

# PLOTTING AN OCEANIC VOICE: A LONGITUDINAL REVIEW AND ANALYSIS OF REGIONAL THEOLOGISING

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“Oceania is peripheral to many studies on global Christianity in that they hardly pay any attention to the Pacific world or, worse, completely ignore it.”<sup>1</sup>

“We must also confess that many of the theological problems addressed in BEM [Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry] seem foreign to us, since they arise out of the history of Christianity in Europe, and thus do not appear relevant to our Melanesian concerns.”<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

One axiomatic observation through the study of world Christianity is that the faith has become polycentric and polyvocal, comprised of many centres and many voices. This essay enquires after the distinct accent of the Oceanic voice. It does this through a longitudinal statistical analysis of three journals of academic theology: *Pacifica*, *Colloquium*, and the *Australian Biblical Review*. Each of the 1529 articles published by these journals since the first in 1951 is examined from the perspective of three questions: First, did the article

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1 Frans J. Verstraelen, *Christianity in a New Key: New Voices and Vistas Through Intercontinental Communication* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1996), 147.

2 “Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry: A Melanesian Response,” *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 3, no. 1 (1987): 65–74.

address the concerns and theologies of the Indigenous peoples of Oceania? Second, was the author or co-author Indigenous to Australasia, Polynesia, Micronesia, or Melanesia? Third, did the article manifest, in whatever way and to whatever degree, an Oceanic voice? The answers may not surprise—but they should shock. The article concludes with constructive suggestions regarding structural change, the encouragement of theological intention, and the active development of local voices.

### **Keywords**

Oceania, racism, academic theology, polycentric, polyvocal, ecumenical

## 1. Hearing the Landscape

A prevailing orthodoxy governs the contemporary study of world Christianity. It first takes the form of a legitimising theological rationale: Pentecost made manifest the promise of God that every tribe, tongue, and nation can proclaim God's praises. God shows no partiality (Luke 20:21; Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11; Gal 2:6), meaning that all can belong to the people of God. The consequent diversity of embodiment and expression is not simply a marker of the faith, but the very acting of God the Spirit.

An idealised factual observation accompanies this prior theological assertion: the gravity of Christianity has shifted south. Christianity has become a world religion comprised of multiple centres, "polycentric" and "polyvocal." Each of these centres speaks in local tongue and contributes to the Church catholic's understanding of the nature of its fullness in Jesus Christ. Nor is this insight new within Western theological discourse. While the secular historian Philip Jenkins popularised the insights of theologians of world Christianity in 2002,<sup>3</sup> Western academic theology began to acknowledge these existing realities in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup>

Though touted as an indicator of the truth of Christianity, this idealised account smooths out the ongoing power base in Western institutions and the concomitant norming of theological discourse—while numbers might be

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3 Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

4 See Walbert Bühlmann, *The Coming of the Third Church: An Analysis of the Present and Future of the Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1977).

shifting south, the same cannot be said of the theological voice. As indicated by the above citations, first, it is not simply possible but normative to exclude the distinctive theological concerns and voices from the continental group of Oceania (hereafter referred to simply as a continent). Second, the questions entertained within this region, the questions this region is asked to answer, originate in a different socio-political context. The expected orientation remains toward Europe and North America.

This promise and its lack are fundamental to this essay. Despite the apparent absence of the distinctive Oceanic voice even within ecumenical discourse, a clear and significant body of theological scholarship exists within Oceania. The essay examines that scholarship to identify our local voice, and the ecumenical learning across our region. The distinctive voice of Oceanic theology, the Word of God speaking in our tongue, is the determining criterion. It accomplishes this via an objective accounting: it conducts a longitudinal evaluation of three journals of academic theology, charting the articles, themes, and voices as they have appeared through these publications in the decades since their launch. The journals under examination are *Pacifica*, *Colloquium*, and the *Australian Biblical Review*.

Section two addresses the study's methodology. It outlines the rationale for selecting these journals, along with the evaluative criteria and processes guiding the identification of individual articles. The following three sections (three to five) examine each of the journals in turn, subjecting them to three questions and determining the percentage of articles that

match the evaluative criteria. Section six addresses potential methodological concerns with the study, while section seven considers the consequences for the theological project of an imagined derivative, sectarian and secular responsibility. Section eight begins a response by examining the findings, outlining the constructive potential of highlighted materials, including suggestions for relocating our theological discourse. The conclusion proposes tools for the critical appreciation of our own cultural, structural, and theological blinders and for the intentional cultivation and promotion of an already existing Oceanic voice.

## **2. Context, Methodology, Subjectivities**

Oceania is an ambiguous term reflecting a cartography corresponding to a certain ideology of categorisation.<sup>5</sup> It is used here to establish preliminary parameters. One might hope that the seventy years of theological discourse encompassed by the selected journals would include some commentary on the contexts of reflection and the relationship between different communions and histories in the region. But, to begin with the continent of Oceania, it is unique in that its defining “landmass” is ocean, being comprised of more than ten thousand islands and stretching from 28 degrees north to 55 degrees south. Oceania encompasses 181 million square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean, about one-third of the earth’s surface. Its formal definition distinguishes the region from Asia and the Americas, encompassing Australasia, Melanesia,

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5 Martin W. Lewis and Kären Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

Micronesia, and Polynesia. This categorisation inserts a hard border between Papua New Guinea and Indonesia, but popular imagination often misses how far north and east the region stretches: from the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the Hawaiian Islands to the Pitcairn Islands. Its total population is around 43 million. With 7.75 billion inhabiting the globe today, Oceania constitutes only about 0.54 percent of the whole. However, the region includes numerous diverse cultures and languages, each with complex histories and relations with their neighbours.

In terms of religion, current census figures suggest that about 50 percent of Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand are Christian. In comparison, Christianity accounts for about 80 to 90 percent of the populations in Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia.<sup>6</sup> With this dominance, the Christian faith informs the everyday lives of the peoples through Oceania. In this essay, Oceania poses manifold theological questions, histories, methods, and constructive proposals. Given this already existing richness of voice, this essay interrogates where and to what extent this theological burden finds expression through the region's instruments of academic theology.

The approach taken here began with the conclusion of *Pacifica* (1988–2017). *Pacifica* was a well-established, multi-disciplinary journal, not restricted to a singular theological tradition, meaning that it had the widest potential

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6 For this and more detailed statistical details, see Manfred Ernst, "Changing Christianity in Oceania: A Regional Overview," *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 157 (2012): 29–45; Kenneth R. Ross, Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *Christianity in Oceania* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).

to include diverse themes and voices from a multitude of methodological angles. As a form of eschatological accounting, a judgement on a life lived, the journal presented as a bounded set, permitting a charting of the themes it explored, the authorities and methods it employed, and the conclusions it reached. It presented an opportunity to map theological norms and lines of questioning as they appeared over three decades of academic theology.

Due to the results of this initial reading, it became necessary to widen the sample by reference to a second journal. *Colloquium* (1964–) was chosen because it too is a well-established, multi-disciplinary journal, not restricted to a singular theological tradition, but it had the added benefit of being the formal instrument of a key scholarly guild in the region: The Australian and New Zealand Association of Theological Schools (ANZATS). Reference to *Colloquium*, in other words, gives some sense of the structural framing of theology: the institutional supports given to voices and themes through invitations to annual conferences or via special issues or programs. It helps us to ascertain the regions from which the invited voices hail; whether and the extent to which these organs encouraged Indigenous voices; whether and the extent to which the voices of the wider Pacific region have helped shape the agenda; and whether and the extent to which these voices have resourced local questions.

Due to the statistically identical findings across these two journals, a third and final journal was selected. Unlike the previous two journals, while it too is well established (the longest in production in the region) and not

restricted to a singular theological tradition, the *Australian Biblical Review* (*ABR*) (1951–) is a disciplinary journal. Including a disciplinary approach within the dataset made it possible to examine whether and to what extent disciplinary frameworks and expectations afforded greater freedom to explore different themes. In addition, anecdotal evidence suggests that biblical studies is the most popular discipline for “higher degrees by research” in the region. It, therefore, gives a greater percentage chance for these voices to publish within the “local” journal in which their supervisors also publish (there exists intimate avenues of support, encouragement, and practical guidance). The *ABR* is the “official organ” of the Fellowship for Biblical Studies, and, as a second guild instrument, displays well the intentionality of the field.<sup>7</sup>

As to methodology, this study is simply a numerical accounting of the themes, methods, voices, and conclusions contained in these three journals. Nothing more. The dataset included every research article in each journal to the end of 2020. Each article was physically sighted, and the total number constituting the dataset was hand counted. Each article was evaluated according to one main criterion: whether some identifiable “Oceanic voice” might be discerned through the text—no doubt a contentious task. The approach taken asked three questions. First, did the article address the concerns and theologies of the Indigenous peoples through Oceania? Second, was the author or co-author Indigenous to Australasia, Polynesia,

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<sup>7</sup> This language comes from the cover page of the first issue of the *ABR* in 1951.



Micronesia, or Melanesia? Third, did the article manifest, in whatever way and to whatever degree, an Oceanic voice? There was no expectation a single text would emerge as exemplary of “the” Oceanic voice. Rather, the intent was to identify small developments and conversations and the growth of a discernible discourse over time. The logic was much like a connect-the-dots line drawing: identify and connect all the little points to outline a bigger picture.

Each article only needed to satisfy one of the posed questions. The total of identified articles was rendered into a percentage of the whole. For example, ninety articles across a dataset of 350 would constitute 25.71 percent of the whole. For every statistic, both the number of articles and what these represent as a percentage of the whole will be given. While the analysis contains the total number of articles selected according to identified themes, only representative articles were cited in full.

Identifying articles which corresponded to the first two questions was, in the main, straightforward (though a notable problem did present itself). While the selection of most articles proved simple, the third question enlists several subjectivities. Foremost, the selection process traded on some idea of a “distinctive Oceanic voice.” The clear danger resides in using a set of unarticulated parameters to determine the selection of the articles and so the statistical analysis and findings. The act of selecting texts would impose a reading upon the whole, rather than letting the whole indicate the lines of an Oceanic voice.

