Audio, ergo sum  
(I hear, therefore I am)

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Introduction

A chief concern of postcolonial theory is human identity, the colonial factors that impact and shape that identity, how that identity is represented and by whom it is represented. Postcolonial enquiry is specifically located within the colonial period,¹ and it encompasses a wide range of academic disciplines that are not always theologically based or focused.

The research summarised in this essay is important as a means not only to critique the relationships shared between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian people in the context of the Lutheran Church of Australia (LCA), but as an apparatus and motivation to evaluate all cross-cultural or multi-cultural relationship within the LCA. Failure to engage in such self-reflection and insight may result in continuing cohorts of people who are spoken for and spoken about in the life of the LCA who will be at risk of remaining its unheard, unknown, unequal ‘others’.

Postcolonial theory

Postcolonial theory encompasses and documents a wide range of human experiences, subject areas and disciplines. It focuses on the whole scope of human experiences in respect of the historical era of European imperial and colonial expansion (Young 2003: 16–18). Postcolonial theory is a multi-disciplinary field of study. It is a discourse in which economists, political scientists, feminists, activists, theologians and others who carry no label can equally engage. Because of this broad scope, postcolonial theory is also discursive. It meanders its way through the complexities of human experiences, diverse narratives and assorted epistemologies. Most importantly, it is a discourse through which the formerly and formally silenced, colonised person speaks and is heard such that a new, shared hybridised equal identity with the coloniser emerges.

Postcolonial theory does not comprise a discreet, systematically coherent, harmonious and predictive series of propositions as might be expected from scientific or mathematical

¹ Approximately from the 16th to 20th centuries of the Common Era.
theories. Neither is postcolonial theory based upon one exclusive epistemology (Young 2003: 6). Instead, postcolonial theory is a point of convergence for a plurality of lived, human experiences. It is a work in progress offering many points of access to the researcher. Rukundwa and Aarde say that

This lack of clarity in postcolonial theory together with its fluidity and ambivalence, is what is genuinely enabling about the field. The term not only lacks clarity, but also keeps changing through new forms of social collectivity as they emerge in time and space in a postcolonial world. These new forms require new ways of describing them. (2007: 1172)

The practice of postcolonial theory strains to hear colonised persons speak from within and about their colonised contexts. This is its primary function. Its secondary and attendant function is to shape and reshape the disposition of the coloniser from commanding and controlling speaker to attentive and transformed hearer.

Postcolonial theory is an ontological enquiry, concerned with individual and collective human identity and its representation. It is not primarily concerned with locating and hearing the voices of colonising persons. Their voices already dominate. They are heard. Their being, their representation and identity are not at immediate risk. Instead, postcolonial theory strains to hear the voices of people whom Gramsci (Ashcroft, et al: 198) identifies as subaltern or whom Spivak (Ashcroft, et al: 156) describes as the coloniser's other or as a diminished and reduced alterity. They are subordinated and colonised people. They are people for whom power has been denied, including the power to self-identify and self-represent. To help us see and hear this formally and formerly invisible group Young asks:

Do you feel that your own people and country are somehow always positioned outside the mainstream? Have you ever felt that the moment you said the word ‘I’, that ‘I’ was someone else, not you? That in some obscure way you are not the subject of your own sentence? Do you feel that whenever you speak, you have already been spoken for? Or that when you hear others speaking, you are only ever going to be the object of their speech? Do you sense that those speaking would never think of trying to find out how things seem to be for you, from where you are? That you live in a world of others, a world that exists for others? (2003:1)

Christian theology adds a further layer to the endeavours of postcolonial theory as it seeks to hear and understand human identity through God's self-representing voice.

The intersection between postcolonial theory and Christian theology

Tension exists between postcolonial theory and Christian theology. Postcolonial theory approaches the ancient biblical text by foregrounding the lived experiences and cultural expressions of colonised people in the modern era as its interpretive or hermeneutical apparatus. According to Van Aarde (2004:1105-1125) it can become ethnocentric, generating a contemporary epistemology from a modern world view which is then
imposed upon the ancient biblical text. By doing this the actual biblical witness is, in effect, colonised, quelled and subverted. Biblical theology seeks to understand the biblical witness from within its own context, and the traditions that preceded it and that proceeded from it.

