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The Community of the Weak :

Social Postmodernism in Theological Reflections on Power and Powerlessness in North America

by

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GENERAL INTENTIONS

A View on North America

The book presented tries to combine three basic intentions. *First*, the book introduces the reader into a *European perspective* on some of *the most current North American systematic theologies* along the basic concepts of *power and powerlessness* in many places, social spaces, and lived experiences. Certain experiences are unique to the North American context, other experiences and theological images *for a better world* do connect. The book tries to unify the often separate and distanced in a creative way.

North American systematic theology has only recently been recognized as a serious area of theological studies in European contexts. It still is common usage in European and predominantly German textbooks on the history of systematic theology in the 20th and 21st centuries (*Fischer 2002, Rohls 1997, Gibellini 1995, Vilanova 1997*) or on systematic theology in general, Protestant as well as Roman Catholic (*Frey 2000, Härle 2000, Leonhardt 2001, Lange 2001, Pöhlmann 2002, Schneider-Flume 2004, Wagner 2003*), to omit most North American contributions to systematic theology. This book is one attempt to change a general forgetfulness in an intercultural dialog.

French-speaking publications have been more receptive to a respectable degree, with the pioneering work of systematic theologian *Klauspeter Blaser* from the *University of Lausanne* (*Blaser 1995, Blaser 1995*), accompanied by colloquia organized by French universities in Switzerland on various authors and themes in North American systematic theology. *Mark C. Taylor's* postmodernism (*Gisel et Evrard 1996, Gisel 1995*), *George Lindbeck's* postliberalism (*Boss, Emery et Gisel 2004*), as well as *Stanley Hauerwas's* communitarian theological ethics, have been serious topics of concern in the French-speaking parts of Europe, entering into dialog with major currents of contemporary North American systematic theology and ethics. A dialog not followed as intensely in the German-speaking parts of Europe, where most of contemporary theological North America still does not seem to exist. In an attitude well expressed by well-known German Roman Catholic systematic theologian, now German bishop, *Walter Kasper*: "There is no systematic theology in North America."

The book continues in the early footsteps of *Klauspeter Blaser* who taught systematic theology with an emphasis in mission theology at the *University of Lausanne* until his untimely death in 2002. Klauspeter Blaser's introductory theological overview in *Les théologies nord-américaines* (1995) and in *La théologie au XXe siècle: Histoire-Défis-Enjeux* (1995) presents North American systematic theology in a very helpful historical narrative up to the times of postliberalism and first attempts at a theological postmodernism. The book continues where Klauspeter Blaser ended his narrative. At the same time, the book's approach is not as historical and systematic as Klauspeter Blaser chose to present this theological continent, but more *eclectic, jazzy, narrative*,

personal, constructive, autobiographical, ethnographic and postmodern “messy,” due to a theological option in *method*. The method is exemplified throughout its narrative.

Common thread throughout the book is the fundamental theme of the experience of *power* and *powerlessness* in North American systematic theologies. A theme very central in most theological discussions in the US, both in systematic, fundamental, dogmatic, ethical, practical, and pastoral theology. The book approaches power and powerlessness in both *personal and theological ways*, connecting it to experiences in pastoral ministry almost 15 years ago. In 1993 in a small Swiss village where the author was pastoring a local church, a young girl, a teenager at the age of 14, part of a confirmation class, died of a heroin overdose during a threatening social crisis in a village facing the social and ethical issues of *exclusion* and *embrace* (Miroslav Volf).

Connecting Experience and Writing

Therefore, in a *second intention*, the book offers a *pastoral combining* of theological and sociological discussions in North America with a *particular local und personal experience of the author*. The experience of a social crisis in a small village during a ministerial calling in a local church in the 1990’s where 14-year-old teenagers taking heroin caused a *radical inbreaking of social and communal violence*. During this time, most theological questions posed in North American systematic theologies - on the nature of power, the postmodern, difference, ambiguity, fragmentation, but also creation, culture, community, ecological living in oikos/koinonia of peace - erupted. The book attempts to *join the personal with the theological*, using these experiences of *exclusion* and *embrace* (Miroslav Volf) as a background in formulating a theology.

