

Canto ergo sum:
Indigenous Peoples and Postcolonial Theology

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Abstract: This essay argues that indigenous Christian theologians are justified in expanding their canonical resources to include the ancestral “Testaments” of their own people groups, and scripture itself provides a precedent. The book of Genesis reveals a pattern of respect for the distinctive religion of the ancestors. And contrary to a reading of Paul which has Galatians erase distinctive cultures, the body of Christ is as much Greek as Jew, as much Pitjantjatjara as Anglo-Celtic. Theology needs, however, more than the serial addition of ethnicities, to work with postcolonial understandings of cultural hybridity and self-limiting practices of “kenotic” listening – to attend within the body of Christ to the particularity of all the songlines which have become, or may become, incorporated into our life together.

IF DESCARTES HAD BEEN BORN PITJANTJATJARA, and had been taught the modernist fiction of *cogito ergo sum*, he might well have coined the counter-claim: “*canto ergo sum*”.¹ And that singing would have disclosed a web of other contrasts which demonstrate why traditional indigenous identities are inimical to some of the characteristic features of modernity: the overcoming of tradition, the disembodiment of thought, the divorcing of materiality and spirituality, the invention of secularity, and the individualising of religion.² Yet a nativist retreat into the aboriginal past is simply not possible; the colonialist damage has been done. A key question for theology – now part of our “sorry business” – is how postcolonial Christian identities are to be sung.

To begin with, what are the resources for indigenous theology? To suggest, with Anglican expansiveness, that scripture, reason and tra-

1. “I sing therefore I am”. This heuristic fancy comes from William H. Edwards, *Recovering Spirit: Exploring Aboriginal Spirituality* (Adelaide: Charles Strong Memorial Trust, 2002) 22. In his lecture, Edwards explores an exemplary cultural blending in the life of Tony Tjamiwa, Pitjantjatjara custodian of Uluru and an elder within the Uniting Church.

2. See especially, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990); Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

dition are the primary resources, already threatens to pre-empt the discussion by introducing Western theological categories. I want, rather, to take some cues from an essay by Steve Charleston, an indigenous theologian, in his essay "The Old Testament of Native America".³ This essay, however, can be read in light of another recent work, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament, a study of Genesis*, by Walter Moberly.⁴ What I want to suggest is that the arguments of these two authors can, in some respects, be seen as analogous. And the analogies can help us to re-think the "spiritual" resources⁵ which lie behind the hybrid practices of postcolonial Christian theologies.

1. THE OLD TESTAMENTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Charleston is a Christian from the Choctaw Nation in Oklahoma, and this combination of identities has often been a struggle for him, not least because colonial Christianity has historically de-valued his Native American heritage, condemning it as superstitious and animistic. There has been a systematic attempt to erase the collective memory of his people, an attempt he describes as theologically "macabre".⁶ Moreover, he was told that he should forget his own story and be content with another people's story, Israel's.⁷ Many indigenous Christians have done just that, literally forgetting their own culture and language. We might describe this as a kind of cultural anorexia, in which resources are denied to one's own body so that a person can live up to the standards set by some other, supposedly ideal body.

Also problematic, in a different way, has been the attempt to derive some kind of romantic spirituality from Native Americans, while ignoring the particularities of their history, identity and marginalisation.⁸ The recent fascination with indigenous spirituality, both in America and in Australia, has ironically also had the effect of

3. Steve Charleston, "The Old Testament of Native America" in S. B. Thistlethwaite and M. B. Engel (eds.), *Lift Every Voice: Constructing Christian Theologies from the Underside* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1990) 49-61.

4. Walter Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992). Moberly identifies himself as an evangelical Anglican, which may be of interest to those who are exploring the implications of evangelical identity.

5. Following Bill Edwards, and in continuity with the Hebrew Bible, the conception of "spirituality" in this essay is never divorced from materiality, nor from the corporate practices of particular communities. See Anne Pattel-Gray (ed.), *Aboriginal Spirituality: Past, Present, Future* (Melbourne: HarperCollins, 1996); Robert Di Vito, "Old Testament Anthropology and the Construction of Personal Identity", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 61 (1999) 217-38.