Secondly, postcolonial theory starts with anthropology. As a consequence it represents religion and theology as expressive human phenomena, whereby religion and theology embody human searches for identity, meaning, hope and the way to right living. In this way God is diminished to a representative metaphor, encompassing this human desire and search. Christian theology, on the other hand, begins with God and God’s self-representing identity. Anthropology follows that. This sequence is demonstrated in the first two articles of the Augsburg Confession. The first article is Trinitarian in its content, bearing the title, God. Following from this, the second article presents a biblical anthropology. It has the title, Original Sin (Tappert: 27–29).

Christian theology does have points of contact and interaction within the discursive projects of postcolonial theory. This interaction can be titled postcolonial theology.

Postcolonial theology comprises a discrete subset and complementary application of postcolonial theory where identity and representation remain among its central concerns. It is discreet because it pertains to and is accountable to specific theological disciplines. It is complementary because it participates in the greater, postcolonial discourse whereby theological and other understandings, beliefs and practices interrelate with, describe, interpret, shape, direct and hybridise the diverse range of lived human experiences. These lived human experiences extend far beyond western, rational thought as their primary descriptor. Citing Schubert Ogden, Brett states: ‘Theology engages with cultural, political or economic matters within which the religion is embedded’ (2008: 179).

Lived human experiences, located within their own unique context together with the full range of the speaker and hearer’s particular traits, provide and shape the interpretative apparatus or hermeneutic for understanding and representing that experience. In this way, lived experiences are also theologically represented. They are received, described, understood, codified and practised all within the particular milieu of the speaker and hearer.

Lived human experiences and their contexts vary. Some people experience life as colonisers while others experience it as colonised people. Some people are missionaries or evangelists while others are the objects of those actions. Yet each can coexist within the same religiously branded construct, faith system or denomination by learning to accommodate and navigate the tensions that this might create. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe this in the following way:

Religion could therefore act either as a means of hegemonic control or could be employed by the colonised as a means of resistance (2007: 188).
Graham Paulson is a theologian who applies this thinking to his own lived theological experiences as an Indigenous Australian man. He asks the core postcolonial, ontological question: ‘What kind of theology can hold together, with integrity, both Indigenous and Christian identity?’ (2006: 310)

In asking this question, Paulson has already identified the factor that confounds the discussion. In asking, ‘What kind of theology?’ Paulson envisions and anticipates an alternative to the western theological form that he currently experiences. It is a theology that arises from the heard voices and lived experiences of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people listening and speaking together. Paulson is suggesting hybridity. He writes:

The fact that Christianity in Aboriginal Australia appears to be boxed in by Western European cultures is a fact of history that has to be challenged if Christian faith is to be fully embraced by Indigenous peoples. If evangelism means the telling of the story of the gospel as it was articulated in the western world, and translated into the sub-cultures of denominational religious institutions, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been very well evangelised. But if the process of evangelising includes the telling of the biblical stories in ways which connect with our deepest spiritual expectations, evoking practices in tune with our own cultures, then we were not well evangelised at all. (2006: 310,311)

In critiquing western theological processes embedded with western views of the eastern biblical text, and in promoting processes resonant with Indigenous self-understanding and experiences, Paulson writes:

The Christian’s job is then to peel away what is culturally relative, leaving only what is theologically binding. Thus, one proposal for overcoming the imposition of Western culture in theology is to try and do away with culture altogether. But, in fact, no meaning can be conveyed apart from culture. Theology does not seek to discern acultural concepts; rather, it seeks to let us see that same work of God and hear that same voice of God in the midst of our own culture. (2006: 320)

Similarly, Paul Albrecht describes the transition of Indigenous Lutherans and their communities from being the objects of western, Lutheran evangelism toward independent, Indigenous Lutheran communities. To accomplish that he distinguishes between practices of Aboriginalisation and Indigenisation. He writes:

