

WENDY PETERSON

*An Aboriginal Missiology of Identity Reclamation:
Towards Revitalization for Canada's Indigenous Peoples
through Healing of Identity*

Abstract

This essay concerns the failure by Canada's Indigenous people to fully apprehend and embrace the Christian doctrine of *imago Dei*. The concern is founded upon the negative self-perception and perceived inferiority of Aboriginal peoples as less-than the Caucasian majority. Is this a failure of transmission on the part of missionaries, or is it a failure of reception on the part of Aboriginals? The premise is that both the theology of mission and the practice of mission with Aboriginal people must take into account the issue of self-perception and the problem of identity formation. The question is asked, Is there a missiology which will affirm the Creator's love for diversity—for the particularity of his creation—that will better serve Canada's Aboriginal peoples? Understandings of the Self and Identity are investigated from the disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology. A preliminary missiological discussion highlights the main features of a proposed Aboriginal theology of Mission.

Key words: Aboriginal, Indigenous, reclamation, revitalization, identity, postmodern, *imago Dei*.

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Caucasian missionaries plus Christian and Traditional First Nations men and women gathered to discuss Indigenous issues in a Winnipeg, Manitoba, church. As we sat in a talking circle, I sensed the proverbial elephant in the room. Baffled by this unnamed reality, I turned to my Christian friend seated next to me—a physically beautiful Cree woman working on a Master's degree. I asked her, "When you are all alone, and you look into a mirror, what do you see?" Her response shocked and saddened me. "I see a no-good dirty Indian." Other First Nations men and women echoed her statement. They had absorbed as their personal identity a racist slur commonly voiced by Euro-Canadians. Later in the week I watched a documentary about an Aboriginal man newly released from prison. Anxious to return home, he explained, "On the reserve I don't have to be ashamed of being Indian."

What is the cause of this failure by Canada's Indigenous people to fully apprehend and embrace the Christian doctrine of *imago Dei*? Is it a failure of transmission on the part of missionaries, or is it a failure of reception on the part of Aboriginals? This distorted and damaged self-image has informed my understanding of a characteristic of far too many Christian Aboriginals. Surely, any theology of mission and the practice of mission with Aboriginal people must take into account the issue of self-perception and the problem of identity formation.

Admittedly, in a Freudian/Jungian world where psychology and psychiatry are the avenues normally associated with healing dysfunctional identity issues, a biblical theology of mission seems strangely out of place. However, in this paper I will argue that a biblically-based model of mission must address the destruction of identity regardless of its source. Whether it is a product left in the wake of flawed missions and colonial impositions, and therefore a failure of transmission; or, a failure in apprehension because the message of the dominant culture has been projected more loudly, the consequence remains. Overcoming perceived inferiority is a necessity for First Nations, Inuit and Métis in order to grow healthy mature disciples of Jesus.

Methodology

The task for this paper is primarily to discover the answer to one question, posed in two different ways: Is there a better way to do mission? Is there a missiology which will affirm the Creator's love for diversity—for the

particularity of his creation—that will better serve Canada’s Aboriginal peoples? In the process of discovering that answer, other questions will be introduced and explored. This study will present definitions and insights on self, identity and related terms from the disciplines of sociology and anthropology. It will turn to the area of theology of mission to seek a solution. The goal is to propose the elements of a potential new model of mission. The comprehensive development of that model will remain a task for the future.

Definitions and Terminology

Aboriginal Categories

The necessity of explaining terminology related to Canada’s Indigenous peoples is the first task. Although *Indian* is still an official term (thanks to The Indian Act of 1876 which governs Indigenous/ Government relationships), it has been rejected by many for primarily two reasons. First, Aboriginals point out that it is a misnomer resulting from a navigational presupposition by one Christopher Columbus who was in actuality lost. Second, it has become a pejorative term in the majority culture. Consequently, *Aboriginal* is a self-descriptor of many Indigenous peoples. There are three separate Aboriginal categories: *First Nations* refers to those who have been labeled Indian. *Inuit* is the collective and correct name for those labeled Eskimo, as Eskimo is also a pejorative word meaning “raw meat eater” The third term is *Métis*. The Métis are what I refer to as the human by-product of the fur trade when inter-marriage occurred between fur traders (and later, settlers) and Aboriginals. We were legally known by the British as “Half-breeds” who fit neither in the treaties nor in white communities.¹ The Métis nation is now an official category. It remains to be noted that increasingly First Nations self-identify by what would formerly be called a tribal name, such as Cree, Ojibway, Blackfoot, Mohawk, *etcetera*. A final term is *native/Native*. In Canada, Native is reserved most frequently as a referent for Aboriginal people. The terms Indigenous, Aboriginal and Native will be used interchangeably.

