

MF received a letter from a reader with some serious concerns about certain approaches to contextualization among Native Americans. His comments were spurred by the interview with Richard Twiss entitled, "That the Natives Might Lift Jesus Up," found on pages 8-11 in our September 2000 issue. Here is an excerpt where Richard Twiss shares his views regarding the use of native drums for worship:

"We view [the drum] as any man-made object. ... As in many churches, evangelical, charismatic, non-charismatic, the prayer at the beginning of the service is, 'Holy Spirit, we invite you to participate with us in this meeting and lift our eyes to see Jesus.' So, we usually do it with an acoustic guitar ... But if a native Christian takes his drum and he invites the Holy Spirit to come on his drum, we don't see that as un-Biblical or compromising Scriptural truth. Nor do we see that as syncretism. ..."

Read the full interview at: www.missionfrontiers.org/2000/04/twistl.htm

Letter from a Lakota pastor:

As I read the comments from Richard Twiss, I was amazed that, until now, I had never seen him say that he invites the Holy Spirit to come on his drum. This is interesting and would be, in most people's minds, syncretism. As a Lakota pastor who contextualizes the message of Christ, I believe Mr. Twiss is weak in some places. Actually, he only partly contextualizes to one group of native people. Most native people are bi-cultural—maybe even tri-cultural. You have to go deep into some reservations to find people who only practice their ways.

Here is the question: If it is true that a drum can be used, even though some people have considered it sacred, and we use his methodology or contextualization, then we could do this with other objects. Let us look to a Ouija board. Using Mr. Twiss' method of looking at something used for spirit manipulation, we could still use it. Maybe we could play another game with this same board. After all, it is man-made and we are new creations, right? You see, it does not make sense, and Mr. Twiss has tried to change the minds of many people, but he has not worked out his contextualization. I would hope that you would not print these type of articles without the voice of people actually working fulltime in ministry. I serve in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, and I am trying to be respectful, but Mr. Twiss does not speak for the Lakota pastors working in the field. I have asked him to come to Pine Ridge and bring his methods, but he chooses not to come to Lakota Country.

I am sorry if I have offended anyone, but I am getting tired of people speaking about theory. I am working in my homeland as a Lakota pastor, and I have to stand before them on a daily basis.

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Response from Richard Twiss:

I have known Leon for several years and admire his faithful commitment to serve the people of the Oglala Lakota/Sioux Nation. Pine Ridge is the home of my father's people. Several years ago, at Leon's invitation, I was a guest on his radio program there, as well as a guest in his home.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to some of his concerns. First, when I say "invites the Holy Spirit to come on his drum," what I mean, as I stated previously, [See quote at left.] is that a believer, indwelt by the Spirit of God, can invite the Holy Spirit to bless or anoint their playing of a drum for praise and worship in the same way we would ask the Holy Spirit to anoint or bless a prayer, song, or sermon. The Holy Spirit indwells and anoints people to play instruments of music for the glory of God and the edification and enjoyment of His people.

Comparing a Ouija board to a Native drum is an unequal "apples and oranges" comparison. It is my understanding that the Ouija board's exclusive use is a medium of communication with demonic spirits for guidance, etc., with its roots in Druidic occultism, while the drum is a musical instrument of percussion or rhythm, which was a feature of ancient Jewish worship.

In the Old Testament we see radically different uses for various musical instruments. In Psalm 150, instruments are used to praise the one true Jehovah/God. In Isaiah 5:11-12, carnal people used musical instruments for their drunken parties. Finally, in Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar used them to call people to false, demonic worship and idolatry.

Some of the instruments, one being the harp, are used in all three cases. There is conceptually, only one identical harp being used by each group for a distinct purpose, as opposed to an evil harp, godly harp, and carnal harp. The problem is not the instrument, but the heart of the musician. Likewise, there is not an evil drum, godly drum, and worldly drum. The drum, conceptually, is simply a percussion instrument, not a medium of spirit communication.

Contextualization is always a challenge. To be thoroughly Biblical, our missiology must be supra-cultural—able to work in any country, among any people. Do we see African believers using their historical drums for Christ-honoring worship today? I believe their drums were/are used for the same reason our First Nations drums were used in North America. If using our drums, which were considered sacred objects, is syncretistic, then to be theologically consistent, we would have to say the African, Polynesian, etc., tribal believers' use of their drums is also syncretistic and the same as using a Ouija board, (which we know is not the case).

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Send letters to Mission.Frontiers@uscwm.org or write us at the address below. We reserve the right to edit for clarity and brevity. 