I use the term ‘Aboriginalise’ to mean to place Aboriginal people in non-traditional roles and expect them to fulfil these roles in much the same way as non-traditional people would… On the other hand, to ‘Indigenise’ is to place Aborigines in non-traditional roles with the shared expectation and understanding that they would fulfil these roles in ways appropriate to their culture. (2002: 207)

Western understandings and practices of theology that arise from a western, colonising world view and hermeneutic can be used as the agents of western imperial, colonial
expansion. Susan Smith writes: ‘Western biblical interpretation sought to justify the West's domination of the colonial and neo-colonial world’ (2004).

According to postcolonial theory, Biblical interpretation, its ordered and codified arrangement as dogma and its derived theological exemplars, becomes a means by which powerful, colonising persons impose and justify their sensed supremacy over against subaltern, colonised people. Powerful persons occupy that space by claiming a silencing divine right or manifest destiny which can be further supported with military and civil interventions. Further to this, an immutable and imposed state or station for the subaltern is also justified as the exercise of God's sovereign will and design. This can be articulated through the agency of theology by representing colonised or subaltern persons as being spiritually defective: pagan, heathen, infidel and Gentile.

Postcolonial theory challenges Christian theology when it becomes indistinguishable from dominant western, colonial practices. If it is the case that in the LCA the Indigenous Australian voice remains unheard and the euro-centric colonial voice dominates, tensions around identity will continue to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Lutheran people. These tensions may not always be apparent to non-Indigenous people. Paulson says that this is an impediment to the development and expression of Aboriginal Christianity.

The first [impediment] is an assumption that Christianity is inextricable from its Western cultural frameworks and it therefore undermines the integrity of Aboriginal identity and cultural expression...The second major impediment to the project of Aboriginal theology is the idea that Christian Spirituality not only comprises Indigenous identity, but it actually undermines our dignity and self-worth. On this view, Aboriginal Christianity will always be a demeaning ‘whitefella’ religion, which encourages Indigenous people to abandon their own culture on the grounds that it contains only an inferior spirituality. (2006: 310,311)

In this respect the imposition and practices of western views of Christianity and theology are closely aligned, if not the direct agents, of western imperial, colonising practices. This, however, is not the core of the problem. The problem is rooted in views of God that have their origins in an imperial and colonising world view and hermeneutic. God, and God's accepted means of representation within the common Christian tradition in the person of Jesus Christ and through the biblical text, are at constant risk of being colonised as a means to subjugate and control less powerful people. The power lies with the person who has access to the text and controls its voice and hearing, which in the case of the LCA is largely non-Indigenous people. Such influence is imposed through a construct that may, in many ways, be alien to God's own self-representing voice within the text. Brett writes:

In the history of colonisation, it is clear that generations of Europeans became intoxicated with their ideas of racial superiority and civilisation, and the Bible was caught up in the destructive consequences. Biblical texts were often used
as colonial instruments of power, exploited with pre-emptive and self-interested strategies of reading (2008: 310).

Within the Australian Lutheran context an example of a western colonisation of the biblical text appears at Mengler’s Hill in the German-Lutheran heartland of South Australia’s Barossa Valley. Atop the hill there is a pioneer memorial that publishes a misquotation of Joshua 2:9. It reads: ‘The Lord has given us this land’. The quotation should actually read: ‘I know that the Lord has given you the land’ (yāda‘ī kî nāthan Adonai lākem ’eth-hā’ārets).

Israel’s Canaanite alterity, Rahab, is the speaker in this text. Through the misquotation, both her voice and God’s voice are silenced. By speaking, Rahab represented her faith, and God was actively present in and through her faithful witness. By misquoting the text in this way, a turgid colonising apologetic is propagated. By denying Rahab’s voice, this misquotation and the colonial supersessionism that underpins it buttresses the colonial doctrine of Australia as terra nullius, and God is devilishly called upon as its agent and witness.

