underserving according to popular opinion. These unsavoury types are ‘the unjust judge’, ‘the cunning servants’, despised tax collectors, prostitutes. Such figures repeatedly emerge in his encounters and parables. They confront us; they challenge our values about who is most deserving of kindness. Indeed, the dodgy types go into the kingdom of God before the good and the great. It was offensive then and remains so. The attraction of such characters is that they break open for us our deep need of God. Their repentance and faith show us the possibilities for new life when mercy gets a look in.

In Giradian terms, the resurrection from the dead of the innocent victim Jesus (a) exposes the cruelty and repetitive necessity of sacrificial systems and (b) at the same time renders it null and void. The divine law is not sacrifice but mercy. And it is a mercy that breaks through the glass ceiling of transactional accounts of mercy. Compassion is reconstituted in relation to God’s self-giving love.

## Thesis Five

### The Vocation of the Church is to be a Body of Compassion in the World

The movement of the merciful God towards the world in Christ in the power of the Spirit is an ecclesial reality, or is it nothing. After Pentecost the compassion of God has to be embodied in a particular form of life that casts light on the ways of God in all life. The form of the compassionate church has been powerfully and movingly articulated by Sobrino in *The Principle of Mercy*. The subtitle is telling: *Taking the Crucified People from the Cross*. Sobrino’s context is one of poverty, suffering and violence – and, yet, he proposes an uncompromising theology of the church shaped by the principle of mercy. For Sobrino, it is pre-eminently the Samaritan church and mercy, or what Marshall calls the “compassionate justice of God”, that are the key. Beyond mere sentiment or ‘works of mercy’ something more radical is envisaged.

Mercy is a basic attitude toward the suffering of another, whereby one reacts to eradicate that suffering for the sole reason that it exists, and in the conviction that, in this reaction to the ought-not-be of another’s suffering, one’s own being, without any possibility of subterfuge, hangs in the balance.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 90, 93.

<sup>39</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, NJ: Orbis, 1994), 18.

The sense here that human life ‘hangs in the balance’ is haunting to say the least. Our very humanity is endangered to the extent that we refuse to live mercifully and with compassion toward the suffering of others. Taking the crucified people down from the cross is a costly and life-involving matter. The transactional accounts of mercy and compassion – Sobrino’s ‘calculated mercy’ – so much a feature of the Western philosophical tradition, are rendered null and void on this account.

What emerges into the full light of day is Sobrino’s thoroughly Christological interpretation of mercy. The primordial mercy of God – the structured form of love whereby the suffering on another is interiorised – “appears concretely historicized in Jesus’ practice and message”.<sup>40</sup> It is most powerfully narrated in the parable of the Good Samaritan, or we could say ‘the merciful Samaritan’. Mercy is “fundamental to the structure of the life of Jesus”.<sup>41</sup>

What then of the people of the church? Their vocation is to “reiterate this mercy of God’s, exercising it toward others and thus rendering themselves like unto God”.<sup>42</sup> Sobrino’s theology of the church through the lens of the principle of mercy offers a powerful kenotic ecclesiology patterned after Christ. At the heart of the mercy dynamic is a going out of oneself for the sake of the other. This mode of outreach is the very antithesis of the contemporary culture of narcissism driven by self-interest, twisted in on itself and its desires.

The mercy dynamic identified above is not a one-way transactional type of relation. Rather it involves genuine reciprocity and mutual accountability, as well as vulnerability. It is not simply the one to whom mercy is shown whose life “hangs in the balance”, *but the one who offers mercy*. It is the life of this one that hangs in the balance. Such is the nature of true mercy. It generates a reciprocal relation undergirded by a theology of kenosis. A kenotic ecclesiology is the natural theological home for the vocation of the church to be a body of compassion for the world. This is a radical move beyond the transactional frameworks in which mercy and compassion have been developed and practised in the Western tradition. Moreover, a kenotic ecclesiology shaped by compassion is inevitably a scandalous activity of the church that generates scandal and lives in the shadow of the cross of Jesus and its attendant violence. This kind of Samaritan church offers a genuine glimmer of hope for a society living in the twilight of compassion.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 17.

# HOMEMAKING AS A REDEMPTIVE TRANSFORMATIVE PRACTICE

*Seforosa Carroll*

This chapter seeks to apply a feminist critique of home and reclaim the notion of home as belonging to both the private and public spheres. It argues that homemaking can be cultivated as a public practice that is redemptive and transformative. It further explores how homemaking practices can be used to facilitate meaningful (and just) relationships within diverse cultural and religious contexts. In so doing, the chapter shows how homemaking can exemplify the way a public theology can advance the task of democracy in bringing about justice/redemptive transformation. Homemaking is essentially good household management that is not, should not and cannot be limited to an understanding of the home in the private sphere.

The language of home is often associated with the domestic or private sphere and the place specifically designated for and to women. The divide between the private and public spheres, commonly known as the separate spheres ideology, has been a theoretical framework used to describe the resulting gender-associated roles. The feminist argument in response is the blurring of these private and public spheres with the resounding reminder that home should be seen as relational and can be a place where difference and otherness are affirmed and nurtured.

Home has its etymological roots in the classical Greek word *oikos*. *Oikos* or *oikia* means house or dwelling place, household or family and possessions/belongings. The term also refers to and includes the lines of relationship between members of the household and their respective functions. It is now widely known that *oikos* forms the basis of three contemporary words, each of which is in its own right what Edward Farley describes as a word of power<sup>1</sup> – hence economy, ecumenical and ecology. How these three can be seen as being interrelated is evident in Larry Rasmussen’s helpful definition of each one.<sup>2</sup> Rasmussen describes economics as providing for the household’s and service materials and managing the household well. The term ecumenic refers to valuing and treating the human and non-human inhabitants of the household as a single family. Ecology encompasses the knowledge and understanding of the interdependence upon which the life of the household depends. The interrelationship and interconnectedness of these three words assert an understanding of home, which is defined by Douglas Meeks as “enabling all

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1 Edward Farley, *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Replacement* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

2 Larry Rasmussen, “Theology of Life and Ecumenical Ethics”. In: D.G. Hallman (ed.), *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North*, 112-129. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1994), 118.

(human and non-human) access to life”.<sup>3</sup> Each word has a connection to a dwelling or a house, and the acts of inhabiting and managing. Good household management, or homemaking, incorporates all three meanings and must also include the Earth and non-human creatures as part of God’s household.

The metaphor of home is especially useful because it is easily intelligible. It is a middle axiom: it is a term that has an explicit biblical and theological purpose alongside its more ordinary usage. The use of middle axioms is recognised as a standard practice in a Christian public theology.<sup>4</sup> In the service of this emerging discipline, the metaphor performs a bilingual task. It reaches back into the rich resources of the Christian theological tradition; at the same time the word ‘home’ is near at hand and familiar to all. The use of home is especially well suited to an age in which there has been a global movement of peoples and asylum-seeking on an unprecedented scale. Displacement and dislocation inevitably raise questions about, as well as challenges to notions of home, nation, belonging and identity, both for the receiving society and the migrants. The metaphor puts a potentially awkward question into the public domain. In the light of Stephen Pickard’s thesis on the twilight of compassion, it directs attention to the way a country, such as Australia, can provide a sense of belonging, identity and home for many dislocated and relocated peoples

Any discussion on home almost inevitably gives rise to gender considerations. This tendency is to be expected given that the language of home is often associated with the domestic or private sphere, and the place specifically designated for and to women. This private/public dichotomy finds its origins in ancient Greece, namely with Aristotle’s description of the two spheres *oikos* and *polis* in *Politics*.<sup>5</sup> Michael McKeon claims that by theorising the contrast between the “political activities of the citizen and the economic activities of the household management, Aristotle’s *Politics* laid the foundation for the separation between the family and the state”.<sup>6</sup>

In the West this ideology of separate spheres gained prominence from the late eighteenth and during nineteenth centuries in the wake of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>7</sup> The ideological term has become a theoretical framework within which to describe gender roles. It has become the lens through which feminists describe and analyse the marginalisation and oppression of women in their own particular sphere and, as a consequence, exclusion from the public sphere. It was also a trope used by feminists in the nineteenth century to re-inscribe the place and role of women and, as such, can be viewed as a strategy of resistance rather than assumed obedience.<sup>8</sup>

3 Douglas M Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 43-45.

4 Cf. Elaine Graham, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: Public Theology in a Post-Secular Age* (London: SCM Press, 2013).

5 Aristotle, *Politics*. Translated by Carnes Lord. 2nd Ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2013).

6 Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 7.

7 Christopher Wells, “Separate Spheres”. In: E. Kowaleski-Wallace, *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory* (London, New York: Routledge, 2009).

8 See, Cathy Ross, “Separate Spheres or Shared Dominions?”, *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies*, 23(4):228-235 [https://doi.org/10.1177/026537880602300406].

It was not until the twentieth century that this ideology of separate spheres began to be challenged and critiqued by feminists.<sup>9</sup> This dichotomy assumed that there is no overlap between the private home and the public sphere. Rebecca Hancock took issue with this received understanding and practice.<sup>10</sup> She examined the way the language of public and private made itself felt in studies pertaining to women in the Bible. Hancock explored this matter through a close focus on the role of Esther. Hancock's thesis overturned the conventional understanding that Israelite and Jewish women were excluded from the public world of politics, governance and leadership. She blurred the strict division between the public as male-dominated and the private as female-dominated spheres, challenging the sharp dichotomy between the private and public realms.

Hancock argued that "employing categories of public and private to describe women's lives is misleading and problematic because the language is misleading and anachronistic".<sup>11</sup> The categories of private and public are not distinctly separate. It is too simplistic to confine women primarily to the domestic/private sphere. As in the case of Esther, even if her narrative was viewed as being primarily located in the domestic sphere, "her story and the festival associated with it have transformed her actions into a very public affair".<sup>12</sup>

One of the most significant contributions of second-wave feminism (from the 1960s to about the late 1980s) to the separate spheres debate is the pertinent insight that the 'personal is political'. The origin of the phrase is uncertain. The phrase became popular following the publication of an essay in 1979 by American feminist Carol Hanisch under this title.<sup>13</sup> The original essay, written in 1969, makes the connection in general terms, stating that "personal problems are political problems". The term is now widely accepted by feminists to explain how the personal/private sphere is affected by decisions and policies of the public sphere. Feminists have argued that women's lives at the personal or domestic level are affected by a larger system of patriarchal oppression. Although the phrase was initially used to explain and analyse women's oppression, it has subsequently been broadened to describe the web of interlocking relationships between the private and public sphere.

The Australian sociologist and political analyst Fiona Allon has illustrated the connection between the private and public spheres through her use of home and nation. In her book *Renovation Nation* Allon insisted that the "concept of home has long been a staple of politics, used to connect the individual's experience with the

9 Carol Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism, Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989); Dorothy O. Helly & Susan M. Reveby, *Gendered Domains: Rethinking Public and Private in Women's History* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1992); Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).

10 Rebecca Hancock, *Esther and the Politics of Negotiation: Public and Private Spaces and the Figure of the Female Royal Counselor* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), 39 [https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt22nm669].

11 Ibid., 126.

12 Ibid., 135.

13 Carol Hanisch, "The Personal is Political". In: S. Firestone & A. Koedt, (eds.), *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (Radical Feminism, 1970). Online at: <http://bit.ly/2p7ynLx> [Accessed 18 September 2018].

larger community of the nation".<sup>14</sup> Allon further argued that "home has been rescued from its exile within the 'private sphere'; home now more than ever, is seen as firmly connected to the world of politics and economics, as actively shaped and defined by the public sphere rather than existing simply as a refuge from it".<sup>15</sup>

By extension, nations are homes that are inscribed and formed through certain narratives and stories or homemaking practices. Home, nation and empire have deep and longstanding connections. The narrative or home practices of an empire shape a nation and influence the private sphere of the home. A nation's narrative and homemaking practices influence the values and worldviews that are nurtured in the home. Feminists have argued this connection on the basis that the personal is political.

In *Renovation Nation* Allon "connects the (Australian) domestic story – what went on in our private homes – with the national story, seeing them as ultimately impossible to separate".<sup>16</sup> In her considered opinion:

our obsession with home not only transforms the houses we live in and the cities, places and communities around us, but has profound consequences for how we understand our sense of identity (who we are) and our place in the world (where we belong).<sup>17</sup>

Allon has noted that "the obsession with home ownership (in Australia) configures both the domestic and the national home as islands of sanctuary and refuge, with renovation as a practice that keeps the nation looking inward."<sup>18</sup> In a climate of anxiety, uncertainty and globalisation, Australians have indeed opted to focus on creating and maintaining their own private sanctuary and refuge through obsessive home renovations. Allon linked this obsession with the policy of the Liberal Prime Minister John Howard, who not only promoted Australia as a nation of shareholders and homeowners, but also made a nostalgic appeal to the past of the 1950s. Allon claimed that the:

real key to the success of the politics of John Howard was that he developed a language of comfort and cohesion that directly countered such challenges, and connected the individual to the family home and to the neighbourhood and to the nation in a reassuring framework of belonging.<sup>19</sup>

This was a vision of home that appealed to a past of exclusion, insecurity and fear of the other. It reinforced and re-engaged fantasies of white supremacy. "The private domestic home and the national home began to look remarkably alike: they became fortresses inside in which Australians worried about safety, security and protecting our wealth".<sup>20</sup> This conflation of the private and national home was emphasised in Howard's memorable assertion in his 2001 election campaign speech in which he

14 Fiona Allon, *Renovation Nation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008), 88.

15 Fiona Allon, "Home as Cultural Translation: John Howard's Earlwood", *Communal/Plural*, 5:1-21, (1997), 1 [<https://doi.org/10.1080/17450100701797323>].

16 Allon, 2008:3.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid., 109.

20 Ibid., 3.

insisted that “we will decide who comes into this country and the circumstances in which they come”.<sup>21</sup> It was a dog-whistle expression of a politics that was both a proclamation of fear and an assertion of ownership.

In a similar vein Pauline Hanson and the One Nation Party demonstrated how the personal and political home can easily be collapsed into one. In her maiden speech to Parliament in 1996 Hanson proclaimed that “if I can invite whom I want into my home, then I should have the right to have a say in who comes into my country”.<sup>22</sup> Hanson intensified her general position through laying claim to being a particular kind of mother to a nation. As Ien Ang observes:

Pauline Hanson, a white Australian single mother of four, once famously represented herself as the ‘Mother’ of Australia, and the Australian people as her ‘children’. But for her, not all people living in Australia belong to the ‘Australian people’. Her proverbial hostility toward Aborigines and Asians is well known, and was arguably a major reason for her popular success in the closing years of the twentieth century. And while by 2001 Pauline Hanson’s role on the Australian political stage seems well and truly finished, her quick and spectacular rise and fall should remind us that what she stands for – the anxieties and prejudices of White Australia – has not fully disappeared from the Australian landscape.<sup>23</sup>

Hanson re-entered Australian politics in 2016. She was elected to the Senate together with three other representatives representing the state of Queensland. In addition to the party’s existing anti-multiculturalism, anti-immigration policy, Hanson has included an anti-Islam policy. The basis of the policy is a recommendation for a:

ban on Australian companies and businesses from paying the Halal Certification tax on food and other items. Ban the burqa and any other full face covering in public and government buildings. No more building of mosques and Islamic schools until an inquiry is held into Islam, to determine whether it is a religion or totalitarian political ideology undermining our democracy and way of life.<sup>24</sup>

What we have explored to date is one version of being at home that presupposes an Anglo-Celtic imaginary. In the discussions on contemporary Australia questions and issues addressed tend to be associated with identity and citizenship and the level of sustainable diversity. One of the effects of this tendency has been the establishment of what Miriam Dixon has called ‘the imaginary Australian’.<sup>25</sup> Dixon drew on a particular cultural period whereby talk of what it means to be Australian is affected by understandings of race and blood. For Dixon, however, recognition and celebration of difference must be tied to some form of solidarity or belongingness

<sup>21</sup> John Howard, “2001 Election Policy Speech 2001”, online at: <http://bit.ly/2AWfPR2> [Accessed 15 July 2018].

<sup>22</sup> Pauline Hanson, “Maiden Speech in the House of Representatives, 1996), online at: <http://bit.ly/2OtxHe9> [Accessed 15 November 2012].

<sup>23</sup> Ien Ang, “From White Australia to Fortress Australia: The Anxious Nation in the New Century”. In: L. Jayasuriya, D. Walker & J. Gothard, (eds.), *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation* (Perth: Western Australia Press, 2003), 51.

<sup>24</sup> *One Nation Party*, online at: <http://bit.ly/2ASQY0H> [Accessed 4 June 2018].

<sup>25</sup> Miriam Dixon, *The Imaginary Australian: Anglo-Celts Identity 1788 to the Present* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999), 18–28.

which is dependent on a 'holding core'.<sup>26</sup> Dixson argues for a maintenance of unity based on the adherence to formative influences. Dixson believes that the 'holding core' or role of the 'parent' lies in the Anglo-Celtic core culture. Herein lies the core 'imaginary Australian'. The dilemma is whether Dixson's core Australian 'imaginary Australian' creates sufficient space for the other/alien now present in Australian society.

In terms of faith, this vision of being at home assumes the Judaeo-Christian tradition or secular indifference. It is a vision of home that is bound by cultural prejudice and theories of racial purity, and the superiority of one civilisation over another. It is a vision of being at home that is essentially self-contained and has depended upon legal restrictions and migration policies favouring those who are already like 'us'. The Australian Commonwealth was instituted in 1901 from a commitment to create a particular kind of society or home. At the first sitting of the Australian Federal Parliament the then Attorney-General Alfred Deakin declared "We should be one people, and remain one people, without the admixture of other races".<sup>27</sup> The White Australia policy, a physical manifestation of Alfred Deakin's statement, became a successful tool, in effect a household code through which to keep the inhabitants of Australia 'White'. It became the foundational means by which Australia understood itself, its relationship with the 'other' and, in broader terms, how it has positioned itself as host and home for many cultures and religions. It is intriguing that more than a century later Australia is a culturally and religiously diverse country, particularly since the ideology that undergirded the foundation of this country for more than three quarters of a century was to hold faithfully to Dixson's Anglo-Celtic imaginary.

In his book *What Was It All For? The Reshaping of Australia*, Don Aitkin reflected on the following three key factors: education, immigration and wealth over a period of some fifty years (1953-2001). These factors have been driving sources behind the changes in Australia's movement from a conservative former British colony to the diverse country it is today. Aitkin concluded that the Australia of the future will need a new dream that reflects the diversity of the Australian people.<sup>28</sup> This new dream will require an engagement with our past, with our history and the necessary interrogation of the kind of memory that we as a nation possess. The foundation of this new dream is echoed in bell hooks's claims that:

the past can be a resource that can serve as a foundation for us to revision and to renew our commitment to the present, to making the world where all people can live fully and well, where everyone can belong.<sup>29</sup>

The public rendering of home must overcome one or two obstacles in feminist discourse. There is, of course, the simple weight of history: the home has been relegated to the private sphere and assigned a subservient place to women. This particular history opens itself up rather easily to the complaint that home for many women has been (and to a large extent still is) a place of oppression and violence.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 158-161.

<sup>27</sup> Kate Walsh, *The Changing Face of Australia: A Century of Immigration 1901-2000* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2001), 29.

<sup>28</sup> Don Aitkin, *What Was It All For? The Reshaping of Australia* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2005), 244.

<sup>29</sup> bell hooks, *Belonging: A Culture of Place* (New York: Routledge, 2009) [<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203888018>].

Feminists like Chandra Mohanty, Teresa de Lauretis and Bidy Martin argue that home is “a nostalgic longing for an impossible security and comfort bought at the expense of women and those constructed as others, strangers, not-home, in order to secure a fantasy of a unified identity”.<sup>30</sup>

For Iris Marion Young these obstacles do not exhaust the meaning of home for feminist thinkers. She well understood the history of subservience and violence. She also argued that there are essential values of home, ‘regulative ideals’ by which societies should be described. Young further argued that the notion of home should be cultivated as an ideal for which society should not only aspire to achieve but also order itself by. Young proposed a number of normative values of home. She stated that society as home should firstly be a place of safety. The home should not be based on exclusion and oppression; it should not be a place of violence and abuse. The home should be a place of individuation where we can freely be connected to a place to which we belong, and to people and belongings that connect us to ourselves. A person cannot exist without a place or a shelter, however minimal: the home is an extension of the person’s body. The home should be a place of connection and dialogical relationship. The home should be a place where privacy is respected: “the autonomy and control a person has to allow or not allow access to her person, information about her, and the things that are meaningfully associated with her person”.<sup>31</sup> Finally, the home should be a site of individual and collective history and meaning. Home should be a place where we remember and reinterpret events of the past in the light of new events, relationships and political understandings.

Young’s analysis of home and its intimate relationship and connection with the political is instructive for a theological framework of homemaking. The bottom line is, as Young most emphatically states, “not all homemaking is housework”.<sup>32</sup> Making the ideal of home possible can no longer be a task that is assigned solely to women or to the domestic duties of the private home. Homemaking is a shared task. It is also a public and political one. It is domestic and social.

Homemaking is indeed essentially relational. According to Daniel Kemmis, to inhabit a place is to dwell there in a practised way, in a way that relies upon certain regular, trusted habits of behaviour. He argues that our capacity to live well in a place might depend on our ability to relate to neighbours – especially neighbours with a different life style – on the basis of shared habits of behaviour.<sup>33</sup>

Homemaking practices enable and nurture the creation of a *habitus* for meaningful inhabitation where both human and non-human life are nourished.<sup>34</sup> It is creating

30 Bidy Martin & Chandra Talpade Mohanty. In: T. de Lauretis, (ed.), *Feminist Politics: What Has Home Got To Do With It* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 191-212 at 200 [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-18997-7\_12].

31 Iris Marion Young, *Intersecting Voices: Dilemmas of Gender, Political Philosophy and Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 132.

32 Ibid.

33 John Inge, *A Christian Theology of Place: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (Aldershot, Burlington, IN: Ashgate, 2003), 19, 31.

34 Steven Bouma-Prediger & Brian J. Walsh, *Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

and recreating spaces/places into meaningful shared storied places and providing opportunities to open up conversations with indigenous and non-indigenous people who identify this place as home. It is the ability to create new spaces by transforming them into places (homes) endowed with meaning and value. Robert Ginsberg captured this well in saying that human beings are inherently home-makers:

We make our homes. Not necessarily by constructing them, although some people do that. We build the intimate shell of our lives by the organization and furnishing of space in which we live. How we function as persons is linked to how we make ourselves at home. We need time to make our dwelling into a home... Our residence is where we live, but our home is how we live.<sup>35</sup>

Our home has to do with *how we live*. It is concerned with how we structure the household by the housekeeping rules we choose to be governed by and the stories and symbols we choose to represent who we are. Young rightly emphasised how homemaking

consists in the activities of endowing things with living meaning, arranging them in space in order to facilitate the life activities of those to whom they belong, and preserving them, along with their meaning which is both a personal and collective act of identity. Homemaking is a redemptive act of story-telling which, in turn, requires us to restructure the household (*be it the nation, home, household of God*) by the symbols we choose to identify ourselves by.<sup>36</sup>

Homemaking is a redemptive transformative task. Young described homemaking “as a redemptive act of story-telling which in turn requires us to restructure the household (*be it the nation, home, household of God*) by the symbols we choose to identify ourselves by”. The redemptive task of homemaking is one of reconciling, renewing and transforming spaces. It is the ability to create new spaces by transforming them into places (homes) endowed with meaning and value.<sup>37</sup>

To this end homemaking is dependent on at least three basic key assumptions. The first is that home is not fixed, impermeable or permanent; it is relational and involves movement, which is manifested through homemaking practices. The movement, the act of creating or recreating home based on the values of an ideal home, is homemaking. Homemaking is best understood as the redemptive practice of making the ideal of home possible for all. The ideal home is a place where one feels that one can be ultimately one’s own without judgement or fear. It is a place free from violence, a place of openness to the world, where one is free not only to be one’s own but also at home with oneself, the earth and one’s neighbour. Geraldine Brooks has described home as a destination, a goal, a source of inspiration.<sup>38</sup>

The play and use of home lends itself to the practice of homemaking and *oikeiosis*. For the Christian the metaphor of home possesses an eschatological dimension. We know what home can be and yet we live in a reality of what home is not. But this

<sup>35</sup> Robert Ginsberg, “Meditations on Homelessness and Being at Home: In the Form of a Dialogue”. In: John M. Abbarno, (eds.), *The Ethics of Homelessness: Philosophical Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 1999), 31.

<sup>36</sup> Young, 154, my italics.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Geraldine Brooks, *The Idea of Home* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2011).

understanding of home does not entitle us to a life of escapism or spiritualising home as the great reward in the afterlife for the suffering of this life. Walter Brueggemann has concluded that “home is not in heaven, as though we may escape. Home, rather, is God’s Kingdom of love and justice, and peace and freedom that waits for us”.<sup>39</sup>

There is always a sense of ‘not yet’ being truly at home which can be situated alongside the hopeful anticipation of already being at home in the journey of homecoming itself. Such is the nature of *oikeiosis* – a term put to use by Ernst Conradie – to mean the journey of coming home and can be translated as the making of home. Conradie used *oikeiosis* to describe the journey towards reconciliation with ourselves and our place in the larger scheme of things.<sup>40</sup> That larger scheme of things is God’s *oikonomia*. On the one hand, we are called to indulge in homemaking practices in our here and now; on the other hand, there remains the tradition of not being at home in this world and aspiring towards a heavenly citizenship. In the light of this double deal Rowan Williams has called on us to be trustworthy bearers of the gospel who see the need to love the neighbour as oneself.<sup>41</sup>

The eschatological necessity directs our gaze beyond history and current cultural religious practice. It transcends the present. Nevertheless, we live in a particular here and now. It is within space and time that we are to put into practice *oikeiosis*. The critical step is to put into place appropriate homemaking practices that nurture that journey.

