SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH CORPORATE WORSHIP IN INDIGENOUS CHURCHES IN CANADA: FROM INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES TO BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

by

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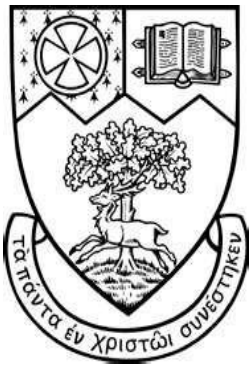

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ABSTRACT

"Spiritual Formation through Corporate Worship in Indigenous Churches in Canada: From Indigenous Perspectives to Biblical Spirituality"

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This dissertation explores creative knowledge and practices in corporate worship designed to foster spiritual transformation and growth among Indigenous congregations. Many Indigenous congregations in Canada experience spiritual depression, partly due to the social and religious challenges arising from colonial history. Furthermore, Indigenous cultures and traditional rituals greatly influence individuals and worship groups, contributing to an identity crisis that distances them from the Christian faith. Understanding Indigenous culture and traditional rituals facilitates a decolonizing approach to Christian theology and worship, enhancing the communication of the gospel. Consequently, theologians and ministers ought to contextualize the gospel, providing a more effective means to convey its essence within Indigenous cultural contexts. Data from the survey and results indicate that communal worship has a direct impact on the spirituality of individuals and congregations, transforming their worldviews and lifestyles in Christ. Contextualized elements of communal worship enrich the experience of God for Indigenous individuals and congregations. Specifically, Indigenous-focused elements enhance the worship experience and strengthen the cultivation of biblical spirituality. Authentic worship encourages Indigenous Christians to grow spiritually, purifying and sanctifying cultural elements and worshipers.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IRS	Indian Residential Schools
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission

INTRODUCTION

Canada's Indigenous population has increased rapidly in recent decades.[1] Despite this, pastoral ministry within Indigenous communities has not received much attention from Christian ministers and practical theologians. Richard Osmer states that the first task of practical theology is "a matter of attending to what is going on in the lives of individuals, families, and communities."[2] I have served in several First Nations churches in the West Coast regions since completing my studies at Bible College and Theological Seminary in Canada.[3] I then relocated to the Prairie Provinces and served at another Indigenous church for several years. I moved to southern Ontario eight years ago and served a First Nations church on an Indigenous reserve. Throughout my years in Indigenous ministry, Indigenous churches in Canada have generally been depressed and declining both spiritually and physically. Many churches on Indigenous reserves face challenges, including vacancies due to low attendance, financial difficulties, and a lack of pastoral leadership.[4] As a result, the role and influence of the church within communities are diminishing compared to traditional rituals and other community events. The church's

[1] According to the 2021 Canadian census, 1,807,250 individuals identified as Indigenous, accounting for 5.0 percent of the country's total population. The Indigenous population grew by 18.9 percent from 2011 to 2016 and 9.4 percent from 2016 to 2021, surpassing the growth of the non-Indigenous population over the same period (5.3 percent).

[2] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 34.

[3] I graduated from Northwest Baptist Theological College (BRE), Langley, BC, and earned a Master of Divinity degree through ACTS Seminary in Langley, BC, and Briercrest Seminary in Caronport, SK.

[4] In the 2001 Canadian census, about 290,000 respondents self-identified as some form of Protestant out of the total Indigenous population of 1,359,010. However, in the 2021 Canadian census, about 180,000 Indigenous individuals identified as Protestant Christians, representing about 10% of the total Indigenous population of 1,807,250.

evangelical tasks as *Missio Ecclesia* are currently in crisis among the majority of Indigenous populations in Canada.

What has caused Indigenous churches to struggle, and what methods exist to revitalize Indigenous ministry while empowering Indigenous Christians to live faithfully and ethically with a biblical spirituality? Historically, the assimilationist approach to Indigenous peoples has resulted in distrust, hatred, dysfunction, and loss of identity; it has also hindered the effective presentation of the gospel to them. Consequently, many Indigenous peoples, including believers and their families, continue to face challenges related to physical and mental illness, as well as spiritual and ethical shortcomings. After ministering to them for an extended period, I propose that individual and collective spiritual transformation, facilitated through contextualized worship services, is crucial. Those whose transformed spirituality impacts their lives and communities contribute to effective evangelism within their nations.

Throughout my life, a conservative Reformed Church in Korea has significantly shaped my denominational identity and theological foundations. Since my youth, Presbyterian Calvinist theology has profoundly influenced my life, theological perspective, and ministry. From this background, I have sought to make the gospel of Christ central to my operational theology by living it out in practical ways. This pragmatic theological approach informs my ministry's orientation, focusing on assisting the poor, the sick, and the marginalized while promoting social justice and community accountability within our societies. With this mission in mind, I aspire to serve Indigenous communities in Canada, particularly through the practical spirit of cross-cultural ministry rooted in Jesus' incarnation for the world. As a pastoral practitioner and researcher, I

envision an Indigenous ministry grounded in pragmatic, theologically informed study, employing cultural hermeneutics within an ethnographic framework. I will draw on my own theological and ministerial experience, as well as discussions with Indigenous Christians, to gain insights into new creative practices of authentically contextualized worship.

As a First Nations congregation pastor, I am concerned about creating inspiring worship experiences for congregations struggling with physical and spiritual challenges that hinder their Christian lives. The goal of my ministry is to help church members experience the power of the Holy Spirit through dynamic worship grounded in biblical and theological teaching. My role and core practice involve planning worship arts and facilitating services, which encompass all aspects of Sunday worship, including music, songs, messages, and sacraments. I hope that my ministry experience can positively impact various disciplines for Indigenous peoples in creative, experimental, and innovative ways through research in practical theology. This research aims to guide a profoundly enriching spiritual journey, not only for myself but also for Indigenous believers, other ministers, and theologians.

In their article "Mapping the Field of Practical Theology," Kathleen A. Cahalan and James R. Nieman write, "Practical theology focuses on called people who manifest a particular faith through concrete ways of life."[5] The main context of practical theology is a human activity involving individual Christians or the Christian community. In other words, practical theology interprets the Christian tradition, considering how God's saving work is manifested in various situations. Becoming a practical theologian means engaging

[5] Cahalan and Nieman, "Mapping the Field," 67.

in a theoretical study of the encounter between God and humans, and interpreting the meaning of human activity from a theological perspective. These tasks are better accomplished by drawing on the pastoral experience and engaging in theological reflection on various academic and practical approaches.

My research focuses on developing a deeper understanding of Indigenous congregations in Canada and on suggesting more effective ministries within their churches. It highlights the spiritual growth in Christ through corporate worship that embraces Indigenous believers. The introduction will provide context for the research, including research questions, methodology, and a literature review of primary published materials about worship practices. In the first chapter, I provide a historical overview of Christianity and Indigenous peoples in Canada, as well as the requirements for a deeper understanding of the contemporary worship context. The second chapter examines the foundations of the theological and theoretical components of Christian worship, with a focus on its role in promoting cultural diversity. This chapter also discusses the theology and philosophy of contextualization in corporate worship. The first two chapters illustrate why Indigenous churches and congregations long for restoration, how they can accomplish their mission through biblical worship, and the impact of this worship on their lives. Chapter 3 examines Indigenous worldviews, spirituality, and inculturation in Christian worship. Shaping the Christian worldview through worship is inextricably linked to reforming the traditional spirituality that Indigenous Christians may possess. I develop two ideas from the authentic contextualization of worship: an incarnational and a sanctifying approach to traditional Indigenous rituals, artifacts, and worship participants. Then, I suggest that authentic contextualization facilitates Indigenous believers' commitment to faithful worship and a life of faith. Chapter 4 explores an Indigenous

perspective on Christian theology and worship by examining the features of the Indigenous concept of the supreme being, Christology, the theology of creation and ecology, and liberation theology. In Chapter 5, I will discuss the survey project, which draws on data collected from interviews and integrates it with discussions from previous chapters. The primary goal of the interviews is to study the inculturation of Indigenous cultural objects in Christian worship contexts. Chapter 6 develops creative approaches to worship elements for Indigenous churches, grounded in the principle that the gospel of Christ should be inculturated into recipients' cultures. This approach relies on the belief that inculturated worship will alleviate personal and societal trauma stemming from forced assimilation. Chapter 7 addresses the potential for spiritual transformation in Indigenous communities through corporate worship, focusing on the paradigm of Knowing, Being, and Doing. I will discuss how authentically contextualized worship ultimately catalyzes the spiritual growth of Indigenous worshipers and communities.

In this study, I hope my experience in Indigenous ministry will lead to insightful analyses and significantly advance innovative ministry practices. As a researcher and a third party in the historical conflict between Indigenous nations and European ethnicities, I aim to approach the topic with a postcolonial perspective and objectivity. I examine how the Indigenous and settler cultures have clashed and coexisted, as well as how cultural assimilation and resistance challenge Indigenous communities. Additionally, I emphasize the importance of viewing colonial history in North America from Indigenous perspectives and understanding how the consequences of colonization continue to affect Indigenous peoples today.

I view Indigenous ministry as a practical discipline with the potential to strengthen its theological foundation and to emphasize cultural hermeneutics. Theological thought and

the interpretation of ethnographic methods will foster the development of practical theology tailored to Indigenous ministry, offering more literature, knowledge, and solutions to the challenges facing Indigenous churches today. This study will also shape how future ministers should engage with experimental and theoretical advancements in Indigenous ministry.

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Over the last century, many Indigenous communities have faced various societal issues due to the trauma caused by forced assimilation. To address this, Indigenous people believe that traditional rituals are necessary for the healing process. Such ideas have influenced corporate worship in Indigenous churches for centuries. Some Indigenous Christians think that the values of Christian worship and traditional spirituality are compatible and that individuals can choose between the two possibilities, both of which must be respected to facilitate healing.[6] Such syncretistic attitudes have impacted the spirituality of individuals and worship communities, generating significant challenges, including an identity crisis for Indigenous Christians regarding their spirituality and ethical obligations. However, legitimate identity, spirituality and ethical obligations should not draw people away from the Christian faith.

Some Indigenous believers tend to regard Christian worship as just one of the traditional ceremonies in which humans seek help from Indigenous spirits using various rituals. In that case, worship services could be merely weekly gatherings for "human-

[6] "A Matter of Faith," 27–31. There is still tension in dealing with the issue. Some Indigenous believers embrace this, while others resist it.

centred" ceremonies. As a result, people may overlook worship practices because they are accustomed to passive attendance during worship. Furthermore, Indigenous Christians frequently struggle with ethical challenges, stumble, and regress in their lives and spiritual journeys. They often face many problems, such as substance abuse, domestic violence, dysfunctional parenting, depression, and crimes, as they remain vulnerable to sustaining self-control due to the effects of intergenerational trauma inflicted by historical mistreatment. Despite this, many Indigenous Christians have had remarkable, faithful journeys through authentic Christian worship, while others remain distant from such experiences and the grace that accompanies them.

Over the last two decades, I have counselled and observed these groups while ministering in Indigenous churches to understand the differences between the two responses. I concluded with Paul G. Hiebert's notion that regularly attending church and participating in baptism and communion do not necessarily indicate that underlying beliefs have changed.[7] Therefore, they should seek communion with God and be empowered and spiritually transformed by engaging with the power of the Holy Spirit. The basic assumption of this study is that contextualized corporate worship can and should have a significant impact on Indigenous individuals and worship communities by imparting biblical spirituality that transforms their traditional perspectives and ways of living.

The primary research question is: How can corporate worship be more formative of the biblical spirituality of Indigenous believers and offer a Christ-centred way of life while transforming their traditional perspectives and lives? The sub-questions are as follows:

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[7] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 10–11.

- How can Indigenous individuals and congregations retain their Indigenous identity while remaining committed disciples and members of the community of Jesus Christ?

- How can Indigenous music, instruments, rituals, and artifacts be effectively integrated into Christian worship?

- What are the prominent characteristics of spiritually transformed Indigenous congregants?

This study addresses these issues and concludes that transformed individual and corporate spirituality helps Indigenous believers overcome past traumas, leading to healthy churches and a significant impact on their communities.

The Importance of the Research

As mentioned, many Indigenous peoples in Canada have been confronted with ethical issues and social challenges. Even many church congregants or their families continue to face challenges such as high rates of poverty, poor physical and mental health, and low levels of education.[8] These problems have left residual issues that have persisted over long periods and have been transmitted to the next generations.[9] The Canadian federal and provincial governments have made various social and economic benefits available exclusively to Indigenous peoples, particularly for younger generations.[10] Additionally, many academic institutions have conducted significant research projects focusing on the lives of Indigenous peoples from diverse social and political science perspectives. However, theological research on Indigenous groups and ministries lags

[8] Boksa et al., "Mental Wellness," 363–65.

[9] Castellano, *A Healing Journey*, ii. The intergenerational impact includes violence, suicide, substance addictions, identity crises, and broken relationships resulting from sexual and physical abuse passed down from Indigenous individuals who attended residential schools, affecting their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

[10] Castellano, *A Healing Journey*, 62–70.

behind other fields of practical theology. This may relate to the roles of the churches involved in the forced assimilation process that harmed Indigenous peoples. Now, these churches must acknowledge that the assimilationist approach has contributed to deep-rooted distrust, intergenerational trauma, social dysfunction, the erosion of Indigenous cultural identities, and ineffective evangelism among the nations.[11] As the community of Christ, the churches in Canada should engage in general repentance and rely on the healing power of the Holy Spirit to disrupt these detrimental cycles.

This research study aims to draw on creative practices and knowledge in corporate worship that may foster spiritual growth and the renewal of Indigenous peoples and churches.[12] I focus on an Indigenous (decolonial) approach to corporate worship and spiritual growth by addressing various elements of the worship service that facilitate the spiritual formation of worshipers. Through contextualized worship, worshipers can recognize God as the giver of life, allowing them to discover their human identity and be holy in God's sight. The primary objective of this study is to provide insight into how corporate worship influences both personal and communal Indigenous spirituality within Indigenous churches in Canada. The study of the practical theology of worship for Indigenous peoples in Canada is of great importance to churches, as it enables the development of Indigenous theoretical and practical methods.

Methodology: Pastoral Ethnography

The primary methodology of this study is ethnography. Ethnography involves studying individuals in their natural environments within a group's communal and ritual life to

[11] Tinker, *Missionary Conquest*, 3–16.
[12] Candy, "Practice Based Research," 3.

gain a comprehensive understanding of the situation.[13] It falls under the broad umbrella of qualitative research methods, focusing on observing and collecting data from people and cultures to explore the beliefs and practices of a specific group.[14] Indigenous ethnography is an ethnographic approach characterized by Indigenous paradigms and perspectives. Indigenous and qualitative inquiry honour Indigenous belief systems (ontology) and their tribal knowledge bases (epistemology) while also recognizing the value of Indigenous principles (axiology). In practical theology, ethnography helps researchers identify and examine a group's theology and lived faith, seeking to find the connections and disparities between their theology and their lived practice.[15]

To explore the worship experiences of Indigenous congregations and understand the thoughts and actions in their lives, the specific approach used within this methodology is "pastoral ethnography," based on the work of practical theologian Mary Moschella.[16] According to her, using ethnography in ministry is essential for individuals and congregations to surface their stories, both for self-recognition and for appreciating the narratives of specific communities of faith that experience and live out those beliefs. This approach enables researchers to explore the faith experiences of Indigenous believers and gain deep insights into the interplay between individual and communal spiritual growth within community churches. The method of pastoral ethnography includes participant observation, interviews, and other pastoral activities.[17] Alongside the methodology of pastoral ethnography, demographic data produced by decennial censuses, including the size and relative distribution of ethnicities within religious groups in the Canadian population, contribute to the quality of the research.

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[13] Moschella, "Ethnography," 225.
[14] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 29–30.
[15] Moschella, *Ethnography*, 46–51.
[16] Moschella, *Ethnography*, 49–51.
[17] Moschella, *Ethnography*, 66–72.

Data Collections

In qualitative research, especially ethnographic research, interviewing is the hallmark method for collecting information about participants' experiences, views, and beliefs regarding a specific research topic or phenomenon of interest.[18] The primary data collection method used in this study was interviewing, consisting of twenty-two semi-structured, in-depth telephone interviews, each lasting forty-five to sixty minutes. The open-ended questions were theoretically driven to draw on participants' viewpoints and experiences. The flexibility of the semi-structured interview allowed me to explore a series of less-structured questions that did not need to be asked in a specific order or use exact wording in each interview. The participants narrated their own stories of experiences rather than answering a series of structured questions, which aligns with the nature of pastoral ethnography and the storytelling ethos of various Indigenous cultures. The interview discussions focused on their experiences of worship, as well as the traditional practices and elements that influence Christian worship in their spiritual lives. Individual interviews contributed to in-depth data collection by providing further insights into people's perceptions, understandings, and experiences of a particular phenomenon. The entire narrative of the interviews was recorded and prepared for analysis, along with the study's final implications.

Analyzing the Interview Data

In this study, the data collected through interviews were analyzed and interpreted within a cultural context, employing an ethnographic approach.[19] Ethnography is a type of cultural

[18] Scharen and Vigen, eds., *Ethnography*, 104–12, 234.
[19] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 13–14.

hermeneutics that is based on contextual interpretation and analysis.[20] Cultural hermeneutics is an approach to interpretation and understanding that considers the social, historical, and cultural factors influencing texts or narrators. This method enables the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the meanings behind Indigenous cultures, their religious practices, and the works of art and literature that they produce. The modes of analysis began at the onset of the interview inquiry and continued throughout the entire interview project. Interview analysis primarily focuses on the definitions expressed by the subjects, clarifying the meaning of what the respondents said. I documented the participants' stories and merged the collected data with the components of cultural exegesis.

Indigenous knowledge systems emphasize the interpretative and subjective, which require highly contextualized analysis. Analyzing the data required me to immerse myself in it, including listening to interview tapes, rereading transcripts, and reviewing field notes. As a result, I began recognizing concepts and themes in the data and sought to discern patterns among the ideas and behaviours. In the analysis stage of the results, I sought to uncover the intrinsic meanings and symbolic functions of the narratives by comparing various data points to gain a deeper understanding of traditional Indigenous knowledge and its implications. Finally, by reflecting theologically on the traditional and religious practices of a local congregation or group, I could interpret the findings in light of the Christian faith.[21] Then, I discuss the meanings and implications of the findings in relation to the research objectives and questions.

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[20] Littlejohn and Oetzel, *Theories of Human Communication*, 394.
[21] Moschella, "Ethnography," 229.

Ethical Considerations

Moral and ethical concerns are significant in interview research, as the data collected from interview questions can potentially harm individuals. Ethical care is crucial when researching Indigenous peoples, as it significantly impacts the research outcomes. For decades, Indigenous communities have expressed frustrations about the historical assimilation of their peoples through residential schools. The shocking discovery of Indigenous children's remains at former residential school sites provoked outrage nationwide. Indigenous communities have demanded that all former school sites be investigated for unmarked graves where numerous young students suffered and died due to the forced process of civilization and Christianization. Such issues are delicate and deeply intertwined with Christian churches and their ministers. Distrust of the church and its ministers can tarnish the genuine intentions of other Christian researchers, making their research purposes less credible to others. Therefore, I considered the potential psychological and social risks associated with the interviews, which aimed to foster confidence while encouraging participants to speak comfortably on their own terms.

As most codes of ethics for human research stipulate, I adhered to the ethical requirements for research, including obtaining informed consent from participants, protecting confidentiality, and considering the implications of their participation in the research project.[22] Before interviewing, I explained the research subjects, primary design features, and the purpose of the interview. Participants may have been concerned about being identified through their private information. Therefore, participants' identities remained anonymous in any results report. Above all, I demonstrated integrity, sensitivity,

[22] The McMaster Research Ethics Board approved this research's ethics application (MREB# 6357) to ensure compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the McMaster Policies and Guidelines for Research Involving Human Participants on May 31, 2023.

and a commitment to moral issues related to understanding and respecting Indigenous worldviews, particularly the responsibilities associated with their traditional and cultural values.

Overview of Research

A substantial body of literature acknowledges the biblical, theological, and practical significance of corporate worship. Much of it is directly related to the development of this dissertation, which primarily explores the conflict between Christian worship and surrounding cultures. These works offer a theoretical and practical understanding of the discernment and contextualization of worship in cultural diversity, a core discussion of this project.

Marva Dawn suggests that we should understand culture and worship more thoroughly to sustain our genuine faith and care for these cultures.[23] She draws attention to the culture surrounding the church's worship, which affects the cultural landscape in which our communities live. She stresses that our relationship with Christ should be central to our lives to overcome the allure of entertainment culture. It is essential to remember that worship should be culturally connected for the sake of worship, not for the sake of culture.[24]

Robert E. Webber suggests that the worship community must clarify the content, structure, and style priorities of the different worship languages.[25] In terms of content, which is non-negotiable, we proclaim and act on Christ and his redeeming work. The structure of worship, which can be modified, serves as the pattern for organizing the

[23] Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 11.
[24] Plantinga and Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits,* 89.
[25] Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 149–50.

content of our worship.[26] The style is constantly evolving in response to the changing culture and preferences of the church. This discussion teaches us to approach critical reflection on theological guidance for discerning spirits and on contemporary worship practice.

Derek Brotherson, the author of *Contextualization or Syncretism,* approaches the cross-cultural worship context by drawing on forms from other faiths and questions how contextualization can be distinguished from syncretism.[27] He discusses how cross-cultural ministries should always be equipped to discern which other worship practices may be considered acceptable forms of contextualization and which should be avoided due to the risk of syncretism. A notable discussion he draws on for the "cultural conversion" issue in Acts 15 shows that the Jerusalem Council upholds the right of Gentile believers to retain their cultural customs, except for certain practices, to maintain unity with Jewish believers. Some assert that the text implies Gentile Christians should keep their cultures, affirming the gospel's ability to redeem Gentiles who have retained their culture and identity.[28]

Indigenous Archbishop Mark L. MacDonald of the Anglican Church of Canada explains contextualization through the concept of Jesus' incarnation: inculturation is the Word made flesh (John 1:1). It describes the process of receiving the gospel and the life of Jesus into a specific cultural context.[29] Additionally, he stresses the power of the gospel as it involves all aspects of culture. Inculturation is a challenging yet transformative process that helps culture better represent the fullness of Jesus' revelation. MacDonald attempts to transplant the Indigenous perspective of Christian

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[26] Webber, *Worship Old and New*, 150–51. Webber suggests a fourfold structure of worship: Gathering, Word, the Lord's Table, and Sending for love and to serve the Lord.

[27] Brotherson, *Contextualization or Syncretism*, 3.

[28] Brotherson, *Contextualization or Syncretism*, 207.

[29] See, for instance, Mark L. MacDonald on "Gospel-Based Discipleship and Indigenous Christians," [n.d.].

worship by incorporating Indigenous beliefs and rituals into the Anglican Church. The worship resources of the United Methodist Church take on a hybrid form, incorporating Indigenous wisdom, pride, and land regarded as holy and honourable during worship.[30] Although the form of inculturation undertaken by the church has been effective in accommodating Indigenous beliefs, the practice of faith and worship has diverged into unhealthy patterns of syncretism.[31]

Syncretism has been a significant issue in Indigenous ministry since "Indigenous people lead their own ministry and articulate their own unique expression of Christian faith."[32] Syncretism refers to the blending of one religious belief and practice with another, which dilutes or obscures the core principles of each.[33] In mission contexts, syncretism may occur when a missionary seeks to make the gospel relevant in a cultural form that retains meanings associated with the Christian belief system. There are numerous approaches to understanding syncretism in the process of contextualization. Ron J. Bigalke explains that syncretism is the "conscious" or "unconscious" merging of two belief systems, typically between dominant and less powerful groups, reflecting cultural contexts.[34] Within Christian ministry, syncretism occurs when church leaders adapt Christian beliefs, traditions, or practices to conform to the prevailing culture.

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[30] "21st Century Worship Resources for Native American Ministries Sunday," [n.d.].

[31] Thorlakson, "The Story of Indigenous Ministry," 32. Some argue that integrating Indigenous elements into Christianity is not contextualization but syncretism, which must be rejected to protect proper theology and practice within the church.

[32] Thorlakson, "The Story of Indigenous Ministry," 31–32. Cayla Thorlakson has criticized NAIITS for overreaching in its attempts to integrate Christian faith within an Indigenous context, veering into compromise or even syncretism.

[33] Sundermeier, "Syncretism," 267. At the Missionary Conference in 1938, Hendrik Kraemer used the term syncretism exclusively in a negative sense, while others viewed it more positively. H. Gunkel, R. Bultmann, and others considered Christianity a syncretistic religion, although they regarded it as a strength rather than a weakness. Syncretism "denotes the inner dynamics of a religion," enabling it to incorporate essential elements from other cultures or religions.

[34] Bigalke, "Contextualization/Syncretism," 599.

According to Carlos Martin, however, one might not even be aware of syncretism in the church, as it can be challenging to recognize it within one's own culture.[35]

David Lindfield differentiates "syncretism from above" from "syncretism from below."[36] Syncretism "from above" is the decision of religious leaders to incorporate Indigenous elements to attract new followers. On the other hand, syncretism "from below" refers to people adopting aspects of different faiths, either spontaneously or intentionally. Syncretism from below typically occurs when a minority group encounters the culture or religion of a more dominant group. Similarly, Martin introduces two basic models of syncretism: symbiotic syncretism and synthetic syncretism. Symbiotic syncretism occurs when a dominant society governs primary cultures, integrating elements of uncivilized religion, while synthetic syncretism involves a "horizontal encounter of transnational religions."[37]

Andre Droogers explains syncretism in both objective and subjective terms, which makes it a challenging concept. The primary objective's meaning is neutral and describes the blending of religions. The subjective definition includes an evaluation of such intermingling from the perspective of one of the involved religions.[38] In this sense, van Rheenen states, "What is considered authentic contextualization by some may be interpreted as syncretism by others."[39] Therefore, syncretism can only be understood through contextualization, as these two processes are interrelated.

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[35] Martin, *Toward a Faithful Contextualization*, 63.
[36] Lindenfeld, "Syncretism," para. 4.
[37] Sundermeier, "Syncretism," 267.
[38] Droogers, "Syncretism," 7.
[39] Rheenen, "Syncretism and Contextualization," 3.

In the context of North America's Indigenous peoples, a church historian, Martin E. Marty evaluates the syncretism of Indigenous American religion, which could not be integrated and contextualized due to the violent history of encounters with Indigenous Americans. Protestants and Catholics both explicitly contributed to the syncretism in their efforts to convert Indigenous Americans. As a result, "the relatively few conversions of Indians resulted in forms of syncretism where Christian beliefs were mixed with Native American beliefs about spirits, nature, and tribe; forms that were dismissed by the missionaries as paganism."[40]

In 2001, the North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies (NAIITS) presented its initial symposium, advertised as a *First Nations Missiological Symposium* in Winnipeg, Manitoba.[41] Since then, NAIITS has held conferences and invited scholars to engage in dynamic conversations about Indigenous culture and faith. In the second symposium, Dr. Terry LeBlanc emphasized a new perspective on contextual theology: "Contextual theology must no longer be restricted to tinkering at the edges of the 'Textus Receptus' of Western theology, making things fit for us, pointing us to the appropriation of a culture and theology not our own."[42] They focus on developing and articulating Indigenous perspectives on mission, theology, and practice. LeBlanc is a Canadian Indigenous scholar who explores Indigenous culture and theology in relation to the mission and ministry preparation of Indigenous North Americans.

Don Saliers' exploration of worship draws on many years of his lectures at Emory University. It has helped advance the discussion about liturgical theology in its

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[40] Marty, "North America," 401.

[41] Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel*, 172–73. NAIITS's primary goal is to engage in honest dialogue about the contextualization controversy and the concerns raised within First Nations ministries and communities.

[42] Leblanc and Leblanc, "Contextual Mission," 87–100. Terry LeBlanc is the founding Chair and currently serves as the director of NAIITS.

human, social, cultural, and aesthetic contexts. He highlights the function of worship as bringing together the world's suffering and as God's self-giving to us.[43] Saliers approaches worship from an eschatological perspective: effective liturgy relates to the future of God and our openness to the profound implications of that future for present living. He has made significant contributions to the debate on the theological foundations of liturgical reform. He asserts that there can be no true liturgical reform unless we reassess what it means to be the Body of Christ in its fullness.[44] For Saliers, liturgical debates are theological debates, regardless of how culturally, aesthetically, or politically complicated they may be.

A significant topic in literature is the relationship between corporate worship and spiritual formation, with the critical concept that the Spirit of God transforms and shapes individuals and communities in the likeness of his holiness through faithful worship.[45] I believe that individual transformation leads to a stronger movement of healthy churches, nurturing communities with the power of the gospel to become disciples of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:46–47; 1 Cor 14:22–25). This final topic can lead to discussions of individual and community transformation in biblical spirituality, which is the ultimate aim of this study.

Brian Schrag, Robin Harris, Frank Fortunato, and James Krabill collaborated as editors on *Worship and Mission for the Global Church*. This collection features contributions from over a hundred authors across twenty nations and introduces readers to the principles and practices of ethnodoxology from a global perspective. In her article in the book, Robin Harris explains that the term "ethnodoxology" was first coined by Dave Hall in the late 1990s by combining three Greek words: *ethne* (peoples), *doxa* (glory), and

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[43] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 22.
[44] Saliers, "Theological Foundations," 20–27.
[45] Dawn, *Reaching Out,* 124.

logos (word). Hall defined ethnodoxology as "the study of the worship of God among diverse cultures."[46] More recent interpretations of ethnodoxology focus on the theological and anthropological exploration of "how Christians in every culture engage with God and the world through their own artistic expressions."[47] This term, ethnodoxology, has been increasingly embraced by ethnomusicologists and mission workers in mission journals and forums.[48] As indicated by the subtitle of this handbook, *An Ethnodoxology Handbook*, it offers a rich blend of experience and insight, encouraging readers to become more informed and actively involved in promoting and supporting the use of local music and arts in global Christian worship. Throughout the book, each essayist shares their experiences, presents their perspectives, and urges readers to consider the challenges, struggles, and triumphs of integrating culturally relevant arts into the global church's activities. This book consists of three sections: "Foundations," which presents biblical and theological viewpoints; "Stories," featuring eighty intriguing case studies from around the world; and "Tools," which compiles essays that describe how many of the ideas and insights discussed in the earlier sections are applied. These well-crafted and engaging essays give readers a comprehensive understanding of local arts in global Christian worship.

The second volume in the ethnodoxology series, *Creating Local Arts Together,* provides comprehensive guidelines and models for research methods and data collection across diverse cultural contexts. Schrag presents a thorough seven-step process that helps

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[46] Harris, "The Great Misconception," 85–86.

[47] Global Ethnodoxology Network, https://www.worldofworship.org/what-is-ethnodoxology/

[48] Harris, the president of the Global Ethnodoxology Network, launched the International Council of Ethnodoxologists (ICE) in 2003. This network was created for worship and mission-focused musicians and artists who expressed a desire to incorporate the newly emerging term ethnodoxology into the group's identity.

practitioners and local communities understand and appreciate local arts as expressions of worship. According to Schrag, all cultures possess the potential to collaborate with local artists to inspire the creation of new songs, dances, dramas, paintings, sculptures, and stories that encourage individuals to bring God's kingdom into their lives and communities.[49] This process begins with field research to gain insights into the community, assisting community members and others in identifying their local artistic resources, which will serve as the foundation for leveraging the arts to achieve kingdom goals. Next, Schrag provides guidelines for critiquing, enhancing, and incorporating these works into community life, allowing the community to use its artistic traditions to express God's truth and address challenges. Then, local artists can produce new pieces while considering suitable forms for the context. Research and relationship-building are central to this process, which cycles through artistic creation and worship celebrations.

W. Jay Moon's *Intercultural Discipleship* explores diverse cultures worldwide and spans different generations in our quest for intercultural discipleship practices that foster spiritual growth. The author, Jay Moon, reminds us that God has provided numerous cultural tools to promote spiritual growth. However, we often overlook these resources and settle for only one. At the same time, Moon argues that many individuals, families, and entire cultures could be transformed if we rediscovered discipleship methods from earlier periods and diverse cultural backgrounds. He asserts that for intercultural ministers to shift worldviews, they should identify cultural forms that can be infused with Christian meaning to shape a Christian worldview.[50] He emphasizes the significance of a holistic

[49] Schrag, ed., *Creating Local Arts*, xv.
[50] Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship*, 116.

approach to discipleship that encompasses various artistic elements, noting that overemphasizing one area can negatively affect others.

In the first three chapters, the author lays the groundwork by detailing the concepts of critical contextualization, which asserts that the gospel must resonate with local culture, and syncretism, which encourages cross-cultural ministers to engage more deeply with Scripture within a context of discipleship.[51] The subsequent chapters address various forms of media, including symbols, rituals, proverbs, dance, and music, all of which the author considers essential for making disciples of all nations. He urges mission workers to apply the four-step process of critical contextualization to various cultural elements, thereby facilitating gospel communication and effectively transforming worldviews, drawing on Hiebert's contextualization theory.[52] Throughout the book, he explores each of these cultural elements in depth. Each chapter provides practical examples and emphasizes the potential of cultural insights from diverse communities to engage those committed to God's truth and nurture discipline in the new generation. The author offers mission practitioners practical suggestions and insightful stories for contextualizing worship and making disciples across varied cultural settings.

Terms and Limitations of the Study

This study was conducted within corporate worship in Indigenous churches in Canada. The following terms are defined and utilized to describe Christian worship and Indigenous cultures.

> *Worship (Corporate Worship)*: Christian worship is a response to the act of the Trinitarian God, who has delivered his people through incarnation, death, and

[51] Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship*, 36–37.
[52] Moon, *Intercultural Discipleship*, 121–25.

resurrection. In worship, we communicate with God by glorifying and praising him as we comprehend his divine reality and mysterious nature. We can extend the meaning of worship by defining corporate worship as a collective enactment through words, prayer, rites, songs, and other worship activities that worshipers can use to impact their communities (1 Cor 14:22–25).

Rituals: Rituals are complex systems of action that employ verbal, gestural, and material signs to express and shape people's thoughts, emotions, and values. They provide a means for individuals to reflect on what they consider essential and to connect with gods (or their powers) to bring about change. Christian rituals constitute a religious symbolic system that expresses and shapes people's thoughts, emotions, and values, facilitating communication with God across time and space and conveying biblical truths and church traditions.

Liturgy/Liturgical: Liturgy is more complex than simply being one expression of worship that churches inherently communicate from history to the present. As a religious language, liturgy possesses a universal component: expressing and forming thoughts involving words, aesthetics, and bodily engagement. It varies uniquely from one denomination or local context to another. Liturgical worship consists primarily of a predetermined order of service with a specified structure that includes written prayers, hymns, scripture readings, and sacraments. This formal worship service is designed to engage the congregation in a communal expression of faith within the context of church traditions. Cultural liturgies are repetitive cultural practices that influence our values, beliefs, and worldviews.[53]

Contextualization/Indigenization (Inculturation): Contextualization is generally an approach and methodology for communicating the gospel and teaching the Christian faith in the recipient's culture so that they genuinely understand both the gospel and the Christian life. Yet, no commonly accepted definition of contextualization exists among evangelicals; it is simply a series of suggestions that agree on the elements required for authentic contextualization. Indigenization and inculturation are similar to contextualization, referring to how Christian ideas are expressed through different cultural forms. However, indigenization (inculturation) focuses only on a traditional cultural dimension,[54] whereas contextualization involves a deeper, more dynamic interaction between the context and the text. It relates to the gradual assimilation and localization of a foreign faith or belief system within a specific cultural context.

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[53] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 23–25.
[54] Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 31.

Worldview: A worldview is a fundamental and all-encompassing perspective on reality that individuals hold to understand the world within their shared culture. It is practical because an individual's worldview influences how they live. A Christian worldview is a core component of Christian teachings, providing a practical and comprehensive understanding of God's truths and values.

Syncretism: Syncretism refers to the loss, blending, or replacement of fundamental elements of Christian doctrine with those of other religious or cultural traditions. In missiology, syncretism refers to the blending of beliefs and practices that are incompatible with biblical teachings, while claiming to be either Christian or compatible with Christianity.

Indigenous Peoples: The term "Indigenous peoples" refers to people who have been the land's original inhabitants since time immemorial. This term is also used interchangeably with "Aboriginal peoples," which comprises three distinct groups in Canada:[55] First Nations, the majority Aboriginal group; Inuit, who mainly inhabit the Arctic regions of Northern Canada; and Métis, who are unique in being of mixed Indigenous and French European ancestry. First Nations and Métis are widely distributed across the country, from the West Coast to the Atlantic regions. Hence, they are fairly involved in the study. However, there are no Inuit participants in my study.[56] Since this is practice-led research for a practical theology that draws on my location and practice, it does not extend to the lives and religions of the Inuit in the Arctic. Their lives and cultures may be similar to those of other Indigenous groups, but we have limited access to data about them.

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of contemporary issues surrounding the incorporation of traditional Indigenous symbols, sacred objects, and rituals into Christian worship. The study contexts are limited to evangelical Indigenous churches and their congregants. It will focus on the correlation between liturgical worship and the spirituality of worshipers, in light of participants' perceptions of the Holy Spirit's work.

[55] "Indigenous Terminology Guide," [n.d.].
[56] Inuit are another Aboriginal group that is legally and culturally different from First Nations.

