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This is to certify that the thesis entitled
CONTEXTUALIZATION AS AN APPROACH
TO FOLK-CATHOLICS IN COSTA RICA:
A FEW EXAMPLES OF HOW READING
THE CULTURAL RELIGIOSITY OF FOLK-CATHOLICS
CAN PROVIDE BETTER OPTIONS FOR EVANGELIZING THEM

presented by

Osias A. Segura-Guzman

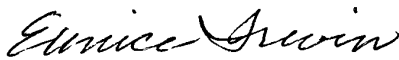
has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

MASTER OF DIVINITY degree at

Asbury Theological Seminary

Wilmore, Kentucky



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Associate Professor, E. Stanley Jones School of Missions and Evangelism

Date



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17 August 2000
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ASBURY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

CONTEXTUALIZATION AS AN APPROACH
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A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
MASTER OF DIVINITY DEGREE

BY

OSÍAS SEGURA-GUZMAN

WILMORE, KY

AUGUST 2000

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

For this thesis I had the honor to work under the supervision of two brilliant professors from two different schools at Asbury Theological Seminary. First, Dr. Eunice Irwin, associate professor of Contextual Theology from the E. Stanley Jones School of World Missions and Evangelism, and Dr. Joel Green, professor of Biblical Studies and Dean of the School of Theology.

I deeply want to thank Dr. Eunice Irwin for her help and continued motivation during the elaboration and final edition of this thesis. Her classes and openness to new ideas and new applications of theory made possible the main idea set forth here. Her acceptance to become my mentor for this work was honor enough, but her input and dedication during all readings of my drafts and charts of ideas were immeasurable.

I also want give appreciation to Dr. Joel Green as my reader for this work. I had not only the honor of his time for reading this thesis, but also his input and dedication in the improvement of the section of Critical Analysis (Biblical Studies) in Chapter 3.

Finally I would like to thank Desiree, my wife, colleague and partner in ministry.

CHAPTER 1

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TWO MAJOR RELIGIOUS CHRISTIAN WORLDS IN COSTA RICA

Introduction

I returned to my home country of Costa Rica (after three years of seminary) to teach a class on contextual ministry at the Methodist Seminary in August of 1999. I was teaching current Methodist pastors about four negative cultural influences I had noted that affect most Costa Rican pastors. As a cultural insider, I have been able to experience, and later reflect during my years of seminary training, what Costa Rican pastors confront in their everyday reality. For these reasons I had selected as class issues the themes of *machismo*, pastoral stress, pastoral relationships, and boundaries in ministry and at home. My purpose for approaching those topics was to teach the pastors that within their immediate context pastors can find themes¹ for theological reflection to which the Scripture can provide answers. We discovered together that Scripture and its interpretation provide wholistic and relevant answers to all human needs. The result of this class was a success, and today those pastors are making a difference in their local churches.

¹ Schreiter in his book Constructing Local Theologies (1996, 29-31) states that contextualization begins with an analysis of the culture, and from such analysis themes are outlined according to the priorities or immediate needs of the community. That is, those local themes are used as a way to find in the Scripture what is being said about current issues. In this way a theology is built that may respond to the needs of the context.

While teaching them how to do contextual theology, I realized that they did not have enough tools for doing cultural exegesis, the first step in contextualization² They needed cultural exegesis to analyze their folk-Catholic environment so that they could do biblical exegesis for their own context. Therefore, I decided to explore the cultural background of Costa Rica more fully in this subsequent work to attempt to provide some of those tools.

In Costa Rican religious culture, evangelicals and Roman Catholics, coming from two strong historical traditions of Christianity, represent two different worlds. These worlds have clashed often throughout history both politically and with regard to the meaning of Christianity. A further complication is that in the folk dimension of Spanish Roman Catholicism within Costa Rica has developed a unique practice of the Christian faith, expressed in rituals and local traditions. This thesis will begin by giving a historical description of both worlds and then follow with an explanation of the continuing misunderstanding between two segments of these worlds.

This thesis intends to achieve the following objectives:

- To demonstrate that by knowing the religious world of folk-Catholics in Costa Rica by means of phenomenological and cultural study, evangelism with folk-Catholics will be more successful.

² "In ideal circumstances the process of constructing local theologies [contextualization] begins with a study of the culture, rather than with possible translations of the larger church tradition into the local circumstance" (Schreiter 1996, 39).

- To demonstrate that by implementing Critical Contextualization³, evangelicals can not only evangelize folk-Catholics, but also stimulate theological thinking that will generate discipling events for Christians.
- To provide specific tools for evangelism with folk-Catholics that would be useful for evangelical churches in Costa Rica.
- To demonstrate that evangelicals can be fully Costa Rican and fully Christian through participating in folk-Catholic festivals and activities, employing alternative evangelistic and discipling events, without compromising their faith.

History of Two Christian Worlds in Costa Rica

Christianity was introduced through missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church when Christopher Columbus arrived on the Caribbean shore of Costa Rica in 1502, giving it its name, “Rich Coast” It took time for the Spanish conquistadors to conquer the Costa Rican Caribbean areas because of the hostility of the natives and the absence of mineral wealth. It was not until the 1560s that Juan Vásquez de Coronado established the city of Cartago (later named as the first capital city) and other settlements in the Central Valley, where most of the population still lives today. It is said that after the conquistadors conquered the bodies of the natives, the Catholic missionaries attempted to conquer their hearts and minds, but not exactly their souls.

The church provided the bank, the social welfare agency, and the center of education for natives and Europeans in Latin America. Clergy were the ideological force of the Spanish Crown. They learned the native languages, created dictionaries, studied indigenous societies, and even taught the natives how to write in their own languages.

³ See definition on page 24 in this thesis

The greatest growth of the Catholic faith among the natives came when the missionaries found points of similarity between practices or symbols in the indigenous culture and those in European Christianity. The natives, however, in their holistic understanding of life where society and religion are not separate entities, could not assimilate completely the Catholic Christian faith in its European version. Instead they created a new local interpretation now recognized as a syncretism of folk-Catholicism.

Costa Rica later was made a province of the kingdom of Guatemala, which at the same time belonged to the viceroyalty of Mexico, or New Spain. For many reasons, Costa Rica became an insolated, almost forgotten, province of Spanish interests due to its remoteness from Guatemala; its lack of mineral wealth; its unfriendly natives. Therefore, Costa Rica became a place where the sedentary European and native populations turned to subsistence farming on small land grants because they could not afford to import African slaves, as did other areas with more commercial, agricultural or mining potential. It was not until the late 1800s that the Spanish Crown tried to gain some extra wealth by placing an emphasis on commercial agriculture in Costa Rica, with tobacco as a major product of exportation.

Tobacco farming provided an opportunity for the development of a wealthy intellectual class who later became the rulers of what became an independent province from Spain after 1821. In 1838, Costa Rica gained its independence from the Federation Provinces of Central America, thus becoming a Republic. What greatly strengthened this separation and local identity was the growth of coffee as a product for exportation. It was

the quality of Costa Rican coffee that first brought non-Catholic Europeans into the country.⁴

By the end of the nineteenth century, Costa Rica had experienced a growth of Liberalism⁵ with its ideas of separation of church and state, democracy expressed in political parties, and a capitalistic economy (Poveda 1997, xiv). Since the wealthy class of Costa Rica was educated in Europe and therefore influenced by the late Enlightenment and Protestantism, the first presidents of the country turned toward use of the cultural and political ideas of Europe in their own country's development. It was in that period that the first European Protestants came to the country seeking to export coffee for the international market and thereby making their living.

The arrival of Protestants in a country that had been under Catholic influence for over 350 years was not taken lightly. During colonial times, control of the Spanish Crown over its territories was very strong. Initial contact with Protestants during that period came when groups visited Costa Rican shores to burn churches, kill priests, and steal everything they could. These first Protestants—pirates—obviously did not portray a very

⁴ Information in this section on the early history of the Republic was taken from "Costa Rica," by Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr. in Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

⁵ "Between the mid-seventeenth and the mid-nineteenth centuries, liberals fought chiefly against oppression, arbitrariness, and misuses of power and emphasized the needs of the free individual. About the middle of the nineteenth century many liberals developed a more positive program stressing the constructive social activity of the state and advocating state action in the interests of the individual.... Despite the metamorphosis in the philosophy of liberalism since the mid-nineteenth century, almost all modern liberals agree that their common objective is enlargement of the individual's opportunity to realize full potentialities." Peter Gay, *Liberalism* in Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

good or friendly religious image. Protestants of the nineteenth century had to live and develop their business and faith among the Costa Ricans against this backdrop.

The Protestant Church in Costa Rica

The Protestants who came to make their living among the Costa Ricans needed a space for worship. In 1865, the Church of the Good Shepherd was opened, and the record shows that 268 Protestants worshiped in this interdenominational setting. The Costa Ricans called this church *la Iglesia de Metal*, meaning “*the Iron Church*,” because its metallic structure was imported from England piece by piece. In 1896, this church affiliated itself with the Anglican Church and, in 1947, with the Episcopal Church in the United States. The purpose of this first church building was not to provide a base from which to evangelize Costa Ricans, but rather to create a worship place exclusively for the European Protestant wealthy class in the country (Piedra 1984, 12).

Later, other Protestant churches in Costa Rica were started, including the Baptist Jamaican Church (1888), followed by the British Methodists (1894), and the Anglicans (1896). All of these denominational churches were located in the Caribbean area of the country and arrived as part of the religious culture of the black population who built the second railroad in the country at the initiative of a United States businessman, Minor Keith, for the exportation of bananas. In 1899 his company became the United Fruit Company (Piedra 1984, 20).

The importance of these churches is that they brought about religious diversity, introducing division and competition among Costa Rican Christians. According to Wilton Nelson (1983, 63), the Archbishop of San José in the early years of the twentieth century is quoted as saying, “a very extended portion of the national territory has been divided

spiritually from the rest of the regions of the country.” In other words, the twentieth century began with a marked separation of Christianity in Costa Rica and a division of the singular religious world of Christianity into two distinctive traditions: the Catholic world and the Protestant world. Costa Ricans had known only the world of the Catholic Church for over three hundred years until the Protestants came into the country. These two religious worlds are very different even though they share common concepts (e.g. Christian myth, a supreme God, rituals and systems of purity as discussed in Chapter 2).

The Evangelical Church in Costa Rica

Further diversity developed within the Protestant religious world as time passed; thus, it is important to differentiate between the Protestant church and the evangelical church because sometimes both are used by outsiders as synonyms. In Costa Rica, however, the two have historical differences. The Protestant church was never concerned with evangelizing the Costa Rican people who were members of the Catholic Church. It originated only to provide a place for worship and means of grace to non-Catholic Europeans in the country. The evangelical churches were introduced through missionaries from the United States who intended from the start to evangelize the Costa Rican Catholic population. In 1890, the first United States mission agency began operating in Costa Rica. It was called the Central American Missions and was supported by Cyrus Ingerson Scofield and businessmen from the State of Texas.⁶

⁶ According to Bastian (1986, 44) Cyrus Scofield created this missionary organization in 1890 with the support from businessmen from Dallas, Texas. This mission focused on the imminent coming of Christ and the need for repentance. The Roman Catholic Church did as much as they could to pressure people not to rent space to them. However, in 1902 the first evangelical chapel opened in San José. Nelson (1984) adds that they did not show very good organizational skills in opening churches or keeping their missionary work going. By 1921 their last two missionaries left the country (Piedra 1984, 22).

The first evangelical mission church to create an impact on the country, however, was the Latin American Mission, led by Harry and Susan Strachan. This mission was broad in its ministries, opening a clinic (1929), an orphanage (1932), a Bible institute (1926), a publishing house that produced evangelical books (1945), and an organization for relief (1962). The mission built a church in downtown San José, the capital of Costa Rica at the beginning of their work, in 1929.

Other Protestant denominations from the United States also came into the country during this time. The Methodist church opened its mission work in Costa Rica by 1917. This was done after the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, which inspired the development of the first Latin American Protestant-Ecumenical Congress in Panama in 1916. As a result of this congress, different U.S. Evangelical denominations divided up the region of Latin America among themselves to carry on their evangelistic and missionary work. The Methodist church was selected for Costa Rica.

Pentecostal churches appeared in the country (the Assemblies of God in 1942 and the Church of God in 1950) and over time increased in size beyond all other evangelical churches⁷. The enormous growth of pentecostal churches accentuated even more the tension between the Catholics and evangelicals. To some degree, however, other historical and theological identities and nomenclature also are significant within the evangelical church. For example, in Costa Rica the Catholic Church classifies

⁷ “In 1956, 6.5% of the evangelical population was Pentecostal, while the traditional churches (Methodist, Episcopal, and Lutherans) were 36.6%... By 1978, the Pentecostal churches occupied the 44% of the population while the others only 12%. It is important to point out that in Latin America, Pentecostalism reached 80% of the evangelicals” (Campos 1986, 85).

evangelicals into two groups as “sects” which evangelicals call “pentecostal,” and “historical churches” (which evangelicals call “non-pentecostals”). On the other hand, evangelicals classify themselves in two groups—“pentecostals” and “non-pentecostals”

As a Costa Rican insider, I must clarify that within the evangelical camp we do find two conflictive religious worlds. However, that is not the issue for the purpose of this thesis. I am dealing only with the two more general religious worlds—the Catholic, and the evangelical. And more narrowly within these, my concern in this study is how the folk dimension of Catholicism and the non-pentecostal dimension of evangelicalism have been unable to relate to one another.

Baroque Sources of folk-Catholicism and Their Influence in Evangelism and Discipleship

Baroque culture was born in southern Europe with “the union of humanism and Catholicism ... which [produced] the dominant form of European culture in the first half of the seventeenth century and which maintained its influence in Austria and Germany and Spain and South America far into the eighteenth century” (Dawson 1952, 3). The baroque culture period not only affected art, architecture and music, but also impacted the religious life of the people. During this epoch, two forms of Christianity were in conflict in Europe. As these forms of Christianity developed, they were expressed ideologically through form and ritual, creating two distinct religious worldviews. As Anderson (2000) states, for the Catholic Church

religion determined many aspects of baroque art. The Roman Catholic Church was a highly influential patron, and its Counter Reformation, a movement to combat the spread of Protestantism, employed emotional, realistic, and dramatic art as a means of propagating the faith... Intense spirituality is often present in works of baroque art; in the Roman Catholic countries, for example, scenes of ecstasies, martyrdoms, or miraculous apparitions are common. Infinite space is

often suggested in baroque paintings or sculptures; throughout the Renaissance and into the baroque period, painters sought a grander sense of space and truer depiction of perspective in their works. Realism is another integral feature of baroque art; the figures in paintings are not types but individuals with their own personalities. Artists of this time were concerned with the inner workings of the mind and attempted to portray the passions of the soul on the faces they painted and sculpted.⁸

This is how the Roman Catholic Church began to disciple its people through images and rituals in Europe, and later in Latin America. For instance, a work by Rafael Briones-Gómez expresses how symbolic experience affects those who participate in Catholic religious rituals, where the use of images is essential.⁹ The same is seen in Baroque influence still today in Spain. Images

possess a major capacity to unchain [a] mechanism of projection in the people... It is that experience face to face between the person and the image where the interior world of the person comes up to the surface in presence of the image. Many people have told us that "it seems that the image is watching us," ... bringing a sense of communication between the image and the observer. This communication allows watchers to project themselves into the suffering of the image [e.g. Christ] and to connect that suffering with their own situations (Briones-Gómez 1993, 2 my translation).

For Briones-Gómez, the symbol helps the participant to identify him/herself with the image creating a spiritual experience. This spiritual experience sanctifies time and space, creating an inner impact on the participant, where the present time contributes to the recreation of the mythical past. This creates at the same time a sense of renewal and a future of hope. This has been the discipling approach typically used by Catholics whose

⁸ Baroque Art and Architecture, by Lawrence B. Anderson in *Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2000*. © 1993-1999 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

⁹ From Rafael Briones-Gómez in his article "The symbolic experience of the Holy Week. Function and Utility." See Works Cited for more details.

heritage is rooted in the baroque culture—discipling through experiences, stories, and rituals.

These inner experiences that baroque art has inspired, for evangelism or discipleship, along with the Mariology of Roman Catholic theology, have created Christological problems for evangelicals when evangelizing Roman Catholics in Latin America.¹⁰

John A. MacKay in his book The Other Spanish Christ presents interesting highlights of some Christological observations of Spanish Catholicism and its influence in Latin America.¹¹

[Christ] appears almost exclusively in two dramatic roles—the role of the infant in his mother’s arms, and the role of a suffering and bleeding victim. It is a picture of a Christ who was born and died, but who never lived.... A Christ known in life as an infant and in death as a corpse, over whose helpless childhood and tragic fate the Virgin Mother presides; a Christ who became man in the interests of eschatology, whose permanent reality resides in a magic wafer bestowing immortality; a Virgin Mother who by not tasting death, became the Queen of life.... He came as Lord of Death and of the life that is to be; she came as Sovereign Lady of the life that now is (1933, 110, 102). They are the Christ and that the Virgin who came to America.

¹⁰ For further readings on this matter, Samuel Escobar (1994), in his article “The search for a missiological Christology in Latin America” presents a rich contrast of different Christologies in missions between evangelicals and Roman Catholics in Latin America.

¹¹ At the same time is important to mention that this thesis disagrees with one of MacKay’s main hypotheses throughout his book about the cultural deterministic concept of an “Iberian race,” which for him is what makes Latin Americans the way they are and will be.

Christ became identified less and less with anything that was virile and progressive. He was the Lord of death. Full-blooded men with a passion for life and liberty found their religious inspiration in the figure of the Virgin who had never died.... Christ stands before us as the tragic Victim.... He is dead forever. He has become the incarnation of death itself (1933, 63, 96, 97).

Christ has lost prestige as a helper in the affairs of life. He lives in virtual banishment, while the Virgin and the saints are daily approached for life's necessities.... The Christ, however, who becomes lost to life by a process of dehumanization is later restored as a fetish. His image, His humanity and His name have all been converted into fetishistic realities. (112-113)

But however much overshadowed by His Mother, Christ too came to America. Journeying from Bethlehem and Calvary, He passed through Africa and Spain on His long westward journey to the pampas and cordilleras. And yet, was it really He Who came, or another religious figure with His name and some of His marks? Methinks the Christ, as He sojourned westward, went to prison in Spain, while another who took His name embarked with the Spanish crusaders for the New World, a Christ who was not born in Bethlehem but in North Africa. This Christ became naturalized in the Iberian colonies of America, while Mary's Son and Lord has been little else than a stranger and sojourner in these lands from Columbus' day to this. (95)

As we can see, symbols, stories, oral traditions, and rituals create experiences which may affect the spirituality of a religious person. Therefore, creating these types of spiritual experiences for Catholics, through an evangelical alternative, could be a very effective tool for evangelicals in the task of the discipleship and evangelism of Catholics in Costa Rica. MacKay mentions that "religion [meaning the Christianity of Spanish Catholics] has been presented to the understanding by means of crystallized definitions and formulas, and to the sentiments in the seductive guise of ceremonial" (1933, 105).

Evangelicals, however, have gone to the opposite extreme, making their discipleship very verbal, rational, sometimes academic, and abstract because of their Enlightenment influence. Evangelicals in Costa Rica have even rejected any type of Christian symbols and ceremonies because some of them look Catholic. This is a difficult bridge to cross for newborn Christians coming from a folk-Catholic faith (rooted in the baroque cultural tradition). These Christians have come from a faith which highlights tangible experiences and inner emotional reflections, into an evangelical faith that is very abstract and intellectually focused on the use of the Scripture. For this reason, and because of the long exposure to folk-religious practices as part of national culture, any Catholic who becomes evangelical must, it seems, even reject being Costa Rican.

Contemporary Sources of Folk-Catholicism

Today's Roman Catholic writers prefer the concept of "popular" rather than "folk" to describe religious practice beyond the church's direct influence. Popular for them seems to offer a sense of reconciliation with those native cultures that they once controlled by force, and now after Vatican II, the church may just want to approach in a friendly way. Bamat and Wiest editors of the book, Popular Catholicism in a World Church, define popular Catholicism as

the complex of beliefs and religious practices of self-identified Catholics who belong to the popular sectors of societies, though certain elements of such beliefs and practices may not appear to be particularly Catholic. [Their concept of "popular" is sociological. The poor and marginal people are defined as] ... those sectors of society who do not enjoy much wealth, status or power, those who are perceived as part of the "common people" in their own milieu (1999, 6).

In the same fashion, Segundo Galilea in his book The Challenge of Popular Religiosity also uses a sociological framework¹² for his meaning of popular Catholicism. According to Galilea, the way to help popular Catholics to become “real” Roman Catholics is to help them to come closer to the official church (1988, 53). One of his hypotheses is that Latin Americans are popular Catholics because of the lack of social sensitivity of the Catholic church to the poor and the lack of evangelism¹³ (1988, 11, 16).

In this thesis, the concept of popular Catholicism is not used because this work does not want to be part of this confusing conceptual problem. For instance, the work of Bamat and Wiest shows the limitations and weaknesses of this sociological concept of popular Catholicism. They present three types of popular Catholics—those close to the official church and its dogmatic teachings, those who practice popular magical religious rites but go to mass frequently and practice ancient Catholic rituals, and those who in their syncretism participate in new age movements and combine their faith with elements from traditional folk-religion (1999, 31-32). Therefore, in their opinion, it seems only the clergy are the ones who truly belong to the official church. Popular Catholicism seems to be presented as a contemporary social and economic problem and never a historical, theological, and pastoral problem that has always existed in the Catholic Church.¹⁴

¹² According to Galilea “around 80% of Latin-American Catholics belong to the so-called ‘popular Catholicism’ (1988, 10).”

¹³ He writes, “popular religiosity’ is the religious expression of our great majorities [the poor] whose faith has not been cultivated enough” (Galilea, 1988:16).

¹⁴ According the authors what challenges the Roman Catholic Church today is the problem of globalization and its capitalistic values and the religious diversity that promotes secularization.

