

A Theological Framework for Reconciliation,

With Special Reference to The Indigenous Peoples of Australia

A Resource Paper for the Indigenous Ministry Task Force

The following report has been written in response to Synod Resolution 22/18, which ‘requests the Diocesan Doctrine Commission, in consultation with Indigenous Christian leaders’ produce a report outlining ‘a theological framework for reconciliation, with special reference to the Indigenous peoples of Australia’. The purpose of this report is to serve as a resource for the task force established by Synod, which, together with the Social Issues Committee, is to produce a further report ‘detailing an appropriate out-working of the Bible’s teaching on reconciliation, and providing recommendations as to how the Diocese as a whole, including organisations, parishes and individuals, might (i) acknowledge past failures in relationships with this nation’s First Peoples, and (ii) find ways to become more intentionally involved with the ministry of the gospel to and with Indigenous peoples’.

Introduction and Overview

1. The word ‘reconciliation’ has been applied to many contemporary political situations around our globe. This includes our government’s initiatives and policies concerning relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. Reconciliation is also a significant theme in Scripture. However, since we may run the risk of reading political ideas into scriptural ones, it is important to grasp the theological framework established by the biblical teaching, before we seek to apply this framework to address the very real and substantial issues we face in thinking about improving current relations and addressing past abuses.
2. In the Scriptures, ‘reconciliation’ has multiple dimensions, such as divine-human reconciliation, cosmic reconciliation, Jew-Gentile reconciliation and person-to-person reconciliation. It is important not to conflate these dimensions by, for example, assuming that the principles of divine-human reconciliation are identical to person-to-person reconciliation, or that the principles for restoring broken relationships at a person-to-person level are identical to the principles for restoring disordered relationships within and between groups of people.
3. In Section A, we trace out a theological portrait of reconciliation to demonstrate that there is both **asymmetry** and **analogy** between divine-human reconciliation and person-to-person forgiveness.
4. In Section B, we explore how divine-human reconciliation provides both the **shape** and **basis** of reconciliation in human relationships. We recognise that it is important to distinguish between human relationships that have been ruptured because of personal sin, and human relationships that have been disordered by past actions, attitudes and consequences that have caused estrangement in the present. Reconciliation is required in each case, but the steps towards reconciliation will differ.

5. In Sections C – E, we apply this framework to individual believers (Section C), to local church communities (Section D) and to broader organisational relationships (Section E), with special reference to the indigenous peoples of Australia.
6. In Section F, we move beyond the theological framework to explore some practical implications.
7. Finally, in Section G, we draw the threads of the discussion together and suggests the value of this theological framework for the report on reconciliation to be written by the Indigenous Ministry Task Force and the Social Issues Committee.

A) A Theological Portrait of Reconciliation

8. In common parlance or the ordinary contexts in which reconciliation is discussed, it is a term that depicts the transition of personal relationships from antagonism or alienation through restoration to communion or mutually beneficial community.
9. In Scripture, the word ‘reconcile’ (καταλλάσσω) occurs in a limited (although theologically very significant) number of passages in the Pauline epistles (Rom 5:7-12, 2 Cor 5:16-21, Col 1:16-22, Eph 2:14-17). However, the theme of reconciliation is much wider, and is connected to the restoration of peace and the right-ordering of relationships more broadly.
10. In Paul’s usage of the term καταλλάσσω, he ranges across the cosmic to the vertical to the horizontal dimensions of reconciliation.