This study primarily focuses on Canadian Protestant churches, where participants actively engage in all aspects of worship. However, since priests or other designated individuals typically lead the Roman Catholic liturgy, or Mass, on behalf of the congregation, this aspect falls outside the scope of my study. I will frequently encompass the mission and ministry contexts of Indigenous Americans, as their social and religious situations closely parallel those of Indigenous groups in Canada.

CHAPTER 1:

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND CHRISTIANITY IN CANADA

This first chapter provides an overview of the historical backgrounds of Indigenous peoples and Christianity in Canada, offering a deeper understanding of the suffering and trauma caused by colonization, as well as a discussion of contemporary worship contexts in Indigenous churches. The first section reviews how early missionaries initially reached out to Indigenous peoples centuries ago, leading to practices of cultural assimilation. Protestant missionaries usually sought to radically change Indigenous cultures and beliefs with the intent of converting them, while Catholic missionaries exhibited more tolerance for Indigenous lifestyles. In the second section, I will address the delicate issues that Indigenous peoples face today, including the residential school system and the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in Canada. In this regard, the documented actions of apologizing and providing compensation for the mistreatment that occurred during schooling periods by church leaders and government representatives represent significant steps forward.[1] The third section examines how missionaries treated Indigenous peoples during their missions many years ago and the lasting impact this had on Indigenous societies. At some point, the missionaries' success was primarily determined by the Indigenous Christians they encountered, worked alongside, and lived among. The final

[1] In 2007, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) commenced its work. On June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister of Canada issued a historic apology to the survivors of Residential Schools and their families. On June 11, 2010, the Indian Residential School forgiveness was granted. From June 11 to 13, 2011, a national coalition of individuals, including survivors and children of survivors, officially signed. The Charter of Forgiveness & Freedom. On September 19, 2007, the implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement began.

section of the chapter discusses the ministry landscape in contemporary Indigenous churches. Charismatic churches have grown in Indigenous communities over the past few decades due to their affinity with Indigenous spirituality in worship. Other Protestant churches have sought to engage Indigenous peoples by incorporating more Indigenous rituals without thorough theological examination, which raises concerns about syncretism.

Canada's First People and Christian Missions

According to the 2021 "Religion by Indigenous Identity" report by Statistics Canada,[2] nearly half of the Indigenous peoples identify as Christians. Of the approximately 1,807,250 individuals identified as Indigenous, 849,815 (47 percent) identified as Christian, whereas the general Canadian population identifies as Christians at a rate of 53.3 percent. Roughly half of Canada's First Nations, Inuit, and Métis claim Christianity as their religion. How did Indigenous peoples come to adopt Christianity? How has Christianity affected their traditional lives? This section analyzes the practice of evangelism directly connected to Christian missions to Indigenous peoples, focusing on mainstream denominations, including the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and other Protestant churches, as well as Moravian missions and Pentecostals.

The Indigenous Peoples–Christians Encounters

Indigenous peoples and European migrants have coexisted in Canada for centuries, although they have maintained an uneasy partnership since Christian missionaries

[2] "Indigenous Identity," [n.d.].

officially began their missions in the seventeenth century. Since then, European settlers, including missionaries, have focused on establishing dominance to incorporate Indigenous groups into the cultural patterns of Western civilization. As a result, considerable controversies have surrounded Christian missions toward Indigenous nations. The involvement of missionaries in the civilizing process is a prominent theme in discussions of the relationship between missionaries and colonialism.[3] The connection between Christian missions and colonization has raised tensions—not just social but also theological—around the spread of Christianity and civilization.[4]

The first encounters between Europeans and Indigenous peoples in North America differed depending on the countries involved. In 1534, the earliest documented presentation of Christian teachings to Indigenous peoples within the present boundaries of Canada occurred in Gaspé, eastern Quebec.[5] Afterward, European settlers and French Jesuit missionaries began working in Quebec, establishing the leading Catholic mission order in the region. French Jesuit missions were prevalent across North America during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The early missionaries were optimistic about potentially converting the Indigenous peoples, but their efforts were largely unsuccessful. At that time, all Catholic missionaries regarded the new French colony and Roman Catholic churches as distinct, yet they cooperated in matters of colonialism concerning Indigenous nations.

Protestant missionaries typically exhibited a slower and less aggressive approach to missionary activities, whereas the French Jesuits arrived earlier and actively engaged

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[3] Jolly, C*hrist Is Building*, 37.
[4] Austin and Scott, *Canadian Missionaries,* 21.
[5] Gough, *Historical Dictionary*, 143–44.

with Indigenous villages. Initially, the Protestant missionaries and their activities were considered integral to the settlement frontier. Their activities were mainly focused on the newly established settlements and colonial expansion; however, their interest in converting individuals to Christianity was lower than that of Roman Catholics. Consequently, their missions to the northwest coast region before establishing the settlement frontier were limited in number and duration until the late eighteenth century.[6]

The impact of Christianity on the overall structure of Indigenous civilizations varied significantly across regions. In many cases, Indigenous peoples' responses to the missions were initially determined by the missionaries' association with trade products, upon which they became increasingly reliant.[7] The primary explanation for why Indigenous groups tolerated the missionaries' activities and even allowed them to access their communities, despite still being feared and mistrusted, was their concern about maintaining trading relations with them. Consequently, the missionaries were welcomed in the northern Indigenous communities, where more trading resources were available.

The Indigenous peoples of early encounters perceived the missionaries as shamans who offered remedies and other advantages to the European settlers rather than to themselves.[8] In one sense, Christianity and Indigenous religions shared a comparable focus on intimate relationships with the supreme deity, although these connections may have been coincidental. Indigenous religions were not separate from life; they manifested through various customs related to everyday activities. They were primarily based on magical incantations and the manipulation of invisible powers. Therefore, the primary

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[6] Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 119.
[7] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 38.
[8] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 25.

objective of the missionaries was to convert Indigenous peoples while improving their well-being. Additionally, it is clear that their involvement in fur trading, which often drew criticism, was aimed at supporting the success of their missions rather than pursuing profit.

Early missionaries were confronted with moral issues such as polygamy, paganism, alcoholism, and conjuring that prevailed among Indigenous peoples and communities.[9] The approach to dealing with specific ethical problems differed from that of Protestant and Catholic missionaries. Protestants, for example, accused Roman Catholics of disregarding pagan practices, while Roman Catholics blamed Protestants for condoning polygamy. Protestants also placed great importance on literacy, as they relied on the authority of the written word. However, it was not always as essential for Roman Catholics, who tended to believe that images were the most significant form for Indigenous peoples. Despite such differences in missional approaches, the changing circumstances in Indigenous communities and the emergence of Indigenous converts were a result of the missionaries' sincere efforts. Their efforts to promote settlement and cultivation among Indigenous peoples, alongside their gospel teachings, appear to have influenced the next stage of missions.

The Missions of the Roman Catholic

The Roman Catholic Church is the most prominent Christian body in Indigenous Christianity, with more members than all other Christian denominations combined. The Catholic Church has a long history with Indigenous groups, dating back over four centuries. In the seventeenth century, the Jesuits approached Indigenous peoples on the

[9] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 110.

East Coast of the country, near present-day Quebec. They established residences in Indigenous communities, where they became accustomed to learning the Indigenous languages and ways of life while developing trading relationships.[10] As a result, Catholic missionaries gained significant power and attained notable popularity among Indigenous populations in the eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Notably, the nineteenth-century Catholic movement extended across what became Canada, and its missionary outreach to Indigenous communities has continued.

According to the 2021 Census of Canada, approximately 27 percent of all Indigenous peoples in Canada identify as Roman Catholic.[11] Catholic Churches can be found in nearly all dioceses across these Indigenous territories. The census reports show that Catholicism has profoundly impacted their worldviews and lives; however, this does not imply that it has completely transformed them. In most cases, those who are not involved in regular worship services and the parochial life of the church still identify as Christians.

In the last few decades, the Catholic Church has acknowledged its role and responsibility for the historical tragedy that has deeply affected Indigenous peoples. They have promised their ongoing commitment to revitalizing and strengthening relationships with Indigenous communities.[12] Yet, the church attendance rate is relatively lower than that of other denominations. Many Indigenous elders have noted that a large number of individuals in many Indigenous reserves have rarely attended the Catholic Church since

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[10] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 26–31.
[11] "Religion by Indigenous Identity," [n.d.].
[12] Institute for Catholic Education, "Walking Forward Together," 1–3.

the mid-twentieth century. I have also confirmed this during my involvement in Indigenous ministry across the provinces over the past twenty-five years. The authors of *Leaving Christianity* write that Indigenous people "have made a deliberate decision to distance themselves from the beliefs and norms of the Catholic Church."[13] This may be attributed to the Church's focus on traditional Catholic liturgy and the roles of saints and divine intercessors rather than pursuing a dynamic, personal experience with the Spirit of God as followers of Jesus Christ. For Indigenous people, divine beings such as saints or human mediators may no longer be seen as relevant or impactful in their lives. Additionally, Roman Catholic missionaries were often more tolerant of traditional Indigenous rituals than Protestants. As a result, there was a greater degree of syncretism in Catholic churches within Indigenous communities.[14]

The Missions of Protestant Churches

During the seventeenth century, many Protestant missionaries entered Canada, establishing a presence aimed at assimilating Indigenous nations into the Western cultural framework.[15] The missionaries employed two distinct approaches to interacting with Indigenous groups. While their primary objective was to share the gospel of Christ throughout many regions, another goal was to help individuals and communities adapt to Western culture. The British Puritans, in particular, sought to establish and cultivate Christian communities that preserved a distinct separation from the surrounding secular society. They believed that Indigenous peoples needed to undergo a process of civilization

[13] Clarke and Macdonald, *Leaving Christianity*, 152.
[14] Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 139.
[15] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 71–73.

before converting to Christianity, however, the Puritans and their descendants were largely unaware of cross-cultural strategies that could have been applied to Indigenous missions and discipleship. Consequently, the missionaries could readily collaborate with the settlers or the colonial government to implement civilization and enforce assimilation.

Since the mid-seventeenth century, Moravian missions have expanded into the Canadian interior, from east to north and west of Canada. They have dedicated their lives to serving Indigenous communities across the Prairies, Upper Canada, and the Arctic. They were convinced that individual transformation would eventually lead to the conversion and change of their families and communities, with a focus on personal spiritual development. The missionaries provided specific social, spiritual, and economic opportunities inaccessible elsewhere. They were not overly concerned with furthering imperial projects and were culturally non-aggressive. The Moravians, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador, operated boarding schools and orphanages for the Inuit. These were considered highly effective tools for the social transformation of Indigenous populations. Moravian missions reached their peak among Protestants from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. They achieved notable success and distinguished themselves from other residential schools in Canada through the authenticity of their educational programs and evangelization efforts.[16]

Methodists and Anglicans dominated in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Methodist missionaries and other churches, such as the Anglicans, worked in Lower Canada in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[17] Methodists (the

[16] Procter, *A Long Journey*, 8–11; Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 73. Moravian missionaries initiated a highly successful Indigenous mission in Halifax in 1749.

[17] Austin and Scott, eds., *Canadian Missionaries*, 22.

denomination formed by merging three different Protestant denominations into the United Church of Canada in 1925) and Anglicans predominantly influenced many Indigenous communities during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Due to differing teachings and liturgies, many Indigenous believers accustomed to Catholicism or Anglicanism significantly hindered the evangelization of Protestantism throughout the Indigenous nations. Subsequently, contemporary evangelical missions, comprising conservative evangelicals from various denominations, emerged in Canada much later than their mainstream Catholic and Anglican counterparts, beginning roughly in the early to mid-twentieth century.[18] In 1907, a series of Pentecostal revivals in Winnipeg, Manitoba, attracted many Cree people from the north, some of whom later became ordained preachers.[19] Indeed, many new entrants into the mission field were charismatics; the twentieth century was a significant period for Indigenous responses to the gospel. The Protestant mission strategy primarily focused on Indigenous church planting and individual conversion, while Catholics and Anglicans practiced rituals that respected sacred symbols during their traditional liturgies.

In summary, Christianity has had a continuous interaction with the Indigenous peoples of Canada over the past few hundred years. Their reactions to the gospel have varied from rejection to acceptance, with some views in between.[20] Some Indigenous believers blended traditional Indigenous religions and cultures with Christian rituals and beliefs, while others refused to accept Christianity due to conflicts between the two groups.[21] As a result of exposure to Christian teachings through missionary work, many

[18] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 201.
[19] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 201.
[20] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 86.
[21] Crawford, *Native American*, 70.

Indigenous peoples became at least nominal Christians over time. On the other hand, Christianization has led to the fragmentation of Indigenous societies and the breakdown of cohesiveness among Indigenous communities, as becoming Christian, in one sense, meant adopting an anti-Indigenous stance.[22]

The history of Canadian missions is more complex than many recognize. It encompasses the intertwining of Christian missions with imperialism, as well as the tensions surrounding the indigenization of Christianity. Today, many argue that certain missionary outreach efforts to Indigenous peoples have led to oppressive practices of forced assimilation.[23] In one sense, some contend that the missionaries protected Indigenous nations from settlers' violence and the wrongdoings of the colonial government. As Robin Fisher notes in his book *Contact and Conflict*, missionaries often advocated for the rights of Indigenous peoples to fair treatment regarding land issues. As representatives of Indigenous peoples, "they often aroused anger among the European settlers."[24] It is subject to debate whether Indigenous groups were merely helpless victims of colonial history.[25] The generally held notion that missionaries were entirely unsuccessful and made no positive contributions is a controversial assertion that warrants scrutiny through historical and theological analysis.

[22] Berkhofer, *Savation and the Savage*, 122–23.
[23] Morgan, *Travellers through Empire,* 14.
[24] Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 44.
[25] Morgan, *Travellers through Empire*, 59.

Indian Residential Schools

By the late 1800s, the colonial government decided to provide education to Indigenous children through residential schools. During this educational process, at least 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students typically received no education beyond the elementary level within the school system. Many Indigenous children were discouraged and even punished when they attempted to express their original cultures and traditions.[26] For over two centuries, settler colonialism has perpetuated historical and ongoing injustices, and thousands of residential students have been mistreated or gone missing.[27] This section reviews the conflicts and wrongdoings of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) and the reconciliation process among Indigenous communities, the government, and churches.

A Collaboration of Church and State

In the nineteenth century, missionaries initially aimed to teach the gospel, anticipating that the civilization of Indigenous people would follow.[28] However, similar to the early missionaries' attempts, they faced a significant challenge in converting Indigenous peoples due to a lack of cross-cultural theology. There was no attempt to identify values or benefits in Indigenous spirituality or cultural traditions. Instead, they educated the Indigenous people about European values to civilize them within the economic and political system. It became clear that the easiest way for the missionaries to proceed was to start schools where the Indigenous children would receive Western instruction and be kept from following the traditional customs of their elders.[29]

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[26] Gellately and Kiernan, eds. *The Specter of Genocide,* 130–31.
[27] "Hundreds of Children's Remains."
[28] Austin and Scott, *Canadian Missionaries*, 21–22.
[29] Walsh and Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*, 24.

In 1879, Nicholas Flood Davin made a report for the Canadian federal government recommending taking advantage of Indigenous children's ongoing education in schools administered by missionaries. Davin visited Indian Residential Schools in the United States and existing industrial schools in Canada, examining their operations and preparing a report on his findings. He observed that Indigenous education in the United States, particularly in federal Indigenous boarding schools, was used to enforce assimilation. He proposed funding Indigenous schools through a contractual arrangement, with the federal government paying a specific amount per student to the churches that operate the schools.[30] Davin also suggested special incentives for students with exceptional abilities or progress. Initially, Davin proposed funding for four schools, including the first at Prince Albert (Saskatchewan), Old Bow Fort (Alberta), Qu'Appelle (Saskatchewan), and Riding Mountain (Manitoba).[31] Other proposals included teaching staff and wages, mandatory education, and school supplies. His report provided insight into the workings of industrial schools in the United States and the feasibility of establishing comparable institutions in Canada.

Afterward, the federal government formally cooperated with denominational churches to establish and maintain a nationwide system of educational institutions for Indigenous children.[32] The mainline churches, such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, United Church, and Presbyterian churches, played significant roles in this process by operating 139 residential schools aimed at the Christianization and assimilation

[30] Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools*, 13.
[31] Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools*, 13.
[32] Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools,* 288. Indian Residential Schools first operated in western Canada in the 1880s, then gradually spread to every province and territory except Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland.

of Indigenous generations.[33] The residential schools resembled industrial or reformatory institutions for disciplined children. Professor Anne McGillivray summarizes the disciplinary methods used at the time:

> The perishing child and the dangerous child were to be reformed by corporal punishment, regimentation and surveillance, isolation from kin and culture, cultural devaluation, religious indoctrination, and education tailored to social status, and child labour, whatever the model.[34]

According to McGillivray, these techniques were widely adopted in the nineteenth century to normalize childhood for mainstream institutional systems.

The government authorities took Indigenous children from their families to attend these residential schools, which usually resulted in post-traumatic stress disorder.[35] The residential schools enforced strict regimentation, punishing any display of Indigenous language, customs, beliefs, or values. The children endured severe mistreatment, suffering physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse from school staff over an extended period. As a result, later generations did not grow up in typical families but in somewhat awkward relationships and interactions among all members. Furthermore, the trauma inflicted on the original children of the schools was transferred to the next generation of Indigenous children. Later, the government and churches concluded that the residential schools were ineffective as assimilation tools.[36] Both the government and the churches acknowledged that serious abuses occurred in the past and that the school system was

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[33] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 200. Of the 139 residential schools, 64 were operated by Catholic entities. The Anglican Church administered about 36 residential schools, and 15 of them were operated by the United Church. Other denominational churches ran the rest of the schools. Later, integrated residential schools followed, for "orphans, children from broken homes, children of migrant parents, and for those children for whom there are no local day-school facilities."

[34] McGillivray, "Therapies of Freedom," 151.

[35] Gellately and Kiernan, eds. *The Specter of Genocide*, 131.

[36] Virag, "A Disastrous Mistake," 19.

detrimental. In 1996, the government discontinued its collaboration with the churches, assumed control of the residential schools, and began transferring educational authority to regional Indigenous bands.

On the other hand, a few ministers of Indigenous churches who participated in the interviews shared their experiences of the residential schools differently. They attended schools operated by Catholic or Anglican churches. They testified that they had no experience of such mistreatment that severely affected their physical or mental health, although the discipline was harsh. Despite this, the interview participants noted that the religious chapel provided them with an opportunity to study the Bible while exploring liturgical worship, which offered them considerable comfort and solace. Undoubtedly, the residential school system was destructive and harmful in many ways and primarily detrimental to Indigenous children; however, not all experiences in these schools were identical.[37] Attempts at non-residential schools, such as integrated schools and home placement programs, have also raised concerns about their effectiveness and human rights.[38]

Missing Gospel, Missing Children

During the period of the residential school system, the school's religious educators and employees enforced militaristic discipline in the schools and physically and emotionally mistreated the children. As a result, many children who entered the school did not survive

[37] "Residential School Experience," The author of this article, Rodney A. Clifton, is a professor of sociology of education at the University of Manitoba. He says that the "TRC survivors' stories of abuse and misery, as heartfelt and horrifying as they are, present a partial and skewed picture of the entire IRS experience."

[38] Lussier, "Moon of Wintertime," 282–83. Antoine S. Lussier was director of the Native Studies program at the University of Saskatchewan.

for various reasons. It is unknown how many children died in the schools or where they may have been buried. In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) acknowledged in its reports and concluded that at least 6,000 children died while in the care of the church-run IRS.[39] The TRC also stated that there were additional unrecorded deaths, requiring further investigation to uncover the full scope of children's deaths in the schools. Nonetheless, the government did not accommodate all of the Calls to Action.

In recent years, Canadian society has experienced controversy over the ethical issues surrounding the historical assimilation of Indigenous peoples in the school system. On May 27, 2021, the shocking discovery of 215 Indigenous children's remains at a former IRS site in Kamloops, BC, provoked nationwide outrage.[40] A few weeks later, more Indigenous children's remains were found at the Marieval IRS in Saskatchewan. The issue of the disappearance of Indigenous children from the IRS is not new, and Indigenous societies have consistently raised this concern for the past two centuries. Indigenous societies have demanded that all former school sites be investigated for unmarked graves. They contend that many young students suffered and died due to the forced civilization and Christianization processes that the Catholic and Protestant churches, unfortunately, conducted on behalf of the federal government within the school system over the past two centuries. The churches that ran the schools in the name of Christianity should bear appropriate responsibility for the undocumented deaths. This shameful incident starkly illustrates the moral shortcomings of the institutionalized church, which lacks the

[39] "Missing Children," Although the TRC noted that the documentary record was not complete, it has identified 3,200 deaths, leaving the precise number of students who died at residential schools unknown. Since then, the TRC's estimate has increased to over 4,100 and is expected to keep doing so. According to Murray Sinclair, the former TRC chair, approximately 6,000 children might have died at the residential schools, yet they have not been identified.

[40] "Remains of 215 Children," [n.d.].

authenticity of the gospel of Christ, as highlighted by various ethical failures throughout the history of Christianity.[41]

The IRS and ethical issues are sensitive and closely related to Indigenous ministry today. Distrust of the church can undermine the efforts of sincere ministers, making the gospel seem less credible. This adds another challenge to the reality that Indigenous peoples have faced spiritual distress due to the historical period of colonization and Christendom. It serves as a reminder of the trauma and horror associated with schools in general, which affect both individual and communal spirituality by fostering immorality and diverting people from biblical ethics. Indigenous peoples have a spiritually receptive disposition, are intellectually and spiritually equal to other nations, and can be devoted Christians. Today, the contemporary church should help them overcome past trauma, walk alongside other Christians, and experience spiritual regeneration through the Spirit.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

On June 1, 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, also known as the TRC, was established to conduct a comprehensive study of the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) system while exploring broader political questions regarding its legacy. The TRC has allowed many victims to speak out about their experiences publicly and have their voices heard by both the government and Indigenous communities. The TRC intended to create an opportunity for survivors who attended residential schools to recover from the harm inflicted over centuries. After seven long years of work and collaboration with various parties, the TRC of Canada was completed in June 2015. It released a report on

[41] Carter, *Rethinking Christ*, 86–93.

the residential school system contains 94 recommendations.[42] The report stated that the practices of the IRS included racism, sexual abuse, deprivation, and the extinction of Aboriginal languages as central components of a government-led cultural genocide, urging all Canadians to embrace the immense challenge that would help right the wrongs caused by the residential schools.[43]

Over the last several decades, officials of Christian denominations have offered apologies to Indigenous societies in the name of reconciliation. The United Church of Canada apologized to Canada's First Nations in 1988, while the Anglican Church apologized in 1993. In 1994, the Presbyterian Church in Canada adopted the Confession to God and Indigenous peoples for its role in the IRS system.[44] Along with recognizing their failures, the Government of Canada offered its historic apology to the survivors of the schools and their families on June 11, 2008. Two years later, an Indigenous representative granted IRS forgiveness on June 11, 2010. Federal Indian Affairs Minister Chuck Strahl accepted a "Charter of Forgiveness and Freedom" from members of the Indigenous communities as part of the healing process for survivors of the IRS.[45]

On July 25, 2022, Pope Francis visited Canada to apologize to Indigenous communities for the Roman Catholic Church's role in the IRS. Many Indigenous leaders, however, found their expectations falling short due to his failure to acknowledge the church's wrongdoing rather than offering a personal apology. They wanted the church to move forward in reconciliation by making concrete commitments and taking meaningful action. By doing so, the relationship between the Catholic Church and Christians within

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[42] Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Honouring the Truth,*184–362.
[43] Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Honouring the Truth*, 1–6; 83–112.
[44] "Church Apologies," [n.d.].
[45] "Forgiveness Granted," [n.d.].

the Indigenous community would strengthen, allowing wrongs to be forgiven, which is the ultimate goal.

According to the final report of the TRC,[46] the entire assimilationist approach of Western Christian churches and the government towards Indigenous peoples is critiqued for its arrogance and condemned for its flagrant breach of human integrity. It has resulted in distrust, hatred, dysfunction, and loss of identity, preventing Indigenous peoples from embracing the Christian faith. We have witnessed these social impairments create barriers to building relationships and accepting the gospel message. Theologian Craig A. Carter criticized that "Christendom was not biblically justified; it was not theologically sound; it was not pastorally responsible; and it was not evangelistically effective."[47] The forced educational projects aimed at civilizing and Christianizing Indigenous peoples constituted institutional injustice and state-sponsored religious violence. The history of residential schooling will be subject to ongoing historical, ethical, and theological review and evaluation.

The Missionaries as the Agents of Assimilation

Christian missions and missionaries have played a distinctive role in Canada's cultural history as a new colony of the French and British empires. Since they arrived in North America, they have served Indigenous peoples while collaborating with colonial authorities.[48] This section will discuss how Christian missions contributed to the spread of European cultures and belief systems within Indigenous communities. To grasp this,

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[46] Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Honouring the Truth*, 1–6.

[47] Carter, *Rethinking Christ*, 22–23. Carter says, "Christendom was more about covering up paganism than about actually converting."

[48] Austin and Scott edited *Canadian Missionaries*, 33.

adopting a postcolonial perspective would significantly expand our understanding of the missionaries and their impacts, enabling us to approach the development of contemporary mission theology in Indigenous contexts more effectively.

The Work of Missionaries

It is widely recognized that during encounters between the dominant Christian culture and Indigenous populations, missionary activities aimed to convert these peoples and assimilate them into Christian civilization.[49] The missionaries, along with the colonial government, sought to educate, civilize, and ultimately evangelize the Indigenous populations. This primarily involved eradicating Indigenous identity to transform them into Christian citizens, as they were viewed as uncivilized savages.[50] However, the colonists held perspectives that differed significantly from those of the missionaries. They were skeptical that Indigenous peoples could be transformed, even if they closely resembled white settlers in terms of civilization. To the settlers, the missionaries seemed to be wasting their efforts because the Aboriginals appeared to have no future. Nevertheless, the missionaries engaged with culture, expecting a complete transformation in their converts. They pursued this agenda more aggressively than other white settlers, seeking to eliminate the traditionally integrated Indigenous way of life.[51]

When the missionaries tried to establish the Christian faith more forcefully among the Indigenous peoples, they met with little success, as the complex entanglements of the

[49] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 297. According to Bosch, by the end of the nineteenth century, the evangelical missionary movement was divided between those who believed that evangelism came before civilization and those who believed that civilization was necessary for evangelism.

[50] Jennings, "A Model for Christian Missions," 57; Randall, *Native American Religions*, 102–5.

[51] Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 144–45.

colonial process inevitably yielded ambiguous consequences. Several factors contributed to the mission's failure, even during what appeared to be the most one-sided cultural encounters.[52] First, many missionaries worked within the colonial policy framework established by the settlement frontier.[53] They exhibited cultural insensitivity, political disposition, and financial impropriety.[54] Canadian church historian John W. Grant describes the mindset of English missionaries in the early nineteenth century:

> That the aboriginal peoples of the world could hope to survive contact with the European colonizers only by adopting their religion and civilization was a precept so deeply engraved on the British mind in the early nineteenth century that no missionary of the Protestant faith, at any rate, could begin his work with any other expectation.[55]

Likewise, some Catholic missionaries travelled with fur traders to conduct business with Indigenous villages, while other British missionaries tended to work on expanding new settlements. Such colonial images could not provide a trustworthy environment for effectively communicating the gospel. Although many missionaries played a significant role in colonial relations with Indigenous groups, some missions and their efforts served as the vanguard of the colonizers.

Secondly, some settlers, including missionaries, viewed Indigenous peoples as racially inferior beings who needed to be tamed.[56] The missionaries were overconfident in their own culture and, therefore, had no qualms about interfering with Indigenous traditions.[57] American anthropologist George J. Jennings used the terms

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[52] Austin and Scott, *Canadian Missionaries*, 5.
[53] Fisher, *Contact and Conflict,* 142.
[54] Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 144–45.
[55] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 109.
[56] Jennings, "A Model for Christian Missions," 60. Some Puritan settlers regarded the Indigenous Americans as agents of Satan and justified their conduct of destruction by disease or firearms as a blessing of God's providence ('A Model for Christian Missions," 57).
[57] Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*, 125.

"Euroconformity"[58] and "mission conformity" in his research article, *A Model for Christian Missions to the American Indians*. According to him, Indigenous peoples were initially deemed uncivilized heathens, and many missionaries believed it was biblical only when their expressions matched those of European Christianity or culture. Such an ideology was embedded in a movement of missionizing and education that has endured for centuries and is accepted by many Christian denominations. Similarly, some Indigenous tribes have been in contact with missionaries for several centuries, and the relationship between missionaries and Indigenous peoples persists as a variant of mission conformity. Consequently, the missionaries could observe the progression of their converts as they moved along the path of life, ultimately leading to assimilation. In other words, Indigenous societies have adopted many cultural traits brought by the settlers and have participated in religious practices as part of the assimilation process.

Third, regarding land appropriation, the conquests disregarded the rights of Indigenous groups who had inhabited the area for generations. Two theories of extreme racial action justified the conquest of Aboriginal lands, acting as if they had rights to the land:

> A Papal Bull issued in 1493 articulated the Doctrine of Discovery, which laid claim to lands that were not under Christian control. More explicitly, New England Puritans articulated a doctrine of "vacuum domicilium," the right to take vacant land to make it productive and make it prosper. Thus, Indian lands on which they hunted, fished, trapped, and gathered were seen by Euro-Americans as vacant and undeveloped.[59]

[58] Jennings, "A Model for Christian Missions," 61–62. "Euroconformity" is a conceptual model that has been used to describe the interaction between White settlers and Indigenous peoples, while "mission conformity" refers to the relationship between missionaries and Indigenous peoples.

[59] Booss, "Missionaries, Measles, and Manuscripts," 109.

In this view, missionaries were indifferent when they learned about the forcible evacuation of devastated reserves. In one sense, the Protestant missionaries, for a good reason, often tried to isolate Indigenous peoples to protect them from contact with fellow immoral settlers. As a result, in the nineteenth century, the missionaries sought to keep their Indigenous followers isolated on reservations and away from the appealing lives of white settlers' society.[60]

Fourth, many missionaries attempted to impose Christian doctrines on Indigenous converts rather than serve as examples of a humble lifestyle. Most Indigenous Christians misunderstand missionaries due to their affluent lifestyle.[61] They share everything among themselves, as shown by their communal way of living, which is not a religion but a lifestyle; their traditions are not religions but ways of life.[62] In the history of mission work, some missionaries have criticized Indigenous believers for failing to grasp the specifics of Christian doctrine or for continuing to adhere to their traditional beliefs and customs. Instead of imposing their will, missionaries ought to have taken the time to understand Indigenous culture and language.[63] Thus, the idea that missionaries changed Indigenous peoples or their religions does not always hold.

A Case Study: Moravian Missions in Arctic Canada

In the mid-eighteenth century, Moravian missionaries from Europe arrived in Canada to Christianize the Inuit. The colonial authorities of Labrador and the Moravians aimed to

[60] Jennings, "A Model for Christian Missions," 62.
[61] Jennings, "A Model for Christian Missions," 69.
[62] McNally, "The Practice of Native American Christianity," 849.
[63] Jennings, "A Model for Christian Missions," 61. Very few missionaries indeed attempted to learn the Indigenous language to understand the Indigenous culture better.

establish stations for both missionary work and trade. After much discussion, in 1752, an exploratory mission trip ended in tragedy when the Inuit killed German missionary Johann Erhardt and six crew members. Then, another group of Moravian brethren went to Nain and built mission stations and trading posts, establishing peaceful relations and trade with the Inuit. During the scarcity of 1791, the Inuit experienced severe food shortages. The Moravian missionaries supplied relief, and many Inuit, particularly widows and those in vulnerable social situations, sought assistance at the missions. Years later, during the significant revival movement among the Inuit, many more people converted to Christianity, fulfilling the missionaries' long-held hope.[64]

The Moravians approached missionary work in a distinctly different manner compared to other Europeans. Their commitment to learning the local language and working alongside the community facilitated the missionaries' integration with local cultures. The missionaries aimed to transform Inuit spiritual beliefs through Christianity by guiding their behaviour in accordance with the Inuit's moral standards for proper conduct. They believed that social and religious changes would foster healthy, organized communities of dedicated and disciplined individuals. Ultimately, their efforts focused on improving all aspects of ethical and spiritual life, significantly enhancing the Inuit's lives.[65]

Additionally, the missionaries in Inuit territory were convinced that education in schools was crucial to converting the Inuit to Christianity, as it might persuade young people that their families' religious beliefs and cultural traditions were immoral. Although boarding schools disrupted close family relationships and community connections, some

[64] Procter, *A Long Journey*, 36.
[65] Procter, *A Long Journey*, 38.

Inuit families welcomed the education that the schools provided. In some communities, boarding schools were the only option, so parents hoped that literacy skills and other training would help their children. Initially, attendance at boarding schools was voluntary, and mandatory school attendance was implemented when Newfoundland and Labrador joined the Federation in 1947.[66] However, they respected the Inuit language and operated boarding schools in Inuktitut and English.

Moravians' efforts to convert the Inuit in their communities and schools were modest, non-violent, and patient.[67] The first school opened in 1955, but closed because students and their families did not want to move far to attend boarding school; instead, they preferred day schools in their hometowns. The missionaries were resolved to empathize with those to whom God had sent them, and since they did not serve as agents of colonial power, the plight of the Indigenous peoples became their own.[68] Consequently, compared to other residential schools in different provinces, few traumatic experiences associated with the Moravian-run boarding schools were reported. As this Arctic Inuit case demonstrates, their incarnational missions, guided by devotional spirituality, led to a paradigm shift in Indigenous missions.[69]

Contemporary Indigenous Ministry Landscape

Practical theologians John Swinton and Harriet Mowat strongly emphasize the importance of the church's context in ministry. They state, "One of the main critical tasks of practical

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[66] Procter, *A Long Journey*, 9.

[67] Westmeier, "Becoming All Things," 173. Westmeier described the character of the Moravian missions to the Indigenous Americans as "the Moravian peace emphasis corresponded with a centuries-old Native American peace vision."

[68] Wheeler, *To Live upon Hope*, 82.

[69] Rollmann, *Hopedale*, 172–73.

theology is to recognize distorted practice, call the church back to the theological significance of its practices, and enable it to engage faithfully with the mission of God."[70] In this sense, I will explore the landscape of Indigenous ministry, which reveals the current state of Indigenous churches.

In the past half-century, the Indigenous ministries of the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches involved in evangelism for Indigenous groups have decreased significantly.[71] As a result, many churches have begun to suspend operations, especially in the Catholic, United, and Anglican churches. Half or more of the Indigenous churches lack pastoral leadership, and the decline of these churches has created a spiritual vacuum. Recently, Pentecostal churches have faced their most challenging period in history, marked by declining attendance, dwindling finances, and a shortage of pastors.[72] Reflecting a decades-long decline in revivalism, these churches are committed to repairing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and their churches. This endeavour has given rise to distinctive phenomena in worship and church leadership. The notable developments include charismatic worship styles and syncretistic practices.

Charismatic Worship

One of the most significant transitions in Indigenous Christianity was the emergence and movement of charismatics in the early to mid-twentieth century. Compared to the mainstream Catholic and Anglican churches, whose mission activities date back centuries, the charismatic movement for Indigenous nations began after the 1960s and has achieved

[70] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 24–25.
[71] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 92–93.
[72] Wilkinson, ed., *Canadian Pentecostalism*, 164.

notable success.[73] This movement provided the momentum that encouraged the charismatic revival within Indigenous churches, developed strength, and spread rapidly among Indigenous communities across Canada.

Since 1986, the PAOC, Canada's largest Pentecostal body, has affiliated with over 108 Indigenous congregations in First Nations territories.[74] How could Pentecostalism proliferate among Indigenous churches during that period? Canadian church historian John W. Grant explains the spread of Pentecostalism among Indigenous peoples. Grant writes in his book that "the Pentecostals, whose charismatic approach has affinities with Indigenous concepts of communion with the spirits, have been especially successful in winning Indigenous converts and in developing Indigenous leadership."[75]

Despite recent successes and the rapid growth of Pentecostalism within Indigenous churches, some scholars express concerns about the spirituality and practices associated with indigenized Pentecostalism.[76] Such embedded features of indigenized Pentecostalism can be observed within Indigenous churches and among individuals. First, how Indigenous believers experience God is compatible with Pentecostal epistemology, based on the teachings of Scripture. They tend to understand that an experiential way of testifying to mystical encounters with the Spirit defines the Christian faith. Although Christian life is receptive to a sense of mysterious power and presence, the basic framework of faith should be centred on the gospel's teachings rather than on individuals'

[73] Collins, "The Historiography," 26.
[74] Berkinshaw, "Native Pentecostalism," 142–63.
[75] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 202.
[76] Westman, "Pentecostalism," 141–42.

lived experiences, as these contexts vary. Such an indigenized Pentecostal perspective may facilitate an emotion-driven worship style.[77]

Second, Indigenous peoples' experiential dispositions—promoting ecstatic spiritual experiences and healing ceremonies—are directly linked to the growth of Indigenous Pentecostalism. Substantial evidence indicates that Pentecostalism in Indigenous churches is influenced by or responds to the enduring strength of various shamanistic traditions.[78] Pentecostalism offered a distinct religious experience for Indigenous believers in North America, distinguishing it from other forms of Christianity.[79] Indigenized Pentecostalism emphasizes the existence of spirits, healing, and miracles while also being receptive to validating and integrating elements of Indigenous spirituality that may foster contemporary religious pluralism or syncretism.[80] Moreover, Indigenous Pentecostal healing ministry bears a resemblance to physical healing in traditional Indigenous practices. Indigenous Christians perceive a worship service as a means to achieve physical healing or material prosperity, aligning with the primary purpose of Indigenous cultural practices related to divine healing. While physical healing is one of the many inclusive benefits of Christ's atoning work, Indigenous Pentecostals may blend biblical worship services with traditional and cultural practices to promote physical recovery or material prosperity.