Of course, every article across the whole paints a picture of the “local,” the make-up of authorities, methods, and material questions driving academic theology in this region. But the interest here rests in the distinctive, in material which might be gathered as plotting an Oceanic voice—an accent identifiable as different to those not from the region. One question was asked of each article: Could this be construed as a generic statement of theology and of themes (migration, feminism, ecology, hospitality, culture, inculturation, contextualisation) that might appear in any standard theological journal? This is not to suggest that these articles were without meaning for the local context, only that they failed to draw connections in a way that the voice might be identified as Oceanic.<sup>8</sup> The onus lay with the author, not the reader, to make the necessary translation and application.

Easiest selected were articles directly referencing the Oceanic context via conversation with local histories, cultures, methods, or theologies. However, relevant material did not need to focus on Oceania, or require that authors depart from their disciplinary interests and established methodologies. Identifying an “Oceanic voice,” in whatever varied form this might take, remained the directing criterion. The selection process did not preclude works focusing on, for example, a German theologian as the primary interlocutor. It simply required setting that scholar in relation

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8 For example, see Zenon Szabłowiński, “Apology Without Compensation, Compensation Without Apology,” *Pacifica* 18, no. 3 (2005): 336–48. This speaks to many of the concerns expressed by Indigenous peoples in Oceania, but while it addresses every other continent, Oceania is omitted from the picture.

to local concerns in a way that the resulting position might be identified as Oceanic in voice.<sup>9</sup> Nor need this voice be singular in note, reflecting a determined interpretive line. For example, in North America one can point to James Cone's work as developing out of, and as an explicit commentary on, the experience of slavery and its ongoing theological legacy. The context is constitutive of the tone. A second, more ubiquitous interpretive line would highlight the framing significance of pragmatism for theological discourse and so the contribution of William James. The point here is that what might be viewed as characterising a distinctive local voice is not reducible to an explicit reference to context. While the selection did not include articles focused on Asia, Africa, or Latin America alone, articles that set regional concerns in conversation helped highlight particular Oceanic interests.<sup>10</sup> The selection looked for interdisciplinary linkages, such as, for example, the application of the biblical text to the political order.<sup>11</sup> It included articles that cited or summarised Oceanic voices. The overriding intent was to be generous in expectation.

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9 As an example of this approach from a Chinese context, see Jin Li and Li Ma, "Theology in Crisis: Re-Evaluating the Influence of Karl Barth on Chinese Theologian T. C. Chao," in *Yearbook of Chinese Theology 2019*, ed. Paulos Z. Huang (Netherlands: Brill, 2019), 126–51.

10 For example, see Felix Wilfred, "Asia and Western Christianity," *Pacifica* 2, no. 3 (1989): 268–81.

11 For example, see James Ha Tun Aung, "The Role of Christians in a Conflict Society in Myanmar: A Reading of 1 Corinthians 9:19–23," *Colloquium* 49, no. 1 (2017): 61–73.

Though Oceanic theologies and methodologies remain under construction, an extensive amount of available material already exists. How well do the three journals under investigation reflect and expand these existing voices?

### **3. *Pacifica* (1988–2017)**

*Pacifica* began publication in 1988, producing a sample size of 528 articles over thirty volumes until its close in 2017. Located in Melbourne, Australia, *Pacifica* originated with a strong Roman Catholic centre, before assuming a more ecumenical posture through its support in 1992 from the then Melbourne College of Divinity. According to its stated vision, as recorded on its inside cover from inception until 1996, it developed with the intent “to provide a forum for theologians of Australasia and the West Pacific Basin . . . It also brings the unique contribution of Australasia and the West Pacific to the international church and the international community of scholars.” Its first editorial began with a simple statement of Australia being a “place of human dreaming for tens of thousands of years,” before expending the remainder of the text narrating the entrance of “European culture and belief to the Antipodes.”<sup>12</sup> Writing out of this colonial location, the editorial notes that “the quest for an Australian theology has barely begun. Much of our Christian conversation has been too constrained by the vocabulary and vision of our European origins.” Though it failed to examine the nature of

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12 Dan Madigan, S. J., “Editorial,” *Pacifica* 1, no. 1 (1988): iii.

this “constraint,” the origin story included the following observed benefit (in 1988): “The Australian Church lives as part of a fundamentally European society in the Asian-Pacific region,” and, with these European roots, the Australian Church is “well-poised . . . to serve as a bridge between the developed and the developing nations.” Framed by these terms of economic civilisation, the journal hoped “to be one meeting point where all these different voices might be heard, and where theology may be shaped to serve the faith in this region and beyond.”<sup>13</sup> Let us begin our analysis by enquiring how well *Pacifica* satisfied this stated intent.

The first article to reference the Pacific appeared six years after the journal’s launch, in 1993.<sup>14</sup> This, however, was preceded by an article “celebrating” the “fifth centenary of the arrival of Columbus in America.”<sup>15</sup> The second (and final) article addressed the church/state relationship in Fiji.<sup>16</sup> Neither were produced by Indigenous authors. With a sample size of 528 articles, these two articles represent 0.37 percent of the whole. Across the dataset, zero articles (0.00%) were written by Micronesian, Melanesian, or Polynesian authors.

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13 Madigan, “Editorial,” iv.

14 John D’Arcy May, “Human Rights as Land Rights in the Pacific,” *Pacifica* 6, no. 1 (1993): 61–80.

15 Andrew Hamilton, “Celebrating Columbus,” *Pacifica* 5, no. 3 (1992): 314–23.

16 Joseph E. Bush, “Claiming a Christian State Where None Exists: Church and State in the Republic of Fiji,” *Pacifica* 12, no. 1 (1999): 55–68.

Fourteen articles (2.65%) included a deliberate focus on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Australia, with five articles authored by Indigenous voices (0.94%). Most of these voices were concentrated in a single 2006 special issue titled “Land, Culture and Faith” (vol. 19), which set personal stories, “vignettes,” alongside research essays.<sup>17</sup> In terms of themes addressed, four general concentrations suggest themselves: reconciliation,<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The Indigenous authors included: Michael Connolly, Lee Miena Skye, Garry Deverell, Patrick Dodson, Jacinta Ekston, Graham Paulson, Tony Calma, Margaret Kemarre Turner, Elizabeth Pike, Bishop Saibo Mabo, Janet Turpie-Johnstone, Ed Story, and Vicki Walker.

<sup>18</sup> Geoffrey Burn, “Reconciliation and Land in Australia,” *Pacifica* 24, no. 1 (2011): 80–100; Tony Calma, “Respect, Tolerance and Reconciliation Rather Than Opposition and Denial: Indigenous Spirituality, Land, and the Future of Religion in Australia,” *Pacifica* 23, no. 3 (2010): 322–36; Christiaan Mostert, “Reconciliation and the Church,” *Pacifica* 23, no. 2 (2010): 192–211; Dominic O’Sullivan, “Pope John Paul II and Reconciliation as Mission,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006): 265–81; Christopher C. Prowse, “Reconciliation With the Aboriginal Community: Some Theological Reflections,” *Pacifica* 7, no. 1 (1994): 31–45; Christopher C. Prowse, “Aboriginal Disadvantage and Collective Moral Responsibility,” *Pacifica* 10, no. 1 (1997): 39–52.

land and country,<sup>19</sup> establishing frameworks for relationship,<sup>20</sup> and constructive theologies.<sup>21</sup>

Regarding other Indigenous voices through Oceania, a second 2005 special issue examined “Theology in the Context of Aotearoa New Zealand” (vol. 18). Of the six essays in this issue, zero (0.00%) were authored by Māori, and the singular article that names Māori spirituality sets it in relation to “paganism” and nature spirituality.<sup>22</sup> Apart from this, the journal failed to address or include any other Indigenous peoples of Oceania.

In terms of a wider concern for an Oceanic voice, eleven articles (2.08%) looked at regional history. These, in the main, concentrated on ecumenical

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19 Digby Hannah, “Experience of Place in Australian Identity and Theology,” *Pacifica* 17, no. 3 (2004): 297–310; John Hilary Martin, “White Man Got No Dreaming Him Go ‘Nother Way’—Albert Muta,” *Pacifica* 7, no. 3 (1994): 325–45.

20 Frank Fletcher, “Finding the Framework to Prepare for Dialogue with Aborigines,” *Pacifica* 10, no. 1 (1997): 25–38; Carl F. Starkloff, “Indigenous Peoples and the Experience of Christianity,” *Pacifica* 2, no. 3 (1989): 323–32; Prowse, “Aboriginal Disadvantage and Collective Moral Responsibility,” 39–52.

21 Patrick L. Dodson, Jacinta K. Elston, and Brian F. McCoy, “Leaving Culture At the Door: Aboriginal Perspectives on Christian Belief and Practice,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006): 249–62; Graham Paulson, “Towards an Aboriginal Theology,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006), 310–20; Lee Mienna Skye, “Australian Aboriginal Catholic Women Seek Wholeness: Hearts Are Still Burning,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006): 283–307; David Thompson and Michael Connolly, “Clapsticks and Karaoke: The Melting Pot of Indigenous Identity,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006): 344–55; Mark G. Brett, “Canto Ergo Sum: Indigenous Peoples and Postcolonial Theology,” *Pacifica* 16, no. 3 (2003): 247–56.

22 Nicola Hoggard Creegan, “Jesus in the Land of Spirits and Utu,” *Pacifica* 18, no. 2 (2005): 141–53.

and sectarian histories,<sup>23</sup> with a minor concentration on “Australia and New Zealand Army Corps” (ANZAC) history and its cultural significance.<sup>24</sup> A further set of nine essays (1.70%) considered social issues and were mainly concentrated after 2010.<sup>25</sup> Three essays (0.56%) were interested in art, culture, and the built environment.<sup>26</sup> The main areas of concentration were on educational structure, with five essays (0.94%),<sup>27</sup> and fourteen essays

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23 John Nurser, “The Australian and New Zealand Protestant Churches in the Early Ecumenical Movement’s Campaign for Global Order,” *Pacifica* 21, no. 1 (2008): 17–38; Trevor Hogan, “The Radical Irony of Tradition: Revis(ion)ing Antipodean Anglo-Catholicism,” *Pacifica* 12, no. 2 (1999): 209–24.

24 Bradly S. Billings, “Is Anzac Day an Incidence of ‘Displaced Christianity’?,” *Pacifica* 28, no. 3 (2015): 229–42; John A. Moses, “Anglicanism and Anzac Observance: The Essential Contribution of Canon David John Garland,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 1 (2006): 58–77.

