‘In his own strange way’
Indigenous Australians and the Church’s Confession
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When in a special situation … Holy Scripture speaks to the church, when in view of definite and urgent questions nothing remains but what Scripture has to say …, when in the church we cannot lay hold of scriptural truth but only receive it, when therefore the church has not found this truth but this truth has found the church—then and then alone can there be church confession. The genuine Credo is born out of a need of the church, out of a compulsion which in this need is imposed on the church by the Word of God, out of the perception of faith which answers to this compulsion.

—Karl Barth

I. A confessing church: The Basis of Union

The Uniting Church was constituted by a confession of faith. The Basis of Union is neither a policy statement nor a calm doctrinal summary; it speaks with the urgent language of surprise, obedience, commitment, interruption.  It is true even though the Basis of Union crosses a number of different genres, including issues of church organisation: see James Harr, ‘Confessional Theological Struggles in the Uniting Church, 1907–2003’, Uniting Church Studies 15:1 (2009), 5.

Confession is the church’s obedient response to Christ’s call. It is the church’s answering call to Christ’s word of mission. A confessing church is simply an obedient church, a church that ‘confesses Jesus as Lord over its own life.’ As Karl Barth argues, confession is an act of ‘definite decision’ in which the church takes its stand with the Word of God. It is always a ‘hazardous human venture’ since by confessing the church takes upon itself the risk of obedience, the peril of authentic discipleship.

The Basis of Union also reflects the fact that confession involves a risk to the church’s institutional

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1 Karl Barth, Church Dogmatics (London: T&T Clark, 2009), 1/2, 524.
2 This is true even though the Basis of Union crosses a number of different genres, including issues of church organisation: see James Harr, ‘Confessional Theological Struggles in the Uniting Church, 1907–2003’, Uniting Church Studies 15:1 (2009), 5.
3 Basis of Union (1902 edition), 4.
4 Basis of Union, 4.
5 Basis of Union, 3.
6 Barth, Church Dogmatics 1/2, 528.
7 Barth, Church Dogmatics 1/2, 536.
identity. Christ’s call interrupts the church’s existence, disturbs its institutional forms, shatters its denominational integrity. The Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian churches unite not for the sake of political strategy or institutional convenience, but in response to Christ’s own call to a united mission. It is a profound challenge to the very notion of denominational identity when the Basis describes the church as ‘a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal’, a community devoid of any ‘continuing city’ in this world.9

Confession is thus an act of self-dispossession. In obedience to Christ, the churches show that they are willing to be divested even of their own hard-won identity. The 1963 report of the Joint Commission on Church Union underscored this point, insisting that the church betrays its vocation whenever it succumbs to the temptation of ‘power’ and ‘mastery’, whenever it grasps as its own what ought to be given away in humility and servanthood.10 What is at stake here is the church’s institutional identity as such; indeed, the report speaks of the church’s call to be the “institution of Christ’s presence”11—in other words, a paradoxical institutionalisation of pilgrimage, homelessness, dispossession.

What, then, does a confessing church look like? It is the most vulnerable of all communities, roaming through the world with no place of its own, suspended over the abyss of nonbeing, upheld solely by a Word that calls it continually into being. It is a church whose identity lies outside itself, whose institutional continuity is not a possession but an eschatological promise: “here the Church does not have a continuing city but seeks one to come”.12 The Basis echoes Barth’s language that the church exists zwischen den Zeiten, between the time of Christ’s death and resurrection and the final consummation of all things which Christ will bring.13 Without a time, without a place. The church of Jesus Christ is the most fragile of all institutions, since its own constitution (so to speak) strictly prohibits any attempt to win for itself institutional security and continuity. Such a church is able to live and endure through the changes of history only because its Lord comes, addresses, and deals with people in and through the news of his completed work.14 As the 1963 Joint Commission report also puts it, even the church’s institutional forms must serve to show that the church “has her life solely by response to God’s call and care, and by her dependence upon God’s word and action”.15

This is what the Uniting Church confesses about its own identity in the Basis of Union. It is not hard to see why Barth describes the act of confessing as ‘a challenge, an unsettling factor, a disturbing of the environment’ in which the church finds itself.15 As the church confesses, it places itself entirely

at God’s disposal, it prepares to be called and deeds’.16 Divested of its own identity, the church’s ‘strange way’ is to be in the world, but not of it. To confess is to venture ‘the one who calls, to the one who calls,

So while the Basis is a statement as a confession a highly occasional, it is the church’s current control, reminding the church of its hope in Jesus Christ, it is the new words and deeds, ‘between the times’, between the surprising work of God and its understanding in this time, while it is an act of its own redundancy, since it is the unpredictable lord of history. It is open to his call to be the church of Jesus Christ.

