

We are Kamea Christians Not Because We Sing Like Berrien Springs Christians: Towards a Methodology of Developing a Biblical Theology in Context”. by Unia Kaise Api

Abstract:

This paper attempts to demonstrate a methodological approach to doing theology in context. A lot of homogenizations of Western Christianity have very much impacted the way we do church in Melanesia (Pacific Islands). This trend motivated me to ride on the wave of Melanesian thinkers to make theology relevant in the Melanesian context.

I matched *gutpela sindaun*, the ‘highest value’ in Melanesia¹, represented by the cognitive schema of the Kamea people through their brand, with the Biblical schema of shalom. The purpose of my presentation was to show how a Kamea understanding of *gutpela sindaun* enables them to appreciate Biblical shalom. I used cognitive studies as it pertains to valuing a perspective of human well-being which is all about *gutpela sindaun*. My presentation provides the opportunity for the churches in Melanesia to initiate change (they become change agents) as they adjust their schema to meet God’s expectations for them.

Guided by cognitive studies, I incorporated the concept of schema informed by principles of Relevance Theory as my theoretical framework to discuss the need for doing theology in context rather than contextualized theology. In my field research, I used the ethnographic methods of participant observation by employing the principles of observation questioning technique where I “watch what people do and listen to what they say about these activities” (Shaw 1988, 59), I then asked the people: “who can I see or where can I go to learn more on the value of *gutpela sindaun*?” I had my participants discuss their experiences and then used that to derive their cognitive schema which, in turn, reveals their “understanding” about what they had to know in order to manifest/experience *gutpela sindaun* appropriate to their cultural expectations. By applying Grounded Theory in my data analysis, it assisted me to present their brand of *gutpela sindaun* – which I refer to as a Theology of *gutpela sindaun* in the Kamea context.

Hence, I am developing a methodology for helping the Kamea people of the Gulf Province (Papua New Guinea) develop their own Biblical theology in context. This methodology can be used for other people groups in Melanesia and similar contexts to research Christian truths dynamically informed by cultural insights.

Key Words:

Melanesia

Gutpela Sindaun

Shalom

Biodata:

¹ The term represents “peace” – the idea that people can sit and relax because they feel safe from enemies, have food in plenty, and live in “social harmony.” It is classified as the highest value in Melanesia.

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