American Indians and Jesus: Reflections Towards an EATWOT Christology

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American Indian peoples in North America stand in a relatively peculiar position of colonisation and oppression that is significantly different from most people in the Two-Thirds World because we are physically, and geographically, surrounded on all sides by our coloniser and conqueror. While this is similar to the context of indigenous peoples in Central and South America, Australia and New Zealand, for instance, it is still more intense and complicated because we live in a territory that is co-inhabited and fully controlled by the one state presumed by the whole of the Two-Thirds World to be both the most powerful state politically and economically and the common oppressor of the whole of the Two-Thirds World. Given the particularity of our history of oppression and particularly the role of missionisation in the conquest of our territories and our indigenous nations, it is important to begin the process of sorting out what the function of Christianity and christology is and might be for us as we continue our struggle and resistance against ongoing colonisation. The conquest is not yet complete.[1]

1. Contributions of the Other EATWOT Regions

I would like to begin by addressing the third of the three questions posed for each participant of this conference. It seems to me that the question of intercontinental influence in our theological and christological reflection can best lead me into a reflection on the first question: how I might construct a christology "from the underside of history." My response to the second question on the related concerns of gender, race, class, culture and religions, ecological issues and scriptures would seem to flow naturally out of my earlier remarks.

Political Analysis and Theology

It was first of all from Latin America that we finally discovered the critical truth that all theology is inherently and at least implicitly political.[2] We now know that there can be no existentially useful theological or christological reflection that does not engage in critical political analysis. How one identifies the Christ and understands the functions of christology determines much of one's political reality and how one deals with it. A comfortable christology, which ignores the reality of systemic injustice in the world, can do much to ease the consciences of those who function as oppressors and to rationalise the oppression they perpetrate as just or at least necessary. As R.S. Sugirtharajah describes it, the practical christology of the coloniser's mission efforts, Jesus was made to be the ally of the coloniser:

> Jesus was manipulated to validate the ideological and class interests of the exploiters, the privileged and the powerful. He was projected as a preacher of timeless truths who conquers and vanquishes the cultures and religious traditions of other people, a proclaimer of cosmic catastrophe who was indifferent to current social issues and a pacifist who was remote from human tensions and turmoils.[3]

This too continues to be the American Indian experience of Amereuropean missionary colonialism and their preaching about Jesus in our communities.

In contrast to such theological rationalising of power and privilege,

liberation theologies decidedly established that a genuine understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ results in a commitment to the liberation of the oppressed and poor of the world. Thus, christological interpretation in the Two-Thirds World has been an exercise in articulating Christ as a spiritual force for liberation from political contexts of oppression.[4]

In the United States, it is crucial that American Indian intellectuals pay close attention to the past five hundred years of colonialism and conquest if we are to plan a future that includes genuine healing and empowerment of our indigenous communities. Since our history of colonialism includes a correlative history of colonial missionisation, our political analysis must focus in no small measure on the ways that Jesus and the doctrine of the Christ has been used as a tool of the conquest of our nations and our eventual subjugation as small, poverty-ridden internal minorities in what has become the wealthiest and most politically powerful state in the world community of states. As an example of missionising colonialism, let me point to the relationship between Jesus and the Amereuropean cultural affectation of individualism. Much of the missionising process among Indian peoples has been a studied attempt to encourage Indian converts to develop an individual relationship with Jesus at the cost of the inherent Indian cultural commitment to the community as a whole and to a communitarian value system. Thus, the missionary victory involved cultural conversion as well as spiritual conversion, the destruction of one set of cultural values and the imposition of a new set. It is much more clear today in retrospect that this sort of Amereuropean cultural proclamation of the gospel did as much as the U.S. Army to change the political landscape of each Indian nation.[5] It needs to be said here that the oppression of Indian peoples in the United States continues today. We remain colonised peoples; more or less rigidly controlled by the government that surrounds us; too often appealing targets for the extraction of natural resources; and the on-going subjects of poverty, joblessness, diseases, and other symptoms of colonisation.

