

The Centrality of Contextual Theology for Christian Existence Today¹

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Introduction

Contextual theology is increasingly central for Christian existence throughout the world. It is central because Christianity is growing in the global south, that is, in the world of contextual theologies, or *theologiae in locò* as they were first called. It is central because these contextual theologies of the global south are lived out in communities' lives but not always recognised for what they are. It is central because often in the global north, and in the global south too, these contextual theologies are not regarded as of immense significance for Christian existence throughout the world, not just in their own places.

Asia has been at the very heart of the history of contextual theology. Indigenous Asian Christian theology has, of course, a very long history, as outlined so clearly by Samuel Moffett³, and then by Gillman and Klimkeit.⁴ However, we can see the development of self-conscious *theologiae in locò* and then contextual theologies in Asia since the late 1950s. A vast literature has been produced on the issue of intercultural theology since the first discussions of the so-called *theologiae in locò* took place in the late 1950s, now fifty years ago. The Asian movement for contextual theologies, like other such movements around the world, was very aware that the authentic gospel⁵ or Christ-Event-for-us is not pre-packaged by cultural particularity, but is living. The church always remains in a constant struggle between the acceptance of the Christ Event within its particular culture in each place, and yet in the wrestling with that which stands over against its own particular acceptance in each place. In this sense the church is always both indigenous and *reformata*

¹ Parts of this paper were delivered at the joint Australian Association of Mission Studies (AAMS) and Charles Sturt University (ACC&C and PACT) Conference on "The Christian Message in the Public Square" in Canberra, Australia, in October 2008. Some of the ideas in this paper were also introduced at the World Council of Churches (WCC)/Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) Consultation on "Towards Revitalising the Ecumenical Movement in Asia" in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in September 2008. This paper has been peer-reviewed, and fulfils the criteria for original research as set out by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

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³ S. H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Vol. 1 (San Francisco: Harper, 1992).

⁴ I. Gillman and H. J. Klimkeit, *Christians in Asia before 1500* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2002).

⁵ Throughout "the Gospel" is used in the Bultmannian-type sense of "the Christ Event" or "the Christ Event for us" or "the Christ Event for them", etc. "The Christian message" or "gospels" are used for the written and oral traditions.

sed semper reformanda ("reformed but always to be reformed"). If the Christ-Event-for-us in each place lives in widely diverse cultures, then for the whole people of God throughout the whole world there can only be a true fullness of that Event or that gospel if there is true inter-confessional, inter-traditional, international, interracial and inter-cultural fellowship. The church of Jesus Christ, indeed, is a fellowship which transcends space and time. The gospel, especially today, can only be lived in its fullness through sustained and widespread inter-cultural theological reflection and *praxis*. This fact is important for Christians throughout the world, and especially for Christians in Asia. It is important for Christians throughout the world to take indigenous theologies seriously, not just as marginal or decorative, in that in them central truths of the faith are often being expressed with greater clarity than elsewhere. It is important for Asian Christians to press the insights of contextual theologies as pivotal for international Christian self-understanding in dogmatics, apologetics, missiology and inter-faith discourse.

In this paper I wish to do a number of things. I wish to look at a very significant complex of indigenous Asian theological thought and *praxis*. To do that in an authentic way I need first to look in some detail at this specific Asian culture and world-view. Then I need to look at some of the interactions between the pre-literary world from which this culture comes and the Islam and Christianity which entered its world. I then need to examine this significant indigenous Christian theology in its context. From this, we will then be able to see how a contextual indigenous Christian theology provides not only for Christian dogmatics and apologetics but also for missiology and inter-faith dialogue around the world. In this perspective, such a contextual theology has a vital place in international Christian existence in our time. Contextual theology must not, therefore, be seen as marginal or decorative, but as central to the international theological struggles of the church throughout the world.

There is a French proverb, which may have come from French experience throughout the world, which runs: "Il n'y a que les détails qui comptent" ("Only the details are really important"). Mircea Eliade found it very illuminating in relation to cultures.⁶ Certainly it fits in with this study. Our "*way-in*" on this occasion is not to be via a study on the history of religions, nor via a dialogue with non-Christian living faiths, nor via a phenomenological analysis of religious appearances, although naturally all of these will impinge upon the work.

I wish on this occasion to look at that all-embracing facet of human, and in particular religious, life for which we use the code-words "animism", "primal religions" or "pre-literary religions". No term that I know of is totally appropriate in this field⁷, and that is the experience of many researchers in the area of cultural⁸ interchange, and in particular

⁶ M. Eliade, *The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), 37.

⁷ The term "pre-literary" is used to stress the fact that these religions have a long-developed tradition the origins of which would appear to pre-date the appearance of literary forms in the various religions. The term, therefore, seems more neutral and purely descriptive in its use than many other terms (e.g., animistic, primal, primitive). Other terms (e.g., tribal, customary, traditional) seem possible, but also appear to be more applicable to other religions as well than the present use of "pre-literary".

in the area of interaction between the gospel and cultures. I wish on this occasion to use the term "pre-literary" in relation to these life-systems and world-views, including the religions, in a purely descriptive way. No value judgement is applied to it. It has its disadvantages; other terms have, however, as great, if not greater, difficulties.

In the sense outlined above pre-literary life-systems and world-views underlie all religious expressions in Asia, and not only in Asia, of course. On this occasion I wish to take one Asian pre-literary system in which I have been involved in research for some considerable time. I wish to look at some aspects of it in some detail, and also to make some comparisons with aspects of other pre-literary systems. I wish to look at it carefully, as this provides the basis for a strong and sustained understanding of the indigenous Christian contextual theology. Moreover, I wish to look at the interaction of these pre-literary forms and certain aspects of other religions, in particular Islam and Christianity.

