

ANZATS 2021 *Theological Ethics*

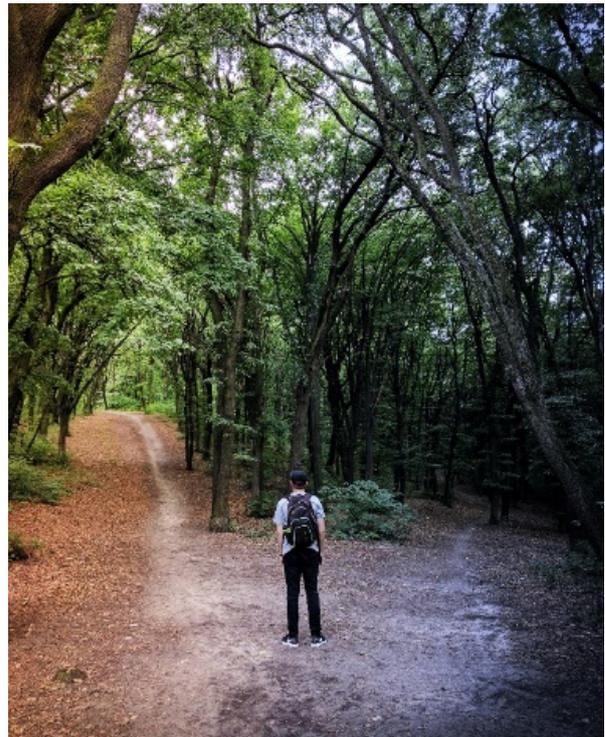
Elective Session Proposals – Reading the Bible in Australia

	Presenter 1	Presenter 2	Presenter 3
Session 1	Naomi Wolfe	Karyn Woodford	Sam Freney
Session 2	Melinda Cousins and Elliot Keane	Barbara Deutschmann	Michelle Eastwood
Session 3	Meredith Lake (TBC)		

1. **Presenter** Naomi Wolfe
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Reading the Bible in Australia: A place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theologians?

Meredith Lake (2020; pp.8-9) writes “From the outset, the Bible was associated with the colonising projects of transporting convicts, appropriating Aboriginal land, and forming settler societies. To understand its long-term significance in Australian life, we need to consider not only the transmission of its European cultural products, but the messy realities of culture contact and the dynamics of colonial power.” With these words in mind, what space does the wider church and its supporting institutions e.g., universities and theological colleges, make for the reception, inclusion and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander theologians and their communities? How might reading the Bible from the place of being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander be different from those who originate from settler societies or recent patterns of immigration? How might we come together to address issues at the heart of continuing colonization, and explore matters such as Indigenous readings of text and tradition? It begins with listening and reflecting. This paper aims to bring these matters to a discussion as an offering from community to community, as firesticks to light a wider fire of recognition, reception and inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their theologians.



2. **Presenter** Karyn Woodford
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Depictions of ‘White Jesus’ in Eighteenth-century Britain and the Treatment of Indigenous Australians during Settlement

The mistreatment of Indigenous Australians during the early years of Australia’s settlement is widely recorded. The impacts both of this initial treatment and the foundational beliefs and

behaviours it set for government policies and attitudes among the general populace, is still being felt today leaving reconciliation like a vast gulf in society. This presentation will describe research currently being undertaken into one potential factor of this treatment. The research was inspired by quotes from early clergy and missionaries in Australia who saw that the dark skin of the Indigenous Australians reflected a dark soul (if they had one at all) and an inability to accept Christianity. This raised the question of whether these people were aware of the likely colour of Christ's skin as a middle eastern man, a question instantly answerable as the Christ of eighteenth-century Britain was decidedly white.

The research is in its early stages, establishing the depictions of Jesus that both clergy and common people would have been exposed to during this time, before going on to the impact of these depictions on the treatment of Indigenous Australians. These depictions include not just traditional artwork, but paintings and stained-glass windows in churches, early illustrated Bibles, and other depictions. The overarching question is whether seeing Jesus as a white man resulted in believing that only those with white skin could be like him and receive salvation (a misinterpretation of Genesis 1:27). The research aims to explore whether early settlers (born and raised in eighteenth-century Britain) saw Indigenous Australians as "less than human" due to the colour of their skin as a direct result of their perception of Jesus as white.

Biblical texts discussed will include Genesis 1:27 and Mark 12:29-31 (Jesus citing Leviticus 19:18) which tie together the image of God with love of neighbour.

3. **Presenter** Sam Freney
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Judges and Kings: A Distinction Without A Difference?

How can a translation accurately reflect hierarchical differences when the target culture and language knows nothing of such dynamics? This is the issue faced by Pitjantjatjara translators of 1 Samuel.