Home and homemaking are in the journeying that is *home*. Home is the *journey!* Conradie described this journeying as *oikeiosis*.<sup>42</sup> Conradie was writing with an ecological purpose in mind. It is his conviction that we humans are not yet at home on the Earth. Within this setting home is not so much about a goal or the arrival at a destination; home is to be found in the actual journeying or movement itself in and through which we ourselves are changed. In a very broad sense home is about how we choose to faithfully live out our Christian discipleship and also how we respectfully *manage* our relationships with others and with place in the here and now. What we do here and now matters!

Homemaking involves practices – intentional practices that create the *habitus* for home. Mary McLintock Fulkerson has defined homemaking as “the distinctive ways the community maintains itself as a physical place, for maintenance or upkeep, but also as a liveable place – a real homeplace where people offer each other material, emotional, and spiritual support”.<sup>43</sup> Homemaking creates space for the other through hospitality, enabling the other to tell their story and allowing them room in our home (the nation, church or community) in order to display the symbols of their

<sup>39</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination: Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 130.

<sup>40</sup> Ernst Conradie, *An Ecological Christian Anthropology: At Home on Earth?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 6.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012).

<sup>42</sup> Conradie, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Mary McLintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 127.

story. The relating of such stories through the practice of compassionate listening creates and makes room for the other. It is a way of listening and paying attention.

Sharon Kujawa-Holbrook has discerned five underlying assumptions of such listening. The first is the need to listen to the other, for we cannot ever assume we know how it is to be another. The second is the imperative need to refrain from changing the other, but rather the other should be loved and welcomed for who they are. The third recognises that long-term peace comes from acknowledging the humanity and suffering of the other and that conflict and violence are a result of unhealed wounds. The fourth assumption is trusting that when people feel they are truly heard, they will be more open to listen to the stories of those they disagree with. Finally, compassionate listening is a practice of reconciliation. This practice of reconciliation is grounded in the belief that “mutual understanding and respect are the foundations for building communities across the borders of difference”.<sup>44</sup>

The redemptive transformative task of homemaking is one of reconciling, renewing and transforming spaces, narratives and exercising our prophetic role in the public domain. As a sent people or a sent community we are charged with a mission of reconciliation. This mission calls us to serving, healing and reconciling a divided, wounded community *and earth*.<sup>45</sup> Following Thomas Tweed’s understanding of religion as crossing and dwelling,<sup>46</sup> the church is called to a journey of relationship. This journey of relationship is one of partnership exercised in the form of reconciliation and healing of the wider *oikonomia*. It is mission. It is homemaking. It is a collective call to all to create an inhabitable, safe place for all. As such, mission is *homemaking*. It is engaging in the action and process of making home for all. Homemaking is concerned with the flourishing of God’s household.

The task of ‘making home’ is a collective shared effort. It cannot fall primarily on either the government or religious or cultural communities. It is a shared task. Diana Eck states that community and belonging are not something religions can do on their own: “the question is how do we do it together”.<sup>47</sup> In her reading of what is required, she insists:

The aim is not mutual understanding, but mutual self-understanding and mutual transformation. What we must be able to do, however, is to recognize and clearly articulate our deep guiding values, our criteria and place them in clear, critical conversation with others. At its deepest level, the dialogue that will undergird a pluralist society is the encounter of commitments as well as the encounter of criteria.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Sharon Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders: Interreligious Learning among Faith Communities, Horizons in Religious Education* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2014), 34-37.

<sup>45</sup> David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 494 [https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969101900203].

<sup>46</sup> Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 80-164 [https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674044517].

<sup>47</sup> Diana Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1993), 190.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

In this journey, in our life together with others in the earthly home, we are sojourners in this time and place. It matters, then, how we live and manage the resources entrusted to us. The home we create for future generations will be influenced by the homemaking practices we choose to adopt and adapt now. Homemaking is the journey of making the ideal of home possible so that all human and non-human beings can flourish. Good household management takes into account the whole inhabited earth and its people. Stewardship of the whole inhabited earth does not just mean caring only for the Christian household. The invitation to care or manage is the vision of a shared home for all.

# THIS BODY SPEAKS

The Body, Rights and Recognition in Giorgio Agamben and  
Rowan Williams

*Ryan Green*

At the beginning of October 2016, in a speech at the Conservative Party Conference, Theresa May argued that “if you believe you are a citizen of the world, you are a citizen of nowhere”.<sup>1</sup> This statement lit fires across the political spectrum, provoking questions about nationality and citizenship, the rights of refugees, and the safety and status of the nation-state. Meanwhile, in Australia, Amnesty International had condemned the country’s offshore detention centre on Nauru as “an open-air prison” and akin to ‘torture’,<sup>2</sup> but still the government spoke only in terms of security, deterrence and denial. In this chapter I want to bring together the political philosophy of Giorgio Agamben and the public theology of Rowan Williams to address questions of human rights and the body. Can the human body continue to speak in terms of recognition, communicability and mutual giftedness, or is it merely to survive, reduced to an anonymous and disposable bare life in an escalating context of global political catastrophe and paranoia?

## Part I

### Biopolitical Bodies: Human Rights and the Refugee

In *Means without End: Notes on Politics* Giorgio Agamben argued that political power is founded on an enforced separation between ‘bare life’ (which is the way Agamben defines mere survival, or the empty signifier of life in general) and forms of life (this particular life lived in this particular way). For example, in Roman Law *vita* (life) indicates both of these things – life in general, “the simple fact of living”, or a particular way of life. But *vita* acquires a juridico-political meaning only in reference to the absolute power over life and death that the *paterfamilias* has over the male son, where “*vita* is nothing but a corollary of *nex*, the power to kill”.<sup>3</sup> What was valid for the *pater’s* right of life and death is extended in the form of sovereign power, and so “political life ... is nothing but this very same life always exposed to a threat

1 “Theresa May’s Keynote Speech at Tory Conference in Full”, *The Independent*, 5 October 2016. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2Vs2CJa> [Accessed 1 July 2018].

2 Amnesty International, “Australia’s Regime of Cruelty in Nauru”, online at: Amnesty International Nauru an open-air [Accessed 1 July 2018].

3 Giorgio Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 5.

that now rests exclusively in the hands of the sovereign".<sup>4</sup> Agamben saw that the principle of sovereignty is not political will itself, but what he termed 'bare life,' a life both protected and yet put at risk by sovereign decision-making and submitted utterly to the "sovereign's right of life and death".

That this threat of death can be activated at any time is best seen in Agamben's use of "the state of exception".<sup>5</sup> Here he took up Walter Benjamin's argument that "the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule".<sup>6</sup> Discussing the crisis of sovereignty in the modern nation-state, Agamben argued that its systems can "no longer function at all except on the basis of emergency", and that they actively seek to preserve such a state in order to continue to exercise their power. We need only consider the nexus of issues our public discourse constantly engages in – security, terrorism, Islam and immigration – to see the pertinence of this argument.

As a corollary to this thesis, Agamben argued that "naked life, which is the hidden foundation of sovereignty, has meanwhile become the dominant form of life everywhere".<sup>7</sup> This rendering of existence follows Foucault in an understanding of the *biopolitical*. Foucault saw the biopolitical as the context in which life itself is captured by the political. 'For millennia', he argued, "man (*sic*) remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man (*sic*) is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question".<sup>8</sup> Now political power assigns itself the task of administering life through a 'bipolar technology' – firstly, by concentrating on the utility and manipulation of the "body as machine", and it does so, secondly, through a focus on "the species body", the mechanics of life in whole populations. But if for Foucault it is the *Panopticon* that is the spatial mechanism for the anonymous control and measurement of the human body, for Agamben, it is the *camp* that has become the place for the incarceration and disposal of anonymous *bare life*.

How is this so? To answer this question, Agamben turned to the work of Hannah Arendt. Forging a link between the "decline of the nation-state" and the "end of the rights of man (*sic*)", Arendt argued that "the paradox is that precisely the figure that should have embodied human rights more than any other – namely, the refugee – marked instead the radical crisis of the concept".<sup>9</sup> Arendt asserted forcefully that this conception of human rights, constructed on the supposed existence of a human being as such, unravels just at the moment it encounters a refugee – a person who has lost every quality and relation except for the bare fact of being human.<sup>10</sup> Agamben's analysis of the French Declaration of the Rights of

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4 Ibid.

5 See particularly, Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

6 Quoted in Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, 5.

7 Ibid., 6.

8 Michel Foucault, "Right of Death and Power over Life". In: *The Foucault Reader* (ed.), P. Rabinow (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 265.

9 Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, 19.

10 See particularly Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Inc, 1968), 267-304.

Man and Citizen of 1789 is decisive here. The first three articles read in part: Article One: *Men are born and remain free and equal in rights*; Article Two: *The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man*; and Article Three: *The principle of all sovereignty resides essentially in the nation*. Agamben noticed a threefold movement here from birth (natural life) to the figure of the *citizen* (defined by its 'political association') and finally to the *nation*.

This mode of association means that there is finally no space within the political order of the nation-state for something like the 'pure human' and that "rights ... are attributed to the human being only to the degree to which he or she is the immediately vanishing presupposition ... of the citizen".<sup>11</sup> Here Agamben has discerned a link between the modern nation-state and the rise of totalitarianism in the twentieth century: both operate in the context of the biopolitical where life itself is the political issue at stake. Like Arendt, Agamben saw the concentration camp as the laboratory of the biopolitical, an experiment of total domination over bare life. Paradoxically, this domination was only made possible because modern politics had already been entirely transformed into biopolitics. "It is time to stop regarding declarations of rights as proclamations of eternal, metajudicial values", suggested Agamben, "and to begin to consider them according to their real historical function in the modern nation-state".<sup>12</sup> For Agamben the refugee represents a "limit-concept" that brings "the originary fiction of sovereignty to crisis" by breaking the identity between 'the human' and 'the citizen', and until the "citizen has been able to recognise the refugee that he or she is," our political survival remains at risk.<sup>13</sup>

## Part II

### The Body of the Slave: Use and Recognition

Is the machine of the *biopolitical* and the 'bare life' of the camp the only *telos* now possible for the human body? Rowan Williams certainly did not think so; it is right in the middle of the complex relationships between human rights and the body that he began to construct his thought. Like Agamben, Williams is very aware of the dangers of the language of 'human rights', but whereas Agamben saw the language of human rights as the language of the *biopolitical* itself, Williams wanted to take another trajectory, a theological retrieval that potentially leads beyond the violent reductions of management, exposure and control.

For Williams, political thought always needs to reckon with the *religious*. This given is because the religious asserts three things that are not easily reducible to the political or the secular (or even, perhaps, the *biopolitical*). The first is the suspicion that at the heart of things is "something other than human power and initiative"; the second is an awareness that "human beings are limited and dependent", which delivers us "from aspiring to mythic goals of absolute human control over human destiny"; and the third aspect to the religious is that "there is more to anything and anyone I encounter than I can manage or understand". Already the religious is emerging as

<sup>11</sup> Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University press, 1998), 127.

<sup>13</sup> Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, 26.

a possible counter-voice to the biopolitical, as that which prompts us “to let go of the fictions of control, the notion that you ‘own’ your body, your world, your future or whatever”.<sup>14</sup>

In his *Faith in the Public Square* Williams asked the question: Do human rights exist? The posing of this question leads him to think through issues that Agamben himself had wrestled with. Williams began by articulating the *aporias* that Agamben’s *sovereign-subject* also encounters, where the language of rights seems to emerge at a precise moment of tension between the claims of the individual (on the one hand) and the administrations of the state (on the other), leaving us with an “exclusively *managerial* account of political life”.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond the machinery of the *biopolitical*, Williams imagined a cosmos where discourse, relationality and meaning are written into the very fabric of things, a meaning that remains stubbornly elusive to human systems of power, control and reduction. Beginning with Western Christianity’s “confused and uneasy relationship” with slavery, Williams started to plot an understanding of human rights based on the *giftedness* and *recognisability* of the human body. Even as slavery is not condemned by Scripture, the relationship between slave and slave owner is quickly complicated through the act of baptism. No longer simply in a relationship of property to owner, now both slave and master exist in a context of prior relatedness, that of ‘belonging’ to God. Already in Greek philosophy it was argued that a master had no power over the mind of the slave, but now Christianity complicates their bodily relationship also, questioning absolute ownership and providing what Williams called “minimal but real protection to the body of the slave”.<sup>16</sup> The human body can no longer be regarded simply as an item of property.

Williams saw the irreducible core of human rights as “the liberty to make sense as a bodily subject”,<sup>17</sup> looking to Aquinas to flesh out this idea, who understands “the body ... as the organ of the soul’s meaning”.<sup>18</sup> Williams suggested that “to recognize a body as a human body is to recognize that it is a vehicle of communication”, a carrier of meanings yet to be discovered.<sup>19</sup> This Christian emphasis on baptism means two things. Firstly, “the body of every other individual is related to its maker and saviour before it is related to any human system of power”.<sup>20</sup> And, secondly, the body finds itself “in a relation of mutuality according to which each becomes the bearer of necessary gifts to the other”.<sup>21</sup> Williams was here pointing us to the acknowledgment that the political – an arena dangerously vulnerable to the corruptions of power and utility – must take note of something *prior*, something not immanent in the system, but transcendent, what we have termed *the theological*.

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14 Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London ; New York: Bloomsbury, 2012), 3-6.

15 *Ibid.*, 149.

16 *Ibid.*, 151.

17 *Ibid.*, 155.

18 *Ibid.*, 152.

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*, 154.

21 *Ibid.*, 156.

Here we can discern a resistance to the *biopolitical* reduction to 'bare life'. Our bodies are not related to us as an object is related to its owner, and so the body cannot be simply reduced to an object to be used, as "simply instrumental to another's will or purpose".<sup>22</sup> At the heart of Williams's argument is the conviction that the human body is *recognisable*, and recognisable specifically as a means of communication. This assertion means that human rights can be anchored in the liberty to 'make sense' – not just verbally or rationally, but as *embodied subjects*. It is this sense of embodiment, Williams argues, that protects us from becoming the mere carriers of the desires or purposes of others. Indeed, "if the body cannot be property, it will always be carrying meanings or messages that are inalienably its own".<sup>23</sup> This body is always already a social body, a political body, a religious body, as it relates in a shared world of meaning. If talk of human rights is to have any currency, it is to be located in the embodied human subject. "The recognition that it is impossible to own a human body", not simply because the body is a site of specific meanings and communications, but also because of the conviction "that the bare fact of embodied reality 'encodes' a gift to be offered by each to all", where "the inviolability of the body is ultimately grounded in the prior relation of each embodied subject to God".<sup>24</sup>

### Part III

#### The Body of the Egyptian Slave: Hagar, Exodus and Exile

In this final section I want to reach further back into our tradition, to the book of Genesis, and consider what has been called a 'text of terror',<sup>25</sup> but which hints at new possibilities for our consideration of bodies, slavery, citizenship and rights. It is the story of Hagar as found in Genesis 16.

Despite the promise of God, Abram and Sarai remain childless. But they have an Egyptian slave (notice the ironic allusion here as the Israelites will later be slaves in Egypt under the power of Pharaoh), a gift given to Abram after some dangerous political manoeuvring over the use of Sarai's body. Abram makes use of Hagar, as if she were Sarai, and Hagar becomes pregnant. Jealousy ensues between the two women – both having had their bodies used in the political games of men – and, after being harshly dealt with, Hagar runs into the wilderness. There the angel of the Lord meets her and tells her to return to her slavery (make no mistake, God is implicated in the use of bodies in this narrative as much as any of the other characters). But before she is forced to return, Hagar is given her own annunciation, a moment of grace that mirrors the promise to Abraham (the 'father of nations'). More than this, Hagar becomes the only person in the whole of Scripture to name God: 'You are El-roi,' the God who sees, or perhaps the God who lets himself be seen.

Phyllis Trible describes the complexity of relationships in this narrative:

Beginning with Sarai and ending with Hagar, the narrated introduction opposes two women around the man Abram. Sarai the Hebrew is married, rich and free;

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 156.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>25</sup> See Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1984), 9-19.

she is also old and barren. Hagar the Egyptian is single, poor, and bonded; she is also young and fertile. Power belongs to Sarai, the subject of action; powerlessness marks Hagar, the object.<sup>26</sup>

But this power and powerlessness are far from settled in what feels like a Hegelian dialectic, where the master-slave relationship is brought to a crisis of *aufheben*. It is important for us to notice also that Abram and Sarai are called out of the *polis* of Ur – an intertextual nod to the city of the Babylonians, that antagonistic political entity *par excellence* in the Hebrew Scriptures. They are called beyond citizenship in order to form a new kind of nation. But God does not require them to play politics and every time they do – from the [mis]use of Sarai’s body when she is given to Pharaoh in Chapter 12 to the [mis]use of Hagar’s body here – the promised future is threatened. This nation is to be a wandering nation, a *nationless nation*, a people on the move. In this narrative, however, Sarai and Abram together play politics with a slave woman’s body and this death-dealing politics ends in *displacement* and *exile*. And yet it is precisely in exile, precisely in this *no-man’s-land*, reduced to disposable bare life, that Hagar’s body is finally, divinely recognised as a carrier of meaning beyond utility and expediency, as a carrier of promise. For it is to this Hagar, the *slave-woman-in-exile*, that the promise of a coming community is given. But even if the narrative entertains a new future for a moment, it finally turns back on itself and “a circle of bondage encloses Hagar” once more.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

In *Means without End* Agamben imagined a new understanding of the human beyond the citizen and the state, an understanding that opens up in a space of mutual recognition of ‘citizen’ and ‘refugee’. He thought of a space in which “all the (citizen and noncitizen) residents ... would be in a position of exodus or refuge ... the being-in-exodus of the citizen”.<sup>28</sup> It seems as if Agamben believed that there is a context beyond the biopolitical where life is not always put at risk by the sovereign decision, indeed where sovereignty itself is refused. Genesis 16 also hints at a space of mutual recognition, where Sarai and Hagar can come to see themselves in each other: the owner and slave, the citizen and the exile, somehow carrying the same mysterious promise of a future community, a community beyond the political, an exodus-shaped community. It is Williams who names this [non-]territory as the religious, where bodies can be recognised beyond their mere use, as gifts encoding a message of promise, calling us out of exile and towards home.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>28</sup> Agamben, *Means without End: Notes on Politics*, 25-26.

# CONFRONTING THE STIGMA OF NAMING JESUS AS A VICTIM OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

David Tombs<sup>1</sup>

Pastor Skosana's sermon in 2010 in the township of Khayelitsha outside Stellenbosch on the theme that "Jesus was HIV-positive" attracted worldwide attention. This chapter discusses the controversy around the sermon and Skosana's reason for making this metaphorical identification of Jesus with HIV/AIDS. Although he never meant his sermon to be taken literally, the pastor did expect it to be taken seriously. His serious intention was to break a silence within the church and to express solidarity with people with HIV/AIDS. This chapter is especially interested in Skosana's response to critics who claimed the sermon was insulting and offensive. These criticisms revealed a powerful sense of AIDS stigma within the churches. Skosana's recognition of this problem and his readiness to criticise it for what it really was, offers lessons for other areas of work which are commonly associated with stigma, such as sexual violence.

Recent work has highlighted the role that religious organisations can play in addressing sexual and gender-based violence as a global issue.<sup>2</sup> This is especially true in South Africa, where churches are central to community life and have a strong influence on social attitudes and values. In the South African census 2001 approximately 80% of South Africa's population professed to be Christian, and 35 million South Africans belong to a church. As respected institutions with considerable moral authority, they are well placed to offer leadership on responses to the pandemic of gender-based violence attested in research reports and regular news stories. Figures released in June 2018 by the national statistical service of South Africa suggest an estimate of 138 out of every 100,000 women in the country were raped in 2016 and 2017.<sup>3</sup> However, Tearfund's report *Breaking the Silence: The Role of the Church in Addressing Sexual Violence in South Africa* (2013) shows that a major shift is required for this reporting to occur reliably. In practice, survivors often

- 1 This chapter is a revised and expanded version of the conference paper "Naming Jesus as a victim of sexual violence: The role of the churches in confronting the stigma of sexual abuse" at the Global Network in Public Theology Triennial Conference, on Democracy and Social Justice in Glocal Contexts, at University of Stellenbosch (24-26 October 2016). I am grateful to Professor Beverley Haddad, University of KwaZulu-Natal, for insights and comments on an earlier draft of the paper, but all errors and limitations are of course entirely my own.
- 2 Elisabet Le Roux, Neil Kramm, Nigel Scott, Maggie Sandilands, Lizle Loots, Jill Olivier, Diana Arango & Veena O'Sullivan, "Getting Dirty: Working with Faith Leaders to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence", *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 14:3 (2016):22-35 [https://doi.org/10.1080/15570274.2016.1215837].
- 3 Statistics South Africa, *Crime against Women in South Africa: An In-depth Analysis of the Victims of Crime Survey data 2018*, Crime Statistics Series Volume V, 2018. Online at: <http://bit.ly/322rz0C8> [Accessed 15 July 2018].

remain silent because of fears and stigma. The churches can, in turn, deepen this silence and reinforce the stigma associated with sexual violence.

The silence of survivors and the churches provides an important context in which to discuss the significant biblical and historical evidence that Jesus was a victim of sexual violence. Breaking the silence on this claim is long overdue. It is not just a matter of setting the historical record straight. As Skosana's sermon suggests, naming Jesus as a victim of sexual violence can expose stigmatised attitudes within the churches towards survivors of sexual violence. Skosana's sermon shows how naming Jesus as a victim of sexual violence might, nevertheless, help the churches to confront stigmatising attitudes within their own cultures.

In making this connection between Skosana's sermon that "Jesus was HIV-positive" and recent research on Jesus as victim of sexual violence, it must be remembered that Skosana's sermon was metaphorical and not intended as putting forward serious historical or biblical claims. By way of contrast, there is good historical and biblical evidence for recognising Jesus as a victim of sexual violence. This historical and biblical evidence provides all the more reason for biblical scholars, theologians and churches to break the silence, to name Jesus as a victim of sexual violence, and to address the negative reactions and stigmas that this might initially prompt.

### Pastor Skosana's Sermons on Jesus as HIV-positive

Khayelitsha, which means "Our New Home" in Xhosa, is a large township on the Cape Flats alongside the road between Cape Town and Stellenbosch. Pastor Xola Skosana founded the Way of Life Khayelitsha congregation in 1996 with support from the Way of Life congregation in Port Elizabeth, where he had previously been involved as a song writer, psalmist and preacher. His ministry draws on black theology and his Pentecostal Church tradition for his preaching of the gospel. He is ready to be outspoken when he wants to get a message across. For example, in his book *Disband the White Church*, he discusses the public call he made in 2002 that "[t]he honorable thing to do for the white church in South Africa, is to disband, dissolve, and re-emerge within the black church in poor communities of South Africa".<sup>4</sup>

For Skosana, HIV/AIDS is an unavoidable and immediate concern in Khayelitsha and other poor communities. HIV/AIDS is not a distant problem which the church can pretend not to see or safely confine to a detached discussion. Two of Skosana's sisters died of AIDS, one in 2003 and another in 2010. In August 2010 Skosana preached his dramatic three-part sermon series that "Jesus was HIV-positive". The sermon launched a campaign to encourage people to know their HIV status. At the time the congregation was meeting at Luhlaza High School hall and during the third of the three services Skosana took an HIV test in front of the congregation, along with a hundred members of the church.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Xola Skosana, *Disband the White Church* (Cape Town: Lesedi House Publishers), First published as *The Things We Feel, Things We Dare Not Say, Disband the White Church*, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Allie, "'Jesus had HIV' Sermon Sparks South African Fury", *BBC News, Cape Town* (1 November 2010), online at: [<https://bbc.in/320EHDk>]. Udani Samaraseker, "'Jesus had HIV' draws backlash, world hype", *Pretoria News* (6 September 2010), 3. David Smith, "Pastor's 'Jesus had HIV' Sermon Angers South African Christians", *The Guardian* (25 August 2010) <http://bit.ly/33cY8sP> [Accessed 5 March 2016]

In the sermon Skosana drew on the parable of judgement in Matthew 25 to show that Christ is to be found in the sick. "In many parts of the Bible, God put himself in the position of the destitute, the sick, the marginalised," he said. "When we attend to those who are sick, we are attending to him. When we ignore people who are sick, we are ignoring him."<sup>6</sup>

The theological connection between Christ and AIDS was not completely new. African theologians had taken the lead in pioneering this area of theology in the previous decade. Adriaan van Klinken provides a valuable overview of African theologians who, before Skosana's sermon, had already drawn on verses in Paul to write and speak on the church, the Body of Christ and AIDS.<sup>7</sup> This overview includes work by Fulata Moyo (Malawi), Musa Dube (Botswana), Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator (Nigeria), Isabel Phiri (Malawi), Denise Ackermann, Beverley Haddad and Sarojini Nadar (South Africa), and others involved in the Circle of Concerned African Theologians. The painting "Man of Sorrows: Christ With AIDS" (1993) by AIDS activist and artist Maxwell Lawton had also made a connection along similar lines, and another version had been painted for St George's Cathedral, Cape Town. However, Skosana's sermon was a particularly dramatic and forceful expression of this idea, not least because he spoke more directly of Jesus rather than using the more theological language of "the body of Christ".