In doing so I wish to bear in mind such questions as: What is the God whom we as Christians know " " ("in the face of Jesus Christ")⁹ saying to us in these pre-literary forms? And, what is God saying to us in these interactions?

Indigenous Belief and Praxis

The area in which I have been involved in research is the group of North Moluccan Islands in Eastern Indonesia. From an anthropological viewpoint it is an extremely useful area in which to carry out research, for a number of reasons. First, a comparison of historical accounts by travellers over the past four centuries¹⁰ indicates only the very slightest changes to indigenous pre-literary forms over that period. This is very different from the situations, for example, in some South Pacific Islands¹¹ or among the varied Australian Aboriginal groupings¹², where Asian or European influences have so influenced pre-literary forms so that today we cannot really know what they were even two centuries ago. As a result it is very difficult to comprehend how the whole system works, or even which are the genuine vestiges of any original system.¹³ Second, population change through immigration

⁸ Throughout "culture" and "cultural" denote the total life pattern of social life including religion, rather than the artistic as distinct from other activities, such as those of politics, trade or religion. The term is thus used as it is used by social anthropologists rather than as it is used by historians of the arts.

⁹ II Corinthians 4:6.

¹⁰ E.g., J.M. Baretta, "Halmahera en Morotai", in *Mededeelingen van het Bureau voor de Bestuurszaken der Buitenbezittingen, bewerkt door het Encyclopaedisch Bureau*, XIII (Weltevredan, 1917) 116 ff; C.F.H. Campen, "De Godsdienstbegrippen der Halmaherasche Alfoeren", in *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde (uitgegeven door het (Koninklijk) Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen)* XXVII (Batavia, 1882) 438-451, especially 438-439; C.F.H. Campen, "De Alfoeren van Halmahera", in *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandsch Indië*, 4e serie, XII, i (April 1883) 284-297, especially 293.

¹¹ J.R. Garret, *To live Among the Stars: Christian Origins in Oceania* (Suva/Geneva: University of the South Pacific/World Council of Churches, 1982) *passim*.

¹² D.H. Turner, *Tradition and Transformation: A Study of the Groote Eylandt area Aborigines of Northern Australia, Australian Aboriginal Studies*, No. 53 (Ph.D. thesis, University of Western Australia; Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1974), 189, 192-193.

has been very limited.¹⁴ Third, the heartlands of the pre-literary systems have been very isolated; an almost "laboratory-type" situation has occurred.

In looking at this pre-literary system, and in comparing it to others, we shall be mainly concerned to look at the beliefs, and the interaction of beliefs, from the standpoint of the believers, that is, of those involved in the life-systems. We shall not, therefore, be primarily concerned to discuss the various beliefs in terms of structural-functionalism or any other socio-anthropological models.¹⁵

In other words, we are vicariously involved in "being there" in all senses, as far, of course, as that is possible. To the North Moluccan, of course, could be applied the words of Williamson concerning the Akan of Ghana, that "the integration of his religious views and practices lies not in the fashioning of theological and philosophical structures, but in his socially inculcated personal attitude to the living universe of which he is a part".¹⁶

It is, of course, impossible from a Northern Moluccan point-of-view to dissociate in any way so-called "religious beliefs" from a total understanding of life and the world.¹⁷ For theological reasons, however, we have chosen that particular part or aspect of the totality of life which is the particular focus of the meeting of the Christian message with other beliefs as our departure point in this investigation; in doing so, however, we must attempt to be true to the North Moluccan viewpoint in not extrapolating one particular part of the whole but rather in using one particular "way-in" to view the whole.

In the North Moluccas the term *gikiri* was and is used as a generic word for one of the many local or personal divinities. However, it is clear the word originally had a much wider meaning. Hueting in 1908 sees the basis of its meaning as "levend wezen, mensch, iemand"¹⁸ ("living being, spirit, human being, someone/anyone"). In other words, he sees in it the elements of *mana*¹⁹, permeating nature in general and human beings in particular. Elsewhere Hurting notes that "De mensch bestaat uit roehe,²⁰ gikiri of njawa²¹ en gurumini"²² ("Humanity consists of body, gikiri or njawa and gurumini").

¹³ D.H. Turner, *Terra Incognita: Australian Aborigines and Aboriginal Studies in the 80's* (typed manuscript, 1986), 18.

¹⁴ The only significant movement of population was that of the Sangihe and Talaud Islanders into the area.

¹⁵ I.e. we are not dealing with the issue primarily from such a standpoint. On this, see J. Rex, *Key Problems of Sociological Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961; Routledge Paperback, 1970), 175-190.

¹⁶ S.G. Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith: A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions*; ed by K.A. Dickson (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1965), 86.

¹⁷ P.H. Thomas, "Penyebaran Agama Kristen dan Pengaruhnya bagi Pendidikan Penduduk Halmahera" ("The Spread of Christianity and its Influence on the Education of the population of Halmahera"), (unpublished thesis; Ambon: Pattimura University, 1968), 19.

¹⁸ A. Hueting, *Tobèloreesch-Hollandsch Woordenboek, met Hollandsch-Tobèloreesche inhoudsopgave* ('s-Gravenhage: Het Koninklijk Instituut voor de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië / Martinus Nijhoff, 1908), 100.

¹⁹ On this, see H. Hadiwijono, *Religi Suku Murbu di Indonesia ("Primal Tribal Religion in Indonesia")* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1977), 11, 17.

