

# Re-Thinking the Faith with Indigenous Categories

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*The author of this article, a lay theologian teaching at a Catholic major seminary in the Philippines, takes an important step beyond the general critique against doing theology with western categories to show how indigenous Filipino categories contain a wealth of untapped possibilities for creative reflection and “re-rooting.”*

If there is one thing that has gradually dawned on the consciousness of Christians with regard to theological re-rooting of the Gospel from one cultural and historical milieu into another, it is the necessity of re-thinking rather than just translating this Gospel within a new frame of reference. While the possibilities are many and inviting, the lack of points of reference and non-existence of past models are disconcerting. It means that the process of re-thinking will just have to proceed with the risks inherent in a new enterprise and will be painstakingly slow. This, of course, does not come as a surprise. After all, it was only in Vatican II that the Church gained the possibility to be truly a world Church and to go beyond the confines of the Jewish and Graeco-Roman cultures, and that only after practically twenty centuries.<sup>1</sup> Asian, African, Latin American, and Oceanian Christians are all confronted with that enormous task of re-interpreting the Good News to their peoples in a fresh and an intelligible way.

In responding to this challenge, it will be necessary for us here in Asia as well as elsewhere to go back to our cultures to learn from this wellspring of wisdom and insights. As a time-tested tradition of experiences which have been patterned and institutionalized, culture provides us with ways of looking at life, our world, and the whole of reality. Through these we experience reality in a particular manner. Our experience of any given reality is made possible by interpretative elements, most of which come from our very own culture — that integrated system of beliefs, of values and customs and which binds a society together, giving it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.

Clearly, familiarity with culture is a must for those who wish to contribute to the re-thinking and reformulation of the Christian faith in their own cultural context. This is not necessarily easy, even for people who belong to the culture in question. For one, there is the long tradition and experience of western theology which may be

difficult to “shake off.” Furthermore, the experience of colonization as well as industrialization which a number of countries have had makes of the task more difficult than easier. And finally, one has to contend with the fact that “culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants.”<sup>2</sup> This is because one’s assimilation of the culture is generally so successful that he is no longer aware of the cultural nature of what he thinks or does. It is in this connection that consciousness raising becomes necessary even for the native of the culture. Only when he is explicitly aware of his culture can he adequately examine, assess, and make use of it to give expression to his Christian faith. This is, perhaps, why Vatican II made it a point to speak about this matter.

### *A dialogical approach to theological re-rooting*

In the dialogical approach suggested by the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity of Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*,<sup>3</sup> a positive outlook on culture is promoted. It states that “by sincere and patient dialogue” the disciples of Christ can “learn” about “the treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth.” It is striking that the decree emphasizes an attitude of humility when one is confronted with a culture because the primary aspect of the dialogical process is listening and learning.

It does not deny, to be sure, a critical aspect to the dialogue whereby the faithful are to “try to illumine these treasures with the light of the Gospel, to set them free, and to bring them under the dominion of God their Savior” (AG. 11). Nevertheless, it is not this element of challenge to the culture that takes precedence; it is rather the element of listening, learning, and appreciating. By the very fact that the decree speaks of “treasures” God has given to a particular culture, it is only appropriate that in the task of theological re-rooting one should assume a “listening heart,” that is, a profound and sincere attitude of respect and appreciation.

Bishop Kenneth Cragg formulates this posture beautifully: “Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men’s dreams. More seriously still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival.” The attitude is doubtlessly applicable in approaching one’s own culture, too. This is all the more true since many, if not most, of the practitioners of theological reflection are probably more familiar with western theological modes of thought than they are with indigenous ones.

This stance of humbly learning from the culture, to be sure, is related to the first criterion of theologizing in a specific context, that of intelligibility and meaningfulness of a particular articulation of the Gospel within that very context.<sup>4</sup> We can only ensure such relevance if we listen carefully to the culture of a people to whom we shall speak, especially if it is our own culture.

### *Reasons for a respectful posture*

Vatican II acknowledges explicitly the presence of God in cultures. In *Gaudium et Spes*, article 58 it says, “For God, revealing Himself to His people to the extent of a full manifestation of Himself in His Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the

culture proper to different ages.” It then speaks of the “spiritual qualities and gifts of every people and of every age.” Because of this “each branch of the human family possesses in itself and in its worthier traditions some part of the spiritual treasure entrusted by God to humanity, even though many do not know the source of that treasure” (G.S. 86).

