

THEMES, MOTIFS, AND PURPOSES OF MAKING INDIGENOUS LOCAL THEOLOGIES

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The way the gospel was communicated in the colonial era¹ meant that the recipients had never had a chance to fully explore their cultural Christian roots. How Christianity was translated in the West and its forceful transmission to another culture, especially during periods of colonial expansion, meant that the subtle features of the local cultural ideas were not reflected in the making of their theology.

Post-colonial theologians express their suspicion of the colonial Church and Eurocentric theological scholarship to create an encounter between the Biblical text and the cultural context. The culture once condemned as pagan has now been revisited as the subject of Biblical interpretation.

Natural transmission of the Christian faith has been through the languages and cultures of people. However, contextual theology involves broader and deeper interactions with the entire culture since culture broadly defines who people are. This contextual dialogue is perceived not as the encounter between parallel religious systems but as a personal experience of integration.

This process of inculturation is necessary for Indigenous Christians to engage in Christian discipleship fully in their local form of Christianity. The Christian doctrines that were never reflected in the culture of the people tend to be dismissed because those doctrines do not bring relevant attention to who they are as people (Hastings 1950:52). The Christian doctrines as practised in worship and the Christian life provide the ethical guidelines. However, the lack of cultural reflection of Christian doctrines results in something other than Christian discipleship, such as a legal, conceptual, or foreign religion.

POST-COLONIAL AND LOCAL THEOLOGY

When the colonial periods ended, Christian theologians in the formerly colonized world began their quest for searching for more culturally relevant theologies. Developing Christian theology from one culture based on another naturally involves translation, interpretation, and enculturation (Sanneh 1989). As for the basis for constructing contextual theology, several different theological and sociological themes and motifs have been explored by theologians in the continents of Africa and South America. They not only trailblazed the ways for Post-colonial exploration of Christian theology but also provided tools to Indigenous theologians to initiate their

searches.

Cultural Situation as a Context of Theology

A cultural situation is considered necessary for the formation of theology. A theology can tell us about the theologian's struggle for their own cultural identity. The history of various cultural or theological works in transmitting early Christian thoughts from Judaic to Hellenistic culture can demonstrate how we should treat our cultural efforts, which relate to our theology. Bediako, a Christian theologian of Ghana, asserted that theoretical conclusions also must be made from actual Christian existence. Theology is a by-product and shows the process of Christian self-definition. Thus, theology answers or has to do with culturally rooted questions. Christian writings show us the theological ideas of the authors' encounters and questioning. This notion gives a solid ground to discuss our cultures in relation to Christian belief (Bediako 1992:3-12).

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However, Bediako uses the word culture as a personal situation and a range of personal preferences. Tatian, for example, who belonged to Syriac Christianity, when he spoke to the Greeks about Hellenistic Christianity, expressed disfavoured with the idea of Christianity enmeshed with Hellenistic culture — but related Moses' role to the Old Testament and the Hellenistic culture to the New Testament. This was a radical inculturation of Hellenism. Tatian faced accusations from his theological opponents on the Hellenistic side for being a heretic. Others did not see the Syriac side of him either. Later, he let out this anger in his writings that expressed extreme disfavoured towards Hellenistic Christianity.

As a Greco-Roman from Carthage in the Roman

¹ Colonial era also includes post- and neo- colonial era during which the euro-western Christian missions to the non-western world continued.

province of Africa, Tertullian kept a distance from Hellenistic culture, whereas Justin and Clement had positive attitudes towards Greco-Roman culture. As Justin did the groundwork, in the light of Christian revelation, Clement worked to integrate the good elements of the culture as the hermeneutical key to the entire religious history of humanity. These theologies arose out of personal situations and identity.

While it gives importance to the cultural situation in forming a theology, Bediako's theology and identity complicate local theology. Bediako's chosen identity with a culture indeed constitutes an essential aspect of local theology, but it provides a motive, not the basis, for constructing a local theology. Local theology deals with the culture that is common to a particular society. Personalized identity is a practice which benefits the postmodern world. But culture, as defined, is a 'cumulative and patterned response to its environment and provides a 'context' which is omnipresent in its territory to shape human belief and behaviour to interact with the environment. Thus, social behaviour is generally patterned in a culture so that the beliefs and behaviour of members of society are directed towards broad channels, whose courses are implicitly known to all. Culture attributes identity to a person, not just a person grasping it from a culture (Knighton 2007: 58-59).

Self-Respect for a Local Theology

An attempt to explicate an Indigenous theology is an assertion of tribal sovereignty (Kidwell, Noley & Tinker 2004). The primary reason for reconstructing one's cultural and religious ideas and connecting and attributing to their own Christian self-understanding is to validate the authenticity of the peoplehood of God. People, for personal reasons, might want to know that God was in another culture accessible to them, even before Christianity arrived. Suppose an Indigenous theology is to be a part of the people's life-giving, life-sustaining social structure, which serves the end of tribal sovereignty. In that case, it must speak not only of past Indigenous experiences and cultures but also to speak to the contemporary reality of their existence (Kidwell et al. 2004). For Tutu, upholding his traditional religious heritages in theologizing is for their self-respect because they had a genuine knowledge of God that they were able to communicate with the deity and speak authentically and the gospel in their own ways (Tutu 1978:366).

