[A paper given at "Christian Mission in the Public Square", a conference of the Australian Association for Mission Studies (AAMS) and the Public and Contextual Theology Research Centre of Charles Sturt University, held at the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture (ACC&C) in Canberra from 2 to 5 October 2008.]

# An Exploration of Multi-Cultural Body Language Communications and its implications for Australian Theology and Mission.

By Rev Wendy Snook.  Cranbourne Regional UCA, Victoria. September 2008.

## 1.   The Australian situation.

Australia is a culturally diverse nation with more than one in five people born overseas, almost 400 different languages spoken at home and more than 250 different ancestries reported in the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2006 Census.[1] Since 1980 Australia has been officially a "multi-cultural" country. Then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser made a speech to the newly formed Institute of Multicultural Affairs, heralding "Multiculturalism is about diversity, not division… interaction not isolation." Fraser claimed that multicultural acceptance was "set within a framework of shared fundamental values."[2] What was different was not, in fact, the presence of migrants to Australia, but the ethnicities of the migrants now welcomed by the Australian government.

The original and sovereign inhabitants of Australia were the Aboriginal peoples. Prior to the colonisation of Australia by the English in 1788, Australia was known and visited by other peoples such as the Macassans of Indonesia, the Chinese, the Hindus and Buddhists from India via Bali, the Muslims from Arabia via Java, the Portuguese, the Spanish, and the Dutch.  In 1607 Torres met Moors in West New Guinea as he travelled through the Torres Strait.[3] So there were multicultural connections prior to the establishment of Anglo- Australia.

Colonial Britain exported criminals, its political undesirables and its poor to Australia, with people coming from England, Scotland, Wales, Cornwall and Ireland. There were also immigrants, both legal and illegal, from New Zealand, the United States of America, and China during the gold rushes of 1850-60's in NSW and Victoria and 1880's in WA. Until after World War 1 Australia was overwhelming British in origin. 'Australians, no matter what class, religion or party, were united in their racist and ethnocentric views of the world. Quite apart from the Aborigines- who were given short shrift- Australians, by and large, believed that non whites –be they black, yellow or brown- were culturally and intellectually inferior to whites."[4] Even post World War

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[1] ABS 3416.0 - Perspectives on Migrants, 2007 Birthplace And Religion
http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3416.0Main%20Features22007?opendocument&tab name=Summary&prodno=3416.0&issue=2007&num=&view= Accessed 29 September 2008
[2] Pung, Alice. "Alice Pung on New Australians" in The Weekend Australian magazine, September 20-21, 2008. p. 32.
[3] Clark, Manning. *A History of Australia*, Melbourne University Press, 3 volumes, quoted in Stringer, Col, *Discovering Australia's Christian Heritage*, Robina, Queensland; Col Stringer Ministries Inc., (1999, 2000).  P. 20-25.
[4] Jaensch, Dean and Teichmann, Max. *Australian Politics and Foreign Policy: An Introduction,* Melbourne: Longman Cheshire P.L., (1987.) p. 203.

2, immigrants from Britain and Europe were accepted into Australia preferentially over immigrants from other races. This was known as the White Australia Policy.[5]

Consequently the abolition of the White Australia policy and the introduction of the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 were significant milestones in Australia's ethnic history. Now immigrants were accepted from the Pacific and Asia, particularly from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia after the Vietnam War. Family reunions became part of Australia's immigration policies, allowing refugees' families to come. And more recently, migrants from Africa and the Middle East have joined the mix. Today, Australia has more than 21 million people, of which, according to the 2006 ABS Census of Population and Housing, 22% (4.4 million) of people were born overseas. A further 26% of people who were born in Australia had at least one parent who was born overseas. 37% of the migrant population were from main English-speaking countries (the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the Republic of Ireland, Canada, the United States of America and South Africa). The remainder (63%) were born in other countries. Of those born in other countries, around 2 million (82%) were proficient in spoken English.[6]

Over the last ten years, there has been an increased emphasis on skilled migration programs in Australia. During this time, the pattern of migration has also changed. For example, while migrants from the United Kingdom and New Zealand remained the two largest overseas-born groups, the proportion of migrants coming to Australia who were born in China, India and South Africa increased considerably between 1996 and 2006. (See ABS *Australian Social Trends 2007*, Migration: Permanent additions to Australia's population, pp 24–29.) [7] At 30 June 2002, those born in the United Kingdom were the largest group of overseas-born, followed by New Zealand, Italy, Viet Nam and China. They were mostly aged between 15 and 35 years, with the median around 25 years.[8] In 2008, China (3rd) and India (6th), are major contributors

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[5] Technically the White Australia policy lasted from the enactment of the Commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act, (1901) at Federation till the early 1960's. McConnochie, K, Hollinsworth, D and Pettman, J. *Race and Racism in Australia*. Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press, Australia. (1988, 1993).