In terms of a straightforward historical claim the idea that Jesus was HIV-positive is self-evidently anachronistic. Skosana made clear "Of course, there's no scientific evidence that Jesus had the HIV virus in his bloodstream".<sup>8</sup> The identification of Jesus as HIV-positive that he makes through Isaiah 53 and Matthew 25 is theological and metaphorical. It allows Skosana to connect the lived historical experience of HIV/AIDS in the township directly with Christ's own experience of suffering.<sup>9</sup>

The sermon prompted sharply divided reactions. A supporter of Skosana wrote to the *Cape Times* to say: "One of the most powerful things we can do as a church right now is to say Jesus was and is HIV-positive".<sup>10</sup> Mark Heywood, the deputy chairperson of South Africa's National Aids Council, was reported as saying: "I applaud his actions. It's very important that church leaders set an example, destigmatising HIV and encouraging testing so people know their status" (Smith 2010). However, others questioned whether the sermon would have the positive consequence he intended.

Some people living with HIV had already expressed reservations about speaking of Christ as HIV-positive, and spoken of the importance of finding hope in the

<sup>6</sup> Smith, "Pastor's 'Jesus had HIV' Sermon".

<sup>7</sup> Adriaan van Klinken, "When the Body of Christ Has AIDS: A Theological Metaphor for Global Solidarity in Light of HIV and AIDS", in *International Journal of Public Theology* 4:4, (2010):446-465 [https://doi.org/10.1163/156973210X526418].

<sup>8</sup> Allie, "Jesus had HIV' Sermon".

<sup>9</sup> For wider theological and church perspectives on HIV/AIDS, see especially Beverley Haddad, *Religion and HIV: Charting the Terrain* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2011). Gideon B. Byamugisha, John Joshva Raj & Ezra Chitando (eds.), *Is the Body of Christ HIV Positive? New Ecclesiological Christologies in the Context of HIV Positive Communities* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2012).

<sup>10</sup> Allie, "Jesus had HIV' Sermon".

HIV-negative blood of Jesus.<sup>11</sup> In a lengthy response to the sermon, Madipoane Masenya and Lehlohonolo Bookholane argued that, although Skosana's efforts to speak out on HIV/AIDS should be welcomed, a number of significant criticisms can be made of his approach. They pointed out that the identification of Jesus with HIV should not be necessary for the church to break its silence on HIV/AIDS.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the claim Jesus was HIV-positive may serve to individualise the pandemic:

What concerns us more, is the impact of such claims on the gains made through the public campaigns to highlight the systemic and structural nature of HIV and AIDS and the impact such sermons will have in order to personalise, individualise and internalise what is essentially and naturally a public matter.<sup>13</sup>

They also argued that it might distract attention from the role of those who "are responsible for the structural designs that create and perpetuate such miserable conditions".<sup>14</sup> Above all, Masenya and Bookholane argued that it would be counter-productive to Skosana's intentions:

Our main concern with a sermon that seeks to encourage activism around the pandemic of HIV and AIDS by claiming that Jesus was HIV-positive is that it can only defeat the mission to which it seeks to be committed. In our view, such a claim can only do harm to the campaign for abstinence, faithfulness and the use of condoms; because if Jesus himself could be positive, who am I not to be, a believer on the ground may ask.<sup>15</sup>

A fuller discussion of the range of responses to Skosana from different critical perspectives is beyond the scope of this chapter. Instead, what follows will focus primarily on the reactions which saw the sermon as offensive or insulting. Some of these were highlighted in the international media coverage. For example, the *Daily Mail* in London reported on the controversy under the title "Jesus was HIV-positive: South African pastor sparks outrage with bizarre claim".<sup>16</sup>

These responses typically ignore Skosana's intention and wider discussions around HIV/AIDS prevention, and focus instead on the offensiveness of the sermon. For example, the BBC reported the reaction of Pastor Mike Bele, who officiates at the Nomzamo Baptist Church in nearby Gugulethu. Bele said most clergy in Khayelitsha and other Cape Town townships are strongly opposed to associating Jesus with HIV: "The subject of my Jesus being HIV-positive is a scathing matter," he says. "I believe no anointed leader with a sound mind about the scriptures and the role of Christ in our lives would deliberately drag the name of Christ to the ground". For Pastor Bele, portraying Jesus as HIV-positive means he becomes part of the problem,

<sup>11</sup> Phumzile Zondi-Mabizela, cited Gerald West with Bongzi Zenge, "Reading Job 'Positively' in the Context of HIV/AIDS in South Africa", *Concilium*, 4, (2004):112-113.

<sup>12</sup> Madipoane Masenya & Lehlohonolo Bookholane, "Towards an Ethical Reading of the Hebrew Bible in the Fight against HIV and AIDS", *Old Testament Essay*, 24:1, (2011):99.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>16</sup> *The Daily Mail* (2 November, 2010), online at: <https://dailym.ai/35m9WKW> [Accessed 5 June 2016].

not the solution: “The pastor [Skosana] needs to explain how it came about for him to bring Christ to our level, when Christ is supreme and is God”.<sup>17</sup>

Pastor Bele’s outrage is focused on what he sees as the demeaning implication of Jesus as HIV-positive. The emotional force behind his complaint reveals what he felt was really at stake. He is not concerned with the history or science of the sermon, or the sermon’s potential impact on people with HIV/AIDS, or the potential consequences for HIV-prevention work. Instead Bele’s criticism (at least in the version reported here) focuses primarily on the perceived offence and the supposed insult.

As Skosana shows in his response to such criticism, his sermon is all the more important precisely because of this perception of insult. One of the consequences of the sermon was that it unveiled the victim-blaming and stigmatising which operates within society, and within the church, but which many in the church would usually deny.

The scathing attacks I've received from Christians are unbelievable ... They're saying you can't reconcile Jesus and Aids. They assume it means Jesus was promiscuous and had a louche lifestyle with many sexual partners.<sup>18</sup>

The HIV/AIDS stigma is a major obstacle to effective responses to HIV/AIDS.<sup>19</sup> As Skosana points out, there seems to be an association of HIV/AIDS with the stigma linked to immoral behaviour in the minds of critics, like Bele, which makes it impossible for Bele to imagine Jesus as HIV-positive, and prompts him to see this connection as highly offensive. The reaction is not about history or science, but about perceived insult and offence.

In this context Bele’s comments show that Skosana’s sermon was in fact a highly effective way to draw out this perception and start a deeper discussion. The sermon exposed and excavated the HIV/AIDS stigma that church members typically seek to keep hidden. The HIV/AIDS stigma is all the more harmful because it is often hidden so well that church members may not themselves be aware of how strongly it influences them. These dynamics are further complicated because they are often disguised or hidden. Church members whose attitudes are influenced by the stigma are more likely to see themselves as acting in a correct and respectable way rather, than doing something wrong or uncompassionate.<sup>20</sup> Thus the HIV/AIDS stigma is often both hidden from view and disguised as something more respectable.

The harm done by the HIV/AIDS stigma can therefore only be addressed if creative ways are found to confront the denial and bring the stigma out into the open. Skosana said: “It baffles me why in the church this [HIV/AIDS] is the most unspoken-about

17 Allie, “Jesus had HIV’ Sermon”; Samaraseker, “Jesus had HIV”; Smith, “Pastor’s ‘Jesus had HIV’ Sermon”.

18 Smith, “Pastor’s ‘Jesus had HIV’ Sermon”.

19 Donald Skinner & Mfecane Sakhumzi, “Stigma, Discrimination and the Implications for People Living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa”, *SAHARA-J: Journal of Social Aspects of HIV/AIDS*, 1:3:157-164 [<https://doi.org/10.1080/17290376.2004.9724838>]. Haddad, *Religion and HIV*; Byamugisha et al., *Is the Body of Christ HIV Positive?*

20 Rachel Vernon, “The Body of Christ is HIV Positive”. In: Byamugisha et al. *Is the Body of Christ HIV Positive?*

subject”.<sup>21</sup> The silence around HIV/AIDS is not a neutral and non-committal silence, but an oppressive and damaging silence that hides and sustains a destructive stigma. Furthermore, the judgemental silence encourages people with HIV/AIDS to self-stigmatise. Skosana explained further in an interview:

If I went to church and never heard the pastor talk about this, I would assume I must go home and die in silence. The message is that it's an unpardonable sin and we must just forget about HIV/Aids ... My responsibility as a pastor is to open a Bible and paint a picture of a God who cares for people and wants the best for them, not who judges them and is ashamed of them.<sup>22</sup>

To sum up, Skosana's sermon was never intended to be history or science, but rather a metaphorical connection of Jesus to HIV as a creative confession of Christ's suffering. It was bold and provocative, but in no way bizarre. The reservations offered by Masenya and Bookholane and other critics on the potential unintended negative consequences of the sermon are important, but more positive responses should also be noted. Of particular relevance to the argument here is that the sermon provoked particularly strong reactions from some who saw it as insulting and offensive. This reaction served to expose the stigmatising attitudes and values underlying these responses.

Insights from the sermon's capacity to reveal what might otherwise remain hidden and disguised are relevant to other issues where stigma is a major barrier to prevention initiatives. The rest of this chapter will suggest how this might also be significant for church responses to sexual violence and its stigma.

### Tearfund's *Breaking the Silence* (2013)

The HIV/AIDS crisis opened up new ways within the churches to address sex and sexual ethics. Over time this disclosure prompted the church to give more attention to sexual violence. As an international Christian relief and development agency, Tearfund's work on HIV/AIDS helped prepare the way for its new programme addressing sexual violence. On 21 March 2011 the Tearfund report *Silent No More* (2011) was launched at an event at Lambeth Palace.<sup>23</sup> Tearfund, the Anglican Communion, Restored, and Christian Aid, also used this event to launch a "We Will Speak Out" (WWSO) coalition of Christian-based NGOs, churches and organisations, and partners committed to ending sexual violence.<sup>24</sup> *Silent No More* focused on conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. *Breaking the Silence* (2013) took the work on sexual violence further with South African case studies.<sup>25</sup>

21 Smith, "Pastor's 'Jesus had HIV' Sermon".

22 Ibid.

23 Tearfund, *Silent No More: The Untapped Potential of the Worldwide Church in Addressing Sexual Violence* (Teddington, Middlesex: Tearfund, 2011).

24 "We Will Speak Out", online at: [www.wewillspeakout.org](http://www.wewillspeakout.org) [Accessed 18 August 2016].

25 Since then Tearfund has published further reports on sexual violence in other African countries and other conflicts.

Tearfund's report *Breaking the Silence* draws on interviews conducted in townships and poor rural communities in South Africa.<sup>26</sup> These were conducted in two locations in the Western Cape (Bredasdorp and Du Noon), and two locations in KwaZulu-Natal (around Pietermaritzburg and Durban).<sup>27</sup> The whole report, as well as the data on which it is based, deserves careful attention. In what follows three aspects of the report which are especially relevant to Skosana's sermon will be discussed: the silence of survivors, the silence of the churches and the potential of the churches.<sup>28</sup>

### The Silence of Survivors and the Fear of Blame, Shame and Stigma

Sexual violence is widespread in South Africa. Conservative estimates suggest that more than 580,000 rapes could have been committed in 2012, which would amount to one in every 86 people in South Africa.<sup>29</sup> Yet the prevalence of sexual violence is consistently under-reported. During 2011 to 2012 more than 64,000 rapes were reported to the police, but "it is estimated that between 80 and 95% of rapes are not reported due to fear and stigma".<sup>30</sup>

This fear of stigma is often well justified. There is an extensive feminist literature on ways that survivors are frequently blamed or shamed for sexual violence. These 'victim-blaming' attitudes often imply that victims encouraged, or are in some way responsible, for what happened to them. The actions of perpetrators escape scrutiny and censure because they are seen as normal and to be expected, especially when it is sexual violence by men against women. By contrast, women's actions are viewed with a presumption of responsibility and a readiness to blame.

*Breaking the Silence* describes a readiness to 'judge and gossip'.<sup>31</sup> Even if the survivor is not directly blamed for contributing to sexual violence in some way, she can still be

26 Tearfund, *Breaking the Silence: The Role of the Church in Addressing Sexual Violence in South Africa*, (Tearfund South Africa, 2013). Tearfund, *Silent No More* and *Breaking the Silence* both draw on fieldwork and analysis conducted by Elisabet le Roux at the Unit for Religion and Development Research, University of Stellenbosch.

27 On 2 February 2013 Bredasdorp was the location of a particularly brutal rape and mutilation of a seventeen-year-old woman, Anene Booysen, who died of her injuries shortly afterwards. The case sparked a national outcry and highlighted the extreme forms which sexual and gender-based violence can take. See Chanel September, "The Anene Booysen Story", *Eyewitness News* (1 November 2013), online at: <http://bit.ly/2p3flpS>

28 The three points discussed in this section in the light of Skosana's sermon are closely related – but not a direct match – to the three key points which the report itself highlights as a summary of its contents: "First, sexual violence is widespread across South Africa and has a deeply traumatising and damaging effect on survivors. Second, the church has often failed survivors of sexual violence. Many churches deepen the impact of sexual violence through their silence, stigma and discrimination. Some churches have not done enough to care for the marginalised or to speak out on their behalf. Third, the church is central to community life and has untapped potential to prevent and respond to sexual violence. It can provide care and support, stand alongside survivors seeking justice, and identify and challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs within society that perpetuate sexual violence"; Tearfund, *Breaking the Silence*, 3.

29 Tearfund, *Breaking the Silence*, 5.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid., 6.

judged negatively because of what happened. Survivors of sexual violence are often viewed as having been diminished, damaged or despoiled in some way. They are seen as having less worth or less dignity because of what happened, and may even be described as defiled or ruined. This tendency fits closely with Erving Goffman's influential work on stigma and spoiled identity: it is his understanding that the stigmatised person is "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one".<sup>32</sup> Even church members who might otherwise be caring and compassionate towards survivors can reinforce this negative perception and stigma. Social perceptions of shame and gender, and the association between sex and shame for women, are critical elements in the stigma of sexual violence.

Some Tearfund interviewees who reported sexual violence described the additional distress and re-victimisation they suffered in the reporting system. The institutions and authorities which should help survivors often fail to do so, and can make them feel worse rather than better. In the words of one survivor

[t]hey make you feel like you are the criminal. They are not sympathetic. Survivors keep silent because of the way we are treated when we go and report it.<sup>33</sup>

These victim-blaming reactions and responses reinforce the sense of shame and stigma, and the inclination towards maintaining silence, which many victims have already internalised from wider social attitudes to sexual violence. The church also shares a special responsibility in this alienation. When survivors are already coping with hostility and neglect from authorities and other agencies, further poor treatment within the church can be especially upsetting. A survivor reports on how "I have rejected all churches. Church members were the ones who hurt me the most".<sup>34</sup> It is little surprise, then, that so many cases go unreported. In the words of a survivor interviewed in *Silent No More*, "I choose to die silently. You're too scared to talk about it and you don't know who to tell".<sup>35</sup> This non-reporting reinforces the silence and contributes to further offending and repeated victimisation in a destructive cycle. Another survivor reports that "I've been raped more than 20 times. It has numbed me. I don't have feelings. I can't trust anyone. It has broken me inside".<sup>36</sup>

The Silence of the Church and the Reinforcement of Blame, Shame, and Stigma

The self-imposed silence of survivors is often further reinforced by the silence of the churches. A survivor is cited as saying

[p]astors cry out from the pulpit: "We love people", "We want to help people". But as soon as you go with a real situation like someone being sexually violated, they will run. They sweep it under the rug.<sup>37</sup>

Some churches deepen the pain and grief associated with sexual violence through victim-blaming or a judgemental silence. Negative responses within the churches

32 Erving Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (New York and London: Simon & Schuster, 1963), 2.

33 Tearfund, *Breaking the Silence*, 7.

34 *Ibid.*, 6.

35 *Ibid.*, 4.

36 *Ibid.*, 5.

37 *Ibid.*, 6.

are not necessarily explicit or direct, but can be expressed in a range of indirect and subtle ways, and especially through an unsympathetic silence. These church responses are often shaped by similar tendencies towards blaming and/or shaming the victim as in wider society, even if these are not directly spoken. It is precisely because these attitudes are not articulated explicitly that they persist under the surface and are left unexamined. When they are hidden from view in this way, they can undermine a compassionate response to sexual violence and shield harmful attitudes and behaviour from the ethical scrutiny they deserve.

The report refers to a disturbing normalisation of sexual violence. It cites a 2008 survey which found that “28% of men in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces had raped a woman or girl. One third of these men said they did not feel guilty”.<sup>38</sup> The statistic that one third of men did not feel guilty for rape raises serious questions about social attitudes amongst men and how such attitudes can excuse and support sexual violence. Since the figure is so high, there can be little doubt that such attitudes are also shared by some within the churches. Even so, it seems likely that if asked directly, most church members would agree that sexual violence is wrong, and that the shame attached to sexual violence should be carried by the perpetrator not the victim-survivor. However, in practice this question is rarely asked. In the absence of an explicit question, the gendered nature of shame makes it much more likely that even those who see sexual violence as wrong will still associate shame with a female victim-survivor rather than a male perpetrator. The silence of the churches means that despite the obvious ethical self-contradictions in this victim-blaming and stigmatising, little is done to challenge these views or to critically examine the assumptions which support them.

## The Untapped Potential within the Churches to Address Sexual Violence

A third key message from the report is much more positive. If the churches in South Africa can overcome their silences and reflect on their teaching and actions, they have an untapped potential to address sexual violence in their communities.

One aspect of this potential is the institutional presence of churches throughout South Africa. Churches are physically present in communities as pastoral institutions. No other social institution has the same geographical reach or physical presence as the churches. They can offer services for both rural and urban communities. Reaching out for other support services might require a trip to an unfamiliar organisation in the nearest town, or even a distant city, whereas the churches are well known and more readily accessible:

The church's reach goes beyond that of any other institution in South Africa. It is not only stable: it is also trusted. This is crucial when responding to the sensitive issue of sexual violence.<sup>39</sup>

A second aspect of the potential of the churches is that very few other institutions have the same moral authority or social influence as the churches. The churches have a social acceptance and social respect that exceeds many other social agencies

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 10.

and crosses many social divides. The churches are thus uniquely well placed to provide care and support for survivors, stand alongside those seeking justice, and identify and challenge harmful attitudes and beliefs within society that perpetuate sexual violence.

Despite this exceptional potential, *Breaking the Silence* indicates that the churches have not done enough to embrace the opportunities which are before them. It notes that “[t]he current challenge to church leaders at both national and local levels is that the church should have a more profound impact on sexual violence”.<sup>40</sup> *Breaking the Silence* calls for urgent action by the churches in South Africa to do more to end sexual violence and show care for its victims. It was used to launch the *We Will Speak Out Campaign* in South Africa on 25 November 2013, with support from Thabo Makgoba, the Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town.

In Tearfund’s report *Silent No More* (2011), survivors of sexual violence in other African countries identified the church as *the* institution with the most potential to help them.<sup>41</sup> Yet at the same time it also confirmed that in practice the churches generally remain silent on sexual violence and ignore the needs of victims. As noted above, the same silence on the part of churches is reported in *Breaking the Silence* as a key issue for the churches to address. Both reports suggest that the churches’ silence is at least partly because many churches do not see tackling sexual violence as part of their biblical mandate, or central to their theological identity or missional purpose.

There have been some exceptional individuals, congregations and local organisations that are exceptions to this overall picture. Imaginative local initiatives demonstrate the church’s capacity for powerful impact. Yet, on the whole, the churches have been slow to make sexual violence a priority and have failed to make their voices heard (Le Roux 2012, 2014). Whilst no church would actively endorse sexual violence, many churches are likely to say nothing and are thereby complicit with the *status quo* through silence. They have done little to critically interrogate their own teachings on gender relations and power, or to examine how these might contribute towards sexual violence.

To help the churches in these important initiatives, a more theologically grounded motivation for addressing sexual violence could make a powerful contribution. If church responses to sexual violence are seen as merely one strand of good works or pastoral action amongst many others, addressing sexual violence will inevitably struggle to claim church time and attention. Without a clearer theological mandate, many within the churches will find it hard to make sexual violence a priority. In view of the silence and stigma associated with sexual violence, it is more likely that it will be paid no more than lip-service and be largely marginalised and forgotten.

This risk of being sidelined raises a key question for Christian theologians, biblical scholars and church leaders: what theological and biblical resources are available

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> For a response to *Silent No More* that offers further background on the report itself and its potential theological significance, see David Tombs, “Silent No More: Sexual Violence in Conflict as a Challenge to the Worldwide Church”, *Acta Theologica*, 34:2, (December, 2014), 142-60. Online at: <http://bit.ly/35e1y0h>

to ensure that churches are more actively engaged, and their responses to sexual violence are firmly part of a solution rather than part of the problem? In particular, what biblical and theological resources are available to address the silence and stigma associated with sexual violence, and the mistaken and harmful assumptions connected to this within churches?

A sustained investigation of attitudes towards blame and shame could help transform church responses to survivors. This would support a more informed and more caring attitude to survivors. A deeper awareness of blame and shame connected to sexual violence could shape a pastoral response which affirms the human dignity of all, regardless of what they might have been subjected to. Rather than deepening the damage and despair of sexual violence, the church can help lift up survivors. It can seek to restore their sense of self-worth and value when these qualities have been damaged or lost.

Much of the biblical and theological work that has been done on sexual violence has focused on critiquing how Christian teaching can often be part of the problem. Although this is essential work, it needs to be supported by works which address how the Bible and theology can also be part of the solution. The reactions to Skosana's sermon offer insights that theological work on sexual violence might draw upon. The sections below will suggest that in terms of historical evidence there is an even stronger reason for making the connection between Jesus and sexual violence. Making this acknowledgment more public will almost certainly prompt hostile reactions, but will serve a positive purpose in the long term.

## Jesus as Victim of Sexual Violence

One of the greatest silences in Christianity is silence on the sexual violence that typically accompanied Roman crucifixions. There has been extensive work on Roman sexual politics, gender identity, notions of masculinity and femininity, and the symbolism of sexual penetration.<sup>42</sup> Yet this has rarely been recalled as a significant context for reading New Testament passages on crucifixion. Academic literature which views and names the experience of Jesus in terms of such violence has only recently started to emerge. My own article "Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse" (1999) appears to be the first to do so.<sup>43</sup> The Australian Catholic priest Michael Trainor has also written independently along similar lines.<sup>44</sup> In both cases, a concern with current context has shaped the biblical reading. My article draws on accounts of torture and prisoner abuse in Latin America. Trainor links his reading to the sexual abuse scandal in Australia. It is not that these contemporary contexts determine the meaning of the biblical context, or project something into

<sup>42</sup> Judith P. Hallett & Marilyn Skinner (eds.), *Roman Sexualities* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997). Craig A. Williams, *Roman Homosexuality: Ideologies of Masculinity in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>43</sup> David Tombs, "Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse", *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 53,(Autumn 1999):104. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2VpE97m>

<sup>44</sup> Michael Trainor, "Sexual Abuse and Luke's Story of Jesus". In: H.D. Regan (ed.), *Child Sexual Abuse, Society, and the Future of the Church* (Adelaide: ATF Australia, 2013) [<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt163t9qr6>]. Michael Trainor, *Body of Jesus and Sexual Abuse: How the Gospel Passion Narrative Informs a Pastoral Approach* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2014).

them which is not already there. Rather the contemporary contexts open up the texts from different perspectives to show how the texts might be read in new ways. The contexts encourage attention to features which might be missed or neglected. They give voice to what is otherwise so often left silent.

My own initial works suggest at least three areas of Jesus' mistreatment which invite further research in terms of sexual violence: the stripping and exposure; possible other sexualised abuses in the Praetorium; the unspeakable violence of the cross.

The stripping and public exposure are particularly important because they are explicitly attested. As I have argued before:

[b]ased on what the gospel texts themselves indicate, the sexual element in the abuse is unavoidable. An adult man was stripped naked for flogging, then dressed in an insulting way to be mocked, struck and spat at by a multitude of soldiers before being stripped again (at least in Mark 15.19 and Matthew 27.30) and re-clothed for his journey through the city – already too weak to carry his own cross – only to be stripped again (a third time) and displayed to die whilst naked to a mocking crowd.<sup>45</sup>

Social awareness and social attitudes to sexual violence have changed so dramatically since this passage was written that the stripping of Jesus is now much less likely to be dismissed as insignificant. The #MeToo movement has created a new context in which stripping and enforced exposure are less likely to be dismissed as incidental or unimportant. Yet, it is still easy to pass over these passages without pausing to reflect on their disturbing elements. Part of the reason for this omission is that the understanding of the passage is often shaped by a prior understanding influenced by Christian art. Depictions of the stripping in Christian art, including portrayals in the tenth station of the cross, typically show Jesus as surrounded by just a handful of others, and often no more than two, who are not necessarily in military uniforms. In some pictures his assailants seem to be assisting him to undress rather than forcibly stripping him of his clothing. The indication in Mark 15:16b that “they called together the whole cohort” of soldiers sounds a very different note. The assembly of more than five hundred soldiers to view the forced stripping of a prisoner would have heightened the sense of vulnerability, humiliation and threat involved with the stripping.<sup>46</sup>

Skosana has also apparently referenced the emotionally charged significance of the naked body in some of his writing. According to Zvomuya, in explaining the connection between black South Africans and Easter in *Interpreting Easter*, Skosana writes that:

[t]hey have an immediate identification with a bruised and naked body of a stranger hanging on the cross. That stranger has become their symbol of suffering and hope, a depiction of their daily struggle. When they look up at the cross, they look at themselves.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Tombs, “Crucifixion, State Terror, and Sexual Abuse”, 104.

