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An Orbis Series on Contextualizing Gospel and Church

General Editor: Robert J. Schreiter, C.PP.S.

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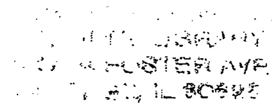
FAITH AND CULTURES SERIES

Doing Local Theology

A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity

Clemens Sedmak



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ht find it tasteless and boring. The question of how to ng is one of the key questions in constructing local the-

: at a certain place. It has to be that way. That is why we n and the fireplace. Cooking, just like theologizing, takes me, within a particular context. Cooking, just like doing :arned by way of courses and books—but good cooks, ›logians, do not always follow the recipes; they create ›n, know how to cook without a book, know how to able ingredients. Cooking can be creative without end. ·rives in a village, he or she introduces the people to new ys of preparing and eating food. Can we understand the he idea that Jesus taught us a new way to eat? Isn't it ıs tells us: "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the and the blind" (Lk 14:13)? What does this tell us about ›king and our theological (soup) kitchens?

ın image for the theologian. Unfold the different aspects of this :cts would you like to emphasize? Does the image you choose · forms of theology?

2

Jesus

Teacher of Theology

THESIS 10: Jesus is our great teacher. Since he was talking about God, he was doing theology. It is helpful to look at the way Jesus did theology. We will take this look without an elaborate Christian theology. We will look at Jesus "B.C."

Obviously there is a difference between a meal that we can enjoy and a meal that is not enjoyable at all. How should we cook in our theological kitchen? Which ingredients should we use? For whom do we cook? It might be a good idea to go back to the foundations and look at Jesus, who nourished and taught, healed and celebrated. The image of Jesus as the host who invites us to his banquet is familiar. The image of Jesus, bread of life, is well known. What about Jesus as the village cook?

What can we learn from Jesus about theology? Jesus did not teach courses in a classroom. He had no syllabus. He didn't write a book. This is significant. It took quite some time to record some of Jesus' sayings and deeds. Jesus' life was a series of personal encounters. The portrait we find in the gospels shows how much Jesus' theology depended on the people, on their pains and wounds, questions and concerns.

There can be no doubt that Jesus was doing theology. He was proclaiming the good news, teaching and preaching, talking about God. He answered questions about our attitude toward life as such and toward the world as a whole. Jesus challenged his friends and encouraged his community. In the same voice with the disciples who asked Jesus "teach us to pray" (Lk 11:1), we could ask Jesus: Teach us how to do theology!

Jesus' life has often been judged from a Christian perspective using Christian categories. Albert Nolan, in contrast, wrote a widely acclaimed book taking a look at Jesus before Christianity. When we try to reconstruct Jesus' life from this perspective, we see the local categories and images used to describe Jesus' life. He is depicted both as a citizen of his local culture and as a local theologian fulfilling the task of challenging his local culture.

The gospels describe Jesus in order to show his *relevance* for local human existence: "The four small books that we call the gospels are not biographies and were never intended to be. Their purpose was to show how Jesus could be relevant to people who lived *outside* Palestine a generation or two *after* Jesus' death" (Nolan 2001, 13). We have to be careful not to jump to quick and narrow conclusions, however. The sources we have reveal a certain perspective and were written under particular circumstances. The image of the Pharisees in Matthew or the image of the Jews in John or the image of women in Paul's letters must be taken with a grain of salt. However, it is indispensable to look at the foundations of our faith prior to any elaborated theology. It is important to look at Jesus "B.C."

Jesus was teaching and preaching about God. He was doing theology, and he was doing it explicitly. Let us take a look at the way Jesus was doing theology. The very first impression one gets is that Jesus must have been skeptical regarding theology. His harsh words directed against the Pharisees seem to indicate that Jesus was actually unhappy with the prospect of systematic, learned theology. "Beware of the scribes!" (Lk 20:46). Jesus denied a sign to the scribes and Pharisees (Mt 12:38-42).

This impression that Jesus is no friend of academic theology becomes stronger when one thinks of church officials and professors of theology today—aren't there in a number of cases striking similarities between them and the Pharisees as they are presented in the gospels? Doesn't that mean that the whole enterprise of theology is suspect? Are the shoes that professors and church dignitaries wear too big for the small path of Jesus?

Let us be optimistic. It is understood that the accounts of the Pharisees that we find in the gospels are filtered through special interests and perspectives. Jesus taught in the Temple (Lk 21:27) and the synagogues (Mt 4:23; 9:35). These were the official teaching institutions at that time. So, Jesus was doing theology in more than a private and merely informal manner.

The way Jesus dealt with scriptures shows his respect for these texts, and the way he argued reveals a high esteem for intellectual skills and the capabilities of human reason. In fact, he astonished people with his theological arguments at an early age (Lk 2:41-52). He did not despise studies and scholarship. It is significant that Saint Paul was made an apostle of Christ. Hence, I would not say that Jesus was in any way against theology. But the example of his life points in a very particular direction. Looking at the whole context of Jesus' life, we can ask how Jesus did theology.

THE LOCAL LIFE OF JESUS, THE CHRIST

THESIS 11: Jesus' life is described as a human existence within a certain local culture. He was rooted in the religious traditions of his time and place. Jesus' life is described as a sequence of face-to-face actions on a local (especially rural) level. Jesus is, however, also described as a person challenging local cultural standards and raising a universal claim.

Jesus was "somewhere"; his genealogy, his place in history is clearly described (Mt 1:1-17). Jesus started at the very beginning as does any human being—as a baby. Everyone who has some experience with babies knows what this means: helplessness, dependency, and a need to learn, grow, and mature. Jesus was "born into a little people, a nation of little importance by comparison with the great powers of the time" (Gutiérrez 1991, 86).

Jesus is also made part of a local tradition by the many references to the prophets throughout the gospels. This shows the attempt to describe Jesus as a legitimate citizen of a local tradition. Jesus is placed by the public in the local cultural context (see Jn 7:40-44). The circumstances of his birth are told in a very detailed way (Lk 2).

The first aspect of the local life of Jesus, the Christ, is Jesus' situatedness in a particular local culture. Jesus was rooted in a local culture, expressing himself in the local language, using local experiences and local images in his parables (Denzinger 1991, 4332, 4404; Soares-Prabhu 1988, 109-10).[1] He was a member of his cultural community. Jesus shared the hopes and fears of his people (Denzinger 1991, 4611). It can be argued that Jesus had a home and local roots (Nolan 2001, 46). The famous passages Matthew 8:20 and Luke 9:58 might have been taken too literally in the past. "Besides it is difficult to understand how Jesus could have been accused of entertaining sinners (Lk 15:2) if he did not have some kind of a home in which to do so" (ibid.; see Mk 1:29, 35; 2:1-2; Mt 4:13). Finally, the most important period in Jesus' life for the project of doing local theology is Jesus' "middle period," the so-called hidden life of Jesus.[2]

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[1] "Jesus taught with imagery taken from his culture, pointing to the birds of the air, the lilies of the field, the sower and the seed, and so on, to explain the mysteries of the kingdom" (Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation* [New York: Paulist Press, 1990]).

[2] Charles de Foucauld, appropriating the perspective of Jesus, wrote: "What was the meaning of that part of my life? I led it for your instruction. I instructed you continually for thirty years, not in words, but by my silence and example. What was

We do not know anything about Jesus after the story about the twelve-year-old Jesus in the Temple and the beginnings of Jesus' public activities. There are almost twenty years in the life of Jesus that are missing in the acknowledged gospels. It is this period of time that gives rise to the assumption that Jesus was very much rooted in his time. Otherwise, the historians of his time and the authors of the gospels might have found it important to mention details of that period of Jesus' life. The very fact that this is not the case can be taken as an indication that Jesus' life during that period was locally rooted and unspectacular.

"Jesus was a Jew. He was born into Judaism, subject to the law of Moses, and lived within the limits of that law. The movement he founded stood in the tradition of the Old Testament prophetic movement and that of John the Baptist (Ukpong 1994, 57).[3] Jesus used important Jewish sources in his ministry himself (for example, Mt 11:10); he was a law-abiding citizen. He asked the healed leper to show himself to the priests and offer for his cleansing "what Moses prescribed" (Mk 1:44). Jesus' family followed the local laws. This is shown in the passages that retell the circumcision and the presentation of Jesus (Lk 2:21-40). His parents followed the Jewish customs, and Jesus and his disciples themselves respected the Jewish feasts and rituals. Jesus did not intend to abolish the law (Mt 5:17).

There can be no doubt that the localness of Jesus' life is a key to understanding Jesus; Jesus was doing theology "in the village." Jesus' life was a life full of local encounters. It is significant that Jesus did not live in the urban context of New York City in the twenty-first century! Jesus is described as a "country person" who taught mainly in rural areas (Soares-Prabhu 1988, 98-100). With the exception of Jerusalem, Jesus seems not to have preached in any other significant town in Galilee or Judea. We encounter Jesus at quite insignificant places like Nazareth (Mt 2:23; Mk 1:9), in remote fishing villages like Bethsaida (Mk 6:45; 8:22; Lk 9:10), and in little provincial villages like Capernaum (Mt 9:1; Mk 1:21; 2:1; 9:33; Lk 10:15).

Jesus' disciples are also countryfolk. Peter betrayed his identity, possibly through his rural accent (Mt 26:73). Jesus is described as walking through the villages and towns and meeting many people, his life a series of personal encounters (Rayan 1984, 83). Jesus was dealing with "little people." This is significant because history is usually written about the powerful, rich, and

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I teaching you? I was teaching you primarily that it is possible to do good to men . . . without using words, without preaching, without fuss. . . . I was teaching you to live by the labor of your own hands" (*Spiritual Autobiography of Charles de Foucauld*, ed. J. F. Six [New York: Kenedy & Sons, 1964], 82f.).

[3] See B. H. Young, *Jesus the Jewish Theologian* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995). Young describes Jesus as a theologian who is deeply rooted in the Jewish tradition. He depicts the Jewish roots of Jesus' kingdom theology (part 2) and the Jewish theology in Jesus' parables (part 3).

famous (Nolan 2001, 28). In the light of his very unspectacular life for many years during his life time we could say that Jesus led the life of a worker (Denzinger 1991, 4332).[4] As a woodworker, Jesus belonged to a social class even below the peasants, since woodworkers did not own land. It is indicative that Jesus was not a member of the highest classes.

The localness of Jesus is one aspect of his life. On the other hand, Jesus challenged the local tradition. He became a stumbling block for many people. He was not well received in his hometown as a prophet (Mt 13:53-58); this indicates that there is a contrast between the ordinary life of Jesus within his local culture and his public ministry. The tension expressed in that passage is the tension between Jesus' local existence and his invitation to transcend the local context.

Jesus introduced new categories like "being born from above" (Jn 3:5-8) or "freedom" (Jn 8:34-38) or "living water" (Jn 4:10-14) and caused confusion and amazement. Jesus challenged the perception of the people around him by talking about the official's daughter and Lazarus as "sleeping" (Mt 9:24; Jn 11:11). His parables are challenges and, although in familiar language, are frequently misunderstood, even by his disciples (Mk 4:10; Mt 13:36; 16:11-12). Jesus wanted the law to be understood at its deepest level. So he placed the fasting (Mt 9:14) and the Sabbath law (Mt 12:1) in a new, deeper, more human context in which the law served the well-being of people and was not an end in itself.

Local cultures, like individuals, are in need of transformation, in need of conversion. This is part of our concept of the kingdom of God. It is this invitation to "go beyond," to walk the extra mile, to risk the exodus. Jesus questioned local norms, invited outsiders and sinners, and redefined social borders; we can see this in the encounters with the Samaritan woman (Jn 4) and with his family (Mt 12:46-50) (Nolan 2001, 27-36; Cunningham 1988, 127f.; Senior 1992, 61-73). Jesus gave new value to old traditions by reinterpreting them; he reinterpreted the Paschal meal through the institution of the eucharist, and he reinterpreted the Sabbath. Respecting local traditions means reappropriating them in the light of change and new challenges.

Jesus is not only the cornerstone but also the stumbling block. Jesus talked about the seriousness of following him (Mt 16:24-28) and used the image of sheep among wolves (Mt 10:16). He challenged the local contexts of his time to transcend the village, to refound the village, to discover differences and alternatives. Jesus had a universal claim, crossing the threshold of his

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[4] The image of Jesus the worker has been influential for the worker-priests in France and the Catholic Worker Movement in the United States. "Christ Himself was a worker. St. Joseph, His foster father, was a worker. A man who works with his hands as well as with his head is an integrated personality. He is co-creator, taking the raw materials God provided and creating food, clothing, and shelter, and all manner of beautiful things" (Dorothy Day, *From Union Square to Rome* [New York: Arno Press, 1978], 150).

local culture. There is a paradox between the universal savior and the provincial teacher (Smith 1969, chap. 4).

