

STUDY 8

READING: ACTS 14:8-17

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk. When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them. In the past, he let all nations go their own way. Yet he has not left himself without testimony: He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons; he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy."

AUSTRALIAN'S AND THE IMAGE OF GOD

Aboriginal people share with all humanity the privilege of being formed in the image of God. And the Church among Aboriginal people is part of redeemed humanity as incorporated into the Body of Christ. This means that we are equally partners in humanity both by virtue of creation and redemption, without either being required to stop being true to their created nature. As specific racial groups, we are to see our distinctions united in Christ. This is the meaning of Paul's words in I Corinthians 12:13 and Romans 10:12. Even those verses which seem to imply the denial of racial distinctions, such as Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11, are not saying that in Christ they are removed, any more than all gender distinctions are removed. In fact, if this were so, then both bondage and freedom would have to be removed, since there are neither slaves or free. Clearly the lesson is not that differences should not (or will not) occur, but that the differences are not significant in the Abrahamic Covenant. This is the meaning of Abraham's fatherhood of many nations in Romans 4:16 and 17 (it is not saying that he is the father of those who used to be many nations but of those who are many nations).

A peoples' understanding of God's blessings in creation is formed as God, by his Holy Spirit, interacts with them as cultural beings, it can be no other way. Therefore, different cultural groups will rejoice in different aspects of the creational blessing. For example, when a European community is revived there may be a change in such things as work out-put, property maintenance, application to studies and dress code, because these things are the culturally determined norms by which a person's moral standard is assessed. In other words, rightly or wrongly, these are the things that our culture says are moral and good and are the values by which we measure a person's value. But is this tendency to make judgments on others based on externals, so prevalent in western culture, a godly practice? And are the norms of our culture simply our values that we impose on God to claim divine sanction? In short, is our ethnocentrism a godly practice, or simply personal and cultural prejudices?

When Europeans speak of being made in the image of God, we tend to stress humanity's distinction from the rest of creation which the truth implies, rather than the more essential affinity which it proclaims¹. Even when the relationship to the Creator is under consideration, it is for pragmatic and not relational reasons (in other words, we try to explain the problems that are here rather than discover the unity that is there). For the European mind, humanity, as higher than the rest of creation, is more important than humanity as one with creation. And, because we want to

¹ A careful reading of Genesis 1-3 shows that mankind's creation was for the purpose of sharing lovingly and tenderly in all that is meant to be a creature. The mandate to care and guide was part of the 'very good' of creation in which they shared.

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break free from our bondage to time and space, our theology emphasises the things that separate us from it, such as the Fall and the subsequent alienation. This manifests itself in an emphasis on production as opposed to relationships, the garden becomes a paddock, and the command to care and replenish the garden is sacrificed to the command to multiply and subdue it.

CHURCH STRUCTURES AND FINANCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

There is no doubt that the west has inherited a great deal of its understanding of the church and its government from the Old and New Testaments. However, it is also true to say that over two millenia there has been a great deal of contextualism (some would even say syncretism²) that has resulted in the church of the 21st century as we know it.

These two influences of our Biblical and historical inheritance, are nowhere more evident than in the Church systems and structures that we accept as the norm. They are expressions of our culture and are at home in our culture. They are envisioned by images and dreams, hopes and aspirations inherited from century's of western thought, they are funded by tithes and offerings made possible by western economic structures, they are sustained by our western educational system, and they are underpinned by our western political and legal frame work.

However, as wonderful as these are as gifts given to us, and therefore to the world, they must not be so tied to the Gospel that they are portrayed as essential to the Gospel. In Australian mission history this con-fusing of cultural structures and the Gospel has caused ongoing dependence on the parent mission body as well as the parent mission body using this dependence as a control mechanism. It has also fostered the assumption that a lack of financial stability and autonomy of the Aboriginal congregations, shows a lack of spiritual maturity³. It means that congregations of believers among Aboriginal communities are left with a sense of inadequacy because they cannot perform as the mission organisations have taught them without ongoing mission funds and expertise.