Reclamation and Revitalization

Reclamation is applied both to recovering and to reclaiming aspects of culture lost through colonization. The reasons are myriad, but include laws against practicing or transmitting cultural practices, Euro-based and enforced residential educational institutes, and Christian conversion which required rejection of Native culture. In this paper the focus of reclamation is revitalization of faith through healed identity. The study of revitalization crosses boundaries between disciplines. It may be approached through varied lenses such as the disciplines of psychology, philosophy, sociology, anthropology, theology, missiology, as a subject for historiography, *etcetera*.

Rynkiewicz defines revitalization through the lens of anthropology as “the process of infusing new life or vitality.”² Snyder expands on this, noting “A common aspect of all revitalization movements is their connection to the spiritual dimension of life. In fact, outside the West such movements often are responses to colonialism or to the paternalism sometimes associated with Christian missions.”³ With all due respect to Dr. Snyder, the *raison d’être* of North American revitalization movements within the West parallels his conclusion.⁴ Revitalization may apply to an individual as well as a community, involving the sacred and the secular. Matthews provides the scale at the individual level, for “personal restoration includes abandoning an old life and adopting a new life that brings knowledge, healing, liberation, purity, salvation, or forgiveness [expressing] itself in ritual rejuvenation.”⁵

Culture, Identity and Ethnicity

Culture is defined by Robbins as “The system of meanings about the nature of experience that are shared by a people and passed on from one generation to another.”⁶ For the purpose of this paper, this definition is inadequate since the Aboriginal context covers a vast geographic territory and encompasses dozens of distinct people groups who experience their Aboriginal categorization and ethnicity as a consequence of colonization. Culture must be used in its broadest sense and rooted in indigeneity. Thus, Wallace’s definition best suits the subject at hand: “Culture then is the transgenerational learning of *all* those categories of behavior that contribute to human adaptation.”⁷ Wallace further acknowledges “some aspects of the culture of a particular community may in fact be maladaptive.”⁸ Both the adaptive and maladaptive inform the collective Self. Pachauw weds elements of culture, identity and ethnicity by stating “The general understanding of what constitutes ethnic groups in recent years does not limit it to primordial identity, but also includes identities formed around beliefs . . . , ideals, or other socially constructed axes. . . . Whether identity is conceived as ‘given’ or as ‘constructed’, it is a relational entity.”⁹ Identity is developed more fully below. Ethnicity and its related terms, despite its importance, will be relegated to a minor role for the purpose of this study. Definitions will be limited to that of *ethnie* as provided by Hutchinson and Smith interacting with Richard Schermerhorn: “a named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity among some of its members.”¹⁰

Identity from Sociology: the Self

Are Canadian Aboriginal cultural values more akin to postmodernity than modernity given that the people have never bought into the package that is modernity?¹¹ I will explore this through an article written by sociologist

Dennis Hiebert. “Toward a Post-Modern Christian Concept of Self”¹² offers some perspective on the Self and thus on self-identity. Hiebert isolates three tenets of the postmodern Self: “a post-mechanistic indeterminism; a post-rational subjectivism; , [and] a post-individualistic cultural determinism.” This Self holds community as a high value. So much so that “Truth is defined by and for the community, and all knowledge occurs within some community of discourse.” Due to the extraordinary significance placed on external views of Self, “Self-image replaces self-concept in postmodern discourse on self. Perhaps the most salient feature of the postmodern self is its relationality.”¹³ The ‘I’ and the ‘Me’ reflect subjective (internal) and objective (external) points of view, both contributing to Self-esteem. In fact, although this may seem extreme in child-indulgent North American family constructs, Hiebert contends “there are no individuals, only members of communities.”¹⁴