What can we learn from Jesus about doing theology? We can, first of all, see that it is not easy to take our tradition seriously and to consent to it. Appropriating the tradition is a creative act that asks us to uncover its true concern rather than merely follow its external form. We also learn that theology has to be rooted, that we as theologians have to be rooted in a village, in a community of reference. And we also learn that we must not consider our village the ultimate norm. We cannot expect all villages to be structured in the way our own village is organized. Jesus was rooted in a village, but he did not stay there!

THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS

THESIS 12: Jesus did theology with authority that was not his. The basis of Jesus' doing theology was his relation with God. That is why he sought out spaces for prayer and solitude. He did theology as one sent, and he used this authority to serve God and the people.

Jesus started his theological mission after accepting the baptism of John the Baptist, after a time of probation (the temptations), and after a time of prayer, meditation, and solitude (Mt 4; Mk 1:35-36). It is important to see that Jesus took up the task of doing theology publicly only after a process of spiritual formation. Furthermore, Jesus is described as a person who withdrew for prayer and meditation (Mt 14:13; Lk 4:42; 5:16; 9:10-11; Jn 8:1). Jesus prayed and meditated before making decisions; it was after a night of prayer that he summoned the Twelve (Lk 6:12-16). He also went with his disciples to deserted places to reenergize them (Mk 6:30-33; Jn 11:54).

Jesus was doing theology to show the way to someone other than himself. Both the foundations and the message of Jesus' theology were life in God. This is the basis of Jesus authority, a basis he touched again and again in prayer and solitude. Only out of his intimacy with God could Jesus teach and preach. Their relationship is so close that Jesus used the word *Abba* to talk to and about God.[5] The intimate relationship with God was the basis for Jesus' prophetic language, which is grounded in a deeper, mystical language.

It is on this basis that Jesus was able to teach with authority. Among the attributes Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff uses to describe Jesus, I would like to mention the very astute observation that Jesus is a person who had the courage to say: "I" (Leonardo Boff 1987, 115-18). He had the courage to stand up against the tradition ("You have heard . . . but I say to you" [Mt 5:21f., 27-28, 33-34, 38-39, 43-44]). Jesus was doing theology "with authority" (Mt 7:29) (see Grollenberg 1978, chap. 7). He ratified this authority in practical deeds, by healing (Mt 9:5) and feeding (Mt 15:37). Jesus pointed at the fruit as the ratification of his mission (Mt 11:5). We could say that he was one with his message. Jesus' message also gets authority by the witness of his whole life. He was willing to endure the consequences.

Jesus used his authority to serve—to serve God in fulfilling God's will and to serve the people in being their servant. Daniel Berrigan discovers "tenderness, majesty, and above all, personalism" in Jesus (Daniel Berrigan 1979, 19). Jesus was exercising his authority in a tender and personal way. People were astonished at his teaching because he was teaching "with authority" (Lk 4:32). The question "By what authority are you doing theology?" (see Lk 20:2) is an important question, until now.

People knew that Jesus' authority was not the authority of the scholar (Jn 7:15). Jesus' answer to those questioning his authority is very clear: "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me" (Jn 7:16). He was doing theology by way of imperatives because he was clear about the fact that his mission was not his. Jesus was authorized by the Father (Lk 3:21-22). Jesus did not go out to preach on his own; he was sent (Jn 5:23; 7:28-29). Jesus explicitly mentioned that if he glorified himself his glory would be nothing (Jn 8:54-58). There are similarities between Jesus and prophetical speech (Helminiak 1986, 68-71). Jesus was doing theology in a prophetic way—talking about a future and a hope for his people. The God of Jesus is the God of the kingdom Jesus proclaims (see Lois 1993, 179-82).

The center of proclaiming God is our relationship with God. Jesus teaches us that theology is theocentric, God-centered, and that it serves both God

[5] "The word [*Abba*] implied deep intimacy. Now the Old Testament had spoken of God as Father. God was the Father of orphans and the Father of the nation. Jesus' usage was remarkable on two counts: It uses 1) the diminutive form 2) in personal direct address to God. The sense of intimacy with God expressed in the term *Abba* exceeded the generally accepted limits in Judaism" (D. A. Helminiak, *The Same Jesus: A Contemporary Christology* [Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1986], 74). "The central and decisive fact in the appearance of Jesus was the renewal of the sense of the present immediacy of God" (John B. Cobb Jr., *The Structure of Christian Existence* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967], 111). Jesus "knew God as the presently active reality that had incomparably greater reality than the world of creaturely things. He lived and spoke out of the immediacy of this reality" (ibid., 112). This relationship was new and is a key to understanding Jesus: "The research of J. Jeremias . . . has placed it beyond all doubt that Jesus addressed God as *abba*, that he taught others to do the same (Lk 11:2) and that no one else had ever done this before" (Albert Nolan, *Jesus before Christianity*, twenty-fifth anniv. ed. [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2001], 97).

and the people. Theology is not about self-promotion and seeking one's own glory.

THE PASTORAL THEOLOGY OF JESUS

THESIS 13: Jesus was doing theology with common sense. He invited people to use their own judgment and trusted in the capabilities of human reasoning. This can be illustrated by the parable of the good Samaritan.

Jesus was doing theology as a pragmatic person. We can see Jesus' appeal to common sense in the way he talked about the Sabbath law (Mt 12:1-14). Jésus talked about priorities and human needs (see Lk 13:10-17; 14:5; Jn 5:1-19). He trusted that human beings are capable of making judgments. He invited John's disciples to make up their mind by looking at the fruit of his ministry (Mt 11:4-5). He knew that people can make valid judgments (Lk 12:54). He argued logically against the Pharisees (Lk 11:14-52). He asked those he healed what they wanted him to do.

Jesus honored common sense and sound reason. We can think of his sayings on discipleship: "For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? . . . Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand?" (Lk 14:28, 31). Jesus invited people to use their common sense.

The common-sense attitude of Jesus is a pastoral attitude that permeates his sense of ministry and interaction. It can be traced in the parable of the good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37). This parable points to the way to do local theology.

- The good Samaritan is not expecting the situation. He is moved by the occasion, changes his schedule, and adjusts to the needs of the situation. His ministry is service in context.
- Compassion is the primary motivation of his ministry.
- He takes care of the victim according to his means; after that, recognizing his limits, he delegates the task of attending to the man to a local professional, the innkeeper.
- The good Samaritan continues his journey as planned; he does not give up everything because of the emergency situation.
- The good Samaritan accepts the responsibility and promises to return to the innkeeper on his way back to pay whatever more is due.

This is an impressive model of doing local ministry. It provides an example of ministry based on common sense and on compassion. It is important for our understanding of theology to see that Jesus honors reason, judgment, and common sense. Being down to earth can be an expression of humility. It is vital for our theological efforts to recognize the trust Jesus puts in human capabilities. But it is equally vital to see his emphasis on life. Jesus looks at what people do rather than what they say. Jesus even gives the message that the common understanding of "orthodoxy" ("know your faith") is not the ultimate thing. We should not forget that the Samaritan was not a person of "right faith" but a Samaritan, one whose faith was considered "unbelief" by Jesus' Jewish hearers!

THEOLOGICAL OCCASIONS

THESIS 14: Jesus did "situational theology." He had an eye for detail, the small things and the "little people." Jesus used occasions to do theology, and he respected the dynamics of particular situations. We could see this as an invitation to do "leaflet theology" rather than "book-length theology."

Jesus did not give formal courses. With the exception of a few passages that portray Jesus teaching in the synagogues, the gospels talk about Jesus as teaching and preaching in villages, in fields, on mountains, and on the road. Jesus was using *occasions*. Jesus was flexible in doing theology; he changed his pastoral approach according to the situation, thus living the parable of the good Samaritan. This is shown in the encounter with a centurion in Capernaum (Mt 8:5-13). Jesus was doing theology according to the "signs of the times" (Mt 16:3-4).

It is remarkable that Jesus is very often depicted as the addressee of people's demands: sick people are brought to Jesus, people call Jesus for help. We could say that Jesus reacts to local needs; his theology is "user oriented." Jesus respected people in need and asked them what kind of ministry they were seeking (Mt 20:29). On the other hand, he was not willing to "sell" his ministry for the sake of demonstrating something (Mt 16:1-4; Mk 8:10-12); he refused to give a sign, he refused gratifications such as fame, money, and power.

Jesus did local theology also in the sense that he did not use prefabricated notions. He did not impose ready-made theological categories on people. This can be illustrated by looking at the story of the man with the withered arm who was cured by Jesus on a Sabbath (Mk 3:1-5). Uruguayan theologian Juan Segundo comments on this passage: "Jesus rejects

the possibility of forming any concrete judgment on the basis of theology or its realm of competence. One cannot begin with certitudes deduced from revelation. . . . To paraphrase Gutiérrez once again, theology is the second step in the methodology of Jesus and the first step in the methodology of the Pharisees" (Segundo 1976, 78).

Jesus went with the tide. That is why he was willing to learn in the encounter with the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28). That is why he adjusted to the needs of the times: he took time to stay two days with the Samaritans (Jn 4:41); he took time to stay with friends who needed him (Jn 11:6-7). Jesus lived in the present, in the here and now. There is an amazing local attentiveness in Jesus.

Jesus also used the local material to heal and cure. He did not carry ointments or powders. He used the soil and his spittle (Mk 7:31-37; Jn 9:6-7). Jesus characterized those who are part of his mission as householders who bring forth from their storerooms things new and old (Mt 13:52); this could be understood as a statement saying: Everything you need is there; everything you need for your mission is in your hands. Jesus respected local theological resources. This is also shown in the mission of the disciples, who are to go forth without taking much baggage (Mt 10:5).

Jesus used local observations as a starting point of his teaching, as he did in the experience of the widow's offering (Mk 12:41-44). Jesus respected the dynamics of a situation and did not impose rote judgments; an illustration of his readiness to listen and see is the encounter with the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8). Jesus is depicted as a person who listened and perceived rather than talking and judging. He did not react to the situation with a general judgment but with an unexpected and unprecedented response.

Jesus' eye for detail is also shown in the way he dealt with people. He treated everyone with dignity. He respected people's privacy and did not permit anyone except Peter, James, and John to enter with him into the house of Jairus to see Jairus's daughter (Lk 8:51). Jesus respected small things and "little people," like children and social outsiders, the sick and marginalized. Jesus had a special compassion "for the little ones" (Mt 10:42;11:25-27; 18:5-6, 10; Mk 9:41-42; Lk 7:13).[6] He emphasized that his wisdom was revealed to the "little ones" and kept from the wise and

[6] See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), xii. Gutiérrez underlines that Jesus took a position contrary to the cultural expectations and against the mainstream. Who are "the little ones"? "The 'little children' are related to the poor, the hungry, and the afflicted (Luke 6:20-23); to sinners and the sick (who are despised on this account) (Matt. 9:12-13); to sheep who have no shepherd (Matt. 9:36); to the little ones (Matt. 10:42; 18:1-4); to those not invited to the banquet (Luke 14:16-24). All these categories form a bloc, a sector of people; they are 'poor of the land'" [illegible]

prudent; he blessed the children as living parables of the kingdom (Mt 19:13-15; Lk 10:21).

These are key ideas for understanding theology as a series of local theologies. Jesus seems to encourage local theologies that rise to the particular circumstances. He teaches us to do theology "unencumbered by baggage." He challenges our ideas of general theories. Jesus invites us to wake up—to see the small things and to discover the dynamics and proper weight of situations. Theology becomes an art, the art of looking at details, the art of responding to the "little ones."

Theology is always in the making, reading the signs of the times. Jesus is walking, not standing; he is always on the road. Jesus teaches a "theology of leaflets" rather than a "theology of books." Jesus encourages oral theology and "little theologies" for particular occasions. He suggests that the particular situation rather than the full "backpack" of prefabricated notions should serve as a source for theology.

A THEOLOGY THAT BUILDS COMMUNITY "AS IF PEOPLE MATTER"

THESIS 15: Jesus did theology to build up community. He called everyone into community, a community that is constantly "on the move." Doing theology as Jesus did is a community-building enterprise.

Jesus called people into community and redefined the borders of the local communities of his time. Service to God cannot be rendered if one's communal life is in disorder (Mt 5:23-25). Jesus called people to community (Mt 4:18-22); he instituted disciples with authority and created new social networks (Mt 10); he introduced forms of fraternal correction and an order of life valid for his disciples (Mt 18:15-18). In this way Jesus instituted a community.