By being silenced in this way, God is also at risk of becoming an alterity, an other, a subaltern, dispossessed of a self-represented identity. When limiting ourselves and our understandings only to our own lived human experiences and colonising aspirations, God is also colonised. To master God’s people the coloniser must domesticate and subdue God. Brett writes of

… a Christian theology of salvation that so completely reverses the logic of redemption in the Hebrew Bible that it tolerates, or even promotes, the dispossession of Indigenous people from their traditional country. The scale of the contradiction in this case is, once again, so great that the tradition has arguably lost any intelligible claim to truthfulness (2008: 181).

Like the human subaltern, God has always spoken and continues to speak and so self-represent into and from within colonising narratives through the biblical text and the multiplicity of human voices contained within it. God also speaks through the human interpreters of that text, with all of the attendant hermeneutical risks that this might bring. In this way God speaks human to human, so that even powerful, colonising people might hear:

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son (Heb 1:1,2).

**Moving toward postcolonial hybridity in the LCA**

From the sixth to the eighth of July, 2012 the South Australia-Northern Territory District of the LCA held its synodical convention in Alice Springs. This is the first time that any convention of the LCA has been held in Central Australia. At that convention Pastor Basil Schild was invited to provide the key note address. His address was titled, ‘Twenty-one
things I didn’t know—give or take a few’. His presentation reflected on what he had not known about the Lutheran church in central Australia prior to his own arrival to serve as a non-Indigenous Lutheran pastor 15 years previously. This was one of his points:

I didn’t know that 58 percent of all Aboriginal people in Central Australia—including Alice Springs—identify as Lutheran. One in two. What does this mean? It means the heart of this country is a Lutheran heartland. That makes the problems and challenges of this place Lutheran problems and Lutheran challenges (2012: 8).

Schild’s shared Lutheran ‘problems and challenges’ are not, in fact, treated that way in the LCA. In July of 2012 a Lutheran pastor, Kumanytjayi ² Stewart, was stabbed to death in his own Central Australian community of Ti Tree. According to western law, he was murdered. By any measure, this was a very unusual and tragic event, and one that would reasonably produce an extraordinary response from the LCA. If Kumanytjayi Stewart had been a non-Indigenous Lutheran pastor, it is likely that word of his death would have rapidly spread throughout the LCA via formal and informal means. One would also expect to hear him lauded and eulogised in LCA newsletters and publications. At the very least, it is common practice for a Bishop to attend the funerals of deceased pastors, especially if that death was in tragic circumstances. None of that happened. Kumanytjayi Stewart’s death was treated atypically by the LCA. This omission is reflective of an institutional incapacity through an unwillingness to listen and hear. Indigenous Lutherans remain as non-Indigenous Lutheran alterity. Their identities and cultural practices are perplexing, and their lived experiences are far too complex for non-Indigenous Lutherans to engage with. Despite Schild’s profound words, Indigenous Lutheran problems are not corporately owned by the whole of the LCA.

In his statement Schild established the impetus and trajectory for Indigenous and non-Indigenous hybridity in the LCA. The plurality of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Lutheran identities constitutes the LCA as one entity. The articulation of this identity, against the background of adverse representations, silencing habits and mono-cultural drives originating from the LCA’s colonising and settler origins is the great challenge of hybridity. For hybridisation to develop, clamouring, mono-cultural, colonising, western voices must hush and listen without giving in to an urge to purge cultural, intellectual and social plurality and all that it brings to a discourse.

Indigenous Lutherans, on the other hand, do not represent non-Indigenous Lutherans as hostile alterity. It is acknowledged by some Indigenous Lutherans that early Lutheran colonisers and missionaries strongly advocated for and defended Indigenous Australian people. Their actions have embedded themselves in at least one documented modern Indigenous Australian narrative. In 2001 the Agangu (Luritja) staff and students at the Papunya school in the western desert region of Central Australia published the Papunya school book of country and history. Beginning with references to their own pre-history, embodied within their own discreet way of knowing, their Tjukurrpa or Indigenous

