

A CASE STUDY
FOR DOING LOCAL THEOLOGY
IN QUITO, ECUADOR:

*“If God is our Father,
then who is our Mother?”*

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Introduction

This paper will argue a case for using a spiritual mother as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. This case study only applies to Quito, Ecuador where my wife and I are presently serving as missionaries. I will focus on the choice of paradigms and how these relate to my doctoral research.

Context: Folk-Catholicism in Quito, Ecuador

Along with the conquest of Ecuador by the Spaniards came three religious orders: the Mercedians, the Franciscans, and the Dominicans, which were responsible for the evangelization of Quito and the rest of the country during the sixteenth century (Vargas 1980:190). The Mercedians focused on the coastal regions, while the Franciscans and Dominicans concentrated on the Andes regions. The Jesuits arrived later, and did a phenomenal job of reaching the Amazon region. Evangelical missions didn't arrive in Ecuador until the beginning of the twentieth century (Padilla J. 1989:191).

In spite of five centuries of evangelization, syncretism abounds. Many Catholic ceremonies are cover-ups for indigenous festivities that the priests attempted to eliminate, and eventually tried unsuccessfully to replace with "correct" religious activities. The celebration of San Juan is really the celebration of "Inti Raymi" (The Sun); "Mama Monserrat" is a cover-up for "Pacha Mama" (Mother Earth); and "San Pablo" (Saint Paul) masks the celebration of "taita Imbabura" (Father Imbabura) (Moya 1995:18).

Issue: The Role of the Virgin Mary

As in Europe, where the Virgin Mary was substituted for Juno and Diana, so in Ecuador, different virgins, such as "La Inmaculada, La Dolorosa, and others" were used

to replace a host of feminine gods (Moya 1995:17). Altars to Virgins abound in Ecuador especially on roadsides at critical locations which pose particular driving hazards. Many small towns honor a virgin as their patron saint.

The veneration of the Virgin Mary is one belief that a faithful Catholic in Ecuador will refuse to relinquish. Her picture hangs in many a public building, over the windshield of most buses, around the neck or wrist of many Ecuadorians, and without exception in every Catholic church.

From listening to a few masses, I have noted two principle roles of the Virgin Mary. The first is as the Mother of God, and the second is as intercessor between the believers here on earth and God in heaven. "Saint Mary pray for us" is a common phrase used in Catholic ritual.

Question: If God is our Father, then who is our Mother?

Western theology has typified God as Father. Jesus referred to God as "Father," and taught us to pray using the phrase, "Our Father in heaven" (*The New International Version* 1984: Mt 6:9). Most of Latin American theology in the past two centuries has come from Anglo-Saxon missionaries (Núñez 1989:337). In my opinion, at the folk level of theology here in Quito, God is conceived as being male. Since Ecuadorian culture is still very family oriented, and not only family oriented, but matriarchal, the mother figure is very important. Most people in Quito will agree that the mother is the central figure of the family, and not the father. Given this cultural perspective, is it not unusual for an Ecuadorian to ask, "If God is our Father, who, then, is our Mother?" Before answering the question, we must first look at different ways of answering it. Western theology is only one way. What are some other ways of "theologizing?"

Paradigms of Contextualizing Theology

Several authors have proposed not only the idea, but the need, of doing theology in context. “Theology today must be a contextual theology” (Bevans 1992:10).

“Contextualization, biblically based and Holy Spirit-led, is a requirement for evangelical missions today” (Gilliland 1989:3). Nuñez states:

“During at least the last twenty years there has been a great deal of theological and missiological discussion about the idea of encouraging the churches in the Two-Thirds World to produce their own evangelical theology in response to their own needs, in their particular cultural and social context” (Nuñez 1989:311).

Kraft has proposed using the term “appropriate” rather than “contextual” when referring to developing theology (Kraft 2006:4). The term “contextual” has put too much emphasis on the culture at the expense of leaving out Scripture. Appropriate theology must be true to both the culture and the Bible.

Yet even so, theology can go in many different directions. The key is the starting point. Any philosophy has basic assumptions, which need to be stated clearly from the beginning, and takes a specific direction, according to the issues involved and the context in which the philosophy is developed. Thus I need to define three issues in order to continue: basic orientation (which I will refer to as “paradigm”), the question at hand, and the context in which I am working. I have already mentioned the question at hand, and briefly described the context of that question in Quito, Ecuador. Here, I will deal with paradigms.