6. Charleston, "Native America", 54. Djiniyini Gondarra speaks of "spiritual genocide" in his essay "Aboriginal Spirituality and the Gospel" in Pattel-Gray, *Aboriginal Spirituality*, 42.

7. Charleston, "Native America", 55.

8. Charleston, "Native America", 52-53.

dis-embodiment of Native Peoples, since it has been imagined that a spiritual ethos could be separated from particular pieces of land and from the particular suffering bodies who were born of the land.⁹

Charleston's proposal is that we begin to speak of a people group's spiritual heritage as its "Old Testament". While he is aware of the negative connotations of the term, he thinks that properly conceived, a Christian identity must be constituted by a dialogue with an "Old" Testament which is owned authentically by indigenous people, rather than borrowed from Israel.¹⁰ In effect, he wants three primary sources of theology: the New Testament of Christian scripture, the Hebrew Bible of Israel, and the Old Testament of his own people. Either indigenous people have their own covenant relationship with the creator, he concludes, or we are left with some bizarre alternatives: was it that God was an absentee landlord for Native America, passing off disinformation to the Choctaw and the Navajo and the Cheyenne as a kind of joke?¹¹

Charleston is more inclined to think that the joke was on his seminary professors, because the more they tried to prove the uniqueness of Israel, the more continuities he saw with his own tradition and people: he heard that God creates all that exists and sustains human history, giving people a land and a law. Worship takes place at sacred places, and God raises up charismatic leaders who speak through dreams and visions. The people maintain a seasonal cycle of worship, and they believe that God can deliver them from suffering. This land-based covenant is preserved in many genres of stories, poetry, music, liturgies, prophecies, proverbs, visions and laws. Each indigenous group, Charleston argues, has a unique covenant on points of detail, but many of these basic themes are held in common with Israel.¹² And we could

9. See Bill Edwards, "Rainbow Spirit Theology", *Australian Religious Studies Review* 11.2 (1998) 137-46; Peter Sutton, "The Politics of Suffering: Indigenous Policy in Australia since the 1970s", *Anthropological Forum* 11.2 (2001), 125-55. Cf. Mark G. Brett, "Earthing the Human in Genesis 1-3" in N. Habel and S. Wurst (eds.), *The Earth Story in Genesis* (The Earth Bible, 2; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 73-86.

10. I cannot help noticing that this assertion of the Choctaw's own covenant, over against an imperialist dominance, has precisely the mimetic logic which motivates Deuteronomy's appropriation of Assyrian suzerainty covenants. See Andrew Mayes, "On Describing the Purpose of Deuteronomy", *JSOT* 58 (1993), 29-31. See Homi Bhabha's postcolonial account of biblical interpretation as "mimicry", in *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994) 102-22.

11. Charleston, "Native America", 54. The Australian indigenous artist Lin Onus provides his own version of this joke in his painting, "And on the Eighth Day", which depicts the arrival of British angels – after creation is complete – bearing a sheep, fencing wire, a gun, a Bible, and toilet duck. See the reproduction in Margo Neale, *Urban Dingo: The Art and Life of Lin Onus 1948-1996* (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 2000) 90.

12. For example, the Jubilee tradition of Leviticus 25 assumes that the Israelite tribes had indefinite claims on, and divinely-given responsibilities for, particular pieces of land. This same kind of assumption about land can also be found in indigenous worldviews.

add to Charleston's list the theme of *exile* as a common experience of indigenous people.¹³

Charleston has no difficulty saying that God became incarnate within the people of Israel, and consequently their story is of primary importance. Jesus was a Jew, but as the risen Christ, he is Choctaw and Navajo and Kiowa, and so on, fulfilling all of their Old Testaments. This is not an abstract claim about the "Christ of all cultures", but a specific claim that the risen Christ participates in each indigenous tradition, fulfilling each Old Testament, and not just Israel's.¹⁴ In Australia, we would need to say that the risen Christ is also Pitjantjatjara, Warlpiri, Kulin, and so on.

