
"Christianity is never just about beliefs but habits and practices—for better or worse. Theology always reflects the social location of the theologian—including her privileges and prejudices—all the time working with a particular, often undisclosed, notion of what is normal. Therefore theology is never ‘neutral’—it defends particular constructions of reality, and it promotes certain interests.

Following Jesus in Invaded Space asks what—and whose—interests theology protects when it is part of a community that invaded the land of Indigenous peoples. Developing a theological method and position that self-consciously acknowledges the church’s role in occupying Aboriginal land in Australia, it dares to speak of God, church, and justice in the context of past history and continuing dispossession. Hence, a ‘Second people’s theology’ emerges through constant and careful attention to experiences of invasion and dis-location brought into dialogue with the theological landscape or tradition of the church.”

**ABOUT CHRIS BUDDEN:**
Chris Budden is the minister of North Lake Macquarie Uniting Church, and is also an Academic Associate in the School of Theology and an Associate Researcher in the Public and Contextual Theology Strategic Research at Charles Sturt University. “Chris has a long interest in the church’s relationship with Indigenous people, the nature of contextual theology in Australia for people who live on invaded land, the relationship between citizenship and discipleship, and how the church gives witness to the claim that Jesus actually makes a difference to life.”

**A SECOND PEOPLES’ CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY**

Chris Budden has set out to write a Second Peoples’ contextual theology for Australia. All theology by definition is contextual. Those who control the theological agenda, mostly white males, tend to universalise their reality and exclude other voices (p2). Following Jesus in Invaded Space seeks to privilege the voices of Indigenous people, and treat “with suspicion the voice of those in power” (p3). Budden argues that theology needs “to recognise the real pain and suffering in invasion and dispossession. Theology has often sought to too easily and quickly incorporate such things into its worldview and to explain them away, when in fact they should challenge and seek to break open that world” (p7).

Australian people have a plurality of identities—male, female, young, old, migrant, refugee, second generation, however “there is one that is essential for theology in the Australian continent. Second people are a people who live on another’s ‘land,’ not as guests but invaders” (p4). One could argue that recent migrants are not invaders, even if the earlier arrivals were. However, all migrants to Australia have come “without invitation, have claimed the right to occupy the land of a sovereign people, have not recognised that sovereignty” (p6).
AUSTRALIA’S DEFINING CONTEXT

Budden provides an overview of the defining context for modern day Australia which is invasion. Invasion defines place, social location, power and meaning for a people. The violence used in invasion serves to remind the defeated people of their “place in a new world” (p17). Land is the most contested point in the relationship between invader and invaded. “It is social location, economic base, a site for political and civil life, a place for sacred sites and their attending stories... To be removed from land, to be deprived of access to place, is disruptive in a multitude of ways” (p17).

Invasion necessitates a language and a narrative that permits the dispossession and violence. The language of terra nullius and the description of Aboriginal people as primitive and uncivilised, “constructed a world of peaceful settlement, benevolence, and the conversion of ‘pagans’” (p18-19).

The doctrine of discovery was invented to regulate the colonial endeavours of the various European nations, so that they did not step on each others’ toes. In short, “discovery” gave the particular European nation the right to sovereignty over the “discovered land” on the assumption that the “natives” were not civilised enough to exercise sovereignty (p20). The doctrine did not officially give the discovering nation ownership of the land. However in practice ownership was often assumed (p20). The British invasion meant that people were cutoff from their land, their homes and food sources, their sacred sites and their stories. Sheep and cattle changed the landscape forever, making “it unproductive for many vital food and medical plants, destroyed waterholes, and robbed the native animals of access to food” (p20).

The British view of land was largely as a commodity to be exploited for economic benefit, there was no understanding of the land as a place of meaning beyond its productive nature (p20). Land was there to be grazed, mined and farmed, “sold as real estate, and owned as a source and sign of wealth” (p20). Aboriginal people view land in a different way. For them it was more than an economic resource, instead it defined identity. To lose the land was to lose themselves (p21). The link between the people and the land was two-way, the land suffered as much from the dispossession of its people as the people suffered dispossession from the land (p21).

Not only that but many Aboriginal people were massacred in order to keep them in their “right place” and to maintain European control of the stolen land (p22). They were also victim to violence in the form of imprisonment, deaths in custody, police brutality, communal violence, mistreatment by employers, physical and sexual abuse (p23). Aboriginal women were subjected to “repeated assault, pack rape, enslavement, genital mutilation, and, often, murder”, while “white women closed their eyes to this abuse rather than harm their Victorian sensibilities” (p24). While white people did not call it slavery, Aboriginal people alongside convicts were used for forced labour, most often not receiving pay for their work, but only basic rations (p27-28).

The policies of segregation, assimilation, integration, and self-determination “are all about making Indigenous people disappear as a separate people, absorbed completely into mainstream society” (p28). Assimilation was an attempt to make Aboriginal people part of white society even if they remained genetically distinct. Children of mixed heritage were removed to assimilate them into white society. In reality they were typically assimilated only into the lower classes as servants (p28). The overall impact of the removal of children was harmful, they lost their family, relationships and identity (p29). Self-determination introduced in the 1970s was only a system of “limited self-management within govern-established goals and guidelines. It was about limited rights in a framework of paternalism and racism” (p29).

“The challenge for present relationships and theology is that the land we exist on is stolen land, it is land taken without right, and justified by naked power and foreign laws. Indigenous people have never given up the claim that this is their land” (p21-22). For the church this raises the question of how we should relate to indigenous people when we occupy their land, and have gained wealth at their expense (p22).

The morality of the actions of the church in Australia’s colonial history is varied. Some Christians and missions defended and protected Indigenous people. Others destroyed lives, and shared in the prevailing belief that “Indigenous people were a primitive community that would give way before superior civilisation” (p19). Some upheld the truth that Aboriginal people are made in the image of God whilst the society believed them to be un-evolved animals. Some “attended church on Sunday mornings and killed Indigenous people later in the day in order to claim their country” (p19).

FURTHER INFORMATION

Publisher’s Book Information - https://wipfandstock.com/store/ Following_Jesus_in_Invaded_Space_Doing_Theology_on_Aboriginal_Land