Cosmic reconciliation and its consequences

11. In Colossians 1, Paul reminds the Colossians that God has acted to bring them under the reign of his beloved Son, through whom and for whom he created all things (v. 16). With the rebellion of the man and the woman in the Garden (Gen 3), God’s good creation was ‘subjected to frustration’ by him (Rom 8:20). The power of death was given to the devil (Heb 2:14) and thus a ‘dominion of darkness’ ensued (Col 1:13). The wonder of the gospel is that this subjection was in anticipation of the coming of the Son ‘to reconcile everything to [the Father] ... by making peace through his blood shed on the cross’ (Col 1:20).
12. The humility of the Son in taking ‘the form of a slave’ and ‘becoming obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross’ (Phil 2:7-8) was vindicated by God when he was made ‘the head of the church’ as ‘the firstborn from among the dead’ (Col 1:18). In designating him as the Son by the Spirit of holiness at his resurrection (Rom 1:4), God ‘highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name’ (Phil 2:9). In doing this, he made his ‘enemies a footstool’ (Ps 110:1; cf. Acts 2:34-35). This was God reconciling all things to himself through his royal and eternal Son.
13. The Father’s action to reconcile everything to himself, revealed in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, creates the fellowship of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14). That is, God, in the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13), has constituted the church as a body of which Christ is the head (Col 1:18), and which displays the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 1:10; 3:10).

14. Revelation 7:9-10 explains how the eschatological outcome of this cosmic reconciliation is displayed in the new creation, where the redeemed from every nation, tribe, people and language will stand before the throne to worship God and the Lamb. Here we learn that reconciliation leads to a unified, although certainly not uniform, people, gathered to worship God for his saving work.
15. Thus, the concept of reconciliation is ultimately grounded in the triune life of God. This is not because the persons of the Godhead need reconciling to one another but because the perfect order of relations among Father, Son, and Spirit effects the order of right relations between God and humanity, as well as between persons. This is a work that has begun in the present age and will be perfected in the new creation.

Divine-human reconciliation

16. Romans 5:7-11 and 2 Corinthians 5:16-21 focus on the vertical reality between God and his people. Because human sinfulness puts people at enmity with God and provokes his wrath against them, reconciliation is necessary for salvation. God is the sole agent of reconciliation as he reconciles the world to himself in Christ (2 Cor 5:18). This is an expression of his great love for his enemies (Rom 5:8-10).
17. The propitiatory death of Christ lies at the heart of the message of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18-21). God's self-giving love for the godless is seen, atonement for sin is made, and forgiveness of sin is possible. In this reconciliation a new and enduring relationship is established, whereby the reconciled believer is no longer subject to the wrath of final judgement but rather enjoys the hope of the glory of God (Rom 5:9-11).
18. People are deserving objects of God's wrath prior to reconciliation. Reconciliation is God's work from first to last. We do not reconcile ourselves to God; God reconciles us to himself and himself to us, at the cross. Nonetheless, in 2 Corinthians 5:20, Paul calls on his readers to 'be reconciled to God' as the right response to their reconciled relationship with God in their everyday lives.

Interpersonal reconciliation

19. Ephesians 2:11-22 points to the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles in a new unified humanity, where previous sociological distinctions have lost their power to separate what has been brought together in Christ. Christians are called, therefore, to 'be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace' (Eph 4:3). This pushes us forward to a further level of unity: "unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God" (4:13). As we will see, this has significant implications for how we treat one another.
20. While the gospel provides this impetus towards reconciliation between people, it is debatable to what extent divine reconciliation provides a paradigm or pattern for our practice of reconciliation, given the **asymmetry** of the divine-human relation in the account given above. Reconciliation between God and humanity is not based on mutual agreement that has to be established first, but rather on a one-sided offer of peace where there was conflict. It is costly and requires

withdrawing from attempts at retribution. The one who offers reconciliation is the one who pays the price for the renewal of the relationship. This may be possible to enact at an interpersonal level, but the complexities multiply once groups and social relations are involved.

21. Matthew 5:23-24 takes this further by pointing to the importance of reconciliation in the case of a believer who, while bearing no animosity towards another, becomes aware of the animosity of other towards him. Jesus urges the believer to take immediate action to be reconciled before performing an act of worship before God.