Some Protestant theologians would no doubt be uncomfortable with Charleston's proposals and want to re-assert a sharper distinction between scripture and tradition. But it is worth asking whether scripture itself gives some weight to the proposals. We know, for example, that the prophet Amos deflated the election theology of his day by insisting that the Philistines and the Arameans had their own exodus stories, along with Israel's, and it was the one God who lay behind all these stories (Amos 9:7). The editors of Isaiah moved beyond their Zion-centrism in envisaging Yhwh's speech, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance" (Isaiah 19:25). These are just a couple of examples which illustrate a dynamic tension in the theologies of the Hebrew Bible between universalism and particularism. The dynamic has long been recognised, and both Jews and Christians have justifiably responded to the problem by attempting to distinguish between a particular election and an exclusivist election.¹⁵ But specifically in the book of Genesis, we are also faced with the probability that the Old Testament itself had an "Old Testament", which brings us to Walter Moberly's work.

2. ANCESTRAL RELIGION AND MOSAIC YAHWISM

In *The Old Testament of the Old Testament*, Moberly sets out the distinctiveness of ancestral religion over against the ethos of Mosaic Yahwism. Much of this argument is well known in historical scholarship: ancestral religion is open and inclusive, with virtually no evidence of antagonism

13. See Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology* (Blackburn: Harper Collins Religious, 1997) 24, 51, 69.

14. Charleston, "Native America", 59. See John Wilcken, "Christology and Aboriginal Religious Traditions", *Australian Catholic Record* 75 (1998), 184-94, who relates this issue to the idea of the "pre-existent Christ" behind the Jesus of history.

15. See, for example, Jon D. Levenson, "The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism" in M. G. Brett (ed.), *Ethnicity and the Bible* (Leiden: Brill, 1996) 143-69; John Goldingay, "Justice and Salvation for Israel and Canaan" in W. Kim et al. (eds.), *Reading the Hebrew Bible for a New Millennium Vol. 1* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International, 2000) 169-87.

with the indigenous people.¹⁶ For example, Abram builds altars in two places where it seems that sacred trees already exist (Gen 12:6-7; 13:18). There are no distinctive customs like sabbath or food laws, and circumcision is held in common with the surrounding nations. The Canaanite divine name El Elyon is shared, in Genesis 14:18-20, with the priest of Salem. Patriarchal "election" does not have exclusivist emphases, and it lacks the concept of holiness, which arises with the Yahwism of Exodus. As Moberly puts it, "The concept of holiness, from Exodus 3:5 onward, focuses the exclusive, demanding, regulated, mediated and sanctuary-centred relationship between Yhwh and Israel, while the absence of holiness in patriarchal religion equally epitomizes... its 'ecumenical bonhomie'."¹⁷

Without wanting to explain the details of historical developments, Moberly emphasises that the religious ethos in Genesis is quite distinct from Mosaic Yahwism. In all probability, then, the traditions of Genesis preserve a pre-Yahwist religion, and Moberly finds here a model for the relationship between Christianity and Judaism:

Mosaic Yahwism respected and preserved the distinctiveness of patriarchal religion, saw it as the foundation for its own existence, and recognized the continuing validity of God's dealings with the patriarchs. In a similar way, therefore, the Christian should respect and recognize both the content of Mosaic Yahwism as its own antecedent of continuing validity and also the religious system of Judaism that in its own different way develops from it.¹⁸

This does not imply the absence of critical responses to preceding traditions, but it does imply a basic attitude of respect, rather than denigration.

In summary, then, Moberly's work supplies a biblical model for Charleston's proposal that there should be more than one "Old Testament". If Israelite theology allowed for the respectful incorporation of at least some religious traditions older than Yahwism, this might provoke us to reflect further on the implications of inclusive elements in biblical theology. I would suggest that a postcolonial theology will need to work with concepts of cultural hybridity and transformation, rather than reified cultures as such.¹⁹ Attempts to

16. The only exception perhaps is Gen 35:2-4 which Moberly takes to be evidence of Yahwist influence, yet even this does not attribute the idolatry to Canaanite influence. See Moberly, *The Old Testament*, 88-89.

17. Moberly, *The Old Testament*, 104. See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985) 68: "There is not so much as a single sentence which rejects Canaanite religion or morality."

