

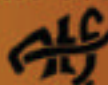
Emerging Downunder taps into the current hunger for spirituality, the death pains of obsolete church forms, and the rising tide of hope felt by many Christians. It suggests ways the fragmented church may reconnect both with its root and the contemporary environment, providing practical examples of church that bring praying, eating, learning and hospitality together in one place.

This book was first published as *Church of the Isles* by Ray Simpson for a British audience. In collaboration with Brent Lyons Lee, it has tapped in to worldwide conversations about 'emerging church' and 'new monasticism' and applied it to a 'downunder' context.

Ray Simpson is a celibate Anglican Priest and has been a minister in churches in Britain's industrial Midlands, multi-racial London, and rural East Anglia, and he has planted a neighbourhood church, sponsored by six church streams (Protestant, Catholic and Quaker) in Bowthorpe, Norwich. He is the Guardian of The Community of Aidan and Hilda, a globally dispersed community that is focussed on weaving together the separated strands of Christianity, healing the lands and resourcing people in discovering new monastic ways. He is the author of a number of best-selling books on Celtic spirituality, including his most recent *A Pilgrim Way: New Celtic Monasticism for Everyday People*.

Brent Lyons Lee has worked for several years with Urban Seed in Melbourne's CBD dealing with issues of poverty and wealth in an urban context. He is the 'Minister' of a community of people working from the Norlane Baptist Church, an hour from Melbourne in a low socio-economic suburb. He is married to Belinda and has studied both Theology and Social Science.

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Foreword

The pages you are about to read are full of rich insight and wisdom. Don't start reading if you are happy with the status quo—if you feel your life is well balanced, or that your church is a happy, harmonious, well-oiled machine—these pages simply won't work for you.

This is a read for the restless; those who are hungry for something deeper, who cringe with what passes for Christian identity and worship these days and despair when they read church pew bulletins. In fact many who now feel church-less may well find hope here. Or those who walk a lonely path of spiritual isolation where soul mates are rare.

Ray Simpson brings the depth of his experience in Celtic tradition based in The Community of Aidan and Hilda in the UK which gives an insightful overview of the challenges facing the church in Australia and New Zealand. He weaves the impressions he received from his time here where he listened, read and observed widely with the depth of his study and background in the centuries-old tradition known as the Celtic spirituality. Brent Lyons Lee has initiated this conversation in order to better serve in the emerging church here in Australia. There are some huge challenges in these humble pages, such as: 'We are called to cradle a Christian spirituality for today that brings healing to our lands' and 'Australia has an opportunity to birth something in the third millennium which can give hope to the declining old world and to the nascent new world.'

In order to respond to these challenges the shape of the emerging church is explored through the window of Celtic wisdom. At its heart is humility, earthiness, a relinquishment of power and formality and an openness to fresh ways of embracing home, hospitality and a prayerful connectedness to God.

I think it is a timely book. These days I am not in formal ministry in a church as I lead World Vision Australia but I am often speaking in churches or in Christian contexts. I am struck by a sad uniformity of styles, expressions, even songs. I cringe with the clichés that pass as being meaningful ways of worship. And I often leave these churches asking—what is it all about? I do not think I am alone. We live in complex times and the church is caught up in a culture full of a cacophony of competing influences. It takes wisdom and insight to look at it afresh so I commend this book as a thoughtful, challenging and instructive means of listening to the winds of the Spirit for a way to emerge into the future.

Tim Costello
December 2007

Introduction

Brent's thoughts:

At age twenty-nine, I'm apparently an 'emerging church' leader. The 'emerging church' term has been used to describe a fresh paradigm for church. I think the term has by default described doing 'worship' in new and 'cool' ways. Some parts of the emerging movement have included the idea of being 'missional' which has often lead to groups not taking time for worship at all. I came across a book not long ago written in 1970 entitled 'Emerging Church'. To be reminded that this concept is not new was quite refreshing—every generation needs to look for 'new' ways of doing and being church. I point this out not to undermine the momentum created by the emerging church dialogue, but to give some perspective. We the Church have managed to survive for two thousand years!