Bamat and Wiest then are implying that rich or middle class people who participate in Catholic spiritual activities are not “pure Catholics” simply because of their socioeconomic status. But this thesis contends that what characterizes Catholics in Costa Rica goes beyond their socioeconomic class and is rooted in their belief system as a religious world. Therefore this thesis prefers to use the term of folk-religion¹⁵ and define it as “the presence of traditional beliefs and practices within the context of a world religion” (Burnett 1988, 215). That is, in this case, it is proposed that folk-Catholicism consists of a mixture of doctrines from the official Catholic Church and other traditional beliefs (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999, 76-77). By traditional beliefs, this thesis means the Baroque Spanish Catholicism which was mixed with animistic pre-Columbian (aborigens) forms, as well as contemporary beliefs like new age forms. This phenomenon can be illustrated in the following figures,¹⁶ which show how folk-Catholicism has been shaped:

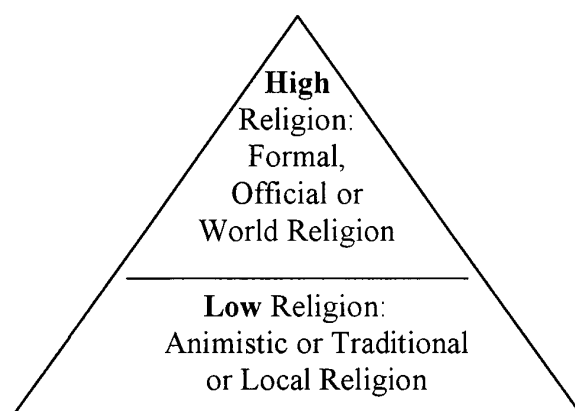


Figure 1: High and Low Religion

¹⁵ Folk comes from the Germanic adjective “volk” which means “of the people.” “In a cultural sense, ‘folk’ has a body of wisdom in tales, proverbs, and lore, which has been preserved and transmitted orally from generation to generation” (Noh, 1998:36).

¹⁶ Presented in Eunice Irwin’s class MW-725; originally taken from Robert Redfield’s work, and further developed by Harold Turner and later by Norman Allison, illustrating religious and theological domain of folk-religions.

Figure 1 helps us to understand that every tradition has two areas of concern. On the one hand, high religion is related to the official institutionalized church which provides cosmic questions and answers such as the origin of life and its meaning. On the other hand, low religion is related to an informal, unofficial, and uncontrolled religion which provides answers to problems of human existence at the level of everyday life, through local traditions. As this thesis has already explained, Spanish Catholicism and later baroque Roman Catholicism encountered and influenced the shape of native animistic faith in Costa Rica (high religion's influence upon low religion). However, at the same time there were always syncretistic practices by Spanish, *mestizos* (those of Spanish and native mix), and native Costa Ricans (low religion's interpretation of high religion). This mixture is what is called folk-Catholicism and can be seen in Figure 2 in its relationship with the official Roman Catholic Church.

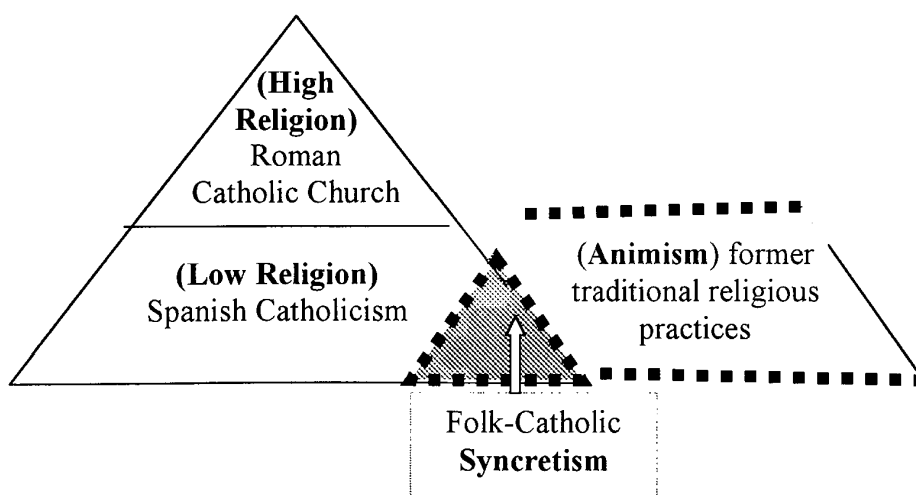


Figure 2: Areas of folk-Catholicism in Costa Rica

In this second figure it can be noted that there is no high animistic organized religion in Costa Rica anymore (see area of dotted line marking absence of institutional control in traditional religion). The Christianization method's of the Spanish colonizers effectively removed all traces of publicly-sanctioned indigenous religious practices.

Statement of the Thesis

This thesis intends to discover new opportunities for evangelicals to do faithfully Christian and culturally sensitive evangelism leading to the development of relevant theology for discipling Costa Ricans by contextualization done through the study of the cultural background and spiritual practices of folk-Catholics. To accomplish this, three specific religious practices will be examined. Doing this will help evangelical leaders appreciate the meaning of those practices and use them as opportunities for Christian witness. These cases include a national pilgrimage called *la Romería*, a local festival (*el baile de la Yegüita*), and a national oral tradition of prayer that occurs outside the church in homes and involves only the laity—(*los Rezos del Niño*).

Some general reasons why these cases fit the folk-religious profile are the following:

- They are done partially beyond control of the official Catholic Church.
- They deal with issues of low religion, answering questions of daily life.
- They use no official religious leaders for their organization or direction.
- They are performed through oral tradition, and not recorded as official liturgical tradition.

La Romería is done on the 2nd of August when many pilgrims, known as *romeros*, walk several miles in order to visit a statue of the Virgin who may grant them a miracle.

The purpose of this pilgrimage to the city of Cartago is to visit the Virgin Mary (the Virgin of the Angels, patron Saint of Costa Rica). The folk-Catholic pilgrimage is done as an expression of their spirituality, showing sacrifice, repentance, thanksgiving, and supplication. The hope is to obtain a miracle of healing or revelation.

This practice was selected because the pilgrimage marks a yearly national and spiritual event of the Costa Rican culture—the country’s biggest public expression of the Catholic faith. Since this is a Catholic practice where nearly two million Costa Ricans participate in one way or another, seeking the presence of the Virgin of the Angels for miracles and thanksgiving, this is an excellent case to be examined. This historic ritual is an annual spiritual renewal and recommitment to the Catholic faith. By contrast, where do evangelicals go for a spiritual pilgrimage while this event is taking place? Can they express faith and commitment and renew themselves on their spiritual journey in a culturally meaningful, tangible way?

El baile de la Yegüita en Nicoya is a folk Catholic festival celebrated in the northwest area of the country where, during early colonial times, the Virgin Mary granted a miracle of peace and reconciliation. She sent a *Yegüita*, “a young mule,” to separate two local men who were fighting to kill each other. This is a living legend among the people because they believe that even today they may receive a miracle by participating in rituals associated with the story. Analysis of the festival shows how this legend is used as a discipling event among Catholics in this area of the country. The importance of local, indigenous expressions of spirituality fitting into time and place occur here.

This festival was selected because it is one of the oldest and most famous folk festivals in the country. The majority of the folk-Catholic festivals are observed

nationwide; however, the one in Nicoya is done only at this locale—a semi-rural town of 25,000 thousand people who claim to have experienced the presence of the Patroness of Costa Rica, the Virgin of the Angels.

This is a perfect case for local churches to study in order to build a local contextual theology for response in their own community. During this celebration, people are open for miracles to happen. Can the evangelical church provide for one of those miracles to happen?

Los Rezos del Niño (translated “prayers to God the child”) is celebrated in homes all around the country. Every January during the church season known as Epiphany this folk ritual is practiced without the help or direction of the official church. This practice was selected because it shows the maximum freedom of the laity, since it happens outside of the Catholic church without the leadership of the clergy. It is one of the only remaining practices of oral tradition left in Costa Rica. As an oral tradition, it may be the oldest folk-Catholic practice in the country that has not experienced much change through the centuries; therefore, studying it becomes of great interest to locate the indigenous religious meanings and forms. According to the few academic sources found in Costa Rica, it is almost scandalous that not much written academic work has been published on this folk practice.

The *Rezos del Niño* is a discipleship opportunity for Catholics. The celebration brings together the community in prayer to the Virgin Mary, showing neighborhood hospitality and common faith. Would this not be a good opportunity also for evangelicals to practice their spirituality outside their churches? Can there be an indigenous evangelical alternative that can be effectively evangelistic in nature?

I will suggest ways to respond to the challenges of folk-Catholicism seen in the three cases by offering suggestions for alternative practices. My efforts will employ the study of the Scriptures and use Costa Rican cultural and spiritual practices. Critical contextualization and cross-cultural evangelism will help provide some answers here. These suggestions will provide only examples and be a beginning point from which local evangelical leaders can then develop their own alternatives.

Importance of This Study to the Costa Rican Evangelical Church

The first evangelical missionaries who brought the gospel to Costa Rica not only imported their theological interpretations, liturgy, and spiritual practices of piety but also the inheritance of conflicts between denominations and the war against the Catholic Church. This tension became even worse when these missionaries began preaching a form of spirituality that explicitly required cultural alienation among their followers. That is, in order to become an evangelical Christian, one must separate oneself from any cultural participation that can be considered as Catholic or non-Christian. This became even more extreme when Costa Rican cultural practices centered on Catholic rituals, and festivals were rejected by evangelicals.

Therefore, it is unlikely today that one can be fully Costa Rican and an evangelical Christian at the same time. That is, an evangelical Christian loses almost all patriotic, ethnic, cultural, and even social participation at the time of conversion. Why? Probably one reason is that the concern of missionaries has been to reproduce their own imported spirituality among Costa Ricans, rather than to find ways to make Christianity encounter the indigenous ways of Costa Rican culture.

Even more, as we have seen, the relationship between the Catholic Church and the evangelical churches in Costa Rica has not been very peaceful. In the Costa Rican Constitution, the Catholic Church is recognized as the only Church and, politically speaking, it has great power and influence in governmental institutions. Evangelical churches, on the other hand, are legally recognized only as associations, not as churches. This legal, political, and social disadvantage makes the conflict even greater. In Costa Rica, ninety percent of the population claim Catholicism as their religion. Despite the evangelical presence in Costa Rica for the last one hundred years, the evangelical church appears very foreign to the Costa Ricans (Campos 1987, ?).

Therefore, this thesis contends that because of the imported assumptions regarding religion and methods of evangelism, western evangelical missions have not been able to help evangelical churches to become fully Costa Rican. It could be said that evangelical church growth is in a stalemate in Costa Rica, probably because it sounds and looks foreign to Costa Rican culture! How can Costa Rican evangelical leaders “read” their own culture and to read the Scripture in order to satisfy the needs of their own people to be Costa Rican? This thesis is not implying that Costa Rican leaders have problems reading the eternal Gospel contained in the Scriptures, but they have failed in finding its local relevance and application to their cultural context. Their main problem is that they have to find new or better ways to read their cultural and religious context. The method of critical contextualization can be a very helpful tool with this problem. A phenomenological approach for studying the cultural and spiritual traditions of folk-Catholics can provide a way to understand the Costa Rican religious culture, not by

judging or condemning, but by appreciating it, allowing the development of alternatives so the evangelical churches can evangelize and disciple folk-Catholics.

From my own knowledge and experience and from other personal sources I have contacted in Costa Rica, nobody has done a study on this topic, using an approach with the intention of developing contextual responses to folk-Catholic practices. This thesis may be a first step to motivate evangelical leaders to appreciate their culture, to be fully Costa Rican, and to meet the specific needs of their context.

CHAPTER 2

PHENOMENOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

Schillebeeckx in the foreword of Schreiter's book Constructing Local Theologies, raises a very good question, "How can this selfsame Gospel, which is given only in a societal and cultural context (even in the New Testament, for that matter) and can never be wholly extricated from any culture, be allowed to speak the language of an entirely different culture?" (1996, ix). It is time for the Costa Rican evangelical church to develop a contextualization that may respond with the gospel of Jesus Christ to the immediate needs of its own context. However, what is the contextualization of theology all about?

Based on a wide variety of sources during my studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, I have come to define contextualization as how the local church brings the Scripture into dialogue with its own cultural context. Therefore, the local church will exegete the culture and the Scripture with the purpose of presenting biblical and theological language in terms, symbols, and other ways that will be understood in the frame of reference or worldview of the culture. In this dynamic dialogue, the local church as a hermeneutic community brings the culture to challenge their biblical reflections, while they provide Scriptural answers to the culture. This work of putting the Scripture's message in the language, terms, and worldview of any cultural context is contextualization.

According to Whiteman, contextualization attempts:

- to communicate the Gospel in word and deed and to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldview, thus allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture. (1997, 2)
- to develop contextualized expressions of the Gospel so that the Gospel itself will be understood in ways the universal church has neither experienced nor understood before, thus expanding our understanding of the kingdom of God. (1997, 4)

Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999, 22) propose the four step concept of Critical Contextualization, which will be adapted for this thesis to a three-step process including (1) phenomenological understanding, with (a) phenomenological description and (b) phenomenological analysis; (2) critical work, with (a) ontological critique and (b) critical analysis, and (3) missiological response. This process is presented in the following figure:

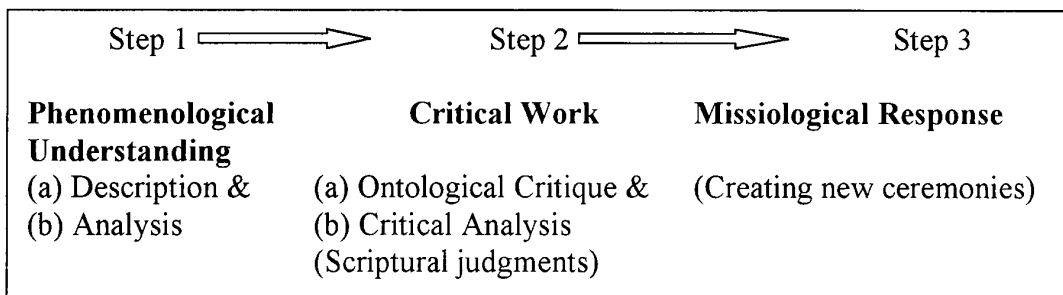


Figure 3: Steps for doing Critical Contextualization

This thesis will apply the concept of critical contextualization. The method begins with a phenomenological understanding, which is done through description and analysis of Costa Rican folk-Catholic religiosity. This understanding will help the evangelical church to describe and analyze, without premature judgments, the spiritual practices and experiences of folk-Catholics, according to a folk-Catholic worldview. Phenomenology

of religion provides the best way to understand a religious world, since it provides objective descriptive criteria for use in comparison. This step is done in the remaining pages of this chapter.

After understanding folk-Catholic practices and experiences, comes the second step—critical work. This will help the evangelical church (a) to do ontological critique to find the main principle behind every legend/myth/practice in order that (b) there can be critical evaluation to create judgments according to the Scripture about that main principle, which provides God’s view of reality. That is, in Step 2 of critical work both the Scripture and the local culture are brought into dialogue. This process also will help evangelicals to evaluate and respond to their own existing beliefs and practices in the light of the new Scriptural understanding of folk-Catholics. Thus, critical work not only helps evangelicals to respond to folk-Catholic’s needs, but also may help in getting to know themselves even better. This will be demonstrated in Chapter 3.

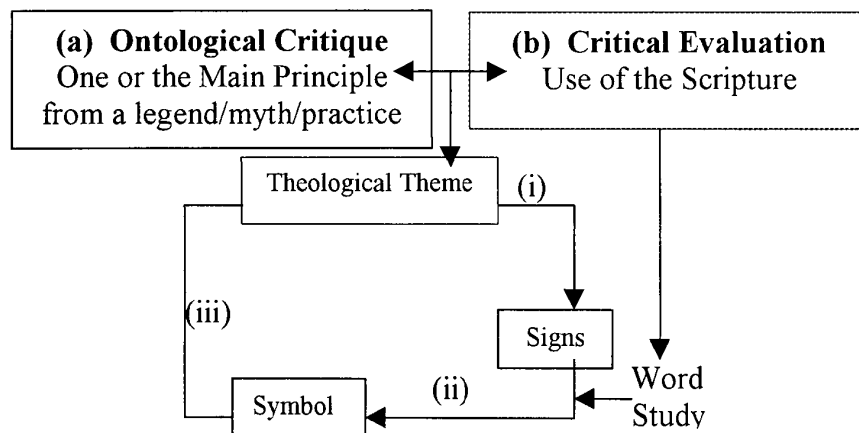


Figure 4: Critical Work Contextualizing through finding a Theological Theme, Signs and a Symbol (step 2).

The final step (Step 3), comes after understanding (Step 1) and judging (Step 2) folk-Catholic beliefs. This step of missiological response includes the evangelical church creating transformative ministries in order to guide folk-Catholics from where they are to where God intends for them to be. This response implies a creation of new ceremonies and symbols in order to evangelize folk-Catholics. This will be done in Chapter 4.

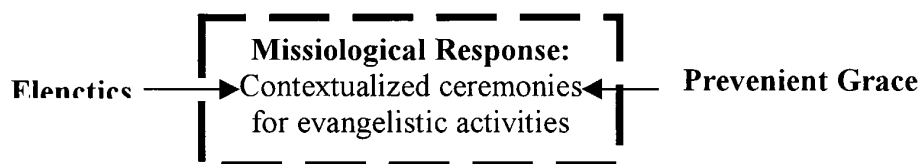


Figure 5: Missiological Response

The evangelical church has approached folk-Catholics with the Gospel, but evangelicals have not been able to interact with the culture through the process of describing and analyzing the folk-Catholic religious world. This evangelical approach to folk-Catholicism has perpetuated the conflict that already exists between them. Therefore, critical contextualization can become a good practical strategy for the evangelical church in evangelizing folk-Catholics.

Therefore, the dynamic interaction between the cultural context and the Gospel will produce a contextualization able to communicate the Gospel to Costa Rican folk-Catholics in their specific historical situations. The purpose of using contextualization is to engage not only individuals but also their worldview, so evangelicals may have a holistic and meaningful impact in the transformation of the Costa Rican culture. During this process of contextualization, theology not only is affected by culture, but it also

begins to affect culture in order to provoke transformation. This transformation is the building of the Kingdom of God on earth in a specific cultural setting.

Step 1: Cultural Exegesis Through the Use of Phenomenology

The purpose of using phenomenology¹⁷ is to do cultural exegesis in order to understand Costa Rican folk-Catholics and then communicate the gospel of Christ. Phenomenology of religion will be helpful in this study to (a) *describe* the religious world, and (b) *analyze* the spiritual or religious beliefs of folk-Catholics. Three case studies taken from the Costa Rican cultural context will be considered as examples where the evangelical church wants to contextualize the Gospel.

¹⁷ Twiss and Conser (1993, 3) explain more in-depth that “phenomenology must limit itself to descriptions and analyses of experience, inquiries that are open to further revision and improvements” These authors mention Husserl’s procedure for examining the nature of human experience in four major phases:

-Bracketing common sense beliefs. This phase includes suspending all of one’s beliefs or judgments about the existence, value, or truth of the phenomena encountered in experience.

-Focusing reflectively on the phenomena of experience. In my own interpretation this implies an intellectual act of reflection about the observations made by the observant in the act of understanding the cultural context. This phase is necessary because nobody can describe a phenomenon without a cultural frame of reference. Here the importance of being critical of oneself is emphasized. As much as is possible, the object is described in the words of the host culture.

-Analyzing the traits of these phenomena and their implications. Phenomenology [is] concerned with the essence and not simply the incidental aspects of experience ... [analyzing] the basic traits and types of objects, to figure out the implications and possible interconnections of the experiences under review (:4).” Therefore, in order to trace the implications and interconnections of the phenomenon being studied, it must be observed from the perspective of system of systems.

-Reporting the results to others for further confirmation or disconfirmation. That is, the findings are presented to the public so that those findings may be subjected to verification and criticism.

The goal of any phenomenological description and analysis is first to appreciate every religious expression as a real experience, suspending any judgement of truth or falsity. In this view, phenomenology of religion requires suspending one's judging attitudes in order to reach the understanding of another religious human experience. The idea is to accept any spiritual interpretation that the host culture may give and understand it as sacred, and then in their own words, interpret their experience in their context.

Second, the phenomenological process of analysis of folk-Catholic beliefs based on what Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999, 45-72) call "an analytical model of belief systems" presents an alternative Christian approach to the traditional ways of dealing with folk-religious practices on the mission field. According to these writers, the beliefs of the people must be studied before our judgment is made "because it is on the basis of these [beliefs] that they act" (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999, 21).

Let us begin this phenomenological process explaining the importance of describing religious worlds. This descriptive way of comparing worlds, suspending one's judgment values, and being critical of one's biases is a very important approach and attitude for the evangelicals to hold in order find common ground and create new opportunities to evangelize folk-Catholics.

Step 1 (a) Phenomenological Description of Religious Worlds

William Paden (1988) presents four categories that can be helpful to evangelicals in the work of describing the religious world of folk-Catholics in Costa Rica. Paden compares and differentiates religious worlds through the religious dimensions of Myth; Ritual and Time; Gods; and Systems of Purity. To put these categories in context, Paden's view on phenomenology and religious worlds are presented followed by a

discussion of his categories, which can be helpful for this thesis's methodological approach to cultural exegesis.

Paden proposes a new approach to the study of religions: a type of methodological light that can change one's attitude towards other religions. He calls this "comparative perspective"¹⁸ He clarifies that comparison is not simply juxtaposing "one religion with another, but is the process of understanding any continuities and differences in the history of all types of religious phenomena ... the knowledge of the whole in relation to the part" (Paden 1988, 3).

Using Paden's categories will provide a way of comparing the two religious worlds of folk-Catholics and evangelicals in Costa Rica. For instance, the conflict between religious worlds is evident when comparing the different perspectives on how spirituality should be practiced, experienced and lived. In the next chapter, the historical differences of these two worlds will be discussed; however, along with Paden's comparative categories, an understanding of worldview and how it contributes to the existence of these two religious worlds must be established.