18. Moberly, *The Old Testament*, 164.

19. See further Robert Schreier's distinction between syncretism and cultural hybridity in *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997) 62-83; see Bill Ashcroft, *Postcolonial Transformation* (London: Routledge, 2001) 1-17.

preserve a "culture" do not, *ipso facto*, preserve the identity or dignity of a people group, and ethnic identity can still be preserved in spite of cultural changes and influences.²⁰ In short, people groups are *culturally permeable*, and it is the people rather than the culture who are the moral agents.

3. HYBRIDITY AND AUTHENTICITY

The life of William Apess – a nineteenth century Pequot Indian – illustrates a key complexity in the exploration of this theme of cultural hybridity, since Apess both absorbed and contested the values of the colonising culture. He engaged with a discourse about the Bible, articulated especially by Daniel Webster, which made Jewish and Christian scriptures a source of civil liberty, individual responsibility, human dignity and equality.²¹ This framework of political values rested substantially on Enlightenment philosophy, but Webster grafted his modernist interpretation of the Bible on to early American nationalism. Apess responded to this intertextual alchemy with an *expanded* version of nationalism, generated out of his colour-inclusive Methodism: Apess re-inscribed his native American identity precisely within the sphere of the colonising discourse that had excluded it, in spite of the supposed universalism of Webster's modern egalitarianism. Instead of allowing himself to be configured by Puritan preaching as a "Canaanite" worthy only of extermination,²² Apess adopted Webster's

20. This has long been recognized by many anthropologists. See the recent discussion in Jane Cowan, Marie-Benedicte Dembour and Richard Wilson, "Introduction", *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 1-26, who argue that the language of indigenous rights itself represents a global cultural flow, appropriated in diverse ways in local contexts. Specifically on indigenous Australians, see Klaus-Peter Koepping, "Nativistic Movements in Aboriginal Australia: Creative Adjustment, Protest or Regeneration of Tradition" in T. Swain and D. Rose (eds.), *Aboriginal Australians and Christian Missions: Ethnographic and Historical Studies* (Bedford Park: Australian Association for the Study of Religions, 1988) 397-411. See Deborah Bird Rose's comment that "Virtually everything can be accommodated from tin cans to Toyotas, but everything must be accommodated according to the logic of country." Even the tradition of Noah's ark has been accommodated in several places in Aboriginal Australia – not Noah's ark as such, but "the arks for all the other people and countries and animals". *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996) 41.

21. See especially Laura Donaldson, "Son of the Forest, Child of God: William Apess and the Scene of Postcolonial Nativity" in C. R. King (ed.), *Postcolonial America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000) 201-222; B. O'Connell (ed.), *William Apess, On our own Ground: The Complete Writings of William Apess, A Pequot* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); see Jace Weaver, "From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics: Native Americans and the Post-Colonial", in L. Donaldson and R. S. Sugirtharajah (eds.), *Semeia 75: Postcolonialism and Scriptural Reading* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 153-76.

22. See Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) 3-5; Robert Allen Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians", in R. S. Sugirtharajah (ed.), *Voices from the Margins* (London: SPCK, 1991) 287-95.

synthesis of scriptural and modernist discourse and turned it against his colonisers.

Randall Moon's recent critique of Apess conforms to a pattern which has been deployed in many contestations of aboriginal identity: Apess writes, we are told, "too much like a white person and is too Christianized to be recognized as an 'authentic' representative of native America".²³ This echoes what Gareth Griffiths has, in the Australian context, called the "myth of authenticity",²⁴ a myth often used in the white media to create a hierarchy of aboriginal voices which separates the "authentic, traditional pure-bloods" from urban aboriginal activists who have learned enough Latin to know that *terra nullius* was a British legal fiction. The discourse of nostalgic "authenticity" over-writes the resisting voice insofar as that voice adopts the language of the coloniser; if the subaltern speaks a creole, the subaltern does not speak. While Moon's argument justifiably stresses the numerous examples where missionary cultures have been imposed on indigenous peoples, it does not do justice to the subtleties of cultural transformation and resistance.²⁵

Laura Donaldson's defence of Apess convincingly places him in a frontier zone between complicit and oppositional postcolonialism.²⁶ Accordingly, her argument suggests ethnic identity can still be preserved in spite of cultural changes and influences, against those who have taken the view that every culture has a natural right to separate existence. An unintended by-product of this version of "culturism" is the expectation amongst some groups that inter-ethnic exchanges will inevitably be characterised by defensiveness and aggression. What was originally an anti-imperialist strategy²⁷ has ironically been turned by

23. Randall Moon, "William Apess and Writing White", *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 5 (1993), 52.