The experience of a *14-year-old teenager dying of a heroin overdose* in a local Swiss village in 1993 serves as a repeating and *common memory* throughout the text to reflect on and artfully compose *new images of postmodern community* (Mary Grey), connecting basic theological discussions in contemporary North American systematic theologies with this most personal and social experience in *pastoral ministry*. Mixing both worlds in a text by letting personal experience and open autobiography *narrate* theological, sociological, anthropological, political, philosophical, ecological, ethical, and cultural studies concepts. The text mixes and mingles the personal narrative with the theoretical in open ways, trying to find a different and *new theological language* which touches hearts and breaks the ice of the soul in *narrating life* (Dorothee Sölle).

Following *postmodern sociological concepts of narrative ethnography*, developed by Norman Denzin and other postmodern cultural theorists and sociologists, the book presents a form of a lightly “*messy text*” (Norman Denzin) as the basic presentation of the text. The mixing of theory, praxis, narrative, personal biography, excerpts of *deeply lived experience* (Anais Nin), and theology seems to the present author to be a promising new method in theology, writing a text in a consistent way following this narrative method, postmodern in style. The text proposes and exemplifies its method.

Narrative biography and *autobiographical writing* have become important basic concepts and methods in North American systematic theologies, both in feminist theologies (*Carter Heyward, Rebecca S. Chopp*) and in African American theologies (*Cornel West, Dwight Hopkins*). Combining the personal with the theoretical, the biographical with the academic is a favorite North American style that the book uses in even more explicit ways, combining autobiography and systematic theology in new and openly creative ways (*James McClendon, Stanley Hauerwas, Rebecca S. Chopp*).

The book, all throughout the text, lays the groundwork for *autobiographical theology in an academic context*, defining the use of it and its justification. Theology, whether systematic, fundamental, dogmatic, ethical, practical, or pastoral, should, as proposed by the author, become more *autobiographical*, personal, social, artistic, experiential, everyday, walking, traveling, political, and communal, combining *memory, narrative, ethnography, autobiography, and border-crossing cultural studies* in a “*messy text*,” narrating concepts in *personal-dramatic* (*Cornel West*) ways, moving back and forth between personal experience and theological reflection. The book mixes systematic, fundamental, dogmatic, ethical, practical, and pastoral theology purposefully in a narrative text *border-crossing* modern separations of disciplines in postmodern ways.

A New Vision for Community

In its *third intention*, this text proposes a *new vision for community*. Writing a book, formulating texts, should never remain in a cozy distance to what people and whole communities go through in life. For the author, theology as well has always been an *embedded, organic, engaged intellectual accompanying* (*Antonio Gramsci, Cornel West, Maria Widl*) of pastoral ministry. This book offers some *therapy* for a life lived.

Confronting *the postmodern* in the pastoral, the social, and the cultural in communal dealings of people in these times is the beginning of creating a new kind of *ecology of all living things*. The challenge facing systematic, fundamental, dogmatic, ethical, pastoral, and practical theology in these postmodern times is creating a new vision for communal living that includes *diversity and fragment, ambiguity and otherness*, as well as the *interdependence of all living things* (*Matthew Fox, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara, Mary C. Grey*). The text concludes in a major home-bringing of all the different elements proposed in a new kind of *ecological perspective on a koinonia of cultures* (*Jay B. McDaniel, Matthew Fox, Ivone Gebara, Mary C. Grey*).

Theology - systematic, fundamental, dogmatic, ethical, practical and pastoral - will so become *deeply cultural and ecological* in being more *creative*, artfully composing, creatively knowing, thinking, acting, ecologically suffering, empowering, communal, sensual, spreading life, transforming communities and the world, knowing things ecologically, living in *koinonia* with all living things. Co-creating in *God's shalom*.

From this a new *oikos and koinonia of cultures* that redefines communal living in new ways follows *dogmatically*. Behind this stands a new and openly *postmodern*

ecclesiology (Mary C. Grey, Ruth Page, Matthew Fox) rephrased in communal and ecological terms. Shalom peace, justice, non-wounding, reconciling, and inclusion of diversity in the *community of all living things* (Jürgen Moltmann) stand at the center of this new ecclesiology and point beyond a narrow institutional understanding of church or ecclesia. *Koinonia* as the *community of the weak* includes all of life's diversity. Such an *oikos and koinonia of cultures* embraces the diverse, the other, the stranger, the different. An *oikos and koinonia of cultures* welcomes even 14-year-old teenagers in a local Swiss village in the 90's. In this it joins a *new dream for creation*.