25 Anita C. Ray, “(Re-)Discovering Comparative Theology: An Australian Perspective,” *Pacifica* 27, no. 1 (2014): 50–67; Paul Oslington, “Sacred and Secular in Australian Social Services,” *Pacifica* 28, no. 1 (2015): 79–93; Jason A. Goroncy, “Euthanasia: Some Theological Considerations for Living Responsibly,” *Pacifica* 29, no. 3 (2016): 221–43; Brian Macallan, “Embracing the Other: A Christian Response to Counterterrorism Legislation in Australia,” *Pacifica* 28, no. 1 (2015): 40–53.

26 Noel Rowe, “Are There Really Angels in Carlton? Australian Literature and Theology,” *Pacifica* 6, no. 2 (1993): 141–64; Judith Keller, “Songs of the Australian Landscape: The Art and Spirituality of Rosalie Gascoigne,” *Pacifica* 20, no. 3 (2007): 307–21.

27 Raymond Nobbs, “From Nowhere to Know How: Sydney College of Divinity, the First Twenty Years,” *Pacifica* 17, no. 2 (2004): 121–36; Paul Beirne, “The Melbourne College of Divinity: A Selective Historical Overview,” *Pacifica* 23, no. 2 (2010): 123–36.



(2.65%) on some sense of context and method in producing an Australasian theology.<sup>28</sup>

John Horner, *Pacifica*'s original and longstanding editor, in his mature historical overview of the journal, makes only a singular reference to its content: that *Pacifica* managed to secure contributions from the likes of John de Gruchy, Gustavo Gutiérrez, Johann Baptist Metz, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, and Jürgen Moltmann. He interpreted this not as an instance of “cultural cringe” for the journal published a “number of young Australian Theologians.” These other voices simply “set the journal on an international stage.”<sup>29</sup> He included no further reflection on the Oceanic context and its contribution to *Pacifica*.

#### **4. *Colloquium: The Australia and New Zealand Theological Review (1964–)***

The *New Zealand Theological Review* (NZTR) began in 1964 before changing its name to *Colloquium* in 1967. Although the name changed, the sequential numbering remained. The NZTR produced five issues across two volumes, and *Colloquium* began at volume two, issue two. Combined, this

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28 Neill Darragh, “Contextual Method in Theology: Learnings from the Case of Aotearoa New Zealand,” *Pacifica* 16, no. 1 (2003): 45–66; Frank D. Rees, “Doubt in Search of Understanding,” *Pacifica* 6, no. 3 (1993): 279–96; Clive Pearson, “‘For Christ’s Sake’: From Expletive to Confession,” *Pacifica* 17, no. 2 (2004): 197–215; Tracy Spencer, “Getting Off the Verandah: Contextual Australian Theology in-Land,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 3 (2006): 323–41; Mark G. Brett, “Locating Readers: A Response to Frank Moloney,” *Pacifica* 11, no. 3 (1998): 303–15; Elaine M. Wainwright, “Looking Both Ways or in Multiple Directions: Doing/Teaching Theology in Context Into the Twenty-First Century,” *Pacifica* 18, no. 2 (2005): 123–40.

29 John Honner, “*Pacifica*: Genesis and Progress of a Journal,” *Pacifica* 25, no. 3 (2012): 305.

results in a dataset of 630 articles over the fifty-two volumes to 2020. At its inception, no stated purpose informed the journal apart from providing “an organ for the expression of scholarly views on theological and related matters.”<sup>30</sup> The editorial introducing the shift to *Colloquium* spoke of a “closer relationship and a deeper communication between the theologians of Australia and New Zealand” and between “their friends in the Northern Hemisphere, and their brethren in Asia and the Pacific.”<sup>31</sup> It laid stress on “scholarship” and how this “takes no account of the accidents of birth, nor pays special attention to a man’s [sic] ecclesiastical allegiance”—a claim, of course, to be tested through the statistical rendering of the published materials.<sup>32</sup> Apart from this scholastic and ecclesial ordering, no conceptual framework appears to have directed the journal.

To begin with treatments of Micronesia, Melanesia, or Polynesia, *Colloquium* included three articles (0.47%) across its fifty-six years of publication.<sup>33</sup> In terms of authors native to the region, the journal included four (0.63%): one Aboriginal Australian, one Māori, one Samoan, and one

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30 “Editorial,” *New Zealand Theology Review* 1, no. 1 (1964): ix.

31 “Editorial,” *Colloquium* 2, no. 2 (1967): 95.

32 “Editorial,” 95.

33 Peter N. Wedde, “Church and People in Papua-New Guinea,” *Colloquium* 3, no. 2 (1969): 163–72; Larry Hannan, “Formation in a Multi-Cultural Seminary,” *Colloquium* 20, no. 1 (1987): 12–21; Terry Pouono, “‘Coconut Juice in a Coca Cola Bottle’: In Search of an Identity: A New Zealand-Born Samoan Christian in a Globalized World,” *Colloquium* 45, no. 2 (2013): 170–84.

Tongan.<sup>34</sup> Six articles (0.95%) focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander questions,<sup>35</sup> but only one was written by an Indigenous author.<sup>36</sup> Five articles (0.79%) raised Māori issues, with one of Māori authorship.<sup>37</sup> This Māori-authored article was a two-part piece that appeared in 1966–67.<sup>38</sup> In the intervening fifty-five years, not one of the three journals published a Māori voice.

The work by James Irwin, the then Dean of Māori and Polynesian Studies at Knox College, Dunedin, deserves attention here. His two articles, one outlining the “Maui Myth Cycle” and one charting a “Māori Theology,” represent the only attempt across all three journals to examine the Māori imaginative universe and associated social institutions and rituals.<sup>39</sup> But

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34 Graham Paulson, Moke Couch, Terry Pouono, and Jione Havea.

35 W. E. H. Stanner, “Some Aspects of Aboriginal Religion,” *Colloquium* 9, no. 1 (1976): 19–35; Ronald M. Berndt, “A Profile of Good and Bad in Australian Aboriginal Religion,” *Colloquium* 12 (1979): 17–32; Lynne Hume, “Delivering the Word the Aboriginal Way: The Genesis of an Australian Aboriginal Theology,” *Colloquium* 25, no. 2 (1993): 86–95; Frank Brennan, “Risking Embrace: Living the Theology of Reconciliation,” *Colloquium* 34, no. 2 (2002): 93–106; Frank Brennan, “When We Know What We Are, and Can Go On, I Wish for What You Wish for Me,” *Colloquium* 34, no. 2 (2002): 107–20.

36 Graham Paulson and Mark G. Brett, “Five Smooth Stones: Reading the Bible Through Aboriginal Eyes,” *Colloquium* 45, no. 2 (2013): 199–214.

37 Michael P. Shirres, “A Māori Theological Response to Violence,” *Colloquium* 26, no. 2 (1994): 94–103.

38 Richard Thompson and Moke Couch, “Māoris and the Urban Church, Part 1,” *The New Zealand Theological Review* 2, no. 1 (1966): 56–62; Richard Thompson and Moke Couch, “Māoris and the Urban Church, Part 2,” *Colloquium* 2, no. 2 (1967): 156–65.

39 James Irwin, “The Maui Myth Cycle: Some Theological Dimensions and the Māori Estimate of Man,” *Colloquium* 14, no. 1 (1981): 40–45; James Irwin, “Towards a Māori Theology,” *Colloquium* 16, no. 1 (1983): 13–22.

it remains an attempt by someone external to that cultural world to sketch possible Christian theological affinities with that world. To his merit, he demonstrates awareness of this secondary distance. It is also notable because Irwin wrote these in 1981 and 1983. In the intervening four decades, zero articles (0.00%) have continued the discussion. Furthermore, zero articles (0.00%) attempted to set the Indigenous voices through Oceania into conversation. At a minimum, a special issue which invited an inter-Indigenous dialogue, one which charts existing discourses and proposes further agendas, seems like an obvious learning opportunity.

In terms of locating a wider Oceanic discourse, seven articles (1.11%) engaged with regional sectarian or ecumenical histories.<sup>40</sup> Four focused on the ANZACs in World War I, meaning that across *Pacifica* and *Colloquium*, more articles dealt with the ANZACs than with Micronesia, Melanesia, or Polynesia.<sup>41</sup> Two articles (0.31%) were interested in art, culture, and the built

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40 Walter Phillips, "Luther in Australia: The Colonial Commemoration of the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Birth of Martin Luther," *Colloquium* 16, no. 2 (1984): 28–38; Anne Klose, "Covenantal Priesthood as a Narrative of Community for Australian Baptist Churches," *Colloquium* 45, no. 1 (2013): 61–79.

41 George M. Crombie, "Fate and Faith: A Reflection on Australian Culture," *Colloquium* 20, no. 1 (1987): 22–30; John A. Moses, "The First World War as Holy War in German and Australian Perspective," *Colloquium* 26, no. 1 (1994): 44–55; John A. Moses, "Was There an ANZAC Theology?," *Colloquium* 35, no. 1 (2003): 3–13; Kerrie Handasyde, "ANZAC Theology and Women Poets Under the Southern Cross," *Colloquium* 49, no. 1 (2017): 17–30.

environment.<sup>42</sup> A concentration of fourteen texts (2.22%) examined a range of social issues from HIV/AIDS to homosexuality to abortion to migration.<sup>43</sup> Twelve articles (1.90%) examined the question of local theologies in New Zealand and Australia, either by way of stocktaking recent tendencies or via constructive attempts.<sup>44</sup> Theological education and its structuring occupied fifteen articles (2.38%), but these displayed minimal attention to wider cultural concerns and how these might also inform structural questions and the forms and ends of theological production.<sup>45</sup>

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42 Judith Brown, “‘And Darkness Came Over the Whole Land’: Some Thoughts on Colin McCahon and the Colour Black,” *Colloquium* 43, no. 1 (2011): 82–92; Richard Morris, “The Interior Landscape: Metaphors for Faith and Belief in the Religious Paintings of Colin McCahon,” *Colloquium* 43, no. 1 (2011): 71–81.