² This is a generic Indigenous title used to avoid referencing the specific name(s) of a deceased person.
epistemology, the Indigenous authors recount the British colonial period and its impact upon them:

When the *Tjulkura* (white men, *Luritja*) came to Australia, they did not recognise that, between them, different groups of Aboriginal people owned all the continent. Because there were no pieces of paper saying which people belonged to which country, white people decided that the land was *terra nullius*. Those words mean ‘empty land’ or ‘no one’s land’. The *Tjulkura* did not understand that Aboriginal people had been recording their ownership of their country in songs, stories, dances and paintings since the time the law began. As soon as explorers made the first maps, the Government began giving out pastoral leases over huge areas of *Anangu* land. The white men wanted to run big mobs of cattle. The station owners built fences, stockyards and homesteads. They went all over the land, without asking for permission. They did not respect the sacred places. The cattle drank the waterholes dry, and ate the grass that the kangaroos and other bush animals used to eat (Papunya school book: 8,9).

This account of colonisation does not include German, Lutheran missionaries who arrived later in 1877. Their appearance is remembered and represented differently:

At first the local Western Arrente people did not know what to think about these new white men [missionaries]…Over a period of time, *Anangu* started to see the Mission as a place of refuge (Papunya school book: 13).

Despite this favourable Luritja representation, Lutheran missionaries in other places have been identified for their involvement in the exploitation and forced removal of Indigenous children from their parents. This happened in South Australia’s mission settlement of Koonibba:

The charge was that the Koonibba authorities were placing Aboriginal children in domestic service, to members of the Lutheran community, without the consent of their parents, and for little or no remuneration. From the perspective of Matthew Lawson at least, the Koonibba children were being treated as slaves (Raynes 2009: 58).

Colonisation can therefore mean many things. As it moves toward hybridity, it encompasses a range of human actions and representations that can be viewed as both harmful and beneficial, as diabolical and as altruistic. Nonetheless, in the Australian context it began with denial, invasion, dispossession, and annihilation. It was within that context that non-Indigenous Lutherans entered the complete narrative or Dreaming of Australia’s first nations people. This Dreaming is the place from where the colonised, Indigenous Australian voice originates. It is through their Dreaming that Indigenous people frame, reframe and give representative voice to the colonising event and their experiences of it. It is an Indigenous person’s occasion for being. To entertain any movement toward hybridisation, the LCA’s postcolonial discourse must begin with the Dreaming.
This application of postcolonial theory challenges non-Indigenous Lutherans to consider and accept an identity as colonisers or as beneficiaries of Australia’s colonial and settler era. This further challenges those people to identify the subordinating, colonial features of their continuing discourses with and about Indigenous Lutherans. These discourses regularly leave Indigenous Lutherans as the spoken for, unheard ‘others’.

The return of land formerly owned by the LCA to its traditional owners, as part of Australia’s Land Rights Movement and the aspirations of self-determination that accompanied it (Albrecht 2002: 75–91), should have marked a distinct change in how Indigenous Lutherans were identified and represented within the LCA. In some ways it did. Missionary philosophy changed. Indigenous Australian people were no longer regarded as objects to be theologically and spiritually acted upon by non-Indigenous Lutherans. Instead they were identified as church, in almost the same ways as other LCA members. They built their own Lutheran church buildings, located in their own lands. They worship in their own languages being served by their own LCA ordained pastors, and using portions of the Christian scriptures and hymns that have been translated and printed in their own languages. On that basis alone, and somewhat naively, it would seem that the distinctions between coloniser and colonised need no longer apply in the LCA. This, however, is not the case. Since Australia’s pivotal land rights movement, Indigenous Lutherans continue to be spoken for, spoken about and decided for in the LCA. This is evident in the LCA’s institutional form and its attendant functions. Based upon western understandings of organisation theory, western hierarchical values, western systems for codifying and sharing information, and western decision making processes, Indigenous Lutherans are regularly silenced as members of the LCA. This is most evident in the LCA’s constitution.