<sup>46</sup> Katie Edwards & David Tombs. 2018. “#HimToo – Why Jesus Should be Recognised as a Victim of Sexual Violence”, *The Conversation*, 23 March 2018; online at: <http://bit.ly/33kYca1>

<sup>47</sup> Percy Zvomuya, “Jesus Christ Lived in the Townships”, *Mail and Guardian*, 21 Apr 2011. Online at: <http://bit.ly/326prFa> [Accessed 10 July 2016].

This identification, along with the use of stripping and exposure of prisoners in apartheid detention, deserves more attention for a deeper understanding of the deliberate humiliation of Jesus.

The second area where questions might be asked relates to further mockery and humiliation that may have taken place in the *Praetorium*, but which has not been recorded in the text. Stripping and naked exposure are often a precursor to other forms of sexual violence. It is impossible to know with certainty what else may have taken place. However, a careful reading of the texts in the light of accounts of prisoner abuses in recent times such as at Abu Ghraib suggests that the possibility of further abuses cannot be dismissed. Likewise, careful reading of Roman practices and Roman attitudes to sexual violence make this a very real possibility. The Romans were known to use a wide range of kinds of sexual violence and violations against those whom they wished to humiliate. Executions were often the culmination of a sequence of abuses, and earlier steps in the punishment could include rape, burning of body parts, castration and mutilation.

A third area for investigation, alongside the stripping and the possibility of other humiliation in the *Praetorium* relates to the cross itself. The cross can and should be viewed as an instrument of torture as well as execution. Viewing the cross in terms of torture helps to ask a question about crucifixion and sexual violence. It is very unusual to ask this question and there is very little in Christian art which encourages it. Even so, there is significant historical evidence which points in this direction. The Roman historian Seneca records what he saw in the campaign in Bithynia, in his *Letter to Marcia on Consolation* (dated about 40 CE):

I see crosses there, not just of one kind but made in many different ways: some have their victims with head down to the ground; some impale their private parts; others stretch out their arms on the gibbet.<sup>48</sup>

It is not completely clear what the genital impalement witnessed by Seneca involved, but it suggests that Roman crucifixion could be much closer to earlier impalement practices than has usually been appreciated. When this is placed alongside other evidence pointing to the sexualised nature of Roman crucifixions, it challenges the common account that crucifixion was a development away from ancient impalement practices. Most discussions of crucifixion follow Martin Hengel's classic work.<sup>49</sup> They recognise the link between crucifixion and impalement, but put the emphasis on the discontinuity between the two. This implies that Roman crucifixion shared little with earlier impalements. Seneca provides clear evidence that, in fact, Roman crucifixions could involve sexual impalement. This would presumably have been done to signify humiliation and to announce Roman power. Since there is a scholarly consensus that the contrast between the humiliation of the victim and the power of Rome was precisely what crucifixion was meant to convey, it is startling how little consideration has been given to how this might be done through sexual violence.

<sup>48</sup> Seneca, *Dialogue: To Marcia on Consolation*, 6.20.3.

<sup>49</sup> Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 25).

The otherwise excellent and comprehensive recent survey by John Cook<sup>50</sup> does not address this question.<sup>51</sup>

References to crucifixion are relatively plentiful in Roman literature, but also relatively scant on detail. Frequently references to crucifixion are no more than a passing mention of the punishment. In many cases a euphemism such as ‘slave’s punishment’ is used instead of explicitly naming crucifixion. It seems that crucifixions were considered unspeakable in Roman society, and there is good reason to suspect that it was the shame and stigma associated with sexual violence that was the reason for this. It is possible that the euphemism ‘slave’s punishment’ is a tacit reference to sexual violation. There is no question that crucifixion was a punishment particularly associated with slaves, along with bandits and rebels, and hence ‘slave’s punishment’ would have been readily understood as crucifixion. However, what might give the term a less obvious further meaning is that since slaves were the property of their masters, a slave was vulnerable to sexual violation at any time. To be a slave was to be without control over one’s body. Both male and female slaves were subject to their master’s orders and expected to serve their master’s sexual wishes. The term ‘slave’s punishment’ could therefore have had a more direct suggestion of sexual violation than is normally assumed.

## Confronting the Stigma Around Sexual Violence

In my experience sharing this research, when people first hear the idea that Jesus was a victim of sexual violence, they usually assume they have misheard, or that the suggestion is only metaphorical, or that it self-evidently mistaken. Yet when the biblical passages are read and the historical evidence is discussed, people are often amazed that they have never heard this before or seen it for themselves. Moreover, the fact that something they now see as so obvious has been hidden in plain sight for so long prompts new questions. What influences what is seen and what not seen, what determines what is said and what is not said?

As has already been mentioned, Christian art is an important factor in how crucifixion is seen. The dominant representation of crucifixion in Christian art adds to the difficulty in imagining the strong connection between crucifixion and sexual violence. Christian art typically offers a highly sanitised version of crucifixion which has been so entrenched in Christian tradition that to question it can initially seem bizarre. Thus, although many ordinary church members today are aware of the scholarly consensus that Christ was crucified naked, this form of sexual humiliation is rarely represented in ways that acknowledge its disturbing nature or encourage recognition of it as a form of sexual violence.

The sensitivity of the subject and wider silences around sexual violence and male victims are also important factors. A primary reason that the sexual violence against Jesus has not been given the attention it deserves is that at first glance the mere idea

<sup>50</sup> John G. Cook, *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World*, WUNT 327 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014) [<https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-153125-5>].

<sup>51</sup> David Tombs, “Review of John Granger Cook, *Crucifixion in the Mediterranean World*”, *The Bible & Critical Theory*, 13.1, (2017), online at: <http://bit.ly/30Yqk13>

appears not just mistaken but offensive and insulting. For those who take the Bible seriously, it is assumed that little of value is to be gained by even considering the possibility. This sceptical reaction is understandable but misguided. Skosana shows this blindness in response to the reactions of those offended at his metaphorical identification of Jesus as HIV-positive. The reactions which claim it is offensive to say Jesus was a victim of sexual violence need to be challenged and addressed.

Discussion of the sexualised elements in the humiliation and abuse of Jesus clearly raises sensitive and disturbing questions that the Christian tradition has usually avoided. It will take time and care for this conversation to develop in a way that is serious rather than sensationalist. However, Skosana's sermon offers encouragement that, if the churches are willing to face up to these questions, this difficult process will eventually prove worthwhile and may have extraordinary potential to make a positive difference. Recognition that Jesus was a victim of sexual violence could help the churches in South Africa, and in other contexts, to break their silence on sexual violence. It can provide a biblical and theological basis to develop a more honest and more constructive approach to sexual violence in dialogue with survivors of sexual violence.

The conventional reactions of blaming or stigmatising a victim of sexual violence are disrupted when the victim is Jesus. Powerful dynamics in the theological tradition prevent this default response. Jesus is typically recognised within the churches as being 'without sin'. This chapter is not the place to ask what 'without sin' really means in this context, or to discuss its merits and limitations. The convention is more to highlight the self-evident failure of the victim-blaming response when Jesus is recognised as the victim. It is clear that Jesus is not to be blamed. This convention can then lead onto questioning why victim-blaming is so readily assumed for other victims. It may be precisely because acknowledgement of the evidence that Jesus was a victim of sexual abuse is so disruptive of these stigmatising assumptions that some people react so fiercely to the suggestion Jesus was abused and dismiss it as insulting and offensive. There is a lot more at stake Christologically than first appears.

The claims that Skosana's sermon was insulting and offensive show why attention to Jesus' experience of sexual violence matters in the present. It can help expose and address the stigmatising and blame that prevent the churches from responding more appropriately to sexual violence. Recognising these dynamics can contribute to a transformative change within the churches that makes a practical difference to the way that churches relate to survivors.

This act of discerning is not to suggest that the churches should take sexual violence seriously only because of the experience of Jesus. Nor do the churches 'need' Jesus to have been abused for sexual abuse to be important, because only his experience is regarded as important. It is, however, appropriate to acknowledge that Jesus of Nazareth has a particular significance and status within the churches, and his experience of crucifixion and resurrection are central to the way the churches understand themselves and their work.

Likewise, it is not to suggest that Jesus should be acknowledged as a victim of sexual abuse regardless of the historical and textual evidence which supports or contradicts this. Whilst there might be some value in a metaphorical identification

irrespective of the historical and textual evidence, that would clearly be a very different matter from the historical identification of sexual violence suggested here. The historical identification must be based on the evidence quite separate from the positive consequence or purpose that this identification may serve, but this does not preclude clearer recognition of this historical evidence from also having positive consequences in the present.

The argument of this chapter is that naming Jesus as a victim of sexual violence would be a justified and revolutionary step within the churches. This suggestion will need to be reflected upon further with attention to whether or not survivors of sexual violence see it as helpful or not. Understanding more of survivor responses is a crucial next step for this work and research along these lines has barely begun. However, whilst the views of survivors on the difference that acknowledging Jesus as a victim of sexual violence might make is critically important, it would be wrong to see this discussion as a concern only for survivors. It is also relevant to the whole church. Just as HIV/AIDS prompted new theological reflection on the whole church as body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27) in terms of HIV, so sexual violence provides a new context for new Christological insights and ecclesiological awareness of the church as the abused body of Christ. What does it mean for the whole church if it is the current body of the sexually abused Christ? If the Christological and ecclesiological implications of the sexual violence of crucifixion are taken seriously, they offer a strong counter-message to the mistaken attitudes of victim-blaming and stigmatising which still prevail within churches.

## Conclusion

The churches have extraordinary potential to show transformative leadership on issues of sexual violence in South Africa and in other countries. Recent biblical and historical research which suggests that Jesus himself should be recognised as a victim of sexual violence could offer a powerful resource for this work. Facing up to the reality of crucifixion and what it meant in terms of sexual violence will not be an easy or straightforward process. There will be a lot of work involved in talking through the ideas in a way that is historically, biblically, theologically and pastorally responsible. This task will need to be essentially attentive to the responses of survivors, but it is a conversation for the whole body of the church. The churches should embrace opportunities to face up to these issues and become better at these conversations. As shown in Tearfund's *Silent No More* and *Breaking the Silence*, this need presents an important opportunity to be embraced. As Skosana's sermon suggests, the initial reaction to this acknowledgement will often be to dismiss it as offensive or blasphemous. It is precisely this reaction, however, which creates the opportunity for a fuller transformation to occur. It is not just a matter of correcting the historical record, it also reveals something deeper about hidden attitudes. It makes a real difference to the ministry of the church and the very being of the church as the body of Christ. A similarly bold approach to addressing hidden attitudes and stigma would serve the churches well in their response to sexual violence.

# ACTING JUSTLY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Considering the Case for a Christian Social Ethic

*Clive Pearson*

## Welcome to the Anthropocene

The dawning of the Anthropocene has provoked multiple discussions around matters to do with definition, timing and likely consequences – will it be ‘good, bad or ugly’?<sup>1</sup> From a feminist perspective it has even been argued – prior to any formal definition of a shift in geologic epochs – that the human species has already ventured into the ‘post-Anthropocene’ era.<sup>2</sup> The term itself now lies frequently in the background of the cases lawyers wish to make on behalf of ‘client Earth’ (thus establishing legal protection for the wellbeing of creation),<sup>3</sup> while concerned activists, likewise, strive to free cultures from their apparent dependence on plastic ‘trash’. It is evident that oceans along with land and air are at great risk.

What might constitute a Christian social ethic in the Anthropocene finds itself in unprecedented territory. Until now a Christian theology and ethics have assumed life within the Holocene, where the climate allowed for the flourishing of human cultures and civilisations. The Christian faith itself is a religion of the Holocene. How can its moral virtues of faith, hope and love, quite apart from its salvific claims and its profession of providence, transcend geological epochs? Kjetil Fretheim has rightly made the case for “contemporary climate change” being ‘our kairos’. Here he draws upon the support of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople to the effect that this *kairos* moment is a “decisive time in our relationship with God’s creation”.<sup>4</sup> The plural pronoun ‘our’ Fretheim and the Patriarch invoked here refers to “the whole of the human race”. It is thus a crisis that concerns ‘us’ as a species: Fretheim and others have also extended the crisis before ‘us’ to include the non-human creation as well.<sup>5</sup>

1 Simon Dalby, “Framing the Anthropocene: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly”, *The Anthropocene Review*, 3:1 (April, 2016), 33-51 [<https://doi.org/10.1177/2053019615618681>].

2 Claire Colebrooke, “We Have Always Been Post-Anthropocene: The Anthropocene Counter-Factual”. In: R. Grusin (ed.), *Anthropocene Feminism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 1-20.

3 Martin Goodman & James Thornton, *Client Earth* (Brunswick and London: Scribe Publications, 2017).

4 Kjetil Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination: Public Theology in Times of Crisis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 132-133.

5 *Ibid.*, 137; Wayne Gabardi, *The Next Social Contract: Animals, the Anthropocene, and Biopolitics* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press), Barbara Creed, *Stray: Human-Animal Ethics in the Anthropocene* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2017).

The call to construct a Christian social ethic in the Anthropocene will need to negotiate a significant obstacle course. There are many references to climate change provoking a ‘moral storm’ and driving the imperative of an ethic fit for purpose. It is not so easy to determine what exactly ‘climate justice’ is, nor how that might be crafted on an intergovernmental scale. The dilemma is further compounded for the present, which is also an age when there are significant doubts over the capabilities of democracies. Are they robust enough to put into place appropriate policies for the management of this planetary crisis?<sup>6</sup>

The task of acting justly in the Anthropocene is thus a fraught prospect. From the perspective of a public theology it is a critical transdisciplinary issue. It cannot be assumed that theology will find itself invited as a matter of course to this discussion in the public sphere. The most obvious voices will be those of the Earth system scientists, politicians, corporations and lawyers. One of the vocations of a public theology in whatever forum into which it can gain access is to maintain its “primary loyalty with the poor, the oppressed, and suffering”.<sup>7</sup> There is an important distinction to be made between those who enjoy climate privileges and those who do not.<sup>8</sup> Now a public theology must respect the disciplinary insights of others and be aware of the Christian faith’s own complicity in matters to do with climate change. It must also be willing to be a medium and advocate for those most at risk, even this early on in the Anthropocene. For this reason alone one urgent position is to advance the voice of those who inhabit what Robert Jay Lifton has identified as the Job-like nations of the Pacific.<sup>9</sup>

### “The Polar Bears of the Pacific”

In September 2015 the President of the Pacific Ocean state of Kiribati, Anote Tong, led a fact-finding mission to the Arctic. His reason for going was twofold: he wished to view the melting Arctic ice shelves in order to see for himself what was happening with regard to this index of global warming; he wanted to set what he saw in the light of his own people’s experience of rising sea levels and place their situation within a wider context. And, secondly, Tong wanted to see a polar bear.

This visit included a detour arranged by Greenpeace while Tong and his party were en route to the climate change summit of 120 leaders held in New York.<sup>10</sup> Greenpeace’s invitation arose out of its desire to have a national leader sign its International Declaration on the Future of the Arctic; Greenpeace is campaigning to limit the prospects of harvesting virgin fossil fuels in the Arctic that are now becoming accessible as a result of the retreat of the ice cover. Greenpeace has also recognised

6 Daniel J. Fiorino, *Can Democracy Handle Climate Change?* (Cambridge and Medford: Polity Press, 2018).

7 Fretheim, *Interruption and Imagination*, 139.

8 Kari Marie Norgaard, “Climate Denial and the Construction of Innocence: Reproducing Transnational Environmental Privilege in the Face of Climate Change”, *Race, Gender and Class*, 19:1-2 (2012):80-103.

9 Robert Jay Lifton, *The Climate Swerve: Reflections on Mind, Hope and Survival* (New York and London: The New Press, 2017), 27.

10 John van Tiggelen, “Cold Comfort: The President of Kiribati Goes on a Fact-Finding Mission in the Arctic”, *The Monthly*, December 2014-January 2015, 20-26.

the iconic status of island nations like Kiribati and Tuvalu.<sup>11</sup> It wished to interview the President while he was on site – far from home – in the Arctic – a landscape which he will describe as ‘intimidating’ and one where nature is dominant:<sup>12</sup> it is a region where he says the human creature must be humble rather than arrogant. Clad in a survival suit for the occasion, Tong is made to feel like an astronaut.<sup>13</sup> He is not at home in this experience of the earth. And what he sees leaves him with a grim and palpable sense of ‘foreboding’.<sup>14</sup>

That description of the visit being a fact-finding mission is rather overblown. Through satellite imagery comparisons can be made between the extent of the summer ice cover in the 1970s and now. It seems to be retreating, on average, by about 13% per decade. It is conceivable that in the not too distant future the big melt will allow for an ice-free North East passage. The implications are far-reaching. The Arctic helps to cool the Earth by giving off more heat to space than it absorbs. Remove the ice and snow cover and the Arctic Ocean will absorb sunlight rather than reflect it. The Antarctic is likewise shedding ice.

Tong’s visit was really more about public relations.<sup>15</sup> A few days later he would draw upon his visit to the Arctic at a media conference in New York to describe his people, the I-Kiribati, as being “the polar bears of the Pacific”. This claim sounds like a nonsense at a first hearing. Tong is President of a group of coral atolls that straddle the International Date Line and the Equator. It is the only country in the world which exists in all four hemispheres – north, south, east and west. Its population is a little over 100,000. The land is exceedingly low-lying; on the one side of each atoll you have the *moana nui*, the big ocean, the Pacific; on the other lie lagoons which from a distance look pristine and idyllic. It is hard to imagine more of a polar opposite between South Tarawa and the Arctic.

Tong is deliberate in his choice of language. His usage of the image of the polar bear has its origins in his expedition on board the Greenpeace ship, *Esperanza*. Now, amid the tall towers of Manhattan, Tong speaks of how iconic the polar bears have become. The prospects of their precarious future survival elicits a strong emotive response worldwide. The plight of Kiribati scarcely attracts the same level of attention, though, as Tong notes that “what happens to the polar bears will also be happening to us in our part of the world”.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 22-23. Greenpeace was conducting a campaign against the advance of oil exploration and industrial fishing.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>15</sup> Anote Tong, “Statement by H.E. President, Anote Tong, 69th UNGA, New York, 26 September 2014”, <http://bit.ly/33hy3c1> “It has been an eye opener for me to spend time last week in the polar conditions. It gave me a wider perspective of the immensity of what is at stake beyond our own immediate concerns. This visit to the Arctic highlighted the stark reality of the very direct connection between the destruction of this polar region to what is happening to us in the equatorial region”.

<sup>16</sup> Sophie Yeo, “Kiribati President: My People are the Polar Bears of the Pacific”, online at: <http://bit.ly/2VrAXbq>

Kiribati, like its distant neighbour across the Pacific, Tuvalu, is destined to disappear. Tong is under no illusions.<sup>17</sup> There is an air of resignation mixed with great resolve about him: he makes the point at the UN: “For us climate change is not an event in the future. It’s an event that we’re dealing with today”.<sup>18</sup> In an interview with the *New Yorker* magazine he indicates that the people of Kiribati have only about 20 years left before the islands must all be abandoned. Already Papua New Guinea has taken the 2,500 citizens of the Carteret Islands. Faced with rising sea levels and the accelerating loss of freshwater reserves, Tong has overseen the purchase of 6,000 acres in Fiji in order to guarantee the islanders’ food supply. The policy he is now advocating is one of “migration with dignity”. Every year a small number of people, at present, are sent to relocate their lives in New Zealand. Tong is overseeing governmental initiatives that are designed to provide education, qualifications, employable skills and a capacity to survive and thrive in an alien land and unknown future.<sup>19</sup> He has a deep and passionate concern for the next generation – which, for him, refers not to some vague disembodied phenomenon, but something there before him, now, ‘his kids’ as he calls them: where will they live? For him climate change is not a theory which one might deny; it is not a political debate over carbon emissions with one eye on the research polls and the self-interested electorate and the next election. Tong tells the UN Summit that for his people the changing climate is a pressing matter of culture, identity and life itself.

These islands are like the canaries in the mine. Tong advises the summit that “[t]he global community cannot afford to NOT listen to our stories and the plight of our people. Our plight is the plight of the global community, further down the line”.<sup>20</sup> His people are the forerunners of the environmental refugees yet to come. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees is already referring to how “entire populations (from small vulnerable islands) could become stateless”.<sup>21</sup> Further, but not too much further, down this trajectory of risks lie much larger, more densely populated lands, like Bangladesh – for instance.<sup>22</sup>

17 Van Tiggelen, “Cold Comfort”, 22: “Tong often speaks of his crushing disappointment after the Copenhagen summit, 2009, when the world failed spectacularly to agree to anything that might help arrest global warming. Although he retains the hope that a solution might be negotiated ‘one day’, he says it would come too late to save his nation. ‘The world is finally listening, but sometimes it all feels futile, you know’”.

18 Tong, “Statement”, online at: <http://bit.ly/33hy3c1>

19 Office of the President, Republic of Kiribati: “Kiribati Climate Change: Relocation”, online at: <http://bit.ly/2IAmUv2> “Our ‘migration with dignity’ strategy is an investment in the education of our people and the upskilling of our young population to equip them with educational qualifications and employable skills that would enable them to migrate with dignity to other countries voluntarily and in the worst case scenario, when our islands can no longer sustain human life”.

20 Tong, “Statement”.

21 Coral Davenport, “Rising Seas”, *The New York Times*, 27 March 2014.

22 Gardiner Harris, “Borrowed Time in a Disappearing Land: Facing Rising Seas. Bangladesh Confronts the Consequences of Climate Change”, *The New York Times*, 28 March, 2014. The World Bank Group has predicted that “rising sea levels and more extreme heat and more intense cyclones will threaten food production, livelihoods, infrastructure, as well as the slowing of poverty reduction”. The World Bank, “Warming Climate to Hit Bangladesh Hard”, 19 June, 2013, online at: <http://bit.ly/2Vtp04V> [Accessed 1 February 2017].

## “Who is Christ for us in our Disappearing Islands?”

In terms of a globalised public theology, the plight of Tuvalu and Kiribati can serve as icons of the crisis that Kjetil Fretheim (and many others) have identified. That status should not obscure the islanders’ own indigenous and theological voices. Their own cultural traditions have been established on the basis of the care of land, sea and air in a holistic and sustainable manner. The immediate problem which presents itself is, of course, is whether these practices are sufficient for the purposes of mitigation of and adaptation to a crisis without precedent and on a scale the Anthropocene anticipates.

Clive Hamilton is one of the more prominent philosophers of the Anthropocene and is deeply sceptical of the value of an indigenous spirituality. It comes from an era in the Earth’s history that is passing.<sup>23</sup> In the circumstances the necessity of a Christian social ethic in the service of a public theology is intensified. The function of arguing the case for indigenous voices to be heard and taken seriously in the geopolitical regime of the ‘climate leviathan’ remains.<sup>24</sup> The overt theological aspect of the bilingual task of a public theology must at the same time respect the local theological insights. Here the idioms, speech and images of the Christian faith which inform a public discourse are close to the surface of the everyday world

One of the givens in this glocalised context is the need for due recognition that the inhabitants of these islands, like others in the Pacific, are deeply religious and are virtually all Christian. Jione Havea refers to all Pacific Islanders as being ‘Bible conscious’ peoples. Cliff Bird from the Solomons and Ama’amalele Tofaeono from Samoa both speak of how inconceivable it is to think of the local cultures apart from the gospel. The life of faith here creates a public worldview which is more difficult to conceive in the sceptical contemporary West. These rising sea levels, which are directly experienced through regular wave invasions, pose a serious theological problem.<sup>25</sup>

It should come as no surprise that local theologians see their vocation as one of seeking to address some basic confessional anxieties. Tafue Lusama from Tuvalu, for example, has striven to address the deeply and widely felt perplexity expressed in various forms – “What is it that we have done wrong to deserve this fate?” And, again, “Why is God angry with us?” Hitherto there had been a coming together of a natural theology and indigenous knowledge which was expressed in and through the providence of God that accompanied these ‘seawater peoples’ on land and on water. Now the attribute of God seemingly most close at hand is one of wrath. The task for theologians in this part of the world is intensely practical. For Lusama it is to engage with the problem of theodicy on behalf of his people and recover the narrative of Job as well as to show that this problem is not a work of God’s anger but

23 Clive Hamilton, *Defiant Earth: The Fate of Humans in the Anthropocene*, (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2017), 105-107, 109.

24 Joel Wainwright & Geoffrey Mann, *Climate Leviathan: A Political Theory of our Planetary Future*, (London: Verso, 2018).

