

Cultural Theology and Missiology

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Many pastors and Christian leaders believe that the only way to hear from God is through the Bible or from a Christian who preaches the Gospel. The Bible is, of course, our measuring stick of all other revelation and the Bible itself records many accounts of extra-Biblical revelation. To understand the Bible thoroughly in all its aspects and historical background is a task that cannot be finished in a lifetime. I have found that, because of the many areas of study necessary to be a pastor, most pastors and Christian leaders have had one or two courses at most in the subject of cultural missiology. Therefore, some cultural missiology can seem new and strange to them.

I will be presenting in this paper just a basic overview of cultural theology/missiology as it pertains to the four subjects below.

Part I: Can an indigenous man who does not have the Bible or has not heard the Gospel know and have a relationship with the God of the Bible?

Part II: Is it scriptural to use an indigenous name of God from an indigenous religion and has there been good, long-lasting fruit in church history from using an indigenous name for God?

Part I – Can an Indigenous Man Who Does Not Have the Bible or has Not Heard the Gospel, Know and Have a Relationship with the God of the Bible?

To say that one can only know and have a relationship with God through the Bible or through someone who shares the Gospel to them is not scriptural. God has spoken to many people who were not Jews or Christians. This is not to discount the importance of the Bible. Without the Bible, we would not have a means to discern if a supernatural communication was from God or demons! The Bible is our measuring stick of truth. Without the Bible recording many of these incidences, we would not know that God spoke to other peoples (Gentiles) throughout history.

There was also one thing that the Lord hid from their eyes, *“Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.”* (Romans 16:25-27)

Although men may know God, they still need to be told about Jesus.

The following is a brief list of some of the people listed in the Bible who heard from God after the Fall of Adam and Eve outside of the Special Revelation of God to Israel, in the person of Jesus, or the Bible.

Enoch: Had such a close relationship with God that God “took him,” he never died and went straight to heaven. (Genesis 5:22)

Noah: God told Noah about the judgment to come and specifically how to build an ark. (Genesis 6:9-22)

Abraham: God spoke to Abraham, who was a Chaldean. He most likely had household god at the time God chose to communicate to him like his clansman, Laban (Gen. 31:19-35) and worshipped the Gods of the Chaldeans. (Genesis 12:1-4)

Lot: God sent angels to Lot to save him from the judgment of Sodom. (Genesis 19:1)

Job: God had a very close relationship with Job. Most church historians believe that Job was a contemporary of Abraham because of the culture he lived in. Because of cultural evidence, some historians believe he was an Edomite. Job even knew that there was a savior and knew he would be resurrected in the flesh to see God (Job 19:25-26).

Canaanite: Melchizedek was the Canaanite priest/king of Salem (Jerusalem) and follower of the same God (El - El Shaddai/El Elyon) who called Abraham out of Ur. Abraham acknowledged this by giving him the first recorded tithe. (Gen 14:18-21)

Philistine: God gave a dream to Abimelech, King of Gerar (Genesis 20:6-7), even though he probably was a worshipper of Molech, to whom babies were sacrificed alive. Although another meaning for “Melech” is “King,” his name means: “My father is Melech (Molech).”

Babylonian: God gave Nebuchadnezzar dreams (Daniel 2, 4).

Midianites: Jethro, priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, was a follower of "El Shaddai" like Melchizedek.ⁱ He was also called "Reuel," meaning, "Friend of El (God)." (Exodus 2:18). Balaam was a Midianite living in Pethor, Mesopotamia (Numbers 22:5). Balaam was a famous "heathen" prophet of God (Num. 22:5-6). He heard from God and God also sent an angel to him and had his donkey speak to him (Num. 22:8-24:25)

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, revised edition says, "*In the rest of the OT it (the El Elyon form of the name of God) occurs for the most part in poetry, especially in Psalms, is always synonymous with Yahweh, and is uniformly translated 'the Most High.'* Ps 91:1 combines 'Elyon, 'El Shaddai, and Yahweh in one confession of trust in God. The same grouping appears in the oracles of Balaam (Num 24:16)."ⁱⁱ

Egyptians: Hagar, God sent an angel to her (Gen. 16:7-11). God also gave dreams to the baker, butler and Pharaoh of Gen. 40-41. God spoke to Pharaoh Necho who rebuked the king of Judah, Josiah, in the name of God. (2 Chron. 35:20-24).

New Testament: The wise men who came to see Jesus (Matthew 2:1-2, 12). The Roman Centurion, Cornelius, saw an angel who directed him to Peter (Acts 10).