The LCA’s constitution is a point of convergence between its confessional or theological identity and its legal or temporal identity. The constitution is the LCA’s occasion for being. According to its constitution, in order to exist an LCA congregation must have its own, LCA approved constitution. This allows a congregation formally and fully to participate in the LCA’s corporate or synodical processes. In other words, a local community must have an LCA approved constitution to be able to participate in debate, vote at conventions, and shape and give expression to LCA theology and identity. Very few Indigenous Lutheran congregations are legally constituted. This anomaly excludes people numbering in the thousands from serving on any board or committee of the LCA, and from attending synodical conventions as delegates. Indigenous Australian Lutheran people are not only silenced as part of the colonial event, but limited opportunity exists for the full self-representation that most other LCA members enjoy.

Each year all constituted LCA congregations are required to provide a census-like statistical return. In this way individual congregations are identified within the whole LCA,

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and the LCA shapes its corporate identity and strategic aims around that data. As most Indigenous congregations are not constituted, they are not required to provide a statistical return. As a consequence, their actual presence in the LCA is not formally acknowledged and so has little impact upon the formation of the LCA’s identity, self-awareness and strategic directions.

Apart from these prescribed institutional forms and practices, evidence of a silencing domestication of Indigenous Australian identity and the diffusion of its culture also exists in the LCA. When, for example, Indigenous Australian Lutheran people are present at one of the LCA’s national or district synodical conventions, it is common to hear them welcomed, acknowledged and referenced by various speakers as ‘our Indigenous brothers and sisters’. The use of the terms ‘brothers and sisters’ is done with very little awareness of how those terms might be understood by the Indigenous hearer. In the voice of the coloniser these terms carry none of the cultural weight of Indigenous Australian kinship relationships and their attendant obligations and prohibitions. Instead, the terms ‘brothers and sisters’ are aboriginalised, spiritualised and domesticated by non-Indigenous speakers in ways that confuse and further silence the Indigenous Australian hearer.4

**Conclusion**

Non-Indigenous Lutherans need to acquire and develop disciplined dispositions as hearers and not speakers, as receivers and not ascribers, to facilitate their own progress toward postcolonial hybridity in the LCA. This new disposition is a receptive one in which hitherto silenced Indigenous speakers might represent all that is true of themselves, in their own time and place, and by their own chosen modality, and so bring their own weight to bear on the formation of a new hybridised, Lutheran identity and discourse. Brett indentifies this vital reconfiguring and the possibilities for Indigenous modalities in the broader Australian theological context:

> To begin with, what are the resources for Indigenous theology? To suggest, with Anglican expansiveness, that scripture, reason and tradition are the primary resources, already threatens to pre-empt the discussion by introducing Western theological categories (2003: 247).

> The key question is how specifically Indigenous identities can be related to the universality of the Christian gospel (2003: 254).

Like all subaltern people, Indigenous Lutheran people have always represented their own identities. They have constantly spoken, danced, painted, sung, worshipped and travelled throughout their lands prior to and during the colonising event. They continue to do so. In doing this they have not only maintained their unique cultural practices but, more importantly, they have maintained and promoted their identity, if only among themselves. Now non-Indigenous Lutherans as colonisers must be attentively silent. Colonising speakers must reconstitute as hearers.

4 See Margaret Bain (2005) for an extended discussion of some of these issues.
To listen attentively and empathically is to engage with the whole lived experience of the speaker through the speaker’s own communicative and interpretive apparatus. These apparatus are embedded in a plurality of cultural forms and modalities, directed by the speaker’s epistemology and worldview, and are used to present the speaker’s whole being. Indigenous, colonised Lutheran people do speak. In the LCA, postcolonial hybridity will take its next step when the LCA as coloniser, listens, in Christ Jesus to God through the voices of its Indigenous ‘others’. Such discipline may have further benefits for other ‘spoken for’ and ‘spoken about’ groups of people within an increasingly diverse LCA.

How will the Lutheran Church of Australia continue to transition from a colonising to a hybridised, postcolonial identity? Through a reconstituted, postcolonial identity as hearer. Hush:

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