II. The Preparatory

It is at this point that the Basis of Union’s account of the church’s forms and purposes becomes inextricable from the context of the Australian society. The Basis of Union and its 1960s-era preamble are very different from the church’s earlier preambles. The Basis of Union’s preamble has been designated as the ‘new’ Basis of Union, with its ‘new’ use of the term ‘preamble’ and its ‘new’ purpose of establishing a church constitution with the ‘deepest aspiration’ of the confessional church.

Basis of Union, 3.
1 The Church: Its Nature, Function and Ordering; in Theology for Pilgrims; Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia, ed. Rob Buss and Geoff Thompson (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2009), 89.
2 The Church: Its Nature, Function and Ordering; in Theology for Pilgrims, 94.
3 Basis of Union, 3.
4 Basis of Union, 4.
6 Barth, Church Dogmatics I/2, 942.
at God’s disposal, it relinquishes its own institutional lust for power and self-mastery. It confesses its readiness to be called by Christ in new and surprising ways, and ‘to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds’; 

Divested of power, the people of God respond joyfully to Christ’s call to discipleship; and in his own strange way Christ constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church. In this reference to Christ’s ‘strange way’, one finds a potent distillation of the Basis of Union’s confessional ecclesiology. To confess is to venture the risk of obedience. To confess is to stand exposed before the strangeness of the one who calls.

So while the Basis of Union affirms the authority of the ecumenical creeds, it is not so much a doctrinal statement as a confession. It is closer in genre to the Barmen Declaration than to the Apostles’ Creed: a highly occasional, unsystematic intervention which addresses only those areas directly pertinent to the church’s current situation. A confessional statement of this kind thrusts the church beyond its own control, reminding the people of God that their existence lies beyond themselves, that the church’s hope is in Jesus Christ alone. Indeed, the Basis of Union confesses even its own provisional status, with its prayer that the church of the future ‘may be ready when occasion demands to confess the Lord in fresh words and deeds’. 

Even the church’s theological priorities and commitments are thus situated ‘between the times’: the church seeks not adherence to a closed doctrinal system, but openness to the surprising work of Christ, the Lord who leads the church by his own gracious and commanding voice. Understood in this way, all theological commitments retain an edge of exegetical unertainty. Even while it is an act of unreserved commitment, every true confession retains within itself the seeds of its own redundancy, since it is a venture of discipleship, a confession of Christ’s own living and therefore unpredictable lordship. “The Church must remember that Christ is the Lord, and she must always be open to his call to be reformed.”

II. The Preamble: Recognising or confessing?

It is at this point that I am uneasy about the proposed Preamble to the Uniting Church’s Constitution. Although the act of revising the preamble (or indeed the Constitution) is in keeping with the spirit of the church’s founding confession, the content of the new Preamble reflects a theological stance incompatible with that of the Basis of Union. Of course, a confession of faith and a constitutional preamble are very different kinds of documents. Especially since the nineteenth century, constitutional preambles have been used to articulate the deepest aspirations animating a constitution, the ‘primary ends’ of the polity as a whole; fundamentally, a preamble is a statement of ‘belief.’ In the case of a church constitution, therefore, a basic requirement of any preamble is that it reflects the church’s deepest aspirations, articulating those theological commitments by which the whole system of polity is

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6 Basis of Union, 11.
6 Basis of Union, 4.
6 Basis of Union, 11.
19 This Church: Its Nature, Function and Ordering, in Theology for Pilgrims, 88.
animated. So although a constitutional preamble is not itself a confession of faith, one of its minimal requirements is that it reflects the confessional aspirations by which the church was 'constituted'. To put the matter more simply: the Preamble to the Uniting Church's Constitution is responsible to the Basis of Union. Its role is not to repeat the Basis of Union, nor to remain stuck in the past, but to reflect the theological ethos of the Basis within a constitutional context — that is, the theological ethos by which the whole of the church's polity is animated.

