Michael Riley's Bible and the Touch of the Text (with reference to the Gospel of Luke)[1]

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Australian Indigenous photographer and filmmaker, Michael Riley, a Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi man, died at the height of his artistic career in 2004 at the age of forty-four. Among many things, Riley explored the colonial impact of Christianity with reference to the Bible as a material artefact of colonization. Colonial contact in Australia is a complex, often violent, 'touch' where colonial violence and ecological destruction intersect. Riley's series *Sacrifice* (1992) draws on Christian imagery to comment on the cultural impact of Christianity on Indigenous peoples in Australia, but without explicit reference to the Bible. The Bible appears in his *flyblown* (1998) and *cloud* (2000/2005) series expressly in relation to the land and ecological impacts of colonization. With reference to Riley's images of the Bible, this essay explores the theme of touch in the Gospel of Luke in conversation with the ongoing event of colonial contact in Australia. I argue that a pattern of compassionate touch can be read in the Gospel of Luke unsettling patterns of violent relatedness. But in the dual context of colonization and ecological destruction in Australia, the materiality of the text intersects with my interpretation in multiple, complex ways such that my potentially counter-colonial reading of the text is not free of the impacts (for good or ill) of the text as a material artefact of colonization. Riley's imagery suggests that the tragic ambiguity of the Bible as a cultural artefact of the colonizers may open to hope through kinds of Indigenous resistance to, and enculturations of, the Bible.

The materiality of the text and the materiality of the body

As many of his contemporaries and reviewers comment, Riley – like many Australia Indigenous people – died too young. Djon Mundine and Bronwyn Watson cite childhood

poverty as implicated in his renal disease and ultimately renal failure.[2] Such poverty, while not unique to Indigenous Australians, is more prevalent in Indigenous populations. Colonization and its cultural accompaniments (including the Bible) cannot be separated from such material impacts on bodies, especially where culture, land and health are so closely entwined. In this section, I detour some centuries and continents, to introduce the intersecting materialities of biblical texts and bodies, where bodies and texts touch upon each other, before considering explicitly the question of colonial contact.

On one page of a thirteenth century CE Parisian *Bible Moralisée*, an infant nestles in a partly open Bible. The scene recalls the presentation. A woman appears with the child and two men are present. The men stand together. The gaze of one rests on the woman, the gaze of the other is directed toward the child. In the image to the left, ties or clasps secure the book holding the child. The book is close/d around him. Above left, a child appears swaddled and directly above he lies in a basket afloat on a river among the rushes. A woman inclines toward the child at a similar angle to that of the other woman who bends toward the child nestled in the book. The eyes of the former woman are closed while the latter's focus on the child. The words to the side of the images suggest that these narratives are about Moses, and his sister Miriam (Marie). But the images link Jesus and Moses and suggest at this level that the book represents the Torah, the law of Moses, referred to in Luke's account of the presentation, when his parents bring the infant Jesus to be presented before God in the Jerusalem Temple where they encounter the aged Simeon (2.22-35, esp. 22-24). There is a crossing between basket/manger/cradle/book. A white scroll falls from the draped hand/arm of Miriam/Marie, and could also hint at the prophet Anna, whom the parents and child also meet in the Temple (2.36-38). The Lukan story unfolds in relation to a woman called Mary/Marie/Miriam. For Luke, Mary is the keeper of all these things: the story, the Torah, the word (2:19, 51). In the moment represented in the *Bible Moralisée* illumination, the Bible

(as manger/basket) is the intermediary between the touch of the sister/mother and the touch of the elders. Here the materiality of the text touches the materiality of the body.[3]

Of texts and bodies, Jean-Luc Nancy writes:

> Bodies, for good or ill, are touching each other upon this page, or more precisely, the page itself is a touching (of my hand while it writes, and your hands while they hold the book). This touch is infinitely indirect, deferred – machines, vehicles, photocopies, eyes, still other hands are all interposed – but it continues as a slight, resistant, fine texture, the infinitesimal dust of a contact, everywhere interrupted and pursued.[4]

As I touch the copy of the catalogue from the posthumous exhibition of Riley's work, leafing through its pages, I am held by his keen eye for the materiality of bodies, their embeddedness in networks of relationships, as if his portraits could touch on both subject and viewer. Riley's photographs, as Jennifer Deger writes, 'cannot be abstracted from the context of the lives, relationships and socio-political histories that infuse the frames', and his photographs are evidence of his deep engagement in the socio-politics of contact.[5] They give evidence, too, of what Deger calls a 'relational aesthetics'.[6] Brenda Croft describes Riley's portraits of women and their children: 'His images of women friends and their children are stunning and incredibly intimate, showing the bond between photographer and subject, as much as that between mother and child.'[7] Perhaps it is a stretch, but as I write I feel a resonance between the quality of the holding of the child in the book of the *Bible Moralisée* image and those subjects held in Riley's photographs, and the way that holding touches on the materialities of bodies, texts, illustrations and photographs, and their readers/viewers.

