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“CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY”

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INTRODUCTION

For the past centuries, the Christian mission of North American Indigenous peoples and other indigenous groups rendered awkward consequence that 'the relationship with their Creators required them to reject their own identity and adopt a European one. The effect was to leave Indigenous people in self-doubt and self-rejection (Leblanc 2014: 512). Inadvertently, the mission caused social and cultural assimilation more than spiritual transformation (Knockwood 1992: 134). This setback was not a problem of distant history; but, the twentieth-century mission utilized the same mission model.

Unfortunately, older approaches to the mission with Indigenous peoples produced dismal outcomes as a result. The mandate of the twentieth-century mission was to continue the task that begun as far as the earliest Jesuit mission among the Mi'kmaq, Maliseet, and others at the dawn of the seventeenth century (Thwaites 1896) – namely, civilizing and Christianizing (Ross 2010). The old model of Indigenous mission was implemented across the denominational lines and arguably still is in the missions today (LeBlanc 2014: 513). This concern was pointed back to Edinburgh 1910 that the theology of mission was shortcomings of a common pre-Reformation theological history and its construction of the nature and purpose of the mission. The task of rethinking the theological presupposition of mission and shift of methods was not the concern dealt within the conference at Edinburgh 1910 (Philip 1910: 64).

In this mode of mission to the Indigenous people who came across Christianity, the mission had no interest in the other aspects of their life but offered salvation of soul and eternal life. Even in the ardent missionary

endeavour toward Indigenous people, they were largely side-lined in the growth of the contemporary societies and subjugated by those bringing the gospel. Around the late 1980s, Indigenous believers started seeking to facilitate spiritual transformation and growth with an Indigenous frame of reference, without leaving their relationship with Jesus. They started engaging the daunting task of stripping the cultural wrapping of '*propositional, controlling, Westernized, religious expressions of the gospel*' and pursued transformation through the singular power of the gospel (LeBlanc 2014: 514). Nevertheless, this movement often faced oppositions in being seen as

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heterodox or idolatrous.

However, the model of holistic mission at that time saw the horizontal interpretation of the gospel only within the limits of social justice, social action, political liberation, and socio-political issues, but, unfortunately, still oblivious to contextual approach. Indigenous mission started from its beginning in the colonial era, without any concern for the vast cultural gap and the cultural mediation of the gospel for their culture. Nevertheless, it is often perceived that the culture stood in the way of the gospel. In the earlier mission in Northwest Canada, there were indications, according to the Wesleyan Missionary Society Report, that 'Indian missions' were widely suspected of being a failure. The report signified that perceived failure always connected to the resurgence of Indigenous traditional practices.¹ It offers a theory as to the collapse of the mission by then. Still, the sustaining issue between culture and the gospel has been the most contended topic in the mission of Indigenous people.

Jack Forbes, an Indigenous American scholar, pointed out that the gap was created by the differences in the perception of religion. He noted that the apparent cause for this gap was because Indigenous religion is *not prayer; it is not a church; it is not theistic; it is not atheistic; it has little to do with what the white people call religion*. In addition to what is not a religion, religion is living and what they do twenty-four hours a day (1979: 26-27).

Consequently, the difference in the perception of religion led to a wide gap in the assessment of Christian progress by Christian denominations. The Indigenous theologian Vine Deloria Jr. learned in his encounter with the presbyterian minister who was in charge of Indigenous missions and his intended plan to continue their missionary work among an Indigenous tribe that lived as Christians for more than 350 years. Because he saw that the job is not done (1988: 112). The study contends that Christianity in Indigenous culture can grow differently from conventional Christianity and take a unique cultural form. Cultural understanding and new expressions of the gospel have been advocated by field missionaries and Christian anthropologists. This cultural form of Christianity may differ from the terms and concepts used in traditional Christian theologies. However, within the most basic Christian doctrinal framework, new terms must be re-examined and recognized.

Therefore, the contextual or theological approach of the mission requires this study to recognize what kind of Christianity the cultural characters possessed by the traditional Indigenous tribes have formed and will make in the future. This type of study falls into the category of local contextual theology.

Contextual theology deals with the integral aspects of Christian theology. Most Christians profess that the doctrine of Trinity stands at the centre of the Christian

faith. However, for Indigenous cultures, the Trinity was a theological concept regarding God's inner nature that was foreign and culturally distant from their thought world. To have a meaningful dialogue of the basic understanding of Christianity with the Indigenous constructive thoughts, it needs to study through comparison of cultural sign systems at a symbolic/philosophical level.

Furthermore, the contextual approach to Indigenous mission requires theological starting points different from the conventional theology. The general missional thinking was much influenced by the West's view on Indigenous culture and people: They considered Indigenous people as "savage (Lescarbot 1610: 91) and 'heathen' (Le Jeune 1634: 229). But Indigenous people should have understood God if it is accepted that God was omnipresent and not absent from what was deemed a "godless and heathen land and people. In other words, Indigenous people required no new paradigm of thought-world to know about God.