The proposed Preamble, however, is framed not as the aspirations of a confessing pilgrim church but as a definitive and irreversible doctrinal statement. It lays claim to definite knowledge about the mode by which God has acted among specific Indigenous peoples. According to paragraph 3:

The First Peoples had already encountered the Creator God before the arrival of the colonisers; the Spirit was already in the land revealing God to the people through law, custom and ceremony. The same love and grace that was finally revealed in Jesus Christ sustained the First Peoples and gave them particular insights into God's ways.

This is not so much a confession of the church's faith in Christ as an authoritative pronouncement about the specific mode of God's self-revelation. God was at work among (presumably all) Indigenous peoples 'through law, custom and ceremony'.

The crucial question to put to this document is that of the church's fundamental posture or position. Where does the church stand? Where is the church positioned in order to formulate such a fixed definition of the divine action in human history? Can a confessing church make such authoritative pronouncements? Or does the church first need to relinquish its confessing stance, its posture of vulnerable openness before Jesus Christ, in order to define God's activity in this way? Can such doctrinal pronouncements really remain open to the free and surprising work of Christ in the world? Or has the eschatological untidiness of the Basis of Union been relinquished in favour of a highly determinate decision about the precise nature of divine action in history? In short, can a confessing church adopt a position of privileged insight into the mysteries of the divine will — a theological bird's-eye view?

The language of the Preamble betrays the fact that this document is indeed an authoritative, objective pronouncement rather than the statement of a confessing church. It is spoken not from the position of obedient confession but from a superior viewpoint. God's activity in the world is not so much confessed as grasped and assimilated within an all-encompassing doctrinal schema.

Thus the Preamble's ten statements are said to be 'recognised' by the church. What does it mean for the church to 'recognise' the fact that God's self-revelation in Australia has taken place through law, custom and ceremony? Surely it indicates that the church occupies a privileged position. Specific information about God's activity — information not available in scripture — is somehow at the church's disposal. Although the church knows God only in Christ, it now also commands knowledge of God's action extra Christum. Instead of confessing, instead of remaining open and expectant to God's surprising work in the world, the church is said to possess knowledge (in all ten paragraphs) with the clarity of a particular location of God — and of the world's history, times and confessing from a particular viewpoint. It occupies a theological 'view' of God, and God is surveyed as though from a particular vantage point.

A confessing church can remain silent about problems which is different from that of a 'presumptive view of nature', but Jesus Christ. There are definite questions.... But there is no other truth than that attributed here. We remain silent about problems which we were committed to a thoroughgoing confession exclusively to scriptural and confessional work in history. It must remain silent, and risky obedience. It can only point that belongs to God and it is not for the church to discern his work.

III. Discerning Christ

There is, then, all the difference between the work in human history any church confesses that it's Lord is also alive and active in the work of the church to discern his work.

The church's responsibility is characterised as one of discovering Christ's activity among us and in the church beyond its own resources.

If the church really believed unexpected signs of Christ...
the world, the church is said to 'recognise' these facts. Not content to bear witness, the church speaks (in all ten paragraphs) with the voice of an anonymous historian, informing the world about the precise location of God—and of the Uniting Church—in Australia's history. Instead of standing between the times and confessing from a position of weakness and vulnerability, the church has mastered history. It occupies a theological 'view from nowhere', an objective position beyond history from which even God is surveyed as though from high above.

A confessing church can never understand itself as the privileged interpreter of history. Nor, as Barth notes, can a confessing church ever 'speak on the basis of a supposed and immediate revelation which is different from that attested in Holy Scripture'. Its confession is not 'God in history or God in nature', but Jesus Christ. 'This does not prevent it confessing in definite historical situations, in answer to definite questions... But it does prevent it speaking on any other ground than Holy Scripture or any other truth than that attested in Holy Scripture.' Barth’s point here is not that the church should remain silent about problems which scripture does not address. As the Barmen Declaration shows, Barth was committed to a thoroughly concrete and contextualised confession. But by binding the church's confession exclusively to scripture, Barth reminds the church that it cannot become the arbiter of God’s work in history. It must remain a pilgrim church, witnessing to Christ from a position of vulnerability and risky obedience. It cannot take possession of God’s self-revelation. It cannot occupy the vantage point that belongs to God alone. When the church adopts such a privileged position, it is in danger of forfeiting its own identity, inasmuch as the people of God exist only through obedient attentiveness to the one who 'constitutes, rules and renews them as his Church'.

