RE-ROOTING THE GOSPEL IN THE PHILIPPINES:
ROMAN CATHOLIC AND EVANGELICAL APPROACHES
TO CONTEXTUALIZATION

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"Contextualization" or "inculturation" is a recent development in theology. The term "contextualization" was first used in 1972 with the publication of the Theological Education Fund (TEF) report entitled "Ministry in Context." It refers to the "capacity to respond meaningfully to the Gospel within the framework of one's own situation." Furthermore, it is to be distinguished from "indigenization":

[Contextualization] means all that is implied in the familiar term "indigenization" and yet seeks to press beyond... Indigenization tends to be used in the sense of responding to the Gospel in terms of a traditional culture. Contextualization, while ignoring this, takes into account the process of secularity, technology, and struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical movement of nations in the Third World.

If the theological term "contextualization" came into being through the initiative of the Protestant World Council of Churches' TEF Program, the counterpart term "inculturation" has its genesis in Roman Catholic missiological thinking. The Jesuit missiologist Ary Roest-Crollius defines it as "an expression of the process by which the Church becomes inserted in a given culture."

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1 Bevans (1985: 185), thirteen years since the introduction of the term contextualization, writes: "'Contextualization,' or notions that approximate its meaning like 'incarnation,' 'indigenization,' 'inculturation' or 'constructing local theology,' is a process that only relatively recently has come to full self-consciousness among theologians. They view it as not only interesting but also as vital and indispensable to the theological enterprise."


3 TEF, 19-20.

4 Crollius (p. 2) reports that the term gained a wider acceptance at the time of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (December 1, 1974 - April 7, 1975). Before this period, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (Taipei, 22-27 April 1974) issued a statement detailing the need for "a church indigenous and inculturated."

5 Ibid.
Some scholars use both terms synonymously\(^6\) while others prefer one term over the other to delineate the proper relationship between Christian faith and the surrounding culture.\(^7\)

The phenomenon of contextualization or inculturation is giving rise to contextual theologies especially from the Third World. In the Philippines, a prominent contextual theologian is Jose de Mesa, a Roman Catholic scholar who teaches at the East Asian Pastoral Institute of the Ateneo de Manila University. An emerging evangelical approach, parallel to de Mesa's, is being forged by the Institute for Christian Studies in Asian Church and Culture, especially by the work of its president-theologian Melba Maggay.

This paper will compare and evaluate Jose de Mesa and Melba Maggay's approaches on the contextualization of the Gospel in the Philippines. The study will examine the strengths and weaknesses of their approaches in providing foundations for a rethinking of a church and theology that is distinctly Filipino\(^8\) yet authentically Christian. Moreover, while not overlooking their differences, this paper will also look into the convergences between the two approaches. Finally, the study seeks to deepen "theological re-rooting" as a pastoral-theological hermeneutic through deeper reflection and engagement.

A few words about the title. The phrase "re-rooting the Gospel" has been introduced by Kosuke Koyama and Jose de Mesa. It is deeply rooted, however, in both the Bible and the history of Christian mission where the idea of "sowing" or "planting" the Gospel message (e.g. Mark 4), if we may add, in the soil of different cultures, is well-established. In the title, the juxtaposition of "Gospel re-rooting" with "contextualization" may lead to the idea that this writer take them to be synonymous. Loosely speaking, they are, but technically, they are not. They may designate two different frameworks as in de Mesa, who regards contextualization as an element of the larger framework of theological re-rooting. It is only for purposes of brevity, and also to generate further conversation, that these two concepts are juxtaposed in the title of this study.

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\(^6\) Whiteman (p. 2) refers to "inculturation" as a companion term to contextualization but he does not distinguish the two. Hiebert (1997) conflates the two terms.

\(^7\) Bevans (1992: 1) and Schreiter (1985: 16) are examples of theologians who prefer contextualization or contextual models over inculturation. Shorter (1988; 1994) prefers the opposite.

\(^8\) Note that "Filipino" and "Philippine" will be used interchangeably as modifiers in the rest of the paper.
Chapter One will cover a brief historical overview of the Philippine context. After this, the next two major sections (Chapters Two and Three) will consist of a presentation of the contextualization proposals of the theologians in focus. The main interest of the presentation will be the methodological foundations and theological dimensions of their work. Chapter Four offers a sympathetic critique of the proposals citing their values as well as perceived internal difficulties in their work. The conclusion will note the genius of both theologians and will suggest a way to move the discussion forward.
CHAPTER ONE: A SOCIO-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In this section, we will examine significant snapshots of the Gospel and culture encounter in Philippine history and experience. These will serve as backdrop for the search for a truly Filipino Christianity represented in the works of the theologians under consideration.

1.1 Colonization, Cultural Identity and the Philippine Church.

The Philippines became Spain’s colony for three hundred and fifty years, followed by forty five years under American rule, and three ravaging years under the Japanese Military occupation.9 Christianity came to the Philippine Isles via Ferdinand Magellan’s colonial expedition. Arriving in 1521, Magellan represented both the Catholic Church and the Spanish crown. Thus, Christianity came to the archipelago in supplement and through the aid of the sword. On the one hand, the colonial enterprise could not have existed without the help of the church. The latter was an “accessory” to the whole colonial project. On the other hand, the sword that came with the expedition helped to establish Christianity powerfully in the land.

The Spanish conquest and evangelization came at a time when Spain had the momentum of the “reconquista.” Spain’s rebound from the long subjugation by the Moors ushered a “Siglo de Oro,” a golden age of the cultural consolidation. The spirit of the reconquista modified itself into an expansionist vision under the Patronato Real in which the Pope granted special status to the Spanish Crown as patron of the Church in evangelization and service.10 Christianization and the Hispanization of the land and the natives were correlatives. The uprooting of indigenous religious elements was the precondition of transplanting European forms of inculturation.

9There is, therefore, a truth to Strobel’s (and NVM Gonzales’) description that the Philippines is “a lahar (flowing lava) of colonizations” (Strobel, 1993: 8).

10 Bautista, p. 175, emphases added.
The Christian faith was presented to the Filipinos as something entirely new. . . . Thus, the missionaries sought to *destroy* paganism, root and branch. With the help of the military, and assisted by many of their Filipino converts, they destroyed pagan holy places, burned idols, and obliterated the native literature (because of its religious character). They taught the Filipinos that many features of their native civilization were *contrary* to the “true religion” of Christ, and so, as part of the process of conversion, the friars *obliged* the Filipinos to accept features of European civilization.\(^{11}\)

Lorenzo Bautista notes that the spirit of the European Counter Reformation may have been a motivation in the zealous attitude of the missionaries. He cautions, however, against a simplistic, one-sided reading of church history under Spain. “[T]he missionaries were also agents of change in ways more positive. They introduced new methods of farming and increased the variety of produce by importing seeds. Many of them mastered the native dialects and printed teaching materials in them. The [Catholic] orders also pioneered in education. . . . Most important for the history of Christianity, missionary friars taught the natives the basics of the Catholic faith.”\(^{12}\)

The transition into the American period of Philippine history happened when Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States partly because of Spanish pride (not wanting to surrender to their *indio* subjects) and American sense of opportunity. The Philippine revolution which climaxed in 1896 actually threatened the end of Spanish rule. Indeed, the *Katipunan* (the revolutionary organization) came very close to a decisive win but it was not to be.\(^{13}\)

[T]he United States had decided to claim the Philippines from Spain, ignoring the declaration of independence of the revolutionary government. An expeditionary force arrived (June-July, 1898) and took Manila after token resistance by the Spanish garrison (13 August). By the terms of the Treaty of Paris (10 December) which put an end to the Spanish-American War. Spain ceded the Philippines to the United States and the United States agreed to pay Spain $20,000,000.\(^{14}\)

American Protestants viewed the unexpected possession of the Philippines as a providential opening for missions. “Even President McKinley, speaking as a Methodist, spoke of the duty to “Christianize” the Filipinos who at the time he believed to be ‘unfit for self-

\(^{11}\) Peter Gowing (pp. 16,44) emphases added; as to the American missionary enterprise, see Anne Kwantes, p. 15. On the effect of colonialism in Philippine scholarship, see Enriquez, pp. 59-60.

\(^{12}\) Bautista, pp. 177-178.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., p. 179.

\(^{14}\) de la Costa, p. 211
government." Thus, the beginnings of American Protestant missions in the Philippines (1899-1901) was also tainted by a superiority complex. Yet this should not blind readers to the constructive efforts of the American missionaries. For "they sincerely labored as missionaries and addressed both spiritual and material needs of the people. They started churches and then also educational and medical institutions. They were also pioneer test case in the new reality called freedom of religion."

A Crisis of Identity. The colonized natives "internalized" the colonizers' prejudicial view of them. The early Filipinos came to believe that their way of life, their way of being, is inferior, second-rate, compared to the Spaniards' (colonizers') way of being. They have taken this distorted view of the colonizers upon themselves to the detriment of their human dignity and worth.

With the American conquest, this crisis of identity was only heightened. The Christianity that the Americans furthered did not really address this need. The cultural factor was suppressed and did not surface as a major issue in the transmission of the Gospel. The temper of American Protestantism in the island, according to Bautista, was "straightforward and propositional in

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16 Kwantes (p. 14) notes that "White Man's Burden formed part of the missionary urge of the 19th century" and this was also a motivation in American Protestant expansion in the Islands. She reports that on the day before the American Senate voted to take on the administration of the Philippines (5 February 1899), that is during the outbreak of the Philippine-American War, Rudyard Kipling's poem "White Man's Burden" appeared in the New York Sun and Tribune. It is not without basis, therefore, says Kwantes, to speculate that "Kipling's views [might really have] influenced the senators' vote."

18 A letter from a Spanish "friar" (from the Spanish frailes, representing the powerful group of colonial priests and lay brothers) that dates back to 1720 witnesses to the bigotry of the clergy. Fray Gaspar de San Agustin of the Augustinian Order view the natives as "wretched beings [who]are of such a nature that they live a purely animal life, intent solely on its preservation and convenience, without the corrective of reason or respect or esteem for reputation....[They are] "ungrateful, lazy, stupid, rude, curious, and impertinent, insolent toward Spaniards, "they do not know their place", proud and arrogant, tyrannical, excessively fond of feasts, vain, lustful, vengeful, ignorant, cowardly and ate a lot" (from Bernad, 1972: 168 quoted by de Mesa, 1987: 11).

19 Strobel, pp. 8, 9.
character” appealing mainly “to a small minority of Filipinos, mostly from the politically moderate but some from the masses as well.”21 The gospel they brought came attractively wrapped in a package of imported goods (material and immaterial) symbolizing the superior American way of life.

Americans insisted on the importance of education and democracy as keys to learning and progress. But it had to be their form of education and government and not any other kind. This was all part of the American colonial project. Thus, in the beginning years, the American colonizers immediately established public schools, mainly to “promot(e) the pacification of the Islands.”22 Consequently, Filipinos learned more American history than of their own life history as a people.23 And, as with the reign of the Spaniards so with the Americans, only the established Filipino upper class (elite) benefited economically and politically from the exchange. Speaking of the beginnings of the American period (1901-1913), Philippine historian Bonifacio Salamanca explains,

There already existed an articulate political and economic elite in the Philippines, behind whom stood the other ninety per cent of the people in opposing, first, the continuation of Spanish rule and, second, the imposition of yet another colonial rule, that of the United States. Recognizing this, the United States decided to govern the Philippines through the elite. The latter, in turn, determined what substantive policies should be adopted by the United States and which institutions should be accepted in full, rejected in part, or rejected in full. The Filipino reaction to the American rule, therefore, was essentially the response of the Filipino elite or upper class.24

Colonialism and the Churches. As a primary consequence of the Christianization of the Philippines, the churches in the Philippines have become heavily dependent on Euro-American expressions of Christianity.

22 de Mesa, 1991: 141.

23 Even today, Filipinos continue to be fascinated by things imported from America.

24 Salamanca, p. 2.
(1) We have noted that part of the colonialist policy of (medieval) Roman Catholic missions was a deliberate rupture with the native culture, especially those aspects deemed to be pagan and demonic.25 This passion of preserving the gospel against the paganism of the Islands found its way also in Christian instruction. Key theological words and concepts were not translated in the vernacular but kept in Spanish. In the Doctrina Cristiana of 1593, the first Roman Catholic catechism translated in the vernacular (Tagalog), key concepts such as God, Trinity, Holy Spirit, Virgin Mary, Pope, grace, sin, cross, and the names of the sacraments were left in Spanish or Latin forms.26 This trend has not yet been reversed although the Roman Catholic Church is “the most culturally assimilated among the churches.”27

As a consequence of not being genuinely contextualized, the Catholic church lives with a mosaic of belief system. A major part continues to be Tridentine. A second part follows the trends in Vatican II. A third remains a folk religion, “the Catholicism of the ‘inarticulate,’ in which indigenous religiosity assimilates rudimentary Catholic doctrine.”28 All three belief systems constitute a mosaic - often overlapping, but also in opposition as well as collaboration.29

A genuine transmission of the faith in the vernacular remains an ongoing task for the church in the Philippines. Meanwhile, a separate folk religiosity has developed - a co-optation of official Catholicism into the life-world and religion of the common tao (person) - where “life is taken care of” by the Santo Nino (Holy Child), suwerte at malas (good and bad luck),

25Hollenweger (1995: 107) says that the colonial model of evangelization insists on uniformity of understanding. There is no dialogue, or questing together after the truth of the Gospel - a monologic, monocultural, one-way rule of Truth is imposed on the receiving culture. Informed by the currents of postmodern thought, Walsh and Middleton (1995: 33-36) claims that this perspective does not empower the weak. It does not entertain “difference(s),” rather it tends toward domination, a swallowing up of the “other.”

26Phelan, 1959: 58, 185.

27Bautista, p. 186. The complete paragraph is worth quoting here: “The long presence of the Catholic church and the major role it played as creator of Philippine society makes it the most culturally assimilated among the churches. Again the typical town plaza is an eloquent witness to this. The church building is huge and architecturally foreign, but its moss and ivy have made it look like a natural part of the landscape. The church has a power structure with connections to the Vatican, has distinctive Roman rites, and has a theological tradition well developed from a foreign philosophical orientation. It nevertheless allows itself a great degree of assimilation to native religiosity and social behavior so as to make a distinctively Filipino Catholicism.”

28Bautista, pp. 184-185.

29Ibid., p. 185.
masasamang espiritu (evil spirits), albularyo (shaman), panata (vows), kandila (candles), utang na loob (debt of gratitude)." This situation of dissonance between official religion and folk religiousness recalls Jaime Bulatao's observation on the presence of a "split-level Christianity" in the Philippines: a pragmatic blending of Christianity and indigenous cultural values but without real communication between the two systems of thought and behavior.31

(2) The ascendancy of the Christendom model of the church in the Philippines is also a testimony to the dominance of teutonic Christian expressions.32 Historical Christendom developed in the West as "the powerful religio-political synthesis that resulted when Christianity won recognition as the religion of state in the fourth century."33 It was a fusion of the religious and the political. "Citizenship was established at baptism, and the church regulated the life of the citizenry on behalf of the church and state."34 In Philippine experience, this has given rise to what is known as KBL Christians: those who claim to be Christians "even if they visit the church only for baptism (Binyag), wedding ceremony (Kasal), and their funeral rite (Libing)."35 Moreover, in political life, colonialism had imposed through the power of the sword a "centralized political authority unsanctioned by either tradition or popular consent."36 It was a government born not of indigenous inspiration, quest, and consensus but of expediency.

The underlying ecclesiology of Christendom is ecclesiocentric. The Church is preoccupied with maintaining its own internal, institutional affairs. It has become comfortable with the great power accorded to it by society. The hierarchical church claimed a great part of the people's

30 de Mesa, 1990a: 3.


34 Ibid.

35 Fernandez, p. 127.

social life. The religious vision was a theocratic society in which the church (as a dispenser of grace) reigns at the centre of life. Differentiation was suppressed in favor of centralized ecclesiastical power. Protestant theologian Emerito Nacpil claims that ecclesiocentrism is not limited to Roman Catholicism in the Philippines. The mainline Protestant and evangelical churches which arrived on the Philippine scene considerably later are guilty of perpetuating the same problem, albeit in different forms.

1.2 Prohibition Against Vernacular Translation and Study of the Bible.

An ecclesiastical prohibition against Bible reading for lay people was in effect in the Philippines right up to the 19th century. To own a Bible meant resisting the hierarchical authorities. The Roman Catholic clergy did its best in Spanish times to prevent the Bible from falling into the hands of the laity. Realizing that it would be dangerous to the authoritarian rule and threaten the unity of the Church, the clergy taught the people that it was an evil thing to read the Bible without proper authorization and instruction.

Kwantes notes the revolutionary character of owning the Bible during the Spanish times. During the Spanish rule, “(t)he Bible became a symbol of liberty to Filipinos. . . . In a sense, owning a Bible was comparable to continuing the Revolution, and had political overtones.”

Reinforcing the prohibition to read and study the Bible, a policy was maintained of not translating the Bible. The Roman church neglected to translate the Bible in the vernacular. This state of affairs existed for more than three centuries since the Spanish occupation. In his book on

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37 Ibid., pp. 132-136; also Wostyn, 1990: 5-21.
38 Nacpil, 1975: 117.
39 Gowing, p. 124.
40 Kwantes, p. 24.
the history of Christian missions, particularly his account of Roman Catholic missions in the period between 1600-1787, Stephen Neill points out that the translation of the Bible into the vernacular was never a missionary priority. Vernacular catechisms and books of devotion were produced but not the Bible itself. He cites the Philippine (as well as Indian) experience to stress this point.

The first Roman Catholic missionaries arrived in the Philippines in 1565. In three centuries almost the whole population had become Christian; yet it appears that the first translation of any part of the Scriptures into any language of the Philippines, the Gospel of Luke in the *Pangasinan* language, was made only in 1873.  

With the coming of the Americans, the ban on Bible reading and translation was lifted. During the first ten years of Protestantism in the Philippines (1899-1910), the American Protestants saw to it that entire Bible or portions of it were translated in the vernacular (regional) languages. The Spanish Bibles were popular especially among the elite but Bible translation into the local languages was deemed necessary to make the Bible accessible to the common people. The latter distinction between a Bible for the elite and another for the common people is crucial. The gap between the more powerful Spanish-speaking (and later, English-speaking) elite and the vernacular-speaking majority (mostly poor) continues to hinder the use of the vernacular in both the church and society. This leads us to the next point.

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41 Neill, p. 209.
43 Those who cannot speak English (often from the poorer class) are looked down upon as *bakya* or “lacking sophistication.” See Enriquez, p. 23.
1.3 The Problem of Poverty and the Cultural Divide.

Aside from the presence of neo-colonialism in both society and church, a contemporary socio-economic problem also plagues the Philippines, namely, poverty. A document by the World Bank in 1989 reports that "approximately 30 million Filipinos (50% of the population) lived in 'absolute poverty,' in the sense of having an income that does not enable them to satisfy their basic needs. From 1979 to 1989, an additional 12 million people were recruited into the ranks of the absolutely poor." Writing in 1990, De Mesa and Wostyn also give a succinct summary of this problem.

The prevailing social and economic divisions in the country are between the rich, the middle income group, and the poor. Billionaires and millionaires, although constituting only 2% of the population, own most of the wealth of the Philippines. But the majority of the population - more than 75% - still remain poor. A third group is constituted by the professionals, bankers, lawyers, physicians, teachers, office managers, and technologist - some of whom have acquired some wealth. Thus, today, at one extreme, the wealthiest individuals have a monthly personal income of about 200 times or more of the per capita average income of an ordinary laborer for the same period. This scandalous disparity of wealth is the origin of many social problems and much of the current popular discontent. Although measures for land reform, social legislation, and a revision of the income tax laws have been introduced, the wealthy retain control of the economic and political life of the country.

The coupling of neocolonialism with the problem of poverty translates into what Enriquez calls as the "Great Cultural Divide": the separation between the educated (Anglicized) Filipino and the masses. In the words of Melba Maggay, it is a situation where the culture of the elite reigns thinly on top and unfortunately prevails, at least formally, over the culture of the masses below. The elite culture is served by

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44 Steinberg, p. 171.

45de Mesa, 1990a: 37-38.

46Enriquez, p. 2.
the Ladino class, these culture brokers who, miseducated into alien systems of
doing economics, management, politics or literature, do things that are
unconnected to what goes on among the vast masses of our people. The net of
captivity to foreign-dominated systems extends fairly wide, from technocrats
trained in Wharton or Harvard who make fiscal policies and develop plans that do
not work because they are totally out of context with the tingi and katas ng Saudi
intricacies of our underground economy to writers who can only write in English
and for each other and can not find the tongue to speak to most of our people.47

Thus, those who are learned, whose conceptual world is English, mostly talk among themselves
and are “unable to engage (the) people in genuine dialogue for the simple lack of a common
discourse.”48 This situation is a cause for lament especially as it comes into expression in the life
of the churches. There is, therefore, the need for the churches to be a truly incarnated community
among the masses who are poor.49

1.4 Nationalism and the Quest for Filipino Christianity.

At the simplest level, and emphasizing its positive dimension, nationalism represents “the
search for cultural identity and integrity.”50 Put negatively, it is “an expression against foreign
oppression, i.e., colonialism.”51

Because of the Philippines’ two major colonial experience, nationalism is a particularly
sensitive issue.52 For our purposes, however, we are interested in the relationship between
nationalism and contextualization. There are at least three areas where the two realities seem to
overlap.

48 Maggay, 1995c: 15.
49 Ibid.
50 de Mesa, 1991: 111.
51 The quote is from Smith, 1971: 65, cited by Tai, p. 28.
52 There is extensive literature on this subject. Among others, see Agoncillo, 1974; Mahajani, 1971; Ileto, 1979;
Schumacher, 1981.
First, nationalism in the Philippines has engendered a Christian response of "promoting the genius and wisdom of the indigenous culture." Colonization has brought cultural degradation. It carried with it the stigma that the indigenous culture is inferior to Western cultures. The Church's effort to cultivate a truly Filipino Christianity - a clear instance of being in solidarity with the culture - helps to de-stigmatize the indigenous culture or cultures so that it may regain respectability and dignity before one's own eyes. Thus, inculturation is not simply a matter of advancing contemporary pluralism in theology and the church. It arises mainly out of a concern for social justice.

Secondly, nationalism becomes a call for the churches to be truly "incarnated" and contextualized. The Catholic and Protestant missionaries have tried to adapt the faith to Filipino culture, but as Mercado points out, "(p)olicies did not extend to the people's way of thinking. It was limited to the clothing, not to the soul of the nation." Thus popular religiosity continues to grow unchecked and undisciplined, standing alongside official religion.

Finally, Dionisio Miranda injects a (cross-cultural) missions perspective into the discussion. He poses the question: "why is it that, after so many Filipino missionaries being sent to Asia, our neighbors and brothers have not as yet responded with conversions similar to those of Buddhism, Islam and other religions?" He suggests that a critical factor may be that Philippine Christianity has become closely identified with Western foreign expressions. According to him, a large part of the failure of the Philippine churches to convert its Asian neighbors may be traced to "the alienation or the lack of authentic appropriation and assimilation by the would-be converters themselves, making them appear to be no more than clones of foreign missionaries."

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53 de Mesa, 1991: 144.
54 Mercado, 1975: 8, emphasis added.
56 Ibid.
This concise overview provides the historical setting for the theologies of Jose de Mesa and Melba Maggay. It sketches the cultural context of their writings and highlights key areas that could enlarge and deepen our interaction with them.
CHAPTER TWO: JOSE DE MESA ON THEOLOGICAL RE-ROOTING

Jose de Mesa is a Roman Catholic theologian who has written and continues to write engaging essays on Filipino theology. He teaches at the Maryhill School of Theology and the East Asian Pastoral Institute of the Ateneo de Manila University in Quezon City. He is a major figure in Roman Catholic efforts to inculturate Christian faith in the Philippine setting. The subject of his doctoral dissertation (PhD in Religious Studies) at the Catholic University in Belgium is the theme of providence in lowland Philippine setting. A study on vernacular theology, this beginning work has thrust him into the field of contextual theologizing. His collection of essays on “theological re-rooting” and other related essays have recently been translated into other languages, thereby making his uniquely Philippine contribution available to the global church community. Stephen Bevans, in his book Models of Contextual Theology, actually gives Jose de Mesa pride of place among Philippine theologians and introduces him in the greater North American theological scene.

