



Politics, "ScoMo's Pentecostalism", and Indigenous
ATSI/Tribal Philosophy
or... "ScoMo's Nativist Pentecostalism"

Brisbane CBD SofiA

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In this paper, I will tie together an examination of politics and 'ScoMo's Nativist Pentecostalism', and the past conflict between local Pentecost mission and indigenous ATSI/Tribal philosophy.

In this presentation I will:

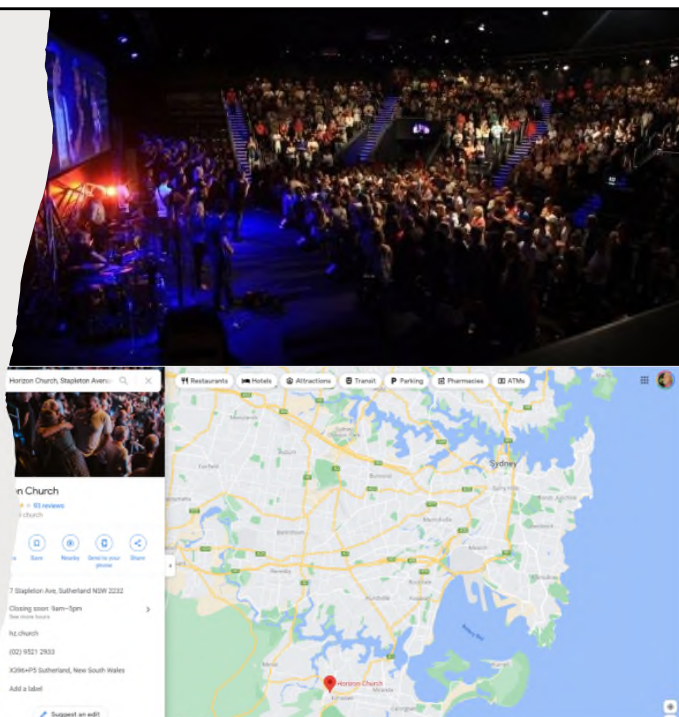
1. Describe ScoMo's Pentecostalism, not his personal faith or beliefs, but the system to which the Prime Minister publicly affiliates with, the Horizon Church.
2. Background with summary statements on the relationship between Indigenous Australians and Christianity.
3. Background the experience of the relationship between Australian Pentecostalism and Aboriginal and Torres Strait, and Pacific Islander, Persons.
4. Note the key event which has shaped the contemporary Australian thinking in the relation: 1979 Elcho Island Revival; and finally,
5. Conclude on what are the current attitudes in the relationship, including the challenge that indigenous affairs have become a 'political football.'

ScoMo's Pentecostalism

- Sydney Revivalism
- Assemblies of God
- Norm Armstrong
- Lower Middle-Class Culture
- Nativism
- American Neo-Pentecostalism
- Jesus, the Material Saviour for Business
- Megachurch and the Prosperity Gospel
- Cultural Assimilation to the Dominant Cultural Model

Horizon Church Auditorium, 2010.

Source: Wikipedia; Google Maps



The current Australian Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, was raised as a Christian in the Presbyterian Church of Australia. The biographers might have, or will have, the details, but to be brief, the Prime Minister, today, expresses a Pentecostal faith and is affiliated with the Horizon Church. The Church belongs to the loose denomination called the Australian Christian Churches, the Australian branch of the Assemblies of God.

Horizon Church is in the commercial district of Sutherland, Sydney. The Church was a pioneer church of the Assemblies of God in Australia originally under the leadership of Pastor Norman Armstrong. His biography is in the Australasian Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements. The heritage of the Church can be understood. Norm Armstrong grew up in a Depression era Pentecost family and taught to be a preacher of the open-air meeting. Like most Pentecostal evangelists, he did not get much of a formal education and worked in a lower middle-class occupation, in this case a clerk in the New South Wales Department of Main Roads. Once ordained, he based his ministry in Rockdale, but saw the opportunity in Sutherland, a central position in the Sydney bible belt. The biographer states, "Armstrong went out to the grave cried out to God, asking for the privilege to start a Pentecostal church in the birthplace of Australia."