III. Discerning Christ’s work

There is, then, all the difference in the world between an authoritative pronouncement about God's work in human history and a confession in which the church responds to Christ's call. To be sure, the church confesses that its Lord is not merely one god among many; the same Christ who lives among us is also alive and active in all the world. The same Christ who calls the church thus also summons the church to discern his work in the world.

The church’s responsibility in relation to indigenous cultures and traditions may therefore best be characterised as one of discernment. From the standpoint of faith, the church seeks to discern signs of Christ’s activity among other practices and traditions. Here more than anywhere, the church is thrust beyond its own resources; here more than anywhere, it is sustained only by the Word of God in Christ. If the church really believes its own message—that Jesus Christ is Lord—then it must remain open to unexpected signs of Christ's work in history. While the church has at times been tempted to renounce

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21 In this connection, we would do well to heed Nathan Kari’s warning against the church’s temptation to seize control of history, or to view itself as history’s privileged interpreter: Christ, History and Apocalypse: The Politics of Christian Mission (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2019).

22 Barth, Church Dogmatics 1/2, 621.

23 Basis of Union, 4.
its theological particularism in favour of a vapid liberal pluralism, it is in fact precisely the particularity of the church’s confession that creates the possibility for appreciative openness towards non-Christian practices and traditions. The Lordship of Christ summons the church to look beyond itself and to perceive Christ’s work even in the most unexpected places. The confession of Christ’s lordship means that Christ does not belong to the church and is not confined within the hallowed walls of its sanctuary. Christ is risen; Christ speaks and reigns in all the world. The church is called therefore to incline its ear attentively to this voice, to discern the surprising work of Christ in the world.

This exercise of discernment once more involves the question of the church’s posture or position. Discernment is not an exercise of ecclesiastical power; it is not an expression of the church’s superior vantage point. Rather discernment opens the church to judgment. It is an act of appalling vulnerability, to proclaim the gospel of Christ as a message of universal validity while remaining attentive to hear Christ speaking from beyond the church, addressing the church in ways that cannot be anticipated in advance. Discernment is an act of humiliating obedience: it is a dangerous and necessary enactment of the church’s confession—the confession that the church has nothing of itself, and everything from Jesus Christ.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer—one of the formative theological influences on the Basis of Union—provides an instructive example of this practice of Christian discernment. In the early 1930s, amidst the intense struggle with the Deutsche Christen, Bonhoeffer felt increasingly drawn to India. He wrote to Gandhi, asking if he could spend several months sitting at his feet and sharing in his pattern of daily life. Bonhoeffer wanted to form a monastic community in Germany—he believed the future of the German church depended on it—and he planned to use Gandhi as his model, including Gandhi’s commitment to ‘life together’, ascetic practices, nonviolent resistance, and the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount. In a letter of 1934, Bonhoeffer describes his eagerness to learn from Gandhi:

It sometimes seems to me that there’s more Christianity in [India’s] ‘heathenism’ than in the whole of our Reich Church. Christianity did in fact come from the East originally, but it has become so westernised and so permeated by civilised thought that, as we can now see, it is almost lost to us. 24

In this surprising place, Bonhoeffer discerns the work of Christ. And this discernment is simultaneously an experience of judgment. The authentic ‘Christianity’ of a Hindu community becomes a mirror in which the Western church perceives its own profligacy and degradation. Bonhoeffer does not wish to become a Hindu, nor is he interested in anything resembling interfaith dialogue. It is rather his exclusive commitment to Christ that drives him to Gandhi. 25 He discerns Christ’s way in Gandhi; while the church crumbles to ruins all around him, Bonhoeffer perceives Jesus Christ living and active in India, and so he resolves to seek Christ there, to learn from the ‘heathens’ what it means to become a disciple of Christ.

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25 Bonhoeffer’s plans to visit India were never realised. But his creation of a Protestant community at Finkenwalde was modelled partly on what he had heard and read about Gandhi’s ashram.
As the church exercises discernment, it is thus judged and questioned from outside itself. It perceives surprising signs of Christ's free and unprincipled activity in the world, and it finds its own life subjected to Christ's searching and commanding Word. From this position—not a position of superior knowledge about God, but a position of judgment—the church hears Christ's call and confesses. From this position, the church refuses to regard itself as the exclusive arena of God's activity; it looks not to itself but to Jesus Christ.

