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Requiem Mess:
The Bitter Medicine of Religious Change

James Treat
treaty@illinois.edu

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New Overtures: Asian North American Theology in the 21st Century (Essays in Honor of Fumitaka Matsuoka),
edited by Eleazar S. Fernandez

I first crossed paths with Fumitaka Matsuoka in 1992 when he returned to Pacific School of Religion as the academic dean. I was finishing up my doctoral dissertation at the time and serving as teaching assistant for Choan-Seng Song, the distinguished theologian and church leader from Taiwan. The following spring I began teaching Native American studies at UC Santa Cruz, two hours to the south. I nurtured my spirit by making regular pilgrimages back to Holy

Hill, and in the fall of 1994 Fumitaka hired me to teach a course on Native Americans and Christianity. On two subsequent occasions I was invited to offer a condensed version of this course during the Cooperative Summer Session. So I have known Fumitaka as administrator, advocate, and friend; a collegial academic who understands that any authentic North American theology must account for the Native American experience.

What follows was written during my time in Berkeley, for an advanced seminar on Third World theologies. How should we evaluate theological propositions in light of cultural difference and colonial conflict? Having earlier concluded that biculturalism offers the best route to liberating conceptions of Native Christian faith, I finally acknowledged the limits of biculturalism and argued for the indigenization of Native Christianities as an organic, autonomous, open-ended process. My research and writing have continued to cross back and forth between domestic and transnational contexts, a cosmopolitan dialectic roused by kindred spirits such as Fumitaka Matsuoka and Choan-Seng Song. But be forewarned, dear reader: Native Americans were not Asia's second sons sent packing across the Bering land bridge, and we are not just another American minority group. There will be no simple solidarity between indigenous peoples and immigrants, subaltern or otherwise.

The Bitter Medicine of Religious Change

The Canadian film *Where the Spirit Lives*,[1] winner of the award for Best Feature-Length Film at the 1989 American Indian Film Festival, recounts the story of Ashtoh-Komi and her experiences in a missionary-run boarding school. Set in 1937, the fictionalized drama is based on

[1] *Where the Spirit Lives*, videotape, directed by Bruce Pittman (Amazing Spirit Productions, 1989).

actual events in the lives of Native children from the prairie provinces of Canada, and it faces squarely the complexities of the cultural, spiritual, and even physical genocide encountered by these children. The film also raises serious questions about the nature of the Christian faith and its place in a world indelibly marked by cultural pluralism.

As the film begins we observe Ashtoh-Komi, twelve years old and living among her Blackfoot people, playing with her brother and other children around their remote Rocky Mountain encampment. They are intrigued by the sight of an approaching seaplane, which lands on a nearby lake and taxis to the shore near them. After enticing several of the children into the plane by singing a frolicking Irish folk song and offering them pieces of brightly colored candy, the pilot locks the cabin door and proceeds to read aloud (in English) the government decree which states that they are required by law to receive a proper English education. The scene's obvious parallels to sixteenth-century Central America, where Spanish priests recited the *Requerimiento* to Indians before loosing the soldiers on them, are chilling.[2] Thus begins Ashtoh-Komi's long and brutal journey into a foreign and unforgiving world, a world that would attempt to change her very spirit—or destroy her in the process.

The festival program encapsulates well what follows for Ashtoh-Komi and her friends: "Few incidents in the history of Canada's Native policies are as heinous as the one on which

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[2] Wilcomb E. Washburn, ed., *The Indian and the White Man* (Garden City, New Jersey: Anchor Books, 1964), 307-309. A portion of the *Requerimiento* reads as follows: "One of these pontiffs, who succeeded that St. Peter as lord of the world in dignity and seat which I have before mentioned, made donation of these isles and Terra-firma to the aforesaid king and queen and to their successors, our lords, with all that there are in these territories, *as is contained in certain writings which passed upon the subject as aforesaid, which you can see if you wish*…Wherefore, *as best we can* [i.e., spoken in Spanish and often without interpretation], we ask and require you that you consider what we have said to you, and that you take the time that shall be necessary to understand and deliberate upon it." (emphasis added)