We turn now to an examination of Jose de Mesa’s framework for the “contextualization” of the gospel.

57 For a recent collection of engaging essays which also contains his reflections on theological method, see de Mesa, 1987.

58 Other prominent Philippine Roman Catholic theologians who are practitioners of inculturation/contextualization include Mercado, 1975, 1979; Miranda, 1988; also Abesamis, 1975.

2.1 On Theological Re-rooting

In current discussions on gospel and culture, most scholars choose either “inculturation” or “contextualization” to represent the church’s missional engagement with culture.\(^{60}\) Jose de Mesa, following the lead of Kosuke Koyama, also distinguishes the two but as elements of the larger framework which he calls “theological or Gospel re-rooting.”\(^{61}\)

2.1.1 Definition. In his early work, De Mesa establishes a definition of theological re-rooting which proceeds from Kosuke Koyama’s seminal reflections.\(^{62}\) De Mesa defines theological re-rooting as

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\text{a thoughtful attempt to translate the inner meaning of the message of Jesus Christ from one historical and cultural milieu and root it into another (Koyama). The re-rooting is \text{“for the purpose of transforming humanity from within and making it new” (Evangelii nuntiandi). Since the Gospel is a living testimony, it must seek its roots in the lives of those who profess it both in their social structure and in their ideals and hopes.}\(^{63}\)
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The key ideas in the definition are “transformation,” “translation,” “the inner meaning of Christ’s message,” “re-rooting” and “historical and cultural milieu.”

Transformation means the permeation of the Gospel in personal and social life. It is presupposed that the Gospel is an instrument for renewal and revitalization of cultural life. The vision, however, is a transformation from within. It does not mean the “injection of

\(^{60}\) Bevans (1992) prefers to use “contextualization” instead of “inculturation.” Schineller (1990) holds the opposite. Others like Whiteman, 1997 and Hiebert, 1997 tends to conflate the two and see them to be synonymous.

\(^{61}\) cf. the works of de Mesa, above n.39.


\(^{63}\) de Mesa. 1979: 34, emphases added.
[Christianity] into people's lives from the outside like an alien substance.” Rather, following the lead of Gaudium et Spes, transformation consists of the presentation of the Gospel “as an answer to the needs, anxieties and hopes” of the people.64 Thus, the Gospel and culture encounter is an intentional meeting, as it entails the vision of evangelizing culture from within in a “respectful” and “critical” way.65 The continuity-discontinuity dimension is a precondition to the affirmation and critique of the recipient culture.

This presupposes, of course, that seeds of the Word are already in that [cultural] context even prior to the explicit proclamation of the Gospel. In this way, this Good News will come to its recipients as something that affirms their personhood, coupled with the realization that to become a Christian does not mean ceasing to be what one is. In this way, not only will the Gospel of Christ lead the culture to its fullness, but also submit it to a creative criticism.66

The goal of transformation from within - the re-rooting of the Gospel in culture - directly relates to the cultivation of a truly local (indigenous) church. De Mesa emphasizes this in his shorter definition of theological re-rooting which he refers to as “the appropriation of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition by the local church into its indigenous culture.”67 In other words it is “an endeavor to give the Gospel a truly Filipino expression for the benefit of both the Church and the culture.”68

In the definition, the concept inner meaning refers to the core of the Gospel message, “the living Person of Christ. . . . He himself is the summary and content of the message of the

64Ibid. Note that de Mesa’s actual reference was to “Christianity” not “the Gospel” but he seemed to be equating the two in the paragraph.
66Ibid., p. 46.
67The quote is from the Introduction to the book, In Solidarity with the Culture (1987)
68Ibid.
Kingdom, he is himself the Christian message.”69 The inner meaning, however, is not culture-free. While transcendent, this living core is “never without a historically and culturally situated expression.”70 The witness of the incarnation validates and gives renewed appreciation for this fact of cultural embodiment which is entrusted to the Church. It is necessary, however, to distinguish the core of Gospel - the living Christ - from its present cultural expression because the Western expression of the Gospel is often absolutized and confused with the very Gospel itself.71

The historical and cultural milieu refers to the “human situation together with its needs, concerns and questions.”72 De Mesa uses “culture” to refer to this element. The broader hermeneutical term, however, that he uses to designate the reality of culture is “human experience.” Actually he uses the terms interchangeably.73

Although there are both positive and negative elements within culture, de Mesa insists on the “fundamentally positive thrust of culture as a whole.”74 It is in the service of the well-being of people, seeking to make life more human. De Mesa associates the more positive side of culture with the “presence of revelation.”75 Following Vatican II, he believes that there is continuity between the message of salvation and culture.

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691979: 35. emphasis added.
70Ibid., p. 37.
71Ibid., p. 35.
72Ibid., p. 42.
73Most notably in de Mesa, 1990c.
741992: 28.
751979: 63.
De Mesa's initial assumption that the culture has within itself the elements that could embody and transmit the Gospel is one of the fundamental presuppositions of his approach. A corollary to this process of finding "the seeds of the Word" (revelation) in culture is the need for discernment on the part of the church.

By the term re-rooting de Mesa affirms the fact that the Gospel - the message of the living Christ - is able to journey from one culture to another, i.e. to be "historically incarnated," without losing its fundamental identity. While the message remains substantially similar, it is able to be received, appropriated, and embodied by the different cultures of the world. The re-rooting is described as theological because it is guided by theological principles, foremost among which are the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery. But theological re-rooting is not dependent simply on theological reflection for its accomplishment. De Mesa emphasizes that the Christian witness in life and work is the primary vehicle that spells the success or failure of the whole process.

Translation is closely identified with re-rooting. The definition suggests that the former is the primary medium of re-rooting. Translation refers to "the transposition of the inner meaning of the Gospel message into the language a particular people understands." It fulfills the "need to rethink, reformulate, and to live anew within each culture the events and words revealed by God." However, it should not be thought that the process is a one-way movement, i.e. from the

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761979: 34-35; See also 1990a: 18 where he states: "a substantially identical christian message can find expression in a plurality of embodiments corresponding to the new contexts of our contemporary world."

77Ibid. p. 34.

78Ibid., p. 46.

79Ibid., p. 46.
Gospel to culture (represented by a people’s language). It is rather a genuine encounter where the face of the Gospel and the culture are renewed by the encounter.

2.1.2 Elements of Theological Rerooting. Inculturation, contextualization, and dialogue are important elements of theological re-rooting. De Mesa regards these as norms for the work of theology in general and for the realization of Gospel re-rooting in particular.

*Inculturation* is the hermeneutic aspect of theology which concerns the “process of proclaiming and explaining the Gospel in a language a particular people understands.” This function honors the distinctiveness of the Gospel - its origin is not from culture - at the same time that it insists that “theological language must have a recognizable reference to the lived experience of people” in community. There is a Word to proclaim and this is meant to be heard and understood (1 Cor 14:19). Following the pattern of the Incarnation, and affirmed by the Pentecost Story (Acts 2:11), this communication entails the assumption of “the cultural flesh of a given people so as to make an impact on that culture.”

The matter of “cultural enfleshment,” accented by the concept of inculturation, is crucial for two reasons. First, it is an encouragement to the church in the Philippines to continue its work of culturally disengaging the Gospel from its Western theological expression since “no given expression of the Gospel is absolute.” Secondly, it proposes to the local church a particular

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80Ibid., p. 54.
81Ibid., p. 54.
82Ibid., p. 54.
83Ibid., p. 55.
84Ibid., p. 56.
vision of how the Gospel could impact the culture from within, namely, that “Christian life and thought penetrat(e) the most profound depth of a people’s soul and culture.” The local church has to be “rooted so deeply in a culture and mentality that it will produce a spirituality and theology [both of which] are well rooted in the culture without being less Christian.”

If inculturation expresses the hermeneutic function of theological re-rooting, *contextualization* stresses the prophetic or critical function. The latter goes beyond indigenization (meaning: to grow out of the natural environment of a place) and takes seriously the new historical realities of secularity, technology and the struggle for human justice. Contextualization “arises out of genuine encounter between God’s word and his world and moves toward the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment.”

*Dialogue* functions as the framework within and the attitude with which the whole methodology takes place. As an *interpretative attitude*, it is important because it is not the Gospel as such that meets culture as such. The meeting is between people. Listening and understanding is vital since the people involved have both a faith and a culture which are intimately united. Mutual communication and comprehension with the goal of cultural transformation will not come easy. As *a method or procedure*, dialogue involves a sharing that takes into account “the light the people already have so that Christ will be seen as the fulness of

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85Ibid., p. 56.

86Ibid., p. 58. A specific approach to inculturation which de Mesa advocates is called thematic cultural exegesis. See de Mesa, 1992c.

87Ibid, p. 54; cf. TEF, 1972.

88Ibid., p. 57.
light." Patient listening/understanding is important to (re-)discover the seeds of the Word in culture. De Mesa asserts, however, that this posture has to be complemented with the challenge of Christ who is the fullness of light. One should not be excessively stressed at the expense of the other. "There is always the need to go through a culture and not to stop with the culture because the Gospel is not identical with any one culture." Every culture must follow the way of Christ: to die and rise again to new life. The Christological theme by which we end aptly leads us to a discussion of the theological bases or principles of theological re-rooting.

2.2 Fundamental Theological Principles. In his earliest work, de Mesa establishes the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery as the primary theological principles that undergird his framework. These Christological principles "inspire and demand the contextualization and inculturation of the Gospel." The Christological is intimately linked with the Ecclesiological principle. In his later works, an additional theological principle takes on greater prominence. This is the theology of Revelation which serves as a vital principle for re-appropriating the Christian faith.

2.2.1 Christology and the Church. The Incarnation affirms the particularity and cultural rootedness of the Word. The reality of the Incarnation is clearly portrayed in the Scriptures and theologians of contextualization often look to this Christological theme as the primary theological

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89Ibid., p. 64.
90Ibid., p. 66.
91Ibid., p. 5ff.
92Ibid., p. 52.
basis for their work. Yet de Mesa gives a particular direction to his interpretation of the Incarnation in relation to theological re-rooting. He does not simply invoke the Incarnation to establish the truth that the Gospel is always embodied in community. He goes a step further by asserting the redemption of cultures through the Incarnation. Redemption through the Incarnation means that “everything that has been created through (Christ) might be assumed, saved, and consecrated to God. In this way He will be all in all (cf. Jn 1:1-18; Col 1:15-20; 1 Cor 15:28).” The relevance of the Incarnation is a well-established in the literature on “contextualization,” but the same cannot be said of the Paschal Mystery. De Mesa offers readers a renewed understanding of this event with its consequences for evangelization. While Incarnation refers us to the particularity and limitation of the Word, the Paschal Mystery, completes the limitedness of [Jesus’] incarnational presence, for by the resurrection Jesus becomes the Christ. He is released and he transcends the confines of local particularity, and by doing so, He becomes really present to the whole of history as its Lord. In other words, in the Paschal Mystery the particularity of the incarnation is transcended and Christ fills all creation with his life-giving presence. Now that he is Lord of all cultures, histories and people - a Lord immanent and transcendent - he must be born, die and live anew in every culture, history and people for these to be purified, perfected, and ennobled.

The Incarnation is brought to its fulfillment in the Resurrection. The Lordship of Christ represents the movement from particularity to universality, from historical limitation and boundedness to transcendence and spatio-temporal release. Immanence and transcendence are shown to be united in the living Christ who has become Lord of all. This principle has prophetic significance for the evangelization of cultures.

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93 On an earlier appropriation of this principle in the Philippine theological scene, see the pioneering work of Leonardo Mercado (1975). Aside from Mercado, see also Maggay, 1979; Costas, 1982; Schineller, 1992.


95 Ibid., p. 21.
No matter how intimate the Lord is in a given cultural context at a particular period of history, he is still the Lord who transcends that culture and therefore its judge. Consequently, the Church in inculturating herself should continually challenge the culture where she has found a ‘home’. And this she should do through the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit that Jesus has given to her.  

This quotation brings to light another important facet of de Mesa’s thought. The Christological principle is inseparable from the *Ecclesiological*. The Church, being Christ’s Body, perpetuates the mission of the Word made flesh. “(I)n the name of the Word Incarnate (the Church) perpetuates this mission of assuming and saving, gathering and unifying and consecrating to God.” The Church’s missionary activity is “in imitation of the plan of the Incarnation (*Ad Gentes* 22).” She is, therefore, committed in binding herself to human culture(s) to minister salvation in these conditions. Moreover, on the basis of the redemptive significance of the dying and rising of Christ, “the Gospel message and the Church that bears that message must re-live the Incarnation-Paschal Mystery process in the movement of being re-rooted from one given culture to another. They [the Gospel message and the Church] must not only become incarnate in the lives and in the culture of the people to whom Christ brings new life, they must also die and rise again in these people.”

A vital dimension of the Ecclesiological principle in de Mesa’s approach is the concept of the local church which is closely related to the principle of catholicity opened up by the reality of the Resurrection. The Resurrection has given birth to the church which is truly catholic. This

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reality became established at the Council at Jerusalem in Acts 15 (cf. Gal 2:1-10) where they came to the decision that "Christianity not only could but should take on the cultural flesh of one new people after another in the course of history."100

2.2.2 A Theology of Revelation. In addition to Christological and Ecclesiological principles, de Mesa grounds theological re-rooting in the very nature and process of Revelation. The doctrine of revelation functions both as another foundational principle for the methodology of re-rooting and also as a tool for fresh formulations (re-appropriation) of the Christian Tradition (e.g. Christology) for local churches. These two functions are clearly demonstrated in an article on "doing Christology" which he wrote in the East Asian Institute Pastoral Journal. Indeed, in the article, de Mesa encourages the use of the revelational principle to help "articulat(e) the meaningfulness of Jesus for our cultures and our times."101

De Mesa views the process of doing Christology (or theologizing in general) today to be similar to what the early disciples had gone through in their identification of Jesus.102 There are three levels discernible in the process of the disciples' identification of Jesus which is actually an experience of Revelation. First, the disciples received God's offer of life and love (the gift of decisive and definitive salvation in Jesus) in and through their experiences as they perceived and received this offer in faith. Their experience of the gift of salvation in Jesus (=revelation), mediated by their own culture, led them to know who God really is.103 It follows, thus, that

100Ibid.
101de Mesa, 1992b: 112.
102According to de Mesa, it is a search similar to the way "the disciples went through in identifying Jesus for themselves." Ibid.
103Note that this is the same way as saying that revelation and soteriology are intimately linked. De Mesa insists on this "functional primacy" of the soteriological in understanding revelation. The experience of salvation (Soteriology) is what precedes and gives meaning to Revelation (cf. de Mesa, 1994b: 55-60).
"(o)ur cultural and historical circumstances mediate God's offer of life and love..." 104 Secondly, since interpretation is a constitutive ingredient of experiencing reality, the disciples' experience of Jesus is surely never without interpretative elements. Undeniably, these interpretative elements flow from an "inherited source; that is, socially shared knowledge." 105 They (the disciples) saw Jesus "the way their culture allowed them to see Jesus. In this way, they were able to relate their manner of living life (culture) to the reality which was Jesus." 106 To articulate the relevance of Jesus to our situation today means following the same hermeneutical path of employing interpretative models available to us. Thirdly, the religious Tradition of the disciples provided them with guidance and inspiration to bring out the meaning of Jesus for their lives. "They interpreted the significant changes they had experienced in their concrete situations in the perspective of their Jewish religiosity. By the same token, their experience of Jesus made them see their religious Tradition in a different light." 107 For Christians today, there should be this mutual interaction between the faith heritage (Judaic-Christian Tradition) and the concrete situations in their cultures to bring about the meaning of Jesus that is authentically Christian and culturally relevant.

De Mesa finds support for his perspective in the Second Vatican Council (*Dei Verbum*). 108 The newness of the Vatican II document on Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) lies in the fact that it

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105 In our contemporary awareness, "this comes from culture, social situation, philosophical perspectives, educational training, religious background, or even gender." Ibid., p. 114.
106 Ibid., p. 115.
107 Ibid., p. 116.
proffers a dynamic, historical understanding of revelation in which the faith experiences of people form an integral part. (De Mesa reads this in juxtaposition with Gaudium et Spes.) Moreover, he affirms Dei Verbum's thrust that Scripture and Tradition "are not two sources [of revelation], but witnesses to one and the same event: the recollection of Jesus which, in the Spirit, is continuously happening within the Christian movement."\(^{109}\) He also gives preference to the living Tradition of the Church as the bearer of Christ's presence to the world. "God's revelation, the divine offer of life and love in Jesus Christ, is to be found not in the first place in a Bible or dogmas but in the living community of the Church. . . . (2 Cor. 3:2-3)."\(^{110}\)

### 2.3 On Theological Method

De Mesa characterizes his methodology as being *dialogical*. He talks of dialogue as "the framework within which. . . theological re-rooting takes place."\(^{111}\) It is "an approach that clarifies how methodologically theological re-rooting proceeds."\(^{112}\) More precisely, theological re-rooting as dialogical means that it is a *dynamic process of interchange where the offer of life through the Christian Tradition and the seeds of the Word in the local culture are synthesized or critically correlated for the benefit of the Church and the local culture.*

At this point, the various concepts de Mesa employs to denote the mutual exchange between Christian faith and culture deserve closer examination. In his early work, the language of "synthesis" and "translation" dominates the nature of the exchange while "critical correlation" and

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\(^{109}\) 1990: 98.

\(^{110}\) Ibid., pp. 98-99.

\(^{111}\) 1979, p. 61.

\(^{112}\) Ibid., p. 62.
"(re-)appropriation" assume greater prominence in his later writings. The latter two categories will be treated in another major section on theological sources.

2.3.1 Synthesis.113 De Mesa says that an effective "synthesis" between Christian faith and indigenous Philippine culture is waiting to be explored and is yet to be.

He believes that the challenge of nationalism in Philippine society, the church, and the individual beckon for a critical synthesis of faith and culture. This will serve as a response to the contemporary quest for what is genuinely Filipino - the quest for national identity - at the same time that it will enrich the universal church. To aid with the search for what is distinctively Filipino, Christian reflection should assist in synthesizing the cultural heritages of the Philippines. As to the Filipinization of Christianity, this will also contribute to arresting the increasing tide of new (indigenous) religious movements in the Philippines. Finally, de Mesa suggests that the "split" in people's lives between the professed faith (Christianity) and indigenous values - what sociologists in the Philippines call "split-level Christianity" - is due to a lack of authentic dialogue between the two thought and behavior systems. Conversely, wholeness will come through the genuine synthesis that is envisioned.

2.3.2 Dynamic Equivalence Translation. A definition of "translation" was given in a previous section (2.1). Note again that de Mesa uses the term broadly in its anthropological and cultural sense and does not limit its meaning linguistically. Translation refers to the announcement of the Gospel to people in a language that is intelligible to them and meaningful to their life. Theology as a way of communicating the gospel inevitably draws its vocabulary and

1131979: 1-19.
expressions from the local culture. The goal is a genuine translation of the Tradition within the local culture.

As a general direction, translation needs to negotiate between the pull of cultural identity and the scandal of the cross. These twin concerns - arising from the fact that Christian faith is universal and missionary and emphasized by the Conciliar documents - should guide any "translation" of the Christian message in any culture.114

From the general direction, de Mesa suggest practical procedures for "translation." He adopts the ideas proposed by evangelical theologian Charles Kraft known as "dynamic equivalence translation." Influenced by new developments in Bible translation, dynamic equivalence translation focuses on the response of the receptor rather than on the form of the message. "Formal correspondence translation" utilizes the old focus and aims for an exact correspondence word in another language. Dynamic equivalence translation, however, aims at an equivalence of response rather than equivalence of form. "This necessitates the comparison of the receptor's response to the 'translated' message with the way in which the original receptor's presumably reacted to the message when it was given in this original setting."115 Thus, the question arises: "What does the receptor language require that this concept be intelligible and convey an impact similar to that experienced by the original readers/hearers?"116

The Gospel message does not merely need to be translated in a dynamically equivalent manner. Dynamically equivalent translation should yield a Church that is also dynamically

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114Ibid., p. 46.
115Ibid., p. 49.
116Ibid., p. 50.
Utilizing Charles Kraft's ideas, de Mesa construes a dynamically equivalent church as one "which 1) conveys to its members truly Christian meanings, 2) functions within its own society and produces within it the same Christian impact as the first century Church in its day, and 3) is couched in cultural forms that are nearly indigenous as possible."  

2.4 Theological Sources and their Correlation. In later works de Mesa introduces the idea of critical correlation of theological sources as a primary method.

2.4.1 The Two Sources of Theology. Human experience or culture and the Christian Tradition are posited as the two sources of theology. On the one side, experience or culture serves as a primary vehicle for theological expression even as it mediates revelation, i.e., God's offer of life and love. On the other side is the pole of the Faith Tradition or the Judaeo-Christian Tradition. It consists of the history of faith experiences in the Bible and through the Church. Christians are traditioned by this Tradition in that they identify themselves with it. It is also the source of their basic model of interpretation for understanding reality. De Mesa turns to the Conciliar document Dei Verbum to define the salvific thrust of the Tradition even its interpretative function.

This living reality of faith experiences is regarded by the community as sacramentally embodying God's amazing offer of salvation to all human beings. In other words it is primarily concerned with life and the total well-being of people with God (cf. Dei Verbum, 1). It is also this Tradition which Christians take as their basic model of interpretation to understand reality. . .

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117 Ibid., p. 50.

118 1987: Ch. 1, also 1992: Chs. 2-3.

119 Ibid., p. 47.
As the Christian's vision for life, the Judaeo Christian Tradition has to be re-rooted into various socio-cultural contexts so that it can be born anew and challenge that situation afresh.  

Tradition (with the upper case) should not be confused with traditions (lower case). Traditions (lower case, referring to local, regional churches) are historical incarnations of the Judaeo-Christian Tradition. They are faith interpretations and the ways of living of various Christian communities in different times and places seeking to be faithful to the Tradition. 

"(L)ocal Church traditions inevitably rise to incarnate the Judaeo Christian Tradition." 

2.4.2 Experience, Correlation and the Interpretative Process. As noted before, human experience and revelation are indissolubly linked in de Mesa’s framework. The common denominator in his presentation of the two poles of theology is experience. Human experience and culture (in the sense of patterns of life) are used interchangeably, and the Judaeo-Christian Tradition (including the Bible) is presented as the tradition (lower case) of Christian faith experiences. 

The primacy of experience is a major feature of de Mesa's theological method. Experience, says de Mesa, serves as “the matrix of interpretation.” Echoing Schillebeeckx’s view, this theological approach is grounded in a particular view of Christianity, namely, as “first an experience which only later on becomes a religious message.” The experience of faith

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120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., p. 17, 99.
122 Ibid., p. 99.
125 Ibid., also 1990a: 89.
of the early Christian disciples is the “Jesus experience” or the “original experience.” The *primordial experience* of salvation in Jesus has received a variety of formulations of faith in the New Testament. The various forms of expressing the original experience are born out of a particular religious consciousness and patterns of a culture. The biblical accounts of experiences of faith are thus “embedded in particular theories which are bound up with a cultural worldview.”¹²⁶ This embeddedness witnesses to the limitation and inadequacy of many biblical conceptualizations for today.

This embeddedness can make the Bible again a closed book. Reading the report of the bloody cultic sacrifices in the Old Testament to redeem human beings from a wrathful God, for example, may not only be puzzling but also repulsive for a culture which shudders at the thought of cultic sacrifices. The early faith interpretations of Jesus of Nazareth too as a wonder worker or a divine man may appear to us inadequate to express the mystery of this person.¹²⁷

Amid the witness of the diverse (and limited) biblical forms of expressing faith mainly due to cultural embeddedness, theology has to go back to the original experience of faith of the disciples and constantly reinterpret this original experience within a contemporary (target) culture’s own experience of expectation and hope. The original experience is the historical grounding as well as the “fount -- ‘the reservoir-of-meaning’ for the unfolding interpretative process.”¹²⁸ The nature of this interpretative process is qualified by the notion of the *interpretation levels* and *interpretation models*.

