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**Ministry and Mission on the Asian Century**  
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***Chutney and Chow mein – making disciples in a multicultural Australia***

. . . *Go therefore and make disciples of all nations* ((Matthew 28:19). What happens to the character of mission when the world comes into our midst? The context, the faith community and an Anglican mission imperative that embodies diversity.

An invocation to the Blessed and Holy Trinity in Sinhalese/Tamil.

Walk carefully as you come here,  
for God is here before you.  
Walk humbly as you come here,  
for two or three are gathered.  
Walk softly as you come here,  
for the Spirit may speak  
in the silences of this ancient land.

First words of the Opening Service of WCC Assembly in Canberra 1991  
(on entering worship tent through the smoke of burning leaves:  
a traditional Aboriginal cleansing process)

I acknowledge the local Aboriginal Elders, past and present. I pay my respects to those who are the first inhabitants of this vast continent. I pray that our imprint on this fragile earth may bear the marks of reverence as we journey towards reconciliation in Christ, in whom all of creation finds fulfilment in all its dreaming.

Thank you to Archbishop Philip and the organisers of this conference. The Diocese of Melbourne has a proud history of engaging in conversations regarding the changing context of Australian society. I have found the report and recommendations from previous conferences helpful in thinking through the challenges of mission and ministry in Australia today.

I congratulate Archbishop Philip on his election as Primate of the Anglican Church in Australia. Archbishop Philip has journeyed with Aboriginal communities in their fears and hopes. He is attentive to the complexity of nations, languages, creeds, races and tribes that are a part of the continents of Australia and Asia.

Chutney is a mixture of spices with particular fruits and/or vegetables that gives flavour and bite to the main items on the menu. Chow mein is the name given to a variety of noodle dishes that are enhanced by the addition of vegetables and meats. It has an amazing ability to adapt according to the place in which it is made.

The mixture of various strands of food and spices that make up Chow mein and chutney require the primary distinctions to be recognised and dealt with.

I was born and lived most of my life in Sri Lanka. From my childhood the call to worship from temple, mosque, kovil and church formed an essential part of my sound bank . . . bells, drums, conch shells, the plaintive cry from the minaret. My closest friends and neighbours were of different faiths and ideologies. The major festivals of all religions were celebrated.

It is believed that St Thomas visited Sri Lanka in 52AD. Persian traders of the Nestorian branch are said to have continued the Christian faith. The Portuguese invasion in 1505, followed by the Dutch and British brought Christianity associated with military conquest to this island. Ancient texts describe Christians as “those who brought peace with the Bible in one hand and the sword in the other”.

Sadhu Sundar Singh, one of the revered saints of the region, observed that Christianity is a potted plant and that people had begun to worship the pot rather than the plant. The imperial trappings of the culture in which the Gospel was brought to Sri Lanka became identified with the Gospel itself.

Sri Lanka is a mixture of religious traditions, often borrowing from each other, yet maintaining the peculiar and distinctive flavour of each cultural, racial and religious entity.

Melbourne is home to the largest group of migrants from Sri Lanka. The tensions present in this island paradise are evident in Australia. The Federal Government’s ‘stop the boats’ mantra conducted under the catchcry of sovereign border protection has highlighted the tensions evident in Sri Lanka and in the diaspora in Australia.

In my early teens I came to recognise the deep hatred between the two major races in Sri Lanka, a chasm that went back to the earliest periods of historical record.

Deeply embedded in my memory is the killing of a man in front of my eyes.

A racial riot had broken out. One group grabbed a young man and forcibly carried him to a barrel of boiling tar – flames licking its base. The tar was being prepared to seal the road. The man was put into this boiling cauldron. Those who had carried him uttered shrieks of hatred. I can still hear their beastly cries. The look of terror in the man’s eyes as the tar burnt him alive haunts me to this day.

Those watching on were paralysed with fear. My mother’s words as we moved on ring in my ears, “How can the womb of life bring forth children who have such hatred for each other?”

Many migrants from Asia, Africa, the Middle East and other parts of the world have memories that are scarred by such atrocities. Tread softly when you engage with them. Their experiences may lead them to believe that being ‘singled’ out is a step that could lead to annihilation.

Difference and distinctiveness are an essential part of our DNA. Inasmuch as the natural world is a riot of variety, so is the human race.