24. Gareth Griffiths, "The Myth of Authenticity", in C. Tiffin and A. Lawson (eds.), *DeScribing Empire* (London: Routledge, 1994). For an anthropological discussion of cultural "authenticity" in relation to the native title claims of the Yorta Yorta people, see James Weiner, "Diaspora, Materialism, Tradition: Anthropological Issues in the Recent High Court Appeal of the Yorta Yorta", *Native Title Research Unit, Issues Papers*, Vol. 2 (October 2002), www.aiatsis.gov.au/rsrch/ntru/ntpapers/IPv2n18/pdf.

25. Compare the more nuanced critiques in, e.g., James Treat (ed.), *Native and Christian: Indigenous Voices on Religious Identity in the United States and Canada* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology* (Melbourne: Harper Collins Religious, 1997); Roland Boer, *Last Stop Before Antarctica: The Bible and Postcolonialism in Australia* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001) 150-79.

26. Donaldson, "Son of the Forest". See Homi Bhabha's discussion of mimicry, in *The Location of Culture*, 102-22. Biblical motifs were also used by Maori leaders to inspire violent resistance in nineteenth century New Zealand, a case which is discussed in David Gunn, "Colonialism and the Vagaries of Scripture: Te Kooti in Canaan", in T. Linafelt and T. K. Beal (eds.), *God in the Fray* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) 127-42.

27. Marshall Sahlins has convincingly argued that the very idea of a "culture", in the relevant anthropological sense, was invented as a Romantic, counter-Enlightenment strategy in the late eighteenth century by J. G. Herder. Yet this "Western product" has been adopted as a common principle of resistance by peoples as diverse as Ojibway

right-wing movements into xenophobia: since every culture has a right to separate existence, this argument goes, so people of other cultures should keep their distance.²⁸

While postcolonial theology will need to move beyond a nostalgic understanding of culture, a key problem arising is how indigenous people can negotiate their hybridised identities while minimising the brute force of dominant cultures. This is especially an issue for Christian Aboriginals who are transforming the boundaries of indigenous identity, while at the same time, being engaged in a hermeneutics of recovery.

4. IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY IN AUSTRALIA

Some theologians have begun to discuss the ways in which indigenous law, ritual and sacred topography can be recovered as part of the exercise of Aboriginal Christian faith. The key question is how specifically indigenous identities can be related to the universality of the Christian gospel. Djiniyini Gondarra has suggested that the way to proceed with this question is to compare the particularity of Aboriginal identity with the faith of Israel, respecting the integrity of both people groups within the multi-cultural reality of the body of Christ.²⁹ Gondarra has compared the traditional law of his Aboriginal Dreaming with the laws of Israel, and he sees no incompatibility between either set of laws and his Christian faith. He also draws analogies between sacred sites in his own culture and the significance of sites like Bethel and Sinai for the construction of Jewish identity. Gondarra has not gone quite as far as Charleston in speaking, perhaps, of an Old Testament of Indigenous Australia, but the basic contours of their proposals are essentially the same.

These arguments of Gondarra and Charleston converge to imply that the spirit of Christ does not bring about a "final reconciliation" in which Aboriginal or Jewish identities are erased, but rather, that the specificities of social identity are given dignity within the larger body of Christ. Miroslav Volf puts this well, in *Exclusion and Embrace*:

The body of Christ lives as a complex interplay of differentiated bodies – Jewish and gentile, female and male, slave and free – of those who have partaken of Christ's self-sacrifice. The Pauline move is not from the particularity of the body to the universality of

Indians, Tibetans, Kashmiris, Zulus, Maoris and Aborigines. Sahlins, *How "Natives" Think: About Captain Cook, for example* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995) 11-14, following Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

28. See Etienne Balibar, "Is there a 'Neo-Racism'?" in E. Balibar and E. Wallerstein, (eds.), *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991) 17-28.