43 Caroline Blyth, “‘I Am Alone With My Sickness’: Voicing the Experience of HIV- and AIDS-Related Stigma Through Psalm 88,” *Colloquium* 44, no. 2 (2012): 149–62; Mark G. Brett, “Forced Migrations, Asylum Seekers and Human Rights,” *Colloquium* 45, no. 2 (2013): 121–36; Douglas Pratt, “An Ecclesial Dilemma: Homosexual Affirmation and Church Process,” *Colloquium* 39, no. 1 (2007): 36–57; John Tucker, “A Matter of Life and Death: New Zealand Baptists and Abortion Law Reform, 1960–1990,” *Colloquium* 43, no. 2 (2011): 202–28.

44 Robert Banks, “Fifty Years of Theology in Australia, 1915–1965, Part One,” *Colloquium* 9, no. 1 (1976): 36–42; Robert Banks, “Fifty Years of Theology in Australia: 1915–1965, Part Two,” *Colloquium* 9, no. 2 (1976): 7–16; David J. Bromell, “Universal Truth and Local Contexts: Doing Theology in Aotearoa-New Zealand,” *Colloquium* 21, no. 2 (1989): 39–44; Scott Cowdell, “Eucharistic Liturgy: Theology, Context, Australianness,” *Colloquium* 21, no. 2 (1989): 45–51; H. M. Jamieson, “Embodying Christ: An Image for an Australian Church,” *Colloquium* 48, no. 1 (2016): 61–73; Frank D. Rees, “New Directions in Australian Spirituality: Sabbath Beyond the Church,” *Colloquium* 47, no. 1 (2015): 75–88.

45 Allan K. Davidson, “Teaching Church History in a Cross-Cultural Context,” *Colloquium* 19, no. 2 (1987): 41–47; Robert K. McIver, “Theological Education in Australia: The Past and Present as Possible Indicators of Future Trends,” *Colloquium* 50, no. 2 (2018): 96–112; Geoff Thompson, “The Functions of Theology: Loosening the Nexus Between Theological Education and Ministerial Formation,” *Colloquium* 47, no. 2 (2015): 208–20.

Comparing the results of *Colloquium* and *Pacifica*, note foremost the identical returns. They are mirror images of one another across every measure. A similar percentage of articles treated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander questions, Indigenous voices, and questions emerging from Aotearoa, Polynesia, Melanesia, and Micronesia. In terms of the wider Oceanic voice, an identical percentage of church history articles were produced, along with a particular concentration on the ANZACs. An identical number of articles dealt with social issues and theological education.

To draw but one evident conclusion: the founding “international” focus of the journal and the society it serves failed to inform and redirect the theological discourse towards Oceania. To extend this point, one might observe certain differences between Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand: with *Te Tiriti o Waitangi* conceived as the nation’s founding document, the relationship of Pākehā and Māori is a key feature across its contemporary cultural and legislative discourses (however imperfectly). Aotearoa also includes significant Polynesian communities and ties through the Pacific region, a relationship that has found ecclesiological expression in the *Tikanga* system of the Anglican Church. In other words, the relationships between these peoples are near and not distant. But none of this norming of relationship at the public, cultural, social, and even ecclesial levels, translated into change within academic theological discourse and its attribution of value. Note, for example, the name *ANZATS* has not reflected the conventional change in New Zealand to include Aotearoa as essential to that identity: *The*

*Australian and [Aotearoa]/New Zealand Association of Theological Schools* (A[A] NZATS). The opposite is the case—more articles were written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors (thirteen) than Māori authors (one). Significant sociocultural changes have failed to inform the cultural liaisons determining the institutions of academic theology.

### **5. *Australian Biblical Review* (1951–)**

The *Australian Biblical Review* (ABR) is the longest standing, and some might even say “premier,” academic journal in the region. The stated intent in its first issue concerned the need for a “society devoted solely to scientific research of biblical and other matters” and that the journal served to connect the members of this society. Its sample size is 371 articles across sixty-nine volumes. In terms of the study’s parameters, it had the fewest returns. Zero articles (0.00%) were directed to Indigenous concerns, and zero (0.00%) were written by Indigenous peoples of Australia or Aotearoa. One article (0.27%) was authored by a scholar native to Melanesia, Micronesia, or Polynesia.<sup>46</sup>

Regarding the more generic contribution to an Oceanic voice, Eric Osborn’s 1986 encouragement to develop “variety” within Australian theology maintained the benchmark of Anglo scholars gaining especially Northern European experience.<sup>47</sup> Mark Brett’s 2019 examination of the “Past

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46 Felise Tavo, “The Outer Court and Holy City in Rev. 11:1–2: Arguing for a Positive Appraisal,” *Australian Biblical Review* 54 (2006): 56–72.

47 Eric F. Osborn, “Variety in Australian Theology,” *Australian Biblical Review* 34 (1986): 59–64.

and Future of Biblical Studies” is the singular text to set the study of the Bible in relation to the colonial context, and to raise hermeneutical and structural questions regarding the content, method, and end of theological scholarship in the region.<sup>48</sup>

Not a single article addressed intercultural hermeneutics or read the biblical text in relation to local questions or histories. For example, while a few articles attended to the idea of “land,” none (0.00%) drew any connection to similar Indigenous concerns through Oceania. The few texts which deal with some hermeneutic of location are those interested in ecology, but these did not stretch to include particular Oceanic questions.<sup>49</sup> The *ABR* included no (0.00%) accounts of Indigenous readings and failed to establish any conversation with readings and forms of interpretation by biblical scholars through the Pacific. Current databases include the capacity to search for words or phrases within the full texts in each journal, and to limit those searches to articles. I would invite the reader to run these searches using the terms: “intercultural,” “cross-cultural,” “Indigenous,” “Māori,” “Aboriginal,” “First Nations,” “Pacific,” or indeed any term that might speak to local

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48 Mark G. Brett, “Past and Future of Biblical Studies in Australia,” *Australian Biblical Review* 67 (2019): 84–96.

49 See Anne F. Elvey, “Earthing the Text? On the Status of the Biblical Text in Ecological Perspective,” *Australian Biblical Review* 52 (2004): 64–79; Elaine Mary Wainwright, “Reading Matt. 21:12–22 Ecologically,” *Australian Biblical Review* 60 (2012): 67–79. See, by contrast, Mark G. Brett, “‘Speak to the Earth and She will Instruct You’ (Job 12:8): An Intersection of Ecological and Indigenous Hermeneutics,” in *Where the Wild Ox Roams: Biblical Essays in Honour of Norman C. Habel*, edited by Alan H. Cadwallader and Peter L. Trudinger (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 1–19.



circumstance. The results return only as dry bones.<sup>50</sup> Electronic searches for Oceanic biblical scholars named in Brett's article returned identical results.

In terms of the biblical scholarship's capacity to speak with wider society, Brett observes that "the Australian university system" has effectively excluded "theology and biblical studies from scholarly conversation about public goods—whether politics, health sciences, economic policy, or the broader discussion of social norms and values that often surface within the humanities. As a consequence, there is no expectation that biblical studies can make a contribution to communal wellbeing."<sup>51</sup> But, no (0.00%) articles set the biblical text in conversation with contemporary concerns. Nothing in the *ABR* suggests that biblical scholarship has any capacity to contribute to communal wellbeing. By failing to draw the connections between theological insight and the public good within our own academic discourses, it seems a stretch to chide those outside looking in for failing to appreciate the connections for themselves.

If we consolidate the findings of the *ABR* into a single statistic, three articles of a possible 371 means that 99.20 percent of the articles in the *ABR* could not be counted as displaying any express interest in the Oceanic context, or in finding any value in local voice, or in the framing of local questions for the interpretation of Scripture, or in cultivating an intercultural hermeneutic

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50 As to dry bones, see Nigel M. Watson, "The First Fifty Years of the Fellowship for Biblical Studies and the *Australian Biblical Review*," *Australian Biblical Review* 49 (2001): 1–4.

51 Brett, "Past and Future of Biblical Studies in Australia," 91.

that might enlighten the text itself. For a field trained in language and culture and the importance of these in the construction, interpretation, and use of these texts by local communities, nothing in the *ABR* suggested the importance of its own cultural location when reading the text, or even that such location might be of framing importance for theological discourse itself. It seems to have pretended throughout that its voice was without context, i.e., it failed to interrogate its dependency on cultural modes of discourse rooted in Europe and North America.<sup>52</sup> Should one ask how the Bible speaks in local voice and to local concern through the years of the *ABR*, the answer is simple: the Word of God does not speak from here.

## **6. Yeah . . . But . . . Whatabout . . . ?**

While these numbers might not come as a surprise, the apparent racism of this theological work and the implication, not simply of its contemporary irrelevance, but of its positive service to legacy colonial structures will prompt forms of defence and mitigation.

One such defence, oft-repeated in casual conversation, applies established tropes regarding “availability”: “English is their second language,” or “there is no one with expertise in our (norming) speciality,” or, to

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<sup>52</sup> For a critique on this point, see Willie James Jennings, “Renouncing Completeness: The Rich Ruler and the Possibilities of Biblical Scholarship Without White Masculine Self-Sufficiency,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 140, no. 4 (2021): 837–42.

employ the final measure of invisibility, “we can find no one.”<sup>53</sup> On the one hand, translators and editors appear readily available for a range of voices issuing from Europe. On the other hand, several individuals from the wider Oceanic region have earned higher degrees by research in theology through Australasian universities. (The question of the actual numbers was put to one university, but no answer has yet been forthcoming.) The statistics indicate that none have published in these journals.

A further way of parsing this “availability” question might observe that the themes or voices constituting this study’s critical parameters were simply not submitted to these journals under examination. In response, first, I know of cases whereby such authors submitted work, which was rejected (even when, in one case, the work was translated and published in German). Second, one might talk of hospitality, of creating an inviting environment, of supporting marginal voices. This, of course, names the very centre under investigation, the paternalistic “we” (i.e., those embodying the norm) with the power to create space for the “other.” Third, given that these journals are instruments of academic societies, and certain volumes result from annual conferences organised around themes and invited voices, the published material itself manifests intentionalities. This “tragic air of nostalgia” for the northern and western climes may well serve the international reputations of scholars of divinity and secure the “legitimacy of our theological conferences,”

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53 Françoise Král, “Mapping the Invisible: Critical Perspectives on Invisibility,” in *Social Invisibility and Diasporas in Anglophone Literature and Culture: The Fractal Gaze* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 19–41.

but it reinforces a racism which undoes the theological project.<sup>54</sup> Nor can we stop at this juncture: academic conferences of academic societies result from decisions made by governing bodies, policies, and administrative actions. It does not take much to observe the constitution of these boards or committees, or the similar constitution across boards or committees. One might enquire after the established structures and policies governing article solicitation, peer review, thematic issues, and the presence or absence of explicit support for minority or junior scholars in those structures.

