

**DOING LOCAL THEOLOGY**  
**A guide for Artisans of a New Humanity**  
**CLEMENS SEDMAK**

(Orbis, 2002)

Introduction: Waking Up. Theology helps us do this!

Like a child, we are alert to questions – look and ask!

Religion only exists in the vernacular – treasure in earthen vessels.

**(Ch1) why what, who , where?**

Doing theology is spiritual listening to serve God and people.

We build up a community of friends of God.

We attend to the wounds of our time – since the wounds of Jesus are still there but heal us – and listen to the power of the powerless to heal us. “Was there nothing to be wounded for?” I could give her only my tears.

“Theology can be done with gestures: embracing, kneeling, blessing.” (p11)

We all have implicit theology. Asking important questions too important to leave to professionals. It is Emmaus theology alongside.

Theology is done in the ‘village’ – like Jesus’ parables – it washes locals’ feet.

Yet they make us think beyond the village.

**(ch2) Jesus, teacher of theology.**

So ‘good theology’ like Jesus means (p71):

1. It’s real. – true to the facts
2. It’s is true to the Founder –
3. It has practical Consequences –

“beware the scribes.” Reinterprets and gives new value to old traditions.

He works in the village but does not stay there. On the move – becoming.

Did not create dependencies.

Teaches only out of his intimacy with God which gives authority “the one who sent me.”

He teaches as the occasion, and people, demands – yet refuses to give a sign, to sell himself to their desires.

He is with his friends as well as the Ochlos.

Fruit is criterion.

His theology is about **Sustainability**

Institutes eucharist in memory.

His theology is **Appropriate**

Remain in the same house – get local.

He shares out his Power through **Empowerment**

Go out and do the Kingdom – gives power prayer.

He **Challenges** the local culture. Counter-cultural beatitudes & Kingdom.

(Ch3) **Our Tradition** – reappropriate it (make it our own)

**This is how Jesus does theology**

- **Reappropriates tradition**
- **Do it with people at core**
- **Base it all on relationship with God**

Tradition is not unified nor simple.

So look for key message of the Jesus Tradition ~ salvation, resurrection, Kgdm and appropriate them **by making Little Theologies**

Can we go back beyond the community (church) to the founder's message?

Ambition: *“strive for the Kingdom and all else will follow”* Mt 6:33

Friendship: *He challenges and cares and moves outward*

An interpretation of Life with the aid of the Bible (not reinterpret Bible)

Korea saw Exodus as a telling of their own enslaved life. “I have seen the affliction” of the *Ochlos/Minjung*

Tradition is a source of norms and hints on method for today – placing our work in a wider intellectual context. We are not free to imagine anything we fancy! We must respect the cultures in which our traditions have grown.

**Gutierrez On Job** (Maryknoll 1987) Theodicy:

Eliphaz et al. impose answers from tradition.

They talk about God, not to God – Job talks to God.

Job moves from his personal experience of suffering to solidarity with poor and from prophecy to contemplation. (p16-17)

To the needs of one's neighbour (p31)

He sees that innocence also includes our relationship to the poor (p39)

Thus sharing his language becomes profound – to live in solidarity with poor and God’s love for the poor (p48)

He then sees that the world has not been made to be useful for humans but simply from God’s gratuitous, creative love. Human being are not centre. God’s behaviour cannot be predicted or calculated.

God’s action cannot always be judged in terms of power. God’s freedom is related/limited to Human freedom (Jb40:9-14)

“No human work merits grace” (p88)

We can **misappropriate**:

Spanish *conquistadores* used Jericho as model for destruction and Luke 14:23 for forced conversion of survivors.

(Ch4) **Local Culture.**

***“Any & every theological question begins with the human situation. Theology is ‘the second step’”***

Segundo, Liberation of Theology p79

Our cultures are shaped by implicit theologies – what is supreme for us.

Theologies are the silent language of our culture.

To step back and take a look is what prophets do.

There is no universal Christian culture.

But colonizers colonise the mind through language they leave. So we must understand our own thinking at these levels – looking at the various meanings at the different levels and historical points.

When two cultures meet, stories must be told and background sought and cultural stories mingled. Globalisation has imposed one story, so other cultures have to shout their cultural story in order to be heard.

(Ch5) Local Situation

**For whom do we do theology?**

**1 academy 2. church 3. society** (David Tracy) Speak differently to each. *[I add some more audiences into which we offer theological reflection. See LDTheol.]*

**The Poor!** We do not choose our message – that will not do! (M Gandhi) Taking this option begins with small things – rarely spectacular.

Requires data and human engagement.

*We think in terms of human transformation, forgiveness, reconciliation, conversion, responsibility, solidarity.*

*Theologically it is not lack of money but bad relationship.*

Doing Social Analysis in a Christian way? (Mueller & Banawiratma)

1. selection of issue
2. analyse how we want to address (assumptions, values)
3. collect data

4. social mapping (institutions and structures in society)
5. historical analysis
6. formulate assumptions about connections and dependencies
7. prioritise theses put forward to explain social relations
8. analyse with (2) our values in mind
9. evaluate terms used by team – our norms
10. conclusions for our praxis

(Ch6) **Little Theologies** (cf Ernesto Cardinale, Solentiname)

these emphasise local soundness and embeddedness.

*Subsidiarity of theology.*

*Doing theology as if people matter means choosing right scale.*

- 1 Take off our shoes in other cultures
- 2 Challenge! Go beyond the culture (poor not problem, we are their problem)
- 3 Help to dream dreams

Read the little details of our lives – ‘what do I do when meeting a beggar?’

Jesus sees disciples quarrelling, sees widow’s mite, observes the season.

Use what’s locally available. [*rather like Illich*]

Theology is built from notion that little people can make a difference – hope!