

## WHOSE LAND?

In tribal Aboriginal culture the land owns the people. For many of us, we own the land. It's a commodity to be bought and sold, an asset to profit from. Australian Aboriginal people have a profound connection to land. Their law and spirituality are intertwined with the land, the people and creation, and this forms their culture and sovereignty. The health of land and water is central to the quality of their lives. This land is their mother and with that comes the responsibility to care for it. Living in towns and cities have their own challenges, 'I often wonder how to connect with my country when I'm in the city.' writes a local Aboriginal mother. Another says, 'We cultivated our land, but in a way different from you white fellas. We try to live *with* the land; you seem to live *off* it.'

Land sustains Aboriginal lives in every aspect, spiritually, physically, socially and culturally. The notion of landscape as a 'second skin' is central to all Aboriginal art forms. Without this deep connection to the land Aboriginal artists cannot create. Maintaining this connection is vital to pass on important stories to their younger ones. 'We see the world that non-indigenous people see, but we also see a mythical and historical landscape. You might see parks and headlands; we see sacred sites as we look for bush food.'

Elder Yunipingu says, 'The land is my backbone... I only stand straight, happy, proud and not ashamed about my colour because I still have the land... I think of land as a history of my nation.' Another offers, 'In white society, a person's home is a structure made of bricks or timber, but to our people our home is the land that we hunt and gather on and hold ceremonies and gatherings.'

The senior custodian and ranger of Kakadu National Park said, 'When you dig 'em hole in that country, you're killing me. Money don't mean nothing to me. Country is very important to me.'

Cultural sites are living museums of their ancestors and include dreaming sites, archaeological sites, water holes and burial grounds. For many to know that their land will be mined is very painful, 'It's like ripping pages from our library books. Respecting the land is like love for mum and dad.'

Why talk about this on a 'Blessing of the Fleece' Sunday? - because it's all essentially about a Christian approach to the environment. It's about stewardship not ownership.

We understand that carbon dioxide is heating up the Earth. Ice caps are melting, ocean levels are rising, hurricanes are intensifying, tropical diseases are spreading, and the threat of droughts, floods and famines expands daily. What are we doing to God's creation?

While Jesus hadn't heard of global warming and nuclear weapons, his teachings and his life style were in direct opposition to all attempts to exploit the weak, the poor, human life and nature itself.

Jesus said, '...to everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from whom the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.' Luke 12.48

Our planet is at risk. In this scenario there is no such thing as a Labor, Liberal or Green voter. We all breathe the same air and drink the same water. As Christians, is it time we stopped retreating from the giant social issues of today into a pygmy world of private piety? Is it now more a question of, what do we do to save our earthly home rather than what must we do to be saved? Controversial sure, but so is Jesus.

Ultimately, we own nothing and God continues to gift us with free choice so that we may learn the best ways of caring for the earth and each other.

I recall a beautiful song that the Aboriginal Christians from Port Augusta taught me years ago.

'Jesus just the mention of your name  
flowers grow  
the desert blooms again.  
You're like fire when winter's cold  
you're like pure, precious gold.  
Jesus, just the mention of your name.'



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