

# A look at aboriginal spirituality religion essay



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There remains a continuing effect of dispossession on Aboriginal spirituality in relation to the stolen generations. Aboriginal spirituality is based on the encompassment of the Dreaming, the inextricable link with the land, totems and sacred sites and involves ceremonies, story-telling, kinship roles and responsibilities and a strong sense of cultural identity. The stolen generations involved children being forcibly removed from their families and communities and put into institutionalised missions and camps run by both the state government and the Christian Church. It was the cause of dispossession that involved colonisation, missionisation, segregation, assimilation and self-determination policies which significantly impacted Aboriginal spirituality; past, present and future. These were deliberate, calculated policies of the state and are evident in the first YouTube video, Rabbit Proof Fence ' Stolen Generations (March 24, 2009), where the white official points to the authorisation paper, ' this is the law', and physically removes the three native Aboriginal girls from their mother showing signs of inhumane brutality. Through these policies, Aboriginal land, spirituality, culture and Dreaming were lost. This, along with the crying scenes in video two, Rabbit Proof Fence Documentary ' forced removal scene (March 1, 2007), shows the emotional impact that it had on the actors as well as on all the victims of the Stolen Generation. This video depicts the traumatic psychological effects the stolen generation era had on the actors themselves, who emotionally broke down into tears having to act in these roles. This illustrates how the loss of family and spiritual ties caused such devastation. This disconnection from the families, communities and thus, from the elders resulted in the inability to pass down necessary knowledge

to the next generation that is needed to keep Aboriginal spirituality holistic, living and dynamic as there is a strong need for oral teaching and learning.

In summation, such dispossession, violent and physical removal of native Aboriginal children from their parents demolished Aboriginal spirituality since the Dreaming, kinship roles and responsibilities, cultural identity, heritage, language and traditions were lost with disconnection from their elder generations. This drove modern Aboriginals to overwhelming social and emotional problems.

The relationship between Aboriginal spirituality and religious traditions require the process of reconciliation. There is a strong need for reconciliation between Aboriginal spirituality and Christians due to the initial contact between the two; full of racism, classism, oppression, inequality, injustice, hate, fear and division. Aboriginal people were forced and threatened violently to forget their Aboriginal culture, traditions and language. Instead they forcibly were made to integrate into nominal Christianity attending Church services, Sunday school and singing hymns. Western Christianity had a negative impact where falsehoods and heresies were taught to Aboriginal people, for example, The Hamitic Curse, condemning all 'dark-skinned humans' to eternal inferiority. These falsehoods had such an immense impact that most Aboriginals voluntarily denied their Aboriginal heritage, identity, culture, traditions and language because they were forced to believe in the falsehoods and were concerned with their personal sins rather than the institutionalised sin conducted against them. The awareness that these negative experiences were immoral was the catalyst for the process of reconciliation. A step towards hope for Aboriginal victims to restore their

spirituality can be seen in the source, taken from the Lutheran Church of Australia. Aboriginal artwork in the form of a circle is positioned in the centre of the cross to illustrate the continuous existence of Aboriginal spirituality in the heart of those who converted to Lutheranism. If reconciliation is achieved, the future encompasses more hope for these victims.

The source is an expression of Aboriginal theology which is the reconciled relationship between Aboriginal spirituality and modern Christianity. The sun rays in the image symbolises the cross' significance and how it permeates throughout Aboriginal spirituality and emphasises the need of reconciliation. The symbol of symmetry epitomises the reconciled coexistence of the two religions and the hope for continuous reconciliation. There are some Aboriginal theologians that are part of the liberal tradition. Rev. Dijimiyini Gordarra and Pastor Cecil Grant from Churches of Christ individually helped reconcile Aboriginal spirituality with the Uniting Church in 1970 by 'contextualising' the gospel for Aboriginal people. In 1985, Rev. Arthur Malcolm, the first Aboriginal Anglican Assistant Bishop in Australia was deeply committed to reconciliation and thus, counselled and nurtured Aboriginal people throughout their painful experiences, hopes and visions. The Catholic Church attempted acts of reconciliation when Pope John Paul II visited Alice Springs in 1986 and stated ' There is the need for just and proper settlement that lies unachieved in Australia'.