Timeless sagas unwind their narrative skeins in each of us: a *genetic* story, older than memory; an *archetypal* story that forms, shapes, and directs in service to adaptation and meaning; a *socially constructed* story, such as gender, or race, or class, by which we are so often bewitched as to grant them ontological status despite their fictive origins. And then there are the compelling complexes which are splinter stories, splinter identities, splinter scripts, splinter mythologems.

We all have complexes because we all have a history and history charges our psychic life with energized clusters of valence. Some complexes exercise a benign, protective role in our lives. Without some positive experience of bonding and trust, we would be prevented from forming commitments and relationships. Yet others bind us to trauma, immaturity, and outdated prejudicial perspectives. The recrudescence of these fragmentary histories invariably usurps our purchase on the present and plunges us into our replicative pasts. Some complexes even dominate an entire life.

James Hollis, *Hauntings: Dispelling the Ghosts Who Run Our Lives*,  
Chiron Publications, North Carolina, 2013, p3

This ‘universal consciousness’ plays itself out not only in our individual lives but are held within the body corporate of tribe, race, nationality – making itself potent by adding a divine order to its existence and expression.

Worshipping, serving and giving glory to the creature rather than the creator (Romans 1:25) lies at the heart of human sinfulness.

Several conflicts in our world today go back to these archetypes that haunt our memories. Cain and Abel – the first act of worship recorded in the Bible is accompanied by murder. The God we seek to appease causes within us jealousy and rejection that leads to the ceasing of communication, ending in murder (Genesis 4:8-10). Jacob and Esau struggle in the womb for supremacy. Superiority and inferiority create tensions that fashion action and reaction (Genesis 25-28). The ongoing conflict and the tragic loss of innocent life in Palestine and Israel a constant reminder of this deeply ingrained division.

Such conflict parades itself before us in a myriad of colours, even cloaking itself as a virtuous desire to protect the weak and vulnerable.

In my time in New Zealand I became acutely aware of the insistence of the Maori that, prior to the “Pakeha” (white New Zealanders) engaging in an open way with migrants from Asia and other parts of the world, there was a need to come to terms with the ghosts of a bitter history that required examination and exorcism. The primary relationship between “the people of the land” and those who had settled in it by deadly force needed attention.

The call for mutual dignity and repentance was most clearly evident in the Maori greeting - the Hongi – the pressing of noses, reminding each and all of the common bond we share as persons created in God’s image. The day that we forget that the breath that I breathe and the breath that you breathe comes from the same source we lose our humanity.

This truth had been distorted by the invasion, the land wars and the ongoing division between Maori and Pakeha.

Maori elders in their wisdom reminded the political and religious leadership that without the constant attention to the primary relationship (the bicultural) all other relationships will continue to be made on the basis of patronage rather than partnership.

Multicultural Australia and our engagement as a Church with the Asian countries run the risk of the inherent DNA of British Imperialism.

The Anglican Church still has a long way to go in respect of our engagement with Indigenous people. Dr Rowan Strong’s observations re the mission endeavour are disturbingly accurate not only for the past but for the future:

. . . the English were unable to emulate the French Jesuits because they shared the common Enlightenment paradigm of native peoples as savages who needed to be remade into real human beings – a view that resulted in an almost complete dismissal of the value of indigenous culture. In the case of the English, however, this was exacerbated by their insular conviction of the superiority of their own culture and religion not only to that of the Native Americans but also to that of other European nations, which made them especially intolerant of any retention of local ways. To be civilized was to be more human than a savage; to be Christian was to be superior to a civilized pagan; but to be English was to be the epitome of a civilized Christian human, and therefore the acme of God’s will. Under such an English paradigm conversion meant essentially an annihilation of indigenous identity down to the smallest aspects of daily life, and a replacement of that identity with an English one – though never of course to such an extent as to be accepted as genuinely English by the English themselves.

Rowan Strong, *Anglicanism and the British Empire c1700-1850*,  
Oxford University Press, 2007, pp58-59

People who come to this continent from outside our shores be it Asia, Africa or other countries are able to offer us a mirror in respect of our primary relationship that we may well find confronting.

Bishop Joseph Abura is a Bishop in Uganda. Before his arrival to Western Australia a few years back he had prayed for three things: To cuddle a koala bear, to watch kangaroos play and to meet an Aboriginal person.