Van Engen proposes five different paradigms for doing theology in context (Kraft 2006:159). Each one emphasizes a different method of doing theology according to the need at the time and the particular situation at hand. My own interpretation of Van

Engen's paradigm is that they developed historically. The first missionaries had to deal with communicating the gospel message to a people with a different language, different values and ways of thinking. Much of their effort dealt with translating the message so that the people could understand it. This is the communication paradigm.

Once churches were established, the issue became that of how to develop a church that looked "national." Many of the churches were looking like transplants from the missionary's home country, rather than anything familiar to the surroundings of the church. The new idea was to "plant the gospel" and let it "grow up" in its natural environment. Van Engen refers to this as indigenization (Kraft 2006:161). During this stage, many mission boards were attempting to make the mission churches completely independent from foreign mission authority and financial support.

The next step was to allow the churches to be completely "national" in form and essence. Not only would the churches be independent from foreign influence, but they would also take on new forms and expressions that came from their surrounding cultures. The idea is that the gospel is universal and can express itself within any cultural form. Van Engen terms this "translatability" (Kraft 2006:163).

The three paradigms mentioned so far all deal with the Gospel coming from a foreign country. As the local church develops, the time eventually comes when the Christians there begin to question the Gospel itself: not the Gospel in the Bible, but the Gospel that was brought to them by the missionaries. This provokes a process of rethinking the Gospel, and understanding God's revelation to them, through the Scriptures, in their own culture. Van Engen names this "local theology" (Kraft

2006:167). At this stage Christians are developing a theology of their own, completely separate from foreign influence.

The final paradigm, which Van Engen calls “epistemology” (Kraft 2006:170), occurs when those cultures who have developed a local theology begin to interact with others who have also developed a local theology, and they both develop a new theology as they learn from each other. The basic assumption of this paradigm is that no one knows everything about God, and that one group can understand certain aspects of God that the other group never even imagined.

Not every paradigm is adequate for every context. It depends what the issue is and where the church is in its development. Yet only one paradigm may not be enough for every situation. A combination of paradigms or a progression of paradigms may work better.

I will now justify my choice of paradigm for theologizing in the context of Quito, Ecuador in order to deal with the question of our spiritual mother.

My Choice of Local Theologizing

For the present Ecuadorian Church in general, I advocate the paradigm of “local theologizing” for the question of a spiritual mother. The Church in Ecuador has received the Gospel for the past one-hundred years from foreign missionaries, many churches and denominations (though not all) are independent from foreign influence, and some churches (not many) are taking on new forms of expression unique to Ecuador. It’s time for some local theologizing.

The topic of “our spiritual mother” is particularly suited to local theologizing in Ecuador, because the question itself comes from the context. This is not a question

Westerners are asking. Their questions are different. So it is not a matter of translating a foreign concept into Latin culture or of making a concept “Ecuadorian.” It is a question that rises from their reality.

In Quito, a matriarchal society predominates. Even though many men claim to be machistas and rule in their home, when they are honest, they will admit that the woman is the center of the home, holding it together and determining what happens within it.

In the indigenous festivals, many female figures are predominate. Whether it’s the Virgin Mary herself, or another Virgin, or the “Mama Negra” (Black Mother), or the flautist (referred to as the “mother”) who leads the dancers, one can find some mother figure in almost every festival.

Since Ecuadorian society is matriarchal and religious festivals generally have a mother figure, the question naturally arises as to who is the spiritual mother. And since this question is a local phenomenon, it needs to be answered locally. Thus the local theologizing paradigm is most suited.

Western Perspectives

Since my audience for this paper are Westerners, I would like to discuss briefly how Westerners address this question and how they go about doing so. I feel this is necessary to clarify what I am NOT dealing with in Ecuadorian culture. Otherwise the reader may be distracted by thinking of irrelevant issues. I did a quick survey of some recent articles that deal with the topic from a Western point of view.

God's Gender

The first aspect of this topic is whether God is Father or Mother. From a Scriptural point of view, Sonderegger argues:

“Christians call God Father, I believe, not because we and all our ancestors grew up in patriarchal culture, nor because the Roman father was the model and local authority of the Empire, but because Jesus of Nazareth called upon the God of Israel by that name” (Sonderegger 2001:397).