[6] The preliminary estimated resident population (ERP) of Australia at 31 March 2008 was 21,283,000 persons. This was an increase of 336,800 persons (1.6%) since 31 March 2007 and 102,000 persons since 31 December 2007. Preliminary net overseas migration for the year ended 31 March 2008 was 199,100 persons. Australia's population grew by 1.6% during the 12 months ended 31 March 2008. Natural increase and net overseas migration contributed 41% and 59% respectively to this total population growth. All states and territories experienced positive population growth over the 12 months ended 31 March 2008. Western Australia recorded the largest percentage gain (2.6%) and Tasmania the smallest (0.9%). The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 3101.0 - Australian Demographic Statistics, Mar 2008, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0?OpenDocument Accessed 30 September 2008.
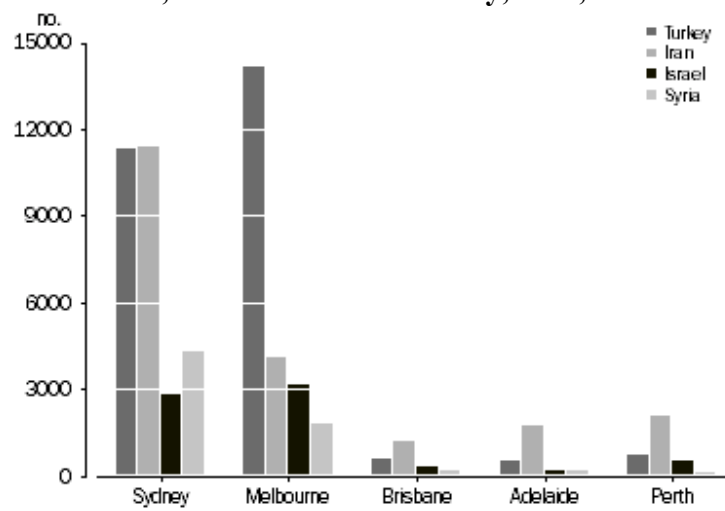
[7] ABS Australian Social Trends 2008 Article: Social participation of Migrants http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/F99FA4B54A4758DACA25748E00129A47/$File/41020_2008_6.pdf accessed 28 September 2008
[8] ABS 3412.0 Migration, Australia, accessed 28/04/2004 C:\Users\Wendy\Documents\Word Files\Census Articles 2003-2008\Aust All\AusStats  3412_0 Migration, Australia.htm

to Australia's net migration (13.0% and 9.8% respectively) and have shown increasing rates of migration to Australia in recent years, particularly students.[9]

Migrants are not uniformly distributed across Australia. By 2004, New South Wales received the largest share of net overseas migration (40%), which exceeded the share of population of Australia living there (34%). Queensland had the second largest share of net overseas migration (24%), followed by Victoria (18%), Western Australia (14%) and South Australia (3%). The Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory and Tasmania (less than 1% each) had the smallest shares. The contribution of net overseas migration to total population growth ranged from 85% in New South Wales to 15% in Tasmania. Most of this migration is into the capital cities of Sydney and Melbourne. [10] For example,

**USUAL RESIDENCE, Persons born in Turkey, Iran, Israel and Syria, 2006**



Source: ABS 2006 Census data

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[9]ABS 3416.0 - Perspectives on Migrants, 2008
 http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3416.0Main%20Features22008?opendocume
nt&tabname=Summary&prodno=3416.0&issue=2008&num=&view= Accessed 29 September 2008.

[10]ABS 3101.0 - Australian Demographic Statistics, Mar 2008,
http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0?OpenDocument Accessed 30 September 2008.

**RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS, Selected countries of birth, 2006**
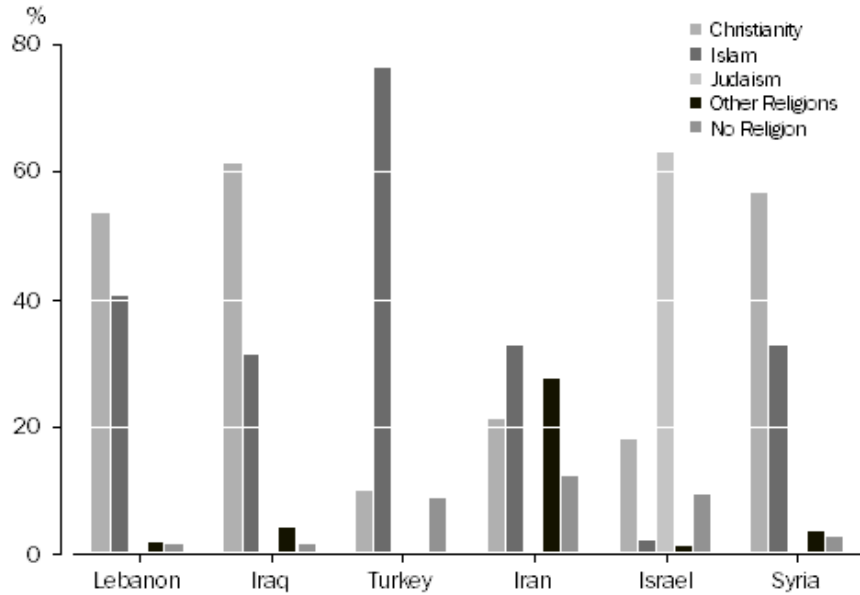


Source: ABS 2006 Census data

However nearly two centuries of fear of Asian invasion, known as 'the Yellow Peril' has not completely disappeared.[12] Some of these cultural imprints have remained until this day, evident during the Howard era in the mandatory detention policy for boat people, and recently in 2008, the choice of the Rudd government to slow African immigration because of Australian community unrest. However according to figures released recently from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), overall, Australia's net overseas migration is at an all time high.[13]

Often there are correlations made between nationality, ethnicity and religious affiliation. It is true that religions like Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam have grown in Australia due to overseas migration.

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[11] ABS 3416.0 - Perspectives on Migrants, 2008  CENSUS 2006 - People Born In The Middle East http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/3416.0Main%20Features42008?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3416.0&issue=2008&num=&view= Accessed 29 September 2008

[12] . McConnochie, K, Hollinsworth, D and Pettman, J. *Race and Racism in Australia*. Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press, Australia. (1988, 1993). Pp. 73-76.

[13] ABS 3101.0 - Australian Demographic Statistics, Mar 2008, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0?OpenDocument Accessed 30 September 2008.

**NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS, Australian and overseas born residents**
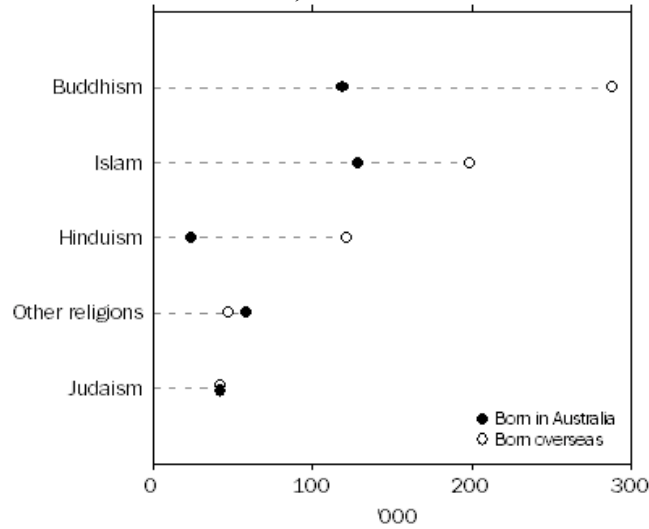


Source: ABS 2006 Census data [14]

However detailed studies made by the ABS show there are disparities between the percentages of various religions in the home country and the percentages of those religions amongst those who migrate to Australia. For example, data from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam indicate 81% of their population reported 'No religion' in their census compared to 11% of Australian residents born in Viet Nam. There are also significant differences in the proportion of people recording Buddhism or Christianity as their religion.

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[14]Apart from Judaism, the majority of people who reported non-Christian religions were born overseas: including 82% (121,300) of those recording Hinduism, 69% (288,100) recording Buddhism and 58% (198,400) recording Islam.
ABS 3416.0 - Perspectives on Migrants, 2007 BIRTHPLACE AND RELIGION
http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3416.0Main%20Features22007?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=3416.0&issue=2007&num=&view=
Accessed 29 September 2008

**RELIGIONS OF AUSTRALIAN RESIDENTS BORN IN VIET NAM,**
**Compared with Vietnamese residents**
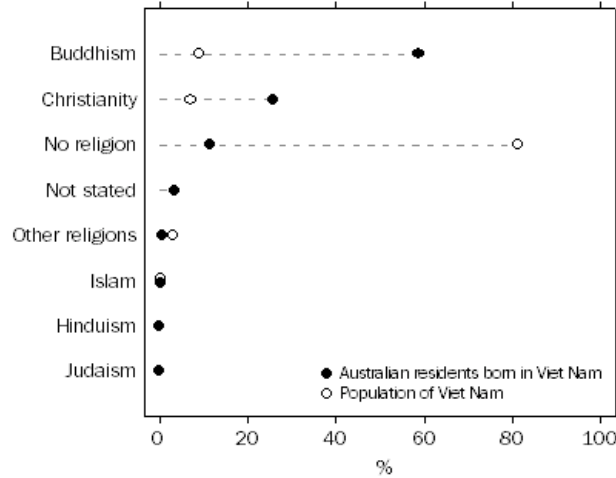


Source: ABS 2006 Census data
General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 1999 Census

In Lebanon, 60% of residents cite Islam as their religion. The majority of Lebanese-born people in Australia report Christianity (53%) while 40% cited their religion as Islam.

**RELIGIONS OF AUSTRALIAN RESIDENTS BORN IN LEBANON,**
**Compared with Lebanese residents**
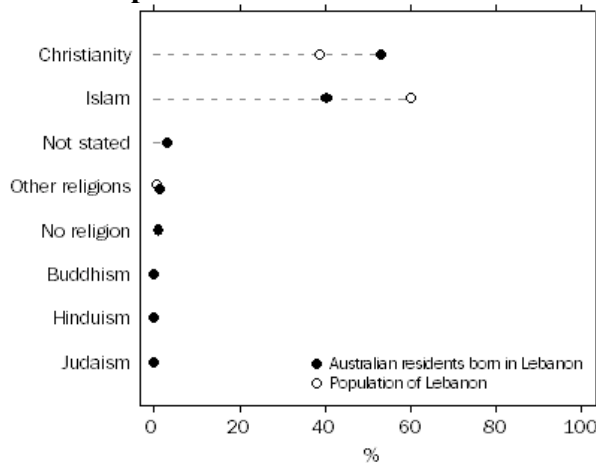


Source: ABS 2006 Census data
Central Intelligence Agency, United States Government, The World Factbook

So there cannot be an automatic correlation drawn between a migrant's nationality or ethnicity and their religious affiliation. Other measures of ethnicity and cultural diversity such as 'Ancestry', 'Country of birth of parents', 'Language spoken at home' and 'Religion'. also need to be considered with care.[15]

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[15] ABS 3416.0 - Perspectives on Migrants, 2007 BIRTHPLACE AND RELIGION
http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3416.0Main%20Features22007?on
document&tabname=Summary&prodno=3416.0&issue=2007&num=&view=
Accessed 29 September 2008

In 2008 the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in the document *ABS: Australian Social Trends•4102.0•2008*, reported:

> High levels of social participation and social connectedness are believed to contribute to the overall wellbeing of individuals and their communities. Opportunities for social participation and interaction may be found through participation in paid and unpaid work, friendships and participation in culture and leisure activities.
>
> Australia is a culturally diverse nation with migrants arriving from around two hundred countries during the past two centuries. These migrants have played an important role in shaping our nation. Recent social and economic issues such as the ageing population and skills shortages have highlighted the role migration will play in the economic and demographic future of Australia. While migrants contribute to and enrich Australian society through their different skills, abilities and experiences, they potentially face difficulties such as language barriers, cultural differences and discrimination, which could affect their ability to participate in some social activities……
>
> In 2006, migrants from main English-speaking countries (34%) and people born in Australia (38%) were most likely to be involved in a sport or recreation group whereas people from other countries were most commonly involved in a religious or spiritual group (30%).....
>
> Friendships generally provide networks of trust, reciprocity and cooperation, and may contribute to an overall sense of belonging. People who were born in Australia or main English-speaking countries were more likely than people from other countries to report having three or more friends outside the household they could confide in (56% and 53% compared with 39%). A small proportion of people from main English-speaking countries (14%) and people born in Australia (11%) did not have any friends outside the household they could confide in, compared with over one in five (23%) people from other countries. This difference may reflect the fact that migrants to Australia, particularly those who have recently arrived, may not know as many people as those born in Australia and may not have had sufficient time to develop as many supportive friendships.
>
> Research suggests that an individual's social support network can have a substantial impact on successful social and community adjustment. Strong supportive ties among family members are considered especially important. … Regardless of country of birth, the greatest source of support in a time of crisis was a family member. … Friends were also a big source of support, with nearly 70% of both Australian-born and people born in main English-speaking countries, and over half (57%) of people born in other countries, reporting that they could ask friends for support during a time of crisis. … Almost one in seven people born in countries other than Australia or main English-speaking countries reported that they had no source of support during a time of crisis.
>
> …Both migrants and people born in Australia benefit from and contribute to Australian society through participation in social activities. Participation in the labour force and involvement in social activities provide people with opportunities

to engage with the wider community and to build social support networks, which in turn contribute to an increased sense of community. People who were born in Australia or main English speaking countries generally had higher levels of social participation than did migrants from other countries. [16]

Summarising, Australia has experienced major demographic shift due to immigration. This not only impacts the church in the present, it also indicates the potential directions of God's mission for Australian Christians and the churches. If 'God so loved the world', (John 3:16), then so should Australian Christians when the world comes to us. But how do we do it? The ABS document quoted above gives us some clues. For example, building mutual friendships, offering support in times of crisis and building networks in the community would meet a clear need of the migrant community in Australia, particularly those from a non-English speaking background. And through these relationships we can share the gospel by being a witness. But that means we need to communicate with one another, in all our diversity.

### 1.2  Body language.

Gestures and body language have been called "the silent language". It is studied under the discipline of Psychology, with sub-disciplines such as 'kinesics', (the study of body motion), and 'proxemics', (the study of the distances or space between people.) It has been estimated that human beings can produce up to 700,000 different physical signs. The face alone can produce 250,000 expressions, and at least 5,000 distinct hand gestures have been attributed verbal equivalents. Another researcher has catalogued 1,000 postures and their accompanying gestures. Flora Davis argues that gestures are short-cuts, stronger than punctuation, underscoring of type face or italics.[17]

Anthropologist Edward T Hall claims 60% of *all* our communication is non-verbal. Rev Dr Jana Childers, in her recent Melbourne lecture series on Embodied Preaching claimed it was up to 87%. Quoting Albert Moravian's work, she said that 55% of language meaning came from one's body and face, 38% from the tone of the words used, and only 7% from the words themselves. While we may prioritise the words in our listening, such percentages encourage us to keep our words and our body language congruent. Daniel Goleman is quoted as saying in *Emotional Intelligence*, (Bantam, 1995) that 90 % of our emotions are expressed non-verbally.[18]  Whatever the exact percentage, clearly the majority of our communication is expressed through our bodies.

Some anthropologists divide our actions and gestures into three broad categories: instinctive, coded, and acquired. Instinctive gestures are those we do almost automatically, and are almost universally prevalent. For example, "the eyebrow flash", that is, we raise our eyebrows and wrinkle our foreheads when we greet someone. Often people cross their arms across their bodies when they feel defensive, although people also do this when they are cold! In Western society, head oriented

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[16] ABS Australian Social Trends 2008 Article: Social participation of Migrants
http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/F99FA4B54A4758DACA25748E00129A47/$File/41020_2008_6.pdf  p. 2.  Accessed 28 September 2008
[17] Axtell, Roger, E. *Gestures: the Do's and Taboo's of Body language around the World*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (1991, 1998). P. 7.
[18] *Ibid*., p. 2.

people use finger tip gestures frequently, gut oriented people more often use their torso, and heart oriented people use their palms and cheeks frequently when communicating.[19] Coded, ritual or technical gestures are those which are created by pre-established agreement. For example, there are set hand signals used by umpires, TV directors, sports coaches, defence force personnel on duty, and stockbrokers in the commodity markets. Sign languages for the deaf such as Auslan and American Sign Language are other examples. Much of what we do in our rituals of liturgy and dance could be classed as coded gestures. Acquired gestures mean those gestures which are socially generated and acquired, and are the subject of this paper. Many gestures have no known origins, (such as the OK sign), and no apparent reason (such as waving to say hello or good-bye.) Some only have loose connections with their meanings, and frequently are sexual in character. The only thing unifying these gestures is that they are widely used and understood amongst a certain group of people and perhaps only in a particular time and place.[20]

Much has been written about the differences between genders in our non-verbal communication in Western society. Gender is a social construct.[21] However, identical gestures from people of the same gender often mean different things among different societies. Each culture seems to adopt its own set of rules. For example, a stationary thumb upright means "Great!" in Australia, but in Nigeria it is an insult.  A "V for Victory" sign with two fingers upright and with the palm outwards is acceptable in Australia. However as President George Bush found out when he visited Sydney in 1993, when the sign is made with the palm inwards, it was front page news. In Australia, the "Reverse V" signifies "Up yours!"[22]

If there is no understanding of body language rules amongst cultures, then the potential for friction is immense. And while acknowledging that there are always sub-group and individual differences to the use of one's body and gestures in communication, there is sufficient group agreement inside cultures to justify the belief that there is value in becoming more sensitive, more aware, and more observant when it comes to effective, silent communications. Axtell says:

> 'What is the value of avoiding just one misunderstanding? As a wise counsellor once told me: "That's like trying to determine the value of a single light bulb. Unlit, the bulb has little value. Lit, the bulb can illuminate one room. And, one illuminated room occupied by one creative person can change the world."' [23]

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[19] Childers, Jana, Embodied preaching course, Melbourne, 2008., quoting Leland Power's Trinity of Expression, adapted from Powers, Leland, *Practice book*, Boston: Haven Merrill Powers Publishing, 1916.
[20] Axtell, *Ibid*., p. 4-5.
[21] For example, Pease, Allan and Barbara, *Why men don't cry and women can't read maps*, Queensland: Pease International P.L., (2001, 2002, 2003.) Distributed by HarperCollins.
Pease, Allan and Barbara, *Why men lie and women cry*, London: Orion Books, 2002.
Pease, Allan, *Body Language: how to read others' thoughts by their gestures*, Queensland: pease international P.L., (1981,1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003).
Romaine, Suzanne, *Communicating Gender*, New Jersey, and London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1999.
[22] Axtell, *op.cit*., pp. ix, 5.
[23] Axtell, *op.cit*., pp. xvii.

2.  <u>Theological Assumptions</u>

    Multiculturalism has a number of definitions. In the first instance, it simply draws attention to the variety of cultural backgrounds from which Australians come. Often it goes beyond what is, to what ought to be. That is, our cultural diversity is something to be valued and nurtured. Hence people should be encouraged to maintain their original languages and cultures, and we should all be tolerant of one another's differences. But what happens when our differences conflict? Some people would argue that there are values and practises we don't want in Australia, and thus say that multiculturalism is about social tolerance and cohesion, as well as cultural diversity, access and equity. In effect, this means that we are expected to accept certain core values, like our Parliamentary system, the legal system, and our mixed capitalist economy, but beyond that, people are free to maintain their own values.[24]

    The problem with that, is that not only could it be seen as assimilation where it counts, (such as concerning centres of power), and diversity where it doesn't, it also trivialises culture. By reducing multiculturalism to lifestyles, such as food, dance and social occasions, it denies the public expressions of those same cultures, such as how things are done in the law, in politics, and in the workplace. It can also support stereotypes about other ethnicities, and overlook the dominance of one group over all the others.[25] Holding implicit values of assimilation as one's definition of multiculturalism increases the private- public dichotomy of power structures in Australia. Thus our definition of multiculturalism affects our public theology. We can only speak prophetically to our centres of power if we value our cultural diversity in all its forms.

    For example, in the recent debate at the UCA Victorian Synod 2008, some people wished the UCA to rescind its support of exemptions to churches for the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act, arguing that there were practises of other churches that the UCA didn't like, and so wished to challenge with the full weight of the law. They defined where they would challenge as those practises with which the UCA disagreed. However it could be argued that not only would this offend our ecumenical neighbours, the UCA may wish to retain its rights to exemptions from the EO Law for some aspects of its own life and order, and so it could be hypocritical of the UCA to do so. But underneath, the request could be heard as one holding an implicit assimilation-based view of cultural diversity and the validity of the practises of other ethnic and cultural religious groups. One's definition of multiculturalism has far reaching effects.

    When reflecting upon Multicultural body language, one's own cultural and theological position are very relevant. The author is a post-graduate Anglo- Cornish Australian female, who has four and five generations of Australian –born forebears. Her multicultural experience has been a personal acquisition, through experiences of living overseas as an exchange student in Bandung, Indonesia in 1974, and through overseas visits to many countries. She has also worked with mono-ethnic and multi-cultural congregations, currently working alongside a Samoan Congregational Christian Church congregation, and a Cook Islands Christian Church congregation,

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[24] McConnochie, K, Hollinsworth, D and Pettman, J. *Race and Racism in Australia*. Wentworth Falls, NSW: Social Science Press, Australia. (1988, 1993). pp. 184-5, p. 236-237.
[25]*Ibid*, p. 185.

with whom Cranbourne Regional UCA is entering into a formal partnership agreement.

Theologically, she has been influenced by feminist theology, particularly the works of Elisabeth Schussler- Fiorenza, Christine Smith, Sally McFague, Phyllis Trible, Elizabeth Moltmann- Wendel, and others. If one considers the nine hermeneutical methods used by women described by Carol Noren, then method five, 'preparing the way' is very relevant to the missional task. By this Noren means the implicit assumption that the worshipping community's task is not simply to worship God, but to move towards God's new social order, to work for it, to announce it, and to train for it. Doing God's will means cooperating with the divine will as it is presently discerned, rather than conforming to past patterns. Noren sees this as an offshoot of early twentieth century liberalism. But it could be seen as choosing to participate in the Missio Dei, the Mission of God as described by David Bosch.[26]

Many of Noren's tools are similar to those identified by Christine Smith as products of the influence of white western feminist theology upon the preaching of women generally. Smith named the use of women's experience, the importance of relationships, solidarity with other women and other oppressed and marginalised groups, the call to bring in God's Kingdom, and self-ratified authority.[27] Having solidarity and relationships with other women and other oppressed and marginalised groups  is not only what Jesus did, it is also the challenge ahead of the church as we experience high levels of immigration into Australia, and come to terms with our Anglo history of oppression of indigenous peoples.

For the author, the experience of embodiment is crucial for our anthropological and theological understanding of Body Language and is essential for our Christology.
The doctrine of the Incarnation of Jesus is that God was embodied in Jesus and that God used a human body to communicate with us. In turn, this implies that bodies and bodily communication matters to God today. If one accepts that up to 87% of human communication is made through our body language, and that our body language, like gender, is culturally defined, then there are significant implications for theology and mission in multi-cultural Australia.