Not to belabor this category of identity, it remains to be noted that Hiebert summarizes the characteristics of this Self as: constructed (in contrast to objective), decentred, unbounded, multiple (as in multiple selves), images (in contrast to essences), relational, and metaphorized as a part in a clock.¹⁵

The application to formulating a new missiology is in the recognition that the concept of the Indigenous self is community oriented, places a high value on relationships as opposed to production, and accesses knowledge through community discourse which is predominantly narrative. The Aboriginal worldview is in opposition to mechanistic determinism, rational objectivism, or individualistic cultural determinism. While rejecting these elements of modernity, the Indigenous Self and the collective-Indigenous-Self are frequently damaged through cultural maladaptation and distorted through Western Christianity’s “civilizing” agenda, in the process of physical dislocation and dispossession of land; and through disrespecting, devaluing, demoralizing and demonizing Indigenous culture.

Identity from Anthropology

“Social anthropology,” states Eriksen, “deals with processes *between* people and since identity has conventionally been held to exist *inside* each individual, the study of personal identity was for a long time neglected by anthropologists.”¹⁶ He adds, “When we talk of identity in social anthropology, we refer to social identity, not to the depths of the individual mind—although A.P. Cohen has argued the need to understand just that.”¹⁷ Anthony F.C. Wallace defines identity as “any image, or set of images, either conscious or unconscious, which individuals have of themselves. [It] may be recognized introspectively as an internal ‘visual’ or ‘verbal’ representation, but it is observed in others as an external assertion in words, deeds, or gesture which is assumed to reflect in some way an internal representation.”¹⁸

One’s *Total Identity* consists of all impressions and images of self; these

may be contradictory, inconsistent, and vague; and may be held in subsets which are “mutually interrelated in a complex pattern of conflicts and alliances.”¹⁹ While these subsets are potentially myriad, the primary Identity Divisions consist of *Real Identity* (what the individual deems to be the true self); *Ideal Identity* (what the individual wishes to be true, but realizes is not or not necessarily true); *Feared Identity* (what the individual may not believe is true, and would not want to be true of him or herself); and, *Claimed Identity* (what the individual would like others to believe is true).²⁰

Identity from a Flawed Missiology

David Bird began his paper to the NAITTS²¹ Fifth Symposium on Native North American Theology and Mission by addressing his former dysfunctional self-identity:

It was in March of 1990 when I fully committed myself to following Christ and embarked on a journey of faith that is now the foundation for all that I believe and all I do within the community I serve. I was 23 years old at the time and very much the product of my generation and culture. Culture did not solely consist of the traditional ways of the Cree or Saulteaux. It was largely defined by the dysfunction of a native family and a community dealing with a legacy of missionaries, Indian agents, two world wars, segregation, residential schools, the Indian Act, the reserve system, abuse, and a whole lot of other factors. Fear, superstition, abuse, poverty, and feelings of inadequacy were friends of mine, as with anyone growing up in a First Nations family in Southern Saskatchewan. I became heavily involved in a Full Gospel/Pentecostal ministry in downtown Regina. One year into my walk, I became the Associate Pastor and have been in the ministry in some form ever since. I brought all my dysfunction to that first ministry, but dysfunction was welcomed with open arms. Fear, superstition, abuse, and feelings of inadequacy were talked about frequently People were either preaching about dysfunction, testifying about it and/or leading the ministry from its perverse and hidden influence ... So, I belonged to a dysfunctional church practicing a dysfunctional faith that was led by dysfunctional people, who were only slightly less dysfunctional than many First Nations people.²²

Notwithstanding the good intentions of colonial and modern missions, Bosch presents his assessment of the negative aspects. He helps us to comprehend the dysfunction of which Bird speaks:

The problem was that the advocates of mission were blind to their own ethnocentrism. They confused their middle-class

ideals and values with the tenets of Christianity. Their views about morality, respectability, order, efficiency, individualism, professionalism, work and technological progress, having been baptized long before, were without compunction exported to the ends of the earth.²³