It is remarkable how often Jesus is depicted in the company of his friends. "One of the most touching and revealing aspects of the gospel story is that of Jesus in the company of his disciples. They are an almost constant presence, gaping in awe at his acts of power. They are confidants of his most important teaching, at his side as his mission drove him through the crowds of Galilee. . . . All of the gospels relate that one of the first things Jesus did was to gather disciples" (Senior 1992, 51). Jesus proclaimed the good news and brought people together. The crowds that Jesus attracted were amaz- [illegible] People came together to be healed and nourished. Jesus was a wise

community leader. He distinguished between his close disciples and the crowd. He felt responsible for the crowd as well, attending to them and being present, but he spoke differently to his disciples, more intimately—the language of friendship.

Jesus did theology by bringing people together, by building community, and by living friendships. Consequently, the Jesus-disciples differ significantly from the rabbi-disciples at that time. Thus, Jesus offered a new way of community building. The following characterized Jesus' way of building community, of forming a "Jesus community":

- Jesus chose his disciples; he was the founder and the center of the community; it was not primarily the disciples who chose him (Jn 15:16; Mk 3:13; Lk 9:59).
- The community of life with Jesus is an end in itself; it need not be justified with reference to other external factors (Mt 10:24-25).
- Jesus empowered and sent his disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God and to make its presence felt (Lk 9:60; Mk 3:14).
- Jesus called everyone to become his disciple; his community is "an open society"; he even called the rich and the outsiders (Mk 1:16-20; 2:14; Lk 6:15). Jesus called disciples rather than accepting demands for discipleship (Mt 4:18).
- Jesus exhorted his disciples to humility and service and did not promote strict hierarchies within the structure of his disciples (Mt 23:5-12).
- The disciples of Jesus in turn did not form their own disciples (Mt 5:19; Mk 6:30) (see Fuellenbach 1998, 91f.).

We could say that the community that Jesus founded is to be characterized by its intrinsic tendency to overcome local contexts. Second, the Jesus community is characterized by its localness in the sense that it is rooted in a person, Jesus. It is the itinerant person, not a place, that gives the community its local identity. The way Jesus showed was a way open to everyone. He called everyone and invited everyone to convert and be transformed. The Jesus community is "on the road." Jesus described the way of following him in terms of an ongoing journey (Mt 8:18-22). The follower of Jesus can never complacently sit down; the story of the transfiguration of Jesus (Mt 17:1-13) depicts this refusal to get too comfortable very impressively.

Jesus refused to settle down. He did not choose buildings in which to institutionalize his community. The Jesus community is defined by a person, not by a location. He called his disciples out of their ordinary life and invited them to a new way of life. Jesus' way of doing theology changed the life of his followers entirely.

When we think of our understanding of theology, we can see the importance of friendships and of bringing people together. Doing theology is an attempt to build communities, to strengthen the ties of a community. It is not

surprising that Ignatius of Loyola emphasized the criterion of community building in decision making (Does the decision contribute to strengthening the community and to promoting unity?). This is an important consideration for theology. There is the invitation to build up and not to divide, to create unity and not conflicts. That is why John XXIII talked about the "medicine of mercy rather than that of severity" to be applied by the Second Vatican Council. Jesus' invitation to build community can be seen as an invitation to use the same wisdom in choosing the right medicine to attend to the wounds of the community.

THESIS 16: Jesus did theology with self-respect and with respect for others; he did theology "as if people matter." Healing and feeding, forgiving and teaching formed a unity in Jesus' way of doing theology. We can see this feature of Jesus' way of doing theology as an invitation to theologies that are vulnerable, modest, and a response to people's questions and needs.

Jesus was doing theology as if people matter.[*] He treated his fellow human beings with respect. As we have seen, Jesus had no doubts that humans are capable of making judgments (Lk 12:54-59) and decisions. It is in this spirit of empowerment and trust that Jesus called and commissioned his disciples. Jesus' way of doing theology was holistic in the sense that teaching, preaching, and healing went hand in hand (Mt 4:23-24; 9:35-36). Doing theology meant forgiving sins, instructing people, and healing human illness. Jesus fed the crowds, thus dealing with their basic needs (Mt 14:13-15; 15:32-33); he did not separate basic physical needs from the spiritual needs of the people.

Jesus was so committed to his ministry that he accepted the responsibilities involved; he took it as part of his responsibility for his sheep to feed the crowd when they had nothing to eat. Taking part in the mission of Jesus means to serve, to do ministry as if people matter, to render service to people. In this regard Jesus compared his mission with the responsibility of a physician (Lk 5:32).

A deep motivation and driving force for Jesus' doing theology was compassion for people. Jesus was compassionate. He was not afraid to touch people or to be touched. He touched the leper (Mt 8:3) and allowed the

[*] This phrase refers to E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful*, which is a study in economics as if people matter. Schumacher wanted to stress the fact that economic systems (like the Sabbath and all religious norms [see Lk 6:6-11; 14:1-6]) are constructed because of the people and that they can serve this purpose only if their size is human and can be handled by the people.

voman suffering from a hemorrhage to touch him (Mt 9:20). He used his ›wn saliva to heal (Mk 7:31-37; Jn 9). Jesus encountered people with tenlerness (Nolan 2001, 37). Seeking the personal encounter was part of Jesus' *heological method* (Rayan 1984, 81; see Fuchs 1990, 31-45).

Jesus healed people, but he did not create dependencies. Again and again we find the invitation: Go! Go your way! Jesus did not heal people to have followers; he did not heal people to become famous; he was discreet about his healing ministry (see Mt 12:16) and healed people for their own sake. Jesus empowered the sick by telling them that the healing power was within them ("Your faith has made you well!" [Mk 10:52]). Jesus did theology as if people matter—irrespective of his own reputation and the categories of political correctness of his time.

Let us look at the spirit in which Jesus did theology. Christian spiritual life is life lived in the spirit of Jesus (Sobrino 1985, 2). Hence, it is important to analyze not only the deeds of Jesus but also the spirit in which Jesus acted.[8] Leonardo Boff, in an attempt to approximate the spiritual profile of Jesus, describes him as "a person of extraordinary good sense, creative imagination, and originality" (Leonardo Boff 1987, 11-15). Millar Burrows talks about the following "outstanding characteristics" of Jesus: devotion to the will of God, sincerity, patient endurance, love for the Father, consciousness of sonship, authority, insight into human nature, keenness of intellect, sense of proportion, rejection of asceticism, friendship with outcasts, relations with women, love of children, love of nature, humor, tolerance, anger, grief, compassion, mysticism, and prayer (Burrows 1977, 280-95). The following features must be considered when trying to understand the spiritual profile of Jesus:

- Jesus is consistent in his life—he accepts the consequences of his actions and his actions follow his convictions.
- Jesus does not want to say something new merely for the effect and whatever the cost.
- Jesus wants to understand; he appeals to sound reason.
- Jesus does not paint the world better or worse than it is. He is honest to reality, the visible, and the invisible.
- All that is authentically human is seen in Jesus: anger and joy, goodness and toughness, friendship, sorrow, and temptation.

[8] Knowledge about Jesus in a theological perspective, consequently, is practical knowledge: "Knowing Christ . . . is something we achieve not intellectually, but in doing. We know him to the extent that we understand what he did through experience, and by assimilating this and making it ours, we come to be more fully in tune with his cause and his person, which complement one another. . . . The best setting for really knowing Jesus is simply carrying out what he did, following him" (Pedro Casaldáliga and J. M. Vigil, *Political Holiness* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994], 65).

What does that mean for theology? What does it mean to do theology as if people matter? There is certainly the aspect of wholeness. Doing theology as if people matter cannot separate the hunger for God from the hunger for life. The bread of life and the daily bread cannot be separated in our theological work. There is certainly the aspect of responsibility: it is the responsibility that we see in the parable of the good Samaritan. Doing theology as if people matter means responding to people. There is certainly the aspect of authenticity. Doing theology as if people matter is a call for spiritual and intellectual honesty. Good theology is not judged by the *finesse* of its rhetoric but by its truthfulness.

GOOD THEOLOGY

THESIS 17: Jesus talked about the criteria for good theology. The most obvious criterion is the criterion of the good fruit, but he also saw this fruit coming from modest beginnings. Jesus taught that the full variety of good fruits came from a variety of sources or ministries (theologies). Jesus did theology according to the criteria of sustainability, appropriateness, empowerment, and challenge.

The criterion of good theology is the kind of fruits it bears (Mt 7:15-20; 12:33-38). Jesus stressed that the kingdom starts small (Mk 4:30-32).[9] Any natural fruit begins small. Jesus, when asked about his credibility, offered the fruits as the criteria by which to judge the way he did theology: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise, the poor have the gospel preached to them (Mt 11:5-6). The fruits are the main criteria.

There are many good fruits by many good trees. We can think of the different local theologies as a garden full of trees. There are apple trees and

[9] Gerald A. Arbuckle took up this point in requiring the quality of a commitment to small beginnings as an important quality of a pastoral change agent (Gerald A. Arbuckle, *Out of Chaos: Refounding Religious Communities* [New York: Paulist Press, 1988], chap. 5). The readiness to work with small beginnings is alien to the contemporary academic culture of intellectual competition. The Centro Bartolomé de las Casas in Lima attempts to live a different culture, a culture of small beginnings. In the words of Xavier Iguiniz: "We are not interested in creating a new theology, we are not trying to confront traditional church structures. We are not hoping for quick radical changes. No, we want to listen carefully and patiently to the movement of the people and slowly identify those elements that lead to progress" (Henri Nouwen, *¡Gracias!* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1992], 163).

plum trees and pear trees and cherry trees. They need different kinds of soil, have different flowers, and bear different fruits. There are better and worse ecological conditions for a particular tree. It is amazing that Jesus acknowl-edged a plurality of ministries (see Mt 11:7-19). This is an invitation to accept a plurality of theologies, a richness of the many ways of doing theol-ogy. At the same time, this is an invitation to generosity for each local theology, an invitation to be open to the gifts of others. Many trees—one garden; this is true for ministries and theologies. Jesus had no problems with other people casting out demons (Lk 9:49-50). He saw his mission and the mission of John the Baptist as complementary missions in the common task of building the kingdom.

Let us try to be a little more specific about the criteria by which to evalu-ate theologies. I suggest that we take a prominent passage from the gospel of Luke, the one in which the disciples are sent out. This is indeed an impor-tant gospel passage for our topic. Jesus tells his disciples how to proclaim the good news:

> After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town" (Lk 10:1-12).

This gospel passage illustrates Jesus' way of doing theology. We can look at the criteria that Jesus suggests in doing theology. One way to do that is to see whether the criteria we normally use to assess local initiatives are used by Jesus: sustainability, appropriateness, and empowerment.[10] Let us take a

[10] These criteria are taken from the field of development. The criteria of sustainability, empowerment, and appropriateness emerged in the 1990s and are an attempt to respect local knowledge, local cultures, and local initiatives. It is because of this background (respect for localness) that these criteria seem to be fruitful for our context of local theologies.

look at Jesus' mission statement in the light of these three criteria. Does Jesus make use of the ideas expressed in these criteria?

First, let us look at sustainability. It is obvious that Jesus was interested in the sustainability of his mission. That is why he sent disciples out in the first place; that is why he spoke about the kingdom as the ultimate goal, challenge, and task; and that is why he encouraged endurance and strength (Mueller 1988, 28f.). The very idea of mission is a sign of Jesus' interest in making his mission sustainable. The gospel passage is a call to mission, a situation in which disciples are sent to multiply the fruits of Jesus' mission. Jesus was rooted in a local culture, but his claim transcended the local con-text and became universal. This is also expressed by the symbols that he used—word, life, light, water, bread, shepherd. He touched upon the really human (Amaladoss 1984, 33). It is part of the Christian message to hope and strive for the salvation of all.

Jesus extended his mission to people who were not part of his own cul-tural community. "Jesus extended one's neighbor to include one's enemies. He could not have found a more effective way of shocking his audience into the realization that he wished to include all people in this solidarity of love" (Nolan 2001, 75).

The central symbol of this claim that Jesus' message is a lasting one is the message of the kingdom of God. The church (after Christ) clearly realizes and acknowledges the claim of sustainability. Actually, the very foundation of the church is the idea of the sustainability of Jesus' mission. Jesus' mis-sion was the annunciation and the restitution of the kingdom of God (Denzinger 1991, 4105, 4224, 4571f.). Jesus both announced and realized the kingdom of God (Denzinger 1991, 4611; Brown 1994, 60-70; Leonardo Boff 1978, chap. 4). The kingdom of God described by Jesus has to be extended and preserved (Denzinger 1991, 4123). Jesus wanted his words to bear fruit (Mt 7:24-27). The key symbol for the claim of sustainability of Jesus' mission is the institution of the eucharist and the command to cel-ebrate it in memory of him.