This, of course, is the very reason why the same council can say that there are many links between the message of salvation and human culture. In a way this only echoes what Paul had earlier exhorted the Christians in Philippi to do:

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (4:8). Hence, it is not surprising that the Council urges Christians to be familiar with their national and religious traditions and to gladly and reverently lay bare “the seeds of the Word which lie hidden in them” (AG.I 1).

The respect and the seriousness with which the Council treats culture is shown by its determination to follow what has always been customary in the Church, i.e. the use of culture to understand, express and preach the Gospel. “Living in various circumstances during the course of time, the Church, too, has used in her preaching the discoveries of different cultures to spread and explain the message of Christ to all nations, to probe it and more deeply understand it, and to give it better expression in liturgical celebrations and in the life of the diversified community of the faithful” (G.S. 58, emphasis added).

The disciples of Jesus, then, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ who searched the hearts of men and led them to divine light, i.e. to the treasures God has given them in their culture, must first be listeners and discoverers. Only in this way will they both find out and eventually retrieve the real genius and strength of the culture. They need to listen with great care and empathy to the culture into which theological re-rooting of the Gospel is to take place. Otherwise, they will impose their own views and criteria on the culture and, to be sure, on the people (even their own) of that culture. Furthermore, they risk answering questions that have never been really asked and confront issues that have never been raised in the socio-cultural context.

#### *PROBING LISTENING: THE FIRST METHODOLOGICAL STEP*

The first methodological step in this process, in contrast to the so-called traditional way of theologizing<sup>5</sup> consists in “discerning the fruits of the Holy Spirit in consciences and making an inventory of the spiritual values to be found in a people’s religious culture” in order to discover, through the investigation of the culture, what God is already doing and saying in people’s hearts.<sup>6</sup> The recognition of the intrinsic goodness of cultural values is the point of departure.

Even indigenous Christians would need to be careful regarding this point. The western theological influence in Asia cannot be underestimated. The tendency to view culture from a western frame of reference can block sympathetic listening to the positive aspects of the culture. It is not easy at times to recognize the cultural dimension of

a given theological reflection since we are not fully conscious of our own presuppositions. Moreover, it cannot be denied that many of our theological presuppositions and formulations do come from our western theological mentors. This, of course, is understandable. The missionaries from the West could only preach and explain Christianity in the way they have understood it and to blame them for doing so would be unreasonable. But this was not the whole story.

A particular understanding of theology which thought of a-historical eternal truths and, consequently, of a *theologia perennis* gave little room for the possibility of a new expression of the gospel. A sense of cultural superiority also accompanied the process of evangelization and this hindered the inculturation of the faith in another cultural context. Theologically and culturally, western Christianity was thus not disposed to listen and learn but to speak and teach.

A complaint voiced out by the Japanese theologian, Kosuke Koyama, about Christianity can serve as a caution for those who wish to approach the matter dialogically. He said that Christianity has become so self-righteous and arrogant. It simply wants to teach but not to learn. It is suffering from a “teacher complex.” Christianity is most interested in “teaching people” while at the same time it is not interested in being “taught by people.” In speaking to people but hardly listening to people, Christianity in Asia has really ignored people for the last four hundred years.<sup>7</sup>

A listening attitude and a willingness to learn are indispensable elements for the Church in her attempt to re-root the Gospel in each particular culture. An “appreciative awareness” is called for.

Such a “regulative principle in thought which, as an orientation of the mind, can make for a maximum degree of receptivity to the datum under consideration on the principle that what is given may be more than what is immediately perceived, or more than one can think.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, a positive mark of true dialogue is a “probing listening” and there is little doubt that Christian witness in the past, if not in the present, has been “slow to hear and quick to speak.” This attitude of sensitive listening and humble learning derives from the principles of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery, for it is what we may call a kenotic mind (Phil. 2:5—8) or a “crucified mind”(Mt. 16:24).<sup>9</sup>

We shall, therefore, be primarily concerned in this discussion of the Gospel-culture dialogue with probing listening vis-a-vis the culture, particularly in its language as expression of cultural genius and strength, without denying the important role that a critical aspect plays in the process. We focus here on the task of the local Church to re-root the Gospel into its own cultural milieu through an exploration and eventual creation of an indigenous theological language. There is no intention here of presenting a whole methodology for theological re-rooting.<sup>10</sup> Our aim is more modest: to pinpoint and highlight the necessity and advantage in becoming more aware of the cultural dimensions of theologizing in a particular context.