The history of missions to Indigenous people is well documented elsewhere.²⁴ For the purposes of this paper, I will reference only the establishment of Residential Schools in which Aboriginal children were frequently abused. The abuse included forceful removal from family; loss of transgenerational communication of language, culture and parenting skills; as well as physical and sexual abuse. Most schools were church-run. A leap forward occurred in June 2008 when Prime Minister Harper stood in the House of Commons and offered a “full apology on behalf of Canadians for the Indian Residential Schools system”²⁵

Drawing the foregoing points together, this statement can now be made: the suppression of culture and the unintentional delivery of an unbiblical and falsified identity has marred and distorted the self identity of many Canadian Indigenous people. A significant proportion of Indigenous people have absorbed that identity as both their *Real* and *Fearful* Identity, and it has seeped into the remaining cracks and crevices of their Total Identity as individuals.²⁶

Assumed here is that the negative social residue contributes to a people who implode upon themselves and their communities in anger, violence, suicide, addictions and dysfunction. The argument for reclamation of culture in order to reclaim dignity as human beings is informed and sustained by the creative act of God who made us in his image (Gen 1:26-27). The love of the Creator as affirmation of worth is indispensable to a healthy Christian identity. Missiology requires a corrective model. We must begin afresh to reimagine a missiology which reflects love of one’s neighbour as oneself.

No longer can we conceive of mission in terms of church expansion or the salvation of souls; no longer can we conceive of mission as the supporting of colonial powers; no longer can we understand missionary activity as providing the blessings of Western civilization to “under-developed” or “developing” peoples and cultures; no longer can we conceive of mission as originating from a Christianized North and moving toward a non-Christian or a religiously underdeveloped South. Mission today is much more modest much more exciting much more urgent .. Mission is dialogue. Mission today will be done in what David Bosch calls “bold humility,” modeled after mission in Christ’s way of humility and self-emptying and bold proclamation of God’s “already” and “not yet” reign.²⁷

While agreeing with most of the above statement, I would argue that the salvation of souls is very much the church's mission.

Identity Crisis in Scripture

Turning to theological anthropology, we find Israel's self-identity was located in the covenantal relationship with God through the "missiological dimensions of their *election*—their conviction that they were a people uniquely chosen by God, yet for a purpose that reached far beyond themselves."²⁸ This perception has held them together as a distinct people for thousands of years despite invasions, Diasporas, persecutions and pogroms, and the Holocaust. They have refused to assimilate, as have the Aboriginal people. But both experienced identity crisis.

God's people in exile serve as an example of identity crisis in Scripture. Although this will be a minor excursus which merits deeper consideration, the intent is to introduce the impact of the Babylonian captivity on Hebrew self-identity. Returning to Hiebert's article, he writes, "while the Israelites suffered fragmentation, identity crisis, loss of agency, and the perceived failure of God, all were being taunted by their captors to 'sing the Lord's song in a foreign land.'"²⁹

Fundamental differences exist between circumstances facing the Israelites and Indigenous people. The former were removed from their land; the latter were permanently invaded, out-populated, and technologically over-powered. Their communities were removed to new territory (usually "scrub-land") under "Indian agents" Often they were forced to share low-level governance with a different First Nations group on the mistaken notion that "all Indians are the same." Their land base was/is either severely diminished or supplanted.

Similarities include the recognition of Land given to the people as a gift from Creator, and a shared understanding that Land ultimately belongs to the Creator not to individuals. If there is "ownership" it is a collective ownership that transcends an individual's death. Although Aboriginals include formerly nomadic as well as agrarian tribes, all hold a high value of Land. For example, the Sacred Assembly of 1995 called by Elijah Harper, Cree and a former Member of Parliament, witnessed Christian and Traditionalist, urban and reserve leadership gathering around the concept of Land as a gift from Creator.³⁰

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the reader sees the consequences of confused identity when the people have to relearn how to be Israelites—how to belong to the Land and the God-of-the-Land again. Albeit, their selves, their religion and their descendents are forever changed through Babylonian cultural influences.³¹

It is my contention that the Indigenous peoples of Canada have long been experiencing an identity crisis which can be addressed meaningfully

through an affirmation of identity by the macro culture, which in a real sense would end their dislocation and place them back, belonging in the Land. Prime Minister Harper's apology is an initial step. The church, however, *is* positioned theologically and morally to be actively involved in repentance, reconciliation, restoration and relationship. Sadly, this is an unlikely ideal on any meaningful scale as a materialistically oriented church culture under-values a relationally based culture. Then, perhaps, one other level of culture may be appealed to: the mission-minded segment of God's people. Here then is where we can direct our efforts.