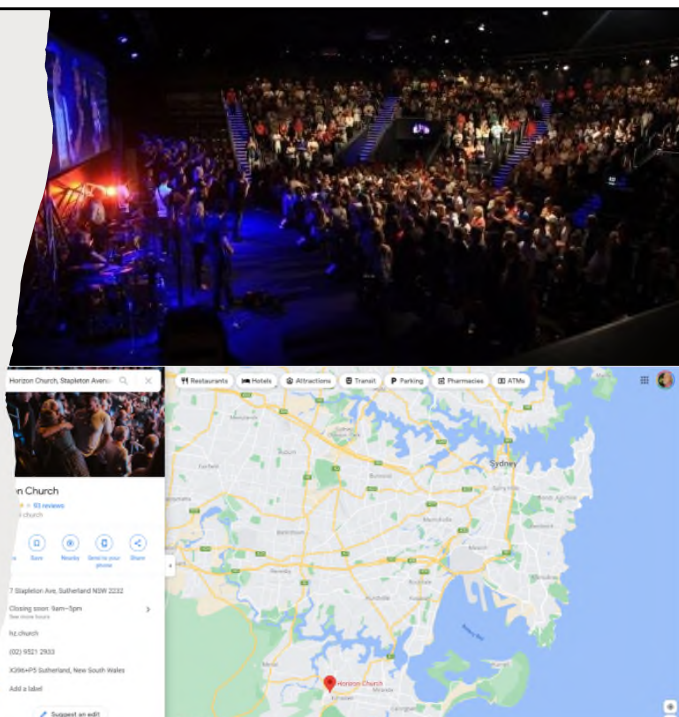
It is reported that Armstrong did this because the place was where the first white person born in Australia, Forby Sutherland, had been buried. Here we have the first clue to the nativist attitude in So Mo's Pentecostalism. There is a very poor understanding of Australian history for most Pentecostal believers. The Australian Natives' Association was the gatherings where British white Australian residents argued that that they were the true 'indigenous' inhabitants of the land. Nativism is the political policy of promoting the interests of Anglo-white inhabitants against those of immigrants. Aboriginal Australians and other 'non-whites' were also excluded.

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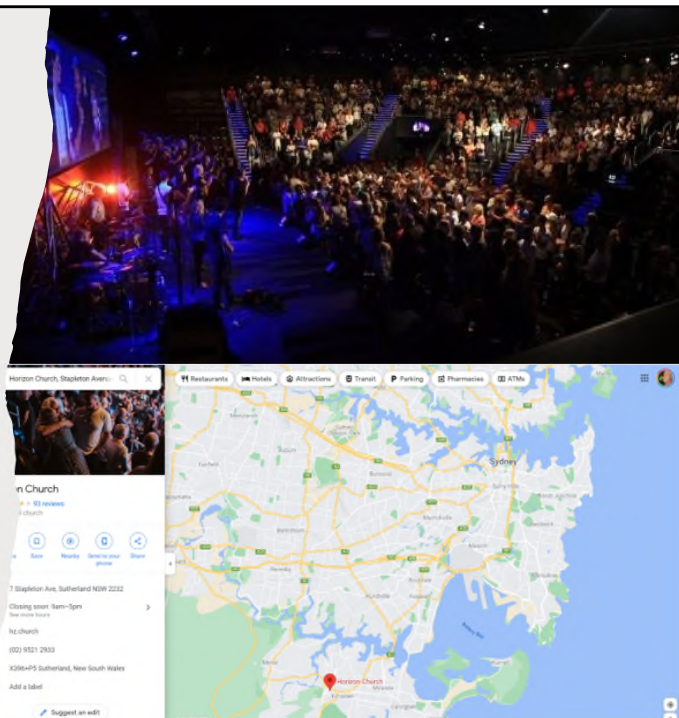
The Sutherland Assembly of God opened on 17 April 1949 in the School of Arts hall. The significant event that changed matters for the Church was the 1956 Oral Robert's Sydney Tour. There are two aspects to this change. The first is the healing revivals and is usually noted by the historians. Less noted by Australian historians is Oral Robert's Neo-Pentecostal prosperity gospel doctrine. These are the days when the American Assemblies of God married into the nation's corporate culture. The Full Gospel Businessmen's Fellowship International (FGBMFI) was formed in 1951. It was the ethos of Sinclair Lewis' 1922 satirical novel, *Babbitt*. And the textbook was Bruce Fairchild Barton's *The Man Nobody Knows*, originally published in 1925. The text established the global narrative that Jesus Christ was "the world's greatest business executive", and "The Founder of Modern Business." And the Pentecost world in the United States sold its soul for a slice of the action. These imaginative works are about American cultural identity. Everything in 1950s Australia which appeared modern was American. Australian society was at a crossroad between the cognitive influences from the United Kingdom and the United States. Generally speaking; spiritual discernment was lost for the Australian Assemblies of God.

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The choice is made, and Norm Armstrong built his Sutherland ministry with Oral Roberts Broadcasts and Films. In the beginning of the ministry, the focus is on the first aspect, faith healing. Armstrong took long extended Australasian tours in revival healing campaigns. Exhausted from touring, Armstrong attended to the other aspect, the prosperity gospel megachurch, which originally was called, the Revival Life Centre (1980 – 2011). The biographer declares that Armstrong “was a major link between classical and charismatic neo-pentecostalism.” In the meantime, Armstrong’s original church in Sutherland went through a series of corporate rebranding: Christian Growth Centre up to the year 2000, Shire Christian Centre until 2006; and was known as Shirelive up until 2018 when it became Horizon Church.