He reported that he cuddled a koala which made no response to his endeavours - a total indifference; an apathy he observed present in many Anglicans. He saw kangaroos at play, though it quickly deteriorated into a major boxing and kicking match with those on the margins getting involved. He noted this was similar to the Anglican ability to get caught up in conflict without a clear understanding of the issues involved - a sign of our propensity as humans to act as a mob.

Finally, after observing some Aboriginal people in Perth, some sadly sleeping on park benches; he went to Carnarvon in the far North West. In the fish market he came across an Aboriginal man. He walked up to this man and greeted him "My brother, it is good to see you". The man looked shocked, tears began to fall from his face as Joseph repeated the greeting "My brother, it is good to see you". The response was sad and confronting of our reality, "It is a long time since anybody called me 'brother' and no-one has ever said to me it is 'good' to see you".

Until and unless we can see the intrinsic good in a human being as made in God's good image (Genesis 1:26-28) – and unless we repent of our attitudes that have diminished this image in the 'other' all our efforts of evangelism, mission and ministry will be tainted by an unholy alliance with our Imperial past.

There is every need to be faithful, attentive and engaging with our Lord's imperative and command: 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matthew 28:19-20).

But as Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama reminds us we often forget the word "therefore" after the command to "go". Therefore means 'go in the same way that our Lord and Saviour has come to us'. Go in the primary unity of the Trinity in whose image all humanity is created. Go with the grace of the God who sees good in that which he has formed out of the dust in his own divine image. Go, remembering that there is a Christ-shaped image in all God's creation waiting to be identified and with us to be set free (Colossians 1:15-20).

Our mission imperative must be motivated by the downward, servant movement of Christ the anointed one so powerfully described by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2:5-11.

In our quest to engage with multicultural Australia we must take the difficult and costly steps towards reconciliation with the ancient peoples of this land. We will only be able to treat others with dignity when we exorcise the ghost of our denials from our midst through true repentance, amendment of life in the grace and comfort of the Holy Spirit. The 'wall of hostility' between Gentile and Jew (Ephesians 2:11-18) is replicated in many places, all requiring the power of Christ's saving death to enable "true reconciliation".

For those of us who have come to these shores more recently, it is easy to bypass this engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. We are tempted, in our desire to engage with the evolving Australian culture, to evade the important task of breathing in the ancient history of the peoples of this land. The journey towards multicultural Australia will lack authenticity if we ignore the inherent culture that permeates this land.

The Asian century has been a reality for some time. The economic and technological advancement of China, India, South Korea, and Japan has caused us to re-evaluate our trading partnerships.

Migrants from Vietnam, our engagement with Indonesia and our desire to be seen as a 'super power' in the region have contributed to an interesting mix of understandings.

Who is an Australian?

Are we seen as an extension of the 'American Empire', and how do our political and religious systems look to those neighbours who find themselves living in Australia?

In 1993 the Diocese of Melbourne held a consultation on the multicultural challenge. It was an honour for me to be a part of the national Anglican Church's responses to this challenge. Jim Houston in the book entitled *Seeds Blowing in the Wind* noted:

Melbourne is the most cosmopolitan of the Australian capital cities: more than one third of its three million people are of recent non-English-speaking immigrant origins.

By contrast only 8% of the people in Anglican churches in Melbourne come from non-English-speaking backgrounds.

Thus in an intensely multicultural city, Anglicans are remarkable for their intensely monochrome character, culturally speaking.

Should this be accepted as normative forever? Does it constrain the relevance of the Anglican Church to today's society? Or does it imply an uncomfortable choice between an openness to the future or an attachment to a fast fading past?

Today the Anglican Communion spans the globe and reflects a great many of the world's cultures. The English origins of the Church are being increasingly balanced by a strong local identification.

In Melbourne this would entail a new willingness to embrace people of other cultures, languages and origins. The ministry and mission of the Anglican Church can be re-focused, to touch the whole life of our multicultural society.

But profound changes in outlook, action and priorities will be required, on the part of church leaders, theologians, clergy and laypeople. How shall we move towards a new vision of Anglican ministry and mission?

Jim Houston, *Seeds Blowing in the Wind*, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne, Melbourne 1994

A further consultation in 2005 agreed to a number of recommendations that has seen the Diocese of Melbourne respond in creative ways to the changing face of Australian society.