'Where the Spirit Lives' is based: determined to instill in Native children a sense of white, Christian values, the government empowered agents to virtually abduct children from communities disregarding orders to send their young to English schools. Their ties to family and tradition cut, their language forbidden, Native children found themselves in remote schools where they were force-fed the bitter medicine of a Christian missionary education."[3] Bitter medicine indeed. During her time at the mission school Ashtoh-Komi finds that the other children are struggling against the same cultural bulldozer she faces. One friend experiences only confusion in trying to understand and establish her own identity, having been taken from her people as an infant and deprived of even their memory. Another girl suffers repeated sexual abuse at the hands of the dormitory matron until she finally escapes, only to be found several days later, having died from exposure. In one particularly disturbing scene, Ashtoh-Komi's idealistic young teacher is visiting with the school's headmaster/minister, who has taken up gardening as a way of coping with the remote, difficult life of the mission station. As the headmaster shows her some of his prize creations, the teacher is surprised at his obvious sense of accomplishment, commenting that the flowers look just like the profusion of plants growing wild on the prairie outside the mission grounds. Unperturbed by her naïveté, the headmaster replies that they may look alike but are actually quite different. He then calmly explains how he observes the utmost care for his plants as he digs them out of the prairie sod, carefully cleans their roots so that not even a trace of dirt remains, and then plants them in the rich, clean soil of

[3] *American Indian Film Festival* program, 1989.

his garden plot. The teacher smiles politely, but as she realizes that the only distinction he is making is a moral one, the expression on her face changes from incredulity to fear.

I. **Predicament: Discontinuity**

Where the Spirit Lives highlights the complex issues involved in the meeting of two very different cultures and their accompanying religious traditions, issues that are complicated even further by the presence of an inequitable power relationship. It presents dual historical realities: an indigenous tribal culture clinging tenaciously to the vestiges of longstanding traditions and practices, and an invading Christian culture proceeding on the basis of a sadistic, even demonic, superiority complex. Both cultures find themselves not only facing each other but also confronted with the ideological predicament posed by their confluence, the predicament of cultural discontinuity.

While the film is a moving portrayal that all viewers can appreciate and be affected by, it is also especially painful in different ways for two particular audiences. For Natives, many of whom have firsthand experience with Indian residential schools (the last mission boarding schools in Canada were closed in 1988; some still exist in the United States), the film is a painful reminder of family, language, spirituality, and culture now forgotten or lost. For Christians, few of whom have firsthand knowledge of Indian missions, the film is indisputable evidence of yet another regrettable chapter in the history of the Western missionary enterprise. If Natives and Christians share one thing in their relationship to the events this film portrays, it is that these events constitute inescapable dimensions of their respective histories. Just as Natives must attempt to fashion individual and tribal identities out of the cultural remnants that have survived

the centuries-long drive toward assimilation, so Christians must search for a basis for the proclamation of good news in the wake of so much news that has been irredeemably bad.

Christians often attempt to deal with the negative dimensions of their own history by drawing a distinction between the *ideals* of the gospel message as preached and practiced by Jesus and the *actions* of professing Christians as witnessed in history. "I'm not perfect, just forgiven," they proclaim. "Don't blame God for the mistakes of Christians." But such a superficial reading of the dilemma fails to satisfy all but the most thoroughly indoctrinated. The Seneca chief Red Jacket could draw on nearly two centuries of his people's experience with the Europeans when, in 1805, he responded to a British missionary's request for permission to establish evangelistic work among the Seneca. Red Jacket pointed out that his people already had a religion they were satisfied with, "which was given to our forefathers and has been handed down to us their children." Still, he was willing to consider the missionary's message, with one stipulation:

> We understand that your religion is written in a book… We only know what you tell us about it. How shall we know when to believe, being so often deceived by the white people? …We are told that you have been preaching to the white people in this place. These people are our neighbors. We are acquainted with them. *We will wait a little while, and see what effect your preaching has upon them. If we find it does them good, makes them honest and less disposed to cheat Indians; we will then consider again of what you have said.*[4]

The presumed distinction between ideals and actions thus fails to adequately address the dilemma posed by the historical record. It is an artifice because the ideals of the gospel message are not so transparent as to allow their satisfactory separation from the actions of Christians who

[4] Washburn, *The Indian and the White Man*, 212-213. (emphasis added)

have acted "in good faith" and from within the faith. The message and the messenger certainly are not indistinguishable, but they also are not completely distinct. To paraphrase Red Jacket, the crimes of Christians implicate the Christian God.

