

## Presentation

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## 1. Introduction

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge the place where we are meeting today. The Adelaide City Council uses this expression, which I am adopting for us today<sup>1</sup>:

"We acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional Country of the Kurna people of what we call today the Adelaide Plains. We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land. We acknowledge that they are of continuing importance to the Kurna people living today."

In Kurna translation:

*Ngadlu tampinhi, ngadlu Kurna yartangka panpapanpalyarninhi. Kurna miyurna yaiya mathanya Wama Tarntanyaku. Parnaku yailtya, parnuku tapa purruna, parnuku yarta ngadlu tampinhi. Yalaka Kurna miyurna ithu yailtya, tapa purruna, yarta kuma puru martinhi, puru warri-apinhi, puru tangka martulyainhi.*

This type of acknowledgement has become widespread amongst many agencies, companies - and at events in Adelaide and the Kurna Country. I'll come back to this later.

Thank you for inviting me to speak to you today. My presentation focuses on the Aboriginal people from three language communities in the infant colony of South Australia, and their encounters with four young German men sent out by the Dresden Missionary Society in 1838 and 1840. This may sound like just another piece of South Australian mission and – perhaps – church *history*, but it is not. It's much more about present day Aboriginal politics, culture and spiritual revival, and the reconciliation between the First Australian People and us migrant Australians.

That brings me to my own situation. I came to Australia in October 2006, after having married my long-term Australian partner in 2005. We first met in 1992, in a remote valley in Papua New Guinea of all places. I was working with a Lutheran Church district in Northern Germany at the time, as what the Uniting Church in Australia calls a Deacon, or the LCA a Lay Worker. I had studied Christian Community Education in the mid-1970s and Theology in the 1980s. Since then I have been involved with church related projects on inter-cultural relations and exchange, both locally with refugees and other migrant communities, and internationally in the area of mission and Ecumenical relations.

This also brought me into contact with the Lutheran Church of Australia and the South Australian Council of Churches during the 1990s. I knew about the plight of the Aboriginal communities, as

<sup>1</sup> <<http://www.adelaide.edu.au/kwp/welcome/acknowledge/>>

almost everybody in Germany who is interested in Australia as a tourist destination or for political reasons. When arriving in Australia, however, I never thought that I'd be personally entangled in Aboriginal affairs, even if only marginally. But it is only fitting.

In 2007 I enrolled in a TAFE SA course in English as Second Language, where we had to write three academic-level essays about issues of some political relevance in Australia. As my in-laws are all Lutherans, and I was aware of the peculiar history of the LCA, I started looking into its records and came across some remarkable stories. One was about the four Dresden Missionaries in South Australia.

While mission history was no stranger to me, I was nevertheless awestruck by the relevance this story has for present-day life here in South Australia in terms of Aboriginal language revival and therefore began to have a closer look at it. Eventually, one of my brothers-in-law, a Lutheran pastor, indicated that this story was closely connected with our very own family-in-law: His wife and mine, and all our immediate relatives, are direct descendants of one of these missionaries, Lutheran Pastor Clamor Schürmann. After some initial research at the Lutheran Archives, and further research in Germany, I am currently working in a part-time support role with the Kurna Language Reclamation program *Kurna Warra Pintyandi* (KWP), hosted by the University of Adelaide, and as a researcher.

In relation to this story, I have been on a remarkable journey through Australia and Germany, and learned lots about church and political history of Australia and my own home country, about which I had not the slightest idea.

## 2. Literature background

I do not intend to present a full account of the history of the four Dresden missionaries in South Australia between 1838 and 1846, 1852, or 1857 – whichever way you want to count those years of commitment of these four young men. Not many publications deal with this story in detail, but I would like to mention some which give you a pretty good background:

- **Brauer, A.** *Under the Southern Cross: History of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Australia.* Facsim. ed. Adelaide: Lutheran Pub. House, 1985. (Original 1956)

This book presents one of the most comprehensive accounts of Australian Lutheran mission work with the Aboriginal people. It is available at the Lutheran Archives. To some degree, Brauer takes the credit for opening access to information that was long forgotten.

- **Schurmann, Ted, and Clamor Wilhelm Schürmann.** *I'd Rather Dig Potatoes: Clamor Schurmann and the Aborigines of South Australia 1838-1853.* Lutheran Publishing House, 1987.

Ted Schürmann was a great-grandson of missionary and Pastor Clamor Schürmann, and children's books and nature history writer. He published Clamor's diary in a heavily edited version, but almost complete and with many additional details. This book has long been one of the main sources of research into this missionary story and the Kurna language research.

- **Amery, Rob.** *Warrabarna Kurna!: Reclaiming an Australian Language.* Lisse; Exton, (PA): Swets & Zeitlinger Publishers, 2000.

This is the published version of Rob's PhD from 1998, and probably the most comprehensive account of the Dresden missionary story from a linguistic and Kurna revival perspective, i.e. language reclamation based on historical sources.