Where such experiences of discernment give rise to a new confession, this should not be confused with doctrinal codification. Surprised by God, the church confesses that God's activity in the world is contingent, unprincipled, unanticipated; such confession cannot be assimilated into a general definition of the way God always acts. As Rowan Williams argues, God's activity beyond the walls of the church cannot be codified in any theory; rather it is 'something only discoverable in the expanding circles of encounter with what is not the Church'. The church's call to exercise discernment is a summons to enter into this process of surprise, discovery and judgment.

The impulse to domesticate God's action by subsuming it within a comprehensive doctrinal framework must at all events be avoided. It is not the church's vocation to ensure that God's work in history is equitable and intelligible; the church must simply bend its ear to the voice of Christ, and follow wherever he leads. To quote Williams once more: 'We Christians are very reluctant sometimes to leave things to God to sort out. We have often a vague feeling that God hasn't read the proper books. And sometimes we feel rather protective towards him and make sure that he knows the right policy.' Reading the Uniting Church's new Preamble, it is indeed hard to avoid the same impression. But even in these matters, the church is called to put its trust in God—not because God can be relied upon to follow the correct policy, but because God is God.

IV. Jesus already in this land': the logic of discernment

I have been arguing that a confessing church—the kind of church described in the Basis of Union—should look for signs of Christ's work in the world, while at the same time resisting the temptation to assimilate these signs of God's free activity into a universally applicable doctrinal schema. When Bonhoeffer hears Christ's voice in Gandhi, he responds with faith and repentance; he does not formulate a general pronouncement about the mode of God's self-revelation among Hindus in India.

In the same way, where Indigenous Christians in Australia look back on their own cultural traditions and perceive clear lines of continuity—'Jesus was already walking around in this land', as one Indigenous Christian put it to me in conversation—that is a proper exercise of Christian discernment. It is not part of a larger theory about God's self-revealing activity among all indigenous peoples, nor is it a doctrinal insight.

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into the structural relationship between the God of the gospel and indigenous law, custom and ceremony.

The theological discussions of the Rainbow Spirit Elders reflect this logic of discernment. The elders affirm that the Creator Spirit has been present from beginning within Aboriginal culture. This is a treasure that lay hidden, but is now disclosed to the eyes of faith; only now, in light of the gospel, can such treasures be uncovered.\(^{28}\) The elders thus look attentively to their own cultural heritage in an attempt to discern continuities of Christ’s work in this land: ‘As we search our culture in the light of the Gospel …, we must ascertain those things which are alien, as well as those things which are true to the Gospel.’\(^{29}\) It is the gospel of Jesus Christ that ‘gives us our Christian Aboriginal theological bearings’,\(^{30}\) uncovering the hidden treasures of the past and revealing surprising lines of continuity between indigenous traditions and Christ’s work in the gospel. It is because indigenous Christians have already come to know God in Christ that they are led subsequently to perceive that this God was already ‘leading us to know that Christ is … an Aboriginal person “camping” among us, giving life to our people and our stories.’\(^{31}\)

As Vincent Donovan has argued in reference to African traditions, it is in this way that the gospel creates its own surprising ‘recapitulation’ of all the riches of a culture.\(^{32}\) This recapitulation in turn generates a thoroughgoing reassessment of a people’s cultural heritage. For some Aboriginal elders, the Rainbow Spirit is now perceived ‘as a life-giving God of love, and not as an awesome power that frightens us’.\(^{33}\) This is not a neutral historical assessment of the relation between the Rainbow Spirit and the God of Jesus Christ. It is not something that could be read off the face of indigenous traditions. It is an act of Christian discernment in which the riches of the culture are ‘sublated’—both preserved and transfigured—into the world of the gospel.

If we understand this logic of discernment, we can preserve the distinction between a quasi-historical account of indigenous heritage and the recapitulation of that heritage as seen through the eyes of faith in the moment of Christian discernment. And we can thus avoid perpetrating a subtle theological imperialism which colonises indigenous traditions, swallowing them up without remainder into a romanticised anonymous Christianity.