The General Synod Standing Committee appointed a Multicultural Commission to engage with this growing aspect of our mission and ministry. Archbishop Rayner, writing a foreword to the brochure produced by the General Synod Commission, challenged the Anglican Church in Australia about its monocultural patronage:

We began our life in this country as the church of English migrants. The danger for us is that we simply remain the ethnic church of the English. If that occurs the influence of our church will steadily diminish as the Anglo-Saxon component of our population diminishes. We shall then find that we are not ministering to the Australia that is, but to an Australia that was – many years ago.

The Most Reverend Keith Rayner, Primate of Australia  
in “Disciples of All Nations: The Anglican Church of Australia learning  
to be an international church within a multicultural Australia”,  
published by The General Synod Multicultural Committee

The Commission was disbanded as “gurus” on mission, all from the United Kingdom, moved the priority of mission into programmes like ‘Fresh Expressions’ and the like. The call to cross boundaries and to invite and include difference as a part of our common fellowship does not come without a cost:

We are called to the border to follow the One who crosses all boundary lines and tears down all barriers. Jesus was a Jew who dared befriend; Samaritans, a carpenter who did not hesitate to challenge scholars, a male who was sensitive to women's experience, an activist who prayed continually, a Nazarene who confronted the power structure in Jerusalem. Jesus showed special concern for the poor and the marginalised, yet knew how to speak to the powerful. Just as surely as the Cross awaited Jesus, so it awaits those who would break out of cultural captivity and allow themselves to be transformed by the Gospel; those who would build community across economic, racial, cultural and national lines; and those who would develop an historical consciousness to shatter the power of oppressive 'old ways and old walls'.

Patricia Lloyd-Sidle  
*International Review of Mission*, Vol. LXXVIII April 1989  
Jim Houston, *Seeds Blowing in the Wind*, Anglican Diocese of Melbourne,  
Melbourne 1994, p61

In John's Gospel, chapter 4, we find the intriguing meeting between Jesus and the Samaritan woman. The fact that he asks for a drink is revolutionary enough. The disciples are even more concerned that he may have partaken of food from her home. She gives the apostolic message to her people, “Come and see a man who saw me as I truly am, and yet never discarded me. Could he be the Messiah?” The Samaritan village arrives to meet Jesus. They test his authenticity with a simple yet powerful request – stay with us, break the kosher laws, pull down the barriers of the half-caste prejudice inherent in your DNA and meet us on our patch. Treat us as equals and our ears will be open to your message.

The process of engagement across the cultural, ethnic, religious divide requires deep engagement – a staying in their midst, of participating not patronising.

The truth of Pentecost is that each of the various nationalities, tribes and races heard of God's "mighty" acts in their own language (Acts 2:5-6, 11). There is a sensitive waiting, an attentiveness that is well portrayed in an answer given by Rowan Williams:

In an address to the House of Bishops in 2003, Elizabeth Templeton asked the bishops to consider how they would respond to the following scenario. On the street one day, a man walks up and says, 'My bus leaves in two minutes. Tell me about the resurrection in the time remaining.' Templeton supplied her own humorous solution: 'If you really want to hear about the resurrection, be prepared to miss your bus.' But Rowan scratched his beard for a moment, then suggested a different answer: 'I think I'd have asked the man where he was going, then said that I'd accompany him on the journey.'<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin Myers, *Christ the Stranger: The Theology of Rowan Williams*, T&T Clark, London, 2012, p2

Accompanying those who are 'different', inquiring and curious about the "Resurrection community" requires a listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Churches.

Controversial author Salman Rushdie speaks of civilization as a process of migration. Since the 15/16th century's these migrations have become more widespread – colonization, wars, refugee settlements, economic and trade globalization, advances in travel, communication and technology have aided this process.

Exploring the experience of migrants in his novel *Shame* Rushdie draws out some specific characteristics that may be attributed to migrants of any time and space.

There is emptiness in one's baggage – "we have floated from history, from memory and from time". Memories arise from the place once called home. There is an absurdity that mocks one's search for meaning given the emptiness of shared memory. The Psalmist's lament "how can I sing the Lord's song in a strange land" echoes through the pages of history. It is the song of every migrant.

There is a temptation to live with the illusion of the past. The migrant tends to build fantasies around what has been left behind and superimposes these dreams on the land they settle in – even the fleshpots of Egypt have greater attraction when the alternative is to wander endlessly in a wasteland devoid of tangible memory.