25 For a recent description of the issues see: “After Cyclone Pam – Now What? An Interview with Uniting World’s Reverend Seforosa Carroll, 1 April, 2015”, online at: <http://bit.ly/35kcEka> [Accessed 28 July 2016].

rather a result of global human activity.<sup>26</sup> There is an educative task required here to help a people understand in categories of the Christian faith they know well and which serves as the cultural symbols that bind the household of life and creation together. It is against this kind of background that Sulufaiga Uota in Tuvalu and Tioti Timon from Kiribati pose the question: “Who, then, is Christ for us” in our disappearing islands?<sup>27</sup>

The impending plight of these islands is captured in a couple of iconic images which are full of theological implications. In one of his many interviews Tong refers to the site of a local church. Several years ago the sea rushed through a small village. The residents fled to what higher ground there was; now the church, Tong reflects, is “sitting out in the middle of the water, because there was a village around it, but it’s no longer”. The church remains where it is because the President asked the villagers to build a sea wall around it, “so that it doesn’t go, so it can bear testimony to what is happening”.<sup>28</sup>

The other iconic image is to be found in a contrast made available through a DVD with the title *Trouble in Paradise*. The scene begins in Times Square, New York. The Square is ablaze with neon lights, frenetic energy, up-to-the minute news reports, the strength of the dollar, the euro, the yuan. Then there is a shift; a plane lands, the doors open, a frangipani-scented tropical welcome awaits us and we are on the runway of Funafuti, the capital of Tuvalu. Life here is slow and laid back: Tuvalu’s main claim to the digital age is that they provided the internet domain suffix ‘tv’, the rights to which they partially sold off in order to raise money for an otherwise fairly subsistence economy.

In the course of the DVD we hear the islanders tell their stories of how their staple crop, the *pulaka*, has been affected by salt water bubbling up through the coral base upon which they live; they point to breached spaces which were once a part of their home islands; we hear them talk about rising sea levels – the story of Noah and the flood is invoked by an older generation who do not want to leave the islands. The reference is to the covenant made with Noah, then sealed with a rainbow, which claimed that there would be no such future flood of destruction. The younger generation have been educated in a way which is more aware of the science of climate change. The iconic moment occurs when a voice says, “What did we do to deserve this?” and then follows hard upon this intensely felt question a reminder of Jesus’ ministry: “Are we not your neighbour?” This resonates with Tong’s comment in New York: “I know a lot of people think they will be inconvenienced”, he said. “But how inconvenienced will you be in comparison to your home not being there?”

26 The changing climate that threatens to drown the island nation of Tuvalu is also a test of the islanders’ faith. “We plant and depend on God to provide fruits. We go out fishing with faith that God will provide enough daily,” said Tafue Lusama, General Secretary of the Ekalesia Kelisiano, Tuvalu’s national church. “The failure of these seems to indicate to the people that God’s providence has failed them”. Cited in Ruth Moon, “Teaching Natural Theology as Climate Changes Drown a Way of Life: Pacific Islanders Relearn God’s Care as Rising Sea Levels Threaten the Future”, *Christianity Today*, 14 February 2012.

27 Clive Pearson, “Oceanic Readings on Creation and Redemption”. In: Ernst Conradie (ed.), *Creation and Salvation: Volume 2. A Companion on Recent Theological Movements* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2013), 371-380.

28 Betsy Morais, “President Tong and His Disappearing Islands”, *The New Yorker*, 8 June 2014.

## The Lack of Precedents

The inclusion of an indigenous voice in the response of a public theology to the *kairos* moment of climate change is relatively infrequent. Its presence here puts a vulnerable human face on what is acknowledged to be a “truly complex and diabolical problem”.<sup>29</sup> There is, of course, widespread recognition that climate change affects the whole species – indeed, the non-human world as well. The transition away from the Holocene to the dawning of Anthropocene conveys a recognition of this daunting prospect. It is not uncommon for a politics of culpability – whether the blame be placed on capitalism, the Western exploitation of nature and other nations, or a masculinist patriarchy – to emerge and be assigned responsibility for this disruption to the Earth system. For all the merits of such arguments, the awkward truth is that the consequences affect the species as a whole, now and into the future. The very name – the Anthropocene – though contested at times, nevertheless conveys “the age of humans”. That designation is not just causal: it is also predictive.

What is of particular importance with regard to the future is how the name is no longer simply a geological term. Writing in the introduction to their anthology on *The Anthropocene and the Global Environmental Crisis* Clive Hamilton, Christophe Bonneuil and François Gemenne have identified a further two discrete discourses: the Earth systems sciences and the social sciences. The former comprise atmospheric chemistry, climatology, oceanography and geology and they way that they intersect with one another. their focus of interest lies in whether or not the Earth system as a whole has “reached its boundaries”. Has a tipping point been reached – do we now find ourselves in an Earth system for which there is simply ‘no-analogue state’?<sup>30</sup> The evidence for this, if it is indeed the case, is to be found in rising temperatures and sea levels, “large-scale shifting of sediment, rapid rates of species extinction, and the prevalence around the globe of widespread artificial molecules”.<sup>31</sup> What this reading of the Anthropocene presumes is “the cumulative impact of civilisation” on the planet.<sup>32</sup> This strikes a much more ominous note than the ‘mere’ recommendation of whether or not a working group of the international Stratigraphy Commission

29 Mark Maslin, *A Very Short Introduction to Climate Change*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). Dale Jameson, “The Nature of the Problem”. In: J.S. Dryzek, R.B. Norgaard & D. Schlosberg (eds), *The Oxford Handbook on Climate Change and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 38-55. Will Steffen, “A Truly Complex and Diabolical Policy Problem”. In: Dryzek, et al., *The Oxford Handbook*, 21-37.

30 The lack of precedents is also dealt with by John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard, and David Schlosberg, “Climate Change and Society: Approaches and Responses”, 3: “The social problem-solving mechanisms we currently possess were not designed, and have not evolved, to cope with anything like an interlinked set of problems of this severity, scale and complexity. There are no precedents”. See also Paul J. Crutzen & Will Steffen (2003), “How Long Have We Been Living in the Anthropocene Era? An Editorial Comment”, *Climate Change* 61(3):251-257 at 253 [<https://doi.org/10.1023/B:CLIM.0000004708.74871.62>].

31 Hamilton et al., “Thinking the Anthropocene”, 3.

32 Hamilton et al., “Thinking the Anthropocene”, 3. That impact can include the transformation of landscape, urbanisation, species extinction, resource extraction and waste dumping, as well as disruption of natural processes such as the nitrogen cycle.

decides that a golden spike should be marked in the Earth's geologic record.<sup>33</sup> Hamilton et al. argue that this naming of the Anthropocene is tantamount to a 'step-change' in the way in which human beings relate to the natural world.<sup>34</sup> It is, further, a change which has come about because humans themselves have become a 'force of nature', a telluric force, every bit as much as are "volcanism, tectonics, the cyclic fluctuations of solar activity, or changes in the Earth's orbital movements around the Sun".<sup>35</sup> The Anthropocene marks "not just a new geological regime for the Earth but also a new human condition".<sup>36</sup>

In the circumstances the future prospects of these small island states can become submerged in the need to address the immense complexities of the 'superwicked problem' that is climate change.<sup>37</sup> The current rhetoric refers to 'hothouse Earth' and "the madhouse effect". Some years ago now John Dryzek, Richard Norgaard and David Schlosberg were wrestling with the likely consequences in their introduction to *The Oxford Handbook on Climate Change and Society*.<sup>38</sup> For them climate change presents

perhaps the most profound challenge ever to have confronted humans and their social, political and economic systems. The stakes are massive, the risks and

33 Hamilton et al., "Thinking the Anthropocene", 2. It is the responsibility of stratigraphers to separate two intervals in geologic history by means of a golden spike on the basis of evidence found in rocks and sediment.

34 The coming of the Anthropocene represents a rethinking of history. There has been a tension implicit in the performance of history in the past. History was conceived as human history and as a story of human progress and advancement over a static nature. The natural world was "external to society and governed by slow and steady laws, but free of any telos in its history. On the other hand, there was 'Society', teleologically oriented by progress towards a freedom understood as humankind wrenching itself out of any natural determination and limit" (Hamilton et al., 6, building upon Jules Michelet (1834) *war against nature? – is this a book title? no.* "In the past natural history and human history, largely taken as independent and incommensurable since the early 19th century, must now be thought as one and the same geo-history" (Hamilton et al., 4). "Modern humanities and social sciences have pictured society as if they were above material and energy cycles and unbound by the Earth's finiteness and metabolisms. Now they must come back to earth" (Hamilton et al., 4).

35 Ibid., 3.

36 Ibid., 3-5.

37 The term "wicked problem" was coined by Horst Rittel & Melvin Webber, "Dilemmas in a General Theory of Planning", *Policy Sciences*, Volume 4, (1973), 155-169. It connoted a sense of being malignant, tricky, vicious or aggressive. The contrast was made with 'tame' problems. Rittel & Webber defined wicked problems as ones which are: i) difficult to define; ii) full of interdependencies and are multi-causal; iii) liable to unforeseen consequences; iv) not stable and constantly evolving; v) without clear solutions; vi) socially complex; vii) not likely to sit within the responsibility of any one organisation; viii) likely to involve changing behaviour; and x) characterised by chronic policy failure. Writing in *Policy Sciences* (2012), Kelly Levin, Benjamin Cashore, Steven Bernstein and Graeme Auld have defined climate change as a "super-wicked problem". Such problems represent a new class of problem which possesses four key features: i) time is running out; ii) those who cause the problem also seek to provide the solution; iii) the central authority needed to address the problem is either weak or non-existent; and iv) irrational discounting occurs which pushes responses into the future. "Overcoming the tragedy of super-wicked problems: constraining our future selves to ameliorate global climate change". *Policy Sciences* 45.2 (2012):123-152 [<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11077-012-9151-0>].

38 John S. Dryzek, Richard B. Norgaard & David Schlosberg "Climate Change and Society: Approaches and Responses". In: Dryzek et al., *The Oxford Handbook*, 3.

uncertainties severe, the economics controversial, the science besieged, the politics bitter and complicated, the psychology puzzling, the impacts devastating.<sup>39</sup>

There are no precedents for us to indicate how we should respond to a global issue on this scale.

Considering the plight of these small islands seemingly lost somewhere near the Equator in the vast expanse of the Pacific raises concerns about rising sea levels, international justice, the capacity to hear the most vulnerable voices,<sup>40</sup> intergenerational justice,<sup>41</sup> the extent of cosmopolitan knowledge, the nature of a global civil society,<sup>42</sup> climate refugees,<sup>43</sup> the prospects of cultural identity and losses,<sup>44</sup> and the role of religious activism.<sup>45</sup> This list could go on. It is unclear what the future will hold, simply because there are so many variables at work at the intersection of climate science and human activity. Dryzek and associates note how the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has frequently qualified its predictions with terms such as 'likely', 'very likely' and 'virtually certain'.<sup>46</sup>

### Constructing a Social Ethic

On any one of a number of grounds the Anthropocene puts great pressure on the infrastructure of Christian belief and practice. Writing with regards to the social sciences, Hamilton et al. argue that these forms of knowing can no longer be pursued as if "they were above material and energy cycles, unbound by the Earth's finiteness and metabolism". It is time for them "to come back down to earth": all of the essential ideas which lie behind the study of what it means to be human, as well as of politics and government, ethics, history and what nature is itself are 'ask[ing] to be rethought'.<sup>47</sup> The confessional foundations upon which a public theology depends are rather vulnerable in several areas, most notably those to do with doctrines of

39 Dryzek, "Climate Change and Society", 3. "The social problem-solving mechanisms we currently possess were not designed, and have not evolved, to cope with anything like an interlinked set of problems of this severity, scale and complexity. There are no precedents".

40 Maaren Haies & Wystke Verseeg, "Voices of Vulnerability: The Reconfiguration of Policy Discourses". In: Dryzek et al., *The Oxford Handbook*, 82-95. The small island nations have combined in a number of ways in order to press their claims. Tong, for instance, informed the New York summit that in July 2014 Kiribati had "initiated with other frontline low-lying atoll island states of Tuvalu, the Marshall Islands, Maldives and Tokelau – the formation of a Coalition of low-lying Atoll Nations On Climate Change (CANCC). The CANCC held their inaugural meeting in Tarawa in July this year and produced an outcome document that embraces the goals and vision of the Coalition about building the resilience of our people in the face of climate change". Online at: <http://bit.ly/33hy3c1>

41 Richard B. Howarth. In: Dryzek et al., *The Oxford Handbook*, 338-354.

42 Sheila Jassanoff, "Cosmopolitan Knowledge: Climate Science and Global Civic Epistemology". In: Dryzek et al., *The Oxford Handbook*, 129-143.

43 Timothy Doyle & Sanjay Chaturvedi, "Climate Refugees and Security Conceptualizations Categories and Contestations". In: Dryzek et al., *The Oxford Handbook*, 278-294.

44 Robert Melchior Figuerola, "Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Losses". In: Dryzek et al., *The Oxford Handbook*, 232-250.

45 Laurel Kearns, "The Role of Religions in Activism". In: Dryzek et al., *The Oxford Handbook*, 411-430.

46 Dryzek, "Approaches and Responses", 5.

47 Hamilton et al., "Thinking the Anthropocene", 9-12.

creation and providence. These kinds of positions of risk stand alongside a clear need to undertake a re-reading of a Christian anthropology which recognises the power that now inheres within the species, while discerning its dependence on the created order. The editors of the anthology, *Christian Faith and the Earth* (2014) now rightly note that it is no longer adequate for ecotheology itself to be a “concern in the specialised branch of environmental ethics or in creation theology as a theme in systematic theology or biblical studies”.<sup>48</sup> It is time to “revisit the whole of Christian thinking”. To that end Michael Northcott and Peter Scott oversaw the publication of an ecumenical primer on Systematic Theology and Climate Change. Uota and Timon’s concern for the whereabouts of Christ in these disappearing islands has become “Who is Jesus Christ for us today in the Anthropocene?”

The dilemma which the beginning of the Anthropocene creates goes beyond the obvious plight of Tong’s ‘polar bears in the Pacific’. It conjures up a vision of the potential ending of the human species. Hamilton has already written the requiem.<sup>49</sup> It is, of course, well-nigh impossible to imagine what shape the deep chronology will take. Will the Earth be susceptible to geo-engineering and a new balance between humanity and the created order be arrived at? Will humanity somehow survive through becoming a modified species? Or is it too late? Will the Earth rid itself of these earthlings?

The construction of a Christian social ethic for the Anthropocene takes place in this planetary setting. The call for climate justice and a demonstration of love in a time of climate change for those ‘on the frontline’<sup>50</sup> are set within the geopolitics of the global (dis)order and the Earth system in which that is acted out. It is evident that this talk about the Anthropocene is not just about its beginning. It is also about the possibility of endings. The rhetoric rather easily slides into the apocalyptic and there is much comparative religious and secular discussion on such matters at the moment. From the perspective of a systematic theology, the Anthropocene presents us with the demands of eschatology. The summons to act justly in the Anthropocene should most likely be set within this doctrinal framework.

Hamilton et al. identified the rather worrying presumption that once we find ourselves in the Anthropocene, we are in a realm for which there is no analogue, no precedent. And, of course, in terms of the geological and Earth system sciences that is true, but is it true for theology? This step change and radical sea of uncertainty enables a Christian eschatology to move into sight.

Stefan Skrimshire argues that eschatology is more than just “reasoning about the end”. It is also a “psychological-phenomenological experience”; it is about where we may “legitimately place our hope” at a personal level (life after death) through to the fate of the cosmos and “the end of all things”. Eschatology raises questions with how

48 Ernst Conradie, Sigurd Bergmann, Celia Deane-Drummond & Denis Edwards (eds.), “Discourse on Christian Faith and the Earth”. In: *Christian Faith and the Earth: Current Paths and Emerging Horizons in Ecotheology*, (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 3-7.

49 Clive Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species: Why We Resist The Truth About Climate Change* (Abingdon, VA: Earthscan 2010).

50 Sharon Delgado, *Love in a Time of Climate Change* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017) [<https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1pwt3z9>].

we should act in the light of an ‘imminent’ end and on what basis that action should be built: “What does one *do* when the end is pronounced?” How does one live in the world in which limited time remains?<sup>51</sup>

Skrimshire is writing with a deep awareness of climate change. He sees the present time as a time of radical uncertainty. We do not know whether we have already passed a tipping point as to what can be done for the sake of the future of humanity. It is unclear whether any activism we engage in now will have a sufficient effect. This concern for “the end” of things raises abruptly the question of what is achievable and what is not. It is not a question that can be answered in advance. Are we simply to ‘wait’ for the end of all things? Or are we to seek to transform the present, even if the critical threshold has already been passed?

Skrimshire revisits the apostle Paul, his ‘groaning creation’, and his advice to the church at Corinth that “the present form of the world is [indeed] passing away” (1 Corinthians 7:31). Skrimshire concludes that those who first followed the “newly crucified and resurrected messiah” knew what it was like to live in the interim.<sup>52</sup>

Living in the interim now is not, of course, a carbon copy of that early experience. In the Anthropocene there is little option but to recognise that *homo sapiens* has become a ‘geologic agent’. It is also now clear that human history can no longer proceed upon the expectation that nature’s timing is slow in terms of geological change and seasonal variation. The effects of anthropogenic climate change have come with accelerating speed and an increasing violence which is consistent with *Laudato Si’s* concern for the ‘rapidification’ of life.<sup>53</sup> That past slowness had allowed for humanity to concern itself in a rather autonomous manner with progress and the quest for liberation.<sup>54</sup> That time is passing as inter-generational history and deep geologic time are coming together.

In the midst of a grim prognosis Skrimshire considers the purpose of eschatology. Even if a threshold of no return has been crossed, a Christian eschatology still endeavours to “remain faithful to two features of the Christian faith” – (i) that there are grounds for hoping in a future that is given by God; ii) that God’s presence in the world makes possible good action – ethics – in the interim before the end. In the Anthropocene to what extent does a Christian eschatology transform that ethical life from one of ‘mere waiting’ as opposed to that of ‘transforming the present’, maybe along the lines set out in *Laudato Si’* with one or two significant provisos?<sup>55</sup>

Seen from this perspective Skrimshire rightfully reminds us that eschatology is not just about endings. It is also intimately bound up with how “we act in the time we

51 Stefan Skrimshire, “Eschatology”. In: Michael S. Northcott & Peter M. Scott (eds.), *Systematic Theology and Climate Change: Ecumenical Perspectives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), Northcott & Scott, *Systematic Theology and Climate Change*, 157-174.

52 Skrimshire, “Eschatology”, 157-158.

53 Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015), 23.

54 Skrimshire, “Eschatology”, 159.

55 One proviso is the failure of *Laudato Si’* to deal with birth control and the continuing population explosion. See Robert Manne, “*Laudato Si’: A Political Reading*”, *The Monthly*, 1 July, 2015?

have at our disposal in the full knowledge of an end being likely".<sup>56</sup> There is more to this eschatological message, though. Simply expressed in this way, we have a virtuous secular eschatology. Skrimshire's theological confession of a future that is given by God suggests that this current climate-induced ending – which has been precipitated by human activity – may be a *penultimate* ending. It does not necessarily signify the *ultimate* end which comes from God and which lies hidden within the imagery of a new heaven, a new earth, the heavenly city, the kingdom of God.

The ethical question which arises from this distinction of the ultimate from the penultimate is obvious. Is a longer future in the interim better than a shorter version? If it is, "what is it that makes the prolongation of the present world worth fighting for?"<sup>57</sup> For theological reasons Skrimshire prefers the former: the latter leads to pessimism as well as the more serious issue of any of our remedial actions being seen as a form of obstruction to the carrying out of the divine intention.<sup>58</sup>

The interim without an appropriate ethic is likely to be nasty. The strength of *Laudato Si'* is the way in which it binds climate change – which it sees as a common good – with a profound concern for the poor who are much more likely to feel the effects of ecological degradation before those who are rich by comparison. *Laudato Si'* may indict the present age as one of a 'throwaway culture' and not talk of Golden Spikes and the Anthropocene. It has nevertheless captured an ethic for the interim which is informed by the claims Christ makes upon us and the prospect of a "realignment within God's redemptive future".<sup>59</sup>

The task of acting justly in the Anthropocene is and will be a demanding intergenerational vocation for a Christian social ethic. Those who live on small atolls in the Pacific surrounded by rising seas require a theology and accompanying ethic that is compassionate and just in an age faced with the possibility of penultimate endings.

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<sup>56</sup> Skrimshire, 160.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 161.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

# CARING FOR GOD'S CREATION

## An Islamic Obligation

*Mehmet Ozalp*

The practice of Islamic thinking in the contemporary world has often focused on issues to do with matters pertaining to radicalism, terror, security and how to engage with the legacy of Western imperialism and the emergence of modern science.<sup>1</sup> Writing in a Routledge Handbook, Zainal Abidin Bagir and Najiyah Martiam have observed that “the issue of ecology does not occupy an important place yet”.<sup>2</sup> The pioneering work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr on an Islamic understanding for the care of creation over the last four decades has only occasionally stimulated further research.<sup>3</sup> Nasr has drawn upon the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions within the Islamic tradition, while being highly critical of “the secularist ideology” that governs Western science<sup>4</sup> – and which has led to the desacralisation of nature that removes it from theological and ethical consideration.<sup>5</sup> Since then, the global concern has shifted from a preoccupation with sustainability and loss of biodiversity to the urgent and serious threats posed by human-induced climate change.

Faced with this deepening crisis Muslim eco-activists and scientists have moved to release an Islamic Declaration on Climate Change. This particular declaration arose out of a symposium held in Istanbul shortly before the Paris climate summit in 2015. In terms of its content the Declaration mediates both the claims of climate science and relevant Qur'anic wisdom.<sup>6</sup>

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- 1 Note the omission of ecological concerns in the following recent publications: Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Contemporary Islamic Thought* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006); John L. Esposito, (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Omid Safi, (ed.), *Progressive Muslims: On Justice, Gender and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2003).
  - 2 Zainal Abidin Bagir & Najiyah Martiam, “Islam. Norms and Practices”. In: W. Jenkins, M. Evelyn Tucker & J. Grim (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Religion and Ecology* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017), 79-87 at 79.
  - 3 Tarik Massud Quadir, “Modern Science and the Environmental Crisis: The Traditional Islamic Response of Seyyed Hossein Nasr”, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011.
  - 4 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “Religion and the Environmental Crisis”. In: W. Chittick (ed.), *The Essential Seyyed Hosein Nasr* (Bloomington, IN: Word Wisdom, 2007), 29-39.
  - 5 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “God is Absolute Reality and All Creation His *Tajali* (Theophany)”. In: J. Hart (ed.), *Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Ecology* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 3-11.
  - 6 Islamic Declaration on Climate Change, <http://bit.ly/20yL1hA> [Accessed 1 June 2018].

The Declaration is divided up into several component parts. Its preamble is deeply realistic about how “[t]he pace of Global climate change today is of a different order of magnitude from the gradual changes that previously occurred throughout the most recent era, the Cenozoic”. The Declaration is under no illusions: our species is called upon to be a “caretaker or steward (*khalifah*)” in the new epoch in which we now live – the Anthropocene, the “Age of Humans”. The current rate of climate change cannot be sustained and “we are in danger of ending life as we know it on our planet”. The nagging questions become “What will future generations say of us, who leave them a degraded planet as our legacy? How will we face our Lord and Creator?”<sup>7</sup>

The preamble leads on to a sequence of affirmations to do with Allah and His creation. Each affirmation is supported by a Qur’anic reference. The contrast is effectively drawn between the urgency of empirical studies of the Earth system science and the poetics of belief, balance, equilibrium and submission. There is a stark acknowledgement of humanity’s failure to fulfil its role of *khalifah* and the effect of such abuse on the created order.<sup>8</sup>

The Declaration concludes with a series of calls. What these invocations bear witness to is a call to be accountable. There are specific policy-based calls to well-off nations, oil-producing states, corporations as well as to the financial and business sectors. The Declaration concludes with a call made to all Muslims “wherever they may be ... to tackle habits, mindsets, and the root causes of climate change, environmental degradation, and the loss of biodiversity in their particular spheres of influence, following the example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) and bring about a resolution to the challenges that now face us”.<sup>9</sup>

The Declaration draws upon traditional insights from the Qur’an. It does so in a manner where texts are isolated to support the general direction of the argument but without mounting a sustained theology. The criticism Bagir and Martiam make of a turning to canonical texts like this is not entirely justified in this instance. They observed that such a strategy is inclined to be “defensive, if not apologetic”. Something else is required because, as they argue:

[i]t is anachronistic to think that a centuries-old tradition should be prepared with answers to any emergent question, especially questions that have not yet been asked, at least not in the magnitude of today’s environmental crisis.<sup>10</sup>

Bagir and Martiam are also mindful of how within Islam there is a plurality of interpretations – and so there is a need to establish a hermeneutical principle upon which to mount an argument. Those considerations, nevertheless, are necessary (though incidental) to a much larger concern facing any religion seeking to respond to climate change and the Anthropocene. Bagir and Martiam conclude that “this kind of overtly textual exposition does not go far enough to respond to new

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7    ibid., 1.3.

8    ibid., 2.1-8.

9    ibid., 3.6.

10   Bagir & Martiam, “Islam. Norms and Practices”, 80.

ecological knowledge and environmental problems".<sup>11</sup> This is where the Declaration is at its strongest. It embraces and describes the science of climate change, as well as invoking Qur'anic claims.

A question arises then: What does Islam and its theology say about the environment, ecosystems and wildlife? The posing of this question is of global significance given the percentage of the world's population that is Muslim. There have been articles written on Islam and the environment, but they have rarely, if ever, approached the question from a theological perspective. When Muslims discuss how they should protect the environment, there is no all-encompassing theology that could feed into an ethical consideration. What theological perspective there is does not stimulate action motivated by a religious obligation to protect the environment.

