

## Article

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### Introduction

Thank you, Christine, for your summary of the story of the first four German missionaries here in South Australia.

When it comes to this piece of Australian Lutheran Church history, Christine is surely one of the most knowledgeable Lutherans today. I've had the privilege of hearing her speak on several occasions since she undertook her honours' thesis in 2007, and I was able to assist her for a short time searching for files at the SA State Archives. Christine's comprehensive research of archival material in South Australia and beyond is highly regarded.

Many other people in the past have also delved into this story and I have brought along some of their books today, which you can find on the table<sup>1</sup> along with books for sale.

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- <sup>1</sup> > Brauer, A. *Under the Southern Cross : History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia. Fascism.* ed. Adelaide: Lutheran Pub. House, 1985. (Original 1956)  
*This book presents one of the most comprehensive accounts of Australian Lutheran mission work with the Aboriginal people. It is available at the Lutheran Archives. To some degree, Brauer takes the credit for opening access to information that was long forgotten.*
- > Schurmann, Ted, and Clamor Wilhelm Schürmann. *I'd Rather Dig Potatoes: Clamor Schurmann and the Aborigines of South Australia 1838-1853.* Lutheran Publishing House, 1987.  
*Ted Schürmann was a great-grandson of missionary and Pastor Clamor Schürmann, and children's books and nature history writer. He published Clamor's diary in a heavily edited version, but almost complete and with many additional details. This book has long been one of the main sources of research into this missionary story and the Kurna language research.*
- > Harris, John. *One blood : 200 years of Aboriginal encounter with Christianity : a story of hope.* Sutherland, N.S.W. : Albatross Books, 1994,c1990  
*The most comprehensive summary of Australian mission history.*
- > Gara, Tom. *Aboriginal Adelaide.* Journal of the Anthropological Society of South Australia – Special Issue. Volume 28, No 1&2, December 1990  
*Tom Gara edited a highly interesting booklet with articles covering Kurna cosmology, the "Native Location" and the Dresden mission school "Piltawodli" and other details of early*
- > Amery, Rob. *Warrabarna Kurna!: Reclaiming an Australian Language.* Lisse; Exton, (PA): Swets & Zeitlinger Publishers, 2000.  
*This is the published version of Rob's PhD from 1998, and probably the most comprehensive account of the Dresden missionary story from a linguistic and Kurna revival perspective, i.e. language reclamation based on historical sources.*
- > Klose, Samuel, and Joyce Graetz. *Missionary to the Kurna: the Klose Letters.* Occasional Publication (Friends of Lutheran Archives) 2. North Adelaide, S. Aust.: Friends of Lutheran Archives, 2002.  
*Letters by missionary teacher Klose to the Dresden Missionary Society.*
- > Scrimgeour, Anne. *Colonizers as Civilizers [manuscript]: Aboriginal Schools and the Mission to "Civilize" in South Australia, 1839-1845.* PhD Thesis. Charles Darwin University, 2007.  
*Anne analyses the context of the first Aboriginal mission school "Piltawodli" at the Native Location from a colonial political perspective.*
- > Lockwood, Christine J. *A Vision Frustrated: Lutheran Missionaries to the Aborigines of South Australia 1838-1853.* A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with

Many publications discuss this story from a *whitefella* perspective of the Aboriginal peoples, with little mention of their voice or their part as agents of their own destiny. This is demonstrated by the lack of indigenous names. Rob Amery's PhD in 1999 on the revival of the Kurna language is probably the most extensive account to give a voice to these peoples.

This attitude is not surprising because it has long been a tradition amongst Aboriginal peoples and European settlers that there was no comparison between the material culture of the first Australians and that of Europe as regards agriculture, roads, houses, churches, or a societal infrastructure of authority and hierarchy. I won't be able to change this attitude today, but I would like to plant the idea.

### **Land of No-one - *Terra Nullius***

You may be familiar with the term "*terra nullius*", the land that belongs to no-one and is free for the taking. This was the prevailing and convenient ideology during colonisation of Australia, although everybody was aware of the existence of some one Million Aboriginal peoples living all over the continent, with around 250-300 different languages.

Support of the four Dresden missionaries by George Fife Angas, chairman of the South Australian Company, was in response to concerns in London to secure the well-being and survival of these people in the wake of colonisation.

More recent studies clearly show what even Clamor Schürmann and Gottlob Teichelmann had already recorded in their dictionaries: all clans inherited tracts of land which were clearly defined and acknowledged by the wider community. Many ancient cave paintings, traditional housings, animal catching structures, fire farming and other recent "discoveries" attest to an extensive use of the lands that these peoples enjoyed.