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[77] Westman, "Pentecostalism," 142.
[78] Westman, "Pentecostalism and Indigenous Culture," 141–42.
[79] Tarango, "Jesus as the Great Physician," 107–126.
[80] Westman, "Pentecostalism and Indigenous Culture," 152.

Syncretistic Worship

Over the last few decades, Protestant churches in Indigenous communities have found it increasingly difficult to maintain their ministries, even suffering shortages of pastoral ministers.[81] At the same time, the churches have acknowledged the history of colonialism and its subsequent role during the residential school era. They are attempting to mend their relationships with Indigenous people, as they are aware of the suffering that forced assimilation causes. Recently, Indigenous ministers of denominational churches have tried to incorporate Indigenous traditional rituals into modern church worship.

An Anglican Church, for instance, attempted to build momentum to help Indigenous Christians find healing as they recover from the traumas suffered in the wake of the residential schools.[82] A liturgical ceremony called "standing stones" created a radically alternative approach.[83] An amalgamation of Christian and Indigenous traditional beliefs provides a tool to help the churches become agents of reconciliation within their denominational contexts. This ceremony, rooted in Indigenous practices, has served as a symbolic restorative act to help Indigenous worshipers find healing for themselves and their communities. Another Indigenous traditional ritual, "smudging," is commonly practiced and infuses conventional Anglican worship with Indigenous spirituality.[84]

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[81] This is based on my observations within Indigenous reserves across Canada over twenty years. Most traditional churches, such as Roman Catholic or Anglican churches, were vacant, with no services held except for special occasions or community gatherings.

[82] In 1992, the Anglican church officially apologized to Indigenous peoples for spiritual harm inflicted by the church.

[83] "Standing Stones." The four main components of Standing Stones are: confession and purification; a wisdom circle; healing and reconciliation; and thanksgiving. Participants smudge to purify their minds, hearts, and spirits and better understand God. Next, they explore Indigenous stories and scriptures to seek wisdom, invoke God's healing water, offer prayers for themselves and their communities, and commemorate God's actions by sharing native foods. Standing Stones serves as a new presence of Jesus for Indigenous communities. According to the church, this circular ceremony signifies Christ's reconciling love, healing historical wounds and enlightening future generations.

[84] "Cree Pastor in Edmonton Blends Indigenous and Christian Beliefs," [n.d.].

The United Church also acknowledges the limitations of Christianity rooted in European origins and the profoundly negative impact it has had on Indigenous peoples. In 1986, the United Church issued a public apology for imposing its civilization as a condition for accepting the gospel.[85] It has built new relationships with Indigenous communities and incorporated Indigenous themes into public worship. Subsequently, the United Church has aimed to ensure Indigenous ministries understand their needs, share their wisdom, and support and empower their people.[86] The relevance of Indigenous culture, spirituality, and leadership within the denomination has become increasingly vital for the church. Additionally, the church's faith statement recognizes and practices the "sweat lodge" ceremony as part of the worship service,[87] one of North America's most common and widespread Indigenous rituals.

Other denominations, such as Methodist and Presbyterian churches, strive to connect with more Indigenous peoples by prioritizing the indigenization of the gospel in corporate worship. They incorporate Indigenous culture, language, music, and governance, including the development of local leadership to convey the gospel of Christ. These churches assert that the words of God should be accessible to Indigenous peoples to heal past wounds and enlighten future generations. These efforts can encourage them in various ways while also requiring additional discussions. I will explore this subject further in the remaining chapters.

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[85] "Remembering the Children," [n.d.].

[86] For instance, the United Church has incorporated the four colours of the "medicine wheel" and the Mohawk phrase ("Akwe Nia'Tetewá:neren"—all my relations) on their United Church crest since 2012. They declare that "the medicine wheel teaches us to seek balance in the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of the circle of life."

[87] "The United Church." The primary purpose of a sweat lodge is spiritual healing, although it is also believed to have a physical cleansing effect. United Church–conducted sweat lodge ceremonies are held regularly at the Sandy-Saulteaux Spiritual Centre in Beausejour, MB, an Indigenous-oriented retreat center.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the historical backgrounds and ministry contexts of Indigenous peoples in Canada. In encounters between the dominant European culture and Indigenous populations, missionary activities aimed to evangelize Indigenous peoples and to bring Western civilization. Evangelizing Indigenous peoples meant eradicating their identities and cultures, transforming them into Christian citizens, as the missionaries regarded Indigenous peoples as savages. Such an ideology is embedded in a movement of missionizing and education that has endured for centuries, involving many Christian denominations. Namely, the primary paradigm of Indigenous missions is rooted in Canadian nationalism and cultural imperialism. In that sense, modern missionary efforts are considered, in part, failures due to the catastrophic rupture in Indigenous-settler relations. Notwithstanding, the influence of Christianity on Indigenous societies varies substantially among regions. The Moravians' successful missions to the Inuit demonstrate how contextualized missions can impact Indigenous peoples.

The appropriateness of the residential schools operated by the church and state as educational institutions for Indigenous children is an ongoing subject of critique and condemnation. The involvement of missionaries with Indigenous children at residential schools, in collaboration with governments, resulted in profound suffering for many students. Generally, Indigenous peoples view missionaries as messengers of Western Christian beliefs and agents of cultural imperialism, while residential education functions as a means of social control. Many missionaries remained indifferent, even after becoming aware of the forcible evacuation of devastated reserves. Lastly, I examined issues related to what is happening in Indigenous churches and the landscape of Indigenous ministries. In recent decades, many Christian denominations have accommodated Indigenous culture

and included Indigenous ritual elements in public worship services to engage more Indigenous groups; however, this has not significantly impacted the people's faith and spiritual lives.

CHAPTER 2:

THEOLOGY OF WORSHIP AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

This chapter explores the theology of Christian worship across diverse cultures, with a particular focus on its relationship with Indigenous cultures in North America. Understanding the meaning of worship is foundational for this research study, facilitating an ongoing discussion of the research theme throughout the chapters. In the first section, I will examine the implications of worship by tracing biblical foundations and presenting theological perspectives. A theology of worship is a collection of beliefs and practices about who God is and how we should respond to him, incorporating the proper function of worship within the belief system. Above all, the theological foundations of worship address God's divine initiative in his redemptive covenants and in his self-revelation to humanity and the Church.[1] The doctrine of the triune God must be central to the theology of worship since God is the ultimate object of worship. The central contents of worship celebrate Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection. The components of worship may vary and can include prayers, music, songs, preaching, sacraments, and other forms of artistic expression. Holy Scripture, as God's revelation, is the foundation of Christian worship, which worshipers believe they should adhere to.

The second section examines how secular cultures influence contemporary worship by creating attractive cultural liturgies. Diverse cultures have consistently shaped

[1] Aniol, *By the Waters*, 127.

corporate worship, diverting people from biblical perspectives and priorities. When worship encounters diverse cultures, it is crucial to preserve the essence of the gospel from non-biblical influences. Worship is accessible to all cultures while remaining distinct from cultural rituals. I will present the key features that distinguish corporate worship from other human-centred cultural practices. The essential point is that the Holy Spirit engages in and presides over our worship.

The third section addresses the theology of contextualizing worship. A primary goal of missional inculturation is to effectively share core beliefs and biblical traditions in various cultural forms within worship contexts. Here, I will introduce three dimensions of worship to evaluate contextualization: content, structure, and style. At the same time, I will tackle several challenges related to developing adequate contextualization to avoid syncretism. As the Indigenous church matures through worship, it may recognize how the meanings of traditional cultures and rituals can be incorporated into its context, utilizing what it has learned about the principles of biblical worship.

A Theology of Worship

A theology of worship (liturgy) is a set of doctrines about how God should be honoured. It refers to a collection of beliefs and practices that incorporate the proper worship functions within the Christian belief system. The primary objective of liturgical theology is to explain and articulate the understanding of God implicit in worship.[2] In worship, the church interprets and applies the knowledge of God as presented in scripture, highlighting that God listens to what we say to him. Those who participate in worship engage in the

[2] Wolterstorff, *The God We Worship*, 170.

practical application of serving and adhering to God's will while being inducted into the tradition of liturgical worship. Consequently, the worshiper's desire to love and obey the Lord may increase significantly. Discussing the theology of worship in this study serves the essential purpose of providing the theological foundation and theoretical framework for this research project. It will allow us to examine and understand Indigenous traditional rituals and ways of worship through the lens of biblical worship.

Understanding Christian Worship

In worship, worshipers communicate with God through the Spirit and actively trust in the divine reign and sovereignty that transcend human experience. Worship centres on God, as individuals direct their affection, praise, lament, confession, and adornment towards him. However, contemporary worship in some churches often emphasizes musical sound and environments that engage worshipers' actions and emotions, creating an exciting and enthusiastic atmosphere. In other words, these practices prioritize the emotional experiences of worshipers over genuine communication with God. Therefore, it is essential to return to the original purpose and function of worship, focusing on God, after understanding the biblical and theological implications, which I will explore in the following section.

The Nature of Christian Worship

Christian worship is "the supreme and only indispensable activity of the Christian Church."[3] In our English Bibles, worship refers to "bowing down" or falling prostrate

[3] Nicholls, "Jacob's Ladder," 9.

before someone who is worshiped.[4] This is an ancient way of showing vulnerability and submission to the deity. David Peterson examines the Old Testament vocabulary for worship, describing the human side of engaging with God.[5] He demonstrates that Old Testament worship is characterized by grateful submission, service, and reverence, connecting attitudes with actions associated with the tabernacles and temples. These attitudes are not limited to those actions but extend into faithfulness and obedience to God's covenant demands.[6] The nature of worship is to respond to and engage with God's majesty and gracious work in his redemptive history.[7] The content of worship is to remember and celebrate what God has done for us through the person and work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.[8]

Theologians generally characterize worship as a community gathering for human response and spiritual acts of drawing near to God through Christ.[9] Worship forms and styles vary depending on the congregation's denomination, culture, or ethnicity. Liturgical worship refers to public rites with specific histories centred on external structures and church traditions. In contrast, a modern and non-liturgical concept of worship does not follow traditional structures but primarily focuses on the individual's internal experience.[10]

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[4] Ralston, "The Spirit's Role," [n.d.].

[5] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 28, 35.

[6] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 73.

[7] Allen and Borror, *Worship*, 16. The authors define worship as "an active response to God whereby we declare his worth. Worship is not passive but participative. Worship is not simply a mood; it is a response. Worship is not just a feeling; it is a declaration."

[8] Webber, *Worship Is a Verb,* 38.

[9] Aniol, *By the Waters*, 147. The editor says, "Christian theology of worship is rooted in the radical nature of gathering, which in turn was rooted in the revolutionary character of a theology that believed in a God who called us together to form a new community" (263).

[10] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 16.

Today, worship is often narrowly defined as the musical and singing parts of a Sunday service, usually led by a dynamic worship team. These elements are essential for worship as a means of prayer, thanksgiving, confession, praise, and glorification of God. We must have the right relationships with God and others to make our worship more genuine, spiritual, and truthful. In other words, we are to be reconciled to God (Lev 7:1–21) as well as with other people (Matt 5:23). In this sense, worship encompasses not just the concept of the adoration of God but also the entire range of a Christian's life and activities (Rom 12:1–2). Furthermore, engaging with the distinct practices of Christian elements—scripture, prayer, and sacraments—is essential for worshipers who want to participate in Christ's ministry. In short, worship is an active, holistic response to the divine revelation of the holy God, characterized by reverence, love, and dedication to serving him.

Worship in the Scripture

The biblical foundation of worship can be traced to God's creation of humans, as indicated in Isa 43:21: "The people I formed for myself that they may proclaim my praise." God intended for humans to worship and praise him, and he desires to be honoured by our worship. When this is the case, he will come and bless us (Exod 20:24).[11] The narrative of Exodus also shows that the deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt was meant to enable them to worship God in the wilderness. In Exod 3, God promised Moses that the Israelites would be rescued from slavery in Egypt and given the land that their forefathers

[11] God commanded Israel, "Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burned offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you" (Exod 20:24, NIV).

were promised.[12] After the successful liberation from Egypt, Moses received instructions to remind the people of how the Lord, through his mighty deeds, had graciously led them to himself (Exod 19:3–4). The people of Israel bowed their heads and worshiped when they realized God had seen their misery. God's gracious care is a strong motivator of worship in the Old Testament. The start of acceptable worship does not depend on human inventions but rather on God's divine actions. Human-initiated practices, such as the pagan customs of surrounding cultures, contrast with the God-revealed worship described in the scriptures.

The place of worship for the Israelites in the Old Testament was the tabernacle, a tangible symbol of a dwelling place for God (Exod 36:8–40:33). As a symbolic place of corporate worship, the tabernacle was transferred to the temple until Jesus replaced the temple with his body as the new covenant (John 2:19–21). As a place of worship, the temple became the central site of the sacrificial liturgy (Lev 8:14–9:22).[13] The tabernacle and the temple of Solomon established physical spaces for God's presence. During the exile period, the synagogue became the centre of teaching and prayer, as not everyone could travel to the temple for worship. The synagogue coexisted with temple worship throughout Israel's subsequent history.

In the New Testament, there is no prescribed form or order for worship, except in a few scriptures that indirectly teach about the form of worship. The apostle Paul, for example, encourages Christians to speak to one another with "psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:19–20, NIV).

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[12] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 27.
[13] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 42–43.

Jas 5:13–16 tells us that the elders of the Early Church conducted anointings and prayers for the sick after they confessed their sins. Early Church believers' worship was devoted to the apostles' teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42).

More importantly, the New Testament employs the concept of a temple primarily in a symbolic rather than literal sense as a place of worship. While Jesus is recognized as the embodiment of the divine presence and serves as the new temple,[14] the apostle Paul teaches that Christians are God's temple, where the Holy Spirit dwells within them (1 Cor 3:16–17). The concept of worship has been profoundly reconfigured; true worship is in spirit and truth and is possible at all times and in any place (John 4:20–22). Spiritual worship for the follower of Jesus in the New Testament involves both the heart and the mind and has become relationally oriented rather than customary or ritualistic. In Col 3:16, the apostle Paul also writes, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts (NIV)." In this passage, corporate worship becomes a spiritual temple where we experience the immanence of God and the community of fellow believers. Paul finally declares that the ultimate goal of corporate worship is to build the church (1 Cor 14:26).[15] This work of the Spirit, building and empowering the church, will continue until the Second Coming of Christ.

[14] John depicts Jesus' body and his resurrection in the metaphor of the temple when Jesus says, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19, NIV).

[15] "When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up" (NIV).

Theological Perspectives on Worship

Worship practices center on theological teachings about God the Creator, redemption, and the heavenly kingdom, which Christians aspire to in their future lives.[16] All creaturely things used in worship glorify God and have the potential to represent his work appropriately. The primary content of worship is the Triune God, celebrating Christ's incarnation, atoning sacrifice, and resurrection–the extraordinary mystery of his victorious life over the power of evil. Liturgy is the locus of the ongoing work of the Spirit, teaching people about the word of God and involving the processes of regeneration and sanctification that assure our salvation. Thus, the Spirit's power is essential for spiritual worship,[17] strengthening our faith as Christ's disciples and enabling us to participate in Christ's body. Worship, in theological terms, is a spiritual discipline that guides our lives toward God's redemption plan, emphasizing God's grace and power to make us faithful disciples.

The Covenant of Redemption

God revealed himself through his creation and the garden, where he dwelt in communion with man and woman as they served him. Once they fell into sin, God established a covenant with them, in which he promised redemption (Gen 3:15). The narrative of Exodus also shows that liberation from slavery in ancient Egypt was the primary purpose of engaging in divine service or worship.[18] God called Moses and promised to deliver his people from Egyptian slavery and give them control of the land granted to their forebears.

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[16] Taylor, "Creation and Worship," 38.

[17] Williams, "Pneumatology and Worship," 106.

[18] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 27–30. Peterson notes that "the engagement with God at Mt. Sinai was to inaugurate a total life pattern of service or worship for the nations. Their salvation had fulfilled the covenant made with the patriarchs, and now they were being told how to keep that covenant and live out the relationship it implied."

Moses was told, "When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain" (Exod 3:12, NIV). God assured Moses that he would rescue his people from slavery in Egypt and give them possession of the land promised to their forefathers. Upon fulfilling their salvation at Mt. Sinai, God instructed Israel to uphold the covenant and effectively manifest the implicit relationship. Establishing the covenant of law (the blood of the covenant)[19] between the Lord and Israel involved providing detailed instructions through Moses for the sacrificial practices associated with worship (Exod 24–27). The engagement with God at Mt. Sinai served as the foundation for an exclusive pattern of worship for Israel and all nations.[20] The central act of worship at the tabernacle was "the offering of sacrifices" on the altar of burnt offerings.

The spirit of Christian worship in the New Testament derives from the fulfillment of Old Testament sacrifices through Christ, who shed his blood on the cross for his people. This redemptive truth became the source of our worship in the New Covenant because we share Christ's redemption when we are spiritually in Christ. In the acts of worship, as priests of God's kingdom (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9),[21] we offer spiritual sacrifices that draw us closer to the Father and enable us to share his love and truth with others.

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[19] This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made. The ratification of the covenant is confirmed by sprinkling the blood on the altar, and Moses took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the Lord has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exod 24:3–8).

[20] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 28.

[21] "You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites" (Exod 19:6, NIV); "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (2 Peter 2:9, NIV).

The Work of the Holy Spirit

Worship provides individuals with various perspectives on the Holy Spirit, who guides people into truth and spiritual renewal. The Spirit's primary work is to reveal the word of God actively and to facilitate a profound transformation within the human heart. Karl Barth asserts that the Holy Spirit, as a divine agency, is the one who recognizes the words of God rather than human effort.[22] Although the scriptures are God's word, they are perceived as his word only through the Spirit, who illuminates the teachings of God, thereby removing the veil of human ignorance. The Holy Spirit plays a unique role in understanding truth and guides individuals in Christian spirituality.

In non-Pentecostal churches, we often overlook the Holy Spirit's crucial role in the worship of the gathered community of God's people. As a result, contemporary approaches to worship emphasize the human dimension rather than the encounter with the divine presence. Timothy J. Ralston, a pastoral theologian, explains that the Spirit makes the worship offered by God's people honest and, therefore, acceptable to God.[23] In other words, the presence of the Spirit vitalizes and validates our worship.

Participating in the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper provides an excellent opportunity to experience the Spirit's presence.[24] In baptism, the Spirit reconciles the participant with the immanent God. In the Lord's Supper, the Spirit witnesses the unity and fellowship of God's covenant people in the living Christ. We experience Christ's death and resurrection to new life through the Spirit, who completely

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[22] Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*, 136.

[23] Ralston, "The Spirit's Role," [n.d.]. Ralston says, "Without these essential works of the Spirit of God, worship offered by people on earth in this age is not accepted by God."

[24] Sherman, *Covenant,* 96.

transforms our spiritual lives. While participating in the sacraments, the Spirit prompts acts of confession and repentance, uniting participants with one another and Christ in fellowship or communion.[25] Furthermore, the Spirit draws us into fellowship with the triune God and one another, leading us to surrender ourselves to God and long for eternal life.

Discipleship: Liturgical Evangelism

One way the church evangelizes individuals and communities is by proclaiming the gospel of Christ through worship. James K. A. Smith discusses being a disciple of Jesus through worship, saying, "We are made to be such people by our immersion in the material practices of Christian worship."[26] This statement implies that Christian worship is essential for believers who want to be disciples of Jesus by actively practicing the commandments, following the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and evangelizing unbelievers.

Robert E. Webber emphasizes worship as a place for proclaiming the gospel by stating, "Worship is the gospel in motion."[27] He discovered that the gospel in worship correlates with "matters about evangelism, education, spirituality, and social action."[28] Corporate worship encompasses the celebration of God's incarnation and the work of Jesus Christ, serving as an act of evangelization empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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[25] Sherman, *Covenant,* 102; Aniol, *By the Waters*, 136. Aniol describes the Lord's Table, "The climax of this gospel-shaped worship is communion around the Lord's Table. In the Table, Christians are enabled to sit in full communion with their Sovereign Lord because of Christ. The Lord's Table is the most beautiful earthly enactment of the complete fellowship made possible by union with Christ."

[26] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 33.

[27] Webber, *The New Worship*, 155.

[28] Webber, *The New Worship*, 155.

Patrick Keifert presents a compelling paradigm of evangelism and worship for the church growth movement. He asserts that public worship is meant for evangelization. He describes corporate worship as possessing an evangelical dimension grounded in four theological principles.[29] From this perspective, the church's liturgical rites are critical in experiencing conversion within evangelical worship. This dynamic and transformative function can encourage participants to engage in liturgical rites, particularly for Indigenous participants. Some interviewees reflected on their early impressions of worship experiences that involved transformative dynamics.

Pastoral theologian Scott Aniol explains that the church's primary objective is to engage in disciple-making, and corporate worship must contribute to the mission's goal.[30] He argues that worship has two aspects: making disciples and being worshipers. He, then, suggests three ways to accomplish the two elements of worship: (1) worship must proclaim the gospel in its very structure and content; (2) worship must contain rich, doctrinal content; and (3) the form of worship must be compatible with the content. The goal of worship, according to Aniol, should be "making disciples so that they might worship God acceptably by leading people to draw near to communion with God through Christ by faith, using appropriate cultural expressions."[31]

In 1 Cor 14:22–25, the apostle Paul teaches that corporate worship is not only for believers but also for outsiders or unbelievers. The spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of tongues in prayer, are a sign to unbelievers rather than believers. They are intended for the conviction and conversion of unbelievers so that they might be brought into Christian

[29] Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 72–73.
[30] Aniol, *By the Waters,* 179.
[31] Aniol, *By the Waters*, 179.

assemblies.[32] Therefore, corporate worship should uphold the basic theological principle that the church is a nurturing community. The disciplined lives of individuals in corporate worship create a dynamic evangelical community (Acts 2:46–47).

Worship and Culture

Christianity consistently encounters diverse cultural contexts and the people who inhabit them. Worship is intrinsically linked to the culturally significant messages of creation, the fall, and salvation. Culture encompasses everything people make of the world, both physically and intellectually. For the sake of the gospel, Christians should be able to discern all kinds of cultural activities in their contexts and create biblical ones.[33] The objectives of culture creation and gospel sharing are not necessarily mutually incompatible. Instead, spreading the gospel is a natural and necessary part of culture-making. In that sense, worship should challenge cultural liturgies that adversely affect our values, beliefs, and worldviews.[34] The following section reviews the contemporary cultural landscape that impacts Christian worship and discusses the distinctiveness of that worship.

Undercurrents in Christian Worship

Evangelical theologian Marva J. Dawn explores the cultural liturgies surrounding Christian worship and their impact. She is concerned about the most dangerous example,

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[32] The passage says, "So if, therefore, the whole church assembles, and all speak in tongues, and outsiders or unbelievers enter. . . he is called to account by all, the secrets of his heart are disclosed; and so, falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" (1 Cor 14:23–25).

[33] Crouch, *Culture Making*, 263.

[34] Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 286–87.

"market-driven worship," which fails to provide God's healing revelation.[35] Dawn writes that other idols influencing our public worship include "efficiency, money, and power," which dominate and distort the gospel within the worship community.[36] She stresses that to overcome the attraction of secular culture, our relationship with Christ should remain the centre of our worship and lives.[37]

Today, the technological advances of the twenty-first century have significantly changed how humans make crucial decisions. Computer-generated data has become a belief system that places humans at the centre instead of God.[38] People rely on algorithms to enhance their decision-making, helping them consider the most relevant options rather than relying on the word of God. Modern, technologically driven societies have already legitimized humanism as a belief in the inherent value and dignity of human beings, as well as their ultimate authority. Humanism has become the dominant world religion, as human will and experience are the primary sources of power and meaning.[39]

Worship and liturgy scholar James K. A. Smith thoroughly explains how certain powerful aspects can become more appealing than Christian worship for some individuals. Since human beings are more than mere thinkers, they also possess instincts and desires.[40] Smith describes "a mall as a temple," a place of worship, in contrast to the church, because the mall is where people commonly love to go more than anywhere else. A mall

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[35] Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 24.

[36] Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 41–51.

[37] Dawn, *Reaching Out*, 50.

[38] Harari, *Homo Deus*, 181. For Harari, religion is "anything that confers superhuman legitimacy on human social structures."

[39] Harari, *Homo Deus*, 76, 181, 366. As Harari understands it, humanism is a belief in the sanctity and ultimate authority of human beings and their individuality, emotions, and desires.

[40] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 26. Smith drives home a key statement of his work — that "our ultimate love is what we worship" — by exploring a fundamental understanding of human beings.

consumer can be compared to the most devoted follower of a secular liturgy,[41] serving as a metaphor for the cultural liturgy of a modern mall and its allure. Such customary practices of cultural liturgy exert a potent and formative influence on the culture of Christian worship.[42]

While in Indigenous ministry, I observed various cultural elements and attractions that seek to divert Christian values and faith. An emerging concern is that corporate worship must be mindful of the dangers of adapting to the surrounding culture, as traditional cultural liturgical practices may strongly influence the context of Christian worship. Therefore, understanding traditional culture and worship is essential for the church to maintain authentic Christian worship and learn how to address the influence of Indigenous cultures. A fundamental question is how we can keep our faith in evangelical worship while preserving the central elements of the gospel.

Distinctiveness of Christian Worship

Christian worship has functions and forms that are distinct from those of other cultures. Yet its practices can be meaningfully articulated within local cultural settings. When worship encounters cultures, it constantly interacts with them. James White discusses the tension between worship and culture. According to him, Christian worship has functions and forms distinct from other cultures, and the culture associated with Christian worship is adaptable, affirming, and critiquing elements of various cultures.[43] We must distinguish

[41] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 19–23.
[42] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 88.
[43] White, *Christian Worship*, 86. He says, "If Christian worship could survive nearly twenty centuries and exist in all parts of the world, surely it can adapt to many, if not all, cultures, yet be identified with none."

our worship in several ways to avoid dangers in cultural liturgy. The three features of worship—the Triune God, the incarnation of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit—represent distinctive doctrines in corporate worship that adhere to biblical foundations and traditions.

First, Christian worship focuses on the Trinitarian God, the subject of worship and the object of our reverence. The rituals and liturgy of worship practices are fundamental and powerful ways to develop intimacy with God. Worshipers can communicate with God through written and spoken words, as well as through the dynamic acts of God's immanence and transcendence. In the spiritual interaction between God and worshipers, God reveals his will and presence through the scriptures and the liturgical rites, which become forms of expression in our beliefs and values developed in the apostolic tradition.

Liturgical scholar Don Salires emphasizes the dynamics of worship by combining the concepts of human pathos and divine ethos; integrating these two dimensions of worship is essential.[44] The idea of divine ethos refers to the distinctive manner in which liturgy is enacted as a means of God's self-revelation to humanity. It encompasses the encounters through which divine grace and glory manifest in human lives. Thus, worship is an ongoing communion between God and the pathos of human life, enabling people to remain connected throughout their lives. Unlike other systems of primitive worship, Christian worship is not a one-way monologue or performance with gods as the audience. Our relationship with God should be at the center of our worship. Worship is a discipline that enables people to maintain a personal connection with God throughout their lives.

[44] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 22.

Second, Christian worship focuses on the redemptive work of Christ and the eschatological future, which have values different from those of local cultural liturgy. In worship, we celebrate not only God's incarnation and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ—his death, resurrection, and ultimate triumph over evil—but also our focus on eschatological hope.[45] The implications of Logos Christology presented through song, prayer, preaching, and sacraments affect the character of the Christian life as a paradigm of the Christian attitude.[46] Paul employs the Christological hymn, demonstrating Christ's attitude and a complete reversal of values in God's kingdom (Phil 2:1–11). Adopting Christ's life as the ultimate model for all believers in their personal and community lives is more valuable than anything else. Such faith-led worldviews and ethics embody fundamentally different values from those of secular cultures.[47]

Third, the Holy Spirit and his work are essential for connecting the other two features of worship and the worship participants. The Holy Spirit is God in himself, within us, and among us–the agent of his redemptive work.[48] As the Holy Spirit confirms the Father's love and the Son's self-offering, he helps us comprehend the relationship between the Father and the Son in the work of redemption. Another critical mission of the Holy Spirit is revelatory. Through the Spirit, we can recognize God, and he helps us understand his words and revelations.[49] Although the Bible is God's word, it is recognized as such only through the Spirit. In worship, the Spirit's role is to transform us into true worshipers by guiding Christians to keep God at the center of worship and helping us be free from the

[45] Lee, "Eschatology and Worship," 111–13.
[46] Morrill, "Christology and Worship," 90–91.
[47] Dawn, *Reaching Out,* 50.
[48] Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*, 149.
[49] Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*, 135.

influence of cultural norms. Additionally, the Spirit confronts the power of secular cultures on our behalf. The worship inspired by the Spirit shapes our yearning for God's kingdom and serves as a counter-formative influence against the strong allure of secular attractions.

Contextualization of Worship

In today's global communities, Christianity has expanded to reach every corner of the world. Christian worship is situated within the globalization of Christianity, serving as a messenger of God's good news. Missiologists have been discussing how Christians should embrace the global Christian community.[50] As a result, contextualizing Christian worship has become one of the essential tasks of the church. Contextualizing worship encompasses various elements of worship and liturgical services, including songs, prayers, preaching, worship attire, church buildings, sanctuary settings, and more. If these elements are adequately contextualized, they will contribute to higher levels of communication and gospel embodiment for people from diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds within specific cultures.

Today, Indigenous churches in North America face numerous issues related to worship and traditional cultures. In recent decades, mainline denominational churches in Canada have closely explored cross-cultural approaches and the process of indigenization. While they are making progress in understanding the connection between the gospel, worship, and Indigenous cultures, a considerable distance remains to be covered. This section discusses the general principles of contextualization and the challenges faced in

[50] Wilson, "Embracing Global Christianity," 172.

this process. The subsequent chapters will then address practical issues to consider when contextualizing the gospel within the framework of Indigenous ministry.

Implications of Contextualization

There is no commonly accepted definition of contextualization among evangelicals yet, only a set of proposals that agree on the criteria required for authentic biblical contextualization.[51] A general concept of contextualization essentially includes presenting the supra-cultural message of the gospel in new cultural, social, religious, and historical settings.[52] Darrell Whiteman defines contextualization as "an attempt to communicate the gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context."[53] Contextualizing the gospel within a specific culture makes the message relevant to the receptor's cultural presuppositions. In other words, contextualization is an approach and methodology for communicating the gospel and teaching the Christian faith within the recipient's culture, enabling them to understand the gospel and the Christian life genuinely. The subject of contextualization comes to the forefront when the gospel of one culture is seamlessly adapted to another culture.[54]

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[51] Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 35.

[52] Prince, *Contextualization*, 14.

[53] Whiteman, "Contextualization," 3.

[54] Wilkey, *Worship and Culture*, 137. There are a few ways to explain how Christian worship relates to culture, primarily by drawing on "the Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture." According to this, worship is dynamically associated with culture along four dimensions: worship is transcultural; worship is contextual; worship is counter-cultural; worship is cross-cultural (Plantinga and Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits*, 62). In the term "transcultural," the same substance of worship transcends cultural lines, just as the attribute of God, omnipresence, means God's presence crosses cultural boundaries. Next, "contextual" refers to worship that reflects local patterns or cultural values. Although worship adapts to the cultural elements of the local community, the value of the gospel and belief never change and can be relevant to people in their daily lives. In contrast, worship as "counter-cultural" refuses to adapt to the patterns or values of the local culture, even when it is wholly purified, because the elements of the local culture are often in disaccord with the gospel and cannot be integrated into Christian worship. Another term is "cross-cultural." Here, worship is ecumenical, sharing all the elements of worship in different local cultures by its attribute of transcending

There is scholarly debate over whether to prioritize culture or scripture when adapting cultural practices to new contexts. Although evangelicals take culture seriously, they begin contextualization with Scripture rather than context, while many "conciliar theologians" prefer culture as the primary starting point.[55] The role and primacy of culture are also controversial in Indigenous ministry in North America. I will discuss this again in later chapters.

When it comes to the relationship between the gospel, the church, and culture, contextualization is similar to indigenization and inculturation, both of which refer to how Christian beliefs are expressed through different cultural forms. Indigenization refers to the gradual assimilation and localization of a foreign faith or belief system within a specific cultural context. Indigenization focuses solely on traditional cultural dimensions, that is, the surface expressions of the gospel.[56] For example, Indigenous religions, such as the Shaker Church and Peyotism, which emerged in Canada and the United States a century ago, incorporate certain Christian forms into their cultural practices but do not integrate the content of Christianity.[57]

On the other hand, the term inculturation has been used to describe how worship adapts to its cultural context while maintaining its distinctively Christian character.[58] It does not mean that the purity of the gospel and the holy sacraments are compromised by non-biblical culture. Inculturation is "the incarnation of Christian life and the Christian message in a particular cultural context."[59] In terms of evangelical worship, this implies

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time and space. Thus, corporate worship should give people more chances to find God's presence in everyone.

[55] Prince, *Contextualization*, 15.
[56] Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 31.
[57] Lehnhoff, "Indian Shaker Religion," 288–89; Hampton, "American Indian Religion," 130–31.
[58] Chupungco, "Inculturation of Worship," [n.d.].
[59] Moreau, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary*, 475.

that the core beliefs and biblical traditions are taught and expressed, but conveyed in many culturally relevant ways. This way, cultures are respected and critiqued by understanding the cultural elements adapted into deeper worship. Yet, Cornelius J. Plantinga and Sue A. Rozeboom remind us that "worship should be culturally connected, not for the sake of culture but for the sake of worship."[60]

Incarnation

Contextualization is also known as "incarnation," a critical theological foundation of Christianity: God's incarnation in Jesus Christ becomes contextual.[61] From early Christianity to the present, incarnational Christology has been the predominant way of understanding and worshipping Christ Jesus as the Son of God and Saviour (Phil 2:6–11).[62] Over the past century, theologians have developed a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the profound implications of God's incarnation within Christian worship. Saliers' concept of the divine ethos presents faithful worship as God's self-giving, reminding us of the profound nature of God's incarnation in the person of Jesus and the complex world he came to save.[63] Since God's incarnation in Jesus is a central theme of Christianity, presenting the gospel to people with diverse ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds requires it to be embodied. It must continue to touch the nations throughout worship services, wherever they are located.[64]

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[60] Plantinga and Rozeboom, *Discerning the Spirits*, 89.

[61] Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 69; Kraft, *Anthropology,* 68. Kraft writes that "Jesus had a worldview. It consisted of His Kingdom perspectives integrated into His first-century Hebrew worldview."

[62] Morrill, "Christology and Worship," 81–82.

[63] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 22.

[64] Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 31.

The necessity of contextualization was also evident when the apostle Paul proclaimed that God is now declaring that "all people everywhere should repent" (Acts 17:30). Individuals everywhere need Christ, but ignoring their histories, cultures, and concerns may hinder a sincere proclamation, leading to unclear communication. The biblical message must be central, and its content must be relevant to the receptors' cultural presuppositions. The gospel should be presented in a manner that enables local people to experience Christianity in a way suitable to their local context, or, more specifically, in a form historically and culturally conditioned. The gospel message and the Christian faith possess a transcultural nature, free from limitations imposed by any single culture.[65] As cross-cultural ministers proclaim the gospel, teach new converts, gather these converts to build Indigenous churches, and develop local disciples, biblical truth must be contextualized (Matt 28:19). Missiologist John M. Hitchen highlights the importance of contextualization: "Contextualization is at the heart of knowing and sharing Christ Jesus as Lord. We cannot avoid it. We can only choose whether to do it faithfully or poorly."[66]

Content, Structure, and Style

Contextualization of worship involves presenting and expressing the gospel in various contexts, allowing local worshipers to understand and participate from their own perspectives, using their language, culture, and systems. Robert Webber suggests that the Christian worship community must clarify the three dimensions of content, structure, and

[65] Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 1.
[66] Hitchen, "Culture and the Bible," 52.

style customized to the local setting.[67] These three dimensions of worship practice influence worshipers' deepest convictions about God and their relationships with him.

The primary dimension that constitutes worship practice is its content. The content of worship pertains to the elements and doctrines considered standard and customary within authentic church worship. Namely, the story of God's redemption and salvation must be the primary focus of worship for it to be biblical and represent orthodox Christianity. The elements of proclaiming the gospel and the actions of God's love for us, the divine nature of Christ, and his redeeming work are non-negotiable in cultural adaptation. Certain elements of the gospel—such as songs, scriptures, and prayers—are considered essential to biblical teaching and form the foundation for worship, stemming from the traditions of the synagogue and the temple.[68] Marlene Kropf explains that there is a strong biblical foundation for worship and preaching based on scripture. She presents Isa 6:1–8 as a depiction of a transcendent God in worship and Luke 24:13–35 as an example of the immanent God.[69]

The second is structure, which organizes and improves how we express our worship styles. Worship structure refers to how the various acts of worship come together to form a cohesive whole. In other words, how should the story of God's saving work be organized so that it can be heard and experienced clearly during worship? The structure, as is the pattern, is changeable depending on the liturgical heritage, yet it should be done thoughtfully. The structure is neither formal nor informal, nor liturgical nor modern in style. Its purpose is to provide a logical flow to our communication with God.[70]

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[67] Webber, *Ancient-Future Worship,* 91.
[68] Kropf, "Why Eat? Why Worship?," 91.
[69] Kropf, "Why Eat? Why Worship?," 91–94.
[70] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 224.

