

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](https://paypal.me/robbradshaw)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *Indian Journal of Theology* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_ijt_01.php

Teaching Third World Contextual Theologies from Ecumenical Perspective – Tribal/Indigenous People's Theology

A. Wati Longchar*

Prologue

The development of the third world contextual theologies is a part of the larger movement of liberation and self-hood. Though contextualization of theology has been the way of doing theology throughout the history of Christian thought the introduction of the Theological Education Fund, the predecessor of the Programme on Ecumenical Theological Education of the WCC has made significant contribution in doing contextual theologies. It encourages and enables theological institutions and individual theologians in their efforts to develop theology in their own contexts. Many creative and innovative programmes have been encouraged, initiated and incorporated in the on going programme of theological training.

Contextual Theologies

The third world contextual theologies such as Feminist/Womenist theology, Black theology, Minjung theology, Dalit theology, Tribal/Indigenous theology are all contextual theologies. They are rooted in the experiences of the people—the poor and marginalized. In a sense, all theologies can be considered as contextual theology. For example, the Neo-Orthodox theologians like Barth and Brunner of the 19th century have reflected deeply on the crisis of the European civilization which was brought about by the World War and the failure of liberal theology. All theologies developed at that time bear cultural, social and political imprints of the time. Then, what makes the third world contextual theologies different from other dominant theologies?

1. *The context of the poor and marginalized is taken seriously.* The dominant theologies are considered as science of faith drawn from scripture and tradition. It takes the realities of the context of dominant groups and communities. The perspectives of the rulers and the elites become the paradigm for doing theology. Whereas in the third world contextual theologies, the experience, hardship and spirituality of the poor and marginalized people like the indigenous people, women, the poor become the vital source for doing theology. It is a theology from 'below' and 'underside of history'.

* Dr. A. Wati Longchar, formerly Professor of Theology at Eastern Theological College, Jorhat, Assam, is the E.T.E. (Ecumenical Theological Education) Consultant for Asia and Pacific.

TEACHING THIRD WORLD CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES

2. *The sources:* In the dominant theologies, the language, content and framework of theologizing are drawn from the philosophical insights and categories. Theology becomes highly intellectual and rational in its approach. However, in the third world contextual theologies, the sources are drawn from the experience of the people themselves; their symbols, stories, myths, songs, dances and other forms of expression become the source of doing theology. Therefore, the third world contextual theologies draw insights and categories not only from philosophy but also from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, economics and other forms of reflective expression.
3. *Liberation:* A Major focus of the dominant theologies is to engage in systematic constructions of timeless theological concepts (they claim to be) beginning from the doctrine of God, the Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, the problem of Evil, the Creation, Human, Sin, the Atonement, the Church and Ministry, the Sacraments, Salvation and Christian Hope. However, the primary objective of theological reflection of the third world contextual theologies is to help people in their struggle for transforming their situation of injustice and oppression. It is not only to discern and articulate God's act, i.e. to give rational for their faith, but to enable them to transform their situation in accordance with the utopia or the vision of the gospel. In this sense, we say that the third world contextual theologies are liberative. They give rise to critical awareness among people *vis-a-vis* their situation of bondage. They provide a vision for the future, and empower people to change the existing values and relationships. They are integral to people's on-going search for their identity and their struggles for justice.¹

With the emergence of contextual theologies, the approach and content of theology have changed considerably during the last few decades. Today, students are oriented to reread the Bible to help people, especially the poor and oppressed in their struggle for justice and freedom. Theological education is seen as a vocation to bring good news to the poor and struggle for justice against the structures of oppressions. The dimension is very unique and a pervasive contribution to the poor and oppressed people. It enables them to discover their identity, rights and dignity. It helps them to engage in a new way of doing theology by relating the gospel to the socio-politico-cultural realities of the people.