- **Klose, Samuel, and Joyce Graetz.** *Missionary to the Kurna: the Klose Letters.* Occasional Publication (Friends of Lutheran Archives) 2. North Adelaide, S. Aust.: Friends of Lutheran Archives, 2002.

Letters by missionary teacher Klose to the Dresden Missionary Society.

- **Scrimgeour, Anne.** *Colonizers as Civilizers [manuscript]: Aboriginal Schools and the Mission to “Civilize” in South Australia, 1839-1845.* PhD Thesis. Charles Darwin University, 2007.

Anne analyses the context of the first Aboriginal mission school “Piltawodli” at the Native Location from a colonial political perspective.

- **Lockwood, Christine J.** *A Vision Frustrated: Lutheran Missionaries to the Aborigines of South Australia 1838-1853. A Thesis Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honours in the School of Social Sciences, Flinders University, Adelaide.* Adelaide: unpublished, 2007. <<http://www.lmw-mission.de/de/files/lockwood-a-vision-frustrated-5136.pdf>>

A full account of the Dresden missionary story from a Lutheran perspective. Christine is working at a PhD on a similar topic.

- **Gale, Mary-Anne.** **H.A.E. Meyer at Encounter Bay,** in Peter Monteath, ed. *Germans - Travellers, Settlers and Their Descendants in South Australia.* Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2011.

The first full account of missionary Meyer as the author of the Ramindjeri dictionary. A critical edition of his correspondence is in preparation by Heidi Kneebone in collaboration with the Lutheran Archives und the University of Adelaide.

There are many other publications in journals and book chapters discussing aspects of this story. In particular, Rob Amery has published, besides his PhD in 2000, numerous papers on the reclamation and revival of an Aboriginal language which was considered extinct by linguistic standards. This language has now been taught to more than ten thousand students! Rob's wife, Mary Anne Gale, has for some years now supported the Ngarrindjeri people around Lake Alexandrina in their own language revival program, and has published widely on this and related topics. Linguist Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann at the University of Adelaide has started to re-teach Barngarla to the Aboriginal language community on Eyre Peninsula.

All the diaries, letters and reports which the missionaries had sent to Germany are accessible at the Archives of the Francke Foundations in Halle, Germany. Most of these have been transcribed and translated by volunteers of the Lutheran Archives and are available there.

### 3. Between Failure and Success

#### 3.1. The Context

The story of the four Dresden missionaries in South Australia can be told in just a few chapters or a number of books, depending upon your approach.

In the early to mid-1830s, four young men in Germany felt that they were being called to the newly spreading profession of missionary. Clamor Schürmann (1815-1893) was the youngest son of a farmer's family near Osnabrück in Western Germany, and according to custom he would have inherited the farm. But having been guided by his mother, in his early years, to a faithful Christian life, he decided to follow his older brother, who had enrolled as a student in the then only mission school in Berlin.

Gottlob Teichelmann (1807-1888) was born into a cloth maker family in the small town of Dahme, then belonging to the Kingdom of Saxony. After school he became a carpenter, and as customary for his time travelled for three years as an apprentice in Saxony and Prussia. Eventually he decided to have private tuition in algebra, arithmetic and geometry as preparation for acceptance into the Royal Building Trades School, which he attended in 1830-31. It was then that he became acquainted with students from the Berlin Mission School and got interested in their studies himself.

Eduard Meyer (1813-1862) grew up in Berlin in the family of a factory worker, who had apparently been close to the small Lutheran congregation in the city of Union churches. Like Schürmann and Teichelmann, he studied at the Jänicke Institute in Berlin between 1833 and 1836.

The Bohemian Lutheran Pastor Johannes Jänicke had established this mission school in 1800, after the death of his own younger brother as a young missionary in India, and with the support of other like-minded members of the Bohemian refugee community. Influenced by the role model of the Moravian Church in Herrnhut (near Dresden) and their missionaries in remote places around the world, and also by the many influential publications telling their stories, up until 1848 the Jänicke Mission Institute trained some 120 people to be sent out by other mission societies such as in London, Rotterdam or Basel. Some of these men became renowned missionary linguists in their own time (e.g. Karl Gützlaff in China and Korea, or Karl Th. E. Rhenius in Southern India), and so was Clamor Schürmann's older brother John Adam Shurman in Benares, India.

Most likely, the three young men expected to be sent to China, as indicated by two notebooks on Chinese and Hebrew language studies – one of the few personal possessions that survived from Clamor Schürmann's library. Already his brother had been taught Chinese at the University of Berlin. However, unbeknownst to the three young would-be missionaries, they became pawns in a power gamble of global dimensions.

In **Berlin**, the three young men were trained at a school that was most likely strongly influenced by the Protestant tradition of Jan Huss in the Czech Republic and, subsequently, by the Moravian and Bohemian people fleeing religious persecution at the hands of the Catholic Austrian Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, to the politically and religiously liberal city of Berlin. This was also true for other religious refugees in Europe, e.g. Lutherans from Austria or the Huguenots from France, who settled in Berlin and Prussia.