Second, let us look at the criterion of appropriateness. In the gospel pas-sage mentioned, Jesus tells his disciples to accept the local conditions that determine both the welcome or acceptance and the way of life. That is why he warns them not to take too many things with them. They are to eat and drink what is available in the local culture and become rooted in a local culture as much as possible ("remain in the same house"). They should not arrive with ready-made tools and concepts; instead, they should first assess the situation and accept the local quality of life.

The idea of appropriateness is a key message of the gospels. Many things that could be mentioned under the word *appropriateness* have been men-tioned already in the characterization of Jesus' ministry. Let us repeat some of the main ideas: Jesus accepted the local laws and hierarchies to the extent possible. He asked the leper to go to the priests and offer the gift that Moses commanded (Mt 8:4); he was diplomatic about the tax (Mt 22:15-22). He

alked in local images.[11] Jesus emphasized that norms and laws must be ocally appropriate; they are instituted for the sake of the well-being of human beings (see Mt 9:14-17; 12:1-14).

Jesus dealt with many different people in many different ways. And the people approaching Jesus had many different reasons to be with him: some wanted to be cured, others were seeking forgiveness and consolation, some wanted to be fed, others hungered for a vision, some might have been only curious. Jesus gave himself in many different ways.

Doing theology in a way that is appropriate to a local context can also mean accepting local challenges; we do see passages in which Jesus was challenged by the local culture, especially in the encounter with the Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21ff.). Jesus respected the dynamics of situations and human encounters; he accepted the specificity of a situation and measured each situation separately. He did not apply ready-made standards to situations, as we can see in the story of the anointing at Bethany (Mt 26:6-13) or the story of the centurion's servant (Mt 8:5-18). Jesus adapted the mode of healing to the circumstances. This is part of who Jesus was. Jesus Christ, "*the* model of incarnation and inculturation, became incarnated in one particular time and place. Even there he spoke differently to his own apostles than he did to the scribes and Pharisees, differently to the Samaritan woman than to Peter. He could be stern or gentle. He knew when to speak and when to be silent. He was sensitive to the generosity of the widow at the temple, and to the need for affection on the part of the children who sought his blessing" (Schineller 1990, 7).

Third, we look at the criterion of empowerment. Jesus did not hold on to his powers—the power of healing, the power of evangelizing, and even the power of forgiving sins—but shared them. The gospel passage quoted above (Lk 10) continues with reports of the disciples returning full of excitement and joy that their powers had worked. We can see this kind of empowerment at work in all the situations describing Jesus healing people. It is on that basis that Jesus could send his disciples and the people he healed to "go out and do the kingdom," because the kingdom has to be "done."

The concept of empowerment can be traced throughout the gospels. The images Jesus used to describe the responsibility of the people are images of empowerment (salt of the earth, light of the world, fishers of men). Jesus encouraged his disciples to be part of the mission (Mt 10:26ff.). Jesus

[11] There is a revealing passage in Ernesto Cardenal's recordings of Bible discussions in Solentiname, in which the group discusses Matthew 25:14-30. They do not like the fact that Jesus uses the image of money to make his point. One participant suggests that this is probably what people understand best, and another says, "Like here among ourselves we give examples of hens and corn and kidney beans, which are the things we understand best, so it'll be seen clearer, in the people's words. Well, that's the way Jesus was talking too" (Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel of Solentiname*, 4 vols. [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1984], 4:39).

invited people to come to him with their sorrows and burdens (Mt 11:28-30). He called people to mission and commissioned his apostles (Mt 28:16-20); he talked about the efficacy of faith and the works that can be done on the basis of faith (Lk 17:5-6). Jesus empowered people by telling them that everything is possible for God (Lk 18:27). The invitation not to be afraid can be found in many places throughout the gospels (see Mt 8:26; 9:22; 19:27). This is as much empowering as the invitation not to worry about material needs (Mt 6:25) and the reassurance of the power of prayer (Mt 7:7-12; 18:19-22).

Again and again Jesus made clear that it is the faith of the healed person that has brought about the healing (Mt 8:13; 9:29; Lk 7:50). Jesus empowered people. Again and again it is mentioned in the gospels that Jesus invites people to go their way. This is indeed a core element of Christian ministry. Ricardo Rezende talks about Acts 3 and the healing of the crippled man through Peter. "No longer did he have to ask anyone for favors." Rezende connects this story with a Brazilian experience, the experience of the farmers of Itaipava who wanted the bishop to solve their land problems: "Bishop Hanrahan read this passage from the Acts of the Apostles to them. The farmers, on hearing the reading, understood that they had to walk with their own feet. They returned to the land. They were evicted again. They persisted and won the rights to the land" (Rezende 1994, 46). This is an example of empowerment.

Jesus did not use his healing powers to create dependencies or to exercise power; he empowered the people he healed to live their lives (Mk 10:52; Lk 7:10; 8:38-39; Jn 4:50; 8:11; 11:44). He tried to make clear to his disciples that their ministry, that doing theology, is not a matter of power (Lk 10:17-20).

Sustainability, appropriateness, and empowerment are three standard criteria. In the light of what we said about the invitation to go beyond the local context I would like to add a fourth criterion: challenge. Jesus makes it clear that good theology challenges local cultures. This is the criterion that talks about the counter-cultural force of the message of Jesus.

Let us look at the criterion of challenge. Jesus was not absorbed by the local culture. He did not totally surrender to the local culture. Time and again he posed counter-cultural challenges to the local culture. Jesus challenged people to take a different look at reality; the judgment that the ruler's daughter had died was challenged by Jesus (Mt 9:18ff.), and people laughed him to scorn. Jesus uses different categories that are incompatible with the traditional, local categories, for example, talking about "rebirth" (Jn 3:5-8) or "freedom" (Jn 8:34-38). Jesus indicated that there is a significant difference between knowledge of earthly things and knowledge of heavenly things (Jn 3:10-13). We are talking about *different categories*.

Jesus challenged his disciples when they tried to measure his mission in secular categories—it is in this sense that he rebuked Peter (Mt 16:23). We can see the same challenging harshness in Jesus' approach toward cultures

that try to find a "way out" similar to the escape suggested by Peter. For cultures not willing to accept the counter-cultural challenge, "it will be more tolerable on that day for Sodom" (Lk 10:12). Counter-cultural challenges were part of his very mission. Because of his lack of formal education (Jn 7:15), the very fact that Jesus was teaching could be seen as a counter-cultural challenge to the local cultures of his time.

The core of Jesus' teaching is in the beatitudes. The beatitudes are a strong expression of Jesus' counter-cultural challenge to established categories of power and fame. In the beatitudes Jesus contrasted the old law with the new law (Mt 5:17ff.), thus explicitly indicating that he would introduce new ways of looking at reality and human life. The beatitudes show a transformation from external criteria. This is also clearly shown in the new law of divorce (Mt 5:31-32; 19:3ff.).

Jesus' mission called for transcending local social boundaries (Mt 8:22; 12:46-50); the community he founded is not compatible with the established social order, as the cleansing of the Temple showed (Mt 21:12-17). Jesus talked about the mission of his disciples as explicitly counter-cultural: "Behold, I am sending you forth like sheep in the midst of wolves" (Mt 10:16). There is a price to pay for the kingdom, Jesus said: the cross. Jesus did not promote "cheap ways to salvation" (Mt 16:24-28).

The price for the counter-cultural challenge of Jesus is a certain loneliness. Jesus did not entrust himself fully to the local cultural community (Jn 2:25); his fate clearly showed the price of counter-cultural engagement. Jesus talked about his own mission as a counter-cultural challenge that would bring the sword, not peace (Mt 10:34). Jesus did not hesitate to threaten local cultures by talking condemnation and disaster (Mt 11:20). Being counter-cultural was part of what the Jesus community was.

The message of the kingdom of God is the core of Jesus' message. The kingdom provides us with a vision of a new society, a contrast society. The kingdom of God is not simply an opposition to secular kingdoms. The structure of the kingdom of God, as described by Jesus, is entirely different from those structures that are familiar to us. Power in the kingdom, for example, is essentially different; it is not the case that the rich and the poor simply change places (Nolan 2001, 84).[12]

Christianity is a constant invitation to go beyond the local. This call has been heard from the very beginning (see Rom 1:14; 1 Cor 9:22). People whom we call saints are those who have transcended their local village, left the safe harbors, and sailed the open sea. What does this mean for theology? The challenge Jesus poses to local cultures is ongoing. As Tony Walsh says, "The Gospel needs to keep its shocking effect. You can never claim to

[12] Juan Segundo speaks about the "counter-theology" of Jesus as opposed both to capitalism and to socialism (Juan Segundo, *Capitalism-Socialism: A Theological Crux*, *Concilium* 96 [1974], 118).

have fully understood the Gospel. It always should keep you on edge and never satisfied" (in Nouwen 1976, 117). The gospel must not lose its counter-cultural force. It remains the engine of theology and of the church. Rodney Stark explains that a "movement must maintain a substantial sense of difference and considerable tension with the environment if it is to prosper" (in Mullins 1998, 167).

Thus, we have four criteria for judging local theologies. They need to be applied jointly, since they counterbalance each other (for example, the criterion of appropriateness and the criterion of challenge). These four criteria imply a trust in human growth and the depth of cultures. They express the fact that not all theologies are equally good, and that it is important to distinguish between more adequate and less adequate (or bad) theologies.

A THIRD LOOK AT JESUS

THESIS 18: An important tool for doing local theology is taking "a third look at Jesus." It is an invitation to ask the question: Who is Jesus for you? This question can be answered by identifying the key moments in the life of Jesus as depicted in the gospels.

Filipino theologian Carlo Abesamis talks about the necessity of taking "a third look at Jesus" (Abesamis 1991). The first look is the way Jesus saw himself and perhaps the way all those who had face-to-face encounters with Jesus saw him. The second look is that of the Western world, which normatively appropriated Jesus. The third look is from a local perspective, the local appropriation (reappropriation) of Jesus. This can be done by asking a simple question: Who is Jesus for you?

The question is simple but demanding. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer asked "Who is Christ for us today?" in the Nazi prison of Tegel (Bonhoeffer 1953, 279). Questions of identity are delicate. I remember being asked by a friend who did not know my wife, "What kind of person is Maria?" I sat there thinking about an appropriate answer, an answer that would do justice to my wife. How could I describe her? What key features and character traits did I want to communicate? Should I use the word *caring* to describe her? Or *gentle*? Should I tell stories about her? Which stories, which experiences? These are difficult choices. The same applies to this third look at Jesus.

A good way of taking this third look might be to ask which story we would tell about Jesus. Another way is by picturing a day in the life of Jesus, the Christ. We might find Jesus praying in the early morning, walking on

the road in midmorning, resting at a well during lunchtime, attending to the people's needs in a village in the afternoon, celebrating in a friend's house in the evening, and, again, praying at night.

Who is Jesus for you? How would you depict Jesus in a painting? Is it significant that the majority of Jesus representations depict Jesus as an innocent, helpless child or as the suffering Jesus on the cross?

Another challenging way of taking the third look at Jesus is to rewrite gospel passages in the first person, from the perspective of a face-to-face observer, or from the perspective of Jesus. Who is Christ for you? Dom Helder Câmara writes, "Although for some people it may seem strange, I declare that, in the North-east, Christ is called Jose, Antonio, or Severino. *Ecce homo*! Here is Christ the Man! Man who needs justice, has the right to justice, deserves justice!" (in Mary Hall 1980, 75). Who is Jesus for you?

The discovery and construction of local images of Jesus have been identified as central topics of theological research and pastoral work. In the African context Jesus is depicted as the chief, the ancestor and elder, the healer, and most especially as the master of initiation. Who is Jesus for you? is a key question for inculturation. Robert de Nobili presented Jesus as a guru. There are many different local images of Jesus. Different social groups will come up with different reappropriations of Jesus.

Who is Jesus for you? is a key question if not *the* key question in the framework of the Christian religion (see de Mesa 1987). Every culture has to receive Jesus Christ in its own special way. There are Asian faces of Christ, and there are faces of Jesus in Latin America; there are faces of Jesus in Africa and there are faces of Jesus in high schools and convents. The special way of receiving Jesus should be an invitation to freedom and dignity. This special way has to be liberated and cleansed from colonialism: "Christ the liberator can hardly look like the colonizer (Williams 1994, 152). This is not easy, as Kosuke Koyama points out for the Thai context: "The first question our Lord posed to his disciples at Caesarea Philippi was: 'Who do people say the Son of Man is?' To this question, Thailand today is likely to answer, 'Jesus Christ is a god of the Americans'" (Koyama 1976, 82).