¹⁸ In this thesis, for instance the practices or beliefs of folk-Catholics (a concept that will be discussed in the next chapter) and evangelicals cannot simply be compared, as in two columns side by side. Rather, Paden suggests comparing, for example, the religious phenomena of prayer, with the intent of describing how prayer is practiced, experienced, and expressed in the life of both Costa Rican Christian spiritual worlds (folk-Catholics and evangelicals) through a synchronic as well as in a diachronic analysis; from both a deductive and inductive way. "Every religious expression has its own unique context of meaning, its own distinctive configuration that is different in some way from others" (Paden 1988, 3). Therefore, in order to capture that specific significance of what prayer is and means for folk-Catholics in their specific context, purpose, and practice, prayer must be explored through the categories of practice and experience (described later) which will help them in the comparison with the evangelical practice of prayer.

Worldview

Worldview can be defined in many ways. According to Whiteman (1983, 478) it is “the central set of concepts and presuppositions that provide people with their basic assumptions about reality”. Burnett (1990, 13) states that it is “a shared of framework of ideas held by a particular society concerning how they perceive the world” Bradshaw (1993, 24) mentions that “ worldviews are like maps: they provide us with maps with a theme for organizing our perceptions of the world” Based on this, worldviews are not simply personal opinions of how things are, should be, or must be. However, worldviews are social and cultural maps that are acquired, learned and reproduced in any culture, and they help in understanding how things are, should be, and must be, and how they relate to each other. Behavior and beliefs of peoples may be easily changed, but worldview goes much deeper.

Finally, Hiebert (1999, 375-376) states that worldview is an intertwined net of beliefs (cognitive), feelings (affective), and values (evaluative) of assumptions that people make about reality. Hiebert’s concept of worldview can be seen as follows:

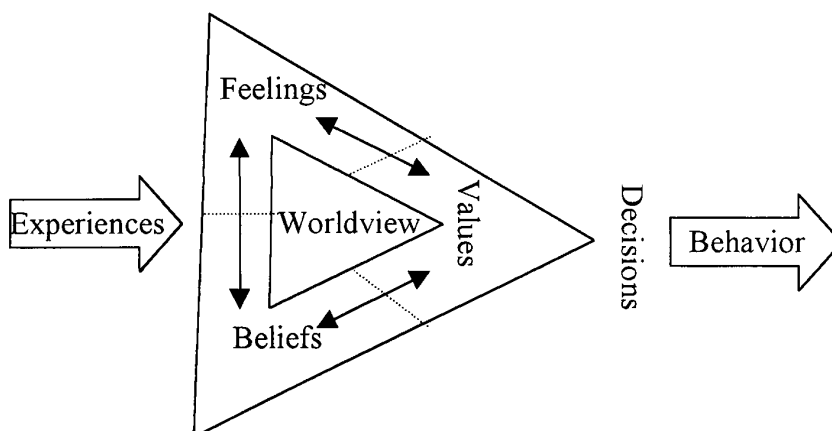


Figure 6: How do worldviews work?
Figure adapted from Hiebert (1999:376)

For instance, in order to affect the worldview of folk-Catholics, evangelicals must take into consideration how to carefully challenge their beliefs, feelings, and values about reality. Evangelicals must provide a careful bridge of symbols and ceremonies that can make sense in the religious world of folk-Catholics, so that the Gospel can become culturally meaningful for them.

The following figures illustrate the contrast between the two religious worlds under study in Costa Rica.¹⁹

Level	Focus	Questions Concerning...?
High/ Orthodox Religion	Truth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ultimate origins and destiny • Meaning and purpose in life
Low/ Folk-Religion	Power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well being: diseases, famine, drought • Guidance: Fear, uncertainty of the future • Success: Failure • Peace: dealing with the Spirit world and spirit possessions.
Science	Control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Control over nature by technology • Hostile world and difficulties • Social harmony: social conflict, wars, rivalries, feuds.

Figure 7: The Relationship of High Religion, Folk-Religion and Science
[Figure taken from Bradshaw (1993, 13)]

Figure 7 is a further refinement of the prior discussion on issues in high religion and low religion. It presents domains where folk-Catholics normally might ask questions and would find answers to explain and confront daily issues such as struggles of

¹⁹ Both figures 7 and 8 have their origin in Hiebert's theoretical work but have been expanded by missiologist Bruce Bradshaw.

misfortune, sickness, death, or any other existential problem, in contrast to ultimate meaning and the solutions that either science or high religion could provide.

Figure 8 presents the Western dualistic worldview that separates reality into two domains: the physical and the spiritual.

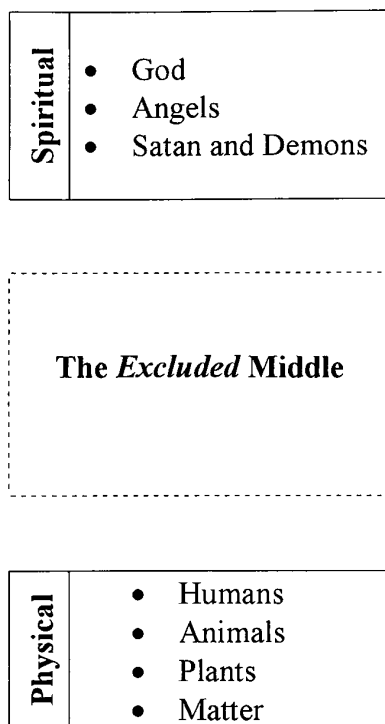


Figure 8: Western Worldview [figure taken from Bradshaw (1993, 25)]

In this view, the spiritual domain cannot be empirically measured or seen; therefore, some may not even believe that it does exist. The other domain is the material where science divides reality, and the spiritual realm has no control or access in that area. This Western worldview provides a classic struggle for many evangelical churches in Costa Rica because of the excluded middle.

“Middle level questions” such as “why am I sick?” or “how can I know the future?” are those that folk-religious people raise that originate from an “excluded

middle” level of reality. A synonymous concept is “split level” Christianity that deals with issues of power, creating dual allegiance and syncretism. The idea here is that Christian missionaries from a Western worldview confront this problem when trying to disciple non-Christian cultures whose questions cannot be answered because of the Enlightenment influence in the missionaries that separates the spiritual world from the material world. These traditional cultures in their non-dualistic worldview raised basic existential everyday questions, like misfortune, life or death, blessings for more crops, etc. Zahniser (1997, 53) presents a solution to this problem saying, “the task of cross-cultural discipling is to permit an integrated rather than an excluded middle. For this task a second level of engagement seems necessary-- a level on which the means by which traditional religious cultures deal with issues is taken seriously” Evangelicals, disciplined by Western missionaries, who did not emphasize very clearly how to relate to folk-religions, did not learn issues or approaches to use in dealing with folk practices that occur in the middle area.

Figure 9 illustrates the worldview of the folk-religions presenting the excluded middle zone absent in the Western worldview.

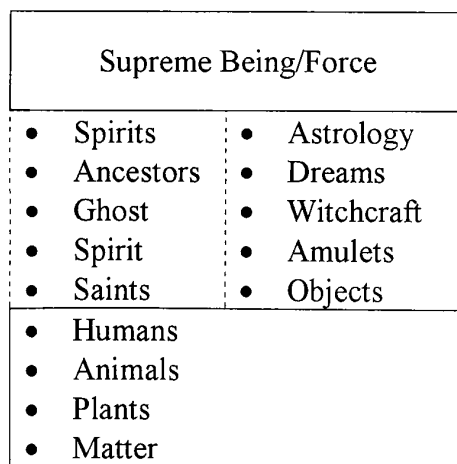


Figure 9: Folk-Religion Worldview [figure taken from Bradshaw (1993, 25)]

In this excluded middle zone, folk-Catholics “organize the world around relationships of power between physical and spiritual forces” (Bradshaw 1993, 25).

Four Categories to Describe the Religious World of Folk-Catholics

Paden views religious systems more as “worlds” than as “beliefs.” Perhaps this is one of the reasons why evangelicals and Catholics are constantly in conflict in Costa Rica. They often fight against one another’s beliefs apologetically, while not appreciating each other as different worlds “embodied in the languages of myth, ritual, and other expressive forms” (Paden 1988, vii).

Myth

Paden (1988, 69) mentions that religious language is based on myths, or sacred written or oral stories that are “authoritative accounts of great foundational forces that generate and govern the world.... Models by which one lives” That is, mythic language is normative. That is why religions are grounded in mythic language because myth shapes our worldview, “organizing and presenting reality in a way that makes humans not just conceivers but respondents and partakers” with the divine (Paden 1988, 74). For instance, the Christian myth of creation from Genesis shapes and explains from where we came (past), why and what we are doing here (present), and where we are going (future).

The author, in his phenomenological approach to understanding other worlds, presents “myth [as] an alternative to beliefs (Paden 1988, 73).” This contrast is based on the argument that “beliefs” explain things in a narrow way, “emphasizing just human ideas” about the divine, such as the above doctrinal explanation of the creation (Paden 1988, 74). Classical examples of these explanations are theological creeds and doctrines,

which explain the “why” of myth. For instance, behind every religious festival there is a sacred story of a divine manifestation. People recreate and retell the story hoping that such manifestation may happen again; thus, the myth/festival celebration makes time and place sacred.

The power to believe in mythic language²⁰ is based on human will, that “sacred attitude toward mythic words that makes them myth” (Paden 1988, 79). An example of this would be sacred words or prayers, where humans repeat a passage from the Scripture that represents God’s spoken words or spoken words to God by someone else in the past with the attitude that those sacred words may shape behavior as it did with others in the past. Costa Rican folk-Catholics have a practice during the Epiphany where they repeat prayers (*Rezos*) in order to bring blessings to their homes. Those prayers in a ceremony are a recreation of the birth of Christ (myth) in which Mary, as their intercessor, will provide to them those blessings.

Mythic words used in religious ceremonies remind people of the recurring themes of where and to whom they belong, who they are, and from where they come. They shape the mood towards the future, bringing humans closer to the divine. The power of mythic words is that they are sacred because they were originated by or directed to the divine, which makes simple human words powerless and meaningless for sacred purposes.

²⁰ Myths, for instance, employ language to describe the divine in relation with humans and the rest of the creation, from the origin of everything, the present time, and the future to come that will end everything that once was created. A classic example of this is how the Christian Bible begins with God the Creator forming the world from nothing (Genesis), and ends with God judging and ending the world, taking the faithful humans to another world of eternal peace and joy (Revelation).

In summary, all religions explain the origin of almost everything—the present and the future—through myths. Myths become a transcultural category, “a central common denominator among religious systems” (Paden 1988, 91). Myth reveals values, explains the divine itself, and, in relation with humanity, how time and space are organized. Myth also helps to interpret rituals because they recreate the myth and objects in its own language. “Although myth has a similar function across religions, its content and style is different in each...” (Paden 1988, 92). For instance, a common myth in folk-Catholicism is the apparition of Mary (hierophanies) providing healing, miracles, designating a place for worship, and providing specific revelation. However, how does the Virgin meet the specific needs of Costa Ricans? How is the evangelicals’ story told to meet their needs?

Gods

Gods are aspects of myth, the reason for rituals, and the marker of boundaries in systems of purity. In this thesis, this category is used as a “descriptive approach that examines how any god represents a way of structuring existence and hence amplifies our thematic understanding of religious beings and objects” (Paden 1988, 121). For this study, this category includes God, Mary, saints, spirits, ghosts, and demons. The concept “gods” implies “any superior being that humans religiously engage, any being visible or invisible, inhabiting past, present, or future” (Paden 1988, 122). Gods have a specific location (Paden: 125-131), The Virgin of the Angels is the patron saint of Costa Rica, while some towns have their own specific Virgins. Another example is how Costa Rican towns carry the name of saints, and each town has its own festival in a specific week of the year to engage the sacred. Therefore, people have their own gods, and gods have their own people, sacred places and times, as well as words, objects, and even writings.

Humans interact with their gods through spiritual practices that occur in sacred places and time (e.g. festivals). “Gods, whatever they may or may not be ultimately, present themselves to human experience as ‘other’ and as primordially given. Even from the point of view of invention, gods and their worlds would surely be among the astonishing creations and creative acts of our human species unavoidable subject matter for any student of how humans choose to live” (Paden 1988, 140). For this reason, it is important to investigate how Costa Rican folk-Catholics understand and relate to their “gods.”

Ritual

Paden (1988, 95) interprets ritual as a “sacred action and time deliberately created.” Ritual is that human activity which structures action and time with the purpose of focusing on the sacred. In rituals we dramatize or recreate the myth. “As myth expresses the world foundation in terms of words and image, ritual dramatizes world foundations in terms of performance” (Paden 1988, 93).

The structure of ritual can be divided into two faces of the same coin called framing and displaying. The idea of framing is linked to the understanding that to enter “into the sacred time requires a state of readiness” (Paden 1988, 97). This readiness is understood by focusing or framing, which is preparation, or observance. A good general example of this is the preparation or observance of festival through a display of symbols, images and food, that is, a “tangible form of expression.... [Because] ritual is essentially a form of display (Paden 1988, 98).” Display includes those objects (ornaments) and actions, like kneeling, chanting, sharing, eating, abstaining from food, etc., which show submission and the celebration of purification.

Therefore, for those who participate in rituals, “ritual is authoritative ... and is instrumental in creating new forms of life and relationship” (Paden 1988, 100). That is, within a ritual, the myth of the community (calendrical times) is recreated and celebrated within that communal myth, and an individual may also recreate his/her own story, as in the case of personal crisis (crisis ritual). The most prominent crisis rituals in the life cycle of the individual are the rites of passage²¹ Other kinds of crisis rituals are for illness, spiritual impurity, death, or natural disasters. In these cases, human life has to be restored to make sense again. That is where prayer, sacrifices, and offerings take place in order to restore the imbalance that the crisis may have created.

As it was explained above, festivals²² illustrate very well how time and space become holy. A festival is “a culturally intimate affair in that it is through the characteristic economy or media of a group that ritual time is expressed” (Paden 1988, 105). For instance, the three cases under study for this thesis are festivals, and in festivals “life is presented just as it should be” (Paden 1988, 104). Festivals are a way to annually regenerate the religious vitality of any community, because of the rituals in which the

²¹ A rite of passage relates to life transitions from an existing status into a new culturally valued status that requires ritual acknowledgement-separation, liminality, and integration. Examples of these include marriage, religious membership, adulthood, and birth.

²² Ritual changes not only time, but also space for the religious participants. Ritual changes ordinary time into sacred time by reenacting a specific event of the communal myth. For instance, Catholics dramatize and retell the Christmas story through an elaborated manger scene of when God became incarnate in a baby child. This becomes cyclical renewal, where Christian families come and pray together and possibly exchange presents and feasts. On the holy day of Christmas, “the sacred gets restored” (Paden 1988, 101) because the baby-God is born again. Therefore, when Christian time is changed suddenly space is also affected by these same actions. A simple home may become a place of worship because the ritual observance changes attitudes from an ordinary activity into a holy activity. As Paden said, “ritual time is analogous to ritual space” (Paden 1988, 97).

community participates, affirming values and moral standards which are characteristic of the society. If evangelicals could take advantage of the time and place where folk-Catholic festivals are about to be celebrated, they would be able to contextualize the Gospel to folk-Catholics enabling them to encounter Jesus, the way to the Father.

Finally, it is important to realize that ritual is also a transcultural category. “Ritual has a similar structure around the globe, but its content reflects different cultural and historical situations and reveals an enormous panorama of sacred and human values” (Paden 1988, 120).

Systems of Purity

According to Paden, all religions draw boundaries of behavior for their followers. These boundaries tend to be a polarization of behavior between pure and impure, holy and sinful, and good and evil. Systems of purity, according to Paden (1988, 141), are “those many ways that religious systems deal with negativity ... dynamic oppositions that make religious behavior a field of contesting forces and thus create the many versions of piety, integrity, and holiness in religious history” Therefore, all religious worlds have their own boundaries, according to their worldview of what is pure and impure for the sacred.

The two religious worlds under study have boundaries both pure and impure. Evangelicals are more rigorous in their boundaries than folk-Catholics. Each world demonstrates its own moral compass, and each participant knows that in order to reach out to the sacred they have to purify their behavior; however, nobody can purify oneself. Rules exist wherever a sacred person executes rituals. The person may recite or repeat

sacred words or writings or even pay a fee. These rituals vary and have to do with all areas of human life (sexuality, food, social interaction, sicknesses, etc.).

According to Paden, three ways of dealing with impurity are the following:

- **Avoidance of profanity:** Almost all spiritual traditions teach how to avoid impurity according to their interpretation of what the sacred requires either through detachment, abstention, or prohibition. This is the approach that pentecostal evangelicals use the most.
- **Purification of profanity:** Once one has been contaminated, cleansing must occur in order to restore the purity desired by the sacred. Depending on the type of contamination, some ways to be cleansed include punishment, exorcism, penance, or rehabilitation. The rituals may involve the use of sacred objects, words and/or actions performed by sacred persons. “Sacrifice is one of the most universal forms of religious behavior and a prominent example of purification” (Paden 1988, 155). Folk-Catholics use this approach the most.
- **Transcending the opposition of profanity/purity:** For some spiritual traditions there is another option to “overcome the dichotomy of purity and profanity.... Where profanity and offense are overcome within, then they are already overcome without. If the mind is clear and pure, then the hands cannot be defiled” (Paden 1988, 156-157). Some evangelicals employ this approach.

This thesis believes that if evangelicals want to reach out to folk-Catholics, they must take into consideration all three ways of dealing with impurity. For instance in the three folk-Catholic cases under study here, purification of profanity is the common way

for folk-Catholics to deal with impurity, a boundary that evangelicals do not respect at all.

Finally it should be noted that each spiritual world not only has its own boundaries but also its own relativity of what is pure and impure according to the understanding of the sacred. What is unholy for a folk-Catholic may be holy for an evangelical. For instance, for folk-Catholics to participate in traditional religious festivals is considered a “holy” practice, something that evangelicals have considered sinful and idolatrous. Each world with its boundaries shows that purity and impurity are not just “the fear of pollution but a function of the unity and integrity of the world” (Paden 1988, 159). The reason why people want to stay within the boundaries marked by their world is because they want to belong to that world. That is, a spiritual world without a boundary is not a world.

Based on what has been said up to this point, applying the phenomenological approach of Paden to describe the folk-Catholic religious world will help evangelicals to first understand—describe—the folk-Catholic world in their own language and structure. Secondly, after finding common points of understanding with the evangelical structure, communication can then lead to a clear proclamation of the Gospel in a meaningful process of dialogue. The latter will be addressed in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

As we have seen, Paden (1988) uses phenomenology of religion to describe and compare religious worlds. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999) take us one step further. They use phenomenology of religion²³ as a base to provide an approach to Christian

²³ For instance for Hiebert Shaw and Tienou (1999, 31) the phenomena of “folk-religions consist of a bewildering array of rites, festivals, beliefs, symbols, texts, practitioners,

witnessing by analysis of religious beliefs. This thesis combines both approaches, because without a phenomenological description the analysis of beliefs cannot be objective, and a description without analysis of beliefs is useless for the purpose of Christian witnessing.

Step 1 (b) Phenomenology and the Analysis of Religious Beliefs

This second stage of the phenomenological approach can be useful for an analysis of the religious systems of folk-Catholics. Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999, 45-72) present folk religions as belief systems that can be analyzed and interpreted. In their model they intend to compare and contrast different types of constructions of belief systems according to two dimensions of horizontal and vertical.

The Horizontal Dimension deals with how people formulate their beliefs through analogies. This first dimension has two subdimensions:

- Organic analogies: People use organic analogies to compare things with living organisms to show how they relate to each other. For instance, people sometimes see animals and even plants as human beings that can talk back to them, praise God, do good or evil. Some speak of the Christian church as a living organism, the body of Christ. Others even talk about an institution as being capable of having a life on its own -capable of reproducing, dying, killing and being killed. Humans use these types of analogies in order to explain abstract experiences.
- Mechanic analogies: People use mechanic analogies to “see things as inanimate objects that act upon one another like parts in a machine” (Hiebert Shaw and Tienou

institutions, buildings, schools, art, music, and processions. Some of them are public, but many are hidden in private life”

1999, 45). These analogies are presented as amoral because a machine does not have control over itself.

The Vertical Dimension deals with how people formulate descriptions of their experience in the world. This second dimension has three subdimensions useful for distinguishing folk religion's primary domains:

The seen world presents how people (empirically speaking) perceive the world in an immediate human experience through their five senses. "All people are aware of this world and develop sciences to explain and control it, ... how to build a house, plant a crop [etc.]" (Hiebert Shaw and Tienou 1999, 47).

The unseen world "has to do with beings and forces that cannot be directly seen, but are thought to exist on this earth. They include spirits, ghosts, ancestors, demons, and earthly gods.... In many traditional religions, there is no sharp distinction between the seen and unseen realities of this world.... Each world affects the other" (Hiebert Shaw and Tienou 1999, 48).

The unseen other worlds are those "furthest from the immediate world of human experience ... [like] heavens, hells, purgatories, and other levels" (Hiebert Shaw and Tienou 1999, 47).

In their model, Hiebert Shaw and Tienou (1999, 49) combine two dimensions and their subdimensions, creating a horizontal and vertical grid. The authors explain the grid model in the following way:

Each level deals with different ontological entities. At the bottom are the sciences-belief systems in which people use "natural" explanations to account for empirically perceived phenomena. Natural sciences use mechanical or impersonal

analogies, and the social sciences use organic or transactional ones. At the top are what is typically called ‘religions’—belief systems that have to do with ultimate cosmic realities— heavenly gods, demons, ... heavens, and hell. The middle level is hard for modern people to understand. It deals with the *transempirical realities of this world*—with magic, evil eye, earthly spirits, ancestors, witchcraft, divination, and the like. (Hiebert Shaw and Tienou 1999, 49)

The following is a model for analyzing the religious beliefs of folk-Catholics according to the work of Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou (1999).