Cultural Analysis

It was theologians from Asia and Africa who pressed us toward the next step beyond political analysis. Today it would be unthinkable to do political analysis in our theological and christological reflection without paying close attention to cultural analysis as well.[6] Indeed, it has become axiomatic in Two-Thirds World theological discourse to talk of contextualising and inculturating theology. Likewise, culturally discrete interpretations of Jesus have become common place in world Christianity.[7] In the American Indian world, we have found that it is important to affirm who we are, not just socially and politically but in terms of our traditional cultures and value systems. Having begun the unending process of analysing the ongoing political aspects of our colonial reality, it is apparent to many of us that we must move intentionally and assertively to affirm in great detail the ongoing importance of our own traditions. This means that some of us will struggle to understand the Christ in terms that are more culturally compatible with those traditions. From time to time I have myself reflected on the possibility of seeing traditional Indian mythic or historic figures such as Corn Mother or White Buffalo Calf Woman as appropriate Indian Christ equivalents. Others in the Indian world will continue to press the more radical question as to whether Jesus and Christianity can be rescued as a significant source of spiritual sustenance for Indian peoples at all.

One important example of the role of cultural analysis in articulating an American Indian christology would be the destructiveness caused by the varieties of the typical "fall and redemption" evangelism proclaimed in Indian mission contexts. In the Lutheran variation of this type of theology, the "law" (nomos) is paired with the gospel as its natural and logically necessary antecedent. One must be convinced of the need for salvation by the preaching of the law as a preparation for hearing the good news of the gospel. Yet this intrinsic emphasis on human sin and sinfulness violates Indian people in two devastating ways. First of all, Indian cultures do not

inherently share the same sense of human depravity that is so pervasive in European cultures and has there given rise to the doctrine of original sin. Thus Indian peoples, who are inherently open to varieties of spiritual expressions and experiences, are forced to experience the foreign emotive sense of depravity and sinfulness before they can enjoy the deep spiritual insights of the power that emanates from God in the witness of Jesus. Secondly, and more importantly given the social dysfunctionality that reigns in Indian communities as a result of our history of colonialism and oppression, this emphasis on sin and depravity impedes any hearing of the good news among a people demoralized both spiritually and emotionally by their experience of conquest. In our internalising of our own oppression we have taken to heart too much the continual insistence of the missionaries, the government and virtually all White Amereuropeans that everything Indian is necessarily less good than the superior cultural values and structures brought to us by Amereuropeans. Yes, it is unfortunate, but we have learned to hate ourselves and to value things that are White. Generations of abuse have caused us, like too many abused children, to internalise the abuse as wholly deserving on our part. As unhealthy and wrong as this is, it is only reinforced by fall and redemption notions of christology.

Culturally, any proclamation of the Gospel among Indian peoples must begin with some sort of affirmation of Indian people as Indian and as human beings. It is not even enough to focus on the affirmation of Indian individuals, as such; rather, it is the whole of an abused community who must be built-up by such affirmation. Thus, I have always proposed that spiritual proclamation or teaching in American Indian communities must begin with creation and the affirmation of the community and each individual as an equal part of the whole of creation. In a Christian or biblical context, for instance, this would mean an initial emphasis on human beings as created "in God's image." Hence, if God has created me, and created me as an Indian, then I must be good, just as all of creation is good, and being Indian

must also be a part of God's good design. Likewise, our Indian communities with our unique cultures and values must also be rooted in some created sense of the goodness of all of creation.

Of course, those christologies that build first on some notion of human sin and the need for salvation that is answered by Jesus as the Christ of God also tend to emphasise the universality of both this worldview and of Jesus. As a result, Amereuropean missionaries have consistently tried to disallow any traditional expression of spirituality on the part of Indian people. Their notion of original sin can allow for access back to an alienated God only the way they would prescribe. Any notion that God may have provided a panoply of ways to relate to God's self would be anathema. Again, Indian people are taught that they are somehow less than White people. Again, we are excluded. Our own christology must do better than that.