The Prussian royal dynasty in Berlin, however, was involved in a cultural and religious battle of its own concerning the formation of a unified Prussian Christendom between Reformed and Lutheran traditions, to prevent another defeat by foreign forces as had happened just a couple of decades earlier under Napoleon in 1815. All this led, as you well know, to the famous "Lutheran" migration for "Faith and Freedom" in the 1830s and 1840s, mainly to North America and to South Australia.

At that time in **London** an initiative was established to colonize South Australia as an economic experiment that was "to be different" to the convict colonies in other parts of the continent. This project was, for the most part, a huge investment scheme, virtually robbing South Australia's indigenous owners of their land by a feather stroke, and selling it to British "Capitalists", as they called themselves. However, the Colonial Office in Britain was dominated by "Non-Conformist" Christians with strong ethics and an awareness of the fate of other British colonial subjects around the world, and it insisted that protection of the Aboriginal people be included in the foundational regulations of the colony.

The so-called "Letters Patent" establishing the Province of South Australia (19 February 1836), thus included the famous clause:

*Provided Always that nothing in those our Letters Patent contained shall affect or be construed to affect the rights of any Aboriginal Natives of the said Province to the actual occupation or enjoyment in their own Persons or in the Persons of their Descendants of any Lands therein now actually occupied or enjoyed by such Natives.*

Parallel to movements in England, a number of Christian initiatives in Germany followed the British model of establishing mission societies and auxiliary support networks. In the context of redefining their Lutheran faith over against other mainstream Christian denominations, and influenced by the Moravian mission role model around the world, people in Dresden, Saxony initiated the establishment of a distinctively confessional Lutheran mission association.

Meanwhile, in Berlin in 1836, Meyer, Schürmann and Teichelmann were told that they would have to sign the **39 Articles of Faith of the Anglican Church** if they wanted to be accepted for mission posts in India. Being Lutherans, they refused to do so and approached their wider church community in Germany for support, including the Dresden mission aid association. They took their contact as being a divine call to establish an independent mission society, with the three of them amongst their first missionaries. They were eventually joined by – amongst others – Samuel Klose, the fourth of the Dresden missionaries in South Australia, who hailed from Silesia in Eastern Prussia, now Poland. After further studies in Dresden, and their ordination in February 1838, Schürmann and Teichelmann were the first to leave for South Australia, arriving here in mid-October 1838.

In 1839, the Dresden Mission Board sent Meyer and fellow missionary Heinrich Cordes to Erlangen in Bavaria, to study the Indian language Tamil, after learning Greek and Hebrew in Dresden. Meyer, however, did not feel confident in mastering this Southern Indian vernacular, and asked rather to be sent to Australia, following his friend Schürmann. Samuel Klose, the oldest of the four, was considered to be unprepared for full missionary duties in South Australia and was instructed to work as a teacher, when they left in 1840.

**George Fife Angas**, son of a global business family in London and a Baptist in the Non-Conformist tradition, was the figure that brought all the threads together. In 1837, he had been contacted by Lutheran Pastor August Kavel with a request to support migration of his Lutheran congregation in Klemzig (then Prussia, now Poland) to Australia to flee religious persecution of the Prussian Lutherans opposing the “Union Church”. As head of the South Australia Company, which was to facilitate settlement in the new colony, and influenced by the recent Slavery Abolition Act from 1833, which he had actively supported, Angas was looking for missionaries to mediate between the native people in South Australia and the settlers from England. When he heard from Kavel about the plight of the two young missionaries, he offered them support through the Dresden Mission society.

As their financial co-sponsor, Angas asked the two young missionaries not only to “acquaint” themselves with the language and habit of the people with whom they had would work, but also to compile a dictionary, establish a school for natives, and a mission station somewhere up the Murray River to Christianize and civilize the Aboriginal people there. Angas promised support for the first few years, expecting that the German Lutheran refugees, whose voyage he was also to sponsor, would support the missionaries in subsequent years, as would the future Protector of Aborigines.<sup>2</sup>

### 3.2

Schürmann and Teichelmann were lucky to travel together with the second governor of South Australia, George Gawler. This offered them three important opportunities:

- They were given access to, and could study in detail, the dictionary of what is now called the Awabakal Language at Lake Macquarie, NSW. This dictionary was previously published by the LMS missionary Lancelot Threlkeld, who was the first person ever to study systematically an Australian language.
- Schürmann in particular had some serious debates with the governor and his staff about the legitimacy of the British to colonise Australia and thus rob the peoples' land. (During the voyage, Schürmann read the 1837 “Report from the Select Committee on Aborigines”).
- Both young missionaries were challenged to administer worship services to a diversity of Christians on the vessel, which Teichelmann handled more easily than Schürmann. Their difference in age and attitude, and their political and theological outlook not surprisingly caused some tension between them throughout most of their mission work.