Aboriginal story-telling theology is another pathway to allow Aboriginal victims to remember their Aboriginal spirituality as well as embrace their Christianity. In this way, Aboriginal people reconcile their heritage with their Christianity as they are taught Biblical scriptures through Dreaming Stories

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which makes the gospels more meaningful and relevant to the Aboriginal way of life. The reconciliation and unity between Christianity and Aboriginal spirituality can be seen in the source where the cross is made using traditional Aboriginal witchetty grubs.

There have been many other movements towards reconciliation. The Uniting Church and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christian Congress organised an exchange program called About Face, where 150 non-Indigenous people aged from 18 to 30 lived in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As a sign of reconciliation, a friendship was built when Aboriginal Pastor Ricky Manton and his wife Kayleen were invited to St. Augustine's Anglican Church to perform a service. Leaders from many religious traditions gathered in order to fight against Howard Government's attack on the Wik legislation. Other religious traditions, like Judaism and Islam, have assisted in the reconciliation process. A Jewish couple, Tom and Eva Rona, funded the Rona-Tranby project that recorded oral history with the help of Aboriginal Elder Eliza Kennedy. 'The Muslim community in Australia is most supportive of Aboriginal reconciliation on spiritual, moral, humanitarian and prudential pragmatic ground' is a claim of Islamic assistance in the process of reconciliation. Many faiths like Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism have also assisted in the process of reconciliation. This is evident in The Week of Prayer For Reconciliation that began in 1993 where they shared the same goal of reconciliation exhibited through dedication to prayer, thought and reflection on acts of unity.

In conclusion, there have been many efforts to encourage the process of reconciliation between Aboriginal spirituality and religious traditions and

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there needs to be continuous support in this subject. The symmetrical elements in the artwork, sourced from the Lutheran Church of Australia, are powerful examples of how artwork has symbolised the co-existence of both traditions. Steps towards reconciliation in the form of proactive movements also provide hope for the victims who had suffered the horrendous effects of spiritual deprivation.

Ecumenical developments and interfaith dialogue are of immense significance in Australia. Ecumenical developments are movements that promote cooperation, discussion and unity between different Christian denominations, focusing on what brings sects together, rather than what pulls them apart. Such movements are important to Australia as different Christian denominations unite to solve Australian youth, spiritual, environmental, social and justice issues, spreading peace and harmony. Interfaith dialogue is the cooperative communication between different religious traditions and their adherents. These promoted understanding, peace and a strong sense of belonging between many religious traditions.

Non-denominational approach is a method of ecumenical development where it focuses on ignoring differences between different Christian denominations. Such movements can be of great importance to Australia. For example, the Australian college of Theology (ACT) strengthens Australia's education system. ACT began in 1898 when Anglicans within Australia gathered resources to produce tertiary courses and exams at every Anglican college. It was linked to universities across Australia and was credited by the NSW Higher Education Board. It became non-denominational when there was more non-Anglican than Anglican students. It was a strong organisation due

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to the ecumenical movement which increased its efficiency and offered a common program amongst people. Other examples of a non-denominational approach towards ecumenical developments include youth associations such as Girls Brigade and Young Men's Christian Association. Such organisations builds trust between the different denominations involved. This trust would result in a community that is based on trust, kindness and friendship, creating a stronger witness to the community.

Ecumenical developments, in the form of interdenominational approaches, are increasingly evident and significant in Australian culture. Such approaches are those that are collaborative and the goal is to provide opportunities for negotiation between different Christian denominations. This is important to Australia as it creates a sense of unity, belonging, commonality and acceptance on many levels. It begins when Christians from different denominations interact with each other and, hence, leading to communal discussion. An example of this is the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and Reconciliation. This is conducted with a united goal to reach a state of complete reconciliation, relieving many denominations from tension, violence and unnecessary conflict. Many denominations hope for denominational dialogue to act as a facilitator to develop new relationships by exchanging ministers to perform services. Such exchanges are known as 'pulpit exchanges'. Christmas Bowl Appeal, Force TEN and the House of Welcome are other instances of ecumenical movements where many denominations unite to build fundraising programs. These assist Australia by providing it with a positive reputation in charitable work, ' These projects show how the kindness of Australians can make a practical difference in the

lives of people very far from our shores' Some of these projects, like House of Welcome, are vital in Australia as they support refugees that have been newly released in Australia by providing them with accommodation and employment. Through these charitable organisations, different denominations bond together and form strong relationships.

