

Let me start with a story shared among my people, the Naga Indigenous community, transnational people living across India and Myanmar.

A man once went with his companions to a river to poison fish. While diving into a deep pool, he found a stretch of dried sand where a water spirit sat beside a hearth made of three human skulls. The spirit gave him a dried fish as a gift and warned him not to dive into the river again. The man returned to the riverbank and shared the fish with his companions. But the temptation to get more overcame him. He dove again and this time, he never came back.

The man who went back for more fish is like the Christian mission that came to us - an arm of empire.

Christian mission brought the Gospel of Jesus Christ but with a price - the price of losing culture, language, land, family, and life itself. Converts were told to disregard their cultural practices, sowing shame and disunity. Our ancestors witnessed the creation of borders, Western values imposed, their bodies studied and displayed, some of our ancestors' remains still lie in museums, and the labeling of our people as "savages," "uncivilized," and "without intellect."

And yet, many Indigenous communities still held on to the Gospel. Maybe one reason was survival, because rejecting mission often meant annihilation. But more importantly, Indigenous peoples found something life-giving in the Gospel that resonated with our own sense of wholeness and connection. Among the Nagas, the American mission planted the seed, but it was the Nagas who made it grow. Today, Nagaland is a Christian-majority state in India not because of missionaries alone, but because our ancestors became agents of the faith.

Mission carries both wounds and wisdom. This is the paradox of being both Indigenous and Christian. The mix of British colonists and Christian mission helped reconcile different Indigenous groups and formed a shared political and social identity distinct from the dominant religio-linguistic culture of Brahmanical patriarchy in India. With this identity, we Nagas took up arms and resisted the Indian state that came to occupy our lands. This struggle continues today under laws like the Armed Forces Special Powers Act, which has normalized military presence and ignored countless human rights violations.

When the Indian state tried to assimilate us by force, our resistance was branded as separatists and terrorists. For us, taking up arms was about dignity and survival. People who have not lived through this cannot tell us what we should or should not do. And we see this same logic of colonialism today by calling the oppressed "terrorists" in the struggles of our Palestinian siblings.

This is our story. But it is not only ours. Across the world, Indigenous siblings face similar struggles, states driven by profit at the expense of Indigenous lives. Churches still ignore their role in genocide and silence Indigenous voices and initiatives that seek real reconciliation. Churches hold land that was taken from Indigenous peoples by imperial decrees. They continue to profit from those lands, from that history.

To challenge empire is always risky. But God's mission was never safe. The incarnation of Jesus shows us divine solidarity with the vulnerable. It is about the fullness of life, about restoring creation to communion.

I, as a Naga Indigenous woman, carry these contradictions in my body, baptized in the Gospel and scarred by its history.

And so, I call upon WCRC and its members to stand for restorative justice- for repentance, reparations, and right relationships. Walk alongside Indigenous communities seeking self-determination, land return, and healing.

Decolonizing Theology

Christianity brought both healing and harm. It left behind white Christian supremacy and theological ideals that still shape our imagination. Many Indigenous churches lean toward evangelical theology, shaped by the ways our communities learned to survive colonial trauma. But the same theologies that once helped us endure can now wound us when they silence life and diversity.

Such as, before colonial contact, Indigenous communities accepted diverse genders and sexualities as part of life. These persons had roles, significance, and dignity. But Western Christian values suppressed them, much like witch-hunting did. The binary idea that only “male and female” are proper images of God continues to wound many. It erases the vast and generous ways the Creator’s image is revealed in creation. Queer and Indigenous lives remind the church that salvation is about fullness, that God’s image thrives in difference, not sameness.

Also, Pietism, with its focus on individual holiness and personal salvation, shaped much of Indigenous Christianity. But salvation that involves only the individual and God is a colonial construct. It isolates us from creation, from community, from justice.

We must unlearn such colonial forms of faith to reclaim its fullness. This means honoring Indigenous ways of knowing, listening again to the wisdom of our ancestors, who lived in deep communion with the divine and with the earth.

Mission from Indigenous perspective

Missio Dei was never about domination or accumulation, but about life overflowing in all creation. Mission is a participation in the life that God sustains.

To speak of mission today is risky, because it means challenging greed and power, the very forces that sustain global inequality. But if we follow Christ, who overturned the tables of those who exploited the poor, we must also overturn the theologies that bless exploitation in God’s name.

From an Indigenous perspective, Mission begins with listening: to the land that groans and to those at the edges of power. God is already present everywhere. The church’s role is not to bring God, but to recognize God in stories, rituals, and daily lives. When mission learns from Indigenous peoples it rediscovers that God was never confined to the church walls but in the borders, like what we saw in Kawthoolei Hope Theological Seminary. In our way of life, every act of caring for the land, every celebration of Indigenous festival, every song that carries our ancestors’ memory resist systems of domination and nurtures the richness of God’s life-giving mission. Indigenous wisdom brings back life to mission. It reminds us that mission is about communion and to be in right relationship with all creation.

Indigenous stories hold wisdom and reveal what happens when we forget our place that we are part of creation and not the owner. The story of the man and the water spirit warn the church: ignoring wisdom and taking more than we need brings harm. Mission is not diving again into

the river for more. It is honoring the one fish, the one gift, living in gratitude, and practicing right relationship with land, water, spirit, and each other. It disrupts greed to preserve life, strengthen relationships, and create space for those too often ignored.

Friends, the risk is real. But if we want our theology to be truthful, we must challenge greed, empire, and domination. It demands courage to support Indigenous voices, decolonize theology, walk with us in faithful solidarity, honoring land, life, and spirit.

Reform is not over. The Spirit is still moving, calling from the edges, from forests, from rivers, from the spirit of our ancestors, from queer bodies, from the lands the world forgets. May we have the wisdom to listen. May we have the courage to be reformed by those whom history tried to silence. And may our communion become a place where the wounded can finally breathe, where justice is honored, and where all creation can glorify our Creator and enjoy life in its fullness.

Thank you.