Contact: The Bible as material artefact and the touch of colonization

The medieval *Bible Moralisée* image discussed above references the Lukan presentation narrative (2.22-35).[8] The right hand images from top to bottom show the birth of a child, the lying in the cradle/manger, the discovery of Moses among the rushes, and the presentation of

the child in the book. There is a crossing between the hands of the midwife, the manger, the reed basket and the book as the place that touches and holds the child and keeps him safe. The left hand column provides a contrast. From top to bottom are images of children taken from their mothers and slaughtered with the sword; of Moses left on the river due to Pharaoh's cruelty; of the book closed around the child. The mediaeval images of violence against children are uncanny in their resonance with Indigenous Australian experiences of colonization, of forced removal of children and massacres. For many, the Bible has become part of this ongoing story of dispossession, resistance, survival and cultural negotiation. Riley speaks of the 'sacrifices Aboriginal people made to be Christian'.[9]

As noted earlier, signifying touch, 'contact' is used for the colonizing meeting of invader/settler with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australian scholars such as Roland Boer, Mark Brett and Deborah Bird Rose have considered aspects of the use and impact of the Bible in a period of contact that continues. For example, the Bible has informed explorer and settler perceptions of their enterprises and relationships to land, has authorized the suppression and destruction of Indigenous cultural practices, and has prompted critique of the violence and dispossession accompanying colonization.[10] Jeremy Beckett argues that once colonization has occurred, material artefacts such as Bibles become resources for ongoing meaning making within Indigenous cultures.[11] At the same time, traditional material symbols, such as message sticks and coolamons, become part of Indigenous inculturations of Christianity.[12]

In the wake of colonial dispossession and displacement, one negotiation of meaning for Indigenous Christians is an appeal to two laws, which parallels but differs from traditional Christian appeals to both an old law, represented by the Torah, and a new law, represented by Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ. Diane Austin-Broos relates a story in which an Aranda elder refers to two laws, Aranda law and God's/Bible law, seeing both as resources for survival,

but differently in that while biblical religion has taught that Aranda law is not 'proper', God's law is lacking as it 'doesn't say anything about country'.[13] Warramirri elder David Burramurra also poses the question of the relationship between the God of the Bible and the land. Without the lens of biblical religion, 'would he [God] look like the natural world?'[14] Burramurra describes a sacred Yolngu word that is 'our word for God', encompassing 'ceremonial beliefs and cultural traditions' and having manifestations like 'the Bible, Cross, flying fox, or cuttlefish'.[15] This suggests to me that the Bible, as material artefact, interpretative story and interpreter of story, is assimilated to country, as one among many sources of life.

Ian McIntosh describes further some ways in which the Aboriginal community of Elcho Island negotiate meaning and survival in relation to their traditional beliefs and Christianity. He relates a story told by Buthimang, a senior member of the Wangurri clan at Elcho Island, that 'there were two types of Balanda [non-Aboriginal people]. One had a gun and the other a book (i.e. the Bible), and only the latter could be trusted'.[16] Nevertheless, he notes, '[t]he local view [is] that there is little respect among Balanda for Yolngu understandings or ways of doing things and yet Aborigines have needed to make substantial changes in their own ways to accommodate Balanda ideas and structures'.[17] With regard to the Bible, one aspect of this accommodation has been in relation to language. In many cases, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been introduced to the Bible in English, the language of the colonizer, as part of the process of cultural damage that accompanied colonial education.[18] Some attempts were made to translate the Bible into local languages. The translation of the Bible into Aranda has impacted this language, shifting the meaning of some concepts, notably, for example, 'the moralization of various terms concerned with physical well-being'.[19] In the nineteenth century with his Aboriginal mentor and friend Birabahn (Johnny Magill), Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld attempted to translate the Bible into the Awabakal

language.[20] Where Threlkeld could not find words in the Awabakal language for concepts in the biblical text, he introduced Greek or Hebrew words.[21] Among his published research is an incomplete Awakabal-English lexicon.[22] While his project set out to respect the language and culture of the Awakabal, it did little to ensure the survival of the people whose language it celebrated.[23]

Indigenous writer Oodgeroo Noonuccal situates her writing as a material alternative to the Bible for her people, a translation of an oral Aboriginal voice in writing.[24] Anne Brewster relates:

> The decision to work with the written word was a conscious political decision for Noonuccal. She describes in an interview how old Aboriginal men would express themselves at public meetings through the Bible, and that the sight of this prompted her to write them 'a book they could call their own' ('Recording the Cries' 18). She describes seeing, after the publication of *We Are Going*, the same old man who used to quote the Bible, reciting her poetry at a meeting, despite the fact that he could 'neither read nor write; he had got his white friends to read it to him and had memorised it' (23). ... Noonuccal concluded her anecdote about the old man and how *We Are Going* replaced the Bible, with an explanation for the popularity of the book: 'for the first time the Aboriginals had a voice, a written voice' ('Recording the Cries' 19).[25]

Writing in response to an issue of the Friends of the Earth magazine *Chain Reaction*, which focused on the positive role faith traditions could play in response to ecological crisis, Yorta Yorta elder, Monica Morgan points out that religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism are introduced to Australia.[26] They are 'man-made' insofar as they are not of the land.[27] She is strongly critical of Christianity:

> Christianity is especially divisive and dangerous. At its core is the need to control resources – it promotes wealth, elitism, the benefits of a few at the expense of the

> many; it is almost like a feudal system. It benefits a few and captures the rest – in effect becoming like slaves. Then the bounty of the earth becomes the property of those in charge.
>
> The Catholic church has been one of the worst. They have stolen the most from our peoples. They have store houses of sacred objects: Churingas, sacred stones, human remains and other objects, carefully taken and catalogued, our culture and history taken and archived; it's like stealing DNA because these objects are the very core of our being. And once they stole our objects, and controlled our symbols, they replaced them with their own – the cross, the Bible.[28]