	Organic Analogy	Mechanical Analogy	
UNSEEN WORLD	High Religion Triune God The Virgin Mary	Sacraments, Official Rituals, Amulets & Charms, Holy Prayers	OTHER WORLDLY
	Folk-Religion Local Virgins, Local Jesus, Local Saints Religious Specialists Spirits, Ghosts, Demons, Angels, Satan	folk-rituals, festivals & practices (rezos, pilgrimage, local festival) Astrological forces, magical rites (witchcraft) by religious specialist, curses, spells, non- Christian amulets, herbs and traditional medicine	
SEEN WORLD	Sciences Political corruption, lack of employment, cost of living, social safety & security, animals, plants.	Interaction of natural objects based on natural forces like natural disasters.	

Figure 10: Framework for the Analysis of Beliefs Systems of folk-Catholics in Costa Rica [Figure adapted from Hiebert Shaw and Tienou (1999, 49)]

The authors emphasize that this model helps missionaries to understand the “middle zone” where folk religion abides. However, it must be remembered that this is a theoretical model, and that in reality boundaries between categories are not always very clear, and descriptions and interpretations need to be done by those studying folk religion in context.

This thesis presents the application of the model in Figure 11. For instance, in the following figure the Virgin Mary for folk-Catholics is an unseen being who is part of the other world in heaven. However, she can also be viewed as an unseen being who is part of this world in local apparitions, like the Virgin of the Angels, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and many local Virgins all over the world. Therefore, the Virgin Mary for folk-Catholics is the goddess who fills up their middle zone in addition to saints, spirits, and ghosts.

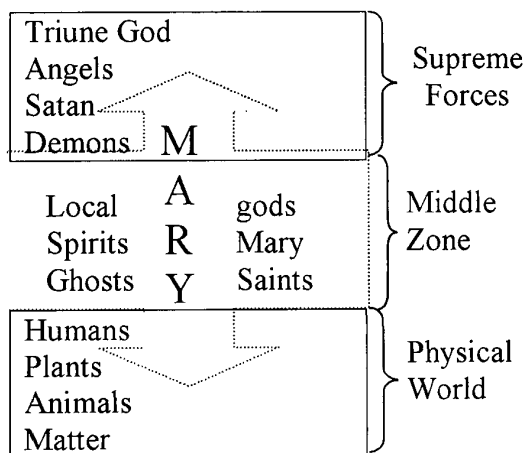


Figure 11: Costa Rican folk-Catholic Worldview

Hiebert Shaw and Tienou (1999) provide a good model to help new Christians who come from a folk religion, such as folk-Catholicism in Costa Rica, understand their local religious worldview. The Christian evangelical church must begin here so their

worldview can be challenged to move from a sub-Christian folkview to a Christian one.

For instance, the following figure presents an evangelical alternative for folk-Catholics:

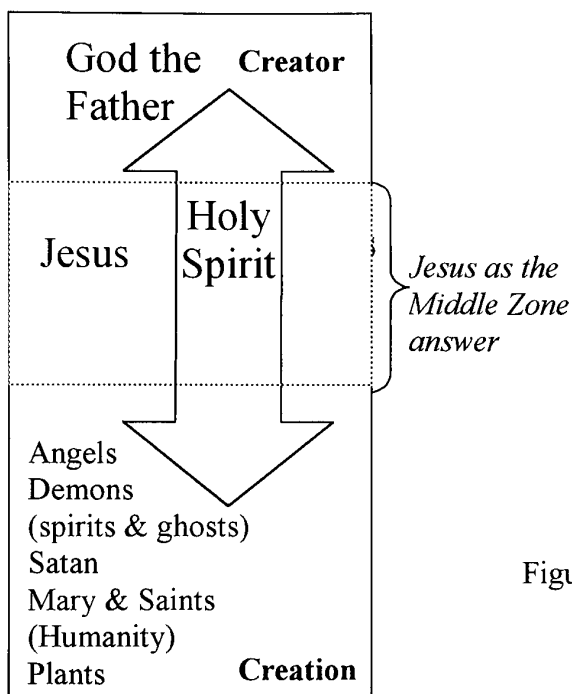


Figure 12: A Christian Worldview

In the next chapter, the three case studies briefly introduced in Chapter 1 are now fully presented. Each case will be described and analyzed phenomenologically, studied ontologically, and critically analyzed using theological insights through one theological theme per case study.

As has been shown, phenomenology is used to “help outsiders to understand other cultures, and therefore, to make more informed judgments. [However,] it does not provide criteria for making those judgments. To stop with phenomenological analyses is to end with cultural relativism.... To end up with total cultural relativism, however, is to deny meaningful communication between cultures, tests of truth, or moral judgment of evil” (Hiebert Shaw and Tienou 1999, 23).

Therefore, after the use of phenomenology to understand the folk-Catholic world, evangelicals need to move on into ontological and critical steps in order to complete their work of contextual theology with the folk-Catholic faith. That is, after evangelicals have understood folk-Catholic world and beliefs, they must then analyze those beliefs ontologically in order to later allow the Scripture to reveal a biblical understanding of God's view of reality.

CHAPTER 3

THE CRITICAL WORK: THE PROCESS OF ONTOLOGICAL CRITIQUE AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Critical Work is the second step in the task of critical contextualization of folk-Catholic practices in Costa Rica. This thesis wants to give the evangelical church in Costa Rica a way to “bridge between divine revelation and human contexts ... providing biblical answers to the confusing problems of every day life” (Hiebert Shaw and Tienou 1999, 26). By creating this bridge, folk-Catholics for the first time may find the good news of salvation to be culturally reliable and meaningful. Meanwhile, evangelicals may discover that even some of their beliefs and values are not biblically supported, but are actually more cultural accretions. This process is depicted in the following figure:

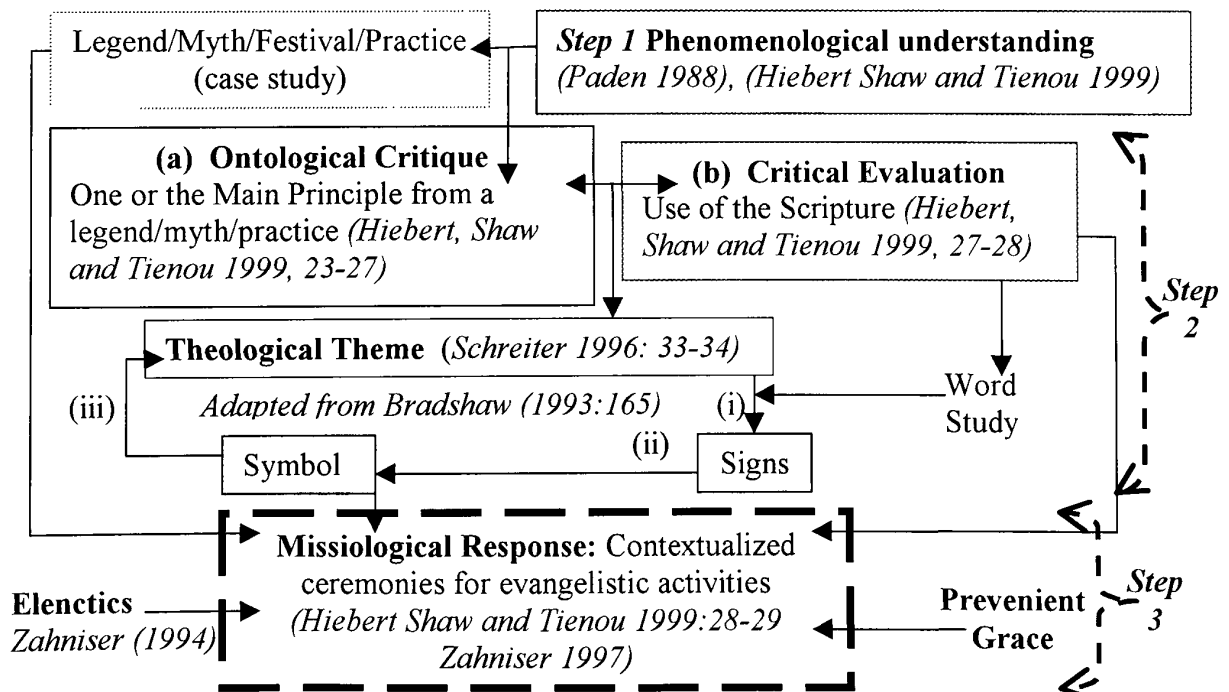


Figure 13: Process of Critical Contextualization for Evangelistic purposes with Folk-Catholics.

Ontological critique (Step 2a) and critical analysis (Step 2b) cannot be done without first gaining a phenomenological understanding of religious practices (Step 1). This avoids cultural relativism and makes the Scripture relevant to the context. The Step 2 of Critical Work attempts to answer the following questions:

- What is this legend/myth/festival teaching? What is the one or main **principle** behind the legend/myth/festival? (**Step 2a**)
- Can we explain the central theological concept (**theological theme–Step 2a + b i**) the **principle** of the legend/myth/festival under study? Where in the Scripture can we find this theological theme (**Step 2b**)?
- What signs (**b ii**) may be produced by this theological theme (**b i**) if it is accomplished in our community? Are these signs biblical and possibly better than the ones from the legend/myth/practice under study?
- What symbol (**b iii**) can help evangelicals to express the signs (**b ii**) that the theological theme (**b i**) produces? Is the symbol selected (**b iii**) the best expression of the theological theme (**b i**)? (**Step 2**)
- What ceremonies can evangelicals adapt from folk-Catholics or from the Scripture or other Christian communities that may express biblically the best meaning of the symbol identified from the signs that the theological theme produces? (**Step 3**)

Phenomenology can help the evangelical church not only to understand folk-Catholics but it also can help in discovering the folk-wisdom behind many folk-Catholic practices. Understanding the cultural role of the main principle behind every legend/myth/festival/practice helps evangelicals to turn to the Scripture in order to find a theological theme that can provide a similar principle. Having identified the theological theme, evangelicals through biblical word study (critical analysis) seek to discover those signs. After those signs have been identified, the evangelical church must find a symbol²⁴

²⁴ “Anything you can see, hear, taste, smell, or touch can be a symbol. This includes words, gestures, and other actions as well as objects. Any color or sound can be a symbol.... Christian Scripture contains a rich heritage of symbols. These can be associated with appropriate symbols familiar to believers from traditional religious cultures and used to integrate their world and that of Scripture into holistic Christian application of faith to life” (Zahniser 1994, 13).

for them, which can be from the local community, from the Scripture, or other Christian communities. The idea of the symbol is to have a way to communicate Christ's good news through the theological theme that the symbol represents.

The correlation between these concepts of theological themes, signs, and symbols as adapted from Bradshaw (1993, 165, 167) is described as follows:

- [1] The application of the concept [theological theme] produces signs, and we translate the signs into symbols.
- [2] We create symbols from signs to bear witness to the concepts from which the signs resulted.... Symbols also enable us to communicate abstract concepts that are relative to cultures effectively ... the symbol provides a visual image for a more abstract concept.
- [3] Symbols are particularly helpful in making the presence of God discernible, intelligible or accessible. In contrast to signs, we do not use symbols as evidences of God's presence. Through symbols, however, people receive the affirmation that God is present.

However, it must be understood that "the meaning of signs and symbols are not static, but change over time and between cultures"²⁵ (Bradshaw 1993,168). Thus evangelism and discipleship are very important for rescuing, creating, and reusing signs (forms) in the context of any culture, in order to make symbols (meanings) whose theological concepts can always be applicable to one way of perceiving God's presence in the world.

Symbols are an important part of any ritual (used here as synonym for ceremony), because a ritual is the sum of the symbols that recreate the myth. As it was noted previously, through rituals a myth is recreated, which shows the work of God and God's

²⁵ The cross, for instance, was a sign of murder and punishment during the times of the early Christians. Today that sign carries a different meaning, becoming the symbol of Christ's victory over death, and the hope for Christians that the same victory is going to be theirs. As it has been shown, we see in this a concept behind that symbol.

nature in relation to humans and other elements of creation. Symbols, then, represent all those important concepts in the myth.²⁶ Also “symbols play a key role in helping people make sense of the world by organizing experiences into mental categories” (Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno 1999, 235). Symbols may be the perfect bridge for creating communication between two religious worlds because they can embody beliefs, feelings, and values: key elements which when intertwined, may transform the worldview of any person or community.

Critical analysis, on the other hand, has the value to help evangelicals to evaluate critically the beliefs and customs of folk-Catholics, as well as their own, in the light of their new biblical findings through theological themes. “The gospel is not simply information to be communicated. It is a message to which people must respond” (Hiebert, Shaw and Tiéno 1999, 27). That is a critical analysis that helps new Christians to test their old beliefs, according to the new beliefs provided through Scriptural interpretation.²⁷

²⁶ For instance, in communion or Eucharist, Christians have the symbols of juice or wine and bread. These respectively represent the blood and body of Christ. In the rituals (because there are many ways that different Christian traditions recreate the myth of Jesus’ new covenant) those two Eucharistic symbols may be explained through a blessing prayer, a silent or euphoric meditation time, the way that they are served, and/or the way that the bread is first eaten and then the juice, or the bread is dipped into the juice. The ritual recreates the time and place where the Lord served those elements to his disciples. In that moment the participant is transported into a state of meditation where the myth is remembered. However, the symbols can become just signs if their forms have lost the meaning for the participants. This is where the importance of discipleship is shown, in order to teach new converts the real meaning of the symbols in the context of the ritual, and avoid adding different meanings of their own, creating syncretism (we will study this concept in the following chapter).

²⁷ Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999, 384) states the following about the use of the Scripture:

The biblical reflection of the church must be “rooted in the acceptance of Scripture as divine revelation. . . . [Scripture] is the source not only for finding answers to human questions, but of defining the worldview through which they should look at reality”

In this step (2b) theological answers to the middle zone questions that folk-Catholics ask are provided. “What we need are biblically balanced answers to the existential questions addressed by folk religions” (Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénoú 1999, 370). This is a very important step where evangelical leaders must help the church to do the critical process of Scriptural exegesis. Evangelicals have to help themselves in the process of determining what the Scriptures meant in their original context and what the Scriptures mean for today in any particular context

to test the people’s beliefs and practices in the light of biblical truths and tests of reality. This calls for a deep knowledge of the Bible and theological frameworks for understanding Scripture that serve as criteria by which human social and cultural systems are evaluated and judged.... Christians must go beyond phenomenology to ontological evaluations that test the truth claims of different beliefs and values.” (Hiebert, Shaw and Tiénoú 1999, 370, 24)

Case Studies

In the following paragraphs, a phenomenological description of each case study is presented, starting with *El Rezo del Niño*, followed by *el Baile de la Yegüita*, and finishing with *la Romería*.

El Rezo del Niño [Prayers to the God child]; the Manger as a Symbol of Shalom

There is an old tradition in Costa Rica in which I barely remember participating when I was Catholic and before I became an evangelical. This tradition came to my mind

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- Believers must seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in interpreting Scripture.... Christians must recognize that their theology is an understanding of Scripture, not Scripture itself [admitting] that their understanding of truth is partial, biased, and possibly wrong, and test their convictions by returning to Scripture (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999, 384, 385).
 - There must be openness to the community for accountability. “Interpretation and application of Scripture in everyday life are just personal matters. Ultimately the church as a whole must act as hermeneutical community (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999, 385).

when my grandmother began wondering if our neighbors had built any manger scenes.²⁸ Since she recently reached ninety years of age, I thought that her brain was tricking her perception of reality. “Oh, that was during the times when chickens used to fly!” I said. However, she began sharing with me the tradition of the *Rezos del Niño* which occurs between 6 January and Ash Wednesday. It used to be celebrated all over the country, but today is only observed in certain areas of the country.

Before Christmas, families make *tamales* (a traditional food) and send them to all their friends and neighbors. A common friendly invitation to receive during those days is “come and visit us for *un cafecito y tamal*” (a little coffee and *tamal*). However, besides this informal invitation, these Christmas days can be busy times because along with making tamales and judging the quality of the ones from friends and neighbors, they also are times to build the manger.

After Christmas people used to visit and be visited by friends, family, and neighbors during evenings and mainly on Sunday afternoons in order to see their mangers and hope to be officially invited to join in their *Rezo del Niño* (prayers to the God child). Poor families used to join together and would do one *Rezo* all together in order to be able to afford to do it. On the other hand, rich families would each do their own and to receive an invitation from them was very important.

After Kings Day (6 January) and before Ash Wednesday (Epiphany season) is the time for the *Rezos*. The folk-Catholic tradition that the Spaniards brought to Costa Rica

²⁸ This is called “portalear” in an article by Patricia Fumero (1996) “Memorias de Navidad” (Christmas Memories) where she explains this old Costa Rican tradition. Available in *La Nación/Revista Dominical* 12/22, electronic edition. www.nacion.co.cr. San Jose, Costa Rica.

teaches that it is bad luck to put the mangers away before making a ritual prayer for a blessing of the house and the family. During those prayers there was a time for feasting, praying, and fellowship.

The *Rezos del Niño* is a ritual of different prayers that express folk-Catholicism's devotion around the manger. "It is a structured dialogue with ancestral rituals with the purpose to end the Christmas festival" (Corte 1997, 2). The manger is the center of the scenery of the birth of Jesus, with other figures located around it. The manger, which tells the incarnational myth, is made up of five main figure—Jesus, Mary, Joseph, the ox, and the mule—but many others can be added. Some say that this tradition began after Saint Francis of Assisi created the first manger scene and "when the Spanish came to Costa Rica [they] brought ... this practice" (Campos-Jimenez 1978?, 99). This tradition can be found in all of Latin America existing since the eighteenth century and "the devotion to the manger seems to come from local festivals that the church celebrated every Christmas" (Campos-Jimenez 1978?, 99).

According to Corte (1997, 3) the folk-Catholic tradition observes the following:

- The manger must not be purchased.
- Each couple as part of their wedding gifts should receive it as a special present.
- If the couple does not own a house, the manger must be built on the floor.
- If the Jesus Child grants them with a house, the family should build it on a table.
- The building of the manger is necessary to obtain blessings.
- The manger must not be taken away without having prayed the rosary to Jesus the child. The more devotion that is given to the *Rezo* the more the blessing to be received.

However, on the other hand, the priest Javier Muñoz, professor of Theology at the Seminar Central (a Catholic Seminary in Costa Rica), expresses that the *Rezos* have a spiritual sense as well as a social sense. “Spiritually speaking, it is an act of thanksgiving, and prayer requests, through which the family and guests give thanks to Jesus the Child for the gifts given last year and share requests for blessings for the new year. Socially speaking, on the other hand, family and friends gather together to share music and good food” (Corte 1997, 1).

Some mangers may reach over ten feet long by eight feet tall and may take several weeks to be built. According to Campos-Jiménez (1978?) there are two types of mangers: the traditional and the realistic. The difference between them is that the traditional tends to represent a contextualization of the manger scene. “In this type of manger, it is not pretended to reproduce the biblical scenes, but rather scenarios, situations, and characteristics according to the country or local community” (Campos-Jiménez (1978?, 98). In this kind of manger, the figures can be made of any type of material, and be any color and any size. On the other hand, the realistic manger tends to be more faithful to the biblical scene.

Nevertheless, in 1954 in a Costa Rican monastery, an association of manger makers was born. A Catholic monk from this association wrote a short book which created a standard understanding of what a manger is, what type of figures to use, and how to arrange them. Today this association organizes competitions and gives prizes to those homes that create manger scenes of either of the two types (Campos-Jiménez 1978?, 99).

Regardless of the quality of the manger, three elements help guarantee the success of the activity. Most important is the prayer specialist, or *Rezador*, who knows the flow of the prayers, their timing, their recitation and intonation. Secondly, the food must be provided, and finally music must be involved. Usually a family hires the *Rezador* who may have his/her own musical band. However, for phenomenological reasons of description and analysis, I am going to consider the following elements separately: the *Rezador*, the ritual prayers, the musical band, the food, the guests, the manger, and the host family.

The *Rezador* is a storyteller who has memorized hours of traditional poetry, prayers, and requests. It is common to find families of *rezadores* where the tradition tends to be inherited from father to son. According to one *Rezador*, “first an introductory prayer must be done, then the rosary, and among the mysteries, songs of praise to God’s child have to be introduced. At the end the rosary, three special *avemarias* songs [Hail Mary], the *litanies* in Latin, and at last the *alabado* [solemn prayers from the fifteenth century]” (Corte 1997, 2).

Let’s now consider some of the other elements. The band, with guitars, accordion, and voices, plays two main roles: one is to help in the ritual, for instance, singing *villancicos* (Christmas carols), and the other is to provide entertainment after the ritual, which sometimes ends with a dance party. Another element is the food. Food is the main reason that people want to attend the *Rezos*. The food includes traditional dishes and beverages. Among the beverages that may be included are eggnog and special recipes for mixed alcoholic drinks. The guests may include neighbors, special friends, and family. The number of guests depends upon the space available in the house and the economic

possibilities of the family to feed them and cover other expenses, such as paying the band and the *Rezador*

Finally, the manger, as already described above, is the center of devotion for this ritual activity of *el Rezo del Niño*. The ritual, through the rosary, tells the myth of the birth of Jesus, Jesus' role as Savior, and mainly the nature and divinity of the goddess Virgin Mary. The ritual that tells this myth through prayer follows.

Ritual Prayers

The following are descriptions of the ritual prayers used in association with this festival.