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<sup>2</sup> Letter from Angas to Schürmann and Teichelmann in Plymouth, 28.5.1838

After their arrival in Adelaide on 14 October 1838, they settled at “Piltawodli” on the northern banks of the Torrens River (Karawirra Pari), the so-called “Native Location” chosen by the local Aboriginal people themselves (today the ACC Park 1 between North Adelaide and the Torrens Lake). It was soon established that they were the custodians of the country that we now call the Aboriginal Plains, between the Gulf St Vincent and the Adelaide Hills from Crystal Brook and Clare in the north and Cape Jervis in the south, with the centre of today's Adelaide a culturally important site.

The two young missionaries set out immediately to learn the language of the Aboriginal people, using to some extent Threlkeld's dictionary as a role model. In early 1839, Schürmann and fellow German geologist Johannes Menge, employed by the South Australian Company, explored the Murray River to find a suitable spot for an independent Mission Station somewhere near the merger with the Darling River – but were unsuccessful. The missionaries were fully aware of the imminent danger of extinction of the Aboriginal people around Adelaide and requested repeatedly settlement reserves for them from the colonial administration – but to no avail.

On 23 December 1839, Schürmann and Teichelmann felt confident enough to open a school for the children of the local Aboriginal community that we now call “Kurna” (or *Miyurna*, both meaning “Man”). Schürmann taught the children and Teichelmann mainly preached to the elder people in their vernacular. The missionaries soon discovered that their pupils were intellectually equal to any English or German child of the same age, if not better learners. Besides the children and their parents staying at the native location, other people lived with the missionaries, for instance WATTIWATTIPINNA who built a house beside Schürmann's cottage and shared his knowledge of Kurna culture and religion with him, or 22-year-old NANTO KARTAMMERU. Two other young men, TUITPURRO and KUDNAIPITI, invited the two missionaries to a five-day hunting trip. Schürmann recorded the following conclusion in his journal:

I cannot conclude these five days in the bush without a few comments which are worth not forgetting. What I had expected from this journey – a closer acquaintance with the way of life and the language of the aborigines – I have found more than confirmed. [My] progress in the language consists not so much in a multitude of new words than a greater adaptation and fluent use of what I had already known. So for example there was also the discovery of a conjunctive mode. This is being applied through appending the little affix *ma* to the stem of the verb ... for the recent and distant past ... quite regularly. Furthermore, I was very amazed and pleased about the decorum and discipline amongst the entirely free and equal aborigines, so especially also about the obedience of the young towards the older men.

Yet, I hope that not only I drew some profit from this life in the bush but that it was also of some use for a few of the aborigines. Indeed I confess with shame and humility before the all-seeing eye of the Lord that I did not always use proper caution and earnest dignity as I could have. Because of the circumstances and the curiosity of the aborigines this indeed was not an easy task.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that, for one or the other, the foundation was laid for the awakening of the sleeping conscience. This can be seen in the earnestness and the questions with which they commented my clumsy, weak description of eternal life and eternal retaliation. For example, they asked where their relatives now were, above in God's dwelling or down below in the fire hole. I replied that if they had been good they would be in the former but if bad then it was in the latter abode. It quite frequently happened that my words were followed by a brief discussion amongst themselves which indeed I did not understand. However their attitude and tone of voice led me to conclude their interest and their approval. May the Lord bless in mercy the weak and single grains of seed which are now beginning to be sown on this virgin soil and suppress the endemic and foreign weed.

In September 1839, the colonial Protector to the Aborigines, Matthew Moorhouse, invited Schürmann to visit **Encounter Bay**. During at least four trips, and with the support of the local Ramindjeri man TAMMURUWE NANKANERE ('Encounter Bay Bob'), Schürmann endeavoured to learn his language, and in early 1840 he observed in his diary that the "the Natives from the Murray [River] were astonished and delighted when I spoke to them in their own language" (10.2.1840). In the same year, Teichelmann and Schürmann published their first sketch grammar and dictionary of the Kurna language. Later that year the governor asked Schürmann to go to the newly settled district around Port Lincoln as a teacher and deputy protector. Here Schürmann was confronted with the harsh and murderous treatment of Aboriginal people on the settler frontier, including the intentional killing of an Aboriginal man whom he knew well from Port Lincoln.

In August 1840, **Samuel Klose and Eduard Meyer with his young wife Friedericke arrived in Adelaide**. Since Schürmann had been sent Port Lincoln, Meyer took the mission post at Encounter Bay, which must have been quite a shock for his wife who had previously been working at one of the royal palaces in Berlin. However, both seem to have been able to establish a close relationship with the local Ramindjeri people – one of the Aboriginal language communities to bear the brunt of early white settlement in South Australia, through whalers and sealers at the Bluff. Many of their women had also been abducted by white escapees on Kangaroo Island. In 1843, Meyer published a 111-page dictionary on the Ramindjeri language. However, like his fellow missionary brothers in South Australia and indeed all over Australia in those early years, he did not succeed in converting any of the Aboriginal people at Encounter Bay to the Christian faith or to "civilize" them. His letters record a number of discussions with the people around him, but mainly show the unbridgeable gap in spirituality between both sides. Yet Meyer and his wife appear to have been well liked, as some of the Aboriginal people became concerned about Meyer's health, asking him:

Why do you work [so much]? Then you sit down and read or write. You will not live long – come with us, if you are hungry catch a fish for yourself, eat and lie down and sleep ... and you will live for a long time. (Correspondence 25.7.1844).