### *Probing listening and respect*

In interacting with its culture the Christian community must, first of all, be respectful. Without this respect there cannot be a genuine listening to the “treasures” which are present in a given culture. Respect for the culture, an attitude which the Council itself

commends (cf. G.S. 42), is essential in humble learning from that culture. Theologically, one can say that respect is imperative because we touch the humanity of fellow human beings in dealing with culture and because the source of the treasures to be discovered in a culture is ultimately God Himself.

I believe that insisting on the primacy of a respectful stance helps us not only to discover the positive, life-giving aspects of a culture but also to appreciate them. There is no intention here of romanticizing any culture which, after all, is ambiguous with a mixture of positive and negative elements and aspects. I am aware that this is a possible pitfall and remains to be so. But there is equally danger connected with the critical dimension of the gospel-culture dialogue, that of being overly critical at the expense of seeing the beauty and strength of the culture.

While a certain naiveness regarding the positive in a culture has not been absent in discussions and treatment of this subject matter, there seems to have been, nevertheless, an over emphasis on the critical element in theological reflection to the extent that the real wisdom and genius of the culture is not given “space” to surface. The habit of being critical in theology has led largely to the neglect of the respectful and appreciative modes of thought which are just as valid and legitimate as the critical one.

It is true, to be sure, that a critical perspective does not necessarily mean a negative outlook. It has, however, tended (perhaps, unintentionally) to function negatively towards culture. Even the legitimate attention given to ideological suspicion in theological matters has had the unfortunate side effect of obscuring the potential of the positive resources of a people’s culture. Whatever it is that seems to cause this blind spot in theologizing, it is only appropriate to avoid the temptation of only asking what is wrong and ignore what is right in a culture.

### *Listening and the indigenous language*

A most important aspect of listening and understanding the indigenous culture is the comprehension which arises from a grasp of the language within its cultural context. Language, we must bear in mind, are not labels on reality which we can stick and remove at will because they do not make any difference. Hans-George Gadamer rightly insisted that language “is not only an object in our hands, it is the reservoir of tradition and the medium in and through which we exist and perceive the world.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, with language we touch a tradition of time-tested experiences of people in dealing with reality. It is not just a conceptual play of words.

I am easily reminded at this juncture of the similarities and differences in the concepts *metanoia*, conversion, and the indigenous term *pagbabalik-loob*. While the three terms refer in general to the same reality of a positive change in a person towards the good, each of the concepts has a unique way of understanding it. *Metanoia* focuses on the change of the *nous*, the mind, while conversion emphasis the change in direction. But the Filipinopagbabalik-loob interprets the same reality as a “return to the most authentic self.”

Clearly the words are not just equivalents from one culture to another. They are interpretations of reality. And interpretations are our access to reality, not simply formal designations of it. When we listen to the culture, then, it is imperative that we lis-

ten to it in its own terms, that is, in the language or indigenous categories through which the culture expresses itself. In this way, we can begin to understand the reality as the reality for that culture.

#### FOREIGN CATEGORIES AS A HINDRANCE

Foreign categories imposed on the culture may inhibit the culture from speaking for itself; they may even mislead a person trying to understand that culture. Take, for instance, the search for Filipino values.<sup>12</sup> Ordinarily, Filipinos do not speak of “values” (*mga pinahahalagahan?*) in the native tongue. It would be possible, but certainly not common to talk about things that Filipinos value (= *pinahahalagahan*) in the vernacular.

More pertinent, perhaps, than “values” to Filipinos are the things that they would stand for: *mga paninindigan*, convictions “*paninindigan*” makes us focus our attention on things like “*paggalang at pagmamala.sakit*” (respect and concern), “*pagtulong at pagdamay*” (help and active involvement), “*pagpuno sa kakulangan*” (empathy for human limitations) and “*pakikiramdam*” (sensitivity and regard for others), “*gaan ng bob*” (rapport and acceptance), “*lakas ng loob*” (inner strength, courage, daring), “*haganclahang-loob*” (graciousness, generosity, benevolence) and “*pakikipagkapwa*” (human concern and interaction as one with others).