29. Djiniyini Gondarra, *Series of Reflections on Aboriginal Religion* (Darwin: Bethel Presbytery, Uniting Church in Australia, 1996).

the spirit, but from separated bodies to the community of interrelated bodies.³⁰

Precisely for this reason, Volf rejects any model of reconciliation based on the neglect of cultural differences.³¹ The body of Christ is a catholic community of interrelated bodies, making space for diverse ethnicities, without projecting a final reconciliation which amounts to the denial of actual bodies.³² Insofar as the church lives in the spirit of Christ, it will seek in every place to overcome the distortions of power and, as Sze-kar Wan has argued, constitutes a peoplehood “not by erasing ethnic and cultural differences but by *combining these differences into a hybrid existence*”.³³ “In Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek” therefore implies a limiting of powerful ethnicities and affirmation for the weak.

In enacting this vision, we need to begin not with a neo-colonial “anonymous Christianity” which ignores the self-descriptions of others, but with an Abrahamic model of inclusive monotheism.³⁴ Abraham recognises an indigenous divine name (Genesis 14:18-20) and sacred trees (Genesis 12:6-7, 13:18), engaging in transformative conversations and negotiation, rather than cultural imposition. We need self-limiting and space-making practices of “*kenotic listening*”, or “*contemplation*”, which in an indigenous idiom might be called *dadirri*.³⁵ Enabled by these practices, repentance becomes not so much self-abnegation but a re-discovery of who we are: liberated strangers within the divine economy, called to love other strangers (Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; see 1 Peter 2:9-11). Accordingly, in the New Testament, we are called to hospitable practices of “*loving the other*”: *philoxenia* (Rom 12:13; Hebrews 13:2).

A postcolonial ecclesia will not draw a distinction between the spiritual and material implications of *kenosis*. If we are to move justly beyond the lies of *terra nullius*, Anglo-Australians need to appropriate a

30. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996) 47-48; see John Barclay, “Neither Jew nor Greek: Multiculturalism and the New Perspective on Paul” in Brett (ed.), *Ethnicity and the Bible*, 209-14.

31. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 43.

32. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 51-52; 109-110.

33. Sze-kar Wan, “Does Diaspora Identity imply some sort of Universality? An Asian-American Reading of Galatians”, in Fernando Segovia (ed.), *Interpreting Beyond Borders* (The Bible and Postcolonialism, 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000) 126-27.

34. Norman Habel, *The Land is Mine* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), chapter 7; M. G. Brett, *Genesis: Procreation and the Politics of Identity* (London: Routledge, 2000) 137-46.

35. See Sarah Coakley, “Kenosis and Subversion: On the Repression of ‘Vulnerability’ in Christian Feminist Writing” in D. Hampson (ed.), *Swallowing a Fishbone?* (London: SPCK, 1996) 82-111. Compare especially Coakley’s discussion of contemplation, pp.107-111, with Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, “Dadirri” in Patricia Derrington, *The Serpent of Good and Evil: A Reconciliation in the Life and Art of Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann* (Flemington: Hyland House, 2000) 113-117.

self-understanding as a diaspora group,³⁶ grafted on to the spiritual inheritance of the land's ancestors who interpreted each part of the "Book of Nature" in Australia by "song, dance and design".³⁷ If the dominant diaspora groups can learn to be respectful of Aboriginal needs, and to respond to their just claims, then we will be in a better position to receive their gifts. The self-limiting and space-making practices of "kenotic" listening may then be turned towards the stories of other diaspora groups, such as Asian Australians – not through a thin appeal to equal rights or through a civic rhetoric of multiculturalism, but by actually attending within the body of Christ to the particularity of all the songlines which have become, or may become, incorporated into our life together. This is not to suggest a self-negation on the part of any group, but rather, a receptive incorporation into the life of God.

36. See Daniel Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002) 189-203 ("Towards a Diasporic Christian Theology"). Even traditional Aboriginal Australians consider themselves "strangers" outside their own specific country, and hence, Bill Edwards questions the homogenizing of "Australian Aboriginal spirituality" in *Recovering Spirit*, 5, 16.

37. Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*, v.