However, all the contextual theologies differ considerably in its content and approach. For example, feminist/womenist theology is concerned with women's liberation, the Black theology is concerned with black struggle for liberation from racism, dalit theology's main focus is to dismantle the oppressive caste structure, etc. In the same way, the tribal/indigenous theology differs considerably in its methodology from other third world contextual theologies. The crucial issue here is: How do we teach a contextual theology from ecumenical perspective? Reflecting upon the indigenous people context, I would like to show how it can be taught from ecumenical perspective.

Who are the Tribal/Indigenous People?

There is no universally accepted definition of Indigenous or Tribal People. A working definition used by the United Nation Sub-Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities may be-useful here:

Indigenous communities, people and nations, are those-which having an historical

continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, and their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as people in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institution and legal system.

Socially, the tribal/indigenous people are the most exploited and divided people in the world. Their history is a history of defeat, suffering, and oppression. They have suffered discrimination, genocide, exploitation and alienation in different stages of their history. As a result of many years of slavery and subjugation, the tribal/indigenous people have lost their self-esteem and confidence that developed into a feeling of inferiority. It prevails even today. In the eyes of the dominant communities, the tribal/indigenous people are looked down upon as backward, primitive and uncivilized people living in the hills and forests. The term 'tribal/' 'indigenous' itself carries a very strong pejorative, negative and derogatory meaning. In the caste-dominated society, like in India, the tribal/indigenous people suffer the stigma of being untouchables.

In recent years, a peculiar form of alienation, injustice and humiliation is being enforced with fast emerging globalization. With the accelerating deterioration of the global economic and political situation, the indigenous/tribal people face further marginalization and graver threats of continuity and sustainability. In the modern world, the tribal/indigenous people have become the victims of big reservoirs, mega projects, wild life sanctuaries, mines, industries, etc. They are forcefully evicted from their ancestral land and the abode of the various spirits they worship using repressive measures and often without proper compensation. They are simply ignored, silenced and despised. It is said that there are currently 1,600 dams under construction 42 countries worldwide. According to the World Bank, the construction of 300 large dams each year would mean the displacement of more than four million Indigenous people from their territories.² Likewise, in the name of development, the tribal/indigenous people's right and their existence are completely ignored and the tribal/indigenous people who are already powerless and exploited are further reduced to powerlessness and bondage.

In search of a fuller life, justice and equality and to protect their identity and land, the indigenous people in many parts of the world have organized themselves to fight against the oppressors for their rights. Since the dominant societies do not listen to their cries and do not recognize them with human rights and dignity, some indigenous people have gone upto the extent of armed struggle. The Policy Makers, instead of recognizing the movement as a justice issue, try to suppress the movement by army rule. In the process, many villages were burnt down to ashes, not only once, but three to four times and many innocent people have been killed. Churches were used sacrilegiously as concentration camps. Worshippers were beaten up or tortured to death and to add to this, women were raped even in the place of worship. Such human right violations go on and on in many places in Asia. Many people continue to live in tears, pain, fear and suffering. All that people can do is to weep silently within their hearts. Indigenous/tribal people continue to experience such misery, pain and humiliation all over the world. We hear cries of indigenous/tribal people in Aotearoa, New

Zealand, Australia, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Japan, Myanmar, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Fiji and many other places.

What is Tribal/Indigenous Theology?

Tribal/indigenous theology is born out of the experience of various forms of injustice and exploitation. It is a theology that attempts to express Christian faith in socio-cultural, traditional and liturgical thought patterns of the people. We can say that tribal/indigenous theology is a resistance theology - resistance to affirm the dignity of life. The experiences of oppressions and hardships, stories, myths, symbols, dances, songs, and the tribal/indigenous people's spirituality have become the vital sources for doing theology.

Like other contextual theologies, tribal/indigenous theology is also a contextual theology, a theology from 'below' and 'underside of history'. It seeks to reflect on the faith experience of the tribal/indigenous people from their inferiority complex, from oppression and discrimination by attempting to rediscover the liberative motifs from the tribal/indigenous culture, and by reinterpreting the Bible and Christian traditions. Hence, the focus and goal of the tribal/indigenous theology is liberation. It embraces social, economic, cultural, political and ecological dimensions. In the process of working for their own liberation, the tribal/indigenous people work for the liberation of both the oppressors and the oppressed. It is, therefore, a theology that includes liberation of the whole humanity and of God's creation.