If one does a quick electronic search in the Bible (NIV) of the word “Father” as compared to “Mother”, the results are 1082 to 237. These results reflect the large use of “Father” when referring to God, and the very infrequent reference to God as “Mother.” Jesus’ use of “Father” when referring to God is extensive in the Gospel Matthew.

Yet the Bible does refer to God as “Mother.” Leonard list several such passages: Is 49:15; 66:13; 46:3-4; Hosea 11:1-4 (Leonard 2005:16). Parmentier’s list is a little more extensive: Psalm 131:1-2; Isaiah 46:3-4; 49:15; 66:13; Hosea 11:1-4; Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21; 13:34” (Parmentier 2002:577). And he argues that God has no gender. Therefore we can relate to God as both male and female.

This brings in the other side of theology: understanding God through who we are. Whether God has no gender (Parmentier 2002:579) or whether God is both male and female (Spearing 1999:318), the issue is how we see God in our relation to God. “If God has no gender and language is metaphorical and not realistic, then one can use both masculine and feminine imagery to speak of God” (Parmentier 2002:579). We try to understand God based on who we are: “What is in effect being done here is to seek an

analogy of the Trinity in terms of the basic human unit, the family” (Williams 2000:56). An interesting note is that a study revealed that the view of God as Father still predominates among Christians today (Lee 2000:233).

What I have just described is two approaches to seeking God’s gender and how we can relate to God as male or female: through Scripture and through culture. A purely Scriptural argument usually leaves many questions from a cultural perspective. Our goal is to find a culturally relevant and Scripturally faithful theology ((Kraft 2006:4).

Images of God

A second issue is that of metaphors. From a systematic theology point of view, Bracken argues that one must maintain “a single governing image or set of interrelated images which will be suitable for incorporation into a systematic theology as a fully coherent representation of the God-world relationship” (Bracken 2002:372). Yet Dickey feels that one dominant image can become an idol (Dickey Young 1999:200) and Donohue argues that since metaphors are imperfect, the use of several metaphors keeps any one from distorting divine reality (Donohue-White 2005:24).

The difference between these arguments is the paradigm they are using. Systematic theology cannot handle multiple images of God. It’s too difficult to fit all the metaphors of God into one theological system. Whereas from a cultural point of view, just one image or metaphor of God doesn’t allow us to capture the beauty of God’s diversity.

Real Life Questions about God

The third issue is the list of questions that arise from our daily reality. I list these questions to demonstrate the kind of questions common people ask and that systematic theologians rarely answer.

“When you think of God, do you think of God as male or female? What happens to us when we consistently use the pronouns *he* and *his* for God? How are women created in the image and likeness of God?” (Brennan 2006: 24)

“What does my experience as mother teach me about the ways God loves us?” (Donovan Massey 2000:17)

“I have found it difficult to pray to a male God... If I’m made in God’s image, it must mean the divine can manifest itself in a feminine way. Do we really believe that women are made in the image of God?” (Schlumpf 1999:34).

The questions I ask are: “Does our theology satisfactorily answer these questions for these people?” and “Are we theologians tuned-in to people’s questions?”

Oppression of Women

The fourth issue is that of using theology to maintain the superiority of males. The issue begins by asking why God is always referred to “Father” and describing its consequences. My objective is not to enter this debate, but to document its Western expression. I quote several authors:

“we are not surprised when patriarchal societies create a male God in the image of those who have the pride of place in society. Then, these images take on a life of their own and reinforce the idea that maleness is more God-like than femaleness” (Dickey Young 1999:199).

“the designation of “father” as a name for God transforms a paternal model into a patriarchal model” (McFague 1982:9);

Language about the father in heaven who rules over the world justifies and even necessitates an order whereby the male religious leader rules over the flock” (Johnson 1992:36);

“if God is male, then the male is God” (Daly 1973:19).

Local Theologizing in Quito, Ecuador

My Personal Pilgrimage

Local theology should be done by locals. Do I qualify? I have lived in Quito, Ecuador for close to twenty years. I am married to an Ecuadorian, and I have spoken and thought in Spanish for most of that time. Yet I was born and raised in the United States. I am not an Ecuadorian. But the fact that I am bi-lingual and bi-cultural gives me the advantage of being able to process thoughts in a way a mono-cultural person cannot. The theologizing process in this paper will be done by me.