In thinking about a title for this book, it was almost more appropriate to use the term 'submerging' rather than 'emerging'. David Tacey writes that in contemporary post-colonial Australia, spirituality is entering our life from below, and the feet play a more important role than the intellect. He quotes Barbara Blackman as saying that if we want to 'understand' spirituality in this country we have to 'stand-under' our habitual logic and our usual perceptions, since that is the vantage point from which the spirit is found. Understanding calls us away from our conscious conventions.¹

Heritage

I'm Anglo-Celtic through and through; Scottish on my maternal side, English and Irish on my paternal side. I'm at least a third generation Aussie. I think I feel more comfortable with the angst of Gen X even though I'm technically Gen Y. When I speak publicly I often apologise up front about being Gen Y, but will joke that I'm not a good one because I've worked with the same organisation for several years and I have moved out of home and married! A lot is made of generational differences. One thing that is certain for people of my generation (and for all generations) is that the world is different and there is seemingly no certainty. Foundations that have been satisfactory in the past have been questioned to the point of being meaningless—even church.

Like many others, I found myself looking for meaning in the concrete act of tracing the footsteps of my ancestors. In 2004, my wife and I travelled to the UK. It was a holiday; but more important for us was to tread in the places our ancestors had trodden. We also wanted to explore our growing interest in Celtic spirituality. The holiday was great. Going to Royal Tunbridge Wells, where parts of my family originated, was amazing. However the greatest experience was the sense that the fingerprints of generations of people, some of who I may have been related to, were everywhere.

We made a number of pilgrimages to 'holy' sites around Europe, from the tiny monastic village of Glendalough in Ireland to the massive St Peters Basilica in Rome. Most transforming was a little tidal island off the east coast of Northumbria called Lindisfarne, or Holy Island. There we met Ray Simpson who lived on the island as the Guardian of the Community of Aidan and Hilda. There was an instant connection as fellow lifelong learners. I was drawn to Ray as I

consider him a mystic. I'm quite intuitive, but I'm much more a pragmatist, yet I felt God on that island like never before. I experienced what the Celts call the 'thin places'—where only a thin veil exists between the material and spiritual.

Beyond the isolation of Holy Island, even in the bustle of tourist filled cathedrals, something was very different. I became aware of my own sense of mortality as I visited such historical sites, getting some perspective on the slice of time each person is allotted. Life viewed from the perspective of death is indeed an important component of Christian discipleship, one which we shy away from—the unknown is scary!

Returning to Australia

I came back to Australia after only several weeks away and felt like an exile in what I had always thought of as 'my' country. I wasn't sure how to make sense of my experience. The Australian psyche seemed best described as a teenager with no life experience, motoring on with the attitude of invincibility found in youth, compounded by its unwillingness to reflect on mistakes and learn from them. And it's true; Australia is a young country with a lot of growing up to do.

Reading David Tacey (who I regard as a most insightful author on Australian Spirituality) hit the mark for me. Tacey writes that the power of the land and the influence of aboriginal culture are activating primordial levels of the Euro-Australian psyche, stirring its deeper layers. He believes that a version of ancient Celtic spirituality is being awakened and stirred to new life in Australia. One can see this in many different ways in Australian folk culture, where the attempt to 'grow down' into Australian soil has the effect of revitalising Celtic roots, giving rise to a kind of Celtic revival.²

Indigenous people in Australia find their identity through the connection with their land. I never really knew what that meant

until I went to the UK and started walking on the land of my ancestors and hearing the stories of ‘my’ people. I began to gain some perspective on the importance of the land to indigenous people, it’s something that is intuitive and too hard to describe rationally.