The exact process challenges the conventional scope of Biblical interpretations and reinterprets them from the perspectives of Indigenous culture. An Indigenous theologian suggests a few comparisons of definition needed in this contextual process (Leblanc 2014):

- The western definition of the spiritual is behaviour, going to Church, reading the Bible, or praying. In contrast, spirituality for Indigenous people is a general disposition towards life in which all of the creation shares a spiritual nature.
- Seemingly fictitious and lavishly embellished Indigenous stories carry objective and factual teachings for life and the community. These collective communal narratives have embedded cultural meanings about which all understandings are viewed through the idea of their spatial community.
- A contextual approach is possible only on the acknowledgement that, as Indigenous creation myth is true, there is but one Creator of all.
- Lastly, as a practical concern, contextual and restorative approaches to the mission of Indigenous people are far more impacting and biblically appropriate than seeking to replace Indigenous culture with other cultural ways.

As the character of the Christian God needs to be understood through the idea of a tribal deity to an Indigenous person, as a beginning point, the Christian practices derived from their cultural specificity can bring about other aspects, such as ecclesiological forms and worship style. On what grounds can these cultural interpretations of Christianity be considered valid based on what spiritual values were sought in their communities and what collaborative practices these values caused them to act, and whether the actions showed Christian theological understanding.

Besides, one of the irremovable features of the Christian religion was the fact of the historical Christ. How it is possible to mediate Christ to the Indigenous people culturally is the primary search of the quest.

1. 1874-78/78-84. Microfilm. Vancouver, Canada: The United Church Archives at Vancouver School of Theology.

The common cultural heroes appeared in too many inter-tribal myths shared in a wide range of cultural groups. However, the central theme of their hero myths was the tribal survival that evolved into an advanced concept of communal system in time. Thus, the critical aim of the search lies in the understanding of their community.

Another critical study explores how the traditional Indigenous conception of the spirit informs the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit. The traditional communal ceremony of adaptation of the spirit revealed the nature and function of the spirit. It told about the traditional ideas of spirits and the concept of the transformation they pursued in the spirit adaptation. Their concept of spirit evolved through time, like the idea of spirit in the OT (Ps. 78:39; Is.32:2; 2Kings 2:11; Ps. 11:6). Comparing the two developments mended the gap: how did the spirit become the Holy Spirit. Christianity understood through the Indigenous cultures showed a different practical outlook from traditional Christianity. Moreover, since their religious ideas were deeply rooted and operated in the community, the current form of Christianity could not be established outside of their community. Thus, Christianity took a form that was absorbed in the traditional society, and, consequently, it was not easy for conventional Christianity to perceive the cultural form of Christianity. Thus, this approach engaged in studying the aspects of their culture that allowed the relevant topics.

Thus, the construction of theology that can accommodate a specific tribe or social group requires the contextualization of theology, also called local theology or Christian inculturation. Postcolonial theologians expressed their suspicion of the colonial Church and eurocentric theological scholarship to create an encounter between the Biblical text and the cultural context. Culture and tribal worldview, once condemned as pagan, have now been revisited as the subject of biblical interpretation.

CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

The contextualization of theology attempts to understand Christian faith in terms of a particular context, which is a 'theological imperative' (Bevans 2012: 3). What we called the history of Christian thoughts consisted of a series of local theologies. Therefore, theology should deal with cultural concepts along with theological ideas, to adequately represent the culture. Importantly, conversion to Christianity must be coupled with cultural continuity (Fasholé-Luke 1975). The theology that we have come to understand today is the outcome of a very process of contextualization. A contextual approach to theology is not only in many ways a radical departure from the noting of traditional theology but, at the same time, it is very much in continuity with it (Bevans 2012: 3).

PRESENT HUMAN EXPERIENCE

A new theological source for contextual theology is the 'present human experience' (context). This change makes contextual theology radically different from classical theology. Classical theology was understood as a reflection on the two theological sources of scripture and tradition that have not changed and conceived as a kind of objective science of faith. However, contextual theology recognizes the 'present human experience' (Bevans 2012: 4).

Moreover, theology is not just a matter of relating to an external message. It needs to be treated as relating to the deep roots of the cultural and historical situation since the understanding of reality comes as the perceived reality of the human context. As Charles Kraft puts it:

“There is always a difference between reality and human culturally conditioned understandings of that reality. We assume that there is a reality out there, but it is the mental constructs of that reality inside our heads that are most real. God, the author of reality, exists outside any culture. Human beings, on the other hand, are always bound by cultural, subcultural, and psychological conditioning to perceive and interpret what they see of reality in ways appropriate to these conditionings. Neither the absolute God nor the reality created is perceived absolutely by culture-bound human beings” (Kraft 1979:300).

Indigenous people saw their reality through their cultural lenses and expressed it through their language. Since their reality was also closely related to nature, their cultural views were often expressed through nature around them. Therefore, their indigenous theology can only be created and expressed through this understanding of their reality.

SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION IN CONTEXT

The Scripture and tradition were also developed in cultural and historical contexts. As we recognize the importance of context for new theology, we also need to acknowledge the obvious importance of context for the development of both scripture and tradition. They are products of peoples and their cultures. The different names of God in the Old Testament point to different cultural meanings, interests, and human circumstances. The Hebrew God, El, Eloah, Elohim, or El Elyon, convey the idea of a transcendent being, superhumanly strong and with everlasting life. Adonay means one who rules over everything. Yahweh is God's name, which was given to Moses in his encounter with God in the Hebrew scriptures (Ferguson et al. 1988: 274).