As a North American, the thought of God being feminine didn't have a place in my theology. It wouldn't fit anywhere. Yet after living in Quito, Ecuador for many years, the question that immediately comes to my mind now is not “Is there a spiritual mother?” but “Where is she?” There has to be one.

Now the way I am handling this question is not in a traditional theological style. I am not seeking God's gender, nor a feminine divinity. The question is how an Ecuadorian can relate to God as a mother. We all have parents: a father and a mother, and we have learned to relate to each. Since Western theology has taught us that God is father, what happens to the mother image?

Reasoning versus Experience

In order to understand local theologizing, I find it helpful to refer to a thought by Kenneth McElhanon: “We can truly comprehend abstract concepts only in terms of our experience of phenomena at the basic level” (McElhanon 2000:5). This implies that we understand the spiritual world based on what we experience in the physical world.

McElhanon argues that tradition theologians begin with abstract concepts and use them to explain life. “They begin with axiomatic statements which are then worked out in the phenomena of human existence” (ibid:6). On the contrary, human science researchers begin with the reality we know, and from that reality form concepts. The two groups of researchers use different paradigms.

I would suggest that we use the human science researchers’ paradigm for theologizing. This implies the use of metaphors. The only way we can begin to conceptualize God is through comparisons with things we already know. Bracken notes several metaphors used in the Bible for God: “a rock, a shield, a fortress (Ps. 144:1-2), a shepherd (Ps. 23:1), a warrior (Ex.15:3), a lover (Hosea 2:16), a Father (Hosea 11:1), and a Mother (Is.49:15)” (Bracken 2002:362).

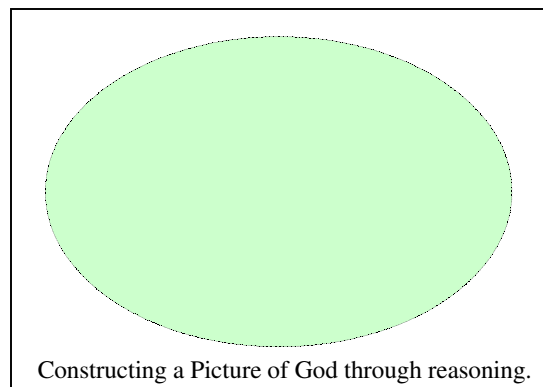


FIGURE 1: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Taking this one step further, we only know God as we experience God in daily living. We understand God through those things we see and use every day. This is very different from knowing God through intellectual propositions. I suggest the two are distinct paradigms for knowing God. The latter is an attempt to construct a “perfect” picture of God through reasoning. (Figure 1) The former is constructing different "ways" of understanding God, or different glasses through which we see God. (Figure 2) This can also be described as using different metaphors to relate to God. (Figure 3)

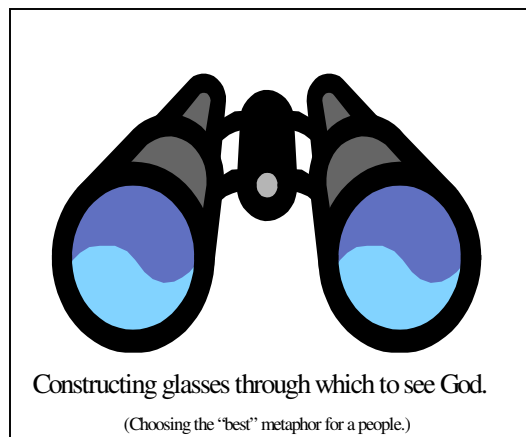


FIGURE 2: LOCAL THEOLOGY

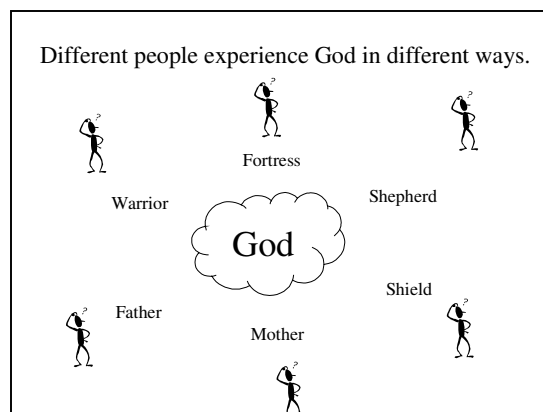


FIGURE 3: METAPHORS

In general, the Old Testament characters knew God through experience. The Patriarchs knew God as the One who appeared to them and gave them the promises. The Israelites knew God as the One who divided the Red Sea, the One who gave the manna in the desert, the One who made the walls of Jericho fall. This is a "local theology" paradigm. In the New Testament, much of Paul's teaching about God is through abstract reasoning: "God is spirit" (Jn. 4:24), "to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God" (1 Tim 1:17). This is comparable to our systematic theology. I am oversimplifying, but my point is to illustrate that local theologizing is nothing new.