In regard to the *levels* of interpretation, expressions of the first, original interpretative experience are referred to as “‘first order’ affirmations” while the succeeding, progressive interpretations are called “‘second order’ affirmations.”

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¹²⁶ 1990: 61.
¹²⁷  Ibid., emphasis added.
First order affirmations are the interpretative elements which constitute the intrinsic identification of the experience. However, the growing self-expression makes it possible to deepen the original experience; it opens up the experience and makes it more explicit. These expressions of a further, more reflective experience are called second order affirmations, without intending to suggest that they are affirmations of secondary importance (because they are not). The distinction between first order and second order affirmations is necessary in order to discover the original experience and how it has been elaborated further through other interpretations.

The paragraph revolves around the discussion of the variety of Christological affirmations in the New Testament but the principle of interpretation elucidated in this passage is fundamental to the whole interpretative proposal. First order affirmations point us to the elemental encounter of salvation while second order affirmations refer to theological reformulation. Both are interpretative experiences which find coherence and unity through models of interpretation. First and second order affirmations "are not loose, unrelated interpretations. They belong to 'models.' This wider framework of interpretation synthesizes and integrates divergent experiences into a harmonious whole." This notion of interpretation in models points to the contextual nature of all experience and is the basis for pluralism in theology.

The contemporary re-appropriation of the gospel is an interpretative act that parallels the interpretative experience of the early Christian disciples. The models of interpretation from culture provides the necessary framework of meaning for the continuing re-appropriation of the experience of salvation for succeeding generation of believers in various times and places. The process of re-appropriating the faith is rooted in a primordial encounter of salvation which is capable of continuing re-interpretation. A critical correlation of the tradition of faith rooted in

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129 Ibid., p. 27.
130 Ibid.
salvific encounter and the contemporary search for wholeness and salvation is a primary tool for reinterpretating the Gospel for today. This leads to theme of theological correlation.

2.4.3 Critical Reading Together of the Two Sources. The correlation of the two theological sources involves critically retrieving their life-giving thrusts as occasioned by the situation and through the aid of the hermeneutical circle. De Mesa calls this process “critical” or “dialectical drawing together” of the poles of theology. He also refers to it as the “mutually respectful and critical interaction” of the theological poles where one serves as “a ‘source’ and ‘target’ to the other. Each pole serves as interpretative and critical guide to the other.”

The critical interaction must involve mutual respect. Both the culture and the faith tradition have their origin in God. Moreover, this respectful stance is for the benefit of the church. Through such posture, the church becomes better able “to rediscover and recover positive, life-giving aspects of both the culture and the Faith Tradition and to appreciate them.” Finally, honouring the culture’s own integrity and search for well-being (salvation) aids in the work of (cultural) self-reconstruction amidst the damage done by colonization.

De Mesa emphasizes that it is this stance of mutual respect which distinguishes his approach from that of Paul Tillich’s theological correlation. Tillich’s method, according to de Mesa, is an apologetic of (cultural) question and (Christian) answer which tends toward an impositional revelation as it ignores the culture’s own experience, integrity and quest for life. De

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132 Ibid., p.76, emphasis added; also 1987: 4-18.

Mesa's alternative is to correlate a Christian experience of salvation with the community's (culture's) search for well being.134

Alongside respect, the critical element is likewise needed to "detect the negative and death-dealing elements of the culture which hinder the development of that very culture."135 Criticism is leveled not only at culture. It is a mutual criticism of the two poles because there are "ambiguous and ideological aspects" in both the culture and the Faith Tradition.136 With respect to ambiguity in culture: it is evident that "not everything in culture enhances the humanity of a given people."137 With reference to the Faith Tradition (which includes but is not limited to Scripture), the Tradition comes to us in a particular cultural and historical form and expression. Its concrete manifestation is, therefore, not exempt from ambiguity.138 De Mesa affirms the place of Scripture as an indispensable locus theologicus for theologians (Dei Verbum, 24) but it also needs to be subjected to criticism because ideology (understood negatively) is present even in theology and scripture.139 "One has only to consider the ideologically structured perspective regarding the role of women in the life and mission of the Church to see this."140

134 1990a: 19.
135 Ibid., p. 76.
136 Ibid., p. 6.
137 1987, p. 6.
138 Ibid., p. 6.
139 1990: 84, 86.
140 Ibid.
2.5 On Synthesis and Normativity. Since the theological sources are themselves ambiguous and the data of biblical faith being culturally embedded, the question of normativity, which should guide any synthesis of faith and culture, becomes critical. Positively, this question concerns the criteria for correct and adequate interpretation. Negatively, normativity is intimately related to the question of irresponsible syncretism and heterodoxy. De Mesa is acutely aware of the questions that include the issue of normativity.

If there are so many divergent, and sometimes apparently conflicting interpretations, how can we be sure that our understanding of the faith is correct, that is, faithful to the Judaeo-Christian Tradition? Is it possible to recognize the one faith in the different interpretations? Does pluralism not become an ideology of adaptation when what is adapted or inculturated is automatically considered to be correct? Should we not, perhaps, re-introduce at least some basic and universal truths, conceptually expressed and accepted as such?

De Mesa sets forth a Christian basis for theological authority and criteria for adequate interpretation toward responsible theological synthesis. This naturally leads to the question of criteria for normative theological expressions. But before examining this issue, it is vital to inquire of the relationship between de Mesa's idea of synthesis and the matter of "syncretism."

2.5.1 Synthesis and Syncretism. In missiological discussions, the synthesis of cultural beliefs and practices raises the question of syncretism. Like the process of synthesis, syncretism also involves the intermingling of beliefs and practices, especially of religious nature. As Luzbetak clarifies: "Syncretism, as understood in anthropology, is any synthesis of two or more culturally diverse beliefs or practices, especially of a religious character." If synthesis parallels

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141 On the ambiguity of "contexts" and corresponding issue of normativity, see Mouw and Griffioen, pp. 130-157; on local theologies and the quest for normativeness, see Schreiter, pp. 95-121.

142 de Mesa, 1990: 90, emphases added.

143 Luzbetak, 1988: 362, emphasis added.
syncretism, could one say then that synthesis is comparable to syncretism? For theologians who approach the issue from an anthropological perspective, it will not be difficult to answer yes to the question. Indeed, from an anthropological perspective, syncretism need not be construed negatively for this may be seen to “reflect the church at its best, searching openly and courageously for true catholicity.”

Theologians who hold to an anthropological perspective view syncretism in an open and positive way. A missiological perspective, however, presents an opposite stance. Luzbetak explains this other view this way: “Syncretism,” in missiological terms, involves Christian theology and “may accordingly be more narrowly defined as any theologically untenable amalgam.” In this view, syncretism is not something that is normal or neutral. Rather, it a term of judgement denoting inappropriate contextualization. For instance, African theologian Byang Kato asserts that syncretism happens “when critical and basic elements of the Gospel are lost in the process of contextualization and are replaced by religious elements from the receiving culture.” This is the dominant view reflected in recent documents on evangelization from all sectors of the church, Roman Catholic, Mainline Protestant, and Evangelical.

Does de Mesa proffer a view of syncretism? A negative answer may be valid since de Mesa does not mention the term syncretism in his writings. Yet the mere absence of the term does not mean that the topic is absent. For one, as Stephen Bevans rightly notes, de Mesa’s remarks about what is “correct interpretation,” set against the perils of “the ideology of adaptation,” fall within the domain of the subject of syncretism. Indeed, de Mesa’s language

144 Schineller, 1992: 50 referring specifically to Boff’s view expressed in Church, Charism and Power (1986).
147 See the relevant sections from related evangelization documents in Bevans, 1992b.
148 Bevans, 1992a: 17-18
about the ideology of (cultural) adaptation versus orthodoxy presupposes the matter of syncretism, specifically its negative meaning. For another, the language of synthesis in de Mesa's works evokes a positive approach to the issue of syncretism. Synthesis is the prevalent word in de Mesa, not syncretism. It is used, however, as an equivalent of syncretism in its neutral sense. This point will be further explored in Chapter Four.

2.5.2 Criteria for correct interpretation. To avoid the ideology of cultural adaptation and to cultivate a correct interpretation de Mesa maintains that the points of reference for any Christian theological articulation of truth are the Holy Scripture and Tradition. The Bible functioned as canonical norm in that the early Christian churches recognized their identity in these particular writings. The authority of the Bible lies in its being a foundational document, a privileged witness to the "Jesus experience" and also to the Easter community that arose from and gave witness to this experience of salvation. "The original authority of the Bible, its being a norming norm... lies in the total event of a new experience of salvation gradually narrated in texts."\(^{149}\)

Biblical authority can never be an absolute reference point for articulating faith today because the literature of the Bible is bound up with a particular culture and worldview. While it is unique as a foundational document, Scripture is never to be separated from Tradition which is "the whole life of the Church with its practice, worship and teaching."\(^{150}\) The Bible is a product of Tradition and the latter is also the appropriate context within which the Bible is to be interpreted. Even if the question of theological authority has been settled, the matter of

\(^{149}\)Ibid., p. 97.

\(^{150}\)Ibid., p. 98.
interpretation still needs to be considered. Because the Bible and Tradition are themselves
culturally conditioned, they, too, need to be constantly reinterpreted in new situations. De Mesa
together with Wostyn propose three “relational or dialogical criteria” which could help in
ascertaining the correctness of new theological articulations of the faith in a changing situation.

First, because of the very nature of revelation as God’s offer of life and love as witnessed
to by the Scriptures and received in faith, theological structures are to be judged on the basis of
whether they are oriented to life and love. The Christian message has a basic intentionality
which can be expressed in a religious proposal: God is Love. Any new contextual formulation of
faith or doctrine that runs contrary to this conviction is an inappropriate theological expression.
For example, the theological formulation “outside the Church there is no salvation” is
questionable. It goes against God’s revelation of Godself as Love. Indeed, it “severely limits the
life-giving intent of God in Jesus.”

Second, any new formulation of faith is to be judged on whether or not it leads to right
action. The orthodoxy of our formulations “can only be judged if they are seen as bound up with
the totality of Christian existence and practice in community.” Any new theological expression
that leads to un-Christian practices, however logical and meaningful it may be in a culture, is not
orthodox at all.

The notion that “once we have the right doctrine, a right Christian practice will follow” is
an idealist assumption which is nurtured by a historical-critical approach to faith. This

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151 Ibid., pp. 104-110.
152 Ibid., p. 109.
153 Ibid., p. 110.
154 Ibid., p. 112.
separates theory from practice. The authors, however, hold that the rightness of a theory appears in its practice. Thus we need to be more sensitive to the actual consequences of our theological formulations. This also shows the need to supplement the historical-critical approach to theology with the "ideological-critical." This means the application of the hermeneutics of suspicion to expose the ideological infrastructure that governs the theorizing.

Third, a new contextual articulation of faith needs the acceptance of the whole Christian community. Theology is the creation of the whole church. "Orthodoxy and orthopractice are not a matter for individual Christians." Thus, the "sense of the faithful" - the confirmation of the people of God is vital in the process of discerning Christian truth.

2.6 Doing Christology as Theological Re-rooting. This section will demonstrate how de Mesa applies his methodology. Presenting de Mesa's theology in this way is not a simple task. For one, de Mesa is a prolific author and it is hard to choose among the many theological themes he explores indigenously. For another, because he makes use of several methods contextually, presenting one methodological sample from his writings would not seem to be adequate. As Bevans rightly observes: "[D]e Mesa does not lay down a particular theological method and then follow it with consistent regularity and rigor." This observation, however, does not negate the concern of this segment for as Bevans further alerts us: de Mesa's employment of several

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155 Ibid.
156 Ibid.
157 Ibid., p. 114.
approaches does not amount to methodological incoherence or unsophistication. Rather, "it points to a *flexibility* that employs a number of approaches in a truly *synthetic* way."\(^{159}\)

For our purpose, the above comments function as caveats, but more positively, it suggests the need for a topic which is able to demonstrate what Bevans characterizes as de Mesa’s synthetic ability. De Mesa’s account of doing Christology locally may just be this topic. Indeed, the way he does Christology combines elements of indigenization, mutually critical correlation, and liberation in a single thread.\(^{160}\) Moreover, Christology relates to a cluster of companion theological themes (revelation, salvation, evangelization) which reveal further the uniqueness of de Mesa’s perspective.

**2.6.1 Doing Christology: Hermeneutical Steps.** De Mesa constantly calls his readers to the critical role of method in doing theology. His method commits him to look back and revisit the experiential basis of early Christian faith but with an eye for present appropriation. Three hermeneutical principles are drawn from the way the disciples came to the recognition of Jesus as the Christ: (1) revelation happens in and through experience; (2) experience is necessarily culturally interpreted experience; and (3) the need to correlate the Faith Tradition ("christologies") and contemporary experience for fresh appropriation of the Jesus-experience (pp. 113-116). As a result of the mutual interaction, "our understanding of Jesus will be rooted not only in our cultures, but also in our religious Tradition" (p. 116).

According to de Mesa, the way the disciples identified Jesus suggests that the fundamental question in doing Christology is that of salvation. "Before proceeding to the question of who (= the identity of Jesus), the attention must be given to what Jesus effected or

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\(^{159}\) Ibid. We will interact more explicitly with Bevans’ discussion of contextual models, particularly with his attribution of the ‘synthetic model’ to de Mesa, in the conclusion.

\(^{160}\) The discussion begins with de Mesa’s article: “Pastoral Agents and ‘Doing Christology’” (1992a: 111-124).
brought about (= salvation). Soteriology precedes Christology: the understanding of salvation is the stepping stone to a grasp of who Jesus really is for us” (p. 116). To support his claim, de Mesa asserts that the titles ascribed to Jesus in the Gospels (e.g. Christ, Lord, Savior, Prophet, Word, Good Shepherd, etc.,) were the end result of “having experienced decisive and definitive salvation from God in Jesus.” This soteriological claim embodies three elements: (1) Jesus decisively brings total human well-being; (2) Jesus defines for us what salvation from God is; and finally, (3) Jesus is the revelation of God.

Based on the hermeneutical insights above, de Mesa charts the procedure for doing Christology for today. First, based on the understanding of salvation as total human well being, cultural exegesis will “look for a cultural notion of ‘salvation’ which embodies and expresses the experience of human well-being in the culture” (p. 118). The people’s experiences of contrast (their negative and positive experiences) are the key to finding an culturally equivalent soteriological notion.

The second phase involves “projection”: attributing to Jesus the positive elements found in the cultural notion of salvation, as well as giving Jesus a name or title (drawn from the cultural perspective), signifying that it is truly Jesus who brings about this (culturally rooted) salvation. It is he who effected the change from the negative situation to the positive one. “Just as Jesus was given a designation “Christ” by his disciples in the context of their culture, we project onto Jesus appellations which bring out his significance for our cultures and for our time” (p. 120).

“Regauging,” as the third phase, consists in “assessing the applicability or suitability” of the names or titles attributed to Jesus.” To assess is to decide on whether the titles are to be “affirmed, negated or purified in relation to the very person of Jesus” (p. 120). De Mesa is
referring to the normative Jesus who is "not an unknown figure" (the historical Jesus). "It is he who norms us." Thus, in doing Christology the norm for regauging is the understanding of Jesus found in the New Testament, especially the Gospels. This understanding is based on the interpretation of the first disciples of Jesus summarized in the formula: "Jesus is the decisive and definitive salvation from God (i.e., "the Christ" in the Jewish cultural situation)" (p. 122).

To fail to "regauge" would "merely make Jesus into our own image(s) and likeness(es). "Regauging" is for the service of what is life-giving (salvation). Cultural notion(s) need to be correlated with the Faith tradition and thus have to be critically assessed and purged of negative characteristics before they are applied to Jesus. The same careful analysis must be applied in regard to the names or titles given to Jesus.

In the succeeding discussions, we will not repeat de Mesa's exegetical conclusions about the identity and mission of the historical Jesus. Suffice it to say that de Mesa regards these as foundational norm (what he calls "the given side") for Christological re-appropriation. We will devote the remaining discussion to his 'cultural exegesis' and the corresponding correlation with biblical understandings which are directed toward effecting the re-rooting of a particular Christology.

2.6.2 Filipino Experiences of Salvation. The basis for delineating the "experience of salvation" are those "contrast experiences in which people suffer and search for wellbeing within a society (p. 56)." In the Filipino situation, "the forces of modernization and of tradition clash with one another," thus, "giving us an enormous variety of contrast experiences (p. 56)." De Mesa, with Lode Wostyn, discern at least "three types of experiences of salvation" among Filipinos.

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161 In this and the succeeding subsections, all the page references are to de Mesa's work on Christology which he co-authored with colleague Lode Wostyn: Doing Christology: The Reappropriation of a Tradition (1989).
These three experiences correspond to three types of Filipino Christians whose experiences of salvation are partly shaped by three forces of our 'meta-world: “the process of Enlightenment, the Western middle class societies, and the marxist societies of the East” (p. 56). The three types of Filipino Christians are:

- the *enlightened christian*, strongly influenced by the Western movement towards emancipation,
- the *conscientized christian*, responding to the marxist challenge, and
- the *folk christian*, whose faith remains storingly embedded in the cultural tradition (pp. 56-57).

The typology, de Mesa clarifies, is not a watertight classification of people. One’s experience may often show characteristics of the three types. Drawing up the types, however, can help us “to understand certain manifestations of their search for salvation” (p. 57). Here de Mesa is invoking the notion of (cultural) models of interpretation which could illumine, yet be transformed by, the Christian tradition.

For the ‘enlightened Filipino Christian’ the underlying view of salvation is an “individualistic and spiritualizing view” (p. 59). Among such Christians, one finds a strong awareness of Christ’s presence in their lives yet “even such exemplary christian lives are challenged in our society, on the one hand, by the structural evil of injustice, and on the other hand, by the religious cultural history of our people” (59).

“Liberation” serves as the model of salvation among “conscientized Filipino Christians” whose faith is a reaction against “bourgeois Christianity.” They focus on the problem of socio-political-economic liberation although this does not imply that they reduce salvation to what is political. Conscientized Christians have made the churches strongly aware of the challenge of poverty. De Mesa claims that the model of liberation is useful in retelling the story of Jesus to lowland Filipinos but the “secular” vision of history that undergirds this model may simply not be
understood by the majority “who live in a sacred or theocentric worldview in which they are, as it were, in symbiosis with the divine” (p. 62). Moreover, the liberation model, which strongly stresses the secular and ethical, “may lead to a crisis of faith and to the total rejection of a universe in which the believer sees God present.” Thus this (partial) model of liberation will have to be *complemented* by other models -- models responding to the challenge of indigeneity: “[Filipino] culture, with its history, values and wisdom and its potential to lead to fuller humanity” (p. 62).

*Ginhawa* is the lowland Filipinos’ model of ‘salvation.’ Alive in folk consciousness is a general contrast experience: *hirap* (difficulty, suffering) and *ginhawa* (ease, relief, rest).

*[Hirap and ginhawa]*, discussed within the framework of the various “anthropological constants” [Schillebeeckx’s] . . . give us glimpses of how lowland Filipinos look at the reality of wellbeing or salvation. *Hirap* can refer to oppression and domination, implying that liberation is an experience of *ginhawa*. The condition of poverty is also *hirap*. “Surfacing from this condition” (*makaahon sa hirap*) is *ginhawa*. The same can be used of the transformation of strained or broken relationships into pleasant and restored ones. *Ang hirap ng kalooban ay napapawi at ang tao ay gumiginhawa* (p. 63).

On the religious level, *ginhawa* as an indigenous model of salvation is manifested in folk Catholicism. De Mesa constrasts this model *ginhawa* with the other two. The first two models reflect the reality of social change in Philippine society (colonization, modernization, etc.). The

162 The complementarity between the liberation model of salvation and the indigenous model of *ginhawa* (wellbeing) suggest the combination of contextualization and inculturation, a combination which, as we have explained, is integral to de Mesa’s project of theological re-rooting. Here is how de Mesa posits the complementary nature of the models of liberation and wellbeing: “Our short analysis of the concrete situation of the suffering of our people, in quest of liberation and wellbeing, makes us opt for the development of a christology which discards the traditional model and attempts to articulate the experience of “underside,” the experience of salvation of the common people. We proposed the models of liberation and wellbeing in an effort to respond to the challenge of a contextual and cultural reapropriation of christology. The relevance of a particular model does not guarantee its truthfulness. The model of Jesus “Liberator,” for example, may also be a projection, and at least partly inadequate as a expression of what is proper to Jesus” (69).

163 De Mesa defines “folk Catholicism” as “basically an indigenous interpretation and incarnation of official Western Christianity” (62).
third model, however, arises from the wellspring of the indigenous culture. \textsuperscript{164} Aligning with recent cultural anthropological studies, de Mesa holds the view that the different waves of colonization did not radically alter the wellspring of the indigenous culture. "[D]eep down, the lowland Filipinos have remained faithful to their 'rural' culture with its sense of identity, its values and attitudes" (p. 62). In a way, this anthropological stance reveals a key aspect of de Mesa's theological hermeneutic.

We have seen that language is a way of interpreting reality. Words provide perspective. \textit{Ginhawa}, therefore, interprets for the lowland Filipino the reality of wellbeing. The English categories "ease of life," "relief from pain, sickness, straits or difficulty," consolation received," "freedom from want" and "convenience" are only inadequate counterparts needed to explain to the foreigner what is implied in the indigenous sense of wellbeing. For the lowland Filipino, the model \textit{ginhawa} does not need any explanation, it is something interiorized unlike the previous models of "satisfaction," or "liberation" which have to be adopted consciously. And yet, an analysis and evaluation of this model in which we explicitate its various aspects is needed when we seek to use it within a new context, concretely within the context of an indigenous christological reflection (63).

De Mesa wants to interact with a view of salvation from \textit{inside} the culture, a view of salvation which is not imposed but rather called forth by the local language (and thus, culture) itself.\textsuperscript{165} It is not sufficient, however, to simply commend the indigenous model of salvation (although, in the context of colonization, accenting the positive resources of the culture is an imperative). To adopt this model means analyzing and evaluating this model within a new context. This kind of analysis de Mesa calls "an indigenous Christological reflection."

In what follows we will continue reflecting on indigenous themes relating to de Mesa's christology. Particularly, we will present three key elements in de Mesa's indigenous

\textsuperscript{164} This distinction between what is "indigenous" and what is "contextual" is again reflected here.

\textsuperscript{165} Note that de Mesa's theology presupposes that language and culture are closely intertwined.
christological and soteriological proposals: salvation as *ginhawa*, the person of Jesus as *ang taong maganda ang kaloob*, and the reign of God as *pamamayani ng kagandahang-loob ng Diyos*.

### 2.6.3 Salvation as *ginhawa*.

Recall that de Mesa proposes *ginhawa* as the "cultural soteriological model of the lowland Filipino" (p. 120). Moreover, 'indigenous soteriological reflection,' for de Mesa, involves a mutually respectful and critical interaction between the "indigenous model of salvation" and a biblical understanding of it. In light of a two-fold exegesis and correlation of the Bible and culture, de Mesa submits that the indigenous idea of *ginhawa* approximates the reality which the Bible calls salvation.\(^{166}\) *Ginhawa* is a comprehensive concept that could communicate the blessings of salvation that Jesus brings.

On the one hand, the Bible shows that the notion of salvation is rooted in earthly realities. Salvation is effected ultimately by God but with human participation. This divine-human participation extends toward the expectation of the new creation with the Messiah Jesus, being the absolute bringer of total salvation. The reality of salvation in the Bible is actually this vision of total well-being in God. On the other hand, cultural exegesis (through etymological, literary, and anthropological studies) finds *ginhawa* to be a rich and comprehensive concept that could convey the biblical meaning of salvation. Ginhawa covers a wide range of meanings: 1) Ease of life, comfortable living, 2) Relief from pain, sickness, straits or difficulty; 3) consolation received; 4) Freedom from want; and 5) Convenience. The term is related to the different experiences of a person, as well as the different aspects of one’s life (physical, emotional, spiritual, material).\(^{167}\) The idea of *ginhawa* could serve as the dynamic equivalent of the Greek *soteria* (health) as well as the Hebrew *yasha* (liberation). *Ginhawa* best captures the holistic vision of biblical salvation.