However, while self-respect can bestow some degree of national, regional, and tribal identity and respect, the overall construct of a local theology can never solely rest on the theme of self-respect.

Translations of Languages and Cultures

Lamin Sanneh is a historian of Islam and Christian mission in West Africa. A significant area of Sanneh's academic work is the study of world Christianity. He writes extensively about the translation of the Christian message, challenging a good deal of the

accepted history of mission in the modern academy. In *Translating the Message*, he wrote:

In time, Christianity expanded from Europe into Asia and Africa, among other places, and was able to break out of its Western cultural confinement by repeating the process by which the Church's missionary centre shifted from Jerusalem to Antioch and beyond. In some important respects, however, the modern shift was unprecedented, for the extraordinary multiplicity of mother-tongue idioms became the subject of Christian mission rather than the cosmopolitan values of an ascendant West. Nonetheless, the mission-maintained continuity with its apostolic past. In examining the modern missionary phase, however, we should highlight essential signposts in the indigenous culture, especially in the local encounter with the contemporary West. The translation role of missionaries cast them as unwitting allies of mother-tongue speakers and reluctant opponents of colonial domination (Sanneh 1989:94-95).

Christianity was never free from cultural embedding. The diverse expansion of Christianity needs to be seen positively rather than negatively, which, in a practical sense, is the only possible way of passing on the Christian messages. Vernacular language, culture, and history are the actual vehicles of Christian transmission. Even at birth, Christianity was embedded in the Jewish heritage. The Apostle Paul's contribution to the mission to Gentile, Gnostic themes that appeared in the Gospel of St. John, the Hellenization of Christianity, and the lasting prominence of the King James Version are all examples which support the cultural embedding of Christianity. It is misleading to think of the Christian religion as being monolithic from the beginning. There were different Christian traditions; some were not Jewish, and Judaism covered a range of expressions. On the one hand, Sanneh's openness to translate Christianity into language and culture, a pluralistic expansion, gives courage to many post-colonial theologians searching for a unique cultural Christian theology. But on the other hand, to view colonization as the context in which the gospel message was received and understood may justify the historical horrors committed to indigenous people and, as a result, undermine the historical consequences and the associated pain. This logic underpins Bediako's notion of identity, in this case, a collective identity.

Despite Sanneh's ideal position distinguishing the West's political impact from its religious implications, much of the colonial mishaps, including the abolition of language and culture, were carried out against Indigenous people in and through Christian religious institutions. As the Church represents Christian belief, what it has done to the people still affects how they perceive their Christian faith. The same echoes in the case of the Indigenous tribes of Canada

and the Aboriginal people of Western Australia. The cultural package that came with the gospel profoundly impacted indigenous peoples' Christian self-understanding. This topic is discussed in a separate article that engages in a discussion of 'Indian Residential Schools.

Moreover, Sanneh views culture as an obstacle to overcome, not as a resource to enrich to reach the universal understanding of the message. A problem with the vernacular translation is that it uses only the corresponding words or concepts from the culture of the transmitter and does not fully construct a local theology from cultural sources. Moreover, languages neither contain whole aspects of culture nor fully express the cultural dynamic. But, Sanneh's notion of the vernacular gives prominence to language rather than culture, as he views language as a living expression of culture (Sanneh 1989: 200).

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POST-COLONIAL THEOLOGY

North American Indigenous Theological Perspectives

Indigenous theological discussions did not begin with systematic talks of God, which is different from the theology of the West. It started as a reaction to the colonial interactions with Western Christianity. LeBlanc classifies the class of Indigenous scholars who engage in these discussions into two camps: 'liberal and acculturative (Leblanc 2015)' The liberal camp comes from a reactive disposition that considers that nothing of value came to them when the white people invaded their lives. In his historical study on four prominent missionaries, Tinker concluded that Euro-American missionaries were part of the colonial conspiracy and their objective was 'the extinction of Indigenous culture' (Tinker 1993). The reason for this determination comes from an observation that the missionaries who came during the colonial period were insensible to the distinction between the Christian gospel and Western culture.

Consequently, eliminating Indigenous culture was an intrinsic part of colonial Christian missions. The acculturative side thinks that when converted to Christianity, one must subscribe to Western culture and values. Both sides appear to share the exact outcome of weakening Indigenous culture. This classification primarily concerns political issues. However, a more dominant theological problem for both is the appropriation of their contextual theology. Simply bringing the cultural expression of Indigenous peoples to churches is what Marc-Ela would call a 'window dressing' (Mugambi 2002:198).

Indigenous and Christian: Historical Irony

Jace Weaver, a Cherokee, is an assistant professor of American studies and religious studies at Yale University and a lawyer. He discloses five vignettes (Weaver 1998:1-2) to revisit the historical atrocities,

contradictions, and ironies during the colonial era and beyond, all in search of a 'community hermeneutic' to dissolve those ironies (Weaver 1998:1-25).