There is the reappropriation of Jesus as superstar, pal, pacifist, new man. Virgilio Elizondo discovers Jesus as a mestizo liberator and a human sufferer (Elizondo 1988, 79ff.). Who is Jesus for you? Receiving Jesus according to the culture presupposes a personal encounter with Jesus and a translation of Jesus' message in a way that makes this message relevant for the everyday life of the people. It is only at that point that theology can fulfill its practical purpose and its service function.

***Exercise:** Take "a third look" at Jesus. What are the most important words that Jesus spoke, according to the gospels? Which of the recalled actions of Jesus impresses you the most? Which image would you use in order to understand Jesus? Can you describe a gospel scene in Jesus' words? Or can you describe it in your own words as a close observer?*

3

Reappropriating Our Tradition

THESIS 19: Doing theology is a way of following Jesus. We follo Jesus as a community of believers, a community built on a trac tion. In order to do local theology we have to reappropriate tl tradition of our community. This is a challenging task becau: there is a series of little traditions rather than one great trad tion.

Jesus can teach us how to do theology. Jesus teaches us (1) to reappr ate our tradition, (2) to do theology as if people matter, and (3) to base theologies on our relationship with God. Doing theology is a way of fol ing Jesus. It is a ministry. It is not an end in itself, but a means that ser higher goal. Theology is to be characterized through the service it ren It serves the kingdom of God. In this chapter we look at reappropriatin tradition. Then, in the following chapters, we look at what it takes t theology as if people matter, a call to respect the local context in its cul and social dimension. Thus we look at the relationship among theo culture, and social structure. In each case we look at the context that sh our community.

In order to understand our community we need to understand its t tion. Looking at the tradition that has shaped our religion is difficult sometimes painful. Whenever we do theology, we do it within the co of a community and the tradition of that community. There is a long rather confusing tradition that provides the foundations for our theolo This tradition has given birth to many concepts and ideas, some of w seem difficult and hard to understand. Rather than talking about *the* C tian tradition, we might feel more comfortable talking about many traditions that have shaped Christianity—many small rivers that com gether in the sea of the great tradition of Christianity.

nted Europe in the seventeenth century. In our
ar 1670 a chapel was built to honor Anderle of
as a shrine it inculcated a spirit of contempt for
story, Anderle von Rinn was made a martyr and
e organized. Representations of the alleged mar-
/ murder of the little boy by Jews and became
ish church. A supposed relic of the boy was even
iid 1980s, however, the local bishop asked for a
his local devotion, and when it was finished, he
ntinuation of this local "spiritual" practice

ent, first of all, acknowledged that there was a
lved. Even in a situation such as this one, the
e has to be an appreciation for local culture and
blatantly aberrational must not be simply con-
s. Instead, a careful theological evaluation had
n of our first criterion, concerning the *reality* of
ice is based, a historical investigation found that
was no factual basis to the legend upon which
ierefore, there was no fidelity to real events. In
egend is an example of baroque fictional litera-

erion—*fidelity of the devotion to the spirit and*
ider of Christianity—we know that Jesus was a
l not encourage any form of anti-Semitism. In
ie leaders of the Jewish people over the proper
he essence of his teaching was a call for life in
iced everybody. Similarly, Jesus respected facts
eful in making judgments, especially in making
l of others. Jesus also taught that God is the

—that of the *practical consequences* of a theo-
stemming from it—one needs only point to the
, songs, prayers, and emotions. This local spiri-
lings and practices that caused pain among the
failure to meet our three criteria, a theological
this particular local spirituality.

cal work of which you are aware (for example, a
ous order) and evaluate it using the three criteria.

4

Theologies and Local Culture

THESIS 26: Local cultures are expressions of God's continuing creation. Theology begins with the human situation. It is a "second step." The human situation has a cultural face. The concept of culture, which touches all levels of human existence, is one of the most difficult and yet basic concepts and needs to be considered in local theologies.

CULTURE AS A LOCAL REALITY

"Culture is what we make of creation" and "a metaphor that has come to stand for what humans have made of their particular corner of the earth" (Dyrness 1997, 58, 62). Bernard Meland gives us a colorful description rather than a definition of culture when he characterizes culture as

> the human flowering of existing structures and facilities, becoming manifest as an ordered way of life in the imaginative activities and creations of a people, their arts and crafts, their architecture, their furniture and furnishings, their customs and designs, their literature, their public and private ceremonies, both religious and political. It is in their formative ideas, giving direction to their educational efforts and customs, as well as to their religious notions and practices, their social graces and manners; in their habits of eating and body care; in their modes of livelihood and the social organization that follows from them (Meland 1962, 212).

Culture is the way we live and at the same time the framework within which we live as social beings. A few familiar characteristics that shape the modern concept of culture are the following: Culture marks the difference between human and nonhuman forms of life; culture is multifarious and varies with geographical, social, and historical context; the way cultures are shaped and come into existence is contingent; culture is learned and passed on, constantly changed and modified; a culture forms "a whole" that can be construed either on an expressive level (various features of a particular culture as the expression of the same idea or worldview) or a logical-semantic level (various features of a particular culture are interlinked in relations of implication and dependency); culture is expressed in many observable ways; culture touches all levels of human existence (see Tanner 1997, 25-28).

Cultures are expressions of our attempts to come to terms with life. Cultures express the human need for security and meaning and the human fear of chaos. Cultures help to answer the question, Who am I? This question is also one of the basic questions of theology. In this sense we do theology all the time, because we constantly try to find our place in our community, in the society, in the world. Questions of identity are theological questions. "The complete loss of one's identity is, with all propriety of theological definition, hell" (Murray 1960, 6). And being known for who we really are is heaven.

Questions of identity are questions that make our heart burn. Virtually anything can become the object of theology, anything can be treated from a theological point of view. Every aspect of life can be related to God, to a matter of ultimate concern. Theology is about the whole human situation. "Any and every theological question begins with the human situation. Theology is 'the second step'" (Segundo 1976, 79). The first step is the human situation. Theology is a way of reflecting on human life in the light of human experiences with God. Theology is secondary; it depends on our human experience. Gustavo Gutiérrez writes, "What Hegel used to say about philosophy can likewise be applied to theology: it rises only at sundown" (Gutiérrez 1973, 11). The journey of theology can only begin once you have embarked on the journey of life. And the journey of life is difficult.

The human situation provokes questions because it is fragile. Without warning someone loses a job, gets involved in a car accident, is diagnosed with cancer. None of us can program our life as a straight line. We cannot predict what is going to happen tomorrow. The rich man built a larger barn and died (Lk 12:16-21). We cannot plan the exact outcome of our lives. Whoever lives, takes risks—the risk of failing, for example. That is why we ask these burning questions of identity and meaning all the time. These questions pervade our cultures and shape our cultural expressions. In this sense our cultures are shaped by implicit theologies.

IMPLICIT THEOLOGIES

THESIS 27: Doing theology is a matter of being honest with ourselves and others. We do theology because we are inevitably faced with burning questions of life (beginning, end, purpose, choices) in our human situation. Everybody is confronted with these questions and develops "implicit theologies," which can be dangerous and should be made explicit for the sake of the community.

Implicit theologies are our attitudes toward life as such and toward the world as a whole. Implicit theologies are our attempts to deal with the burning questions of life. Because we all experience wounds we all ask questions. Nobody can assume a "view from nowhere," looking down on life from an ivory tower without ever getting involved.

There is an implicit theology hidden in our form of life and in our way of looking at things. Our cultures are shaped by implicit theologies, implicit beliefs about what counts in life. The businessman will hear the noise of a falling coin in a busy street, but he will not hear the singing of a bird. A mother will hear her baby. Where some people see a beggar, others see a loser, and still others see a person in pain. Our cultures teach us how to listen and look.

American anthropologist Edward T. Hall has drawn our attention to the "silent language" and the "hidden dimension" of cultures (Hall 1959; Hall 1982). We are raised to organize our space in a particular way. Each culture teaches a particular concept of time. What constitutes a "long silence" depends on the culture. How close we can stand to another person without making that person feel uncomfortable depends on the culture. What is public space and what is private space depends on the culture. We might recall the example of the Filipina girl who was sent to a host family in the United States. Right after her arrival in the house, the host mother showed the girl to her room and closed the door. She assumed that the girl needed some rest and privacy. The girl felt miserable—what had she done wrong to be so excluded?

Culture teaches us a way of facing reality, space, time, and people. In one of Chesterton's stories a person testifies that no one came to the house that morning. No one? It turns out that there was a man delivering something and the postman. But they do not count; we do not even "see" them usually, certainly not as visitors. Whom do we see? What do we see? What are our implicit theologies, shaped by our cultures?

Our implicit theologies are like silent languages that shape our way of life. These implicit theologies are sometimes more important than the explicit ones because they are hidden, deeper, more powerful, and less controllable. Colonization has introduced implicit theologies, thus colonizing the mind. Theologies are silent languages of our cultures. There are innumerable cultures, and there are many silent languages within each culture.

The silent languages of cultures are revealed in details. Colors may "mean" something (See Mveng 1979). An example comes from Africa:

> Victory, in my culture, for example, is marked by white. If you see people with white clay *(hyirew)* marks on their bodies, you know that they have been successful in one of life's battles, be it childbirth or a case in court. Red (*ntwoma*-Laterite) markings spell gloom, disaster, and even despair. The choice of white clothes by Methodist Church Ghana for communion service and Easter and New Year celebrations is not fortuitous. White clothing is the raiment of a people who trust in the victorious God (Oduyoye 1986, 50).

The analysis of signs can point to important dimensions of cultures, "depth" dimensions. Semiotic analysis can have an impact on the organization of pastoral set ups: "In the West black is traditionally associated with mourning, but in other parts of the world, like China, white is the color of grief" (Chupungco 1992, 91).

These silent languages can reveal wounds. Virgilio Elizondo observes from a Hispanic perspective: "From birth we are conditioned to see angelic beauty in the white, the blond, the blue-eyed. The liturgical colors sacralize our color coding: white is pure and festive while black and brown are negative and non-existent. White baby Jesus and blonde Virgin Mary" (Elizondo 1988, 54).

People normally have a good idea of what the "good life" means for them. This idea depends on their culture. Let us look at an example:

> Two American volunteer development workers on a South Pacific island, who were worried by seeing the ladies in a village washing their clothes in a distant river, decided to build washing tubs. Having built the tubs—according to the specifications from America and with imported cement—the volunteers invited the women to use the tubs. The following day, the women were back at the river and the volunteers were hurt and angry. On being asked why the tubs were no longer used, the women replied: "We like to gossip about the men. If we wash at the tubs, the men will hear. Also, our backs are sore from standing at the tubs. We like to squat when we do the washing" (Arbuckle 1987, 130).

Anybody doing local theology has to respect the implicit theologies of the local culture. An explicit theology can only strike roots if the minister, community leader, or professional theologian respects and honors and considers the existing implicit theologies.

Implicit theologies can be inconsistent, unjustifiable, or even dangerous. Because of the consequences of our implicit theologies, we have to do explicit theology. We can say about theology what Karl Popper wrote about philosophy:

> We all have our philosophies, whether or not we are aware of this fact, and our philosophies are not worth very much. But the impact of our philosophies upon our actions and our lives is often devastating. This makes it necessary to try to improve our philosophies by criticism. This is the only apology for the continued existence of philosophy which I am able to offer (Popper 1973, 33).

We do theology to acquire some distance from the heat of our implicit theologies. We step back and take a look.

"VALUE STORIES"

THESIS 28: A way to unveil biases or to trace hidden values and implicit theologies is through the use of stories that present ambiguous situations with actors who act on the basis of different value systems. These "value stories" are a useful theological tool when we ask which actors in this story are justified in acting the way they do.

Value stories invite us to think about the appropriateness of various behaviors. An open discussion of the story can reveal silent assumptions and interpretations of the text as well as moral standards we live and judge by.