Peter said, "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.." (Acts 10:34b-35 NKJ) This scripture complements Romans 2:11-16, "*For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law; (For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another;) In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.*" And 1 John 4:7-8, "*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*" Most Christians know some truly loving non-Christians. Romans 13:8 also says, "*Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*" Romans 13:10 says, "*Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*" Galatians 5:14 says, "*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*"

ⁱ Miller, Harper's Bible Dictionary, pg. 333

ⁱⁱ International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, revised edition, Copyright © 1979 by Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Romans 1:20 tells us, *“For the invisible things of him (God) from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse.”* This scripture shows that a revelation of God has been made to all men from the creation of the world until today. This revelation is not dim but “clearly seen” and is not just a vague revelation of God but is knowledge of his “eternal power” and “Godhead” (his nature). A clear, definite, and detailed revelation of God is available to all men who seek Him since the creation of the world. This type of communication from God showing who He is through natural things is found in God’s communications with the indigenous man, Job (Job 12:7-9 and Job 38-41). Job also said *“I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!”* Job 19:25-27 NIV

Acts 17:26 says, *“From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.”* Why did God place the nations where they should be and set the time of their living in that place? *“God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. ‘For in him we live and move and have our being.’ As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’”* This scripture again confirms that God made himself available to those who wanted to find him from the creation of the world until now. He made himself so available to all men that “we live and move and have our being” in Him.

Matthew Henry says of Acts 17:27, *“The Lord of all, as he is rich (Rom 10:12), so he is nigh (Deut 4:7), to all that call upon him. He that wills us to pray every where, assures us that he is no where far from us; whatever country, nation, or profession we are of, whatever our rank and condition in the world are, be we in a palace or in a cottage, in a crowd or in a corner, in a city or in a desert, in the depths of the sea or afar off upon the sea, this is certain, God is not far from every one of us.”*ⁱⁱⁱ Adam Clarke says about Acts 17:27, *“[Feel after him] Pseelapheeseian auton, that they might grope after him, as a person does his way who is blind or blindfolded. The Gentiles, who had not a revelation, must grope after God, as the principle of spiritual life, that they might find him to be a Spirit, and the source of all intellectual happiness; and the apostle seems to state that none need despair of finding this fountain of goodness, because he is not far from every one of us.”*^{iv}

ⁱⁱⁱ Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, PC Study Bible Formatted Electronic Database
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^{iv} Adam Clarke's Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright © 1996, 2003, 2005, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc.

Examples from Church history of indigenous men who heard from God:

Africa

A man named Warrasa Wange of the Gedeo people of south-central Ethiopia was a worshipper of Magano, the omnipotent Creator of all that is. Only a few of the several million Gedeo people still remembered and worshipped Magano like Warrasa did. One day while Warrasa was praying to Magano, asking Him to please reveal Himself to his people, he had an amazing vision. He saw two white skinned strangers erect flimsy shelters under the shade of a large sycamore tree near his hometown of Dilla. Then Warrasa heard a voice saying, *“These men will bring you a message from Magano, the God you seek. Wait for them.”*

Warrasa waited 8 years. During that time, several others among his people prophesied that strangers would soon arrive with a message from Magano.

Finally, in December of 1948, two Caucasian missionaries pitched their tents under the large sycamore tree near Warrasa’s village of Dilla, fulfilling his vision.

Through these two white skinned missionaries, Warrasa became a follower of Jesus Christ, Son of Manago. Warrasa has helped the missionaries as they built over 200 churches averaging over 200 members each among his people.^v

The Mbaka people of Central Africa knew the creator god by the name “Koro.” Most of them had forgotten about this god. Ferdinand Rosenau and his Baptist colleagues first preached among the Mbaka in the early 1920s. The Mbaka responded eagerly to the Gospel. Later, Ferdinand’s son, Eugene Rosenau, Ph.D. recorded an account given to him by Mbaka tribesmen. *“Koro, the Creator, sent word to our forefathers long ages ago that He has already sent His Son into the world to accomplish something wonderful for all mankind. Later, however, our forefathers turned away from the truth about Koro’s Son. In time they even forgot what it was that He accomplished for mankind. Since that time of ‘the forgetting,’ successive generations of our people have longed to discover the truth about Koro’s Son. But all we could learn was that messengers would eventually come to restore that forgotten knowledge to us.”* His father was one of those messengers!^{vi}

South East Asia

The Karen live in northern Thailand and Myanmar. They had a tradition that they had known and followed the Creator God whom they called “Y`wa.” However, they lost the book of his precepts. Their ancestors lost their way to God and could no longer find his trail. Because they could no longer find their way to God,