Of 'white fellas' relationship to the land, she continues:

> They have brought their religion to this place and just rolled it over the top of what was here before, just like their gardens of plants and lawn are rolled over the top of the real plants. None of the introduced religions have evolved to the point where they understand where they are and what that means.[29]

Palawa womanist theologian Lee *Miena* Skye, is similarly critical of the failure of white Australians to understand the spiritual being (which she calls 'spiritualness') of Indigenous people, especially with regard to their connection to country, a 'spiritualness' she regards as inherited through genetic memory in spite of colonial dispossession.[30]

This 'spiritualness', for Skye, is counter to a Western and colonialist dualistic framing of spirit in opposition to matter.[31] Skye describes the Christianity inculturated by Indigenous women as different from the Christianity of the colonizer, 'presenting an image of Christ that is One-with-Creation'.[32] For Skye, the problem with the Bible is in its destructive misinterpretation by those who brought it to Australia.[33] She comments that for the Australian Aboriginal Christian women she interviewed and for herself, 'the Bible validated their "experience" of Christ; in other words, the Bible was not their "first" introduction to and

experience of Christ'.[34] Their experience of Christ is embedded in the sacredness of the land and reflects the experience of their own suffering which cannot be separated from the suffering of the land.[35]

Michael Riley's Bible[36]

Michael Riley's *Sacrifice* (1992) series references this suffering with Christian imagery: a stone cross; a row of fish; another fish set against cracked dried earth; a fish on grass; lilies; a cross on a chain against a bare chest; and the pierced bleeding hands of a dark-skinned person, evoking both the death of Jesus and the stigmata born by saints such as Francis of Assisi. Grains of flour, sugar and coffee allude to the rations of mission life, as well as issues of substance abuse. For Croft, this Christian imagery serves not only to symbolize Indigenous suffering, but to evoke the suffering that the colonial impact of Christianity entails: a 'loss, experienced not only by the individual but by entire Indigenous communities: "loss" of culture and land in enforced, and sometimes embraced, "exchange" for Christianity'.[37] Riley's photograph of the fish on parched ground evokes the way this colonial 'exchange' is also implicated in ecological destruction.

While not featured in the imagery of the *Sacrifice* series, the Bible appears in Riley's film *Empire* (1997) and his later *flyblown* (1998) and final *cloud* (2000/2005) series. Echoing the imagery of the fish on parched ground, in his *flyblown* series, a Bible lies/floats open face down on a shallow puddle on red-brown earth. Another image in this series shows a dead galah (rose breasted cockatoo, found throughout Australia) on baked red-brown earth. In his *cloud* series, a Bible floats open face down against blue sky and luminous cloud (Fig. 8.1). Other images in the series show a crow's left wing, split and open; a cow; a locust with wings open wide as if pinned to a board; a boomerang; and a feather, floating or positioned against a similar blue sky with white sometimes luminous cloud. The audio commentary that accompanies *Untitled* [*bible*] from the *cloud* series says:

> The Church had a seminal impact on Michael Riley's childhood through the weekly visits of the Aboriginal Inland Mission. Michael's mother, Dorothy, recalled how Michael loved to attend Sunday School. However, in his later years, Riley referred to his Christian experience as 'creepy'. The floating Bible appears in other photographic series, often associated with images of the cross set against a brooding sky. In this series of photographs, the Bible, identified by the cross on the cover, floats alone. The book is open. Its pages are invisible behind the cover and the cross is aimed downwards like an arrow, like a weapon.[38]

In Riley's *flyblown* and *cloud* series, the Bible appears as a material artefact in parallel and contrast with images of sky, earth, colonization, death, drought, rain, and spirit. The multiple imagery echoes the multiplicity of the touch of the Bible on people and country.[39]

Anthony Gardner criticizes Riley's work in these series as facile and reductive, and contrasts the imagery of crosses, dead animals on dried earth, and the image of a cow against the sky with Riley's earlier activist works.[40] For Gardner, in his later work Riley's hints at colonial and ecological devastation '[condense] the complex histories of Aboriginal peoples and their European – especially Christian – colonizers into ... facile images'.[41] In contrast, Michael Desmond describes Riley's last series as his 'most powerful', with their impact being in the 'hallucinatory narrative they suggest'.[42] The implication is that for Desmond, Riley's 'philosophy of doing', evident in his earlier explicitly activist images is not missing from these later works, but their enigmatic (rather than 'facile') quality engages the viewer differently.[43] For Dan Edwards, the Bible image in *flyblown* lying face down in water, calls forth 'the ambivalent relationship between Indigenous Australians and the Christian church' (and hence something of the complexity of this relationship).[44] While Edwards sees in the *flyblown* series 'an unsettling portrait of the Australian environment and the unsettling

presence of Europeans within it', he describes a shift in the *cloud* series towards 'a sense of hope and liberated possibility'.[45]

[Fig. 8.1. Michael Riley, *Untitled [bible]* from the *cloud* series, 2000, printed 2005, chromogenic pigment print, 110 x 155cm, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Copyright © Michael Riley Foundation/ Licensed by Viscopy, 2016.]