- 1) In 1782, Christian Delaware abandoned their farms and moved to a new town to avoid conflict with Euro-American farmers. As they returned to harvest the fields, they were confronted by a patrol of one hundred militia and massacred as they prayed and sang hymns. Twenty-nine men, twenty-seven women, and thirty-four children were killed.
- 2) In 1838, 16,000 Cherokees were forcibly marched 900 miles from Georgia to present-day Oklahoma, and one-quarter of them died en route along what came to be known as the Trail of Tears. Christian Cherokees sang hymns in their language as they marched.
- 3) In 1862, thirty-six Sioux were hung because of their roles in an uprising against Little Crow, an Episcopalian, who led the brutal treatment. As they were present at executions, they sang the hymn, 'Many and Great, O God.' As the trapdoor dropped, they grabbed each other's hands and sang, I am here! I am here!
- 4) Vine Deloria, Jr. encountered in 1967 a Presbyterian minister who was in charge of the denomination's Indian missions. Deloria listened to the clergyman describing his mission among the Shinnecocks of New York's Long Island and asked how long his Church intended to carry on such work among the tribe who had lived as Christians for more than 350 years. The answer was, 'Until the job is done.'
- 5) Between 1845 and 1848, the confessing Christian faith was a criminal offence in the Creek Nation. The penalty for an infraction was thirty-nine lashes from a cowhide whip. Samuel Checote, who was in his early twenties, was so punished. He was asked as blood flowed to his ankles; will you give up Christ? You may kill me, but you cannot separate me from my Lord Christ. He later served as chief of the tribe and as a clergyman. He was instrumental in abolishing the ban on Christianity. But out of respect for his people, he never admitted having to suffer for his Christian confession.

There was the terrible irony of being both Indigenous and Christian. Indigenous people in the eastern United States made great efforts to adapt and accommodate to Euro-American culture. Many converted to Christianity to protect themselves from further depredations. Adjusting to the culture did not change anything. The profession of Christian faith did not matter. In the end, it only mattered that they were Indians (Weaver 1998:3).

In the early 1990s, two Indigenous scholars addressed the treatments of the Indigenous/Christian encounter: *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* by George Tinker and *First White*

Frost: Native Americans and United Methodism by Homer Noley. Despite the basic agreement the two authors share, Weaver finds essential differences. Tinker² dismisses the Christian missionaries of all denominations working among Indigenous nations as partners in genocide. Tinker, despite his assertion that the process of Christianization of Indigenous people assumed the internalization of the larger illusion of Indian inferiority and the idolization of white culture and religion, the sphere of his main academic interests stays within liberation discussions of theology (Tinker 1993:3). He points out that the missionaries in the colonial period confused the Christian gospel and their own European/Euro-American culture so that both the Indigenous people and Indigenous culture were devastated (Tinker 1993:4).

He claims this devastation is a 'cultural genocide.' He points out four aspects of cultural genocide: political, economic, religious, and social (Tinker 1993:7). He concluded that the Christian missions overtly attempted to destroy the spiritual solidarity of Indigenous people. An apparent and deliberate pressure was applied by outlawing ceremonial forms, as in the 1890 legislation that banned the performance of the Sun Dance and the Hopi Snake Dance. He used the case of military suppression of the Ghost Dance, which resulted in the massacre of 350 Indigenous women, children, and older people, as solid evidence for cultural genocide (Tinker 1993:7). With this line of reasoning, he questions the genuine motives of the missionaries and points to the destructive forces of colonialism. He holds the missionary intention as cultural genocide as a historical fact (Tinker 1993:17). In one of his writings, Weaver points out that Tinker's declaration stated the missionaries themselves would not have known their sin in this regard. Still, in another writing, he noted, concerning missionary cooperation in Euro-American economic and political power structures, that they should have known what they were about (Weaver 1998:4). Weaver points out the inconsistencies with Tinker's positions and suspicions on the topic.

Noley, on the other hand, consistently asks how the missionaries whose work was so destructive could not have known what they were doing. Noley declares,

Given the political intrigues that spanned most of the eighteenth century, the integrity of missionaries and their mission was in doubt. The biblical dictum 'You cannot serve God and Mammon' (Matt. 6.24) was set aside as missionaries, on the one hand, were offered a religion of love and eternal life, and colonists, on the other hand, were forming a militia to kill tribal people or drive them from their homes to take their land and crop (Noley 1991:43).

Weaver criticized that Tinker's idea of the 'best intentions of the missionaries cannot be reconciled

with 'any amount of Native suffering and any amount of culpability on the part of the evangelists' (Weaver 1998:4). Accepted, Weaver's criticism on Tinker's stance on the topic of cultural genocide by the missionaries, has wider implications for the condition of the European Christian discipleship and the qualifications and motivation of the European missionaries. It is difficult to implicate the lack of knowledge about God's impartiality since the Christian scripture, which was written much earlier, understood these conditions, as written in the OT Bible (Deut. 10.17),

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.