The way one seeks common memory is to create ghettos – places where the clan that have had a common history can gather – a community whose fire is stoked by nostalgia and who refuse to engage "with the now of their lives" – the context of the present world. What must be retained? What must be dumped?

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<sup>1</sup> The anecdote is related in Rupert Shortt, *Rowan's Rule: The Biography of the Archbishop* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2008), 320-21



What we often forget is that the Church is always called to be “in” but not “of” the world.

In our engagement as the body of Christ with people from other cultural and ethnic backgrounds it is easy to see the ‘others’ as the ‘great diaspora’, as the exilic community. We do well to remember that we, the Church, are always called to be, in heart and mind, God’s diaspora, the community in exile. For Christians there are no home game advantages. For in following Christ (John 1:1-14) we are always engaged in witnessing in an “away game” environment.

Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign.

And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country.

From a letter to Diognetus, Nn 5-6; Funk, 397-401

The Apostle Peter speaks of this truth as he writes to the Diaspora. He describes them as “outsiders” who are chosen and destined by God. A Jewish citizen of Rome in the first century was called in Greek *paroikos*. It referred to a sojourner. A person who lived in a foreign land but whose thoughts constantly were of Jerusalem. Such a state of exile, the exile of the inner mind, was called *paroikia* – from which we get the word – *parish*.

Rushdie reminds us that the greatest gift that a migrant population brings to the world that they must now call home is hope accompanied by courage. Their role as storytellers "saves a nation from amnesia". “These are the ones who for whatever reason have left the land of their beginnings to move into a different context – that journey if undertaken with hope makes for an attitude which believes not so much in the “good old days” but that “the best is always yet to be” (Hebrews 11:1, 12:1-2).

Multicultural ministry in the Asian century will bring us greatest benefit if we can harness the hope and courage that is offered by the migrant into the mission and ministry of the Church at every level of our life – in worship, in testimony, in seeing the Scriptures through their eyes, and in the vibrant witness they offer.

The Asian migrant who is a Christian has, more often than not, learned what it is to live as a ‘persecuted minority’. A living faith burns with hope. Never quench that zeal.

This openness to receiving the gift of hope from the “different other” will require a change of attitude:

As a multiracial society, Australians have been remarkably hospitable towards migrants. Long-standing Australian attitudes towards migration are easily identified:

Migrants are welcome, as long as they are prepared to embrace the Australian way of life and its values;

Migrants are welcome as long as they make the learning of the English language a top priority;

Migrants are welcome as long as they are not robbing Australians of jobs and other opportunities (including educational opportunities);

Migrants are welcome as long as they leave their own racial and cultural tensions behind, and do not import prejudices and conflict into the Australian culture;

Migrants are welcome as long as they are largely assimilated (with some tolerance for the preservation of ‘quaint’ ethnic customs and behaviour);

Migrants are welcome as long as the culture they import (especially their food) enriches our culture and is accessible to us;

Migrants are welcome as long as they do not lower the Australian standard of living (by imposing too much strain on our urban infrastructure, or on our welfare system).

In effect, the traditional Australian attitude towards migrants is that they should become as invisible as possible, as quickly as possible. Assimilation has, in effect, meant homogenisation, and the term ‘New Australians’ which came into vogue in the Fifties and Sixties was a term which Australian enjoyed using because it implied that the goal of immigration was assimilation and that migrants would place their new-found Australian identity ahead of the ethnic context from which they had come.

Hugh Mackay, *Reinventing Australia: The Mind and Mood of Australia in the 90s*,  
Angus & Robertson, 1993, pp 155-156, 157

Sadly the Anglican Church and Christians in general have been guilty of this attitude. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks in his book *The Home We Build Together* offers three models that constitute different attitudes to hospitality:

“The Lord of the Manor”: The migrant is a guest whose existence depends on the good will and welfare of the master. There is an element of servitude required to benefit from the largesse of the master’s table and his bounty. The relationship and contribution is one of slave to master.

The second model is that of a hotel: The hospitality is based upon a contractual agreement, a payment for service. No emotional or relational engagement is required. The migrant is a paying guest whose worth is geared to economic buying and selling power.