B) Divine Reconciliation as the Shape and Basis of Human Reconciliation

22. The Bible often connects the saving, reconciling work of God with the restored relationships that we should seek with each other. We may not be able to achieve reconciliation unilaterally in the way that God can, in his infinite power and grace, but the love of God in Christ provides the essential **shape** and **basis** of reconciliation in human relationships.
23. We see in God's reconciling work the **shape** of all true reconciliation—where the source of the enmity or hostility is accurately recognized as arising from human sin, where the cost and consequences of sin are dealt with, and where forgiveness and the restoration of relationship is thus made possible.
24. We also discover in God's reconciling love a new **basis** and motivation for reconciliation in human relationships. In Christ, God recreates us as new people (2 Cor 5:16-18), no longer trapped in the inwardness and selfishness of sin, but now forgiven and set free in the Spirit to walk in love (Gal 5:13-26). Christ is the mediator not only of reconciliation between us and God, but of reconciliation between alienated and hostile people.
25. This is frequently seen in the New Testament in the restoration of relationship between Jews and Gentiles. The hostility and division between these historically alienated groups is dissolved at the cross. In Christ, the two become one (Eph 2:11-22). A new humanity is created in which mutual love, gentleness, unity and peace are realities to be sought and maintained (Eph 4:1-3).
26. This God-given reconciliation—which Paul, in Colossians 1:20, describes as the 'reconciliation of all things to himself'—calls believers to a new life, in which they put off the 'old humanity' of malice, anger, envy and strife and put on the new Christ-like humanity of love, patience and forbearance, 'forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven [them]' (Col 3:1-17).
27. This has an obvious application to personal relationships. If there is a rupture between two believers, the gospel drives us to reconciliation—to a repentant recognition and confession of the particular sin involved, to free forgiveness, and to a restoration of fellowship.
28. However, the example of the ancient division between Jews and Gentiles alerts us to the fact that relationships between individuals and groups can be ruptured not

only by individual sins, but by a hostility that has its roots in something deeper and more historical. Sometimes, relationships are disordered not by particular sins in the present, but as a consequence of more far-reaching, longer-term expressions of humanity's sin—in this case, God's historical election of Israel for the sake of the nations, which was distorted by both Jews and Gentiles into a deep animosity.

29. This relationship between our own personal sin, and the broader, inescapable sinfulness of humanity after the fall, is seen at a number of other points in Scripture. We cannot escape the universal corruption that comes from being a child of Adam. We are both affected by this corruption and, in various ways, complicit in it (Rom 5:12-14). The consequences of corruption can run deep. "The sins of the parents are visited upon their children to the third and fourth generation" (Exod 34:7), and sins committed by past generations can irrevocably shape the lives of their descendants. Complicity takes the form of solidarity in sin with our ancestors. We may not be guilty of their particular sins, but we reap the fruits of their deeds and almost inevitably perpetuate the culture which their sins brought into being.
30. The distinction between our personal sins and the sins of our parents is useful for understanding reconciliation more deeply. Sometimes reconciliation will be needed because of a personal offence; because of something we have done (or not done) that has rightly offended our brother or sister. At other points, relationships may be disordered by historical, inherited factors—by past actions, attitudes and consequences that cause bitterness, hostility and alienation ('estrangement')—that also call for reconciliation.
31. It is worth teasing out what reconciliation looks like in these two kinds of relational breakdown. Let us describe them as 'personal enmity' and 'historical estrangement'. Although the overall shape and goal of reconciliation is the same in each case, the particulars are a little different.
32. In both cases, reconciliation first requires a clear-eyed **recognition of the cause of the relational problem**—whether of particular sinful actions, or failures to act, or indeed indifference, for which we are personally responsible; or of historical or inherited factors that generate and perpetuate estrangement.
33. Second, there is an **appropriate attitude** or stance towards the causes of the problem. Whether personal enmity or historical estrangement, the attitude should be one of godly sorrow, an acceptance of guilt for what we have done or failed to do, and a desire to set things right.
34. Third, this appropriate attitude should lead to **action**. In the case of personal enmity, the appropriate actions are to confess our sin to the one we have wronged, to seek (or grant) forgiveness, and to make (or accept) whatever restitution is possible. In the case of historical estrangement, there may be no personal sin to confess or seek forgiveness for, and no personal restitution to be made. However (and especially if there is), a loving desire to set things right will lead us to look for ways to do good to those from whom we are estranged, to show grace and generosity instead of animosity, and to retrieve as much justice and good as possible (Matt 5:23-24).