This line of thought points to what is perhaps for Christians the most challenging aspect of *Where the Spirit Lives*, which succeeds as a cinematic portrayal because it combines the cold reality of a documentary with the warm humanity of a drama. Without departing from the generalized historical facts, it establishes a perspective that allows the viewer to experience the events portrayed in their immediacy. Transported to another time and place, and forced to observe unfolding events from the inside out, the viewer finds himself deprived of the luxurious objectivity that detached historical retrospect normally affords. What are otherwise mere historical events become living, breathing realities, and the questions these past realities raise become present—and necessarily open—questions today. These open questions encapsulate the predicament of discontinuity contained in the nexus of culture and religion: (1) The plurality of cultures (including the discontinuity between cultures) challenges the validity of cultural norms and the transmissibility of cultural values as well as the exclusivity of culturally bound religious understandings of revelation, cosmology, history, society, and morality. (2) The barbarity of Western culture in its treatment of non-Western peoples (and even of marginalized groups within its own culture) indicts Christian religious institutions, which have enjoyed a symbiotic relationship with Western culture throughout the process. Tissa Balasuriya comments on the consequences of this development for Christian theology:

> It was a handmaid of Western expansion, an unwitting ally in the exploitation of peoples of other continents, first by Europeans and later by North Americans. The

> symbiosis of the 'sacred duty' of civilizing, baptizing, and saving pagans and the North Atlantic quest for military, economic, political, and cultural domination was disastrous for Christianity itself. It not only made many aspects of Christian theology unacceptable to the rest of humankind, but it also dehumanized the content of Western theology and blinded its practitioners to the cultural implications of what they—and others—were creating.[5]

It should be noted, though it is sometimes forgotten or ignored, that Western Christians are themselves culturally discontinuous with the cultural milieu of Jesus and the early church. Harold Turner points out that the great Western colonial/missionary adventure that began in the sixteenth century resulted in the *second* wave of geographic expansion. "The first gathered up the Mediterranean world and spread out to include the continent of Europe."[6] The Roman numeral "I" in the subheading above is symbolic of the discontinuity that is inescapable for Western Christians; imperial Roman culture was as discontinuous with that of the Hebrews as is Western culture with that of tribal societies. Western Christians no more "own" Jesus than non-Western Christians do.

But despite this reality and the diligent efforts of many non-Western Christians, the Christian religion continues to be controlled by Western institutions and ideas. The discontinuity

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[5] Tissa Balasuriya, "Why Planetary Theology?" in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, ed. Deane William Ferm (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986), 326. Balasuriya's point is well taken, but he is mistaken when he describes traditional Christian theology as the "unwitting" ally of Western expansion and exploitation. Western theologians from Juan Gines Sepulveda to the Dutch Reformed theologians of apartheid have known full well the consequences of their willingness to sacralize colonial empires.

[6] Harold W. Turner, "A Further Dimension for Missions: New Religious Movements in the Primal Societies," *International Review of Mission* 62 (1973): 321. He goes on to make an interesting observation: "After the initial spread into the Mediterranean world, Christianity has depended in each [advance] upon alliance with a culture more sophisticated than that of the peoples it was winning… It moved into Europe in association with a Christianized Graeco-Roman culture, and into the wider world of the primal societies in alliance with the successor Western European culture it had helped to mould" (322).

between Western and non-Western cultures has been and continues to be a major impediment to the meaningful incarnation of the gospel message among non-Western peoples. Christians have attempted to respond to the predicament of discontinuity in a variety of ways, and three general types of response can be identified: conversion, biculturalism, and indigenization. The significance of the Western missionary enterprise for Native children like Ashtoh-Komi has been described as "bitter medicine"; of course, medicine comes in a variety of forms. If cultural discontinuity can be thought of as a *condition*, then the *remedy* has appeared in three qualitatively different varieties: placebo (conversion), palliative (biculturalism), and prescription (indigenization).