2. An Indian Christology from the Underside of History?[8]

There are a number of considerations involved in thinking about how an American Indian christology might be constructed from the "underside of history." There are several aspects that are unique to the situations of indigenous peoples and are not universal to the context of all marginalised peoples. These involve aspects of both political and cultural analysis and must invariably gravitate around traditional Indian community patterns of thought and values, especially in terms of the spiritual well-being of the people. This christology must begin with and continually be in touch with the analysis of the political context, but it must today especially include the results of colonisation, particularly the psychological state of the community and the psychology of the act of colonisation.[9] At this point perhaps it is enough to simply list a few of these considerations and then to reflect further on the basis of these.

a) Jesus, that is, the Jesus manufactured by the colonisers, has been systematically imposed on Indian peoples as a replacement for internal, cultural forms of spiritual involvement. The mission

programme dictated by this artificial Jesus construct had more to do with altering the traditional social, economic and political foundations of self-sustaining communities, attempting to bring them into line with European and Amereuropean norms, than it had to do with supporting social structures that nurtured the well-being of Indian communities. In the course of this imposition (missionisation), traditional forms of spirituality have been defamed, belittled, disallowed and even outlawed, by the missionaries or by the government under explicit pressure from the missionaries.

b) The U.S. government has been historically involved in encouraging missionary activity as a means toward the pacification of Indian peoples. In spite of its constitutional claim to insure freedom of religion, the government has consistently supported and even funded missionary projects among Indian peoples. Christianisation was assumed to be an important foundation for the civilization of "savage races."

c) The christology that has been imposed on Indian peoples in the course of missionisation has been, in every context, one of control and manipulation of Indian peoples by the denominations that did the missionisation. The churches have provided little or no opportunity for Indian communities to determine the parameters of the Gospel for themselves, let alone for them to determine their own christology.

d) Christianity has been from the beginning and continues to be divisive of Indian communities. In every case, the first missionary to win a convert in an Indian community effectively split the community into two camps that have not been reconciled to this day. The tragedy in this process is that, ideally, Indian cultures function as communitist value structures, as integrous wholes with each person and each part of the community's life related to everyone and everything else. In traditional life one was never forced to make a choice between competing spiritual forms. If the community had a ceremony on a given occasion, everyone was included and had a part to play in

fulfilling the ceremony. Suddenly, with the arrival of the Amereuropean missionary, the Church imposed on Indian peoples, and ultimately on each individual, a choice between the community's ceremony and the new form of spirituality proclaimed by the missionary. Our communities would never again be whole and would never again pray together as a whole and united people.

e) Any attempt at this late date to develop an Indian Christology "from the underside of history" must begin by claiming its own freedom in Christ Jesus: "For freedom Christ has set you free. Do not submit again to the yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5: 1). Our question about this "freedom" eventually must extend to asking if it includes the freedom to choose a return to traditional native religious structures. Pressing toward an Indian articulation of this gospel freedom begins with (1) defining christology and the Gospel for ourselves in ways that might be more compelling and more culturally appropriate for us. It moves then towards (2) claiming the freedom to embrace and participate as Christians in the traditional ceremonies and belief structures of our own peoples. But at its most radical, the question must (3) ask whether a colonised, conquered and subjected people might now choose to return entirely to its own traditional forms of prayer, whether Jesus does not bless us in our prayers apart from reciting his name. The contemporary Indian experience in North America is that many people are finding greater health and liberation in abandoning the colonising relation in favour of such a return to the ancient ways of the people.

f) Great care must be taken to ensure that, whatever sort of christological statement we decide to make, it not result in another exercise of participating in our ongoing colonisation and oppression.[10]

