Theological research is often a lonely and even individualistic affair. The scholar is writing in his study, often more in dialogue with the resources, books, and articles, than with his students or colleagues. During the early 1980's the Dutch Ministry of Education tried to discipline academic research through the regulations of „voorwaardelijke financiering“ [conditioned financing]. All faculties were supposed to submit collective research programmes for a period of at least five years to their universities. After evaluation of these programmes grants would be allotted to the research groups accordingly. The Faculty of Missiological Studies at the Catholic University of Nijmegen started a collective research programme on Third World Theology as Contextual Theology. To publish the fruits of this programme the series „Kerk en Theologie in Context“ (KTC) [Church and Theology in Context] was launched in 1988, which contains dissertations, other related studies, and summaries of the project „Contextualiteit in het missiologisch denken.“

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This book examines the encounter of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSC) with the Papuans of Netherlands South New Guinea (1905-1963). It is remarkable how much time and trouble the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart spent from the very beginning (1905) on the study of the languages and cultures of the Papuans. A small group of Fathers continually worked at this, while the rest of the missionaries could profit from the results of that study. Its goal was to obtain an insight into the way of thinking of the Papuan in order to enable the missionaries to provide better mission work. The Fathers who did these studies were all amateurs, with the exception of the anthropologist Father J. Boelaars. Yet their work was certainly not without merit, because they were pioneers.

The missionaries wanted to achieve evangelization by changing the Papuan culture for the better. The Papuans were supposed to unlearn their bad habits, but to retain their good qualities. The mission continually pressured the Dutch government for dealing firmly with the head-hunting, blood feuds, burying people alive and infanticide of the Marind-anim. Not until 1913 did the Dutch government deal with these matters.

Education in Netherlands South New Guinea really got under way only in 1921, when the rescue plan of Father P. Vertenten was executed. Its success was connected with two factors: There was more money available from a social subsidy provision and compulsory education was introduced. The special subsidy was granted for a period of five years (1921-1926). In 1926 the five-year plan was extended to another five years.
(1926-1931). In those first ten years agricultural education in the school garden was an important part of the curriculum. In 1931 the special position of education on the south coast of Netherlands New Guinea was abandoned. Henceforth the same curriculum was in force in the Papuan schools as in the schools in the rest of the Dutch East Indies and they fell under the general subsidy provision. It was not allowed to work in the school garden during school hours. This difficult situation came to an end only in 1938, when the civilization schools (beschavingsscholen) were founded. These were supposed to prepare Papuans for ordinary primary education. Work in the school garden was again part of the timetable of the civilization school. After the Second World War the standard of education in Netherlands South New Guinea was raised. Preparatory (Voorscholen) and continuation schools (Vervolgscholen) were founded. The Mission wanted to form quickly a core group of young Papuans. In cooperation with that core group the Papuan community could be raised to a higher level of development.

The Mission and the Dutch government brought together small Papuan groups, who used to live scattered, in villages along the large rivers. Particularly in the fifties the Mission, in collaboration with the Dutch government, spent a lot of time on economic projects. In 1965 they started the Prosperity Plan Mappi (Welvaartsplan Mappi); the goal of this plan was to raise the agricultural level of Papuans in the Mappi district.

In the fifties the missionaries also applied themselves to social contextualization. It is remarkable that the Fathers from the start translated sermons, religious lessons and hymns into the Marind language instead of the Malayan language which they could also have used. They did this in order to bring religion closer to the Papuans. In the period between the two world wars the Missionaries could hardly find the time to accomplish religious contextualization. This was connected with several factors: The execution of the rescue plan of Father Vertenten in the twenties and the tug-of-war with the Protestant mission (1930-1937) took up a lot of time and energy.


The essays of the first part deal with the development in western Catholic theology and the Latin American theology of liberation. The second part asks questions about the approach to contextualization. Part three presents the context of secularization. The papers of part four analyze the methodology of the theology of liberation and the emerging feminist theology. Evaluating a symposium is like describing a whole bag of groceries to someone who only wants to know if you picked up the potato chips. The main point and background of all papers was the question whether the theology of the Third World can help the western/European theology to find a way out of its present difficulties.