The difference in theologizing can be illustrated by an analysis of Psalm 23. I have heard several sermons on this Psalm which gave lengthy descriptions of how a pastor shepherds the sheep. The application is that God shepherds us in the same way. Yet I believe David did not write the Psalm to describe the general principles by which God treats us. He was writing a summary of his experience of God during his past life. Since David grew up as a shepherd, he related his experiences of God using this metaphor. If he had been a farmer, he would have written the psalm very differently. Perhaps describing God as giving rain, weeding the soil, and causing the crops to grow. David described his experience of God based on his own way of life. He was not developing a systematic theology. He didn't think that way.

The Family Metaphor

Local theologizing in Quito, Ecuador needs to start with a metaphor people can identify with. If we are dealing with the question of our spiritual mother, the family metaphor is a familiar one to use.

The Bible describes God principally as Father. But God is occasionally described as Mother.¹ In systematic theology, we can talk of God as having no gender, or having both genders and acting as both. But how can we understand a bi-sexual or asexual God if we live daily with distinct genders: male and female? From a local theology point of view, we need to begin to understand God through what we already know. A family consists of a father, a mother, and children. If God is father, Jesus is the son, and the Church is the bride, then the mother is the Holy Spirit.

Metaphors are not perfect, and there's a danger in carrying a metaphor too far. Geertz warns that a religious symbol can become more real than the reality it represents (Geertz 1973:90). But we can use metaphors to help us understand God, recognizing that we are approaching a fuller understanding of God, and that as we gain more understanding of God, we may leave the old metaphors behind.²

The Holy Spirit Can Replace The Virgin Mary As Our Spiritual Mother

Returning to the Ecuadorian mentality, what is the concept of "mother"? She is the center of the family, the one the children turn to for protection, comfort, and counsel. The father is the authority figure, the provider, and the leader. Cannot Ecuadorians use this metaphor to understand their relationship with God? Where is the mother? The Holy Spirit fulfills the role of mother.³

Western missionaries have ignored the maternal divine role, and as a result, Ecuadorians have sought the mother figure in the Virgin Mary, and other feminine figures already mentioned. Why is the Virgin Mary the intercessor between the believer

¹ See section on God's Gender.

² This is an application of Hiebert's concept of centered-sets (Hiebert 1994:123).

³ Parmentier discusses this option from a systematic point of view (Parmentier 2002:580).

and God? Because Ecuadorians see their biological father as distant and the biological mother as near. They approach their father through their mother. And this real life experience they transfer to God, and so look for a mother through which to approach God.

Why can't the Holy Spirit fulfill this maternal role for Ecuadorians? If we Westerners have exported a masculine God to Ecuador, why are we surprised if Ecuadorians have sought a feminine figure in the Virgin Mary? (They even had feminine divinities before Catholicism.) The Holy Spirit is our intercessor (Rom 8:27), and our Comforter (John 14:16). The Holy Spirit is between us and God (John 16:13-15). Doesn't this image of the Holy Spirit as mother "fit" into the family metaphor?

The Pentecostal Church

Might it not be that the Pentecostal church has "discovered" this role of the Holy Spirit without realizing why? Maybe the Holy Spirit is the mother figure that Ecuadorians have been seeking in the Evangelical Church. The Holy Spirit is the "near mother," the Counselor. They can pray to the Holy Spirit, and feel the Spirit's presence very near. The Holy Spirit is the one who heals, especially inner healing, like a mother caring for her child. The Holy Spirit is the one who guides, like a mother walking her child by the hand.

Is the Holy Spirit feminine, and God the Father masculine? That's not the question! Do Ecuadorians see God as the Father, and the Holy Spirit as the Mother? Maybe so, for now.