Methodology

However, the point of departure of the indigenous/tribal theology from other third world contextual theologies is that the tribal/indigenous theology seeks liberation from the perspective of 'space'³. In our search for liberation, the issue of space is very central and crucial in doing theology. A peculiar character of tribal/indigenous worldview is that the tribal/indigenous people's culture, religion, spirituality and even the Supreme Being cannot be conceived without "creation/land" or "space". Humans always understand themselves as 'an integral part of creation/land and not apart from it.' Therefore, in the tribal worldview, the issue of the 'space' is not merely a justice to be set alongside other justice concerns. But it is the foundational theology of self-understanding out of which liberation, justice, and then peace will flow naturally and necessarily.⁴ That means relating to integrity of creation/land. Justice to creation/land is the key to liberation and human dignity. That is why harmony with 'space' is the "starting point of the tribal people's spirituality and their search for liberation. Commitment and dedication to the harmony of creation/land springs forth in love, nurture, care and acceptance. In other words, the first act to liberation is justice to creation/land. When we do justice to the land, then love, nurture, care, acceptance and peace flow naturally and necessarily."⁵ When there is justice in the land, the fields and forests and every living things will dance and sing for joy (Ps. 96: 11-12). Thus, an awareness of being one with the whole of creation is the spiritual foundation of the tribal/indigenous people.

From the tribal/indigenous people's perspective, one cannot do theology without relating to the issue of 'space'. A theology that addresses humanity alone and leaves the rest of the cosmos unaddressed is an incomplete theology. Theology becomes impotent when it addresses only humanity. There is no theological justification to reduce theology to mere liberative or transformative activity of humanity. Therefore, the challenge before us is to commit ourselves

to struggles for the transformation of the poor, the weak and the disfigured and also to curtail the over-exploitation of nature. The question of identity, culture and religion of the tribal/indigenous people are also inseparably related to space and thus, the survival crisis of the tribal/indigenous people is an integral part of the ecological crisis in Asia and elsewhere today. Therefore, without restoring justice to space, the tribal/indigenous and oppressed communities like women, dalits will not be able to attain liberation.

Space - A Foundation of Tribal/Indigenous People's Theology

Sayings about the land by the tribals

“The land is the Supreme Being’s land”

“One cannot become rich by selling land”

“Do not be greedy for the land, if you want to live long”

“Land is life”

“The one who does not have land always cheats others or cannot become a good citizen”

“The land cries in the hands of greedy people”

“The land never lies, do not lie to the land”

“Anyone who takes another’s land by giving false witness will not live long”

“The land is like a bird, it flies away soon in the hands of greedy people”

“You can sell other things, but not land”

“You are a stranger without land”

A Prayer

Oh, God, the Creator,

You come out from the soil.

Oh, God, the owner of all rice fields.

Give us a bountiful harvest.

Oh, God, the giver of all blessing.

We bring to you this zu (rice beer).

You drink first and accept our offerings.

A Harvest Song

Oh, children of the earth.

Let us celebrate.

Let us sing and dance.

Let all hear the melody of drum.

It is harvest time.

God has answered our prayer.

The land has brought plenty of rice

The land has brought plenty of fruits

Sing and dance, it is harvest time.

The land occupies a very central place in the tribal/indigenous people's worldview. The indigenous people perceive the land as sacred and co-creator with God. It is the land that owns people and gives them an identity. It is also a temple in and through which people become one not only with the Supreme Being, but also with their ancestors, the spirits and creation.

The tribal/indigenous people's myths and rhetoric speak of the land as belonging to the Supreme Being. Like the Hebrews, [“the Earth is the Lord's and fullness thereof” (Ps. 24:11)], the tribal/indigenous people also affirm that the land belongs to the Supreme Being. The village, clan and individual own the land, but within the wider understanding that the land belongs to the Supreme Being. The Supreme Being alone is the ultimate owner of the land. Thus, the land equally belongs to all with equal rights and freedom to live in it, and no one can claim it exclusively for himself/herself nor can one sell it as though it is one's exclusive property. A human's ownership is only temporary. The whole land is the home of the Supreme Being and humans are only members in it. Hence, the ownership of land by village, clan and individual has to be understood within the greater recognition that the land belongs to the Supreme Being.