What is significant here is that it would seem there are two kinds of *mana* operative in North Moluccan religious understanding; for Kruijt has observed that, while *gikiri* is found in human beings, animals and plants, *gurumini* is found additionally in animals and especially in humankind.²³ What seems clear is that among the Northern Moluccans the *gikiri* was originally a *mana*-type concept more connected with a Supreme Being,²⁴ while *gurumini* was originally a *mana*-type concept more related to the physical needs, particularly in relation to mobility, in creatures,²⁵ although in humanity the two were very closely connected.²⁶ However, it is the *gikiri* which “is het onstoffelijke van den mensch, datgene wat ook na den dood voortleeft”²⁷ (“is the immaterial element of humanity, that which also lives on after death”), in all cases.²⁸ Moreover, the *gikiri* has a connection with plants and agricultural and forest areas which the *gurumini* has not²⁹. It is for this reason that “spirit” or “god” seems a more appropriate translation than “soul”, although no translation exactly covers the meaning-spectrum.³⁰ This *mana*-type concept is still seen today in that the power or the *gikiri* is particularly seen in “objects, for example stones or tree-roots which have extraordinary forms” (Indonesian: “benda-benda, umpama batu, akarkaju jang bentuknja gandjil-gandjil”³¹); it is also seen in humanity.

It is doubtless from the breadth of the applications of the *gikiri*-concept that the term *Gikiri Moi* was related to the concept of a High God. We can see that, from *gikiri*, which we

²⁰ I.e. Tobelorese for “body”.

²¹ “Njawa” is a Malay word which as used in the North Moluccas has a meaning very close to that of “*gikiri*”.

²² A. Hueting, “De Tobeloreezen in hun Denken en Doen”, in *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië (BKl)*, 77 (1921), 217 – 358, and 78 (1922), 137 –n342, especially 77 (1921), 251.

²³ A.C. Kruijt, “De Rijstmoeder in den Indischen archipel”, in *Verslagen en Mededeelingen der Koninklijke Academie van Wetenschappen*, Amsterdam, Afdeling Letterkunde, Vierde Reeks, IV (1903), 361-411.

²⁴ Nothing specific is *here* implied about such a Supreme Being.

²⁵ Despite his uncertainty as to how to translate this term (see Hueting, “De Tobeloreezen”, (1921) 252-253), Hueting uses the word “levenskracht” (“vital strength”) for “*gurumini*”.

²⁶ Kruijt (e.g. in Kruijt, “De Rijstmoeder in den indischen Archipel”), 23, uses the term *zielestof* for both; he uses *zielestof* rather than *ziel* because the *gikiri* and the *gurumini* are not in particular places (or in a particular place) in the body or plant but rather are diffused like a fluid or ether throughout it. (“*ziel*” means “soul”; “*zielestof*” means “soul-material”).

²⁷ A. Hueting, “Geschiedenis der Zending op het eiland Halmahera (Utrechtsche Zending-Vereeniging)”, in *Mededeelingen: Tijdschrift voor Zendingwetenschap* (Oegstgeest (The Netherlands)) LXXII (1928), 1-24, 97-128, 193-214, 289-320; LXXIII (1929), 1-31, 97-126, 289-320; LXXIV (1930), 1-32, 97-128, 193-234 (Subsequently published as *Geschiedenis der Zending op het eiland Halmahera*. Oegstgeest (The Netherlands): Zendingbureau, 1935), especially (1928), 11.

²⁸ In limited cases; the *gurumini* also has a life after death.

²⁹ Hueting, “De Tobeloreezen” (1922), 221-224. In the Northern Moluccas plant-life is closely connected with human and animal life; cf. J.J. Fox, “Sister’s Child as Plant: Metaphors in an Idiom of Consanguinity”, in R. Needham, ed., *Rethinking Kinship and Marriage* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), 219-252.

³⁰ E.g. Hueting moves between *geest* (spirit) and *ziel* (soul) in translating *gikiri*, but seems partially dissatisfied with both; see Hueting, *Tobeloreesch-Hollandsch Woordenboek*, 100; Hueting, “De Tobeloreezen” (1921), 251-252.

³¹ M. Rudjubik, “Kepercayaan Agama Kafir” (“Heathen Beliefs”), (Kao, North Moluccas, Indonesia,

translate "spirit" or "god", and *moi*, the general North Moluccan word for "one", *Gikiri Moi* implies "the One God" or "the One Spirit". Thomas sums up the present understanding of *Gikiri Moi* as "the One God" (or "Lord"), who is head of all powers which are animistic, dynamistic or mana" (Indonesian: "Tuhan Jang Satu, jang mengepalai segala kekuatan-kekuatan jang animistis, dinamistis maupun mana").³²

Hueting defines the term in a similar way, as "het opperste wezen, de eerste der geesten (God?)",³³ ("the supreme being, the first of the spirits (God?)"). However, it would seem to be inaccurate to think of *Gikiri Moi* in terms of a *deus otiosus*.³⁴ His connection with the life of the world is rather as "misschien de *gikiri* of de *voornaamste gikiri*"³⁵ ("perhaps the *gikiri* or the *principal gikiri*"). For this reason *Gikiri Moi* is regarded as the Great God or Spirit in whom all the various *gikiri* have their unity and meaning; although each *gikiri* might appear to be more powerful than *Gikiri Moi*, this power is the power of immanence or presence; *Gikiri Moi* holds the unity in that the North Moluccans do not tend to distinguish between higher and lower powers but rather to experience each microcosm as the pertinent presence of the macrocosm at that time.³⁶

It would seem that *Gikiri Moi* was the primary term associated with this Unifying God. However, other terms too are found, the most common being *Djou Ma Datu* and *Djou Latàla*. The word *Djou* is found in Tobelorese, Galelarese and Ternatenese,³⁷ and means "Lord", and as such it was the primary title applied to the Sultan of Ternate,³⁸ who was formerly regarded as having the status of a demi-god too.³⁹ It seems that the meaning of the term was then widened and applied to *Gikiri Moi*. However, in general it was used together with an epithet. *Ma Datu* (or *Madutu*) originally may have meant either "the true" or "the possessing" ("eigenlijke" or "eigenaar").⁴⁰ There is similarity, of course, between the two in that "the Lord who is the Possessing One" or "the Possessor" is for the reason "the true" or "real Lord". At the present time *Djou Ma Datu* is similar to Hueting's "de Opperheer, het Opperwezen, de eigenlijke Heer"⁴¹ or "de heer"⁴² ("the Sovereign, the Supreme Being, the true Lord" or "the Lord").