The various cultures of humankind have their unique understanding of God. The scripture also confirms that God gave the desire of eternity to the hearts of humanity, in Ecclesiastes (3:11), as it says, '[God] has also set eternity in the human heart'. This biblical

evidence enables the dialogue of God in each culture because it confirms that the Creator of this world is one, and the Creator is understood to be unique in every culture.

The stories of the synoptic gospel are written in different cultural perspectives also reveals a specific cultural and traditional context. The process by which the law was formed in the tribal community, before the law of the Old Testament was codified, may be similar to forming of the laws of other tribal societies. The past scripture and tradition were preserved in a context. In doing a contextual theology, a significant part of the theological task is to discover about past Christian theology and consider the present experience, the context. It is authentic theology 'when what has been received is appropriated, made our own. For that to happen, the received tradition must, of course, pass through the sieve of our individual and contemporary-collective experience: we cannot give it, profess it as ours, unless such a process occurs' (Hall 1993: 33).

Moreover, cultures naturally preserve divine standards for the survival of society and human continuity. In a parenthetical note in the book of Romans (2:14-15), the Apostle Paul implies his understanding that the same ideals of the law in the Old Testament Hebrew culture were also 'written in the hearts' of those in other cultures. Conn affirms that 'cultures are also the means of God's common grace. God uses the shaping of human cultures to check the rampant violence of evil and preserve human continuity through his providential control' (Conn 2000: 254). This also provides an essential methodological element of Indigenous theology. This perspective provides us with a critical basis for discussing contextual Christian theology in different cultures.

'PROPHETS' AND 'POETS' OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES

Schreiter's notions of the 'prophets' and 'poets' as players in the making of a contextual theology touch the very nature of the balance of the overall contextual process: prophets give an expression of the gospel in the community; poets capture the 'rhythm and contour' of the experience of the community. However, the process of contextual theology is not minimized to either one of them, for they both are essential parts (1985: 18-19). In a tribal community, like the Nuu-chah-nulth, where the influence and knowledge of Christianity are scarce, prophetic as well as poetic inputs are gradually spearheaded by the movement of the community itself.

Over the last 200 years of exposure to Christianity, the gospel narrative influenced and naturally shaped the stories of the Nuu-chah-nulth people in the way of appropriating it to their culture. Many origin myths were naturally shaped to a parallel, ready to be compared to the Christian worldview: Creator,

the world, community, and possibly salvation. These theological processes seem to have been slowly carried out by natural, cultural synthesis, not consciously driven.

The balance of prophetic (gospel) and poetic (experience) is at the centre of different approaches to contextual theology. Bevans presented a cascade of contextual theology models in six various forms (2012): the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model, the transcultural model, and the countercultural model. As Schreiter noted, the word 'model' explains how contextual theology arrives at theology and suggests specific interests or principles that help guide the process (1985: 6). The first two contextual models were discussed here because the comparison between these two renders a justification for a theological model used in Indigenous contexts.

THE TRANSLATION MODEL

The translation model translates words and grammar and translates the meaning of the Bible and tradition into cultural languages and symbols. It is also a model that discovers the spirit of the Bible to understand it culturally. So, it needs to be idiomatic or must be done by functional or dynamic equivalence. This dynamic-equivalence method of translation aims to elicit the same reaction in contemporary hearers or readers as the original hearers or readers. Bevans notes that the translation model applies to every model of contextual theology.

However, the centre of gravity of the model lies in the text (Scripture) and tradition (Church). In that sense, the model can be understood as a translation of traditional theology in a context (Bevans 2012: 37-53). Schreiter viewed the translation model as a two-step process. First, a conventional theology frees its Christian message as much as possible from its previous cultural accretions, so, for the second step, a new cultural situation can apply the data of revelation in their culture (1985: 7). In the past century, European and North American theologians attempted the so-called de-Hellenization of Western Christendom, which meant to remove Greek categories from the biblical revelation. The dynamic-equivalent method used in Bible translation is similar to this model, where specific terms and ideas in the Bible in one culture were replaced with the equivalents sought in the local language.

However, the problem with this model is that a simple translation cannot overcome the differences between the total world view based on culture and the paradigm of understanding of religion. The making of contextual theology involves broader and deeper interactions with the entire culture since culture broadly defines who they are. The contextual dialogue is perceived not as 'the encounter between parallel religious systems but as a personal experience of integration' (Peelman 2006: 17). In an essence,

contextual theology is the incarnation of Christian life and the Christian message in a particular cultural context (Shorter 1988: 11). And it is an incarnation in such a way that this process not only finds expression through the proper element to the culture but becomes a norm to guide the culture, transforming it and remaking it to bring about a new creation. A contextual theology is more than what the translation can establish but as an experience that can give birth to a new creation. The word 'incarnation' signifies that contextual theology is wildly new, compared to one that existed before and yet delivered in an environment familiar to the people in the context.

INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY IN THE TRANSLATION MODEL

Twiss, Sicangu Lakota, was converted to Christianity and became a pan-Indian activist. His early writings and activism focused on advocating *cultural ways of Christian expressions in worship*, and revealed that he believed the historical inference that Christianity would be communicated to Indigenous people in North America by white people, which was seen through the vision of Indigenous elders he respected. In his humble demeanour, he wrote:

In the providence of the Almighty God, believe he planned that the white man from across the great water would deliver the sacred message of Jesus to the First Nations of this continent. Our gracious heavenly Father redeems our worst blunders and causes all things to work together for good. Had the roles been reversed, I doubt we Native people would have performed better than the Europeans (Twiss 2000: 25). Therefore, he adhered to the ideas that Christianity was a religion of white people and destined to reveal to Indigenous people of North America. The received form of Christianity, traditionally western, posed no significant difficulty understanding the Christian message. His concern was to use more cultural expressions of Indigenous people. He envisioned Indigenous believers to be 'full of passion for God, strength and beauty, using their traditional dances, music and colourful dress to speak to captivated audiences worldwide' (2000:19). His theological thoughts mainly operated in Western Christianity, which limited contextualization to adopting the expressions of Indigenous cultures. Anticipating the revival of Western Christianity in Indigenous nations, he envisioned that the Indigenous people in North America use their unique position for world evangelization (2000: 19).

Furthermore, Twiss relates indigenous worship expressions with the past controversy using the electric guitars and drums in the 70s and 80s in the Church. He wanted the Church to fully adopt the use of Indigenous drums, gongs, rattles and dances as legitimate expressions of godly faith (2000:21). As he heard the news report about a Canadian pastor prevented spiritual dances of indigenous people, he

lamented how little are the general understandings of the Christianity of different cultural groups, especially of the indigenous people in Canadian society (Twiss 2015: 26). He explicated the slowness in Indigenous people coming to Christ the lack of cultural translation:

"My twenty years of observation and participation in mission activities among First Nations people has 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, a deficient number of Native people are actively engaged in a life of faith in Jesus and participation in some Christian tradition (2015: 28)."

He maintained that the Christian message in the form it was received was good but translating it in an Indigenous context was necessary. His ideas for an Indigenous theology align as closely as what Bevans and Schreiter would describe as the translation model. The goal of his contextualization lies in maintaining traditional Christianity with Indigenous expressions. Besides, the pan-Indigenous approach to contextual theology was considered a socio-political movement with a minor concern for contextualizing individual Indigenous cultures. Thus, it poses apparent limits since there is 'no single Native American theology for all' (Kidwell et al. 2004: ix). Indigenous scholars say that there can be no unified expression of Indigenous culture. Nevertheless, it is a habit of non-Indigenous to homogenize Indigenous groups, levelling differences among them unconsciously.

SYNCRETISM AND DUAL RELIGIOUS SYSTEM

Two problems usually surface when the gospel enters a non-Western context: '*syncretism and dual religious systems*' (Schreiter 1985: 146). Doing a contextual theology within the rubrics of the translation model may bring out more tension between syncretism and contextualization, because, as aforementioned, the centre of gravity of the translation model lies in the text and tradition. Thus, the model can be understood as a translation of traditional theology in a context. The etymology of the word 'syncretism' suggests that it has to do with the mixing or crashing two religious systems that damages' basic structure and identity (Schreiter 1985: 144). However, whether Indigenous culture and spirituality can be seen as a religious system is a topic of another study.

Nevertheless, An Indigenous leader defines syncretism as 'the attempted reconciliation or union of different or opposing principles or practices or parties, as in philosophy or religion. The attempted union of principles of parties irreconcilably at variant with each other, especially the doctrines of certain religionists' (Jacobs 2003: 3). Jacobs maintained that Christianity exists above culture, and it must be that the text and

tradition which guides constructing a contextual theology. The proper scope of cultural interpretation is permissible only as it continues Christian theology's basic structure and tradition. It seems that syncretism is a dreadful topic to some in choosing the model of indigenous theology, seeing that the term is being used as a tool to justify a certain class of theology.

Syncretism is the most feared response to Native culture among most Evangelical Christians. No one wants to compromise his or her commitment to Christ and the importance of His redemptive work. Syncretism in this context means taking non-Biblical Native beliefs and practices and making them one with Christianity. There are many areas of Native beliefs that are in agreement with the Bible. There are other areas where there is obvious and serious disagreement. (NAIITS vol.1, no 1)²

Using a spiritual dance in Christian worship was acceptable to Twiss. However, assuming the similarities between Christian tradition and certain cultural practice 'without qualification' was perceived as 'dangerous' to him (2000: 127). His definition of 'unqualified' is 'adopting foreign forms but interpreting them largely in local ways' (2000:127). The words he used, 'unqualified' and 'foreign,' are somewhat ambiguous because his qualification of the terms seems to be in his internal system. The conceptual framework of contextualization for Twiss mainly came from the theological ideas and languages of Western theology. His method is to evaluate individual tradition or ceremony of Indigenous cultures instead of looking at the theological process of cultural formation.

Twiss used the Native American Church's (NAC) practice of peyote in their services as an example of syncretism. The NAC uses the Bible and Christian songs in their services. But what sets them apart from the rest of the Christian Church is the prescribed use of the hallucinogenic drug found in peyote. He argued that the hallucinating nature of the plant was to enhance one's closeness to God, making him or her holier. He provided three definitions for which to measure the threshold of syncretism:

Syncretism is a belief or practice, whether in Anglo (white) church on Sunday morning or in a Native ceremony, that attempts to replace or distort the historical doctrines of justification, righteousness, atonement, holiness, redemption, sanctification, salvation, and so; anything that tries to replace, augment or add to the long-standing doctrines of historical Christianity; and any belief or practice that says Christ's work is not enough (Twiss 2000: 128).