Given the implicit and explicit participation of the churches' missionaries in the colonising oppression and cultural genocide of American Indians, what relevance can Jesus have for Indian peoples? This, I think, is the principal and foundational question facing any

attempt at articulating an American Indian christology. This is a constantly recurring problem for us at Living Waters Indian Lutheran Ministry where I serve as pastor. How will we proclaim Jesus to a community that has been constantly hurt not by the Gospel but by the proclamation of the Gospel and those Amereuropean colonisers who have proclaimed it?[11] Yes, there have been continual missionising efforts on the part of many of the U.S. mainline churches, and indeed many Indian peoples have been converted to one denomination or another. The competition on some Indian reservations among the denominations is so great that many Indian converts report having been baptised three or four or more times by different denominations. Yet in spite of what has now been more than three centuries of effort, it must be said that Christianity has not established itself among Indian peoples with any great tenacity or vitality. To the contrary, there are growing numbers of Indian peoples today who are explicitly rejecting Christianity in favour of a return to their traditional ceremonial spirituality.

Jesus and Indian Traditionals

Over the years I have often made the observation that among Indian peoples the problem is not with Jesus but with Christianity and the Church. My point has been that Indian people seem relatively accepting Jesus as a spiritual source of power for living life, whereas the Church is seen as a continuing source of oppression and the imposition of cultural change. This is true of many traditional leaders (so-called medicine people, their helpers, knowledgeable spiritual elders and oral traditors) who have come to Living Waters, or with whom I have dialogues in many reservation communities.

Traditional spiritual elders, medicine women and men rather consistently expressed their respect for Jesus as a spiritual person and even as a manifestation of Wakonda, the Sacred Mystery (namely, God, or something like what Amereuropeans mean by God). While these spiritual elders and medicine people may have significant resistance to Church and Christianity, they find that they are quite

able to participate at Living Waters, since Living Waters represents an Indian community more than it represents Church. Moreover, they are more likely than many other traditional people to participate fully in our service, even participating in the sacred meal of communion. Jesus poses little problem for these elders. They can respect him as having been a spiritual presence and even as a continued spiritual presence in the world. As these people have expressed themselves, Jesus is much more acceptable than the church.

When traditional Indian people attend Living Waters' Sunday service – and many of our regular participants are – they are faced with a choice when it comes to the Eucharist, whether to participate or not. Never having considered ourselves Communion police in deciding who can and cannot participate, we assume a spiritual foundation in all Indian people and always leave the decision to participate to each person. Many find Living Waters a culturally comfortable place to pray with Indian people, yet they are not always ready to concede the efficacy of this important Christian ceremony. The political compromise of participating in the conqueror's ceremony is simply too great. Abstaining from bread and cup is a final act of resistance and a clear political choice.

On the other hand, many choose to go ahead and participate. There are various reasons for their acquiescence. 1) Traditional values often dictate that spiritual respect for another's ceremony supersedes one's political conviction. 2) For many there is recognition of spiritual power in Jesus that goes beyond ethnicity or culture and is similar to the spiritual power already experienced in traditional Indian ceremonial life. 3) There is a traditional valuing of sharing hospitality: When in someone else's camp, one does what they do.

For Amereuropean Christians there is a curious aspect to our Indian Communion ceremony in nearly every case. Whether an Indian participant in our Eucharist is Christian or not, they come to our communion with a belief (even faith) in the presence of Jesus in the

sacrament. I would even go so far as to say that there is a stronger or more lively sense of the "real presence" of Jesus in the sacrament than there is in most suburban Lutheran congregations. Perhaps I can explain this phenomenon in terms of Indian cultures and the customary experience in our spiritualities of the numinous in so many different ways. For Indian people to find the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist credible is merely an extension of their experience of a variety of real presences in their own cultures. This has little or no correlative in Amereuropean society where the numinous survives too often as no more than a historical memory or as the experience of credulous and disreputable fringe groups.