³² Thomas, "Penjebaran Agama Kristen", 20. *Tuhan* is the usual Indonesian for (the Christian) "Lord"; it is also frequently used for (the Christian) "God", in order to avoid using the standard Indonesian for "God" (including "the Christian God"), "Allah".

³³ Hueting, *Tobèloreesch-Hollandsch Woordenboek*, 100.

³⁴ On this, see P.L. Tobing, *The Structure of the Toba Batak Belief in the High God* (Amsterdam: Jacob van Kampen, 1956), 21-23.

³⁵ Hueting, "De Tobèloreezen" (1921), 258.

³⁶ Cf. Tobing, *The Structure*, 21.

³⁷ It is also a loan-word in other North Moluccan languages.

³⁸ On a similar use of " " ("Lord"), see W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian Literature* (translated and adapted from W. Bauer, *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments and der übrigen unchristlichen Literatur*, 4th edition, 1952), (Cambridge/Chicago: Cambridge University Press / The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 460.

³⁹ *Djou* is also sometimes written (and so pronounced) *Djou* or *Djoöe*.

⁴⁰ Hueting, "De Tobèloreezen" (1921), 258-259.

Latàla is associated with another North Moluccan phrase, *Unanga Daku*, both of which imply "The One from above" or "The One above" ("Hij daarboven").⁴³ However, it would seem that *Latàla* or *Lahatàla* is a localised form of the Malay/Indonesian expression for the Arabic-Muslim divine name, *Allah ta'ala*. Therefore, *Latàla* (or *Lahafàla*) is at source a loan-word from Malay/Indonesian, and has replaced the North Moluccan *Unanga Daku*; it has been given the thrust of the meaning of *Unanga Daku* ("above") because the Muslim God has been implied to be superior to the Highest Being (Gikiri Moi) in the pre-literary belief. From this it would seem that originally perhaps Gikiri Moi was given the additional names of Djou, Djou Ma Datu, Unanga Daku and Djou Latàla.

It would seem that there gradually came a tendency to pose a *deus otiosus* above Gikiri Moi, although, of course, related to him, and that such a God was associated with the names Djou Ma Datu and Djou Latàla; he was the God who was the true and real Lord and the Possessor of all and the One Above All. Nevertheless, there was always a tension, with this dualism between Gikiri Moi and Djou Ma Datu/Djou Latàla; on the one hand, Gikiri Moi was the very same as Djou Ma Datu/Djou Latàla; on the other hand, he was no *deus otiosus*.

Below Gikiri Moi are the company of the *gòmanga*, the spirits of the dead or, more accurately for the North Moluccans, the living-dead ("geest van afgestorvenen, zielen die men vereert"⁴⁴ ("soul of the dead, spirits whom people revere"). All *gòmanga* are *gikiri*.⁴⁵ These living-dead involve a very considerable amount of the thinking of the North Moluccans. The basis of this concern with the *gòmanga* is the uncertainty as to the future relationship between a North Moluccan tribes-person and a near-relation of anyone of great influence in the village or tribe (Indonesian: *suku*) who had died and so now lives in a new way.⁴⁶ The *gòmanga* or living-dead can thus become a true friend, guardian, guide and counsellor or a very dangerous personal enemy. For this reason the customs carried out at death must be done so with the utmost care. Campen reported in 1883 that on the death of the head of a household it was customary to destroy most of his property, especially that of any value, so as to prevent his *gòmanga* later having any regrets or jealousy over any possession which he could now no longer use⁴⁷; in recent years too it has been known. Funerary rites, then, involved the building of a small, separate *dooden huisje*⁴⁸ (house of the dead) beside a family's house where the corpse was guarded for up to forty days; thereafter, sometimes the bones were buried, sometimes they remained in this small house and sometimes they (or some of them) were placed in the roof-space of the family's home.⁴⁹ In any case, the *gòmanga*, after the due observation of these rites, was regarded as living with the family

⁴¹ Hueting, *Tobèloreesch-Hollandsch Woordenboek*, 66.

⁴² Hueting, "De Tobèloreezen" (1921), 258.

⁴³ Hueting, "De Tobèloreezen" (1921), 259.

⁴⁴ Hueting, *Tobèloreesch-Hollandsch Woordenboek*, 109.

⁴⁵ However, of course, not all *gikiri* are *gòmanga*. North Moluccans say that the *gòmanga* are "more refined than 'gikiri'" (Indonesian: "lebih halus dari 'gikiri'"); by this it would seem that the *gòmanga* are deemed higher than the other types of *gikiri* associated with birds, etc.

⁴⁶ On this, see J.B. Noss, *Man's Religions* (2nd edition; New York: The Macmillan Co., 1956), 21-24.

⁴⁷ Campen, "De Alfoeren van Halmahera", 293.

⁴⁸ A. Hueting, *Van Zeeroover tot Christen* (Oegstgeest:Zendingsbureau, n.d.), 12.

and the total village community; daily food would be offered to him by being placed in the roof-space.