The intention of this chapter is first to give an outline of an Islamic theology on the environment in order to illustrate how the environment is an extremely valuable divine artefact displaying the infinite creativity of God. Everything in the natural world worships God in a unique way; animal and plant species in ecosystems form communities that have a right to live independently of humans. Secondly, the chapter examines the relationship between humanity and the environment. So often human interaction with the environment is a one-way engagement. In a physical sense, humans only take from the environment but give nothing back. The act of taking creates an imbalance in the environment. The best that humans can do is to help preserve the environment and not upset the balance irreversibly. Although humans are given right of usage to what the earth provides, they do not own the earth. It is entrusted to them by God and they have to return it undamaged. Humans are accountable at the court of God for betrayal of trust, if they damage the earth irreversibly. This trust is sometimes described by Islamic scholars as a 'bestowed trust'.<sup>12</sup> Accountability to divine judgment in turn entails obligation to protect what is entrusted. Thirdly, there is a need to build a case that caring for the environment is an Islamic religious obligation (*fard*). There is a dilemma to negotiate. Humankind must inevitably live off the resources and life forms on the planet. The theological urgency lies in determining how collective human activity on earth is harming not only life on earth but the entire planet (Anthropocene). Hence Islam's overriding principle of preventing harm before acquisition of benefit applies. The obligation is placed not only on every individual Muslim, but on Islamic organisations and governments of Muslim majority countries.

## Theological Perspectives on Life on Earth

The most obvious place to begin is with an Islamic understanding of life and nature. Life is the most precious gift in the universe. If the universe is made analogous to a tree, life would be its finest fruit. The entire universe with its matter, energy, laws and activities are brought together to produce life. Life is nothing short of a miracle which makes the tiniest living creature comparable to a cosmic star. Life is the most extraordinary miracle of divine power connecting living creatures to every other

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Richard C. Folz, Frederick M Denny & Azizan Baharuddin (eds.), *Islam and Ecology: A Bestowed Trust* (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for the Study of World Religions, 2003).

being in existence. A tiny bee can claim ownership of a majestic mountain by virtue of its life and its connection with the natural world that supports its being. Not surprisingly, Islam gives immense value to creation and living beings. We only take care of things if we believe they are valuable. So, the first premise that Islam asserts is to accord immense worth to the environment. All life is considered special and valuable, for it is the life and the creative art displayed in each living creature that connects it to the Divine.

The Qur'an uses the word *ayāt* (signs) to refer to the actual verses of the Qur'an as well as the signs that God has placed in the natural world for reflective human minds: "... And it is He who spread out the earth and set thereon mountains standing firm and (flowing) rivers: and fruit of every kind He made in pairs: He draws the night as a veil over the Day. Behold, verily in these things there are signs for those who think and reflect",<sup>13</sup> "It is He who sends down rain from the sky: from it you drink, and out of it (grows) the vegetation on which you feed your cattle. With it He produces for you corn, olives, date-palms, grapes and every kind of fruit. Behold, verily in these things there are signs (*ayāt*) for those who think and reflect!"<sup>14</sup> By describing nature as signs of God in the Qur'an, Muslims are encouraged to reflect on them to learn about God's *tawhid* (unity), His divine attributes and about the inter-connectivity of life with the natural world and the universe. Linking the Creator with creatures as His wonderful creative works of art makes everything intrinsically valuable as distinct from having only an instrumental value. This linkage renders the natural environment and animal forms as sacred and valuable, because they contribute to the belief in God and God's unity.

Reflection on the natural world goes beyond an invitation to believe and instinctively leads to the worship of God. The Qur'an encourages its readers to see the spiritual dimension, hence worth, of the natural world by focusing on creation's cosmic worship of God:

Do you ever consider that all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth prostrate themselves to God, and so do the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the beasts, and so do many among human beings?<sup>15</sup>

This worship goes beyond the symbolism of the physical act of 'prostration' and includes the spiritual praise and glorification of God expressed in uniquely natural ways, "the seven heavens and the earth, and whoever is therein, glorify Him. There is nothing that does not glorify Him with His praise but you cannot comprehend their glorification".<sup>16</sup> These verses and others similar to them not only invite the reader to join in with the rest of the natural world in worshipping God, but they also inspire humans to see the natural world beyond its materialistic worth and utility.

One way to contemplate this act of glorification is to acknowledge that the cosmos and the creatures in the natural world praise God by becoming a mirror to God's names and perfect attributes.<sup>17</sup> In addition to Qur'anic revelation, God is known

<sup>13</sup> Qur'an, 13:3.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 16:10-11.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 22:18.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 17:44.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 59:24.

through the universe and the natural world. In this respect, they serve higher divine purposes and submit to God's overarching plan through the laws He ordained in the universe.<sup>18</sup> All life is indeed valuable and worthy of reverence for it has spiritual value and purpose. The natural world and the universe help adherents not only to connect with the Creator but also to understand Him.

Importantly, God's plan for creation elicits a design of life on earth by establishing plant and animal worlds in ecosystems just as human beings develop interdependent communities. In the wake of Nasr's earlier work, one of the most important steps taken in Islamic environmental thinking has indeed been in the area of its teaching and attitudes with regards animals.<sup>19</sup> The Qur'an clearly talks about living beings existing in ecological systems: "No living creature is there moving on the earth, no bird flying on its two wings, but they are communities like you".<sup>20</sup> The comparison of animal species with human communities is significant. Since human societies are complex systems made up of numerous interdependent individuals, this comparison points to the modern concept of ecosystems. The expression 'communities like you' positions ecosystems in the same league as human societies. The existence of plural 'communities' leads us to the conclusion that there are many concurrently existing and independent ecosystems. Not unlike human societies, responsible treatment of ecosystems and striving to avoid damaging or destroying them is part of the general Qur'anic prohibition not to cause corruption on earth.

While Islam treats the life of all creatures as valuable and recognises ecosystems as communities worthy of protection, it gives to human life a higher degree. Humanity and, therefore, human life are distinguished from the rest of the creation in a number of distinctive ways. Human beings are the most elaborately integrated living compositions.<sup>21</sup> They have intellect and a capacity to learn. By reflecting on the universe, they have a capacity to gain knowledge of God (Qur'an, 2:31-33). Human beings have been 'honoured with goodness'<sup>22</sup> in that men and women are created with the innate capability to recognise goodness and to respect virtue. Human beings are created with a sound "natural disposition (*fitrah*) of God upon which He has modelled the humans".<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, human beings are created as a "vice-gent (*khalifah*) on earth"<sup>24</sup> with the power and privilege of exercising command over earth's life forms and utilising its resources. But they are also charged with the responsibility of protecting the natural world and not causing 'corruption on earth'<sup>25</sup> by destroying either its order or its beauty. Whenever the Qur'an gives responsibility to humans, it comes with an obligation to follow through with the responsibility and the resultant accountability before God. Hence, humans should expect to be judged by how they treat other living creatures and the environment.

18 Ibid., 3:83.

19 Richard Folz, *Animals in Islamic Traditions and Muslim Cultures* (London: Oneworld Publications: 2014); Al-Hafiz Basheer, Ahmad Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam* (Markfield: The Islamic Foundation, 2016); Sarra Tlili, *Animals in the Qur'an* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

20 Qur'an, 6:38.

21 Ibid., 95:3-6.

22 Ibid., 17:70.

23 Ibid., 30:30.

24 Ibid., 2:30.

25 Ibid., 2:27, 5:32.

Thus, an Islamic theological assessment illustrates that the environment is an extremely valuable artefact displaying the infinite creativity of God; everything in the natural world worships God in a unique way, and animal species with the ecosystems they create form communities and have a right to live independently of humans. Humans are endowed with intelligence and ingenuity to exert a power over the rest of creation which is balanced with the responsibility and accountability of human treatment of the earth, its living creatures and the environment. Hence, life on earth must be preserved as an extremely valuable artefact and humans are charged with the responsibility for this.

## The Unilateral Relationship of Humans with the Environment

The Qur'an tells us that human beings are created from an earthly essence<sup>26</sup> and, more generally, that every living being is created from water.<sup>27</sup> Humans do have a common physical existence with everything else on earth and need the environment to survive. There is, however, a profound difference between the way humans function in the common home we call the earth and the way animals and plants do.

On earth, every living being adds value to its ecosystem. Consider the vine plant for example. It sucks muddy water from soil and turns it into sweet and nutritious grapes. The sheep consume plain grass off the meadows and produce milk, wool and meat. Trees absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen, thereby cleansing the atmosphere for animals and humans. Every animal and plant species adds a measurable value to its natural environment, either by what they produce or by the functions they perform. Human beings, on the other hand, consume the best of what the 'kitchen of nature' has to offer and turn it into waste that is ultimately flushed away or dumped in the environment. If all humans packed up their bags and left on spaceships, the planet would rejoice and return to its pristine form. Humanity, in a physical sense, adds no value to the ecological environment. Humans produce nothing that is of value to other life forms and do not perform any function that is essential to the environment.

This observation has two important consequences. First, humanity is not part of any ecosystem in purely physical terms. Human beings are designed to live in nearly all ecosystems but have come from outside the system. Or, viewed from another perspective, they have become independent of ecosystems. Human beings take but contribute nothing physical to nature. The second consequence flows from the first. It is necessary to look beyond mere human physical existence to find the true purpose of human existence. A human being cannot compete with a bird in terms of survival, but has greater mental and spiritual capacity and this is the faculty where human potential and purpose manifestly lie. In spite of all human intellectual, moral, artistic and technological progress, nothing that humans do directly or indirectly contributes to the environment in a meaningful and value-added way.

So, unlike animals and plants, human interaction with the environment is essentially one way. Human beings consume and benefit from everything on earth, but give

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 7:11, 17:61.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 21:30.

nothing in return. The only contribution, in a physical sense, humans can make to the environment is to ensure its sustainable protection and preservation. Even in this respect, it is about minimising harm rather than adding value. Islam addresses the repercussions generated by human existence on earth at five levels.

The first is to see the intrinsic value of life on earth, the natural environment and the whole planet as explained in the previous section. If humans see all living beings as intrinsically valuable rather than mere resources to be utilised and consumed, they are more likely to protect them. In this way, a sensitive Muslim should be able to feel pain at the loss of animal species as a result of human activity and climate change, the loss of a beautiful artefact of God.

The second level is the role given to human beings on earth. Although Islam treats the life of all creation as valuable, it gives greatest honour to human life and acknowledges that the earth is at the disposal of humans – “God made subservient to you the sea ... that you may seek of His grace, and that you may give thanks. And He has made subservient to you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth”.<sup>28</sup> If left without further qualification, such human empowerment may be viewed as a sanction for humans to pillage the earth. With such verses the Qur’an recognises the apparent human dominion over the earth. Humans will use the environment for their benefit whether the Qur’an says so or not. But, as the central Islamic belief *tawhid* implies, the Qur’an signals that God is the owner and creator and owner of everything in the universe, “to God belongs all that is in the heavens and on earth”.<sup>29</sup> Hence, the Qur’an distinguishes natural resources as God’s favour and blessings, so that humans are grateful for what has been bestowed on this planet and go beyond the utility of life on earth and the natural resources it provides. This awareness is essential for humans to be motivated in the protection of the environment.

The Qur’an goes further to assert that, although humans do have the freedom to exert their power over the environment, such freedom of disposal is not absolute. Humans do not own the planet and cannot just do whatever they please with impunity. With freedom and empowerment comes accountability. This accountability is expressed in the key role given to humanity as the vice-gerent (*khalifah*) on earth – “And when your Lord said to the angels: Lo! I am about to place a *khalifah* on the earth”,<sup>30</sup> “It is He that has made you *khalifah* over the earth”.<sup>31</sup> This role gives human beings authority. With this authority comes accountability as its natural consequence.

Being a vice-gerent means having authority over creation, but also accountability for the treatment of the environment. Prophet Muhammad said, “The world is beautiful and verdant, and God has appointed you as His stewards over it. He sees how you acquit yourselves”.<sup>32</sup> Whenever Islam mentions accountability, it means that actions are recorded for the judgement process in the afterlife where nothing is overlooked; “whoever does an atom’s weight of good shall see it, and whoever does

28 Ibid., 45:12-13.

29 Ibid., 4:126.

30 Ibid., 2:30.

31 Ibid., 6:165.

32 Muslim, *Tawba*, 155.

an atom's weight of evil shall see it".<sup>33</sup> These teachings and emphasis would make every believing Muslim sensitive to their treatment of other life forms.

The third level rests on the Qur'anic concept of trust. As God's vice-gerents, humans are given a trust, "Truly We did offer the trust to the heavens and earth, and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it. But the human bore it".<sup>34</sup> The fact that the Qur'an does not explain what this trust is renders it open to interpretation. Linking this verse with the concept of vice-regency (and since the verse mentions the earth and mountains), one plausible interpretation is that humans are entrusted to look after God's creation, to protect it, to maintain it and to ensure equal access to it for all humans and life forms. This responsibility is so great that other beings 'declined to bear it', meaning that only humans are charged with the responsibility for the protection of the trust, that is, the earth.

Importantly, trust implies the value of what is trusted. It would be pointless to trust something worthless. What is trusted is placed in the possession of those who are trusted so that it is returned unharmed, or else the trust would be violated. It also means that the one who trusts has confidence in the human capacity to fulfil the requirements of keeping the trust, otherwise the act of trusting would be futile. So, humans as God's deputies, stewards and trustees, must not feel entitled to nature, but rather feel obliged to protect and return the earth entrusted to them in pristine form for future generations and other life forms.

Given that humans only take from nature and give nothing, the duty of trust can only be delivered through the Qur'anic principle of balance, which is the fourth level. The Qur'an emphasises that God created the universe and the natural world in perfect balance and proportion, "Verily, all things have We created in proportion and measure".<sup>35</sup> Humans are instructed to maintain the balance and warned not to disturb it, "And the sky has He raised high and has devised (for all things) a balance, so that you might never transgress the balance: weigh, therefore, (your deeds) with equity, and do not upset the balance".<sup>36</sup> The unilateral relationship of humans with the environment implies that human activity is always in the direction of deviating from the balanced state of the environment. Since humans must inevitably use the resources of the planet, the only way to preserve the balance is if the usage is sustainable. Muslims, therefore, must live in harmony with the environment and only use what is necessary for survival in a sustainable way. They cannot participate in exploitative industries that upset the balance, e.g. land clearing, deforestation or any unsustainable use of finite resources.

A key action that upsets the balance is excess and waste, which are located at the fifth level of the Islamic emphasis on minimising human harm to the environment. In terms of waste management, the Qur'an states, "O Children of Adam! ... Eat and drink but waste not in excess, for God does not love the wasters".<sup>37</sup> While Islam encourages people to enjoy the blessings of life, it clearly lays down as a precondition

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33 Qur'an, 99:7-8.

34 Ibid., 33:72.

35 Ibid., 54:49.

36 Ibid., 55:7-9.

37 Ibid., 7:31.

that there be no waste. Notably, the verse does not limit its address to ‘Muslims’ or ‘believers’, but the whole of humanity is engaged with the proclamation “O children of Adam!”

The determination of Islam to minimise waste is taken to a higher level in the words of the Prophet Muhammad, who asked his followers not to overuse water even when the ablution for prayer takes place on the banks of a flowing river.<sup>38</sup> While this recommendation is aimed at waste minimisation, it implies that waste minimisation should not only be confined to times of shortage but, more importantly, even when there are resources in abundance. Why? Because waste usually occurs when there are more resources than are immediately needed. There is not much to waste when there is a shortage. The Prophet also said that the sewerage should not be dumped in still waters<sup>39</sup> and the lowest manifestation of belief in a person is that one should at the very least remove harmful objects standing in the path of people.<sup>40</sup> Since it is good to remove waste and harmful objects, it is better not to litter in the first instance. In a well-known saying, the Prophet recommends that people “plant the sapling you hold in your hand even if it is the Last Day”<sup>41</sup> on earth. In this saying Muslims are encouraged to plant trees for the benefit of future generations, even if there is no immediate benefit. Any benefit from the tree, including the portion of “wild animals and birds”, is regarded as charity.<sup>42</sup> So, in Islam, not only is there a strong discouragement of wastage and pollution, but also sustainable human interaction with the environment and concern for wild life are equally encouraged.

Thus, the nature of human interaction with the environment is a unilateral benefit-harm relationship. Humans only benefit and inflict harm, whereas the environment benefits nothing from human existence. In a physical sense, humans only take from the environment but give nothing back. The best humans can do is to preserve the environment and not irreversibly upset the balance, which they can do by using the resources of the environment in a sustainable way and minimising excess and wastage. Although humans are given right of usage of what earth provides, they do not own the earth. It is entrusted to them by God and they have to return it undamaged. Humans are accountable at the court of God for betrayal of the trust if they irreversibly damage the earth.

## The Vital Necessity to Curb Harm Caused by Humans to the Planet

If the natural world has intrinsic value and humans are charged with the responsibility for the earth, what ought to be the Islamic ethical ruling on the level of Muslim responsibility and accountability to protect the environment? While the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change calls on individuals and governments for action, this chapter goes a step further and sets up caring for the environment as an Islamic obligation (*fard*) for every individual Muslim, Muslim organisations and Muslim nations and governments.

<sup>38</sup> Ibn Majah *Tahara*, 48.

<sup>39</sup> Bukhari, *Wudu*, 68.

<sup>40</sup> Bukhari, *Iman*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Bukhari, *Adab*, 479.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

The main premise behind this contention is that the harm caused by human activity is at a critical level in that it can have an irreversible negative impact on the Earth's climate, its life forms (their potential extinctions) and the entire life structure of the planet. The human production of energy produces tremendous amounts of carbon dioxide at a rate the natural systems are not able to clear. The rate of carbon dioxide production is ten times faster than any other period in the last 66 million years.<sup>43</sup> Carbon dioxide production is approaching the critical irreversible threshold of 400 parts per million and since the Industrial Revolution carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by 45%.<sup>44</sup> As carbon dioxide causes the green-house effect, the average temperature on the Earth has been rising steadily since the time of the Industrial Revolution. The report published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2013 stated that "each of the last three decades has been successively warmer at the Earth's surface than any preceding decade since 1850".<sup>45</sup>

Temperature increases have an irreversible impact on the melting of glaciers, the rising sea levels and changes in climates across the globe. Melting ice sheets in Antarctica have increased by 77% since 1973 and half of this melting occurred between 2003 and 2009.<sup>46</sup> Climate change and other human activities such as land clearing and habitat destruction are causing the sixth mass extinction of life forms on earth. Since 1970 more than 50% of animal populations have been reduced.<sup>47</sup> If present levels of extinction continue, 75% of species will disappear within a century or two.<sup>48</sup>

The human-caused pollution of the environment is also at unprecedented levels. Human-produced plastic is dumped on the land and into the sea to such an extent that, unless reversed, there will be more plastic by weight in the sea than fish by 2050.<sup>49</sup> Microplastic is traceable from oceans to fish and from there to humans. The harm caused by human activity on the environment is measurable and at such a scale that humanity is currently the primary geological force shaping the planet. The Earth is now entering into a new human-influenced geological epoch, the Anthropocene.

With this dire state of the environment in mind, the Qur'an's warning echoes down through time: "Corruption and disorder have appeared on land and in the sea because of what the hands of people have (done and) earned. Thus, He causes them to taste the consequence of some of what they have done, so that they may return (to the

43 Damian Carrington, "Carbon Emission Release Rate 'Unprecedented' in Past 66 million Years", *The Guardian*, last modified 12 March 2016, online at: <http://bit.ly/2MqbR8X> [Accessed 16 July 2018].

44 Michael Slezak, "World's Carbon Dioxide Concentration Teetering on the Point of No Return", *The Guardian*, last modified May 11, 2016, online at: <http://bit.ly/33dOuWP> [Accessed 16 July 2018].

45 "The Planet's Temperature is Rising", Union of Concerned Scientists, online at: <http://bit.ly/20vGufB> [Accessed 16 July 2018].

46 J. Mouginit, E. Rignot & B. Scheuchl, "Sustained Increase in Ice Discharge from the Amundsen Sea Embayment, West Antarctica, from 1973 to 2013", *Geophysical Research Letters*.

47 Damian Carrington, "Earth Has Lost Half of its Wildlife in the Past 40 years, Says WWF", *The Guardian*, last modified 1 October 2014, online at: <http://bit.ly/35mverQ> [Accessed 16 July 2018].

48 Elizabeth Kolbert, *The Sixth Extinction an Unnatural History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

49 Graeme Wearden, "More Plastic than Fish in the Sea by 2050, Says Ellen MacArthur", *The Guardian*, last modified 20 January 2016, online at: <http://bit.ly/2oimuTi> [Accessed 16 July 2018].

right way)".<sup>50</sup> Human-induced climate change and related ensuing disasters not only harm the whole planet, but actually have a boomerang effect – they return to harm human life as well. Since this verse of the Qur'an links the environmental disaster to human actions, only human action can reverse the catastrophic consequences.

There is an obligation to stop the harm caused to the environment based on the higher objectives of Islamic law reflected on two levels. In the first instance, protection from harm and subsequent suffering is one of the peak aims of Islamic law. According to the renowned Muslim jurist, Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi (d. 1388), the teachings of religion, its commands and prohibitions laid out in the revelation by the Divine and put into practice by the *sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad serve an ultimate higher purpose – that is, "to promote good and to benefit human beings and to protect them from evil, from harm and from subsequent suffering".<sup>51</sup> Al-Shatibi bases this definition on the Prophetic saying: "No harm should be sustained or incurred upon others". He emphasises the way in which the *hadith* calls for the removal of harm: such removal includes the prohibition of subjecting oneself to harm (*darar*) and causing harm to others (*dirār*).<sup>52</sup> All juristic opinion must serve this overarching purpose. The prevention of harm is so important that it has been acknowledged in relation to the competing need to acquire benefit in the famous Islamic legal maxim – that is, the prevention of harm takes precedence over the acquisition of benefit.<sup>53</sup> This principle is expressed as "repelling of corruption (*mufasid*) is preferred to the acquisition of benefits" in the *Majalla*, 19th-century Islamic legal codes compiled by Ottoman Empire.<sup>54</sup> Hence stopping harm to the environment should precede the right to benefit from it, especially at the present time when the harm far outweighs the benefit necessary for survival.

The second level of legal imperative is drawn from the five basic protections or fundamental rights identified by Muslim scholars. Those areas of protections cover life, intellect, property, religion, lineage. Governments (and the laws they pass) should respect and preserve these immutable individual rights for the sake of a safe and free society. These rights and protections place immense value on human life and in so doing convey substantial responsibility as well. For this reason, the Qur'an equates killing a person with the murder of all humanity and saving a single life with the saving of all humanity: "He who kills a soul unless it be (in legal punishment) for murder or for causing disorder and corruption on the earth will be as if he had killed all humankind; and he who saves a life will be as if he had saved the lives of all humankind".<sup>55</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Qur'an, 30:41.

<sup>51</sup> Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 67.

<sup>52</sup> Muḥammad al-Ṭahir ibn 'Ashur, *Ibn Ashur: Treatise on Maqasid al-Shari'ah* (London: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2006), 57.

<sup>53</sup> "The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam: The Qur'ānic Principle of Wasāṭiyyah", 126, online at: <http://bit.ly/2C2C4aI> [Accessed 16 July 2018].

<sup>54</sup> C. R. Tyser (trans.), *The Mejelle: Being an English Translation of Majallah al-Ahkam-i-Adliya and a Complete Code on Islamic Civil Law* (Kuala Lumpur: Other Press, 2007), 7.

<sup>55</sup> Qur'an, 5:32.

While the principle of protection of life is usually made with respect to human rights, it is possible to expand this principle to protection of all life forms. The place of life, and the duty to protect it, is so significant that saving lives becomes a necessity and might even temporarily suspend certain divine prohibitions.<sup>56</sup> By way of example, if there is nothing to eat and a person's survival is at stake, Muslims may eat pork meat.<sup>57</sup> If alcohol is the only medicine available for a serious illness, it can be consumed. In both instances, Muslims would be mindful of the injunction against pork and alcohol, but these may be set aside if life hangs in the balance. Since necessity is forcing a person to enter the realm of prohibitions, Islamic law stipulates that the allowance must be made, but only for the period of necessity – no more and no less.<sup>58</sup> A Muslim cannot use the excuse of necessity and feast on pork or get drunk with alcohol if there is non-prohibited food and drink available.

Most importantly, the door of necessity (*dharura*) can only be opened to save lives or to meet the most basic necessities of life, such as food, shelter and clothing. It cannot be used as an excuse to end life or to damage the necessities of life. Even in the two exceptions that are made in verse 5:32 – “unless it be for murder [capital punishment] or for causing disorder and corruption on the earth” – the principal vision is to save more lives. In effect, the injunction always and everywhere is to choose the lesser of two evils. The principle of necessity is so important that humans are allowed to slaughter animals by permission in order to survive. But this allowance for survival should not be in constructed in such a way as to wipe out entire species and ecosystems. It should be done in a sustainable way. If our use of the environment is not done in a sustainable way, the principle of necessity works the other way – that is, limit human activity for the necessity of saving living species. It could even be argued on the principle of necessity that human activity should be limited to protect the planet and the environment ultimately to preserve human existence itself as there is no other planet like Earth for humans to reside on.