The token use of Filipino concepts and the local language has led to the identification of some supposedly Filipino national values such as *hiya* (shame), *pakikisama* (yielding to the will of the leader or the majority), and *amor propio* (sensitivity to personal affront). Consider *pakikisama*, for example. This is a supposed value which was identified by western-oriented social scientists during the period of token use of the native language in Philippine Social Science. Isolated as a value, *pakikisama* was removed from its original context in the Filipino worldview of relationships. It was thus forgotten that *pakikisama* is just one among the many possible levels and types of interaction among Filipinos. The sphere of *pakikipaghapwa* (relationships with fellow human beings) includes modes of interaction such as *pakikipagpalagayang-loob* (being in rapport), *pakikilahok* (participation), *pakikisalamuha* (interaction with), *pakikiisa* (being one with), *pakikitungo* (civility with) as well as *pakikibaka* (struggling against). At times it is *paki hibaka* rather than *pakikisama* which is called for in a given situation.

#### FOREIGN CATEGORIES AS POINTS OF REFERENCE?

Another problem connected with the token use of the indigenous language is the reliance on the English language categories which are used as basis and point of departure. Equivalent vernacular terms are, then, found to translate the English (or Spanish) categories instead of looking for English (or Spanish) terms which approximate the vernacular concepts. Thus, *rebebasyon* and *kaligtasan* would be equivalents of the English “revelation” and “salvation” respectively. Dependence on English and translation of it into the vernacular hinders the re-thinking of the Christian faith in a new cultural situation.

This is not to repudiate in any way the need for translations which are necessary for inter-cultural communication and sharing of insights. But translation cannot be a substitute for listening to the culture in its own terms because every language has its own genius, its own distinctiveness, its own special character. It has its own grammatical patterns, its own peculiar idiom, its own areas of vocabulary strength and its own weakness and limitations. These should be respected. But this also means adequately formulated and represented in another. what can be conveyed clearly in one tongue may only be articulated poorly in another. *Traduttore traditore*.

It is, moreover, imperative for the local Church to take its solidarity with the indigenous culture more seriously. She should really begin exploring the many ways open for creating a theological language which has a recognizable reference to the lived experience of people in which she finds herself. This would mean serious study and analysis of key terms and concepts which are truly indigenous and which proffer concrete possibilities for creating a new theological language. For us in the Philippines, it is really high time that we began to think in the vernacular rather than in English. It is moreover important for us to realize that, while theologizing in English has its value, our primary responsibility in doing theology is to find a theological language which speaks to the experiences of our people in a manner that they culturally comprehend. For the majority of the population, English is not a functional and practical language. Working primarily in English and maintaining such a practice is detrimental to a real cultural understanding of the Gospel by people.

In the section which follows, this is what I am attempting: a probing listening to the culture in order to re-think an aspect of the Judaeo-Christian tradition within the indigenous mode of looking at reality. In the spirit of exchange and solidarity with other local churches, however, it remains necessary to translate somehow into a common language like English so that an example of re-thinking is shared with a wider audience. I find this situation better than translating from English concepts to vernacular equivalents, if there are equivalents.

*A probing listening to "kagandahang-loob": a cultural analysis<sup>13</sup>*

We explore here, by way of an example, the concept of *kagandahang-loob*. Rendering *kagandahang-loob* in terms of "benevolence," "kindness," "generosity," "helpfulness," and "goodness" do not quite capture the flavor which is found in the original vernacular term. One would have to reckon with the various connotations and associations linked with the concept of *kagandahangbob* such as the reality of the inner self, the drive and motivation which comes from such an inner resource, as well as the positive relating which contributes to the well-being of the other.

*Kagandahang-loob* connotes all that is good in someone, which is in fact an ideal among Filipinos. It is a quality of being which has its roots in the very heart of a person and which is given expression in the totality of one's life of interrelationship. For *kagandahang-loob* does not only mean goodness and benevolence; it is the goodness and benevolence that arises from the very core of one's personhood.

To understand this notion properly, one has first to explore the meanings connected with the key concept, *loob*. *Loob* (literally, the inside or the inner self) is the most authentic self of the Filipino; that is what he is in his innermost reality. *Loob*, the inner self, is the core of one's personhood and where the true worth of a person lies. It is what makes the lowland Filipino what he is and who he is as a person. The *loob*, I would say, is the ultimate, organizing center of human reality. And more than that, it is the very zone of creaturehood which is the substratum of ideas, feelings, and behaviors. To speak of the *loob*, then, is to speak of the person as a whole.