El Rosario (the Rosary):

El Rosario is the name for the whole ritual of prayers. During its development, the audience would respond, standing up and sitting down, repeating lines, and performing penitential gestures. The order of all the prayers and the leading of the ritual is directed by the *Rezador*. This ritual for the *Rezos del Niño* is composed of around 30 points in the following order of prayers:

Praying the Rosary²⁹

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make the sign of the cross and say <u>The Apostles' Creed</u>. • Say the <u>Lord's Prayer</u>. • Say three (3) <u>Hail Mary</u>. • Say the <u>Glory Patri</u> to the Father. • Announce the First <u>Mystery</u>; then say the <u>Lord's Prayer</u>, • Say ten (10) <u>Hail Mary</u>. • Say the <u>Glory Patri</u> to the Father. • Say the <u>Fatima Prayer</u>. • Announce the Second <u>Mystery</u>; then say the <u>Lord's Prayer</u>, 10 <u>Hail Mary</u>, <u>Glory Patri</u> to the Father, and <u>Fatima Prayer</u>. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce the Third <u>Mystery</u>; then say the <u>Lord's Prayer</u>, 10 <u>Hail Mary</u>, <u>Glory Patri</u> to the Father, and <u>Fatima Prayer</u>.
 • Announce the Fourth <u>Mystery</u>; then say the <u>Lord's Prayer</u>, 10 <u>Hail Mary</u>, <u>Glory Patri</u> to the Father, and <u>Fatima Prayer</u>. • Announce the Fifth <u>Mystery</u>; then say the <u>Lord's Prayer</u>, 10 <u>Hail Mary</u>, <u>Glory Patri</u> to the Father, and <u>Fatima Prayer</u>. • Conclude by saying the <u>Hail, Holy Queen</u>. |
|---|--|

A Costa Rican version³⁰ that this thesis consulted mentions the Rosary in the following way:

²⁹ According to and available in www.roadluge.com/~kozbee/628page/rosary.htm
 For more information about the Rosary visit the following websites:
www3.nd.edu/~knights/prayers/ www.links2go.com/more/www.prayrosary.com/
www.elandee.com/rosarypage/index.html
www.trialofamerica.com/rosarytutor/intro.php3 www.prayrosary.com/temptutor.html

³⁰ According to an insert from La Sagrada Biblia, (1974) edición EcuMénica by Monsignor Dr. Juan Straubinger, Barza: Winnepeg, Canada.

The Sign of the Holy Cross
 The Act of Contrition
 Gloria Patri
 The first *Misterio*
 Another Gloria Patri
 The second *Misterio*
 Another Lord's prayer
 Another Lord's Prayer
 10 more Ave Marias
 Another Gloria Patri
 The fifth *Misterio*
 Another Lord's prayer
 10 more Ave Marias

10 more Ave Marias
 Another Gloria Patri
 The third *Misterio*
 Another Lord's prayer
 10 more Ave Marias
 Another Gloria Patri
 The fourth *Misterio*
 Another Gloria Patri
 Another Lord's prayer
 A praise to Mary (Repeat it four times)
 God saves you Queen and Mother
 Litanies (after the second Vatican council have been praised in Spanish)

The following section is the description of the prayers above mentioned:

Hail Mary³¹

Rezador: Hail Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee; blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.

Audience: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(Latin Version) Ave, Maria, gratia plena; Dominus tecum; benedicta tu in mulieribus, et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus.
 Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis, peccatoribus, nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.

Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary³²

These prayers were written in Italy in the fifteenth century. They are composed by forty-nine invocations that described the excellence of Mary. The first four invocations announce the theme. The other forty-five describe Mary as always virgin, always Queen,

³¹ According to and available in www.bitstorm.net/campbell/prayer/bvm.html

³² According to and available in www.bitstorm.net/campbell/prayer/litany.html In this website there seems to be several litanies. For instance, besides this one for the virgin Mary there are the Litany of the Saints, and Litany of the Little Flower (Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus and of the Holy Face).

Queen of heaven and earth, Mother of God, and universal intercessor. After each of the following invocations the audience response is "Pray for us!"

Lord, have mercy.
 Christ, have mercy.
 Lord, have mercy.
 Christ, hear us.
 Christ, graciously hear us.
 God, the Father of Heaven,
 have mercy on us.
 God the Son, Redeemer
 of the word, have mercy on us.
 God the Holy Spirit,
 have mercy on us.
 Holy Trinity, one God,
 have mercy on us.
 Holy Mary, pray for us.
 Holy Mother of God, pray for us.
 Virgin most prudent, pray for us.
 Virgin most venerable, pray for us.
 Virgin most renowned, pray for us.
 Virgin most powerful, pray for us.
 Virgin most merciful, pray for us.
 Virgin most faithful, pray for us.
 Mirror of justice, pray for us.
 Seat of wisdom, pray for us.
 Cause of our joy, pray for us.
 Spiritual vessel, pray for us.
 Singular vessel of devotion,
 pray for us.
 Mystical rose, pray for us.
 Tower of David, pray for us.
 Tower of ivory, pray for us.
 House of gold, pray for us.
 Ark of the Covenant, pray for us.
 Gate of heaven, pray for us.
 Morning star, pray for us.
 Health of the sick, pray for us.
 Refuge of sinners, pray for us.
 Comforter of the afflicted,
 pray for us.
 Help of Christians, pray for us.
 Queen of angels, pray for us.
 Queen of patriarchs, pray for us.

Queen of prophets, pray for us.
 Queen of apostles, pray for us.
 Queen of martyrs, pray for us.
 Queen of confessors, pray for us.
 Holy Virgin of virgins, pray for us.
 Mother of Christ, pray for us.
 Mother of the Church, pray for us.
 Mother of Divine Grace, pray for us.
 Mother most pure, pray for us.
 Mother most chaste, pray for us.
 Mother inviolate, pray for us.
 Mother undefiled, pray for us.
 Mother most amiable, pray for us.
 Mother most admirable, pray for us.
 Mother of good counsel, pray for us.
 Mother of our Creator, pray for us.
 Mother of our Savior, pray for us.
 Queen of virgins, pray for us.
 Queen of all Saints, pray for us.
 Queen conceived without Original Sin,
 pray for us.
 Queen assumed into Heaven,
 pray for us.
 Queen of the Most Holy Rosary,
 pray for us.
 Queen of Peace, pray for us.
 Queen of the Church, pray for us.
 Lamb of God, You take away
 the sins of the world;
 spare us O Lord!
 Lamb of God, You take away the sins
 of the world; graciously
 hear us, O Lord!
 Lamb of God, You take away
 the sins of the world;
 have mercy on us.
Rezador: Pray for us,
 O Holy Mother of God.
Audience: That we may be
 made worthy of the promises
 of Christ.

All pray: O God, whose only

begotten Son by His life, death and resurrection, has purchased for us the rewards of eternal salvation, grant, we pray, that meditating upon these mysteries in the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, we may imitate what they contain and obtain what they promise. Amen.

Glory Patri, The Apostles' Creed, and The Lord's Prayer

These are said as they are known in liturgical environments by Protestant churches in the United States.

Los Misterios (the Mysteries)³³

They are divided in three categories and each category is divided again into five.

Joyful mysteries:

The annunciation to Mary by
Gabriel the Angel
The visit of Mary to Elizabeth
Jesus is born
Jesus is presented at the temple
Jesus at the temple at the age of 12

Painful mysteries:

The agony of Jesus in the Garden
of Olives
The flagellation of Jesus by
Roman soldiers

Jesus is crowned with a
crown of thorns

Jesus carries the cross

Jesus is crucified

Glorious mysteries:

The resurrection of Jesus

The ascension of Jesus to heaven

The coming of the Holy Spirit

The ascension of Mary to heaven
(after her death)

Mary is crowned as Queen of heaven

El Alabado (the Praised):

This is a praise prayer. The following ones are short prayers:

“Holy Angel of my life light my
knowledge so that my tongue may
pronounce the verses of the Sacrament.”

“Praised be the Sweet Name of
Jesus in the manger, and Mary conceived
without original sin, and her husband

³³ Mysteries are available in www.roadluge.com/~kozbee/628page/rosary/myst

| Joseph for all the eternity.”

Los Villancicos (The Christmas Carols), and other songs:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Traditional Christmas Carol:</u>
 Come little shepherds
 come to adore, the King of
 the heavens that has been born.
 A rustic roof
 Embrace him
 For a cradle a manger
 For a temple the native scene.
 In a bed made of leaves
 Naked laid Him down
 Who sees the stars at his feet
 to shine.
 Come on shepherds, walk, and run
 That in Bethlehem we have
 The God whom we praise. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>A Song of Rosary:</u>
 Because he must be praised
 My Jesus who my soul wants,
 I love you, my God, for whom
 you are and above all the creation.
 It is in a poor manger that the
 almighty wanted to be born,
 to confuse the pride of the Devil.
 Have the winds sweet harmony
 Of the happiness for the Redeemer.
 The world celebrates with great
 happiness
 The birth of God the child
 A child has been born
 A star announces it
 Barely bright its divine light.
 Shepherds and Kings contemplate
 All together who is in that cradle
 The grace of God. |
|---|---|

Otras Oraciones (Other Prayers):

The following prayers are prayed among the mysteries.

Lights (souls?) that are burned and are
 going to be burned; parts of present friends,
 Offerings received

1. During this Holy exercise (ritual?),
 Asking for the needs of the church,
 The leaders that rule it Owners,
 and others of this home
 That united, present in this Holy
 exercise

O Virgin the Most Beautiful
 from whom was born the Divine
 King for light of the darkness and
 rescue to the captives.
 You are the intercessor, you are the
 way to find us what we are asking
 for: security to all walkers, health

Asking mainly for the health and
 intention of the believers that are
 absent, For the devotion of the Holy
 Rosary and for the eternal rest of
 all the Souls that are in the holy
 purgatory. Amen.

3. Prayer to God the Child:
 Child Jesus, fundamental rock of
 the Holy Church approved and
 thrown away by humans, you came
 to become the cornerstone of the
 building figured mysteriously in
 the manger of Bethlehem where

to the prisoners and the sick. And as pious Mother give us your grace, your charity so that we can become better, so that in time and eternity we may love you and glorify you one day in eternity in glory.

you were born, beautiful pilgrim, that not having found a better place in the world where to be born. Come to my heart, fill it with knowledge of the truth; and make us to reject for your sake, all pleasure and vanity from the world. May this be so.

In sum, it can be seen that this folk-Catholic ritual shows the maximum freedom of the laity since it happens mainly outside of the Roman Catholic Church without the leadership of the clergy. The *Rezoes del Niño* is an oral traditional practice (where no one reads any text during its ritual) and a discipleship experience for Catholics which brings together the community in prayer to the Virgin Mary, showing neighborhood hospitality and common faith.

Therefore, why can't my grandma participate in this type of religious activity anymore? One reason is the growth of urbanism and secularism, making folk-Catholicism less Catholic and more folk-religious. The second reason is that since she became an evangelical about twenty-five years ago, she no longer participates in these kind of activities. Missionaries and her first pastor told her that in order to live the new Christian life, she must quit participating in "all those idolatrous activities." Nevertheless, she maintained her friendship with her lifelong friends, although she no longer shared communal activities with them. Sadly, when she became an evangelical her cultural life was totally mutilated because being an evangelical Christian was seen as incompatible with being Costa Rican.

El Baile de la Yegüita: A folk-Catholic festival about Reconciliation

During my internship in Costa Rica last summer (1999) at the Methodist Seminary in Costa Rica, after twelve hours of lecture and teaching small group dynamics, Gerardo Loaiziga, a pastor in Nicoya, Guanacaste, Costa Rica, came to me with a very difficult question related to the topic of our study: Contextual Theology. Gerardo Loaiziga has been the pastor at his church for a little over two years. Gerardo was a very popular sports coach and high school physical education professor who is now retired. He became a Christian in a local “fundamentalist-Pentecostal church,” as he described it. After finding what he called “biblical moral incongruencies” with the doctrine of this church and feeling the call to a pastoral position, he got in touch with the pastor of the Methodist church in this town. According to his own words, “the Methodist church appeared to be more serious than those independent ones.” So he began attending the church and later on he opened a preaching point and mission church in the small town called “Curime” where he lives, about seven miles from Nicoya. After the church in Nicoya confronted some problems with the former pastor, the Pastoral committee of the Methodist Church in Costa Rica asked him to become its pastor.

This local church was founded around 1988, and its sanctuary and parsonage were built in 1993. The church has a membership of about two hundred people, and it is one of the well-known evangelical churches in the area. Previous to this class, I had met Gerardo in his own church during the last weeks of June when I took two short-term mission teams for a period of three weeks to serve there. During this time I preached in this church, did some work on projects, and had time to interact with him and his congregation.

During the class on Contextual Theology that I was teaching, I had said that “we can be one hundred percent Costa Rican *and* one hundred percent Christian.” So Gerardo came to me saying: “Osías, I understand what you have said about being one hundred percent Costa Rican *and* one hundred percent Christian, but in my town of Nicoya I have to say that we cannot be one hundred percent Nicoyans and one hundred percent Christians.”

“Why?” I asked.

He said, “Well figure this out: in Nicoya, as you know, they celebrate the festival of *el baile de la Yegüita* (the Dance of the young mule).”

In trying to be a good counselor, I said to him, “Tell me about it.”

He said “this festival celebrates that a young mule appeared to some Indians who were fighting with each other. The mule came from nowhere and separated them from fighting. It is a big festival and thus, a big deal for the people of Nicoya to participate in it. They recreate the dance, and the young mule even dances behind the Virgin Mary. The thing is that even people from my church like to go there and participate in this festival. I have interpreted this as eating food dedicated to the idols and giving money to the Catholic Church. As well, this story about a young mule sounds kind of diabolic. You know, this is indigenous stuff mixed with the Catholic religion. That is idolatry! Now, tell me what do you think about it? Would you participate, as a pastor, in this kind of activity?”

My reaction was to look up to the ceiling of the chapel in the Seminary and silently ask for a sign of help. I had an ear infection, was not sleeping very well, was teaching fourteen hours a day, and now this kind of question is putting one of my

teaching hypotheses on the hot seat! I understood his question. Also, I had some idea of the cultural background of his town and this cultural tradition of the *Yegüita*, the main cultural celebration in that area of the country. I understood his concern and some of his theological thinking about this matter.

However, although I knew about this cultural tradition, my ethnic group does not belong to that section of the country. That is, being in Nicoya was a cross-cultural experience for me. That is why I realized that I needed to do more research about this *baile de la Yegüita: la fiesta de la Virgen en Nicoya*. The following paragraphs are the interpretation from two Costa Rican newspaper articles that I found on the Internet describing this tradition.

The Myth

Between 12 November and 12 December, *los Nicoyanos* (the natives of the town of Nicoya, the northern province of Guanacaste) have been celebrating for over four hundred years with fireworks and a dance celebration for the Virgin Mary, who once granted them with a miracle. One of the legends tells that two indigenous men from the ethnic group of the *Matambugueños* when returning from work, began discussing the love of a woman, and soon they were fighting *cutacha*, machete in hand, willing to kill each other. Those who came with them, afraid, requested loudly to the Virgin to grant them a miracle by separating them. She granted it. The Virgin made a young and unfriendly *Yegüita* (young mule) come down from the top of a hill and dance in the middle of the two men, which separated them and put an end to the fight. Today this myth is part of a deep spiritual devotion for the *Nicoyanos*. This is why today a traditional dance in honor of the Virgin, the *Yegüita* dance, is danced with flute and drum.

These sacred days begin with the day of the *contadera* (day of counting), during the month of November, when the days are counted with kernels of corn until the arrival of the official celebration. One month before the big festival begins, ox-carts come loaded with firewood that is taken to the *Cofradia*³⁴ (the House of the Virgin). The logs will be the fuel used to prepare the food and drinks made of corn that will be distributed freely during the festival. The official rituals begin 11 December at dawn with the first prayer made to the Virgin. Then, the Nicoyan image of the Virgin, patroness of Costa Rica, leaves the church, “dirty,” as the Nicoyans say, to be given new clothes for its party. Once it is dressed with the best clothing, the procession begins, and the goddess takes its place on the street and, later, in the church. On this day the image visits the *Cofradia* to hear shouts of “Long live the Virgin!” (one shout and three firecrackers). Then it is taken to church around 6:00 p.m. to preside over the first mass. Around 10:00 p.m., the goddess receives a serenade by a professional choir. The party continues the next day at 11 a.m. with the major mass. Once the mass is concluded, the Virgin's image will be with its town for the last time and will dance with the *Yegüita*, which has accompanied her during the whole party.³⁵

³⁴ *Cofradia* literally means “a place of fellowship” (in religious words, it is a sacred place of hospitality and reconciliation) where all the meals are prepared in a sense of communal sharing (perhaps an indigenous expression of a Eucharist meal). These meals are cooked with traditional colonial kitchen equipment.

³⁵ According to the article by Rodríguez (1999), a source told her that before 1914 as part of the dancing there was the tradition where those who became enemies during the year would say to each other “We’ll fix this problem at the party of the *Guadalupe* (Virgin).” So 12 December all those in conflict, during the dance of the young mule, began to flog each other with a whip. After a few minutes, blood was visible, and the young mule as part of the drama would separate them. Then, they would embrace each other in forgiveness, becoming friends forever. However, in 1914 the priest of Nicoya condemned this activity as pagan, and this specific tradition came to an end.

What is the problem?

Understanding the cultural background of this celebration, we now realize why Gerardo asked such a question, and doubted the main hypothesis of my class. Knowing his “fundamentalist-Pentecostal” background, I could somewhat understand his theological worldview. In a general sense, these types of indigenous churches, which he labeled “fundamentalist-Pentecostal,” have a concept of holiness based on their interpretation of the Old Testament. For these churches, this legalistic interpretation of holiness serves as a system of purity. They believe that God expects them to be holy and to do so they must keep pure from other forms of spiritual practices, including the rituals of the Catholic faith. Their conclusion is that the world is sinful and corrupt, and their local church is a holy place. Therefore, everything that does not fit into the parameters of what a local church considers as “holy” is unholy and sinful. A clear example of this is how they perceive the Catholic Church. In their view the Catholic Church is the worst example of idolatry, hypocrisy, and lostness. So the use of any ceremony and images of the Catholic Church is considered idolatry, and participating in them may even mean losing their salvation. These holy/unholy categories are also used in any cultural/social participation, in a general sense between the “secular, polluting” world and the “holy, purifying” activities within the local church.

Therefore, participating in this cultural tradition, which includes Catholic and indigenous cultural backgrounds and the use of images in their ceremonies, can be absolutely considered as polluting, therefore sinful. This is why being one hundred percent Nicoyan and one hundred percent Christian doesn't fit into Gerardo's theological worldview. However, I ask myself, how can pastors like Gerardo be taught, for

evangelistic and missiological purposes, to appreciate rather than judge these spiritual and folk expressions in their own towns? How can they expect to present the gospel and have it accepted in their own immediate cultural context if they are not culturally sensitive?

La Romería to the Virgin of the Angels: The Emmaus Journey

Once a year over a million Costa Ricans pilgrims (called *romeros*) join together in the city of Cartago to express their religious unity. They may gather together after a long journey or through their televisions. One day a year Costa Rica becomes “holy.” National and international officials from the Roman Catholic Church wait for the pilgrims to come and provide them with the Eucharist. Why? Three hundred sixty-four years ago the Virgin Mary appeared on a rock to a Native American woman at the site where the Basilica of Cartago is today. At this site the Virgin of the Angels, Patroness of Costa Rica, now resides according to the myth. The legend tells that

in the beginning of August 1635, the Virgin’s image was found on a rock by Juana Periera, a humble woman referred to as *mulata*. . . . The virgin appeared as a small figurine, approximately eight inches in height, made of black-green stone traditionally worked by the Indians in the area. She holds a child, the baby Jesus, and is therefore considered a Madonna. The statuette, or *muñequita*, returned to the rock five times indicating that the Virgin wanted to be venerated in that place. (Mullenax 1992, 4)

The Pilgrimage

Don Jorge and Doña Claudia were ready to leave with several other pilgrims on their way to Cartago. They were not alone because they knew that a million other Costa

Ricans in one way or another will join them from other parts of the country, riding their bikes, in buses, using their own transportation, or walking. However, their pilgrimage is different because their journey through pavement roads is going to take five days. They will walk about 150 miles in order to give thanks and supplication to the Virgin of the Angels, Queen of Heaven and Earth, Patron of Costa Rica. For over twelve years Don Jorge and Doña Claudia have led small groups of pilgrims from their southern town in Costa Rica, very close to Panama, to Cartago, a city in the middle of the country. “Why not this year?” says Don Jorge. “It is the last year of the century and we do not know what is going to happen.... We have to show respect to the Virgin!”

Their pilgrimage of faith has many reasons. Some go to provide company to their devotees’ friends; others for thanksgiving because they were healed by the Virgin; others go asking for healing for one of their family members. One of the young women expressed her desire to ask for the end of male infidelity in the country, walking in solidarity with other women like her that have been abandoned by their husbands who ran away with other women. Don Jorge is taking with him an *exvoto*, a gold medal in a shape of a liver to give it to the Virgin. “He has had problems with his liver because of his drinking habits, and I want the virgin to heal him,” says his wife Doña Claudia. One young pilgrim, on his first pilgrimage, wants to give a photocopy of his high school diploma to the Virgin. He says, “I prayed a lot for the Virgin to enlighten my mind and help me pass the exams. Now I have my high school degree, thanks to her!”

There is no one reason to go to Cartago besides the desire to encounter the holy and faithful goddess, the Virgin Mary, who has already or may is the future grant them a miracle. Doña Claudia says, “In order to receive the blessing, one needs to hurt the body,

because any sacrifice to God is worth it.” Before they left town, friends and families gathered around them and prayed the rosary for protection on their journey. The local priest blessed them, providing them with the blessed Eucharist. However, they wondered why he was not going with them. Anyway, they knew that miracles can and have happened; therefore, they had to go and meet the Virgin so such miracles can become theirs.

The following are three miracles mentioned in Costa Rican newspapers that explain the faith that motivates people to participate in this pilgrimage.