The Story of Lo-Tsen and Ka-Po

> Lo-Tsen has been in the capital for a few days visiting friends and having fun. On the way back to the village, Lo-Tsen is traveling with Aku, the best friend of Lo-Tsen's partner, Ka-Po. Late at night Lo-Tsen and Aku are stopped by a group of criminals, threatened with weapons, and brought to a cave. One of the group, Ra-Tschung, is put in charge of the prisoners. Aku is sleeping. Ra-Tschung approaches

Lo-Tsen and says, "I do not know what is going to happen to you tomorrow. Anything can happen. They might kill you both. I have a suggestion. If you spend the night with me, I will let you and your travelmate go tomorrow and tell my people that you managed to escape. I will come back to you once all my friends have fallen asleep." Lo-Tsen is confused and does not know what to do. After some time Ra-Tschung comes back. Lo-Tsen spends the night with Ra-Tschung, and the next morning Lo-Tsen and Aku are set free. Aku asks Lo-Tsen what happened. Lo-Tsen tells the story. Finally they reach the village. Lo-Tsen and Ka-Po are happily reunited. During the night, however, Ka-Po senses that there is something wrong with Lo-Tsen. Lo-Tsen does not say anything. The next morning Ka-Po turns to Aku and inquires what happened during their stay together. Aku thinks of a friend's duty and tells Ka-Po the whole truth. Ka-Po is angry, sad, and disappointed. Ka-Po knows that there is only one way out: the criminals have to be killed. Aku has to promise to keep silent. Without saying a word to Lo-Tsen, Ka-Po leaves the village to look for the criminals. Ka-Po has never been seen again.

Of whose behavior do we approve?

The Story of Kiko and Ono

Kiko is married to Ono. Ono falls ill and cannot work anymore in the factory, the only employer of their village. Kiko's wage has to sustain the whole family—Kiko, Ono, and their two children, aged five and seven. Kiko's wage has to cover Ono's medical bills as well. Kiko's wage in the factory is low. So Kiko approaches Zaza, the boss of the factory. Kiko urges Zaza to assign a different type of work in which Kiko can earn more money. Zaza promises to think about it. The next morning Zaza calls Kiko and says, "I am willing to help you. But I need your help, too. There is a military training camp where my children have been called to go for three months. The people at the camp are nasty. I do not want my kids to go there. If you send your kids to the camp instead of mine, I will take a risk and give you a much better paying job even though you are not qualified for it. Think about it." Kiko does not know what to do. Kiko goes to Runu, a wise person, and seeks advice. Runu thinks about the question and says, "This is a decision where any advice would be dangerous and wrong. You are mature and adult. You will have to make the decision on your own!" Kiko becomes more and more confused. Kiko turns to Ono and tells Ono about the dilemma. Ono says, "This is no question. We will not expose our children to the military camp. I will die soon and then you will be free to marry again, perhaps to a wealthier person." Kiko is desperate. While Ono is sleeping, Kiko takes the children to Zaza, then lies to Ono about their whereabouts. Kiko gets the well-paid job and with expensive medical treatment Ono slowly gets better. After three months the children return. They tell Ono what has happened. Ono is angry and wants to divorce Kiko. But Ono is still not well enough to take care of the children. Ono decides to say nothing and wait till the situation has improved. Then Ono will leave Kiko and take the children.

Value stories leave much space for interpretation. There are no exact indications of place, time, background, age, sex, religion, and so on. They are written solely to help us to think about our hidden values, about our implicit theologies.

Exercise: Assess the behavior of the actors in one of the stories told above. Which (if any) acted in a way you approve of? Discuss your opinions with others. Are there differences? What major arguments are brought forward? Would it make a difference if all people in the story were male? if they were all female? Would the time or the place of the story make a difference? What implicit judgments (assumptions) concerning their sex did you make? What about time and place?

THEOLOGY AND THE DIALOGUE WITH CULTURE

THESIS 29: There is a need for a dialogue between our understanding of theology and our concept of culture: Theology reflects upon culturally embedded forms of religious life. Theology has to reappropriate the message of Jesus from its cultural context into local cultural context. There is, however, no "supercultural theology" or "universal Christian culture."

As we've seen, implicit theologies shape our cultures. Doing theology is an attempt to bring the implicit theologies to the surface, to make our hidden values explicit. In order to do that, theology needs to take a careful look at the many faces of a particular culture. Local theologies are invitations to enter a serious and respectful dialogue with a particular local culture. "Those cultural realities that cluster around the theological concepts of creation, redemption, and community are of paramount importance for a theologian wishing to listen to culture" (Schreiter 1985, 40). The pastoral constitution of the Second Vatian Council, *Gaudium et spes*, tells us that understanding culture is necessary for a full understanding of the human (no. 53). It is a genuine theological task to analyze local cultures from a

theological perspective. This is part of the prophets' tradition in the Old Testament.

Theology touches upon the deepest layers of human existence; it touches the point where we seek to understand our life and where we seek to come to terms with the world as a whole. These attitudes are shaped in cultural ways. Second, theology needs to look at cultures because the origins of Christianity are to be found in a particular culture. Theology has to talk about culture when trying to understand the person and message of Jesus the Christ in particular and of the Holy Scriptures in general. Third, theology is itself part of a culture. Doing theology takes place within the framework of a particular culture. This has an impact on the language we speak, the categories we use, the experiences we rely on, the problems we deal with, the assumptions we make.

We also need the dialogue between theology and culture because Christian identity is constantly negotiated within local cultures. Christians live within local cultures. They do not live within a Christian culture. There is no such thing. Nor is there any Christian religion on a culturally neutral ground. "Human beings are 'situated' beings. They can begin only with what they have received. There is no 'ideal Christianity' on this earth" (Kabasélé 1994, 80). In this sense Japanese theologian Uchimura Kanzo said in 1926:

> I am blamed by missionaries for upholding Japanese Christianity. They say that Christianity is a universal religion, and to uphold Japanese Christianity is to make a universal religion a natural religion. Very true. But do not these very missionaries uphold sectional or denominational forms of Christianity which are not very different from national Christianity? . . . Is not Episcopalianism essentially an English Christianity, Presbyterianism a Scotch Christianity, Lutheranism a German Christianity, and so forth? (in Mullins 1998, 37).

Christian identity is always shaped in dialogue with particular cultures. Christian identity in a country where the majority is Hindu is different from Christian identity in an environment where the majority is Christian. But we are still talking about Christian identity. Christian identity has to be understood in terms of a task and a responsibility rather than in terms of something we "have," "own," or "possess."

Furthermore, Christian identity cannot be based "purely on the gospel" (not to speak of the many cultures we refer to when we talk about the gospel): "Christian social practices are always forced to incorporate material from other ways of life if they are to constitute a whole way of life themselves" (Tanner 1997, 112). This basically means that we cannot understand our Christian identity without understanding particular cultures. This is what Jesus did: By reappropriating his own tradition he was trying to make sense of his own culture.

LOCAL LANGUAGE

THESIS 30: Local theologies need to pay attention to the particularities of local language. Concepts are powerful because they reveal a culture's way of seeing the world. Concepts convey value systems. An elementary linguistic analysis is a useful tool for local theologies. Using local language is a sign of respect for the local culture.

The most important expression of culture is language. There are not only many different languages and many dialects of one language, there are also many ways of talking, many ways of making use of a particular language. This colorful variety is of vibrant interest for local theologies that attempt to take the many forms and faces of a cultural context seriously.

Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has called to mind the many ways of using language. He compared the function of words with the function of tools: "Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screw-driver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws.—The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects" (Wittgenstein 1967, §11). From this observation on the diverseness of our linguistic units, Wittgenstein proceeds to invite us to view language as a "system of language games." He uses this term to refer to the whole gamut of words used and activities surrounding the use of words.

Speaking is a way of acting; uttering sentences is part of our way of life. There are countless kinds of sentences. There is a colorful multiplicity of language games. Wittgenstein mentions examples as diverse as "giving orders," "reporting an event," "translating from one language into another," "thanking," "cursing," "greeting," "praying" (Wittgenstein 1967, §23). Different cultures produce different kinds of language games, but language games are part of all ways of life, parts of all activity.

American anthropologists Benjamin Lee Whorf and Edward Sapire show the relation between culture and language. There are many different expressions for "snow" among the Inuits; the Hopi language makes no distinction between past, present, and future but distinguishes among a fact, memory, expectation, and custom. Concepts reflect situations in which a culture felt compelled to draw a distinction and to mark this distinction. Our linguistic distinctions depend on our needs and interests. Our concepts and distinctions are embedded in everyday life. It is hardly possible to learn

a language without knowing the culture. That is why we cannot simply introduce new concepts into particular contex s.[1]

Language games are part of life. The way we talk is linked with the way we live. Talking is a way of doing things. Concepts are always linked with use, with praxis, hence with culture. To give one example from a Pacific island:

> The word in Tobian for "baptize" usually refers to bathing (both swimming and washing), but it has two other meanings—one for the traditional cure for insanity, the other for a traditional disciplinary measure. Fathers punished their misbehaving sons by taking them to the sea and holding their heads underwater until they lost consciousness. Shamans chanting incantations used a similar technique to treat the insane (Black 1988, 58).

This language usage reflects the fact that the baptismal rite was linked with the cure for insanity and the punishment for transgressions. Language usage has an impact on the understanding of the meaning of a term when it is introduced. If our praxis changes, our concepts will change.

It is a powerful act to name something. It is powerful to be emancipated from the bonds of imposed language. It is an act of liberation to find one's own words and one's own names. Betty Friedan, for instance, wrote in *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 about "a problem that has no name." Leny Mendoza Strobel[2] talks about faint memories about pre-colonial times "buried underneath an avalanche of foreign words. There were no words for what I felt in my bones—not in English anyway" (in Montgomery-Fate 1997, 89).

Concepts are powerful because they carry the whole force of cultures. Colonizers who have left their linguistic marks on colonies exercise power even after their departure. Kenyan novelist Ngugi Wa Thiong'o calls the linguistic colonization a "colonization of the mind." He observes that due to the traces of colonialism in language, "language and literature were taking us further and further from ourselves to other selves, from our world to other worlds" (Wa Thiong'O 1986, 12). Again, we see how implicit theologies are transported in our language.

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[1] The advice of the British philosopher John Austin has not lost any of its significance: "Our common stock of words embodies all the distinctions men have found worth drawing, and the connections they have found worth making, in the lifetime of many generations: these surely are likely to be more numerous, more sound, since they have stood up to the long test of the survival of the fittest, and more subtle, at least in all ordinary and reasonably practical matters, than any that you or I are likely to think up in our own arm-chairs of an afternoon—the most favoured alternative method" (Austin, *Philosophical Papers* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1961], 130).

[2] Quoted in Montgomery-Fate, *Beyond the White Noise*, p. 89.

Concepts can be liberating. *Han* is an extremely powerful concept used in Korean *minjung* theology. *Han* is a psychological term that denotes the feeling of suffering of a person or a people who has been repressed or oppressed by others. "This feeling of *han*, the suffering and hopelessness of the oppressed, is a collective feeling in the collective social biography of the oppressed minjung of Korea" (Suh 1981, 24-25). This feeling of unresolved and unjustifiable suffering is the starting point and the point of reference of a local Korean theology.

Similarly, the term *lucha* plays an important role in liberation theology: "This word is used to counteract a passive and fatalistic stance towards the misery of the masses, and stress the urgency of an active—even aggressive—involvement in the war against poverty, oppressiveness, and exploitation" (Nouwen 1992, 138). Key terms in Hispanic theology—*pastoral de conjunto, teologia de conjunto, permitanme hablar, la comunidad, la fiesta*—have become means to give name to an important reality that cannot be properly grasped in the language of the oppressors.

Words develop against the background of a local culture. The very fact that the concepts are found within a local culture gives them a certain depth. The history of missiology and mission gives us many examples of the attempt to do mission work locally using the local language, local images, local concepts and distinctions. For example, the people of the Pévé in Southwest Chad use the word *Ifray* to talk about God. This word is derived from *Ya* (mother) and *fray* (heaven). The translation of the Lord's Prayer in this culture has to adjust to the local concepts found there. Local theologies must be sensitive to the nuances of a local language (see Sedmak 1997, 58).

THE FILIPINO CONCEPT OF *BAHALA NA*

Let us look at an example. In the context of the Lowland Filipinos the Tagalog expression *bahala na* is used frequently. *Bahala na* expresses a worldview, a general attitude, and has very strong theological implications; in fact, any major theological question can be linked with this expression. The Filipino way of life is condensed in this expression. The following (rudimentary) linguistic analysis of the expression *bahala na* has four steps: (1) examining dictionaries and possible translations; (2) collecting various contexts and ways of usage; (3) assessing the historical and social contexts of the expression; and (4) interpreting the expression theologically.

Meaning and Translations

Bahala na is widely used to characterize an attitude of fatalism, acceptance of destiny, and trust in higher powers. It is translated in various different ways: "let come what may"; "never mind"; "God will provide"; "it is up to

God"; "what will be, will be"; "leave it to fate"; "whatever happens, happens."