3.   Body language and cultural misunderstandings- examples
See Powerpoint presentation for photo examples. Using historical and recent multi-cultural personal experiences as examples from Anglo, Aboriginal, Indonesian, Pacific Islander and other cultures overseas and presently in South-eastern and Western Australia, multi-cultural body language expressions and its frequent misunderstandings are explored. For example, in a humorous way, Pease offers these multicultural examples.[28]
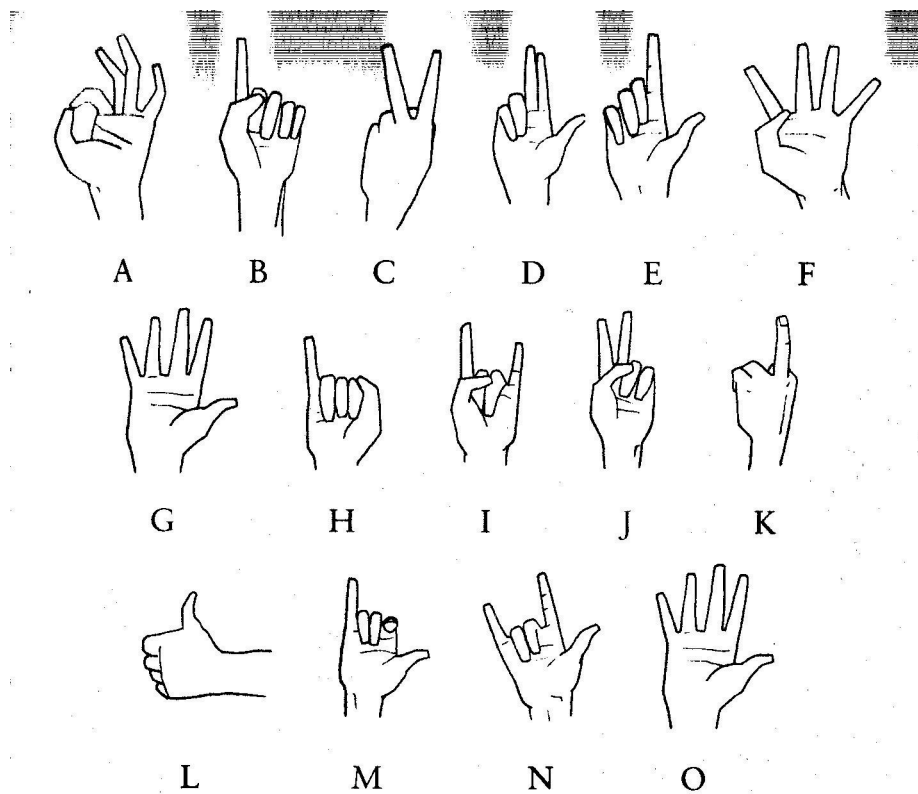
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[26] Noren, Carol M. *The Woman in the pulpit.* Nashville: Abingdon, 1991.
Bosch, David, Transforming Mission: Paradigm shifts in Theology of Mission, Maryknoll: Orbis books, 1991.
[27] Christine Smith, *Weaving*, pp. 22-42, 43-48, 88-89.
[28] Pease, Allan and Barbara, *The definitive Book of Body Language*, Queensland: , Queensland: Pease International P.L., 2004.  pp. 109-110.

A    B    C    D    E    F

G    H    I    J    K

L    M    N    O

Meanings according to different ethnicities include:

A. Europe and North America: OK
Mediterranean region, Russia, Brazil, Turkey: An orifice signal;
sexual insult; gay man
Tunisia, France, Belgium: Zero; worthless
Japan: Money; coins (You could be asking for a bribe).

B. Western countries: One; Excuse me!; As God is my witness; No!
(to children)

C. Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Malta: Up yours!

USA: Two
Germany: Victory
France: Peace
Ancient Rome: Julius Caesar ordering five beers

D. Europe: Three
   Catholic countries: A blessing

E. Europe: Two

Britain, Australia, New Zealand: One
USA: Waiter!
Japan: An insult

F.   Western countries: Four

Japan: An insult

G.  Western countries: Number 5

 Everywhere: Stop!
 Greece and Turkey: Go to hell!

H.  Mediterranean: Small penis

Bali: Bad
Japan: Woman
South America: Thin
France: You can't fool me!

I.   Mediterranean: Your wife is being unfaithful
Malta and Italy: Protection against the Evil Eye (when pointed)
South America: Protection against bad luck (when rotated)
USA: Texas University Logo, Texas Longhorn Football Team

J.   Greece Go to Hell!

 The West: Two

 K. Ancient Rome: Up yours!

 USA: Sit on this!

L.  Europe: One

   Australia: Sit on this! (upward jerk)
   Widespread: Hitchhike; Good; Ok
   Greece: Up yours! (thrust forward)
   Japan: Man; five

 M . H a w a i i :  'H a n g  l o o s e '

Holland: Do you want a drink?

N. USA: I love you

O. The West: Ten; I surrender

Greece: Up Yours — twice!

Widespread: I'm telling the truth

In the Powerpoint show are many other examples of multiple meanings for the same gestures, or different gestures meaning the same thing. For example, in Indonesia, the "Come!' gesture has the palm turned downwards, not upwards as in Australia. Heads may never be touched. Sorry is indicated in West Java with the 'Punten' gesture. Hand holding between adult people of the same sex to indicate friendship and respect is fine in public, but male-female hand holding is an intimate gesture, usually only done in private. Pointing one's toe at someone else while seated is rude, as is showing them the sole of your foot. One never shakes hands with the left hand, as this hand is regarded as unclean, and only to be used for personal ablutions and toilet functions.