The Virgin granted me a huge miracle because 46 years ago my child got poliomyelitis and she healed her. (Calderón & Aguilar 1999, 6, my translation)

Her miracles are very human. She turns her eyes to humanity in order to make us believe in God and the Virgin.... (Calderón & Aguilar 1999, 6, my translation)

One day I came with one of my neighbors to this Basilica. I carried two bottles to take holy water home with me, one for me and another for my mother-in-law. We were loading the bottles with holy water when I saw the Virgin, who told me to take one of the bottles to a young woman who was seriously ill in a town near mine.... She did not want anybody to visit her, but I told her that I came on behalf of the Virgin, and she let me in. I told her about the bottle of holy water from the Virgin. She drank it and said that it tasted like the water of roses. She sat down and was very happy. She remembered that she owed two promises to the Virgin.... She was living with a man and had two girls; therefore, she got married and was doing fine for sometime. Then she died, but in peace because she also forgave all her enemies. (Matute 1999, 12, my translation)

The pilgrims, under the leadership of Don Jorge and Doña Claudia, had planned the trip, even though it was rainy season and at any moment could rain. They knew that the first two days they would be walking in weather of about ninety-five degrees Fahrenheit. The third day they would ascend a series of mountains, one of them called “The Mountain of Death” because at night its temperature may plunge to thirty degrees.

The last five miles they would walk barefoot, and then on their knees as they cross the sanctuary of the *Basilica* where the image of the Virgin stands.

The government has provided a whole strategic plan of twelve hundred Red Cross volunteers throughout small stations, three hundred units of transit police, and eight hundred police officers all over the country to provide assistance and protection to the pilgrims. For one day, 2 August, the country will become a sacred place, so sacred that taverns and street vendor's stalls will be closed in the city of Cartago. Even the Catholic Church has asked radio stations not to transmit non-Christian music for the day of the pilgrimage.

In this folk-Catholic activity, even the current Costa Rican president, Miguel Angel Rodríguez, went to Cartago asking for his brother to be healed.³⁶ He went accompanied by twenty people including security guards, politicians, family, and friends who walked around twelve miles to the city of Cartago to visit the Virgin. He said, "We not only want our country to improve, but we also have people to pray for it" (Matute 1999, 5A).

Regardless of his Catholic devotion, the president was criticized by the well-known Catholic priest Minor Calvo who said, "The president participated in the Eucharist but is committing immoral acts." This confrontation happened a few days before this religious pilgrimage when the president approved a law to allow sterilization for men and women in Costa Rica. However, the Archbishop of San José, Monsignor Arrieta, did not refer to this matter during the main mass for the pilgrims. His main topics were to ask

³⁶ "Promise of the President" by Ronald Matute, La Nación 8/2/99 page 5A.

Catholics not to change their religion, but instead their conduct. Besides other topics like domestic violence and drugs, he prayed the following:

We ask you today also Queen of the Angels for all our brothers in poverty, because often in Costa Rica we forget about them, for their health, housing, education and employment. May the rich cease their injustice, and allow the Government and its institutions to use more resources to raise their condition of living. (Saenz-Valverde 1999, 6)

Nevertheless, it seems that no matter the moral condition of the pilgrim, this pilgrimage is done to obtain miracles. *Romeros* believe that sacrificing the body may awaken their spirits, and the Virgin may look down from heaven and see their effort, and then may grant them what they request. How many miracles may happen this year?

Step 2a Applying an Ontological Critique

As it has been shown, if the evangelical church wants to know how to deal with the issues of folk-Catholic spirituality, they not only must do cultural exegesis, but also study the Scriptures in an exegetical way. That is, evangelicals must contextualize the Gospel within a specific culture in a language that folk-Catholics may understand. Now, in order to do cultural exegesis, evangelicals must not only do it with the purpose of understanding (describing and analyzing the phenomena), but also appreciating folk-Catholic spiritual communal experiences, such as the festival of *el baile de la Yegüita* (festival of the Yeguita), *la Romería* (pilgrimage), and the *Rezos del Niño* (ritual prayers).

This thesis will now analyze (ontologically speaking) the three cases together because of their common goddess who is the Virgin Mary. Mary is the one who marks the difference between the two Christian worlds in Costa Rica. She is the center of almost

all folk-Catholic myths, the goddess to whom the majority of rituals are oriented, and the one who provides a common sign in all three cases: miracles. Thus, folk-Catholics seek her favor to intercede on their behalf to God the Father in order to obtain miracles.

According to Paden in his book Religious Worlds, the sacred defines the world. Therefore, asking where the sacred is, helps in identifying religious worlds.

The study of the locations of the sacred is a study in the varieties of things that sustain human life and the concomitant variety of things that profane or destroy life. Where life is local, the sacred and the profane will be local. Where life is individual, the sacred and the profane is individual. Where life is institutional or cultic, so the sacred/profane distinction follows suit. (Paden 1988, 60)

As this thesis explained above, if anyone wants to discover the two Christian worlds in Costa Rica, one needs simply ask where and what is “sacred.” Immediately boundaries arise between the two worlds. Why? Because each religious world lives in its own world inhabiting its own structure, actions, forms and boundaries, judging each other’s behavior and beliefs from their own worldview. For folk-Catholics, the “sacred” is located, present and accesible in festivals in which the Virgin Mary’s life and inmediate power are celebrated. For evangelicals the “sacred” is located, present and accesible in church services in which Jesus Christ’s life and inmediate power are proclaimed. Even though these two groups may share a Christian myth, Scripture, and some rituals, each interprets its own world by different beliefs.

For instance, Mullenax presents the Virgin of the Angels as having its own geographical and spiritual world in Costa Rica, explaining her role as local goddess of the Costa Rican. This author writes:

As the patroness and protectress of Costa Rica, [she] is a national symbol ... [a] symbol of regional identity.... [She] is queen, mother, lawyer, and ideal woman. She is the reason of the marriage of religion and nationalism, of politics and faith, which the *Virgin de los Angeles* represents.... Both *Guadalupe* [the local Virgin

and patroness of the Mexicans] and the Virgin of *Los Angeles* are described as the best intercessors, on the part of their children, to God the Father... Furthermore, God the Father is said to never deny the petitions of the Virgin, the Mother of God. Thus, while the Virgin cannot take direct action, through her mediation her children are saved from destruction of earthquakes, the invasion of pests, and, ultimately, from the castigating and angry Judge and Father, the male God (Mullenax 1992, 4, 7, 8).

However, if phenomenologically speaking, for evangelistic purposes one follows Paden's idea (1988, 95) that ritual is a way humans structure action and time in order to focus on the sacred, then we can understand folk-Catholic rituals as the way they dramatize or recreate their myth. Let us remember that "myth expresses the world foundation in terms of words and image, ritual dramatizes world foundations in terms of performance" (Paden 1988, 93). In other words, festivals as rituals illustrate very well how time and space become holy in the midst of the presence of the Virgin as the folk-Catholic goddess.

In Nicoya, the myth of *el baile de la Yegüita* is re-created by folk-Catholics who seek to participate in this festival in order to experience the miracles that the Virgin can grant them. Their myth explains that the first miracle the Virgin granted them was sending a young mule to cause reconciliation between the two men who were willing to kill each other. Thus, reconciliation can become the main principle behind this legend and the theological theme necessary from the Scriptures. Now in order to find a symbol to represent such a theological theme, evangelicals can ask themselves, what symbol is mentioned to express God's reconciliation with humanity that may also impact relationships among humans? What about the cross of our Savior? What an opportunity for the evangelical church to proclaim in word and deed the evangelical meaning of

reconciliation during this festival, held during the time of advent in preparation for Christmas.

Another example is the *Rezos del Niño* that presents how the manger seems to become the *axis mundi* (Eliade 1959, 36), a place where heaven and earth joins. As well, the local house, through rituals, becomes a sacred space for renewal of the participants. According to Mircea Eliade in his book The Sacred and the Profane, religious people experience two kinds of time: sacred time and profane time. Profane time is ordinary time without any religious meaning or special celebration. Meanwhile, sacred time is a reactualization, a way to perform again, to repeat, and to remember a meaningful event through a ritual. In this case, religiously speaking, this event was time that was sanctified by the divine when Jesus was born. This event that took place in the past is remembered in the calendar with celebration.

Every time that these *Rezos* are reenacted through ritual prayers, a festive time is celebrated, and the participants recreate and celebrate that sacred time. Festivals function for *homo religiosus*³⁷ [a person that is by nature religious], according to the calendar, to remember any supreme divine manifestation, in this case the cosmogony of Jesus being

³⁷ According to Eliade the task of *homo religiosus* (a religious human being as opposed to a profane human or modern humanism) is to imitate the divine, and this implies an awesome responsibility. That is, *homo religiosus* is not a natural gift; people change themselves by approaching the divine models (through rituals recreating the myth). Doing this, humans remain in the sacred and sanctify the world. The frustration that *homo religiosus* may experience with modern humanism is that profane humans believe that they are shaped and constituted only by human history where there is no divine model but only self. If the whole religious life is the commemoration of the divine event and that divine event is not part of history in modern humanism, then the frustration of *homo religiosus* is enormous because there is no space in the cultural calendar for them. This big frustration is how profane humans shape themselves, while *homo religiosus* is shaped by the divine.

born in a manger. For instance, with every celebration of the *Rezos*, sacred time is regenerated, and the building of the manger is a way for the family to reactualize the incarnational cosmogony (Eliade 1959, 62-65). Therefore, there is nothing inherently wrong with the form of this tradition for evangelicals, aside from its current direction toward Mariolatry and the magical approach in the use of the prayers. The concern is: What is behind this ritual form, its meaning?

Through this practice of the *Rezo del Niño*, evangelicals can see how folk-Catholics are concerned about misfortune. Folk-Catholics through this ritual want to receive blessings in order to have prosperity in the year to come. “[One of folk-Catholics’] central concern is for well-being on earth, not eternal life in heaven, and many beliefs and activities are designed to gain blessings here and now” (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999, 133). Folk-Catholics, in their syncretism, have been able to create a system to deal with the problem of well-being and to avoid disasters through not only personal rituals, but also communal ones because these are problems that may affect anyone at any time. “Beliefs in the power of blessings to bring good fortune and curses to cause misfortune are worldwide” (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999, 134).

Thus, in the midst of folk-Catholics looking for blessings through the symbol of the manger, evangelicals should ask themselves: What is the main principle behind this festival? In their looking for blessings through these ritual prayers, folk-Catholics seem to show their need to experience God’s blessings to provide them with peace. They seem not to be secure in their covenant with God. God has promised peace for those who are faithful to the covenant. Jesus Christ is the new and continuing covenant, who brings peace or shalom. Shalom can be the wholistic well-being they need to confront their

misfortunes. Evangelicals, through building the manger, can teach folk-Catholics that through Jesus we can have shalom with God and with all creation. Therefore, the manger can become a symbol of God's shalom that reminds humans that their covenant with God is perpetual.

On the other hand, the examples of *la Romería* and *el baile de la Yegüita* can be seen as *miracle legends*. According to McKenzie (1988, 145), "the core of all legends is the miracle story.... It rests on historical foundations, not merely because the person of the saint or prophet is historical, but also insofar as the events narrated have an historical nucleus, a residuum of fact" However, let us remember that the phenomenological approach invites evangelicals to appreciate the "phenomena," not as true or false, but as real. For the evangelical church to debate against the truthfulness or historicity of these two activities involving a manifestation of the Virgin would be worthless because they relate to a spiritual experience, which involves faith. The folk-Catholics who believe in these two miracle legends do not believe in them because they are historically truthful, but because they express and reinforce their faith. In the same fashion, evangelicals should appreciate this festival as a way in which the folk-Catholics celebrate their spirituality and the sacred power available to them in the cities where the Virgin appears (the sacredness of their cities) during those few days.

In the case of the *Romería*, folk-Catholics travel to the city of Cartago looking for miracles, mainly of healing. Their symbol of power is the Virgin who can ask God to work and provide them with miracles. However, again it can be noticed that they are not looking for submission to God's will, rather they are trying to manipulate the Virgin for a miracle. Thus, what can serve as an evangelical symbol to show the Christian journey to

find miracles through the sign of submission and participation? Can the chalice³⁸ be the symbol that shows the Christian journey done in obedience to God?

Step 2b Application of a Critical Analysis: Finding Theological Themes

In this section the Scripture will be explored in order to find theological themes from which signs can be developed. From these signs, symbols will be created. Symbols are necessary to structure ceremonies or rituals. It is crucial that evangelicals base their ceremonies on biblical and theological work in order to avoid syncretism or cultural relativism. That is why this section is extremely necessary as part of the critical contextualization process.

Finding a Theological Theme for the *Romería*

Πορεύομαι (*poreuomai*, translated as “journey”) is mentioned eighty-five times in Luke and Acts and 145 times in the New Testament. *Πορεύομαι* in the sense of pilgrimage can be found in Luke 2:41, 4:42; 9:12-13, 51; 13:22; 17:11; 19:28; 22:8; 24:13, 28. In these verses Jesus and his disciples were going to Jerusalem. In other verses the Jewish people had different destinations related to festivals or not, but with the same spiritual significance. On the way to Emmaus (Lk. 24:13-33), when Jesus’ disciples were coming back from Jerusalem after celebrating the Passover, the Lord Jesus started walking with them.

Jesus came near as they walked. These pilgrims found out, as Jesus explained, that the Scriptures provide guidance for understanding and interpreting reality. Jesus was

³⁸ The Lord Jesus chose the verbal symbol of the chalice to signify his submission to God when describing his “drinking the cup” (Mt 29:37). This verbal symbol also appears in Christ inquiry regarding his disciples’ submission and willingness to share his life (Mt 20:20).

their companion on their journey. Jesus listened to their concerns and frustrations, then he presented the interpretation of the events through the Scriptures answering their questions. It was at the end of their destination where the stranger became revealed to the pilgrims. Their welcome table became the sacred place for the revelation that Jesus walks with any pilgrim who seeks to meet the divine in their journey. The risen Christ, companion and enlightener, revealed himself as the one who breaks the bread and shares the cup. For the Emmaus pilgrims the participation with Christ on the journey became the center of their experience.

On the other hand for folk-Catholics in their pilgrimage to Cartago, the destination is the center of their experience. Gil-Zuñiga in his thesis El Culto a la Virgen de Los Angeles mentions that pilgrimages are a massive manifestation of a type of sacrifice, like an offering to the Virgin.³⁹ This pilgrimage is a way of purification from whatever stresses the pilgrim has as devotee of the Virgin (Gil-Zuñiga 1982, 67). It is important to highlight that the pilgrimage to Cartago is very unique. That is, the reason folk-Catholics participate in this pilgrimage is not to find salvation or spiritual growth, but to show thanksgiving for a miracle granted by the Virgin or to manipulate the Virgin by showing how much effort they have given. Therefore, they believe they deserve her response to their supplication.

³⁹ The Virgin's appearances and pilgrimages are common in many countries in Latin America and in Europe. In Latin America the Virgin's appearances have always been to a non-Spanish woman of dark skin, holding a non-ecclesiastical role, in a non-Spanish settlement and given to indicate the building of a temple.

An evangelical approach to the pilgrimage may be found by considering the following aspects from the passage of Luke 24 about Jesus and two disciples in a journey. Here we see:

- As Jesus explained his life using the Scriptures, evangelicals must become vulnerable in sharing their journey with folk-Catholics. The middle level questions that concern folk-Catholics also worry evangelicals, but the use of the Scripture to present Christ as the hope in difficult times can make a big difference in the life of any one who participates.
- As Jesus did, evangelicals must allow folk-Catholics to express their version of the story. Then evangelicals can use the Scripture to guide and find possible answers to folk-Catholic concerns about how to obtain God's peace through Christ.
- The risen Christ made himself known through the breaking of the bread and the welcoming table. Sharing the sacraments and other Christian ceremonies in the midst of a pilgrimage are a perfect combination of activities to allow the Holy Spirit to do God's convincing work.
- Making Christ the center of any ritual enforces the idea of a God who walks with his creatures to open their understanding that Jesus is alive and wants to relate to them and satisfy their needs.

Evangelicals, through the theological theme of journey and the signs of submission to God's will through loneliness, tiredness, and the need for healing and community (taking the cup), can create a symbol that may represent the welcoming table of Emmaus. The chalice can become a contextualized symbol of the welcoming table of

participation for the pilgrims in Emmaus. Therefore, the chalice may represent God's desire to have communion with us in good times and bad times. That is, when evangelicals and folk-Catholics see the chalice as a symbol of the signs of God's presence with the church through healing, community, fellowship, and rest, then the pilgrimage through the world becomes a communal path for vulnerable Christians to recognize the presence of the risen Lord always in their midst. Evangelicals in Costa Rica must be willing to drink from the chalice of the Lord while welcoming folk-Catholics as partners in a common journey in order to share the revealing Light of God. As Nouwen (1996, 20-21) highlights saying

“can you drink the cup? Can you empty it to the dregs? Can you taste all the sorrows and joys? Can you live your life to the full whatever it will bring? I realized these were our questions. But why should we drink this cup? There is so much pain, so much anguish, so much violence. Why should we drink the cup? Wouldn't it be easier to live normal lives with a minimum of pain and a maximum of pleasure? ... Drinking the cup is much more than gulping down whatever happens to be in there, just as breaking the bread is much more than tearing a loaf apart. Drinking the cup of life involves *holding, lifting, and drinking*. It is the full celebration of being human. ... Can you hold our life, lift our life, and drink it, as Jesus did? In some of those around me, there was a sign of recognition, but in myself there was a deep awareness of truth. Jesus' question had given me a new language with which to speak about my life and the lives of those around me.”

Finding a Theological Theme for *el Baile de la Yegüita*

Reconciliation is the main theme from the festival in Nicoya that the evangelical church can rescue, after a phenomenological understanding and an ontological critique. Schreiter (1998, 42) states that “a theology of reconciliation can be discerned on three levels: a Christological level, in which Christ is the mediator through whom God reconciles the world to God’s self; an ecclesiological level, in which Christ reconciles Jew and Gentile; and a cosmic level in which Christ reconciles all the powers in heaven and on earth”

Καταλλάσσω (*katalasso*) and *ἀποκαταλλάσσω* (*apokatalasso*) are cited in some of Paul’s epistles and are translated as reconciliation in Romans 5:10, 11; 11.15; 1 Corinthians 7:11; 2 Colossians 5:18-20; Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 1:20, 22. Porter (1994, 160) makes an interesting observation about *Καταλλάσσω* in his comments on Romans 5:8-11 when he explains that justification and reconciliation are two different metaphors describing the same fact. The noun “enemies” determines the meaning of the verb “to reconcile.” Reconciliation puts an end to enmity, while to justify puts an end to legal contention. In this same idea, Martin (1980, 201-202) mentions that

categories of justification by faith were useful to express the rationale of the new life in salvation to Jewish audiences. But once Paul’s mission moved out to confront the cultured Hellenistic world the expression of his kerygma changed with the diversity of dominant needs. To men and women in Graeco-Roman society the prime need was to experience deliverance from bondage to superstition and demonic forces that were thought to hold human life under its sway. Paul’s adaptation of the message of reconciliation was admirably suited to meet that need and to communicate the good news of God’s saving power in the cross where Jesus overcame the spirit-powers and delivered the church in a victorious engagement that both proclaimed the end of the old order and offered forgiveness of sins as a sign that Christians belonged to the new world.

Therefore, Paul in his contextualization of the atonement of Christ for the Hellenistic world used the concept of reconciliation to show Jesus' victorious saving power over sin and all evil works. That power is given to God's church who accept and live God's reconciliation with others. The atonement of Christ is that historical mark that ended the enmity between humans and God and between humans and humans whether due to their ethnic diversities or any social or economic inequality. Christ's death at the cross, once and for all until the end of human history, is bringing peace to humanity restoring all kind of broken relationships.

I propose that the supplication of the indigenous Nicoyans, asking for help so their two siblings could be reconciled, was genuine. To this request, God in His grace responded in cultural terms that they could understand. This festival of *el baile de la Yegüita* is a tradition of how Nicoyans articulate their relationship with the spiritual realm. Rejecting or labeling this tradition as "idolatry" or "evil" will only make it more difficult for the Gospel to penetrate in Nicoya. We have to help the folk-Catholics to read the Scripture and their culture so they can come to their own theological conclusions of how to interpret this traditional festival as a way of God teaching them about reconciliation.

Evangelicals during this festival can proclaim that reconciliation in terms of relationships (as an organic analogy) is the work of God through Jesus' death at the cross, and not just humanity's own work. Reconciliation first comes from God and not from our rituals. Therefore, rituals have to be transformed to express the work that God has already done through Christ at the cross and in the resurrection.

On an ecclesiological level, evangelicals have to consider some historical facts that may help them to appreciate the “spiritual phenomena” of the festival of *el baile de la Yeguita*. As we have seen, the first evangelical or non-Catholic churches came during the second half of the nineteenth century, around three hundred years after this miracle happened in Nicoya. How can we expect Native Americans under the Spanish Crown’s control, and “evangelized” by the Catholic Church to have a further Christological knowledge of the gospel (as evangelicals expect) when even Bibles (in Latin) were only read by the clergy?

The natives prayed to what they understood was the Christian deity who performs miracles, according to what they were taught about Christianity from the Catholic Church.

There are many Virgins throughout the world, especially in Latin America, that share these iconographic and semantic characteristics: she appears to Indians, *mestizos*, and *mulatos*; she is related to pre-Columbian cultures by some means; and she represents the defense of the people. (Mullenax 1992, 9)

Mary was the light of revelation that the Catholic Church preached to these natives. Can God then answer a call that is not to him? What about those who, spiritually speaking, prayed to Mary for salvation and miracles but did not have adequate knowledge of the work of Christ at the cross?

In order to give a short answer to these questions, it can be said that in this festival we can see how the Holy Spirit’s prevenient and convincing grace was at work before evangelicals preached the name of Christ for salvation. If the grace of God is not limited to the proclaiming work of the church, then evangelicals may easily understand the work of the Holy Spirit in Nicoya even before the evangelical church got there, as evidenced in the intervention of God in *el baile de la Yegüita*. With this concept of prevenient grace in

mind, the way in which Mary was viewed as a deity can better be understood. In this instance, the following insights from Pinnock (1992, 157-158) are helpful:

People are saved by faith, not by the content of their theology....

People are judged on the basis of the light they have received and how they have responded to that light....

People cannot respond to the light that did not reach them. They can only respond to revelation that did.... God cares about the direction of the heart, not the content of theology.