Local Theologizing Precedes Indigenization

I have illustrated how the local theology paradigm must precede the indigenization paradigm. In other words, one must understand the deep meaning for a particular people, before deciding what form best expresses the meaning. The idea that the Holy Spirit is our mother will not be accepted everywhere in all cultures. In our class at Fuller with Dr. Van Engen, one African student claimed that in his country the idea of God's femininity would not be accepted or understood. A Korean student agreed that the same applied to his country. My point is that in other cultures, they may not need a feminine figure to be able to relate to God. But on the deep level, how do they relate to God? That is the key question for each culture.

Music Worship and Our Spiritual Mother

How does a spiritual mother relate to music worship? (How does this paper relate to my research?) The most obvious connection is "How do I relate to the God I am worshipping in music?" Some may emphasize worshipping God the father, others may see themselves worshipping the Holy Spirit.

The second application is to analyze what music means to a people, before deciding what type of music and song is most helpful for them in their relationship with God. This deals with paradigms. In my own research on contextualizing music worship, I have developed a series of research models, each of which uses a different paradigm. This developed from the idea that different biases produce different conclusions even though they use the same data. For example, if my data include research on music worship, I can analysis the data using different paradigms (figure 4). My first idea was to use all three paradigms to analyze the role of song in Christian discipleship in Ecuador.

Then I realized the project was too large. I will have to choose only one for my dissertation.

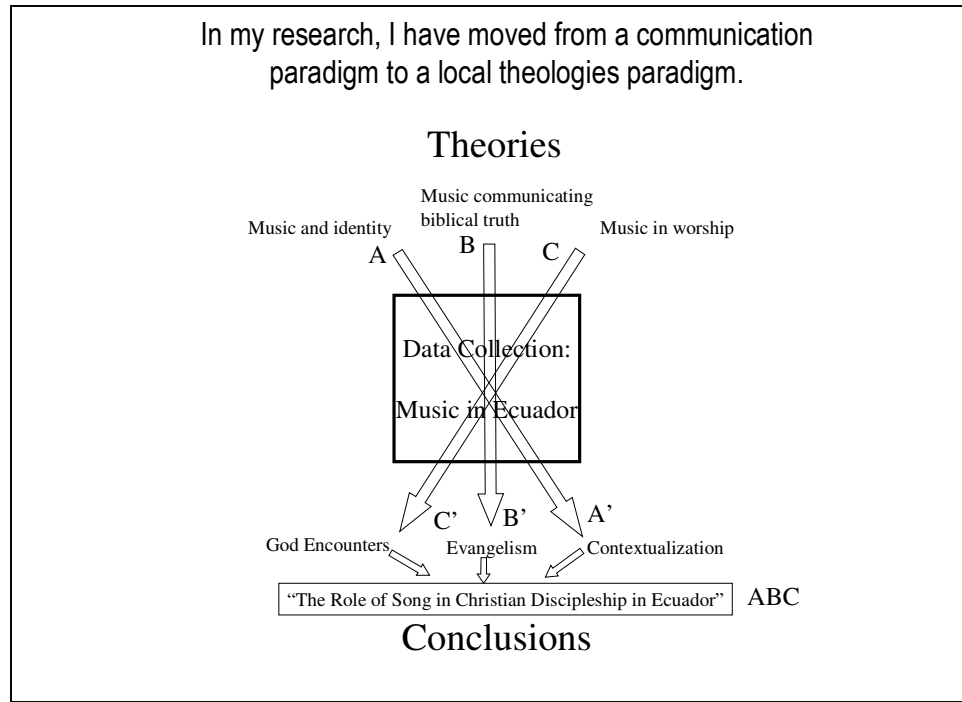


FIGURE 4: DATA ANALYSIS WITH DIFFERENT PARADIGMS

My first model dealt with communication (figure 5). I drew a triangle model of communication between musicians, congregation, and God. The goal was to see what was happening during the music worship in the interaction between each pair. This is mainly surface-level research using the communication paradigm.

The second model (figure 6) sought to go deeper by investigating the difference in mentality between musicians and congregation. The assumption is that God wants to communicate to the congregation through their mentality. In many congregations the musicians are youth and the congregation consists of adults. Their mentalities are very different, and often the musicians interfere with rather than facilitate God's communication with the congregation, because the musicians impose their mentality on

the congregation. This model takes into account the indigenization paradigm, because the musicians need to adapt their music to the congregation's mentality.