^v Eternity in Their Hearts” Don Richardson, pages 48-50

^{vi} “Eternity in Their Hearts” by Don Richardson, pages 50-52

they were forced to worship the “Nats,” demonic spirits who would grant healing or safety for costly sacrifices. There was however, a precious prophecy among their people that someday, a white skinned stranger would bring back the book that they had lost and they would be able to find God’s trail again.^{vii} When a missionary finally shared the Gospel with a Karen man, he realized that this was the book they were waiting for; he immediately began spreading the word with great joy. Excitement about the book that said their God’s son made a way for them to return to him spread like wildfire. It spread so fast among the Karen that missionaries could not keep up with the Karen converts. When missionaries arrived at one Karen village, they found 5,000 Karen converts ready to be baptized. The Karen consider themselves to be a Christian nation today.^{viii} This prophecy of the book is so important to the Karen that it is a part of the Karen national anthem! The Karen became nearly 100% Christian. Even today, nearly 200 years later, it is estimated that 80-90% of the Karen are Christian. I preached one Sunday at a Karen village in the mountains of Northern Thailand and the whole village came out to church. The fruits have been very good and long lasting.

Hawai’i

When the first Christian missionaries arrived in Hawai’i, they were directed to Kailua on the Big Island where the king resided. Hewahewa, the High Priest of the old Hawaiian religion, had given a prophecy to the new King of Hawai’i. He pointed to a rock on the shore of Kaiula Bay, a bay near the King’s residence and said, “*Here O king, the new God shall come!*” When the missionaries reached Kailua Bay, they landed on the very rock Hewahewa had prophesied over. This rock still remains today and is known as the “Plymouth Rock of Kona.”^{ix} It lies under the pier next to the King Kamehameha Hotel in Kailua-Kona, Hawai’i.

Several Hawaiian prophets prophesied the coming of the True God. One old Hawaiian prophecy said the true God would return in a form they would not recognize^x and another said the god of peace would return in a small black box and speak a language they would not understand.^{xi} The first missionary stepped onto the rock the High Priest of the old Hawaiian religion had prophesied over carrying a small black box. Because they were hand pressed, Bibles were highly valued. Special boxes were made to protect them, especially on long voyages. When the box was opened by the king, the book inside (the Bible) contained a strange language they could not understand. Various Hawaiian priests then

vii Bunker, A., *Soo Thah, A Tale of the Making of the Karen Nation*, Fleming H. Revell C., 1902, pp. 79-94

viii Richardson, D., *Eternity In Their Hearts*, Regal Books, 1981, pp. 73-109

ix Gessler, *Hawai’i, Isles of Enchantment*, p. 58

Kailua-Kona Walking Tour Brochure.

x Hon. Star Bulletin, *All About Hawai’i*, pp 28-29

xi Gessler, *Hawai’i, Isles of Enchantment*, p. 59

Taylor, Hon. Star Bulletin, Mon., June 19, 1961

proclaimed that the Hawaiian God of Peace had returned in his new form. The new God, the true God of the Hawaiian people, had returned as prophesied!

Maori (New Zealand)

A Maori prophecy was given in 1766, three years before Cook arrived in New Zealand (before any Western contact). The prophecy concerned two children who would be born to two cousins. After their birth, strangers would arrive bringing their new God. 'Te ingoa o to ratou Atua, **ko Tama I Rorokutia**, he Atua pai, otira, ka ngaro ano te tangata', meaning, "*The name of their new God will be 'The Son Who was Killed.'*" The prophecy also said that He was a good God, but the Maori people would be oppressed.^{xii}

North American (Native American)

Inupiat (Eskimo)

Maniilaq was a prophet held in high regard by the Inupiat of the Northwest Arctic. Maniilaq was born in the early 1800s.

When Maniilaq was a young man, he was sitting in the woods one day, admiring God's creation. A small bird called to him saying "*Father and Son. Father and Son, the source of intelligence, the source of thought.*" This experience is a prime example of Job 12:7-10, "*But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds of the air, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish of the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.*"

Maniilaq listened to this source of intelligence and he said that he was actually bringing home a ray of light each time he listened to it. He said he was bringing this light into his thoughts and mind by remembering those two words, "*Father and Son.*"

One of Maniilaq's many prophecies was that strange white skinned people would come and bring the book that would tell his people about the Son of the Father. The source of intelligence told him not to wait until they came but to begin worshipping the Son now. When the white missionaries first came with the Bible, they found a group of people already worshipping the Father and the Son, they were also setting aside the seventh day of the week as a special day to do this.