It is significant that *bahala na* is a short expression that is, because of its intonation, phonetically attractive. This could indicate that the expression is part of the basic and elementary vocabulary. "Linguists tell us that *bahala na* does not refer to the god *Bathala*" (de Mesa 1987, 149); the root word of *bahala* means "responsibility," "concern," "management" (ibid., 161).

Contexts of Usage

Bahala na epitomizes the Filipino attitude toward the world as a whole and toward life as such and toward God's rules within life. Let us take a number of situations when the *bahala na* might be used:

- A student, choosing between studying for an examination and going to a movie, chooses the movie, saying "Bahala na!"
- A married Filipino refuses to consider family planning, shrugs, and says "Bahala na!"
- People waiting in a shopping mall for the pouring rain to stop say "Bahala na!"
- People caught in traffic say "Bahala na!"
- A jeepney driver eyes his thin tires, his exhausted machine, and his third traffic violation and then tries to right things with some coffee money for the policeman at the corner. He sets out cheerfully with "Bahala na!" (de Mesa 1987, 161).
- Prisoners awaiting (political) trial and people suffering under the martial law of the 1970s and 1980s said "Bahala na!"

Because of the Westernization of the Philippines, *Bahala na* is also used on a meta-level; when the intellectual elite use it, they implicitly make fun of the concept and the social context. Students at the elite universities use the expression to talk about the traditional, rural Philippines. They see the *bahala na* as an expression of a way of life that is out of fashion, that is out of step with the speed and efficiency of the American culture that serves as the major model for the Philippines.

Affiliated expressions are frequently used in everyday life, especially when people have to "take care" of something, such as who should pay in the restaurant. The idea of having to take care of something that is expressed in *bahala na* with reference to God is also applied to humans. People use derivatives or affiliated expressions in the context of the father taking care of his family or the company boss taking care of his employees. In this sense it also connotes responsibility and solidarity.

The expression *bahala na* can be connected with proverbs like "Man's life is like a wheel, up now, down tomorrow" connected with the widely

used expression *gulong ng kapalaran* (wheel of fortune). There is also the proverb, "Although I don't search for my fortune, it will come to me if it's really mine" (de Mesa 1987, 150, 152).

Historical and Social Context

Bahala na points to experiences of powerlessness and dependence and is socially connected with colonialism and poverty that is not caused by individual failure and that cannot be changed through individual human efforts. According to José de Mesa, slum dwellers inevitably find themselves having to embrace the attitude expressed by *bahala na*: "Since so much of their lives is dominated by external forces, over which they have so little actual control, they easily assume an attitude of *bahala na*" (de Mesa 1987, 158). Historically, according to F. L. Jocano, the expression is closely tied up with ancient beliefs (Jocano 1969, 118).

Theological Interpretation

There are two qualitatively different contexts of usage. First, there is a positive dimension. In this context *bahala na* connotes a "genuine trust or hope in God which includes human efforts and cooperation" (Gorospe 1978, 166). This is historically expressed in the resilience of the Filipinos in the face of adversities (the EDSA revolution of 1986 was called the "smiling revolution"). It is also connected with sentiments of solidarity, since individual independence is not as important a value as it is in the United States. It was used in this positive way by José Rizal, the national hero: "Bahala any may Kapa!" (God will provide) (ibid.). In this positive context, using the expression of *bahala na* is also connected with a sense of responsibility. No slum dweller following the *bahala na* attitude "is so utterly fatalistic as to wait for God's mercy and grace. Everyone, even the young, struggles for a place in life, for simple comforts, for a way to enjoy God's graces in little opportunities provided by the slum environment" (Jocano 1969, 194).

There is, however, a negative dimension. In this sense the attitude of *bahala na* is despised by the modern, urban, Americanized Filipino. It is taken to be an escape from involvement and responsibility and used in contexts of resignation. It connotes lack of motivation and effort, as well as laziness and resignation.

Our theological evaluation is based on local theological sources. In the *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* (CFC) we find the following contexts of usage: "If God creates and sustains everything, then *bahala na*, all is decided already" (CFC, 312). *Bahala na*, understood positively, relates the Filipino to God's providence (CFC, 260). The attitude of trust in God "is echoed in the traditional Filipino attitude of *bahala na*. Some claim that this has led to a certain fatalism, and a lack of the energy, discipline, and purpose needed for personal, familial, and national development" (CFC, 1158).

This attitude, according to the catechism, is based "on mistaken belief in some magic force or luck that supposedly renders our own efforts unnecessary or useless" (ibid.). This expresses a trustful dependence on God with a persisting belief that God provides for everything. This optimistic resignation, which can mean a commitment to do one's best while leaving to God what is not within one's control, is in line with Matthew 6:34, the first petition of the Lord's Prayer, and the invitation to seek first of all the kingdom of God. Theologically speaking, the *bahala na* is connected with religious convictions that the supernatural is heavily involved in the everyday life of individual people (Mulder 1997, 25ff.). The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines stresses the connection between *bahala na* attitude as trust in God and the social responsibility involved.

From the foregoing example drawn from the Filipino *bahala na*, we can gather the following:

- The emotional weight of concepts is revealed by their connotations.
- Everyday concepts are sources for doing theology.
- It should be part of the theologian's vocation to listen to the everyday language of people in everyday circumstances.

Exercise: Identify a key concept in your culture and try to conduct a linguistic analysis similar to the one on bahala na.

CULTURAL GAMES

THESIS 31: Culture can be analyzed by looking at cultural activities. We can call any identifiable cultural context a cultural game. Cultures can be characterized through their cultural games. Thus, we can view society as a community of players with different functions and different roles. We can view social life as a complex landscape of cultural games played. Important concepts to analyze are the distinction between competence (know how) and mandate (authorization) to participate in cultural games, the distinction between standardized and non-standardized games, and the concept of leading cultural games. The following questions can help to understand a particular local culture: Who is playing which cultural games? According to which rules? When and where? Why? Asking these questions systematically is a useful tool for local theologies.

The diffuse phenomenon of culture can be analyzed in much the same way as the complex phenomenon of languages. Eating, writing letters, making jokes, praying, traveling, watching TV, reading a book, undergoing a medical exam, and more are examples of cultural games. A cultural game is any social context that can be described by the rules that organize this particular social context. This can happen on a macro level (elections as a cultural game) and on a micro level (greeting as a cultural game).

A cultural game is any type of human activity that can be named and described and reproduced. Games are played in accordance with a canonical set of rules, and given this framework of rules, games can be reproduced and taught and played again and again. This kind of repetition and predictability is a basic element of our social life; we have to be able to count on the actions of our fellow human beings or we would completely lose our social orientation. Cultural games structure our lives.

There are three significant features that characterize games: (1) games are played in accordance with a set of rules; (2) games create a world of their own (very often special games are played in special locations only, for example, weddings, elections, graduations); and (3) games are limited (in space and time). Cultural games too take place in a special context; they follow specific rules; they have a beginning and a (more or less happy) end. In many cases we clearly mark the beginning and the end of a cultural game by rituals (think of a soccer game or a prayer service).

Cultural games can be learned (socialization) and handed down from generation to generation (tradition); cultural games can be introduced within a cultural context (innovation) or can be abolished after some time (obsolescence). Cultural games, like language games, have rules that determine whether the game is played properly. In order to participate in a certain cultural game, one has to meet specific requirements. Participation in cultural games presupposes (1) a certain type of competence (that is, knowing how to do it; for example, playing the piano, reading Aristotle in the original Greek); and (2) a certain type of mandate (society's permission or social authorization to play the game; for example, celebrating a Catholic Mass, announcing the date of national elections, or installing the electrical wiring in a new home).

The more cultural games a person seeks to play, the more intelligent, educated, and talented that person must be. The more cultural games a person is authorized to play, the higher the social status of that person. A kind of "social grammar," in other words, determines the mandate to enter a specific cultural game, though sometimes mandates and competencies seem to be out of order. The access to the cultural games reserved for Catholic priests, for example, seems to many to be a case of a formal mandate given to some rather than a matter of the competence of individuals to be effective priests. The point I am making here is that the question of the priesthood of women is not a question of competence, but exclusively a question of the

mandate. When cultures are changing, the question of competence versus mandates often becomes a source of great disagreement in social groups. Other situations are less complicated and easier to understand. For example, anybody is welcome to learn to play the piano, but not everyone who tries to learn masters the instrument. This is a matter of competence, not of mandate. In this sense cultural games serve as social levelers, or—viewed from another perspective—as social stratifiers. The mandate to participate in cultural games organizes the different segments of society, allocates positions and status, distributes power and authority, and, if mandates are not given to all who are competent, keeps otherwise competent persons from moving upward into higher social strata.

Another important distinction lies between what have been called standardized and nonstandardized cultural games. Different local cultures standardize different sets of cultural games. Making telephone calls is a standardized cultural game in Austria but not in Bangladesh. Reading and writing are standardized cultural games in academic situations but not necessarily in a day-care center. Development in the context of adapting to a new culture entails being introduced to standardized cultural games (like the rules governing driving, communicating by telephone, gaining access to education, health services, and governmental administrative structures that can help solve a problem) in another culture. If you are an Arab in the United States or France, and if you want to take part in such Western cultural communities, you have to be able to participate in these standardized cultural games. "Outsiders," in such a context, are people who do not get the mandate to participate in standardized cultural games or people who do not have the skills to play the standardized cultural games. Each culture has interlocking sets of standardized games. Some games (like signaling welcome to visitors in Austria with a glass of schnapps) appear relatively minor and particular to a given culture. But extending or not extending such gestures is an important sign of whether one is truly accepted by members of that culture on the basis of reciprocal relations or is regarded as an undesired outsider.

Skill at playing standardized games defines cultural identities. Subcultures and minorities often struggle to get access to standardized games (think, for example, of the struggle for university education and entry to professions such as medicine, law, and ministry in the church by generations of women). Trying to change the interlocking set of standardized cultural games often causes bitter social conflict (think, for example, of the struggle to get German accepted as an official second language in Italian South Tyrol or to have Spanish accepted as a second official language in the United States). Hence, one must recognize that the question of standardizing cultural games is linked with questions of power. The answer to the question "Who has the influence and power to set the standards and change them?" reveals where ultimate authority lies. In every society we find outcasts, persons perceived to be socially deviant or simply not admitted to the full range of society's standardized games.

Sometimes it seems to be the vocation of an individual or a generation to break the rules.[3] Sometimes the rules that obtain—for example, when societies are undergoing major changes—are confusing.[4] Sometimes influential or creative people introduce new cultural games. Jesus may be described as a person who sought to bring new cultural games to a certain local cultural context. His reception by those with a stake in maintaining the traditional manner of running the society of his day is typical for those who seek to be agents of major change. Seeking to be a founding figure of a social movement is a dangerous occupation. Yet only such people truly change the games played within the framework of their culture.

Within the standardized cultural games of a culture we can identify the leading cultural games that dominate a particular culture. To understand them is to grasp the peculiarity of a local context. The leading games can be identified according to the amount of material and money devoted to them, the amount of time and space used by them, and by the number and prestige of people involved in them. Based on such criteria we see that soccer is a leading cultural game in Brazil; the celebration of Christmas is a leading cultural game in rural Austria; the presidential election is a leading cultural game in the United States; the fiesta is a leading cultural game in Hispanic cultures. The leading cultural games differ from culture to culture and are a good point of reference from which to assess local cultures.

There are key questions for the analysis of cultural games: *Who* plays *what* cultural games? *How* are they played? *When* are they played? *Where*

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[3] Suppressive political regimes are characterized by a rigid body of rules and strict enforcement of these rules. Jean-Bertrand Aristide talks about Haiti, his country, in terms of rules and the need to break these rules: "Haiti is a prison. In that prison, there are rules you must abide by, or suffer the pain of death. One rule is: Never ask for more than what the prison warden considers your share. . . . Another rule is: Remain in your cell. Though it is crowded and stinking and full of human refuse, remain there, and do not complain. That is your lot. Another rule is: Do not organize. . . . Another rule is: Accept your punishment silently. Do not cry out. You are guilty. . . . I say: Disobey these rules. Ask for more. Leave your wretchedness behind. Organize with your brothers and sisters. Never accept the hand of fate. Keep hope alive" (Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *In the Parish of the Poor: Writings from Haiti* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991], 33-34).