These living-dead existed in so far as they had had influence in their previous life and had been given due funerary rites; and those people with the greatest influence in the past had the greatest "presence" or "existence" after death.⁵⁰ The *gòmànga* as such were neutral in their attitude towards their families and community, as we have noted. However, a *gòmànga* of great influence who was properly cared for both in his original funerary rites and daily and annually thereafter could become the main guide, guardian and hope of a person and their family; if, on the other hand, the rites were poorly observed both at death and thereafter, the *gòmànga* could become a fearful enemy. However, two forms of the *gòmànga* from the outset were mainly implacable enemies. First, the *gòmànga madorou* was one of the living-dead who has been insulted at death by being given improper funerary rites.⁵¹ He thus brought disaster at every opportunity, especially upon his immediate family.⁵²

From what we have seen, it can be observed that in the pre-literary religious understanding of the North Moluccans the security-creating harmony most closely related to the Christian concept of salvation concerns protection from the village spirits, the correct relationship with other creatures and nature, the right ties with the *gòmànga* and the hoped-for respect to guarantee one's future *gòmànga*-status. It seems that for the North Moluccans in general it is accurate to follow Cooley's observations in the central Moluccas, that is, that "the indigenous religion and *adat* should be seen as two halves of a whole"⁵³ Although Gikiri Moi or Djou Ma Datu/Djou Latàla has not given a specific law-code, nevertheless the *gòmànga* and the village-spirits are they who provide the sanctions for the *adat* (or customary law) system; and it is Gikiri Moi who sums up and holds together the various *gòmànga* and other *gikiri*. For this reason the *adat* system has a close connection with the security-creating harmony which is dependent upon the relationship of a person with the *gòmànga* and all the other *gikiri*.⁵⁴ This we can see in relation to that part of the *adat* which most concerned the population, that is the issues of marriage and sexual relations. The correct actions in these matters, of course, were determined by what was correct within the tribe.⁵⁵ In the coastal regions of the North Moluccas, a man was quite free to have sexual relations with an "outside" unmarried girl⁵⁶; however, an adulterous wife and her lover could be killed by the husband and his brothers. In fact, the effect of this outlook was to cause great stability in family-life among the coastal peoples. This self-preserving intolerance to *howono*, "the breaking of the *adat*", was presumably related to the fact that

⁴⁹ Hueting, "De Tobeloreezen" (1922), 154-157.

⁵⁰ Rudjubik, "Kepercayaan Agama Kafir", 3.

⁵¹ Cf. the Batak "hasangapon" in: P.B. Pederson, *Batak Blood and Protestant Soul: The Development of National Batak Churches in Northern Sumatra* Grand rapids, MI:Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), 25.

⁵² Rudjubik, "Kepercayaan Agama Kafir", 4.

⁵³ F.L. Cooley, "Alter and Throne in Central Moluccan Societies: a Study of the relationship between the institutions of religion and the institutions of local government in a traditional society undergoing rapid social change", Unpublished Ph.D.Thesis (New haven, Connecticut: Yale University, 1962), 482.

⁵⁴ I.e. all the other *gikiri* including all the village-spirits.

⁵⁵ I.e. in general moral action only concerned those within the tribe.

⁵⁶ I.e. with a girl from outside the village, and even more with a girl from outside the tribe (*suku*). Even with a girl from within the village, penalties were not very severe.

the coastal people were traditionally a sea-faring people who had set up communities at great distances from their homeland; therefore, they needed a strict marriage *adat* in order to protect their stability.

On the other hand, in some interior agricultural plains, there was an annual fertility feast, known as *waleng*, the term referring to both the feast and the *gikiri* of fertility. The feast was held for seven to ten days at the end of harvest and before the new planting; during this time there was worship to the *gikiri waleng*, Gikiri Moi and the *gòmànga*, in addition to communal eating and merry-making for a number of villages. Also, from dusk until dawn, there were communal sexual relations; during the period of the *waleng* one did not concern oneself about who was one's wife or husband. The purpose of this was to give honour to *gikiri waleng* and to ask for fertility of the soil and of the produce in the coming planting-season. Unlike the situation of the coastal, sea-faring peoples, the significant difference of this interior *adat* was that it had in general very little sanction against adultery; adultery in recent times, especially by the wife, was considered of little consequence. Thus the attitude towards adultery and marriage-sanctity in Christian communities was very strongly influenced by the differing pre-literary outlooks on the subject in coastal and inland areas. In coastal areas the wife's adultery was a very serious breaking of the *adat*, while in inland, agricultural areas it was considered to be of little consequence. This latter was, of course, related to the much greater significance of inland fertility-cults.

So here we see an integrated system of pre-literary belief and life.

Contextual Theology in Word and Praxis

It has seemed to me important to look in considerable detail at this pre-literary structure, so that we can appreciate the climate and outlook of such a system. Systems of this kind underlie many situations in Asia, and indeed in many parts of the world.

I now wish to look at the interaction between this system and the two world religions, Islam and Christianity, which came into the area. Each of these two religions has very large formal followings in the area. I wish to look at certain aspects of the mutual interactions of this pre-literary system and Islam, and at some facets of the mutual interactions of this pre-literary outlook and Christianity. I wish to pick up certain salient features, rather than give an overview, as I have done elsewhere.⁵⁷ Of course there were mutual interactions between Islam and Christianity; but that is outside the scope of this paper.

First, Muslim concepts influenced pre-literary beliefs in a number of ways. There was clearly a strong Muslim influence on the development of the concept of Gikiri Moi as the One High God. This is confirmed in the application to God of the title Djou and the epithet Latàla/Lahatàla. However, while for Islam *Allah ta'ala* brought widely-diversified facets, the effect of this concept upon the concept of Gikiri Moi, without the fullness of

⁵⁷ J. Haire, *The Character and Theological Struggle of the Church in Halmahera, Indonesia, 1941-1979* (*Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums*, Band 26) (Frankfurt-am-Main und Bern: Peter D. Lang, 1981), 237 ff.; cf. P.D. Latuihamallo, "Report of the Bali Consultation on 'The Gospel and Cultures'", in *Called to Witness to the Gospel Today* (Newsletter No. 6, February 1986), 16.

