



As a descendent of Australian slaves, I'm grateful for White Missionaries

By Mark Powell

I was speaking to an aunty from northern Queensland recently who, with great excitement, was filling me in on the latest family developments. Apparently, a politician from the Solomon Islands was funding research into identifying those who had been brought over to Australia historically as slaves. As I already knew, our family was part of that horrendous practice.

But to my great surprise, when I asked her how she personally felt about our ancestors as having been possibly “blackbirded”, she gave the same answer as my late father had given me. She said that while what happened historically was clearly wrong, it didn’t bother her now at all! Australia was her country, and she simply wanted to make a positive contribution to the community. Indeed, both my dad and his sister were deeply grateful for the many wonderful opportunities which they had been given.

The Prime Minister of Australia, Scott Morrison, last week came under fire for saying that slavery never existed in this country. I think that a charitable understanding of what he meant was that slavery was not an institutionalised strategy of the original colony, which is true. As Mr Morrison later explained, “Australia, when it was founded as a settlement, as NSW, was on the basis that there be no slavery, while slave ships continued to travel around the world”.

However, while slavery did tragically occur, especially involving people from the South Sea Islands, what impact should this have on us as a nation today? We need to learn from the past, sure, but let’s not perpetuate the pain by revisiting the sins of the fathers upon their children. That’s an inherently unjust thing to do. (see Ezek. 18:20)

Did my father—or even myself for that matter—experience racism growing up? Sure. But when it did occur, those around us were quick to call it out. And we were never held back in life simply because of the colour of our skin, but were treated according to the level of our achievements and the content of our characters.

My dad and mum (who was white) went on to start their own earthmoving business and were heavily involved in both church and community groups. They both worked incredibly hard and made many personal sacrifices so that my sister and I could have every opportunity educationally and in life to succeed. While they have sadly both passed away, I look back on their examples as a model for persevering in marriage, raising children and giving back to society.

I have since lived in Wee Waa, a remote NSW town comprised of people who are 40% indigenous. My own children went to a school where white Australians were in the minority. The social problems within these communities are significant, and I have been personally involved in and observed first-hand the good works of many anonymous Christian people in Wee Waa who have generously and sacrificially made a real difference in the lives of indigenous people.

Dr. Anthony Dillon—an aboriginal academic at the Australian Catholic University—recently informed me that the public school in Wee Waa had the highest success rates regarding indigenous education. What was their secret? Dr Dillon told me that it was because aboriginal children were treated exactly the same as everyone else. And that was one of the key principles in helping everyone to move forward.

The African-American academic, Larry Elder, insightfully argues, that the modern welfare system has only exacerbated social problems in financially supporting non-nuclear families. And Denzel Washington recently made the point that most of the issues in coloured families in the United States stem not from prejudice but from the absent father syndrome in the home.

Sadly, substance abuse, physical violence, domestic violence and sexual assault are all common place. But as Jacinta Nampijimpa Price has recently pointed out, "Realising that there are fundamental connections between child neglect, child sexual abuse, Aboriginal victims of crime and the high rates of incarceration will allow us to address these critical issues affectively."

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders receive \$33 billion dollars every year in financial assistance and associated benefits, yet the current policies are quite simply not working.

I am eternally grateful for what white missionaries—particularly within my own denomination—did in bringing the Gospel to my forebears in the South Seas. We were lost in spiritual darkness, and by them giving up their "white privilege" we have received salvation. As the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself says (quoting Isaiah 9): "...the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned" (Matt. 4:16).

It was said of the Presbyterian missionaries John Paton and John Geddie that when they came to the New Hebrides—now Vanuatu—there were no Christians. But by the time they left, there were few pagans. By the way, if you're not familiar with their story, then I would highly recommend Paton's classic autobiography, or the shorter and more recent biography by Paul Schlehlein, John G Paton: Missionary to the Cannibals of the South Seas, both of which are superb.

I'm not sorry white Europeans brought the Gospel to the South Sea Islands, but eternally grateful! Indeed, they themselves were

at the forefront of stopping the so-called 'Kanaka' slave trade. Befriending aborigines and being generous to them will do more than issuing apologies.

If we borrow from secular critical race theory—which views life through the binary lens of victims and oppressors—we cede too much ground to Cultural Marxism. (For an excellent explanation and analysis of which see the following article by Rob Smith). This is a profoundly anti-Christian worldview that is currently dominating the modern zeitgeist and protest movements.

Ultimately, the fundamental problem that we all have as human beings—black or white—is not our *race*, but our *rebellion*. And as descendants of the same ancestor (Acts 17:26) we have not only all been equally made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-28) but we also share in the same fallen, sinful nature. Praise be to God, though, that through the death, resurrection and ascension of His Son we can be redeemed. He removes the dividing wall of hostility 'vertically' between ourselves and the Father (Ephesians 2:1-10) as well as 'horizontally' between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11-22).

The way forward then, is not with a faux humility of apologising for the colour of one's skin, sexuality, gender or education. Our task is to call on all peoples of this world to repent and believe the gospel. The beauty of the gospel is that our nationality no longer define us. Instead, as the apostle Paul so famously says in Galatians 3:26-28:

"You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

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