Australia as God's vessel to build up other nations

Since it is God alone who has authority to *"announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted"* (Jeremiah 18:9) he is at work when a new nation emerges, though we tend not to recognise his action. So in 1788 when Britain thought it was forming a convict settlement in New South Wales, God was at work toward planting a nation.

Australia since then has been favoured as his vessel to help form the nations of Israel, Papua New Guinea and East Timor:

- In 1917 the Australian Light Horse regiment charged into Beersheba, restoring Jewish sovereignty over that city - on the same day as Britain decided that the Jews should be restored to their homeland.
- In 1975 Australia formed the new nation of Papua New Guinea, and has since given it vast financial, administrative and peace-keeping support.
- In 2002 Australia led several countries to form the nation of East Timor.
- In 2005 the government of Australia gave the astounding figure of one billion dollars in aid to assist South East Asian nations ravaged by a tsunami; no other nation came close to such a generous donation.
- In 2006 Australia worked to restore peace and security to East Timor.

A neglected component of Christian thinking is to recognise how God has used our nation as his favoured instrument, and that we cannot retain that profound status while continuing to embrace evil. In fact it is only by the grace of God that we have not already experienced catastrophic judgement.

Our task is to tell ourselves and the world that nations are useful only by God's grace, as he is sovereign over all. It is a very serious matter for a nation to be touched by the Holy Spirit and be instrumental in God's hand - to bring his freedom. We can continue in this favoured position only by constant national repentance and renewal.

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Reclaiming the South Land of the Holy Spirit

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Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (II Corinthians 3:17)



Pedro de Quiros (1590-1667)

The name *Australia*, meaning "South Land", was given to the great southern super-continent that geographers presumed to exist - to "balance" the great land masses of the northern hemisphere. Though there is no great southern super-continent, the word *Australia* was applied to a real piece of land, on 14 May 1606, when Pedro de Quiros (a Portuguese explorer who worked for the king of Spain) arrived in the region - probably in Vanuatu, which can be regarded as an offshore island of the Australian continental land mass.

Thinking he had discovered the super-continent, he planted a cross and claimed the landmass using the phrase, "The South land of the Holy Spirit" - *La Austrialia del Espiritu Santo,* asserting the purpose of spreading the Christian message among native peoples. From that phrase comes the name of the continent of Australia. His 1606 **Proclamation** is as follows:

> *Let the heavens, the earth, the waters with all their creatures and those present witness that I, Captain Pedro Ferdinand de Quiros... in the name of Jesus Christ... hoist this emblem of the holy cross on which his person was crucified and whereon he gave his life for the ransom and remedy of all the human race... on this day of Pentecost, 14th May... I take possession of all this part of the South as far as the Pole in the name of Jesus... which from now on shall be called the Southern Land of the Holy Ghost ... and this always and forever... and to the purpose that to all natives, in all the said lands, the holy and sacred Evangel may be preached zealously and openly.*

Since then, Australia has helped to spread the gospel and share blessing to neighbouring nations and further afield.

Blessing Australia's indigenous people



While recent Australian history contains many sad injustices against our beloved indigenous people, we should not overlook the action of God over the migration of newcomers (Acts 17), nor the goodwill extended towards Aboriginal people. Instructions given to **Governor Arthur Phillip** by King George III (in 1787) reveal profoundly enlightened concern about indigenous welfare:

> *You are to endeavour by every possible means to open an Intercourse with the natives and to conciliate their affections, enjoining all Our Subjects to live in amity and kindness with them.*

Perhaps it was in God's providence that Governor Arthur Phillip (who led the colony of New South Wales) had an upper front tooth missing, and he was therefore especially respected by the local Aboriginal people whose initiated men had the upper right front tooth knocked out. Though he was speared right through the shoulder by a hostile aboriginal man at Manly Cove (in 1790) Phillip extended mercy to the offender, and he took no action to redress the injustice. In fact Governor Phillip thought that his wound was fatal - yet he pressed on to complete the day's paper work before seeking any medical attention from his anxious surgeons!

Phillip generally exercised incredible patience when managing the inevitable clash between Western and Aboriginal society. In contrast, had Australia been colonised by a less enlightened people, the clash would have been much worse, and could well have led to the summary execution of all the indigenous people. On the contrary, in most cases the interaction was benevolent and motivated by a sincere desire to promote goodwill, along with the sharing of the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ.

While tremendous effort is needed to bring help to the Aboriginal people, the work in the indigenous community can prosper as we consider God's purpose for the Western colonisation of this land. That purpose, linked biblically to the spread of the gospel, is clear in the foundational influence of Pedro de Quiros, King George III, and in the devoted example of wise and merciful leadership given by statesman such as Governor Arthur Phillip.

Australian sports excellence promoting justice



In the mid 1970s, God used sporting excellence through the great batsman **Sir Donald Bradman** to bring justice to the oppressed people of South Africa. As the most loved and influential player internationally during in the nineteenth century, Bradman turned from his view that there was no problem with Australians playing a cricket team chosen on a racial basis, by a minority race which dominated South Africa - a view which gave tacit approval to the Apartheid regime.

Though he once said, "Politics should not come into sport", Bradman was sufficiently open-minded and even-handed as to consider the concern raised with him by a human rights group. He asked to be briefed, and visited South Africa to investigate personally the problem. In a historic meeting with South African Prime Minister Vorster, he was informed that blacks were inferior and unable to cope with playing cricket. Bradman asked Vorster whether he had ever heard of Gary Sobers (the great cricketer from the West Indies)!

Convinced of the injustice of Apartheid, Bradman took steps as head of the Australian Cricket Board to stop the South African all-white cricket team touring Australia in 1971. He made a simple, direct statement to the media: *We will not play them until they choose a team on a non-racist basis.* Bradman's action put such pressure on the Apartheid regime that it never recovered. Finally, 22 years later (in 1993) a South African team chosen on a non-racial basis toured Australia.

As Bradman's view was foundational to the Australian government's stand against Apartheid, he enabled the nation to become God's instrument to help bring justice to the oppressed blacks of South Africa. Further, a case can be made that Bradman gained his humanitarian perspective as a result of the Christian worldview contained (imperfectly) in Australian culture. Combined with sporting excellence which itself is part of God's grace, his principled stand has continued to provide positive encouragement to oppressed peoples and nations. So in 2005 the New Zealand government decided to prevent the Zimbabwe cricket team tour, in protest at oppression and corruption within the nation of Zimbabwe.