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\(^{166}\) 1987: 75-101. Tano also refers to this example as an illustration of theology in Filipino. See Tano, 1995: 362-364.

\(^{167}\) This is how Tano (1995: 363) wisely puts it.
Seen from the perspective of what Jesus effects in the lives of people (soteriology), de Mesa portrays Jesus as "ginhawa-bringer." Jesus is that "Someone who graciously and unconditionally offers and brings about ginhawa, not for what he can get out of it but simply for the sake of others" (121). This ginhawa is para sa katawan (for the physical body). He responds to the physical needs of people and proceeds to teach others the way to extend ginhawa to others (Mark 6). But this ginhawa is also for the kaloooban (for one's inner self). This dimension of ginhawa is for those who are conscious of sin and their sinfulness. It is forgiveness for human sinfulness.

As ginhawa-bringer, Jesus reveals to us that he is a person with magandang kaloooban (literally, a beautiful/good inner self). "In other words, the ginhawa-bringing activity of Jesus "sacramentalizes" (i.e. it makes the unseen palpable) for us his kagandahang loob. The activity of Jesus serves as the cultural clue as to the inner self (kaloooban) of the man from Nazareth. This leads us to a related vernacular theme which is a window into knowing Jesus through Filipino eyes.

2.6.4 Jesus: Ang Taong Maganda ang Kaloooban. Consistent with his claim that soteriology precedes Christology, de Mesa identifies Jesus as a ginhawa-bringer. The person of Jesus is first of all known by his ginhawa-bringing activity. But there is related cultural theme which could uncover further the identity of Jesus. The one who brings ginhawa is a person with magandang kaloooban (literally, a beautiful/good inner self). This is another way to present the person of Jesus to Filipinos, that is, viewing his personhood in terms of his kaloooban. The emphasis here is thoroughly relational.

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De Mesa suggests that in viewing the personhood of Jesus in relationship to others, the lowland Filipino culture would regard Jesus as a person with a *magandang kalooban*. He explains this cultural value and suggests the prospect of a biblical correlation.

We can be sure that if Jesus went “out doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil” (cf. Acts 10:38) in the Philippines, he would have been regarded as a person with a *magandang kalooban*, not of course, immediately but gradually in the whole course of his life and ministry. *Kagandahang-loob* is not something which one would casually attribute to a person one does not know well; the determination of whether he or she is of *magandang kalooban* or not takes time and is experientially founded on perceptive knowledge.

*Kagandahang-loob* connotes all that is good in someone, which is, in fact, an ideal among Filipinos. It is a quality of being which has its roots in the very heart of a person and which is given expression in the totality of one’s life of interrelationship (pp. 121-122).

*Kagandahang-loob* consists of two root words. The first one, *loob* (literally, the inside or inner self), conveys “the most authentic self of the lowland Filipino, that is, what he or she is in his or her innermost reality” (p. 122). It is “the core of one’s personhood and where the true worth of a person lies” (p. 122). The other root word, *ganda*, has two levels of meaning. On one level it refers to the beautiful, on another it means “what is good” or what ethical, proper, and humane. On this second level of meaning, it is quite common to simply use the adjectives *maganda* (the beautiful) and *mabuti* (the good) interchangeably.

Notice, first of all, that for the Filipino, what is inside (*loob*) is what truly matters in knowing another. Moreover, this process of knowing the *loob* of another is always relational. It takes time for someone to really know the *kalooban* of another and the beauty/goodness (*ganda*) of one’s *loob* is defined by one’s relationship to others. Thus, the cultural value of *kagandahang-loob* proffers at least three characteristics: winsome goodness demonstrated in
one’s relationship with others; a graciously free act borne of self-authenticity; and finally, pure gracious goodness which is always other-directed.

De Mesa outlines the meaning of Jesus as a person with magandang kalooban. This reveals the contours of what he deems to be indigenous christological articulation.

One only has to go through the characteristics of [magandang kalooban] to discover how well they apply to Jesus. The man from Nazareth was known through his relationships with others. In welcoming people into table fellowship with him, relieving them of sickness and burdensome mental anguish, he has made known to them who he really was: a man for others. Jesus’ freedom with regard to life, manifested sharply in his attitude towards the law, expressed that the source of his actions came from within himself (bukal sa kalooban). It was not dictated nor manipulated from external factors. What he did for others welled up from his most authentic inner self (i.e. loob). Finally, what Jesus did he did for the wellbeing of people. Both in his deeds and words, he championed whatever it is which brought ginhawa to people. He wanted in one way or another to bring people out of hirap so that they can experience ginhawa (p. 127).

2.6.5 Reign of God: Ang Pamamayani ng Kagandahang-Loob ng Diyos. The previous discussion showed how de Mesa attributes kagandahang-loob to the person of Jesus. We have also seen how de Mesa correlates the cultural theme ginhawa with the salvation that Jesus brings. A third example concerns the nature of God’s kingdom seen through Filipino eyes. Here de Mesa dialogues with the Filipino myth of Malakas and Maganda, taking the myth as a theological source.

Ginhawa as wholeness consisting of a partnership between lakas (power) and ganda (graciousness), a vision that de Mesa discerns in the local myth, is offered as as an equivalent to biblical notion of God’s kingdom. This is how de Mesa’s retells the Filipino myth with an eye for re-articulating the vision of God’s reign in indigenous terms:

\[169\] Lakas and ganda are the two root words in the very title of the myth: Si Malakas at Maganda.

\[170\] As the Genesis Creation story was told and retold to guide Israel on their journey as a people, de Mesa invokes a similar purpose for his retelling: “[t]here is much sense in ‘historicizing’ myth just as Israel, for example, historicized the myths they appropriated from other cultures and reformulated them to suit their own purposes.
The myth actually "personifies" two important and related themes: *lakas* (power) and *ganda* (graciousness). Just as the names of Adam and Eve in the Old Testament are not references to two individuals, one male and one female (usually thought to be our first parents), *Malakas* and *Maganda* are not either. The names are symbolic of the whole human race and are not apppellations of two individual persons. With this thought in mind, we summarize the salient points of the story and analyze its message.

According to the story, our world before was a beautiful paradise with an abundance of flora and fauna. There was, however, no human being. Once when the king of the birds got hungry, it saw a house lizard crawling on a large bamboo. When it tried to peck the lizard, the latter managed to move away. It was then that the bird heard knocking from within the bamboo. The bird ignored the knocking, intent as it was to catch the lizard. When it once more tried to catch the lizard and missed, it hit instead the bamboo. At this, the bamboo was split into two and out came a man and a woman identifying themselves as *Malakas* and *Maganda*. The two were, of course, grateful to the king of the birds for splitting the bamboo (p. 171).

Not unlike the biblical creation story, de Mesa regards *Malakas* and *Maganda* as symbolic names representing two cultural values which stand for "what it means to be human." At the very least, to be fully human suggests being a fully integrated person. De Mesa relates this with the Filipino vision of wholeness: *Ginhawa* (wholeness) is "an integration of *lakas* and *ganda*, power and graciousness, capability and humanness. This is why *Malakas* and *Maganda* were together in that powerful symbol of the culture -- the bamboo" (p. 172).

Theologically, the cultural vision of a partnership (synthesis) of *lakas* and *ganda* opens up a new meaning of the message of Jesus in Filipino context. The message of Jesus, the reign of God, is a vision of God's lordship. Looking at the reality of God's kingdom solely through the lens of *lakas* (power) suggests power and dominance. One might end up with a picture of God as a despot. Jesus' interpretation, however, of God as king suggests the radical notion of *ganda kagandahang-loob*.

Surely we can do the same with the myth of Malakas and Maganda to help us in our journey toward a society worthy of human persons" (172).
Jesus does acknowledge God's kingship, but he sees this kingship as "fatherly." The one to whom he says, "Your kingdom come; Your will be done," is the very same one he so daringly and intimately addresses as Abba. So God's lordship, in fact, has another meaning -- that of what is gracious towards human beings. God for Jesus is not an autocrat who wants all His subjects to recognize His omnipotence and be submissive to it for the sake of submission. Rather, Jesus presents God as total wellbeing for people (p. 178).

If Jesus views the kingdom to be a partnership of lakas and ganda under God's rule, then the kingdom is a process which is already taking place "as God manifests his being-God in the world of people" (p. 179). But it also awaits the final eschatological state of affairs that brings to an end the evil world dominated by the forces that militate against human wellbeing.
CHAPTER THREE: MELBA MAGGAY

ON THE CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE GOSPEL

Melba Maggay is an evangelical contextual theologian who was one of the key founders of the Institute for Studies in Asian Church and Culture (ISACC) based in Quezon City, Philippines. She is also editor of the evangelical journal PATMOS (ISACC’s theological journal) which began publication in 1979. ISACC’s vision, according to their brochure, is to “stimulate and support the Filipino Church in her effort to give a clear biblical witness... to the end that the gospel may be more rooted in the context of Filipino life, lived and communicated more authentically by people whose lives demonstrate... the presence of the Kingdom.” ISACC as well as PATMOS have as their basis the 1974 Lausanne Covenant, a consensus evangelical document, and are a prime mover in the renewal of evangelical churches in the Philippines.

Maggay is also an established scholar in the field of cross-cultural communication and Philippine studies. She has undergraduate and graduate degrees in Journalism and English from the University of the Philippines and pursued a post graduate training in Cross-cultural Communication from the University of Cambridge. Recently, she finished her doctorate in Philippine studies from the University of the Philippines with a dissertation devoted to the study of Filipino communicational patterns. In his review of her recent book Transforming Society, Charles Ringma, an Australian theologian who teaches at the Asian Theological Seminary,

171 The other prominent evangelical scholar who was instrumental to the founding of ISACC in 1978 was William Dyrness. He was a professor at the Asian Theological Seminary and is now Dean of the School of Theology at Fuller Seminary.

172 See 1995d.
referred to her as "undoubtedly the finest protestant theological writer in the Philippines, and possibly in the Third World."\textsuperscript{173}

3.1 The Contextualization of the Gospel

3.1.1 The Indigenization of Theology. Maggay’s concern for contextualization began with a passionate call for the indigenization of theology in the Philippines.\textsuperscript{174} Indigenization is actually integral to Maggay’s contextualization framework.\textsuperscript{175}

Rootedness in the Soil. “Indigenization” signals the need for the Gospel to be more rooted in the “soil of [Filipino] culture.”\textsuperscript{176} It represents the need to fashion a theological tradition that is rooted in Philippine life where the latter’s needs, questions, social and thought-structures are deeply engaged and play an integral part in theological construction.\textsuperscript{177} Indigenization points to the specifically Filipino color or distinctive of the theological tradition. Rather than simply being “related to the soil,” indigenizing theology means “rooting the Gospel in the soil of culture”\textsuperscript{178} The indigenization of theology is explicitly linked with Filipino-ness:

It has been said once that Christ became a man, not so that we may become divine, but so that we may become more truly human. For this reason, to incarnate Christianity more genuinely in the context of Filipino culture is to become, not only perhaps more Christian, but also more Filipino.\textsuperscript{179}

\textsuperscript{173}Ringma, 1995: 92.

\textsuperscript{174}“The Indigenization of Theology” cf. Maggay, 1979.


\textsuperscript{176}1979: 3.

\textsuperscript{177}Ibid., p. 1.

\textsuperscript{178}Ibid., pp. 1, 3, emphases added. The distinction between “related to” and “rooted in” the soil comes from Peter Beyerhaus quoting a statement from the 1952 Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council. See Beyerhaus, 277.

\textsuperscript{179}1991c: 21.
As with contextualization, indigenization takes the pattern of the Incarnation as the model for the whole process.

*Indigenization and the Filipino Struggle.* To be Filipino, Christians must embody the Gospel in Filipino ways of thought and feeling. Moreover, indigenization is a specific expression of the Filipino's struggle to recover cultural dignity which is similar to the aspirations of Filipino nationalism. This is clear in her most recent monograph entitled *Pagbabalik-loob: Moral Recovery and Cultural Affirmation.*

In this work, Maggay states that her effort aligns itself with the “ongoing process of self-definition, besides its being aimed at helping the country in these crucial stages of reconstruction [due to ravaging effects of colonization].” This process of “self-definition,” the effort to build up cultural identity and integrity, has to be done from within, resisting the temptation to use outside (or borrowed) categories to evaluate the values of the local culture. With this stance, she wishes to disengage herself from colonialist Filipino scholars who have tended “to judge Filipino character based on western cultural assumptions.” At the end of the provocative essay, Maggay concludes by sounding a nationalistic call. She advances “self-affirmation” or “self-value” by fostering pride in being Filipino.

For a long time Filipino values, have been evaluated from the unconscious value preferences of disciplines shaped by foreign cultures. . . .

These days, we could do with a little more regard for who we are and what we can be as a people from those who make it their profession to offer us self-definitions. A nation with a painful sense of being “small” or, worse, *kulelat* [last in the list] among its Asean neighbors, could do with a good dose of self-

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180 1993b: Earlier this was published in the journal *PATMOS* but under a different title: “Transforming Culture: A second look at the moral recovery program.” See Maggay, 1993a.
181 1993b: 2 emphases added.
182 This echoes Enriquez’s notion of “indigenization-from-within”. See Enriquez, pp. 86-88.
183 1993b: 12.
affirmation. In contrast, Britain, which has about the same land size and 
population as the Philippines, calls itself “great”, and Americans, when they are in 
trouble, react with the sort of self-confident and wind-bag assertiveness
characteristic of adventurers in their movies: “You can’t do this to me, I’m
American!” It is our hope that in the face of the government’s massive disregard 
of our right to a system that works, Filipinos would finally learn to develop a 
culture of protest and smash the false images mirrored to us by outsiders. In place
of the usual self-flagellation and quiescent accommodation, let us at least begin
from a position of self-value and say of ourselves: “You can’t do this to us, we
are Filipinos!”

One must be careful, however, not to equate what Maggay identifies to be “indigenous culture”
with the culture of the privileged elite. From within Philippine society, Maggay identifies
indigenous culture not with the culture of the elite but with those “who belong to the underside of
[Philippine] culture.” It is from the masses of Filipino poor that “the indigenous culture
springs.”

3.1.2 The Meaning of Contextualization. When Maggay mentions the term contextualization,
it means the effort to faithfully communicate the Gospel in various cultural contexts. If the
language that Maggay uses for indigenization is “rooting the Gospel in the soil”, the descriptive
phrase that she employs for contextualization is “the communication of the Gospel” in the
particular context.

For Maggay, the concern of contextualization is “to make the Gospel intelligible” in a
particular cultural setting. It requires the discernment of the Christian community in

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184 Ibid., p. 25, emphases added.
185 Ibid., p. 16.
186 She uses the word only a few times. It is quite clear, however, that she intends her works to be works of
theological contextualization. The various titles of her major essays reveal this point: e.g. “The Gospel in our

rearticulating the meaning of the Gospel for the particular cultural context. This consists of an authentic (biblical) understanding of the Gospel which has to be communicated in a manner that is hearer-sensitive. The latter means that the communication must "respect not only what people think but also how they think." It must "wrestle with the people's mythology and worldview," as it seeks to locate the meaning of the Gospel at these precise points. This communication is necessary because the Gospel must take root in people's way of life and thought.

*The Text and Context.* The faithful communication of the Gospel is borne of the Spirit, and is discerned communally through the dialectic of text and the context.

First of all, the text is the whole Bible which Maggay, as a committed evangelical, regards as the authoritative guide for the church in mission. It records "Absolute Reality" (the revelation of God) of which what we see is but a small part. It has "the knowledge of God as originally recorded," and is also "the common text by which theological systems are to be measured and judged." The Scriptures has a plot that is simple enough (creation-fall-redemption). This plot is shareable across cultures (transcultural) and is familiar to the church worldwide. Maggay, however, wants to go beyond the use of this common outline. In a country already immersed in Roman Catholic Christianity like the Philippines, it is possible to rehearse this plot regularly without really knowing the meaning of these events. "It is this problem of meaning which makes cross-cultural communication intensely difficult." Moreover, this Gospel summary is too

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188 Ibid.

189 Theologian Rodrigo Tano (1981, 1995) holds a similar view.

190 Maggay, 1989: 16.

191 Ibid., p. 17.

192 Ibid., p. 18.
general. As is often the case with a general statement, this summary tends toward abstraction and is less usable for the Philippine situation. Maggay regards the task of communicating the Gospel in the Philippines to be “way past the stage of making known the Gospel plot.” What yields greater fruit is engaging the Scriptures and opening up its rich themes with the concerns of the culture in mind. One theme that Maggay finds to be of central importance for the communication of the Gospel in the Philippines is the kingdom of God. The Gospel is good news of the kingdom which is embodied in Christ’s person and work. As the goal of the church’s mission, God’s reign is able to re-orient the church away from internal preoccupation (ecclesiocentrism) toward mission to the world. It also brings to light the social and political dimensions of the Gospel.

Maggay believes that contemporary Christianity came to an awareness of the “issue of context” through dialogue with the experiences of Third World churches. In her writings, context seems to refer to two things. One, it points to the cultural situation which consists of the questions, needs, predispositions, cognitive style, and aesthetic orientation of a particular group of people. They serve as the points of contact for the sharing of the Gospel which is the fullness of God’s will for all peoples. “Points of contact” refer to elements in the culture that show promise of being pointers to the Gospel. The contact points in the local culture could serve as vehicles for communicating the Gospel. Context as cultural direction is of primary importance for construing the Gospel. Maggay says “it is really the context which provides the hermeneutical principle for interpreting the Gospel. The world, in a sense, ‘sets the agenda’”...

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193 Ibid.


195 “Voices from churches in the Third World have raised the issue of context, challenging western theologies and methods of communication and stirring awareness of culture as a controlling principle in the reading and teaching of Scripture.” See Maggay, 1990c: 9.
historical situations determine the selection of central motifs in the formulation of theologies."

The second meaning of context is the church which is the setting of the gospel, the embodiment of the proclamation. The discussion of the context, always involves the church which is Christ’s living witness in the world, in culture. In referring to the church as the context of the gospel, Maggay means not only the situation of the receiving church but also the context of the missionary (sending) church or the heritage of the missionary in shaping the existing ecclesial reality.

**Contextualization as Interpretation.** Between the text and context lies the task of interpreting the Gospel for the Filipino. Fresh interpretations of the Gospel are needed because there is no absolute Gospel interpretation. “All interpretations are historically conditioned. While we have ‘a faith once delivered to the saints,’ our understanding of this faith is always the product of the interaction between our text and our context.”

Going a step further, Maggay finds wanting the typical conservative evangelical approach to evangelism, i.e., the emphasis on transcultural, ready-made Gospel formulation. This approach tends to reduce the Gospel to a formula (abstract idea) at the same time that it hides the cultural presuppositions of the (Western) evangelists themselves. It is now time to accept that the Gospel the Filipinos received from American churches is culturally conditioned and they must reckon with this fact.

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196 Maggay, 1979: 2; also 1989: 58.

197 Maggay, 1990: 11.


199 For Maggay, cultural conditioning is not necessarily wrong. The perspectival nature of learning permeates all of human understanding. “What we see depends largely on what we are disposed to see; and what is seen is but a corner of the reality that is there. In communication we call this selective perception, meaning not so much the wicked propensity of some of us to edit anything unpleasant or threatening from view as the natural phenomenon of missing out on that which does not interest us. . . .” Maggay, 1989: 16,17.
formulations may “fit” the American situation (meaningful to an American audience), they are an inadequate rendering of the gospel for the Philippine setting. The alternative is to rediscover the Gospel in dialogue with Philippine culture, where the Gospel takes on the cultural flesh of the people of the land. Conversion to the Gospel must no longer take the form of going through a kind of cultural circumcision: renoun(c)ing an inherited culture of symbol in favor of a more barren intellectualism in faith and worship; learn(ing) to sing of summer and winter, springtime and harvest; quite unconsciously, (the convert) borrows the taste and scruples of the missionary’s Puritan conscience in matters of dress and lifestyle . . . .

The Interpretative Process. Interpreting the Gospel for the Philippine situation calls for the task of reading the Scriptures in context. The latter involves a dialogue between the interpreter’s historical situation and the Scriptural message. “(A) truly contextual reading takes account of both the context of the text (scientific exegesis) and the context of the reader (intuitive illumination of the Spirit).” But this meeting is grounded in a prior acceptance of the Scriptures as a unique and authoritative text for all cultures. Maggay insists that all interpretations should be consistent with the text and must listen to its “corrective discipline.”

The corrective word of Scripture (as well as its affirmation) should issue in correct action (orthopraxis) which is the goal and gauge of a proper reading of the Bible.

Maggay contrasts her interpretative approach to Bruce Nicholl’s dogmatic contextualization and the liberal, dialogical approaches (which Nicholls calls “existential

Hence, the specifics of one’s culture, e.g. whether rich or poor, pre-industrial or technologically sophisticated, animist or theologically elaborate, determine people’s sensitivities and leanings toward a Christian interpretation. (1989: 16).


202 Ibid.
contextualization"). Dogmatic contextualization honors the authority of Scripture but it presupposes an objectivity which is mythical. It also assumes a "gospel core" and thus tends to view the gospel reductively. The liberal-dialogical approach has the sensitivity to recognize that all interpretations are historically conditioned but "tends to extend [historical boundedness] to biblical revelation itself." As a middle way, Maggay adopts the hermeneutical circle proposed by Latin American evangelical theologian Rene Padilla. It involves a "continuous mutual engagement between the horizons of the text and the horizons of our culture. Neither our understanding of the text nor our understanding of our concrete situation is adequate unless both constantly interact and are mutually corrected." Maggay summarizes Padilla's method, outlining its elements. In her account, Padilla's hermeneutical circle consists of

1) interpreter's historical situation
2) interpreter's worldview which needs an "epistemological conversion"
3) Scripture, the reading of which is both a scientific and a pneumatic task: original meaning plus the Spirit

Padilla affirms that (a) the meaning of the text may go beyond the intention of the writer, and (b) the implications of God's action in the past are more widely understood in practical obedience (praxis). There is need however to maintain the uniqueness and authoritativeness of Scripture.

The Integral Role of the Church. The church is integral to the work of contextualization.

This is where the second meaning of context - the church as the social context of the gospel - comes into focus again. As there is no such thing as a Gospel devoid of culture, the church serves as the social context or embodiment of the Gospel. Gospel witness is Kingdom witness which

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203 Ibid.

204 Padilla, 1980: 76-77.

205 Ibid.
involves word and deed. The proclamation of the Gospel finds presence through the Body of Christ. 206

It is because the church incarnates the Word that contextualization is more than an act of interpretation. It involves discipleship: how Christians could best embody the Gospel in their cultural situation. It means the awakening of (Filipino) Christians to their missionary vocation. Maggay's intent is actually close to Rene Padilla's vision: "the aim of the interpretative process is the transformation of the people of God within their concrete situation."207 The church is actually called by God to be agents of cultural transformation. And the church, at its best, is a "leaven, permeating the social order."208 Indebted to Reformational scholars Herman Dooyeweerd and Abraham Kuyper,209 she insists that the church which transforms society is not limited to the local (institutional) church. It is "(t)he ecclesia visibilis (which) is God's people making the presence of the Kingdom in all areas of life, the leaven which permeates all of human activity. It is the Church in the academia, the Church in politics, the Church in the marketplace."210

3.2 Theological Bases of Contextualization. Contextualization is based on the reality of the Incarnation. Divine revelation has taken on cultural specificity. God made himself known by sending his own Son in our human likeness. "The transcendent, supracultural God circumscribed

206 1994: 15.
207 Padilla, 1980: 75
208 1994: 6
209 Philosopher Herman Dooyeweerd and theologian Abraham Kuyper, who taught at the Free University of Amsterdam, were pioneers of Reformational philosophy and theology. They are part of the influential movement known as Neo-Calvinism.
Himself, daringly and in a mind-boggling way, within the bald specificity of Jewish culture.” The way of divine communication expressed in the Incarnation provides the primary basis for the work of contextualization. Hence, contextualization is concerned with “the gospel incarnat(ing) itself.. . coming down like the lord Jesus, from abstract generality to concrete particularity.”