Many early observers and explorers in Australia reported on the "park-like nature" through which they travelled, and farmers acknowledged the underlying principle and benefits of the systematic burning of bush and vegetation where sprouting only occurs after substantial, but controlled, fires.

Along with regionally distinctive features of culture, spirituality and economy came complex Aboriginal languages in no way related to any other languages around the world. These can be broadly grouped into the *Pama-Nyungan* languages in most of Australia, and the *Non-Pama-Nyungan* in the north, developing over a period of up to 60,000 years. To the amazement of most serious language observers, these languages were seen to be as linguistically complex, if not even more so, as most European languages.

### **Relationship of Trust**

Recording these languages must have required an extraordinary sensitivity by the missionaries in their relationship with the Aboriginal people, and a control of language. In those early days in

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Honours in the School of Social Sciences, Flinders University, Adelaide. Adelaide: unpublished, 2007.

<<http://www.lmw-mission.de/de/files/lockwood-a-vision-frustrated-5136.pdf>>

*A full account of the Dresden missionary story from a Lutheran perspective. Christine is working at a PhD on a similar topic.*

> Gale, Mary-Anne. H.A.E. Meyer at Encounter Bay, in Peter Monteath, ed. *Germans - Travellers, Settlers and Their Descendants in South Australia*. Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2011.

*A first full account of missionary Meyer as the author of the Ramindjeri dictionary. A critical edition of his correspondence is in preparation by Heidi Kneebone in collaboration with the Lutheran Archives und the University of Adelaide.*

Australia, the four Dresden missionaries were able to follow just one other role model, that of missionary Lancelot Threlkeld who worked for the London Missionary Society at Lake Macquarie, near today's Newcastle in NSW. Threlkeld had recorded what is now called the *Awabakal* language between 1825 and 1841, taught to him by his long-time friend and only convert, the Aboriginal man Biraban. Based on this work, Threlkeld published the first grammar of an Australian language in 1834, following a number of smaller publications in earlier years.<sup>2</sup>

During their voyage to South Australia Governor Hindmarsh, travelling with the missionaries, had a copy of Threlkeld's book, and Schürmann and Teichelmann used it as a model for their own language work. It's worth noting that none of these missionaries could have "picked up" the language of the people amongst whom they worked, were it not for their decision to teach it over a longer period of time. Teichelmann complains in his early diary that the Kurna people kept holding back their language from him, possibly by speaking too quickly, so he and Schürmann engaged community members to acquire the language. Given the role and authority of Elders in Aboriginal communities, this could not have happened without their consent. This is even more relevant as the two young men took just over a year to start the Kurna language mission school at the Torrens River (*Pirltawardli*, 1839) and two years to publish their first grammar and dictionary of the Language of the Adelaide Plains (1840).

### **Acknowledgement of Kurna People Country**

I would like to pause for a moment and acknowledge that we are meeting on Kurna Country. This has been a tradition for some years now at the beginning of public events, parliamentary sessions, and conferences in and around Adelaide. The Adelaide City Council uses the following expression:

"We acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional Country of the Kurna people of what we call today the Adelaide Plains. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land. We acknowledge that they are of continuing importance to the Kurna people living today."

In Kurna translation:

*Ngadlu tampinhi, ngadlu Kurna yartangka panpapanpalyarninhi (inparrinhi). Kurna miyurna yaiya mathanya Wama Tarntanyaku. Parnaku yailtya, parnuku tapa purruna, parnuku yarta ngadlu tampinhi. Yalaka Kurna miyurna ithu yailtya, tapa purruna, yarta kuma puru martinhi, puru warri-apinhi, puru tangka martulyainhi.*

I will come back to this statement at the end of my presentation.

### **Language Death**

As mentioned, Schürmann and Teichelmann published their first dictionary of the *Kurna* language (Adelaide Plains) in 1840, followed by Meyer's *Ramindjeri* at Encounter Bay in 1844, and Schürmann's *Barngarla* on Eyre Peninsula in 1846. Given their circumstances of language recording, these dictionaries are considered to be of a comparatively high scientific standard by language experts today.