A change of colonial politics and the lack of substantial financial support from home and the German Lutheran migrant community, forced Meyer in 1847 to supplement his mission work with carting goods to Adelaide. In 1848 he accepted a call as the Lutheran pastor in Bethany, Barossa Valley, where he became influential in establishing early Lutheran congregations in the valley and beyond. In 1862, at the age of only 49, Meyer passed away from a stroke. For many years to follow, his wife was visited regularly by members of the Ramindjeri community.

Samuel Klose, the mission teacher at Piltowodli, carried on teaching the Kurna children. He soon developed a high regard for his students and their learning abilities, and himself acquired a working knowledge of the Kurna language within a year. Although Klose saw the need to teach English to his students in order to survive in a mainly Anglo-Saxon society, he was forced to close the school at Piltawodli in 1845, as a new colonial administration had lost interest in supporting the teaching of an Aboriginal language and had opened an English-only school first at Walkerville in 1844, and then at Kintore Avenue in the following year. Klose's most important credit is the foresight to collect manuscripts written in the Kurna language by his students, and to send them to Germany, thus preserving most of the handwritten evidence of their language achievements. Together with Teichelmann, he later became the founder of a Lutheran Church in Adelaide, now known as Bethlehem Lutheran Church.

In 1846, the missionaries realised that they had no chance of converting any of the remaining Aboriginal people to the Christian faith. Approximately 40,000 white settlers had by then arrived from Britain, and more than 1,000 from Germany. There was no place for the few hundred Kurna Aborigines. Teichelmann tried to establish a mission farm at Happy Valley in the South of Adelaide, but soon had to give up this project.

He continued working at the Kurna language until 1857/58, when he sent manuscripts with a revised Kurna dictionary and grammar to the former governor of South Australia, George Grey, who was by then living in Cape Town, South Africa, and collecting languages from the British colonies. Teichelmann eventually moved to Yorke Peninsula, where he passed away in 1888. Like Meyer, Schürmann became an influential pastor and founder of Lutheran congregations in Western Victoria for another 40 years of his “third life” from 1853 until his death in 1893.

Early Lutheran church historians and the Leipzig Mission history writing judged the South Australian mission project a failure, from which to learn for future mission fields. With its move from Dresden to Leipzig in 1848, the society focused on India, initially receiving substantial support even from South Australia. In the early 1860s, Pastor Meyer became instrumental as one of those early church leaders to revive a mission impetus amongst his fellow Lutherans, first at Lake Killapaninna and then at Finke River (Hermannsburg).

### 3.3

The Kurna language ceased to be spoken on a daily basis from about the 1860s. The then remaining Kurna people were soon outnumbered by members of other language communities from the Murray River and further north. English became a *Lingua Franca* – or bridge language – between the different language communities and the settler society. Aboriginal people were sent to “missions” like Poonindie on Eyre Peninsula, Point Pearce (Yorke PI) or Point McLeay (Raukkan, Lake Alexandrina) and developed a multi-lingual or English-only “mission” identity. Inter-marriage erased most of the knowledge of language and culture. In 1929, the last known “full” Aboriginal Kurna speaker, a lady by the name of IVARITJI, passed away. With her, the Kurna language seemed to have become truly extinct, and more or less the same was true for the other Aboriginal languages in the coastal regions of South Australia.

Significantly, most of the missionaries’ heritage in the form of research notes, sermons, and their private correspondence also seems to have disappeared, if not trashed by the descendants. Preliminary research utilising Internet databases, like Trove from the National Library of Australia, however, reveals that there was an awareness of the Dresden missionaries’ linguistic achievements throughout most of the following 75 years, amongst people interested in Aboriginal languages in Australia and internationally.

In fact, although considered a failure as missionaries, their linguistic achievements formed the basis for a school of linguists in subsequent decades, as present-day linguists like Jane Simpson, Rob Amery and Clara Stockigt have shown.

In Germany, furthermore, we have only recently discovered more of the missionaries’ legacy in museums and archives, albeit sketchy so far. Like the many references to their linguistic role model – the missionary Lancelot Threlkeld at Lake Macquarie – Teichelmann and Schürmann have also been widely quoted in early anthropological and linguistic studies, far beyond any recognition of their work from within the mission community.

As knowledge of the dictionary had never really disappeared, it was reprinted in 1962 and was used in the 1980s for the production of teaching material on Aboriginal history in South Australia. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Kurna people and members of other language communities collected the surviving *Nunga* dictionaries and related documents and began a process of reclaiming and reviving their languages which they considered “sleeping”. Today, all three languages are being taught again in different stages of language revival. The number of Aboriginal *Nunga* and non-Aboriginal people of all age groups who have since studied, to some degree, one of the languages recorded by the four Dresden missionaries, far exceeds an estimated 10,000 people and the missionaries’ names are better known amongst those students than amongst the local churches.