Two. Placebo: Conversion

In medical terminology, a placebo is a substance or treatment that lacks intrinsic remedial value but which nevertheless has the capacity to effect relief, and even healing, under certain circumstances. The successful application of a placebo depends entirely on the psychological dimension of the doctor-patient relationship; only the ability of the doctor to project the belief that a placebo will work, and the willingness of the patient to accept this belief as true, can produce positive results. Of course, there are many medical conditions which require a physical cure and for which a placebo will be ineffective. But in many cases the successful application of a placebo is evidence of the degree to which a medical condition is either imagined or remedied by stimulation of the human body's own internal defenses. With few exceptions, the call to conversion issued by Western missionaries has required this kind of trusting acceptance of their message on the part of non-Western peoples. Conceived without

reference to the presence of cultural discontinuity, this understanding of conversion has functioned for non-Western peoples as a religious placebo.

African theologians Rosemary Edet and Bette Ekeya raise the question of the "growing cultural alienation" present within Christian churches, "because evangelization has not been that of cultural exchange but of cultural domination or assimilation."[7] In his encounter with the British missionary Red Jacket experienced firsthand this particular evangelistic orientation. The missionary, having been afforded the opportunity to address a number of principal chiefs and warriors of the League of the Iroquois (an unusual honor), informed them of his objective—and of their condition:

> I had a great desire to see you, and inquire into your state and welfare; for this purpose I have travelled a great distance…
>
> I have come…to enlighten your minds, and to instruct you on how to worship the Great Spirit agreeably to his mind and will, and to preach to you the gospel of his son Jesus Christ. There is but one religion, and but one way to serve God, and if you do not embrace the right way, you cannot be happy hereafter. *You have never worshipped the Great Spirit in a manner acceptable to him; but have, all your lives, been in great errors and darkness.* To endeavor to remove these errors, and open your eyes, so that you might see clearly, is my business.[8]

The missionary's promise that the Boston Missionary Society would continue to send them "good and faithful ministers, to instruct you and strengthen you in religion," would seem to

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[7] Rosemary Edet and Betty Ekeya, "Church Women of Africa: A Theological Community," in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, eds. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1988), 3.

[8] Washburn, *The Indian and the White Man*, 209-210. (emphasis added)

promote the kind of relationship leading to the "theological begging" Albert Widjaja sees as "one of the major outcomes of the Western missionary endeavor."[9]

Instead of addressing the predicament of cultural discontinuity and the issues thus raised, Western missionaries have usually conceptualized the terms of conversion in a way symbolized by the English word "two" in the subheading above. Conversion requires not only new beliefs and thoughts but a new *language* to express them with as well. In pressing for new patterns of communication, diet, dress, settlement, family structure, education, livelihood, artistic expression, economic relations, and political organization, missionaries have believed they will hasten the maturation of religious ideas and attitudes which they have assumed are inextricably embedded in "Christian civilization." Their understanding of conversion as an all-encompassing process, rather than as a sharply focused event, has led to the implicit goal of making non-Western peoples Western, of making Native Americans white. Despite their success at forcibly changing many outward patterns of behavior, however, they have been unable to penetrate that part of the human person "where the spirit lives." Conversion thus remains a religious placebo, dependent for success upon the cooperative belief by missionary and convert that it is the appropriate remedy for the condition of cultural discontinuity.

***Tutcenen*. Palliative: Biculturalism**

Many non-Western peoples have converted (voluntarily) or been converted (coercively) to the Christian faith, though oftentimes not to the extent hoped for by Western missionaries. Most of these converts have chosen to retain or to recover many of their cultural and religious

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[9] Albert Widjaja, "Beggarly Theology: A Search for a Perspective toward Indigenous Theology," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, 368.

traditions while accepting other cultural and religious features of the Western world. They have elected to live in two cultures, to become bicultural. The Muscogee word *tutcenen* (three) in the subheading above symbolizes the nature of biculturalism for many Native Americans. By adopting the use of the English alphabet for their own language, Muscogee people have developed a form of communication that they did not possess before contact with the Western world. Though many Muscogees understand and use English, their indigenous language has not only survived but has actually been strengthened by the establishment of a written tradition.