A consideration of reading the Bible in Australia would benefit from engagement with the challenges of translation into the languages of indigenous Australians. Translation choices impact the possibilities for accurate and sophisticated Bible reading amongst these communities, and even the languages themselves.

Pitjantjatjara is a dialect of Australia's Western Desert Language, spoken by over 3000 people, most of whom live predominantly in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands of central Australia. Pitjantjatjara culture is very non-hierarchical: the dynamic of one person above another is difficult to capture in the language as it traditionally didn't exist. The word used for 'leader' or 'boss' in the present day is *mayatja*, which is actually a loan-word from English. This presents some confusion especially in the early chapters of 1 Samuel, where distinctions between judges (*mayatja*) and kings (also *mayatja*) are crucial for not only the immediate narrative but more far-reaching historical and theological understanding.

This paper surveys available translation choices for 'judge' and 'king' in 1 Samuel in light of the Deuteronomic background to these categories, placed alongside linguistic, social, and cultural knowledge of current-day Pitjantjatjara translators. Examination of this theme of kingship in ancient Israel is also an opportunity for non-Pitjantjatjara people (the author included!) to reflect on the contours of leadership and our own linguistic biases.

4. **Presenters** Melinda Cousins and Elliot Keane
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Re-storying: collaborative practice in preaching the biblical narrative in a local church context

Australian Baptist churches have long valued and centred the preaching of the Bible in their gatherings, seeking to equip faith communities to live out its truths in their time and place. However, this has often been done in a disjointed way, leaving members with ideas and behaviours to implement as individuals, but without a broader framework to engage as a community. Scholarly work on the biblical 'meta-narrative' over recent decades, including that of Bartholomew, Goheen and Wright, provides one such framework for understanding, embodying and entering into the biblical story.

The presenters work together in a local Adelaide church and seek to apply this framework in ways that will engage, inspire, and commission their community to live out faith in practice in their context. This is based on their assumptions that the biblical story continues to be authoritative for the faith community and relevant for the wider culture, alongside the need for fresh imagination and engagement in the ways it is communicated and practiced. They have been shaped by their commitments to presenting this story as an alternative, invitational meta-narrative rather than seeking to impose it upon anyone, and to acknowledging the country on which they walk and learning from the First Nations peoples of this land. This paper outlines how this has been worked out in preaching the biblical narrative over a number of years, including an example of a teaching series on the big story of God learning from artwork by Warlpiri artist Claris Poulson Nampijimpa.

5. **Presenter** Barbara Deutschmann
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Damned Whores and God's Police: The Use of Genesis 2–4 in Early Australian History.

'Damned whores' and 'God's police,' the polarised characterisation of women seen in writings of Australian history, can be seen to reflect antipodean versions of biblical Eve and Mary. Biblical texts themselves give no firm foundation for such polarised views of women. The paper will read some depictions of gender in early Australia together with Genesis 2–4, looking for resonances, showing how women worked within these polarities, and used them to their own benefit. It will also review the way that racialised stereotypes of Aboriginal women cut across these polarities, depicting Aboriginal women in negative ways.

This paper will proceed in three parts: The first will examine the Genesis 2–4 text through the lens of the 'damned whore' type. The second section will discuss examples of the ways this type was expressed in the early settlement (1788–1820) period of Australian history. Part three will draw some conclusions about the implications of these interpretations for Australian life today.

6. **Presenter** Michelle Eastwood
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Religion as Rhetoric and the Religious Discrimination Bill

The Religious Freedom Bill – or as *The Guardian* has dubbed it, the Religious Discrimination Bill – does not mention the Bible. Instead it makes reference to 'sincerely held religious beliefs' that are assumed to be threatened in the multi-cultural, pluralistic society of contemporary Australia.

However, lying behind the bill is a push by conservative Christians, as represented by Martin Iles and the Australian Christian Lobby, to enshrine Christian privilege and reject recent moves towards equality, particularly for LGBTIQ+ Australians. These moves are exemplified in the introduction of marriage equality, changes to birth certificates for transgender individuals and the outlawing of conversion and sexual change efforts in Victoria.

While the Bible is not mentioned in the bill, supporters of the bill proclaim that they have a biblical mandate to fight changes which threaten the very fabric of society of Australia as a Christian nation. They draw on simplistic representations of key passages of the Bible, such as the creation narratives, to insist that there is one, straightforward, biblical understanding of gender, sexuality and identity, and that alterations to this understanding are tantamount to a cultural war.

This paper will explore the biblical rhetoric that is used to justify the need for the Religious Freedom Bill alongside the counter-rhetoric which aims to discredit it, and consider the impact these discussion have on the attitude to Christianity in Australia.

7. **Presenter** Meredith Lake
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Reading the Bible in Australia – Reflections and Response

Meredith's active participation in the discussion of her response is yet to be confirmed depending on her other commitments.