Next, Christianity has been significantly concerned with worship styles over the last few decades. Style in worship refers to how a particular faith group presents the content of its worship (liturgy) in response to its given context.[71] Recently, contemporary styles of worship, particularly music, have emerged and become increasingly common in church practices. We shouldn't impose a specific style on an unfamiliar group, as it originates internally rather than externally. The Christian community will always offer a diverse range of worship styles. The worship style in which individuals or groups engage with God in Christ is expected to be indigenous, reflecting a natural, intuitive expression authentic to their identity. The style constantly changes, reflecting the church's culture and preferences. Worship planners should consider what type of worship helps people encounter God rather than merely what people like.

Contextualization in Galatians

The book of Galatians addresses the issue of Christian doctrine in various cultural contexts, specifically focusing on Gentile converts who are being drawn away by Judaistic teachings. The Galatian community consisted of Jewish and Gentile converts from distinct backgrounds. Each group had previously held religious beliefs and customs that needed to be transformed into the reality of the gospel of Christ. Thus, the apostle Paul emphasizes how a local church can implement contextualization in accordance with the gospel, which states that Christ died voluntarily for everyone's sins, regardless of whether they are Jewish or Gentile. Above all, he highlights sin and the elemental spiritual forces that kept humanity in bondage and stood in opposition to God's purpose for creation (Gal 4:3). The

[71] Cherry, *The Worship Architect*, 227.

Gentiles worshiped many so-called deities, represented by pagan gods, referred to as "the elemental spiritual forces of the world" (Gal 4:3, 9). Their personal and communal identities are closely tied to the inconsistent and unpredictable spiritual powers found in animistic societies.

In his article, George Mombi explains that pre-Christian enslaved people, under the elemental forces of the world, referred to the spirits of nature that enslaved Gentiles believed controlled the forces of wind, fire, earth, and water, which regulate the entire universe. "These include the star deities, demonic powers, and local tribal deities."[72] For Jews, the law was a set of elemental principles or spiritual powers that enslaved them to the elements of the law. Jews believed God chose their nation as he had promised to Abraham and Moses. The covenantal rituals (baptism and circumcision) and the law justified them as the children of God. As such, the converted Jews attempted to lead the religious people among the Galatians by imposing Judaism on those who had converted from different religious backgrounds.

Paul, however, emphasizes that the gospel of Christ offers converted Christians a new identity as God's family through the redeeming work of Christ (4:4–7).[73] Then, the Christians' responsibility is to fulfill their calling as children of God by allowing Christ to be formed within them, encompassing every aspect of a continuous maturing process in him. In this process, Paul emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit, who makes and empowers them in all areas of life and service as disciples of Christ (3:1–5). Missiology professor John Hitchen writes:

> The Galatians' previous primary dependence on a capricious and unpredictable spirit powers is transformed into continuing reliance, not on a ritualistic or

[72] Mombi, "The Death of Christ," 106.
[73] Hitchen, "Mission," 163.

> legalistic self-competence, but on an ongoing relationship with the Holy Spirit of God actively working in response to vital faith in the message of the Gospel (Gal 3:1–5)… The gospel gives us new faith ancestors and a new cultural inheritance.[74]

Like other Indigenous groups, Indigenous peoples in North America were subject to traditional forces until they encountered Christianity. Many individuals and communities in these nations continue to conform to their cultures and religious practices. Despite this, their cultures and people should be respected and accepted as subjects of cross-cultural ministry (Gal 2:11–21). Every culture and nation should have equal and unrestricted access to the covenant of salvation solely through faith in Christ, without conforming to Indigenous religious regulations or rituals. Contextualization assumes that all cultures are treated equally and that the gospel can transform them to some extent. Furthermore, adequate contextualization reinforces the new identity in Christ that converts have adopted. Similarly, it enables Indigenous converts to understand their dignity and status as God's children (Gal 4:4–7).

Challenges of Contextualization

Contextualization has always been a significant challenge. It is a dynamic process involving communicating the gospel's content in new cultural contexts. Attempts to root the Christian faith in local cultural environments pose considerable challenges for both communicators and the recipient community.[75] Maintaining the distinctiveness of the Christian faith in a world of cultural diversity requires a gospel that is both genuinely

[74] Hitchen, "Mission," 161.

[75] Noll, *The New Shape*, 190. Noll argues that when Christianity takes root in a new location, it also challenges, reforms, and humanizes the local culture.

Christian in content and culturally significant in its localized form. What obstacles hinder the task of adequate contextualization?

In their book *Contextualization*, Hesselgrave and Rommen address the two potential hazards to avoid when communicating mission contexts. The first is "the perception of the communicator's cultural heritage as an integral element of the gospel."[76] This has posed a significant challenge for missionary work over the last few centuries, particularly during the expansion of Christianity in many parts of the world, including Indigenous missions in North America. Similarly, Michael W. Goheen refers to this as "ethnocentrism," which is "where one cultural expression of the gospel is considered normative for all others."[77] Over the past several centuries, the churches' efforts for Indigenous groups in Canada have often led them astray rather than creating a fresh form and content of Christianity. This primarily stems from their failure to examine cross-cultural ministries and the process of indigenization critically. Dean Flemming describes the communicator's attitude: "To articulate and embody the gospel in multilayered and fast-changing intercultural settings requires flexibility, creativity, humility, and a willingness."[78] Now, we more readily understand that mission ministers should cultivate the art of listening to and learning from those different from us. It entails respecting their traditions, values, societies, and worldviews.

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[76] Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 1.

[77] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission*, 268. The author explains that a wrong relationship between the gospel and culture can hold the gospel captive in two ways. It is said, "The gospel is like a caged lion; it does not need to be defended, just released" (Charles Spurgeon); Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 65. Luzbetak also defines ethnocentrism as "the tendency (to some degree present in every human being) to regard the values of one's own society as the normal, right, proper, and certainly the best way of thinking, feeling, speaking, and doing things."

[78] Flemming, *Contextualization*, 150.

The next challenge is how we maintain the distinctiveness of the Christian faith in a world of cultural diversity with a gospel that is both genuinely Christian in content and culturally significant in its form. If people misunderstand or overly criticize the receptor culture, the relevance of worship based on the core of the Christian gospel is lost or becomes meaningless during cultural adaptation.[79] On the other hand, adding elements of the receptor culture in a non-critical way may also change or distort the messages necessary for the gospel's integrity.[80]

One essential concern regarding contextualization is syncretism. Syncretism is "the blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of the dominant culture so that Christianity loses its distinctiveness and speaks with a voice reflective of its culture."[81] Such a phenomenon, in particular, occurs during the development of local theology through excessive accommodation of religious practices or the forms of a specific culture. Regarding this issue, there are two radically different conceptions of syncretism. While the traditional stance views syncretism as unfavourable, since it could weaken the integrity of Christian doctrine by blending beliefs and practices from multiple worldviews, others see syncretism as the natural tendency of the church throughout its history as it seeks to exist within the cultures of its time.[82] Hesselgrave and Rommen distinguish between cultural and theological contextualization and proper contextualization as "dogmatic," which begins with biblical theology. There is an ongoing debate over where

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[79] Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission*, 269. Goheen notes that irrelevance makes the gospel unrecognizable as good news, while syncretism compromises the gospel. He says syncretism and irrelevance are "bars that imprison the gospel and weaken the church's mission."

[80] Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 1.

[81] Rheenen, ed., *Contextualization*, 7.

[82] Rheenen, ed., *Contextualization*, 7–13; Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 55; Prince, *Contextualization*, 21. Prince contends that syncretism "cannot be divorced from contextualization. Rather, they can be viewed as a continuum, with contextualization on one end of the spectrum and syncretism on the other."

the boundary between contextualization and syncretism is drawn —who decides that line, and what criteria are used?[83] With this in mind, the next chapter will address the specifics of the cultures related to the Indigenous churches in North America.

Conclusion

Worship is the natural response of an individual who has been redeemed and filled with the Holy Spirit, directed towards God, who revealed himself through holy scripture.[84] Worship begins and ends with God because he is the only true God, the supreme ruler of the universe, and the benevolent one who made a covenant with his chosen people. In worship, it is crucial to experience the power of the Holy Spirit, who is present and actively involved in regeneration and subsequent sanctification.[85] The Spirit and his work in worship are essential elements in forming Christian belief and community.

Diverse cultural beliefs, worldviews, and practices can continuously influence Christian worship, diverting people from biblical priorities and perspectives. Such cultural elements affect the spirituality of individuals and worship communities by shaping their identities. To keep corporate worship free from external factors that threaten today's Christian worship, worship leaders must help believers grow as God's people and create counter-formative worship that fosters gospel and cultural discernment.[86] To that end, the authority of Scripture needs to regulate Christian worship, communicating God's truth and carrying out the gospel.[87]

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[83] Prince, *Contextualization*, 21.
[84] Webber, *Ancient Future Worship*, 29–40.
[85] Welch, *The Holy Spirit*, ix–xi.
[86] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom,* 89.
[87] Aniol, *By the Waters*, 184.

Christian worship is distinct from other cultural liturgies in its functions and forms. First, Christian worship focuses on God, the subject of worship and the object of our reverence. The purpose of worship is to direct our affection toward God and glorify him. Second, worship centres on Christ's redeeming work and the eschatological future.[88] We remember Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, all of which are connected to the eternal end. Third, worship is an encounter with the Spirit of God, who is present in the revealed word of Scripture.

In summary, authentic contextualization begins with a call to reach out to diverse cultural groups, grounded in the missiological goal of making disciples of all nations globally. Corporate worship is the locus of contextualizing Christ's gospel so that local people can encounter God's presence in a culturally relevant way. The essential content of worship— the gospel's core, God's sovereignty, Christ's divine nature, and redeeming work—cannot change during the contextualization process. Although content selection, organization, and presentation style can vary from culture to culture, contextualization must remain faithful to both the text and the context. In that sense, the process of contextualization faces many challenges, yet it is a ministry dedicated to building the Church of God.

[88] Lee, "Eschatology and Worship," 111–14.

CHAPTER 3:

INDIGENOUS CULTURE, SPIRITUALITY, AND INCULTURATION

This chapter explores Indigenous culture, spirituality, and inculturation in the context of Christian worship. In the first part, I will review Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems. These are structured around the concept of a supreme being believed to have created the world for humans and other ethical values necessary to preserve their communities. Indigenous value systems are rooted in the spirits of creation, a shared ethic, and a reverence for elders and prophets. The profound sensitivity to the spirit world can serve as a helpful link for communicating biblical truth between Indigenous and Christian worldviews. The Indigenous knowledge system represents a unique epistemology focusing on metaphysical, spiritual, pragmatic, and related components.[1] It emphasizes the non-fragmented, holistic nature of knowledge derived from a relational understanding of extraordinary experiences.

The second part explores Indigenous religions and cultural resurgences, which help us understand how Indigenous peoples relate to their cultures and spiritual worlds. Understanding some of the origins and histories of Indigenous religions is essential because it enables us to examine how we can comprehend and incorporate them into Christian worship.[2] Indigenous belief systems highly value mystical experiences, including dreams, visions, and trances. They are all linked through interactions with

[1] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 57.
[2] Shaw and Burrows, eds., *Traditional Ritual*, 38.

supernatural powers capable of curing physical and mental illnesses. From that perspective, Indigenous religions and cultures are essentially similar to one another.[3]

The final section discusses Indigenous cultural elements and practices. Indigenous ritual practices are primarily employed to purify individuals or communities before they engage with the spirits. In this regard, certain Indigenous cultural elements can also assist in conveying the gospel across nations, and their meanings may be adapted to praise and honour God. To achieve this effectively, dedicated individuals and congregations should follow the process of implementing contextualization. Ultimately, this chapter highlights the significance of purifying and sanctifying cultural elements and Indigenous believers to attain genuine contextualization.

Indigenous Worldviews and Knowledge Systems

Culture is "the total process of human activity" through which we make sense of the world, encompassing material creativity and intellectual interpretation.[4] It encompasses almost everything that characterizes a society, including customs, modes of behaviour, beliefs, values, and social practices that define the community's inhabitants, shaping humanity's inevitable, ever-changing destinies.[5] Indigenous culture in North America has undergone significant changes since European settlers began to immigrate in the 17th century. The settlers, especially the missionaries, shared their religious practices and introduced modern agricultural, residential, and linguistic changes among Indigenous peoples. Indigenous ministry in Canada is a dynamic locus of cross-cultural encounters

[3] Albanese, *America,* 26.
[4] Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 32
[5] Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, 134; Vance, *A History*, vii; Jolly, *Christ Is Building*, 127.

between traditional Indigenous cultures, dominant Western cultures, and other worldviews. Recognizing Indigenous cultures and worldviews is essential for effective cross-cultural communication and ministry.[6] The following section discusses the general concept of Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems.

Indigenous Worldviews

Indigenous nations in North America have diverse rituals, symbols, and traditions and live in various environments. Despite their distinctions, they share many similar worldviews that emphasize relationships, spirituality, a sense of community, and respect for the land and nature. They recognize that every human and entity is related to creation; all are interconnected and interdependent. They hold spiritual connections to the physical world, including plants and animals, demonstrating a perspective on the oneness of all life. Indigenous relational worldviews can be characterized by a circle, interconnectedness, and a connection to place based on respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationships.[7]

The Supreme Being

The most prominent feature of the Indigenous worldview is that the Great Spirit (the Creator) inhabits all things: rocks, land, water, plants, animals, and people. Most Indigenous groups agree that the Creator, also known as the Great Spirit, has created the universe and everything within it.[8] The universe is a complex assembly of powers or spirits; thus, nature, land, and animals are sacred and generally regarded as gifts from the

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[6] Jolly, *Christ Is Building*, 131. A Cree Nation theologian, Jolly says, "Knowing the culture of the people is a prerequisite of contextualization."

[7] Vedan, *Pulling Together*, 25.

[8] Jolly, *Christ Is Building*, 124; Hampton, "American Indian Religion," 113.

creator, the supreme being. The name of the Creator or supreme being is referred to differently by various nations or tribes.[9] Ecumenical theologian Achiel Peelman[10] describes the Indigenous concept of the supreme being (the Great Mystery) and their traditional religion: "The traditional Amerindian religions were indeed structured around the concept of a supreme being even before contact with Christianity."[11] Their concept of the supreme being is polysynthetic and all-inclusive, unlike the God of Christianity, and it is challenging to translate into Western languages.[12] Later on, Indigenous peoples incorporated the concept of a supreme being as a manifestation of God, the Creator, under the influence of Christianity.[13]

Indigenous belief generally holds that the supreme being is the most fundamental essence of every living being and the entire universe, which is viewed as a sacred, complex assembly filled with spiritual powers. They believe we can experience the supreme being by finding our rightful place in the universe and creating appropriate relationships.[14] The world around them constantly changes from within, and these forces operate independently of one another. Humans do not control these forces, but to live, they must ally themselves with these powers to maintain harmony among the different entities. Accordingly, their spirituality involves resisting evil by participating in traditional ceremonies and rituals.

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[9] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 142. For example, the name of the Creator or Supreme Being for the Dakota Nation is "Wakan Tanka," which means "Holy Power."

[10] Peelman is a professor at St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto. He is the author of *Christ Is a Native American.*

[11] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 46.

[12] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 45–49.

[13] Randall, *Native American Religions*, 123.

[14] Kelly, *Destroying the Barriers*, 252. Kelly writes that at the core of the Indigenous worldview is "the concept of the acquisition, or control, or manipulation of power. A fundamental belief is that an individual must be able to acquire sufficient supernatural energy to function in a mysterious universe."

Humanity

For Indigenous people, human life is part of a circular time in which everything is eternally connected.[15] Time is considered an unbroken circle in which the present and future are eternally linked to the past.[16] They are more event-oriented, whereas Westerners tend to be more time-oriented. As a result, they are preoccupied with the event's details, regardless of how much time is spent.[17] They believe that a person's life is a part of the universe, granted as a gift from the Creator, who holds all power, all medicine, all knowledge, and wisdom. They see themselves as an integral part of creation and are relationally oriented toward nature rather than being superior to it.[18] Many Indigenous tribes believe that the body returns to the land of Mother Earth, their original mother and life sustainer, in the afterlife. At the same time, the spirit lives forever and will return to its original Father, the Creator. Death, therefore, does not signify an end. Instead, it is a metaphor for rebirth, regeneration, or continuation in some other form.

Nature as a Partner of Life

According to Indigenous spiritual beliefs, the earth, water, plants, and the spirits of living beings are believed to hold the universe together. The concept of the earth as "the fructifying female manifestation of spiritual power" encompasses the land, the sea, the sky, every natural phenomenon, and human and animal life.[19] As a result, the understanding of land carries different meanings for Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples. The former are connected to the land on spiritual, physical, social,

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[15] Church, *Native American*, 25–26. The Church recognizes the cycle of human life. He also believes that the Indigenous church has a life cycle as "some churches start, grow, plateau, enter decline, and die."

[16] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 166–67.

[17] Jolly, *Christ Is Building*, 125.

[18] Jolly, *Christ Is Building*, 124; Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 48.

[19] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 127.

and cultural levels. They view their land as a living spirit, "a blessing from the Great Spirit."[20] At the same time, the latter landowners might consider land to be something they own, a commodity to be bought and sold, an asset to profit from, a means to create a living, or simply a home. Indigenous peoples draw their identity from the earth and live in harmony with it, seeing themselves as integral parts of the land,[21] in contrast to how Christians typically view the world as a transient place on their journey to heaven. For Indigenous people, the land is their mother,[22] to whom they feel bonded, and the land and water are central to their culture. Naturally, they feel a profound responsibility to care for the land.

Regarding traditional ethics, Indigenous communities perceive the distinction between good and evil through personal experiences and those shared within their communities. All forms of oppression are considered evil, particularly those that harm the natural world and its creatures. They believe that humans are fundamentally good, which contradicts the Christian doctrine of original sin.[23] They strongly emphasize community; therefore, members must diligently fulfill their responsibilities to care for their community. Indigenous peoples view sin as irresponsibility and disharmony within the community as they pursue community wholeness. Thus, in Indigenous thought, inappropriate behaviour, conduct, or failure of duty is equivalent to the Christian concept of sin.[24]

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[20] Randall, *Native American Religions*, 102.
[21] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 73–74; Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 48.
[22] "Tink" Tinker, *American Indian Liberation*, 107–8.
[23] Ross, *Indigenous Healing*, 60.
[24] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 109–10.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous peoples possess a distinct knowledge system that seeks to live in harmony with the created order while respecting nature and the values of earth stewardship.[25] This system does not divide reality into fields of study, such as religion, philosophy, art, the physical sciences, and the social sciences. Instead, these systems are generally viewed and treated as a whole. It is impossible to separate the ideas from these various sources and the connections that people, animals, trees, natural forces, spirits, and landscapes create in certain places and situations that learners encounter.[26] Accordingly, Indigenous knowledge is deeply personalized and derived from extraordinary experiences, making it challenging to comprehend universally.[27]

The study of Indigenous knowledge is linked to a unique approach to epistemology, a form of knowledge acquisition that integrates people's stories with a deeper understanding of their environments. Indigenous epistemology emphasizes the non-fragmented, holistic nature of knowledge, which arises from inner and outer relational experiences. The internal space is where metaphysical knowing refers to creation stories, philosophies of space and time, and a source of energy. Sacred power reveals itself through perceptions hidden deep within the collective unconscious. It manifests through rituals such as dreams, visions, prayers, and ceremonial rites, which are understood as spiritual.[28] As a source of knowledge, outer space offers insights by enabling people to grasp the physical world through traditional teachings and empirical

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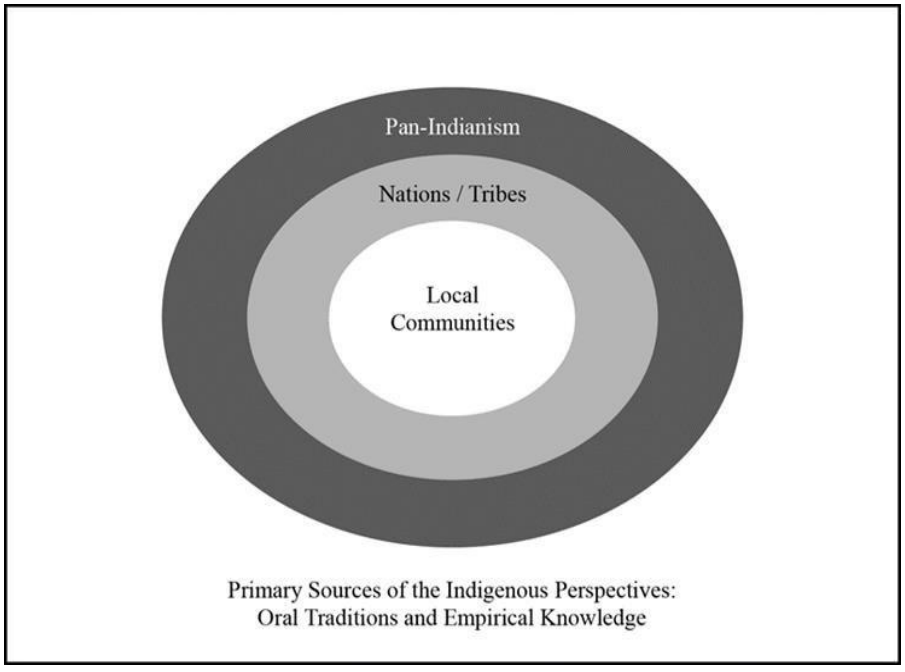
[25] Stonechild and Starblanket, *The Knowledge Seeker*, 75.
[26] Battiste and Henderson, *Protecting Indigenous Knowledge*, 44.
[27] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies,* 56.
[28] Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage*, 116–17.

observations, highlighting practical and relevant components.[29]

Indigenous educator Margaret Kovach explains the features of Indigenous epistemologies: "Indigenous epistemologies include interactional and interrelational, broad-based, whole, inclusive, animate, cyclical, fluid, and spiritual."[30] They emphasize a non-fragmented, holistic nature, focusing on metaphysical and pragmatic values and relationships. The fundamental teachings of this wisdom advocate for kindness and care, giving and positivity, living in the community, respecting others as family, and desiring harmony with creation. Professor Evelyn Steinhauer explains Indigenous ways of knowing: "Indigenous knowledge comes from many sources, including traditional teachings, empirical observations, and revelations."[31]

Figure 1: Dimensions and Sources of Indigenous Knowledge



[29] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 56–57.
[30] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 56.
[31] Steinhauer, "Thoughts," 74.

Figure 1 illustrates the key sources of Indigenous knowledge and perspectives across three main dimensions: Pan-Indianism, the nations and tribes to which the people belong, and local communities. Under the concept of Pan-Indianism, many Indigenous nations and tribes share common worldviews and cultures recognized throughout North America. The second dimension, nations and tribes, includes their distinct ways of life, traditions, and languages that set them apart from other groups. In the third category, local communities shape individuals' and groups' understanding of and interactions with their surroundings, influenced by the immediate environments and lifestyles in which they reside.

Indigenous traditional wisdom has been passed down to current generations by their predecessors, primarily through accounts of creation, lifestyle, and the history that preceded them. In this process, elders significantly transmit knowledge from one generation to the next through ceremonies, stories, and mentoring.[32] Indigenous wisdom is well-developed and marked by strong oral traditions that honour nature and the Creator's creation of the world. It embodies the accumulated experiences and knowledge of families or communities, conveying their spiritual wisdom through oral tradition. Such traditions are the most effective forms of Indigenous knowledge, serving as a "portal for holistic epistemology."[33]

As discussed, Indigenous knowledge is learned and transmitted through interactions among groups of people, through various activities, and through the application of knowledge, including the incorporation of contexts and processes. The process of knowing informs the ways of being, which are inextricably linked to the way of

[32] Stonechild and Starblanket, *The Knowledge Seeker*, 46–47.
[33] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 96.

doing and serving as a guide for establishing relationships between entities.[34] The ways of being, therefore, require respect for the ontological stories of relatedness by being responsible and accountable for people's own stories and the stories of other entities. Indigenous epistemologies tend to favour action-oriented approaches.[35] Their ways of knowing and being are directly reflected in their ways of doing. Therefore, Indigenous forms of learning adhere to an interrelated concept of knowing, being, and doing.[36]

Indigenous Religions and Cultural Revitalization

We can think of rituals as a means of communicating meanings or following sacred or spiritual patterns. These patterns can be compared and contrasted across different cultural settings.[37] An experimental psychologist, Justin L. Barrett, describes ritual more specifically as "someone acts in some observable way upon some object to prompt the gods (or god's power) to bring about some sort of change."[38] In light of this, various rituals may serve as manifestations of the sacred customs, worldviews, or spirituality held by specific tribal communities. Understanding the significance and meaning of Indigenous cultures and religions is crucial for cross-cultural ministry, as it enables us to recognize their inherent qualities and facilitates Christian worship. This section examines the major Indigenous religions and cultural revitalizations of the past century, aiming to understand how Indigenous peoples relate to their culture and spiritual world.

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[34] Martin and Mirraboopa, "Ways of Knowing," 209.
[35] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 62.
[36] Martin and Mirraboopa, "Ways of Knowing," 211.
[37] Shaw, "The Dynamics of Ritual and Ceremony," 4.
[38] Barrett, *Cognitive Science,*120.

Indigenous Religions and Spirituality

Indigenous traditional cultures, rituals, and cults are inherently interwoven as a holistic religious framework.[39] Traditionally, shamanism plays a vital role in most Indigenous cultures and spiritual practices. A shaman interprets dreams and visions, which they believe are direct messages from the spiritual world. Shamans and medicine-men are longstanding concepts of physical and spiritual healers with cult practices. They are typical examples demonstrating the cultural and religious dimensions inherent in Indigenous spirituality. The most prominent form of Indigenous religion in North America is the Longhouse,[40] also known as the Handsome Lake religion, which has gained many followers in Central Ontario and Quebec.[41] The Longhouse religion replaced traditional polytheistic concepts with a monotheistic faith similar to Christianity. The Peyote religion exemplifies a modern Indigenous independent church that combines traditional Indigenous and Christian values. Peyotism is an experiential religion that, like the vision quest and many other rituals, focuses on the personal experience of God through the sacramental use of peyote. Another syncretic form of Indigenous Christianity is the Indian Shaker Church, which emerged at the end of the nineteenth century on the West Coast of the US and Canada.[42] The Shakers' healing ceremonies are closely linked to shamanic practices that incorporate Christian elements. The Shaker Church, like the Peyote religion, declined rapidly due to a lack of doctrines and numerous divisions within the church.

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[39] Albanese, *America,* 26.

[40] The longhouse was the primary form of communal housing and the site of various traditional religious ceremonies in North America.

[41] Grant, *Moon of Wintertime*, 205.

[42] Lehnhoff, "Indian Shaker Religion," 283–90.

These mixed forms of Indigenous and Christian worship illustrate the significant influence of mysticism and spirituality in shamanism.

Longhouse Religion

The Longhouse faith, also known as the Handsome Lake religion, as noted above, was founded in 1799 by an Indigenous American prophet named Handsome Lake (1735–1815), who was a chief of the Seneca tribe within the Iroquois Confederacy.[43] The Iroquois, St. Regis, Kahnawake, Grand River, and Oneida peoples of today's New York State and southeastern Canada[44] emphasize ethical conduct, communal solidarity, environmental stewardship, and a spiritual movement revitalizing Indigenous cultures and religion. Fundamentally, it synthesizes long-established traditional Iroquois beliefs and practices with Christian elements, especially Quakerism.[45] The Gaiwiio, which translates to "the good word,"[46] was given to the prophet Handsome Lake through the inspiration of the spirit and was preached by him until he died in 1815. During the ceremony, people recite the Gaiwiio passage.

In his early years, Handsome Lake was involved in significant conflicts against both Indigenous and American adversaries. He witnessed his people lose their rights and territory following the Revolutionary War. Subsequently, he suffered from a chronic illness exacerbated by bouts of alcoholism, which escalated into a critical condition in early 1799, rendering him near death. Nonetheless, a series of dream-vision experiences revitalized him, and he spearheaded a nationwide resurgence of Indigenous values.

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[43] St. John, "Handsome Lake," para. 1. The followers of the religion are known as "the Longhouse people" because ceremonies are held in a longhouse.

[44] Barrett and Markowitz, *American Indian Culture*, 417.

[45] Barrett and Markowitz, *American Indian Culture*, 417.

[46] Smith, "Handsome Lake Religion," para. 2.

Handsome Lake had a succession of visions and received several messages from the Creator through four messengers he called the four angels. The angels proclaimed the existence of a singular God, bestowing upon him mystical powers and delineating his task for his nations. Subsequently, his bodily and spiritual rejuvenation accelerated as he preached and committed to making changes.

Handsome Lake was a distinctive prophet among Indigenous American religious and nativistic figures. He was an ethical and eschatological prophet who received messages against immoral behaviours that prevailed among the nations: drunkenness, witchcraft, abortion, charms, wife-beating, and adultery. Such activities reflected a severe breakdown of the traditional Indigenous way of life at that time. He presented the nations with the Creator's will: they must either accept the Gaiwiio, which comprised the revelations and injunctions received by Handsome Lake, by repenting of their deeds and embracing personal and social reform or be lost in a personal eschatological sense.

As a Seneca prophet, Handsome Lake was deeply inspired by Quaker beliefs and spread a hybrid faith among his nation. Given that Quaker missionaries had operated among the Senecas, the Longhouse religion shares several remarkable connections with the Quaker faith.[47] Handsome Lake called for a breakup of the communal dwelling in the Longhouse and instituted single-family houses following the Quaker model. The messages formed by Quaker Christianity condemned abortion, drunkenness, and witchcraft, as these were perceived as threats to the community's survival. After Handsome Lake's death, Christianity became popular among the Six Nations people, while the Longhouse religion declined. Still, the Six Nations people continue to practice the Longhouse religion today.[48]

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[47] Randall, *Native American Religions*, 109.
[48] Wallace, *Tuscarora: A History*, 44.

It was a stride toward Christian truth to adopt what he regarded as positive in the Christian faith while retaining what they deemed significant in their culture.

The Shamans and Medicine-men

There are two distinct but complementary concepts within Indigenous spirituality, both located within an individual: the shaman, who mediates between this world and the spirits in a state of ecstasy, and the medicine man, who functions in a medical capacity similar to that of a professional doctor. Shamans, who serve as the primary mediators between people and the supernatural, are prevalent on the Northwest Coast.[49] Their main goal is to treat illness, particularly sickness brought on by taboo violations or witchcraft. Shamans identify the spiritual cause of the disease and restore the patient's soul, the loss of which is the direct cause of the illness. Medicine-men primarily use traditional techniques and knowledge of medicines and herbs to cure physical diseases, which we call alternative or holistic medicine.[50] In most cases, shamans and medicine men assume control over medical matters when supernatural interference is present. Therefore, many scholars in North America have used the terms "shamans" and "medicine-men" interchangeably.[51]

Indigenous people may use ecstatic devices and shamanic gifts when medicine involves supernatural causation. Shamans, the most potent religious practitioners, may become medicine men. Some shamans practice traditional cures when their expert knowledge of supernatural disease agents is needed. Many shamans, but not all, are

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[49] Crawford and Kelley, *American Indian Religious Tradition*, 1022.
[50] Hultkrantz, *The Religions*, 87–89.
[51] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 178.

medicine-men. Conversely, some medicine-men are also shamans. Other categories of spiritual practitioners include hunting-and-fishing magic practitioners, domestic cult leaders, witches, sorcerers, and ceremonial dancers. Throughout the nineteenth century, acquiring supernatural power through spiritual intermediaries was a personal process, and some women became renowned healers.[52] They were especially active during the disease pandemics of the late nineteenth century.

Although the "medicine wheel" is not a religious artifact, it still conveys spiritual teachings and reflects the practical wisdom of North American Indigenous peoples.[53] The medicine wheel represents all phases of human existence, from birth to death and rebirth, encompassing holistic life and its physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aspects.[54] The teachings of the medicine wheel represent the spiritual aspects of humans: a circular view of time in which everything is connected eternally, and time is an unbroken circle. It can indicate a person's current state as well as their future. From that perspective, it serves as a spiritual guide to a holistic, healthy life, offering a way to visualize and understand the interconnectedness of life's various aspects.

Peyote Religion: The Native American Church

Near the end of the nineteenth century, a new religious movement emerged among the Great Plains Indigenous peoples who were confined to reservations in North America. Peyotism, the spiritual use of peyote, a spineless cactus, appeared among the semi-desert

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[52] Crawford and Kelley, *American Indian*, 974.

[53] Gladstone. "Native American Transplanar Wisdom," 63.

[54] Gladstone, "Native American Transplanar Wisdom," 66–68. Colour explanations and colour placement on the medicine wheel vary across nations, tribes, clans, bands, families, and individuals.

and Plains tribes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[55] This pan-tribal movement was the Peyote religion, which became Canada's most significant and widespread pan-Indian religion in the 1930s.[56] The Peyote religion, known as the Native American Church, can be understood as an authentic Indigenous and Christian church. Yet, its theology has remained non-dogmatic, flexible, and syncretic.[57]

The Peyote rituals rely on the belief in the supernatural origin of the cactus.[58] The Indigenous peoples believed peyote to be a holy plant that the Creator gifted for spiritual strength. They used it as a sacrament with highly medicinal and nourishing effects that stimulate the vision, promoting a person's healing, prayer, and spiritual growth. Moreover, Peyotists used a liquid made by brewing peyote as a form of holy water for baptism and to initiate their religion.[59]

For Indigenous peoples, peyote has been perceived as a symbol of resistance to the dominant society and has been used to help rebuild communities broken by ethnic oppression.[60] Suzanne J. Crawford describes the implications of Peyotism:

> This tradition offered Native people an alternative to Euroamerican Christianity at a time when many indigenous people had been deprived of their land, and had been settled on vastly reduced territories and were suffering extreme levels of poverty and political, cultural, and spiritual collapse. The peyote movement, like the Ghost Dance provided a means of maintaining core indigenous values and traditions, gathering the community together in prayer to preserve its identity and culture, and doing so in a way that was distinctly Native.[61]

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[55] Crawford, *Native American*, 88.

[56] Kahan and Dyck, eds., *A Culture's Catalyst*, 27; Bowden, *American Indians*, 211.

[57] Hampton, "American Indian Religion," 130–31.

[58] Peyote is a small, spineless cactus that Native North Americans have utilized for entheogenic and medicinal purposes for thousands of years. It is well-known for its psychoactive properties when ingested. Peyote is still considered a narcotic and forbidden drug in the U.S., but no longer in Canada.

[59] Hampton, "American Indian Religion," 129; Bowden, *American Indians*, 213.

[60] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 75.

[61] Crawford, *Native American*, 89. Peyotism ceremonies are all-night prayer gatherings in which participants consume the sacred drug peyote while singing and praying, accompanied by gourd rattles and water drums. Other essential ritual elements include tobacco, feather fans, a central fire and altar, reverence for the four cardinal directions, and a Bible. During the service, the ceremonial leader uses a staff, a sage, and a rattling gourd.

The Peyote religion gradually adopted the Christian church model by reserving "a central place for Christ, Christian symbols, biblical values, and certain theological doctrines (sin and redemption)."[62] They maintained a monotheistic belief in which God placed his Holy Spirit into peyote for the Indigenous peoples, giving it to them so they could commune with him as a comforter and healer.[63] They believed that the peyote cactus was the "flesh of God" and that it represented a true revelation of God.[64]

Indian Shaker Church

The Indian Shaker Church is a syncretic sect that seeks to heal with God's power through ideas associated with the practices of Indigenous medicine-men or shamans.[65] The church first emerged among Pacific Northwest Indigenous peoples in Washington when they forsook their spiritual beliefs due to colonial intrusion and rapid cultural change in the late nineteenth century. John Slocum, who experienced an extraordinary trance, created a hybrid religion that blended aspects of Indigenous ethics and Christian teachings.[66] The Shakers selectively adopted original elements of Christianity (mostly Roman Catholic) into their practices and recontextualized them as spiritual resources and expressions in the fight against epidemic illnesses.[67] Their church services focus on singing and dancing to the tune of handbells, which support the converted in a light trance, along with elements

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[62] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 75.
[63] Kahan and Dyck, eds., *A Culture's Catalyst*, 52.
[64] Hertzberg, *The Search*, 250–51.
[65] Barnett, *Indian Shakers,* 8.
[66] Lehnhoff, "Indian Shaker." 288–89. An individual is primarily governed by their conscience and personal convictions as a member, with few obligations and restrictions. It is up to every individual to participate in their religious practices, such as praying, confessing their sins, loving their neighbour, shaking, actively participating in cures, and fearing God. They believed that sin causes sickness and can be bodily removed from a person by manipulation. Any imbalance in a person can be treated with a ritual.
[67] Neylan, "Shaking Up," 201–2.

of Christian worship.[68] Shaker's teachings spread to other parts of Northern California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, and Yukon.[69]

The Shakers, however, had to deal with many issues, including controversies over using the Bible during worship, participation in heretical Indigenous dances and other rituals, and the wearing of traditional dance regalia.[70] They suffered internal strife and division and began to show signs of decline over time. The church in these communities has existed for only about a century and has diminished. In contrast, the church's advocates believe it will endure due to a growing demand for its healing services as a result of substance misuse among Indigenous peoples. The Shaker Church represents a powerful reemergence of Indigenous ceremonialism, most of which was "resistant to the Christian context within which it was preserved."[71]

Cultural Revitalization: Pan-Indianism

As previously mentioned, the dominant Western society and the Christian church within it assimilated Indigenous peoples and their cultural traditions until the late twentieth century. For several decades, however, Indigenous peoples have sought to rediscover their cultural heritage, religious practices, and tribal identities in ways that address their current social issues.[72] In the first decade of the twentieth century, two crucial movements emerged within Pan-Indianism: one with a religious focus and the other with a secular orientation.[73]

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[68] Buckley, *The Shaker Church*, 260.
[69] Ruby and Brown, *John Slocum*, 320.
[70] Buckley, *The Shaker Church*, 264–65.
[71] Buckley, *The Shaker Church*, 267.
[72] Leblanc, "NAIITS: Contextual Mission," 88–90. NAIITS (then called "The North American Institute for Indigenous Theological Studies," now called "An Indigenous Learning Community") held its inaugural symposium, advertised as a "First Nations Missiological Symposium," November 29–December 1, 2001, in Winnipeg, MB, Canada.
[73] Hertzberg, *The Search*, 27.