The third is a model where each and all have a part to play in the building of the home. A reciprocal mutuality emerges, dignity is the result. Value and worth are held as intrinsic to the person no matter their background. Their contribution to the 'common good' is received with appreciation.

I am aware of how in local parishes and dioceses "The Lord of the Manor" and the "hotel" models of relationship are fostered without even the local leadership becoming aware of the lack of true 'communion' in these engagements.

The dignity of difference is a hallmark of the home that is being built. Which model of hospitality do we offer in our ministry with other cultures?

There is a tendency to stereotype multicultural ministry by boxing people into ethnic groups.

I once visited a parish with a strong and vibrant, multicultural ministry. It had a particular focus on Chinese/Persian ministries. The usher insisted that I was in the wrong place. The Persian congregation was meeting in the hall next door. He would not or could not see me as worthy to participate in the Holy Communion service of the so-called 'regular worshippers'.

A few weeks ago I attended the early morning service of a well established Cathedral in one of our cities. At the end of the service a well meaning Bible study and inter-cultural leader suggested that I would be more comfortable at the sub-continent fellowship that met in the afternoon.

I know of well-meaning Christians who, if they see a person who is of a different colour, insist that the person must go to the specific Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Sudanese congregations that the diocese has established. The dignity of difference must always give the choice to the person. If the regular "ethnic Australian" congregation is where they wish to be – offer them a welcome.

There is value in enabling migrants to find their feet by providing spaces for the various communities to gather to celebrate the faith in their own language and in their respective cultural traditions. There is always the risk of such communities not engaging with the rest of the wider community. We must be careful not to see these cultural/linguistic-specific entities as isolated entities. In the Diocese of Perth we encourage interaction between neighbouring parishes. Ordained clergy and lay leaders are invited to take up ministerial appointments in parishes outside of their particular "ethnic" grouping.

The Uniting Church in its report on multicultural ministry made some helpful observations regarding the missional potential of all congregations that were prepared to recognise their inherent multiculturalism:

Multicultural congregations are open to receive the gifts of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, are inclusive and welcoming and have hospitality as a hallmark of their life. They intentionally build bridges with new communities and groups, respond to the needs of the culturally diverse communities in which they are placed and recognise the needs of people from diverse backgrounds. Multicultural congregations find ways to utilise the gifts of all God's people and enable the participation of all members. They are watchful of power dynamics and learn the importance of cross-cultural communication. Racism and paternalism are overcome as relationships based on mutual respect and trust are fostered. Multicultural congregations honour a variety of cultural perspectives. They make space for people to maintain language, cultural patterns and traditions that are life-giving and use property as a resource for the ministry and mission of the whole people of God. Most of all there is a commitment to learning and growing together as God's diverse people.

Helen Richmond and Myong Duk Yang (Eds), *Crossing Borders: Shaping Faith, Ministry and Identity in Multicultural Australia*, UCA Assembly & NSW Board of Mission, Sydney, 2006, p13

We must not allow multicultural hospitality to become a place where culture is deified, where no criticism is allowed. The radical nature and challenge of the Gospel (Galatians 3:27-28) can never be compromised.

Culture or nationality that permits an inferior attitude to women and children, or that prides itself in race, colour or caste, must be challenged.

Engagement with people of other faiths must not deteriorate into a dialogue without conviction (1 Peter 3:15-16).

*From the past we see the future* was the theme of the 150th anniversary of the Diocese of Perth. The Archbishop of York, The Most Reverend John Sentamu, as Missioner engaged with the community of Western Australia in a variety of ways. He challenged business leaders on ethical practices, young adults in schools on the importance of vocation, children and parents on living a vibrant faith. At the main public gathering to celebrate the event, in his own inimitable style, he invited Christians to dare to live God's promises in a multi faith, multi religious world.

Integral to the celebrations was a conversation with the leaders of the main faith traditions in the State. Rabbis, Imams, Buddhist monks, Baha'i, and Christians from Coptic Orthodox to "new life" Pentecostals gathered to discuss "Religious faith – Burden or Blessing".

The introductions completed, Archbishop John waded in, "I am deeply honoured that you have invited me to be present today. My fervent hope is that every one of you here may know Jesus Christ as your Saviour and that you will see the world and all creation through the lens of his life and teaching."

A shocked silence was followed by a few embarrassed coughs, then some concerned comments. “Surely a single lens to define truth confines truth”; “Does not such arrogance restrict dialogue?” “Uncompromising conviction leads to intolerance and violence!”