MATURING OF RELATIONSHIPS

Financial involvement; The old saying the "He who holds the purse pulls the strings", has certainly been true in Australian mission history. It is true for reasons of accountability for funds raised and provided but it is also true by virtue of the fact that western funds have established and then maintained, complex mission systems and outposts that only western mission personnel and funds could sustain. So the society that held the purse was the only society capable of pulling all the strings. The mission systems and community structures were of untold value in the protection and care of entire communities at risk of annihilation right across frontier Australia and as recent as the early twentieth century however, the same structures had many negative effects also; they forced unrelated communities together, they contributed to the breakdown of fundamental kinship structures, they forced high density population centres that the land could not sustain, they introduced artificial leadership structures to the demise of traditional elders. They introduced industrial society demands without industrial society opportunities. The Aboriginal communities across Australia continue to groan under the burden of the social and industrial systems we have imposed not the least being that of the institutional church. The percentage of income that denominations commit to particular ministries are an important indicator of the value they place on

² Contextualism is the necessary process by which the Gospel finds expression in a given cultural context so that it can more effectively confront and enrich that culture. Syncretism is the process by which the Gospel is so aligned to cultural practises that it can no longer confront those practises. For contextualism the Gospel is the determinative force where-as for syncretism the culture is the determinative force.

³ Hendrick Kraemer. Religion and the Christian Faith, 1956.

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that ministry⁴. In 2007 the Uniting Church of Australia committed itself to an indigenous recruitment, training and employment program for all of its agencies. And in the same year the Melbourne Anglican Diocese resolved, to allocate one percent of its income to support Aboriginal people in the work of Christian ministry. Today there are an estimated 53 ordained indigenous anglican priests⁵ for nearly 500,000 indigenous people identifying as Anglican (by far the majority of these priests are non-stipendiary clergy).

Aboriginal leadership; Since the revival of the 1970s to 1980s the relationship between the mainstream denominations and the Aboriginal missions to which they gave birth has changed from paternal to fraternal where the indigenous members are recognised as full and equal members of the respective denomination rather than clients or the objects of mission. Aboriginal leadership is now universally accepted and Aboriginal elders, pastors and priests are now the norm. There is now a new attitude between parent bodies and mission churches has been summed up in the following quote;

“Our failure to respond is a spiritual failure,” ---- “It is not what we can do for them [Indigenous people] but what we are willing to recognise and support that they can do for themselves. Maybe differently; maybe in ways we don’t like. But that is what genuine partnerships are about – mutual respect and space for difference while working for a shared future.”⁶

PASTOR ANDREW COE SPEAKS ON THE WORK OF THE ABORIGINAL CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Romans 14:1-13

BAPTIST MINISTRY; NT⁷ AND TODAY

In 1946 the Federal Home Mission Board of the Australian Baptist Church appointed Rev Laurie Reece and Rev. Phil Steer as the first Baptist missionaries to the settlement which became known as Yuendumu. They arrived on February 13th, 1947 and held their first worship service on February 23rd. The baptist missionaries helped supply clothing and medical supplies, taught sewing, commenced and ran the first store, helped build and often staffed the hospital, commenced a kindergarten, and commenced the first school. It was twenty three years before the first baptisms occurred at Yuendumu. In 1964 work began at Wave Hill among the Gurrinji people. One significant leader in this work was Vincent Lingiarri. After twelve years ministry twenty five people were baptised and the Wave Hill -Wattie Creek Baptist Church was constituted in 1977. Various caucasian missionaries assisted over the subsequent years but with the consistent ministry of Gurrinji people such as, Clancy and Blind Doris, Stephen and Victor. **Jerry Jangala** was a key person in the Lajamanu Church and in the development of indigenous expressions of Christianity, but for many years ministered very effectively as the Aboriginal Church Advisor to all the Baptist Aboriginal Churches.