For instance, the ghost dance, a Pan-Indian messianic movement, and other prophetic movements emerged as forms of resistance and cultural revitalization.[74] The ghost dance gradually subsided in the early twentieth century. Then, a new religious movement emerged within Indigenous communities across the Great Plains of Canada and the United States. As discussed earlier, Peyotism had the most significant number of active members of any modern variety of Pan-Indianism.[75] Peyotism, however, also experienced a decline in membership during the early twentieth century. In a similar era to the Peyotism movement, a new religious movement, the Indian Shaker Church, emerged within the same socio-cultural context as the ghost dance and other prophetic movements. The development of non-religious Pan-Indianism movements attracted the attention of leaders of tribal societies, missionaries, and other advocates.[76] Indigenous leaders of various tribes founded defence organizations for Indigenous cultures, self-determination, and socio-political status.[77]

Currently, mental treatments and behavioural corrections through Indigenous traditional spirituality prevail in government institutions such as local hospitals and correctional services. These healing programs emphasize the importance of forming meaningful relationships with the Creator to facilitate progress on the healing journey. Conventional treatments tackle the root causes of discord through emotional, mental, and spiritual healing and restoration rather than relying on medication or corrective programs.[78] More Indigenous people recognize that engaging in spiritual healing centres is

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[74] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 75.
[75] Bowden, *American Indians*, 214–15.
[76] Hertzberg, *The Search*, 111.
[77] Hertzberg, *The Search*, 20, 236.
[78] "A Matter of Faith," [n.d.].

essential for the successful healing of offenders and victims. They say it is more important for an individual to find a relationship with the Creator, whether in Indigenous traditional ceremonies or a church, than to focus on how and where they achieve it.[79] Nevertheless, faithful Indigenous Christians are often unaware that traditional ceremonies may not be compatible with Christian worship and connection to the God of the Bible. I will discuss this subject and my research findings in Chapter 5, which includes interviews with Indigenous ministers and worship leaders.

Cultural revitalization continues, particularly in Indigenous ministry, led by Indigenous leaders and scholars. They argue that the exclusion of Indigenous cultures by Christians and the church has become the most significant reason many Indigenous people remain without a relationship with Christ.[80] Additionally, they believe Indigenous people can heal their deep wounds and restore their fractured cultures by reclaiming aspects of their ethnic identities that were taken from them by the government and Christian missionaries.[81] As a result, some Indigenous churches are increasingly adopting participatory, hybrid Indigenous worship styles instead of the imposed, syncretistic Western style of worship. This movement, known as neo-traditionalism, has been one of the internal struggles that many Indigenous churches face as they contend for authentic Christian worship.

In 2001, Indigenous Christian scholars in North America established a postgraduate theological institution (NAIITS) to enable Indigenous ministers to fully engage in the theological, biblical, and missiological initiatives of their local churches.[82]

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[79] "A Matter of Faith," [n.d.].
[80] LeBlanc et al., "Culture," 171.
[81] LeBlanc et al., "NAIITS," 89.
[82] LeBlanc et al., "NAIITS," 88.

For the past 20 years, NAIITS has provided a platform for innovative and distinctive Indigenous expressions, emphasizing contextualization, academic mobility, and an Indigenous worldview in culturally relevant ways. They argue that European settlers have long asserted that Indigenous traditional practices are worldly and spiritually detrimental rather than fostering the process of contextualization. They elevate Indigenous voices in theology and the contextualization of worship through postgraduate academic research and annual symposiums. However, their perspective does not always align with that of Indigenous ministers who are unaffiliated with the institution. In other words, many Indigenous pastors have not received training in professional theological schools and tend to view terms like contextualization with suspicion.

Indigenous Christianity: **Sacred Circle, Embodied Cross**

Ongoing conversations in missiology about the compatibility of Indigenous cultures with the Christian faith reveal that there are no easy answers.[83] Indigenous Christians can harmonize their beliefs with those shaped by their cultural context. However, the term does not merely indicate a revival of Indigenous rituals in the framework of the Christian faith. How can we respect Indigenous practices, values, and beliefs that align with Scripture without undermining Christ's supremacy, uniqueness, and redemptive work? As discussed earlier, Indigenous cultures and worldviews share many elements with biblical concepts, such as a monotheistic understanding of God, a profound sensitivity to the spirit world, a creation-affinity spirituality, beliefs in God's direct revelation through dreams and visions, sacred symbols, the practice of fasting, and a belief in eternal life. These elements can provide

[83] Bates, *Native American Identity*, 29–31.

valuable connections for sharing biblical truth between Indigenous and Christian belief systems. Conversely, some of these aspects may be incompatible with Christian beliefs. This section explores various Indigenous cultural activities and their related traditional elements.

Indigenous Rituals, Ceremonies, and Symbols

Indigenous peoples believe that traditional ritual processes and ceremonies enable individuals to attain wisdom and discernment, ultimately allowing them to live in harmony with all creations.[84] Some ritual practices also resist the evils of this world (curses) by embodying them in the belief that all life is interconnected in the spiritual realm. The past rituals of Indigenous ancestors have been passed down as sources of ongoing health and well-being. Some rituals are practiced daily, while others are reserved for important occasions such as funerals or community festivals. They meaningfully incorporate various forms of Indigenous symbols, art, and music for different occasions. Although local tribes have unique customs, they generally reflect and present pan-indigenous cultures, worldviews, and beliefs in their sacred rituals, community ceremonies, and traditional symbols.

Sacred Rituals

One integral aspect of various rituals and ceremonies is the burning of incense and smudging, which signifies the beginning of a ritual meeting or gathering.[85] Indigenous peoples widely recognize these practices as essential for purifying individuals and

[84] Stonechild, *The Knowledge Seeker*, 71; Cajete, *Native Science*, 70–71.
[85] Church, *Holy Smoke,* 60; Shaw and Burrows, *Traditional Ritual*, 201.

ceremonial objects of undesirable negative energy. They burn incense made from various medicinal herbs, including sage, sweetgrass, and cedar bark, in an abalone shell or clay bowl, allowing the smoke to sweep around the participants. Indigenous peoples believe that smudging purifies the mind, body, and spirit. One participant in my research interview, a lay worship leader of an Indigenous church, shared her beliefs regarding incense burning:

> I believe in something like tobacco burning as a ritual to thank our Creator, pray for concern and seek the Creator's help. This would be acceptable to me only because it is the ritual I am accustomed to experiencing during Longhouse ceremonies and at our homes. As a child, I attended Longhouse ceremonies with my parents.

This case typically illustrates the use of incense burning and smudging as a means of expressing prayer to the Creator or God, seeking help. Smudging rituals have been essential elements of their cultures and lives.

The "sacred pipe" is one of the most potent and sacred spiritual rituals in many Indigenous traditions. The pipe has become a universal symbol of life and death and a source of temperance, tolerance, and balance with all creation. The stone bowl represents Mother Earth, while the wooden stem represents all living creatures. Each person in the circle smokes the pipe as part of the ritual, symbolizing communion and acceptance of the Creator's gift.[86] The pipe smoke signifies the earth's connectedness with the Creator above as the smoke rises. Consequently, pipe smoking is used in peace negotiations, naming ceremonies, and personal prayers.[87] Indigenous spiritual leaders, shamans, and elders use the sacred pipe for individual prayers and group rituals. For them, the pipe resembles the cross, which has become the symbol of Christianity.

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[86] Treat, *Native and Christian,* 48.
[87] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 138.

The "sweat lodge" is central to traditional Indigenous practices, typically conducted with a sacred pipe. Participants enter the domed structure and sit around a central pit filled with heated stones. This setting reflects the Indigenous myth of creation, where the round universe was once entirely made of stone. The sweat lodge, a closed structure with a pit where heated rocks are placed, is considered a sacred space.[88] Participants sing, pray, talk, or meditate as they sit after the sweat leader pours water onto the hot stones to generate steam. This ceremony is about renewing oneself and fostering a strong connection with the spirit world by purifying the body, mind, soul, and heart while restoring relationships with oneself, others, and the Creator.

Some Indigenous Christians have traditionally engaged in the sweat lodge, a ritual rooted in their ancestral practices, for purification, cleansing, and healing of the mind, body, and spirit.[89] This ritual recalls their preparation to enter the Creator's presence during prayer and supplication, similar to how Hebrew priests had to prepare themselves to enter Yahweh's presence ritually (Num 8:5–7; Exod 30:17–21).[90] There is always a ritual offering of holy plants, such as cedar, tobacco, sage, and sweetgrass, for holiness, protection, and purification. This ritual combines physical and spiritual cleansing with vision questing to prepare for other ceremonies before meeting the Creator. Some Indigenous ministers and churches have incorporated this ceremony into their worship,

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[88] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American,* 167.

[89] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 167–69; Crawford, *Native American*, 91; Marde, *Indians*, 143. Note that in Acts 21:26, Paul continued to follow Jewish purification customs when he went to Jerusalem.

[90] Church, *Holy Smoke*, 58–60. Church is the director of Wiconi, a ministry to Native Americans and First Nations people. He holds a Doctor of Intercultural Studies (Fuller Theological Seminar) and is dedicated to Indigenous ministry direction to help create new Christian ministry models for Indigenous Americans. He is the author of *Native American Contextual Ministry*. Church reminds us that when offering sacrifices to God, the Hebrew priests were required to perform ceremonial cleansing (Num 8:5–7; Exod 30:17–21).

promoting a ritual expression of reconciliation with Christ. However, while the sweat lodge may cleanse the body, it does not purify the spirit.

The primary purpose of the "vision quest" is to establish the right network of spiritual relationships to receive guidance for life.[91] Indigenous young men undertake vision quests to seek guidance during personal and community transitions at the time of puberty. They climb to a higher or isolated place, assisted by a guardian spirit, to seek visions and religious experiences.[92] This experience consists of four days and nights of fasting and prayer conducted in a quiet location. While praying and crying out for a vision or the abilities needed to live in harmony with nature and to experience new life, the sacred pipe is held to unite oneself with the earth. This experience is part of male puberty rites among most Canadian Prairie nations. Seeking a vision through meditative rituals became more prevalent among Indigenous tribes during the 1960s cultural renaissance.[93] Some draw parallels between the vision quest and Jesus' fasting in the wilderness before his public ministry. The dimension of ascetic experience is comparable to the Christian tradition of fasting and prayer. It seeks to eliminate all obstacles within and around the individual, enabling them to connect with spiritual energy. The theological perspective on the vision quest implies that individuals require divine assistance to navigate their life journey successfully.[94]

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[91] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 220–21.

[92] Treat, *Native and Christian,* 33. Treat writes, "The vision quest as a form of meditation would be similar to the meditation of the Zen Buddhist or the Tibetan Buddhist."

[93] McGaa, *Native Wisdom*, 130.

[94] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 220–21.

Community Ceremonies

The "powwow" is a large community celebration of singing and dancing held during the harvest festival to restore rightful relationships and heal all creation. They organize a dance competition during the ceremony to reproduce and maintain social and traditional collectivist values and attitudes.[95] They engage in chants, dances, and prayers to honour the spirits who regenerate the earth on their behalf and provide food. It takes place in a circle consecrated by a spiritual leader, making the area within sacred. Dancers and singers enter the circle from the east, where the sun rises, and move clockwise around it.

Dancing has been a significant component of major ceremonies in many traditional Indigenous societies. It serves various purposes for different tribal groups. In most tribes, dancing is incorporated into religious ceremonies to connect with the spirit world. In West Coast communities, the spirit dance is known as the actual spirit dance and is believed to be a manifestation of a guardian spirit. Spirit dancing is a powerful means of connecting the supernatural with the natural world.[96] The sun dance, ghost dance, and grass dance of the Plains Indigenous peoples are all ritualistic expressions tied to each tribe's ideology and theology of their Creator. The sun dance, for instance, began when a warrior's vision quest showed him a new way of praying during a dedication ceremony to the Great Spirit.[97] The ghost dance is deeply connected to a prophetic vision and messianic revival that bears a resemblance to Christianity, yet these dances are highly shamanistic.[98]

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[95] Aicinena and Ziyanak, *The Native American Contest Powwow*, 7.

[96] Crawford, *Native American*, 95. Spirit dancing takes place in a longhouse and consists of three main activities: hospitality, spirit dance, and drumming.

[97] Bowden, *American Indians*, 215–16.

[98] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 71–72.

Dancers in public ceremonies are expected to cleanse themselves for four days before the ritual and fast for the same duration. As part of the final stage of the powwow, the sun dancers pierced their bodies and tore at the piercings to symbolize a renewal of their quest for the spirit. The spiritual dances that comprise a practicing shaman's spiritual experience are closely related to the domestic cult.[99] The Canadian government banned the Sun Dance as part of the Indian Act of 1895 because it was perceived as contributing to Indigenous resistance.[100]

It is worth noting that in the Old Testament, dancing was a form of worship,[101] and it is still practiced in many Indigenous tribes in the same manner today. However, the meanings of traditional dances vary by style and tribe. Generally, the purpose of the Sun Dance was to present oneself in a new way of praying for dedication to the Great Spirit. In contrast, the ghost dance protests the negative aspects of Western civilization.[102] Currently, powwow dancing is a form of competitive or social gathering.[103] As such, most Indigenous dances involve individuals expressing their desires or invoking Indigenous spirits, whereas Hebrew dances celebrate God's grace. During traditional ceremonies, Indigenous peoples dance for the collective rather than for themselves. However, in contemporary Indigenous worship, dancing during public services may not resonate with the entire congregation. Some individuals might find it more distracting or offensive than beneficial.

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[99] One of the essential functions of spirit dance included the ability to alleviate sickness caused by the influence of spiritual power and/or nonhuman entities.

[100] Whyte, "Aboriginal Rights," 178–84.

[101] The Hebrew people conducted their traditional dances when celebrating various rites of passage. Miriam led the most notable worship dance after Israel escaped from Egypt by crossing the Red Sea (Exod 15:20–21; 2 Sam 6:14–22; Pss 149:3; 150:4).

[102] Hulykrantz, *The Religions*, 152.

[103] Church, *Holy Smoke*, 84–85.

Indigenous dances often incorporate traditional attire or regalia as a crucial component of worshiping the Creator. The uniquely crafted regalia for dancers represents their identity and way of life.[104] The sacred regalia of Indigenous peoples can be compared to the clothing of Hebrew priests in the Old Testament (Exod 25:1–7). A few Indigenous ministers believe they can incorporate traditional dances and sacred regalia into Christian worship since dancing is integral to Indigenous tribes. It is a delicate and controversial issue, even among Indigenous Christians. Many Christians who are skeptical of contextualization feel they have not had enough time to transform the dances from their previous use for ungodly purposes to holy purposes.[105]

The "potlatches" are large ceremonial giveaways designed to raise the host's position in the community and draw more attention to their generosity, wealth, and power. The public acknowledgment and establishment of new spiritual and social positions occur through such a giveaway. This festival involves giving gifts of blankets, beadwork, or crafts to family, friends, or guests to celebrate special occasions, such as a birth, a wedding, or the commemoration of a deceased loved one. This tradition is a significant way to provide, validate, and express power while "strengthening community ties and affirming spiritual relationships."[106] The government also prohibited the potlatch ceremony under the Indian Act of 1895 for the same reasons as the sun dance; the ban was lifted in 1951.[107]

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[104] Church, *Holy Smoke*, 84. Some Indigenous people dress up for powwow dance competitions. Others wear regalia for ceremonial occasions, such as weddings and funerals, or for cultural events, such as tribal council meetings.

[105] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 71–72. The shamanistic dances that comprise a practicing shaman's spiritual experience are closely related to the domestic cult.

[106] Crawford, *Native American*, 51.

[107] Crawford, *Native American*, 76–77; Whyte, "Aboriginal Rights," 178–84. The Potlatch was banned by the federal government of Canada from 1885 to 1951.

Indigenous Symbols

Indigenous tribes believe that the forces of the universe operate in sacred circles, which they view as signs of fullness, represented by Mother Earth, the brother sun, the medicine wheel, and the sacred drum. Indigenous people see themselves as equal parts of the natural world, neither superior nor inferior to any other species, since the circle has no beginning or end. Thus, the circles in Indigenous culture symbolize harmony, interrelatedness, wholeness, and unity, promoting oneness with the earth, all creation, other people, and the Great Spirit.[108] Most Indigenous articles, encampments, meetings, and traditional settings are typically circular in design. Noley Kidwell and "Tink" Tinker describe the meaning of the circle in a Christian context: "We see ourselves as co-equal participants in the circle, standing neither above nor below anything else in God's creation. There is no hierarchy in our cultural context, not even of species, because the circle has neither beginning nor end."[109] The meaning of the Indigenous circle reminds us that we are all one in Christ Jesus and underscores the importance of reciprocity and respect in maintaining the wholeness of the Christian community.

For many tribal groups, drums are sacred objects used in ceremonies, which come in various types and sizes, serving specific purposes. Hand drums are commonly used in community gatherings and play a substantial role in music and dance. Water drums hold essential ceremonial purposes and are integral to traditional rituals. Larger multi-user drums, such as those used during powwows, provide a beat for dancers and a tune that

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[108] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 50; Hascall, "The Sacred Circle," 179–183. Hascall writes, "The sacred circle teaches us that we are all related to one another; our lives are interdependent and shared: human, animal, vegetable, and mineral. We are one creation, as the God who created us is one, though called by many names. Among our many tribes, God is 'Spirit,' 'Power,' 'Creator,' 'Mystery,' yet it is one God who created this life and is personally involved in our relationships" (180).

[109] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 50.

complements the singers' songs.[110] The drumbeat symbolizes the solemn rhythm of creation, the human heartbeat, and Mother Earth, all of which offer people balance in their daily lives. The drumming serves different roles and purposes within various tribal groups; specific uses and meanings cannot be transmitted from one tribe to another or convey the same significance.

Sacred Creatures

Indigenous peoples' affinities with animals are widely recognized. They refer to animals as "relatives" to acknowledge and respect their relationships with all living creatures. They view animals and birds as sacred, seeing them as relatives, mentors, and role models who inspire ongoing growth in life's journey. Indigenous shamans, for instance, consult animal images on behalf of individuals or entire communities to gain insight into navigating various situations.[111] The cures derived from animal spirits are most common among healers, particularly for those animals with which the tribes are associated.[112] Indigenous peoples believe everyone is also connected to a spirit animal that mirrors their personality traits and aids in their spiritual journey. They share life with the animal world, keeping images and artworks of various animals that reflect their worldviews.[113]

The eagle and her feathers, which symbolize power and the sacred spirit, are frequently represented as the strength of God and his loving care in the Christian context (Exod 19:4; Deut 32:11). In Indigenous culture, the feathers are deeply revered and serve

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[110] Church, *Native American*, 122–23.

[111] Cajete, *Native Science*, 150–51. Cajete describes the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the animals: "Each animal is seen to possess certain special qualities and powers that they may share with humans if they are properly treated."

[112] Crawford and Kelley, *American Indian*, 978.

[113] Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel*, 188.

as a sign of high honour, displayed with respect and dignity. David assures us in a Psalm that God's wings will protect him from danger: "He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings, you will find refuge" (Ps 91:4, NIV). For Indigenous peoples, such an image effectively conjures the concept of the almighty and trustworthy Spirit of God (Isa 40:31). Likewise, the Indigenous church can utilize cultural symbols and images to communicate the gospel among the tribes and reorient their meanings to praise and honour God.

Incarnation and Sanctification: Authentic Contextualization

One of the critical implications of contextualization, discussed in the previous chapter, is the nature of the incarnation. The gospel of Christ should be presented in a way that allows Indigenous tribes to encounter the word of God in a culturally relevant form.[114] At the same time, as gospel recipients, Indigenous peoples must purify and sanctify cultures, artifacts, and individuals that have not previously been associated with Christian worship. This study emphasizes two dimensions of authentic contextualization: "incarnation and sanctification."[115]

The Incarnation of the Gospel

The core belief of Christianity is God's incarnation in Jesus Christ, who came to this world in human form. Just as the infinite Creator became incarnate, that is, as a human to

[114] Nicholls, *Contextualization*, 21.

[115] These are the crucial concepts that I have developed for this research. Traditional approaches to contextualizing the gospel in cross-cultural contexts typically take a one-way incarnational approach. On the other hand, this study emphasizes two ways to purify and sanctify cultures, objects, and converted believers within the receptors' contexts.

reach finite people, the gospel, as divine revelation, must be incarnated into human languages and cultures within the context of the tribes and communities we serve. Missiologist and theologian David J. Bosch writes, "The Christian faith is intrinsically incarnational; therefore, unless the church chooses to remain a foreign entity, it will always enter into the context in which it happens to find itself."[116] This does not imply compromising the purity of the gospel and the holy sacraments by adopting non-biblical cultural practices. It means that the gospel of Christ and the tradition of faith are taught and demonstrated in different ways in various types of worship. The editors of the book, *Traditional Ritual as Christian Worship,* gathered many theological and cultural contexts that support and align with a missiological theory of mixed Christian practices.[117] They assume that the scriptures adequately reveal God's plan for intercultural expression and that the gospel should integrate with various cultural forms of worship to create a new sense of excitement and relevance.[118] In light of this, there should be a genuinely Indigenous expression of Christianity within various tribal cultures. Otherwise, it may lead to the mistaken impression that a particular tribe is incompatible with Christians. On the other hand, the gospel always calls for transformation, placing believers in tension with their culture, regardless of that culture.

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[116] Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 195.

[117] Shaw and Burrows, eds., *Traditional Ritual,* xxi.

[118] Shaw and Burrows, eds., *Traditional Ritual*, xx. The editors write, "When God's intent (as expressed in biblical content) is responsibly joined with cultural expressions of spirituality in a hybrid mix, new excitement and relevance emerge." They note that "God was already at work in the local culture before Christians entered."

Purification and Sanctification

In the contextualization of Indigenous rituals, ceremonies, and objects, there is an assumption that sinful people all used them at some point, but this does not make them evil in and of themselves; instead, it merely means that they were employed in the wrong way. Although Indigenous cultures have some characteristics that may be traced back to our Creator, various factors may have defiled these cultural expressions. How can these traditional elements be reconsidered for use in Christian worship? Cultural artifacts with previous cultural meanings can be used for the glory of God as part of the critical contextualization of being faithful to the gospel of Christ.[119] In other words, we seek to reorient the purposes and meanings of cultural forms or creations through purification and sanctification for God's purpose in Christian worship.[120]

A few Indigenous ministers and scholars suggest a possible process for sanctifying Indigenous culture. They contend that for an Indigenous community to change Indigenous elements, it must continually evaluate them in light of God's word and sanctify them by following a proper hermeneutic process under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, accompanied by discerning Christians.[121] Above all, cultural exegesis requires careful evaluation of the object to ensure it does not carry non-biblical factors. In doing this, they suggest three helpful areas for evaluating an artistic or cultural practice: "form, function, and meaning."[122] According to them, a form refers to any tangible item, including musical instruments, pieces of clothing, plants, animals, symbols, and various genres of song, dance, and verbal expressions. Function refers to the idea that a particular item is believed

[119] LeBlanc et al., "Culture," 26.
[120] Adrian, "The Meeting," 184–90.
[121] LeBlanc et al., "Culture," 19.
[122] LeBlanc et al., "Culture," 23–25.

to serve a specific religious or spiritual purpose. The meaning of an object refers to what it signifies to a particular person or group of people. An object may have historical significance for one region or tribe but not for another. Therefore, drawing a parallel between Indigenous ceremonies or artifacts and scriptural references without a biblical and theological examination and reflection is inappropriate.

Figure 2: Authentic Contextualization in Indigenous Church

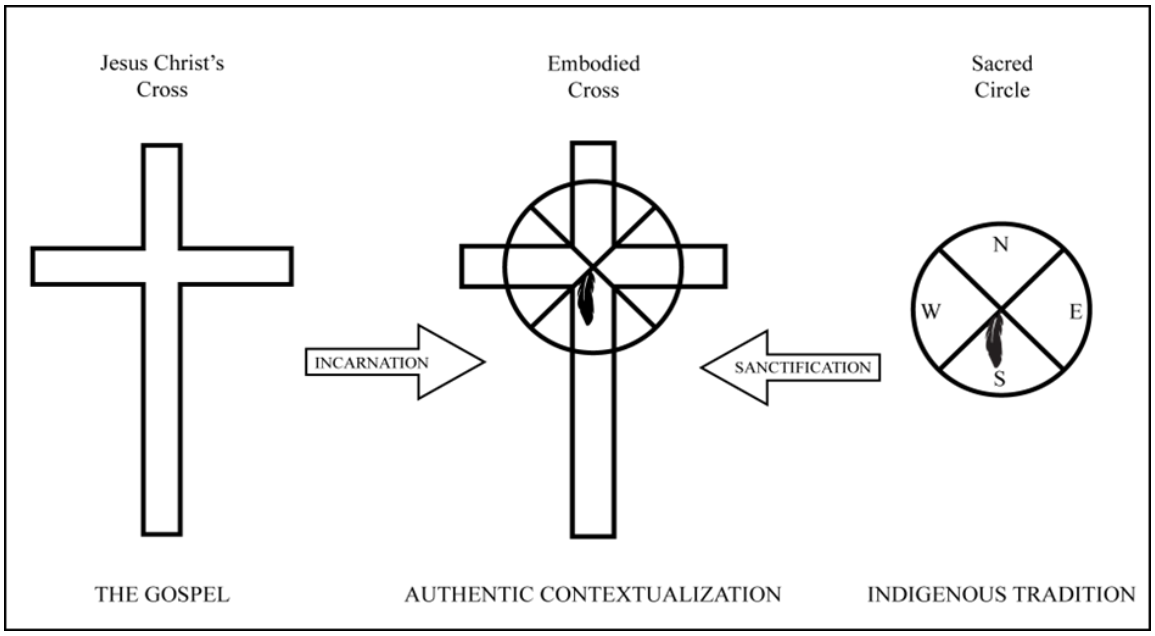

Figure 2 illustrates authentic contextualization within the Indigenous Church.[123] The cross of Christ symbolizes the gospel of Jesus, which is incarnated in the Indigenous peoples of traditional cultures. On the other hand, sanctification incorporates the sacred circle of Indigenous tradition into the cross. These two approaches can produce more adequate contextualization than traditional, one-way contextualization.

[123] The author of this dissertation created this figure to clarify the concept of the fifth self, also referred to as self-sanctification.

Additionally, disciplined Christians, pastoral leaders, and congregants must work together to sanctify the cultural elements that are part of worship.[124] For pastoral leaders, spiritual discernment is essential for contextualization, as it allows them to analyze cultural aspects and practices, thereby purifying the activities and meanings of liturgies. At the same time, converted believers must grow into mature Christians by removing ungodly patterns from their lives and sanctifying their spirits by offering themselves to God. Scott Aniol writes, "Indigenous cultural expressions are not automatically acceptable for Christian worship; in many cases, the newfound faith of a people will require them to change their behaviour, especially in their corporate worship."[125] The above statement implies that Indigenous cultural expressions are not suitable for Christian services, necessitating modification to make them acceptable. I will discuss this subject in detail in the next chapter.

Conclusion

Over time, Indigenous worldviews have been embedded in North America's Christian worship practices and theology. There is a collision between two perspectives: the notion that one may be Indigenous or Christian but not both reflects an Indigenous cultural and identity crisis. Furthermore, Indigenous traditions and practices are reviving within an increasingly secular society, and Indigenous Christians are integrating their spiritual heritage with Christianity. Habitual patterns of traditional liturgy from Indigenous communities may powerfully influence the culture of Christian worship. Even many

[124] Hesselgrave and Rommen, *Contextualization*, 198. The authors recognize that "contextualization is best done within the receiving cultural context by qualified indigenes."

[125] Aniol, *By the Waters*, 147.

Indigenous churches do not know how to deal with the cultural liturgy and practices, which leads to a fall into syncretism.

Along with cultural revitalization in the early twentieth century, pan-Indigenous religious movements emerged among Indigenous nations in the Great Plains, the West Coast of Canada, and the United States. These churches teach a combination of traditional beliefs and Christianity, pursuing supernatural experiences and healing from physical, mental, and spiritual illnesses. The prevailing shamanistic elements of syncretic religions and rituals have frequently been used to manipulate supernatural beings for human benefit or to acknowledge their presence.[126] They use sacred plants, animal imagery, and other objects selected by tribes that represent their beliefs, worldviews, and knowledge as a means of purification, healing, and gaining strength.

Despite negative perceptions of meaning and function, many Indigenous practices and cultural elements can provide valuable insights into contemporary Christian worship. This perspective indicates that Indigenous culture and Christianity can coexist with adequate contextualization. A deeper analysis and understanding of Indigenous culture and spirituality are essential for integrating cultural expression within a tribal congregation as part of contextualization in Christian worship. The primary goal of authentic contextualization should be to honour Indigenous cultures through an incarnational approach and support sanctified cultures, forms, and believers that have not previously been refined for Christian worship. In this bidirectional approach to contextualization, I emphasize the purification and sanctification of various Indigenous rituals, ceremonies, and individuals within specific contexts.[127]

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[126] Shaw, "The Dynamics of Ritual and Ceremony," 18.
[127] Flemming, *Contextualization*, 319.

CHAPTER 4:

AN INDIGENOUS APPROACH TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

This chapter explores a decolonized approach to Christian theology and worship, with a particular focus on Indigenous churches. In discussing the religious aspects of Indigenous peoples, a standard method employed in Indigenous theology is an ethnographic approach to their spiritual practices.[128] The first section introduces the third and fourth self-principles and provides a practical model for cross-cultural mission contexts. In these self-principle approaches, Indigenous peoples articulate their cultural and religious perceptions through an Indigenous perspective on Christian theology and worship. The second section aims to establish an Indigenous theology grounded in the principle of self-theologizing. I will discuss its features, including the understanding of the supreme being, Christology, the theology of creation, and ecology, which provides a foundation for theological and ethical considerations regarding responsible stewardship of the ecosystem. The final section delves into the fundamental rights of Indigenous peoples and their connection to liberation theology. It highlights that Indigenous theology is experiential, relative, and confessional, whereas Western theology is doctrinal, logical, and dogmatic. This chapter emphasizes the importance of self-expression of cultural and religious perceptions from an Indigenous perspective.

[128] Moschella, "Ethnography," 226–29.

The Three-Self Principle and the Fourth Self

Henry Venn (1796–1873)[129] and Rufus Anderson (1796–1880)[130] introduced the "three self principles"—self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating—for the Indigenous mission around the middle of the 19th century.[131] The principles became practical models in cross-cultural mission fields. A sense of self-support liberates them from the financial paternalism of missionaries. Regarding self-government, the Indigenous church has the right to be itself and to form its own governance. Self-propagating means the church is considered mature when it actively fulfills its mission. These notions may be of little significance now or may seem ineffective if the mission ministers do not advocate for them. For example, there is a severe weakness in implementing methods for immature congregations; newly established churches often require financial and spiritual assistance until they are mature enough to accomplish their evangelical missions. Additionally, there has been debate about which principle should be realized first, making the other two feasible. These three principles complement the establishment of autonomy in young churches within Indigenous evangelism.

A century later, missiologist Paul G. Hiebert proposed adding a "fourth self" to the list: "self-theologizing."[132] Since then, it has been recognized that Indigenous churches should engage in self-theologizing in addition to the three self-principles. According to Hiebert, the Indigenous Christian church (congregants) should "develop theologies that

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[129] Dorn, *The Three-Self Principle*, 17. Venn was an influential leader in the evangelical movement within the Church of England, following in his father's footsteps. In 1841, he was appointed secretary of the Church Missionary Society.

[130] Dorn, *The Three-Self Principle*, 17. Anderson was an American Congregationalist who served as the Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions.

[131] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*,194. This principle originated from Venn and Anderson's personal experiences and demands while administering their different mission initiatives.

[132] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 195.

make the gospel clear in their different cultures."[133] In other words, Indigenous churches should develop theologies that meet their specific needs and ensure relevance within their respective cultural contexts.[134] Indigenous peoples should be allowed to worship God in their unique ways, using their languages and cultures. Subsequently, church members may recognize the Lord as their own God rather than perceive him as a foreign Christ.

The current discourse on Indigenous theology in North America focuses on integrating Indigenous perspectives and embodying theological concepts within Indigenous cultural contexts. Indigenous scholars in Canada, Australia, and the United States have been developing an Indigenous theology affiliated with theological institutions for over two decades.[135] They lead studies on Indigenous cultures and contextualization for Indigenous groups worldwide. In my view, they prefer to accommodate Indigenous traditional cultures and ritual practices without adequately debating and listening to the various voices of the larger body of the church.[136] As such, many Indigenous people and churches are concerned about whether the Christian faith is compatible with their traditional practices. In my conversations with Indigenous ministers and congregations, I have found that they are not ready to adopt the theories of contextualization proposed by some Indigenous scholars.

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[133] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 216.
[134] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 326.
[135] NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community operates postgraduate theological programs for Indigenous ministers with many North American and Australian theological institutions.
[136] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 216–17.

Indigenous Theology in North America

Over the past two decades in North America, there has been significant growth in the development of Indigenous theology, driven by the discourse of decolonized theological perspectives. Missiologists and Indigenous scholars emphasize that Indigenous peoples should express their cultural and religious beliefs from an Indigenous perspective based on Indigenous traditions and worldviews.[137] Hiebert notes, "The church in each locale, as a community of faith, must define what it means to be Christian in its particular sociocultural and historical setting."[138] He introduced the term "self-theologizing" and was the first to link it to the standard "three-self" concept, expanding the discussion of contextualization among North American evangelicals to incorporate this fourth-self concept for mission churches. The principle of self-theologizing acknowledges the need for local Christians to develop theological frameworks that effectively communicate the essence of the gospel within their diverse cultural contexts.[139] It involves Indigenous churches having the capacity to know and understand God and the scriptures while recognizing the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers within their own cultures. Hiebert notes that hermeneutics is essential when a believer's community engages in self-theologizing within a global dialogue that develops a biblically based, supra-cultural, historical, Christological, and Spirit-led "transcultural theology."[140] Although local churches have the right to interpret the Bible within their particular contexts, they should also listen to the guidance of the broader church community with which they are affiliated. Establishing this underlying principle, the Indigenous church can interpret the

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[137] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, ix–xii.
[138] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 326.
[139] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 216–17.
[140] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 217–19.

Christian story to promote spiritual growth, thereby enabling it to develop its theological perspectives on the supreme being, creation, and humanity.[141]

The Supreme Being, the Great Spirit

The concept of deity among Indigenous peoples in North America has been a subject of scholarly debate. According to Carl Starkloff, a professor at the Toronto School of Theology, Indigenous tribes in North America hold fundamental beliefs in the "Great Spirit" as creator, maker, or spirit.[142] The Great Spirit is a mysterious entity that transcends all entities and is regarded as the supreme authority. Although the term "Great Spirit" is singular in form, it carries a collective meaning and is perceived as impersonal.[143] The Great Spirit is believed to manifest in various ways for Indigenous peoples. It is often personalized or manifested in natural phenomena such as the sun, moon, sky, earth, winds, lightning, thunder, and other similar occurrences.

The concept of the Great Spirit is superior to all other beings and humanity, holding all power, medicine, knowledge, and wisdom. In contrast, Indigenous peoples believe that human beings and their lives are not superior to those of other creatures but are merely a part of the universe.[144] They, therefore, hold that supernatural help is an

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[141] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 113.

[142] Starkloff, *The People*, 25–50, 124. Starkloff notes that Indigenous peoples are predominantly monotheistic and conceive of God as "Earth Maker, Our Maker, Our Father, Creator, Giver, Man-Above, Great Holy, Master (or Lord) of Life." See also Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 45–50. Peelman describes this supreme being as the Great Mystery (*Wakan Tanka*), the cosmos, and the ethos. Contemporary scholars widely acknowledge that the traditional belief systems of the Indigenous peoples of North America are inherently organized around the concept of a supreme being before the arrival of Christianity. The oldest name for the supreme being among Indigenous Americans is *Wakan Tanka*, older than the Great Spirit or Creator.