However, Heart (1998), from the opposite side, argues that the use of peyote is symbolic, and it is a 'medicine from the Creator' to help people. Prayers are not made to the peyote, and the people who participate in the sacramental peyote are not concerned with what it

contains but helps them in the worship of God. They use it as a symbolic sacrament, 'much as the Christian use of wine in the communion and the Jewish people in the Passover celebrations' (Heart & Larkin 1998: 203).

Schreiter noted that Christian literature regarding syncretism has always taken a hostile stance toward the phenomenon. Anything that would dilute or substantially alter the fundamental structures of Christianity was combated vigorously. The importance of keeping the gospel message 'pure' and 'unadulterated' has been a constant concern of the Christian Church (1985: 144).

The fundamental reason for the phenomenon of religious syncretism is that the two cultures or religions that are encountered have separately developed without intercommunicating or affecting each other over the indefinite past. Therefore, if a Hindu Indian came to believe in Christianity, he would not become a Westerner but remain Hindu. Indigenous Americans also did not become white after they believed in Christianity and remained Indigenous. It is said that the Christian natives became more aware of the spirituality of their culture after believing in Christianity. Conversion to the Christian faith did not displace their native spirituality. These phenomena appear weak in some cultures and strong in others. Western Christianity is accepted almost as it is in cultures those to Western Christian civilization and in its sphere of influence. Still, in cultures isolated or not under the cultural impact, this dual form of faith appears strong.

Schreiter suggested some practical considerations for approaching syncretism (1985: 157-158). First, he pointed out that if the gospel message is genuinely heard in the local culture, the message must find a place among the most fundamental idea of the culture, with an accompanying change in codes, signs, and the entire sign system. The eventual change would be mutual: 'Christ can be found in culture but making that discovery explicit will have consequences for the culture' (1985: 157).

He also pointed out that religion, for certain people, cannot be reduced simply to a set of ideas. Religious means varies from culture to culture, from private voluntary association to a culture to which one is born. The believers with their cultural identity seldom abandon the culturally understood gospel. They do not see Christianity as an alien set of religious ideology but understand it as their own. Second, syncretism and dual religious systems are about the 'entirety of the religious sign system' and not concerned with theology. By this, he meant, replacing a biblical figure in the Bible to an Indigenous elder cannot be done theologically, but 'by looking at the entirety of the sign system which social relations it maintains, what problem it solves, what benefit accrue from keeping things as they are' (1985: 157).

This movement of change introduces the anthropological model of contextual theology. While

². NAIITS is short name for North American Indigenous Institute of Theological Studies. The quote is from their journal publication labelled NAIITS vol. 1, no.1.

the translation model brings a saving message into the context and makes sure the message is delivered in a relevant and attractive way, the anthropological model engages in looking for the revelation and self-manifestation of God as it is hidden in the values, relational patterns, and concerns of a context (Bevans 2012: 56). Therefore, the missionary in the translation model is seen as 'pearl merchant,' while the missionary in the anthropological model' as treasure hunter' (Rush 1991: 45-57).

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL MODEL

The anthropological model of contextual theology is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the translation model. Suppose the primary concern of the translation model is the preservation of Christian identity while attempting to take culture, social change, and history seriously. In that case, the primary concern of the anthropological model is the establishment or preservation of cultural identity by a person of Christian faith. This model centres on the value and goodness of the human person, human experience as it is realized in culture, social change, geographical and historical circumstances. It seems that God's hidden presence can be manifested in the ordinary structures of the situation. It also considers the more general human categories of life, wholeness, healing, and relationship as the standards of genuine religious expression rather than corresponding with a particular message (Bevans 2012: 55). Thus, the anthropological model is shaped by a specific concern with authentic cultural identity. This model emphasizes their cultural identity and continuity. It focuses on how traditional theology can be understood by people belonging to a culture (Schreiter 1985: 13-15).

The anthropological model is preferred for constructive theology in Indigenous Christianity because the parallel theological concepts and terms of traditional Christian theology are not voluntarily available in most Indigenous cultures. Since religion, with most of its theological languages, is a western construct (Schreiter 1985: 149), attempting to translate them in the Nuu-chah-nulth culture might cause uncertainties in meaning. The indigenous theology may be constructed more in depth by observing and studying their culture, in my context, origin myths, traditional feasts, rituals, and contact history.

CRITERIA FOR ORTHODOXY

Also, Contextual theology needs to be constructed based on orthodox Christian theology. There could be an error in contextual theology in bringing in entirely different elements from Christian orthodoxy. Giving extra weight to cultural factors in contextual theology can make the error of bringing about ideas that are different from Christian orthodoxy or reducing it to a kind of 'culture theology' that excludes the elements of orthodox Christianity. This fear raised concerns about the possibility of 'syncretism' and contextualizing

theology among evangelical scholars (Conn 1992: 176-184). And also, the Roman Catholic papal documents such as *Evangelii Nuntiandi* encourage 'theological expression which takes account of differing cultural, social, and even racial milieu.' However, they still caution that the content of the faith 'must be neither impaired nor mutilated' (1975: 65).