A second form of defence might question the selected dataset. One might well argue that Z journal is concerned with X and not Y. Maybe, but it is evident from the lack of express purpose noted in the originating descriptions of these journals, and the absence of any such purpose statements in later developments, that to claim such is to acknowledge an unarticulated expectation directing these journals. Submissions encounter unnamed but determining barriers (including the suspicion of interdisciplinary work or perceived challenges to disciplinary purity). One might also indicate a significant variety of materials in monographs or collected volumes, both local and international, across several disciplines that satisfy these parameters. This is an easy point to grant. But it is a question of medium and normative frames.

Journals are mobile, flexible, and accessible. They afford a longitudinal perspective, charting key authorities, themes, and methodologies across

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<sup>54</sup> Brett, "Past and Future of Biblical Studies in Australia," 95.

significant historical events. It is reasonable, in other words, to examine those journals for the normative authorities, in terms of authors, texts, methods, and lines of questioning. Collected volumes, by contrast, permit variance and niche concentrations. Though whole series are devoted to specific lines of argumentation, niche work diverges from the main path. It costs multiplicatively more than “digestible” products and more than indexed journal articles accessible through a range of instruments. One must both possess the necessary means (financial and institutional) and be deliberate in seeking this material. One must already know the questions—questions not named by the norm, questions deemed to be variant and secondary.

One might further question the dataset by suggesting that other journals are better suited to meet the study’s stated parameters. Take, for example, the *Pacific Journal of Theology* (*PJT*, 1989–), the *Melanesian Journal of Theology* (*MJT*, 1985–), or mission journals such as the *South-Pacific Journal of Mission Studies* (1989–2002), the *Australian Journal of Mission Studies* (2007–), or *Neben Yubu* (1978–2002). Reference to these journals would produce a significant statistical increase in relation to the stated parameters. However, in reference to mission journals, one might note a common operative logic that reduces “contextual” voices to “missionary” interests and so marginalises those voices as secondary to the “church” and its (non-contextual) theological norms. Leaving to one side the pseudo-arguments that establish hierarchies across the theological sub-disciplines, note that the fields of sociology, history, anthropology, and art demonstrate greater interest in Oceanic theology and

method than the aforementioned journals.<sup>55</sup> They are interested in these theologies as part of the academic venture. In other words, it is not simply that the three examined journals failed to develop a local voice—they ignored the rich and extensive material that already exists.

Note yet further the truncation of vision that consolidates Oceania to Australasia, and the manner in which Australasia ignores the scholarship of the region. For example, should one combine the articles across the three journals with express reference to Micronesia, Melanesia, or Polynesia (also in their migratory forms), it would amount to five articles across a combined dataset of 1529 (0.32%). The other noteworthy observation concerns the volume of selected material which interprets local theological concerns through the framing divisions, categories, and authorities of Europe. In other words, even when Oceania (constricted to Australasia) is referenced, it is interrogated via an ordering derived from Europe and evaluated according to received measures.

With specific reference to *PJT* and *MJT*, these are indeed rich resources for local theologising utilising a variety of methodologies across the disciplinary fields. As part of this statistical evaluation, a further “full-text” electronic search was conducted to ascertain how often materials

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55 As a limited selection, see Wolfgang Kempf, “Introduction: Climate Change and Pacific Christianities,” *Anthropological Forum* 30, no. 3 (2020): 215–32; Debra McDougall, “Beyond Rupture: Christian Culture in the Pacific,” *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 31, no. 2 (2020): 203–9; Christine Weir, “The Opening of the Coconut Curtain: Pacific Influence on the World Council of Churches Through the Campaign for a Nuclear-Free Pacific, 1961 to 2000,” *Journal of Pacific History* 54, no. 1 (2019): 116–38.

from *PJT* or *MJT* were referenced in the three journals under consideration. Across the 1529 articles under examination, only one—six-hundredths of one percent (0.06%)—referenced either of these journals. Nor was this singular author a citizen of Oceania: she hails from North America.<sup>56</sup> Based on this result, a further search was conducted using the names of Pacific scholars of historical note (Keiti Ann Kanongata’a, Sione ‘Amanaki Havea, Ilaitia Sevati Tuwere, Leslie Boseto, Patelesio Finau, and Winston Halapua). Again, only the aforementioned essay referenced these names. In other words, while one might note the generation within “niche” publications, these receive no citation, no interaction with the questions raised, the authorities cited, the hermeneutical frameworks proposed, or responses to the charge of “stale” methodologies.<sup>57</sup> The niche voice is cherished in its being sidelined, while continually excluded from the normal course of discussion. Given this absence of reference to local resources, further electronic searches were conducted using the names: Karl Barth (76 *Pacifica*; 71 *Colloquium*; 8 *ABR*), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (37 *Pacifica*; 30 *Colloquium*; 1 *ABR*), Rudolf Bultmann (18 *Pacifica*; 29 *Colloquium*; 29 *ABR*), Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (69 *Pacifica*; 33 *Colloquium*; 23 *ABR*), and Bernard Lonergan (41 *Pacifica*; 6 *Colloquium*;

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56 Nancy M. Victorin-Vangerud, “Thinking Like an Archipelago: Beyond Tehomophobic Theology,” *Pacifica* 16, no. 2 (2003): 153–72.

57 Jione Havea, “Engaging Readings from Oceania,” in *Bible, Borders, Belonging(s): Engaging Readings From Oceania*, eds. Jione Havea, David J. Neville, and Elaine M. Wainwright (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2014), 3–19.

o *ABR*).<sup>58</sup> One might say of the *PJT* and the *MJT* that they are contextual, but the above statistics demonstrate a profound contextual affiliation, one disassociated from the Oceanic context.

The simple fact presented by the statistics is that the examined measures all fall well within a standard “margin of error.” This is an objective accounting.

## 7. Derivative Directions and Sectarian Blinkers

Charting statistics alone is an unsophisticated tool. Statistics require interpretation. At the outset, certain preliminary conclusions present themselves. First, the statistics highlight how the stated interest in “scholarship” across the three journals is not neutral, which will, by nature, encompass a diversity of voices. Scholarship necessitates curiosity and intentionality: intentionality regarding questions posed, authorities examined, methodologies employed, structures developed, voices invited, and goals defined. Any lack of explicit intention is itself intentional, an exercise of satisfaction with the prevailing norms.

Second, the evident racism highlighted by the statistics (you are more likely to win the lottery than read a brown voice from Oceania) should promote some secondary distance, some accounting for the violence embodied through these journals. Eric Osborn, in 1968, observed that

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<sup>58</sup> I was unable to perform a search that listed subject areas by popularity, but other names of significance included: Augustine (194 *Pacifica*; 122 *Colloquium*; 47 *ABR*), Aquinas (185 *Pacifica*; 22 *Colloquium*; 11 *ABR*), Kant (71 *Pacifica*; 61 *Colloquium*; 6 *ABR*), Hegel (43 *Pacifica*; 29 *Colloquium*; 6 *ABR*).



“[w]hen we talk about theology in Australia, we are very ready to invent the problem which theologians in other parts of the world have been talking about, to convince ourselves that these are our problems, and to argue about their present solution.”<sup>59</sup> Fifty-four years later these journals evidence an identical mode of theological generation. Richard Campbell’s 1977 evaluation attributes this failure “to spawn a tradition of self-sustaining theological scholarship” within Australia to its derivative nature (continued reference to colonial bodies), sectarian attitudes (apologetic ties to religious bodies), and the consequential incapacity to attend to, and lack of interest in, the processes of indigenisation.<sup>60</sup> This evaluation reads as accurate today.

One should make particular note of the sectarian problem because one often hears validations of current theological sympathies and lines of argument as “serving the local community.” Though it presumes some form of sacred-cow inviolate status, the claim is demonstrably false: the problem has been narrated in identical fashion over decades, indicating that the continued clinging to the sectarian framing hinders the theological enterprise. It is an approach which succeeds only in fracturing theological discourse, in reducing it to episodic pronouncements on matters that are not local but tribal. The colonial history underlying the sectarian approach damages those living within and sustaining colonial legacies, for they are themselves stuck

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59 Eric F. Osborn, “Theology Here and Now,” *Colloquium* 3, no. 1 (1968): 5.

60 Richard Campbell, “The Character of Australian Religion,” *Meanjin* 36, no. 2 (1977): 179.

in a loop of reference back to cultural centres which continue to look upon those in the colonies as derivative of the norm, if they look upon them at all. Though an accompanying justification hints at the ecumenical nature of this approach, the highlighted journals displayed no awareness of developments in ecumenical method and discourse, such as intercultural hermeneutics and intercultural theology.<sup>61</sup> The idea of the “ecumenical” seemed more a wistful refrain remembering a distant centre than a living discourse interrogating local structures and the forms of their theological production.

Note that, with a combined data set of 1529 articles across the three journals, only three authors were native to Micronesia, Melanesia, and Polynesia (0.19%). Not only does this deny the richness of theologising in these regions or the developed methodologies,<sup>62</sup> it also denies that our communities are intertwined through colonial experiences, migration, and shared theological questions that differ from the answers developed in other places—a silencing of local voice results. For example, while it was possible to include a treatment of “Caribbean biblical hermeneutics,”<sup>63</sup> not a single

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61 See, for example, the work by the then General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Konrad Raiser, “A Hermeneutics of Unity,” in *Faith and Order in Moshi: The 1996 Commission Meeting*, ed. Alan D. Falconer (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 115–28. See also Martien E. Brinkman, “From Ecumenical to Intercultural Theology,” in *A Reformed Voice in the Ecumenical Discussion* (Netherlands: Brill, 2016), 247–60.

62 For a summary of developments, see Näsili Vaka’uta and Darrell Jackson, “Theology,” in *Christianity in Oceania*, eds. Kenneth R. Ross, Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 259–71.