In the tribal/indigenous world view, without the land there is no unity between human beings, God and creatures. For example, the Aos and Sangtams of Nagaland (India) call their Supreme Being, *Lijaba*, *Li* means ‘land’ and *jaba* means ‘real’. It means the Supreme Being is ‘the real soil’. Sometime people call the Supreme Being *Lizaba Li* means ‘soil’ and *zaba* ‘either’ meaning ‘the one who enters or indwells into the soil’. The Supreme Being is believed to enter into the soil with the seeds and rises again along with the crops. Thus, the blooming flowers and rice signify the presence of the Supreme Being. Therefore, the whole of creation is the manifestation of the Supreme Being. In other words, the Supreme Being is an integral part of the land; and at the same time, the land is not external to God. Without land, the Supreme Being ceases to work. Thus, in the tribals/indigenous people's view, the land and the Supreme Being are inseparably related. The Supreme Being indwells not only in human persons but also in creation. Thus, the land is life. The land is not a mere space, it is a place which gives identity to the community; it owns people. Without the land, there is no personhood and identity. The misuse of the land implies chaos among creatures. It is like killing one's own mother.

The tribal/indigenous people further perceive the land as mother. Most of the tribes have myths that say that they are born out of the earth. Many indigenous people have myths which speak of their foreparents emerging from stones. Some tribes have myths that speak of their foreparents emerging from a big hole of the earth or from the bowel of the earth. All these myths symbolically tell that the land is the mother, we are born out of the earth. The mother gives life and unity to all living creatures.

It is also the land that gives them an identity. The tribal/indigenous people always regard the land as the symbol of unity. The land holds the clan, village and tribe as one, but it also unites the Supreme Being, spirits, ancestors and creation as one family. Without the land, it is impossible for people to co-exist with other living beings, with their ancestor and their Creator. In other words, if the land is lost, the family, clan and village and the tribe's identity too will be lost. In the tribal understanding, a person who is not deeply rooted in the land

cannot become a good citizen. He/she is like a stranger without an identity and a home. Since the tribal/indigenous people's identity is closely attached to the land, it is usual for the tribal/indigenous to identify themselves with their village or tribe. A stranger rather than giving his/her name, gives the name of his/her village or tribe. Since the community is inseparably related to the land, the individual person's identity is subordinate to the community identity. Thus, the land is an integral part of the tribal people's identity. It is the basis of life and unity.

The tribal/indigenous people's experience of time and history is also related to land. In the tribal/indigenous people's concept, the land decides and creates the time and history. People move along with the soil cycle and surrounding environment. All the festivals and religious activities of the people are centred on the soil cycle. When the land and surrounding environment are destroyed, the tribal/indigenous people, experience a big vacuum; the rhythm of life is jeopardised. Thus, for the tribal/indigenous people, the whole universe is a religious universe. Rocks and boulders, trees and rivers are not just empty objects, but religious objects; the voices and songs of animals speak of a religious language; the eclipse of the sun and of the moon are not simply a silent phenomenon of nature, it speaks to the community that observes it, often warning of an impending danger and misfortune. It is in this milieu that the tribal people experiences history and time. Thus, the tribal/indigenous people concept of history and time is inseparably interlinked and rooted in the land and creation.

Unlike other religions of the world, the tribal/indigenous religion does not have any founder(s) or reformer(s) or guide(s) nor do tribal people dance and sing adoring a divine historical person(s). The tribal/indigenous people have traditions of divine births and manifestations, but they are not worshipped. They have priests, officiating elders, diviners and other famous men and women in the body of beliefs, and mythologies which are respected and which form an integral part of the religious milieu, but they are neither worshipped nor adored as divine representatives. Instead, the tribal/indigenous people dance and sing with the land itself. A peculiar feature of the tribal/indigenous religion is that the whole religious systems are centred and deeply rooted on the land itself. The religious practices, rituals, ceremonies, festivals, and dances are all related to the land. This understanding of the land provides an ethical basis of sharing, caring and responsible stewardship.