Jesus Language and Colonisation

If Jesus is not necessarily a problem, language about Jesus can be quite problematic. Nigerian theologian Ukachukwu Ch. Manus describes a significant indigenous christology that has emerged in a Nigerian community as part of the spiritual expression of an indigenous church among the Yoruba people. He argues that the "lordship" aspect of christology becomes particularly relevant for these peoples because of the historical tradition of kingship (the traditional institution of the *oba)* among Yorubas.[12] At least this one aspect of their spiritual life might make this particular church, not a European or Amereuropean denomination, relatively comfortable within the family of the World Council of Churches, where the proclamation "Jesus Christ is Lord" is the bare bones common confession of the great variety of communions who make up the World Council of Churches, the doctrinal glue that holds us all together, one of the few doctrinal proclamations to which the entire family of churches in the WCC can agree.

Over the past decade the colonial oppressiveness of this proclamation for Indian peoples has begun to weigh on me in ways that I had never before considered. As foundational as this confession is for the World Council of Churches, it is the one scriptural metaphor

used for the Christ event that is immediately unacceptable and even hurtful to American Indian peoples. There was no analogue in North American indigenous societies for that which is usually signified by the word lord. To the contrary, North American cultures and social structures were fundamentally marked by their egalitarian nature. Even a so-called "chief" had typically very limited authority which even then depended much on the person's charismatic stature within the community. The American Indian experiential knowledge of lordship only begins with the conquest and colonisation of our nations at the onslaught of the European invasion. What we know about lords and lordship, even today, has more to do with Washington, D.C., the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the modern tribal governments created by act of Congress. Unfortunately, by extension, even the church becomes a part of these new colonial relationships, with lords in the form of bishops and missionaries (both male and female) to whom we have learned as conquered peoples to pay lordly deference.

To this extent, then, to call upon Jesus as Lord suddenly began to strike me as a classic example of the colonised participating in their own oppression.[13] To call upon Jesus as Lord is to concede the colonial reality of new hierarchal social structures; it is to concede the conquest as final and become complicit in our own death, that is, the ongoing genocidal death of our peoples.[14]

It can be objected that the lordship metaphor for Christ is actually helpful for White, Amereuropean Christians, because it puts many into a posture of humble surrender to which most are quite unaccustomed, Yet, I would argue that the metaphor does exactly the opposite. It rather seems to excuse Amereuropeans from any earthly humility or surrender, and to facilitate often a lack of consciousness with regard to the impropriety of relationships of exploitation. Since one has surrendered to an overwhelmingly powerful numinous other, no other surrender or act of humility is called for. Indeed, many Christians seem to feed on a worldview of hierarchy which puts them at the top of a pyramid of privilege second only to God who has

foreordained this "righteous empire."[15] Rather than humbled in submission, they are empowered and emboldened – even to imposing their own brand of submission on others. Having submitted to the lordship of Jesus, there is no longer any earthly authority to which the Amereuropean individual must submit or pay homage. Indeed, humbled as vassal before Jesus, the Amereuropean becomes empowered as Jesus' champion in the world of political and economic conquest.[16]

3. Culture, Gender, Class

What role does gender, race, class, culture and religions, ecological issues, and scriptures play in constructing Christology?

Class and race are not concepts of much significance among Indian peoples. The latter may seem especially radical a claim simply because of the Indian experience of consistent and abject racism in the United States. However, in our own spiritual thinking, and hence in my own christological musings, race does not play a role, at least not nearly as extensive a function as does culture. Indeed, the role race does play in our spiritual praxis is too often one of dysfunctionality. As colonised peoples surrounded by the coloniser, too often we fall into a trap of thinking that nothing we do is of any merit by comparison with the coloniser – unless it can win the approval of some of the colonisers. Thus, Indian traditional spirituality is today a prime target for Amereuropean New Age aficionados who are buying their way into traditional ceremonies in increasing numbers.