Indigenous Australians and Christianity

- Relevance?
- Apology?
- Indignity/indigeneity?
- Politics?



Girls' dormitory at Mapoon Presbyterian Mission, north Queensland, 1919.
Source: SLQ, Negative number: 55431

What has this all to do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders you might ask? And, indeed, that is the critical question here.

The author of the Wikipedia entry on “Indigenous Australians and Christianity”, noted that “Around the year 2000, many churches and church organisations officially apologised for past failures to adequately respect indigenous cultures and address the injustices of the dispossession of indigenous people.” No public statement, that I am aware of, has come from the Pentecostal tradition. Shortly, the Journal for the Academic Study of Religion will be publishing my review essay on a recent book about the history of Australian Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. The book is a strange argument that the movements (PCM) are indigenous to Australia. There is one chapter in the book which provides a Pentecostal Australian Aboriginal perspective; Mahnaz Alimardanian [me-nars Ali-ar-dal-in] on the PCM for the indigenous community of the Bundjalung [Bun-ja-lun-a] country (far north coast of New South Wales and south-east Queensland). It is one tribal perspective. On rarer occasions Aboriginal Australia can speak with one voice, and Uluru Statement from the Heart is one of those occasions. Soc Mo’s Pentecostalism cannot be such a voice.

Politics has worked against Aboriginal communities finding a united voice when leaders and figureheads have been used to align support on one side of the Parliamentary chamber against the other side. I will say more on that later.

Australian Pentecostalism and Indigenous Persons



Molly Ayers and Florence Young, the Queensland Kanaka Mission. Source: QAPCM; Missionary.org.uk

- Pentecostal Missions
- Rosalind Kidd's *The Way We Civilise* (1997)
- "indigenous" Bandjalang Pentecostalism (North Coast NSW)
- "quite liberal and white tradition"
- "Indigenous" in Pentecostal Literature

First, what of the history of Australian Pentecost missions among the indigenous inhabitants. The Australasian Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements reveal the patterns which had similarities to other white mission stations: Isabella Hetherington at the Daintree Mission (1928), the Enticknap [en-tick-nap] brothers working among Islander and Aboriginal people around Townsville (1923), as examples.

The first general observation to be made is that missions are entangled in the politics, particular for Queensland history, and this includes the history around Pacific Islanders in central Queensland. Rosalind Kidd's *The Way We Civilise* (1997) is still the best work on this topic.

The second observation is that there is one distinctiveness with Pentecost missions. There was an American revivalist thinking and experience. Historian Mark Hutchinson writes, "the outbreak of indigenous Bandjalang [bub-ja-lun-a] pentecostalism in northern NSW, meant that there were significant indigenous pentecostal movements for over half a century before the key Galiwink'u [gal-a-wink] revival of 1979."

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The argument from Hutchinson is that, "charismatic faith is now 'normative' in the Uniting Church's Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress, a synthetic and often conservative indigenous voice in an otherwise quite liberal and white tradition." It is a fair statement, but it is very troubling that the voice of the "quite liberal and white tradition" is now 'normative' for Aboriginal Christians, and no less for the Pentecostals among the tribal groupings. The statement is true as historical fact. The great failure, though, is to understand multiple indigenous voices within a Pentecostal world. Facts are Facts, but the Pentecost leadership has been extraordinary naive in the education of political history and sociology. If you read the Pentecostal literature that Scott Morrison reads, you will see that the facts of the deeper Aboriginal experience are downplayed by the Pentecostal leadership.



Christian Tribal Revivalism

- 1979 Elcho Island and Beyond
- American Presence
- American Revivalist Framing
- The Tribalism of American Far Right Thinking

March for Christ in
Nhulunbuy
Source: Annie Lim.
Arnhem Land
Witnesses
Controversial Revival.
Eternity News. 24
January 2018

In 1979 a revival began on Elcho Island off the Northern Territory. In 1981 it came to the Warburton [wa-burt-ton] Ranges in Western Australia, and then spread to many Aboriginal communities around Australia. There are more recent stories of revival among the Martu Wangka [mart-a wang-ka], Nyangumarta [nea-ya-gum-mart-a] and other peoples of the Pilbara [pil-bra]. The discomforting factor in these stories are the references to American evangelical presence in these locations. For example, when Franklin Graham visited Perth in early February 1997, over 200 Martu [mart-a] people travelled the 1150 kilometres for his meetings and became the source of yet-another revival.