the Muslim doctrine of God, was to make the latter somewhat of a *dues otiosus*. Again, the effect of the “clothing” of pre-literary beliefs in Muslim nomenclature by the pre-literary religionists themselves was to mean that not only were Muslim terms used, but, more significantly, the Muslim dualism between good and evil was applied by the pre-literary religionists themselves to *certain* living-dead and especially to the village-spirits. Where before the relationship between that bringing good fortune or protecting and that bringing ill-fortune was more complex, involving the varied relationships between a villager and the diverse living-dead and the various forms of the “aweful”, the influence of Islam tended merely to posit the various evil-spirits. There thus remained a tension between the older and the Muslim-influenced concepts of good and evil/fortunate and unfortunate. Again, pre-literary concepts influenced Islam as it developed in the region. For example, the pre-literary outlook of the North Moluccans influenced Islam by encouraging the *Sûfi* mystical movement within Islam in the area. It would seem that the pre-literary animistic, dynamistic and *mana* concepts encouraged the mystical and pantheistic tendencies of *Sûfism* in the tradition of the ways of thinking originally associated with Ibn-al-Arabi of Murcia.

Second, pre-literary influence on Christianity was and is considerable. A good example was the pre-literary influence on *the understanding of the Triune God*, and on the relationship between the Triune God and the varied *gikiri*. There was an attempt to work out an integrated system between the Christian Triune God and the *gikiri* and village spirits. A tendency towards Sabellianism, of course, could be expected in that Gikiri Moi had been integrated into the greater Christian God and this Christian God was the unifying basis of all the *gikiri*; and this in fact seems to have happened.⁵⁸ In this tendency to Sabellianism “à la North Moluccas” Christians regarded the various *gikiri*⁵⁹ as the microsmic presence in each place of one of the three facets of the Triune God, although the doctrine of the Holy Spirit tended to be greatly minimised. Unlike the situation in Ceram in the Central Moluccas⁶⁰, in the North Moluccas the Christian God tended to be regarded more in terms of power-through-presence.

However, the second example, leading on from this first example, is more significant. It creates a significant indigenous *Christology*. As the *gikiri*, as we have seen, were related in general to the facets of the Triune God, so the *gòmanga* were specifically related to the Sonship.⁶¹ As we have seen, there were concepts of the Senior Living-Dead and the Unseen Leader. These pre-literary outlooks were to have considerable influence on the Northern Moluccan Christian understanding of the relation between the divine and human in Christ. Thus the North Moluccan Christians began to base their Christological understanding on the Senior-Living-Dead who was the unseen Leader. They were the people (*bala*) who had

⁵⁸ This tendency towards Sabellianism has, of course, often been inherent in Reformed thinking; cf. K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics I, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Prolegomena to Church Dogmatics*, Part I. (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936), 403.

⁵⁹ Here used in the generic sense, including the *gòmanga* and village-spirits (the latter at least in part). Where the *gikiri* was potentially favourable or unfavourable, then it was related to the Christian God. When it was entirely unfavourable, then it was related to the power of evil.

⁶⁰ Cooley, “Alter and Throne, 490; Haire, *The Character*, 256.

⁶¹ The Fatherhood of God was related to Gikiri Moi as the unifying and meaning-giving basis of all the *gikiri*, including the *gòmanga*.

been called out to follow the Lord Jesus as their leader. He could be related to them (that is, they could understand his humanity) because he had been alive but was now living after death in their villages in their midst, and as such was their Unseen Leader. That is to say, in the first instance He was quantitatively but not qualitatively different from their greatest ancestral *gòmànga*. It is against this background that two New Testament themes were of great frequency in their preaching. First, the Church and particularly the village-congregation as the body of Christ were often used to stress the relationship of each humble villager's future *gòmànga* with the *gòmànga* (*the gòmànga*) of Christ⁶². Second, Christ the Forerunner and pioneer in Hebrews 12 too was used to relate the believer's *gòmànga* to that of Christ.⁶³ We have seen that the pre-literary influence of the *gòmànga*-concepts tended to set no qualitative difference between Christ and believers, although there was a great quantitative difference. Set against this, however, and stressing the divine in Christ, was the "North Moluccan Sabellianism" which we have just seen, and which regarded Christ as the microcosmic presence in each congregation of the whole macrocosmic Christian God. This tended to result in an understanding of Christ which could fit in with the *vere deus, vere homo* of the Definition of Chalcedon of 451 C.E. For the *gòmànga* influence in North Moluccan thinking rendered a clear distinction between the divine and the human both impossible and incomprehensible in North Moluccan terms. They thought of Christ as the Great *Gòmànga*. The *gòmànga*-concept explained and integrated for the North Moluccans what was the Christological problem in Latin terms. On the one hand, as all the *gòmànga* in pre-literary terms found their meaning in Gikiri Moi, so Christ was the aspect of God most related to the lives of believers both before and after death. So he was truly divine (" *vere deus* "). On the other hand, as the Unseen Leader of all Christian *gòmànga*⁶⁴, He was the Head of the village congregational Body of the faithful. However, these two were not mutually opposed but could easily be mentally integrated. So here we see a very significant new indigenous understanding of Christology.

It is against this background that we see the importance and significance of the North Moluccan *dç factò* interaction with the Definition of Chalcedon. Chalcedon insists on three factors in relation to Christology. First, it insists that Christ is "truly divine" (" *ἀληθινὸς θεὸς* "; " *vere deus* "). Second, it insists that Christ is "truly human" (" *ἀληθινὸς ἄνθρωπος* "; " *vere homo* "). Third, it insists that Christ is one. Without doubt, this North Moluccan Christology sees Christ as truly human. As we have noted above, He could be related to them (that is, they could understand his humanity) because he had been alive but was now living after death in their villages in their midst, and as such was their Unseen Leader. That is to say, and as we have noted, He was quantitatively but not qualitatively different from their greatest ancestral *gòmànga*. Again, without doubt, this North Moluccan Christology sees Christ as one. Moreover, it may very well see him as truly divine. Again, as we have noted above, there was great stress on the divine in Christ through the "North Moluccan

⁶² I.e. based mainly on Romans 12: 3-8; I Corinthians 12: 12-30; Ephesians 1:22-23 or Colossians 1: 18-20, the last reference, especially Colossians 1: 18 where Christ is also called " ("the firstborn from the dead"), being most supportive.