Religion is a category that is ultimately foreign to Indian communities across the United States, one that we have only learned to use as it has been imposed upon us by the coloniser's academic specialists. In a traditional Indian community what Amereuropean specialists would categorise as "religion" is rather thought of as simply "the way we live." Like the New and Old Testaments, no Indian language has a word that would function as a translation for "religion." Thus, while we want our ancient religious traditions to be taken

seriously, we resist reducing them to a category called "religion." Any reasonably healthy Indian christological understanding must be fully inculturated into our cultural way of life – inclusive of our spirituality. In the context of American Indians there can be no distinction between our cultures and our ways of being in communication with the numinous since these spiritual ways of communication are so thoroughly infused throughout everyday life.

While the Christian scriptures are interesting to Indian peoples, and relatively important among those who have made some sort of Christian commitment, we are at heart oral peoples yet today and value our own oral traditions above the written word. Moreover, as Robert Warrior has demonstrated, American Indian appropriation of the Christian scriptures can be quite problematic. In Warrior's example it must be recognised that the Exodus story, so seminally important in the liberation struggles of African Americans, is a story of bondage and not liberation for us. Namely, in any Indian reading of the Exodus story we are forced to see ourselves as the Canaanites and not as the Israelites. From the beginning of the European invasion of our lands in North America, they have seen themselves as the New Israel.[17] Thus when we are forced to affirm the Exodus story as somehow our own story, we are being forced to participate in our own oppression, implicitly affirming the New Israel's conquest of our lands. Scripture must be used carefully and critically.

More important to an Indian christological reflection will be the categories of gender, culture, the land (ecology), with gender and land as subcategories to culture. I have argued in other essays that the American Indian cultural value of land is rooted in the priority of spatiality in our thinking, in contrast to the temporal priority of the Amereuropean thinking. Hence, the most natural understanding of the gospel notion of *basileia tou theou* ("kingdom of God") is as a spatial realm of God, in contrast to the eschatological/temporal interpretation of virtually all American and European scripture experts.

And my own spatial interpretation would relate the *basileia* to the whole of creation as the realm where God rightfully rules.[18] In any case, a close relationship to the land is critical for any American Indian self-understanding and will be critical for any articulation of an Indian christology.

For the purposes of this essay, I would like to address the cultural aspect of gender and give an example of how it might affect an Indian Christology. In every Indian community the underlying notion with respect to gender, as in all things, is balance. This is to say that the ideal calls for a balancing of power and responsibility between the genders.[19] In most Indian communities there are cultural devices which insure a maximum balance between the genders, with many social institutions oriented toward the particular empowerment of women. The mythologies of tribes also move consistently toward the empowerment of women and the role of women in our cultures. This notion of balance does not mean that men and women do the same things within these societies, but rather that what each does is fully respected by the other as necessary to the balance and well-being of the community. In some tribal communities there is a specific prioritising of women. For instance, in many Sun Dance traditions it is thought that the men perform this ceremony precisely to compete with the superior status of women as life-givers. Thus in the shedding of blood in ceremonies of self-sacrifice, men are doing their share to maintain life, something that is given naturally to women by the Creator, both in childbirth and in the monthly menstrual cycle.

For Indian people, gender balance in any human community is an ideal that is equally sought in the world generally. Hence, the common Indian symbol of the circle represents this balance in polyvalent ways. Most importantly, it represents the balance of the created order of two-leggeds, four-leggeds, winged and living moving things (rivers, rocks, trees, mountains, fish, and so on). Moreover, balance is sought from the realm of the numinous, as well, since the ultimate well-

being of the whole depends on the relationship with the numinous. Thus, God, the Sacred Mystery, the Wholly Other, has no inherent gender, but has regularly revealed itself to Indian peoples first of all as a duality of balance, as a necessary reciprocity of powers that include male and female. God is always called on as Wakonda Monsita and Wakonda Udseta, as the Sacred Above and the Sacred Below, as Sky Power and Earth Power, as Grandfather and Grandmother.[20] Even God reveals God's self, then, as necessarily a combination of maleness and femaleness.