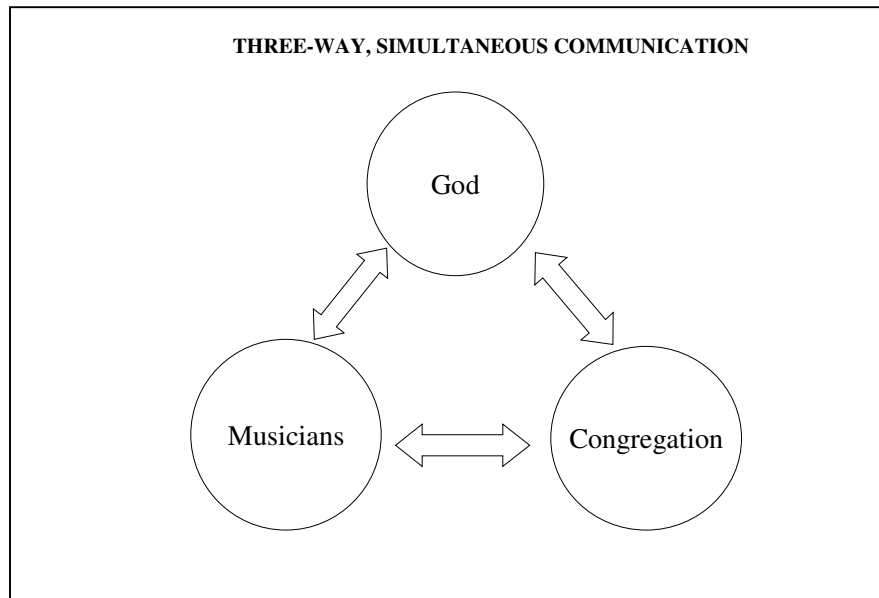


Figure 5: Communication Paradigm

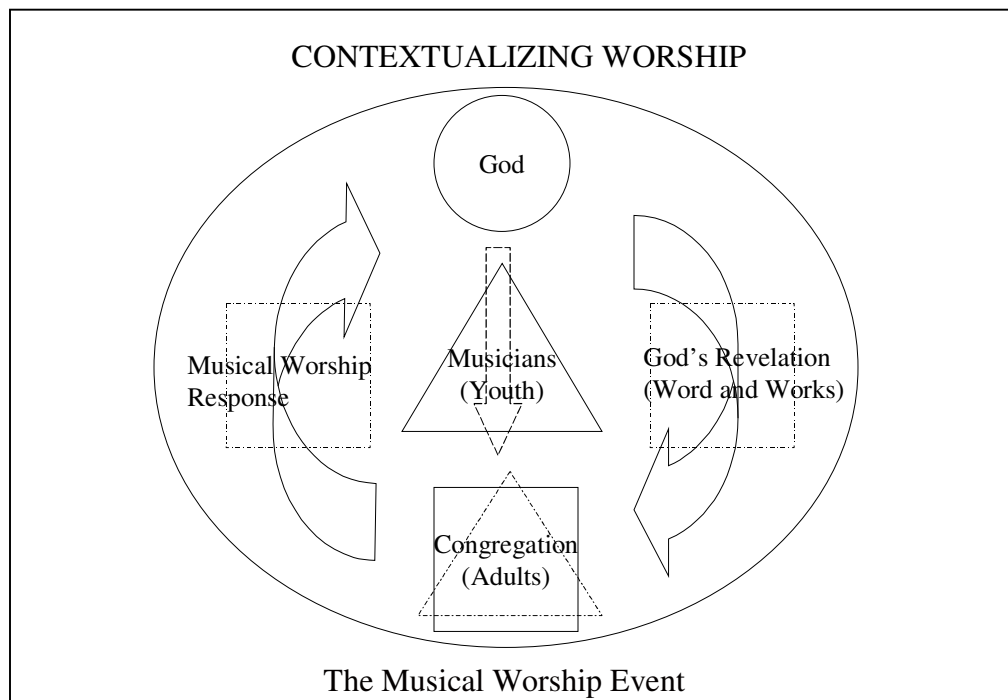


FIGURE 6: INDIGENIZATION PARADIGM

The third model (figure 7) seeks to understand the meaning a people give to their religious music. This deals with the local theology paradigm: how a congregation perceives their relationship with God and express it through music worship; and how an outsider perceives evangelical music worship. The goal is for the congregation to understand the outsider's mentality and adjust their music worship to the outsider. This uses the local theology paradigm as a foundation for using the indigenization paradigm.