As a way of looking at the whole person, *loob* implies that knowing someone in his outside appearance and behavior is not enough. It is imperative to have an insight into what the person really is "in his heart" (the *loob*). The true person, as considered by the culture, is what he is "inside" him. This is why the Filipino always wants to know what is in the *kabooban* (inner self) of another in sizing him up. It is what you may designate as the view of the human being "from the inside." Appearances are deceptive; one can only truly know another if he knows the other's *loob*.

Moreover, the Filipino expects that what a person outwardly (*ang pang-labas*) shows what is truly "inside" him (*bukal sa kabooban*=welling up from the innermost self). But a disjunction between the reality of the *loob* and the outward appearance is, unfortunately, a reality of the *loob* and the outward appearance is, unfortunately, a reality too. Hence, it is not surprising to hear remarks like "*lumabas din ang tunay niyang kulay!*" (i.e. "he has shown his real color!") or "*lumabas din ang kanyang baho!*" (i.e. "now we know he has a foul odor!") if it is a reference to a negative reality. What is implied in the expressions just mentioned is that it takes time for someone to really know the *kalooban* of another. There is a process involved and not a "one shot deal."

This suggests that *loob* is a relational concept and as such is an appropriate concept to describe a person in relationship to others. We cannot truly encounter a person and gain insight into his personhood except in relationships. Contemporary psychology has brought out strongly the point that the person is defined by his relationship to others. In the lowland Philippines, this can be done by describing what sort of *loob* he has. A person is said to be of "*magandang-loob*" (literally, a beautiful inner self) or alternatively, of "*mabuting-loob*" (literally, a good inner self) because he generally relates well and positively towards others. If, however, he is a person of bad character because he relates negatively with others, he is considered as "*masamang-loob*" (i.e. an evil inner self). Robbers, in fact, are colloquially referred to as "*masasamang-loob*."

In the phrase *kagandahang-loob*, the *loob* is characterized as "*maganda*," that is, "beautiful." But while "*ganda*" on one level of meaning refers to the beautiful, on another it means "what is good" or simply what is ethical, proper or humane. It is in fact common practice on this level of meaning to simply use the adjective *maganda* (the beautiful) and *mabuti* (the good) interchangeably. "*Hindi iyan maganda!*" (That's not beautiful!) or "*Pangit iyan!*" (That's ugly!) is often said in disapproval of a mode of behavior which is not considered good.

Approval and encouragement are, by the same token, communicated by saying, “*Maganda yan!*” (“that’s beautiful!”). Thus, the verb *magandahin* or *ipalagay namaganda* means “to consider something as beautiful or good” as in “*minaganda ho ang kanyang paghingi ng tawad*” (I considered her asking for pardon as something good). To forget the obvious here would be no less than an oversight. “Good News,” the Gospel, is often translated as “*Magandang Balita*” (beautiful news) which means “*Mabuting Balita*” (good news). It is undeniable that the Gospel is used in Christian circles as the main criterion for making not only doctrinal judgments but ethical ones as well. For these groups nothing could be more *maganda* or *mabuti*, showing once more the ethical content borne by the concept “*maganda*.” Perhaps, one can speak here of the aesthetics of ethics or, if you please, the ethics of aesthetics.

The “beautiful” is the good, yes. But the “beautiful” here is really still much more than just the equivalent of the good. There is a kind of goodness, after all, which is cold and unattractive. Holy people who have no human warmth, for instance, tend to repel rather than to attract. In contrast, goodness which is warm and inviting is “beautiful.” This must have been in the mind of the evangelist when he designated Jesus as the “Beautiful Shepherd” (cf. Jn. 10:11).

We see on the basis of these considerations that *kagandahangloob* is not only goodness that wells up from the very depths or core of one’s personhood but a goodness which characterizes the person. It describes the kind of person one is, what his “nature” is, his character. This is what *kagandahang-loob* denotes. What is implied furthermore is even more revelatory of the rich associations which the concept carries.

*Kagandahang-loob* exhibits certain features which characterize it. Translated conventionally as “goodness,” “kindness,” or “kindheartedness,” “benevolence,” “helpfulness” and “generosity,” *kagandahang-loob* is, first of all, a relational concept. From the lowland Filipino perspective, a person is only known to be of *magandang-loob* through his relationships with others. *Kagandahangloob* cannot be known or demonstrated in isolation from fellow human beings. The concept, to be sure, assumes that to become human is to become human with others. The very notion of *loob* has already indicated for us this relational understanding of man in lowland Filipino thought.