Identity from Missiological Affirmation of Neighbour

Having referenced Hiebert's perspective on Self, two of his cautions require acknowledgment. The first is recognizing the present propensity to reshape/recreate/remake Self: "Popular culture has become a bustling market of make-overs, self-help, and constant reconstruction of the self."³² Re-shaping mission to meet the needs created by a flawed missiology must never descend into a trendy cultural phenomenon by formulating an ephemeral missiology. It must reflect values embedded in the ancient Word.

His second caution is that "Christians must beware of attempting to appropriate and colonize the concept of the self, as it remains primarily a social construct."³³ This serves as a good reminder not to search out proof-texts, not to build theories of mission on impermanent and transitory human assertions; and even, by extension, not to construct theories that are one-dimensional, applicable only within narrow boundaries and even narrower conditions.

The person of Paul provides a helpful study. Paul's encounter with the risen Lord not only shaped his life-mission, the encounter plus his mission shaped his identity: "Paul's theology and mission do not simply relate to each other as 'theory' and to 'practice' It is not as though his mission is the practical outworking of his theology. Rather, his mission is 'integrally related to his identity and thought', and his theology is a missionary theology."³⁴ Paul's identity was grounded, even pre-Damascus, on the knowledge that a moral, just, loving and faithful God created him. Furthermore, it was rooted in his identity as a member of YHWH's chosen people abiding in the Land God had provided. Despite Roman occupation, that identity remained. His post-Damascus identity grew to embrace "the other"—the Gentile—in a previously unimaginable embrace. Mission as encompassing *imago Dei* is a necessary component of any missiology directed towards First Nations people. It allows, encourages, even commands God's people to view those he created on a basis of humility, respect and acknowledgment that they too bear the very image of God. *Imago Dei*, then, is used here to reflect the necessity of viewing others as fellow-creations of the Creator, reflecting aspects of Himself,

as in Genesis 1 (26 & 27). This necessarily is translated into respect for each human and loving one's neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:31).

Reclamation of Indigenous Identity: Toward a Missiology of Reclamation

Indigenous values include family, relationship, community as an extension of family, Land as a gift of Creator, storytelling, and a spirituality that encompasses and permeates all aspects of life. Richard Twiss, the Lakota co-founder (with his wife, Katherine) of Wiconi International, explains the concept of extended family:

Our vision has brought us to consider again the Lakota concept of *tiyospaye* (tea-yo-shpa-yea) "extended family." In many First Nations cultures extended family describes notions of kinship. We are a family beyond the "nuclear family" concept. It is [a] much broader and more inclusive concept that stretches beyond "blood" relatives into the village and beyond. We hope to engage with one another in *tiyospaye* as an organizational model for Wiconi and see where we are in relationship with one another as a way to collectively fulfill our calling to make Jesus known in ways that transforms people, families and communities.³⁵

If one's identity is distorted or damaged, then a healthy "belonging" within a community is one step towards healing. Calvin Shrag, a philosopher, expresses this value: "We interact, therefore we are." Community is constitutive of selfhood. It fleshes out the portrait of the self by engendering a shift of focus from the self as present to itself to the self as present *to, for,* and *with* the other."³⁶

Another step is embracing the biblical doctrine of *imago Dei* as exegeted from Genesis 1:26-27. This is "the fundamental text" and it "pervades most theological treatments of human identity."³⁷ Mission as encompassing *imago Dei* is a necessary component of any missiology directed towards First Nations people. Here it is used to endorse the necessity of viewing others as created by God, knowing he created male and female to reflect aspects of himself. By extension, this is translated into respect for each human and loving one's neighbour as oneself (Mark 12:31), whether that neighbour is a church member or a Samaritan—a potential "other" (Luke 10:29-37).