Ecumenism is important in Australia at a family level. It promotes family through interchurch marriages. This is seen when both the Catholic and Uniting Church composed an agreement on interchurch marriages as a gift to the church. Ecumenism is also helpful in reducing duplication of material, which in turn increases efficiency. This is seen in The Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC), where the Catholic and Anglicans prepared doctrine works on common beliefs of the faith. In 2001, the Catholic and Protestant churches united in Australia for the National Church Life Survey where 500, 000 adherents from 20 different denominations actively participated in. Such union encourages tolerance and reduces aggression and violence. It in the larger scheme of things reduces racial and spiritual discrimination and attack. Australia is a multicultural and multifaith country and, hence, would benefit from embracing unity of different denominations within Christianity.

Deeper ecumenical developments are those that embrace differences. With these movements, comes appreciation and recognition of uniqueness in order to enrich the relationship and focus on commonalities, like the common belief in one supreme God. The deepest level of ecumenism involves overcoming differences and primarily aiming for unity between



different denominations. These achievements ultimately bring social justice, peace, harmony and understanding in Australia.

The common need and view of religion around the world has resulted to an increase in the search for cooperation and unity since 1945 in Australia. Interfaith dialogue is even more important than ecumenism since the people uniting are separated by greater differences. Since WWII, interfaith dialogue has allowed Australia as a whole to change its attitude towards other religious traditions other than Christianity. It has allowed Christianity and its adherents to recognise their faults and mistreatment against other religious traditions ' errors at best and works of devils at worst'. Interfaith dialogue assists in opening interaction between different people and maintains a multicultural Australian society. It also builds harmony in Australian context as it aims to achieve common goals between religious groups. Interfaith dialogue also addresses division, concern and any ongoing religious conflict such as the Cronulla Riots. It supports and embraces differences. Interfaith dialogue depicts the desire of Australia's religious traditions to engage with each other and with the world as it is extremely important to do so in the 21st century. There is strong evidence of interfaith dialogue in Australia and this has been depicted in acts of cooperation between religious traditions in Australia. In 2001, Anzac Day, Christian ministers and Buddhist monks both took part in the services at St. Mary's Cathedral. This encouraged unity among Australians as they honoured soldiers in the heart of Sydney's CBD.

The Victorian Jewish-Christian Dialogue Committee, The Muslim-Christian Council which together prayed for peace in Ambon, Indonesia and the Multifaith Religious Services Centre which ran at the Sydney Olympics are

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other examples of interfaith dialogue. Leaders of Christian, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and other communities together assisted with the \$2 million Griffith University Multi-faith Centre showing how unity expresses great strengths and benefits to the Australian community. It brought peace in Sydney 2001, after the terrorist attack, where Muslim, Hindu, Buddhists and many denominations of Christians united at a multifaith prayer vigil. Through these instances, a strong union is formed that reduces cultural and political divisions between different religious traditions that in turn, prevents the possibility of extreme violence or war.

Neve Shalom, Wahat as-Salam, is another prime example of interfaith dialogue. It was established by Muslims and Jews and its main goal was to prove to Australia that peaceful relationships between different religious traditions are possible. Through this development, grew ideas about a united education saturated with peace, equality and understanding. The School for Peace (SFP) was created in 1979 as a Jewish-Arab encounter program, where Jewish and Muslim students can share education peacefully. A unique example of interfaith dialogue between a certain denomination and an entire religious tradition is the dialogue between Catholic and Jewish adherents in 1992. This eventually led to the formation of the Guidelines for Catholic-Jewish Relations to later improve the relationship.

National Council of Churches in Australia (NCCA) is an immense organisation that helps and supports ecumenical developments in every state in Australia through several councils such as the NSW Ecumenical Council. It does this through direct communication with the government that provides NCCA with the necessary authority to support many movements such as The Christmas

Bowl and 'The Justice for all Australians' report that researched in support of the native Aboriginals claiming indigenous sites such as cattle stations.

NCCA strongly supported interfaith dialogue within Australia. One example of interfaith dialogue established by NCCA was the Australian National Dialogue of Christians, Muslims and Jews founded in 2003. This aimed to provide opportunities for various religious traditions to understand one another in harmony and peace.

In conclusion, ecumenical development and interfaith dialogue are very important in Australia since they are two of Australia's most powerful driving forces towards national unity, peace and harmony. It encourages tolerance and acceptance through acknowledging the uniqueness of every religious tradition and Christian denomination. Ecumenism and interfaith dialogue works towards understanding and eventually would reduce aggression, tension and violence. Through organisations like the NCCA, Australia benefitted from embracing unity of religions since it is a multifaith and multicultural country.