Maggay relates God’s communication with humans with the problem of relevance and speaking in context. With the Incarnation as backdrop, she thus argues that culture-specificity (speaking in context) and generating culture-specific texts (biblical themes relevant to culture) should be integral to the church’s contextual engagement with culture.

The way of the Incarnation also provides the pattern for the church’s communication of the Gospel. In Maggay’s terms, the Incarnation touches the very life and attitude of the church in mission. Incarnation is, therefore, inseparable from the reality of the church. “The Church is to go out into the heart of the world, and there ‘make flesh’ the Word.”

For the Incarnation means that “the Word must have a body; a community that shall make visible the startling newness of life that Jesus brings.” Moreover, the meaning of the Incarnation for the church directly relates to the task of identifying with the culture for the sake of the Gospel. The “Word having a body” means that “we must empty ourselves, lay aside the sometimes numbing privilege of being in the know, step down from the glory of our clichés and the splendor of our common places, and learn...to see as the world sees and our tongues to speak as the world speaks.”

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212 1979: 3.

213 Ibid.

214 1989: 60.
In a less prominent way, Maggay also points to the continuing work of the Spirit as another basis for the process of contextualization. The Spirit continues to illumine the churches that the Word may “cut and heal” in cultural situations other than the West.215 As in the Book of Revelation, the Holy Spirit continues to speak to the Churches.

What about the classical theological motifs of creation, fall, redemption? More than de Mesa, Maggay recognizes the significance of these theological motifs for the doing of theology.216 Do they figure at all as theological bases in Maggay’s own framework? They surface in at least two ways. First, the notion of “points of contact” serves as one instance. People of various cultures have an innate capacity to comprehend and articulate the Gospel, however darkly and limited that is. This is so because the God revealed in Jesus is the universal God of creation.217 Thus, “there will always be things about culture that we can affirm” which can serve as pointers to the Gospel.218 Affirmation is not the end, though. Because of the prophetic substance of the gospel, it pronounces denunciation against sin. Hence, affirmation should be coupled with judgment. But “the (biblical) pattern is affirmation before judgment.”219 Maggay refers to this as “concept fulfillment”: the process of bringing every thought captive to Jesus as the final fulfillment of what men have only darkly understood.”220

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215 Ibid.
217 We infer this from Maggay’s interpretation of Paul’s message in Acts 17. She says: “In stumbling upon the ‘unknown God,’ Paul finds his opportunity to speak of the universal God of creation” (1989: 23).
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
220 Ibid., p. 24.
Maggay also uses the themes creation and redemption to clarify the nature of liberation vis-à-vis liberation theology. The distinction between creation and redemption becomes a critical foundation for the church-world distinction.

The call for praxis, for concrete immersion in the life of the world, is at the heart of the meaning of the incarnation. However, solidarity with the transforming forces of our history belong to the creative rather than the redemptive work of Christ. While it is true that both are intrinsic parts of salvation as a single, complex process, a distinction has to be made. . . .

The biblical focus on salvation as primarily forgiveness of sin constrains us to view the work of liberation as primarily recreative rather than salvific, a participation in the recreative powers of the age to come.221

She maintains Christian identity while insisting solidarity with culture and she does this by affirming and distinguishing solidarity in Adam with solidarity in Christ.

In a creational sense, Christ is in every man (Colossians 1:17, Acts 17:28); in a redemptive sense, scripture is clear that he does not indwell every one (Romans 8:9, 14-16). Because we are all human beings made in the image of God, there is always solidarity in Adam. However, because our ways as sons of light and sons of darkness divide, there is not always solidarity in Christ. While as human beings there is always solidarity in Adam, as peoples of two kingdoms there is not always solidarity in Christ.222

3.3 Transformation and the Methodology of Contextualization. There is a strong link between Maggay’s vision of transformation and her understanding of contextualization. To probe this connection is the concern of this section.

3.3.1 Bringing every thought captive. In an earlier essay, contextualization is paired with Paul’s injunction to “make every thought captive to Christ” (2 Cor. 10:5).223 The phrase is a

221 1994: 54-55.

222 Ibid., p. 55.

biblical imagery of an initial way Maggay thinks contextualization ought to be done. It is cultural transformation through *possessio* which Maggay explains through an epistemological explanation.

On the basis of creation she says that Christians can not claim a monopoly on truth. All truth is God’s truth, wherever it may be found. Christians and non-Christians alike have common access to “creational fact.” This is the ground for Christian cultural affirmation. The human sciences may be affirmed for the “statements of fact” they contribute. Maggay calls this level the *lower story* of “creational fact.” The level of ‘theoretical constructions’ is the *upper story*. This upper level is where “ultimate perspectives” battle against each other. The manifestations of the Fall (absolutisation, fragmentation, depravity) are more pronounced on this stage of theorizing. This is so because ultimate presuppositions which govern various perspectives have to do with the state of one’s “heart.” Christian affirmation must yield to judgement on this level. Maggay offers the following principle:

The nearer the discipline is to issues that have to do with ultimate presuppositions or the state of one’s heart, the greater the distortion. Modifying this, we may say that statements of *fact* tend to have greater accuracy than statements of *value* or *interpretation* or *ultimate presuppositions*. 224

The appropriate way to think “contextually” or “incarnationally” is set against the framework of the previous discussion. Contextual thinking involves the use of culture’s ways of thinking to express God’s word as in Acts 17, where Paul quoted the ideas of Epimenides and Cleanthes. The Fourth Evangelist, the writer of Hebrews, along with Augustine, Aquinas are also called upon as examples of those who engaged in contextual thinking. With creation as basis, cultural

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224 1990b: 6, author’s emphases.
elements can serve as vehicles to communicate the gospel. They can be captured, subverted to communicate a biblical view of reality. “Bringing every thought captive to Christ” invokes the Pauline model in Acts 17. In the process of interchange the culture itself is evangelized and, hopefully, transformed by the Gospel.

Maggay cautions against the danger of “tying up Christianity to a worldview.” She warns against “wed(ding) Christianity to current paradigms of reality in the attempt to be contextual.” The history of the church shows that the prophetic substance and the transforming power of the gospel are sacrificed in this arrangement. To expose this unhealthy (syncretistic) entanglement, which is a recurring temptation, a “hermeneutics of suspicion” serves as an ally for the communication of the gospel.

Maggay’s vision of transformation, bringing culture under the lordship of Christ, is one in which the church has a central role. It is a vision of renewed evangelical social witness which is grounded in the Kingdom of God revealed by Jesus. There are various models of how churches envision transformation. Maggay discusses them and offers an integral biblical alternative. The various models are the communitarian, christendom, liberationist, and developmental. After presenting the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches, Maggay suggests, as an inclusive alternative, the retrieval and restatement of the biblical vision of the church as prophet, priest and king. For the church to transform society, it has to live out its true self as agent of God’s reign in this world.

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225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
The prophetic office has to do with "bringing the Word of God to the world"; articulating "what is wrong and why it is wrong." The priestly dimension of the church concerns the ministry of intercession: "bringing the need of the world to God and the power of God to the world."

Maggay insists that prayer is at the heart of the social role of the church. Finally, the kingly office is about dominion: "managing the world under God." Contrary to the totalizing motivation of Christendom, this means "exercising dominion under the authority and power of the Suffering Servant." 228

3.3.2 Indigenization from Within. Let this become clear -- or make it clear -- in course of description. Not strictly a category derived from theology or missions, "indigenization from within" is a concept that was developed in the field of Philippine studies. 229 Originally, it functioned as a way of warding off the Western bias in Filipino scholarship and looking for more indigenous ways of research in Philippine learning. It is the conscious adoption of the indigenous viewpoint, with a view toward recovering cultural dignity and cultural reconstruction. This stance is deemed important because the local culture has often been misrepresented due to the bias for the Western viewpoint, methods and judgments. As the originator of the method, Virgilio Enriquez, discloses,

Filipinos [are] primarily characterized from the judgmental and impressionistic point of view of the colonizers. In addition, the native Filipino invariably suffers from the comparison in not too subtle attempts to put forward Western behavior patterns as models for the Filipino ... .

The massive influence of the United States of America on education, religion, commerce, politics, and the mass media predisposes the Filipino to adopt the colonial viewpoint in studying and explaining the Filipino psyche ... . Most of the American-trained social scientist did not only appraise the data that came in but also stood in judgment of their worth and importance, using American categories and standards. The supposedly Filipino values or concepts were lifted as it were,

\[-28\] Ibid.

\[229\] Enriquez, pp. 80-106.
from the cultural milieu, and examined according to inappropriate alien categories, resulting in a distorted and erroneous appraisal of indigenous psychology.230

One should not see the method as an expression of ethnocentrism. It simply suggests the explicit use of culture as source toward the development of the indigenous culture and learning. The possibility of what is uniquely a Filipino contribution to cross-cultural knowledge is envisioned.231

One sees Maggay increasingly appropriating this indigenous method in her own writings.232 Alluding to the work of Enriquez, she says

Latin Americans have long ago taught us to be “hermeneutically suspicious,” to exercise radical doubt about the way things are read. It’s time we get suspicious of the sort of cultural readings held to us by those who pose as having access to privileged information about ourselves. We need to get beyond the kulelat [last in the list] syndrome and reaffirm to ourselves who we are and what we are capable of doing. Otherwise, we merely deepen stereotypes that have been circulating about us, a self-image defined for us by outsiders, against which the psychologist Virgilio Enriquez has long railed in much of his work.233

If change is going to happen in the local culture, it has to be a decision that comes from the people themselves. The language and thought processes of the indigenous culture should be plumbed for resources for renewal.

3.4 Indigenization and Mission: Exercises in Contextualizing Theology.


230 Enriquez, pp. 59-60.
231 Indigenization from within has its counterpart: indigenization from without. With the latter, the basis of knowledge is not the indigenous but the “exogenous.” The direction of culture flow is “from without.” Culture becomes a target and not simply a source of liberating praxis. Ibid., p. 87.
232 1993b, 1995a, 1995c
engages in a stimulating dialogue between Christian mission and the indigenous way of thinking and feeling. Partly her goal in this article is to present how the indigenous culture could be “a controlling principle in the reading and teaching of Scripture,” or how the local culture could help fashion a culturally relevant theological tradition.

Church-Culture Dialogue. Maggay is seeking “more sensitive ways of understanding the indigenous religious consciousness and bridging the gap between it and . . . the Christianity that [it comes] in contact with.” “Bridging the gap” involves having a sensitive listening ear to culture’s ways of thinking and feeling and finding ways for the church to capture the imagination of the Filipino masses. Critical of simply adapting existing Gospel understandings from the West and the Roman Catholic adaptation of the faith, she insists that the church take culture seriously and respectfully. At the heart of the problem of the church being unable to connect with the depth of the indigenous mind, Maggay contends, are “incongruities between the indigenous consciousness and the cultural assumptions behind the theologies that come [to the Philippines] via western . . . missionaries.” Maggay identifies two particular incongruities that she finds critical: incongruity in theological content and in cognitive orientation.

Maggay wants to eliminate unnecessary dissonance and misunderstanding of the Gospel arising from a lack of real dialogue between the church (the sender of the gospel message) and the local culture (the receptor). The communication has to be a genuine dialogue and the underlying assumption is that the meaningfulness of the gospel is discerned by the local church in

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235 1990c: 9.
236 Ibid., p. 10, emphasis added.
237 Ibid.
238 cf. the editorial foreword by Evelyn Miranda-Feliciano in the same issue of PATMOS.
serious and respectful dialogue with the receptor culture. This dialogue will give sharpness and clarity to the reception of the gospel. It will also give a distinctly Filipino shape to it.

Points of Contact for Incarnating the Gospel. As intimated in the exposition above (Section 3.1.2), the notion of “points of contact” function in two ways in Maggay’s though - as pointers to the Gospel and vehicles for its communication. Both these senses are present in Maggay’s presentation in the essay.

In regard to theological content, Maggay wants the church to reckon with the “indigenous culture’s profound supernaturalism.” Maggay uses this cultural element to point to a dimension of the Gospel which is often unexplored: Christ as Lord of the spirits. The indigenous culture understands salvation in terms of transaction and victory over the powers of darkness, healing, and exorcism. She sets this indigenous perception against the Western missionaries’ emphasis on salvation as primarily the forgiveness of sins and removal of guilt.

It has been noted… that Christianity as it has developed theologically in the West has mostly centered on the complex of ideas surrounding sin and guilt. Religion to them is primarily a mechanism for relieving guilt…

The question that most concerns the ‘introspective conscience of the West’ is whether one can find assurance of really making it to heaven apart from one’s doubtful do-gooding or ‘works of the law’. Thus, it is not uncommon to find missionaries here asking question: “Are you saved?” to anyone who would care to hear.

This question, while not entirely irrelevant, is somewhat unimportant and off the track to a Filipino. To him, what counts most is access to the center of power that rules his life and the universe. His religious activity is focused on ways of opening oneself to the strength and curative potency of beneficial powers, whether they be in nature or in the spirit world.

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239 1990c: 12.
240 Filipino religion remains primarily a transaction with the powers, even if expressed in Catholic form, as with the spirit cults of the Sto Niño, the Virgin Mary or God the Father. Reports of a dancing Sto Niño, images of Mary imprinted on petals, miraculous healings through mediums said to be possessed by trinitarian spirits are continuous with the indigenous mind’s sensitivity to paranormal powers” (1990c: 14).

Maggay thus uses the cultural element, Filipino supernaturalism, to open up a neglected dimension of the Gospel. Owing to a captivity to Western cultural assumptions, Philippine local churches tend to intellectualize the faith so that the reality of the “supernatural” is not sufficiently engaged. Maggay wants to retrieve the New Testament emphasis on the Gospel as a message of confrontation with and victory over the powers. The supernaturalism of the culture thus becomes a pointer to redefining the Gospel. But she moves a step further to outline what this means for theology in Philippine setting. It should issue in recognizing the role of “signs and wonders” as complement to the verbal proclamation of the Gospel. The indigenous reverence for mystery should also balance the western emphasis on evidential apologetics/evangelism. Sin needs to be configured in cosmic, relational terms since the local culture views “disruption of harmony in one’s relationship with society or with the cosmos [as] an important failure.” In terms of Christology, the victorious Christ, the Lord of the spirits, “needs to be stressed as a counterpoint to the feeling of helplessness and powerlessness fostered by reigning cultural “images of God as either dead or dying.” Interestingly, in this latter point, Maggay calls attention to two competing Christic images within the culture: Christ as all-powerful versus the image of Christ as forever suffering. She sees the image of Christ as victorious Lord as a better image to cultivate since it is more empowering for the masses of Filipinos who battle oppression, the forces of death and misfortune.

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242 See also Maggay, 1987: 4.
244 Ibid., p. 15.
245 Ibid.
In the succeeding discussion, Maggay probes the differences between Filipino and Western cognitive orientation and takes the indigenous cultural elements as take-off points for the retelling of the Good News. In effect she is affirming specific elements of culture as worthy vehicles to carry forth the Gospel. The Filipino's wholism \(^{246}\) (the sense that religion is all of life, and humanity is both body and soul) connects well with the biblical understanding of salvation and discipleship. Evangelism then has to be decentered, away from individualistic emphasis (one-on-one disciple-making) toward community orientation and relational commitments. Moreover, the imaginative cognitive orientation of Filipinos, which Maggay roots in the Philippines being a largely oral society as opposed to societies having a print-orientation, calls for a gospel communication that is "highly symbolic, continuous, personal and engaged, pays attention to process rather than mere product." \(^{247}\) The understanding of time as a living present, the lack of futurism in Filipino thought holds potential for giving emphasis to the here-and-now dimensions of the reign of God.


*Pagbabalik-loob* could be literally translated as "a return to the within." It consists of a prefix and a compound word consisting of two root words. \(^{248}\) In Filipino, the prefix *pag-* connotes "the act of doing something." The two root words are *balik* which means "return" and *loob* which denotes the "inner part," "inside," "interior," or "the inner self." Thus,

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\(^{246}\) "[The Filipino] sees himself as part of the cosmic whole.... participating in and not reflecting upon the world" (1987: 15).

\(^{247}\) 1991a: 18.

\(^{248}\) English, 1986.
*pagbabalik-loob* could be defined as "a return to one's innermost self".\(^{249}\) Interestingly, *pagbabalik-loob* is also the word for "conversion" in the vernacular.\(^{250}\)

**Conversion and the Recovery of Cultural Dignity.** Maggay likens the experience of colonization to the experience of the Gerasene demoniac in the Gospels. The experience of colonization is like a night of madness, the loss of one's self. Maggay then alerts the reader that madness in the vernacular (*pagkabaliw, pagkabuang*) is the same as the loss of [one's self]" (*nawawala sa sarili*). Thus, she observes that there is the indigenous perception that the state of madness arises from self-alienation.\(^{251}\) Colonization has given birth to a "colonized self" or "colonized consciousness" - Filipinos who are foreigners in their own land. For Maggay, *pagbabalik-loob*, as an indigenous language for conversion (inward transformation), means reclaiming what was lost: "returning to and reclaiming one's ethnic self." This is evident in the eloquently-written foreword to the monograph.

*It is imperative that Filipinos examine what is indigenous to their culture and to shed off what is really not part of the Filipino self.* Hence the need for *pagbabalik-loob* - a journey into the bosom of the indigenous culture while at the same time a struggling against the reigning colonial culture. . . . The journey back is important - somewhat like the *return of the native* - and one needs to be with others to deepen the encounter with the true well of [Philippine] society, a creation whose source is the ordinary Filipino.\(^{252}\)

Hence, *pagbabalik-loob* as an indigenous perception of conversion strategically linked with reclaiming the indigenous self.

\(^{249}\) Miranda, 1992: 271.

\(^{250}\) Ibid. I explore the implications of this equation in a beginning exploration on vernacular theology. See Gener, 1996.

\(^{251}\) Maggay, 1993b: Foreword.

\(^{252}\) Ibid., my translation, emphases added. Major parts of this quote were also published as foreword to *PATMOS* 6 (1993) carrying the original essay but under a different title.
Interestingly Maggay’s original title for the extended essay was “Transforming Culture.” Cultural transformation and pagbabalik-loob are therefore linked. At the very least, one could say that cultural transformation encompasses pagbabalik-loob, understood as the retrieval of the ethnic self. A revealing personal account written in 1993 suggests that she herself may have experienced the kind of pagbabalik-loob that she describes.

Starting this issue, we will try in this [editorial] section to converse in Tagalog, even if I stutter using the vernacular. This is because I am in the midst of transition - trying hard to return inwardly (magbalik-loob), journeying back and penetrating the bosom of our indigenous culture while still “revolving” around the culture of colonization. My journey back has already taken quite a long stretch - somewhat like the return of the native - and right now I am mingling with and worshiping in a squatter community. . . . so as to deepen my encounter with the hidden culture of our society - that is, the culture that springs from the Filipinos masses. It seems that for me this process will have to take longer. So far, I am now able to preach in Tagalog, and may be later on, I will be able to write [extensively] in Filipino. This is how deep my experience of colonization is - like many of the educated in our society, I am more fluent in the language brought to us than the native tongue of the masses. It’s because I’m an English major, that is why the hold of colonial education in me is so deep. Maybe when all of us will seek to return to where we came from . . . this country will be able to move forward.254

253Maggay, 1993a.
254Foreword to PATMOS 6 (1993), my translation.
CHAPTER FOUR: THEOLOGY, IDENTITY, AND THE GOSPEL

This chapter will analyze and assess Mesa and Maggay's theologies by focusing on the specific theme of theology and identity. This writer assumes that this is the most important issue that they present to the Philippine church. Moreover, the claim also involves the corollary assumption that the search for a distinctively Filipino Christian theology is preeminent in their mind and heart. This is very clear in the way culture fundamentally impacts their theologies.

In the remainder of this study, we shall assess the contributions of each theologian in turn, first evaluating the positive and then presenting a constructive criticism of their work.

4.1 Theological Re-rooting: Jose de Mesa

4.1.1 The Value of Theological Re-rooting.

In Service of Mission. De Mesa situates theological re-rooting within the Roman Catholic church's quest for "methods [that] should be followed so that the Gospel can permeate personal and social life." Indeed, de Mesa says his approach is formulated in response to the request of the Synod of Bishops in 1974 for "methods whereby the Gospel can take root in a given culture." Later, he insists on the centrality of mission in doing theology. As Christianity began as a (missionary) movement of those who have experienced wholeness in Christ, who consequently sought to live out and proclaim this faith in the world, it follows that the integrity of Christian theology depends on continuing Christ's mission in the world.257

255 1979: 34.
256 Ibid.
257 de Mesa. 1990a: 16-17.
It is, therefore, fair to say that de Mesa's theology is a “missionary theology” - missionary in the sense that his theology aims to transform culture, and through the dialogical process, the church, too. De Mesa, however, does not use the word “missionary” to refer to his approach. In pressing for a mission-oriented distinctive of his approach, he employs the category “pastoral-theological.” The orientation to mission is clearly present in the elucidation of the meaning of the “pastoral-theological approach.” It is “a new understanding of theology which is culturally intelligible, situationally relevant and pastorally meaningful.”

De Mesa’s theological approach is a better alternative to dominant speculative theological approaches in the Philippines. Two primary examples of theologies employing a doctrine-centred approach in the Philippines are Protestant fundamentalism and Roman Catholic neoscholasticism. For these theologies, the center of Christianity lies in its doctrinal beliefs. Their weakness is simply that the model they adopt tends to confuse, if not reduce, faith to rational systems of belief. Moreover, ecclesial praxis also tends toward ecclesiocentrism. These weaknesses are precisely what de Mesa wants to avoid.

While de Mesa is wary of an ecclesiocentric approach to mission, he, nevertheless, puts the church at a central place in the practice of mission. One way he does this is by situating

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258 Ibid., p. 4. In North America, Schüssler-Fiorenza (pp. 23-42) and Olthuis (1987: 83-86), among others, echo a similar plea to shift toward a “pastoral-theological” model in doing theology.
259 Protestant theologian Emerito Nacpil identifies the dominance of these two theological camps in the Philippines to demonstrate the church’s lack of cultural rootedness. See Nacpil, 1975: 117-146. For a comment along similar lines within Philippine Catholicism, see Wostyn, 1991: 1-21.
261 This is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that Asian theologians who are “pro-dialogue” (dialogical) are not as keen in promoting the flourishing of the local church in the region. It may be that the predominance of the Western bias for the analytic - Third World theology offered as bright and novel theological ideas - is one factor why this is so (cf. Sugden, 1996: 147-149). One other explanation may be theological schooling. Many Third World theologians are schooled in the West and they were conscientized in some form or other to despise the missionary church heritage due to the association of the Western missionary movement with colonialism (cf. Newbigin, 1989: 143). One can discern this “intellectualistic” bent in some of the contributors to Elwood, 1975.
theological re-rooting within the flourishing and development of local churches in mission. The concept of the local church is not limited simply to the local congregation. He uses it to refer to the Filipino church as whole in relation to the wider catholic communion. Thus, theological re-rooting aims for a genuinely Filipino appropriation of Christian faith so that the Filipino church may offer to the worldwide Church its own local contribution to the body of Christ in the world. De Mesa justifies the ecclesial base by appealing to the theology of the Second Vatican Council as well as contemporary Roman Catholic missiology. He is the most explicit Filipino Roman Catholic theologian to have thought of justifying the work of local theology in this way.

De Mesa’s contextual insight on the centrality of the church nicely fits within an emerging consensus that places contextualization within the domain of ecclesiology and spirituality. The significant Catholic difference, however, lies in de Mesa’s emphasis on the universality of the church as the wider context for local theologizing.

Still related to the theme of orientation to mission, De Mesa’s theology also provides a much-needed spark for intra-Christian dialogue on mission in the Philippines. His approach is especially sensitive to evangelical missiological thinking as he largely incorporates “dynamic equivalence translation” in his own methodology. He also dialogues with and appropriates wider Protestant contributions on the subject of contextualization and inculturation. Jose de

262 William Dymess and Melba Maggay, for instance, regard contextualization as intrinsic to Christian discipleship. Following Christ means seeking to communicate faithfully the good news in various cultural contexts. See Dymess, 1989: ch.1; also Maggay, 1987: ch.3. Closely connected to this idea but more nuanced is Lesslie Newbigin’s insight that contextualization and ecclesiology are integrally linked because the biblical story reveals the inseparable bond between Christ and the Church. While Christ did not write a book as his direct legacy, he left a community of followers who by his Spirit gives shape and meaning to the good news that he brought. See Newbigin, 1953: 27, also 1989: 133, 1991: 6.