To summarise: it is a true Christian insight when indigenous believers confess that ‘Jesus was already in this land’. But this confession cannot be transformed into a doctrinal decision about the principled relation between Christ and indigenous cultures in general—as though the entirety of indigenous law, custom and ceremony had merely been awaiting its fulfilment in Christ. It is Christ himself, risen from the dead, who recapitulates the cultural heritage of a people, preserving it and transfiguring it so that it becomes continuous with the glad news of the gospel. If a people’s culture is like a painting, Christ is the

new frame within which the Christian discerning of the world can make sense of no world except the one he has brought into being in Christ.

It is this Christ which is the surprising work in the world. This is our service and

V. Conclusion

I am deeply sympathetic to the call for the church to be ‘a people in a people’.

I am convinced that the church cannot continue to understand and .

challenge the words with which the church gathers together at the end of its

Preamble was to be.

The following section of the book remains faithful to the statement begins with a

culminates in a mutual position of pilgrimage, so that it could stand if the church has
guided by Jesus Christ and his sisters, known as England together with them.


\(^{29}\) Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology, 17.

\(^{30}\) Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology, 22.

\(^{31}\) Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology, 62.


\(^{33}\) Rainbow Spirit Elders, Rainbow Spirit Theology, 59.
new frame within which that picture is transformed even while remaining the same. This is not to say that Christian discernment is merely a subjective reinterpretation of the world. It is a true and faithful seeing of the world as it really is—after all, if we believe the gospel we must acknowledge that there is no world except the one for which Christ has died and risen and will come again.

It is this Christ who summons the church to trust in him, and who calls us to open our eyes to his surprising work in the world. To remain easily surprised, alert and responsive, hopeful and vulnerable: this is our service and our witness in the world.

V. Conclusion: confessing Christ in the Preamble

I am deeply sympathetic with the theological intentions of the new Preamble to the Constitution, and I am convinced that the church in Australia needs to find creative ways to rethink and redefine its own identity in relation to the country’s indigenous peoples, those traditional custodians of the very land on which the church gathers. Chris Budden’s question is in my view fundamental for the Australian church: ‘Can the church be the church in Australia if it does not properly honor the place of the Indigenous people in its life?’ And more than that, are we not denying the gospel itself—the message of Christ’s universal lordship—if we give the impression that God was brought to Australia by the churches?

The theological content of the new Preamble, however, reflects a posture that is hard to reconcile with the Basis of Union’s vision of the church’s position in the world. Certainly one could not simply change the words ‘we recognise’ to ‘we discern’. I am not proposing minor cosmetic adjustments; rather the whole voice of the document would need to be different, spoken from a different standpoint, if the Preamble was to become an exercise of Christian confession and Christian discernment.

The following statement then is intended as an illustration of how the language of a preamble could remain faithful to the church’s confession, reflecting the theological spirit of the Basis of Union. The statement begins with a confession of faith and repentance on the part of the Second Peoples and culminates in a mutual confession of First and Second Peoples together as the one body of Christ. Here, the church speaks not from a position of privileged insight into God’s ways, but from a vulnerable position of pilgrimage within history. The church does not occupy an elevated ‘view from nowhere’, so that it could survey the whole arc of human history at a single glance. Standing within history, the church has glimpsed another world to which it humbly bears witness. Listening to the voices of indigenous believers, the whole church hears the voice of Christ calling, and so is compelled to confess:

Guided by Jesus Christ, the church’s Second Peoples listen attentively to the voices of our indigenous brothers and sisters, knowing that we cannot be the church without them, and that we cannot have Christ except together with them:

34 Chris Budden, Following Jesus in Invaded Space: Doing Theology on Aboriginal Land (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 135.
35 Budden, Following Jesus in Invaded Space, 164.
we rejoice in their witness to the Creator God who was already at work in this land, through Christ and the Spirit, long before the arrival of the colonisers;
in this witness, the church hears and recognises the word of Christ—a word that judges us for our cultural imperialism, our spiritual paternalism, and our hardness of heart; and that graciously liberates us to become together the people of God;
as brothers and sisters in Christ, the First and Second Peoples of this land confess together that there is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Together we entrust ourselves to this God, pledging to journey together as Christ’s disciples: to speak the truth in love, to bear one another’s burden, and to seek and find Christ in one another along the way.

Speaking in this way, the church shows that it is not the arbiter of the divine mysteries, nor a privileged interpreter of history. The church is a fellowship of disciples on their way through history, flawed and fragile, yet seeking ever anew to follow the crucified and risen one—the Lord of the church who rules and renews all things in his own strange way.