Toward a Missiology of Reclamation

Ray Aldred, who belongs to the Cree First Nation, writes: "I propose that Western theology as traditionally practiced is no longer adequate to communicate all that Christianity is and could be among the Aboriginal people of Canada. In particular the reductionist tendencies of the two dominant Western theological trends have in effect cut off Aboriginal people

from the gospel story.”³⁸ In addressing the need to maintain/reclaim cultural identity, he looks to both fundamentalist theology and classical liberal theology for a model, and finds both wanting. He proposes that a model is more likely to be found in a postmodern construct that shares more of the fundamental values of indigeneity including a high value on narrative:

Fundamentalist theology with its supplanting of the Gospel story with a set of propositions carries with it several negative implications for an authentic Aboriginal Christian spirituality. First and foremost it promotes a spirituality based upon Western empiricism, which is neither “Aboriginal” nor “spiritual.” Fundamentalist propositionalism with its assumption that one’s own statements are the essence of eternal truth precludes any ability to change in order to account for new information or a new context.³⁹ This inability to change that is inherent to fundamentalist theology effectively cuts off Aboriginal people from developing Aboriginal Christian spirituality. Ironically fundamentalism was a reaction against or an attempt at reconciling conservative Christianity with Western empiricism. As such it is a Western Christian attempt at contextualization of the Gospel. However, in failing to see its own contextualization it supposes that it is the “only” way one can practise Christianity. Thus it restricts the development of an “Indian” Christianity.

Fundamentalist theology assumes that Aboriginal people will assimilate and adopt a Western, modern, worldview. Five hundred years of history reveal that Aboriginal people are unwilling to assimilate. Aboriginal people continue to maintain their cultural identity.⁴⁰ Many desire to live in harmony with the Creator through his Son Jesus Christ but fundamentalism with its propositional truth is not reconcilable to people maintaining their identity as Aboriginal. One must look elsewhere for a starting point that is more compatible with Aboriginal people.

Some turn to classic liberal theology for a different starting point – surely there would be a place found for an Aboriginal Christian spirituality. This author believes that like fundamentalist theology, liberal theology is also inadequate to provide a holistic starting point for Aboriginal Christianity.

A classic liberal position in seeking to be all encompassing is a form of reductionism because it too seeks to assimilate all into its own position. Classic liberal theology in seeking to affirm everyone’s position ends up reducing everyone’s spirituality to an individualized personalized faith.⁴¹

In concurring with Aldred's assessment it necessarily implies that a new model of missions is required for finding a "home" for Aboriginal theology, it does not necessitate abandoning all that has gone before. That would be insufferably arrogant. It would imply that God had not been in the *Missio Dei*, in the aspirations and sacrifices of missionaries who brought the gospel to Aboriginal peoples. It does require community actively involved in examining culture and traditions with an appreciative eye to contextualize all that gives glory to God. These are the elements that I am proposing are indispensable components of a health-giving identity-affirming missiological model suited to the needs of Indigenous peoples of Canada:

1. It must be unequivocally Theocentric/Christocentric/Pneumocentric; i.e. Trinitarian. The relationship within the Triune God resonates with a people who grant high value to relationships.⁴² While community is important, so is the individual—each person is given a "face and a voice" in the sacred talking circle. This cultural expression contains echoes of the Trinitarian relationship. As to the Christocentric aspect, Norman Thomas reminds us that "Mission is Christ's not ours."⁴³ Stanley Grenz, in commenting on the believers' relationship with the Spirit, states "The pneumatological foundation of the ecclesial self emerges from the Pauline understanding of the role of the Spirit in believers' lives. Paul links the prerogative of addressing God as 'Abba' explicitly to the presence of the indwelling Spirit, whom the apostle identifies as 'the Spirit of God's Son.'"⁴⁴
2. In valuing relationship, this missiology must be undergirded by a theological anthropology informed by *imago Dei*, capable of uprooting the lie that says Aboriginal people are less-than or has them set apart as "the other" This theology must explicitly incorporate loving one's neighbour as oneself, shedding all expressions or intonations of superiority.
3. It must embrace the beauty found in Aboriginal culture, and rejoice in its reclamation for the glory of God through contextualization.
4. It must respect Aboriginal people's ability to self-theologize and not demand that theologizing be overseen by the Caucasian-academy. Rather, it should employ mutuality and interdependence within the universal church.
5. It needs also include the Johannine theology of Jesus as the Sent One who sends his followers.⁴⁵ Those Aboriginals who have already modeled this concept since the early days of European mission are not well known. Nor does the macro-cultural church know of the ones who have gone in Jesus' name this decade to Peru, Russia, China,