I desperately wanted to be back in the UK where it seemed like there was a bit of perspective. I found myself hungry to name and locate an authentic Australian spirituality. Anglo-Australian history is not much more than two hundred years old, yet Indigenous Australian history dates back as far as mythology can recall. I needed to tap in to this spirit, into this dreaming, but didn’t feel like I had the right. So I shared my thoughts with a local Indigenous man. He looked me steadfastly in the eyes and simply said: ‘This is your place’. Being given permission to believe this was my place changed everything. Even though he and I weren’t the individuals killing each other a few hundred years ago, there was a real acknowledgment that we, the ancestors, could struggle forward.

Under ten years of John Howard we may have given up on the hope of an official apology for the atrocities inflicted by Europeans on Indigenous Australians. Yet while our government is not changing its mind, the reality is that every generation is going to have to say sorry. In every generation to come, Indigenous and non-indigenous Australians will have to look each other in the eyes and ask: ‘Where to from here?’ Having recently spent time in New Zealand, I believe Australians could learn a lot from our cousins about reconciliation. We will explore this later.

Inviting Ray

From all the emerging church and missional church literature, I found Ray Simpson’s ideas on reconstructing ways forward for

the people of God most compelling. In 2005, I invited Ray to come to Australia and discuss his Celtic spirituality insights. Following his visit, we have collaborated on applying his ideas in the unique 'Downunder' context. It is important to remember that there is nothing new under the sun. Yet these Celtic insights are drawn from ancient wisdom, and as we face the death of Christendom, I believe the time is right for them to re-emerge.

Ray's thoughts:

A bishop told me when I was twenty-nine that God had called me to have one foot in the church and one foot in the world outside. When Brent invited me Downunder I sought to come with a fresh eye, to see if I could discern as an outside friend any 'God insights'. Some of this book is a record of my encounters and reflections.

I serve a worldwide task force of Christians who seek to restore Christianity as a way of life. We have a few members and friends in New Zealand, as well as Australia, and church leaders from both countries spend time at 'The Open Gate', our Retreat House on England's Holy Island of Lindisfarne. So the reflections embrace both the Anzac countries.

I observed a new wave of spirituality in Australia, but it threatens to bypass the churches and leave them beached. So I thank God that there are some far-sighted Christians who see that a humbled church can tap into this new wave, and also into what is of God in the pre-European Aboriginal spirituality, so that a truly Australian and transforming church can rise up.

The Community of Aidan and Hilda is an international pilgrim people who seek to reconnect us with the Spirit and the scriptures, the streets and the soil, the saints and the seasons. Its members follow a Way of Life based on a rhythm of prayer, study, re-creation, simplicity, earth care and mission.

We are called to cradle a Christian spirituality for today that brings healing to our lands.

Australia has an opportunity to birth something in the third millennium which can give hope to the declining old world and to the nascent new world.

Columba of Iona left behind his 'old world' of Ireland and set foot in the 'new world' of the Scots in Britain. Two footprints carved in a rock on the Mull of Kintyre mark this spot. As I placed my feet in these prints, God's Spirit moved me to pray:

May our friends Downunder be given
the wild strength
the bold faith
the big heart
the well stored mind
the prophetic insight
the inspired servant leadership
and the missionary strategy
of Columba.

From Columba's Iona Aidan, with gentle heart but backbone of steel, brought the torch of faith to the English speaking pagans and the original Britons, even though he was of another race. He set their hearts on fire. The faith became indigenous, drawing on the wisdom of the ancient peoples. Previous attempts to establish churches which were not truly indigenous lacked staying and drawing power.

Soon a deep transfiguration took place and the church of the English had its own birthright. This was enshrined in The Lindisfarne Gospels, whose non-routine illuminations, made in consultation with other major English monastic churches, form a kind of manifesto. The three highlights are:

- The Beatitudes (simplicity)
- The prodigal son (hospitality)
- Jesus' desert struggles (spiritual fitness)

Now it is Australia's turn to raise up athletes of the Spirit who will:

Re-kindle the fire
Draw from the ancient wells
Develop God-given rhythms
Establish compassionate communities
Heal the land
Transform the world.