xii Interview with Maori Historian, Charles Matthews in Sept. 1999

(Much of this material came from tape-recorded discussions on Maniilaq by the elders of the Nana Region of Alaska, during the 1978 Nana Elders Conference in Kotzebue.)^{xiii}

Another Inuit prophecy was given on King Island which is Ninety miles northwest of Nome, Alaska. Paul Tiulana is a traditional chief of the King Island people. He was born on King Island in the early 1920s before any white men came to live there. As a young boy, an Inuit elder told Tiulana (His Christian name, Paul, was given to him later when he was baptized), that a medicine man long ago taught that the universe had a Creator. He also taught that, if you eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Creator, you will be safe.^{xiv} (See Matt. 26:26-28)

Salish

Shining Shirt was a *Kalispel* holy man and chief of the eastern Salish. It is passed down that a Power gave Shining Shirt a great revelation. The Power revealed that there was a Good One and an Evil One of which the Indians knew very little. However, there would come a time when fair skinned strangers dressed in long black skirts would come and teach them the truth. The Black Robes would change the lives of the people in new ways. The Power then gave Shining Shirt a talisman of terrific strength. It was a piece of metal inscribed with a cross. He also told his people that there is a God, although, his true name was not revealed to him. He temporarily called him *Amotkan*, which means, *He-who-lives-on-most-high*. It was the people's duty to pray to Amotkan for Amotkan made the world and all the people in it.^{xv} (From the book, "One Tribe, Many Nations" by Richard Twiss)

Spokane

In 1782, the holy man, Circling Raven of the Middle Spokanes, spoke a prophecy. At the time, he was in a crisis of faith in his God which his people called, *Quilent-sat-men* (He-Made-Us). He was losing faith because his people were being wiped out by small pox. No matter how he tried to heal them, they died, including his son. Circling Raven told his brother, "*If the righteous die while the evil men live, why should we continue to follow our laws? Let us live like animals.*" His brother however, persuaded Circling Raven to hold onto his faith in Quilent-sat-men and his moral laws. He also persuaded him to go to the top of Mount Spokane to fast and pray for four days. According to Spokane tradition, at the end of four days, Circling Raven received a vision. He saw white skinned

^{xiii} The full transcript is available at the public library in Anchorage, Alaska

^{xiv} Lowry, *Natives of the Far North*, pp. 56-58

^{xv} KSPS Public Television, *Sovereign Nations*, Video

Twiss, *One Tribe, Many Nations*, pp. 78-79

men wearing strange clothes carrying in their hands leaves bound together (a book). He was told to prepare his people for these white skinned strangers and to pay attention to the teaching that came from the leaves bound together.^{xvi} (From the book, "One Tribe, Many Nations" by Richard Twiss)

Lakota (Sioux)

For 2000 years the Lakota have passed down a story of a group of young people who saw a vision of a buffalo dancing around a tree. They went to a holy man and asked him what this vision meant. The holy man told them that some day a man in a faraway country would be born of a virgin, suffer under the hands of his own people, and eventually die on a tree.^{xvii}

South America

Satere

The Satere tribe of Brazil dwells in the Amazon jungle. Their most prized possession is a sacred paddle. The paddle was so old that the Satere could no longer read the inscriptions on it. They only knew that the inscriptions on the paddle were ten laws to live by. On one side were all the "dos" and on the other, all of the "don'ts." The Satere had a tradition that someday a prophet would come and translate the sacred paddle and teach them to read and write. A Wycliffe missionary came to the Satere and translated the words on the paddle. They were the Ten Commandments! The whole tribe came to Jesus!^{xviii} This is another example of a 100% success rate when a missionary used what God placed in a culture to lead those people to Him.

Modern personal instances of God communicating to people:

Dean Fujishima, a man living in Hawai'i, was seeking for God after his second suicide attempt. He was crying out to God in desperation when he heard a voice say, "*I am the only one who can help you.*" He did not know who this entity was and began going to religious places he knew of to pray. He went to a Christian church but also went to his family Buddhist temple and prayed in front of the altar. The second time he went to the Buddhist altar to pray, he hear this entity say, "*Do not pray here again.*" He is now a pastor in Hawai'i.^{xix}

xvi Ibid.

xvii Oral History passed down to Art Begay

xviii Braulia Ribero, YWAM missionary in the Amazon

xix Telephone interview with Pastor Dean Fujishima, 4/11/08

A Japanese woman is a member of one of Rev. Junji Ono's house churches in Hawai'i. She has always believed in an omnipotent God and would daily pray to Him at the most spiritual place in her old traditional house in Japan, in front of the Butsudān (Buddhist altar). Later she married an American English teacher who used to deride Christianity. They moved to Hawaii. One day her husband suddenly accepted Christ due to the prayers of his colleagues. When she went to a Christian church with him, she realized that this was the same God she had always known and prayed to".^{xx}

These experiences reflect Acts 17:27 (NIV), "*God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us.*" God, in his great love, reaches out to sinful man if he is "groping" after him even in a misguided way.