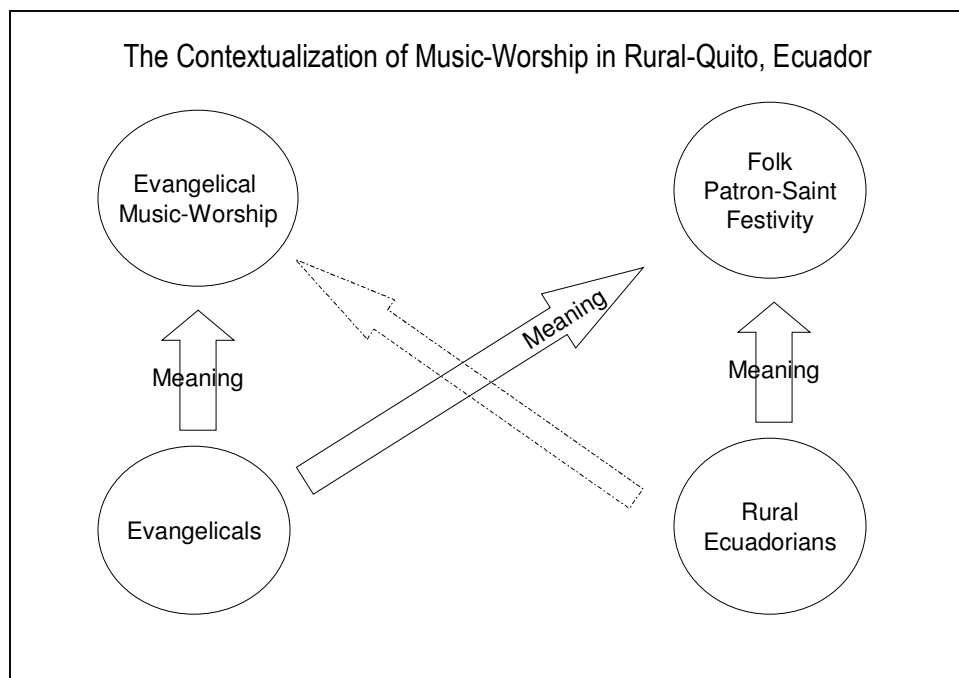


FIGURE 7: LOCAL THEOLOGY PARADIGM

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued the case for using a spiritual mother as a metaphor for the Holy Spirit. This only applies to Quito, Ecuador where my wife and I have lived and ministered for the past twenty years. My argument begins with a bias toward using local theology as opposed to using systematic theology or other theological paradigms.

I use this question of our spiritual mother as a case study for choosing appropriate paradigms for theologizing and research. In my own research, I have moved among paradigms, and have chosen the local theologizing paradigm as the principle one for my investigation of music worship in Ecuador.

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1. who were very dangerous 2. that is such an important part of biology today 3. which made a very important contribution to the study of botany 4. which plants were good to eat and which could be used for medicine 5. what were the earliest zoological gardens 6. which led to an understanding of the causes of disease 7. which is an.Â –“The landscape seen from our windows is certainly charming,â™ said Annabel; –“those cherry orchards and green meadows, and the river winding along the valley. However, nothing ever happens here. Rather dreadful, isnâ™t it?â™ –“On the 32_,â™ said Matilda, –“I find it soothing and restful; but then, you see, Iâ™ve lived in countries where things do happen, especially when youâ™re not ready for them happening all at once.â™ 9) We have to answer our emails quickly - my managers insist on it! 10) It isn't easy to communicate well in a foreign language, but I don't think it's impossible. 11) If you say what is wrong in a polite way, you can complain without upsetting people. 12) Sam left me a note, but the writing was so tiny I couldn't read it. 13) Email is useful, but there are times when it is better to communicate face to face. Start studying Lesson 10. Learn vocabulary, terms and more with flashcards, games and other study tools.Â That's the last time I lie to a client for Mrs.Richards. I'm not going to do her dirty job / work for her anymore. Work. My mum's got organizing her Christmas card list round / down to a fine art.Â Well, she did study ____at Oxford, so it's hardly surprising she knows Latin and Ancient Greek (class). Classics. The Pet Shop Boys' sound is _____ and unique (imitate). Inimitable. What this painting says to me is that we live in a world of _____ and despair (destroy). Destruction. I've got enormous _____for Ben; he's achieved such a lot in such a short space of time (admire).