SUMMARY OF CONTENT

The *two introducing chapters* (**A PREFACE AND INTENTIONS i-viii**) and (**B INTRODUCING THE POSTMODERN TRILEMMA 1-10**) can be looked at as a *musical overture*, presenting some of the ground-laying motifs and tunes, melodies and lines in my own composing of theology. I see theology as a *form of art*, social imagination, and musical assembly, playing theology like a *jazz musician*. Theology, as I understand it, could become more "jazzy" (Cornel West, Sharon Welch, James McClendon, Jim Perkinson), with theology improvising on common standards in new ways, as I close the circle of my theological reflections in the last chapter on a *new kind of fundamental theology*, definitely more jazzy and bluesy. In that sense, the first and the last chapter belong closely together, the last chapter being the great finale in a *postmodern fundamental theology* following creative Protestant and Roman Catholic models (Mark Lewis Taylor, Ann Kirkus Wetherilt, Clemens Sedmak, Roger Haight).

In the first material chapter (**I THE SOCIAL POSTMODERN – SIGNATURE AND CALLING OF OUR TIMES 11-78**) the theme of *postmodernism* and issues relating to *community* and *violence* in a postmodern social world are taken up as a *challenge*. In its choreography, this first major chapter opens a vision for the *signes of the times* (*Segundo*) to which **CHAPTER VI** attempts to give a *musical responsio* in visionary theological and social images or imaginations - theology being an artistically creative form of social imagination in our postmodern world (Walter Brueggemann) - to the *open wound of a radical postmodern world* breaking up all human ties and communal understanding, as experienced in a small village like the one that was confronted with the death of a 14-year-old confirmation girl dying of a heroin overdose somewhere in a local village in Switzerland in the 1990's. A *postmodern world* breaking into local communities and tempting people and places with *social violence* is one of the most urgent and pressing challenges facing theology in pastoral ministry today. Systematic theology, as developed in North America today, can give some helpful vision on how to face these radical and social challenges in a contemporary and fragmenting world.

Fragment, ambiguity, and difference are common and recurring themes in North American systematic theologies (David Tracy, Miroslav Volf, Mark Lewis Taylor, Mark I. Wallace, Cheryl A. Kirk-Duggan). In comparison to European discussions on difference, otherness, and postmodernism, North American proposals take on a more

concrete form. Europe most often stays highly philosophical, untouched by concrete social realities. In contrast, *North America* deals with postmodernism in *social terms*: race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, class, age, and social oppression in many forms make up the concrete material with which the postmodern is translated into real life. Discussions on postmodernism in North America become questions of a political *social postmodernism* (David Tracy, Mark Lewis Taylor, Henry A. Giroux).

Social postmodernism is expounded in this chapter as the continuously challenging *trilemma* in having to *take an open stand* in between listening to tradition, celebrating plurality, and opposing social oppression (Mark Lewis Taylor). Otherwise, like in most European discussions on postmodernism, theology becomes a non-committing *play*. North American systematic theologies try to evade this non-committed stance engaging critical theory, feminism, postfeminism, multi-culturalism, postcolonialism, deconstructivism, and postmodernism in *social ways*, relating the social postmodern to the issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, disability, and community.

North American systematic theologies (Peter C. Hodgson, Rebecca S. Chopp, Mark Lewis Taylor, Serene Jones, Paul Lakeland) could offer a great deal to the European continent where most of these social postmodern discussions have not yet entered into basic theological approaches to systematic theology. Postmodern empowerment, postmodern empathy, postmodern creativity, and postmodern community building in being together in diversity follow as new *basic concepts* for a *theological curriculum*.

