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Foreword to Twiss' "Rescuing the Gospel from the Cowboys: A Native American Expression of the Jesus Way"

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FOREWORD

Each of us met Richard Twiss at different times, yet each of us met when our own journeys (and Richard's) needed additional lift to go forward on our common trail. Whether our first meeting was at a conference, through an introduction, while studying together, or just hanging out and taking a retrospective look at our Creator's thoughts, all of us became fast friends with Richard.

We all reflect very similarly on the fact that Richard had the astounding ability to absorb what he read or heard from others, transforming and then seamlessly integrating it into his own thinking. While each of us does somewhat the same thing as a function of our Indigenous communal approach to knowledge, Richard was a master.

It was in Spokane, Washington in 1995 where Richard hit his stride. He had convened a Christ, Culture, and the Kingdom seminar for pastors to present our "new" ideas about culture and faith. When the conference ended and all the attendees had departed, we turned to one another amazed that non-Indigenous pastors were keenly interested in what we had to say. It was the start of a new era for Indigenous followers of the Jesus Way.

Our individual and collective encounters forged links of deep and unbreakable friendship. Our camaraderie was truly symbiotic—an idea from one transformed by the other, complete with escalating humor. Our journey together depended so much on humor that after a number of years of tag-team conferences, Richard's mom referred to us as a stand-up comedy team. There was never any doubt that Terry was the straight man!

When Richard was provided the opportunity for doctoral studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, he was more than a bit reluctant to attempt such a lofty goal. Moreover, we were all frustrated that advanced degrees seemed necessary to further our efforts to bring an Indigenous voice to the wider public. In Richard's first week of school we had no fewer than seven serious discussions about him quitting the program. Yet, in the end, the experience brought us closer together.

The Indigenous message we brought to class discussions became such a dominant decolonizing voice that we were concerned about being too great an influence—but the professors encouraged us, pointing out how we were empowering international students to speak up. Following a welcome event that we hosted—where Richard spoke words of affirmation for those in attendance—seventy students from around the world expressed that for the first time, they felt welcomed to this country.

Passionate argument often highlighted our close friendship. Yet, while so engaged, we never expressed animosity or ill will—only deep commitment to one another. Just before his passing, for example, an argument raged over Richard's attempt to nuance the definition of syncretism in this, his last book. He used the descriptor *counteractive* to modify the word *syncretism*, attempting a new definition with this two-word phrase: *counteractive syncretism*. We told him it was needless confusion—this hybrid phrase just didn't correspond to the simple definition of syncretism. A lot of food for thought like this came to him in deep discussions over many lattes.

That he took our viewpoints seriously was always evident because later on we would hear people say, "Richard says . . ." and in their words we would hear our own words being repeated—the ones we had previously discussed, even argued over. In our Indigenous communal way, he took our thoughts—those that were different from his—and made them his own. Two different things, his thoughts and our thoughts, became one new thing—*his* new thought. Now, that is the definition of syncretism! His nuancing of the word *syncretism* is still not what we might agree with, but we think he would just laugh at this *nonendorsement* endorsement of one of our best and deepest friends.

Richard was enigmatic. On the one hand, as he made clear in the closing years of his life, he was a common man. Yet undoubtedly, in many ways he was not. He became, for many in the wider Indigenous community, “the voice of one crying in the wilderness,” inviting believers to make straight paths for people to find Jesus. Denominational and doctrinal competition that encroached on his early experience of faith set Richard up to return to the simple message of Jesus—a highly-energized story of a Jesus stripped of colonial baggage. And Richard used his unique style and affable sense of humor to communicate this like no one else ever could.

Richard was a foil to anyone who encumbered the message of Jesus with culturally-bound prejudice. He presented a simple path to faith—inviting people to be all they could be through a renewed relationship with Creator’s son. He welcomed everyone to be a part of what Creator was doing among us, making everyone feel special in the process. We hope you will sense his generous spirit as he welcomes you to broaden your horizons—to come to understand a world where, in Richard’s words, “The Gospel is being rescued from the cowboys!”

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