## Caring for the Environment is an Islamic Obligation on Individual Muslims, Muslim Organisations and Governments

If the harm caused by human activity on earth is at a critical degree and on a global scale and, according to Islamic law, containing the harm is a necessity – it is a priority. Caring for the environment must be at a level of obligation (*fard*) for Muslims, Muslim organisations and governments. In its conclusion the Islamic Declaration on Climate Change makes an emphatic call for action to heads of states and governments of Muslim countries, Muslim organisations and activists. The call for action covers educating minds, establishing eco-friendly habits and tackling root causes of climate change and the ensuing challenges facing humanity and the planet. This call would be taken to the next level of significance if caring for the environment is pronounced as an obligation (*fard*) from an Islamic ethical perspective.

<sup>56</sup> “The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam”, 127

<sup>57</sup> Qur'an, 2:173.

<sup>58</sup> “The Middle Path of Moderation in Islam”, 126.

There are two types of obligations in Islamic law: *fard al-'ayn* (individual obligation) and *fard al-kifaya* (collective obligation) in which case if a group of Muslims fulfil the duty, the obligation is lifted from the rest of the Muslims. If there is no one or insufficient numbers, then every Muslim is accountable. In a way, caring for the environment can be considered as *fard al-'ayn* (individual obligation) and *fard al-kifaya* (collective obligation) at one and the same time.

One important related concept is *amr bi'l-ma'ruf nahy 'ani'l-munkar*.<sup>59</sup> It represents a calling to do good and actively promote what is right, while forbidding and preventing evil. It is strongly emphasised in the Qur'anic verse 3:104 as a key function of promoting what Islam stands for: "There must be among you a community calling to good, and enjoining and actively promoting what is right and forbidding and preventing evil". Even though this verse refers to the role of social and ethical activism, by analogical reasoning (*qiyas*)<sup>60</sup> it can apply to environmental protection as well. They are religious duties for the whole community, require substantial investment of time, and need sufficient numbers of people without which these duties cannot be fulfilled to satisfactory levels. There must also be a group of Muslims to carry out environmental activism.

From the perspective of activism, the possibility of environmental protection can also be covered by the concept of *jihad*, especially for individual Muslims and Muslim organisations. In the Islamic religious sense, *jihad* is an important umbrella concept that encompasses all personal struggles that one has to overcome in order to achieve success despite hardship and adversity. *Jihad* always involves some form of struggle by an individual Muslim even when that struggle is part of a collective action. The result sought has to be positive and constructive, such as ending suffering, injustice or foreign occupation. In all cases, the circumstances must be so difficult that extraordinary effort is required to overcome the destructive forces that are the source of the adversity. If one dimension of *jihad*<sup>61</sup> means struggle against harmful forces for a virtuous outcome and cause, environmental activism becomes a form of *jihad*. Peaceful activism launched against sources and forces that cause harm to the environment, all living beings and consequently all humans, including Muslims, is therefore a legitimate form of *jihad* that would be rewarded by God in the afterlife, as Islamic beliefs would propose.

Since damage to the environment is increasing and the prevailing level of activism is not reversing the situation, taking action becomes an individual obligation (*fard al-'ayn*) placed on every Muslim. The theology and Qur'anic evidence discussed in this chapter impress this obligation on every Muslim. Every individual's actions have a direct bearing on the environment. Every individual and household has

<sup>59</sup> Qur'an 3:104. See also 3:110, 3:114, 9:112.

<sup>60</sup> Analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) is an important legal tool to apply to verses of the Qur'an with respect to analogous situations not directly included in the Qur'an.

<sup>61</sup> *Jihad* has three distinct dimensions. The first is the inner struggle to find inner peace and balance in spite of evil inclinations, carnal impulses and satanic voices from within. The second is social and religious activism motivated by a desire to stop human suffering and improve society in spite of poor leadership, opportunistic politicians and powerful interest groups. The third is just war, which is a commitment to participating in a campaign to achieve peace and security for one's people (or for others suffering persecution) in the face of an aggressive foreign military force.

a measurable carbon footprint. Their actions to care for the environment equally accumulate in order to create a positive impact. Unless individuals take action to reduce their carbon footprint, the harm caused to the environment will not reduce: it will get worse.

The obligation on individuals does not mean that the obligation is lifted from organised groups of Muslims who have greater resources, funding and organised capability to do something to reduce harm to environment. In addition to Islamic organisations specifically established for environmental awareness and protection, every Islamic organisation and institution must be involved in environmental protection to some degree. At the very least, every organisation can reduce its carbon footprint by conducting deliberate, eco-friendly operations and educating their staff and community they serve about the need to care for the environment – and yet even these actions would not be sufficient. There is an obligation on governments of Muslim majority countries, because the cultural and economic policies of a country have a major influence on a nation's carbon footprint. Since harm to the environment is occurring on a global scale and all nations will suffer from the consequences of environmental catastrophe, every Muslim nation should seek to actively reduce its carbon footprint, implement economic policies friendly to the environment, and enact educational and cultural programmes to educate their people on the need to take care of the environment. Muslim countries can also influence global policies through international organisations.

Clear pronouncements in the Qur'an and the example of Prophet Muhammad have given Muslims in the past the impetus to preserve the environment and to protect wildlife and domesticated animals. During the Ottoman reign (1299-1923), for example, comprehensive waste and environmental management regulations were stipulated as early as 1539. In 1502 local government legislation regulated the loads that animals could carry and the number of days they could be worked in a week. There were even organisations dedicated to treating storks injured on their annual migration. Centuries before similar regulations were introduced in the modern world, hunting was regulated on the basis of need and no hunting was allowed during the breeding season. When mosques were built, the architects provided covered nesting areas for birds under the facades.<sup>62</sup> Certainly Muslims can achieve the same objectives in line with the pressing issues of our time – climate change and environmental protection.

## Conclusion

This chapter first argued the case for an Islamic theology of the environment in order to illustrate that the environment is an extremely valuable artefact that displays the infinite creativity of God: everything in the natural world worships God in a unique way, and animal species with the ecosystems they create form communities and have a right to live independently of humans. Hence, life on Earth must be preserved as an extremely valuable artefact. Second, it examined the human relationship with the environment and sought to show that human interaction with the environment

<sup>62</sup> Ahmet Akgunduz & Said Ozturk, *Ottoman History: Misperceptions and Truths* (Rotterdam: IUR Press, Rotterdam, 2011).

is one way. In a physical sense, humans only take from the environment but give nothing back. The best humans can do is to use the resources of the planet in a sustainable way to preserve the environment and not irreversibly upset its natural balance. Although humans are given right of usage of what Earth provides, they do not own the Earth. It is entrusted to them by God and they have to return it undamaged. Humans are accountable at the court of God for betrayal of trust if they damage the Earth irreversibly. Third, the chapter proceeded to build a case that caring for the environment is an Islamic religious obligation (*fard*) as collective human activity on Earth is harming not only life on Earth but the entire planet (Anthropocene). Hence Islam's overriding principle of preventing harm before acquisition of benefit applies. The obligation applies not only to every individual Muslim, but to Islamic organisations and the governments of Muslim majority countries. Caring for the environment is *fard al-'ayn* (individual obligation) and *fard al-kifaya* (collective obligation) at the same time.

The environmental teachings of Islam make it easier for Muslims to be concerned with natural flora and fauna, and to take measures that will arrest climate change, even if such measures do not benefit them directly or immediately. In order to protect the environment, Muslims and non-Muslims must make sacrifices. They need to consume less and produce less waste. Through its theology of the environment and the power of its ethical stance, Islam, along with other religions, can facilitate this critical outcome.

# RECONCILIATION WITHOUT REPENTANCE

The Politics and Theology of Postponement of Aboriginal Peoples' Justice<sup>1</sup>

*Geoff Broughton and Brooke Prentis<sup>2</sup>*

The chapter is co-authored by an Anglican priest and practical theologian (Geoff) and Aboriginal leader and Christian activist (Brooke), utilising the fourfold movement of practical theology incorporating descriptive, historical, biblical-systematic and practical considerations. First, we introduce our particular vocational interest in, and expression of, Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, followed by a broad description of contemporary Reconciliation in Australian political and public discourse. This entails engagement with the gospel of John chapter 21, which connects reconciliation with repentance through the idea of *redeemed* memories. A major theological implication of *redeeming* memories is the role of *confessing* wrongdoing. The final section makes some practical, public policy proposals for *reconciliation with repentance* with Aboriginal peoples.

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- 1 Throughout this chapter the term 'Australian' generally refers to non-Aboriginal peoples of many different cultures. Aboriginal peoples of Australia struggle to identify as Australian, preferring where possible to identify as one of over 300 nations of Aboriginal peoples. This chapter focuses on injustice towards Aboriginal peoples.
  - 2 Rev. Dr Geoff Broughton is a research scholar for the *Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre* and lecturer in Practical Theology at St Mark's National Theological Centre - both located within Charles Sturt University. Geoff is also Rector of Paddington Anglican Church in Sydney. After more than 20 years of inner-Sydney living and 25 of Anglican ministry in places like King's Cross, Darlinghurst, Glebe and Paddington. Geoff's research interests include the connections between Jesus Christ and justice, and between Christian theology, Aboriginal land and culture. Each July Geoff co-leads a "Spirit Journey" in Central Australia with East Arrernte Traditional Owner and healer John Cavanagh. Brooke Prentis is an Aboriginal Christian Leader who is a descendant of the Waka Waka peoples, who reside in Brisbane. Brooke is a Chartered Accountant by profession, a member of the *Public and Contextual Theology Strategic Research Centre* for Charles Sturt University and involved in a number of Christian organisations including as Aboriginal spokesperson for Common Grace, volunteer coordinator for the Grasree Gathering, and former board member of TEAR Australia.

Reconciliation, being the Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, has been in my vocabulary since I (Brooke)<sup>3</sup> was 11 years old (1991). My understanding of Reconciliation finds its roots in the political dimension and the way the term has been used in Australian society during my lifetime. I did not become a Christian until 21 years of age, so the biblical meaning of reconciliation would come some time after my formative years. The 1990s were the decade of my high school education. It was a time marked by experiencing racism, but where Elders such as Aunty Faye Gundy and Aunty Lynne Chapman helped me to be proud of my Aboriginal culture. When I was 17 years old, I thought Reconciliation would be achieved in a couple of years. Reconciliation to me then, and still today, meant schools teaching about the true history of Australia, being the first-hand history that I had learnt from my family, being treated as an equal citizen in Australia, bringing an end to racism, and a treaty. The overturning of *terra nullius* in the Mabo decision as I began high school surely meant the next step would be a treaty. The Aboriginal rock band Yothu Yindi even sang about it. "Treaty yeah, Treaty now".<sup>4</sup> Treaty, reconciliation and justice formed the soundtrack of my formative years.

In 2017, some 20 years after finishing high school, the reality is that Australia is further away from achieving Reconciliation than in the 1990s. This chapter seeks to understand how and why Reconciliation and justice are postponed and what role public theology can play in realising the hope for their accomplishment. My hopes, dreams and prayers, my desire for Reconciliation, come from sitting at the feet of Aboriginal Elders and Leaders from many Aboriginal nations, from kneeling at the foot of the cross seeking to love Jesus, from love of my neighbour, from love of my enemy, from truth-telling, and from a desire to build relationships. I have said publicly for many years that I would rather call Reconciliation 'friendship', my call for "Reconciliation as friendship". If we thought about it as making friends, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, I think we could 'Close the Gap' a lot quicker.

I am a volunteer community Aboriginal pastor as there is little to no funding from Australian church denominations for Aboriginal ministry, to see me employed by the church, any church. This vocation has enabled me to follow Jesus into the realities of Australia in 2017 where I see, hear and feel the impacts of racism, the impacts of poverty in the apparently 'Lucky Country', and the impacts of colonialism still present in Australia – and ultimately the impacts of the lack of Reconciliation. As a Christian leader, who happens to be Aboriginal, it is often a lonely journey of being an advocate for Reconciliation. As Uncle Sam Watson implored: "as Aboriginal peoples we can't do Reconciliation on our own. We need our non-Aboriginal brothers and

<sup>3</sup> Brooke, as a descendant of the Waka Waka peoples, descends from a line of over 2,000 generations of peoples who have lived and died on these lands now called Australia. Many Aboriginal leaders – from Bennelong and Pemulwuy, to Truganini and Windradyne, to William Cooper and David Uniapon, to Sir Doug Nicholls and Oodgeroo Noonuccal, to Charlie Perkins and Lowitja O'Donoghue, to Aunty Jean Phillips – have fought for justice. Brooke thanks and acknowledges Aunty Jean Phillips for paving the way for many Aboriginal Christian Leaders. Brooke stands on their shoulders and among present young leaders, advocates and voices, Amy McQuire, Luke Pearson, Celeste Liddle, Nyuka Gorrie, Latoya Rule, Nakkiah Lui & Callum Clayton-Dixon.

<sup>4</sup> Yothu Yindi, "Treaty, now", online at: <http://bit.ly/2pZ6SV6> [Accessed 23 January 2017].

sisters standing beside us. Not in front of us, but beside us. And even better is they are our Christian non-Aboriginal brothers and sisters”.

I have a desire and calling on my heart to see Australia mature as a nation, stay awake as a nation, and come together in diversity as a nation building a different Australia – one that is built on truth, justice, love and hope – it is a desire to see real Reconciliation recommended in the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC).<sup>5</sup>

The way we have approached Reconciliation politically over many decades has led to the postponement of justice for Aboriginal Peoples in Australia. I still believe in Reconciliation, but it is a new vision of Reconciliation that Australia needs. The new vision is Reconciliation with repentance led by Christian leaders, and a Reconciliation that takes a much needed second and third step to public and practical application instead of the few first steps that Australia has taken and continues to merely talk about. To me that vision looks like friendship – personally, nationally and internationally.

I (Geoff) am writing this introduction as a non-Aboriginal person. The practice of Reconciliation, from the viewpoint of non-Aboriginal peoples, has not been uniformly welcomed and often judged as largely ineffective. The potential to repeat these mistakes of the past is ever-present. But the greater wrongs committed by the Christian church have been the sins of omission: silence, complicity and neglect. The movement for Reconciliation in Australia needs the contribution of public theology: its ‘kingdom’ imagination, its participation in the conversation and its convictions about Jesus that are embodied in action. My hope in writing this chapter, in partnership with Brooke, is to avoid the perils of past and continuing injustice, while making a modest contribution to Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. A personal experience of being reconciled nurtures and nourishes that hope.

In July my family had the privilege of being hosted ‘on country’ by an Eastern Arrernte (east of Alice Springs in Central Australia) Aboriginal Traditional Owner, John Cavanagh. During our week together John told us of a tragedy that killed many of his people from a gold mining accident several decades ago. A burial ground (in the style of a European graveyard) had been established commemorating the loss of many lives, including those of many children. John was emphatic that we would not visit the site as it contained too many sad memories. Additionally, as a Christian and as an Eastern Arrernte elder, he had already forgiven the wrongdoing. Gently, I challenged John. His forgiveness was as remarkable as it was sincere, but seemed inappropriate without a prior apology from us. Would he allow me, on behalf of the non-Aboriginal peoples present, to apologise on behalf of our ancestors? “Yes, but not here. We go to the graveside”. At the graveside a simple and profound liturgy of apology and forgiveness, of confession and absolution, was performed with water from a nearby spring, sprinkled on each other cheeks to symbolise our mutual tears. Then we embraced each other and the remaining water was poured over the tombstones. This liturgical act carried out ‘on country’, i.e. John’s homelands, was

5 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, *National Report*, Vol. 5 (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1991).

Reconciliation with repentance. Tragically, this potential example is not typical of Reconciliation in Australia. While many Aboriginal people, like John, have been willing and ready to forgive and be reconciled, too few non-Aboriginal people have been willing to confess to the wrongdoing inflicted on Aboriginal people and apologise.

Patrick Dodson, Federal Senator and formerly the Chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, thinks we have been “actively pulling apart the delicate threads of reconciliation that many Australians have been weaving into a beautiful garment”.<sup>6</sup> How have the “threads of reconciliation” with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as Australia’s first peoples, been delayed and derailed? The politics of postponement have frustrated social justice for Australia’s first peoples, leaving many disappointed and disillusioned. After a significant milestone in Australian democracy in 1967, when Aboriginal peoples were counted as citizens of Australia in the national census, justice had stalled by 2008, when the Australian Prime Minister formally apologised on behalf of the government to the stolen generations.<sup>7</sup>

## The Politics of Reconciliation in Australia

The legal, social and political history of European Australia’s relationship with its Aboriginal population during the last five decades has included Aboriginal peoples in the national census (decided by referendum in May 1967), the recognition of Native Title by the High Court and a formal apology to Aboriginal peoples by the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 13 February 2008 for the Aboriginal children who were forcibly removed from their parents over 18 decades.<sup>8</sup> Such gestures indicate progress in recognising the legacies of the past and improving relationships with Aboriginal peoples in recent decades. Slow progress has been made. For example, Aboriginal peoples were not included in the national census when I was born in February 1967, but the first Aboriginal person was recently elected to the lower house of the Federal Parliament by popular vote.<sup>9</sup> But Reconciliation remains unfinished business for Australia. Why are Reconciliation and justice postponed? This section will identify the optimism, opportunities and outlook for Reconciliation over the last five decades. Three generations of stalled Reconciliation are illuminated by three pivotal moments. The first is the optimism of the 1960s, demonstrated by the 1967 referendum and the scholarship of anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner. The second pivotal moment is represented by the opportunities of the 1990s, witnessed by the 1997 Mabo High Court decision (in favour of Native Title) and the ‘practical reconciliation’ policies pursued by the federal government. The third is the outlook

6 Patrick Dodson, “Genuine Attempt to Write First Peoples into Nation’s Contract”, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 2010, online at: <http://bit.ly/2M2OjrM> [Accessed 15 July 2017].

7 The 1967 referendum succeeded through the campaign “Vote Yes for Aborigines”, which indicated an emerging, national mood for reconciliation. For many non-Aboriginal people confusion continues regarding Aboriginal citizenship that had been gained previously in 1962 (or 1948).

8 Parliament of Australia, *The Native Title Act*. 1993, online at: <http://bit.ly/32b7bul> [Accessed 22 January 2017].

9 Inclusion in the national census was changed after a successful referendum on the issue in May 1967.

for reconciliation in the 2020s will be considered from the vantage point of 2017 and provocative voices such as that of journalist and broadcaster Stan Grant.<sup>10</sup>

## The Optimism of the 1960s: The First Generation of Reconciliation

The late 1960s was a time of rapid social change and Australia, while geographically isolated, was not immune from those changes. In May 1967 a referendum decided to include Aboriginal peoples in the national census. There was great optimism and excitement, with strong advocacy from within the Christian churches, that the time had come for genuine Reconciliation! The same year as the referendum saw the Wave Hill 'walk off' by the Gurindji people, near Kalkarinji in central Australia. Vincent Lingiari, inspired by the old Christian story, understood these connections and inspired a movement that changed the country. An acknowledgement of Uncle Rev Graham Paulson, who was a significant Aboriginal Christian Leader in ministry with the community at the time, is also acknowledged. Within a decade Prime Minister Gough Whitlam would officially recognise Aboriginal land by pouring desert sand into Lingiari's hand. In the following year, 1968, W.E.H. Stanner delivered a lecture, *The Great Australian Silence*, in which he argued there was a "cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale".<sup>11</sup> In his introduction to the published version, Australian academic Robert Manne assesses this oft-quoted insight from Stanner:

All this helped Stanner come to understand the characteristically 'apologetic' quality of Australian history writing which, as he once put it, "sticks out like a foot from a shallow grave". In turn, this led him to an understanding of that "cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale", which he called "the great Australian silence". This silence did not begin in innocence, as "a simple forgetting of other possible views", as Stanner seemed almost to suggest in his cautious formulation in the Boyer Lectures. It arose rather, as he argued constantly elsewhere, in the systematic strangulation of national conscience.<sup>12</sup>

Stanner's piercing observation about (white) Australia's silence, particularly the "cult of forgetfulness", will be a significant theme in this chapter, which develops a public theology for *redeeming memories* and *confessing wrongdoing*. Traversing many areas of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal history and politics in Australia, such as invasion and massacres, the burden of Stanner's writing was quietly optimistic. In his last major essay he refused to surrender to the pessimism of other scholars about Aboriginal people. Sadly he admitted that "in the past we were wrong – in some respects grotesquely wrong – about the Aborigines ... we could be as wrong about the future".<sup>13</sup>

10 Stan Grant, "The Australian Dream: Blood, History and Becoming", *The Quarterly Essay*. Issue 64, (2016) [<https://doi.org/10.1182/blood-2016-07-722652>].

11 W.E.H. Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays* (Collingwood: Black Inc., 2009), 189

12 Robert Manne, 2009. Introduction to *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, 13.

13 Stanner, *The Dreaming and Other Essays*, 16.

## The Opportunity of the 1990s: The Second Generation of Reconciliation

Another Prime Minister, Paul Keating, saw an opportunity at the beginning of the 1990s to right the wrongs of the past as the next step in reconciliation that had stagnated, then stalled, since the optimism of the 1960s. His landmark 'Redfern speech' (delivered in the inner-city neighbourhood that housed many of Australia's urban Aboriginal people) is worth repeating in some detail. The following words, first spoken 25 years ago, remain prophetic and prescient:

I say, the starting point might be to recognise that the Problem starts with us non-Aboriginal Australians. It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice ... We failed to ask how would I feel if this were done to me? As a consequence, we failed to see that what we were doing degraded all of us ...

I think what we need to do is open our hearts a bit. All of us ... If we improve the living conditions in one town, they will improve in another. And another. If we raise the standard of health by twenty per cent one year, it will be raised more the next. If we open one door, others will follow. When we see improvement, when we see more dignity, more confidence, more happiness – we will know we are going to win. We need these practical building blocks of change.

The Mabo judgement should be seen as one of these. By doing away with the bizarre conceit that this continent had no owners prior to the settlement of Europeans, Mabo establishes a fundamental truth and lays the basis for justice. It will be much easier to work from that basis than has ever been the case in the past. For that reason alone we should ignore the isolated outbreaks of hysteria and hostility of the past few months. *Mabo is an historic decision; we can make it an historic turning point, the basis of a new relationship between Indigenous and non-Aboriginal Australians.* The message should be that there is nothing to fear or to lose in the recognition or historical truth, or the extension of social justice, or the deepening of Australian social democracy to include Indigenous Australians. There is everything to gain.<sup>14</sup>

The opportunity for "the basis of a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal Australians was marginalised for what became known in public policy as 'practical reconciliation'".<sup>15</sup> A year earlier, in 1991, the Australian Parliament unanimously implemented a Reconciliation process that aimed to reconcile Aboriginal peoples and non-Aboriginal peoples by the centenary of federation in 2001. A key goal of this process was to educate the wider Australian community about Reconciliation and Aboriginal peoples, including pre- and post-colonial history. These efforts, in the light of Keating's speech, made the 1990s the 'Reconciliation decade' that sought to address and redress Stanner's "Great Australian Silence". The opportunities of the 1990s, like the optimism of the 1960s, also failed to translate

<sup>14</sup> Paul Keating, "The Redfern Park Speech", in Michelle Grattan (ed.), *Reconciliation: Essays in Australian Reconciliation* (Melbourne, Bookman, 2000), 60 (italics added).

<sup>15</sup> Angela Pratt, *Practising Reconciliation? The Politics of Reconciliation in the Australian Parliament, 1991-2000* (Canberra: Parliamentary Services), 2003, online at: <http://bit.ly/35nDkk3> [Accessed 6 October 2016].

into a 'new relationship'. The political rhetoric of 'Close the Gap' (the measurable outcomes of federal government policies of 'practical reconciliation') has also failed in practical terms.<sup>16</sup>

## The Outlook for the 2020s: A Third Generation of Reconciliation?

The outlook for the 2020s is characterised by a stronger foundation, optimism and resurgence. The current school-aged generation is the first generation to start to be taught the true history of Australia through a National Curriculum. The National Curriculum is the greatest attempt yet to teach the true pre-colonial history and true post-colonial history. The National Curriculum teaches, among other lessons, about Aboriginal peoples' diversity of nations and languages, overturning misconceptions that Aboriginal peoples were nomadic and providing information about Aboriginal peoples' sustainable management of the land and waters, whilst also teaching about massacres, genocide and the stolen generations. It will take another generation, however, for this current generation of pupils to become teachers themselves for this history to be embedded in the Australian psyche. The outlook for the 2020s will be the creation of further building blocks; it will provide the strongest foundation for Reconciliation that Australia has seen.

Signs of optimism are that strong, tertiary educated, articulate younger Aboriginal voices are being strengthened and heard. The use of social media is a key tool challenging the mainstream media that have damaged the reputation of Aboriginal peoples since the first publication of the *Sydney Gazette* in 1803. We also see both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers, commentators and advocates wrestling with topics such as colonisation and decolonisation, the Australian National Anthem, the Australian flag and Aboriginal sovereignty.

Australia is seeing a resurgence of "taking it back to the streets", where Aboriginal marches and rallies are seeing the biggest turnouts since the 1980s in every capital city of Australia. A current example is that approximately 50,000 people in Melbourne alone attended the 26 January 2017 Invasion Day Rally. This public show has given renewed strength and energy to Aboriginal Elders and Leaders, indicating that the fight for justice is not over.