⁶³ I.e. based particularly on Hebrews 12: 1-17.

⁶⁴ I.e. both the *gòmànga* of the already living-dead and the anticipated *gòmànga* of believers still alive. The Christian eschatological emphasis stimulated the application of *gòmànga*, in the eschatological "already-but-not-yet" sense found in the New Testament, to still-living believers.

Sabellianism", which, as we have seen, regarded Christ as the microcosmic presence in each congregation of the whole macrocosmic Christian God. Although there may be debate here, this North Moluccan Christology seeks to explain Christ, while Chalcedon is not able, in fact, to explain Him. Chalcedon rather only sets the *guidelines*, or *parameters*, as to what Christians are, and are not, to say about Christ in order to remain Christian. They must say that Christ is truly divine; they must say that Christ is truly human; and they must say that Christ is one. If they fail to acknowledge even any one of these fully, then they place themselves outside the fold of Christian believers. So Chalcedon is a marker, or a rule-book, rather than an explainer. The North Moluccan Christology has the following advantage over Chalcedon. In its own way, as we have seen, it is faithful to Chalcedon. It fully accepts the three emphases of Chalcedon. However, it does more than that; it *explains* Christology. It *explains* the Person of Christ in the North Moluccan context. It thus engages in dogmatics, but it does more than that. It does not simply engage in dogmatics. It also engages in apologetics, and indeed takes part in the missiological task. Moreover, it provides Christian material for inter-religious dialogue and discourse. It is of great value as Asian indigenous Christian theology. However, it is also of great value for international Christian understanding and dogmatics, for international Christian apologetics, for international Christian missiology and for an international Christian contribution to inter-faith discourse.

Following this, we come to another, very significant, contribution to indigenous Asian Christian theology, this time in praxis. This third example indicates the pre-literary influence upon the Christian understanding of *salvation*. We have seen how the pre-literary concern for security-creating harmony, the concept most closely related to the Christian understanding of salvation, was based upon guarding the correct relationships in and around the village-community, including the relationships with the *gikiri*, *gòmanga*, the village spirits, other creatures and nature in general. Implied in this also was a forward-looking concern for each person's *gòmanga*-status after death. What seems to have happened with the advent of Christianity is that these concerns were baptised into North Moluccan Christian practice, while in addition an eschatologically-oriented concept of salvation related to the grace and sovereignty of the Christian God was pursued. Moreover, there seems to have remained an unresolved tension between the two outlooks. On the one hand, the pre-literary salvation outlook had been primarily oriented to *the present* (the guarantee of the security-creating harmony), with the *gòmanga*-status concern as an addendum to that. Both regarding the *adat* and illness and death the thinking seemed to be that, as the *gikiri* sanctioned the *adat* and also had to be in correct harmony with the community for there to be security, and as through *Gikiri Moi* they had all been incorporated into the Christian God, so the correct observance of a Christian *adat* and the righting of wrongs through the church would guarantee security and harmony for the rest of the village.

Running parallel with this outlook, on the other hand, was the *eschatologically-oriented* understanding of salvation. Salvation in these latter terms seems to have been related to the fact that the Christian God was now ultimately responsible for the majority of the previous pre-literary religionists, and so would be responsible in God's grace. However, there tended in this eschatologically-oriented outlook to be less emphasis on salvation from sin. As sin was so closely connected with the breaking of the *adat*, so salvation from the consequences of sin was almost always related to the former, "baptised" pre-

literary security-and-harmony concept of salvation. Thus, under pre-literary influence, a security-and-harmony-related understanding of salvation, primarily oriented to *the present* and largely baptised into Christianity, remained in unresolved tension with a more *eschatologically-oriented* concept of salvation.

However, in one very clear manner, the two aspects of the North Moluccan understanding of salvation came together. This was in the issue of ecology and the integrity of creation. A very significant example of indigenous theological *praxis* gives a clear demonstration of this. In the 1980s, during the logging boom in the islands, a licence was granted to an overseas company to log in an area of high density timber of the highest international value and uniqueness. The concession set out terms for the logging; only one tree in ten was to be felled, and that tree was to be replaced through planting. The villagers, largely Christian of pre-literary background, saw that the terms of the licence were not being carried out. Moreover, they saw great danger in any logging of this proposed scale taking place in any case. In fact, their overwhelming outlook was controlled by their concept of salvation, both present-orientated and eschatologically-orientated, as we have seen above. They regarded the overseas logging company as merely irresponsible children, as endangering the integrity of creation and especially as being unfaithful to their concept of salvation. The villagers were humanly powerless, but divinely empowered, in their eyes. Thus, in darkness, day-by-day, and week-by-week, they removed small parts of the logging machinery and hid them in the forest. The logging company brought in more and more equipment, with great trouble and at great expense. The villagers continued to remove and hide the small parts. The logging company was greatly frustrated, but could not work out how the parts of their equipment were disappearing. Finally, the logging company gave up, returned the licence to the government, and left the area. No more logging took place. After this, the deeply pious villagers gave thanks to God for God's guidance and empowerment. They had absolutely no concept of carrying out sabotage, or of acting illegally. For them, it was clear simply that irresponsible outsiders, like irresponsible children, were engaging in activity that was, and would be, detrimental to both present-orientated salvation and eschatologically-orientated salvation. Thus from their indigenous North Moluccan theological perspective of salvation they carried out a theological *praxis* of salvation.

We have thus seen the main formulations of indigenous Christian theology in thought and *praxis* among the North Moluccans. There were also others, which reinforced the contextual theology which we have observed.