Indigenous Cultural Expressions in Christian Worship

Twiss, a Sicangu Lakota,³ was converted to Western Christianity but later became a pan-Indian activist and advocated the Indigenous cultural expression of the Christian religion. He acknowledged the historical inference that Christianity would be communicated to them by white people, as seen through the visions of some Indigenous elders whom he respected. He attributed the preaching of the gospel by great Indigenous elders to the indigenous people with the purity and genuine faith in following Jesus. The gospel they preached was not a 'white men's religion' but a gospel contextualized in Indigenous culture. Quoting from a CBC News headline (2007) about the pastor of a Canadian church prevented the spiritual dance of Indigenous people, saying it had nothing to do with authentic Christian ceremonies. He lamented how little the general understanding of Christianity for diverse cultural groups, especially of the Indigenous people in Canadian society (Twiss 2015:26):

My twenty years of observation and participation in mission activities among First Nations people have made it evident that rather than good news, the 'Good News' story remains highly ineffective among Native people, and for many, it means bad news. After hundreds of years of missionary efforts, an insufficient number of Native people are actively engaged in a life of faith in Jesus and participation in some Christian traditions (Twiss 2015:28).

This study shares the same concern and motivation. Since the contact with Western Christianity, missionary endeavours continued to reach the Indigenous people without significant progress. The minute success was not the absence of effort, as many missions serve Indigenous people. But we need to consider a proper theology to see indigenous people's Christian progress accurately. The salvation of Indigenous people may look different from that of the Christians in the West. A contextualization of Christianity naturally calls for an ideation of the

2. George Tinker: The Clifford Baldrige Professor of American Indian Cultures and Religious Traditions at Iliff School of Theology.

3. Sicangu Lakota also known as Sicangu Oyate or Rosebud Sioux is a federally recognized Amerindian nation located in South Dakota, United States.

doctrines within the scope of the culture. There cannot be a unified expression of Indigenous culture. It is a habit of non-Indigenous to homogenize Indigenous groups, levelling differences among them unconsciously.

Religion vs Spirituality

Slaton highlights the differences between religion and spirituality as an essential topic in the discussions of creating Indigenous theology (Slaton 2013:1). He sees Transcendentalism, an Indigenous philosophy and the Sàmi worldview as spirituality rather than religion. Rather, he defines spirituality independent of religious rituals and solely depends on individuals searching for higher knowledge and contact with some greater force (Slaton 2013:2). He proposes that the three sects share a common nature of mystical spiritualism as they draw from the collective consciousness. Each revolves around a greater understanding of the natural world (Slaton 2013:2).

Slaton sees a similar degree of faith as in Transcendentalism and Indigenous philosophy centred on nature and the unseen cosmos and revolves around 'unnoticed forces' (Slaton 2013). Bear Heart, a current Indigenous shaman, describes a standard mode of Indigenous 'religion':

We didn't spend one hour Sunday morning in a religious situation—we spent each day acknowledging that every day was a holy, sacred day. We have a song in the morning that says, 'I thank you for another day. I ask that you give me the strength to walk worthily this day so that I will not be ashamed when I lie down at night.' It's a song that came to us long before the missionaries (Heart & Larkin 1998:164).

Both Transcendentalism and Indigenous philosophy⁴ view 'nature as a divine window to God,' Slaton highlights, as Thoreau's heightened sense of awareness with the need for a relational view of the world (nature) around him, the Native American Church (NAC),⁵ through the sacramental use of peyote,⁶ attempts to achieve such insights and wisdom along with a relational perspective to the greater universe around them (Slaton 2013:3).

Syncretism vs Contextualization

4. By 'Indigenous philosophy,' Slaton appeared to limit its term 'Indigenous' only in Indigenous peoples in North America, since Indigenous applies to Australia, Latin America, Africa and Asia.

5. Native American Church. Many denominations of mainstream Christianity made attempts to convert Native Americans to Christianity in Indian Country. These efforts were successful for many Native American tribes reflect Christian creed, including the Native American Church. Although conversion to Christianity was a slow process, the tenets of the Native American Church were readily accepted. From Native American Church – *The Encyclopaedia of Oklahoma History and Culture*: www.okhistory.org, retrieved 23 June, 2018.

6. Peyote. *Lophophora williamsii* (/lou' fofərə wtlī' æmsiəz/) or peyote (/pé' jouti/) is a small, spineless cactus with psychoactive alkaloids, particularly mescaline. Also, known for its psychoactive properties when ingested, peyote is used worldwide, having a long history of ritualistic and medicinal use by indigenous North Americans (Wikipedia).

But Twiss was cautious about this kind of contextual theology as he expresses the dangers of syncretism (Twiss 2000:127). He expressed difficulties with the theologians seeing the similarities between Christianity and Indigenous cultures and assuming they are the same without qualifications. The definition of the 'unqualified' contextualization that Twiss proposed in 'adopting foreign forms but interpreting them largely in local ways' (Twiss 2000: 127) is somewhat ambiguous. Inculturation describes how the Christian faith interacts with a culture by influencing its people's understanding of the gospel and how it is practised and shared within that culture. The object of inculturation is to enable the gospel message to be readily understood, accepted and lived out in the culture's thought forms as expressed in its vocabulary, art forms and imagery (Escobar & Shenk 2007:185). Hence, contextual theology is less concerned with altering 'the long-standing doctrines of historical Christianity,' which Twiss wanted to defend from syncretism (Twiss 2000), but rather with delivering it in a culturally relevant form.