Reconciliation in the 2020s also faces several challenges that are best posed as questions. How will Australia work towards truly closing and, dare we dream, eliminating the huge disadvantages in health, education, prison incarceration, juvenile detention and life expectancy? How will non-Aboriginal Australia mature, politically and in the media, to recognise and embrace the diversity of Aboriginal opinion and voice, waking up to the reality that over 300 nations of peoples do not think, speak and act as one homogeneous group? How will Aboriginal peoples deal with the growing distance between the poor and the Aboriginal middle class, and even the creation of the Aboriginal upper class? How will Aboriginal dreaming, lore and culture be maintained with the competing demands of education and jobs? Such questions illustrate that, by delaying justice, Australia is postponing Reconciliation. Does justice need to be achieved before true Reconciliation occurs?

<sup>16</sup> Malcolm Turnbull, *Closing the Gap. Prime Minister's Report 2016*. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2lCfZl1> [Accessed 8 October 2016].

## Justice before Reconciliation? A brief Survey of a Complex Relationship<sup>17</sup>

Three major conceptions of justice have emerged within political democracies: first, the universalist claim that there is only one justice; second, the pluralist concession that justice bears many names; and third, the practical acceptance that justice can only be understood and enacted within a specific interpretative tradition: our conviction of public theology's task for Aboriginal justice. While a singular justice can be traced back to the ancient world (e.g. Aristotle), politically the justice of the dominant becomes the dominant justice.<sup>18</sup> The dominant justice in Australia is the history and horror of the *political assimilation* of Aboriginal peoples, sanctioned by a 'cult of forgetfulness': postponing justice. More recently the question has become: is justice necessarily situational and perhaps inevitably contingent? Those advocating for the plurality of justice believe there can be freedom from the domination of the powerful.<sup>19</sup> Economic and social abuses of power can be justly contained within their own sphere of justice. Others are concerned these spheres of justice exclude the possibility of taking a single stand in the name of justice. Politically, egalitarianism masquerades as justice (according to the Australian philosopher John Passmore) as Western liberal democracies have lost the 'ability to distinguish' between justice and injustice.<sup>20</sup> Most Australians have been distanced from the injustice inflicted daily on Aboriginal peoples.<sup>21</sup> Egalitarianism in Australia (instead of justice) is a history of *political abandonment* of Aboriginal peoples, supported, tragically, by an Aussie culture of 'a fair go' – thus, postponing justice.

The challenge for public theology is acute. 'Post-colonial' describes an academic aspiration but is not a lived reality for Aboriginal peoples. This means that a public theology of justice – grounded in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – must be able to name transparently and remember truthfully injustices inflicted upon Aboriginal peoples.<sup>22</sup> A Christian stance regarding Aboriginal justice is not a return to the single or comprehensive ideal that can be promoted under the banner of 'God's justice' in the public sphere. Christian justice, to be publicly credible and politically plausible must always reject any account of justice that relies upon coercive force employed by those possessing power.

Bonhoeffer's famous dictum is that cheap grace is, first and foremost, "preaching forgiveness without repentance".<sup>23</sup> Reconciliation in Australia, a corollary of cheap

17 M. Phillips, "Aboriginal Reconciliation as Religious Politics: Secularisation in Australia", *Australian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 40.1, (March 2000): 111-124. [<https://doi.org/10.1080/10361140500049362>].

18 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, David Ross (translated) & Lesley Brown (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 122.

19 Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 35-46.

20 John Passmore, "Civil Justice and Its Rivals". In: Alice Ehr-Soon Tay (ed.), *Justice* (London: Edward Arnold, 1979), 25.

21 For example, few Australians would aware of the hidden history of Aboriginal agriculture uncovered by Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu, Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2014).

22 Jon Altman & Melinda Hinkson, *Coercive Reconciliation: Stabilise, Normalise, Exit Aboriginal Australia* (North Carlton: Arena Publications Association, 2007).

23 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Volume 4: Discipleship, Geoffrey B. Kelly (ed.). In: J.D. Godsey transl. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 36.

grace, is political Reconciliation without remembering, repenting, confessing and forgiving found in the public theology, worship and practices of the Christian community.

## Reconciliation with Repentance in Scripture and Theology

Theologically, what kind of repentance is required for true and lasting Reconciliation? An exploration of Peter's reconciling encounter with the risen Jesus on the beach foreshadows the most defining moment of reconciliation in the New Testament: Paul on the Damascus Road.<sup>24</sup> C.H. Dodd commented on the "abundance of detail, drama and lively dialogue" of these resurrection appearances.<sup>25</sup> Aboriginal people *re-member* – in ways most non-Aboriginal people have never understood – the deep connections between the land and the life it sustains, as well as between the spaces we inhabit and the Spirit that indwells.<sup>26</sup> For Aboriginal peoples, land is "a definable location where important personal events have taken place, where bonding occurred, a place of birth and life and death".<sup>27</sup> For Reconciliation with repentance, the relationships between land, justice and reconciliation need to be remembered by the contemporary followers of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> The necessity of apostle Peter's need for repentance is dramatised by the sequence of geographical locations: from a courtyard fire occasioning a three-time denial of Christ to a beachside fire occasioning a three-time reinstatement by Christ. Drawing on the image of the campfire as 'home' in Indigenous culture, Harris has shown that "around the fire [was] where people gathered and where the important bonding activities took place. The fire itself could be anywhere within a particular tract of ancestral land".<sup>29</sup> The reconciliation with the apostle Peter around the fire as an "important bonding activity" begins in disillusionment and despair at Jesus' absence.<sup>30</sup>

24 Elsewhere I have argued that it is through Saul's encounter with the risen Jesus recorded in Acts 9, 22 and 26 that the demands of reconciliation with repentance are defined. See Geoff Broughton, *Restorative Christ: Jesus, Justice and Discipleship* (Eugene, OR, Pickwick Publications, 2014).

25 C.H. Dodd, "The Appearances of the Risen Christ: An Essay in Form-Criticism of the Gospel", *Studies in the Gospels* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957), 14–15. The exegetical issues raised by the different chronologies in Luke 5 and John 21 are beyond the scope of this chapter but are addressed in most major commentaries. For the purposes of this Chapter I simply note that there is considerable scholarly support for interpreting this encounter as a post-resurrection appearance of the risen Jesus. See Raymond E. Brown, *The gospel According to John, XIII-XXI* (New Haven, NJ: Yale University Press, 1997), "Jesus revealed himself in vss. 1 which creates a bond between the activity of the risen Jesus and the Jesus of the ministry".

26 Graham Paulson & Mark Brett, "Five Smooth Stones: Reading the Bible through Aboriginal Eyes", *Colloquium: The Australian and New Zealand Theological Review* (November 2013), 3.

27 These spiritual realities are awkwardly compressed into the English concept of "sacred sites", which encompass law, custom and memory. See Harris, J. "Home," 21 for a brief history of the Eora people. See further online at: <http://bit.ly/2orIRGU> [Accessed 29 January 2017].

28 Jione Havea (ed.), *Aboriginal Australia and the Unfinished Business of Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) [<https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137426673>].

29 J. Harris, "Home: Some Reflections on an Aboriginal Sense of Place", *St Mark's Review*, 153(1993):21.

30 Wes Howard-Brook, *Becoming the Children of God: John's Gospel and Radical Discipleship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1994), 469.

## Naming Wrongdoing, Relationally

The immediate context for Peter's encounter with the risen Jesus is the failure, retreat and disappointment of the previous days. Peter's confession of Christ attested in three of the four gospels (Luke 9:18-21; Mark 8:27-30; John 6:67-71), viewed through a relational lens, can be summarised as allegiance to Jesus, acceptance of his calling, and authenticating his leadership role among the Twelve. Peter's courtyard denial attested to by all four gospels (Luke 22:56-62; Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; John 18:25-27) must be understood relationally. More than just personal failure or a crisis of faith, the courtyard denial is a denial of those relationships: disloyalty to Jesus, denouncing his calling, and defecting from the Twelve.

The theory and practice of restorative justice insists that the various failures are best understood relationally. Peter, reversing his previous confession of Christ, failed in his allegiance to Jesus. Peter, abandoning his calling as a disciple of Christ, returns to fishing for mere fish (21:3). Peter, leader of the Twelve ("I am going fishing"), continues to exert power and influence over the entire group ("We will go with you"). The relational dimensions of reconciliation are generally overlooked in Australian public life. The relational *distance* between many Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples must be named. First, most Australians live in suburban, middle-class neighbourhoods and do not interact regularly with Aboriginal people. Second, many Australians relegate the dispossession and destruction of Aboriginal peoples, their land and culture to a distant past. Third, most Australians regard contemporary injustices suffered by Aboriginal people as the responsibility of the government, or the land councils or ... anybody else!

Brooke's call to "Reconciliation as friendship" is a call to relational proximity. Without genuine friendship, between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples of these lands now called Australia, past wrongdoings will only be understood historically and politically but never *relationally*. Relationships defined by genuine friendship are essential to reconciliation, because they enable us to remember the past truthfully.<sup>31</sup>

## Remembering Wrongdoing, Rightly

Reconciliation with repentance must begin where relationship is denied, where people are forgotten, and where the known has become unrecognisable (John 21:4). Peter's encounter with the risen Jesus, with multiple allusions, begins "just after daybreak" in dark places (John 21:4). Peter is on a familiar beach (Sea of Tiberias) doing familiar things (fishing). Some commentators judge Peter's actions harshly. Brown concludes, that in returning to what he knows best, the scene is "one of aimless activity undertaken in desperation".<sup>32</sup> How does Peter remember his courtyard denial? Is fishing a convenient way to forget? More crucially, how might

31 Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Volent World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006).

32 Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1096, but other commentators are divided on how to interpret these actions.

Peter remember his allegiance to Jesus, his acceptance of the call and his authentic role as leader?<sup>33</sup>

The biblical narrative focuses on the miraculous catch of fish (John 21:5-11). Those who believe this text in John 21 to be the same events as recorded at Luke 5 are incredulous. For example, Brown asks “how Peter could go through the same situation and much of the same dialogue as on the earlier occasion, without recognizing Jesus?”<sup>34</sup> There is ample evidence in the Johannine text that this is a different event, as noted by Carson: “the fact that the narrator’s perspective stays with the boat, instead of diverting to the encounter between Jesus and Peter, is a small indication of eyewitness integrity”.<sup>35</sup> Jesus, wronged by Peter in the courtyard (wronged by humanity on the cross), takes the initiative (John 21:4-5). While the reader knows it is Jesus who invites, Jesus who instructs and Jesus who inspires, “the disciples did not know that it was Jesus” (John 21:5). If, as I am suggesting, these events describe a post-resurrection encounter with the risen Jesus, then a detailed exploration of how history, memory and forgetting connect must first be undertaken.

Excursus: history, memory and forgetting: History, myth, memory and forgetting: these are the things of identity.<sup>36</sup>

How do Australians remember the wrongdoing done to Aboriginal people? Conversely, how should Aboriginal people remember the wrongdoing done to them? These questions underlie the current debate over the meaning, name and date of 26 January in Australian public life.<sup>37</sup> They underline Stanner’s piercing assessment of the ‘cult of forgetfulness’ that characterises the non-Aboriginal view of Australian history. For too long a ‘settler myth’ relating that Australia was found – not invaded – has dominated both the popular consciousness and public education. For too long the legal fiction of *terra nullius* (“land belonging to nobody”) permitted dispossession, destruction and death. The ‘cult of forgetfulness’ is neither benign nor innocent as Miroslav Volf demonstrates the pragmatic alongside the cognitive function of memory. All remembering is also doing something “as I am remembering – I want to argue – I am learning how to lead a kind of life that will create bridges towards another person”.<sup>38</sup> Remembering rightly, therefore, is not only about the past but the future.<sup>39</sup> The right kind of remembering is therefore required for the wrongs we commit and not just the wrongs we suffer. The distorted memories, however, of both the wrongdoer and the victim cannot offer a reliable

33 These questions anticipate the climax of the narrative: the threefold reinstatement of Peter (see John 21:15-17).

34 Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1090-1091.

35 D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: IVP, 1991), 671.

36 Grant, “The Australian Dream”, 69.

37 McQuire, A. & O’Shea, L. “White Australians Celebrate, Aboriginal People Mourn”, *The New York Times*, 25 January 2017. Online at: <https://nyti.ms/2OyjHzL> [Accessed 26 January 2017].

38 Miroslav Volf, “Miroslav Volf Part 2: Loving Enemies – Dangerous and Absurd”, 2010, online at: <http://bit.ly/2pTdlRg> [Accessed 24 October 2017].

39 Miroslav Volf & John Stanley, “Revolutionary Remembering: An Interview with Miroslav Volf”. In: *Remembering the Future: A Collection of Essays Interviews, and Poetry at the Intersection of Theology and Culture: The Other Journal 2004-2007* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2009), 9.

account of these obligations beyond reconciliation unless the memory of both is redeemed as well.<sup>40</sup>

I propose that redeemed remembering means remembering without *blaming* the victim, remembering without *evading* the actions of the wrongdoer, and remembering without *abandoning* the community. This chapter focuses on redeemed remembering for the community and engages with John 21 to then make some proposal for Reconciliation with repentance.

Firstly a point on wrongdoing and apologies. Many attempts to admit wrongdoing, including most carefully crafted apologies (stage managed by or for the media) are built on or surrounded by excuses, rationalisations and justifications such as “I never meant to hurt anyone”. In the very act of appearing to accept responsibility, the wrongdoer deftly evades it. The most effective way of challenging this evasion is rigorous questioning. The right questions lead wrongdoers to see themselves, and others, differently. *This demonstrates memory itself has been redeemed.*

Redeemed remembering must also be done without the wider community *abandoning* either the victim or the wrongdoer. Many communities seeking peaceful relationships prefer to forget wrongdoing prematurely. This tendency is prevalent particularly among Christians where the popular mindset insists that victims must ‘forgive and forget’ or where the wrongdoers are ostracised for their behaviour. In both instances the hope is that past wrongs will be quickly forgotten and ‘normality’ returns. Redeemed remembering ensures that the community does not abandon the victim or the wrongdoer through forgetfulness, nor will it neglect the essential goals of reconciliation and justice – a common basis in Aboriginal lore.<sup>41</sup> Redeemed remembering recognises and challenges covert strategies of evasion and blame, and guards against the inclination of both the wrongdoer and the victim to *revise* their memories of what happened for their own advantage and benefit.

Redeemed remembering enables eyes to be opened to the truth and courageous action. In John 21 Jesus is heard and obeyed (John 21:5-6) but it is not until John’s recognition (John 21:7) and Peter’s reaction that they remember who he is (‘the Lord’) and who they are (his disciples). Seeing the risen Jesus is, of course, the first step towards a redeemed memory. But the risen Jesus requires more from the apostle Peter.

## Interrogating Wrongdoing, Rigorously

The narrative continues with abundant generosity (John 21:8 “the net full of fish”), sacramental hospitality (John 21:9 fish ... bread cf. John 6) and gracious welcome (John 21:12 “Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast’”). In the fullness of the fire, food and friendship, did Peter and the other disciples secretly hope that the previous days had been forgiven and forgotten? As previously noted, rigorous questions prevent such evasion. The ensuing conversation between Peter and the risen Jesus that follows breakfast on the beach is the crux of the narrative. Gently, yet

<sup>40</sup> Volf, *The End of Memory*, 180.

<sup>41</sup> See Working with Indigenous Australians, “The Law and the Lore”, online at: <http://bit.ly/35IPWls> [Accessed 29 January 2017].

persistently, Jesus interrogates Peter by asking three times “Do you love me?” (John 21:15-17). The central burden of the encounter is obscured by extraneous detail of the scholarly debate on this passage. Who or what will convince Peter (the wrongdoer) to take responsibility for his actions? *In effect, what makes Peter repent?* John records Jesus asking essentially the same questions three times (paralleling the third moment in Saul’s encounter with the risen Jesus in Act 9: the revelation of light, the voice of his victim and the question). Rigorous questions shed light on wrongdoing.<sup>42</sup> Too many Australians are not awake to the past, perils and plight of Aboriginal injustice, because they are not exposed to the difficult questions of dispossession, destruction and death of Aboriginal peoples.

## Reconciling Wrongdoing, Restoratively

The outcome of this restorative conversation on the beach is reconciliation and reinstatement. Peter’s faith in Jesus, his calling as a disciple and his commission as an apostle have been restored and re-created. Yet reconciliation and reinstatement entail obligations that have been extended and deepened since Jesus’ first call to follow him. John 21:18-19 Jesus is explicit

“Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go”. (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, ‘Follow me’.

Recognising the risen Jesus, being reconciled with Christ is equally following the Crucified One

## The Public and Practical Implications for Reconciliation with Repentance

Nurturing the desire for Reconciliation is the first step of the process. I have already described the role of redeemed remembering within this first step. Conversation is the second step towards Reconciliation which, I have argued, require naming and questioning (and forgiving). Through long and sometimes difficult conversations, naming and forgiving are held together through asking the right questions. Seeing the risen Jesus, we discover that forgiveness and reconciliation are embodied as resurrection acts through the reconciling embrace of the risen, crucified Jesus. Resurrection, forgiveness and reconciliation are all God’s action in Christ. Here I will name three of the practices of a public theology – naming, questioning

<sup>42</sup> Scholarship, at this point, diverges into very different lines of interpretation. Some (e.g. Schnackenburg, Brown) focus on the “special, authoritative commission” of Peter and debates about apostolic succession. Others focus on the variations in language (e.g. the verbs for love) for clues as the deeper meaning of the awkward repetition. Carson, *The Gospel of John*, 677 rejects both lines of interpretation by concluding, “three times Jesus asks the same question. When Peter is particularly grieved (v. 17), it is not because Jesus has changed verbs, but because the same question is being asked for the third time. As he had disowned Jesus three times, so Jesus requires this elementary yet profound confession three times”.

and forgiving – that are essential for Reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

## The First Practice of Reconciliation is Naming (Confessing)

Naming (or judging) wrongdoing, expressed by non-Aboriginal peoples as confession, by Aboriginal peoples as testimony, and by democratic politics through transparency. As noted in John chapter 21 and Jesus' questioning of Peter, naming wrongdoing means asking hard questions, which is both difficult and controversial. Why? Because, justice is postponed when Aboriginal injustices are hidden, the past wrongs perpetrated are increasingly forgotten and the Australian public becomes complacent (the enduring 'great Australian silence'). The right kinds of questions will unveil Aboriginal experience, unmask popular and political excuses, and unsettle any complacency within the Australian community. When non-Aboriginal peoples hear the testimony of Aboriginal peoples, the justice of Jesus Christ demands repentance: confession rather than hostility. Australians remember our past without evading our responsibilities. Christian people can and must encourage Australians to be publicly accountable so that Aboriginal peoples are not abandoned, but recognised, respected. This enables Australians to speak honestly about the wrongs they have committed.

The admission of wrongdoing is called confession in theological language and has three main components. For example when, on 13 February 2008, then Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd made a formal apology for the 'Stolen Generations', this important step was the first component: confessing to one another. For those living together in community at Bonhoeffer's alternative seminaries, publicly confessing to one another was the only valid kind of confession.<sup>43</sup> Such confession must be carefully distinguished, however, from rituals of public shaming. True confession means non-Aboriginal peoples take the initiative by accepting responsibility for the wrongdoing. Two further components of confession remain as unfinished business for Reconciliation, because most Australians of every generation – since 1967's referendum, 1997's *Bringing Them Home* report and Rudd's apology in 2008 – became complacent about Reconciliation. The great Australian silence endures into 2019.

Confessing sins of omission is the second aspect which includes failing to choose right or proper actions as well as sins of commission. Confession that includes confessing a failure to do the right thing can be more truthful about wrongdoing suffered by Aboriginal peoples. As demonstrated in the current public debate about the timing, naming and meaning of the 26 January commemoration, these omissions (and the accompanying silence) are what cause Aboriginal peoples to grieve while many non-Aboriginal people (including some Christians) grumble! Australians – even many Christians – have not acknowledged God's desire for Aboriginal peoples' deep wounds to be healed, and to be redeemed and reconciled together. That is why the third aspect of confession is the most difficult for public theology, because it demands confessing wrongs as sin. The second practice of reconciliation is forgiving

<sup>43</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 5: Life Together; Prayerbook of the Bible*, Gerhard Ludwig Muller (ed.), Albrecht Schönherr & Geoffrey B Kelly, transl. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996).

Forgiveness has been offered consistently by Aboriginal Christians, as I experienced recently through traditional owner and healer John Cavanagh. Volf rightly notes that the essence of forgiveness is precisely this giftedness. Forgiveness is a gift that Aboriginal peoples have consistently offered, for non-Aboriginal peoples to receive and for the Australian nation to nurture and celebrate. Aboriginal pastor and Kabi Kabi and Goreng Goreng man, Uncle Ray Minniecon, notes the daily challenge of forgiving for Aboriginal peoples:

I struggle with forgiveness but I know I have to practise it every day to relieve my bitterness. It's a moment by moment thing because I can walk into a shop and have a person do racist acts without even knowing they are racist. And when that happens I have to walk away and deal with my rage and anger, and learn to say "okay Ray, forgive that person". If I didn't forgive, then the past would always be present.<sup>44</sup>

Forgiveness cannot be demanded, processed or earned by hard work. Forgiveness, understood as a gift, is also an intimate act of grace. As observed in John 21 and the apostle Peter's encounter with the risen Jesus, it is a resurrection act. It is the way that God-in-Christ breathes new life into dead relationships. The Mabo High court ruling, as critical as it was in ending the legal fiction of *terra nullius*, cannot be the basis of a new relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Australia (contra Keating). The risen Jesus is the basis for *redeeming* memories, *confessing* and *forgiving* as well as the basis for genuine hope of reconciliation! The role for public theology is to nurture and celebrate this gift of forgiveness and reconciliation. The community of God's people in both the Old and New Testaments remembered God's forgiveness through celebratory meals: the Passover and the Lord's Supper.

## Practical Proposals for Public Policy and Public Theology

This chapter has outlined some of the examples of Australia walking towards Reconciliation. We still have more walking to do. Many more first steps, second steps and third steps. More than simply walking together we have to create places and markers that we can walk to that help us to break the silence, to remember rightly and to break our cult of forgetfulness. Below are some suggested steps for the Australian political and church realms that would demonstrate Reconciliation with Repentance and contribute towards ending the postponement of justice for Aboriginal peoples in Australia.

### First steps

Teaching of the true history of Australia in schools through the National Curriculum needs to be protected with a commitment and funding to train teachers to teach the National Curriculum. 26 January is to remain a National Public Holiday but be renamed 'Day of Mourning' as a day of commemoration. A new date for a national public holiday for 'Australia Day' must be selected by Aboriginal peoples. Any celebrations should commence with a Welcome to Country by local Aboriginal Elders and include all national flags – the Australian, the Aboriginal and the Torres

<sup>44</sup> Ray Minniecon, "The Forgiveness Project", 2015. Online at: <http://bit.ly/2Vv2b03> [Accessed 29 January 2017].

Strait Islander flags, which have been national flags of Australian since 1995. 26 May, National Sorry Day, needs to be established as a National Public Holiday as a day of commemoration for the Stolen Generations. The 1988 Barunga Statement needs to be upheld and multiple treaty negotiations immediately commenced between the federal government and/or state governments with Aboriginal peoples including, but not limited to, a national coalition of Aboriginal peoples elected by Aboriginal peoples, state coalitions of Aboriginal peoples elected by Aboriginal peoples and individual sovereign nations.

### Second steps

An apology needs to be issued in federal, state and territory parliaments for stolen land and stolen wages. Monuments are to be set up in each state and territory to acknowledge the over 300 nations of Aboriginal peoples and their prior occupation for over 60,000 years. A statement could be drafted to be embedded in these monuments that contains, but is not limited to, the following points: the negative effects of colonisation, the genocide that occurred in Australia, that Aboriginal peoples were treated as subhuman, that laments the fact that Aboriginal peoples were not recognised as citizens until 1962 (174 years after Captain Arthur Phillip arrived in Sydney), that every Australian should challenge their heart and mind to know what it means to live in these lands now called Australia. A statement could be issued to commemorate our losses, to celebrate our successes and to recognise the long journey still to go. The Australian War Memorial is to formally recognise the Frontier Wars.

### Third steps

A *Truth, Justice and Reconciliation* Commission, similar to the South African example, needs to be set up. An agreement upfront should include specified funding set aside and committed to in the federal budget for findings and recommendations to be implemented – with a focus on stolen land, stolen wages and stolen generations. The first role of the Commission would be to review all 339 recommendations of the 1991 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC, Vol. 5, 1991), and the recommendations of the *Bringing Them Home* report (1997).<sup>45</sup> A national campaign must be launched to stop racism, particularly looking at dispelling the myths that have plagued our relationship for decades.

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<sup>45</sup> National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. 1997. *Bringing Them Home: the Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). Online at: <http://bit.ly/323Jrbp> [Accessed 3 February 2017].

## Some Practical Proposals for Public Theology and the Australian Church

The call of Aboriginal Christian Leader, William Cooper, for the Sunday before 26 January to be Aboriginal Sunday and churches to repent the true history of Australia should be reinstated. This reform is to be taught in theological colleges and the professional development of Christian ministers. Church and other Christian organisations need to employ Aboriginal peoples and fund Aboriginal Christian Leaders and Aboriginal Christian ministries. Plaques on every church building need to acknowledge the local Aboriginal peoples of their community by name, their dispossession and hurt caused to Aboriginal peoples and ask for God's forgiveness.

### Conclusion

The experience of collaborating together over the last twelve months – speaking and writing together, meeting and praying together – has been profoundly moving and has deepened our commitment – as an academic and pastor, activist and leader – to *walk together* for Reconciliation with repentance in these lands now called Australia.

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