In 2002, the Kurna Elders Alitya Wallara Rigney and Lewis Yerloburka O'Brien, and Dr Rob Amery as the principal linguist behind this language revival program, established "*Kurna Warra Pintyanthi*" (KWP), now a joint project between the University of Adelaide and the Kurna community, to oversee and direct the language development. Not least based on their work, Adelaide is said to be the major Australian city with the most visible recognition of Aboriginal culture, for instance by the naming in the Kurna Language, or dual-naming in English and Kurna, of streets and city squares, parks, buildings, or programs. The Kurna Place Names Research project for the southern parts of Kurna country has become one of the most tangible outcomes of this project, recording Aboriginal knowledge of significant locations, often followed by the plaques or information boards.

Close to 1,000 schools, social and public services, companies and government agencies, and individuals have since requested Kurna names or translations for their service or place. Between 2011 and 2013, KWP trained a small group of Kurna community members of all ages in acquiring their language and will continue with a Cert IV course in teaching languages (in collaboration with TAFE SA), both to the Kurna and the wider community.

In 2013, KWP celebrated 175 years of the arrival of the first two of the Dresden missionaries, and their achievements in language recording and teaching. For the first time ever, the director of Leipzig Mission (as the successor of the Dresden Mission Society) re-established contact to the three Aboriginal communities and to the Lutheran Church of Australia. Later that year, KWP published a significant outcome of its 20 years of work, the 230-page Kurna Learner's Guide (Wakefield Press) and a first series of online-teaching aids (video clips). We hope to publish in 2014 a Kurna Language Dictionary including all known sources and in a revised spelling (2010).

Based mainly on the works of missionary Meyer and in the footsteps of Congregationalist missionary George Taplin at Raukkan, the Ngarrindjeri community around Lake Alexandrina is again teaching their language, with the help of linguist Mary-Anne Gale. A popular community choir and dance group utilises poems and hymns translated by Meyer. The Barngarla Language revival commenced on Eyre Peninsula in 2011, with the help of Prof. Ghil'ad Zuckermann at the University of Adelaide.

Most significantly, local government councils and many other bodies acknowledge the existence of the Aboriginal community on whose land they reside. For the past 20 years at least, Aboriginal culture, language and spirituality have received formal recognition and support in reclaiming identity for a healthy future. Whether this will be lasting and sustainable is yet to be determined.

#### 4.

As mentioned in the beginning, this paper not only reviews the historical past, but also raises a number of issues for present-day politics – of reconciliation between First Australians and settler Australia, and in particular for the Christian churches in South Australia.

##### 4.1

In terms of historical research, the gap between mission and secular accounts is noteworthy. Church and mission histories, while acknowledging the efforts of the four young missionaries, only mention their language recording as a minor detail of a failed mission project. Despite the fact that these language resources were widely referred to amongst people interested in Aboriginal culture and languages, the significance of these achievements was ignored.

In the past, this may have been quite convenient as it echoed the initial ideology of Australia as a "Terra Nullius" and the "unavoidable demise" of its first people. But even today, the Lutheran Church of Australia barely acknowledges the people on whose lands they meet, and this is also true for many of the other churches.

The language reclamation and revival, based on historical sources recorded significantly by Lutheran missionaries, has evolved without support by any of the churches in South Australia involved in this early part of mission history.

At the same time, secular histories of South Australia have analysed the interaction between the Aboriginal communities and the missionaries in quite some detail. Of course, it cannot be assumed that these histories include the theological and mission impetus driving the four young missionaries. More often than not, this is simply due to a lack of command of the German language, or access to such sources. Most of these assessments take little notice of the particular background of the missionaries and the existing accounts of their (event theological) interaction with their Aboriginal counterparts.

The current language reclamation, thus, has been supported mainly from a scientific and secular perspective, apart from personal contacts. If the churches don't take up the challenge to strive for reconciliation, who will? Why is it so difficult to face and acknowledge those First Australians on whose land we meet?

## 4.2

In terms of mission history, the Dresden missionary story is rather unique: Unlike Clamor Schürmann's brother Johann Adam in Benares, India, the "Dresden 4" very soon became part of the settler majority, while trying to acquaint themselves with, and advocate for, the increasingly marginalised and displaced original custodians of these lands. Traditional mission experience is to represent a colonial – or today, elitist – political minority in control of the political powers of an alien country. Translating the Bible and preaching the Gospel, therefore, has had a twofold effect: spiritual and political, but in any way is fundamentally transforming the lives of the locals.

It seems to be convenient to ignore the sociological setting of the four Dresden missionaries, as this puts the blame of failure on them personally. In fact, the Dresden Mission Society itself had not done its homework and was lacking a clear understanding of the situation on the ground. They accepted what they learned from the initiators of the South Australian colony in Britain and their promise to protect Aboriginal life and culture. In the same time, they went along with with the prevailing opinion of the inevitable doom of the First Australian Peoples as the lowest race on earth, and in the face of western civilization.