Modern linguists also identify a tradition of language recording that was picked up by other contemporary observers, apparently influencing to some degree even later language work by the Central Australian Hermannsburg missionaries.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/research/publications/awaba/bibliography/full-bibliography.html#T>

Christine mentioned that the four young Germans considered their *mission* work a “failure” because they could not convert any Aboriginal person to the Christian faith. Although they describe numerous “mission dialogues” with the “unbelieving heathens”, neither of the two parties was willing to compromise. In those early years in Australia, however, this was “normal”: None of the early missionaries had much success in establishing an Aboriginal mission congregation.

Unlike missionaries in India, where Clamor Schürmann’s older brother Johann Adam translated the Bible into Urdu, the missionaries in Australia were soon part of the colonial settler-majority that fast outnumbered any local indigenous community. In Adelaide, however, the estimated 700 Kurna people at the time of invasion and proclamation of the colony in June 1836 were driven away by approximately 50,000 settlers in the mid-1800s. Sociologically, the missionaries never had a chance in the first place!

The four Dresdeners and many other observers were fully aware of the danger of extinction of these Aboriginal cultures and peoples.

Around 1846 the missionaries decided not to give up their mission, and to find some other means of financial survival. Initial support from Dresden Mission, by George Fife Angas, or the colonial administration and local supporters, had ceased. Unfortunately we have little archival evidence of the missionaries’ thoughts and experiences regarding Aboriginal peoples in subsequent decades, once the missionaries had essentially swapped sides and worked with the German settler communities.

Early Australian Lutheran church and Dresden/Leipzig mission histories acknowledge the work of these missionaries, but judge it a failure from which to learn. Dresden (and later, Leipzig) Missions had so long forgotten their early missionaries that only in 2011 a small Aboriginal delegation from South Australia unveiled the last missing images on the wall of fame in the Leipzig Mission exhibition – the first four Australian missionaries from Dresden. And at the most recent FoLA meeting, a very interesting summary of 175 years of the Lutheran church and theology in Australia did not even mention the Dresdeners.

### **Language Reclamation and Research**

The Internet today offers history researchers more opportunities than ever before. Google Books, for instance, or the Trove database by the National Library of Australia, provide access to contemporary publications and newspapers which were hard to find as recently as ten years ago. Searching these repositories for information on the four Dresdeners will list many more references to the “missionaries *as linguists*” than as members of their churches or mission agencies.

Throughout the past 175 years, Australian newspapers have often referred to the dictionaries by these missionaries. Internationally, they were referenced by early language researchers in Europe and North America, who collected languages like other armchair scientists examined artefacts or flora and fauna. At the missionaries’ place of ordination, Altenburg in Thuringia, the language specialist Hans Conon *von der* Gabelentz corresponded with Teichelmann and apparently acquired and used the three dictionaries for his own studies (two of the dictionaries, ironically, ended up in the Soviet Union after World War II).

In a day-to-day context, the Kurna language was last spoken in the 1860s, and the last known native speaker, a lady by the name of Ivaritji, passed away in 1929. The language was considered to be truly extinct in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and for many decades no Kurna person was known to exist in greater Adelaide. Yet, the language and the existence of these dictionaries were never forgotten.

Descendants of the Aboriginal people at the time of contact, who had grown up in multilingual and multi-cultural, but English-speaking, camps at Poonindie near Port Lincoln, Point Pearce on Yorke Peninsula or on the Point Macleay (*Raukkan*) Mission at Lake Alexandrina, began asking questions to trace their ancestors.

As you would know, it was only in 1967 that Aboriginal people were included in the count for electoral representation, thus achieving the status of human beings rather than just flora and fauna. In the 1970s, the famous Aboriginal Tent Embassy at the steps of Parliament House in Canberra created much attention.

People like Lewis O'Brien, for instance, who had grown up in Point Pearce not knowing his family tradition, and being a commercial sailor as a young man, began tracking his family only to discover his Kurna descent. The South Australian State Library first re-printed the Kurna dictionary in 1962 and again in the 1980s, and the Education Department in South Australia used it to publish teaching material about the local Aboriginal people. In the mid-1980s, "Kurna" woman Georgina Williams and the South Australian Museum initiated the creation of the *Tjilbruki* Trail which is publicised still today.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s a number of workshops with Aboriginal people in the greater Adelaide region and language experts, amongst them Rob Amery and Mary-Anne Gale, evaluated the existing documentation and began using it, initially for children's songs. Rob was strongly supported by the newly established Kurna Plains School in Elizabeth and its first Aboriginal principal, Alice Rigney, to teach the Language of the Land, Kurna, to their pupils, which was of great significance.

