

## ‘Sorry matters’— through indigenous eyes

### What does the apology mean to me?

**Lynelda Tippo**

Assistant Director, Mamarapha College, WA

Well, personally, I feel like a weight has been lifted off me. However, I believe that many of our people who were taken away feel it much more than I do. At this moment, I think especially of my mum. She was taken away from her mother at a very young age. She was only six or seven years old and put on Palm Island with her sister and brother; she couldn't speak a word of English. That must have been a very traumatic experience for any seven-year old. My mother speaks of the time when they (she and her siblings) were in the police watch-house waiting for transportation to Palm Island. Her memory of this time is in her own words: "We were crying and asking the police if we could see our mum and they told us that we will see her in the morning. But she never came."

You ask the question: "What does the Apology mean to you?" The word *apology* means to express one's regret or sadness over a wrong that has been done, and when that expression comes in the form of sincerely saying, "I'm sorry", then it actually carries a lot of weight. For the government to acknowledge the wrong that was done, and express regret for what happened (although it occurred many years ago), saying "sorry" will put Australia on a path that, hopefully, will heal some of the hurts and pains suffered by many of our people.

It has been put to me on quite a number of occasions that peoples from other nations have gone through similar sufferings and experiences. So what makes the indigenous people of Australia different from them?

I would like to make a comparison between this kind of thinking and the case of a person with counselling needs. If the person went to visit a counsellor because they were suffering from some painful past experience, they would expect the counsellor to spend time helping them deal with it. If, on the other hand, the counsellor felt that others were going through the same kind of suffering and told the counsellee so, would the

person be helped? Would the person feel they have been understood? Would they feel that they have been heard, at all? No. One would think not.

Non-indigenous Australians must come to understand that, just as every person who sees a counsellor has their own particular pains and hurts, so too, each nation's people have their own shared hurts and pains that must be addressed by those who were responsible for having inflicted them upon others.

For my mum, the past could never be erased from her mind. But she harbours no bitterness, because she has accepted Jesus Christ into her life and has forgiven those who enacted such laws in this country. Her perception of all this: "I would never have known my Saviour, Jesus Christ."

For the many who do not know Jesus Christ, I pray that they will find healing through Kevin Rudd's stand, and saying: "I'm sorry". **TEACH**

### The national apology

**Lillian Geia**

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On Wednesday, 13th February, 2008, at 9am, the Prime Minister of Australia, Kevin Rudd, delivered a national apology to the *Stolen Generations* of this country. The words spoken were like a cool ointment on an open wound. A wound that runs deep for so many families who were affected by the removal of their mothers, grandmothers, fathers, grandfathers, brothers and sisters; families that were divided and broken 'for their own good'. It brought many to tears as finally the head of the Australian Federal Government publicly recognised:

... the pain, suffering and hurt, the breaking up of families and communities, the indignity and degradation inflicted on a proud people and culture.'

For me, the apology was from the heart, it gave acknowledgement, and respect to our people and I felt a deep sense of relief. It was a long

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time coming; maybe a case of *too little and too late* for some. But the public acknowledgement of past wrongs committed against the first nations of this country, spoken not only to a national but an international audience, shows that this government is genuine in taking forward steps in uniting this country by reconciling indigenous and non-indigenous peoples.

It may not be easy because the wounds of oppression, segregation, and degradation run deep and will take time to mend, but the apology started the healing process and this can only happen when the past is confronted. Then *all* Australians can move forward together. **TEACH**

\* Quote from the Prime Minister's speech.

## A new beginning

### Joan Lever

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Mr Rudd won the hearts of indigenous Australians when he said “sorry” on nationally broadcast television in Parliament House, Canberra.

History was made as he said the word *sorry* six times in an effort to embark on a new beginning. I would say that the Prime Minister of Australia and his government had the courage to promise this event, and then actually ‘stage’ it successfully.

It was, indeed, a spiritual healing for many indigenous Australians and presented an opportunity for genuine reconciliation, of sharing suppressed emotions and grief, and extending forgiveness to the nation. This event marks a turning point in history and will assist in building a bridge of hope and togetherness for Australians.

After this historic, symbolic event should come a more practical and beneficial demonstration, i.e. compensation for the *Stolen Generations* and institutionalised children of indigenous descent. This action would provide concrete evidence of the government's sincerity, culminating in a satisfying ‘in-depth-reward’ to the ‘sorry story’—its implications and all that it stands for. I believe that Mr. Rudd and his government will continue to acknowledge and pursue this future action, because they have a heartfelt yearning to do the right thing, in the spirit of what Australians call ‘a fair go’.

Thank you Mr. Rudd (and your government) for the courage you have shown on *Apology Day* and giving indigenous Australians a brighter and more secure future.

## Comment on the Prime Minister's ‘Sorry Speech’

### Marion Hastie

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Mamarapha College, WA

There is a consistent and strong emphasis on accountability in Australia. Hence indigenous people have always been publicly held accountable for their actions, whether as organisations, public figures, or private individuals.

Over the years, it seemed to indigenous people that accountability was a ‘one-way street’. Non-indigenous people appeared to remain unaccountable for past mistreatment of indigenous people. Whilst there was proud acceptance of their forefathers’ accomplishments, they distanced themselves from their forefathers’ actions of removing children from their indigenous families. This attitude avoided being accountable. As long as accountability was one-sided, indigenous people found it difficult to ‘move forward’, as many non-indigenous people expected.

It took a ‘big man’ like Kevin Rudd to say the long-awaited word, *sorry*. So simple, yet so powerful! My mother and father were taken off their parents. They were ‘part-Aboriginal’ (a word we don’t use today). One of the beliefs was that part-Aboriginal kids had ‘white’ blood in them and therefore were capable of being educated. Both my parents are deceased, but when I heard the Prime Minister's words I could not stop the tears from flowing, and my body shook from the deep sobbing. It was overwhelming for someone to acknowledge what was done to kids like my parents, and say, “sorry”.

A lot of people took comfort from these words. However, I am here at Bible College because I want to tell my people that *long-lasting* comfort comes from One greater than the Prime Minister. My parents, who were raised on a SDA Christian Mission, received comfort a long time ago from the heavenly *Comforter*. Although they were separated from their parents and did not have the same ‘rights’ and ‘freedom’ as other Australians they were taught of God, who could give them long-lasting comfort. When they left the Mission they wanted to tell others of a God who gives love, peace, joy and comfort to people who need it, just as they needed it. Did they minimise or dismiss their painful experience? No! They acknowledged it for what it was, but also realised from what they went through, that there is a living, loving God—the Great Physician who can heal all! This is what they taught to their eight children. And this is what we want to pass on as well! **TEACH**

“It was a spiritual healing for many indigenous Australians—an opportunity for reconciliation, sharing suppressed emotions, and extending forgiveness”

1 John Murison,  
former  
Mamarapha  
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[Photography:  
Mamarapha  
collection]

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