[143] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 64–65. Indigenous ceremonies are gifts to their communities or manifestations of the intrinsic goodness of Waconda, the Sacred Power or Mystery, and all of its manifestations and personifications as Grandmothers and Grandfathers.

[144] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 37–38.

essential prerequisite for human life and any achievement. They seek spiritual aid through traditional rituals that enable them to connect with powers beyond human capacity. Ultimately, they believe that when people comprehend all these principles in their hearts, they will fear, adore, and know the Great Spirit, and then they will be and act according to his will.[145]

The Indigenous term Great Spirit refers to a conception of God comparable to Christian thought. It resembles the description of God's nature in Rom 1:18–20, yet it remains uncertain whether this term refers to a personified being. As the apostle Paul teaches, God has provided Indigenous peoples with many avenues of redemption and ways to use their culture to connect with God, the Creator.[146] However, the Indigenous understanding of the relationship between the Great Spirit and its spiritual powers can be challenging to grasp.[147] These bridges can potentially facilitate the transmission of biblical principles and values across Indigenous and Christian cultural contexts. We are encouraged to embrace their cultural heritage, endorse the positive aspects of their traditions, reconcile potential conflicts, and foster growth within a particular tribal context rather than segregating Indigenous and Christian belief systems.

Indigenous Images of Christ

Christology is the study of Jesus Christ from a theological perspective, considering the Christian belief in his twofold nature as God and man. For Indigenous peoples, the

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[145] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 47.

[146] Rom 1:19–20. "Since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (NIV).

[147] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 49.

traditional interpretation of Jesus (Lord) as presented by colonizing churches may differ from the perspectives of Indigenous Christians. The experience of lordship among Indigenous North Americans began only with the conquest and colonization of Indigenous nations through the forces of European invasion. What Indigenous peoples understand about lordship relates more to the power structures established by colonialism. In this light, calling upon Jesus as Lord might be viewed as conceding to "the colonial reality of new hierarchical social structures."[148]

On the other hand, most depicted figures from Indigenous views emerge from the suffering image of Jesus, shifting to the healer, liberator, and triumphant Messiah.[149] Indigenous peoples reflect the sorrows and suffering of past generations into a fellow Jesus who is innocent yet heading to the cross on Calvary.[150] Therefore, it is practically impossible to reflect on the image of Christ without considering the history of Indigenous peoples in North America.

Cherokees, in particular, suffered from the tragedy known as "the Trail of Tears," during which they were forced to abandon their homeland and travel thousands of miles to Oklahoma in the mid-nineteenth century.[151] The narrative of this tragic story, in which more than half of them died on the arduous journey, may have contributed to their search for Christ as a healer and liberator. Indigenous tribes in Canada were also subjected to government-enforced living conditions in reserves that violated their territories, customs,

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[148] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 68.
[149] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 162.
[150] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 164–65.
[151] Oberg, *Native America*, 4. The Trail of Tears commemorates the tragic experience of the Cherokee people, who were forcibly removed as a result of Andrew Jackson's policy of Indian Removal. In 1838–1839, the US government moved the people from their homelands in the southeastern United States to new homes hundreds of miles to the west. The journey was made under adverse conditions, and more than 4,000 Cherokees died as a result of the removal.

languages, and family structures. Their sorrow and grief were handed down to their descendants, and Indigenous believers were channelled toward Jesus' healing, liberation, and victory over the dominant powers of this world.[152] They emphasize Jesus as a healer and liberator because these images resonate with those who struggle with personal identity and seek physical, mental, and spiritual healing. Therefore, they are particularly interested in the scriptures, where Jesus proclaimed the good news of the kingdom of God by healing the sick, freeing the captives, and comforting the poor and broken-hearted (Luke 4:18). The images of Jesus in the roles of healer and liberator contribute to the formation of the Christ figure as one who achieves ultimate victory in his Second Coming.[153]

The legend of the White Buffalo Woman's incarnation among Indigenous peoples in North America has given rise to a distinctive Christology.[154] The White Buffalo Woman gave a sacred pipe to the Plains nations and instructed them on how to pray with it. She taught them seven sacred ceremonies to practice, bringing them well-being and comfort. The mystery of the incarnation of Jesus has been paralleled in the story of the sacred pipe, which was given by the White Buffalo Woman (the Mysterious Deity) and has become an important religious symbol shared by many Indigenous tribes.[155]

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[152] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 193; Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 162–65.

[153] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 169–70.

[154] Crawford, *Native American*, 43. At some point, the Buffalo Nation migrated throughout the Plains and Northern Woodlands, hungry and desperate for help. "They sent two men out in search of food. As they walked across the Plains, the men saw someone approaching. As they drew nearer, they realized it was a beautiful woman. According to some versions of the story, one of the men, with evil in his heart, determined to have his way with her. His companion tried to deter him, but the man was insistent. When this ill-intentioned man approached the woman, a mist descended from the sky, covering both of them. When it lifted, the woman was standing, but the man had been reduced to a pile of bones. The second man fell to his knees, aware now that this was a holy woman. She directed him to return to his people and tell them that she would arrive soon, and that they should prepare themselves" (*Native American*, 42–43).

[155] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 134.

According to Achiel Peelman, many Indigenous peoples' testimonials from various tribes in Canada indicate that Indigenous religious experiences contribute to a central foundation for the reinterpretation and adoption of the Christ figure among Indigenous populations.[156] This is because "Christ is profoundly incarnated in Indigenous consciousness. His gospel has become an endogenous factor in Indigenous American cultures, on which Christianity has exercised a tremendous impact."[157] In this view, Peelman draws connections between the theological principles underlying the sacred pipe, a universal symbol of life and death, and the fundamental aspects of the mystery related to the life of Christ.[158]

Theology of Creation and Ecology

The discourse of creation and ecology provides a foundation for theological and ethical reflection on the responsible stewardship of the ecosystem. It also presents Christians with opportunities to identify avenues for their involvement in related issues. What does the creation narrative in the book of Genesis tell us about the theological implications of creational care and its contemporary relevance for Christians? God, the Creator, initiated creation through the spoken word and confirmed that he was satisfied with nature as it complied with his commands during creation.

Moreover, the creation story also reminds us that creation is an ongoing process that requires God's continual sustaining power and presence, as well as the human

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[156] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 133. Peelman conducted significant research on the First Nations in Canada. He notes that "The purpose of this research is to demonstrate that this incarnation of Christ among the aboriginal peoples of North America is producing a unique kind of Christology. Our concern is not to show how the Amerindians have integrated our Western images of Christ, but to underline the specific contributions they are making to a deeper and larger vision of the Christ mystery."

[157] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 14.

[158] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 138–49.

vocation within God's universe (Rom 1:18–20). God appointed a man and a woman responsible for preserving order in the natural world (Gen 1:28–30). Obedience to God's calling and commands is a source of divine pleasure and his ongoing creation. In other words, creation theology concerns itself with determining the ontological status of human beings within the context of the created world. However, the whole creation has been cursed and subjected to futility since humans have fallen short of God's glory in various ways throughout history.[159] As such, the natural world also shares in the fallen state of humanity, which must be restored and brought into the glory of God's creation (Rom 8:21). The church's relationship with the Creator and the natural world, including humanity, should serve as the driving force behind its ethical obligations to this world.

Creation's inherent goodness and beauty become consistent themes in Indigenous theology in North America. Indigenous groups, as we know, emphasize the importance of comprehensively understanding resource conservation practices that enable them to coexist with their natural environments while preserving both their ecosystems and well-being. Hence, traditional Indigenous beliefs and traditions play a significant role in the theology of creation and ecology. An Indigenous approach to Christian theology that has undergone decolonization implies that the Creator intends for humans to engage in stewardship of the natural world by partnering with him.[160]

Indigenous Peoples and Liberation Theology

Liberation approaches to local theology are primarily concerned with the processes of social change in human societies. It analyzes people's experiences to identify the sources

[159] Walsh and Middleton, *The Transforming Vision*, 48–59; Treat, *Native and Christian*, 58.
[160] Treat, *Native and Christian*, 59.

of oppression, conflict, violence, and power. Then, "Christians move from social analysis to finding echoes in biblical witnesses to understand the struggles in which they are engaged or to find direction for the future."[161] In liberation theology, the shared experience of oppression is sufficient to create a desire for a new coalition of marginalized minorities.

A prevailing perspective for understanding Indigenous peoples in North America, especially within the social, political, and religious categories, is that they are an oppressed minority culturally, politically, and economically. This issue regarding the fundamental liberties of Indigenous peoples, specifically their self-governance rights, has emerged as a pressing and complex concern that has dominated Canadian public discourse for the past few decades.[162] The concepts of political independence and cultural integration are gradually evolving to encompass the theological and spiritual aspects of how these rights originate from God. Peelman notes, "They maintain that the sovereignty of people over a given territory comes from the Creator himself, who allows those people to live on that territory and to protect it."[163] Indigenous nations believed that, despite treaties signed with European settlers, they had never surrendered these inherent rights.

The Exodus story is a central theme in the discourse of liberation theology, which has emerged over the last several decades. Theologians advocating for liberation theologies emphasize the liberation of the Israelites from slavery and their subsequent journey to the Promised Land. However, the Canaanite perspective of this narrative has been marginalized.[164] The parts of the narrative that describe God's instructions to

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[161] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 14–15.
[162] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 179.
[163] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 182.
[164] Warrior, "Canaanites," 93–104.

annihilating the native inhabitants mercilessly is mostly disregarded. Indigenous peoples in North America may most readily identify with the Canaanites, as they have previously lived in the land of promise.[165] Some Indigenous radicals argue that the Christian legacy of oppression and theology is a harmful aspect of Western thought that must be entirely rejected for genuine liberty to be attained. For them, the conqueror's image of Christ may symbolize the domineering colonizer and his missionaries. Indigenous understandings of lord and lordship are primarily shaped by the power hierarchies established through colonization.[166]

Vine Deloria, a well-known Indigenous American writer, critiques liberation theology as merely a new tactic to keep minority groups united in the hopeless belief that they can end the oppression faced by nations. It does not attempt to eliminate the root causes of injustice but seeks to shift how oppression manifests.[167] Deloria contends that the Indigenous church can achieve fundamental liberation by developing a new set of propositions that surpass liberation theology, focusing on the lived experience of their humanity rather than defining codes of ethics or doctrines.[168]

Today, the church and Indigenous peoples in North America are in an age of transition. Establishing a new approach for Christians and Indigenous peoples to work together to tackle racial and economic oppression is essential. Implementing a healing process for colonial communities that have suffered social, emotional, and spiritual harm due to centuries of oppression and conquest is the task of practical theology for the

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[165] Warrior, "Canaanites," 94.

[166] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 67–68.

[167] Deloria, *A Native American*, 15. Deloria Jr. (1933–2005, Standing Rock Sioux) was an author, theologian, historian, and activist for Native American rights.

[168] Deloria, *A Native American*, 266. He says that "liberation theology does not address destroying the root of liberation theology, which he identifies as Western thought. It creates a cycle of winners and losers, simply shifting power around and never fully getting to the root of what causes systemic suffering" (262).

wounded. The denominational church should lay down its conventional, self-centred perspective on faith, engage with Indigenous peoples to build meaningful relationships and move forward with spiritual liberation. Jesus proclaimed the spirit of freedom in his ministry for the kingdom of God, not for socio-politics (Luke 4:18–19).[169]

Conclusion

This chapter explored a decolonized approach to Christian theology and worship, emphasizing the importance of self-expressing cultural and religious perceptions through an Indigenous perspective. The self-theologizing approach enables Indigenous peoples to effectively communicate the essence of the gospel in their cultural contexts. This allows worshipers to acknowledge God as their own rather than a foreign deity. Indigenous peoples often employ the concept of the Great Spirit, which is similar to the idea of God in Christian thought. This relationship between the Spirit and spiritual powers is complex, but it can facilitate the transmission of biblical principles across Indigenous and Christian cultural contexts.

Creation's inherent goodness and beauty have become consistent themes in Indigenous theology in North America. The theology of creation and ecology emphasizes the ontological status of human beings, aligning with traditional Indigenous beliefs and playing a significant role in the world that has been created. The fundamental view of both Christian and Indigenous worldviews is that the Creator intends for humans to engage in the stewardship of the natural world as an ongoing process of creation.

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[169] Luke 4:18–19. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (NIV).

Liberation approaches to Indigenous theology have emerged in the past few decades.[170] These approaches focus on the social and political processes of change in Indigenous societies. Indigenous peoples are commonly viewed as an oppressed minority, and their fundamental liberties, particularly their right to self-governance, have become pressing and complex concerns over the past few decades. Given the history of Indigenous peoples in North America, they reflect the sorrows and sufferings of past generations in colonial history onto an innocent fellow Christ heading to the cross on Calvary. Furthermore, the image of the suffering Christ shifts to that of the healer, liberator, and triumphant Messiah. As Jesus proclaimed liberation in his ministry, denominational churches should engage with Indigenous peoples to build meaningful relationships and deepen their understanding of liberation.

[170] "Think" Tinker, *American Indian Liberation*, 1–3.

CHAPTER 5:

SURVEY PROJECT AND RESULTS

Introduction

This survey project serves as a tool for rigorously and faithfully interpreting and analyzing Indigenous worship situations. Practical theology, as an application of theology, takes human experience seriously and provides a contextual voice to worship practices and theological development. This survey begins its theological reflection on the worship experience by examining God's involvement in the present through the worshipers.[1] It will also contribute to the development and reshaping of new theories to be incorporated into Indigenous worship practices and lives.[2] The worship experience is where the gospel is grounded, embodied, interpreted, and expressed. From this perspective, communal worship is regarded as a vital locus for the Spirit's work. This section provides the reader with an overview of the survey's background, including the research objectives, data collection methods, and the analysis process.

This survey aims to develop creative knowledge and practices in Christian worship that may support the spiritual growth of Indigenous congregations by exploring the worship experiences of Indigenous ministers and gaining insights into their perspectives and actions regarding traditional Indigenous cultures. Therefore, the survey's target

[1] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 5. Recognizing human experience does not imply that it serves as a source of divine revelation.

[2] Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology*, 26.

population includes Indigenous pastors and worship leaders from diverse Indigenous churches across Canada. Since this dissertation emphasizes the importance of corporate worship and Indigenous spirituality in Indigenous ministry contexts, this interview survey aims to gather creative insights into the impact of corporate worship on personal and communal spirituality. Based on the collected data and analysis, I, as the researcher, examined the realities of the participants' worship experiences alongside their stories of spiritual growth and transformation. The participants' narratives about embracing Christianity and how their worship experiences have influenced their commitment to church ministers provide valuable insights for the ministries of other Indigenous congregations.

Although the interview may involve little risk of psychological and social harm, including possible loss of status, privacy, and reputation, I convinced the participants of my integrity, sensitivity, and commitment to moral issues and actions to ensure their safety from instability. All data collected was stripped of personal details to prevent tracing back to the original person and to ensure the protection and privacy of each participant. This process included, but was not limited to, the removal of names, pseudonymization, digital alteration of audio recordings, and redaction of phone numbers, addresses, and any other identifiable attributes.

The audio recording helped the interviewee and interviewer establish and maintain a better rapport throughout the conversation, leading to the disclosure of more specific and in-depth information. As a result, I focused on the conversation rather than taking notes, as they could distract both the interviewer and the interviewee from the subject matter. Therefore, I was able to analyze the implications expressed by the respondents and clarify the meanings of their responses and comments.

Regarding data analysis methods, interview analysis primarily focuses on the meanings conveyed by the subjects, clarifying what the respondents said. This analytical approach serves as a means of interpretation and a systematic approach to pursuing that understanding. The data collected through interviews were analyzed and integrated with cultural exegesis. Cultural hermeneutics enables researchers to understand better Indigenous cultures, religious practices, art, and literature. It also offers epistemological orientations and a methodological framework for practical theologians to utilize.

The Interviews

This survey research aims to explore how various aspects of worship (liturgy) interact to form a cohesive service and facilitate an individual's personal and communal spirituality in an Indigenous ministry setting. The study of worship within the Indigenous paradigm is of significant importance to churches, as it fosters the development of Indigenous theories and practical methods. The collected data were analyzed, interpreted, and merged with the components of cultural hermeneutics derived from interviews.[3] The analysis of interviews primarily focused on the meanings expressed by the subjects, clarifying what the respondents conveyed in the context of Indigenous cultures. The data-gathering procedure followed the ethical guidelines for researching Indigenous peoples in Canada.

This chapter outlines creative knowledge and practices in worship that may affect the spiritual growth and renewal of Indigenous individuals and congregations, based on analysis and interpretation of survey data collected through interviews. The primary goal

[3] Bin-Kapela, *The Dialectics,* 17–20. Cultural hermeneutics enables researchers to understand better the meanings of Indigenous cultures, religious practices, and their works of art and literature.

of the interviews aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the inculturation of Indigenous symbols, rituals, and other cultural elements in participants' worship contexts. Individuals who experience conversion or transformation play a pivotal role in fostering an effective movement of flourishing churches that cultivate and positively impact their affiliated communities. The survey findings provide valuable insights into resolving or at least better understanding some inculturation issues Indigenous churches face in corporate worship.

In qualitative research, especially ethnographic research, interviews are commonly used to collect information on participants' experiences, views, and beliefs regarding a specific research topic or phenomenon of interest.[4] I gathered the data through semi-structured interviews with twenty-two participants, which served as the primary source of information collection. The flexibility of the open-ended questions allowed participants to narrate their own stories, thoughts, and experiences rather than answering a series of structured questions, which aligns with Indigenous practices and values. The interviews focused on their experiences with worship (liturgy) and the influence these experiences have had on their Christian lives. Inculturation issues in worship include Indigenous cultural practices such as music (with instruments), rituals, symbols, and clothing. The interview conversations were recorded with participants' consent.

[4] Scharen and Vigen, eds., *Ethnography*, 104–12, 234.

Participants

In the interview survey, twenty-two participants shared their experiences of ministry and worship through observations in their congregations. Due to their theological knowledge and expertise on the research topic, the interview participants were limited to Indigenous pastors and capable worship leaders from Indigenous churches in Canada. They were affiliated with Protestant denominations and belonged to Indigenous ethnic backgrounds. They provided information about what they learned from their ministry experiences, particularly how participants plan and lead worship services, as well as what they observed in their congregations' responses and in their spiritual formation. Ministerial leaders in the Anglican Church were included in this study. Still, leaders of the Roman Catholic Church were excluded because their observance of Mass differed from that of Protestant worship. I screened potential participants via email, considering their professionalism, church denomination, gender, and ethnic background. More individuals expressed a willingness to participate in the interview; however, I excluded them by assessing their ability to adequately discuss the topics and articulate their ideas, taking into account their background in public education, Christian faith, or ministry experience.

Selected participants were contacted and asked if they wished to join the study, with the understanding that participation was voluntary and that their conversations with the researchers would remain confidential. I emailed the recruited participants to complete a form that included confidentiality and participation agreements, as well as a demographic questionnaire. Finally, I conducted semi-structured in-person interviews with participants across the provinces, which served as the primary basis for sampling data. The discussions focused on their experiences with worship and its impact on their spiritual lives. Table 1 below provides brief descriptions of the participant groups.

As pastors or worship leaders, the participants may benefit from this survey. The consent process ensures that participants can access the study findings upon request once the research is complete. Therefore, when participants request to see the results, the investigator will provide them. Participants can learn about the study's results through its integrated conclusions, aggregated data, and interpreted descriptions of the topics they engaged with. In this study, the researcher investigates both theoretical and practical worship methods that enhance congregational spirituality and their impact on the effectiveness of pastoral leadership. Examining Christian worship as a means of spiritual formation will contribute to the renewal of Indigenous peoples and communities.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant	Position	Denomination	Prof. Training	Region	Gender
1	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	Low	BC	M
2	Pastor	PAOC	Low	BC	M
3	Worship Leader	Charismatic Independent	Low	BC	F
4	Pastor (Retired)	PAOC	Medium	BC	M
5	Pastor	PAOC	Low	BC	F
6	Pastor	PAOC	Medium	BC	M
7	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	Low	SK	F
8	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	Low	SK	M
9	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	High	MB	M
10	Evangelist	None	Medium	MB	M
11	Pastor	Independent	Medium	ON	M
12	Pastor	Anglican	Medium	ON	M
13	Worship Leader	Charismatic Independent	Low	ON	M
14	Worship Leader	United Church	Medium	SK	M
15	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	Low	SK	M
16	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	High	SK	F
17	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	Medium	ON	M
18	Worship Leader	Charismatic Independent	Low	ON	M
19	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	High	ON	M
20	Worship Leader	Baptist	Medium	ON	F
21	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	Medium	BC	M
22	Pastor	Charismatic Independent	Low	ON	F

The Questions

When creating an interview script, I, as the principal investigator, outlined the key research questions to address during the interview. I clearly articulated the problem or need in the script, drawing on information from preliminary research. This approach helped the interviewer remain focused on the purpose of each question. The questions are open-ended, impartial, non-sensitive, and easily understandable. The participants are the individuals with whom the researcher interacts to complete the questionnaire. Participants engaged in discussions about specific discourse practices through conversational participation in semi-structured interviews within interactional research contexts. In this process, the participants facilitated active debates on the discourse practices initiated by the researcher. The narratives of lived experiences from their involvement in research interviews encouraged clarification and understanding. Lastly, I explored their worship experiences and interpreted them to grasp how worship influences the growth and spirituality of Christian life.

Interview questions for pastoral ministers and worship leaders during in-person interviews centred on their worship experiences and planning. The inquiries explored how communal worship impacted the leaders and what they considered essential elements of worship that influenced the spiritual development of their congregation. The interview questionnaires comprise three categories: personal and ministry backgrounds, Christian worship and spirituality, and Indigenous cultures and inculturation in Christian worship. The first section included demographic questions regarding specifics about the leadership role within their church. The second category consisted of three questions designed to uncover the worship elements that may inspire the congregation in their ministry context. The third category focused on Indigenous

objects and rituals connected to contextualization in Christian worship. Below are the general questions I posed to the participants.

Category 1: Personal and Ministry Background

1) What is the leadership position of your church (ministry)?
2) What is your ethnic or tribal background?
3) If applicable, what is your or your church's denominational affiliation?
4) What influence has your religious heritage had on your spiritual formation and life?

Category 2: Christian Worship and Spirituality

1) How has the practice of worship impacted the growth and spirituality of your life?
2) What elements of worship would you focus on more to inspire your congregations? (message, songs/hymns, testimony, rituals, fellowship)
3) What would you suggest for developing the biblical spirituality of Indigenous Christians?

Category 3: Indigenous Cultures and Contextualization in Christian Worship

1) Do you have experience playing Indigenous musical instruments in Christian worship? (e.g., drums, flutes, rattles, shakers, etc.)
2) What is your perspective on adopting Indigenous symbols in worship or continuously seeking Indigenous traditions? Could you explain your reasoning?
3) What is your opinion on performing Indigenous rituals or ceremonies to heal a person's physical or spiritual illness?
4) Can Indigenous rituals or ceremonies be contextualized by other means for practice within Christian worship? (e.g., smudging, sweat lodge, sundance, etc.). Could you explain why or why not, based on your thoughts?

Summary

Personal and Ministry Backgrounds

The first section of the question, personal and ministry experience, provides information on participants' leadership positions within the church, their tribal backgrounds, denominational affiliations, and religious heritage. Seventeen respondents identified as pastoral ministers, while five participants defined themselves as lay worship leaders. Sixteen among twenty-two are male, and six are female. Their tribal associations represent their original places of birth and growth. Seven participants are from British Columbia's West Coast or interior, seven from the Prairie provinces, and eight from northern or southern Ontario. Their denominational church affiliations comprise thirteen independent charismatic churches, four other Pentecostal groups, one from each of the Baptist, Anglican, and United Churches, and two unaffiliated.

The participants in pastoral ministry, except for a few young ministers, mostly have over twenty years of experience. Two of them had already retired from active leadership, though they continued to serve in pastoral leadership as evangelists. Other worship leaders were younger than the rest of the ministers' group. Regarding their early religious backgrounds, fifteen participants received a Christian legacy from their parents, while seven respondents did not come from Christian families. Ten of the fifteen participants with Christian origins maintained evangelical beliefs, whereas the other five identified as Roman Catholics or held nominal Christian ties. Seven respondents were not previously Christians and had participated in Indigenous practices before committing to Christian ministry.

Most participants did not hold professional degrees or receive ministry training from accredited theological institutions. Some completed intensive Bible courses

offered by unaccredited ministry associations and distance learning programs. A few denominations recognize them as lay ministers once they commit to their congregations for years of church leadership. Despite this, they demonstrate they are bright and confident in their ministry callings. Professional training is divided into three different levels. The low level indicates lay ministers or worship leaders who have completed secondary school or less and do not have ministerial training. The medium group includes individuals who have taken short-term intensive Bible courses or non-degree certification programs after graduating from secondary school. The high group holds a bachelor's degree from an accredited Bible college or a higher post-secondary qualification.

Christian Worship and Spirituality

The second section comprised three questions regarding Christian worship and spirituality: How did worship influence their personal growth and spirituality? The responses to this open-ended question reflected subjectivity and diversity due to the individual and familial circumstances of the participants. I integrated the participants' responses and summarized them into four major points based on the themes that emerged from their descriptions. First, most participants experienced God's presence during worship services. Afterward, they pursued spiritual growth through prayer and scripture reading. They encountered the deity to some extent and were motivated to devote themselves to God, which gave their ministry momentum. One participant who ministered to Indigenous churches for many decades noted, "Encountering God in worship was the basis of my walk with the Lord. But now, after over fifty years of walking with him, I see the bigger picture of his actions among our nations." The second point of the

responses relates to a shift in paradigm from the Indigenous tradition to a Christian worldview. They realized their worship had been misdirected to other gods in the past and is now appropriately redirected to God.

The next point relates to emotional expressions. More than half of the respondents noted that worship services enabled them to express their emotions sincerely, including inner displays (such as remorse, forgiveness, and gratitude) and outward expressions (such as raising their hands or clapping). One participant recalled, "I have experienced profound mystical moments, including speaking in tongues, experiencing healing power, visioning, and trances, either for myself or with others in the congregation." Indigenous peoples have long experienced what we might describe as mystical encounters or spiritual phenomena, both in their traditional practices and within Christian contexts.[5] For them, encountering the supernatural isn't merely a fringe idea; it often arises naturally from a worldview that anticipates the Creator manifesting in personal and direct ways. Consequently, like traditional spirit languages or sacred utterances, some Indigenous Christians perceive the Pentecostal worship experience as aligning with their understanding of spiritual communication. For instance, the twelve interviewees generally believe that "speaking in tongues is a significant sign of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit." Many Indigenous peoples in North America experience speaking in tongues or spirit-led utterances during prayer and worship services.

Another significant factor influencing their decision to become Christians and ministerial leaders was their perception of corporate worship as the community of saints. The atmosphere and warmth of devoted worshipers in holy fellowship inspired them to be

[5] Hirschfelder and Molin, Encyclopedia, 401–2. These elements have played a vital role in the spiritual landscape for centuries, both before and after the arrival of Christianity.

welcoming community members, distinguishing themselves from the traditions and behaviours of non-believers. They collectively viewed the worship service as a space where they felt genuinely welcomed and comforted by the congregation, an experience they had never encountered at home.

This section's second and third questions are similar in that they seek to identify the methods ministerial leaders use to enhance congregations' spiritual growth. The second question highlights specific elements of worship, while the third requests general suggestions for particular aspects that can foster spiritual growth for both individuals and congregations. Participants manifested balanced responses regarding the worship elements they would use to inspire their congregations. Most participants from charismatic churches preferred music, hymns, and testimonies over other elements of worship. While respondents expressed a desire to focus more on specific elements, they also acknowledged that various aspects of worship are equally significant. One respondent with theological training noted, "Every element is a method of worship that communicates with God." This statement illustrates how Indigenous peoples use artistic expressions, such as symbols, songs, dances, stories, and rituals, to foster worship and align their hearts with the spiritual world and the Creator's will. Indigenous worship patterns are not universal. Each nation has unique expressions and spiritual practices that serve as sacred means of communication among the individual, the community, and the Creator. In this context, W. Jay Moon also highlights the integration of symbols, rituals, stories, proverbs, music, dance, and drama into spiritual formation.[6] This approach seeks to promote a more comprehensive and culturally relevant discipleship process.

[6] See pages 21–22 of this dissertation.

Their proposals for enhancing personal or congregational spirituality focus on combining fasting and praying in tongues, reflecting traditional Indigenous practices like fasting and prayer. Fasting and prayer are essential components of many conventional Indigenous American traditions. These practices promote spiritual purity and cultivate a quieter mind, making it easier to listen and meditate. In the absence of distractions, the heart and intellect are more receptive to God. Fasting prepares the individual, while prayer deepens their connection with God. From my observations in the First Nations ministry, church members often fast to deepen their spiritual practices, including prayer. Those seeking spiritual insight or personal guidance may retreat into nature for extended periods of fasting and prayer. This practice aids purification, alignment, and the forging of a stronger connection to the spiritual world. Although these customs differ among tribes, they share common themes of reflection, sacrifice, and communion with the spiritual realm.

Inculturation in Christian Worship

Nearly half of the respondents in this category reported having previously used drums, flutes, rattles, and shakers in their worship services, but no longer do so because many of their congregants oppose this practice. One said, “I am comfortable with traditional instruments if the people in the area accept them, but I am not as comfortable when the congregation does not accept them. Different regions in Canada have their own perceptions of this.” Likewise, another answered, “This is not the case at this time because most of our congregation would not be comfortable using Indigenous instruments.” The other half said they had never used these instruments during worship. However, three expressed an interest in using them if the congregants were willing to incorporate them

into the worship services. For the second question about using Indigenous symbols in worship services, most respondents indicated that it is possible to utilize them for decorative purposes but not as instruments in worship. Only four opposed their use in church settings, whether for decoration or worship, because these might contain demonic spirits (or possess some power). Regarding this, one respondent who is ministering to an urban Indigenous church explains a significant thought: "I believe that colonization has demonized Indigenous symbols and cultures. Before we can re-incorporate them into our worship as Indigenous peoples, this tarnishing must first be undone by educating congregations about the meanings of these symbols and the essence of the culture." The interviewee noted that the colonists misunderstood Indigenous symbols and cultural practices, labelling them as pagan, demonic, or savage solely because of their unfamiliarity or differences. Consequently, the respondent asserts that they can repurpose the traditional signs or symbols used in Indigenous ceremonies for Christian worship within this new intent and context. Some interviewees also expressed openness to incorporating specific symbols or imagery into worship services, depending on their congregations' willingness to embrace them. Others were inclined to accept certain symbols or imagery but were uncertain how to integrate them into Christian beliefs.

Regarding the efficacy of Indigenous healing rituals, many believe these practices may work for some in specific ways but not consistently for everyone. Nine respondents recognize the power of traditional rituals to temporarily influence individuals, although they cannot provide a fundamental treatment for the causes of illness. One respondent says, "The potential is there for sure. It works for some but does not work for others because they may feel uncomfortable." In other words, Indigenous rituals and ceremonies can significantly contribute to spiritual, emotional, and physical healing. Their impact

often hinges on the individual, their beliefs, and the context of the healing process. They recognize that the influence of these practices can temporarily mislead individuals; however, the rituals cannot offer a proper cure for the underlying causes of the illness, which can be especially concerning for Indigenous Christians.

On the other hand, the thirteen other respondents believe that traditional rituals or ceremonies are ineffective. One respondent with ministry training in a seminary shares thoughts typical of others: “Apart from Christianity and biblical truths, I do not believe any remedies exist that can heal our Indigenous people from the negative impacts of the traumatic experiences they have endured over the past centuries.” Indigenous Christians remain unconvinced that any psychological or traditional therapy can heal the wounds inflicted by intergenerational trauma, despite these methods being widely used among Indigenous nations. Consequently, identifiable Indigenous Christians can blend their cultural heritage with their Christian faith. They possess the maturity and discernment to uphold ceremonial perspectives that align with biblical principles such as community, creation, and restoration, while discarding elements that oppose their faith in Christ.

Lastly, nineteen respondents, the majority, criticized the inculturation of popular Indigenous practices into Christian worship, while five of them remained open to the possibility. Only three respondents expressed an entirely favourable opinion. The common reason for the negative responses is that Indigenous rituals and ceremonies are viewed as tied to demonic spiritual power, and the practices are seen as a portal for demonic influence. One respondent, who ministers at an urban Indigenous church, described the current situation and his ministerial philosophy regarding this issue:

> It can be contextualized in some First Nations communities. It depends on the context. However, not all First Nations want to return to Indigenous traditions and ceremonies. They are okay with living off the land by hunting, trapping, fishing,

> and making native arts and crafts. Some believers would not be comfortable adopting the rituals or ceremonies associated with Indigenous spiritual worship in a Christian setting because they view them as having to do with the demonic. Others don't care whether they return to traditional ceremonies because neither they nor their parents or grandparents were raised in that culture. Despite this, traditional ritual ceremonies can be contextualized in some settings. It depends on whom we are trying to reach. Today, many young people are turning to our traditions and ceremonies; therefore, the gospel needs to reach them. It depends on whom we minister to, as long as the culture doesn't become the primary focus.

This opinion reflects the overall situation that many urban Indigenous communities face. Unlike rural reservation communities, urban communities are less connected to their traditions. Individuals who did not grow up in a traditional culture encounter significantly less conflict with this issue. Moreover, young individuals seem more inclined to embrace Indigenous culture, as their Christian worldview did not shape them. Another minister, contrary to popular belief, listed the rituals he considered unsuitable for adoption and explained his reasoning:

> Smoking, smudging, sweat lodges, and sun dances cannot be adopted. Traditional ceremonies were all created to cleanse and heal the soul and body. If one knows the meaning behind these ceremonies, we as Christians understand that Christ has taken care of all this through his work on the cross.

Conversely, the three remaining respondents contended that Indigenous rituals and ceremonies are cultural practices devoid of religious significance. They stated, "Culture and religion should be distinct, allowing Indigenous practices to be contextualized and integrated into Christian activities such as Bible camps or retreat meetings." They also pointed out that many Indigenous individuals are reluctant to attend church due to the cultural clash between their traditions and Christianity. For this reason, minor respondents are generally more open to integrating Indigenous elements into the church environment.

Throughout the interview, I observed specific patterns in the responses related to the participants' backgrounds. First, participants with a higher level of ministry training

tend to be more open to embracing Indigenous culture and traditional practices than those with less ministry training. Second, participants serving in the West Coast region and inland British Columbia are more receptive to adopting Indigenous practices than those ministering in other areas, regardless of their level of ministry training. Another significant pattern is the regional difference between urban and rural ministry (reservation communities). Rural community churches are more closely tied to their culture and traditional practices, whereas urban churches are less connected to their cultural roots.

Analysis and Findings

The questions about the personal experience of worship aim to deepen our understanding of the influence of Christian worship on individual spirituality, specifically how worship motivates and shapes individuals early in their journey toward ministerial leadership. The survey data show that participants' experiences of God vary depending on their personal and worship conditions.[7] Each participant has a unique experience of worship that inspires them to draw closer to their relationship with God. Although worship is a collective activity, personal encounters with God and expressions of devotion can vary based on an individual's emotional, social, or spiritual state.

The perspective of the new worldview facilitates an understanding of God's truths and how individuals should live in the world. Uplifting music and hymns move some participants, while the reading and proclamation of the scriptures challenge others. The responses to these challenges vary, including confession, prayer, altar calls,

[7] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 21–22. Saliers says worship is "a corporate enactment by word, silence, rite, and song of the community's memories of God to invite the presence and power of God to come to awareness." His words are a reminder of the ultimate purpose of worship, an encounter with the living God.

or participation in the Lord's Supper. Although worship does not depend on time and location, there are specific moments when God touches attendees in a particular and evident way. Worship services are held at specific times in designated places, but ultimately, they are an experience that engages the whole person.

According to the allegations of most interview participants, Indigenous people are intensely emotional about the mistreatment and suffering they have endured over the past few centuries. However, worship provides space and opportunities to heal those emotions and shape new treatment methods. In other words, emotional expression is a common aspect of worship that touches the participants' hearts. This finding suggests that worship entails an ongoing encounter with God, characterized by profound responses such as repentance, forgiveness, humility, praise, delight, and hope for creation.

Indigenous church believers express their faith openly during worship through singing, dancing, drumming, and shouting. This form of worship should convey the worshiper's emotions in a profoundly meaningful way. However, these emotions should authentically reflect the worshiper's genuine affection rather than mere passions or superficial feelings influenced by skilled music, self-centred testimonials, or ecstatic experiences. Consequently, worship should be characterized by abundant religious devotion, adoration, reverence, and joy toward God.