The issues of pluralism in our contemporary theology challenge contextual theologians to search for criteria of orthodoxy. The question is posed this way:

Suppose there are so many divergent and sometimes conflicting interpretations. How can we be sure that our understanding of our faith is correct, that is, faithful to the Judeo-Christian tradition? Is it possible to recognize one faith in the different interpretations? Does pluralism not become an ideology of adaptation when adapted or inculturated is considered correct? Should we not, perhaps, re-introduce at least some basic and universal truths, conceptually expressed and accepted as such? (Mesa & Wostyn 1982: 86).

Three criteria for orthodoxy were suggested (1982: 103-117). First, since the Christian message has basic intentionality, a new, contextual formulation of faith or doctrine should be oriented in the same direction as other successful or approved formulation. For Christians, the fundamental religious proposal is 'God is Love' (Bevans 2012: 23). If ethical principles were used to guide human culture before the concept of religion sprouted upon this planet, it was love. Generally, the theme of God's love is to be accepted as a cosmic fact and seen as a motive for creation. Anything that would run in a contrary direction could not at all be an appropriate Christian theological expression. Second, a criterion of Christian orthopraxis was proposed (1982: 103-117). A theological term that would lead to un-Christian actions, e.g., hatred of the oppressor or the taking of innocent life, could never be considered orthodox, no matter how meaningful it might be in a culture. Reversely, an expression that seems at first unorthodox might be justified in that it leads a group to a genuinely Christian behaviour. Third, there is the criterion of acceptance by the people of God or proper reception. Theology is the creation of the whole Church, and when the Church as a whole seems to accept particular theological teaching, one can trust it as a genuine one.

Schreiter also discussed five criteria of the Christian faith to be engaged in constructing a contextual theology. Like de Mesa and Wostyn, he first proposed 'inner consistency,' although 'not always a consistency of a linear kind' (Schreiter 1985: 118). Christianity believes that God loves the human race, gives mercy, judges to have sound in the human world, and praises and rewards the righteous, but theological logic that contradicts this cannot be the standard of contextual theology.

However, Schreiter noted that this consistency was not always the one of a linear kind. Often in the Christology of non-Western or tribal theology, the historical person of Jesus is not seen as the incarnated

reality of salvation because it is not easy for historical figures to be mediated culturally. When the gospel was delivered to them, missionaries brought the redemptive story instead of Jesus himself. Thus, the second person in Trinity renders a cultural difficulty to be understood as a redeemer as a historical figure. However, any past attempt to substitute a culture hero of local narratives to Jesus Christ in local theologizing was rejected by the Christian theology.

The second criterion is that a true expression of context theology should lead to worship to God. Schreier used a Latin phrase *lex orandi lex credendi* – that the way we pray points to the way we believe and vice versa (1985: 119). The third criterion proposed is, much in line with de Mesa and Wostyn, that the practices that contradict the basic ideas of Christian theology cannot be justified as a contextual expression of theology. Fourth, a developing contextual theology should be open to and judged by other theology (1985: 120). The architecture of contextual theology should be available to comparison with existing theology and exposed to intense discussion and criticism with existing theology to establish new expressions. Theology created in isolation is at risk of heresy. Fifth, it is the criterion of the strength of theology to challenge other theology. The theology of liberation was not limited to Latin American theologies but challenge feminist theologies of various part of the world, including Asia and black liberation theology.

POST-COLONIAL AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Seeking to develop a valid and robust identity of nations and cultures is another part of the motivation for contextual theology. Colonialism fostered a feeling among people in the colonized world that anything excellent and worthwhile came from the West and whatever was their own was inferior or worthless. Towards the end of the colonial era, when the treaty negotiations were settled and ensured the self-governance of Indigenous groups, the formerly colonized people began to have the confidence to work things out on their terms and in their ways. In religious practice and theology, expressing the new consciousness of independence and self-worth was voiced.

Postcolonial studies the impacts of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their environments. Colonialism often refers to a system of control and to an ideology or culture underlying that control. In general, 'postcolonial' represents an ideological response to and seeking liberation from colonialist thought. Desmond Tutu captured this idea in his writing in the earlier part of his movement:

African theologians have set about demonstrating that the African religious experience and heritage were not illusory and that they should have formed the vehicle for conveying the Gospel verities to Africa ... It was vital for Africa's self-respect that this kind

of rehabilitation of his religious heritage should take place. It is the theological counterpart of what has happened in, say, the study of African history. It has helped to give the lie to the supercilious but tacit assumption that religion and history in Africa date from the advent in that continent of the white men. It is reassuring to know that we have had a genuine knowledge of God and that we have had our own ways of communicating with a deity, ways which meant that we were able to speak authentically as ourselves and not as pale imitations of others. It means that we have a great store from which we can fashion new ways of speaking to and about God and a new style of worship consistent with our new faith (Tutu 1978: 366).

For Tutu, upholding his traditional religious heritages in theologizing is for their self-respect. It is to restore and validate their cultural/religious identity.

Liberation theology is a political movement in Christian theology, which understand the gospel in terms of liberation from unjust political, economic, social, and cultural conditions. It describes as an interpretation of the Christian faith through the sufferings, struggles, and hope of the poor and the oppressed. Indigenous theological discussions often began as reactions to colonial interaction with Christianity.