The *cloud* series was Riley's last before he died in 2004. It revisits the themes of his earlier series *Sacrifice* but with a different tone. As Gardner notes in his critique of Riley's later work, several of the images in the *cloud* series have become iconic and some are on permanent display in the Musée de Quay Bradly.[46] But their 'popular' status does not render them trite. The feather image has a deep cultural resonance for Djon Mundine who writes: 'A wing of the eagle hawk, *Malyan*, a skin name, a scary dream-being overhead. Is it guardian angel or assassin? In the south-east, a feather left behind is often evidence of such a spiritual visit.'[47] Mundine sees Riley's photographs less as 'a simple documentary examination from outside' than as 'a spiritual vision of landscape from within'.[48] Astutely, Jonathan Jones points out the political force of the *cloud* series, where country is 'politically present in its absence from the frame'.[49] Francisco Fisher explains that this series merges the private and public in the sacred, as Riley photographed clouds and arranged transparencies from his hospital bed amid the business of nurses, monitors and tubes.[50] A testament to his resilience, in this particular intersection of the materialities of body and image/text, the viewer might imagine the frame of Riley's photographs as his hospital window, a window opening to a complex world of Indigenous being-in-place which is not limited to living in remote communities.

As Skye points out, white Australia routinely and effectively denies Indigenous being-

in-place; this denial is a violent touch on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies and communities.[51] Because of the relationship between people and country, this denial also touches violently on the land.[52] The Bible as a material artefact of colonization, as Riley and others have shown, is implicated ambiguously in this contact.

Contact: Bodies and communities, writing and land

That this impact of the Bible as a material artefact of the colonizer can fall under the term 'contact' occurs because the term itself is in debt to the more general sense of contact as the touch of one person or thing on another. In this section, I explore the notion of touch with particular reference to representations of touch in the Gospel of Luke (a gospel, which in being translated into Awakabal, is a particular part of a history of colonial contact). Touch is the primary sense insofar as all the senses depend on touch (Aristotle, *De an*. III.13) and are forms of contact, of being touched by, and touching, another.[53] Such contact is inescapable: the contact of my feet with my socks; of my eyes with photons of light, indeterminate as they may be; of air on skin, molecules surging into nostrils; of sound waves pressing against the drum of an ear; the always being-in-contact of matter with other matter; the touch of one human on another, of one culture on another.[54]

As a primary agent of touch, the hand (*hē cheir*) appears several times in Luke. Jesus extends his hand to touch as part of healing (5.13); he takes a child's hand as part of her resuscitation (8.54); Jesus – and in Acts, the disciples – lay on hands in healing (Lk. 4.40; 13.13; Acts 6.6; 8.17, 19; 9.12, 17; 13.3; 19.6; 28.8). The hands can be instruments of violent touch (Lk. 9.44; 20.19; 21.12; 22.53; 24.7); the hand of the betrayer rests on the table at the Last Supper (22.21). As election and blessing, the hand of God is on the infant John the Baptist (1.66). The hand of Jesus can denote his role as eschatological harvester and judge (3.17). Angelic hands may be protective (4.11). The disciples use their hands to pick and prepare grain to eat on a Sabbath day (6.1); in juxtaposition, on another Sabbath Jesus heals a

man's withered hand (6.6-11). The dying Jesus commends himself into the hands of God (23.46); the risen Jesus offers his hands and feet to be touched (24.39, 40); he raises his hands in blessing (24.50).

For Fisher, *Untitled [wing]* from the series *cloud* can be imagined as Riley's arm bent to the window of his hospital room; the colours of the transparency that the light throws on Riley's face seem to signal the blessing Fisher finds in this photographic series.[55] There becomes for Fisher a sacred mutuality of touch in the work of the ailing artist.

In his touching on his friend Jean-Luc Nancy, Jacques Derrida comments on Jesus as the Toucher who is touched.[56] For Derrida, 'the Gospels present the Christic body not only as a body of light and revelation but, in a hardly less essential way, as a body touching as much as touched, as flesh that is touched-touching. Between life and death'.[57] A middle verb, the Greek *hēpsamēn* means to touch or take hold of and can refer to touch as 'a means of conveying a blessing', but also as bringing harm or injury.[58] In Luke *hēpsamēn* is used of Jesus touching: a leper (5.13); a bier (7.14); children (18.15); the ear of the high priest's slave (22.50). There is little sense in any of these cases that the touch is violent, unless it is the violence of transformation (even when transformation is healing or restorative). Other more precise words refer to violent touch: to whip (*mastigoō*, 18.33); to beat (*derō*, 22.63), to strike (*paiō*, 22.64); to discipline or scourge (*paideuō*, 23.16, 22). These words describe the power the agents of the Roman Empire wield against the body of Jesus.