Another factor in how corporate worship impacted participants was a hospitable atmosphere that conveyed God's intimacy with worshipers. If those elements are dynamic in corporate worship, they will transform both the character of the believer and that of the unbeliever. In evangelical worship, God is the worship host; the worshipers are simply greeters for this host in Christ's name. As greeters, congregants should

perceive God as the host. They are merely servants who carry out God's instructions by participating in corporate worship in his church rather than fulfilling the preferences of the worshipers. This aspect reveals another purpose of worship: to welcome more worshipers.[8]

The participants had varying perspectives on the efficacy of Indigenous healing rituals. According to some interviewees, traditional healing practices encompass more than mere cultural expressions; they are cultural liturgies that employ deceptive and manipulative methods to foster belief in spiritual entities. Evil spirits possess a tangible power to enchant people for their own purposes. However, some respondents believed that Indigenous practices might not be sufficient to heal people's illnesses; they felt that only God has the power to do this. Regarding the inculturation of cultural artifacts, most participants agree that many Indigenous symbols are primarily cultural and lack spiritual connotations. Additionally, some recognize that their congregations, rather than the ministers, should play a vital role in adapting (purifying) the artifacts or rituals for corporate worship.[9] These responses represent a significant finding from this research that can inform future studies.

There is a gap between the reality of Indigenous cultures and the prejudiced understanding imposed by Christian missionaries and the dominant society. The research participants repeatedly noted that comprehending local congregations is critical for contextualizing cultural elements within Christian settings. Therefore, addressing the central issue of misunderstanding and lack of knowledge about Indigenous culture and Christianity is essential. It is vital to communicate to Indigenous

[8] Dawn, *Reaching Out,* 126.
[9] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 196.

people on how their culture has been misinterpreted to assist them in embracing an Indigenous form of worship.

Lastly, I confirmed that the source of spiritual wisdom is God's gift, not solely the result of human effort. For the interview participants, spiritual wisdom appears to be based neither on theological education nor professional careers (although these factors may influence one's knowledge and life) but instead on a deep relationship with the Spirit of God and a passion for God's ministry. Divine wisdom and spirituality may be available equally to men and women, regardless of ethnicity, academic achievement, or social standing. Spiritual wisdom and discernment begin with getting to know Jesus Christ, who is accessible not just to specific individuals but to everyone.[10]

Reflections

No one knows how or when God will touch the worshiper, but he does so according to his inherent plans and ways. Thus, worshipers are required to place themselves before the divine presence and invite the immanence and power of God to come into their awareness. As worshipers encounter and experience the divine presence, they can recognize God as the Creator and giver of life, revealing something of their true human identity. Through worship, individual worshipers and the faith community continue to grow in their relationship with God. Such a worship experience leads to a stronger movement of personal spirituality, nurturing communities to become disciples of Jesus Christ. Worship is the act of acknowledging and honouring God's divine presence. Consequently, local

[10] Liebert, *The Way*, 19.

churches must create worship services that foster more effective, life-changing experiences with God.

For instance, when I asked them what they considered the most critical aspect of Christian worship, numerous participants mentioned that communion with the Spirit of God is of utmost significance. This aspect affirms Indigenous cultural identity and deepens spiritual authenticity. Indigenous believers perceive the Christian God as the Great Spirit and believe in communicating with him through ritual practices. They hold that individuals can connect with God, the Creator, by purifying their bodies, minds, and spirits to restore righteous relationships. As a result, a goal of corporate worship is to foster spiritual interaction between God and the community. As God speaks through the words written and spoken by the preacher in our worship, we also converse with and hear from him throughout the entire service.[11] Aniol has described this aspect as "drawing near in communion with God through Christ by faith."[12] The Spirit of God instructs and instills such ideas in the respondents through dynamic worship experiences.

Based on the participant demographics, it is affirmed that spiritual understanding and discernment are significant gifts from God. Spiritual knowledge and depth of insight are available to anyone who grows and matures in the Christian faith (Phil 1:9–11), regardless of their educational or social status. Specific disciplines or practices have an obvious advantage in facilitating some degree of spirituality. The essential premise is that such insights begin with getting to know Jesus Christ, who came for everyone, not just a chosen few. In short, godly wisdom and discernment result from communion with the Spirit and his instruction from Scripture. God imparts this spiritual wisdom to the

[11] Drury, *The Wonder*, 42.
[12] Aniol, *By the Waters*, 176.

chosen leaders to help them fulfill their ministries for his people through spiritual leadership, thereby enhancing both their personal and professional abilities (Eccl 7:19).

CHAPTER 6:

AN INDIGENOUS APPROACH TO CORPORATE WORSHIP

Despite centuries of Christian influence on Indigenous communities, there is little evidence of inculturation in worship. As Indigenous traditional cultures integrate into North American society, various approaches to Christian worship are likely to emerge within their specific context. An Indigenous approach to corporate worship is essential to nurture spirituality and community, alongside the discourse surrounding decolonized theological perspectives that have emerged over the past few decades.[1] An underlying assumption of this approach is that inculturated worship will help heal individual and social traumas caused by forced assimilation. Based on the analysis and findings from the interview research, this chapter proposes an Indigenous approach to corporate worship that more effectively conveys the gospel of Christ than Western-style worship. First, I will discuss how the main elements of worship—music, hymns, prayer, preaching, and sacraments—can inspire Indigenous Christians and revitalize their worship.

Additionally, other Indigenous-focused elements should be incorporated into worship, including personal testimonies or sharing, symbols, altar calls, worship settings, and traditional clothing. By integrating these elements into worship services, the congregation will be able to restore their tribal identity within their Christian lives. At the

[1] The centre of this movement is the NAIITS: An Indigenous Learning Community.

same time, they can express their adoration for God through cultural forms that have endured over time.

Music, Hymn, and a Way of Prayer

Music in worship can be one of the most meaningful ways to communicate with God. It opens us emotionally to experience inspiration in ways spoken words or media cannot. Indigenous cultures strongly emphasize the inspirational capacities of rituals, songs, sounds, gestures, and dance forms. Most interviewees believe that musical practices can transform individuals and communities, allowing them to express inner feelings and meanings.[2] This view acknowledges that Indigenous religious customs are inherently linked to musical expressions, including singing, chanting, drumming, and dancing. These elements are essential to their lives and the way they worship. They celebrate the work of the Spirit and embody a dynamic, passionate style of worship through music and instruments. As such, Indigenous groups are often attracted to engage in charismatic forms of worship that emphasize the work and gifts of the Holy Spirit, visions, and prophecy.

As mentioned earlier, Indigenous people are very emotional about their history of past suffering. Many blame the dominant society for the struggles their communities face with current hardships. Over the past twenty years, I have seen a significant number of Indigenous Christians testify to experiencing ongoing backsliding in their faith, which leads to feelings of remorse. Generally, music, hymns, and messages that depict God's comfort and healing are essential sources of encouragement for Indigenous Christians. Accordingly, the selection of hymns and songs should reflect their emotions, resentments,

[2] McNally, "The Practice," 854.

and sorrows. They prefer hymns and songs of divine grace, penance, forgiveness, healing, and eschatological longing to console their souls and promote healing and reconciliation with God. Adequately contextualized worship music emphasizing these themes can help foster a sense of identity for both Indigenous Christians and non-believer communities.[3]

Musical instruments are powerful tools for spiritual growth, helping people embrace their emotional responses, heal wounded hearts, and find comfort. Traditional instruments, such as drums, flutes, and rattles, can enrich the worship experience in a more meaningful way. This is because people can reclaim their tribal identity and heritage while still being Indigenous Christians. In the past, however, little effort was made to create Indigenous worship music that effectively met the emotional and cultural needs of tribal communities. Instead, traditional drumming, dancing, and music were typically reserved for public gatherings and special occasions. The data indicate that some congregations feel uncomfortable with specific instruments. However, many Indigenous churches utilize tambourines and rattles, which are less objectionable than drums or flutes. Now is the time to discuss and implement a broader use of instrumental practices in church ministry.

The types of prayer in worship gatherings at Indigenous churches differ from those at non-Indigenous churches. For example, public prayer is uncommon among most Indigenous tribes in North America.[4] Instead, traditional ceremonies typically begin with prayer gatherings in designated places for rituals or worship.[5] Their prayers are expressed through praise, singing, gestures, and instrumental music, which is often based on the

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[3] Twiss, *One Church*, 125. Twiss writes, "Because music is flexible and able to be interpreted, old Indian music style can become sacred, or Christian, not because of form but through context and meaning."

[4] Hascall, "The Sacred Circle," 179.

[5] Twiss, *Rescuing the Gospel*, 188.

people's chanting. As part of public prayer, drummers and singers chant prayers to the Creator, perceiving themselves as becoming one with the universe and one another.[6] Chanting and moving around or over a smouldering fire serve as their form of collective prayer. This image of prayer corresponds to David's prayer in Ps 141:2: "Accept my prayer as incense offered to you, and my upraised hands as an evening offering" (NLT). The authors of *A Native American Theology* also describe Indigenous-style prayer in worship:

> When a group of Indians forms a circle to pray, all know that the prayers have already begun with the representation of a circle. No words have yet been spoken and, in some ceremonies, no words need be spoken, but the intentional physicality of our formation has already expressed our prayer and deep concern for the wholeness of all of God's Creation.[7]

They claim that the worshipers acknowledge that the formation of the congregants into a circle symbolizes the act of prayer. These concepts and forms of prayer could be reflected on and adapted for contemporary Indigenous churches by arranging worship spaces in circles and having participants pray in turn rather than having ministers pray exclusively. On the other hand, the most prevalent prayers of Indigenous Christians involve requests to God to accomplish tasks rather than expressing gratitude and listening. The teachings of scripture could alleviate this concern as prayer is a two-way communication process, not a unidirectional way of speaking.[8]

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[6] Hascall, "The Sacred Circle," 181.
[7] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 50.
[8] Drury, *The Wonder*, 25.

The Sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper

The sacraments are effective signs and divine symbols of new life. They ensure the Church's continued existence and serve as a source of spiritual life and unity between believers and God. The administration of the sacraments during worship offers an excellent opportunity for catechesis, helping people understand their significance. Above all, from an Indigenous perspective, participants become aware of what worship is, what salvation entails, and the nature of God and human beings. Ministers can convey these profound truths in pre-baptism sessions to prepare participants for the anointing of God's Spirit, allowing them to truly encounter God during the baptism ceremony.

For Indigenous believers, baptism signifies the commitment to serve God at the beginning of the Christian life. This commitment requires abandoning all other forms of worship to the gods of this world, becoming partakers in the New Covenant as children of God, and joining the church community by receiving the covenant sign of baptism.[9] The church is a covenant community whose most valuable proclamations include liberation from sin, victory over death, and entrance into eternal life. Baptism is a sign and a promise of the alliance with the Spirit of God. God uses these symbols to impart the holiness of life to his chosen people so that they might walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:4).

The origin of the Lord's Supper can be traced back to the Passover meals before the Exodus. It was not intended to be a one-time supper eaten only then; instead, it was designed to be an eternal ceremony. Jesus reaffirmed the Passover Covenant during the Last Supper, which he celebrated with his disciples in Jerusalem just before his

[9] Old, *Worship*, 11.

crucifixion. Like the sacrament of baptism, anyone who participates in the Lord's Supper becomes united with the crucified and resurrected Christ. In other words, participating in the Lord's Table signifies joining the New Covenant, which promises eternal life. The Eucharist sacrament involves more than just a relationship with God; it extends to the solidarity of partakers as one body in Christ (1 Cor 10:17–18). Such meanings are profoundly relevant to the Indigenous perspective on community unity. Specifically, the sacraments can remind them that God empowers and nurtures their communities, providing a sense of solidarity in God's reign over their lives.

Many Indigenous churches in Canada are accustomed to following the Eucharistic liturgy, as influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, which emphasizes the doctrine of transubstantiation. As a result, participants in the Eucharist tend to seek certain kinds of bodily transformations. The experience of the mystery of God in the sacraments can flow into the daily lives of Indigenous believers. Concerning the Eucharistic elements, some Indigenous American congregations still practice traditional rituals, including chewing peyote cacti and drinking tea prepared explicitly for their ceremonies.[10] As Jesus states, bread and wine are symbols of his atoning sacrifice for our sins; thus, excluding bread and wine (grape juice) diminishes the value of the sign. The apostle Paul teaches that no one in the covenant community should participate in pagan cultic meals (1 Cor 10:16–21). Therefore, Indigenous participants will be challenged to examine themselves to ensure they are free from the sovereignty of other gods.

[10] Bowden, *American Indians*, 213.

Oral Culture and Narrative Preaching

The narratives in biblical stories can be described as a structure of faith and experience, focusing on the relationship between God and human beings within a text. The term "narrative sermon" refers to delivering a sermon that centres on the story passages of scripture, presenting the biblical truths of life to the listener. Narrative preaching has emerged as a central focus of homiletical considerations over the past twenty years, particularly in New Homiletics. Ruard Ganzevoort advocates for a narrative approach in preaching: "The stories of God offer an open space where we can bring and reflect on our own stories without being pushed in one direction or the other."[11] Narrative preaching can convey the theological meanings embedded within biblical narratives through the context of experiences lived out by the listeners. In that sense, a narrative approach to preaching invites listeners to view their lives through the application of Scripture. I will briefly explain why narrative preaching is effective in engaging the Indigenous congregation.

First, the core of Indigenous knowledge and education in North America is typically transmitted and documented primarily through oral tradition. As a result, tribal elders play an essential role in imparting wisdom to children. The primary method of knowledge transfer to the next generation is storytelling and listening to people's narratives.[12] However, Western communication methods, which focus on propositional styles, have influenced many preaching styles and structures in Indigenous churches. Consequently, Indigenous audiences are distancing themselves from Western-oriented sermons, whether physically or mentally, in terms of comprehension and interest, because this form of preaching removes the narrative aspect from the presentation of the gospel of

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[11] Ganzevoort, *Narrative Approaches*, 219.
[12] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 60, 95.

Christ.[13] The recipients regard the propositional preaching of the gospel as a Western phenomenon.[14]

Second, narrative stories are a primary means of communication and a dominant biblical genre for biblical authors. The entire Bible is one marvellous story recorded in a dramatic script that tells the tale of God and the history of his redemption. In the script, the narrative of God moves from creation and fall through redemption to a new creation brought about by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The homiletic narrative, which is similar to the biblical narrative, significantly influences Indigenous congregations. Biblical stories describe a structure of faith, experience, and the relationship between God and human beings. Scripture demonstrates that stories have always been an integral part of theological reflection on religious practices, and homiletics can draw on this insight exceptionally well. The narrative approach to preaching involves the Indigenous audience in the communication process and the application of scripture.[15]

Third, narrative stories are far more effective at persuading individuals than propositions, especially in Indigenous cultures rooted in oral tradition.[16] The power of narrative sermons enables listeners to connect the gospel stories to their lived experiences and create their own metaphors. Indigenous ways of knowing and conceiving reality differ vastly from the Western ways of thinking that dominate today's North American societies, which are scientific and rational and attempt to justify propositions and beliefs by arguing for something entirely different. Indigenous epistemology is interactional,

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[13] Wendland, *Preaching*, 39.

[14] The majority of interviewees stated that they employed the narrative sermon more than other styles

[15] Wilson, "Let the Earth Hear," 179–80. Wilson states that failure to use communication patterns familiar to people in an oral culture would "stigmatize the gospel as alien and irrelevant."

[16] Miller, *Preaching*, 134.

Inter-relational, inclusive, cyclical, and spiritual. Therefore, narrative preaching in Indigenous culture is an effective means of communication that preachers should employ, enabling people to better respond to the gospel and retain it in memory.

The messages from the biblical narratives are likely to remain more impactful in individuals' memories. When I primarily delivered sermons using storytelling, many Indigenous congregants paid close attention and engaged with the lessons afterward, often for several weeks. Some congregants questioned the stories to clarify their meanings, metaphors, or paradoxical expressions. The most impressive sermon was the parable of the two sons found in Matt 21:28–32. The passage emphasizes our relationship as children of the Heavenly Father and the need to follow God's commandments, even if we cannot comply immediately. The biblical concept of disobedience (sin) may also similarly apply to Indigenous peoples' ethics, which centre on obligation.[17] This narrative challenges many Indigenous Christians, as they have not adhered to the teachings of Jesus Christ after experiencing God's presence.

In summary, narrative preaching has great potential to become an effective tool for preachers to communicate meaningfully with Indigenous peoples.[18] Adapting a narrative approach in Indigenous ministry can connect with their worldviews, as it incorporates their values, beliefs, and ways of knowing. Faithful narrative preaching values Indigenous oral cultures and encourages a commitment to exploring and remaining committed to the Christian faith.

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[17] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 109–10.
[18] Jolly, *Christ Is Building*, 130–31.

Other Indigenous-Focused Elements

As we have seen, an Indigenous approach to the primary elements of worship catalyzes the inculturation of worship for Indigenous Christians, and there are additional components relevant to them in worship. According to the interview respondents, many Indigenous churches devote more time to elements commonly considered secondary in non-Indigenous churches, such as personal testimony, altar calls, prayer, and fellowship. However, for Indigenous churches, these additional elements are no longer secondary; they now dominate the worship experience, while the function of the primary elements recedes.[19] Learning about Indigenous-focused features and other helpful worship aids relevant to them helps us better understand their experiences and worship.

Personal Testimony and Sharing

Evangelists and revivalists in North America employed personal testimony during worship services in the eighteenth century.[20] Modern Indigenous worship services also provide a platform for active participation, where all attendees are encouraged to sing and speak rather than passively listening to a traditional speaker format. Sharing personal stories and testimonies has its roots in the conventional storytelling and sharing circles of Indigenous peoples. Regarding the symbolic meaning of the circle, it represents a comprehensive image of oneness, in which community members, regardless of gender, have an equal opportunity to speak.[21] This metaphor reminds us that they are all one in Christ Jesus and

[19] Drury, *The Wonder*, 75.
[20] Drury, *The Wonder*, 106–8.
[21] Drury, *The Wonder*, 109.

highlights the importance of reciprocity and respect in maintaining the integrity of the circle. This implication of oneness in Christ applies during the worship service.

Historically, experience-focused narratives rather than propositional arguments have been the driving force behind Indigenous communal gatherings. The extensive use of personal testimony provides significant value in worship services that offer equal opportunities for lay speaking. Indigenous congregants are easily moved by listening to how one another has experienced divine power and wisdom. They, then, strive to understand and serve one another, regardless of their physical, social, or spiritual conditions. This tendency to share is closely related to the charismatic style of worship, which emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit and spiritual experiences.[22]

Although personal testimony plays a significant role in worship services that aim to provide equal opportunities for laypeople to speak, there is an adverse side effect: it may emphasize personal achievements or righteousness rather than God's glory and his works.[23] The scriptures and other reliable sources may not support personal stories or testimonies, so they may be viewed as personal experiences or emotional expressions without a biblical foundation. My previous ministry was associated with a charismatic Indigenous congregation that encouraged personal testimony and the sharing of experiences. Due to numerous presentations, the worship times lasted twice as long as in many other churches. These practices sometimes failed to focus on praising and adoring God. Creating ministry guidelines for individual presentations as part of worship (1 Cor

[22] Drury, *The Wonder*, 109.
[23] Drury, *The Wonder*, 110.

14:27–31) is necessary to ensure an orderly worship experience and maintain the authenticity of personal stories.[24]

The Altar Call: Healing and Anointing

Altar calls are invitations to commit, in which ministers encourage individuals to participate in special prayer and to respond to the sermon by approaching the altar of God. Most Indigenous churches hold altar calls to seek God's mercy and forgiveness, along with healing or anointing. Altar calls were frequently used in Indigenous communities to evangelize during camp meetings. They have gained popularity among those responding to their guilt over backsliding. Today, individuals come to the altar voluntarily in public to request special prayers and anointing for healing rituals. These altar calls have become the highlight of communal worship as Indigenous churches aim to address the burden of healing the wounds of oppression and suffering.

These altar calls are comparable in form and function to the Indigenous way of presenting themselves to the Creator or his human representative in search of physical or spiritual healing and blessings. Indigenous churches, with deep roots in charismatic worship practices, maintain the altar call for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, so worshipers are likely to expect a connection with God, healing, and being filled with the Spirit. Unlike the reformers' teaching of "the priesthood of all believers" in God, Indigenous believers tend to rely on visual rites performed by ministers to attain spiritual empowerment. The altar calls enable people to respond to the gospel or draw closer to

[24] As the apostle Paul instructed in 1 Cor 14:27–31, this might include limiting the number of presenters at a time, abiding by the given time to speak, preparing a summary, and protecting the privacy of personal information (especially that of others) and using appropriate wording.

God in prayer immediately. However, the minister must avoid using artificial motivations to encourage someone to approach the altar.

Indigenous Symbols and Images

Signs and symbols are essential to the religious dimensions of communication. A sign is "an intermediary element between the person who perceives it and the object that is signified."[25] A sign embodies its symbolic reality but can also convey its meanings and connotations. A symbol is a word or image that represents something, helping to communicate specific information through ideas, feelings, or values. They serve a higher function that helps us understand the meaning of the designated object, while an image represents mental images. Signs are objects perceived through the senses, such as events, actions, or phenomena. Symbols maintain meanings displayed through signs, based on the designated reality. They also reflect people's underlying beliefs about reality and their perspectives on the world.[26]

Liturgical worship comprises various signs and symbols embedded in ritual activity. What is the significance of our active use of primary symbols in Christian worship? How can the symbolic meaning truly represent the mysterious nature of Christian worship? The symbols employed in rituals are multivocal or have multidimensional significance that can unify several disparate concepts and experiences and accumulate meaning around "both effective and morally normative values."[27] Ritual symbols, such as light, water, oil, candles, and bread, are never merely objects; they have

[25] Fitzgerald, *Augustine*, 333.
[26] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 144.
[27] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 143.

been deeply integrated into the history of Christian life. Such items are not meaningful enough on their own. Instead, the experience of the symbols is enhanced by learning to participate in the shared life toward which these symbols point.[28] These symbols foster a sense of heightened emotional intensity, transforming how we communicate and interact with them. Indigenous symbols and images are now the focus of contextualization in contemporary corporate worship.

Eagles are a prominent symbol in Indigenous culture. Indigenous peoples cherish the eagle and its feathers, using them in cultural ceremonies and traditional outfits. They believe eagles are powerful winged creatures that serve as celestial messengers for human aspirations rather than as objects of worship. They symbolize the biblical truth of strength and the relevance of one's faith and hope in God (Isa 40:31; Ps 91:4).[29] As discussed in the previous chapter, most interviewees supported including the eagle's image and feathers to express God's strength. Similarly, other creatures mentioned in the Bible, such as lions and ravens, are favoured by Indigenous peoples.

Smudging is used in many rituals because participants believe the smoke will carry their prayers to the Creator. Burning native grasses such as sage, sweetgrass, or cedar at prayer time symbolizes that the prayers of the saints are like incense rising to God's throne for his pleasure.[30] The smoke and aroma used in purification rituals can be compared to the fragrant scent found in some Christian liturgies.[31] For these reasons, some Indigenous ministers who did not participate in my interview explained that smudging is directly connected to the practice of burning incense, which the Hebrew priests performed

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[28] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 143.
[29] Twiss, *One Church*, 136.
[30] Twiss, *One Church*, 133.
[31] Jolly, *Christ Is Building*, 103; Bear, "The Smudge Ceremony," 190–204.

to conduct a purification offering to God.[32] However, others questioned the applicability of God's intention for the Hebrew priests' rituals in the Old Testament to other ethnic groups. The adoption of smudging into Christian worship could parallel the imagery of incense representing the prayers of the saints in Revelation (Rev 5:8; 8:3–4).[33] Indigenous peoples have engaged in smudging for cleansing and purification, while the incense in Revelation symbolizes the saints' prayers reaching God. Most interviewees, with a few exceptions, noted that it is not biblical to believe that smudging can cleanse and purify participants or mediate people's prayers to God.

The sacred pipe, which once symbolized both war and peace, has evolved into a universal metaphor for life and its ultimate end. The bowl's centre represents the centre of the universe. It has become a source of temperance, tolerance, and harmony. Many believe that the spiritual power of the pipe becomes real when the bowl is connected to the stem and ritually filled with medicine grass. Indigenous peoples believe that the sacred pipe serves as a conduit for divine energy, enabling them to communicate with the Great Spirit.[34] The utilization of the sacred pipe in Indigenous rituals can be compared to the significance associated with the symbol of the cross in Christian liturgy. Some Indigenous Christians feel that the sacred pipe possesses the same spiritual impact as Christian sacraments.[35] However, most of my participants hesitate to bring it into the church

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[32] Lev 16:12–13; Pss 141:2; 142:2; Isa 6:4–7; Church, *Holy Smoke*, 60, 89; Bear, "The Smudging Ceremony," 202–4. Canadian First Nations minister Cheryl Bear explores the meaning of smudging. She claims this Indigenous cleaning ritual may deepen one's devotion to God by functioning as a purification or cleansing ceremony. It directly connects Jesus to the cleansing sacrifice he made for us. Bear concludes that the hybridity of the smudge ceremony and the concepts of sanctification and justification are feasible and based on both the Bible and culture.

[33] Twiss, *One Church*, 132–33.

[34] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 138.

[35] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 136–37.

context.[36] They point out that individuals in a particular group, not God, invented the notion of the sacred pipe. It is merely a medium between Indigenous peoples and their traditional spirit.

Although the Bible does not provide specific instructions for using musical instruments in worship, numerous scriptures describe various musical instruments, including the harp and lyre, tambourine (or timbrel), cymbals, flute, and other percussion instruments.[37] Indigenous drums are traditional instruments that can be incorporated into church worship, as many churches already utilize modern drums. Despite this, many participants opposed their adoption in worship because Indigenous drums were previously used to summon Indigenous spirits. Others argue that the drums used in traditional ways do not inherently make them wicked. They believe that God gave us our drums, songs, dances, and beliefs to worship and walk with him in a way that is beautiful, special, and ultimately pleasing to him.

There is a notion among Indigenous Christians that all symbols and rituals originating from Indigenous cultures are inherently demonic,[38] representing an erroneous belief in absolutism. Some cultural artifacts with sacred meanings are considered unrecoverable for Christian worship because evil spirits and personalities may inhabit inanimate objects and places. On the other hand, some participants argue that we should not view material things as malicious but instead arrange them to serve specific worship purposes.[39] Few pastors and worship leaders are attached to particular symbols or

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[36] LeBlanc et al., eds., "Culture," 23.
[37] Ps 150:3–5; 1 Chr 15:16; Isa 5:12; 2 Sam 6:5; Exod 15:20; Judg 11:34.
[38] Berkhofer, *Salvation and the Savage*, 122; Arnold, *The Urgency of Indigenous Values*, 82, 189.
[39] Drury, *The Wonder*, 172.

objects, while others express strong reluctance for various reasons, including emotional associations.

One of the Indigenous pastors who participated in my interview shared his experience of incorporating Indigenous drums into his church. His church integrated drums into worship services to gain the congregation's favour, but many members disliked playing them and chose to leave. The church welcomed back worship attendees after removing the drums. In this case, the pastor argues that colonialism demonized Indigenous symbols. Before we attempt to incorporate them into church worship, we should first erase this demonization by educating people about Indigenous symbols and culture. This case illustrates that the contextual analysis did not delve sufficiently to reveal another significant layer of meaning.[40] The transplantation of Indigenous objects or symbols directly into a Christian worship context may not always be feasible. Integrating symbols that hold substantial and intentional meaning for Indigenous peoples into worship without the process of cultural exegesis and purification is inappropriate.[41] Many things are permissible but not always beneficial (1 Cor 10:23).

Sanctuary Settings and Clothing

The contextual approach encompasses the settings and costumes of places of worship. Another factor contributing to the inspiration for communal worship is the importance of these settings and clothing, including church buildings, furnishings, decorative artworks, and participants' attire. Drury states, "Christian worship is both spiritual and material. We

[40] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theology*, 8.
[41] Magnuson, "Selling Native American Soul," 1084–87.

do not think of physical objects as just materials."[42] We must arrange them for their special worship uses. The purpose of the settings and decorations in a worship service is to effectively communicate the gospel's message to people within a given culture. The church incorporates creative elements to make worship more tangible, allowing worshipers to appreciate God's beautiful gifts.[43]

Many Indigenous believers are accustomed to liturgical, colourful, and ceremonial settings and garments in traditional church liturgies, such as those found in Roman Catholic and Anglican churches. The lack of any Indigenous identity in the decor of the sanctuary may convey a message that the associated culture and people are marginalized. For the sanctuary seating, I propose a more circular layout in the worship hall, promoting a communal sense of worship where Indigenous worshipers can feel a traditional circle rather than linear rows. For architectural or practical reasons, some non-Indigenous churches have already adopted a circular or semi-circular seating arrangement for the worship hall. However, the significance of the circular setting in Indigenous churches extends beyond its artistic or physical form to include their traditional worldview, lifestyle, and theological implications.[44] Most Indigenous churches do not have a circular layout because existing structures were designed and built by non-Indigenous people in the past. Despite this, some churches have altered their buildings to adopt a circular setting, at least in their secondary halls, for meeting or fellowship rooms. Our church's secondary hall has been laid out in a circle for Bible study and fellowship meetings. This

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[42] Drury, *The Wonder*, 172.

[43] Taylor, "Creation and Worship," 42–43.

[44] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 50. My proposal is grounded in the primary symbol of the Indigenous concept I have explored throughout this study. I have also been to some Indigenous church settings that use circular designs in their main worship halls.

structure enables participants to pay attention to one another as part of their oneness in Christ. It is ideal for Bible study, which requires reciprocal discussion and exchange of ideas. Furthermore, exhibiting Christian artistic expressions of Indigenous origin in entryways and hallways can enhance communication and hospitality for newcomers.

Regarding the garments, I suggest that it is acceptable for worship participants to feel comfortable wearing traditional tribal costumes, including personalized jewelry, footwear, and other regalia specific to their regions and tribes. Some are concerned that wearing tribal regalia in Christian worship highlights the diverse meanings attached to that regalia across different tribal cultures.[45] Despite this, a fundamental concept is that God created all creatures to celebrate our redemption in Jesus Christ, our new and larger identity. Accordingly, the church congregations of each tribe must decide how to use their artifacts for authentic, biblically consistent worship services.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the necessity of a decolonizing approach to Indigenous theology and worship for effectively communicating Christ's gospel. Indigenous peoples are entitled to express their cultural and religious beliefs and develop theological frameworks that convey the essence of the gospel within their cultural contexts. Indigenous peoples' ideas about the supreme being, creation, and community differ from the beliefs promoted by colonizing churches. This difference stems from unique Indigenous worldviews and tribal histories, significantly impacting them. Indigenous theology emphasizes the inherent goodness and beauty of creation, asserting that the Creator intended for

[45] Smith, *Native Americans*, 82–83.

humanity to coexist with and care for the natural world in partnership with him.[46]

The discourse surrounding liberation theology, which has emerged over the past several decades among theologians, focuses on the liberation of the Israelites from slavery, their subsequent journey to the Promised Land, and its application to various peoples. However, the Indigenous perspective on the Exodus narrative has been marginalized.[47] I believe that the Indigenous church should initiate fundamental liberation for nations by fostering a spiritual revival rather than concentrating solely on social or political movements. Conversely, non-Indigenous churches ought to set aside their conventional ethnocentric views on faith to build meaningful relationships and progress together.

Inculturated worship enables individuals to reclaim their Indigenous identity while becoming disciples of Christ. As the most adaptable and interpretable art form, music is an exceptional tool for spiritual formation, mainly through Indigenous music and hymns. Culturally relevant music and instruments significantly enhance the revitalization of Indigenous worship. The interview participants expressed differing opinions on the use of specific artifacts in church worship.

Oral tradition is the primary means to transmit the essence of Indigenous knowledge to subsequent generations. Consequently, narrative preaching is an effective tool for preachers to convey messages to Indigenous peoples. Incorporating Indigenous-focused elements such as personal testimonies, altar calls, settings, and participant attire

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[46] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 35–36.
[47] Warrior, "Canaanites," 94–95.

can enrich the worship experience, fostering a more profound connection for Indigenous Christians to the gospel.

In summary, integrating cultural forms into worship enhances the relevance of the gospel for Indigenous peoples. They will renew their cultural legacy and discard elements incompatible with Christ. In contrast, compatible aspects receive renewed focus and meaning as people of the culture reorient their traditions to serve the living Christ. Specifically, when Christ is acknowledged as their Lord, their values, art forms, communication processes, and spiritual insights facilitate new integration and creative growth.

CHAPTER 7:

FROM INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES TO BIBLICAL SPIRITUALITY

This chapter discusses how Indigenous Christians and communities can experience spiritual transformation through corporate worship.[1] The central question for this theme is how Indigenous perspectives can shift towards biblical spirituality. I propose focusing on the paradigm of Knowing, Being, and Doing.[2] In the first section, worship empowers Indigenous believers to encounter the true God rather than merely a general spirit, recognize their true humanity, and live ethically. Such epistemological experiences will significantly influence their ability to embrace a Christian worldview, enhancing the spiritual and practical dimensions of the worshipers' faith and lives.

The second section focuses on Being and covers the critical attributes of spirituality among Indigenous believers who experience significant spiritual growth and transformation through communal worship. Engaging in communal worship enables worshipers to grow in the religious affections and wisdom necessary to distinguish between emotional moods and genuine faith, guided by the Word and Spirit of God. This process also fosters a sense of discernment and moral values, which are essential for comprehending Christian ethics and the fundamental principles of morality.[3]

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[1] Richardson, "Spiritual Formation," 519–20.
[2] Martin and Mirraboopa, "Ways of Knowing," 209–11.
[3] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 173–74.

Next, I propose another self-principle—the fifth self—as a contextualization model alongside the fourth self, integrated into Indigenous mission principles. This model suggests that converted individuals and congregations should participate in the purification and sanctification of Indigenous ceremonies and rituals to positively influence the faith communities to which they belong positively. The fifth self-paradigm can be actualized by applying three biblical principles that transform Indigenous individuals and congregations through their worship experiences. It calls for transforming entrenched traditional notions and lifestyles beyond mere participation in liturgical practices. This chapter concludes that critically contextualized worship ultimately catalyzes the spiritual formation of Indigenous individuals and worship communities.

Shaping Christian Worldview: Knowing, Being, and Doing

A worldview is the fundamental, all-encompassing perspective on reality that a group of individuals collectively holds within its shared culture. Hiebert defines it as "the foundational cognitive, affective, and evaluative assumptions and frameworks a group of people creates about the nature of reality, which they use to order their lives."[4] It is a personal or collective viewpoint through which individuals understand humanity's creation, deity, and origins. In this sense, a worldview is one's belief system closely linked to religious life and human living systems. A Christian worldview provides us with spiritual life, equipping us with a profound understanding of God's plan and purpose for humanity. It offers a transformative way of being that impacts each individual's beliefs,

[4] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 25.

values, life purpose, and hope. Furthermore, a Christian worldview provides a framework for ethical living, enabling us to embody a holy life in Christ.

Hiebert asserts that a genuine conversion to Christ involves all three levels: behaviour, belief, and worldview. Without such a comprehensive transformation, the gospel is undermined, and conversion risks becoming "a syncretistic Christo-paganism, which has the form of Christianity but not its essence."[5] He also differentiates between personal and corporate transformation within the context of conversion.[6] Being a faithful disciple of Christ means changing how individuals think, behave, and perceive their worldviews, which are intertwined with their community cultures and religions.

Christian worship is the matrix from which a Christian worldview forms and develops.[7] In any context, a key aspect of Christian worship is the transformation of one's worldview, enabling believers to acknowledge the true Creator over creation. A more comprehensive understanding of the reality of God through worship transforms Indigenous worshipers, who may not have fully refined their cultures but rather have appended Christianity to their existing traditions. It is essential for Indigenous churchgoers today, just as it is for all believers, to have a solid biblical understanding of our Creator, creation, and our human identity in relation to God. The following section discusses how communal worship transforms one's worldview, enabling Indigenous people to encounter God's reality, understand their status as Christians, and consider the ethical implications of their lives.

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[5] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 11.
[6] Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews*, 12.
[7] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 11.

Discovering the Reality of God: Knowing

I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord (Jer 24:7, NIV)

In worship, glorifying and praising God is a way to comprehend God's divine reality and mysterious nature. This approach differs from Indigenous rituals and ceremonies, which focus on appeasing the spirits. In traditional Indigenous practices, participants express their wishes and call upon the spirits. In contrast, Christian worship embodies divine communication that remembers and invokes God's greatness while receiving his self-giving.[8] Theologian David Peterson defines Christian worship as follows: "The worship of the living and true God is essentially an engagement with him on the terms that he proposes and in the way that he alone makes possible."[9] This definition implies that worship is more than just what we do; it encompasses a deeper, more profound meaning. We uncover God's power to form and shape an individual's holiness and cultivate true humanity, and we recognize what he has done for his people.[10] God himself is the source and object of worship.

During worship, the living God interacts with us by manifesting his infallible Word—the written revelation of himself—which reveals his will and presence. Once the Holy Scripture is read and proclaimed, God uses it to encourage and edify the participants, building up the congregation.[11] God's Spirit inspires the words we read and the music we sing, constantly representing the profound truths of the Christian faith. There may be

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[8] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 36–38. Saliers emphasizes two dimensions of worship: pathos (the human suffering of the world) and the divine ethos (liturgy as God's self-giving to us, p. 22). Pathos without God's ethos is tragic self-expression; God's ethos without human pathos, as in Jesus, is opaque —that is, sovereign but not saving (36). This focus perfectly captures the radical essence of God's Incarnation in Jesus.

[9] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 20.

[10] Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality*, 26.