Hence any Indian equivalent for the Euro-Christian notion of the Christ would include examples that are explicitly female. For instance, the revered mythic and historic figures of Corn Mother and White Buffalo Calf Woman, examples from two different Indian cultural traditions, would perhaps come close to functioning in ways that could be conceived of as christological. As narrative oral texts they certainly proximate the earliest Asian narratives about Jesus, and as in Christianity each of these figures continues to be significantly involved in the day-to-day well-being of the communities that tell each of these stories. Both function to bring some element of "salvation" and wholeness to the peoples who honour the stories.

Of course, there is an implicit assumption here with regard to the universality of the Christ and the historical particularity of Jesus as a temporal manifestation of that Christ. This Christological notion builds on a reading of John 1:1-14 which implies that the preexistence of the Logos (Christ) dare not be simply confused with the historical incarnation of that Christ in Jesus. Surely, the preexistence of Jesus is indefensible on any grounds, even a nineteenth century kenotic notion of the Christ. If we are led by John's Logos hymn to differentiate between Jesus and the Logos, then we are finally free to reflect on the possibility of other manifestations of the Logos in the world. To think that God was satisfied to withhold God's love and concern from American Indian peoples for some fifteen hundred years until

European Christians had reached the spiritual maturity that enabled their conquest and enslavement of the rest of the world seems reprehensible. It would be a God not worthy of our faith or our faithfulness.

Notes

1. An allusion to a very useful book by an American Indian legal scholar, Robert Williams, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford, 1990). Williams demonstrates historically from legal texts of the time that systemic forces running through European and Amereuropean colonisation history could not be satisfied until the "conquest" was decisive to the extent that all normative divergence was disallowed.

2. I have in mind, for example, Gustavo Gutierrez, *Liberation Theology* (1973); Jose Miguez Bonino, *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation* (1975) and *Faces of Jesus* (1984); Leonardo Boff; and many others who taught us so much in the 1970s.

3. R.S. Sugirtharajah, "Jesus Research and Third World Christologies," *Theology* 93 (1990): 387.

4. Of course, one of the consistent criticisms of liberation theology in the U.S. – by both government and church officials - has been that it explicitly politicises Jesus. To the contrary, it was early Latin American liberation theologians who first exposed and described the political currents inherent in the theologies dominant in the European immigrant churches. It was the colonisers who first politicised Jesus in the Americas. It seems evident from the colonisers' own strategy and view that Jesus exists in the world and is not divorced from political realities in the world. Latin American liberation theologians in particular met this oppressors' idea head-on with their own rendering of how Jesus exists in the world – including the political/economic world – but articulated this from the underside of history. This is what gives liberation theology its power and authenticity. What I do not yet understand is how to press this discussion with American Indian thinkers who have already decided on the outright rejection of Jesus as the culture hero or spiritual centre of the oppressor. It could be powerful for Indian thinkers to challenge the persistent rendering of Jesus by the privileged as a means for insuring the continuation of their privilege at the cost of American Indian well-being. While I am very sympathetic to Indian reluctance to invest themselves in any type of Christianity, an argument could be made for an Indian christology that would respond effectively to the resurgence of right-wing, racist, oppressive theologies in the U.S. that pose a new (renewed) threat to Indian peoples today. A serious Indian reflection on christology could provide new energy and creativity to confront this new round

of colonialism (which we call "internal colonialism").

5. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993).

6. For Asia: David Kwang-Sun Suh, Chung Hyun Kyung, Kwok Pui Lan, Virginia Fabella, Samuel Rayan. For Africa: see J.N.K. Mugambi and L. Magesa, *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and Diversity in African Christology* (Nairobi: Initiatives Publishers, 1989). In his "Response to the Presentation by Diego Irarrazaval," *Voices From the Third World* (June, 1995), David Kwang-Sun Suh acknowledges a similar shift in Latin American thinking: "It is good news to us Asian theologians that the Latin American colleagues are taking the peoples' cultures and religions seriously" (p. 81).

7. Diego Irarrazaval, "How Is Theology Done in Latin America?" *Voices From the Third World* (June, 1995), attests that cultural analysis is playing an increasing role, for instance, in Latin American liberation theologies.