63 James E. Harding, “Caribbean Biblical Hermeneutics After the Empire,” *Pacifica* 19, no. 1 (2006): 16–36.

publication explored hermeneutical considerations in any part of Oceania. These remain confined to niche publications.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, though it proved possible to engage in a detailed study of inculturation amongst the Turkana nomads of North-West Kenya, nothing similar was developed in reference to any part of Oceania.<sup>65</sup> As to the existing available resources, should one use the phrase the “Pacific way,” for example, one might ask how many readers recognise this as an established political and theological method dating from the 1970s to today.<sup>66</sup> Even in discussions of ecology, a significant field of endeavour through the three journals, one finds no reference to the Islander voice, those who have experienced nuclear waste dumped in their waters, who are and will be the first to lose their lands through rising waters and weather patterns due to the warming seas.<sup>67</sup>

Consider the historical events that impacted Oceania over the seventy-year period encompassed by these journals. One could begin with the wars

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64 As but one example, see Makesi Neemia, “The Hebrew Bible and Postcolonial Samoan Hermeneutics,” in *Colonial Contexts and Postcolonial Theologies: Storyweaving in the Asia-Pacific*, eds. Mark G. Brett and Jione Havea (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 267–79.

65 Thomas G. Grenham, “Interculturation: Exploring Changing Religious, Cultural, and Faith Identities in an African Context,” *Pacifica* 14, no. 2 (2001): 191–206.

66 Matt Tomlinson, “The Pacific Way of Development and Christian Theology,” *Sites: A Journal of Social Anthropology and Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2019): 1–20.

67 As one example, see Ama’emalele Tofaeono, *Eco-Theology: Aiga—the Household of Life: A Perspective From Living Myths and Traditions of Samoa* (Erlangen: Erlanger Verlag für Mission und Ökumene, 2000). See also the direct relationship between rising seas and the questioning of the Christian faith: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-02-06/faitn-on-a-sinking-ship-torres-strait-climate-change/11837360>.

(Vietnam, the Cold War and the Bay of Pigs, Iraq I and II, Afghanistan, to name just the ones which have entered Western sightlines), or the ideological conflicts (collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the rise of neoliberalism in economics and governance; September 11, religious fundamentalisms, terror attacks, and the response). But let us restrict the discussion to “local” events: the Aboriginal Preservation and Protection Act (1939); the referendum for constitutional reform (1967); the Stolen Generation; the Native Title Act (1993); “Sorry Day” (1998); the Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017);<sup>68</sup> Māori land marches; the 1981 South African rugby tour; the Waitangi Tribunal and reparations; the “anti-terror” raids (2007); nuclear testing/dumping in the Pacific; the Rainbow Warrior (1985); West Papua; military coup(s) d’état in Fiji; conflict in the Solomon Islands; the “Coconut Revolution” in Bougainville; the Australian government’s “stop the boats” (2013–) campaign and the related development of off-shore detention centres. Of all this local history, and across these journals—only one article (0.06%) entertained one issue.<sup>69</sup>

Theology, as it has appeared in these journals, proved impotent to speak to the lived experience of local peoples. As theology displays this impotency, it is rightly removed from public discourses informing these living concerns. None of this is to deny that significant theologising concerning these issues

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68 For a brief timeline, see <https://bth.humanrights.gov.au/significance/historical-context-the-stolen-generations>.

69 Peter Lewis, “After Sorry: Towards a New Covenant of Solidarity and Embrace,” *Pacifica* 22, no. 1 (2009): 1–19.

has occurred (at various levels of the churches' life). An analysis of the homosexuality debates alone would demand significant academic attention. But the void of theological interest devoted to the determining events of the region, those culture-shaping moments, reveals an absence of theological leadership. Not this alone: it reveals an absence of theological concern. The fundamental problem reflected here, to use the idea of a "null curriculum," is that this absence proclaims value. The failure to mainstream these discourses, suggests not only that "proper theology" does not address contemporary history or local contextual questions. It also demonstrates that these other concerns and voices are invisible to "theology proper," theology as public community endeavour.

## **8. Reading the Footprints**

The absence indicated by the statistics is not the appropriate starting point for redressing the problem—it retains the existing structures and their reformation as the key focus. Such truth-telling is a ground-clearing exercise for the purpose of positive reconstruction. The driving questions must focus on identifying and articulating the Oceanic voice, God speaking here and now.

One evident limitation of the statistical analysis is that numbers alone fail to indicate the content and quality of the published materials, or the methodologies employed. Nor does it give a sense of development over time. For example, one might assume that the publication dates of the twenty-nine articles dealing with Indigenous questions (1.89%) across the 1529 dataset would skew towards the more contemporary period, that more articles were

published after 2000 than before. Yet, fourteen were published between 1967 and 1999, and fifteen between 2000 and 2020, with five concentrated in the 2006 special issue. No greater theological attention has resulted from the evolving sociocultural support for Indigenous issues among the dominant population.

Observing this does not quite tell the whole story. One might indicate a discernible shift in tone and approach through the identified journal articles. Earlier materials often approached Indigenous questions as secondary objects of study and assumed a stance of pronouncement. In other words, even as we identify these twenty-nine contributions, several perpetuated a base paternalism. Indigenous voices were more apparent through the later publications and made constructive contributions. However, when Indigenous voices did speak and pose questions demanding answers, none of the subsequent articles entertained those questions. This denies the possibility of conversation and so the development of discourse. Indigenous concerns appear episodic and confined to particular thematic ends (thereby distanced from our own living circumstances), not a fundamental resource for a living ecumenical discourse.

This may be due, in part, to an experience of “Western guilt” which results in some perceived incapacity to speak, but which precisely in that silence perpetuates colonial sentiments.<sup>70</sup> Addressing this does not mean

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70 Lamin O. Sanneh, “Christian Missions and the Western Guilt Complex,” *The Christian Century* 104, no. 11 (1987): 331–34.

a return to paternalist practices. Instead, it means that whitefella/Pākehā theologians should attend to the areas of responsibility that pertain to us. It means learning appropriate methods of engagement, allowing the principles of reconciliation to structure the conversations.<sup>71</sup> It means listening to Indigenous voices, citing them, and accounting for one's own theological authorities, priorities, methodologies, and goals.

Let me use two articles published in the journals under examination to give a couple of representative examples of a possible approach. First, see Robyn Reynolds's 2017 *Colloquium* article, "From Marginalisation to Leadership: Reshaping a Theology and Praxis of Mission."<sup>72</sup> Questions about the theology and structure of mission constitute the article's driving concern. These questions are resourced and given constructive shape by reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers. In other words, the essay does not reference Indigenous voices only because it concentrates on a particular Indigenous concern. It references Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices as base theological insight informing a wider discourse. For a second example, see John Wilcken's 2004 article, "To Liberate Theology: Pursuing Segundo's Project in an Australian Context."<sup>73</sup> Wilcken's interest is

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71 See, for example, Schreiber's description of what reconciliation is not: Robert J. Schreiber, *Reconciliation: Mission and Ministry in a Changing Social Order* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 18–28.

72 Robyn Reynolds, "From Marginalisation to Leadership: Reshaping a Theology and Praxis of Mission," *Colloquium* 49, no. 2 (2017): 24–35.

73 John Wilcken, "To Liberate Theology: Pursuing Segundo's Project in an Australian Context," *Pacifica* 17, no. 1 (2004): 55–70.

in theological method, specifically the liberationist interest as articulated by Latin American author Juan Luis Segundo, with “interpreting the word of God as it is addressed to us here and now.”<sup>74</sup> Drawing on the hermeneutical circle enables Wilcken to address four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices as essential to the critical relearning intrinsic to the method—Kevin Gilbert, Anne Pattel-Gray, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, and the Rainbow Spirit Elders. Again, the importance of these voices lies not in some compartmentalised and non-descript “Indigenous” concern, but in resourcing an examination of theological method with an eye to developing local theologies.

Nor does this mean the erosion of disciplinary rigour. John Hilary Martin’s 1990 article, “Can Religions Change? A Hierarchy of Values in Genesis,” addresses this.<sup>75</sup> As the title suggests, Martin uses the biblical narrative to address structures of religious and cultural change with specific reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience. It is an example of identifying local concerns and informing these through the biblical narrative. Local concerns do not override or distort biblical scholarship; biblical scholarship resources those questions. For a second example, see Mark Brett’s 2010 article, “Feeling for Country: Interpreting the Old Testament in the Australian Context.”<sup>76</sup> This engages in a critical rendering

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74 Wilcken, “To Liberate Theology,” 56.

75 John Hilary Martin, “Can Religions Change? A Hierarchy of Values in Genesis,” *Pacifica* 3, no. 1 (1990): 1–24.

76 Mark G. Brett, “Feeling for Country: Interpreting the Old Testament in the Australian Context,” *Pacifica* 23, no. 2 (2010): 137–56.



of the failure of biblical scholarship to attend to its own colonial location and the structuring consequences of “imagined communities.”<sup>77</sup> Australian land marches and the Native Title Act (1993) are set in conversation with exilic narratives, reframing interpretive horizons for the development of a biblical hermeneutic.

However, there is an evident opportunity for disciplinary rejuvenation, with greater attention to investigative rigour. Across all three journals, zero (0.00%) examples of New Testament scholarship dealt with any questions that might pertain to immediate Indigenous concerns (spirits, land, conversion, and repentance envisioned in cultural terms, continuity/discontinuity, religious heritage, purity, law, custom), or the formation of culturally diverse communities, or theologies of reconciliation applied to Oceanic communities, or what healing and restoration might mean after colonisation, or pneumatology and polyvocality, or the resurrection and the cosmic Christ and so cultural continuity and local embodiments of the faith, or eschatology and time and how such frame an account of history and place. Each of these lines of investigation appears basic to the contests and theological constructions through the New Testament and should be a normal part of New Testament scholarship. Why they have not been is a question to be asked.

Brett’s contribution highlights how framing methodological decisions are part of a constructed reality and also serve violent cultural and political

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<sup>77</sup> Brett, “Feeling for Country,” 137.

ends. Methodologies encompass the conceptual apparatus, the framing lenses through which we identify and organise the questions and data under investigation. Naming methodologies assists in the naming of deliberate limits and the isolating of prejudices, in the attempt to procure some sense of self-awareness concerning the constraints of the study. Unexamined methodologies portray as normative their operative apparatus and lenses. This is the claim to power, the assumption of the norm which circumscribes the data and the voices which might intrude upon or erode that norm.