Violence remains an omnipresent *temptation* in a postmodern world. If the realities of *difference, fragment, or ambiguity* cannot be transformed into new patterns of *mutual dance and play*, the temptation to use violence is always close at hand. The contrast to violence in a postmodern world is a *postmodern and ecologically interdependent living in community* (Scott Peck, Karin Granberg-Michaelson, Gloria Albrecht). This has dogmatic connotations, leading up to **CHAPTER VI** with fundamental images on a new *postmodern church, postmodern koinonia, and postmodern living together* in the Spirit of Life as a newly redeemed fellowship of creation (Jürgen Moltmann, Matthew Fox, Ivone Gebara, Mary C. Grey). **CHAPTER I** closes with a few hints of this new vision of community in openly *creational diversity* in the postmodern world.

The theme of *power and powerlessness* (**II POWER AND POWERLESSNESS AS FUNDAMENTAL THEMES 79-128**) has been accompanying *pastoral experiences* of the author ever since his first moments in ministry. Former pastoral colleague and systematic theologian Dieter Olaf Schmalstieg, teaching at the *University of Vienna*, first introduced the author to this theological vision for power and powerlessness in his book *Macht-Wechsel: Theologie, Herrschaft, Sprache in Bewegung*. (1991). Ever since, the theme of power and powerlessness has followed the author in theological reflections on personal and pastoral experiences. Equally so, the theme of power and powerlessness has become a central theme in *North American systematic theologies*.

In **CHAPTER II** the book deals with basic themes of *power* and *powerlessness*, using both *personal*, *social*, *biblical*, and *systematic* approaches to describe its reality.

Personal experiences, translated into the *social categories* of *exclusion* and *embrace* (Miroslav Volf) in a small village facing the reality of several 14-year-old teenagers taking heroin - one girl dying of it - lead back to sociological concepts of *sacrificial logics* (Weir), *scapegoating* (Girard, Williams) and *geographies of exclusion* (Sibley, Soja) that are tempting in any community facing a social crisis. *Power* in its double-bind of creative empowering and destructive destroying can be both healing and excluding, as local communities and churches face the First or Old Testament and Deuteronomic ethical choice between life and death (Walter Brueggemann), or between exclusion and embrace (Miroslav Volf). *Social space* (Sibley, Soja) gets distributed along these categories. Reflecting on personal experiences, opening with some basic thoughts on power and powerlessness in everyday experience, the book presents a *sociology of space* in theological terms, making theology more sensitive to the issues of a *distribution of space* as people are included or excluded in community.

In *biblical tradition*, this distribution of exclusion and embrace can be found most vividly in the *story of Hagar*, used as a cover illustration by Miroslav Volf in his book entitled *Exclusion and Embrace: Theological Reflections on Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. (1996). The book presented here takes up some of the more recent exegetical and theological work on this text of terror (Phyllis Trible, Elsa Tamez). At the same time, the book presents a *canonical theology of exclusion and embrace* in biblical tradition, connecting the *story of Hagar* with the *story of Jesus*, using Afro-American womanist (Renita Weems, Delores Williams) and North American social-scientific approaches to both stories (John D. Crossan, Bruce Malina, Tom Hanks).

In *systematic theology*, the author predominantly engages German and internationally renowned Jürgen Moltmann as one of a few European systematic theologians who consistently approach systematic theology from *human experiences of power and powerlessness* in the modern and postmodern social world, sensitive to both feminist, black, and the Two-Third-World theologies all over the globe. German systematic theology in particular has been mostly oblivious to this fundamental social theme in systematic theology. Traces of power and powerlessness can be found in anamnestic theologies of pain and suffering as well as in *political systematic theologies* of the 1960's all the way through the 90's (Helmut Gollwitzer, Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, Dorothee Sölle, Edmund Arens). Other writers seem to remain in the more speculative (Eberhard Jüngel). In this, North America has followed a different path.

CHAPTER III (III IN NORTH AMERICA 129-176) presents a *kaleidoscopic view* on the vast landscape of *contemporary North American systematic theologies* in a narrative style. In this, it continues where Klauspeter Blaser concluded his story of North American systematic theologies in *Les théologies nord-américaines* (1995) and in *La théologie au XXe siècle: Histoire-Défis-Enjeux* (1995), which presented North American systematic theologies with a historical point of view, narrating the story in

time sequence and systematic interest. This book presents a more fragmented and kaleidoscopic view of North America's "*shattered spectrum*" (Lonnie D. Kliever) or *colorful mosaic* in systematic theology leading all the way up to the most recent time.