Against all odds, and despite opposition to reclaiming a language considered to be extinct, language enthusiasts embarked on a journey to collect and assess all existing historical documents, and to rebuild the Kurna language. It was, and still is, a process similar to the recreation of the language of the modern State of Israel, Hebrew or *Ivrit*: Based on the Biblical account, the language had to be adapted in the 1920s for modern-day use, in particular developing words for things not existing 2,000 years ago.

Unlike "Israeli" or many Aboriginal language projects in Australia, which adopted loan words from other languages, the Kurna language program follows the principles laid down by the missionaries and their teachers. They had observed the creation of new words by Aboriginal peoples themselves in those early days, for all phenomena not known to them initially, and documented more than 100 terms, including *nurliti* (key), *karnkarnkati* (spoon) or *parntapurdi* (gun). Following the process behind this creation of new words as identified by the missionaries, the Kurna Language revival movement and *Kurna Warra Pintyanthi* (or "Creating Kurna Language", KWP), the committee between Kurna people and linguists established in 2002 and hosted by the University of Adelaide, apply these principles for many new words (*neologisms*), for instance

- *padnipadniti* for 'car' (literally go-go-thing)
- *karrikarriti* for 'aeroplane' (fly-fly-thing)
- *yitpiwarra* for 'meaning' (seed word)
- *murlamurla* for 'towel' (dry-dry)
- *tuku wingkura* for 'microwave' (small wave).

## Teaching Kurna Language

Today, all three languages are being taught again, and *Kurna* has been studied by many thousands of students from Kindergarten to tertiary level. In Adelaide, all city parks and squares have been renamed or are dual-named (for instance, Victoria Square as *Tarntanyangga*). KWP has dealt with approximately 1,000 requests from schools, companies, government agencies and private people to translate or name places, programs, buildings or even people, into the Kurna Language.

Young Kurna man Jack Buckskin, 26, who just three weeks ago featured in an ABC Sunday evening documentary<sup>3</sup>, is currently the prime language teacher. Nine Kurna people have completed a TAFE Certificate III course in Learning an Endangered Language, and a smaller group continues with Cert IV to achieve a teaching certificate. Other Kurna people have been, or are still involved in teaching *Kindi* or primary classes.

## Conclusion

None of this would have been possible without the persistence of the four German missionaries and their Aboriginal teachers and communities who embraced and trusted them. Clamor Schürmann has been quoted as saying “We have come to work among the Aboriginals to discharge our debt”<sup>4</sup>, a reference to Romans 1,14-15.<sup>5</sup> So far we have not found the source of this quote in the Schürmann papers but it sheds an interesting light on his attitude.

More important, however, is that the missionaries, despite all their own baggage of cultural and religious prejudice towards the “lowest race on earth”, respected the people, and their abilities and complexities in culture and language. It was their serious commitment to stand alongside those people they came to convert. The missionaries’ writings attest to that and so did the many references to their publications by contemporaries and later researchers. From a linguistic and Aboriginal perspective, the outcome of the missionaries’ achievements today would be “beyond their expectations”, as Rob Amery phrased it in 2002. Theologically, you could say, the success of their work has been granted to them “in God’s own time”.

## And tomorrow?

That leaves us with the question – language revival, what for?

There are many people out there, perhaps even amongst you, who ask this question: Why bother? The language is dead, the culture extinct, the people are not pure Kurna descendants anyway. Why not let the dead rest in peace?

I’d like to touch on a few of these questions and leave them with you for our later discussion. Ideally, it should not be me sitting here, but rather one of my Kurna colleagues with whom I have had the privilege to work since 2010. But for them, this is a “NO discussion”. It is – simply their life.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/programs/buckskin/>

<sup>4</sup> cited by Leske, E *Hermannsburg - a Vision and a Mission* (Adelaide, 1977), p4

<sup>5</sup> I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also. (Romans 1:14-15 KJV)

## 1. Language Death and Revival

The question, When has a language truly died?, could be a long discussion. When the last speaker has passed away and there are no records? When there is no longer any memory of it? Is Latin a dead language as it no longer has any native speakers and country of its own? How about Biblical Hebrew that was never actually spoken<sup>6</sup> to the extent of its modern version, *Ivrit*. Ghil'ad Zuckermann, professor of linguistics at the University of Adelaide and of Jewish descent, says modern *Israeli* is actually a completely new language and a hybrid between Hebrew, Yiddish, Arabic and many other languages!