Consider the debate which occurred within *Pacifica* between Geoffrey Lilburne and Tony Kelly. Lilburne's 1997 article, "Contextualising Australian Theology: An Enquiry into Method,"<sup>78</sup> begins with what today would appear to be a standard accounting of the colonial framing of Australian theological discourse. It then turns to Kelly's 1990 work *A New Imagining: Towards an Australian Spirituality*.<sup>79</sup> For Lilburne, Kelly's approach of "a self shaped by a spirituality minted on another shore, without reference to the history and culture of this place, offers dubious support for a methodology for the contextualising of Australian theology."<sup>80</sup> Though Lilburne's own constructive formulation is rather pedestrian, the informative element lies in Kelly's response. This begins by refusing "to distract the contextualising project

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78 Geoffrey Lilburne, "Contextualising Australian Theology: An Enquiry into Method," *Pacifica* 10, no. 3 (1997): 350–64.

79 Tony Kelly, *A New Imagining: Towards an Australian Spirituality* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1990).

80 Lilburne, "Contextualising Australian Theology," 354.

into endless methodological considerations,” before asserting that the whole rests in an axiomatic definition of context.<sup>81</sup> Kelly’s redirection of the concern arranges the theology/context problematic as something “contextualised in Australia” against “something that has to be at once discovered and created, as a more global theological context already in existence doubles back on itself to integrate, however dialectically, our particular context into its framework.”<sup>82</sup> Kelly’s approach employs a precise theological commitment that defines context using a range of value-rich terms (discover, create, integrate) while denying context (in idea and experience) itself a context (global, read: universal).

The concern lies not in making theological claims even of the fundamental and determining variety—to do such is essential to the theological task. It lies in the refusal to engage in a methodological discussion while asserting as normative methodological claims that are themselves contingent upon these precise theological commitments. Both elements belong together: ignoring operative methodologies clears the ground for the normative assertion of contingent claims. Kelly’s conclusion demands significant mental contortion—context is that which is global, transcending all particularities and to which all particularities must be turned. In academic terms, the approach possesses the answer before any question is posed. It

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81 Tony Kelly, “Whither ‘Australian Theology’? A Response to Geoffrey Lilburne,” *Pacifica* 12, no. 2 (1999): 193.

82 Kelly, “Whither ‘Australian Theology’?,” 196.

is not an interrogation of a problem and the discovery of truth, but rather the assertion of received and undifferentiated answers. And while demanding such mental contortion (or membership within a theological structure that construes catholicity in these terms, and which, in local practice, interprets the critique of these norms as a critique of the community within which they are housed), the very claim to power succeeds in setting the base terms, logics, and limits of the debate.<sup>83</sup>

Mitigating against this misuse of power through academic theology begins with naming—naming location, belonging, and values, and so naming the boundary markers governing inclusion and exclusion. To return to Oceania as a regional delimiter, though a contested term it sets the focus on the ocean and not the land as the main connector.<sup>84</sup> This is not to contest the central theological importance of land through this “sea of islands” (note that only one article [0.06%] dealt with water or ocean, and this from the

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83 See, for example, Frank Rees’s interaction with this debate. Though his discussion begins with a theoretical examination of “the idea of a contextual theology,” as well as recognising the debate as one of “method in theology,” he assumes Kelly’s own eliding of both context and method. Kelly’s definition of context and its framing of “conversation” and “transcending” as beyond context and housed in an unexamined notion of the global, universal (without the naming the theological location itself: catholicity) becomes assumed. This further allows the debate to be rendered in abstract doctrinal terms, without any reference to the framing methodological commitments which permits such abstraction. See Frank D. Rees, “Beating Around in the Bush: Methodological Directions for Australian Theology,” *Pacifica* 15, no. 3 (2002): 271–81.

84 Mikaele Paunga, “Contours of Contextual Theologies from Oceania,” *Chakana* 1 (2003): 47–67; Jione Havea, ed., *Theological and Hermeneutical Explorations from Australia: Horizons of Contextuality* (Lanham: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2020).

perspective of our phobia, our own self-deprecation, of water or ocean). It is to say that the visualisation of space, the philosophies of cartography, and their examination is itself basic to the critical theological project in this region; think of the cultural imaging and decisive consequences of *terra nullius* as a way of mapping the world.<sup>85</sup> Those within Oceania should well question the neatness by which cartography dis-relates difference, including such means as the designations of “north” and “south.” This means an interrogation and retelling of received stories about where we fit in the world and of our peculiar contributions.<sup>86</sup>

Opening this space permits the critical revision of concepts contingent on these maps. Several examples might be given, including conceiving the nature of continuity and discontinuity and their relationship,<sup>87</sup> or ideas of “arrival” tied to Western colonial expansion.<sup>88</sup> These feed into

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85 Jeremy W. Crampton, “Thinking Philosophically in Cartography: Toward a Critical Politics of Mapping,” *Cartographic Perspectives* 41 (2002): 4–23; Bronwen Douglas, “Imagined Futures in the Past: Empire, Place, Race, and Nation in the Mapping of Oceania,” in *Pacific Futures: Past and Present*, eds. Warwick Anderson, Miranda Johnson, and Barbara Brookes (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2018), 131–54.

86 See the contest of origin narratives and especially how these simply deny the Aboriginal voice and local *topoi*, in Mark Hutchinson, Cristina Rocha, and Kathleen Openshaw, “Introduction: Australian Charismatic Movements as a Space of Flows,” in *Australian Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Arguments from the Margins*, eds. Cristina Rocha, Mark Hutchinson, and Kathleen Openshaw (Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 1–21.

87 See the idea of “resonant rupture” in Fraser Macdonald, “How to Make Fire: Resonant Rupture Within Melanesian Charismatic Revivalism,” *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 31, no. 2 (2020): 187–202.

88 Fraser Macdonald, “‘God Was Here First’: Value, Hierarchy, and Conversion in a Melanesian Christianity,” *Ethnos* 84, no. 3 (2019): 525–41.

the identification of key *topoi* through the region (land, creation, water, spirits, ancestors, law and custom, colonisation, Christian and Indigenous spiritualities). However, mapping includes the distinguishing of bodies and the arranging of their relationship. Such maps overlies and interprets these points of interest, assigning them to bodies and tracing the lines of commerce. The *topoi*, in other words, receive an ordering whereby they come to reside within localised bodies and are distanced from more “international” theological residents. The resulting discussion emerges as a contest over which voice has the right to speak: “we” are forced into a conversation happening “over there” while “our wider” concerns appear to be ignored.

In this regard, observe the defining significance of secularisation in the region. Only two articles (0.13%) across the combined dataset considered this framing of life in Australasia.<sup>89</sup> None considered theoretical definitions of secularisation, such as the idea of “functional differentiation” (defining secularisation as the division of society into spheres of responsibility, the associated professionalisation of those spheres, and the moderation of those spheres through bureaucracy and policy expressed as technocratic management structures).<sup>90</sup> Secularisation, in other words, does not eliminate religion. Instead, it demarks the proper religious sphere, its necessary

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89 Peter Matheson, “The Myth of a Secular New Zealand,” *Pacifica* 19 (2006): 177–92; Laurie Guy, “Respect and Ridicule: The Church and the Public Square in Contemporary New Zealand,” *Colloquium* 44, no. 1 (2012): 3–16.

90 Benjamin Ziemann, “The Theory of Functional Differentiation and the History of Modern Society: Reflections on the Reception of Systems Theory in Recent Historiography,” *Soziale System* 13, no. 1–2 (2007): 220–29.

detachment from other social spheres and their areas of responsibility, and establishes the legislative parameters governing communication across and between these spheres. With functional differentiation establishing the parameters of religious existence, the three journals might be interpreted as exemplars of such confinement—creating theology within the regulatory space provided by secular mechanisms of religious production, and so the assertion of sectarian interests over theologies speaking to public need, and the presumption of a necessary distance from those for whom religion informs the entirety of social existence; i.e., from *topoi* which become compartmentalised as “local” and belonging to the “naive” religio-cultural organising of native societies.

One might contest such an evaluation of the theological scholarship contained through these journals (however, in this regard, compare the apparent difference in theological discourse produced by Indigenous authors through the *PJT* and the *MJT*, a difference which counters exactly the above guiding secular assumptions). Such a contest is to be affirmed, indeed invited, as a matter of academic contest. Nor does the above theoretical account of secularisation and the claim of its framing theological production require affirmation to secure the main point: there exists an array of conceptual and analytical tools to interrogate our own locations, and such interrogation is necessary for the integrity of the theological endeavour itself.<sup>91</sup>

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91 See Judith E. McKinlay, “What Do I Do with Contexts? A Brief Reflection on Reading Biblical Texts with Israel and Aotearoa New Zealand in Mind,” *Pacifica* 14, no. 2 (2001): 159–71.

As one final point, there is a question as to where one might find sufficient materials to engage in the theological construction of local voices. Theological scholarship is, in large measure, an extended conversation through time. Little attention through these three journals was devoted to identifying and developing local theological materials, meaning that the most trodden paths remain those leading to European constructions. But this is a failing of the theological vision informing the journals themselves, not the result of a lack of local materials.

First, it is necessary to acknowledge a lack of skill development. Even if one ratifying argument for this restrictive theological voice concerns its service to local communities, the journals displayed no acquaintance with the approach of lived theology, or the capacity of human research and its varied methodologies to identify the forms and content of local theological production. Nor did there appear to be any developed expertise with theoretical frameworks such as contextualisation, and the related burgeoning discussions concerning world Christianity and historiography. Nor is this to suggest that such skill developments result in a non-critical stance.<sup>92</sup> On the contrary, it is to affirm skill development, including language learning

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92 Raimundo Cesar Barreto, "Beyond Contextualization: Gospel, Culture, and the Rise of a Latin American Christianity," in *World Christianity as Public Religion*, eds. Raimundo Barreto, Ronaldo Cavalcante, and Wanderley P. da Rosa (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 2017), 97–118; Jione Havea, "The Cons of Contextuality. . . Kontextuality," in *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, eds. Stephen B. Bevans and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 38–52.



and cultural expertise, as both a possible and necessary part of the academic responsibility.