263 See Bevans, 1992: ch.3.
Mesa's theology, and by close association, the theology of the Second Vatican Council, should occasion an ecumenical dialogue on mission in Philippine culture.

The Potential of a Vernacular Theology. Jose de Mesa is one of the few Filipino theologians who daringly appropriates the vernacular in theologizing. His skill and sensitivity in translation is evidenced by his reinterpretation of major Christian themes - e.g. providence and bahala na, salvation as ginhawa, resurrection as pagbabangong-dangal - through a creative appropriation of the genius of Filipino language and culture.

Because of the trust it puts in the vernacular, theological re-rooting as translation is a real effort to be in solidarity with the local culture. This has particular significance in the Philippines. By believing that the Filipino language could ably convey and communicate the Gospel, de Mesa has helped to boost the culture's estimate of itself. Echoing the words of Leni Strobel, de Mesa's efforts might be viewed as a way of "suturing the split self [of Filipinos... helping to replace] the obsequious, inferior identity which before had no access to its own strength and identity." At the same time, through theological re-rooting, de Mesa is able to imagine a specifically Filipino theological contribution to the worldwide Church.

264 The few are mainly Roman Catholic theologians: Leonardo Mercado (1975), Dionisio Miranda (1988), and the young Jesuit philosopher/theologian Alberto Alejo.

265 1979, also 1987: 147-177
267 Ibid., pp. 102-146.

269 There are signs that Maggay is heading in this same direction of vernacularizing the faith as a way of contextualizing the Gospel. See Maggay, 1995c.
270 Strobel, p. 20. This is putting it in strongest terms. Strobel uses "split self" as a structural metaphor for the Filipino's "wounded self" brought about by the evil(s) of colonial subjugation.
For some, this identification with culture is alarming. It courts an uncritical syncretism which domesticates the Gospel within a culture.271 But this way of identifying with culture comes as a natural historical development and experience of a church dialoguing with her colonial past. It is a Filipino Christian response to nationalism and not simply an agenda-driven, advocacy theology which is beholden to nationalism. Indeed, set against the backdrop of colonialism, inculturation as a form of cultural solidarity is Christian not only because it flows from the assertion of a basic Christian conviction (human creational dignity) but also because it honours the local culture as a worthy vessel of Christian faith.272 The importance of solidarity with culture as a dimension of Christian mission in decolonized countries is brought out forcefully by Robert Schreiter: "without a culture having its own integrity and dignity, as well as the participation of its people, there can be no inculturation of the faith. That is because without these conditions . . . the culture that the faith is inculturated into is fundamentally alienating to the people involved and so cannot speak to their heart and minds."273

Criteria for Adequate Contextualization. The question of criteria for discerning the adequacy of new theological statements arises as a consequence of the proliferation of contextualized theologies from local churches especially those from outside the West. As noted above (Section 2.5), this problem of criteria is directly related to the problem of syncretism in Christian mission or the issue of what is true (or false) contextualization.274 Syncretism pertains

271 See for example, Newbigin, 1989: 143-44.

272 See de Mesa, 1979; also Walls, 1996 and Bediako, 1995.


274 On "syncretism" as a critical topic in Christian mission, see Kraemer (pp. 387-417), Boff (pp. 89-107) Gort, and Starkloff, 1993. Because the term itself is slippery and imprecise, Schineller (1990) wants to abandon the term altogether and proposes to reorient the discussion on what is adequate and inadequate inculturation.
to the intermingling ("interpenetration") of Christian and indigenous religious elements (beliefs and practices) in the process of giving Christian witness within a culture.

While not using the word syncretism directly, de Mesa uses a parallel language, i.e., synthesis, to convey the fact that the intermingling of Christian and indigenous religious elements (syncretism) is normal and to be pursued in an intentional manner. In Section 2.5.1, the two views about syncretism were discussed: the negative and the positive. De Mesa's use of the language of synthesis suggests that he, in effect, holds to a more positive and neutral understanding of syncretism. His language about synthesis conveys all that is implied in the neutral view of syncretism. The whole process of interchange between church and culture (acculturation) naturally gives rise to the syncretic encounter. The contention that de Mesa holds to an understanding of syncretism in the neutral sense is also true because he uses another word for inappropriate contextualization. The word for it is not syncretism (the negative sense; a marker for the missiological view). Rather, he calls it heterodoxy. Thus, de Mesa's notion of synthesis parallels syncretism in the more anthropological than missiological sense of the word.

One discerns why Third World theologians, like de Mesa, prefer an anthropological rather than theological approach to the issue of syncretism. The predominantly negative theological view tends to stifle the creativity of non-Western local churches in their translation of the gospel within their respective cultures. The assumption is that in the hands of worldwide church bodies, this negative evaluation tends only to perpetuate the already ensconced Western tradition in

Newbigin (1989: 141-154), while not abandoning the negative connotation of the term, also proceeds to set forth criteria on what is true and false contextualization.

On this point, see Boff, pp. 89-107. also Starkloff, 1994 and Hollenweger, 1997.
Moreover, clear indigenous alternatives are not provided so that the warning against syncretism is easily interpreted as towing the traditional monochromatic line from the western ("mother") churches. A real oikoumene of the churches is therefore preempted. What is often overlooked, Third World theologians argue, is the fact that all Christian churches are syncretistic. Established Western churches recognize syncretism in other churches far more readily than in Western Christianity itself.

There are reasons for raising the question whether de Mesa does not at certain points succumb to the negative sense of syncretism. This will be the concern of the succeeding section.

While one may raise questions about de Mesa’s approach to specific elements of indigenous religious and culture, one must nevertheless, affirm his act of courage and risk-taking in setting forth criteria for Christian discernment on the matter of new formulations and expressions of faith.

4.2.2 Synthesis, Evangelization, and the Dilemma of Syncretism

As noted above (also Section 2.5), de Mesa accepts the inevitability of syncretism, being a natural part of the whole process of culture-contact (acculturation). For the encounter to be truly Christian, however, synthesis has to be guided and directed by discipleship to Jesus and his offer of salvation. De Mesa argues the reality of Jesus as ultimate norm for re-rooting the Gospel and the way the disciples came to identify Jesus is the supreme hermeneutical model for contemporary re-appropriation of the Christian Tradition. Hermeneutical mediation is always

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277 Boff is most effective in pointing this out. Newbigin (1994: 130) and Hollenweger (1997), however, argue the same point.
necessary because Christianity is always a culturally embodied yet dynamic faith commitment.

Thus, in the quest for the synthesis which is Filipino Christianity, de Mesa elaborates

Being a Christian is not a static reality, but rather a dynamic one. This implies that the core reality of faith and its expression are continuously developing. . . . This [dynamic relationship] applies not only to the very relationship with God, but with the articulation of this relationship in cultural and historical terms. Faith is not an abstraction; it can neither exist nor be lived in a vacuum. Such commitment and relationship can only be thought and lived in a cultural and historical manner. . . . Any expression of the [Filipino Christian] faith results from the mutual interaction of the Judaeo Christian Tradition (of faith experiences) and of our own culture as a people. 278

The cultural component is built in the very foundation of faith. Thus, while following Jesus is the ultimate norm for doing theology, the confession that this Jesus is the Christ is already a cultural appropriation since it is a faith experience rooted in a culture. Moreover, because the cultural factor always colors faith, ambiguity is something every Christian must struggle with. The consequences of cultural embodiment is part of the very sources of faith. Both culture and Christian tradition mediate revelation but they are ambiguous sources. Engaging them means being rigorously critical of them. Thus, the synthesis is like a critical sifting process, a distillation of the positive elements of the Christian faith and culture. 279 The critical mediation should bring out the life-giving resources of the two sources.

Synthesis and Evangelization from Within. This particular section deals with the possibilities and problems of the method of synthesis for evangelization and mission in Philippine culture. To what extent is synthesis helpful in advancing transformation in culture?

278 1992b: 3-4.
279 The language of “distillation” also comes from de Mesa, 1990a: 72.
In suggesting a Christian response to Philippine nationalism, early in his writings, de Mesa argues for the need to *synthesize* the different cultures which Filipinos have inherited. The local church has to aid in forging and cultivating a viable Filipino (national) cultural identity. In his later writings, he drops the term synthesis and ascribes a critical function to the method of correlation. Correlation, as a more nuanced understanding of synthesis, serves as tool for the development of a culturally relevant, and pastorally meaningful theology. It expands on the notion of synthesis by being more clear on the dialectical relationship (drawing together) of the theological sources.

At two key points, however, the method of synthesis or correlation appear to be insufficiently critical: 1) in its approach to the local culture, and 2) in its conceptual presuppositions.

In its approach to the local culture, the methodology is open to the idea of fusing the Christian message with local cultural experience. As a method, the mutual relation between the two poles pushes for the "indigenization" of the Christian message *from within*. But there is the tendency of diluting the dimension of (Christian) "difference" in the process of internal conversation. There are instances where biblical faith is portrayed as a source which is not "other" in relation to the situation. This soft stance toward culture is actually argued to counter the scheme of question-answer apologetic dominant in theology. De Mesa opposes this latter scheme since, in this theological design, the cultural pole is divested of answers. Answers nestle

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280 The idea of a renewal that is pressed internally in a given culture rather than coming as an external imposition figures prominently in de Mesa’s proposals. The same can be said of Maggay’s approach. In Philippine cultural studies, Virgilio Enriquez is its most staunch proponent. See Enriquez, pp. 86-93. In mission studies, this stance is now increasingly being recognized as critically important to mission in culture. See Walls, 1996; Volf, 1997; Sanneh, 1989.
exclusively on the Christian side of the polarity. As an alternative, de Mesa, in his proposed critical correlation, stands by the commitment not to make one pole (faith or culture) a priori the answer. Contemporary cultural experience can also give a faith response that could correspond to the Christian answer.

For instance, de Mesa comments that the core of the faith is something the poor and non-sophisticated Filipinos already know: “God cares, so we care.” He makes the related claim that the kingdom of God offers no demands on the poor. Jesus’ announcement of the kingdom, according to de Mesa, exempts “the poor and the sinners” from any demands: “the kingdom is theirs, precisely because of what they suffer from their inhuman situation.” The beatitude: “Blessed are the poor” is scandalous because “there is a period, a full stop after ‘the poor.’ There is an intrinsic and positive relationship between the kingdom and the situation of the very poor person - period!” The correlation and identification of the Gospel with the experience of the poor eliminates the otherness and strangeness of God’s revelation to them. The possibility of a fundamental unity of God’s revelation and human experience is evident here. It is, however, doubtful that the call for repentance in Jesus’ programmatic statement about the kingdom excludes the poor (Mark 1:14). Maggay, whose approach we will consider later, reflecting on her experience among the poor says:

The [poor] people among whom I have chosen to dwell are just as tragically flawed as any of us. There is the same struggle for holiness, for integrity and just dealings. Sometimes poverty can so overwhelm that there is pressure to help oneself to the church coffers. Financial accountability and stewardship is an area of great challenge to faithfulness. People live so crowdedly and closely that touching

\[28^2\] 1990a: 70.

\[28^2\] 1989: 165.

\[28^3\] Ibid.
proximity often leads to unholy intimacies. There is sometimes a kind of self-assertive dependency, a sense that to be helped is a right. . . .

_The 'Jesus Experience' and Contemporary Re-interpretation._ This continues the discussion on the possibilities and problems of synthesis or correlation as a method. This part deals primarily with interpretative questions that have direct bearing on the reinterpretation of the Gospel.

According to de Mesa, reinterpreting the gospel for today demands that one should retrace the original experience of the early Christian disciples and consequently work out a contemporary reformulation based on critical correlation. Recovering the original experience is a must for theological re-rooting because this experience acts as the check (restraint) for what is true interpretation as oppose to wild and "unorthodox" speculations (e.g. docetism, other-worldly gospel). It is possible to recover the original experience of the disciples because "experience" serves as bridge of understanding to the then and now. The fundamental unity of experience is a major presupposition that assures contemporary believers that they will be able to recover and name the disciples' original (historical) experience of salvation. Going further, this common bond of experience, past and present, is qualified as dynamic and contextual. The fact that all of experience is contextual is a truism that does not apply merely to the continuing task of reformulating the gospel or what is called "second order affirmations." The message of the early Christian disciples ("first order affirmations") are themselves subject to the vicissitudes of time and place. These first order affirmations are the first contextual interpretations of the deeper original (Easter) experience (the ultimate norm) which is summarized in the formula: God's offer of definitive salvation in Jesus. As contextual interpretation(s) of the primordial experience, they

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are not to be absolutized for use by succeeding generations in their expressions of faith in God's salvation in Christ. This is because they are subject to the visions and models of interpretation available in their day.

The preceding explanation should prepare the reader for the consequent claim that the task of reinterpreting or re-rooting the gospel may involve unbounding the original experience from its primary interpretations in the Bible. Because some of these primary expressions are outdated, they may have to be "written down" to give room for fresh appropriations of the gospel for peoples of different time and place.

An original experience and interpretation receive a first expression, but will be identified, deepened out and enriched in further interpretations or expression and may eventually be written down. . . .

The original faith experience of the disciples. . . will have to be retraced along the road of its conceptualization and constantly reinterpreted within the Filipino experience of expectation and hope for wholeness. Otherwise, we run the risk of remaining with a closed book of fascinating but largely irrelevant tales of the past.285

Notice that it is the recovery of an unbounded primordial experience of salvation which serves as the historical, normative grounding for continuing reinterpretation. To "write down" means to forego one particular interpretation in favor of identifying, deepening or enriching another. The background to this is the process of "distilling" what is positive and life-giving for contemporary reappropriation.

(1) At the outset, one wonders whether a primordial experience of salvation can truly be disengaged from its first expressions, since in the New Testament, even in the whole Bible, interpretation and experience, story and history are intimately joined. The New Testament

285 Ibid., p. 61.
writings are fundamentally testimonies or witnesses of the early followers of Jesus. Even modern historical-critical scholarship has not proven this to be wrong.

Modern scholarship has brought to light an immensely complex network of different strands within each of these [varied theological] elements [in the Bible]. It has uncovered the many different sources from which material has been drawn, and the social cultural, religious, political and economic interests which have played a part in shaping it. Yet the Bible comes to us in its “canonical shape”, the result of many centuries of interpretation and reinterpretation, editing and re-editing, with a unity which depends upon certain discernible centres [the Exodus, the events concerning Jesus]. These are events, happenings in the contingent world of history, which are interpreted as disclosures in a unique sense, of the presence and action of God.

These events are, from the beginning, interpreted events (as are, indeed, all the “facts of history”). They are interpreted as divine actions, as the presence of the absolute among the contingent events of history. But the interpretation has to be reinterpreted over and over again in terms of another generation and culture.

Or more precisely in relation to the ‘self-understanding of Jesus,” New Testament scholar Raymond Brown has this to say in reaction to a christology developed by Dutch theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (which is a primary influence in de Mesa’s hermeneutical theology):

E. Schillebeeckx would make the distinction that in the earlier stages there was only a “a theology of Jesus of Nazareth” (a first-order assertion that in Jesus the man, God saves human beings) while in the later stages there was a “christology” (a second-order assertion about the identity of Jesus). Even though Schillebeeckx confirms that the first-order assertion leads to the second-order assertion, he is content with the notion that one was already a Christian in embracing the former. [The conclusions of centrist historical scholarship on the Gospels], however, indicate that already in Jesus’ lifetime there were many indications that God was not only acting through Jesus but was present in him, so that even in that period the issue of Jesus had been raised. Accordingly “christology” remains in my judgment a more appropriate (even if inadequate) first-order term than a “theology of Jesus of Nazareth.”

At issue here is the divorce between history and theology, or alternatively, between history and faith. History and theology are deemed “two worlds which must be entirely separate.”

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261 Brown, 149-150.
262 Wright, 24.
argument is that “what is accessible is not what really happened but the faith of the disciples cast
into the form of narrative.”289 The way out of the dilemma (the historicity of the Gospels), for
Schillebeeckx and others who follow his lead, is to rely on a (disputed) hypothetical “Q
community,” as “a key matrix of early traditions, and some sort of normative theological
interest.”290

Confronting modern (cultural) skepticism about the historical reliability of the Gospel
records, Newbigin’s words seem instructive at this point,

When it is proposed that a sharp distinction be made between the faith of the first
disciples and “what really happened,” it is implied that E.H. Carr’s continuing
conversation should now stop. Of course what we have in the New Testament
represents the faith of the disciples, namely their faith about “what really
happened.” It would be a remarkable example of cultural chauvinism if we
supposed that our faith about what really happened, shaped as it is by our own
cultural perspective, must necessarily displace that of the immediate witnesses. The
conversation between the present and the past must go on, and will go on, until the
end of the world, and the perception of the first witnesses must have the premier
role in the conversation.291

Along with Newbigin, we affirm that, on the one hand, the telling of the Christ-story is grounded
in real historical events. On the other hand, the truth of the biblical witness ultimately lies in its
power to transform lives. One has to enter the story or test its claims in real life to ultimately
prove its veracity. Now, if it is established that the genre of the New Testament (especially the
Gospels) is primarily a record of witnesses or testimonies to the person of Jesus, then to cull an
original, underlying experience out of the disciples’ explicit telling is to superimpose a different
agenda on the text. It may in fact tear the story apart. As a consequence, the reader’s version of

290 Wright, 24.
291 Newbigin, 1991: 8-9. The theoretical consequence for Schillebeeckx christology is summed up by Wright (p.
24): “His eventual leap from a purely historical Jesus to the incarnate Son of God is based on little or nothing in
the main part of the book [Jesus] itself.”
what is supposed to be “original” and true becomes normative over the actual telling. It may in fact happen that the early Christian witness will be superseded in favor of contemporary understanding. This is not an impossibility as the following points will show.

(2) In several instances, de Mesa sums up the unbounded primordial experience of salvation in a formula. It is the soteriological claim: Jesus is God’s definitive and decisive salvation. The Jesus referred to in this formula is the Jesus of history critically reconstructed. The primordial experience of salvation both then (in the Bible) and now is total human well-being or life and love in Jesus. In this claim, Jesus functions as a signifier for wholeness, complete happiness, well-being. This can only be right because Jesus’ mission was to bring life in all its fullness (John 10:10). “The concern of the Gospel,” de Mesa reminds religionists and theologians, “is much more on whether the well-being of people is being promoted or hindered rather than on whether this group of people has primal or special revelation, although experienced salvation always has a cognitive element.”292 This salvation is this-worldly (historical), and wholistic (total) like the indigenous idea of "ginhawa.

For de Mesa, soteriology defines Christianity and the Gospel. For one, it is soteriology which gives meaning to the theology as whole. According to him, it is the soteriological that gives meaning to every theological reality: God, Jesus Christ, the Church, grace, creation and eschatology.293 It is also the experience of salvation which is the bottom line of Christianity.294 Keeping in mind that de Mesa regards soteriology to be foundational to Christianity and that he

292 de Mesa, 1994a: p. 57.
293 Ibid., p. 56. Note the discussion on Section 2.6 on soteriology and Christology.
294 Since for de Mesa Christianity is essentially a soteriological experience of Jesus: “Christianity is not primarily a message which has to be believed but an experience of faith in Jesus of Nazareth which becomes a message. As an explicit message it seeks to offer a new possibility of life-experience to those who heart it from within their own personal and social situations” (de Mesa, 1990a: 89).
offers to sum up salvation in the formula: Jesus means life and love, is he not reducing the Gospel to a preconceived moral principle or formula? This is not an unfounded question. Instead of viewing the Gospel as good news to the world about something that God did to the world (Jesus Christ has altered the course of human history), the Gospel of salvation is reconfigured in terms of what is life-giving and loving as determined by theological analysis of the current context. The significance of the person and saving work of Jesus Christ is filtered through contemporary moral ideals of life and love.

(3) Granted that a central formula of the early Christian’s original experience (God’s offer of definitive salvation in Jesus) can be found amidst the various levels of interpretations, what then is the ontological status of the “first order affirmations” or confessions of the early Christian disciples? If the encounter with Jesus then and now necessarily comes through and is expressed in conceptual models appropriate to a given time and place (and this conceptual continuity is presupposed in the unity of human experience) it follows that de Mesa views these early Christian confessions as contextual interpretations not dissimilar to current efforts to express the primordial experience of salvation.295 Thus, the biblical witnesses about the person of Jesus are not received as ontological assertions about the nature of reality based on faith. Indeed, one could say that de Mesa’s view of the relativity of Christian experience and interpretation does not allow for enduring, normative affirmations. In this case, the function of New Testament theology in contemporary theologizing is relativized. This underlies his point that some of the interpretations of the New Testament, because they may be irrelevant, may have to be “written down” or else modern sensibilities may simply regard them to be dated or obsolete.

295 Along similar lines, Fackre (1984) criticizes Schillebeeckx’s hermeneutical presuppositions.
(4) The preceding discussion should help explain why de Mesa's notion on the re-
interpretation of the gospel is discussed under the heading of synthesis or syncretism. In his
framework the canons of modern perception may act as normative check over the claims of
Scripture and thus may override the "first order affirmations" in the Bible. The Bible is dependent
on its correlate, modern human perception, for its renewed appreciation and reuse. Modifiers
like "inadequate," "irrelevant tales," "culturally embedded," while used sparingly with reference to
biblical accounts, are nevertheless used as normative descriptions of the status of biblical
statements in light of contemporary reappropriation.

4.2. The Gospel in Philippine Context: Melba Maggay

4.2.1 The Value of Maggay's Approach

*Beyond American-Evangelical Paradigms of Proclamation.* Melba Maggay breaks new
ground as an evangelical in identifying the cultural embeddedness of ready-made Gospel formulas
as well as evangelistic techniques from the United States to which evangelical churches in the
Philippines are beholden for far too long.

Many people believe that, because we know all men to be sinners and in need of
God, we can assume we fully understand the spiritual needs of the people to whom
we are speaking. This assumption lies behind the pre-packaged Gospel kit. So
long as this sticks approximately to the "God loves you theme," we trust blithely
that the imported presentation of the Gospel and the country-hopping and
differences in culture do not really matter.296

This is an important contribution to evangelical thinking in the Philippines. Filipino evangelicals
are prone to accept uncritically the transmission of the Gospel from the West. There is the
somewhat naive perception that the Gospel as it has come down to Filipinos through the efforts of

American missionaries is not culturally embodied. Lorenzo Bautista points to the problem of cultural blindness:

[E]vangelicals [in the Philippines] remain most hospitable to foreign missions and spiritual experimentation. An American evangelical leader who receives a global vision in Dallas can start fulfilling it in Manila any time.297

While Maggay distances herself from North American conservative evangelical models of evangelization, she identifies herself closely with a radical evangelical perspective.298 It is a position which stresses the authority of Scriptures but its hermeneutic is strongly oriented to culture in its effort to address socio-political issues. The primacy of the Bible is held alongside critical social involvement. A prominent Roman Catholic reviewer of *Transforming Society* sees the intertwinement of biblical authority with social justice to be Maggay’s evangelical difference vis-à-vis Roman Catholic theological approaches.