35. Fourth, and following from these first three steps, there is a **restoration of relationship**, which is the goal of all reconciliation. This restoration is expressed in peace and unity, and in a generous sharing of the good gifts God has granted us.

C) Applying gospel reconciliation between individuals

36. If individuals have been reconciled to one another through a repentant recognition and confession of sin, and the seeking and receiving of forgiveness, this means the hostility and hurt that distorted and disrupted the relationship has been resolved and removed. This enables a changed attitude toward one another and the reestablishment of relationship. Although the process may take time, the individuals are once again able to seek the good of each other, through prayer and practical acts of love. They are able to work towards rebuilding friendship and experiencing true Christian fellowship. That fellowship, grounded in their unity in Christ, will be marked by generosity, compassion and a desire to serve one another.
37. If the kind of reconciliation described above isn't achievable (for example, when one of the individuals has died or, perhaps, due to domestic violence or physical distance), what is possible is the cultivation of a new attitude toward the other (Matt 18:35).
38. Where hurt, injury and hostility exists between indigenous and non-indigenous people because of racism, exclusion, indifference, ignorance or other personal affronts, how may they be reconciled? Ultimately, as with all other relational breakdown, reconciliation will require repentance, confession, and the giving and receiving of forgiveness. For the indigenous person this will include others' understanding and acknowledging the nature and scope of the hurt that has been caused, both by dispossession and the attendant and continuing violence. This will allow a relationship of trust to emerge, free from previous hurts, and a renewed unity and fellowship in Christ.

D) Applying gospel reconciliation at the level of the local church

39. Estrangement may exist both within and between local churches, arising from either recent events or from deep-seated historical factors.
40. Whether within or between local churches, unity in the gospel of Christ is fundamental to any pursuit of reconciliation. The call to live in good relationship with other local churches is demanded by the gospel itself, and so unity between faithful local churches is not created by them, rather it is the divinely created reality that local churches are called to recognise and express. Any predominantly non-indigenous church already shares a profound unity in Christ with any neighbouring indigenous church.
41. This unity in the shared experience of redemption transcends all social, demographic, cultural, and other barriers, and so entails the imperative to walk alongside other churches or Christian groups, regardless of their different cultural or historical expressions in living out the gospel. The gospel compels indigenous

and non-indigenous churches in the same vicinity to seek out ways to walk with one another.

42. Healthy relationships between different local churches need not be expressed in organisational unity or by regular combined meetings. Rather reconciliation can be expressed in mutual prayer, shared evangelistic endeavour, partnership in social care in the local community, and collaboration on local issues. Only when structural unity or combined gatherings further such goals should they be pursued.
43. This should not involve the imposition of one church's culture and forms upon another, but rather a sincere agreement in foundational matters of life and doctrine, alongside a deepening appreciation for and continuation of diverse practices expressing Christian freedom and varying cultural forms. In particular, an indigenous church ought to be free to find culturally appropriate ways to express biblical faithfulness and Christian discipleship. Indigenous and non-indigenous churches in gospel partnership ought to seek ways to affirm and rejoice in one another's faithfulness, freedom and difference.
44. Where recent or historical sin impacts the expression of gospel unity among local churches, a willingness to understand the roots of such estrangement, a godly sorrow at such a breach in the body of Christ, whole-hearted public repentance from church leaders, and public expressions of Christian unity, will all be necessary steps on the path to reconciliation.
45. Such reconciliation not only expresses the underlying spiritual reality of unity in Christ, but also provides a clear witness to the wider society of the prospect of unity in diversity, even where deep historical divisions would seem to make such unity impossible. There is an opportunity for Christians to model genuine and deep reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians.