Secondly, *kaganda hang-loob* is only *kagandahang-loob* if it comes from the personal initiative of the person acting. Forced or manipulated *kagandahangloob* is not authentic. Not only should it come from within (*loob*) but it should also arise from a genuinely free decision and option of the person concerned (i.e. *kusang-loob*). An indigenous expression even points to a level deeper than just the free decision of a person (which, after all, can be the result of certain pressures). *Bukal sa kalooban* (=welling up from the inner self) suggests that the *kagandahang-loob* being manifested is truly in harmony with the most authentic in the person.

A third characteristic of *kagandahangloob* is that it is directed towards the well-being or welfare of the other. This is recognized as such within the relationship by that other. It is other-directed, not self-oriented; it has the other in mind rather than the self. Someone who clearly does not intend the well-being of the other in relationships

cannot be regarded as one who has “*magandangloob*.” Because of this other-directedness of *kagandahang-loob*, it does not seek for anything in return in a caring reaching out towards that other. It is, as it were, pure goodness oozing out.

Any manifestation of *kagandahangloob* which is ultimately based on a *do ut des* principle falsifies its reality and substance. If anyone, therefore, shows *kagandahang-loob* to another because it will eventually be of advantage to him, but that very fact his “*kagandahang-loob*” is not real. *Kagandahang-loob* is not self-seeking and does not look for a “return of the favor.” When one considers the use of the notion of *kagandahang-loob* in media commercials, one can only deplore the corruption of this beautiful concept. There, a particular company is usually said to be “generous” (because it sponsors the show, gives discounts, and promotes games which has many prizes) but it is obvious that they really want people to pay attention to their product and eventually but it. *Kagandahang-loob* such as this is surely false.

“*Kagandahang-loob*” and the faith experience: a theological analysis<sup>14</sup>

Because of the richness of meaning embodied by the concept *kagandahang-loob* as well as the specificity of denotations and connotations, I have found it useful in articulating the notion of the faith experience in the lowland Filipino context. By “faith experience” I mean God’s self-initiated offer of life and love in and through the human experiences of people and the response of man to that offer by entrusting his whole self freely to God in an obedience which is faith (cf. *Dei Verbum* 1 and 5). The one and the same “faith experience” then, is constituted by revelation (divine activity) and faith (human activity) as correlatives.

In re-interpreting “revelation” through the use of *loob* and, therefore, of *kagandahang-loob*, it is rendered as “*pagpapadama ng Diyos ngkanyangkagandahang-loob*,” i.e. “God making us experience his gracious goodness.” It is, of course, flat in the translation. Perhaps we can glean somewhat the freshness of the original in a more literal translation: “God making us experience the winsome and gracious beauty of his innermost self.” If we consider the whole range of meanings which we have seen when discussing the concept of *loob* and *kagandahang-loob* itself, then we see how rich this notion is in the vernacular. It is the very depths of his Godhood—designated as “beautiful” or eminently good—which we experience. God, as it were, does not merely share something peripheral to himself. What is communicated comes from the core of his Godness. It becomes clear to native speakers that when God “reveals” it is really God’s gift of himself that is at stake unlike what is understood in God’s revelation of truths about himself (although this functions differently for those who assume that the essential in man is reason). He gives and he gives what he is in his innermost reality: *kagandahang-loob*.

What we discover here in the use of the cultural concept *kagandahang-loob* for revelation is that revelation is indeed “grace,” and “salvation.” Somehow, it becomes easier to see the intimate and necessary links between “revelation,” “grace” and “salvation” a problem which arises because of the way of we customarily treat these

themes. I mention this because even seminarians have a difficult time in seeing connections between the different subjects they study in theology and due to this have a hard time perceiving the whole. Perhaps, this is one of the advantages which await us when we allow the culture to speak in its own terms.

Our response in this faith experience, on the other hand, can be designated as “*pagsasalob ng kagandahang-loob ng Diyos*” which can be rendered as “interiorizing or making part of one’s core of personhood God’s will” or “interiorizing or making part of one’s self God’s very ‘nature’ —what he is like towards us.” There is no relationship more binding than this process of interiorizing (=making part of one’s innermost or most authentic self) God’s *kagandahangloob*. Is this not the exhortation of the Gospels: “Be merciful, even as your Father is perfect” (Mt. 5:48) or “Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful” (Lk. 6:36)? Surely, this is the deeper meaning of doing God’s will as meant by Jesus himself (cf. Jn. 5:30).