Moreover, Twiss' criticism of the use of peyote at the Native American Church (NAC) focuses on the prescribed use of the hallucinogenic drug found in peyote as part of their liturgy. He said

Peyote is intended to increase one's receptiveness to God, making the participant more holy and closer to God. This is an attempt to form one new religion out of two old belief systems – a religion that is neither Christian nor traditionally Native. This is syncretism (Twiss 2000:127).

The traditional use of peyote in an ancient tribal religion was to open a pathway to the deities.⁷ The *Huichol* religion of the indigenous people of Mexico consists of four principal deities: Corn, Blue Deer, Peyote, and the Eagle, all descended from their Sun God, *Tao Jreeku*. Schaefer interpreted this to mean that *peyote* is the soul of their religious culture and a visionary sacrament that opens a pathway to the other deities (Schaefer & Furst 1997:52-53). Twiss argued that the modern use of the *peyote* in the Christian Church is to replace the redemptive work of Christ, as it is said in the NT that no one can come to God except through Jesus Christ (John 14.6). Any attempt to replace or distort the historical doctrines of justification, sanctification, and salvation is how Twiss defines syncretism (Twiss 2000:128).

However, Bear Heart asserts that the use of *peyote* is symbolic (Heart & Larkin 1998). It is a 'medicine from the Creator' to help people. Prayers are not made to the peyote. The people who participate in the sacramental peyote are not concerned with what it contains but it helps them in the worship of God and they use it as a symbolic sacrament, much as the Christian use of wine in the communion and the

7. *Huichol* are an indigenous people of Mexico living in the Sierra Madre Occidental range in the states of Nayarit, Jalisco, Zacatecas, and Durango.

Jewish people use wine in the Passover celebrations (Heart & Larkin 1998:203). Heart believes that the Native American Church uses the peyote as an awareness of God's care. As another example of the symbolic use of tradition in Indigenous Christian worship, the drum in the *Sàmi* tradition is also an extremely important part of their traditional spirituality, for it possesses an amazing ability to provide insight to those who use it.

Slaton finds the difference between religion and spirituality in the presence or absence of a ceremony. He observes that the symbolic use of the traditional ritual in Christian worship is to find a window into the divinity of God. Religion emphasizes strict form of rituals, whereas spirituality concerns more with the result. The cultural means used in the worship are essential to the group, as they help 'the gospel message to be readily understood, accepted, and applied.' But Slaton admits his view that, in most cases, they are mere traditions that hold psychological and historical significance in maintaining a dying culture (Slaton 2013:4).

In his latest academic contemplation (Twiss 2015) as a participant observer in the Indigenous theological discussions, fifteen years after his initial publication (Twiss 2000), Twiss' view of contextualization tends to shift more progressively, as stated in his latest publication:

As I think contextualization is not a principle, formula or evangelistic strategy. Contextualization is a relational process of theological and cultural reflection within a community - seeking to incorporate traditional symbols, music, dance, ceremony, and ritual to make faith in Jesus an indeed local expression. Critical thinking and detraditionalization are essential to the excellent contextualization efforts among indigenous communities (Twiss 2015:15).

After Twiss understood the compelling need for surviving the gospel within an Indigenous culture and a hegemonic shift from colonization/neo-colonization to decolonization, he embraced a wider definition of contextualization:

In the radically changing ethnic demographics of American culture and the global community, followers of Jesus are presented with great opportunities and challenges for good. We must genuinely appreciate all cultures as being capable of reflecting biblical faith. We must move away from 'American Christian mythology', which undergirds colonization and its resulting paternalism in Indigenous communities. We must embrace new theological perspectives emerging from Native leaders as being 'equal.' These perspectives provide new pathways for the contextualization process (Twiss 2015:16).

The new pathways he suggests identify Indigenous cultural values, spirituality, and ceremonies as central

to the latest approaches to discipleship and leadership development within the community.

Green acknowledges the fact that Twiss was seeking, in his latest thesis (Twiss 2015), 'to take some of the teeth out of the term by redefining syncretism as the exploration of the synthesis of faith, belief and practice in a dynamic process of blending, adding, subtracting, changing, testing and working things out (Green 2015:4).

Nevertheless, there is an Indigenous theological view that considers inculturation to dominate Indigenous people:

The Catholic Church asserted domination over Amerindian belief systems through the doctrine of inculturation, which asserts that God is central to all cultural experiences because culture is based on experiences with nature, and God is the creator of nature. Inculturation is an ongoing reciprocal process between faith and culture: a way of looking at people's customs, rites, and rituals to discover in them the active and saving presence of God. Through inculturation, the Church affirms what is good in culture, purifies what is false and evil, strengthens what is weak, and educates what is ignorant (Kidwell et al. 2004:9).

This view rejects the implied notion that Indigenous cultures are simply different cultural forms of Christianity and sees it as another Christian attempt to dominate and subdue Indigenous cultures.

The focus of missiology of inculturation is not to make an Indigenous culture Christian but instead to bring or to appropriate the culturally relevant Christian gospel to an Indigenous people, as in agreement with the evangelical definition (Escobar & Shenk 2007:185). The concern of inculturation in missiology facilitates an effective way the gospel is communicated to a culture.