The Kurna people, however, talk about their language as having been sleeping, never being lost in their memory as it was forced to extinction by the colonial administration, and it has been re-awakened. Can language come back to life and be relearned, especially if facing a killer language like English, or other major Aboriginal languages? The case of people who have lost their language memory through a stroke and relearn their language is a striking example – yes, it is possible.

You are right, the new Kurna Language will never be the same as Schürmann and Teichelmann heard it spoken – and all evidence indicates that even this language was already “corrupted”, if you like, by its speakers adapting it to the changing social circumstances and adopting new terms. Other than written documents by white observers, we don't have any sound files surviving from the mid 1800s. But for linguists, apparently, it is enough to adopt and adapt missing terms from a sister language that is still spoken. This is what is happening here, and most likely has happened throughout Aboriginal history, as its speakers were multilingual simply through marriage into neighbouring language communities.

## 2. “Kurna” People and Land

**Pastor Paul Albrecht**, an eminent Australian Lutheran mission expert known to many of you, questioned recently in an unpublished paper the existence of “a” Kurna people in the context of Acknowledgements, as I mentioned earlier.<sup>7</sup> “This would suggest”, he argues,

“that prior to the European settlement of South Australia, the Kurna were a socio/political unit – a nation as some have expressed it – like ‘Australian people’ or ‘Indonesian people’ with their own land over which they as a people exercised sovereignty.”

In this statement, he implicitly raises two important questions:

- What was the societal structure of the First Australians that the British settlers could not identify as parallel to their own hierarchical system?
- Where were the boundaries of these people who went by what name?

In support Albrecht quotes, out of all, Clamor Schürmann and against himself: “Every adult native possesses a district of land, which he calls his country and which he inherited from his father.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Scholars debate the degree to which Hebrew was a spoken vernacular in ancient times following the Babylonian exile, when the predominant international language in the region was Old Aramaic. <  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew\\_language](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hebrew_language)>

<sup>7</sup> Pastor Paul Albrecht (2013). ACKNOWLEDGING THE INDIGENOUS CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND. Manuscript, sent personally via Email 24.4.2013

<sup>8</sup> Full paragraph: “One point is still left which I feel bound to mention and which, if not now any more important, is at least highly interesting. I mean the claim the Aborigines lay to the country formerly in their possession. In respect to that I can state the following: Every adult native possesses a district of land, which he calls his country and which he inherited from his father. When I asked them, whose their country was now, they replied the white

There is much I could say about the use of this excerpt from a report by Schürmann to his benefactor George Fife Angas after just eight months in this country (12 June 1839), its context and its impetus.

However, it seems to be an agreed anthropological principle in Aboriginal studies today, and is not surprising that most of the clans lived on land which was clearly defined amongst them through their Dreaming.

Early cross-Australia explorers were fully aware of this fact and brought along indigenous “ambassadors” to negotiate the right of passage through Country. Aboriginal people like Kurna Elder Lewis O’Brien speak today of their societal structures in analogy to truly early democracies, before the term was even used as such in the Western world, with extensive negotiation and consultation procedures amongst clans. Albrecht may be right in one aspect: It seems to be difficult for us *whitefellas* to accept, and accommodate, a different style of communication amongst indigenous peoples which ultimately causes a lot of social dramas.

Pastor Albrecht is also correct in that the people we now call “Kurna”, for instance, have probably never used that name themselves. So I am not a “German”, I am a “*Bernemer Bub*”, a boy who grew up in the Frankfurt suburb of Bornheim.

Typically, the word *Kurna* – meaning “man” or “people” – is the name for the pre-colonial inhabitants of the Adelaide Plains, given to the famous South Australian anthropologist Norman Tindale in the 1920s — by his informers from around Lake Alexandrina, i.e. the Ngarrindjeri people. In fact, this name is not even a word from the language of the people on the Adelaide Plains; the equivalent being “*Miyurna*”, which is testified in maps from around 1900.

The creation of language maps, therefore, and the assigning of language and community names, or identifying “leaders”, were all attempts by the colonisers to gain control over these peoples.

Yet, the Kurna community today counts some 1,000 members who identify with their apical ancestors, as defined by some of the important present-day Kurna organisations. While most of them are of culturally mixed descent, I am not surprised that they drift back to “Country” from all around Australia, as this is where their spiritual roots are.

### 3. Spirituality and Country

Albrecht also states that

“Custodianship of land was, and in some parts of Australia still is, exercised by Aborigines who know their language and culture, via rituals laid down by the totemic spirit being at the beginning of time. It is problematic in the extreme to speak of the Kurna people, who have lost their language and no longer know the rituals associated with the spirit beings of the area, to be exercising custodianship over these lands.”