European, predominantly *German systematic theologies* still seem to be closed in a *Eurocentric* focusing on Germanic names. At the end of its own Eurocentric age in theology, *North America* has freed itself from old and revered names. *Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Rudolf Bultmann, Paul Tillich, Gerhard Ebeling, Dorothee Sölle, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, and Eberhard Jüngel* no longer have the only hold on North American social and intellectual visions of the relevance of theology, most of them receding to the theological background to allow more space to other pressing concerns. The joke "that God no longer speaks German" points to a *paradigmatic change* (*Hans Küng, Robert J. Schreiter, Clemens Sedmak*) in method and thematic concerns in theological discussions in North America today.

Central for these new concerns are *race, gender, culture, and power* relating back to a *thematic background* that makes North American systematic theology in most recent times *ethnographic* and culturally sensitive to the issues of race, slavery, gender, and power (*Theophus H. Smith, Mark Lewis Taylor, Dwight N. Hopkins, Kathryn Tanner*). Already in 1975 *Benjamin A. Reist* wrote about a *Theology in Red, White, and Black* (1975), pointing to the need for indigenous theological thinking in a North American context. Race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation, besides the radical inbreaking of postmodernism and ecology, are predominant themes nowadays in North America. The social and cultural history in North America are crucial for understanding the developments of most recent attempts at systematic theology in a North America context. This chapter touches on this only in a very brief way, pointing out fragments.

The *kaleidoscopic view* the text presents on North American systematic theology up to the most recent times moves from the "*shattered spectrum*" (Lonnie D. Kliever) of the 1980's to the most recent *North American textbooks* (*Herzog, Migliore, Smart and Konstantine, Schüssler Fiorenza and Galvin, Hall, Hodgson and King, Hodgson, Morse, Grenz, McClendon, Chopp and Taylor, Hanson, Jenson, Barr, Thistlethwaite and Engel, Williamson, Jones, Peters, Finger, McGrath, Placher, Thomas/Wondra, Jones and Lakeland, Inbody*) on systematic theology which wrestle with issues of culture, race, gender, feminism, postfeminism, postcolonialism, gay/lesbian issues, ecology, power, politics, community, and postmodernity. A comparative look at these textbooks on systematic theology shows a radical distance to a contemporary Europe.

CHAPTER IV (IV METHOD AND REAL LIFE 177-226) addresses questions of *first choices and methodological options* in North American systematic theologies, expanding and deepening thoughts on *theological method* and *curricular education*. Method and theological education belong together, as the choices of options in method (*J.J. Mueller, Robert L. Kinast, Rebecca S. Chopp, Clemens Sedmak, Robert Banks, Miroslav Volf, Clodovis Boff, James R. Cochrane*) lead to a different kind of

theological education. In this chapter the book presents a proposal for a *postmodern method and curriculum* in theology moving from real life experience to the academic.

North American systematic theologies, as put in contrast to European, mostly German academic settings (*Arnold/Schüssler*), move from real life experiences to academic reflection, back and forth in a *reflective space* teaching/learning systematic theology. *Open classroom/open curriculum approaches* (*William F. Pinar*) are becoming new methods to engage in *real life* systematic theology, using a *basic textbook* with real life experiences outside of traditional classrooms (*Robert Banks, Thistlethwaite and Cairns, Clemens Sedmak*). Students are invited to relate themes of systematic concern to communal, social, political, and pastoral issues in their closer neighborhoods, in city sections, local communities, social action groups, and local churches. In this way, theology is openly becoming “*practicing*” (*Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass*).

Embattled terms like *experience, real life, biography* and *autobiography, situation, context, social location, an ecology of place, action, and theological reflection* are at the forefront of contemporary discussions on method in systematic theologies in North America today. This chapter attempts to offer some basic clarification of the author’s own *theological and curricular method* in conversation with and even going beyond current North American proposals for a new kind of *theological education* (*Wheeler and Farley 1991, O’Connell Killen and De Beer 1994, Chopp 1995, Banks 1999, Hodgson 1999, Sedmak 2002, Jones and Paulsell 2002, Volf and Bass 2002*).