The same view, however, insists that the methodology, language, and understandings of Christian beliefs of the colonists and the majority society since the colonial period have largely failed to Christianize the Indigenous population. Different conceptual frameworks and a different understandings of terms made (and make) Christian doctrine particularly unappealing and at times incomprehensible to Indians (Tinker 2008).

Theology of Time vs. Theology of Space

Indigenous cultural ideas are entirely focused on their surroundings and their lives are lived responsibly within their places. Thus, Indigenous theologians may contribute to a theology of space through their writings on theological topics (Baker 2016:234). Western theology often overlooks the subject of space, Baker compares, but Indigenous traditionalism is oriented toward a spatial cosmic paradigm. Baker discusses the cultural facts that are related to a Christian theology of space. Tinker concurs with

this idea that, without understanding the spatiality of Indigenous existence, one cannot understand Indigenous spiritual traditions (Tinker 1996:121). An Indigenous worldview is given shape by a spatial paradigm; because Indigenous traditionalism is influenced so heavily by its environment, Jace Weaver, an Indigenous theologian, also describes the Indigenous worldview as 'geo-mythological' (Weaver 2015:29). The connection between the Indigenous people and their environment is of great significance reflected in all areas of their lives.

Baker highlights the distinction between Western theology and Indigenous theology to stress the comparison that Western theology is focused on time, but Indigenous theology is rooted in the solidarity and kinship with the environments. This was shown in ethical decisions of Indigenous people made in connection with creation and communal dynamic, when spiritual practices are drawn collectively with the tribe, and communal and individual identity are focused on their kinship with their surroundings. Their identity comes from their lands and connects them to their relatives. Without land, they are not a people (Bear-Barnetson 2009:55). Indigenous theology's connectedness to their environment is formed as it is their way of life but is not limited to only space. Tribal land ownership and water ownership is a substantial political issue facing Indigenous peoples.

Baker relates this cultural tendency of Indigenous people to their view of time: they see time as cyclical, causing their philosophies to be apathetic toward the past and future (Baker 2016:236). Furthermore, he discusses the same tendency considering the lack of time in Indigenous languages. But it seems more appropriate to think that their time concept and language habits did not affect their philosophy of life but rather were the result of their lifestyle in their culture for many years.

What remains an essential fact is an understanding of their kinship: the Indigenous idea of kinship includes not only family and relatives but also nature and the surroundings.⁸ In the article, Baker relates the time and space dichotomy to the difference between Christian and Indigenous ethics. Christian theology has been primarily concerned with time and history and relegated the importance of place and space. As an effect, its ethics is also derived from past commandments and results in future outcomes. Communal and individual identity found in the idea of the Kingdom of God was to be consummated in the future. But Indigenous theologies contribute to the ethics of the community space and its communal dynamic. Indigenous Christians express their faith on a 'metaphoric map': a map of sacred mountains,

8. The entire seminars at Indigenous Foods and Ecological Knowledge Symposium, hosted by the University of Washington's American Indian Studies Department and Na'ah Illahee Fund, May 4th & 5th, 2018, based their discussions primarily on kinship of Amerindian people. Kinship not only includes people but also plants and animals (From my observation note at the event).

locations for vision quests, and places where particular rituals or dances occur, or so (Charleston 2015:17-18).

The Kingdom of God as Space

In theology, which is based on the cultural understanding of Indigenous peoples, God's created world is a space where God's spirit indwells. However, the fallen nature of the created world poses difficulties to Indigenous theologies because of their strong belief in God's presence in all creation. T.F. Torrance voiced the same concern as he discussed the theology of incarnation since the created world was a God-enclosed space where everything exists in relation to God (Torrance 1969:18). Hence, the Christian idea of space must begin with God's presence relative to and within creation (Bartholomew 2011:319). In developing the spatial understanding of the Kingdom of God, Tinker also noted when Jesus stated the Kingdom not only 'has come near (ἤγγικε v)', which uses a spatial reference meaning 'is at hand (Matthew 3.2) but also is in their midst (Luke 17). Whether this was a spatial or metaphysical meaning, Tinker sees these verses indicating that the Kingdom must in some way be present in every place. Thus, for Tinker, creation is the Kingdom of God (Baker 2016:238).

Repentance as Restoration of the Relationship with Creation

Jesus also proclaimed that because the Kingdom of God is at hand, people are to repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1.15). This repentance is a return to God and the right relationship with all creation. Because we humans are part of creation, we are to live harmoniously with all creations, which to Tinker, is the Kingdom of God. The restored relationship with the Kingdom implies embracing all of life, the entire ecosystem, including people, plants and animals (Tinker 1996:126-128).

Thus, this spatial theology of the Kingdom becomes the basis for eco-theology. Terry LeBlanc, in his lecture at a NAIITS forum,⁹ addressed the topic of the kinship of humanity with his interpretation of Romans 8:18-21. Christian theology often deals with the temporal notion of dispensations of God's redemption, and little was said about the responsibility of Christianity to our space. The contribution of Indigenous theology to the Christian theology of space is an 'identification of the Kingdom of God within creation (Baker 2016:239).