Tibet, Pakistan and many other countries and have had unparalleled opportunities *because* they are “North American Indians”

- 6 A final component of this new (but ancient) missiology is hope. When Elias Chacor laments the lot of the Palestinian youth, he speaks a truth that reverberates to all people who experience ostracism by a dominant society. It applies equally to Aboriginal youth: “They need someone to unite them. They need to work for common goals. They must learn that they are worthwhile and productive citizens. If they don’t gain self-respect, they will always resent the [Caucasians].”⁴⁶

Conclusion

This paper has posed a number of questions: What is the cause of the failure by Canada’s Aboriginals to fully apprehend and embrace the Christian doctrine of *imago Dei*? Is it a failure of transmission on the part of missionaries, or is it a failure of reception on the part of Indigenous people? Is there a better way to do mission? Is there a missiology which will affirm the Creator’s love for diversity—for the particularity of his creation—that will better serve Canada’s Aboriginal peoples? Are Canadian Aboriginal cultural values more akin to postmodernity than modernity given that the people have never bought into the package that is modernity?

The objective is to propose the elements of a potential new model of mission. I have argued that a model of mission is required which speaks healing into the distortion of identity left in the wake of flawed ethnocentric missions, and colonial impositions. Overcoming perceived inferiority is a necessity for First Nations, Inuit and Métis to grow healthy mature disciples of Jesus in the Indigenous communities of Canada. This paper has presented definitions and insights on identity and related terms from the disciplines of sociology, anthropology and theology. Turning to the area of missiology to seek a solution, it has suggested six elements or components of a new model. They are: a Trinitarian foundation; acknowledgement of the *imago Dei* in self and neighbour; reclamation of culture for God’s glory through contextualization; respecting self-theologizing; an emphasis on the Sent One sending forth; and the Christian attribute of hope. It remains for the model to be fleshed out through further study, prayer, and community discourse.

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Endnotes

¹ I use the personal pronoun because I am officially Métis through my father, Albini Beauchemin.

² Michael A. Rynkiewicz, "Revitalization" *Revitalization* 12:1-2 (Fall 2005), 1.

³ Howard A. Snyder, "Revitalization," *Revitalization*, vol. 13, no. 1(Spring, 2006).

⁴ For a comprehensive study of North American—albeit primarily U.S.—revitalization movements amongst Aborigines see Lee Irwin, *Coming Down from Above: Prophecy, Resistance, and Renewal in Native American Religions in The Civilization of the American Indian Series*, vol. 258 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008).

⁵ Ed Matthews, "Renewal Movements," in A. Scott Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000).

⁶ Richard H. Robbins, *Cultural Anthropology: A Problem-Based Approach*, 4th ed. (Belmont, CA: Thomas Wadsworth, 2006), 319.

⁷ Robert S. Grumet, Anthony F.C. Wallace: *Revitalizations and Mazeways—Essays on Culture Change*, vol. 1 (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 87

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Lalsangkima Pachuau, "Christian Mission amidst Ethnic Pandemonium: Toward a Missional Theology of Reconciliation," a paper distributed in Dr. Pachuau's course entitled, Third World Christianity (the course title he is quick to point out is "inherited"), Asbury Theological Seminary, Fall, 2009),14.

¹⁰ John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, *Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 6, interacting with Richard Schermerhorn.