From a Central Australian perspective, he certainly makes an important observation for the indigenous peoples all along the heavily colonised coastal regions of Southern, South Eastern and Western Australia. Most of their land has been – well, simply stolen. Thus the visible totems,

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men's, to whom they had given it; when I inquired further, what the white men had given them for it, they either said rice, biscuits and sugar or nothing. I need not add anything, persuaded that it is sufficient for you as a member of the Society for the Protection of the Aborigines, but will only say, that those wise men, who argue, that the natives have no more right to the soil than the Europeans because they had not cultivated it, ought not to forget, that they could not, there being no horses, no cattle, no grains, no vegetables nor anything requisite for agriculture, etc.” (I’D RATHER DIG POTATOES, Clamor Schurmann and the Aborigines of South Australia 1835 - 1853, Edwin A Schurmann, Lutheran Publishing House, 1987, p.50)



the places of worship and reverence, and at the same time the emotional and mental health of many survivors, have vanished.

Amazingly, for me, it seems as if Language and Country are closely connected with Spirituality. In 2011 I had the puzzling experience of observing a Kurna man who initially appeared to be very arrogant, but who was in fact a highly spiritual person with a faith deeply rooted in this very Country. Do I have the right to deny him his faith? As a Christian theologian I have a hard time grappling with this concept of faith – but this *is* where the faith of these people is rooted. And the ability to use the language of their ancestors allows the expression of deep seated sentiments which I can't discern. Throughout Australia, it has been observed that the reclaiming and use of language, and thus culture and spirituality, improve mental and physical health.

Furthermore, linguistic evidence of about a hundred place names across Southern Kurna Country indicates that even the early settlers, when they adopted an indigenous name to identify a certain place, were fully aware that these were the lands of the people we now call "Kurna".

#### 4. Facts of History and God's Providence

Furthermore, Paul Albrecht suggests that the Bible shows how God the Creator gives and takes land, and quotes a number of passages to support this statement. I prefer not to enter into a discussion because that would require a hermeneutical analysis. I am more interested in the final passage of Pastor Albrecht's paper:

History shows that God has apportioned and reapportioned land through wars and other human activity to different people at different times. To suggest that this did not happen in Australia is to deny God's activity in history. Whatever personal opinions one may have about the British settlement of Australia, it did happen and with it the ownership of the land changed. In this, as in other matters we should not be hostage to political correctness.

This quote addresses us as Christians and also the Lutheran Church. It implies that the factual outcome of political injustice cannot be reversed and should be taken by the losers as the end result for the winners. Is this where we want to be as Christians? Do we really think that the political correctness of justice is a nuisance?

If the Creator God has been in this land long before we ever knew, as Albrecht implies in this passage, and if we believe in the message of Jesus Christ, then I would think the final verse of the famous church song by Robin Mann from 1987 needs to become true for us as well:

Jesus, open our senses, help us see you today  
in the person beside us, as we work, as we play.  
While we love you and serve you, may it *never* be true:  
You were in this place – but we never knew.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> YOU WERE IN THIS PLACE (Words & Music: Robin Mann © 1987)

(If you want, we can sing this song:)

### YOU WERE IN THIS PLACE

1. At the dawn of the ages, you pulled land from the sea.

With your word you invented all we know, all we see:

creek and desert and forest, red and grey kangaroo.

You were in this place – but we never knew.

2. Paintings seen on the rock face, footprints left in the sand,

campfire next to the river, songs that rise from the land -

signs that seem so elusive, shadows just out of view.

You were in this place – but we never knew.

3. Do we take after Jacob, blind to what lies at hand,

needing dreams to inform us God is here in this land?

See him suffering and dying, bread and wine tell the news.

You were in this place – but we never knew.

4. Jesus, open our senses, help us see you today

in the person beside us, as we work, as we play.

While we love you and serve you, may it never be true:

You were in this place – but we never knew.

(Words & Music: Robin Mann © 1987)

An Australia Day service is organised each year in the city of Adelaide. For the 200th anniversary of white settlement, repentance was as much in mind as celebration. The story of Jacob's dream at Bethel (the original stairway to heaven!) was central in the service (and Lowitja O'Donohue - Aboriginal leader - preached very powerfully). This song rose out of that story, and especially from Jacob's statement when he wakes up from his dream: "God is in this place, and I didn't know it!" (Robin Mann)