Leblanc, in his speech at Wheaton School of Theology, classified the class of Indigenous scholars who engage in these discussions into two camps: '*liberal and acculturative*' (Leblanc 2015). The liberal camp operates with the liberation disposition and concludes that nothing of value came to Indigenous people when the white people came into their lives. Tink (George) Tinker, in his historical study, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide*, on four prominent missionaries, concluded that Euro-American missionaries were part of the colonial conspiracy and their objectives were 'the extinction of Indigenous culture' (Tinker 1993). The reason for this determination came from an observation that missionaries who came during the colonial era were insensible to the distinction between the Christian gospel and Western culture.

Consequently, the elimination of Indigenous culture resulted as an intrinsic part of colonial Christian missions. Tinker dismissed the Christian missionaries in all denominations working among Indigenous nations as *partners in genocide*. He also emphasized that the process of Christianization of Indigenous people fostered the internalization of the even more damaging and lasting illusion of Indian inferiority and the idolization of white culture and religion. The sphere of his central theological interests stayed within the liberation theology of Indigenous people (Tinker 1993: 3).

In attempts to liberate the people from the colonial mentality and its lurking psychological effects, postcolonial Indigenous theology always seems to edge with the liberation of theologizing.

INDIGENOUS CHRISTOLOGY

The Papal address to introduce the Second Vatican Council affirmed that 'the substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and how it is presented is another' (Abbot 1966: 715). It was assessed that the church renewal of this kind, which facilitates contextual theological expressions from various non-Western contexts to contribute to a widening of the Christian theology, could not occur without an in-depth reflection on the relationship between Christianity and the Indigenous cultures, and without a corresponding Christological vision (1995: 13). Although the historic encounter between Western missionaries and Indigenous Americans has yet to produce the results of the Christian Church expected by the pioneering missionaries, in the culture of Indigenous tribes, the images of Christ in their own right are being created. There can be no Indigenous church without an Indigenous Christ. Within the contemporary ecumenical movement, the Christological challenge slowly replaces ecclesiological preoccupations, which also inspires the more extensive dialogue between Christianity and other religions (Peelman 1995: 14).

WHO DO THEY SAY THAT I AM?

Jesus asked his disciples two thousand years ago, 'Who do they say that I am?' It has become the most enduring question of the Christian life in terms of individual faith, the character of denominations, and Christian intellectual discourse. Indigenous theology makes some attempt to address the question in various ways.

The indigenous scholars of the 'liberal camp' suggest ways to approach Indigenous Christology. They point out how some ordinary Euro-Christian language is inappropriate for Indigenous imaginations and indicates that there might be more appropriate representations that include the text and context for referencing Jesus and the Christ in a Christian Indigenous context. Their theology re-evaluates the suitability or appropriateness of even this project in the healing process of a colonized community damaged socially, emotionally and spiritually by the past five hundred years of conquest and destruction (Kidwell et al., 2001: 63).

The same scholars equate the suffering of Jesus for the salvation of humankind with a variety of ceremonies whereby the Indigenous individuals took on a discipline of vicarious suffering for the sake of the people as a whole. They see that these ceremonies share the familiar principle that 'the individual undertaking the ceremony undergoes a discipline of suffering on behalf of the people' (2001: 64). They allude that the Indigenous people have no difficulty expressing respect for Jesus as a spiritual person while resisting Church and Christianity. While the Indigenous peoples have a spiritual understanding of the inherently amenable to some central Christian

concepts, e.g., grace, they reject the notion that their cultural ideas are not *spiritual puzzle* pieces that can be locked into a universal Christian worldview. But they want to see that Indigenous spiritual traditions are unique in their own right (Kidwell et al. 2001: 70). These scholars substitute the Christian notion of Jesus the Christ with the idea that the *historical Jesus* and the *historic Christ* were not one-to-one equivalency but to be generative of faith in Jesus as the Christ (2001: 77). Given some of these examples of theological logic, it is hard to qualify these theological efforts to be orthodox Christian theology. Their theological reasoning appears to be arguably aimed at achieving political ends and goes beyond the spheres of Christian theology.³

CHRISTOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

The quest of the Indigenous Christ remains the most critical task in Indigenous Christian theology, which has not been solved by the political motivation of the Indigenous liberation theologians discussed above. This Christological quest is an intrinsic dimension of the contemporary Indigenous movement whereby situated in inescapability from Western culture and the dominant society. Still, they claim the right to be different and control their future (Peelman 1995: 17). Indigenous people understand that they should look first to their tradition to revitalize their cultures and preserve their communities. Once again, they want to drink from their wells without necessarily turning their back on Christianity. Indigenous revitalization is primarily a spiritual movement wherein ancestral religions are gaining new visibility and traditional Indigenous medicine becoming popular. Indigenous peoples today view that the right to be Indigenous as members of the modern world and the return to their traditional values as the best guarantee for their cultural survival (Cleary 1989).