Balance and Harmony

The Christian idea of harmony relates to personal or societal peace. But cosmic harmony is often relegated to an area of eschatology in Christian theology. In most Indigenous cultures, the balance of the spiritual and physical is important (Tinker 1996:126). Personal and communal rituals are performed to bring back

9. NAIITS stands for Native American Institute of Indigenous Theological Studies. LeBlanc spoke at the NAIITS forum at Wheaton College in 2012.

cosmic balance and harmony, which is the focal point of the traditionalist theology of Indigenous people (Kidwell et al. 2004:33, 65, 107-109).

Both the Hebrew concept of 'shalom' and the Cherokee idea of 'elohéh' relate to a God-given peace for a community which is to be lived out responsibly by the communal members (Woodley 2012:71). Shalom, Woodley believes, is the metanarrative of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, which was intended to show the way of life (Woodley 2012:11). Thus, ethics for the Indigenous community, in agreement with the idea of the Torah, derives from and is measured by the overall wellbeing of their community and surrounding environment (Kidwell et al. 2004:18). The theory presupposes the notion that the Torah was founded on the collective dynamics of Judean society which shares the idea of ethics in Indigenous communities.

Survival of Indigenous Peoples

The initial drive of the research has come as a question: if Christianity is to offer salvation to everyone, what does the Indigenous salvation look like? An exploration of such a question involves:

- Indigenous culture and worldview.
- Comparative theology with Christianity.
- Historical process and the current dynamic of religious understanding in the Indigenous culture.

The process will render the precise definition of what salvation means to the Indigenous people in relation to the Christian faith.

Robert Thomas is a Cherokee elder, a practitioner of the Cherokee traditional religion, a mentor to a wide variety of younger Indigenous leaders, and an anthropologist at the University of Arizona. A collection of some of his writings, *Getting to the Heart of the Matter*, was produced as a result of the gatherings of the Native Ministries Consortium over twenty-five years. All his writings in the collection reflect his concern and passion for the survival of Indigenous peoples:

American society is well known for its ability to incorporate and absorb disparate social and cultural groups. Some intellectuals have likened America to a significant social and cultural 'cement mixer,' a colossal homogenization machine. Conversely, it is difficult for distinct groups and people to survive, socially and culturally, in such a milieu (Thomas 1990).

He then said that the Indigenous community could survive a profound cultural loss and continue as social groups if the following conditions can be established, as shown by the minority peoples in the Old World, such as the Coptic Christians of Egypt, the Basques of Spain, the Welsh of the British Isles, the Ainu of Hokkaido, and the Maya of Yucatan in Mexico, who have survived in such circumstances with four features in common (Thomas 1990:23):

- A distinct language, even if it simply functions as a ceremonial/holy language.
- A unique religion, even if it is their own version of a world religion.
- A tie to a particular piece of land, a homeland, and a holy land.
- A sacred history which tells you who you are and why you must survive as a people.

To Thomas, to have a unique religion includes having a unique cultural theology of a world religion. In other words, a local theology should and can serve as a part of their cultural representation and be a religion to unite its people.

Given the weight of those scripture passages where the salvation of a group was called for, rather than individual salvation, the Apostle Paul expressed his concern over Israel's salvation, as in Romans 10:1 and elsewhere, the distinctive group identity and cultural survival of the Indigenous people in North America is an essential element in defining their salvation.

This research will encourage Indigenous Christians and missionaries to establish how we should approach and build a solid and viable Indigenous Christian community.

Christological Challenges

One of the most important tenets of the Christian faith is that Christ precedes culture, meaning all cultures are created in Christ. But, in all cultures, the knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth was unavailable and, thus, had to be brought by a Christian mission. Whether this was done effectively by connecting it to the cosmic Christ in every culture needs to be considered.

Indigenous theologians also realized that the contextual theologies among Indigenous people would not occur without an in-depth reflection on the relationship between Christianity and Indigenous cultures or without a corresponding Christological vision. Achiel Peelman, a member of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate and Faculty of Theology at Saint Paul University, brings an important discussion of Indigenous Christology to the Indigenous theology,

There can be no Amerindian church without an Amerindian Christ. But who is this Indian Christ...? What is his place in the spiritual universe of the Amerindian peoples? How do they visualize him? What impact does his gospel have on their life? (Peelman 2006).

Christological challenge is not only seen within the churches but also in the larger discussion between Christianity and other religions (Dupuis 1991). As recent demographic inquiries indicate that the majority of Christians living in the Third World witness the passage from a theology almost exclusively associated with Western cultures to a more international and planetary theology (Buhlmann 1976). This is the situation in which the majority of the Indigenous peoples find themselves (Peelman

2006:14).

The vitality of the Indigenous Religious Experience

It is seldom reported that when the missionaries came, they faced the vital religious experiences of Indigenous people. Their ancestral spirituality remains the true place for them even after the definite plantings of the Christian churches. As Peelman notes,

Many historical and anthropological studies of the Indian missions in Canada demonstrate that the Amerindian spiritual universe did resist the formidable confrontation with western civilization and Christianity, even though the churches fulfilled their mission in a culturally aggressive way (Peelman 2006:20).

The study of cultural practice and spirituality is where we find the interpretation of Indigenous religious experience. Peelman asserts that the understanding of 'Amerindian Christ' must be found in Amerindian religious experience.

Whether we consider the Indian missions of Canada a success or failure, we must recognize that this ancestral spirituality remains the true place where we will eventually discover the hidden face of the Amerindian Christ (Peelman 2006:20).