CHAPTER V (V THEOLOGY AND POWER IN SOCIAL POTMODERNITY 227-268) translates in an even *more personal way* the *design and method* of systematic theology as conceived by the author of this book. This chapter is the most personal proposition of this book, offering an image of *theology as art* and portraying the theologian as an *artist and artisan for humanity* (*Avery Dulles, Rebecca S. Chopp, Walter Brueggemann, Clemens Sedmak*). Short sections and segments of themes and terms, associative words and open headings summarize and reflect the *kaleidoscopic spectrum* of a theological method developed as on canvas combining colors and tones, shades and metaphors in a larger and suggestive picture. Words and concepts, usually discussed in *fundamental theology*, are regrouped in a creative *new ensemble*.

Theology and *experience* (*Tillich, Schillebeeckx, Klein, Maassen, Tracy*), theology as *auto/biography* (*Metz, Weinrich, Crites, Taylor, McClendon, Tilley, Kitzberger*), and the *contextuality* of theology (*Schreiter, Bevans, Blaser*), *border crossing* (*Henry A. Giroux, Anzaldua*) social worlds which have become *multicultural* and filled with *hybrid identities* in theology as well, all these words and more synthesize a most fundamental conviction of this book that all our theologies have a *biographical base*.

Combining both *George Lindbeck’s cultural linguistic model of theology* and its critique by *revisionist and political theologians* (*Tracy, Herzog, Tilley, Cochrane, Welch, McGaughey*), the author proposes a *coalitional thinking* (*Wetherilt, Clarke, Kamitsuka*) in fundamental theology, joining estranged positions in a common vision.

Experience, autobiography, and context serve as important bridge-building concepts, developing an openly *artistic theology* (Sedmak, Dulles, Chopp, Pederson, Garcia-Rivera). In a creativity of theology as “*messy text*” (Norman Denzin), with theology conceived as *social imagination changing the world* (Brueggemann, Cooley, Chopp, Cox), the book develops theology *beginning in a cry* (Aguirre), crafted and shared in a *community epistemology* (Gebara) of *the everyday* (Smith), with *autobiography* and *hybrid identity in diaspora* inviting to a *new community of poets* (Rebecca S. Chopp).

North-American systematic theologies – as well as the systematic and fundamental theology of the author – transpose into *biography and autobiography* at the moment when the questions of the *social position* or *social location* (James Cone, Monika Hellwig, Frederick Herzog, Peter C. Hodgson, Denis Müller) of the one reflecting on theology in its life context imposes itself as a most determining question. *Tradition, experience, and culture* mingle in a *biographical moment* in the calling of a location. A theology developed along the streets of the *rue du Bourg* and *Saint-Laurent* in a city like *Lausanne* where the marginalized of society sit on the steps of an ecclesial place, a church, will not be the same as a theology read from a lectern (Denis Müller).

Following *postmodern sociological concepts of narrative ethnography* developed by Norman Denzin and other postmodern cultural theorists and sociologists, the book proposes systematic theology as a creatively “*messy text*” (Norman Denzin), mixing theory and praxis, combining narrative, personal biography, excerpts of *deeply lived experience* (Anais Nin) and theology in a promising new method, writing this text in a consistently narrative and postmodern style. The book exemplifies its own method.

Narrative biography and *autobiographical writing* have become important basic concepts in *North American systematic theologies*, combining the personal with the theoretical, the biographical with the academic. The author uses this North American style in even more explicit ways, combining *autobiography* and *systematic theology* in *narrative systematics* (James McClendon, Stanley Hauerwas, Rebecca S. Chopp), all along sensitive in these various places for those *human faces of power* (Boulding).

CHAPTER VI (VI CULTURE, POWER, AND COMMUNITY 269 - 340) offers a *theological response* to the challenges presented regarding *violence* in a postmodern signature of our times. **CHAPTER I** and **CHAPTER VI** form a *hermeneutical circle* in an elliptical movement. Beginning and end are related, symphonically concluding.