The verb *hēpsamēn* is also used of people touching Jesus, for example, the crowd (6.19), the woman who washes and anoints his feet (7.39) and the woman with the flow of blood (8.44-47). In these instances when he is touched, Jesus responds. In response to the desire of the crowds to touch him, Jesus speaks the beatitudes and woes of 6.20-26. In Luke 8 when a bleeding woman who is probably close to death touches him seeking healing, Jesus feels her touch as an outpouring of power from him (8.46).[59] Jesus' response to the woman's

touch suggests the ambiguity of a touch that is at once mutual and unequal. A little earlier in the narrative, the Lukan Jesus is challenged by the unspoken question of why he allowed a woman considered to be a sinner to touch him. In response he speaks of a creditor and two debtors, of forgiveness and love (7.40-47), of his receipt of the woman's touch as an act of loving hospitality prompted by the divine hospitality of forgiveness (7.44-47).[60] While underscored with difference, the reciprocity of their touch brings their bodies into being in a particular time and place as 'absolutely separated and shared'.[61]

Derrida takes up a phrase from Nancy, *se toucher toi*, to self-touch you, to describe the way in which in touching the other I am already touching myself, but also the way in which I cannot touch myself without touching or being in touch with an other, even if that other is my own skin. 'To touch', writes Derrida, 'so one believes, amounts therefore to letting oneself be touched by what one touches'.[62] Moreover, through touching I experience myself as tangible (as a being touched by another). When in Luke 8 a woman touches Jesus, he feels his power expended (8.46). Despite her apparent timidity, the touch initiated by the woman is an act of power that draws forth his power to heal. She consents to the risky intersubjectivity of touch, of self-touching another. Not only is she touched by her touching him, but the Lukan Jesus is given to himself by the touch of the woman.[63]

Nancy extends this mutuality of touching/being touched by the human other. The inescapability of the simplest touch or contact between things and the pervasiveness of the phenomenon of touch arise from and express 'the being-toward of one thing toward the other' that constitutes the sense of the world.[64] The interconnectedness expressed in the language of touch refers not only to physical contact – flesh to flesh, flesh to stone, even stone to soil – but also to the effects of a writing or a work of art. Being touched, gently, violently, or passionately (even tactlessly), by an action, a conversation, a writing or a photograph, *is* a physical touching, felt in the viscera of the human body. Luke makes this connection in the

Emmaus story, where the two whom Jesus encounters on the road say to one another, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' (24.32). The writings that carry the touch of myriad material artefacts and embodied memories touch the bodies of Jesus and his companions on the road.

An artwork or a writing becomes part of a pattern of call and response, in which 'the flesh listens'.[65] For Luke, this pattern of response is focused in the divine visitation in Jesus whose words are felt as a 'burning' in the heart (24.32), a touch that is transformative, as fire transforms. For Derrida, the heart is the heart of the other, the other heart.[66] On the road to Emmaus the two say to one another 'our heart', a shared heart, for each the heart of the other. Touching/being touched by the other is the basis of shared life, that is, community, of which the uniqueness and difference of bodies is the 'life-blood'.[67] Riley's portraits engage lovingly with the uniqueness and difference of Indigenous bodies, with a view to keeping community strong.[68]

Considering Australia's treatment of asylum seekers, Rosalyn Diprose distinguishes between the trace of violence in the tactful touch that is necessary for the corporeal sociality of community, and *a touch that violates* the other in the name of community, for example, through hate speech or laws enacted to excise from the community a particular group identified as alien.[69] As Skye argues, this latter touch is destructive of bodies and communities, country and land.[70]

Patterns of Compassionate Touch

Nancy, writing in relation to the plight of refugees throughout the world, describes compassion as a kind of *contact* that counters violence:

> What I am talking about is compassion, but not a compassion as a pity that feels sorry for itself and feeds on itself. Com-passion is the contagion, the contact of being with one another in this turmoil. Compassion is not altruism, nor is it identification; it is the

disturbance of violent relatedness.[71]

The violent relatedness of colonization, the ongoing violence of contact it occasions and the treatment of more than human others as expendable adjuncts to our existence form a contemporary context for the question of touch in, and of, Luke and the extent to which the Lukan text can reinforce and disturb such patterns of violent relatedness.

I have argued elsewhere that a pattern of compassionate touch can be read across three episodes in the Gospel of Luke as part of a wider theme of divine hospitality: the restoration of the widow's son outside the town gate of Nain (7.11-17); the parable of the Good Samaritan (10.25-37); and the parable of the Prodigal Son (15.11-31). In each case, there is a moment, which is also a movement, of compassion.[72] Luke describes a situation in which someone is an extremity: a widow whose only son has just died (7.12); a person who has been robbed and beaten and left half-dead by the roadside, whom passers-by see but ignore (10.30-32); a younger son who has squandered his share of the family estate only to return destitute and ashamed (15.11-19). Each time someone sees: Jesus sees the widow (7.13); a Samaritan sees the half-dead stranger (10.33); the father sees in the distance his son (15.20). Each is physically moved by compassion (7.13; 10.33; 15.20) toward the other (7.14; 10.34; 15.20). Prompted by an inner touch, the movement is directed toward an outward touch: Jesus touches the bier (7.14); the Samaritan bandages the person's wounds (10.34); the father falls on the son's neck and kisses him (15.20). A restoration follows this compassionate contact. In 7.16, the crowd recognizes this movement of compassion as a divine visitation.