But humans and human societies cannot remain forever in the tension found between two distinct cultural influences; every person and society is marked by an instinctive drive for a unified, internalized identity. Though it does possess remedial value, biculturalism is nothing more than a palliative, a temporary solution that can mitigate the effects of cultural discontinuity. It eases the pain induced by symptoms without curing the condition that causes them.

John Snow, Chief of the Wesley Band of the Stoney Indians and an ordained minister in the United Church of Canada, has recorded the history of his people's struggle for survival in the midst of Canadian society. Tribal self-government was finally returned to the Stoneys in 1969, and Snow explains how they responded to the opportunity for rebirth:

> The basic problem, we realized, was to rebuild the shattered Stoney tribal society. It was a must to rebuild our once proud society if we were to be successful in the new venture.
>
> Part of the solution to this was that the harsh realities of the twentieth century had to be faced squarely by our people…
>
> But, although we had to accept the dominant economy, technology, and legal system surrounding us, we did not have to accept all its cultural assumptions. The Stoney Indians' culture, language, and religion have been threatened ever since the white man arrived on this Great Island. With his excessive dependence on technology, restrictive legislation, greedy individualism, and smug certainty that he knows all the answers—even in religion

> —he has been a real and constant threat to our cooperative communal outlook, our respect for nature, and our value system. With the coming of self-government and a measure of self-determination, we did not have to accept this.
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> *In other words, we came to understand that it was not an either-or choice: acculturation to the dominant society or clinging to our old ways in a world where they could no longer offer us and our children a good life. We came to understand that there was a third way—the way of biculturalism. We came to understand that we could still follow Stoney tribal custom but, at the same time, adjust to a technological age on our own terms. Our hope was (and still is) to retain the best in the Stoney culture and to take the best in the dominant culture.*[10]

Biculturalism is thus a process, the selective construction of a society out of the building blocks found in two distinct cultures, two cultures which both contain elements useful in dealing with present realities. Allan Boesak takes this position when he says he believes that, in addition to the biblical revelation, "both our traditional [African] religion and our traditional thinking have a liberating and humanizing word to say to our situation."[11]

The logo for a new Native American ministries program at a Baptist seminary illustrates the way biculturalism has functioned for many Christian Indians: a medicine wheel and a cross are superimposed, sharing only a common central point. This drawing was the winning entry in a competition searching for a design "which best symbolizes the Christian faith in American Indian

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[10] John Snow, *These Mountains Are Our Sacred Places* (Toronto, Ontario: Samuel-Stevens, 1977), 123. (emphasis added)

[11] Allan Boesak, "Liberation Theology in South Africa," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, 271. Unfortunately, Boesak contradicts himself later when he asserts that the word of God is "the word that speaks to our total human condition and offers salvation that is total, complete. For us today this means that, although the Bible is not a handbook for politics or economics, *it nonetheless reveals all we need to know about God's will for the whole of human existence, including the spiritual, political, economic, and social well-being*." Allan Boesak, "Black and Reformed: Contradiction or Challenge?" in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, 275. (emphasis added) If God has already spoken comprehensively and finally through the Bible, then the "liberating and humanizing word" of African traditional religion would seem to be superfluous at best.

cultural forms,"[12] that is to say, an indigenized Indian Christianity. The winning entry, therefore, does not actually satisfy the basic criteria of the competition; this drawing symbolizes biculturalism, not indigenization. Both the medicine wheel (symbol of traditional Indian religions) and the cross (symbol of the Christian religion) have been retained intact. Neither has changed; the two symbols are merely superimposed. Herein lies the tension contained in biculturalism, and until the two symbols can be synthesized the tension will remain. Biculturalism may be an indefinite but not a permanent condition; it is a transitional stage in the evolution of a single, unified identity. Biculturalism thus remains a religious palliative, useful as a treatment for the symptoms of cultural discontinuity but not as a cure for the condition.

0-У. Prescription: Indigenization

In recent years both Western missionaries and non-Western converts have admitted the presence of cultural discontinuity and have called for the indigenization of Christian faith. As Manas Buthelezi has observed, this new approach has assumed the proportions of "an occupational pet-project of missionaries who have suddenly become aware of the fact that they have to change the content of their leadership role during the passing of the 'missionary era' if they want to have a place in the postcolonial dispensation at all."[13] Indigenization has thus

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[12] *Central Baptist Theological Seminary Voice*, February 1989, 7.