On the other hand, it should be noted that the spiritual traditions of the Indigenous peoples are at a level that is sufficient to discuss Christian theology. Past research on Indigenous rituals seemed to forget that the Indigenous nations of North America had developed complex systems of highly theological and philosophical thinking (Burr 1953: 163). The sun dance of the Plain Indians explains the extraordinary metaphysics surrounding the rite (Jorgenson 1972). The Indigenous vision of the Great Mystery (God) and the Indigenous interpretations of nature are the sources of human wisdom and an ethics of responsibility for our planetary ecosystems. The West struggles with the limits of their philosophical system (Deloria 1992: 78-97). It was assumed that Indigenous people did not have the concept of a supreme being because their spiritual encounters with God occur in the ordinary elements of daily life, as compared to the experiences in institutional religion

3. Some Indigenous theological studies tend to engage in courageous (radical) theological imagination and narrative tools for vital ministry towards Indigenous political survival.

in the West. Thus, the study of cultural practice and spirituality is where we interpret Indigenous religious experience. Indigenous wisdom must fully intergrade with Indigenous Christianity as they seek to find cultural continuity into the broader Christianity. Understanding Indigenous Christ must be located in Indigenous religious experience to determine whether we consider the Indian missions of North America a success or failure. Hence, their ancestral spirituality remains the true place where we will eventually discover the hidden face of the 'Amerindian (Indigenous) Christ' (Peelman 2006: 20).

'CHRISTIC MYSTERY'

The Indigenous peoples responded creatively to the missionary action of the Christian Church with their cultural and religious ideas. Their individual responses transcend the expectations of the missionaries and the objectives of their churches. Peelman noted,

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

The creative responses have emerged in the form of syncretic and prophetic movements, the independent church movement, and dimorphic religious stance, but the critical base of this interpretation has to be the emergence of the *mystical presence of Christ* in the mission, which validates the space for an Indigenous understanding 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. But the Church's mission 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.

The Indigenous Christ is found not directly as the inculturation of the Church. As the centrality of the Word of God and the power of the Cross were evoked in his statement, the theological foundation of this search must be the historical person of Jesus himself whom the Indigenous people of North America can encounter through the mission activity of the Church (2006: 93). This statement is not to say

that this orientation has to come from the science of religions which sets out to analyse all the implications of the historical encounter between Christianity and the Indigenous people objectively. *But it is to see the confession of faith in Jesus as the universal Christ.*

The same Papal statement that prioritized maintaining the absolute position of historical Jesus also discreetly invites us to develop a theological discourse on the presence of Christ with cultures (2006: 95). It has not been easy to maintain the 'paradoxical link between Jesus and the universal meaning of his salvific message' as encountered in the entire history of Christianity (2006: 94). Jacques Dupuis demonstrated the paradox of the particularity and the universality of Jesus Christ as 'the cardinal key question' of the Christian theology of religions (1991: 191). In modern times, various attempts were made to reduce the status of Jesus to a mere symbol that is no longer considered the only road to God (Knitter 1985). This question lies in the centre of the search for Indigenous Christ.

To understand or see the implications of *Christic mystery*, we need to perceive the basic link and necessary distinctions between the mission of Jesus, the mission of the Church, and the mission of the Holy Spirit. With the understanding that the Church's mission has no absolute control over the mysterious providence of God with humankind and the world, we can perceive that the Spirit, who operates fully in the fullness of Christ, is at work everywhere in humanity (2006: 95). Indigenous culture itself constitutes the 'Body' that permits Christ to become truly Indigenous: While God has received a unique human face in the person of Jesus, he continued to reveal himself in many other ways throughout history (2006: 95).

Jesus Christ is the very source of each human being's search for God because, in Him, this search has already reached its fulfilment. The death and resurrection of Jesus is also our death and resurrection (Rom 4:25). The unique mystery which accomplished itself in Jesus Christ is made universally available through the gift of his Spirit to each human person and the entire world. Distinctions of race, culture, or religion should not be seen as obstacles to the Christic mystery; the whole creation receives the centre towards which all the search for the Christic mystery of [Indigenous] culture (2006: 96).

Over the last few centuries, the meeting of Indigenous cultures and Christianity has generated some creative responses and ideas. But this meeting has not yet produced a genuinely Indigenous church. These responses and ideas can neither be the process to lead to a church that is entirely truthful to the indigenous people. On the other hand, from the onset of the encounter between Christianity and Indigenous culture, Indigenous culture moved voluntarily toward the redemptive message of Christ, and carefully observed, signs of that can be seen in their culture. Jesus is not easily called in the language of their

cultures, but it manifests in creative ways in their cultures.

PRACTICAL OBJECTIVE

Developing Indigenous Theology is about finding how cultural elements found in the Indigenous culture help them understand Christianity in their cultural way, which constituted an Indigenous contextual theology. The currently available model for the work offers the anthropological contextual model that focuses on preserving cultural identity by a person of Christian faith and centres on the value and goodness of the human person, human experience as it is realized in culture, social change, geographical and historical circumstances. Thus, this work deals with tentative aspects of Christian theology that contrast the theology of traditional Christianity. Having become aware that Indigenous Christology is the focal point in searching for the contour of Indigenous Christianity, the origin myths, traditional festivals, ceremonials, and the conflicts in the historic meeting between their culture and Christianity offer methodical theological discussions.

The historical literature and other critical materials on traditional culture give significant value to the Indigenous contextual theology because, as part of the cultural revitalization movement, Indigenous scholars too are actively examining them. As they reinterpret and give new meanings to their past, the theological discussions also must pay attention to and follow the cultural traditions they kept in their community life and the cultural factors they are re-inventing. With the search for the figure of the Indigenous Christ and the concepts of the Trinity, the quest must consider Indigenous religious experience, Indigenous worldview, and their struggles as Indigenous people. The primary study objectives of current contextual theology are theological themes related to the ideas of Trinity and other crucial Christian theology in the Indigenous culture.

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