Lastly, evangelicals in Nicoya must remember that all things have been reconciled in Christ. Therefore in Christ, evangelicals and Catholics can find peace through the blood of his cross. As Colossians 1:19-20 reads:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

In this passage evangelicals may see how Paul mentions a symbol for reconciliation—the cross. The concept of reconciliation has its own symbol—the cross—and its signs can be applied in many ways: peaceful living, healing, and forgiveness of sins.

Thus, the cross can be the symbol for evangelicals who seek reconciliation and forgiveness from Catholics. The cross was an instrument on which Jesus bore human sins in his body. So the cross may serve as a symbol of unity for the Costa Ricans, evangelicals, and Catholics alike. The cross for evangelicals can be to love folk-Catholics, accepting them as they are, but offering them a sensitive cultural alternative where they can understand the Gospel of Christ in their own language. This culturally sensitive Gospel can guide folk-Catholics from where they are in their worldview to where God wants them to be through Jesus' reconciliation at the cross.

Finding a Theological Theme for the *Rezos del Niño*

Lasor, Hubbard and Bush (1996:36) mention that archaeologists have found tablets in the Middle East dating from the Patriarchal age, ca. 2000 B.C. to ca. 1500 B.C. that show legal codes similar to the laws of the Pentateuch. These legal codes are explained in terms of covenants, and the Old Testament contain many of them. For instance, the Old Testament presents parity covenants like the ones between Abraham and Abimelech (Genesis 21:22-32), Isaac and Abimelech (Genesis 26:26-33), or Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:44-54). However, the most common covenants are those between God and humans with God as the initiator on the one hand, and on the other hand, with Israel as God's dependent vassals.

Beckwith explains that God participated in many covenants in the Old Testament. According to Beckwith (1986, 103), God is always the sovereign initiator of the relationship with humanity, and humans are always to carry out what God prescribes. All covenants include promises and commands. Some are accompanied by oaths on God's part, inaugurated by animal sacrifice or a similar rite. They also may have an outward sign or token to maintain the covenant from generation to generation (e.g. circumcision Gen. 17), and finally the parties involved include God and God's creation.

These covenants and their forms explain the way in which God worked within the worldview of Israel to communicate a type of relationship that God wanted to have with them. That is, in the cultural context of the Ancient Near East world, God made known God's will to Israel in cultural terms that they could understand. God wanted Israel, as today God wants all human beings, to trust and submit to God's will all the time.

God (in terms of an organic analogy) gave blessings and curses according to a covenant relationship with His people. Blessings were given for people's faithfulness and curses for their unfaithfulness to God's covenant. Therefore, the Scripture teaches us that in order to obtain blessings we have to submit to God's will through obedience to the covenant. However, the approach of folk-Catholics through the use of *Rezos del Niño* is to control through manipulation those blessings (in terms of a mechanic analogy). This issue of manipulation may not be a conscious act by them. Their problem is their lack of understanding about a Christian ritual. The ritual must express their submission and not manipulation.

In their prayers, folk-Catholics implicitly express an organic analogy about the cause of their misfortunes. Sin seems to be the cause of folk-Catholic misfortunes, according to the study of the ritual of *Rezos del Niño*. I believe that their misfortune is caused by problems in their covenantal relationship with God. The theological problem, however, is not the remedy they choose, that is, the way that they solve their problem is through mechanic analogies that do not end in reinforcing their personal spiritual relationship. In the use of prayers as ritual (and objects within the ritual), they seem not to reorient their lives to God but rather to simply manipulate the objects in an effort to force God's blessing.

God, in their theology, is presented as a *Deus Otiosus*,⁴⁰ [a God who withdrew Himself after creation] and from far away in heaven is willing to punish those who sin. However, Mary is not as withdrawn and as intercessor seems to have the power to present their prayers to God and thereby obtain for them the forgiveness of sins and blessings.

⁴⁰ Eliade (1959, 121-122)

How can this organic analogy of the problem of sin be solved through an organic analogical remedy, rather than with a mechanic one? Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou (1999, 134-140) presents a Trinitarian view of God expressed in *shalom* as a way to find a Christian response to the problem of well-being.

Evangelicals express that God is at work today through (שְׁלוֹמִים) *shalom*. In folk-Catholics' worldview, God is not at work but rather far away, and it seems to be Mary who makes God work. On the other hand, in evangelicals' worldview, God the Father maintains creation and superintends all history (Psalm 95). God the Son is present with us (Matthew 28:7), and his victory on the cross has given us access to the Father. Jesus' example helps us and sustains us through trials. Finally, the Holy Spirit works within us, gives us victory over sin and evil, and empowers us in doing God's ministry in a broken world.

Shalom, nevertheless, is the symbol that can also help us to understand, even further what well-being and misfortune for Christians in relationship with God's covenant is all about. According to Bradshaw one can read in the Old Testament that *Shalom* generally means peace. However, this peace is more than the absence of war. This peace is communicating

the sense of human welfare, healing and well-being, in both spiritual and material aspects ... a way of life that characterizes the covenant relationship between God and God's people ... defines the state of wholeness and holiness possessed by individuals and communities as they become part of the greater community of faith ... includes social justice: the protection of widows, orphans, and society's dependents; the struggle against exploitation and oppression; protection of life and property.... Through *shalom*, truth, power and control have a place in making known the covenant that reconciles creation to the Creator. (Bradshaw 1993, 17-19)

Friberg (1994)⁴¹ adds that (שְׁלוֹמִי) is the result of God's activity in covenant (*b^erit*), and is the result of righteousness (Isaiah 32:17). In nearly two-thirds of its occurrences, shalom describes the state of fulfillment, which is the result of God's presence. This is specifically indicated in those references to the "covenant of peace" (*b^erit shālôm*), Numbers 25:12; Isaiah 54:10; Ezekial 34:25; Malachi 2:5) with his chosen representatives, the Aaronic priests and the Davidic monarchs... This sort of peace has its source in God. He is the one who will speak shālôm to his people (Psalm 85:8). His promise to David in 1 Chronicles 22:9-10 puts *shālôm* in context with (*m^enûhâ*) "calmness," (*nûah*) "rest," and (*sheqet*) "to be quiet," as these are gifts from God.

Folk-Catholics need to understand that God's peace can appear to them through the manger. The manger can be interpreted as a sign of God's redeeming work through Christ in all creation (God's salvation as a present experience and not only as an eschatological one). The symbol for that sign is *shalom*, and the concept behind that symbol is God's covenant. Through the manger we can see God's myth of providing wholistic well-being to those who accept Christ as their redeemer. On the other hand, the use of ritual prayers is not with the purpose of bringing blessings, but as an expression of thanksgiving for His faithful work in God's community that is called to remember through rituals—God's covenant through Jesus Christ in each cultural context.

It has been demonstrated that the evangelical church needs to contextualize its evangelistic activities to fit the Costa Rican culture. First, evangelicals must understand folk-Catholics in their spiritual journey as they are, phenomenologically speaking,

⁴¹ Friberg Timothy, "AGNT2 Analytical Greek-New Testament, Greek NT Grammatical Analysis database," *Bible Works 4*, 1996, CD-ROM, 1994 version 2.

through describing and analyzing their religious world. Secondly through an ontological critique, evangelicals can discern the main principle behind any folk-Catholic practice, and then through a critical evaluation find in the Scripture a theological theme that may respond as an alternative. Thirdly, from that theological theme or theological concept, evangelicals must find a symbol that may help in communicating that theological theme. Finally through that symbol, evangelicals can create a bridge, as a missiological response, to create contextualized ceremonies or rituals for evangelistic activities.

CHAPTER 4

STEP 3: MISSIOLOGICAL RESPONSE

Missiological response is the final step in the Critical Contextualization process. This is where new biblical understanding challenges the folk-Catholic worldview and responds to their middle zone questions. In this way, folk-Catholics must be helped to move on to where God wants them to be because “the gospel is truth for people living in specific places and times, and caught in their own dilemmas” (Hiebert, Shaw and Tienou 1999, 29). The form of missiological response this thesis proposes is to use the folk-Catholic symbols and rituals described above to develop alternative rituals for evangelistic and discipleship purposes.

As it was shown, folk-Catholics through symbol and rituals access the presence of the divine. Symbols become an important part of any ritual that recreates a myth, which may show the work of God and God’s nature in relationship with humans. Symbols, then, represent all the important concepts in the myth. For instance, in communion or Eucharist, Christians have the symbols of wine and bread. These represent the blood and body of Christ. Through rituals (because different Christian traditions recreate the myth of Jesus’ new covenant in many ways) those two Eucharistic symbols may be explained through many different ways. The ritual recreates the time and place where the Lord served those elements to his disciples. In that moment the participant is transported into a state of meditation where the myth is remembered.

Zahniser (1994, 47) informs the desire to seek a way to respond to folk-Catholics when he states that “one feature of cross-cultural discipling that makes it cross cultural is its willingness to take the realities of traditional religious culture seriously” Zahniser (1994, 48) demonstrates that folk-religious people (like folk-Catholics) deal with their middle level questions through symbols, rituals and formulas. Evangelicals must understand this and take folk-Catholic religiosity seriously. In so doing, evangelicals can find alternative symbols in order to express rituals that are based on Scriptural myths for folk-Catholics. For instance, in the following discussion, this thesis will present and explain how the suggested alternative symbols and rituals could respond to the needs of folk-Catholics for each case explored in Chapter 3.

Los Rezos del Niño

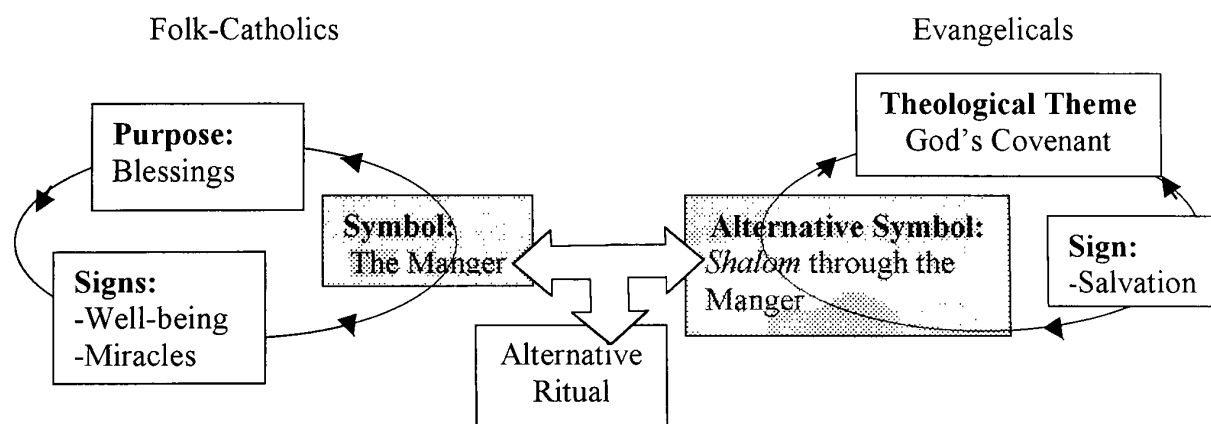


Figure 14: Alternative to *Los Rezos del Niño*

As it was explained in Chapter 3, evangelicals can present a Scriptural alternative to folk-Catholics concerning “blessings.” The manger is a common symbol, but it must have a different interpretation in order to see God’s *shalom* through it. The way for folk-

Catholics to understand this new meaning of the manger is through an evangelical ritual that may explain and show submission to God's will instead of manipulation.

For folk-Catholics *Los Rezos del Niño* is a communal ritual of prayers, a social activity of fellowship, and a feast, all of which is celebrated outside the church in homes. Evangelicals can consider these characteristic activities in order to create a similar ritual for evangelistic purposes during the season of Epiphany. The ritual must express the myth of God's incarnation as Jesus Christ who brought God's fullness of life and blessings (*shalom*) to creation. Under this new understanding for evangelistic purposes, evangelicals can build the manger that explains God-with-us (Emmanuel) who was born in simplicity to make us rich in God's blessing through obedience to God's covenant.

God's covenant is a treaty between God and God's people where God provides blessings to those who follow His commands. Thus, the ritual itself will not produce any blessings. The ritual is an expression and reminder of God's faithfulness to God's people. For instance, Jesus mentioned in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Therefore, the manger is the reminder that keeping God's commandments will bring blessings (*shalom*) to God's people. However, how can the ritual be structured in an evangelical way?

A lay leader or the pastor could read a selection of Scriptural passages that describe why, how, when, what, and where Jesus was born and emphasize God the Father's plan. As it is expected from any evangelistic activity, evangelicals should invite their neighbors to come and participate, and there must be enough room for them. This is a way to show hospitality. The ritual and its songs must also be easy to follow for folk-Catholics. That is, evangelicals must remember that this ritual is an evangelistic outreach

to folk-Catholics and not a *churchy* extension of Sunday worship. A following order of passages in a ritual are suggested as part of this thesis:

Los Rezos del Niño: an evangelical alternative for evangelism

All sing: Costa Rican Christmas Carol *No solo hay portal in Belen* (There is not only a manger in Bethlehem ... but also in Costa Rica)

Family: welcomes all people

All read: Isaiah 42 (Introduction)

Leader reads: John 1.1-5 (Jesus the Logos)

All read: Psalm 130

All sing: Praise songs about peace

All pray: silently for peace in their neighborhoods

Leader reads: Luke 1:26-38 (The Annunciation to the Virgin Mary)

All read: Psalm 128

Women read: Luke 1:39-56 (Mary praises God)

All read: Psalm 1

All sing: Costa Rican Christmas Carol (topic: righteousness)

Men read: Matthew 1:18-25 (The Annunciation to Joseph)

All read: Psalm 119:57-64

Leader invites each person to pray silently for those family members that are not followers of Christ, wishing Christ could be born in their hearts

All sing: Praise songs about conversion

Children read: Luke 2:1-7 (Jesus is born in Bethlehem)

All read: Isaiah 9:1-7

All sing: Christmas Carol *Venid Pastorcillos* (O come little Shepherds)

Participants greet each other joyfully because the Savior is born bringing Shalom to earth

Leader reads: Luke 2:8-20 (The Annunciation to the Shepherds)

All read: Psalm 126

Leader reads: Luke 2:21-38 (Simeon praises the Lord)

All read: Isaiah 42:10-17

All sing: Praise songs

Leader reads: Matthew 2:1-12 (The wise men)

All read: Micah 5:2-5a

Leader reads: Leviticus 26:1,14-21, 2-13

Leader: Meditation about God's Covenant and God's *shalom* (Explaining the meaning of the word *Shalom*)

All participate: Leader calls to renewal or conversion while people take the Eucharist

Each Family member of the house takes one of the pieces from the manger and puts it in a box as a way to express that they have understood God's covenant and they desire God's *shalom* in their home forever

All pray for God's *shalom* to be poured out upon every family member

Everyone hugs each other wishing "*Shalom*"

Leader: Benediction -2 Chronicles 7:14-16

Music, Meal & Fellowship

Finally, although the traditional practice was to give oral recitation from memory, this thesis suggests that this ritual should be printed so folk-Catholics that may not know how to use the Scriptures may follow along in the reading. It is expected that evangelicals

also will take time to greet, welcome and personally share the Good News of the birth of Jesus Christ in an elenctic dialogue.⁴²

Elenctic Dialogical Approach

According to several New Testament dictionaries, the word that *elenctic*, which is found in the New Testament as *elegxei*, *elegxo*, means the following: “to convict, discipline, reproach, condemn, punish, rebuke, correct, reprove in order to show the errors, faults of someone therefore bring him/her to repent”⁴³ Elenctics is based on a vulnerable attitude in which dialogue allows the other person to share his or her faith, creating an environment where the Holy Spirit is the one who will convince the person of sin. The proclamation of the Gospel can be used implicitly to convict someone to repent

⁴⁴ The idea of elenctic (non-apologetic way to do evangelism) was proposed by Banvick

⁴² Elenctics is a dialogue based on a vulnerable attitude that allows the other person to share his or her faith. Listening and sharing one’s faith, not in an apologetic way, creates an environment where the Holy Spirit is the one who will convince the person of sin, and not one’s convincing arguments. (Zahniser 1994)

⁴³ Bible Works 4, 1996, CD-ROM
 -UBS Greek NT-English Concise Dictionary, 1993
 -Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon Semantic Domains, 2nd edition, 1998
 -Friberg AGNT2 Analytical Greek-New Testament, Greek NT Grammatical Analysis Database, 1994

⁴⁴ Zahniser (1997 b) developed this evangelistic model of Elenctic Dialogical Approach from Johann Herman Bavinck and Victor Turner’s missiological work about cross-cultural evangelization. The basic elements of the elenctic approach are the following:

- Only the Holy Spirit can awaken any person to an awareness of sin and the need of repentance.
- God through the Holy Spirit has been witnessing in many ways to God’s moral law. This is the concept of prevenient grace. This doctrine proposes that God is at work in people long before the dialog with Christians began.
- Therefore, the question that must guide the dialogue is, “what is God doing in you?” In this way, evangelicals may actually be able to obtain deeper insights about God by observing what God has done within folk-Catholics. While they may not have the full revelation of Christ, at least they have some, and this must be recognized.

a generation ago. However, Zahniser (1997, 1) developed it more fully by suggesting the addition of the element of dialogue to “consider the convictions of others worthy of serious consideration and make an earnest effort to understand and to appreciate them”

Zahniser also mentions (1994, 72) the following three crucial dimensions of Christian witness among Muslims, which can also be applicable to folk-Catholics: (1) the importance of intimate dialogue, (2) the work of the Holy Spirit in prevenient grace, and (3) the role of vulnerability in being convincing. Those three dimensions bring together an approach or model for evangelism which he calls, “close encounters of the vulnerable kind”

The importance of intimate dialogue and the knowledge of prevenient grace cannot happen with just preaching because “proclamation without dialogue, then, will miss the rich fruit born of discerning the work that God is already doing in the life of those to whom evangelistic witness is directed” (Zahniser 1994, 75). Along with this, Zahniser (1994, 76) adds that in dialogue two kinds of vulnerability are encountered. “We experience both (1) the thread of being impacted by the faith and life of our partners in dialogue, and (2) the pain of having to put them in a position of anxiety and suffering”

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- It is time for evangelicals to focus on sharing God’s love rather than God’s judgment. If only condemnation of folk-Catholics is shared, they may perceive evangelical faith as something in which they don’t desire to participate. However, who can avoid hearing about God’s love? The approach of many evangelicals has been to ask folk-Catholics the question, “what have you done with God?” This patronizing approach has avoided the important step of appreciating the folk-Catholics as people seeking for God’s love rather than God’s condemnation.

What Zahniser refers to is that type of vulnerability which takes one to the point of openness to being convinced by the other person. There, the work of the Holy Spirit, not one's own arguments, convinces. This vulnerability in dialogue implies a phenomenological understanding by evangelicals of the other person's religious background where the other person's worldview and faith is appreciated as real and valuable because God has already been working in that culture.

El Baile de la Yegüita

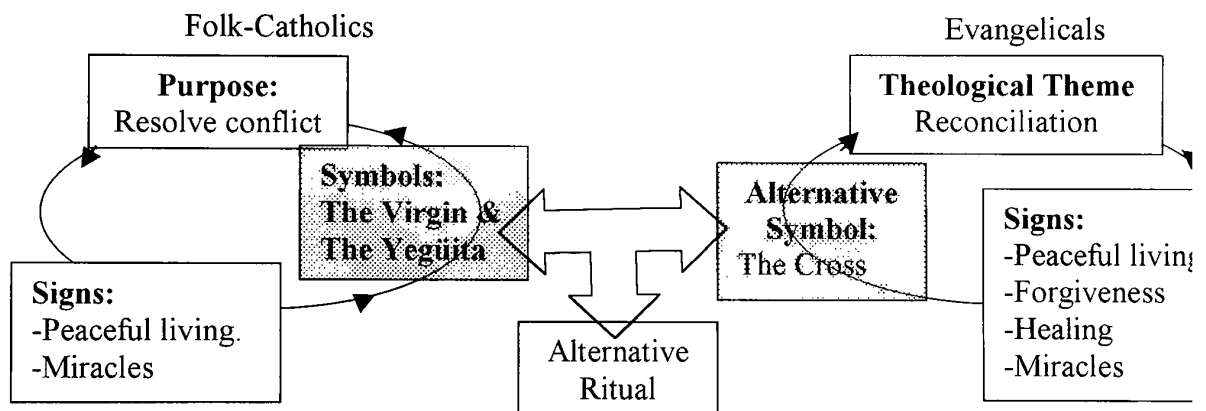


Figure 15: Alternative to *El baile de la Yegüita*

As it was shown, evangelicals in Nicoya participate in this tradition in a very ambiguous way. The church prohibits participation in the local festival, but some church members do participate in the social activities. Is there any way that evangelicals could participate in this festival without compromising their faith and with an evangelistic purpose?

In Nicoya there is a very visible hill that has a large cross, which is lit at night, and years ago the Roman Catholic Church celebrated mass there during the festival of *el baile de la Yegüita*. However, they stopped this practice a few years ago for reasons

unknown. What an opportunity for evangelicals to use this cross-hill as a public way to present their symbol during this festival in Nicoya!

The following are some activities that the evangelical church in Nicoya could do during the festival of *el baile de la Yegüita* between 12 November and 12 December.

Evangelicals must learn to see folk-Catholics during this festival not as idolatrous but as people who are seeking the light of God. Therefore, there is nothing wrong with expecting that the Lord will call to conversion those folk-Catholic seekers who are really seeking God.

On 12 November, the days of *la contadera* begin where Nicoyans count the thirty-one days with kernels of corn until the beginning of the celebration. Evangelical families can count the days also, where each kernel of corn symbolizes one person in their neighborhood that needs to know Jesus. Each family could build a cross out of wood and glue each kernel to it. These thirty-one different people for which the family has been praying will be their cross to carry 11 December to a special vigil service at the cross-hill.