[13] Manas Buthelezi, "Toward Indigenous Theology in South Africa," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, 208. Later he suggests a reason for their enthusiasm: "There is a sense in which one can say that when the missionaries seem to be presumptuous in suggesting 'indigenous theology' to the African, they are, strictly speaking, looking for a solution to problems that stem from their own psychological 'hang-ups.' The missionaries have therefore to play a leading role in the formulation of indigenous theology in order to make sure that it solves their own problems as well. The suggestion here is that when the Africans seem to be encouraged to produce indigenous theology, they are just being used —as they have always been—to solve the psychological problems of the missionaries." Buthelezi, 211.

become the prescription for the condition of cultural discontinuity. It is seen as the remedy that will bring together two cultures and allow for a more authentic expression of religious identity.

Non-Western Christians are divided on the question of whether the process of indigenization must be induced or whether it has a life of its own. Mercy Amba Oduyoye suggests that indigenization requires a conscious decision on the part of the theologian: "To contribute more effectively to the religious development of people, African Christian theologians have *a duty to theologize from this context and incorporate the authentic African idiom into Christian theology."*[14] Kosuke Koyama, on the other hand, argues, "It is wrong to say that we must produce an indigenous theology. It is not necessary to produce one. It is there!"[15] Perhaps both are right; the best approach to indigenization may be to recognize what has already taken place and to encourage that even more be accomplished.

The Cherokee word "Ꭴ" (four) in the subheading above symbolizes the process of indigenization among Native Americans. The inventor of the Cherokee syllabary was Sequoyah, who as a young man had noticed the power that literacy gave to whites. Without an education or the knowledge of English, Sequoyah created a written language consisting of eighty-five characters, and within a few years of its official adoption in 1822 the majority of his people could read and write. Sequoyah had taken the *idea* of literacy and, using letters he had seen in

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[14] Oduyoye, "The Value of African Religious Beliefs and Practices for Christian Theology," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, 247. This statement is curious since earlier she asks, "Is syncretism not in fact a positive and unavoidable process?" Oduyoye, 245.

[15] Kosuke Koyama, "Aristotelian Pepper and Buddhist Salt," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, 291.

Hebrew, Greek, and English texts as well as his own invented forms, created a means of expression appropriate for his own language.

The process of indigenization implies the continuation of religious change with the objective of resolving the condition of cultural discontinuity. Unless it is to be a false or superficial indigenization, it implies syncretism. Anthropologists and other scholars have observed the great variety of cultural and religious revivals that have occurred among non-Western peoples during the colonial/missionary era, calling these revivals revitalization movements. Harold Turner has looked specifically at the religious dimension of these movements and suggests the following working definition for them: "A historically new religious phenomenon arising in the encounter of a primal society and its religion with one or more of the higher cultures and their major religions, and involving some substantial departure from the classical religious traditions of all the cultures concerned, in order to find renewal through a different religious system."[16] Though at times it may seem that indigenization is a practical, workable remedy for the condition of cultural discontinuity, it is this question of orthodoxy that presents the most serious complication. Any syncretistic religious movement that makes "substantial departure" from two "classical religious traditions" will likely find itself scorned by both. The Native American (or Peyote) Church, for example, incorporates elements of both Christian and indigenous belief and ritual in a pan-tribal religious movement. Yet today both traditional and Christian Indians continue to oppose the movement because of its doctrinal and liturgical deviations.

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[16] Harold W. Turner, "A New Field in the History of Religions," *Religion: A Journal of Religion and Religions* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1971): 17.

While many Christians accept the idea of indigenization as sound evangelistic strategy, its actual implementation is subject to intense scrutiny and criticism. Because the Christian religion does not possess a "core" that exists independent of cultural expression, at least not one that can be meaningfully expressed and understood by human beings, there are no culturally neutral criteria with which to evaluate the orthodoxy of indigenized Christian faith. Indigenization involves not only form but also content; it is an open-ended and uncontrollable process. Though indigenization is the correct prescription for the condition of cultural discontinuity, it is a remedy whose side effects cannot be fully known before its use.