Peelman examines Indigenous spirituality in their cultures to imagine Christ within their cultures. Indigenous Christian peoples find their core spiritual place in ancestral spirituality, and he questions if Christ may be found in that places. Indigenous people answer the question, 'Who do you say I am?' (Matt.16.15), he suggests that can be found among the Innu in Northern Quebec and urban Indians, in the land of Anishinaabe, or for the Wet'suw'eten Indians in British Columbia. Euro-Christianity's heeding to Indigenous wisdom will fully integrate Indigenous Christianity as they seek to find cultural continuity into the broader Christianity.

Theological Interpretation of 'Christic Mystery'

North American Indigenous people responded to the missionary action of the Christian Church with cultural and religious creativity. Their response presents itself as a unique and original answer that transcends the expectations of the missionaries and the objectives of their churches. Peelman continues,

Instead of stating that the Amerindians have become Christian, but that Christianity never became Indian, it would be more exact to say that the Amerindians have not become Christian like us and that they have not spontaneously joined our western churches. After their conversion, they managed to create their own expressions of Christianity on the fringe of the official churches and often in opposition to them. They often reinterpreted the Christian faith from the cultural

vantage point of their religious experience. Some have turned their back on the Church, while others commit themselves to an Amerindian renewal of their Christian communities. All these tendencies represent a broad spectrum of cultural and religious developments which need attention to theological interpretation (Peelman 2006:83).

The critical base of this interpretation is the emergence of the mystical presence of Christ in the mission, which validates the space for an Indigenous interpretation that comes from their cultural and religious experience. This interpretation implies that we cannot deduce Christian missions only in sociology, anthropology, and the Church's mission strategy. However, the mission of the Church is understood to serve the mystery of Jesus Christ, who gave his life for the salvation of the world. Christ himself reveals a mysterious presence among those who welcome his gospel.

Indigenous contextualization attempts were made from the understanding that all humans share one God or a supreme being, albeit in various forms. The idea of one God does not always contain the discussion within the theological limits of Christianity but instead brings it out into the field of comparative religious studies. Peelman's idea of 'Christic mystery' shifts the discussion from comparative religious studies to the Christian theological discussion. The validity of his new insight needs to be further explored in the field of Christian theology.

CONCLUSION: CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

In constructing a contextual Christian theology in post-colonial terms, theologians have chosen to go down three major paths of theological trends - inculturation, liberation, and reconstruction (Mugambi 2002:190). In the recent past, liberation and inculturation have been the two most fashionable theological responses.

Adams employed reconstruction as a theological method (Adams 2010). Religiosity is reflected in every aspect of human life. By critically analysing the key elements of culture, we understand the religious ideas of the people. These religious ideas provide the windows through which we understand the cultural form of Christianity. He uses the positive elements from a Ghanaian tradition to reconstruct his local theology. But he struggles with selectiveness of the cultural elements that he chooses to give theological meanings, since he sees the other elements in the same tradition are incompatible with the Christian tradition of his choice. Thus, Adams' reconstruction is constrained by the incompatibility with a certain brand of Christian theology (Adams 2010).

However, Adams' methodology, Bediako noted, is unique and innovative that it shows that the religious identity understood from the study of tradition can

now provide a basis of cultural understanding of Christianity.

The real innovation in Adams' work lies in how elements of religious faith embedded in Asante religious worldview and portrayed in Odwira – basically a purificatory and atonement festival – can provide a framework for understanding the cultural shape that Christianity has taken among the Asante. In this process, traditional Christian notions of time and participation in transcendence acquire new dimensions of interpretation. (Adams 2010: Foreword)

The cultural construction of contextual theology aims to see how fundamental religious values can be embedded and survive through the historical process in a local worldview to give a local person an understanding of the gospel. Thus, it is not a theological approach to a culture but a culture that provides a point of view from which Christianity is understood. Cultural construction is an attempt to view and form a local theology. This method deals with more missiological aims than theological or philosophical angles. All elements of Christian doctrine are culturally understood. This method renders a theology free from power struggles and does not produce counterforces since it naturally builds and understands a local theology from its cultural sources. It also evades immediate deconstruction compared to previous theologies since it seeks to build a theology from its own culture.

The cultural construction of contextual theology aims to see how fundamental religious values can be embedded and survive through the historical process in a local worldview to give a local person an understanding of the gospel. Thus, it is not a theological approach to a culture but a culture that provides a point of view from which Christianity is understood. Cultural construction is an attempt to view and form a local theology.

However, Indigenous political situations are less than optimistic and much different from that of Africa. Indigenous people live in the small reserves on the vast lands still occupied by Euro-Americans. The general state of Indigenous churches is reflective of their political situation, dependent and reactionary to external church organizations. Indigenous Christianity has not developed its church organisation and theology compared to the African Church. Despite all

the pessimism, the vision to understand Christianity in their cultural terms may give them spiritual hope to sustain themselves as a people of God.

The way of studying examines the method of the cultural construction of contextual theology. The research outcome does not aim to render a complete theology by the conventional measure of Christianity. Still, it shows a shape of Christianity native to and develops within a culture.

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