In the Lukan narrative, the compassion that touches the other, that makes compassionate contact with the other, is predicated on a certain kind of seeing which stands in contrast to other kinds of seeing. In the story world of the parable, the seeing of the Samaritan (10.33) stands in contrast to the seeing of the priest (10.31) and the Levite (10.32). For these latter two, seeing prompts not compassion but neglect of the other. In 7.36-50

where the Lukan Jesus receives the loving hospitality of the woman's touch, seeing is also at issue. The seeing of a Pharisee named Simon prompts a misjudgement of the woman and a misinterpretation of her touch (7.39). In the question, 'Do you see this woman?' (7.44), Simon is challenged to see as the Lukan Jesus sees and to recognize the visitation of God in the hospitality both of the woman's touch and of divine forgiveness.[73] Elsewhere in Luke, seeing and knowing stand in parallel (19.42); seeing prompts knowing (21.30-31). What is needful is to know the time of the visitation (of God) (19.44). Not knowing this moment of divine hospitality, not knowing and seeing 'the things that make for peace' (19.42), is to be implicated in a pattern of violent relatedness manifest historically in the destruction of Jerusalem (19.43-44). Jesus' seeing the city prompts his compassionate grief (19.41).

In this representation of the gaze, the one *seeing* is touched or better grasped in the guts by compassion for the other. Such a gaze disrupts the violent relatedness that sees the other within the ambit of the same, appropriating the other to the same or denying the claim of the other: the violent relatedness of a master-slave imaginary and practice, of the colonizer over the colonized. Within the Lukan narrative, approved characters such as Jesus, the Good Samaritan and the father of the Prodigal Son, respond to the claim of the other in a pattern of touch. Through the contact of sight, the person seeing is moved to compassion – a touch felt in the guts – and this internal touch prompts the person to touch the other (7.13-14; 10.33-34; 15.20; see also 13.12-13).

In each narrative, the protagonist touches (on) death. Jesus touches a bier, a litter bearing a corpse (7.14); the Samaritan touches a person who is 'half-dead', who might very soon die (10.30, 34); the father embraces a son who has been living dissolutely, working with pigs and eating their food, who has in the father's words been dead (*nekros*, 15.24). What is touched is *the other's death*. To touch with compassion, and so to touch the death of the other, is marked by an excess in which the self is never solely singular, but in Nancy's terms

‘singular plural’.[74] In this context, to touch compassionately is to be open, to offer oneself in a particular way to the in-breaking of the other.[75] In such touching, I am drawn in the direction of ‘consenting to the body’.[76] To so consent is to be open precisely to the otherness of the corporeal and hence also to death.[77] Compassion signals an openness to the in-breaking of the other whereby in touching the other I touch myself, but this touch is an exposure to death – to finitude – both the other’s and my own. In touching the death of the other, I touch my own mortality.[78]

In the frame of (post-)colonial contact, the touch of the other is inhabited by the other’s death: assimilation; damage to culture; loss of traditional languages; appropriation of country; and genocide. Bruce McLean comments on the way Riley’s photographs draw viewers in, calling forth a kind of (compassionate) seeing through their ability to ‘tell … horrific stories in a beautiful way’.[79] Riley writes himself of the beauty he saw in clouds and their variation.[80] For Fisher, the final series *cloud*, completed in Riley’s last years, displays Riley’s resilience in the face of illness and death, even an element of mischief.[81] Viewing Riley’s *Untitled [bible]* from the series *cloud* in relation to other images of that series, and in the light of my reading of sight and touch in the Lukan narrative, my sense is that Riley’s work is not the passive object of a gaze, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, but is materially active in calling forth a kind of seeing, through its touch on the viewer. While this seeing will have different resonances according to the viewer’s cultural interpretations and experiences of the book (Bible) which Riley has set against the clouds, the image seems to open up possibilities for rethinking the materiality of this text in the context of colonization, as both violent and hopeful, but neither easily one nor the other. It is a work that invites contemplation.

Conclusion: Lukan compassion and colonial Bibles

Riley’s image of the Bible from the series *cloud*, where the Bible’s pages are hidden and the land absent, suggest something of the complexity of a colonial context, where the Bible as a

material artefact is both more and less than its writings and their interpretation. The Bible is a potent image that, as David Burramurra and Monica Morgan point out, stands with the Cross as one of two central symbols of Christian culture and belief, which can be understood in parallel and tension with key Indigenous cultural symbols. In Riley's work, the Bible and Cross stand in parallel in separate images with the cross also inscribed on the book of the Bible itself. The Bible is inscribed with the death by imperial Roman execution that its gospel writings narrate. Moreover, the Bible as material artefact and symbol of Christian culture accrues meaning both by and in excess of certain readings of its writings that situate Christian culture in competition with, and superior to, other cultures.

The pattern of compassionate responsiveness I have read in Luke with an ear to some contemporary theory of touch, especially that of Jean-Luc Nancy, offers a counter to the violent relatedness of the colonial expansion that brought the narrative of Luke's gospel to Australia. Such a reading of touch in Luke cannot undo the damage of colonization, nor is it an apologetic for the cultural touch of the material artefact that has become in Riley's *cloud* Bible image a book with its pages hidden. Mine is not a *true* reading of a misinterpreted text, but a possible reading of ourselves as readers of Luke. Luke touches (on) death, through a pattern of compassionate responsiveness and through the being-given of the body of the Lukan Jesus, and in so doing is in touch with the concretion of a world in which certain writings can be interpreted to give meaning to religious and political violence. This particular meaning-making in turn shapes a world. Insofar as Luke writes to account for the tragedy of Jesus' death and the destruction of Jerusalem, his touching (on) death touches on the tragedy of bodies (and concomitantly lands) violated *en masse* every day.