That same day (12 November) is the day when Nicoyans take ox-carts loaded with firewood to the *Cofradia*. The Sunday before 12 November, evangelicals will bring firewood to their local church, and in a special service the wood will be blessed and loaded on an ox-cart. Elders of the evangelical church will then participate with the rest of the town in this activity on 12 November as a way of seeking reconciliation with the Roman Catholic Church. The idea is not to create a new ecumenical movement, but rather to show that evangelicals want to participate in the festival in peace and with no criticism. Although the Roman Catholic Church may not see a need to forgive

evangelicals, among evangelicals there is likely the need to forgive the Roman Catholic Church for perceived conflicts between their religious worlds.

Between 10 November and 10 December evangelicals will begin a process of evangelistic training. Anyone can participate in this training on its different teams: intercessory team, worship team, food team, booth team, or discipleship team, which will be in charge of follow-up for new converts.

The training will include participating in several activities. Once a week the teams will meet for worship and praise service to pray for the city and develop a bible study to teach about the theological theme of reconciliation, its symbol as the cross of Christ, and the signs of reconciliation. During these four once-a-week services (between 10 November and 10 December), the idea is for evangelicals to seek reconciliation with God, among themselves, with their families and with folk-Catholics or the Roman Catholic Church.

On the four Sundays between 10 November and 10 December, the preaching focus will be on healing, forgiveness, and peaceful living as signs of God's reconciliation in God's people.

Teams will have their own specific training session for their specific tasks. The intercessory team will pray, dividing the twenty-four hours of each day among themselves during the tenth, eleventh and twelve of December. However, they will also commit to lead a prayer service together with all the other teams every day for one hour between 10 November and 13 December. Their prayers will be for reconciliation among members, the evangelical church and Catholics (for their attitude for how they relate to

folk-Catholics), among the people in the town, themselves and their families, and the other teams who will be sharing the Good News.

The booth team in this festival will be purchasing a permit for a concession booth to sell food and drinks in downtown Nicoya during the days of the festival. The main objective of this booth is to have a place within the festival where evangelicals can talk about the Good News of salvation. The way in which they are going to share Christ's salvation is through a friendly elenctic dialogue. The idea is to create conversation seeking the Holy Spirit to touch the heart of those folk-Catholics who will visit the booth to purchase food. The booth is not going to be used for massive preaching, denominational proselytism, to provide Christian pamphlets or Bibles. The idea for seeking reconciliation is to reduce the misunderstanding and conflict between the evangelical religious world and the Catholic one. Evangelicals must rely on the power of prayer, friendly elenctic dialogue, and their own lives as living messages of Christ rather than on any proselytism, massive preaching, or pamphlets.

The food team will organize plans for the food to be sold at the booth, as well as other special activities that may be necessary in the preparation of food. Also, this team will select one or two people with a special mission to go and cook as volunteers with the folk-Catholics at the *Cofradía*. This goal of the subteam at the *Cofradía* is to show acceptance, love of Christ, and friendship to those who work and come to eat there.

The worship team will plan and prepare all worship activities (music, special liturgical activities, and other sacraments) during the four weeks of the festival. Their main activity will be on the Saturday night before 11 December when evangelicals will have a special vigil of worship at "cross-hill." Praise and prayer for a massive conversion

in Nicoya and for their teams who are in town sharing the Good News and preparing and selling the food are their main topics of concern. This worship service will begin at sunset with praise music. Around 8:00 p.m. people will take a break for one hour for fellowship and some food. At 9:00 p.m. a concert of prayer will begin by praying for each member of the church and finishing by praying for the whole community. Then at midnight Communion will be offered, and the kernel crosses that families have been working on and praying over will be burned in a bonfire as a final act of prayer and offering in order to give the persons in their neighborhoods to the Lord. Those crosses they will always carry in their hearts, but now the Lord is helping them on their journey. After the bonfire ceremony, prayer teams will continue their scheduled all night prayer until dawn; however, the main activity will be over at 1:00 a.m. for those who need to go home.

Finally, on 13 December a closing service will be held for testimonies and debriefing time to thank the Lord for beginning reconciliation in Nicoya, during which new converts will be introduced at the church. After this worship meeting, teams will meet and evaluate their work, and the discipleship team will begin the discipleship activities they have planned for the new converts.

La Romeria to Cartago: A Rite of Passage for Evangelicals

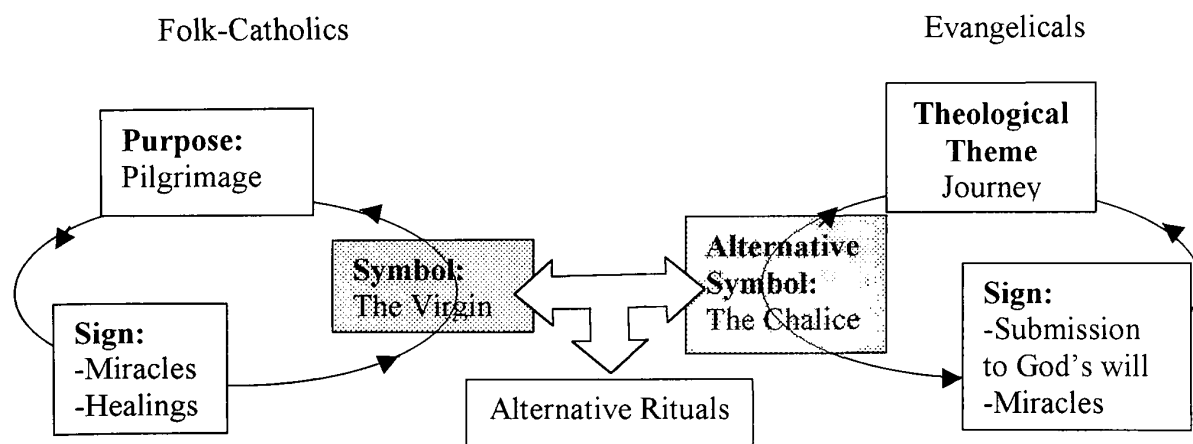


Figure 16: Alternative to *La Romeria to Cartago*

The alternative ritual for this pilgrimage is based on Zahniser's (1997) use of Victor Turner's and Arnold Van Gennep's works concerning the rite of passage.⁴⁵ A rite of passage is a type of transition from one position in society to another.

"The rite-of-passage process furnishes cross-cultural disciplers with a good tool for discipling new or immature believers, particularly, though not exclusively, those from traditional societies [like folk-Catholics]" (Zahniser 1997, 92).

Zahniser (1997, 92) presents the following figure (adapted from Victor Turner's model) to explain the structure of a rite of passage:

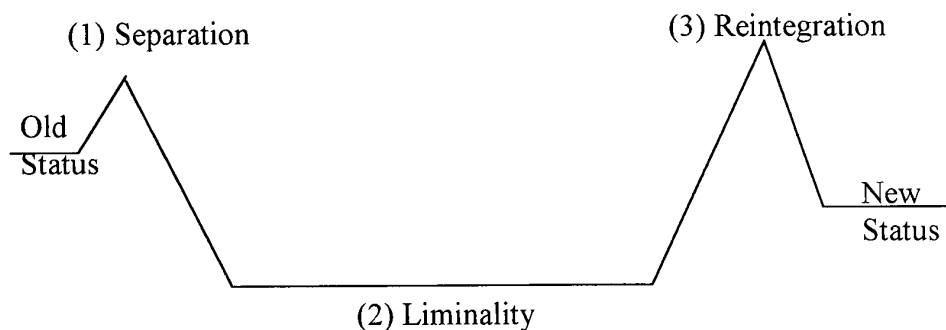


Figure 17: Structure of a Rite of Passage

As it can be seen, the structure of a rite of passage includes three phases. The first phase, separation, "involves the orchestration of symbols in activities removing initiates from their state in society ('old status').... The second phase is called liminality, from the Latin word meaning 'threshold,' because it is transitional.... This liminal phase provides

⁴⁵ A rite of passage relates to life transitions into a new cultural valued status that requires ritual acknowledgment—separation, liminality, and integration. Examples of these include marriage, religious membership, adulthood, and birth (Zahniser 1997).

initiates with a chaotic limbo condition of transition ‘betwixt and between’ (Zahniser 1997, 92).

During this liminal phase, transformation occurs. It is “a chaotic time precisely because it abolishes all socially sanctioned identities, statuses, and roles... This antistructure suspends all former guidelines for behavior and identity and renders initiates ‘structurally invisible,’ certain positive characteristics prevail” (Zahniser 1997, 92-93) . Also there is a sense of *communitas*, a sense of common humanity emerges from a sense of community because roles and status are suspended. Finally, reintegration, ritually reincorporates initiates into society as full-fledged adults through another set of ceremonies. “Without separation, transition and reintegration, no social transformation can take place” (Zahniser 1997, 95).

Rites of passage help new Christians to enter into the importance of continuing the journey of maturity and sharing the Christian faith. They can also help churches to understand and remember the meaning of being a Christian in a sinful world. Therefore, how can evangelicals link the chalice of the Lord as a symbol to the folk-Catholic pilgrimage in Costa Rica?

This thesis proposes that the evangelical church in Costa Rica see this pilgrimage to Cartago as an opportunity to help those Christians who are going to be baptized to experience their first evangelistic encounter of sharing Christ with folk-Catholics. Evangelicals need to get to know folk-Catholics first hand, and what is a more ideal opportunity than to walk with them on their journey?

First, evangelicals must be trained to understand the importance of rites of passage and how to apply these to new Christians and/or new converts. Second,

evangelicals need to be trained how to share their faith with folk-Catholics in a way that their two religious worlds will not clash. For example, this might be done through a study of elenctic witness. Third, new Christians should experience what it is to walk alongside folk-Catholics in a world, being the best example through participating with them in their pilgrimage on 2 August, sharing the good news of salvation. Fourth, new believers in Christ should reenter to their churches not as immature Christians but now in their new status as adult Christians, having had the opportunity to share Christ.

The rite of passage for new converts will include several components.

Separation

The first step will be a yearlong baptismal training program. As part of this baptismal training new or young Christians (adults, youth and children) will be taken to a camp retreat to be trained about the importance of being a Christian in the Costa Rican religious world. There they will be trained about how to share their faith with folk-Catholics and how to walk with Christ in those difficult times that may come. A symbol for such training will be the chalice from Matthew 20:20-23 where Jesus asks Zebedee's sons, "Can you drink the cup that I am going to drink?"

This retreat will take place on 1 August, the day before the 2 August pilgrimage. If it is possible, it would be ideal for the initiates to watch the TV transmission of the national pilgrimage event in the company of their leaders. They also should spend time reading newspapers and analyzing, phenomenologically speaking, why folk-Catholics participate in this type of activity. The retreat will end with Communion, calling the initiates to take part in drinking from one chalice as a way to represent that they are one body and one church guided by one God. This unity means that no matter how difficult

the circumstances may be for them the rest of their training year, they must stay united until next year to walk *la Romería* with the folk-Catholics.

During the rest of the year, more training about the Christian life and sharing one's faith will continue until another short retreat a few days before 1 August when they prepare to walk *la Romería*.

Liminality

In the midst of the chaos of thousands of pilgrims, the new evangelical Christians will walk in small teams supervised by adult leaders. This pilgrimage is like their "graduation test," where they will share the Good News. They will spread out among folk-Catholic pilgrims in order to make friends and begin conversations that will lead to elenctic dialogue. They will introduce themselves as "Christians" and will look for times to share the Good News.

They will experience the anguish of how and when to share the Good News in a fast world, which usually only gives them a few chances for witnessing. They may experience rejection for sharing God's Good News, or may have the glorious experience of seeing folk-Catholics pausing on their journey to receive Christ as their Lord and Savior. During this journey they will learn the value of being a Christian in their own country for the sake of Jesus' kingdom. In one weekend their worldview will be affected forever through this evangelistic activity. Hopefully, Christian life never again will be separated from compassion, sharing of the Scriptures, and walking together with folk-Christians who want to see Jesus in them, like the Emmaus experience.

They have been experiencing *communitas* during the whole year they have been training for this pilgrimage; however, *communitas* will deepen during this pilgrimage

where all of them will identify themselves as brothers and sisters on one journey of being Christians in a folk-Christian world of people looking for Christ. According to Zahniser (1994, 96) in a rite of passage, initiates not only bond to the community in a new way but also “bond to the beliefs and values of that community. This discipling function of the rite-of-passage process—bonding to meaning—makes rites of passage a powerful tool for discipling” (:96).

However, they are not alone on their journey. Their churches, through prayer partners and in a worship vigil activity, will be supporting them in prayer. In this way, the church is expressing their submission to God’s will, recognizing the importance of sharing the Good News as part of the Christian life-style. They will be praying, expecting miracles in the lives of those pilgrims who on their journey are sharing Christ and of those folk-Catholics being changed through the work of the Holy Spirit.

As soon as they arrive in Cartago they will continue seeking dialogue and doing “prayers walks.” After folk-Catholic pilgrims have met and prayed to the image of the Virgin, they rest and tend to create groups around the Basilica in order to chat and tell stories of their pilgrimage, giving evangelical participants ample opportunity for contact.

They will also have a time for debriefing to express their feelings and thoughts about the activity. Some may feel totally frustrated because they were rejected, but leaders can counsel them, remind them of their previous training, and provide analogies between the Christian life and the *Romeria* to Cartago.

Reintegration

On 2 August or afterward as soon as evangelical pilgrims are back from their exhausting journey of sharing the Gospel with folk-Catholics, their churches will be

waiting for them to baptize them. They will hold a worship and a sharing time. Their local churches will prepare a banquet to receive them back as Christians at a table of honor (recognizing their new status). Then, one more time they will take Communion from the same chalice, a few hours after the new group of initiates in a retreat have done the same anticipating the next year, their time for a journey of sharing Christ to folk-Catholics.

Is Evangelism a Ritual, a Method, or an Attitude?

Evangelism arises not only from the attitude of heart of Christians who cannot contain the burning desire to share their conversion experience,⁴⁶ but also from the opportunity that an unexpected or expected event may provide. There is no better method for evangelism than the context itself. However, before evangelicals share God's Good News of salvation in any context, they need to recognize that God has already been working in the will of every person long before their evangelical message came.

God in God's prevenient grace⁴⁷ [latin *Pre*, before and *Veni*, comes] has enabled all people, according to their free will, to respond to God's convicting influence (John

⁴⁶ Conversion is not only a moment but also a process where the worldview of the old person is transformed, according to God's will, into a new worldview in Christ. As Whiteman (1983, 371) defines it "conversion is not a change from non-faith to faith; instead, it is a shift from one faith to another, from allegiance to ancestral spirits to allegiance to Jesus Christ" This process of conversion does not happen only through the teaching of theological concepts, but also through creating experiences where the new born Christian can grow in his/her relationship and understanding of God and Christ's church according to the Scripture. This is why understanding, describing and analyzing folk-Catholic beliefs phenomenologically are so important. In this process, folk-Catholic beliefs and practices should be used with new meanings given.

⁴⁷ Kenneth Collins (1997, 40-42) in his book The Scripture Way of Salvation states that Wesley systematized five chief benefits of the concept of prevenient grace, which through the prevenient agency of the Holy Spirit humans receive. First, a basic knowledge of God: "all people have at least some understanding of God, however

12:32; 16:8), giving the gift of faith to everyone. That is, folk-Catholics may not use evangelical language, but somewhere in their spiritual experiences is an awareness of the existence of the divine. As well, prevenient grace cannot only be found in individuals but also in communities. For instance, folk-Catholics have an idea of a triune God, evil, Scripture, etc., but they need to hear the Good News of Jesus Christ through a dialogue (and not through argument or debate) with evangelicals, while the evangelicals allow the Holy Spirit to convince the folk-Catholics' hearts of their need for Christ (Zahniser 1994, 76).

Therefore, understanding that God has been working in folk-Catholic communities long before evangelicals began sharing the Good News is important. For instance, evangelicals wishing to evangelize must learn to see folk-Catholicism through the eyes of those who practice it and experience it in order to develop a compassionate attitude of the love of God through Jesus. That is, evangelicals should try to experience the struggle of folk-Catholics seeking God in order to know how to provide them with the light of God.

Evangelicals must exercise faith and patience to allow the Holy Spirit to work at convincing the hearts of those who, through God's prevenient grace, have been seeking

clouded or scant" (Collins 1997, 41). Second, "after the fall God did not leave humanity in this utterly dejected state, but reinscribed, in some measure, a knowledge of [the] moral law upon the human heart" (:IDEM). Third, God has fixed in human heart "his umpire, conscience; an inward judge, which passes sentence both in his passions and actions, either approving or condemning them" (:IDEM). Fourth, this concept of prevenient grace implies "the affirmation that a certain measure of free will is supernaturally restored to all people by the Holy Spirit, based upon the work of Christ (Collins 1997, 42)." Finally, "prevenient grace expressed limited knowledge of God's attributes, as an understanding of the moral law" (:IDEM).

God's glory for so long. In this way through dialogue evangelicals can challenge folk-Catholics to respond to God's message of Christ.

Conclusion

This thesis has demonstrated that theology should utilize many other disciplines like religious studies, missiological studies, anthropological, historical, sociological, and biblical studies to understand folk-Catholics in Costa Rica. Evangelicals who follow this interdisciplinary approach can understand the Scripture through developing theological language that is contextual. In this interdisciplinary task, the gospel's message in a specific context can become relevant without losing its universal claim and becoming culturally relative.

First, it has been shown that phenomenology describes and analyzes who folk-Catholics are by what they do, how they do it, why they do it, and when and where they do it. Second, through an ontological critique and critical analysis, the bridge between Scripture and the context is built. Ontology seeks to rescue the principles of truth behind every folk-Catholic practice where God has already been working in the folk-Catholic culture. Critical analysis intends to judge and replace such principles with a Scriptural belief, feeling, and value to transform a folk-Catholic practice/festival/myth into a Christ-centered practice. Finally, a missiological response wraps up the contextual work, presenting alternative strategies, rituals, and symbols to present the Good News in a frame of reference that the worldview of folk-Catholics can understand.

Contextualization of theology is not something that can be done once and forever but is a continuous and dynamic dialogue between Scripture and culture. The Scripture is

challenged by the culture, while the culture is transformed by the Scripture. In this process it is vitally important for evangelicals to engage in dialogue (elenctics) with folk-Catholics, and to learn from their discipleship⁴⁸ and evangelistic approaches. This interaction of Scripture and culture enables evangelicals to find God already in the culture while they bring Jesus to it.

Contextualization helps the evangelical church to realize that some folk-Catholic practices are sinful, others are redeemable, and others are spiritually neutral (Bradshaw 1993, 53). Therefore the contextual work of evangelicals may help folk-Catholics to become either Roman Catholic or evangelical Christians. Either way, the point is to help folk-Catholics to become followers of Jesus Christ, which is what God the Father wants them to become.

The theologizing approach to a specific culture that contextualization provide challenges to how evangelicals deal with the beliefs and practices of their own people and with those of folk-Catholics. Evangelization and discipleship events are sparks that light the bonfire of contextualization, since they push the church to respond to the context with Scripturally-based answers. Therefore, this thesis attempts to stimulate evangelicals to begin their contextualization work by encouraging them to evangelize and disciple folk-Catholics, and to demonstrate that evangelicals can be fully Costa Rican and fully

⁴⁸ For instance, Zahniser (1997, 23) defines discipleship as an “ongoing set of intentional activities governed by the goal of initiating people into the kingdom of God through appropriate instructions, experiences, symbols, and ceremonies” As in his elenctic concept, his cross-cultural discipling model mentions that discipleship “assumes the triune God at work cross-culturally.... That the Father loves all people, that the Son entered into one culture discipling believers in it through its symbols and ceremonies, and that the Spirit works imaginably and persistently in every culture underlies our exploration of cross-cultural discipling” (:24, 25).

Christian. This evangelistic and discipleship task can be accomplished through evangelicals participating in folk-Catholic festivals and activities through alternative events without compromising their own faith.

By doing critical contextualization we see that evangelism and discipleship are two faces of the same coin, and they cannot be separated. As such, both concepts have sometimes been mentioned together; but, for reasons of space and scope this thesis has focused mainly on evangelism. Evangelicals must remember, however, that when they participate in evangelistic rituals to reach folk-Catholics they themselves are being disciplined.

Why has this thesis highlighted the dynamic between evangelism and discipleship? Almost all Costa Rican churches do “evangelism,” but not all do discipleship. People respond to the gospel, but the community of faith is incapable of receiving them or sometimes even accepting them. Evangelicals in Costa Rica usually expect new Christians (former folk-Catholics) to express their faith in entirely new ways, rather than attempting to use the symbols and ceremonies with which folk-Catholics are already familiar and give them new Christian meanings. The problem that evangelical churches have in Costa Rica with folk-Catholics is that for “people from traditional religious communities, religion is a pragmatic affair. It provides them with what they need to cope with their environment, to survive, and to prosper. They make no distinction between spiritual matters and physical matters.... They show more interest in tangible temporal concerns than in eternal salvation” (Zahniser 1997, 20-21).

Folk-Catholics are very tangible people in their use of images, amulets, and other communal activities. Folk-Catholics come from an experiential spiritual life of

pilgrimages, prayer activities, festivals, and even processions as part of their discipling religious world. How, then, can the evangelical church intend to evangelize and disciple folk-Catholics or to challenge their worldview only through a verbal Scriptural explanation of theology? It should be remembered that folk-Catholicism in Costa Rica is based on a baroque Spaniard background, while the evangelical church is based on a modernist rational verbal background that missionaries imported from the United States.

Thus, this thesis has presented that evangelicals can learn to make disciples of folk-Catholics using the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church and adding the rich evangelical tradition of studying the Scripture, which shows that salvation today is only available through Christ through whom all may become God's children.

Therefore, folk-Catholics need to be enabled to continue to grow in faith, not only through a variety of rituals, but also through the study of the Scriptures, so they may become Christians. Consequently, the evangelicals following this model for evangelism and discipleship may respond to folk-Catholics' middle zone questions. Because the Holy Spirit can use symbols and ceremonies that evangelicals may employ with different meanings (in this way avoiding syncretism) in order to nurture the spirituality of the folk-Catholics so they may become strong Christian believers in God's kingdom.

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