E) Applying gospel reconciliation at the diocesan level

46. The Diocese is neither a church, nor simply a fellowship of churches. It is an institution of Christendom with an existence in law, the authority to create and govern social institutions, and a consequent set of social obligations. This straddling of domains makes the question of reconciliation theologically complex, even before we remember that Christians acted against indigenous people who were outside of Christ.
47. Organisations are not persons. Nonetheless they contain persons who represent and empower their constituents to act, all of whom are moral agents. One might argue that reconciliation only involves the people in the organisation, as people. However, like other communities, organisations in the abstract have a continuity with the past which individual members do not, and this puts them in a position to take responsibility for the sins of the fathers, and make restitution for those who continue to suffer from past wrongs. The nation's government is chief among these organisations.
48. The organisation which concerns us here is the Anglican church or, more specifically, the Anglican Diocese of Sydney, which now spans Greater Sydney

and the Illawarra. The ecclesiastical responsibility for this area has changed considerably over the centuries—1788–1813, Bishop of London; 1814–1836, Bishop of Calcutta; 1836–1847, Bishop of Australia; 1847–today, (Arch)bishop of Sydney. Sydney Anglicans today are multicultural and multinational, and may feel little or no personal connection to the nation’s colonial history. Nevertheless, there is an institutional continuity of ministry and church governance that is unbroken, which forms a living connection to the past. Moreover, significant parcels of land now in the possession of the Diocese came from crown grants, which dispensed land taken (often by force) from its traditional custodians. Sydney Diocese is much smaller than it once was, but it still lies within the power of the Diocese through its Synod to act on behalf of the parishes that remain within its borders.

49. It is difficult to identify any indigenous Christian organisation from which the Diocese is estranged. In any case, indigenous Christian victims of historic oppression and violence suffered for being aboriginal, not for being Christian. Historically, the ‘organisations’ the colonisers dispossessed were aboriginal nations—but tragically, none of these survive as organisations. Indigenous communities exist today, both Christian and secular, but ironically their historical dispossession means that their ‘organisational’ connection to the past is fractured in a way that the Diocese’s is not. An organisation that wishes to move forward in reconciliation must deal with isolated survivors of ancient communities, and newly-formed communities and organisations, both religious and secular.
50. Indigenous and non-indigenous believers are already reconciled in Christ, and the Diocese has a role in helping make that reconciliation a reality in relationships, whether inter-institutional or between the institution and families or individuals. The activity of ordering our relationships in a way that reflects the reality of our reconciliation to one another in Christ may be labelled ‘practical reconciliation’. This can happen at two levels.
 - (1) Institutions enable people to act, and the Diocese has the motive, means, and opportunity to facilitate and resource ‘practical reconciliation’ between individuals and between church communities.
 - (2) Institutions themselves, though they are not personally culpable for the sins of those who have passed away (institutions are not persons), and though they may no longer be acting in oppressive ways from which their members need to repent, are nevertheless in a position to speak on behalf of those whose sins the institution once facilitated and resourced. Therefore, the Diocese as an institution is able to express repentance for its past actions as an institution, and has the capacity to set things right where possible. An institutional apology can be powerful precisely because of the real connection to the past which institutions can preserve.
51. When it comes to indigenous non-believers, God’s offer of reconciliation is the ultimate gift we can offer, and one which the institution can support. However, non-believers are also victims of historical oppression, and the gift of God’s reconciliation must not be offered without ‘practical reconciliation’. This then becomes an enactment of the gospel, and a powerful demonstration of the truth and power of the message of the cross. However, if acts of restorative justice are

to have any Christian meaning, they must be interpreted to their beneficiaries by the verbal explanation of the gospel.

52. On the basis of the above, the first steps toward reconciliation involving an institution might include (1) establishing the historical actions, either taken or enabled by the institution, which lie at the root of current estrangement; (2) establishing the identity of those groups and individuals who now suffer from those past actions; and (3) establishing the harms suffered then, and their enduring consequences.
53. The final step is to establish what is needed to retrieve as much justice and righteousness as possible for those still suffering the consequences of historical actions; and which of these needs the church can (and should) best meet, either with the government or, more significantly, in its own right.