When in Luke Simeon holds the child in his arms (Lk. 2.25-35) he also holds death, both his own, before which he has hoped for this moment of contact, and the child's. The living body of the infant will become the dying body of the man, executed by the imperial

occupiers. The holding is part of a pattern of holding that passes from the maternal body, through the manger, to Simeon and to a gospel inscribed in a book.

The material artefact that holds the story of the child, like the book holding the child Moses in the *Bible Moraliseé* image, is part of a complex history of biblical production, reproduction and interpretation that touches, and touches on, bodies, communities and lands, where mortality and finitude are proper to their life and being. The violence remains, the potential for further violence remains. But the deconstruction of Christianity Nancy brings to the body and my reconstructive reading of touch in Luke suggest the possibility of rethinking the touch of the writing that is the Gospel of Luke as disturbing the violent relatedness of colonization. This interpretation of the touch of a writing cannot, however, account for the complex touch on the reader and on the Earth community of the material artefact in which the writing presents itself to reading. Riley's Bible images suggest a wider frame of reference where Bibles as material artefacts are not only part of colonial baggage, exchanged for culture and land, but where the Bible, precisely as a material/cultural artefact, is enculturated by Indigenous people, not only as a symbol of violence and hope, but as part of evolving Indigenous cultural narratives.

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[1] This chapter draws on and revises the opening sections of Anne F. Elvey, 'Touching (on) Death: On "Being toward" the Other', in *The Matter of the Text: Material Engagements between Luke and the Five Senses*, The Bible in the Modern World 37 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2011), 68–86. Re-used with permission.

[2] Djon Mundine, 'Obituary: Michael Riley', *RealTime* 63 (Oct-Nov 2004): 53, available online http://realtimearts.net/article/issue63/7617; Bronwyn Watson, 'Beauty Touched by Horror in the Photographs of Aboriginal Artist Michael Riley', *The Australian* (Aug 3, 2013), available online http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/review/horror-touched-by-beauty-in-the-photographs-of-aboriginal-artist-michael-riley/story-fn9n8gph-1226689528715. See also Brenda L. Croft, 'Up in the Sky, behind the Clouds', in

Michael Riley: Sights Unseen, ed. Brenda L. Croft (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2006), 30.

[3] I am grateful to art historian Dr Claire Renkin for alerting me to this *Bible Moralisée* page and for her helpful discussion of the images.

[4] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 51.

[5] Jennifer Deger, 'Review of *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, ed. Brenda L. Croft (National Gallery of Australia, 2007)', *Oceania* 78.2 (July 2008): 239

[6] Ibid., 240.

[7] Croft, 'Up in the Sky', 28.

[8] The symbolism of such mediaeval images was multivalent, drawing on figurative interpretation which linked Miriam and Mary, Moses and Jesus.

[9] Michael Riley, quoted in Croft, 'Up in the Sky', 40–1.

[10] See Roland Boer, *Last Stop before Antarctica: The Bible and Postcolonialism in Australia* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001); Mark G. Brett, *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008), 7-31; Deborah Bird Rose, *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004).

[11] Jeremy Beckett, 'Aboriginal Histories, Aboriginal Myths: An Introduction', *Oceania* 65, no. 2 (1994), 99.

[12] Message sticks are made of wood inscribed with symbols and were customarily used for delivering messages between different Indigenous groups. Coolamons are containers, generally made from the bark of a tree, used for gathering food and carrying infants. The use of message sticks as part of the Gospel procession during celebrations of the Eucharist and the use of the coolamon as a liturgical symbol during the seasons of Advent and Christmas has been initiated by Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Victoria, in consultation with other Australian Indigenous Catholic communities.

[13] Diane J. Austin-Broos, '"Two Laws" Ontologies, Histories: Ways of Being Aranda (Aboriginal People) Today', *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1996), 11.

[14] David Burramurra and with Ian McIntosh, '*Motj* and the Nature of the Sacred', *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (Summer) (2002), available online http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/motj-and-nature-sacred. See also Rose, *Reports*, 178.

[15] Burramurra and McIntosh, '*Motj*'.

[16] Ian McIntosh, 'Anthropology, Self Determination and Aboriginal Belief in the Christian God', *Oceania* 67, no. 4 (1997), 276.

[17] Ibid., 286.

[18] In 2007, the Kriol Bible was published in Australia. 'Kriol, an Australian Creole language developed out of contact between European settlers and the indigenous people in the northern regions of Australia is presently spoken by 30,000 people across the Top End'; see http://www.kriol.info/about_kriol_bible.php.

[19] Austin-Broos, '"Two Laws"', 7. See also, Brett, *Decolonizing God*, 60–1. Concerning the way in which the call of a dove has been reinterpreted by Yolngu Bible translator, Maratja Dhamarrandji, see Fiona Magowan, 'The Joy of Mourning: Resacralising "the Sacred" in the Music of Yolngu Christianity and an Aboriginal Theology', *Anthropological Forum* 9, no. 1 (1999): 32.

[20] David Andrew Roberts, '"Language to Save the Innocent": Reverend L. Threlkeld's Linguistic Mission',

Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society 94, no. 2 (2008), 107-25; L. E. Threkeld, *The Gospel by St. Luke Translated into the Language of the Awabakal* (Sydney: Charles Potter, Government Printer, 1891). See also, Boer, *Last Stop*, 160, 169–70.