It is impolite to show anger as a frown in Indonesia. Instead one tightens one's muscles on either side of one's eyes, drawing the skin tight, and at the same time maintains a tight small smile. Perhaps that facial difference explains the English myth of "Oriental inscrutability". After being trained by my host families in 'proper behavior", by learning the Indonesian way to facially express anger and using it as 'second nature', the author had to consciously relearn to express anger as a frown when back in Australia. When the author used the Indonesian gesture it frightened her family, and it can still make Australian strangers uneasy.

Eye contact or the lack thereof is a major stumbling block for communication. In Anglo society to look someone in the eye when talking with them is to indicate interest, honesty and openness. However in many Aboriginal and other cultures, eye contact is not made when one person is of higher status than the other as a sign of respect. It is an equivalent of the English curtsy or bow gestures. Recently on the Australian TV Channel 7 reality show "Border Security", Customs staff were asked why they picked a certain person coming through Customs as suspicious, and searched him for drugs. The answer given was that the suspect avoided eye contact with the Customs staff. Yet another example of how the lack of training of staff on multi-cultural communication causes great misunderstanding.

The same happens in Australian churches regularly. Take the nodding gesture. Does it mean "Yes, I will", or "Yes, I understand but I am still thinking about whether I will do it", or "I don't agree but I want to maintain the relationship"? All of these are true for different cultures. So when someone nods after being asked to go on a Church roster, and it is assumed that they meant 'Yes I will', there can be friction later when Anglo expectations are not met. On the other hand, an Indian may indicate "Yes I will' with a sideways nod of the head, or a Pacific Islander may raise their eyebrows. In Bulgaria and Albania, the Anglo 'Yes' head nod and 'No' head shake gestures are completely reversed in meaning. [29] In other words, when working multi-culturally one cannot assume one understands another's gesture correctly without initially clarifying matters verbally.

Similarly, there are different greeting practices and personal space differences between cultures. As an Anglo women who has been trained not to touch others without

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[29] Dresser, Norine, *Multicultural Manners: Essential Rules of Etiquette for the 21st century,* New Jersey: John Wiley & sons Inc, 1996, 2005. pp. 11-12, 254.

permission, it is quite confronting to be told by the local Cook Islanders that a proper greeting involves two kisses, one on each cheek, and not to do so makes them feel they have not properly respected the author in her role as a minister. Both Australian city people and people from high density populated overseas countries are comfortable with a closer distance between their bodies than country Australians. But the overseas- born people usually prefer a closer distance than the Australian city dweller, unless it is an intimate friendship.

We also know from research that in order to communicate more effectively, people often mimic the gestures, or mirror the posture of the person to whom they are talking. In Australian marketing training salespeople are taught to mirror the body positions and gestures of their customers in order to make them feel more comfortable, and thus more likely to buy something. Frequently Western women unconsciously mirror their husbands, or the males they are interested in becoming their husbands, as part of the bonding process. Reflecting another's way of embodiment back to them is yet another way in which we communicate. But what happens if the gestures we mimic or reflect don't mean what we intend to say?

4.  <u>How relevant are 21<sup>st</sup> century Australian Anglo majority assumptions about body language meanings to the interpretation and transmission of the 1<sup>st</sup> century gospel?</u>
    If this lack of understanding of gestures across cultures is true today, then how much more so must that be true of cross-cultural body language understanding across millennia, in a different milieu? When one reads Scripture, one frequently reads of peoples' gestures and actions in the gospel narratives. We read frequently of Jesus touching others, and of his being touched. We even read of people begging to touch his clothes, and Scripture says those who touched him were healed. (Mark 6: 56) Then there is the famous story of Jesus healing the deaf man by putting his fingers into the man's ears, and then spitting and touching the man's tongue, before praying 'Ephphatha!'' meaning, (we are told), 'Be opened', and the man was healed. (Mark 7:33-35) In Mark 8: 22-26, Jesus spits into a blind man's eyes and puts his hands on him. But where? At the second time, we are told Jesus placed his hands on the man's <u>eyes</u> again. So we know there were two eye touches. Yet in Mark 10:51-52, Jesus heals another blind man without any touching at all. Was this man from a different region with different customs about touching and spitting? Another interesting comment was during Jesus' debate with a disbelieving crowd in Luke 11:20. He said, "But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you." Jesus here uses the language of embodiment to describe God's liberating and saving action though him. But would we describe God's actions through us in that embodied way in our cultures today?

    How may we 'decode' the many gestures described in Scripture, if we are not told their meanings? And what they meant to whom? For example, in John 8:6 ff. when Jesus repeatedly drew on the ground with his finger, when asked a tricky question by teachers of the Law and the Pharisees, how would that gesture have been understood in his time and place, as distinct to what it would mean if we did the same thing today here in Australia? By that gesture, did he intend a reference to the finger of God at work through him to liberate and save, as he did in the Lukan passage? Or was it a rude gesture, indicating his anger at their disrespect? Or was it a breaking of eye contact for reasons of their supposedly 'superior' status? We don't know for sure, although some options seem more likely than others. So if we cannot fully understand

the meaning of his gestures, how do we interpret and transmit the gospel to others in our day? Can we mirror his embodied gestures and expect the same results? The author doubts this.

5. <u>Does the Scriptural witness give us some guidance for cross—cultural body language communication?</u>
What we do know is that Jesus was a close observer of other human beings' behaviours. Take for instance, the story of the offering of the widow's mite, told in Mark 12: 41-43, and Luke 21: 1-4. It says that Jesus watched the people as they put their offerings in the temple treasury, and then offered comment about the widow's offering. Now today the author does not think that she would be well received if she sat and watched her parishioners put their offerings into the offerings plate. But the point here is that he took the opportunity to observe his milieu and to reflect upon what he was seeing. It was only after he took the time to observe, reflect and learn that he understood and passed comment, connecting events with kingdom values.