Second, one must affirm the reference to the Church catholic, i.e., the church of the *oecumene*, the whole habitable world. Our sectarian vision needs to be widened via this ecumenical context. Basic to this is affirming the polycentricity of the faith, its polyvocality and so local voice as necessary to the fulfilment of our knowledge of Jesus Christ. In this regard, zero articles (0.00%) even noted the possibility of local Christologies, while such developments are basic within world Christianity.<sup>93</sup>

This reference to polycentricity affirms Oceania as a proper centre of the faith. Plenty of material already exists. This is found in a range of academic disciplines, such as anthropology, sociology, or history.<sup>94</sup> It is found through a range of publications—in journals, collections, and monographs.<sup>95</sup>

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93 Michael Biehl et al., eds. *Witnessing Christ: Contextual and Interconfessional Perspectives on Christology* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2020); Lee Miena Skye, “Australian Aboriginal Women’s Christologies,” in *Hope Abundant: Third World and Indigenous Women’s Theology*, ed. Pui-lan Kwok (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 194–202; Jason A. Goroncy, “A Pretty Decent Sort of Bloke’: Towards the Quest for an Australian Jesus,” *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 1–10.

94 Matt Tomlinson, *God is Samoan: Dialogues Between Culture and Theology in the Pacific* (Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 2020).

95 Dennis Gira, Diego Irarrázaval, and Elaine Mary Wainwright, eds., *Oceania and Indigenous Theologies* (London: SCM Press, 2010); Anne Pattel-Gray and John Percival Brown, eds., *Indigenous Australia: A Dialogue About the Word Becoming Flesh in Aboriginal Churches* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997); Anne Pattel-Gray, “Methodology in an Aboriginal Theology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Black Theology*, eds. Dwight N. Hopkins and Edward P. Antonio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 278–97; Noel Loos, *White Christ, Black Cross* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007); Robert Kenny, *The Lamb Enters the Dreaming: Nathanael Pepper and the Ruptured World* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2010).

It is also found through a range of cultural mediums such as art, literature, poetry, film, music, and the built environment. Only six articles (0.39%) through the dataset entertained and analysed cultural artefacts. To give one example, Graham Redding's 2005 *Pacifica* article, "Reflections Upon Storied Place as a Category for Exploring the Significance of the Built Environment," sets ancient Israel and Māori into conversation regarding the role of narrative in defining a sense of place and the relation to the land, observing also the stories that the built environment tells us regarding the continued mundane learning of colonial horizons.<sup>96</sup> This is an example of establishing vision and normative interpretations of our own locations, and, indeed, of the purposes and proper conduct in these spaces.

Reference to "the Church catholic" means reference to the significant work already being conducted in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. These centres share several similarities with Oceania: not simply the colonial heritage, but also cosmologies, forms of gathering and knowledge production, and modes of theologising and community formation which mirrors such modes within the early church.<sup>97</sup> Christian history is replete with accounts of cultural negotiation and theological production. These encounters and

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96 Graham Redding, "Reflections Upon Storied Place as a Category for Exploring the Significance of the Built Environment," *Pacifica* 18, no. 2 (2005): 154–74.

97 See, for example, Kwame Bediako's comparison of early Christian cultural negotiation and the identical mechanisms informing contemporary African theological production: Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and in Modern Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

experiences need to be drawn into conversation with the encounters and experiences through Oceania.

But it is not the case that one must simply take these local developments as given. Take, for example, George Crombie's 1989 *Colloquium* article "The Divided Self: A Theological Reflection on 'Mateship' in Australian Culture."<sup>98</sup> This demands a variety of critiques (feminist and postcolonial), along with significant questioning of its theoretical formulation of contextualisation and the resulting cultural characterisation; *and* it must be welcomed as a necessary contribution, one with which we must interact. The foundational and problematic values portrayed through the text are all too common. The same needs to be said regarding a portion of the articles dealing with Indigenous questions. These were often more miss than hit. However, error is vital. Error and inadequacies need to be identified, exposed, and diagnosed so that critique and development might occur, moving us beyond this place, leading to the construction of new methods and introducing different authorities, thereby expanding the conceptual range, leading to more faithful interpretations. Such movement requires a first step—and then a second step. Reference to these questions, in other words, cannot take the episodic form as they have through these journals. The conversation needs to be detailed and sustained.

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98 George M. Crombie, "The Divided Self: A Theological Reflection on 'Mateship' in Australian Culture," *Colloquium* 21, no. 2 (1989): 11–20.

## 9. Navigating the Currents

The outlined statistics prompt the following questions: To whom does theology speak, and for what purpose? One might argue that theology speaks to the Church, that it serves the faithful (or, at least, the faithful of a particular cultural segment, given that most are native to the region or migrants from the so-called “global South”). But what is the purpose of developing theologies of hospitality or appreciating the coincidental presence of guest and host in the Eucharist, if our academic structures embody the opposite, “imposed shrunken spaces” with supplied hymn sheets from which to sing?<sup>99</sup> Though various forces (colonial, sectarian, secular) have helped direct the theological production outlined through these journals, such direction is not inviolate. It can be redressed. Let us think of small steps, easily attainable—where there is an appetite.

First, let us *meet* our neighbours. This requires acknowledging the boundary-setting histories that have brought us to this place and set us in determined relations to one another. In terms of constructive theology, it means identifying where we are as the peoples of God in Oceania, cultivating an awareness of the distortions of vision that occur in unbalanced power relationships, and naming the corruptions in stories we tell about ourselves and others. One possible direct action, as modelled by the journal *Verkündigung und Forschung*, is to develop summary articles of key developments within

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99 Gemma Tulud Cruz, “Between Identity and Security: Theological Implications of Migration in the Context of Globalization,” *Theological Studies* 69, no. 2 (2008): 371.

disciplinary fields or select themes. This can both be historical (i.e., they survey the key lines of questioning and developments foundational to contemporary discourse) and ongoing (i.e., they can be revisited at the end of each decade to narrate the journey of these conversations). A second action is developing and curating bibliographies, including annotated bibliographies. Bibliographies serve to direct researchers to materials not necessarily within their usual paths, but which inform and expand the same sets of questions.

Both of these actions encourage intentionality, the deliberate development of theological resourcing and discourse. As one example, it means the curation of special collections, sourcing materials from the region, and establishing reading rooms devoted to primary, secondary, and archival materials. Physical investment in a defined space with a variety of visual and tactile resources indicates value. As a second example, as the statistics demonstrate, without cultivating and expressing agendas and developing forms of accountability the resulting discourse presents as normative unnamed, unexamined, and bounded trajectories. Our institutions must express intent in their guiding visions and supporting structures, the constitution and membership of their committees, boards, and administration, and in the direction of theological production.

Second, let us *listen to and talk with* our neighbours. The identification of materials is not sufficient. It is necessary to read and interact with the range of voices. One often hears complaints that Indigenous voices simply repeat the same critical claims. One might doubt the veracity of such complaints given

the ignorance of developments within Indigenous theologising, especially as it is occurring within Pentecostal communities, i.e., communities invisible to the theological project manifest in these three journals.<sup>100</sup> But let us grant that one finds significant attention devoted to colonial contexts and the experience of dispossession. The above complaint is a form of silencing, an assumed judgement that we already know what is about to be said. Such a posture needs to be unlearned. Perhaps the critical voice needs to be repeated until hearing occurs.

One might enquire about the forms of intentional response within our theological institutions to these charges. For example, no Indigenous voices to have completed their PhDs through Australasian universities have had their work published within these journals. The tone of this observation is not intended to be accusatory. It is rather an invitation to engage in a stocktake, to develop an accounting of the existing structures and their roles in highlighting voices and declaring value. Consider the names invited (at expense) to be keynote speakers at the annual conferences of our academic guilds. It is possible, for example, to develop a five-year project in the construction of a regional hermeneutic, inviting a diversity of voices from Oceania to contribute across a variety of theological disciplines (recognising that significant work has already been done). It is a matter of “mainstreaming”

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100 See, for example, Mahnaz Alimardanian, “‘The Demon is Growing with Sins, But There Are Angels Around’: Bundjalung Pentecostalism as Faith and Paradox,” in *Australian Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Arguments From the Margins*, eds. Cristina Rocha, Mark Hutchinson, and Kathleen Openshaw (Netherlands: Brill, 2020), 257–73.

those voices consigned to niche eddies. It could even mean inviting the Pacific Theological College in Suva, Fiji, to host an A[A]NZATS annual conference. Hearing means constructive interaction. It means the promotion of voices through citation and conversation, and the laying of stones over time to build a foundational knowledge.

Third, let us *celebrate with* our neighbours. Writing in 1987, Sione ‘Amanaki Havea, observed that, as its own distinct contribution, the theologies of the Pacific “are deeply involved in celebrations.”<sup>101</sup> This is a methodological decision, a posture, one which learns from the Pacific way and in which we must learn to share. Let us practice meeting and reading together. This may require the creation of new structures, but the key task lies in forging relationships and expanding networks. One is better able to hear after gathering and sharing a meal. One is better able to develop collaborative projects after building trust and exchanging ideas. Scholarship does not demand agreement, but it does demand debate and conversation, and of the sort that will uncover prejudices, blind spots, silenced voices, and interrogate authorities and conclusions, all with the intent of learning, and all aimed at deeper communion and more faithful witness. This critical work is exponentially more difficult when no relationship exists, and the discourse retreats into adversarial caricatures. Relationships constitute the cornerstone of this entire project. Nor is this to reduce the community of

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101 Sione ‘Amanaki Havea, “Christianity in the Pacific Context,” in *South Pacific Theology: Papers from the Consultation on Pacific Theology, Papua New Guinea, January 1986*, ed. R. Boyd Johnson (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1987), 11–15.

scholars to a singular interest. It is about expanding our theological vision and opening our histories to healing and restoration. Producing theology under the conditions of celebration and of guest rights means prioritising play, adventure, construction, forgiveness, and grace—and laughter, singing, and prayer in the face of mistakes and unfinished works.

Identifying and cultivating the distinctive local Oceanic voice is vital, not as a theological exercise, but rather in recognising the speaking of the living word of the living God, apart from which all theological work is impossible. God speaks here and to us, and from here to the Church catholic. It is our responsibility to listen, learn, express, and embody the fulness of Jesus Christ, in whom we all live and move and have our being.