Little is said in the appearance of innocuous stories of what is going on in the bigger picture. The American revivalist framing from a Franklin Graham has had severe cultural problems that the leading American historians have recognised for a long time. Those problems include a failure to engage in broader education about the society; being politically played on the dispositions of anger and violence; and the escapist thinking which does not ultimately deliver the comfort and security being sought. Graham is the same person who helped to put into power the inept administration of President Donald Trump. The point here is that, outside of the revivalism, there are other theological voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and those voices are far more authentic to the Australian experience than Christian tribal revivalism.

Is Pentecostal Christianity ... politics in another guise for Indigenous Persons?

- Aboriginal Affairs before ATSIC
- ATSIC
- National Indigenous Council
- Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017)
- First Nations Voice to Parliament protected by the Constitution
- Pentecostal Political Instincts?



The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC)

Source: NACCHO News Alerts, ATSIC is gone for good, Nigel Scullion tells Noel Pearson. 29 January 2016

There is a challenging question on whether the charismatic outstation experiences have been no more than the continuation of unreformed Christian missions. The question is whether any structural problems of mission outstations have been addressed, and real social change has occurred. That is an examination more than what can be achieved here. Nevertheless, from the writing of Pentecostal stories, revivalism has only encouraged the inward tribal thinking and continue to cut off communities from the bigger picture, from their own mythic cosmology, and the ever-expanding land and sovereignty. This is not one or two landscapes, but the unity of the continent. This is where the politics comes in.

The political contentions and social dissatisfaction began when the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs formed in December 1972 and continued to March 1990. In the beginning the bureaucracy had been built from Harold Holt Government's 1967 Office of Aboriginal Affairs. It coincided with the changes in the constitution to count Aboriginal persons as citizens. However, the difficulties of the bureaucracy extended from the pre-existing state departments in Aboriginal affairs. With few and minor exceptions, it was a continuation of white paternalism. A significant fact of the bureaucracy is that all such bodies were set up to help the Government to make special laws for the Aboriginal people.

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The administration was flawed from the start. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was set up in 1990 and this is when the politics heats up significantly. For the first time, you had Government being guided by Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders in a body chaired by Lowitja O'Donoghue [lo-wit-ja O-don-ahue] (1990-1996), Gatjil Djerrkura [gat-jer-kur-a] (1996-2000), and Geoff Clark, (2000-2004).

ATSIC was controversial among conservative Australian, edged-on by rabid right-wing commentators. The agency was dismantled in 2004 in the aftermath of corruption allegations and litigation involving its chairperson, Geoff Clark. The key point being that ATSIC could have been reformed, but it was clear that both the John Howard Government and the Mark Latham Opposition wanted to get rid of the ATSIC model. Howard announced the agency's abolition on 15 April 2004, saying that "the experiment in elected representation for Indigenous people has been a failure". So much for believing in the "quite liberal and white tradition." A government-appointed advisory body, the National Indigenous Council, was appointed to continue to advise the Government, but it did not represent the heart and voices of the people themselves as a democratic model. It was an advisory board. Enter, then Uluru Statement from the Heart in 2017 and the proposed First Nations Voice to Parliament protected by the Constitution.

Current & Dominant Pentecostal Belief and First Nation



Portrait of mature Australian Aboriginal woman, Australia, July 2013; with Aboriginal Dot Painting. Source: Photo 36813262 © Rozenn Leard | Dreamstime.com Photo 158632154 © Rafael Ben Ari | Dreamstime.com

1. ...depowered the Australian history profession by promoting a self-propagating culture war, a self-interested political devise.
2. ...praise the utility of education in aid to a business corporate culture. This is covert in that what is not said is more revealing, and what it reveals is that the modern humanities are little valued against the political agendas; and
3. ...are very confused in their entangled worldviews on the "quite liberal and white tradition." There is very poor understanding for their own political traditions, and this means that the true indigenous voices are not heard. The voices are masked by many other worldviews.

The Pentecostalism of Scott Morrison, and his political instincts, means that the proposal is not likely to be carried forward in the current life of the Parliament. Federal politicians who appeal to a Pentecost faith in the congregations have:

- 1) depowered the Australian history profession by promoting a self-propagating culture war, a self-interested political devise.
- 2) praise the utility of education in aid to a business corporate culture. This is covert in that what is not said is more revealing, and what it reveals is that the modern humanities are little valued against the political agendas; and
- 3) are very confused in their entangled worldviews on the "quite liberal and white tradition." There is very poor understanding for their own political traditions, and this means that the true indigenous voices are not heard. The voices are masked by many other worldviews.



THANK YOU

Therefore, we must listen very carefully to our Bunya Mountains hosts.

Thank you.