[21] L. E. Threkeld, *An Awabakal – English Lexicon to the Gospel by St. Luke* (Sydney: Charles Potter, Government Printer, 1892).

[22] Ibid.

[23] Roberts, '"Language to Save the Innocent"', 120–1. See also, Boer, *Last Stop*, 94–5.

[24] Anne Brewster, 'Oodgeroo: Orator, Poet, Storyteller', *Australian Literary Studies* 16, no. 4 (1994): 101.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Monica Morgan, 'Colonising Religion', *Chain Reaction* Summer (2005/2006): 36–7.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid., 37.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Lee Miena Skye, *Kerygmatics of the New Millennium: A Study of Australian Aboriginal Women's Christology* (Dehli: ISPCK, 2007), esp. 1-24.

[31] Ibid., 97.

[32] Ibid., 66.

[33] Ibid., 15, 82-3.

[34] Ibid., 69.

[35] Properly inculturated into country, Skye argues, biblical story is reshaped by these Indigenous women and becomes part of an ongoing narrative of relationship to country and kin, which can form the basis for an ecological Christology. Ibid., 77-98.

[36] For a retrospective of Riley's work, including the images cited below, see Brenda L. Croft (ed.), *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen* (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2006).

[37] Croft, 'Up in the Sky', 41.

[38] Transcribed from audio commentary on Michael Riley's *Untitled* [*bible*] from the series *cloud*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 'Michael Riley, Sights Unseen', available online www.nga.gov.au/Exhibition/RILEY.

[39] See Mundine, 'Obituary', 53.

[40] Anthony Gardner, 'Michael Riley; Art Gallery of New South Wales', *Artforum International* 46, no. 10 (2008): 461.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Michael Desmond, 'Michael Riley: Sights Unseen, National Gallery of Australia' (exhibition review), *Art Asia Pacific* 52 (Mar/Apr 2007): 103.

[43] Ibid., 102-3.

[44] Dan Edwards, 'Michael Riley: Photographer and Filmmaker – Part 1: Spirit, Land, Image', *RealTime* 76 (Dec 2006-Jan 2007): 20. See also, Nikos Papasterigiadis, 'The Meek Michael Riley', in *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, ed. Brenda L. Croft (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2006), 71.

[45] Edwards, 'Michael Riley', 20.

[46] Gardner, 'Michael Riley', 461.

[47] Djon Mundine, 'Wungguli – Shadow: Photographing the Spirit and Michael Riley', in *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, ed. Brenda L. Croft (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2006), 125.

[48] Ibid., 130.

[49] Jonathan Jones (untitled comment), in Croft, *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, 136.

[50] Francisco Fisher (untitled comment), in Croft, *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, 39.

[51] Skye, *Kerygmatics*, esp. 1–24.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 15, 63.

[54] Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Corpus', in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. Brian Holmes et al (Meridian; Crossing Aesthetics; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 203.

[55] Fisher (untitled comment), 139.

[56] Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Meridian; Crossing Aesthetics; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 100.

[57] Ibid., 99-100.

[58] BAGD, 102-3.

[59] Annette Weissenrieder, 'The Plague of Uncleanness? The Ancient Illness Construct "Issue of Blood" in Luke 8:43-48', in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Wolfgang Stegemann, Bruce J. Malina, and Gerd Theissen (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 207-22.

[60] Brendan Byrne, *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* (Strathfield, NSW: St Pauls, 2000), 73-6.

[61] Nancy, 'Corpus', 204; Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 60.

[62] Jacques Derrida, '*Le Toucher*', *Paragraph* 16, no. 2 (1993): 136; Nancy, *Corpus*, 45.

[63] Cf. Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response* (trans. Anne A. Davenport; New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), 85-6, 120.

[64] Nancy, *Sense of the World*, 15; see also, Nancy, 'Corpus', 203.

[65] Chrétien, *Call and the Response*, 130.

[66] Derrida, *On Touching*, 283.

[67] Rosalyn Diprose, 'The Hand That Writes Community in Blood', *Cultural Studies Review* 9, no. 1 (2003): 39.

[68] See Deger, 'Review', 239.

[69] Diprose, 'The Hand That Writes'. See also, Derrida, '*Le Toucher*', 122-57.

[70] Skye, *Kerygmatics*.

[71] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Meridian; Crossing Aesthetics; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), xiii.

[72] Anne F. Elvey, *An Ecological Feminist Reading of the Gospel of Luke: A Gestational Paradigm* (Lewiston: Mellen, 2005), 237-42.

[73] Barbara E. Reid, '"Do You See This Woman?" A Liberative Look at Luke 7.36-50 and Strategies for Reading Other Lukan Stories against the Grain', in *A Feminist Companion to Luke*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 110.

[74] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*.

[75] Derrida, '*Le Toucher*', 137.

[76] Ibid.; Nancy, *Corpus*, 47.

[77] Derrida, '*Le Toucher*', 139.

[78] Cf. John Donne, 'Meditation XVII *Nunc Lento Sonitu Dicunt, Moreieris*', *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), available online http://www.luminarium.org/sevenlit/donne/meditation17.php.

[79] Bruce McLean interviewed in Watson, 'Beauty Touched by Horror'.

[80] Michael Riley, 'I Wanted to Tell Stories', in *Michael Riley: Sights Unseen*, ed. Brenda L. Croft (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2006), 140.

[81] Fisher (untitled comment), 139.