¹¹ Ray Aldred, Cree, from Ambrose University in Alberta, argues that Native people never bought into modernity and thus are positioned to function within a postmodern milieu. For example, Aborigines place a high value on relationships and a low value on productivity. Willie Thompson offers insight when he summarizes the meaning of postmodernism as “a view of culture that is wholly skeptical towards any claims of certainty in science and society . . .” and notes postmodernity’s “characteristics include particularly the eclipse of the productive by the information economy.” Willie Thompson, *Postmodernism and History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 133.

¹² Dennis Hiebert, “Toward a Post-Modern Christian Concept of Self,” in *Didaskalia*, 16, 1, (Fall 2004), 1-24. Note: Page numbers are missing from the copy of this paper which the author gave me. Dr. Hiebert is a colleague at Providence College in Otterburne, Manitoba.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, second edition (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 59. Emphasis in original.

¹⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹⁸ Grumet, *Anthony F. C. Wallace: Revitalizations and Mazeways*, 285.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ NAIITS: North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies.

²² David Bird, “He Must Increase” in *Journal of North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies*, ed. by Wendy Peterson (vol.6, 2007), 29.

²³ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 294.

²⁴ See Wendy Peterson, “Of Steeples and Stories: A Selective Overview of Mission Contact with Aboriginal Peoples of Canada,” 125-158, in *Journal of North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies*, ed. by Wendy Peterson (vol.6, 2007). I refer to this for its bibliographical value.

²⁵ Full text of apology is available at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/index-eng.asp>

²⁶ It is acknowledged my observations on marred identity are somewhat generalized. I concur with Dr. Rynkiewicz’s assertion that in-depth study of just how Aboriginal peoples construct reality is necessary. Meanwhile, I have sought input from my community who support this conclusion. In a PowerPoint that accompanies this presentation at the Colloquium, I introduce the participants to selective faces and stories of people who have sought to reclaim their identities and are leaders in the reclamation movement.

²⁷ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 285. This quotation is in the context of mission as prophetic dialogue.

²⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 10. Emphasis in original.

²⁹ Hiebert, "Toward a Post-Modern Christian Concept of Self."

³⁰ See Native Multimedia Productions, "Sacred Assembly," 1995, video recording.

³¹ For a discussion on this see J. Richard Middleton and Brian Walsh, *Truth is Stranger than it Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Post-Modern World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995).

³² Hiebert, "Toward a Post-Modern Christian Concept of Self."

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Andrea J. Kostenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: a Biblical Theology of Mission*, in D. A. Carson, ed., *New Series in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2001), 164.

³⁵ Richard Twiss, "Smoke Signals from R. Twiss," E-Mail from Wiconi International (April 16, 2009).

³⁶ Calvin O. Shrag, *The Self after Postmodernity* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1997), 78.

³⁷ Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton and Mark R. Talbot, eds., *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 3f. Emphasis in original.

³⁸ Ray Aldred, "The Resurrection of Story," *Journal of the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies*, ed. by Wendy Peterson, vol. 2, 2004, 5.

³⁹ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Society* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 16f.

⁴⁰ Achiel Peelman, *Christ is a Native American* (Ottawa, Ontario: Novalis-Saint Paul University, 1995), 21-23.

⁴¹ Aldred, "The Resurrection of Story," 6.

⁴² George Hunter notes the value of this approach to the Celtic peoples whose worldview demonstrates similarities with Aboriginal people. See George G. Hunter, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can reach the West Again* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 82ff.

⁴³ Norman E. Thomas, ed., *Classic Texts in Mission and Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 87, referencing the Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council, Dec 28, 1957 to Jan 7, 1958. One could debate *Missio Dei* vs *Missio Christo*, but I will leave that to others.

⁴⁴ Stanley J. Grentz, "The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Theology of the Imago Dei in the Post-Modern Context," in Lints, et al, eds., *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective*, 91.

⁴⁵ Andreas Kostenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 203. This is a major theme in Kostenberger.

⁴⁶ Elias Chacour, *Blood Brothers: The Unforgettable Story of a Palestinian Christian Working for Peace in Israel* (Grand Rapids, HI: Chosen Books, 2003), 202.