Allowing for a time for whispered exasperation, interspersed with frustrated sighs, Archbishop John responded, “Every one of you is a leader of a particular religious tradition. You are convinced of that expression and experience of truth. I expect you to want me to share your conviction. If we can accept this reality about each other then we can converse from places that mark our deepest convictions, rather than the shallow engagements that constitute inter-faith dialogue”.

The conversation became intensely worthwhile. Each religious tradition shared the burdens and blessings that a particular faith commitment brought to society. Each described ways in which they contributed to the building up of Australia.

Multicultural ministry must enable such truth telling conversations.

### **Conclusion – Chow mein and chutney**

The society around us is a remarkable blending. Australia and Melbourne boast of being one of the greatest successes in multicultural engagement.

Wherever we come from to this Great South Land of the Holy Spirit the challenges facing us as Church are “legion”. We face a multifaceted, well equipped army in which human beings are stripped of their uniqueness – where they are naked and vulnerable – craving the clothes that the Emperor would place upon them.

Chutney and Chow mein are certainly adaptable to the context in which they are to be consumed. The danger is that they can be so adapted to the context that they become bland, losing their sharpness and their bite.

David Tacey’s concerns are well founded:

The achievement of a multicultural society can hardly be underestimated, since it has taught us how to get along with one another and how to support and tolerate difference. But at what price have we achieved this secular tolerance? Robert Dessaix argues that we are: "living through the meltdown of pluralism and multiculturalism as we knew them - the ideology, as I would think of it, of the ultimate arbitrariness and meaninglessness of everything".

As an ideology championing the maintenance and celebration of difference, multiculturalism represents an excuse not to bother about the complex and difficult task of identifying the moral and spiritual bonds between us. Since our secular elites are made to feel uncomfortable by religious and spiritual questions, multiculturalism allows them to sidestep the pursuit of meaning altogether, while at the same time, the unconscious religious belief of our time - economic fundamentalism - reigns politically and socially supreme, unchallenged.

Secular multiculturalism is interested in spirituality only in the sense that the spirituality of minority ethnic groupings is patronizingly respected. Secular multiculturalism offers another version of rationalistic thinking: "we", the architects of multiculturalism, know there is no basis for spirituality, but if "they", the various ethnic groupings, want to keep their spirituality as a sentimental reminder of their own traditional ancestry and identity, then let them have it.

We must be alert to the secular value system that is placed upon multiculturalism. Tacey concludes that the way in which we in Australia can be delivered from the hollow secular enterprise of multiculturalism is to return to the magic of the land we call home. Its starkness offers a call to us to get rid of our reasonable rhetoric of tolerance and attend to our differences within this land we call home:

It is a harsh magic that we will discover here, poetically affirmed in Hope's image of a "savage and scarlet" spirit of place. The familiar, conventional, heroic ego is displaced by this untransformable landscape. We cannot reinforce the ego's story of limitless progress and enlightenment, but instead must listen to the testimony of rock, the wisdom of the desert, the eternal mind of a timeless country.

When there is a deep wound in the national psyche, only the spirit is large enough and powerful enough to bring about the necessary reconciliation.

Australia can move forward only if there is reconciliation in the depths, and this must be expressed in religious and artistic rituals. We need to listen to the land, appreciate Aboriginal relations with the land, and move towards a new, postmodern and postcolonial enchantment. Our relation to Aboriginality must not be parasitic, but should be creative and progressive, as our country moves into a new religious awareness that is a co-creation of Aboriginal and migrant Australians. But the very thing that could bring healing and renewal in Australia - a binding, inclusive religious awareness - is currently forbidden under the rubric of cultural sensitivity and non-exploitation.

David Tacey, *ReEnchantment: The New Australian Spirituality*,  
Harper Collins Publishers, Sydney 2000, pp244-50

Australia's multicultural achievement and the Church's "rainbow coloured" community must never settle for a bland tolerance. We must resist the invitation to shallow encounters in which we play games that hide our differences and our deeper convictions.

What is true for society is even more truth in the Church. Let us "speak the truth in love" knowing that nothing in all creation can separate us from that love of God in Christ Jesus who has reconciled all things in heaven and on earth by his Cross:

From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

*2 Corinthians 5:16-21*

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