[4] Dow Edgerton describes such a situation in a province of the Philippines: "In some ways it was worse than simple chaos. The knock at the door at midnight, the assassination at noon, the disappearance, the arrest, the accusation painted on the wall, the scooped-out grave—none of these were random and impersonal. Any and all of them were tied to reasons within reasons. Because you are Catholic, because you are Protestant, because you voted, because you didn't, because you have a job, because you don't, because you are in a labor union, because you are not" (Dow Edgerton, "Stand by Me," in *Beyond Theological Tourism: Mentoring as a Grassroots Approach to Theological Education*, ed. Susan B. Thistlethwaite and George F. Carins [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994], 18).

are they played? *Why?* With such questions we can analyze cultures and decipher their inner structure. *Who* is able and allowed to play a certain cultural game (be elected president, made a bishop, explain the theory of relativity)? *What* games are being played within a certain local culture? Among them, which are the most important? What are the games of a subculture or minority? What are the rules of the most important cultural games? What are the officially or unofficially allocated times and spaces for cultural games?

And finally, *Why?* This is the question of the "stories" behind the games. There is a story behind any initiation rite, memorial day celebration, Nobel Prize ceremony. Let us take a closer look.

Exercise: Think of a leading cultural game of your culture. Try to analyze this cultural game by answering the questions Who? What? How? When? Where? Why?

CULTURAL STORIES

THESIS 32: Why a certain cultural game is played is connected to a cultural story, which in turn is connected to a cultural worldview. The introduction of new cultural games is always and necessarily connected with the introduction of new cultural stories. Religions touch upon the deepest cultural layers, upon the worldviews. That is why cultural stories are especially important within the context of doing local theology.

There is more to culture than the layer of observable behavior, the cultural games. Behind many of the cultural games we find stories that show who is in power and how keeping "undesirables" down is maintained. This is especially true for leading cultural games. Let us take an example.

We cannot understand rituals without the story behind the cultural game. For example, the *lavabo* rite during the Catholic celebration of the eucharist calls for the priest to wash his hands. The priest did not slaughter a lamb prior to this ceremony. His hands are clean. He washes his hands not to get rid of dirt but to express a need and desire to be cleansed from his sins ("Lord, wash away my iniquity, cleanse me of my sin"). To an outsider, an external observer, this action does not make sense. Why would a person wash his already clean hands? The story is essential in order to make sense of this cultural game.

Similarly, we could consider the custom of washing the feet of a few chosen people on Holy Thursday. These people prepare, of course, by buying new socks and washing their feet meticulously before the ritual. The priest washes clean feet. Again, it does not make sense to an external observer who does not know the story behind the game.[5] The same condition applies to baptism, prayers, confirmation, ordination, and so forth. We need to have some understanding (background knowledge) in order to make sense of what we see. We need to know the cultural story.

The connection between cultural games and cultural stories is evident in the case of religious cultural games; there is a significant connection between the image of God and the ritualistic praxis at work. Behind our forms of worship we can trace an image of God. Flagellations in the Philippines, for example, depict an image of God demanding sacrifices, whereby grace is considered something that can be earned. In this sense local rituals reveal local knowledge (the local image) of God. The local image of God that is expressed in the ritual of flagellation is rooted in the religiosity of the Spaniards, introduced to the Philippines by way of colonization. There are cultural stories behind many of the cultural games we play.

There is a cultural story behind ceremonies and rituals, there is a cultural story behind many buildings, there is a cultural story behind our clothes and shoes, there is a cultural story behind our songs and behind the design of our keyboards.

A cultural story gives the background knowledge that one needs in order to place a cultural game within the cultural framework, to understand the roots of the game and the meaning of the symbols used. Cultures can be characterized not only through their cultural games but also through their stories. The creation stories in Egypt, Babylon, and Israel are colorful examples of stories that shape a culture. The stories of Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, and Martin Luther King Jr. have influenced many people. The story of Austrian neutrality is a leading story for Austrian identity; the story of Jomo Kenyatta is a key story for Kenya.

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[5] Sometimes we try to keep the cultural story without the cultural game: "In many American parishes the substitution of the quick, antiseptic and nonbiblical 'washing of the hands' for the inconvenient and messy, yet richly symbolic, foot-washing is an illustration. . . . I have even heard of parishes in which the foot-washing is replaced by a few moments of silence after a brief exhortation by the presider encouraging the assembly to 'imagine washing feet'" (Mark Francis, *Shape a Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States* [Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2000], 91). Obviously, it is difficult to preserve a story without expressing it! Dom Helder Câmara, when talking about John 11, makes this point: "I always feel a little uneasy when I see our twelve apostles offering themselves with their feet already well washed. The message ought to be: 'Dear brothers and sisters, we aren't here today to mime the washing of feet already carefully washed. . . .' Otherwise religion is in danger of being a mere theatrical spectacle. Religion has tobe lived, not merely acted" (Dom Helder Câmara, *Through the Gospel with Dom Helder Câmara* [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1986], 136).

Different cultures are shaped by different stories. We talk about the paradigm story (Dyrness 1992, 147) of a culture or the founding myth of a religious community (Arbuckle 1988, 18ff.). The "American dream" is another famous and influential cultural story that shapes cultural identity.

Cultural stories can *be* the history. Henri Nouwen was introduced to the parish Ciudad de Dios in Lima. The parish was the result of a people's "invasion" on Christmas Eve 1954. On that night, thousands of people started illegally occupying barren land. Eventually, the present culture of this parish emerged. This is a cultural story behind the culture of this parish (Nouwen 1982, 5).

Hispanic theologian Virgilio Elizondo considers the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe to be the most significant cultural story of Hispanic identity: "I do not know of any other event in the history of Christianity that stands at the very source of the birth of a people like the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe. One cannot know, understand, or appreciate the Mexican people without a deep appreciation of Guadalupe" (Elizondo 1988, 59). Yet it takes a certain predisposition to understand and appreciate this cultural story: "To appreciate the story, it is necessary to see it through the categories of the ancient Nahuatl language—a language that expresses ultimate reality through image and poetry. The story begins with the *beautiful singing of the birds* and ends with *exquisite flowers*. For the native world, the expression for a divine message was precisely flower and song. Thus the entire story happens within the realm of a divine revelation" (ibid., 63).

The story of the Holocaust is, sadly, a key cultural story to understand contemporary Jewish cultural identity.

Different cultures are founded on different cultural stories, some incompatible (like the cultural story of American individualism and the cultural story of African family life). Guilt-oriented societies have different cultural stories than shame-oriented societies. Individual-centered societies have cultural stories that differ from community-oriented societies.

When two cultures meet, cultural stories are exchanged. When two cultural stories meet, established meanings (stories) and newly introduced ones mingle and overlap. A transformation of meanings takes place. This is when issues of truth become very complicated, and cultural identities have to be renegotiated in the face of different, perhaps incompatible cultural stories. For example, John Berthrong talks about an experience in Hong Kong:

> Early in our stay we were invited to attend the marriage of a young Chinese friend. I can't remember why we were going to send flowers to one of the events leading up to the ceremony, but we were. The flowers were white. Another Chinese friend . . . warned us that they were the wrong color entirely for a festive marriage. He told us that white in Chinese culture is the color of mourning and bereavement. . . . My mother and father were aghast and thanked our friend profusely for saving them from making such an intercultural social gaffe. Where was the truth in this aborted giving of white flowers for a wedding? Were the flowers true or untrue? Was the color true or untrue? (Berthrong 1999, 48).

The history of mission with its good share of syncretism is an especially fascinating example of this mingling of cultural stories. We are well aware of the problem of previous local theologies and previous cultural stories when entering a culture. John Mahoney mentions the vertical and personalistic piety that he encountered when he arrived in Fiji. People were raised in the ecclesiology of the French missionaries. Mahoney challenged their cultural story: "What surprised many people was that the 'French model' was not a timeless, universal one but very specific in time and place" (Mahoney 1994, 5).

The confrontation of one cultural story with another can be a source of conflicts as well as of enrichment. Popular religiosity is a rich source for mixed cultural stories:

> In the high pre-Columbian cultures of Mexico and Peru, the presence of female divinities was bound up with fertility—especially in that we are dealing with an agrarian culture, a culture of the earth. Tonantzin—"our mother," for the Aztecs—was syncretized in the Virgin of Guadalupe, a native American Virgin, just as the *Pachamama* (Earth Mother) of the Quechua and Aymara has been syncretized with Mary (as Mother). Clearly, in the first colonial era at any rate, the image of the Virgin Mary, in the native and *mestiza* mentality, constituted the syncretic elaboration of a female deity linked to cosmic rhythms, vegetation processes, and agrarian rites. But just as surely, the official Catholic significate gradually imposed itself as the agrarian culture lost its force. After all, the Virgin is Mother, no longer as goddess of the fertility of the earth, but as refuge of the helpless (Parker 1996, 99).

The dynamics of globalization can actually be described as a movement that tends to universalize not only a particular set of cultural games but also a particular set of cultural stories. It has been observed, for example, that TV presents the American dream to Hispanic children and hence destroys their dream of equality because it always operates in categories of rich-poor, powerful-powerless, and so forth (Bahr 1991, 68). Ironically, however, the opposite is also true. Cultures that find themselves threatened by globalizing uniformity tend to reassert their identity even more strongly by emphasizing the wealth of their cultural games and cultural stories.

The introduction of new cultural games is always connected with the introduction of new cultural stories. It isn't possible to introduce a casino into a culture without introducing the story (greed, thrill, glitter) behind it. One of the main tasks of the "image industry" is to produce cultural stories

that are connected with trademarks. There is a cultural story behind cars, watches, cigarettes, and dresses.

There is also a cultural story at the foundation of each and every religious community or political movement. Creating a new cultural story is a means of inculturation. Sometimes elements of the Christian story are rooted in a local culture by connecting it with local cultural stories. The parallels between the eucharist and the Javanese slametan festival, for example, or the parallels between the Christian liturgy and Shinto rituals can be used for the inculturation of the eucharist (see Immoos 1993, 228). The cultural game is slightly changed, and a new cultural story is attached to it.

That cultural stories behind the games can change is an interesting phenomenon. Let us look at an example. The traditional rule of abstaining from meat on Fridays was theologically justified by the participation in the universal sacrifice of Christ. Later this complicated theological cultural story lost credibility. An ingenious aid organization encouraged people to abstain from meat on Fridays and to give the money to the poor (a new story). Later this cultural story of solidarity lost its significance in the context of frustration over the politics of development, and an organization promoting healthy food suggested abstaining from meat for health reasons (a new story). The cultural game is the same, but the cultural story behind the game has changed.

Knowing the story does not mean that we have a rational justification. It would be naive to ask for a cultural story behind every cultural detail. Cultural change cannot be described in terms of rational choices. Why would we play the cultural game of using a fork? Using a fork is no more hygienic than using the hands. Similarly, why do we play the cultural game of using a handkerchief? German-Dutch sociologist Norbert Elias has pointed out that the use of forks and handkerchiefs was introduced in connection with ideas of etiquette and a self-understanding of educated urban people in the Middle Ages (Elias 1992-93). But one way is no more rational than another.

Cultures are not to be measured with the yardstick of reason. Every culture is a melting pot of cultural stories and cultural games. The fruit of any cultural analysis will not be a thorough documentation of the culture but a refinement of questions (Beattie 1964, 37f.). Where should we look? Local theologies attempt to look beyond the surface of a culture and to see the many faces of the particular local culture.

Exercise: Select a leading game of your community or choose a cultural game such as "praying" or "preaching" and try to identify the cultural story behind it.

5

Local Theologies and the Social Situation

THESIS 33: Local theologies recognize that theology takes within a particular context. Theologies are developed in res to and within a particular social situation. Understanding t cial situation is a necessary condition for understanding th esis and validity of particular theologies.

Theology is done often and for particular times. A bishop pre official speech or a commission preparing documents on the celeb the liturgy, for example, constitutes a context that is different from professor preparing lectures and seminars. And all three are diffe the pastoral context of a priest or deacon preparing homilies for li a catechist preparing a confirmation class. Doing theology from chair is different from doing theology from an armchair, and doing as a white man in Scotland is different from doing theology as Leonean woman in the desolation of a city ruined by civil war.

Theology that tries to do justice to its place in culture and contextual. *Contextualization* literally means "weaving togethe "thus an interweaving of the gospel with every particular si (Schineller 1990, 19). The process of contextualization includes t tion on one's own place as person within a wider horizon. Obviou are more than merely religious features in a local culture that are tance for doing contextualized theology—in the words of African th Mercy Amba Oduyoye: "Contextualization . . . expands to incluc litico-economic aspects of life and seeks to produce symbols and that are universal and inclusive of Africa's reality" (Oduyoye 1 That is why theology is called to take a look at the social situatio