Situated as they are within the Philippine Evangelical tradition, yet supported by wide reading in other traditions, the reflections of Melba Padilla Maggay come through to the Roman Catholic reader as both strikingly similar to and interestingly different from our own tradition. The similarities stem from the fact that we all see the same issues and problems in the world around us, and the same approaches to them; moreover we share a common Christian concern for our less fortunate brothers and sisters. The main difference lies in methodology: Maggay focuses strongly on Scripture on building a case for social involvement and in evaluating possible approaches; the Catholic would also look to the body of social thought developed by the Popes over the past 100 years.299

This reviewer recognizes Maggay’s theology as part of “a ferment within the Philippine Evangelical churches.” The twin (radical) evangelical emphases on Scriptural authority and

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297 Bautista, p. 187.
298 She is at home with Rene Padilla’s mission hermeneutic (“hermeneutical circle”) which is forged within the Latin American cultural milieu. See 1990b: 7.
passion for justice are seen as openings for dialogue with Roman Catholics. This (informal) dialogue between a Roman Catholic and an evangelical scholar, if it ever carries through, will be very significant, since it will help clarify the nature of evangelicalism vis-à-vis fundamentalism and Roman Catholicism. But within the evangelical tradition in the Philippines, Maggay's work also charts a new direction, even a new option for younger Filipino evangelicals. This new theological option inspired by her will utilize worldview and cultural studies in a major way. Cultural awareness becomes a standpoint for an internal critique of the evangelical house of tradition as well as the whole inherited Western Christian tradition. This will be consistent with Maggay's concern to fashion a Filipino theological tradition where the Filipino worldview (in the sense of cognitive orientation and vision of life) and culture serve as basis for the proper selection of biblical themes as well as in the re-interpretation of the Gospel in the local setting. Moreover, in this framework, the Kingdom of God will be the locus of understanding the fullness of the church's mission for it embodies God's redemptive intent for the world. It is a vision of God's reign which encompasses all of creation and thus, is supreme over the church.

The Gospel and the Great Cultural Divide. We have mentioned before the notion of cultural divide in Philippine studies. To reiterate and further explain this phenomenon, Edilberto Alegre's comments are helpful.

The Filipino elite, including the Filipino intellectual, possesses a weapon which marks him as distinct from the rest of the Filipinos: he is literate in English. Although the stereotype idea that elites speak with each other in English and use Tagalog [the base language for Filipino which is the national language] only when they address their servants has been waning, skills in business, medicine, law, and the all the professions in fact, are still acquired by way of English. Most of our newspapers are published in English but [most of our writers are] illiterate in the

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300 Ibid.
301 As far as I know, a Roman Catholic theologian commenting positively on a work of an evangelical scholar and courting dialogue is very rare.
local languages. They may use the latter orally like the non-elite, but they have no fluency in reading or writing them.\textsuperscript{303}

On the one side, are the elite and educated Filipinos whose conceptual world is in English. On the other side are the masses of Filipinos living in poverty, illiterate in English, yet deeply in touch with the native tongue. They serve as the actual purveyors of the \textit{local, indigenous} culture. Maggay believes that it is this group of people “whose culture through the centuries has managed to resist all alien forms of organizing social life.”\textsuperscript{304}

In a recent essay significantly entitled “Crossing the Cultural divide: Reflections from down under,”\textsuperscript{305} Maggay outlines the critical function of the “cultural divide” for her own (still evolving) standpoint. She begins by narrating her “immersion” into a slum community church and how through this experience she was changed in a radical way.\textsuperscript{306} The theological reflections she offers are “initial notes on this . . . experience of crossing the socio-cultural divide” (14). Contextualization as incarnation means crossing this divide, like Jesus, patiently waiting, as he humbly took his place among his own people to become an agent of transformation (15). Her experience of immersing herself in this poor community engendered a new dialogical posture: the evangelizer is also being evangelized.\textsuperscript{307} The way in to this new experience of being evangelized by the poor was learning their language.

At first, I was conscious of “talking down”, or at least, of simplifying. It turns out from succeeding conversations that I was the one who had limitations, my vocabulary in the vernacular, not being sufficient to cover the depths of the truths we were discovering together. In contrast, they had a far richer store of words to

\textsuperscript{303} Alegre, 1993: 75.

\textsuperscript{304} 1995a: 8

\textsuperscript{305} 1995c

\textsuperscript{306} “What followed had, to put it mildly, changed me, at the core where my ways of thinking and feeling originate” (p. 14).

\textsuperscript{307} The language she uses to describe her experience echoes a language of conversion as in the preceding footnote. Hence, the corresponding use of the terms evangelizer/evangelized.
describe the immense work of grace happening within them. I felt myself swimming, intellectually lost for want of my usual mental stock in trade, yet wonderfully adrift in a vast hoard of words that hitherto had remained locked to me like a huge treasure chest from out of the sea. Given linguistic parity, our people are just as capable of naming the deep things of God and the complexities of the world we live in.

I do not know which is the greater gift: that I am able to speak to our people, or at least engage them in terms that are meaningful to them, or the discovery that our people are just as empowered to articulate their own condition once the linguistic barriers are crossed (15).

What then can be said about the role of the “cultural divide” in Maggay’s contextual framework? At the very least, one could say that Maggay is offering it as a new context for mission in Philippine culture. Here “cultural divide” is useful in identifying one of the culture’s deepest problems. But it is not simply rethinking the Gospel in wholistic terms that is involved. One, Maggay reconceptualizes mission to the poor by insisting on the role of vernacularizing the faith. The church’s use of the “native tongue” is a distinctive Christian witness that energizes and empowers anew both the local church and the indigenous culture. Moreover, the mission to affirm “indigenous culture” implies addressing issues of social justice in behalf of the poor, and not simply part of a striving toward nationalism. Indeed, in her recent writings, Maggay uses the term “indigenous culture” as a cipher for justice in behalf of the poor, seeking justice that spans both the local and global contexts. Aside from its role as a mission priority, the cultural divide reveals a new locus for cultivating a Filipino Christian theological standpoint. The culture of the underside revealing itself and being dealt with in and through the church becomes a valid theological resource for renewing both faith and culture.

308 1995b, also 1997.
309 On this theme, see also Sugden, 1994, 1996.
4.2.2 The Indigenization of Christianity: Engaging a Framework. We could engage Maggay’s theology at several critical points: her notion of contexts and contextuality,\textsuperscript{310} the problem of the ‘fact-value’ distinction in her theorizing,\textsuperscript{311} and the framework of indigenization. Our exclusive focus, however, will be the subject of indigenization simply because the others are marginal themes compared to this one important topic in Maggay’s writings.\textsuperscript{312} The issue of indigenousness and Christianity can be approached from several angles.\textsuperscript{313} The interaction with Maggay will cover three particular areas of engagement and dialogue.

*Indigenization and the Foreignness of Christianity.* Maggay argues that there is a persisting cultural distance between indigenous culture/religion and Christianity in the Philippines. In regard to the beginnings of the Christianity in the region, she suspects that what really took place in the encounter between the early Filipinos and the Spanish Christians was not a meeting that resulted in the conversion of the natives. The natives may simply have exchanged their wooden gods for another set of religious statues. Maggay holds the idea that the indigenous religious consciousness remains intact and unchallenged. The coming of Protestantism did not help remedy the problem of cultural disjunction. One still awaits for a genuine mission encounter when the church would be able to bridge the cultural gap and truly indigenize Christian theology.

\textsuperscript{310} Kuitert’s questions (70, 71) state two fundamental inquiries regarding contexts and contextuality: 1) “[W]ho establishes, with the help of what criterion, where the context begins and where it ends, how narrow or how broad it is, in short, what shall serve as a context which provides contextual experience? Is colour of skin a criterion? Or sex? Or are shared collective norms and values? Or ethnic ethnicity? Must we think of a region? But in that case where does it begin and end? . . . . (2) Does the context “prescribe what is God’s revelation and command”? . . . . Does every context prescribe its own God?

\textsuperscript{311} The distinction between *fact* and *value*, where ‘creational fact’ is the *lower story* and ‘value’ being the *upper story* of ‘theoretical constructions’ has been criticized as a reductionistic approach. If taken seriously, it renders contextualization simply matters of theory. For a trenchant criticism of this position, see Newbigin, 1986: 35-38, 1989: 1-38. I am grateful to Dr. George Vandervelde for calling my attention to this point.

\textsuperscript{312} Reference to these other themes do not figure as much in Maggay’s corpus.

\textsuperscript{313} The appropriate spiritual motivation for indigenization is explored by Roland Allen (1927). Peter Beyerhaus (1971) discusses indigenization and the issue of syncretism. Newbigin (1978: 161-163) and S. B. Harper explore the contemporary ironies of indigenization.
While Spanish colonization has allowed the spread of Christianity with ease, the continuing existence of indigenous religious cults which today enjoy a kind of revival and renewed academic interest qualifies its success. The strength of the indigenous imagination was such that what was labeled as conversion could perhaps be more accurately described as a transaction that involved the mere exchange of statues: dark wooden anitos were exchanged for saints with Caucasian features . . . .

“Filipino religion remains a transaction with the powers, even if expressed in Catholic form, as with the spirit cults around Sto Niño, the Virgin Mary or God the Father. Reports of a dancing Sto Niño, images of Mary imprinted on petals, miraculous healings through mediums said to be possessed by trinitarian spirits are continuous with the indigenous mind’s sensitivity to paranormal powers. It [Filipino religion] is a belief system that coexists with Orthodox Catholicism without leakage from either side.”

Maggay’s portrayal of the cultural distance between Christianity and indigenous religion is very interesting. Indigenous religion and (Roman Catholic) Christianity “still exist side by side” like two unrelated containers (“without leakage from either side”). This conclusion (that Christianity is not culturally rooted in the land and that indigenous religion remains unchallenged) is integral to Maggay’s plea for the cultivation of a Filipino Christian theological tradition.

But what if the persisting cultural distance between Christianity and the indigenous religion only discloses further the alien character of Christianity in relation to the local culture? This question is not without basis in Maggay’s thought. The polarity that she establishes between Christianity (foreign) and the local (indigenous) culture may evoke this other reading. The question could actually ground itself in the underlying suppositions of indigenization itself. On the one hand, indigenousness implies a movement from/of the soil, while Christianity’s thrust is from the outside wanting to be grounded in the soil. The movement from the outside going inside betrays the foreign character of Christianity in relation to the indigenous culture. On the other hand, when indigenization is specifically applied to Christianity (as in “the indigenization of

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314 1990c: 10, emphases added.
315 1991a: 14, emphases added.
Christianity”), the idea itself conveys the transplantation of a “ready-made, foreign commodity.” For indeed, is not Christianity itself a social and cultural embodiment of the Gospel or of the Christian Faith? Thus, the very framework of “the indigenization of theology or Christianity” (Maggay’s) might not be able to ward off the Westernism or “foreignness” in the Western transmission of the Gospel in the local culture. The very term “Christianity” already carries a particular cultural embodiment. One can detect the limitation of indigenization as a framework in Maggay’s struggle to articulate a Filipino Christian view of salvation which encompasses the transformation of culture. A similar dilemma can be recognized in the way she conceives the relation of the Gospel to the cultural inheritance.

*Cultural Dignity and the Meaning of Salvation.* It has been noted that Maggay has advanced the vital role of *pagbabalik-loob* (journeying back, indigenization) for cultural transformation. The link between cultural dignity and salvation can be found in the way she links a vision of salvation (becoming truly human) with the recovery of cultural dignity (becoming more Filipino). This explicit connection may be debatable in and of itself but this is not the point. Rather, it is to call to mind that this wider, more integral view of salvation (becoming truly human) runs contrary to her other assertion that salvation is primarily forgiveness of sin. In fact, Maggay distinguishes the restoration of creation (re-creation) from salvation. For her, the redemptive work of Christ primarily belongs to the sphere of the heart (forgiveness) and not encompassing the totality of human creatureliness.

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318 Bediako, 1995: 118.
319 “Jesus in his incarnation became human, not so that we may become divine, but so that we may become more truly human. He became like us, so that we may become more truly ourselves, human beings made in His image and called to the love of God and neighbor” (1995c: 16). Maggay makes this similar point in an earlier essay (1991a: 21).
There is a chorus of Filipino theologians who argue that if culture has to impact the rethinking of theology in the Philippines, an integral understanding of salvation should be high on the agenda. De Mesa, for one, insists that the vernacular concept of ginhamaw (literally: ease, well-being, abundance, comfort, security) is closer to the reality which the Bible calls "salvation."³²⁰ Both pertain to the reality of total well-being which has its source in God. Another theologian, Carlos Abesamis, argues that in the Philippine situation, it is important to recover the biblical understanding of salvation as

*not just of the soul* but the totality of the whole man, of mankind and peoples, of the whole created universe. It is a salvation *not just from sin* (although sin remains the most important of all human evils to be liberated from), but from all human evils such as disease, hunger, poverty, death, corruption, wars, oppression, weeping, mourning. Positively, salvation means life, peace, health, joy, the Spirit of God in and among men, and resurrection, glory, a re-born and transformed cosmos, God all in all . . . ³²¹

There is more than one opening in Maggay's probings that could help dispel the narrow view of salvation on the way toward a fuller understanding. Aside from linking salvation with full humanity, in dialogue with the culture she also proposes a rethinking of sin in cosmic and relational terms. If sin is viewed in these terms, then salvation cannot be narrowed down to forgiveness of sins.

One wonders why a theologian strongly oriented to culture as Maggay would insist on limiting salvation to forgiveness of sins. One reason could be that, as an evangelical Christian, she does not want to simply equate salvation with the liberationist (social activist) understanding of it. Admittedly, the dialogue with the liberation theologians' position provides the immediate context of her theological reflections on salvation. In her reaction to liberation theology, and liberal

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³²¹ Abesamis. 1975: 5, author's emphases.
theology in general, she faults them for falling into reductionism. Salvation tends to be reduced either to a moral formula or socio-economic liberation. But Maggay’s position, aside from its discernible inconsistency (arguing for the indigenous rootedness of a vision of salvation which is wholistic yet limiting salvation to the sphere of the heart\textsuperscript{322}), ends up in a dualistic position. Indeed, one detects an unfortunate dichotomy: if forgiveness is the restoration of our relationship with God, with others and the world, and thus liberation, why does she place liberation in a “creative” context secured from “redemption” (or salvation)? Ironically, this position also leads to a “reductionism” of both elements of the dualism. “Salvation broadly conceived” is conceived of without the notion of forgiveness. And “forgiveness” is conceived of without the broad sweep of reconciliation of which “forgiveness” or the restoration of the broken relation between the Creator and his image is, one might say, the pivot.

It seems that the framework which opposes a foreign Christianity against the indigenous perception is unable to help Maggay in choosing which is more in keeping with a Filipino Christian response on the question of salvation.

Conversion and the Cultural Inheritance. The indigenization or “incarnation” of Christianity in Filipino soil assumes the foreignness of Christianity in relation to the cultural inheritance. Now, how can Christianity be indigenized in the soil of the local culture without destroying the religion/culture of the people of the land? This is a most important question since the coming of the Christian religion in the Philippines has meant the material destruction of crucial elements of the pre-Christian culture and religion.

\textsuperscript{322} Is Maggay vacillating with respect to the ability of the indigenous perception to withstand the dominant cultural understanding of salvation in the Western evangelical church tradition? The underlying premise of this question is simply that what we have are two options of viewing salvation arising from two different cultures.
De Mesa’s approach to this issue is to posit one source (God) for the life-giving resources present in both the culture and the Christian tradition. In a similar vein, Leonardo Mercado in his pioneering essay on “On Indigenizing Theology” invokes the classical notion of “seeds of the Word” to ground the continuity and ennobling contribution of the Christian faith in relation to the indigenous inheritance. For her part, Maggay mentions the notion of “concept fulfillment” to account for the relationship between the two entities. She mentions this, however, only in passing and it remains an undeveloped theme. The immediate context is her exposition of Paul’s preaching on Mars Hill (Acts 17) and the theological lesson involves the establishment of “points of contact” for a contextual proclamation of the Gospel. This seems to be related to her plea to build bridges for the articulation of Christian faith in Filipino terms or the evangelization of culture from within. “Concept fulfillment” seems to mean that Christ is able to meet the Filipino’s hunger and search for life’s meaning.

Maggay is explicit in pleading for a relevant Christianity in the Philippines. She seeks entry points for Gospel presentation as well as deepening the existing “correlations” to fit the biblical Gospel to the cultural milieu. But she is not as clear in establishing the proper relationship between Christian Faith and the cultural inheritance. It seems that the only clues that the reader has in regard to this critical theme are: the notion of “concept fulfillment” and the missionary strategies of indigenization and contextualization. Placed alongside these missionary principles is Maggay’s strong polemic against the Westernism of Christianity in the Philippines, a theme which, as we have shown above, could tend toward a different path for indigenization. We are referring to a kind of indigenization which aligns with rabid nationalism, understood as cultural

\[\text{Mercado, 1975: 5-6.}\]
reconstruction along *ethnic* lines, and one which could further constrict the flourishing of a truly vernacular Christianity.  

In a meditative piece penned in 1991, Maggay affirms her Filipino Christian stance in another way: the land as *inheritance* and *trust*. This stance suggests a different emphasis, i.e., different from her emphasis on a “missionary” proclamation of the Gospel. Indeed, this starting point provides a fresh opening for conceiving the Gospel and culture interaction. Maggay quotes an unnamed theologian who says, “To be in history means to be in a place somewhere and answer for it.” She takes this to mean “faithfulness to the context in which [one] has been historically placed.” From this vantage point, the land is seen both as an *inheritance* and a *trust*. This theological position (seeing land as inheritance and trust) brings to the fore a unique *historical* dimension to contextualization that falls outside the constricting framework of “indigenization.”

One theologian who has explored this historical opening is Protestant theologian Emerito Nacpil - one of the first theologians who argued for the contextualization (not indigenization) of the Gospel in the Philippines. He opens up this historical foundation by insisting on the continuing presence of God in the history and culture of the Filipino people. He offers the framework of *missio Dei* as foundation for socio-theological engagement. The providence and saving power of the *one* God provides the horizon of possibility for discerning the Gospel in culture. It seems that this is complementary to Maggay’s biblical insight of viewing the land as inheritance and trust. For it is not enough simply to engage in dialogue with culture for the

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324 Indigenousness establishes boundaries “deriving from attachment to the soil” (Harper, 1995: 13). Viewed in this light, it represents self-determination against any foreign system. Harper notes that there is an exclusivist aspect to the concept of indigenousness as it lays the grounds for inclusion and exclusion along ethnic or national lines (ibid.).

325 Maggay, 1991b: 8. Subsequent quotes in the paragraph are taken from this biblical reflection.

purpose of evangelism. One has to go deeper and establish a Christian view of the cultural inheritance. This Christian outlook should seek the “conversion” not the “proselyte” model of the transmission of the faith.\(^\text{327}\) The former involves “turning” which is not a change of substance (= proselyte paradigm) but a change of cultural direction. The convert does not substitute something new for something old but rather redirects what is already there toward the direction of Christ.\(^\text{328}\) The fact that Maggay wants to use cultural elements as pointers and vehicles for the communication of the Gospel indicates that she seeks the culture’s conversion to Christ from the inside. But Maggay has yet to address fully the question of the continuity (or discontinuity) of Christian faith with the existing cultural inheritance.\(^\text{329}\)

\(^{327}\) Walls, 1997 is most helpful in elucidating these models.

\(^{328}\) Ibid., p. 148.

\(^{329}\) Instead of indigenization, a key that might help refocus the discussion of continuity/discontinuity is the vernacularization of the faith. The transmission of the Gospel in the local language suggests new avenues to tackle the issue. Maggay seems to be heading this fruitful direction. See the discussion above on “Cultural Divide” and “Indigenization from Within” (Section 3.3.2).
CONCLUSION: CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH RE-ROOTING AND RE-ROUTING

The study has shown two ways of approaching the re-rooting of the Gospel in the (lowland) Philippines from the perspective of two theologians. Both are Christian converts - one is an evangelical and the other a Roman Catholic. As converts, they engage Christian faith in local terms, yet at the same time insisting on the critical transforming function of theology vis-à-vis the local culture.

This concluding section will reflect on a particular question: in what way do either or both de Mesa and Maggay present unique Filipino contextualized theologies? This question continues the focus on theology and identity. We will attempt to answer this question 1) by looking at the way de Mesa and Maggay view the cultural inheritance and 2) by assessing the value of their contextual approaches. The first route accentuates what makes their Christian theologies truly Filipino. The second probes the uniqueness of their methodologies. By doing these, I hope to pull together their major insights on theology and identity as well as contribute to their deepening. Towards the end, I will suggest that the image of (re-)rooting may need to be complimented by the notion of re-routing. Here I assume that (re-)rooting is inadequate as the overarching framework. As an alternative, which also echoes de Mesa and Maggay’s contributions, I will

330 This means that this final interaction stays with the general thrust of the paper to bracket out a discussion of Filipino theologies of socio-economic liberation. The recognition that liberation theologies are another form of contextual theologizing in the Philippines follow the outline set by Arevalo (1997) on Filipino theology. The recognition that liberation and inculturation are emergent forms of contextual theologies also affirms the observations of Bosch (1991: 421) and Ukpong (1987a: 163-168) which view the two as emerging, complementary models of Third World theologies: the one engages with the issue of cultural identity (indigenization, inculturation), and the other responds to the reality of socio-economic oppression (liberation).
commend transformation or conversion (the more classical term), as framework.

Vernacularization or translation -- a central theme in both theologians -- is actually the dynamic that calls in question rooting or re-rooting as the primary image for contextualization or local theologizing.

**Culture and Christian Conversion.** If one would ask about de Mesa and Maggay’s views in regard to the cultural inheritance, it seems that the stance of redirection rather than substitution would best characterize their orientation. Commitment to Christ does not mean substituting something new for something old. Rather, conversion to Christ involves *turning* what is already there in culture toward a new direction.  

In the words of African theologian Kwame Bediako,

> [C]onversion is not the overlay upon our old habits and attitudes and fears, of some regulations and traditions and solutions which do not answer to our needs. That is proselytization, not evangelization . . . . Rather, true evangelization and conversion is turning to Christ all that He finds when he meets us, and asking that He cleanse, purify and sanctify us and all that we are, eliminating what He considers incompatible with Him. That is what the Great Commission is about, the discipling of the nations.  

(1) De Mesa lays the ground for his “transformational” or “conversionist” perspective on the cultural inheritance in his very first work on theological re-rooting. Even before Christianity came to the islands, God has already been revealing himself to the native Filipinos. There are seeds of the Word in the local culture that could convey the truths of Christian faith. The ability of the culture’s language to utter the Gospel is the preeminent witness to this continuity in revelation. But this continuity or “connaturality” of cultural elements in giving

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332 Bediako, 1997: 3.
333 de Mesa, 1979.
expression to the Christian message does not mean a complete yes to cultural values. These values are to be re-oriented in light of the Gospel message. In the judgement of Filipino Roman Catholic liturgical scholar Anscar Chupungco:

Dr. de Mesa's methodology can be described as the process of acculturation whereby cultural elements with connaturality to express the Christian message are re-oriented and assumed as vehicles of Christian mystery. Or to put it the other way around, Dr. de Mesa's methodology is the process of re-rooting the Christian message in values that are able to contain and transmit it.\footnote{Foreword to de Mesa. 1979, emphases added.}

Or as Jesuit mission theologian Catalino Arevalo explains: De Mesa's approach to doing Filipino theology involves

\begin{quote}
a conscious effort to 'radicate' theological thought in Filipino meanings and values as found, principally in traditional culture; in traditional Filipino religiosity and popular piety; in traditional and contemporary belief and value patterns (as manifested in local customs, practices, popular aphorisms, and relationship patterns); in the structure, patterns, and vocabulary of the native languages.\footnote{Arevalo, 1997: 164.}
\end{quote}

Our analysis of de Mesa's early theology reveals a combined emphases on synthesis and dynamic equivalence translation which are employed to transform culture. The emphasis of his later writings, however, is the refinement of theological synthesis, redefining it as "mutually respectful and critical interaction." We have suggested that the mutual criticism involve in this dialectical correlation presupposes a "parity of revelation": both the Christian message and human cultural experience are deemed equal sources of revelation.\footnote{I am borrowing the phrase "parity of revelation" from Gabriel Fackre. He used it in reaction to David Tracy (1993: 214). Incorporating Fackre's insight is not a digression since Tracy's revisionist hermeneutic parallels de Mesa's "mutually critical correlation."} The two theological sources are viewed functionally, that is, they are intended for a soteriological function: to foster fullness of life. Culture as well as the Christian tradition exists for human well-being (fullness of life). And human well-being is God's salvific will for life in the world.