V/Five/*Cvkepen*/ᏏᏫᏧ. Persistence and Permanence

Two decades after his encounter with the British missionary, Red Jacket was asked why he was so opposed to missionaries.

> They do us no good. If they are useful to the white people and do them good, why do they not keep them at home? They are surely bad enough to need the labor of everyone who can make them better. [The missionaries] know we do not understand their religion. We cannot read their book—they tell us different stories about what it contains, and we believe they make the book talk to suit themselves. The Great Spirit will not punish us for what we do not understand, and the light which they give us makes the straight and plain path, trod by our fathers, dark and dreary… We are few and weak, but may for a long time be happy if we hold fast to our country, and the religion of our fathers.[17]

Red Jacket's reply raises two open questions mentioned earlier as encapsulating the predicament of discontinuity contained in the nexus of culture and religion: (1) the plurality of cultures and the discontinuity between them, and (2) the barbarity of Western Christianity in its treatment of

[17] William L. Stone, *The Life and Times of Sa-Go-Ye-Wat-Ha, or Red Jacket* (Albany, NY: J. Munsell, 1866), 397-398.

non-Western peoples. While the first challenges the assumed exclusivity of the Christian faith, the second questions the validity of its very existence.

Perhaps Rubem Alves is correct in saying that "we live amid the ruins of our religious expectations."[18] Conversion, as Western missionaries have conceived it, has met with some success, but many observers have noted that the missionary enterprise among Native Americans yielded "overall Christian results among the least impressive in modern mission history." The response "seems to have moved from earlier cooperation, through a long period of indifference and passivity, to the more recent vocal opposition and political activism that reassert Indian identity and the renewal of Indian culture within a plural society."[19] Biculturalism as it is expressed by Christian Indians has brought much-needed stability and health to individuals and communities, but it is a temporary solution that only postpones the deeper questions of identity and culture. The need for cultural and religious synthesis is addressed by the call for indigenization, but the very nature of the syncretistic process is such that it cannot be anticipated, organized, or carried out without jeopardizing its success and authenticity.

What we are left with, then, are more questions than answers concerning the ambiguous role of Christian faith in the midst of cultural discontinuity. The missionary enterprise lies in abject failure, having succeeded in converting vast numbers of people but only through the widespread destruction of human culture, human creativity, and even human life.

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[18] Rubem Alves, "From Paradise to the Desert: Autobiographical Musings," in *Third World Liberation Theologies: A Reader*, 98.

[19] Harold W. Turner, "Old and New Religions among North American Indians," *Missiology: An International Review* 1, no. 2 (April 1973): 54, 57.

At the conclusion of *Where the Spirit Lives*, Ashtoh-Komi discovers that her parents and extended family are still alive in their home village. Earlier the school headmaster lies to her, saying that they have died in a smallpox epidemic; his strategy is to make her "adjustment" to the life of mission school more permanent, and for a time it appears to have worked. Ashtoh-Komi learns to read and to write, and soon she is participating in chapel services, singing hymns and reciting bible verses. On the verge of being adopted by a white dowager, however, she finally discovers the truth about her family. Early the next morning she and her brother escape, and in the final scene her young teacher chases after them on the open prairie. Ashtoh-Komi is alarmed by the teacher's approach, but it soon becomes clear that she is sympathetic to their flight. Looking for some redeeming feature in this history, I found myself hoping that the teacher had come to offer her assistance in their long journey home, or perhaps to tell them that she had decided to fight for the release of the other children and for an end to the government and church policies that permitted the school to exist. But as she catches her breath, the teacher says only, "I have come to ask for your forgiveness." In searching for a basis for the proclamation of good news in the wake of so much news that has been irredeemably bad, perhaps this aspect of Christian faith is the most troublesome: the concern for culpability before the practice of charity. In light of Kosuke Koyama's probing question, "To what kind of spiritual and theological heritage am I heir?" this pitiful begging of forgiveness may be the best that Western Christians can aspire to. [20]

[20] Koyama, in *Third World Theologies: A Reader*, 288.