As far as I am aware, there seem to have been very few similar sociological settings of mission endeavours and language acquisition. The few hundred Aboriginals we now call Kurna, and the estimated 3,000 Aboriginal people known to have lived in the early settlement areas, were soon highly outnumbered by about 50,000 settlers in the late 1840s. The Dresden missionaries found themselves a minority alongside the fast diminishing number of the First Nation Australians. Sociologically, the missionaries never had a chance in the first place.

In Australia, I am only aware of another such mission project that may be comparable, the Gossner Mission at Moreton Bay (Brisbane), but there the local Aboriginal language was never recorded and, as such, no serious communication seems to have been possible.

As with Lancelot Threlkeld near Newcastle, or Jakob (James) Günther at Wellington, NSW, at least the missionaries in South Australia tried to establish a serious discourse on some equal footing with their Aboriginal counterparts – fragile and fractured though it may have been.

This sociological context of early Australian missions never seems to have been analysed, as far as I am aware, and certainly not in church and mission histories. Why?

### 4.3

In 2006, the Leipzig Missionary archive (until 1996 and including the Dresden Missionary archive) has become accessible for the first time for systematic research at the professional Archives of the Francke Foundations in Halle, Germany.

The earliest part contains the unique collection of estimated 12,500 pages of documents telling the story of the establishment of the Dresden Mission Society, its search for a suitable first mission place, and the struggle to maintain it. Its core is the correspondence between Dresden missionaries in South Australia and their partners in Germany and the UK, the missionary diaries and their descriptions of Aboriginal life and language(s) in South Australia, scattered in letters and reports.

However, the archive reflects this struggle from a German mission agency perspective. In the same time it is the German mirror of the Aboriginal history of dispossession in South Australia and their loss of Country, Language and Identity. Its core needs to be extracted and made accessible for the wider public and, in particular, for the Aboriginal communities. Published in a proper form (e.g. as an expanding website that may also include the stories of other Aboriginal Mission projects) it may serve educational purposes on all levels.<sup>3</sup>

Most of the core of Dresden Mission archive, i.e. the letters and diaries of the missionaries, has been transcribed by a Leipzig Mission staff worker in the 1980s and translated by Lutheran Archives volunteers in the early 2000s. However, due to the previous lack of access to these archives, the transcripts and translations still have to be verified against the original manuscripts.

A small portion of this material has been published (e.g. Schürmann's Diary in 1987, and the Klose Letters in 2002), but is out of print and only accessible to experts. As a result of the recent language revival in South Australia, one third of the Dresden Missionary archive has now been digitised for research in Adelaide, containing church and mission related documents. A second third of the archive, about 4,500 pages, with the missionary correspondence and the diaries, still awaits digitisation (a project of some \$4,000).

For the first time, therefore, it is now possible to extract the German context of the work of the Dresden missionaries in South Australia as a significant part of its early history. As described above, their commitment developed in the context of a complex story of global colonial politics between Germany, England and Australia, and this side of their story and its effect on the missionaries' approach to their work in South Australia has never been documented. These records offer a unique and focused glimpse into this piece of South Australian history.

Most importantly, the three language communities with whom the missionaries had worked have lost much of their cultural heritage. While the Dresden Mission archive is the administrative flip-side of this story, it contains pieces and bits of reference to tradition, cultural artefacts and natural history of the Aboriginal peoples. **In essence, this archive is their story.**

I believe that making it accessible for future research by Aboriginal community members is a key challenge for us, today, who are the inheritors of this story. In the same time it is a valuable asset for education, research and reconciliation in South Australia.

<sup>3</sup> In the recent past, three such websites have been published for East Coast Aboriginal Mission projects: In 2002 by the University of Newcastle about the Awabakal Mission (Lancelot Threlkeld) <[www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/research/publications/awaba/](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/research/publications/awaba/)> and the Wellington Valley Project (Wiradjuri) <[www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/research/publications/the-wellington-valley-project/](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/school/hss/research/publications/the-wellington-valley-project/)>; in 2009 by Griffith University about German Missionaries in Queensland <[missionaries.griffith.edu.au/?q=node/10](http://missionaries.griffith.edu.au/?q=node/10)>

#### 4.4

I began this talk with an acknowledgement of the Kurna Country on which we gather. Interestingly, one of the most notable Lutheran mission theologian and anthropologist in South Australia, Pastor Paul Albrecht, has recently challenged this custom: He questions the use of the name – “Kurna” – and, more significantly, the “ownership (or custodianship) of Country”.

These two concepts would need discussion of great length, and Albrecht is indeed right: Very few of the names assigned to the Aboriginal language communities across Australia today were used by themselves at the time of contact. In fact, “Kurna” was adopted and promulgated by anthropologist Norman Tindale, in the 1970s, as the name given to him by neighbouring Ngarrindjeri informants for the people across the hills, i.e. “the people” *there*. “Kurna” simply means ‘people’ in the Ngarrindjeri language, the equivalent *here* being “Miyurna”. Names such as “Kurna” were assigned by anthropologists all across the continent to people characterised by similar cultural and linguistic features – in the eyes of Western colonists and anthropologists, and for administrative purposes in the process of colonisation.