\footnote{I am borrowing the phrase "parity of revelation" from Gabriel Fackre. He used it in reaction to David Tracy (1993: 214). Incorporating Fackre's insight is not a digression since Tracy's revisionist hermeneutic parallels de Mesa's "mutually critical correlation."}
Transformation (or conversion) as the stance of the church toward culture, a theme which de Mesa speaks at length in his early work, receives meager attention in the later writings. It may be that the transformational stance is a continuing presupposition, that he deems it vital to accentuate the positive in culture rather than highlighting the disjunctions between the Christian message and local cultural values. One senses, however, the problem of incongruities between the missional goal of transformation and the methodology of dialectical correlation. We have raised this issue in the body of the paper. Suffice it to say that the parity of revelation, a presupposition in the method of dialectical correlation, tangles with the transformational view of revelation as the unique saving deeds and disclosure of God in Christ -- a revelation which intersects but is not equal with revelation in culture.

Maggay also upholds a Christian stance of "redirection" toward local culture. She argues that that the local culture has a critical function in the shaping of the gospel. The context should set the agenda for the interpretation of the Gospel. But she is also clear that culture is not to be left on its own. The Gospel stands as a principle of newness over cultures. It offers a principle of cultural criticism as well genuine affirmation.

Maggay's theology is a bold evangelical statement on the interpretative foundations of contextualization. She is not clear, however, in positing the interrelationship of Gospel and culture especially in regard to indigenization. She posits the critical importance of the dialogue between church and culture for the sake of evangelization but the foreignness of Christianity sticks out as a problem in the encounter. There is, however, a very new thrust in her work that would seem to unseat the foreign versus native polarization. It is the vernacularization of the faith -- a path that,
as we pointed out above, de Mesa argued early on in his work. At a later section, we will argue that vernacularization (= translation, or the translatability of Christian faith) offers an inner critique to both rooting and re-rooting as theological frameworks.

This section has tied together de Mesa and Maggay’s views of the cultural inheritance alongside their theological methods. We have seen that their Christian vision of cultural transformation or conversion is a key toward a necessary balance between Christian authenticity and cultural identity. The following section will probe this matter further but the slant will be on methodology. We will plot their methodologies using Bevans’ proposed models and through this, we seek to arrive at the truly distinctive features of their theologies.

**Mapping their Methods.**

(1) Bevans, in his five models of contextual theology (namely, translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, and transcendental) offers de Mesa's approach as a prime example of the “synthetic” model of contextualization. For Bevans, the word *synthetic* functions in three ways. First, this means that the theologian who does theology in this way looks to a synthesis of other existing models. He also reaches out to other cultural resources and theological expressions in fashioning theological method and content. Finally, invoking Hegel, the theologian working in this frame attempts “not just to put things together in a kind of

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337 It will be interesting to see whether Maggay will move in similar direction as de Mesa: whether she will tone down the “dialectic” (the yes and no) of the Gospel directed to the assertion of cultural identity.

338 We offer one other observation with respect to cultural valuation. Overall, Maggay tends to be less optimistic of the local culture’s potential compared to de Mesa. Maggay talks of a dialectic of text and context but she insists on the authoritative role of the text (Scripture). De Mesa is more positive in assessing the cultural promise. His correlation method assumes this cultural-optimist orientation. This is true in so far as he stresses a syncretic, dialectical drawing-together of two coherent traditions of faith-experiences, the Judeo Christian tradition and the cultural tradition of experience.

compromise, but of developing, in a creative dialectic, something that is acceptable to all
standpoints." Bevans finds all of the three functions of ‘synthetic’ in de Mesa’s contextual
methodology.

The category ‘synthetic’ nicely fits de Mesa’s model of doing theology. Indeed, as we
have seen, de Mesa does not limit himself to one method. His is a synthesis of methods. He works
with several approaches: dynamic equivalence translation, mutually critical correlation, even a
praxis-oriented methodology. Moreover, in employing such methods, he does not apologize for
his indebtedness to Western scholars such as Schillebeeckx, Meland, and Tracy as well as to
evangelical scholars like Charles Kraft. While we affirm Bevans’ observations about de Mesa’s
inclination toward synthesis, we should clarify, however, that ‘theological re-rooting’ functions
as de Mesa’s overall framework and not simply, as Bevans is suggesting, contextualization or
even contextualization as synthesis. Indeed, Bevans has neglected the notion of ‘theological
re-rooting’ in his presentation of de Mesa’s theology. This is partly discernible in Bevans’ use of
sources. De Mesa’s first published work in which he lays down the basics of theological re-
rooting does not figure as a reference.

We raise the question, however, whether de Mesa’s program can withstand the internal
tensions caused by the annexation of various methodologies into the theological program of re-
rooting. This question is partly founded in Bevans’ claim that diverse contextual approaches
undergird themselves with differing theological starting points or convictions. These convictions
may not necessarily be complementary in that they could, indeed, be conflicting. We have seen

340 Ibid., p. 83.
341 In a conversation last February, 1996, I asked Dr. de Mesa if he has changed his views on theological re-
rooting as overall framework for doing theology and he responded negatively.
342 de Mesa, 1979.
this in the differing views of revelation that support translation and mutual correlation. This is also
discernible in that readers receive at least two major interpretations of the Gospel from de Mesa’s
theology. In giving prominence to translation, de Mesa proffers a gospel that is given, eternal,
(the message and work of Christ) although to be continually incarnated in various cultures. From
mutual correlation, what we have is a soteriological formula which tends to reduce the Gospel to
a contemporary moral ideal.

(2) Maggay’s contextual approach would be harder to situate in Bevans’ typology. It may
also be a synthetic model but of a different species. Maggay’s approach is not the translational
model because she does not subscribe to a kernel-husk analogy about an supra-cultural Gospel
core needing to be translated. Neither is her approach the synthetic model since she confidently
assumes the authoritative role of Scripture in the dialectic of text and context. Although
Maggay’s approach is not translational in Bevans’ terms, “translation” or better yet,
“translatability” (not Bevans’ description but Sanneh’s) is proving to be central to it. Thus, if
de Mesa works with an intentional synthesizing framework of mutual enrichment which advances
a soteriological-moral ideal, Maggay, especially in her later writings, echoes a parallel case for
mutuality but not simply in view of advancing a Christian moral ideal but a mutuality borne of the
‘converting’ dimensions of the vernacular transmission of the faith. This is clear in Maggay’s
narrative of her experience in proclaiming the Gospel in a squatter community. In communicating

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343 This somewhat echoes Charles Kraft’s comments about Bevans’ book: “Given the helpfulness of his perspective,
I miss a development of the fact (which he recognizes) that in actual practice, many (perhaps most) approaches do
not limit themselves to a single model. It would be instructive to see what combinations are made and how such
mixtures are worked out” (Kraft, 1994: 131)
344 cf. Sanneh. For a helpful delineation of Sanneh’s perspective on mission as translation, see Satari. In light of
illuminating studies on ‘translatability’ like Sanneh’s, Bevans might need to reconsider his own notion of
translation in his typology. Indeed, Roman Catholic mission scholar Carl Starkloff, in his review of the book,
suggests that a clarification on this point is needed (Starkloff, 1994: 592). Related discussions on ‘translatability’
as missional framework are found in Smalley, Walls, pp. 3-54, Dyrness, 1997: 78-81, and Bediako, 1995: 109-125.
the Gospel to the community, one has to rely on the people themselves for their "own store of words." Here lies the mutuality and critical interaction which arises out of what we regard as "mission as translation." This critical mutuality is signaled by what Maggay calls "linguistic parity." The people starts to own the Gospel as it becomes rooted in their language and culture. Their culture, however, is both affirmed as vehicle of the Gospel and redirected towards the kingdom by the presence of the living Christ who stays with them (John 1:14) in their journey as a people.

Perhaps it is best to say a few words about the vernacularization of the faith or what we call 'mission as translation.' The Incarnation suggests itself as the supreme analogy for mission as translation. Jesus Christ is God's translated speech: Divinity translated into humanity. But he did not become a generalized humanity. He became a person in a particular locality and in a particular ethnic group, at a particular place and time. Continuing the linguistic analogy, the socio-theological implications for discipling peoples and nations (Matthew 28:18-20) become vivid:

Christ was not a loan-word adopted into the vocabulary of humanity; he was fully translated, taken into the functional system of the language, into the fullest reaches of personality, experience, and social relationship. The proper human response to the divine act of translation is conversion: the opening up of the functioning system of personality, intellect, emotions, relationship to the new meaning, to the expression of Christ. Following on the original act of translation in Jesus of Nazareth are countless re-translations into the thought forms and cultures of the different societies into which Christ is brought as conversion takes place.

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345 The phrase comes from Sanneh, 1989. See also Satari.
346 Maggay, 1995a: 15: "Given linguistic parity, our people are just as capable of naming the deep things of God and complexities of the world we live in . . . . our people are just as empowered to articulate their own condition once the linguistic barriers are crossed."
347 On linguistic analogy and the Incarnation, see Walls, 1996: 26-30.
348 Ibid., p. 28.
(3) The mutual interaction inherent in "mission as translation" can also be discerned in aspects of de Mesa's theology. We have noted that translating the gospel is a central theme in his writings as well. One could even say that aspects of his theology offer an apologetic for such a stance. We are especially attracted to his idea that theological re-rooting involves both culture as target and source for the communication of the Gospel message.\footnote{Here we are not assuming, in chorus with de Mesa himself, that the Gospel is not a disembodied message. There is no such thing as an acultural gospel. The Gospel is a message embodied in a community that seeks to follow Christ and discern his presence in every culture.} He offers the following diagram in regard to this point.\footnote{de Mesa. 1987: 76.} 

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{diagram.png}
\caption{Diagram of Theological Re-rooting}
\end{figure}

On the one hand, the Gospel message aims at the local culture to transform it. On the other hand, "interpretative models" from culture "enable us to bring out particular elements of the gospel message which are relevant to us Filipinos in a truly indigenous manner."\footnote{Ibid.}

While in the diagram de Mesa limits mission as translation to the "culture as target" aspect and distinguishes it from the task of interpretation ("culture as source"), we part ways with him in regarding culture as target and source (better, resource) as twin acts of "mission as translation." For one, translation (culture as target) always involves interpretation (culture as 'source') and not, as de Mesa's diagram seems to suggest, the two elements standing apart from...
each other. Indeed, every translation is an interpretation. If one follows the thrust of this revision, then the diagram should not simply be “the process of theological re-rooting” but rather, “the process of theological re-rooting as translation.” But here the limitation of re-rooting as overall framework poses a problem. Mission as translation of the Christian faith is not simply about re-rooting the Christian tradition in cultures but also about re-routing the direction of these cultures to accomplish God’s mission of reconciliation in the world. Taking de Mesa’s diagram as starting point, our intended revision would look this way:

Transformation: Re-rooting and Rerouting. At the outset, we should not forget the summons to advance social justice (the recovery of human creational dignity) that underlie de Mesa and Maggay's call for Filipino theology. Maggay’s notion of rooting the Gospel (or Christianity) in Philippine soil and de Mesa’s notion of theological re-rooting should be viewed, first and foremost, as responses to the fact of cultural uprooting brought about by the colonization of the land. Imbalance in societal and global power-relations are not simply matters of theological interests but of socio-theological locations for (Third World) theologians of culture as exemplified by de Mesa and Maggay. It is critical that one should keep this in mind.

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352 Dhyanchand Carr insists that ethnic consciousness and particularity have their place in the Christian vision of new humanity only if justice undergirds the quest for them.
353 Volf (1996) chides postliberal narrative theologians for missing the connection between power and the doing of theology. Interestingly, the period from 1970 up to the present (the period when de Mesa and Maggay penned their writings) has brought to the fore a corollary anthropological concept to culture which highlights indigenous
The fact the “(re-)rooting” arises as a (justifiable) reaction against “uprooting” suggests the continuing usefulness of the category of “re-rooting” for mission in the Philippine context. Indeed, in de Mesa’s collection of essays on theological re-rooting, the title that he chose for the book was In Solidarity with Culture. The interrelatedness of re-rooting and cultural solidarity is a missional commitment that we still seek to honor. Wholeness (ginhawa), in the sense of “the suturing of the ‘split self’ of Filipinos (Strobel), calls for it. But, precisely because ginhawa calls for more than cultural solidarity (it is only one of the manifestations of the reality of ginhawa), we will suggest that “re-rooting’ is inadequate as overall framework. Instead, we re-assert ‘transformation” or “conversion” as the pivotal missional concept for cultivating a Filipino theology. To maintain the coherent nature of the concept of “transformation,” however, “re-rooting” has always to be complemented by “re-routing.”

Weaknesses of “Re-rooting” as the Overarching Framework. In search of an integral framework, de Mesa combines inculturation, contextualization, and dialogue as elements of re-rooting. But the stress of the very term ‘re-rooting’ lies on the indigenizing impetus of the Gospel. Its weakness lies in one-sidedly representing this dimension of the Gospel. In the words of Andrew Walls: the indigenizing principle of the Gospel is the fact that God accepts us “as we are.” But equally rooted in the Gospel is a corollary principle, namely, the pilgrim principle: “Not only does God in Christ take people as they are: He takes them in order to transform them into what He wants them to be.”

claims to power and self-reliance: “ethnicity” (see Horowitz, also Dyrness, 1997: 88-93). Maggay uses ‘ethnicity’ often in her recent journal articles.

355 Ibid., p. 8.
Another weakness, related to the previous one, pertains to the movement that the term 're-rooting' conveys. 'Re-rooting' suggests a unidirectional movement, namely: from the messenger (or missionary) to the local people. Indeed, one finds it easy to exchange 'rooting' or 're-rooting' with 'planting' or 'transplanting.' At this outset, we do not wish to parallel the old missional connotations associated with '(re-)planting' with that of 're-rooting.' Rather, it is simply to indicate the implied unidirectional thrust of the concept. Apparently, this unidirectionality does not convey the dialogue and mutuality between culture and the Christian faith which de Mesa and Maggay wishes to honor in their theologies. 'Re-rooting' tends to convey the priority of the messenger, the missionary or theologian over the local people since he or she possesses the 'technical' know-how or expertise over the hearers themselves. Taking the discussion a step further, if re-rooting and re-planting are taken synonymously (as, indeed, there is a very thin difference between them etymologically), then the unidirectionality raises the question of indigenousness anew. To re-plant suggests foreignness as opposed to indigeneity. As we have seen, this is a theoretical dilemma which has revealed itself especially in Maggay's theology of indigenization. The tension is not absent in de Mesa's writings as well. The reduction of the Gospel in a soteriological formula betrays a Western theological bias -- a point which Maggay, and other theologians,\textsuperscript{356} are wary of. Viewed in the context of transplanting, de Mesa's norm of "an original experience" read into the historical Jesus becomes the new that is 're-planted' in the soil of the local culture.

\textit{Transformation: Cultural Solidarity and the Cultural Renewal.} We presented transformation as that missional framework which argues for redirection versus substitution in relation to the cultural inheritance. Christ through the church honors the genius of the local

culture yet He intends to renew the whole of culture on the way towards the fullness of the reign of God. This Christian stance recognizes the critical importance of both the ‘indigenizing’ and ‘pilgrim’ principles for mission, God’s mission being the discipleship of the ‘nations.’ At the very least, this stance is realized through the ‘translatability of the Christian faith’ in all the cultures of the world. The biblical warrant here is the Pentecost story (Acts 2) -- “the event that inaugurated the process of the discipling and conversion of the nations.” For, indeed, Pentecost was the sign that “the true Word of God continually seeks incarnation, embodiment, expression in the cultural forms given to us as part of our cultural or national identity.”

(1) The aspects of continuity, affirmation and solidarity with the local culture -- aspects that we find to be integral to the conversion of cultures -- we will associate functionally with the category of “re-rooting.” This perspective honors de Mesa and Maggay’s insistence that mission in Philippine culture demands a methodological stance of “cultural appreciation” as a response to the experience of cultural uprooting. In the Philippine context, the Gospel cannot be at home (as opposed to being foreign) in the local culture if one ignores this methodological stance of appreciation. But this act of social solidarity is grounded in a far deeper reality: Christ is “a stranger to no nation, culture or community.” Through God’s work of creation, Christ has already been there, at the origin of every culture. His abiding presence in every culture is the basis of God’s yes (and no) to every nation. This significance of Christ’s abiding presence is not unrelated to the imperative of Gospel (re-)rooting. For re-rooting may be seen as “the act of

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357 Bediako, 1997: 3.
358 Ibid.
359 Schreiter (1994) sympathizes with Third World Christian who struggle to link their faith with the task of cultural reconstruction due to the ravaging effects of colonization. It is in this vein that he talks of “identification with culture” as a missional imperative.
360 Bediako, 1997: 3.
sowing, deep within every culture the essential instrument [the Gospel] by which every culture will be opened, from within it, to the larger purposes of God for all the nations.”\textsuperscript{361}

In the vernacular,\textsuperscript{362} re-rooting could be rendered as \textit{pag-uugat} (literally, rooting into) which could mean being rooted in the local culture. Or, following Maggay’s lead, it could be seen as \textit{pagbabalik-loob} (journey back to one’s inner self) signifying an effort to reconnect with our (disfigured) history, as well as the adoption of the indigenous viewpoint as a means to ward off Western prejudice. Both the vernacular concepts (\textit{pag-uugat}, \textit{pagbabalik-loob}) could be valued as moral strategies for moving forward as a people. Moving forward has meant, in part, the act of looking back. Interestingly, this remark has rootedness in common wisdom as in this popular proverb: \textit{Ang di lumingon as pinanggalingan, ay di makakarating sa paroroongan}. (He who does not give due regard to his past cannot reach his destination.)

(2) The dimension of cultural criticism, judgment, and more positively, re-orientation is intended by the term “re-routing.” This element highlights Christian authenticity in the gracious (\textit{maganda}) power (\textit{makapangyarihan}) of the Gospel to renew cultures from within. This is to say, not simply that Christ judges cultures or that Christ is the source of new life (\textit{bagong buhay}). It is also to claim that Christ’s fullness means the creation of a “multi-ethnic New Humanity,”\textsuperscript{363} the presence of “the glory and honor of the nations” in the now, yet still coming New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22). In the vernacular, one could think of “rerouting” in terms of \textit{pagtutuwid} (the act of putting things right). Better yet, if re-rooting is about \textit{pagbabalik-loob}, re-routing could be

\textsuperscript{361} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{362} It is necessary to find equivalent terms in the vernacular to express the cultural rootedness and solidarity of the church. This is a presupposition to the remaining discussion. To preserve the transforming dynamic of the Gospel, however, the vernacular appropriation must be done with the conscious commitment to integrate these elements into a Christian view of reality shaped the gospel message. This is not a monological process. The whole process involves a dialogical interchange it and of itself.
\textsuperscript{363} The phrase comes from Andrew Walls, 1996: 27.
seen as *pagbabagong-loob* (literally, “changing one’s own heart or disposition,” or “changing for the better”). Both terms are revolve around the significant cultural value namely, *loob*, which one Filipino ethicist calls “the Filipino within.”\(^{364}\) One connotes a journey back (*pagbabalik loob*), the other a journey forward (*pagbabagong-loob*).\(^{365}\)

**Transformation as Bagong Buhay: The Renewal of All of Life.** In posing the experience of renewal as *pagbabagong-loob*, we are not asserting personal conversion as an end in itself. Indeed, we are interested in the transformation of culture, and even beyond culture, the renewal of the whole of creation.\(^{366}\)

(1) De Mesa suggests *ginhawa* (wholeness) as vernacular equivalent of biblical salvation. It has been criticized, however, as somewhat prejudicial against the atoning death of Christ. The emphasis of the model *ginhawa* “is more on the physical, emotional, and psychological needs of man.”\(^{367}\) “Sin and guilt and the atoning death of Christ” are hardly ever mentioned in de Mesa’s exegesis of the model.\(^{368}\) Maggay also advances the need to restate salvation in indigenous wholistic terms. She claims that Filipinos perceive reality in wholistic terms and theologians must take the cue from the local culture. We have seen, however, that she herself might be charged of propounding a certain dualism that may also be reductionistic. She restricts the meaning of salvation in terms of forgiveness of sins. The social dimension of the Gospel is not recognized as integral to the offer of salvation as reconciliation. Maggay distinguishes liberation which belongs

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\(^{364}\) The ethicist is moral theologian Dionisio Miranda. But de Mesa (1987: 43-74) is even an earlier pioneer in opening up the cultural theme of *loob* for theology. Albert Alejo appropriates the vernacular theme in a unique philosophical work.

\(^{365}\) I have explored at length the theme of conversion in lowland Filipino culture in a preliminary work, see Gener, 1996.

\(^{366}\) Nation-building and cultural reconstruction are part of the motivation of mission as inculturation. The *cosmic* significance of salvation tends to become an appendage to, rather than an integral aspect of, the work of theology as inculturation.

\(^{367}\) Tano, 1995: 363.

\(^{368}\) Ibid.
to the sphere of God’s “re-creating” power from the saving act of forgiveness done in the sphere of the human heart.

(2) Other prospects for a vernacular theology of salvation include kalayaan (literally, freedom, Jn 8:36; Gal.5:1), kasaganaan (abundant life, prosperity, John 10:10). We are drawn, however, to the cultural idiom of pagbabagong-buhay as a prospective translation of biblical salvation; a translation which, hopefully, will move the discussion forward. Two root words comprise the indigenous concept of pagbabagong-buhay: newness (bago) and life (buhay).

Pagbabagong-buhay has “change” as one of its root words. Instead of loob, however, it has the word buhay (life) — another comprehensive term for Filipinos, encompassing their aspiration for human well-being, or fullness of life. Thus, it is “a bringing to a new life,” “regeneration,” “turning over a new leaf.” Miranda suggests that with reference to conversion this latter term is more comprehensive than pagbabalik-loob and pagbabagong-loob. It could also mean a “revival”: a bringing to a new life (morally); “regeneration” or “rehabilitation; a restoring to former standing.”

(3) Pagbabagong-buhay is associated with repentance in Acts 11:18. The pattern of dying and rising to new life calls to mind the Christ-event (2:28-32). The kind of life that is promised is “eternal.” It is ζωή (zoe) not βίος (bios). The latter denotes mere physical existence. The former means life in its fullness. It is not just being able to breathe (huminga) but to experience wholeness (kaginhawahan). It is life in the kingdom of God. In Acts, this means that the

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369 See Gener, 1996 for an earlier formulation.
374 English, 1986.
375 de Mesa, 1987: 92.
fundamental issue in “entering the kingdom” is Christ’s lordship (9:24,35; 11:20,29). That is why it is linked with repentance. The reign of God could be restated in terms of “a restoration to a former standing,” which is one of the explicit cultural meanings of *pagbabagong-buhay*. The theological equivalent of this is God’s new creation, the recreation of a new humanity, which is the renewed image of God, and the reconciliation of all things in Jesus Christ. Transformation then is directly linked with cosmic renewal or reconciliation but its has in turning point in the human heart.

*Bagong-buhay* (new life, life under God’s reign) functions as the major criterion for genuine transformation. Framing it this way puts the lordship of Christ in the central place it deserves in Philippine culture. Justice and liberation figure as cardinal marks of God’s reign in Christ. The model *bagong-buhay* could affirm the existing cultural idiom as well as redirect cultural understandings of new life toward the biblical ideal for society and culture. It could thus become a catalyst for social transformation. For instance, Christian discernment would lead us to critique new life as *pagbabalik-loob* (reclaiming the core self) when it is pursued without reference to the reign of God in Christ. For this could be (mis)taken simply as an anthropocentric, self-help program -- whether for individuals or cultures. While we are not against self-recovery programs *per se*, following Christ does not mean just that. The healing and mending of the divisions among peoples and nations, even the whole creation is the goal of the Christian life.

Also, *pagbabagong-loob* (personal renewal) without the goal of new life in God’s reign could

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376 For an integral exposition of God’s work of reconciliation and recreation in the world, see Walsh and Middleton, 1984 and Wolters, 1985.

377 This may help avoid the dualism between creative-liberative elements and “forgiveness,” since forgiveness refers to the restoration of our relationship with God, and thus, the restoration of us, humans, to the role of privileged recipients of, and partners in, the outworking of, God’s shalom (salvation). I am indebted to Dr. George Vandervelde for this critical note.
simply become an exercise of glorying in one's religious experience. It is the reign of God that could best provide the religio-ethical direction for the Filipino quest for *pagpapakatao* (full humanity). \(^{378}\)

\[^{378}\text{For ethics as *pagpapakatao* (becoming more human), see Miranda, 1988, 1992.}\]
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