The emergence of contextual theologies marks an empirical and hermeneutical turn in the history of twentieth century theology. The local situation and personal experience become the field of theological reflection. The artificial separation between salvation history and world history is overcome in a relecture of the Missio Dei concept. God is rediscovered as the one who is acting in history. With the exception of feminist and diaspora theologies contextual theologies are primarily a Third World phenomenon and signify its irruption into the domain of Western Christendom.

1 From the beginning different expressions were used as umbrella term: “(Third World) liberation theology” (Deane William Ferm), “local theology” (Robert J. Schreiter) or “inculturation theology” (Theo Sundermeier). Yet “contextual theology” proved to be the term that best covers the different trends. “Liberation” and “inculturation theology” are in fact two rival schools within contextual theology. “Third World theology” would not include Western feminist and diaspora theologies. The term “local theology” alludes to “local church” and has therefore catholic overtones reflecting Vatican II theology. The concept of contextual theology which was developed in World Council of Churches (WCC) circles around the Theological Education Fund (TEF) does not have this confessional mould. It refers to the intrinsic relationship between text and context, which is constitutive for the development of any contextual theology. For a detailed account of the theory of contextual theology cf. Küster, Th eologie im Kontext, 17–104.

2 The Trinitarian concept of Missio Dei was introduced in the discussions around the world missionary conference in Willingen, Germany 1952. It was an attempt to overcome the crisis of the Western missionary project by giving it a new theological foundation in God's acting in history. Before, during and after the Willingen conference there were always two competing interpretations. One that perpetuated the old salvation history model in disguise—the church is understood as the agent of God's mission—and the other one influenced by the American Social Gospel and Barthian theology that focused on God's promise to be with the creation. In the prolongation of the latter the relecture of the Missio Dei concept in liberation theologies took place. See below 82.

3 Possible pejorative connotations of this term have been much debated and its use is controversial. Nevertheless, the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) made it part of its name. Along with secular Third World leaders this choice is understood programatically, in the sense of the “third state” in the French revolution or a “third way” between the capitalist and communist systems. Cf. Volker Küster, Aufbruch der Dritten Welt. Der Weg der ökumenischen Vereinigung von Dritte-Welt-Theologen [EATWOT], in: Verkündigung und Forschung 37, 1992, 45–67.

4 Similar trends can however be seen in the French worker-priest movement, in Ernst Lange's theology and the church reform movement in Germany, in new political theology (Johann Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann) or in the social historical interpretation
This development coincides with a demographical shift of Christianity towards the Third World.\(^5\)

Academic theology in Europe remained almost immune to these developments.\(^6\) Insofar as it did take cognizance of Third World theologies, its representatives mostly encountered them quite skeptically. The analysis of these “other” theologies still takes place primarily within the pluri-discipline of missiology, ecumenics (and comparative religion). Initially theoretical and methodological reflection was mostly neglected in favor of concrete cases. Yet in spite of the programmatic contextuality, a comparative framework can be deduced from the themes and methods. Whether a contextual theology succeeds has to be verified in each individual case by means of a repertoire of criteria which do justice to the Christian Faith and its global community of story telling and interpretation as well as to the particular context. The discourse of the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) proved to be an ideal matrix for such a theory of contextual theology. Over against the Eurocentric and evangelical critics here the contours of an intercultural theology as a necessary frame of reference becomes visible. The following sections present a short introduction to the theory of contextual theology and its intercultural framework.

1. THE IRRUPTION OF THE THIRD WORLD

The reshaping of the world following the Second World War marked a new epoch in which the emergence of two antagonistic power-blocks


\(^6\) John B. Cobb, Jr. castigates this attitude: “Theology as an academic discipline may be the last feature of the life of Christendom to cease to have its centre in the North Atlantic. […] The ‘objective’ scholarship of the great tradition in fact reflects their cultural context in the university and in central Europe as well as the male dominance that has been taken for granted. By its very excellence it inhibits Christians in other situations from affirming the different understanding and wisdom gained through diverse situations” (id., *Minjung Theology and Process Theology*, in: *An Emerging Theology in World Perspective*. Commentary on Minjung Theology, ed. by Jung Young Lee, Mystic, Connecticut 1988, 51–56, 51f).