[11] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 206–7.

various responses to the word, including singing, praise, dancing, confession, prayer, altar calls, and partaking in the Lord's Supper.[12]

When congregations gather for worship, the Holy Spirit intercedes so that they can worship God as he desires. In the spiritual interaction between God and the participants, as described in the scriptures, the Spirit teaches about the creation and maintenance of the world, and about the identities of God, Christ, and humanity. The Spirit is the author and interpreter of the scriptures, illuminating Christians with understanding. Paul addressed the role of the Spirit in the teaching and preaching of God's word: "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power" (1 Cor 2:4–5, NIV). The Spirit actively engages in preaching, prayer, singing, and sacraments. The ministry of the Spirit, not of human agents, mediates encounters with God the Father.

Indigenous worshipers will experience even greater exuberance and emotion when they recognize that the Holy Spirit presides over worship, particularly in the sacraments. It enables people to experience God as a more tangible reality. Patrick Keifert highlights that the church's liturgical rites are critical for the conversion experience in "liturgical evangelism."[13] He depicts the sacramental rites using intimate images of family hospitality and an affectionate portrayal of the church as a community for the marginalized.[14] In this view, Indigenous believers can engage with deep emotions and move toward a fuller understanding of the true Creator and his creation.[15] At the same time, they can distinguish between the Triune God and the Indigenous spirit of the creator

[12] Long, *Christian Ethics*, 53.
[13] Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 107.
[14] Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 90.
[15] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 37.

accepted by secular communities. Ultimately, they may become aware of traditional beliefs that might not align with serving the one living God.

Children of God: Being

So in Christ Jesus, you are all children of God through faith (Gal 3:26, NIV)

The transformation of the worldview leads to a change in the notion of ways of being. Such a fundamental change, which occurs through Christian worship, enables believers to view themselves as more than mere creatures, in contrast to traditional Indigenous beliefs. For instance, from the perspective of Pan-Indianism, it is believed that humans emerged from below the earth or descended from the sky.[16] From the Indigenous viewpoint, human beings are simply part of nature and are not considered the most precious creatures in the world. In worship, however, the Spirit of God assists Indigenous believers in discovering their identity, existence, and value in God's presence. Saliers states, "Worship gives us time and space to discover and express who and what we are when we are in God's presence."[17] Humans are made in God's image as stewards of the world, responsible for preserving and caring for creation on a personal and communal level (Gen 1:28). As God's unique creation and recipients of God's particular concern, humans were created to glorify and worship their Creator (Isa 43:21).

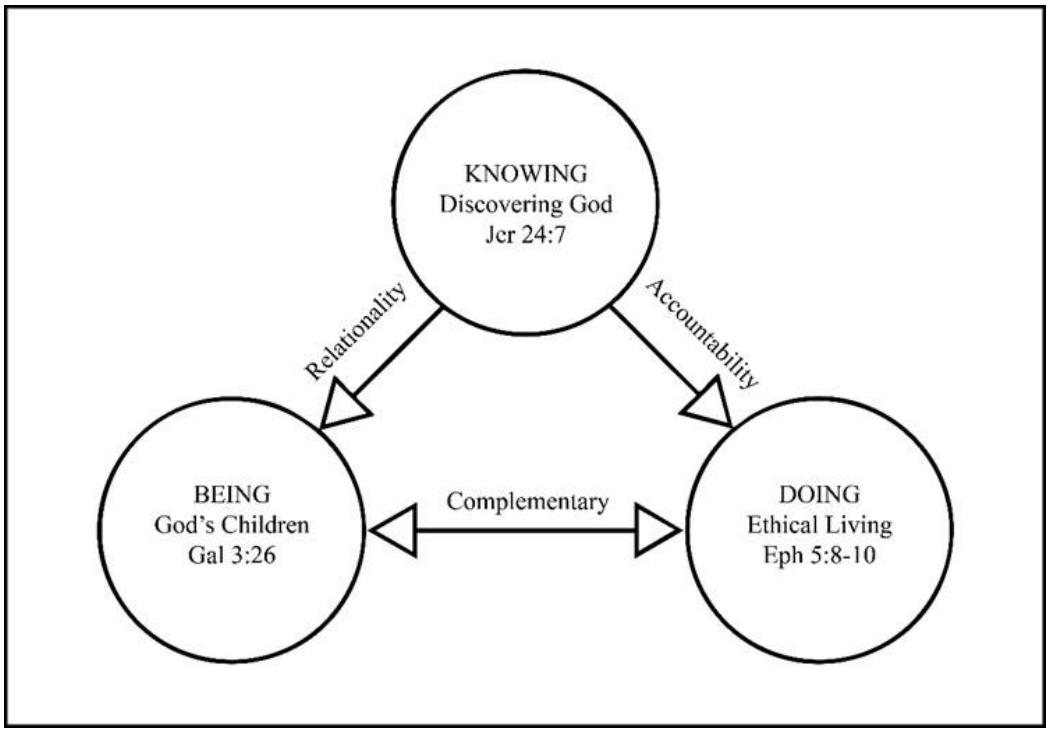
When worship focuses on God's divine holiness, worshipers of every ethnicity can recognize their sinfulness in comparison to God's holiness (Isa 6:5). Indigenous congregations that encounter God's holiness can become aware of their inadequacy and

[16] Kidwell et al., eds., *Native American*, 37. The specific understanding of creation stories slightly differs from tribe to tribe.

[17] Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality*, 25.

sinfulness, just as Isaiah experienced an overwhelming sense of guilt and unholiness in the presence of God's holiness. Moreover, they can acknowledge that human pain, suffering, and sorrow result from the fall and the consequences of original sin (Rom 3:23; 5:12). They may also learn how to glorify God and fully enjoy him, who justifies and sanctifies all humans through the redemptive work of Christ.

Figure 3: The Paradigm of Knowing, Being, and Doing for Indigenous Converts



A Christian worldview can lead to a profound shift in the ontological foundation. An Indigenous traditional view of humans as partners with every creature and entity shifts into a new way of being, in which God created people to steward his creation faithfully. Furthermore, recognizing the divine status of Christians, who become the children of God, enables them to understand how to maintain the right relationships with God and others.

In short, for Indigenous people, corporate worship serves as a locus for rediscovering the origins of humanity, initiating a commitment to God, and serving communities.

Figure 3 illustrates how Indigenous converts integrate into faithful believers through three interconnected paradigms. Upon discovering the true God, they acknowledge what he has done for his people and embrace their identity as God's children. Simultaneously, they become accountable, cultivate humanity, and shape their holiness. Indigenous North American epistemologies are action-oriented, emphasizing daily living in accordance with specific values. This perspective encompasses both understanding and action in relation to the world and the Creator. It reflects a holistic, value-based epistemological system that consistently underscores positive relationships.[18]

Ethical Living: Doing

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness, and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord (Eph 5:8–10, NIV)

The lifestyles of worshipers significantly influence the attitudes and aspirations they bring to worship.[19] Worship service is not a means to escape into another world; instead, worshipers are to present their lives in this world to God as a whole.[20] Saliers notes the relationship between the act of worship and ethical living: "Christian ethics and the shape of the moral life cannot be adequately understood apart from how Christians actually worship God."[21] For worship to be authentic, individuals must adhere to Christian ethics, as evidenced by transforming their lives through the power of the Holy Spirit. The self-

[18] Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies*, 62–63.
[19] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 171.
[20] Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality*, 26.
[21] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 172.

sacrifice of Jesus Christ serves as a concrete example of a set of "affections and virtues" that define the Christian moral life.[22]

How does experiencing corporate worship impact Indigenous congregants or any sincere believer's ability to live more ethically? As Stephan Long states, "Worship redirects us from self to God."[23] All spiritual worship led by the Spirit of God provides insights that help differentiate right from wrong and fulfill God's intention in specific contexts and situations. Thus, worship imparts knowledge of divine commandments and fosters compliance within the covenant community, thereby cultivating an ethical life in Christ and a deep relationship with the living God.[24] For instance, congregations read scriptures during worship, sing Psalms, and learn the creed, the commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. As God speaks through the written and spoken word, revelations, and the New Covenant, congregations have the opportunity to respond to the laws and decrees by obeying them (Exod 19:8; Josh 24:16). Participating in sacramental rituals allows individuals to experience God's presence, and we are called to be sanctified before God (1 Cor 11:27–32).

Indigenous traditional beliefs do not encompass concepts such as sin and salvation found in Christianity, nor do they include a god who possesses absolute power.[25] They believe that the norms of good and evil depend on individual experiences. They understand evil as a person's ability to control others' actions, thereby preventing their freedom of action.[26] The Indigenous perception of good and evil is so relative that norms

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[22] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 174.
[23] Long, *Christian Ethics*, 64.
[24] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 173–74.
[25] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 18.
[26] Kidwell et al., *A Native American Theology*, 102.

change based on their experiences in particular contexts. Likewise, Indigenous virtues are limited in scope, as people cannot effectively organize them for their intended purposes.

However, understanding Christian ethics and the nature of moral life is inseparable from how Christians worship God. The conversion of the heart and living according to Jesus' teachings require a genuine reorientation of one's life. Ethical living, as the people of God, reflects a tangible way of life that emerges from a life of worship. One of my interviewees participated as a guest on a First Nations Christian broadcast in Canada.[27] He noted that the scriptures, particularly Deuteronomy 11, which discusses the rewards of obedience and the consequences of choices, were inscribed on his heart when he was a young worshiper and became his life's guiding principle. More Indigenous servants today testify to how various forms of communal worship have transformed their lives.

Spiritual Formation through Worship

As discussed earlier, corporate worship is inextricably linked to knowledge about God and humanity, while traditional Indigenous spirits strongly influence spiritual reformation among Indigenous believers. Spiritual formation involves becoming a Christian and embodying Christ's character. It is a dynamic process that encompasses discipline and harmony between an individual's outward communal behaviour and their spiritual life. According to Dallas Willard, spiritual formation for Christians refers to "the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self so that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself."[28] Indigenous Christians are religious but not necessarily

[27] The interviewee agreed to share his story anonymously. Tribal Trails is a ministry department of the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission. It is a satellite station that began airing on ITV in 1986. The central station is located in Prince Albert, SK, Canada.

[28] Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 15.

spiritual; they are religiously committed yet inclusive of their traditional beliefs in specific ways. An essential task of the church is to disciple its members in spirituality and practices within the Christian community, particularly for authentic Christian worship. The following are a few distinct features of the spiritualities that Indigenous Christians can develop through their worship practices.

Religious Affections

Spirit-inspired worship and communion with God empower individuals and communities with holy affection.[29] Religious affections refer to an individual's deep response to spirituality, encompassing gratitude, repentance, joy, suffering, and love for God and their neighbour. They represent an intense and enduring inclination of the soul that aligns with one's beliefs and is likely to manifest in actions involving the mind, will, and emotions.[30] Such affections can arise from religious experiences facilitated by the Spirit's work, which infuses his divine life into a regenerated individual. Genuine affections serve as the spiritual power source for the mature Christian life, enabling believers to influence others through spiritual growth and ethical conduct.[31] In short, Christian worship experiences nurture religious affections, are vital to authentic spirituality, and support the works of the Spirit.[32]

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[29] Liebert, *The Way*, 116; Jonathan Edwards understands authentic spirituality as manifested in "holy affections" from one's heart, which could provide an important lens for discerning the works of the Spirit (Saliers, "With Kindled Affections," 5).

[30] Liebert, *The Way*, 127. According to Leibert, holy affections are a crucial quality of Christian spirituality that immediately affects the discernment process as a source and has strong inclinations that "allow us to respond in one way rather than another."

[31] Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, 183–86.

[32] Saliers, *The Soul*, 7. Religious affections are distinguished from shallow emotions. They include gratitude, repentance, joy, suffering, and love of God and neighbour.

Jonathan Edwards saw the spiritual possibility of Indigenous people during his seven years of service as a missionary to them in Massachusetts, stating that most Indians possessed a spiritually receptive disposition, were intellectually equal to Western people, and could learn quickly, given the suitable methods used. He anticipated greater satisfaction in seeing the work of the Holy Spirit among those who had not yet been given a chance, identifying with the lowly and despised individuals of society: the disenfranchised, abused, and even the despised native Americans.

Edwards left behind numerous writings related to religious affections. Edwards focused on the quality of our religious affections in the relationship between reasoning and affectivity. His emerging intellectual interests followed the contours of his spiritual experiences. He distinguishes religious affections from emotions humans can create, such as fleeting feelings.[33] Affections refer to an individual's profound response to spirituality, whereas superficial feelings or passions reflect our innate reactions. He emphasizes the quality of a person's religious affections and their influence on discerning the relationship between reasoning and affectivity. A Christian regenerated by the Holy Spirit possesses a heart inclined toward advancing God's kingdom while turning away from worldly pursuits.

Worship promotes ongoing engagement with the Spirit, transcending human perception. Thus, it can be understood as a union with God in Christ and participation in God's kingdom that surpasses time and place rather than merely seeking superficial phenomena for personal satisfaction.[34] Today, the desire for fleeting emotions and

[33] Martin, *Understanding Affections*, 229–31.
[34] Saliers, "With Kindled Affections," 8–9.

exhilarating experiences, without the discipline to encounter the living God through dynamic worship services, may contribute to the spiritual vulnerability of Indigenous believers and churches, as well as other congregations beyond Indigenous communities.

In worship services at Indigenous churches, many members share personal accounts of their profound conversions or express regret for moral failings such as substance abuse or sexual immorality. Some also testify to ecstatic experiences, dreams, or visions that often seem arbitrary and concerning. Subsequently, congregations applaud as if the testimonies reflect God's divine works. However, they struggle to distinguish genuine religious affections from illusions or misleading emotions. As Paul states in 1 Cor 14:29, the congregation should spiritually discern individuals' experiences to ensure order and clarity in worship.

Spiritual Wisdom and Discernment

From a biblical perspective, every element of worship inspires and influences the lives of those who worship. David Ford examines Christian wisdom in the context of liturgy and explores its connection to worship. He argues that Christian wisdom is essential for worshiping God. It is "concerned with the intellectual and practical judgments that contribute to worship."[35] Thus, discernment and worship are mutually inclusive in the Christian life, as spiritual insights are necessary for worship and empower worshipers to maintain an intimate relationship with God.[36]

Many Indigenous Christians view a worship service as a pathway to physical healing or material achievement, the primary purpose of their traditional healing practices. Although the body's recovery is one of the many benefits derived from Christ's atoning work, Indigenous believers may have gradually integrated Christian worship with various traditional rituals. They are particularly drawn to the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which resonate with their conventional understanding of the Great Spirit, the life-giving source of strength and power. The emphasis on the Holy Spirit relates to the extraordinary healing power presented in Indigenous beliefs, highlighting supernatural abilities. At the same time, there is a concern that they might swiftly revert to traditional Indigenous rituals and practices that undermine the true essence of worship.

Christian worship keeps God at the centre, shapes believers' character, and builds the Christian community. However, all forms of Christian worship face challenges in this regard. Indigenous churches can be more than just places for communal worship; they

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[35] Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, 210.

[36] Ford, *Christian Wisdom*, 193. Ford says, "Wisdom in worship is at the core of Christian life and thought."

should also nurture a sense of community and prepare believers to become disciples of Christ. In this context, Indigenous congregants can receive the divine wisdom and discernment that authentic worship offers, helping individuals and communities to grow spiritually through engagement with the triune God.[37]

Pursuing spiritual wisdom and discernment is essential for every Christian individual and community to remain true to living in accordance with God's will. With the spiritual gifts of understanding and insight, they seek God's guidance and the work of the Holy Spirit within a particular context. In this way, they grow closer to God in Christ. Furthermore, these individuals develop a remarkable ability to distinguish truth from error, make decisions based on faith, and nurture a strong desire to follow God's call.[38]

Throughout my ministry, I have observed that many Indigenous church members have dedicated themselves to corporate worship. They exhibit similar attributes of faith and life, such as knowledge, insight, and ethical conduct, which are often lacking in other Indigenous individuals. Spiritual wisdom and understanding are accessible to anyone who engages with God, regardless of race or social status. Those endowed with spiritual wisdom have consistently yearned to know Jesus Christ, remaining humble and passionate about God for the sake of his kingdom. The Spirit of God has illuminated their hearts so they might see hope in God and strengthen their faith to live as his holy people (Eph 1:17).

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[37] Nouwen, *Discernment*, xxi.

[38] Nouwen, *Discernment*, 30. Nouwen emphasizes listening to the Word of God in our hearts, the Bible, the community of faith, and the voice of the poor to discern God's plan.

A Foretaste of Eternity

Indigenous peoples view human life as cyclical, emphasizing that every creature is eternally interconnected, thus linking the present and future to the past.[39] They believe an individual's soul travels to another world by crossing a river over a bridge.[40] Those who live good lives enter a world abundant in resources, while those who have lived poorly are drawn into whirlpools filled with dangerous creatures and harsh living conditions.[41] Consequently, Indigenous peoples often see death as a symbol of renewal and rejuvenation; however, the concepts of salvation and the afterlife remain somewhat ambiguous.

Nevertheless, Christian worship profoundly shapes one's worldview by allowing individuals to experience God's presence and pursue spiritual growth in Christ. For Indigenous believers, eschatology is a profoundly emotional and significant aspect of their spiritual understanding.[42] Many church members have faced moral and spiritual failures due to historical suffering. They often long for a life in heaven rather than one in this world, a life which offers them few advantages. Consequently, they connect more positively with God's attributes, grace, and the hope of eternal life in his kingdom.

Worship empowers participants to engage in movements and events anticipating God's kingdom.[43] They feel grateful for the resurrection of Christ, which offers the assurance of eternal life, unlike their traditional religions, which provide little information about the immortal lives of souls.[44] From this perspective, their motivation and passion for

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[39] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native*,166–67.
[40] Kidwell et al., *Native American Theology*, 105.
[41] Kidwell et al., *Native American Theology*, 105.
[42] Hitchen, "Mission," 162.
[43] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 51.
[44] Peelman, *Christ Is a Native American*, 139.

corporate worship may stem from eschatological hope.[45] Worship and liturgical theologian Timothy J. Ralston explains: "Corporate worship represents a radical, future-oriented act. The unity of the worshiping church becomes a foretaste of the coming age when Jesus Christ rules over all."[46] In worship, Indigenous participants acknowledge eternal hope, its promise of the future, and victory over worldly existence.[47] This eschatological hope may become more tangible as participants engage with the elements of worship and immerse themselves in the promise of the kingdom of God, navigating their lives in the process.[48]

In my ministry within Indigenous churches, congregations respond strongly to hymns and sermons that focus on eternal life in God's kingdom. Certain songs and texts offer comfort to Indigenous Christians as they navigate difficult times or painful experiences. They draw parallels between their lives and the hardships endured by the Israelites in Egypt, along with their ultimate liberation from slavery, which led to their journey into the Promised Land. Many worshipers in Indigenous churches today may recall experiences that resonate with their current circumstances, drawing from traditions rooted in Israelite heritage. What they pray for, sing, and hope for about the future reflects their longing for the kingdom of God.

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[45] Paul's discipleship strategy for the Corinthian community is grounded in his eschatological framework (1 Cor 15:12–57).

[46] Ralston, "The Spirit's Role," [n.d.].

[47] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 224.

[48] Saliers, *Worship as Theology*, 210–11. Saliers appropriately connects Christian worship practices with the future: "Every song, every prayer, every act of washing, eating, and drinking together, is eschatological—that is, God intends it to point toward completion in the fullness of time."

The Fifth Self: Not by Tradition, but by Spirit and Word

The "three-self principle," introduced by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson, has traditionally guided Indigenous missions toward achieving indigeneity. Despite their apparent relevance to missions and activities, the three self-principles have limited applicability across diverse cultural contexts in the modern world. In recent decades, a growing issue in mission ministry worldwide has been the development of contextual (local) theology.[49] In 1985, Hiebert identified limitations with the three-self indigeneity models and proposed a fourth self: "self-theologizing," asserting that the Indigenous church should develop theologies that clarify the gospel within their diverse cultures.[50] In the process of self-theologizing, the purification and sanctification of Indigenous cultures, as well as the believers engaged in theologizing, are essential to achieving the fourth self.[51] Otherwise, the gospel risks becoming diluted, and contextual theology may devolve into merely syncretic dual religious systems.[52]

As a practical theologian and minister of the Indigenous church, I propose the concept of the "fifth self," which encompasses self-purification and sanctification within the frameworks of indigenization and contextualization. Within this fifth self, Indigenous congregations should discern, purify, and sanctify their traditional artifacts, practices, and ways of living, which can be integrated into corporate worship and the Christian life. This fifth self serves as a relevant extension of the fourth self, self-theologizing, because purification and sanctification are also vital components of self-theologizing. God desires Indigenous Christians, as well as all believers, to critique, purify, and sanctify their culture

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[49] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 3, 15.
[50] Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights,*195–96.
[51] This is the central theme that flows through my dissertation.
[52] Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, 144–47.

in light of Holy Scripture. The apostle Paul does not instruct us to create a new culture that would automatically render us holy; instead, he talks about internal, personal holiness that originates from above but is expressed within (Eph 4:21–24; 2 Cor 5:17). Based on three essential teachings in the scriptures (Matt 15:1–9; John 4:20–24; Rom 12:1–2), I argue that the activation of the fifth self must align to some degree with an individual's spiritual growth. Concurrently, I propose three principles for implementing the fifth self within Indigenous ministry.

The Tradition of Elders or God's Commandment (Matt 15:1–9)

In many cultures, human traditions are considered customs among ordinary people and accepted as standard guidelines passed down through generations. In Jewish culture, the rabbi, elders, or sages of the tribes provide specific instructions on how to navigate civil or religious situations (Deut 32:7). While recognizing conscious variations among individuals, the practical function of accumulated wisdom has been transmitted through the ages in the form of civil and religious customs and rules.

In the context of Matt 15:1–9, Jewish religious leaders questioned Jesus's dismissal of their traditional laws, which mandated handwashing before eating bread. In response, Jesus condemned their corrupted tradition, which contradicted God's commandment: "Why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition?" (v. 3). The Jews misapplied their traditions to justify breaking God's fifth commandment, believing their rules were superior to God's commandments.

As discussed in Chapter 3, some Indigenous rituals adopted by Indigenous churches for worship services are compromises that conflict with the teachings of the

scriptures.[53] These traditions are merely human customs developed by people; they do not always reflect what God instructed regarding the priorities of believers' lives. Therefore, Indigenous churches should not hesitate to abandon specific traditions that cause conflict or distract from their focus on serving God. Otherwise, like the Jewish leaders, they may disregard God's word in favour of their customs (Matt 15:6). Additionally, Jesus critiques the Jewish leaders by quoting the prophet Isaiah, who prophesies that they are hypocrites whose hearts are far from God, worshiping him in vain (Isa 29:13). They place greater importance on religious tradition than on God's commandments. Consequently, Indigenous churches should ensure that worshipers' hearts remain focused on biblical teachings rather than extending or imposing non-contextualized cultural practices within their congregations.

In the Spirit and Truth (John 4:20–24)

Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well in the town of Sychar reveals profound truths about himself as the Living Water for everyone's eternal life. After a personal conversation, the woman learned that Jesus was a prophet. She had concerns regarding the place of worship that God delights in. Her primary interest was more in the "location of worship" than in how worship should be conducted.[54] In verse 20, the Samaritans worshiped on Mt. Gerizim according to their forefathers' traditions. At that time, Jews asserted that Jerusalem was a spiritual hub and the sacred site where people

[53] The Indigenous Ministry of the United Church regularly holds a "sweat lodge" ceremony. They incorporated the four-colour image of the "medicine wheel" aspects into the church crest. Also, the Anglican Church conducts the "standing stones," an Indigenous liturgical ceremony.

[54] See Deut 12:5. Worship in the Old Testament was often directed and centred on a specific location where God had instructed their forefathers to go.

should worship. Jesus, however, taught that true worship is not about performing rituals in specific locations, but rather about experiencing a spiritual interaction with God's truth.

Jesus continued to address the subject of worship, criticizing the Samaritans for their lack of understanding regarding whom to worship: "You Samaritans worship what you do not know" (v. 22). The Samaritans were descendants of the Israelites who had intermarried with local populations, resulting in a blend of local religions and the worship of the true God.[55] As Peterson notes, humanity initiated the worship of these pagan deities, which were localized according to humanity's specifications.[56]

The implications of Jesus' teachings in this passage are relevant to the worship practices of contemporary Indigenous churches. Indigenous peoples often view their traditional territories or specific locations as sacred, believing that these places are where spirits reside. They may find comfort in using traditional worship articles or rituals that enhance worshipers' motivation. Certain external elements of worship, such as setting, attire, and ceremonial practices, are essential for the process of inculturation. However, these components serve merely as vehicles for worship, enhancing motivation without embodying the essence of our faith.

Table 2 presents the three paradigm shifts for the fifth self: self-sanctification in biblical worship. Indigenous peoples once adhered to their traditional cultural practices and secular ways of living. However, following the three biblical principles, their worship

[55] See, 2 Kgs 17:26–34. It is assumed that the Samaritans worshipped their gods, which was arbitrary and immoral. They might have combined local idol worship with Jewish worship tradition.

[56] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 24. "The great concern of people in the ancient world was to know where the presence of a god could be found and to know the names of gods so that they could be approached and communion with them established. Certain localities came to be identified as the dwelling places of the gods, and here, altars were erected, and patterns of worship were established. Part of the shrine or temple tradition would be the story of how the place had come to be recognized as the abode of the god."

paradigm shifts that result in the sanctification of the worshipers. The three scriptures illustrate principles and demonstrate how to apply them to life situations.

Table 2: The Paradigm Shifts for the Fifth Self: Self-Sanctification in Worship

SCRIPTURES	FROM	TO
Matt 15:1–9	Traditions of the Elders	God's Commandment
John 4:20–24	In Designated Places	In the Spirit and Truth
Rom 12:1–2	A Pattern of the World	Being a Living Sacrifice

A Living Sacrifice (Rom 12:1–2)

The passage from Rom 12:1–2 highlights a crucial aspect of the apostle Paul's theology of worship. Paul employs the term "sacrifice," echoing an Old Testament form of worship and symbolizing God's holiness. God commands us to offer him a holy sacrifice because of his sacred nature.[57] While sacrifices in the Old Testament involved slain animals, Paul now encourages us to present ourselves to God as a "living sacrifice." This concept may stem from his dramatically transformed and consecrated lifestyle after conversion (Gal 1:13–24). He underscores that a complete reorientation of life in Christ requires forsaking idolatry to worship the living God.[58] In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul reminds them how they "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess 1:9). To be a living sacrifice, worshipers must cultivate a genuine relationship with the holy God.

[57] The theme of Leviticus is holiness, taught through the five offerings.
[58] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 167 (cf. Acts 14:15; 15:19; 26:18, 20).

Saliers describes four key dimensions of Christian worship, with the fourth being that worship invites full participation as we bring our "whole life to worship."[59] This signifies that our lives should be devoted to God, not merely to church attendance. Just as the Jewish sacrifices had to be spotless, our living offering must also be clean and pure in God's sight. Paul urges believers to avoid adopting worldly thought patterns and to embrace Christ's attitude in presenting themselves as living sacrifices. As a converted apostle, Paul empowers others to follow his example, offering themselves sacrifices that are holy and pleasing to God.

The requirement that worshipers dedicate their lives to God poses a significant challenge for Indigenous Christians, as it does for all believers, since many congregants struggle with ethical and spiritual integrity. Today, the problematic backsliding has become prevalent among Indigenous Christians in ministry. Despite such challenges, many faithful congregants attest that they can overcome various obstacles and become committed to God through worship, which draws them closer to him.

A conversion story of my congregant serves as an excellent example of self-sanctification and can undoubtedly be applied to other Indigenous Christians. His father raised him to be a traditional man who followed Indigenous ways of living, such as "Longhouse ceremonies"[60] and Indigenous beliefs, and he adhered to this lifestyle until he was fifty. One day, he had a dream in which God appeared to him and revealed a vision

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[59] Saliers, "The Travail of Worship," 28. Saliers describes four critical dimensions of Christian worship: (1) the aim is the glorification of God; (2) the glory of God is related to what Jesus said and did as indicated in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures; (3) Christian worship is always culturally embodied and embedded; and (4) Christian worship invites wholehearted participation as we bring our whole life to worship.

[60] Crawford, *Native American*, 70, 100. Longhouse ceremonies are well-known traditional practices among Indigenous peoples in North America. Many Indigenous communities held these ceremonies in longhouses and community halls. Some people also refer to this as a Longhouse Religion.

that would lead to his lifelong conversion to Christianity. Since then, he has abandoned customary behaviours, including traditional practices, the use of alcohol and drugs, and other immoral actions. Instead, he has dedicated significant time to reading the Bible and has become a church leader, enriched with biblical knowledge and spiritual insights. He confessed that the gospel of Christ could bear good fruit in his life once he had purified himself through the work of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, sanctified believers can embrace the incarnate Word without falling into the pitfalls of syncretism. This marks the essential second stage in genuine contextualization, yet it can be the most challenging.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the shift in worldviews and spiritual formation through communal worship, focusing on the paradigms of Knowing, Being, and Doing. First, within the Knowing paradigm, Indigenous peoples can acknowledge the reality of God, the Creator, humanity, and the kingdom of God. Worship is a personal encounter with God, distinct in some ways from the Indigenous understanding of the Creator embraced by their communities. At the same time, worship provides its participants with recognition and affirmation of their identity as God's unique creation and recipients of his special care. God-centred worship aims to form holy and true humanity, which is called to honour God.[61] Finally, their lives are directed toward eschatological hope, where the purpose and meaning of life are reoriented toward the promise of eternal life in God's kingdom.[62]

Second, within the Being paradigm, converted Indigenous believers who participate in communal worship exhibit several distinct characteristics: religious

[61] Saliers, *Worship and Spirituality*, 26.
[62] Taylor, "Creation and Worship," 38.

affections, wisdom and discernment, and ethics. As the source of strength for mature Christians, these characteristics foster genuine spirituality and empower believers to positively influence others through spiritual growth and ethical conduct. Spirituality fosters spiritual wisdom and the ability to discern the workings of the spirit, as reflected in the quality of one's religious affections. With these gifts, individuals seek the will of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in specific situations. Consequently, corporate worship inspired by the Spirit enhances Indigenous congregants' ability to discover their identity in the presence of God.

The third paradigm focuses on Doing. I propose that Indigenous congregations discern, purify, and sanctify their traditional artifacts and rituals to create forms acceptable for integration into Christian worship and daily life. This process is known as the "fifth self: self-purification/sanctification." The fifth self requires that ways of life be purified from traditional cult practices and sanctified by offering themselves to God. The Word and Spirit can achieve this crucial aspect of spiritual formation, but not by relying on human traditions. Worshiping God in spirit and truth is not confined to human conditions but represents a spiritual interaction with God and his words. Consequently, the worshiper's entire life, dedicated to worship, is sanctified in the presence of God. I intend to implement these three biblical principles for Indigenous community congregations and hope other ministers will do the same.

CHAPTER 8:

CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the impact of corporate worship on the spirituality of Indigenous individuals and congregations, as well as the factors that influence their worldviews and religious transformation, particularly in the context of significant life changes related to their faith in Christ. Indigenous communities exist within a multifaceted landscape that encompasses traditional cultures, social and political movements, health and environmental issues, and diverse religious groups. Some Christian churches and missionary activities have marginalized and abused Indigenous peoples. The colonial processes of forced assimilation and the Christianization of Indigenous groups have exacerbated these injustices. This troubling chapter in history highlights the critical failures of Christian missions that aim to shape God's people so they can serve the nations.[1]

As we continued, the theology of worship examined theories and practices related to the appropriate role of worship within the Christian belief system. Corporate worship has the transformative power to shape the Christ-centred biblical spirituality of Indigenous Christians by altering their traditional perspectives and lives. A primary purpose of participating in Christian worship is to allow individuals to draw closer to God through a holistic response to God's divine revelation.[2] It encompasses a comprehensive lifestyle characterized by devoted obedience and reverence.[3] Studying the theology of worship

[1] Long, *Christian Ethics*, 71.
[2] Noble, "Mystery and Worship," 156.
[3] Peterson, *Engaging with God*, 28–29.

enhances the ability to recognize and adapt Indigenous traditional cultures and rituals for Christian worship. Worship, while culturally accessible yet distinct from culture, possesses counter-cultural power through the Spirit's influence.

Indigenous worldviews are deeply embedded in the lives of Indigenous Christians, and their traditional secular liturgies have significantly influenced their approach to Christian worship. As a result, syncretic religions and rituals have emerged among the tribes, seeking supernatural experiences and healing from physical, mental, and spiritual illnesses. Despite the salvific experience and the indigenization of Christianity, beliefs in Indigenous spirits and their powers continue to coexist with the Christian faith, fostering syncretism and new pagan practices. A transformation in Indigenous ministry should begin with a syncretic approach that incorporates Indigenous cultural practices into worship services without criticism or judgment. In doing so, a thorough analysis and deeper understanding of Indigenous culture and spirituality are essential for integrating cultural expression within an Indigenous congregation as part of the inculturation of Christian worship.

Establishing Indigenous theology and worship from a decolonizing perspective reclaims Indigenous identity while effectively communicating the gospel of Christ. Self-theologizing is the idea that Indigenous Christians can engage in discussions about their religious and cultural beliefs to create theological models that enable them to share the core message of the gospel in their own ways. Indigenous theology highlights the inherent goodness and beauty of creation, suggesting that the Creator intended humanity to preserve nature's ecosystems as a means of partnership with him in the ongoing creation. In the discourse of liberation within Indigenous theology, I contend that the Indigenous church

should initiate fundamental liberation for the nations by fostering spiritual revival rather than developing social or political movements.

What is the most effective way to incorporate Indigenous artifacts into Christian worship? The survey results suggest that worship experiences have varying impacts on individuals. Engaging in communal worship offers various spiritual experiences that are difficult to replicate in other practices. Worship is fundamentally a gift from the Triune God, not merely the result of human effort or creativity. This study has demonstrated that incorporating Indigenous approaches into corporate worship communicates the gospel of Christ more effectively than adhering to a westernized form of worship. Music, for instance, is one of the most adaptable and prevalent art forms among Indigenous peoples. Indigenous-friendly music and hymns can be powerful vehicles for spiritual inspiration during worship services. Narrative preaching enables the preacher to convey the message effectively to Indigenous communities, as oral tradition has historically passed down knowledge and wisdom to subsequent generations. Additional Indigenous-focused elements, such as symbols, images, arts, and other resources, enrich worship experiences. We should carefully examine and refine cultural and religious artifacts as we incorporate Indigenous forms into worship. The involvement of the local congregation is vital in this process.

The shift in worldviews and spiritual development through communal worship reflects the essential traits of spiritually transformed Indigenous congregants. They reshape their traditional worldview through Christian worship, highlighting the significance of eschatology and the hope of eternal life in Christ. Spirit-inspired worship and communion with God nurture religious emotions, empowering individuals and communities with holy affection. These affections align with Christian beliefs, enabling believers to positively

influence others and deepen their spiritual growth. Spiritual wisdom and understanding are accessible to anyone who engages with God, regardless of race or social status. Those endowed with spiritual wisdom consistently seek to know Jesus Christ while remaining humble and passionate about God for the sake of his kingdom. The Spirit of God illuminates their hearts so they may find hope in God and strengthen their faith in living as his holy people.

How do Indigenous traditional perspectives on epistemology, ontology, and axiology transform into the Christian worldview? The newly shaped worldview of Indigenous worshipers through corporate worship shifts traditional perspectives on their knowing, being, and doing. These three interconnected concepts shape the holistic lives of Indigenous converts. Faithful Indigenous believers continue to show profound respect for conventional ways of epistemology by seamlessly integrating Scripture, prayer, and centring their faith on Jesus. From an ontological perspective, they view creation as sacred and interconnected; however, they now honour the Creator through Christ rather than the created world. Christian ethics often reaffirm Indigenous values, such as humility, generosity, and relational living, in axiology while implementing these principles through the life and teachings of Christ. This shift doesn't always replace the Indigenous worldview—more often, it reorients it. Indigenous knowledge, relational harmony, and spiritual awareness remain core values, now rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Having walked alongside Indigenous congregations for many years, I recognize the importance of respecting their traditions and allowing them to integrate their customs into church life. This approach empowers them to express their identities. As a result, they learn to listen to one another and collaborate to find their voices, purifying and sanctifying

cultural elements that enable them to worship God within their culture. Over time, the image of the embodied cross among them may become more pronounced. These transformations stem from the experiences of Indigenous believers as they work together to articulate their voices and refine their cultural elements in light of biblical teachings. Unfortunately, the efforts of church leaders, including pastoral ministers and biblical educators, have not led to a shift in their conventional views on knowledge, reality, and values to align with biblical perspectives. Indigenous churches should address this issue independently rather than relying solely on non-Indigenous pastors or theologians for guidance. Meanwhile, non-Indigenous pastors and theologians must listen to Indigenous congregations and learn how to foster greater patience.

In that view, I presented the concept of the "fifth self," which relates to self-sanctification as an extension of the fourth self in self-theologizing. The "fifth self" embodies the idea that Indigenous congregations should examine, purify, and sanctify their traditional elements and rituals to ensure their suitability for integration into Christian worship and life. To achieve this, Indigenous believers should embrace the three paradigm shifts for the fifth self, which enable them to purify and sanctify themselves while advancing in their spirituality. Corporate worship is a precious gift from God for his people to fulfill these objectives.

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