Culture, ecology, and community are the leading terms to transform the postmodern challenge of a *life together* (Dietrich Bonhoeffer) in a biblical shalom of peace and justice (Walter Brueggemann) in a fragmented world. *Culture* has become the most used and abused, overused and misused word in the last decades. Since the explosive expansion of *cultural studies*, cultural and anthropological sciences, popular culture, and everyday culture in the fields of academia, talks and monographs on culture are unending. In North America culture, cultural studies, popular culture, and intellectual culture have become important areas of dialog for recent systematic, fundamental,

dogmatic, ethical, and pastoral theologies (*David Tracy, Kathryn Tanner, Dwight N. Hopkins, Mark Lewis Taylor, Delwin Brown, Sheila Greeve Davaney, Cornel West*).

Defining culture is a difficult undertaking. Innumerable definitions exist. The easiest way to approach the reality of culture is to follow its *concrete signs and expressions* of a life in postmodern worlds. Race, gender, class, and age are part of the definitions of contemporary culture. So are all the fragmentations of musical styles, artistic likes and dislikes, communal debates on issues of youth culture and subculture. An endless variety of shapes of culture leads to a *nomadic* kind of theology that follows these endless expressions of culture. *Nomadic thinking* (*Rosi Braidotti*) is needed to begin to understand a social reality that has turned from the modern to the postmodern. Theology is invited to become *nomadic* as well (*David Tracy, Mark Lewis Taylor*).

Cultural studies have become an important and creative dialog partner for North American systematic theologies. Evangelical authors (*Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor*) as well have newly discovered a *postmodern popular world*. North American systematic theologies integrate the mass media, television, cinema, music, literature, the arts, and popular culture, with popular culture becoming the *lingua franca* (*Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor*) of a modern or postmodern world. Reading theology from below, from where the people and the culture of the people are, is a new task for systematic theologies in the 21st century, inviting theology to write in this *new idiom*.

Theology written in such a new idiom, the *new Koine* of a postmodern world (*Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor*), will be *cultural and ecological*, artfully composing, creatively knowing, thinking, acting, ecologically suffering, empowering, communal, sensual, spreading life, transforming communities and the big world, knowing things ecologically, in living in a *koinonia or oikos of all living things* (*Jürgen Moltmann*).

Writing theology in a *postmodern popular culture* invites theologians to join people in their lives in a new kind of *ecology of all living things*. The task facing systematic theology in these postmodern times is creating a *new vision for communal living* that includes diversity and fragment, ambiguity and otherness in an *interdependence of all living things in true community* (*Matthew Fox, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Ivone Gebara, Mary C. Grey, Scott Peck*). This chapter is attempting to pull together all the different elements of previous chapters in a *socioecological perspective* on a *koinonia or oikos of cultures* (*Jay B. McDaniel, Ivone Gebara, Mary C. Grey, Matthew Fox*).

From this follows *dogmatically* a *postmodern ecclesiology* that redefines communal living in a new image of *oikos or koinonia of cultures* (*Mary C. Grey, Ruth Page*), rephrased in communal and ecological terms. Shalom peace, justice, non-wounding, reconciling, and inclusion of diversity in the *community of all living things* (*Jürgen Moltmann, Jay B. McDaniel, Matthew Fox*) stand at the center of a new ecclesiology that points beyond only the narrow institutional understanding of church and ecclesia.

Conflict in a creative *theology of creation* (Matthew Fox) will be *life-transforming*, as in God's beginning there was conflict (John Paul Lederach). Community in the *pulse of creation* (Paul Sponheim) honors in the interruption of *the other* a *healing moment*.

Power in this new kind of communal living, the *community of the weak* (Dorothee Sölle), gets redefined in *ecological* and *communal terms*, offering a more *redeeming understanding of power* (Christine Firer Hinze) in an *oikos* and *koinonia* of cultures among all living things. Power as thus described is *creative* and *ecological* (Matthew Fox, Jürgen Moltmann), joining in the *shalom of God* (Walter Brueggemann), while *empowering* people and all other living things (Theodore Walker, Cheryl J. Sanders, Starhawk), *earth- and community-healing* in beginning a *new creation* (Scott Peck, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie McFague, Mary C. Grey, Ruth Page), inviting everyone to a joyful *new dance* of creation (Jürgen Moltmann, Matthew Fox). Power thus conceived will not be life-destructive, death-dealing, soul-wounding, and spirit-breaking, but soul-healing, vision-opening, future-envisioning, in inviting to dream a new creation as the Spirit of Life as a *Wild Bird* will flow and dance (Mary C. Grey).