This way of formulating our understanding of faith, moreover, avoids the conflicting stresses on the vertical and horizontal dimensions of this faith. Precisely by saying that it is the “*kalooban ng Diyos*” which we make part of ourselves (i.e. interiorizing the will of God), we affirm our primary allegiance to God who alone is worthy of our supreme dedication; and by stating it is the “*halooban ng Diyos*” that we make our own (i.e. the will of God), we equally affirm that this *pagsasaioob* is intrinsically related to working for the well-being of the neighbor since this is most certainly what is expected of us as disciples of Jesus and the characteristic sign of that discipleship (cf. Jn. 13:34-35).

This interiorizing reminds us also that God’s revelation is something which permeates the very depths of our being. *Loob*, no doubt, reminds us of this very well. It furthermore recalls to mind St. Paul’s own understanding of revelation as a dynamic reality reaching our most authentic selves in Galatians 1:15-16: “But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son *in me (en moi)*, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles. . .” Through the notion of *loob* this point is easy to grasp within the cultural frame of reference.

#### *Summing up*

Re-rooting the Gospel into our own culture requires a re-thinking and re-interpretation rather than just translation of theological systems and categories into the vernacular. Because of this, a good familiarity with the culture is imperative. In following the dialogical approach advocated by the Second Vatican Council in the decree *Ad Gentes*, we spoke of “probing listening” to the culture. Respect, we stated, is an essential ingredient of this sort of “listening” and necessary in order to know, understand and appreciate the genius and the strength of a particular culture. While we do not deny the critical element in this Gospel-culture dialogue, we insisted that it is not this which takes priority. It is not only that intelligibility of meaningfulness is a criterion which takes precedence in theologizing anew, but also because of the experiences of colonization and industrialization that we emphasize the need to be aware of the cultural dimensions of theological re-thinking.

In this exposition we focused on one way, among many, of listening attentively to the culture, i.e. through language and the experiences embodied in that language. As

an illustration we analyzed the notions of “loob” and “kagandahang-loob” in order to become aware of the wealth of meaning connected with these key concepts. Then, we re-interpreted the faith experience (revelation-faith) in terms of these very meanings and indicated how they express this aspect of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in a culturally relevant manner. Both the cultural analysis and theological analysis have exemplified for us the advantage of taking into account this element of listening to the culture in rethinking the Christian faith today for our situations.

#### NOTES

1. Karl Rahner, “Towards a Fundamental Theological Interpretation of Vatican II,” *Theological Studies* 60/4 (December, 1979): 716-27.
2. See Pierre Casse, *Training For the Cross-Cultural Mind* (Washington, D. C., 1981), p.252.
3. All quotations from Vatican II are taken from Walter Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York, 1966).
4. Jose M. de Mesa and Lode Wostyn, *Doing Theology: Basic Realities and Processes* (Quezon City, 1982), pp. 19—21.
5. *Doing Theology*, pp. 6-7
6. H. de la Costa, “Evangelization and Humanization,” *Teaching All Nations* 12/3 (1975): 141.
7. *And God Said, “Bahata Na!”: The Theme of Providence in the Lowland Filipino Context* (Quezon City, 1979), pp. 64-65.
8. J.J. Mueller, *Faith and Appreciative Awareness* (Washington, D. C., 1981), p. 135.
9. Kosuke Koyama, *No Handle on the Cross* (London, 1976).
10. For a further elaboration of a method, see “Doing Theology as Inculturation in the Asian Context,” *Kerygma* 20 (1986): 151—73.
11. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 26.
12. I am following here Virgilio G. Enriquez’s discussion of this point in *Filipino Psychology in the Third World* (Quezon City: Philippine Psychology Research House, 1977). pp. 3-8.
13. See “Understanding God’s ‘Kagandahang-loob’, “*Witness* 1:1 (First Quarter, 1981), 4-13 “‘Loob’ and Prayer,” *Witness* IV:2 (Second Quarter, 1984), 52-60: *Ang Eukaristiya: Bagong Uganayan* (Manila: Asian Social Institute Communication Center, 1987).
14. *Isang Mauksing Katesismo Para Sa Mga Bata: A Study in Indigenous Catechesis* (Manila: Wellspring Books, 1985).