Considerable efforts were taken by the missionaries to present a culturally appropriate gospel to the Warlpiris. In 1975 both the Lajamanu and Yuendumu churches began using Warlpiri traditional symbols to draw Bible stories. This became a very effective means of communication. Traditional singing was also encouraged and particularly at Lajamanu a series of basic Christian

⁴ The Victorian Churches of Christ stats given are indicative of a national trend; In 1978 they had a thirty thousand dollar indigenous ministry budget; in 1988 it was close to forty thousand; in 1998; twenty one thousand dollars; in 2005, three thousand dollars. In 2006, with a revenue of some seven hundred thousand dollars, six hundred dollars was allocated for indigenous ministry! These figures are given on the John Mark Ministries web sit.

⁵ National Indigenous Bishop's Report 2008.

⁶ Indigenous Ministry at the Diocesan and Parish levels report Oct 2009

⁷ The following information is gleaned from the ‘Baptists in Australia’ website compiled by David Parker 1999.

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statements (like a creed) have for many years been a most effective means of teaching. After several years of gentle prompting the Lajamanu Christians developed the first Christian corroboree (purlapa) when they developed the Christmas story in this dramatic form. This was given to the Yuendumu Church who then developed the Easter corroboree. Lajamanu also developed their 'One Family' corroboree based on Galatians 3:28. This vivid portrayal of Christian unity has since been presented in many places, particularly in 1988 when it was presented in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne and Adelaide. In 1979 the women of the Warrabri Church developed their own Easter corroboree. In recent years a further development has been the basing of church structure and ministry responsibility on the kinship structure which under-pins traditional Warlpiri life, rather than on Western church structure.

LUTHERAN MINISTRY: QL AND SA YESTERDAY AND TODAY.

Hope Vale, Queensland: Established as the Cape Bedford Mission in 1886, on the Elim beach. During WW11 the total population was evacuated by the military. Most of the people were sent to Woorabinda near Rockhampton resulting in a tragic loss of life (28 people in one month and nearly a quarter of the people dying over the next 8 years). Hope Vale was re-established in September, 1949 with the first families returning in 1950.

Koonibba: Established in 1898, after white settlement had had a profound impacted on traditional Aboriginal life and customs. From its earliest days Koonibba was the base for an extensive outreach program as far as Port Lincoln and Port Augusta. The Mission was also the government ration depot and by the 1950s, it had direct influence over more than 600 Aboriginal Christians scattered over Eyre Peninsula. However, the Mission was also associated with the official policy of separating children of mixed race from their Aboriginal mothers. Following the introduction of the Aborigines Act 1911, the mission operated a children's home for 50 years, and hundreds of children spent their formative years there.

Yalata and Oak Valley: Anangu (traditional Aboriginal people) originally from the spinifex country north of Ooldea on the Trans Continental rail line. They were forcibly removed from their homeland and placed at Yalata in 1952 when the land was cleared prior to the British Atomic Tests at Maralinga. The Anangu had already been subjected to forced relocation and placed at Ooldea when the government acquired their land for the Woomera rocket Range. Some of this land was handed back only as recent as 1984 and in 1995 when Oak Valley was deemed safe from radiation. An indigenous pastors have served Yalata and Oak Valley for over 15 years.

Port Lincoln: a lay worker ministers to the Aboriginal community through prison and hospital visiting, youth and church groups, confirmation classes and chaplaincy in the Lutheran

Adelaide: the Aboriginal Lutheran Fellowship began in 1970 and ministers in conjunction with St Paul's Lutheran Church at Ferryden Park. Elizabeth: An Aboriginal pastor based in the Northern Suburbs of Adelaide to minister to urban Aboriginal people.

Past Lutheran Mission Centres: Killapannina, Koperananna, Cober Pedy, Pt Augusta, Pt Lincoln.

The Aboriginal and Islander Christian Fellowship (CofC). This is the CofC ministry of Queensland.

Country Gospel weekends; These are a significant aspect of the Indigenous congregations aligned to the CofC in Queensland.

Holy Land Trips; Pastor Mark and Alexandra Naden are involved in this ministry of the Anglican Church from Wyong NSW.

NAIDOC events; these events occur nationally and are opportunities for Aboriginal Christians to be the salt in their communities that they are commanded to be.

Read Rev Bill Bird's testimony Story of fire continued pg 226.