Even more interesting is Albrecht’s reference to the ownership of land. I am not an anthropologist and, unlike him, did not grow up on Aboriginal lands in Central Australia. As mentioned above, the Kurna community in particular – as indeed most of the Aboriginal peoples along the heavily-populated coastline of Southern and Eastern Australia – have lost most of their heritage, and certainly the right to access and use their lands. Albrecht acknowledges that

Custodianship of land was, and in some parts of Australia, still is exercised by Aborigines who know their language and culture, via rituals laid down by the totemic spirit being at the beginning of time.

However, he states that

It is problematic in the extreme to speak of the Kurna people, who have lost their language and no longer know the rituals associated with the spirit beings of the area, to be exercising custodianship over these lands.

While the first part of this statement may reflect a correct observation of Central Australia Aboriginality, the second part turns the argument on its head and equates traditional Aboriginal custodianship, implicitly, with Western concepts of property ownership – most sacrosanct to British law. However, for me as a newcomer, what is most fascinating in the process of Aboriginal Language reclamation is the strong link between revival of Language, spiritual (and thus physical) well-being, and the importance of Country. For a Protestant theologian like me, this is hard to grasp, but clearly a reality for Aboriginal people.

Subsequently, Albrecht quotes the Christian Bible and concludes that

History shows that God has apportioned and reapportioned land through wars and other human activity to different people at different times. To suggest that this did not happen in Australia is to deny God’s activity in history. Whatever personal opinions one may have about the British settlement of Australia, it did happen and with it the ownership of the land changed.

These quotes are taken from an unpublished manuscript provided by Paul Albrecht. As a regular lecturer on Aboriginal studies at the Australian Lutheran College, Paul exerts significant influence. He has published through contributions to the distinctively conservative Samuel Griffith Society in 1997, and in the influential journal “Quadrant” in 2012<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Paul G E Albrecht AM. *ACKNOWLEDGING THE INDIGENOUS CUSTODIANS OF THE LAND*. Manuscript. No Date. PersCom 24.4.2013. – The Nature of Aboriginal Identity, in *Samuel Griffith Society - Ninth Conference*, Perth 24 - 26

If this reflects a mainstream Christian perception of Aboriginality in Australia, I believe that the churches, and here in particular the LCA, have an important role to play in the search for reconciliation.

## Conclusion

This introduction into the history of the four German missionaries from Dresden, in the early years of South Australian colonization, shifts the focus from their alleged failure as missionaries in Christianizing and Civilizing the First Peoples of these lands, to the factual sociological settings of their work, and the significant outcome of their commitment –approximately 150 years later. These achievements have been conveniently ignored in church and mission history writings, as have the survival of the remnants of the First Australian peoples, their reclaiming of culture, language and identity, and their celebration of Aboriginal identity in its own right.

Systematic early Aboriginal language recording in Australia, and so here in South Australia, has been conducted by a few missionaries and colonial Protectors of Aborigines, who had the closest contact with, and interest in, the First Australian peoples. Following Lancelot Threlkeld near Newcastle, the four Dresden missionaries in South Australia established a linguistic school of language studies that is still recognized today. However, this side of their work has been largely ignored by the Australian mainstream churches.

The successors of the former missionary societies in Germany, furthermore, have only recently began to express an interest in these achievements of their first missionaries here in Australia, and the Aboriginal communities and the identity of the individual people to whom these missionaries ministered. A serious sociological analysis would show that the missionaries had never stood a chance in the first place.

Given the widely-held opinion of the “gloom and doom of the lowest race on earth”, which was shared to some degree by the four Dresden missionaries, albeit with a high regard for the intellectual abilities of their students, it is an irony of history that their language recording has become one of the key elements in reclaiming Aboriginal culture and identity today. As Rob Amery has titled one of his many papers, it would have been “beyond their expectations” (2000).

Finally, I would like to contrast the above mentioned statement by Pastor Paul Albrecht with two other biblical references: “There is a season for everything, and a time for every event under heaven”, says the Ecclesiast (3,1), and in his letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul responds: “Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become his adviser? ... For all things are from him, by him, and for him.” (11,34.36). Unbeknownst to themselves, the four young missionaries, their Aboriginal informers and the Kurna children at the missionary school Piltawodli, laid the foundation for a remarkable revival of these Aboriginal languages and cultures – but in God's own time.

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October, 1997, p93-102. Internet: <[www.samuelgriffith.org.au/papers/html/volume9/v9contents.htm](http://www.samuelgriffith.org.au/papers/html/volume9/v9contents.htm)> – RELHIPERRA: ABOUT ABORIGINES (Incorporating the thoughts of a reluctant missionary). Published by *Quadrant Online*. January 2012. Source: <[www.quadrant.org.au/Albrecht%20Relhiperra.pdf](http://www.quadrant.org.au/Albrecht%20Relhiperra.pdf)>, viewed 30.05.2013.