F) Excursus: Justice, righteousness and the gospel

54. At this point, the theological framework for the issue is complete. In this excursus, we take the liberty of going beyond our brief to explore some of the practical ramifications of our thinking.
55. The words *justice* and *righteousness* are significant, because they refer in the Old Testament to the *political* expression in Israel of God's self-giving love. When God delivers justice and righteousness this refers to salvation and security; when Israel's king delivers justice and righteousness it refers to the right ordering of society. God 'defends the cause of the fatherless and widow' (Deut 10:18-19), and so when Josiah 'defended the cause of the poor and needy' he demonstrated 'what it means to know God' (Jer 22:16).
56. Israel was a political organisation in a way that churches are not. Because of the political nature of organisations, and the relationship the Diocese as an institution has to the wider indigenous community, as well as to the government, Israel provides a good model from which to begin thinking about justice for indigenous Australians. Of course there are differences—like the nature of Israelite society and its place in salvation history, as well as the nature of the oppression that marginalized people within Israel suffered—that we will need bear in mind.
57. A trio of classically vulnerable citizens—the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow—permeates the book of Deuteronomy, because God's special love for them holds up a mirror to Israel, in which they see themselves when they were foreigners loved by God in Egypt (Deut 10:18-19). As a result, Israel is to feed them from their tithes (Deut 14:29), include them in their celebrations (Deut 16:11, 14), and apply the law to their benefit (Deut 24:17-22).
58. Christopher Wright identifies seven features of the Old Testament's treatment of the poor and needy: (1) 'The law insists that *poverty must be addressed*, and redressed, whatever the causes may be.' Leviticus 25 does not care about assigning blame. (2) 'The *kinship/family structure of society* [is] the key factor in preventing poverty and restoring people from it.' (3) Israel's law 'formed an impressive and systematic *welfare programme* for those who were truly destitute,

that is, mainly the landless and familyless.’ (4) The poor must be ‘treated with *judicial equality* in the whole legal process.’ (5) ‘The law typically addresses not the poor themselves but *those who wield economic or social power*.’ (6) The law builds ‘a broad *moral and emotional ethos*’ around its legislation. (7) The law ‘makes care for the poor *the litmus text of covenant obedience*.’¹

59. Moving from ancient Israel to modern Australia, it is clear that the authority to dispense forensic justice, for example, lies in our government, not the church, and the relief of poverty and oppression is first of all the responsibility of every Australian through their government as well as privately. Nevertheless the church has been blessed with the resources to distribute many forms of justice, and the plight of Israel’s powerless presents interesting parallels with our own indigenous citizens, Christian or otherwise, to whom the church as a social institution owes a debt. The presenting issue for Israel was poverty and powerlessness, but these ills flowed from the disruption of family groups, and this disruption flowed in turn from the loss of land. The fundamental injustice perpetrated against indigenous Australians was *dispossession*. But restoring a state of justice is no longer as simple as restoring land. The suffering which ensued is also the church’s privilege to address; we write “also” because the fact of dispossession remains, and this must force us as an institution to ask what reparation might look like.
60. In particular, while indigenous Christians have a different relationship to land than their unbelieving neighbours, they remain bound to land as part of their identity in a way Westerners are not, and so caring for them as human beings requires that we recognise this. We also recognise that not all indigenous Australians are poor or oppressed, but every single one of them is dispossessed. What redressing this looks like in practice is a question for our indigenous brothers and sisters.
61. The New Testament church was an ordered community, but not a *polis*; it was under the authority of secular government. Nevertheless, the oneness of Jew and Gentile had social and economic implications. *koinōnia* touches possessions as well as relationships: Acts 4:34; Jas 1:27; Rom 12:13 (hospitality); 1 Tim 6:18 (generosity of the rich); Heb 13:16 (generosity of all); Rom 15:26 (aid = *koinōnia*). These activities will find their closest parallels in relations between churches (as per the Section D).
62. The details of the reconciliatory process of sorrow, retrieval, and restoration are not for this group to discern. But to the extent that what we own as an institution was wrongfully taken from others, it does not belong to us. In the absence of the originally displaced nations, we have the privilege of having indigenous brothers and sisters whose communities (Christian or otherwise) we can serve with the things we possess. It is by listening to those communities, and especially the Christians among them, that we will be able to express gospel grace and gospel unity with the greatest wisdom.
63. The main thing that this Doctrine Commission, an instrument of the diocesan organisation, can affirm on the institution’s behalf is the centrality and uniqueness of gospel preaching in the reconciliation process. Preaching the gospel is the one

¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2004), 172–75.

act of justice no secular government can perform, an act with the power to transform whole communities in unique ways. When people whose earthly inheritance is irrecoverable receive an eternal inheritance in the new creation they are released from the chains of the past, if not from its sorrows. Indigenous ministry training and mission must always be our first priority, even though it should not be conducted in the absence of 'practical reconciliation'. How gospel preaching might be accompanied by acts of restorative justice requires further conversations.

64. The goal is to be in charity with one another at every level, both institutional and personal; to share all things as an expression of our unity in Christ; and to enjoy relationships of mutual self-giving and receiving, enriching one another in our service of Christ.

G) Conclusion

65. Reconciliation is a significant theme in both the Old and New Testaments. On the largest scale, God is at work reconciling the entire universe, bringing all things into their proper relation to Jesus Christ. The result is a new creation, a perfected environment where redeemed men and women from every nation, tribe, people and language are gathered around the throne of God and the Lamb. A little more specifically, God is at work reconciling his human creatures to himself and a key consequence of that activity is a call to reconciliation. Alienation, estrangement and wrath are overcome by what God has done in Christ—'God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself' (2 Cor 5:19)—and at the same time we hear the call to 'be reconciled to God' (2 Cor 5:20). Reconciliation is, in this way, both something accomplished (entirely God's work) and something to which we are directed (our response to God's work). A further and necessary consequence is the call to Christians to live in way which reflects that reconciliation in our dealings with each other.
66. Our report has considered this gospel reconciliation as it applies on three levels: between individuals, at the level of the local church, and at the diocesan level. At each level the ground and nature of reconciliation was explored. On the individual level, fellowship marked by generosity, compassion and a desire to serve one another, and grounded in our unity in Christ, is the goal (36). On the local church level, gospel unity within and between churches is a divinely created reality arising out of the gospel that local churches are called to recognise and express in tangible ways (40). At the diocesan level, we recognised that 'the diocese has a role in helping to make reconciliation a reality in relationships, whether inter-institutional or between the institution and families or individuals' (50).
67. The application of this theology of reconciliation to the question of the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous inhabitants of this country raises important questions. It exposes the inadequacy of much that has been done in this area over the past two hundred years. Critical in the process of reconciliation is a genuine recognition of the need for reconciliation and a proper acknowledgment of the guilt that attaches not only to the actions of the past but to the benefit that continues to be enjoyed as a result of those actions in the present. Yet just as critically, this reconciliation cannot be abstracted as a principle in

isolation from the person and work of Jesus Christ. We love because we have first been loved by Christ. We forgive because we have first been forgiven a far greater debt by Christ. We repent because Christ's self-less sacrifice unmask our self-interest in our dealings with the indigenous peoples of this land and all such dealings are inconsistent with the very heart of the gospel of the incarnate Word crucified for our sin.

68. While repentance and a willingness to forgive is required on both sides in the light of the complex history of the conflict between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, those who have benefitted from the dispossession and violence perpetrated against others are not in a position to demand anything as a condition or a correlate of true reconciliation. Those who have the power (real or perceived) must deal humbly and gently with those who do not (once again, this might be real or perceived). They must be willing to bear the cost of reconciliation, whatever that might be. Such reconciliation remains the business of individuals, of local churches and of larger ecclesiastic units such as a diocese. We must live out the objective reconciliation that has occurred at the cross in a context where there is genuine hurt, severe loss, and continuing injustice. We must be willing to address the hurt, make reparation for the loss, and correct the injustice, pointing both sides to the person and example of Christ. This is how we commend the gospel in the Australia of the twenty-first century. We must never resile from the goodness of gospel as the only hope for all Australians, indigenous and non-indigenous alike.

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