Ecumenical Perspective of the Local Theology

The immediate context of a theologian is the local community. He/she engages in the local context to discern God's purpose in life. However, the lives of the people are very much determined by what is going on globally. For example, the process of Globalization. It has no boundary. It affects every local community. Media stereotypes of persons, places, lifestyles and ways of thinking and behaving affect the whole society. The life-styles of the rich and famous become the models for others to follow. If they do not comply because they cannot afford to, they are garbage.⁷ Therefore, the local issues and global issues cannot be understood in isolation. They are inseparably interrelated. To do theology contextually, we must also engage and take in to consideration the global perspective of the local context. Each contextual theology must have ecumenical nature, otherwise it will lose its significance.

I have highlighted the indigenous people's theology at length. How do we teach this local theology from ecumenical perspective or does it bear ecumenical nature? The problem

faced by the indigenous people demand global concern. We will also discover that the indigenous people's worldview provide a new perspective in our search for a sustainable world.

If we consider the tribal/indigenous people's unrest and ethnic tension and fighting in different parts of the world, we will discover that the issue of 'space' and resources of the earth dominates all other issues; the core of human suffering is inseparably connected to violation of space; First, our selfishness, greed and exploitative attitude towards our mother earth brings poverty, oppression, ethnic conflict and many other forms of injustice. The moment we cut ourselves off from reverential relationships with the land, we are uprooted from the world of mystery and we live a life of indecency to many. Never ending exploitation of a limited earth's resources ends up with a few economic affluent individuals making majority of the poor to struggle with a life of misery and hunger. This disparity makes everyone turn against each other; everyone becomes a threat to the other's peaceful existence. This happens state wise, nationally and even locally. Suspicion, doubt and selfishness take precedence to trust, love, care and acceptance. Our rootlessness in the land makes life without meaning and purpose.⁸

Second, due to our wrong orientation towards the mystery of nature. With the advancement of knowledge in the field of science, people have begun to believe that there is nothing amazing about the cosmos. The physical world is viewed merely as a sum-total of many material components and energies. Humans can understand, predict and control everything. We are separated from, and master of, the earth. Nature is something 'out there', apart from us and also apart from God. This wrong notion justifies manipulation and domination of space. Without any religious restraints, the land and its resources are exploited, abused, denying the right of everybody. Today the land and natural resources that sustained lives for centuries are now forcibly taken away in the name of development without proper alternatives to live on. Indigenous people have not only lost their soil-centred culture, but also have been reduced to bonded labourers in their own land.

And finally, due to lack of our proper orientation to God, the source and the sovereign Lord of all creation. Instead of affirming the Divine presence in the universe, human beings consider themselves as the lord of all. Every person wants to control and manipulate the land and its resources threatening the rhythm of the universe. "Therefore, the land mourns and all who dwell in it languish and also beasts of field and the birds of the air and even the fish of the sea are taken away" (Hos. 4:3). The attempt by the servant to take over the place of the master at home provokes other servants who are also struggling for lordship and thus, the home of everybody becomes a battlefield. Nobody is at peace with anybody. Therefore, for the tribal/indigenous people, doing justice to land is the foundation for life. When we do justice to the land, the tribal/indigenous people will find a healthier life in God's *oikos*.

Therefore, the indigenous people's view of nature helps us to recognize that the struggles and suffering of the poor and marginalized are integral part of the global economic system and ever-increasing life-style perpetuated by media. The poor and marginalized people cannot attain liberation without doing justice to the whole of creation. This demands us to affirm a new spirituality and adopt a new God-world-human relationship.