8. I use the assigned categorisation here of "history" in spite of my own critique of the category as already too Western and European. See Tinker, "Spirituality, Native American Personhood, Sovereignty and Solidarity," *Ecumenical Review,* 44 (1992): 312-24.

9. I have in mind here the work of Albert Memmi, *Colonizer and Colonized* and Ashish Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy.* But note also Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* and Aime Cesaire. I mention these "classics" out of concern that they are too often overlooked in our concern for liberating theologies, yet their analyses of colonialism and the ongoing symptoms of colonial oppression are crucial to our own agenda.

10. To wit, the critique of intra-Asian missionary endeavours today voiced by Aruna Gnanadason, "Asian Theological Methodology: An Overview," *Voices from the Third Word* (June 1995)! "An added phenomenon is the growth of missionary movements within Asia – notably from South Korea. These groups replicate the same mistakes the Western mission movements had made in the last century. They impose a religious mindset which is alien and which exploits the vulnerability of the poor in some countries in Asia, including China, but also in Eastern Europe" (p. 85).

11. See Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide,* for a description of missionary participation in injustices committed against Indian peoples.

12. Ukachukwu Ch. Manus, "Jesus Kristi Oba: A Christology of 'Christ the King' among the Indigenous Christian Churches in Yorubaland, Nigeria," *Asian Journal of Theology* 5 (1991): 311-30.

13. I was gratified to see this issue of the "lordship" of Jesus raised independently

by Virginia Fabella in her keynote paper which began our intercontinental dialogue.

14. See Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide.*

15. Martin Marty's terminology, but significantly appropriated by then President Ronald Reagan in his allusion to the USSR as the "evil empire." See Marty, *The Righteous Empire: The Protestant Experience in America* (New York: Dial Press, 1970).

16. "Lord" is one of those biblical metaphors that seems to have lost all symbolic moorings in modern American society. The problem is that there are no "lords" in our society and no use of "lord" as a form of address that might conceivably give the metaphor content. In other words, before a modern American can appropriate any spiritual content from the proclamation of Jesus as Lord, she or he must engage in enough of a history lesson to have some idea what the word might mean.

There is a further problem in that the most accessible use of the word for Amereuropeans (and undoubtedly for many of the rest of us because of our experience of colonialism in America) is not its use in the eastern Mediterranean world of Jesus' day, but rather its use in European cultures which continues to some extent even today – in places like England, for instance, which still maintains in Parliament a House of Lords. Yet the European use of the word, rooted as it is in the social structures of medieval feudalism, is in actuality a far cry from the Palestinian use that would have been familiar to Mark or even the Greek use that would have been the experience of Luke.

What we are close to saying here is that to continue to use the metaphor in literal translation may be leading the faithful astray, especially the faithful in White North America. Again, it can be argued that it is the preacher's responsibility to interpret, to teach the correct meaning, to unpack the metaphor for the ecclesial community. Yet it seems ludicrous tonic to think that the only path to salvation is in an ancient history lesson focussing on the linguistic culture of a foreign people.

More to the point, what we are experiencing is a shift away from the useful, meaningful, experiential use of language, to what can only be categorised as "religious language." It can be further argued that religious language is by definition and *de facto* language that has lost its meaning and serves only to elicit ceremonial attachment.

17. Warrior, "Canaanites, Cowboys and Indians," *Christianity and Crisis.*

18. Tinker, "A Native American Reading of the Bible," *New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

19. It should also be noted that Indian peoples customarily think in terms of more than two genders, allowing for individuals who appear to be physiologically of one gender but function emotionally and economically as the opposite gender.

See Tinker, "American Indian Berdaches and Cross-Cultural Diversity," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (1988).

20. I explain this somewhat more fully in "An American Indian Theological Response to 'Creation as Beloved of God'," set to appear in a volume edited by Jace Weaver for Orbis Press on American Indian ecojustice.