CHAPTER VII (VII A MUSICAL FINALE 341-360) ends the book with a *musical finale*, like Keith Jarrett playing an encore in his *Köln Concert* or like Pat Metheny enchanting a *Chicago Symphony* and its audience one more and lasting time before leaving. The chapter presents a few modest and first thoughts on a *new fundamental theology* inviting theologians to become more *polyphonic*, *jazzy*, and *artistic*. The text presented has tried to live some of the concepts of being more jazzy and artistic, combing autobiographical memories, pastoral experiences, theoretical rumbling, and conceptual systematizing, arranging and *rapping over* (Richard Shusterman) old and new motives, tunes and melodies in a *musical recomposing* of theology in new ways.

In concluding, the book invites *fundamental theology*, and other theologies, to join in a new and more *musical style of writing*, constructing theology (Peter C. Hodgson, David Tracy, Rebecca S. Chopp, Mark Lewis Taylor, Serene Jones, Paul Lakeland of the Vanderbilt University Group of Constructive Theology) as a form of *creative art*, *social imagination*, and *musical re-assembling*, playing fundamental theology like a jazz musician. In this way, even theology – be it systematic, fundamental, dogmatic, ethical, practical, and pastoral - could become more “jazzy” (Cornel West, Sharon Welch, Jim Perkinson), improvising on common standards in new and creative ways.

The book closes an argumentative and narrative circle of theological reflection with a few suggestive ideas on a *new kind of fundamental theology*, more jazzy and bluesy, proposing a *postmodern fundamental theology*, Protestant and Roman Catholic in terms of a classical tradition and recent discipline (Mark Lewis Taylor, Joerg Rieger, Cornel West, Ann Kirkus Wetherilt, David Tracy, Clemens Sedmak, Roger Haight).

Jazz as a metaphor (Cornel West) could describe the contemporary and new task of a *fundamental theology* in a *postmodern age*. Jazz more as a way of thinking and acting than as a musical style, telling its individual story as in blues and jazz, spirituals and

gospels rising up from *the pain of the wounded*. Sometimes theology may be nothing more, but also nothing less, than only *playing blues in a tragic moment* containing a mixture of aching and hurt, hope and resistance, in the midst of *faith* (Cornel West). The book presented here is an attempt at playing theology in a jazzy and bluesy way.

At the same time, the author has also tried to contribute to a *new kind of fundamental theology* in a *narrative style*. Narrative, autobiography, personal experience, pastoral reminiscences as windows into biographical moments, and communal memories have been interspersed in the text with a purpose, *dramatizing* theoretical concepts (Cornel West) with some concrete and real life. Writing theology as understood by this author should be more like a “composing or re-composing one’s life” (Rebecca S. Chopp). The text would like to encourage further writing in this style, also in academic circles.

North America and *Europe* have been juxtaposed in this text in order to contrast *two different contextual theologies*. The dialog between the two continents is still waiting to be taken up. The hope of this book is that an interest in North American-European crossover has been awakened to be followed by some more in-depth and intercultural dialog across the Atlantic. *Klauspeter Blaser* opened the door to such possible dialog. Others will have to follow in his steps. This book is an academic continuation of his work, expressing a grateful and admiring respect for a great and *global theologian*. It is exceptional in European latitudes to find such a global view of postmodern worlds.

New themes have become predominant in North America challenging the theological scene in systematic theologies in the 21st century. *Culture, postmodernism, ecology, and power* are leading themes to be developed even more thoroughly in systematic thinking in the near future. Most important, however, seems to be the recognition of a *change of paradigms* as a result of facing these new realities in systematic theology. Systematic theologies in *North America* have taken up this fundamental challenge to confront its inbreaking most seriously. *Europe* is not yet awake to this *global reality*.

Only then, awakened, may Europe one day develop *hopeful visions* and concrete places of *communities of the weak* where young teenagers at the age of 14 taking heroin in a local village somewhere in Switzerland in the 1990’s and others will not be violently excluded, but healingly included *in community* in a new kind of oikos and koinonia of *healing* wherein everyone in life is deeply *embraced* (Miroslav Volf).