As noted earlier, the indigenous/tribal people hold a very high nature-centred spirituality,

an ethics of responsibility and respect for all creation. The closeness to nature in which tribal/indigenous people live has sensitized them to the ecosystems that function in their environment and beyond. They help us to discover that the nature is not merely a physical reality, but a 'being' with which persons can directly get in touch, address, communicate with, protect, and cultivate' relations with.⁹

According to indigenous people's worldview, the land is conceived as an integral part of the web of life, physical and spiritual, but not inert, empty and passive. This dynamic and living understanding of land has sophisticated ecological and social implications. This understanding, when interpreted with sound biblical exegesis and theological implication, can provide a powerful antidote to the exploitative dominance that has characterized many Western attitudes to the surrounding world.¹⁰

Further, the strong sense of community rooted in tribal/indigenous culture and land is a wonderful asset to be shared with a postmodern, westernized, individualized world of people who have lost a sense of corporate identity and life. The goal of finding an integrated wholeness of relationships with God, nature and other persons reflects much that is deeply needed in contemporary life. The tribal/indigenous theology is uniquely placed to provide ideals and models to help counter these trends.

The indigenous people uphold an organic worldview. They perceive that the whole reality as one whole. In this understanding, everything constitutes a complex set of relationships, it includes everything, neglects nothing, values everything, everything is linked together. Each one enjoys its own autonomy and thus equally valuable and important. This view of life helps us to reconceive Christian understanding of God-world-human relationship from a wider perspective. I would like to provide a hint in this direction. Since the indigenous worldview affirms high spirituality of interrelatedness, it will help us to understand Christian theology with new meanings:

- (i) We conceive of God as the one who is organically related to the whole of creation. Though God is a distinct and transcendental being, yet God is an integral part of creation. Creation is also not external to God. Without the land and creation, God ceases to be God, God ceases to work and reveal. God becomes inactive without creation. This idea rules out a conception of God as monarch who rules the world from above imposing his divine laws or a God who is detached from the world. But God is immanent in the world who comes and dines, drinks, speaks and reveals to us as a person and even through animals, trees, wind and so forth. It helps us to affirm God's creativity, his active involvement in the whole of earth, but not limited to rational beings alone. Since God is an integral part of creation, God suffers pain when creation suffers, because tribals conceive God as one who comes out from the soil (but not from above).
- (ii) This understanding of God leads us to conceive Christ in a new way. Christ is no longer conceived as the one who works only in the hearts of the believers. But we are challenged to see Christ as the incarnate one who is organically related to the total eco-system. Jesus shares His Being with the whole created order. Since Jesus Christ is an integral part of creation, all parts of creation are now reconciled to Christ. It rejects a Christ of personalism. The incarnation of God in Jesus represents God's entry into finite space. It marks the concretion of all the hope for a land of peace, security and plenty.¹¹ The event of Jesus Christ thus re-established the reality of 'space'.

- (iii) This understanding of God and world further helps us to conceive the work of the Holy Spirit in a wider perspective. We see the Holy Spirit as the one who works not only in the hearts of the believers, but also the one who works and sustains all creation. It inspires all and speaks to all including animals and plants. It is the Spirit that makes all living possible and dynamic. The Spirit works in every life and inspires everything including animals and plants in different ways. Nothing exists without the work of the Holy Spirit even the primeval waters over which the Spirit was hovering at the time of creation (Gen 1:2). By conceiving this habitation of the Spirit in all realities, Leonardo Boff says:

We are submerged in an ocean of life, of spirit, of vibration and communion. We are part of the whole in Spirit who, like the string of pearls, joins all and attracts all towards the heights, in the direction of perfect communion with the Kingdom of the Trinity.¹²

Since the Spirit enlivens the whole world of creation, nature and history becomes not only one whole reality, but dynamic and real.