Associate Professor, Toshifumi Uemura, of the Japan Lutheran Seminary was about to take the final step to become a Shinto priest when his Shinto mentor told him that Jesus Christ was the true God. He, therefore, decided to become a Christian instead.^{xxi}

Erwin Spruth was one of the first Lutheran missionaries in what is now the Enga Province of Papua New Guinea. Using the trade language, Melanesian Pidgin, to communicate in his early efforts, he preached to the Enga tribesman. He was startled when they nodded in agreement and made comments like, "*This is Rare's God.*" and "*We've heard this before.*" "*Who's Rare?*" he asked. They answered, "*Oh, He's a very old man. He used to live by himself up in the bush, but he's too old and we brought him down to take care of him. He used to tell us about this same God that you are telling us about.*"

Rev. Spruth really wanted to meet Rare, so the men took him to the old man's house the next day. As they spoke together, Rare affirmed that he knew the "Great and Powerful One" of which the missionary spoke. "*He appeared to me up in the forest,*" Rare said, "*He told me if I honored Him instead of offering pigs to my ancestors, He would take care of me. He told me that I should tell my brothers about Him, too. But they never believed me.*" After talking with Rev. Spruth about Jesus, Rare was convinced that he had met Jesus Christ on the trail in a vision those many years before, but that he had only known Him as the "Great and Powerful One." Erwin Spruth was, likewise, convinced. He wanted to interview him further, but that night Rare died.^{xxii}

xx Interview at Rev. Ono's House Church in Honolulu

xxi Pastor's seminar, Yokota Air Base, March 2007

xxii Interview with David Wakefield, 4/12/08

David Wakefield is Director for Wycliffe's Multicultural Community Council in the Asia and Pacific area. Years ago, he and his wife translated Scripture for the Miniafia people on the North Coast of Papua New Guinea. He tells this story: *"One of my first friends in Utukwaf village was Koyari Baida, the village magistrate. He was a wise and thoughtful man, but had refused to believe the Gospel message preached by the missionaries. He used to say, 'How can I know what is true: the words from that black book? Or the ways of my ancestors?'"*

After we had been friends for about a year, Koyari came to me one night. 'My son,' he asked. 'Do you believe in dreams?' I told him that I didn't trust most of my dreams and blamed them on indigestion. We laughed. Then I told him that God definitely does speak to people sometimes in dreams. Turning my Bible to Genesis 40-41 I paraphrased the story of Joseph in Miniafia. I told how he interpreted the dreams of the Butler, the Baker and the Pharaoh.

As I finished, Koyari nodded. 'You might understand my dream then.' He continued: 'I've been dreaming much lately. And in every dream a voice keeps telling me that what you and the missionaries are saying is true: the Christian way is true. The Voice tells me, 'You are old and cannot read the Book, but this is most important: you must love Me more than anything or anyone, and you must love all people the same as you love yourself.' Then he asked me, 'Does your book say anything about that?'"

I translated Matthew 22:36-40 for him, 'Master, which [is] the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second [is] like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.' On the basis of the agreement between the 'Black Book' and his dream, Koyari nodded. 'Now I know the truth,' and he accepted Jesus."^{xxiii}

A friend who ministers in Muslim countries told me that many in these countries are turning to Jesus because Jesus, angels, or other spiritual persons have come to them in visions or dreams telling them Jesus is the true God. He said that entire villages have had the same dream about Jesus and have all come to Christ.^{xxiv}

So we can see that there are many indigenous people around the world who heard from God without the Torah or Bible throughout history until today. These are only a small portion of the incidences I have researched or heard about. I need to emphasize again however that the Bible is our measuring stick of truth, the best way to know God, and even if indigenous people have a revelation of God, they still need to hear about Jesus! However, the indigenous revelation of

^{xxiii} Ibid.

^{xxiv} This person must remain anonymous for his protection

God is important because it is God's love letter to them and lets them know that He loves and cares about them. The Bible says that we love God because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19) Therefore, this love letter to indigenous people is vital to preserve because it is a legacy of God's love for them.