As a fourth example, pre-literary influence could also be seen in the understanding of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. If the Bible was the day-to-day contact point with God, so the Lord's Supper was the pre-eminent contact point where God through the Great Living-Dead Jesus Christ was supremely present. It was thus a truly "aweful" occasion, potentially fraught with great danger but also capable of giving great blessing. In this understanding there were clearly influences from the high-feasts of Gikiri Moi and the *gòmanga*. Fear was expressed in that any person attending the Lord's Supper with a hidden unresolved sin was liable to face serious illness or death in the near future. It was also seen that the slightest flaw in the carrying-out of the service could result in grave trouble for the community, as Lord Himself was in the process of holding His feast. Blessing, however,

could be obtained both for each individual attending the Supper and especially for the whole community through the correct carrying-out of the ordinance.⁶⁵

A fifth example, closely related to this, was the pre-literary influence upon the understanding and celebration of Christ's Passion. Thus in the North Moluccas there was often a very close following of the details of Christ's suffering and death week-by-week and sometimes day-by-day up until the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Indeed, Christ was the great and senior *gòmànga*, who was also the Hero (as Unseen Leader) who had undergone a violent death. Therefore the careful following and examination of the details of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ could help guarantee His leadership and support of the congregation as His dependent *bala* (people) in the year ahead, and help protect them from the dangers always attendant upon their contact with such a great *gòmànga*.⁶⁶

A sixth example relates to Confirmation. A very strict procedure for the candidates was undergone at the hands of the church at the end of catechising, and if a potential communicant could show his or her spiritual strength in this then confirmation would ensue. Underlying this would seem to be the concept that through the catechetical process culminating in confirmation the initiate's connection with the Great Gòmànga (Christ) as Head of the Body, and through Him with God, was guaranteed.

Here then is an integrated complex of very significant indigenous Christian theological perceptions, of value not only to dogmatics, but also to apologetics, missiology and inter-faith discourse.

Inter-weaving, Transfiguration and Double-Wrestle

As we analyse the above analysis, we can observe three types of interaction. First, there is a tendency for pre-literary views to be "baptised" *in toto* into Islam or Christianity. Second, there is the struggle between pre-literary and Muslim viewpoints, on the one hand, and the struggle between pre-literary and Christian outlooks, on the other. Third, there is the producing of new insights into Muslim, and particularly Christian, faith and life. In relation to Christianity, this has produced contextual theologies of great significance internationally. Here Asian Christian theology has an opportunity and responsibility in its international calling.

For Christianity, it is perhaps because the Christ Event can never be exclusively identified either with one culture or one type of culture that Paul employs the ambiguous term " " ("the hearing") to describe the action by which the Christ Event enters a person's or a community's life, that is, the crucial step that leads to faith.⁶⁷ For, in a sense, in all the interactions described before and since H. Richard Niebuhr, that Christ Event must truly enter our world, and yet must also always be under the opposing Divine criticism. This, in fact, is seen in the varied theologies in the New Testament.⁶⁸ It seems to me that

⁶⁵ In North Moluccan thinking material and spiritual (i.e. that related to the whole *gikiri*-complex) blessing could not be sharply differentiated from each other.

⁶⁶ On this following of Christ's suffering, cf. *Heidelberg Catechism*, Question 79.

a term such as “syncretism” has only limited value in relation to these issues, in that it tends not to look at the complex interacts such as we have noted above. Transition, translation, transposing, transplanting, transferring, transforming, transfiguring are varying expressions of the inter-cultural activity to which Christians are called and in which theologians bear a special responsibility. In this too Asian theologians have an opportunity and a responsibility.

So, if we return to the issues at the beginning of this paper, we can see how the Christ Event must live, and yet transfigure, the culture in which it is placed, always at the same time struggling with the fact that it is the Divine which nevertheless has entered this world. There is a “double-wrestle”. In the first five centuries of the Church’s life after the New Testament period, the outline within which dogmatic discussion was to take place was largely set. That involved the inter-weaving of the Christ Event into, and the transfiguration by the Christ Event of, Hellenism and its successors. However, if the Christ Event was also inter-woven into, and transfigured, other cultures also with a rich background, as we have seen above, then could not that impact of the Christ Event also bring further clarity in word and *praxis* in our time? If one looks at North Moluccan indigenous Christian theology, as an example of Asian contextual theologies, is not significant new and insightful clarity given there for dogmatics, for apologetics, for missiology and for inter-faith discourse around the world? Much of Western Europe and North America, and indeed Asia as a consequence, is heir to that Christ Event in Jewish, Greek, Latin, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, German and French traditions. However, are we forever to be controlled solely by the fact that the first post-biblical God-talk took place in the Mediterranean basin? From what we have seen, it seems that contextual theology has a vital place in international Christian existence in our time. This is not to be seen in any triumphalist manner, but purely in the service of the church ecumenical. Contextual theology must not, therefore, be seen as marginal or decorative, but as central in the international theological struggles of the church throughout the world. In this too Asian theologians bear a special responsibility, calling and opportunity.

⁶⁷ See here J.V. Taylor, *The Growth of the Church of Buganda: An Attempt at Understanding* (London: S.C.M. Press Ltd., 1958), 254. See, e.g., Romans 10: 16-17; Galatians 3: 2.

⁶⁸ See here, for example, E. Käsemann, “Begründet der neutestamentliche Kanon die Einheit der Kirche?” in *Evangelische Theologie*, München (Germany) XI, (1951/52) 13-21; and E. Käsemann, “Zum Thema der Nichtobjektivierbarkeit”, in *Evangelische Theologie*, München (Germany), XII, (1952/53), 455-466 (both subsequently published in E. Käsemann, *Exegetische Versuche and Besinnungen*, erster Band, 2nd Edition, Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1960).