- (iv) This space-centred theology challenges us to revise our understanding of salvation. Since the self of the Supreme Being is seen in creation and humans are an integral part of it, we are able to affirm that the human attains redemption only in relation to the rest of creation. Together with God, Spirit, and the mother earth, we are redeemed. This idea of redemption further leads us to conceive salvation as a reality that can be experienced authentically here and now. A redeemed person is the one who lives in harmony not only with fellow beings, but also with the mother earth, God and Spirit. This idea rules out Christian understanding of salvation that we narrowly understand in terms of personal salvation and otherworldly.
- (v) A space-centred vision of reality widens our perception of history. Creation becomes the basic component of the interpretation of history. One cannot interpret history without the land, trees, animals, flowers and Spirit. It demands that human history is to be studied within the context of the totality of creation. It means that God must be conceived of not only as God of history but also as God of creation. In other words, history belongs not only to the intelligent beings, but also to the whole of creation. Nature and history are not unrelated to each other, but they are one whole.
- (vi) A space-centred theology enables us to see ourselves as an integral part of the macro-organism. A human ceases to be a true human without God, creature and land. Humans become inactive and inauthentic without creation. Living in harmony within the organic whole is the basis for authentic human existence. This view rules out the notion that elevates intellectual and rational nature as superior to other creatures. We are not apart from creation, but within and in creation. We are integral parts of the earth's community.
- (viii) A space-centred theology enables us to conceive the church as an integral part of the Supreme Being and the earth. The church becomes God's micro-cosmos. In this understanding of the church as an integral part of the micro-cosmos, we cannot narrowly confine the mission of the church to human world alone. It opens us to the whole of God's cosmos. We are called to commit ourselves in God's cosmic mission. We are called to work for liberation of the whole of God's *oikos*. It is holistic and it involves the transformation of the whole cosmos.¹³

In conclusion, a theologian's immediate context is the local community. We are called to actively engage not only academically and intellectually, but also physically and sensitively in the actual life setting of the people. Therefore, theology is always local with global concerns. The local context in which the church is located and is called to witness and serve is very much influenced by the 'global' phenomenon. Therefore, to do theology contextually, we must take into consideration the global and ecumenical perspective of the local issues.

NOTES

1. K.C. Abraham, "Contextual Theologies" in *Contextual Theological Education*, ed. James Massey (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), p. 18.
2. Engr. Catalino L. Corpuz., Jr. "Two major headaches for indigenous peoples" *Echoes*, 16/1999, p. 11.
3. When we say 'space' it does not mean mere natural objects outside of us. It means a place, a sacred place which gives us an identity and sustenance.
4. For this insight, I owe a deep gratitude of Prof. George Tinker's article on "American Indian & the Art of the Land" which appeared in *Voices From the Third World*, Vol. XIV, No.2 (December 1981) and "Spirituality and Native American Personhood: Sovereignty & Solidarity" in *Spirituality of the Third World*, ed. by K.C. Abraham & Bannedatte Mbuy (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), pp. 127-128.
5. George Tinker, "Spirituality and Native American Personhood. Sovereignty & Solidarity" in *Spirituality of the Third World*, pp. 127-128.
6. *Ibid.*
7. For more detail see Peter Consalves, sdb. "A Techno-Media Age: The Promise, the Threat, the Challenge" in *Vidyajyoti: Journal of Theological Reflection*. Volume 65, No. 9. (September 2001), pp. 658-661.
8. Paulachan P. Kochappilly. *Celebrative Ethics: Ecological Issues in the Light of the Syro-Malabar Qurbana* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1999), pp. 348 ff.
9. John S. Mbiti, "When the Bull is in a Strange Country, it does not Bellow" in *In Search of Identity and Tribal Theology. A Tribute to Dr. Renthly Keitzar*. ed. A. Wati Longchar, Jorhat: TSC, 2001, p. 85.
10. *Indigenous Peoples' Struggle for Land and Identity in the Pacific*. Fiji WCC and PCC, 2000, p. 52.
11. Geoffrey R. Lilburne, *A Sense of Place: A Christian Theology of Land* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), pp. 105 ff.
12. Leonardo Boff, "Ecology and Christology: Christian Pan-in-theism" in *Voices from the Third World*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, (June 1993), p. 177.
13. Lilburne, *A sense of Place*, p.105f.