Likewise, when Paul first arrived in Athens, (in Acts 17:16ff), he took the time to travel round the city, to notice the abundance of idols, (including the idol to the unknown God), and to reflect upon what he had seen. It says that he was greatly distressed to see the frequency of the idols, and so he decided to do something about it. First, he preached to the Jews in the synagogue in Athens, using a familiar language in its familiar cultural setting. Then he used his knowledge of the new city and its Greek peoples' ways, including its idols, its philosophy, its literature and its local sayings, to present the gospel in ways that the local people would understand. This is a pattern from which we can learn. In order to communicate with others well, we need to observe, to ask questions and to reflect upon what we have learned, and to use it in order to communicate the good news with people different to ourselves. In this paper, I would argue that the principle also applies to learning the body languages of the other cultures with which we come in contact, even if there are many cultures around us in our city.

6. <u>How can we best present the gospel in word and deed in 21<sup>st</sup> century multicultural Australia in the light of these multi- cultural body language differences?</u>

St Francis of Assisi is quoted as saying- "Preach the gospel every day; if necessary, use words." Usually that saying is interpreted as promoting an activist service spirituality, preaching through one's kind deeds, rather than by words. But what if the meaning of the phrase was not simply about deliberate actions of service, but about one's body language and gestures? How does one best preach the gospel in body language? The author would argue that one needs to study and use the body language of the Other. Indeed, we may need to mirror that body language, if we are sure of the meaning of the gesture. Not only should we translate our words into the verbal language of the Other, if possible. We must also make our body language (echoing or mirroring the other culture's body language) congruent with our verbal communication. Much has been written in Western literature about the necessity for congruity between body language and verbal language. It has been shown that people notice any incongruence between someone's verbal and non-verbal communication, even if they cannot verbalise what they have noticed. Sometimes they simply express

a disquiet, or an unease. But then they exercise a hermeneutic of suspicion, and do not trust what has been said verbally.

If another person of another culture, whether Christian or not, has not understood what we have said, or has exercised a hermeneutic of suspicion about our intentions and the integrity of what we are saying, then we have failed to communicate well. And when we fail to communicate well with our fellow believers, then we reduce the efficacy of the unity and the power of the Body of Christ. When we fail to effectively communicate the gospel to an unbeliever, then we have not assisted the growth of the kingdom of God. In the opinion of the author, neither of these outcomes would be part of the Mission of God, the Missio Dei.

Above all, we need to incorporate this sensitivity to body language and congruency with our verbal language into our daily life and into our very way of being. Otherwise it could be seen as being manipulative and coercive. The US former White House staffer Chuck Colson once said- "So many Christians interpret Christ's words to witness rather than to be a witness. And they see it as an activity instead of what it really is; the state of our being- what you do emerges from who you are." [30]

7.  <u>Where is the gospel present, and where is it absent or being challenged by the expressions and assumptions made in our body languages</u>?

It is interesting to reflect upon the image of the Triune God in Community as a revelation of the gospel being present in human body language. A favourite image of mine is that of 'perichoresis', the Trinitarian dance of the Persons of God, described by Jurgen Moltmann in his book, *The Trinity and the Kingdom of God*. In that book, Moltmann does not describe the dance of God in Community in detail. But one wonders, is it an instinctive dance? Maybe. Is it s ritualised or coded dance, with set movements in an ordered pattern? Quite possible for a God who created order out of chaos, according to Genesis 1. But the author is inspired by the idea that our God in Three persons enjoys dancing with loving, spontaneous, creative, adaptive and acquired body movements which celebrate the glory, hope and joy of the gospel, and which speak of a world of love, light, freedom, wholeness and restoration. Perhaps these Trinitarian body language movements can be movements in which God's people can participate. Even more, perhaps as people made in the image of God, restored and reconciled in shalom, we can even mirror our God's 'body language dance of love' as we share the gospel with our diverse world.

On the other hand, when we make our own body language normative for all people of all cultures and for all time, denying the reality and truth of other cultures' body languages, and /or make no attempt to make our body language congruent with our verbal communication, then we stifle the dance of the Trinity in ourselves and in our world, lessening ourselves as participants in the movement of God, limit the unity and power of the Body of Christ, and reduce the growth of the Kingdom of God.

In Leonard Sweet's book, *Post-Modern pilgrims*, he writes of the post-modern Christian agenda of EPIC, where E is Experiential, P is Participatory, I is Image

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[30]Water, Mark. *The New Encyclopaedia of Christian Quotations*, Hampshire, UK: John Hunt Publishing, 2000.

Driven and C is Community/ Connectedness. He says for the church to be effective in the 21st century, then it needs to be EPIC in its missional practice. Experiential, Participatory and Community/Connectedness are all elements of human communication through multicultural body language, whether used alone, or when congruently combined with verbal communication. The author suggests that in missional and emergent churches, where an incarnational theology and a non-dualistic spirituality is preferred, (for example, Frost and Hirsch, in *The Shaping of things to come*), they should take seriously the place of the congruent use of body language of the Other's culture when communicating the gospel, in order to serve the Missio Dei.

8.  Conclusion.
As this is an exploration, we will leave the discussion here. There are other aspects which could be considered for 21st century mission, for example, it has also been argued against the US Church Growth Movement that the rise of multiculturalism brings to an end the belief that forming Homogenous Units are the best method for church growth.[31]

In conclusion, multiculturalism is present in Australia, with each cultural group using its own set of acquired gestures for its body language. In order to effectively communicate with fellow Christians, to increase the unity and power of the Body of Christ, and to extend the Kingdom of God, Christians need to learn the Other's body language and to use it in a congruent fashion with their words. Then we will be more fully participants in the 'perichoretic' dance of the God in Three persons.

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[31] Deymaz, Mark, *Building a healthy multi-ethnic church: mandate, Commitments and practices of a diverse congregation,* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007.

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