

Theology of Inculturation: A Critical Appraisal

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One of the graced wonders of Pentecost was that Peter and the Apostles preached as Galileans yet the Good News was heard and understood in the native tongues of the peoples coming from different ethno-linguistic groups: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Romans, Cretans, Arabs, and many others. (Acts 2: 5-11) It was truly amazing how, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Gospel was proclaimed from a specific cultural-linguistic milieu and yet was heard and understood by people coming from different socio-cultural contexts. The hearers of the preaching of the Apostles did not have to understand the Good News *as* Galileans but *as who they were*. The grace of the Pentecost-event overcame the confusion of Babel without eliminating the blessing of diversity.¹ Though it would have not been less miraculous had it been the case that everyone instantaneously learnt the language of the apostles, it would certainly have eliminated the blessing of diversity or made the miracle an endorsement of Aramaic as the official language of Christians. Henri de Lubac notes that the capacity of this *ekklesia* to embrace diversity or to be truly *katholikos* was manifested “on the morning of Pentecost

¹ Though it may be claimed that “Babel” must not be seen as a “curse of confusion” but as a “blessing of diversity” that is willed by God, the fact remains that the story highlights the difficulty of communication due to the diversification of languages.

when a small room was still big enough for its members.”² The walls of that “small room” have come down; and today, communities of believers can be found throughout the world.

Christ’s commission to “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel” (Mark 16:15)³ led the community of believers to confront the perennial challenge of preaching in ever-changing times and socio-cultural milieu. The Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) prudently decided that the following of Jesus does not necessarily include the following of Jewish customs. For the sake of the Gospel, Paul “became all things to all people” (1 Cor. 9:22). This talented and resolute “apostle to the Gentiles” has laid down the leitmotif of the apostolic and missionary activities of the Church: being all things to all. This of course entails keeping in harmonious balance unity and plurality, universality and particularity – tasks that have become acutely urgent today with the era of rapid globalization and the counter-movements vigorously opposed to its homogenizing trend. Robert Schreiter discerns in this increasingly globalized world the need for a theology that is truly *catholic* i.e., a theology that has the capacity to encompass sameness and difference, globality and locality.⁴ Integral to this catholicity is the openness to cultures, openness not only to communicate the Good News to “strangers” but also to learn from them.⁵

Fides ex auditu, the faith that is proclaimed by preaching is always heard according to the circumstances of the hearer. From the classical scholastic insight of *quidquid recipitur, ad modum recipientis recipitur*⁶ (whatever one receives is received according to

² Henri de Lubac, quoted by Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998), p. 265.

³ The Scripture quotations contained herein were taken from the *The New American Bible* Copyright (c) 1991,1986,1970 by the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, 3211 Fourth Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. Copyright © 1998 Bible-Works, LLC.

⁴ Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002).

⁵ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), p. 15.

⁶ M.D. Chenu notes that “In neo-Platonic thought, this axiom was a fundamental law in the theory of participation employed to explain cosmic coming-into-being.... This same axiom, however, can also be a vague common sense statement

the mode of the receiver), to Gadamer's rehabilitation of prejudice and the crucial role of foreunderstanding as the condition for the possibility of hermeneutic understanding, it is hardly disputable that we understand not so much the thing-in-itself, but *as we are*. Thus, though inculturation and interculturalism are *neologisms*,⁷ the actual or existential living out of the faith in Jesus Christ is always in a manner that is *inculturated* and the proclamation of this same faith is always *intercultural* especially in the context of mission, of transcending the boundaries of the faith community into a new community.

However, the degree by which this natural appropriation or *inculturation* was allowed to take its due course or was deliberately suppressed or hampered during the great missionary activities to the *novus mundus* had been largely influenced by the "colonial worldview" where the colonized other was invariably seen as an *inferior-other* that needed to be civilized and Christianized. As a result, the Western Church that had been creative in assimilating the cultural heritage of the Greeks, Romans, and then the Gallic and Germanic peoples during the first millennium had eventually become fearful of syncretism and other cultural accretions that could destroy the "purity" of the faith. To a significant extent, preoccupation with "purity of the faith" became intimately connected with the ideal of "purity of blood" or purity of race. Rolando de la Rosa's inquiry into the late emergence of native Filipino religious clergy points to the *limpieza de sangre* statute, a juridical instrument that excluded Moors, Jews, and convicts of the Inquisition from holding public and ecclesiastical offices from the 15th to the 19th centuries, as a major cause for the retarded growth of the

applicable to any kind of recipient. The handling of an axiom is a delicate thing, therefore; all the more delicate in that the precise meaning of it must be set forth, not as in the manner of a term being defined, but as in the case of a judgment." See M.D. Chenu, *Toward Understanding St. Thomas*, trans. by A.M. Landry and D. Hughes (Henry Regnery Company, 1964), pp. 186-87. This axiom was applied specifically by Thomas of Aquinas to the order of knowledge: "Knowledge is according to the mode of the one who knows; for the thing known is in the knower according to the mode of the knower." *Summa Theologiae* I, q. 14 ad 3 (CD edition by Harmony Media, 1996.)

⁷ John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae* nos. 68-69 asserts that even though "acculturation" and "inculturation" are *neologisms*, they actually express the old and fundamental mystery of the Incarnation.

native religious clergy.⁸ Though the *limpieza* statute was originally employed as a “defensive mechanism” it became an instrument for a certain form of “racism” within the Church. The statute may be limited to the Spanish church of the period, yet it is reflective of a Eurocentric view of Christianity that finds succinct expression in Hilaire Belloc’s claim: *The Faith is Europe and Europe is the Faith*.⁹ H. Niebuhr says the same thing about Ernst Troeltsch who “believes that Christianity and Western Culture are so inextricably intertwined that a Christian can say little about his faith to members of other civilizations, and the latter in turn, cannot encounter Christ save as a member of the Western world.”¹⁰

L. Pachau avers that *Christian mission is a frontier-crossing enterprise; to cross-over the boundary of difference into the realm of “the other” is its very nature*.¹¹ From the moment the Christian message was proclaimed in the Hellenistic to the Roman world, and then eventually up to the Gallic and Germanic worlds, the Christian message has been re-appropriated by each of these cultural milieus. Each proclamation of the Gospel across a geographic and/or cultural frontier is always an *intercultural moment*.¹² As R. Schreiter reminds us: “the Gospel never enters a culture in pure form; it is always already inculturated – embedded in the

⁸ See Rolando de la Rosa, OP, *History of the Filipinization of the Religious Orders in the Philippines: Beginnings of the Filipino Dominicans* (Quezon City, DPP, 1990). He avers: “The preoccupation with the degree of lineage, the equation of orthodoxy to purity of ancestry, the belief that converts, by nature, had the tendency or the necessity to reject the faith or to regress into their former ways, had become the yardstick for judging the *indios*” (p. 15).

⁹ Hilaire Belloc quoted by Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 75. Dulles rhetorically asks: “Did Belloc mean to imply that to be a Christian, they [those of different racial stock] would first have to be Europeanized?” At least before Vatican II, the answer seemed to have been in the affirmative.

¹⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001 Expanded Edition), p. 30.

¹¹ Lalsangkima Pachau, “Engaging the ‘Other’ in a Pluralistic World: Toward a Sub-Altern Hermeneutics of Christian Mission” *Studies in World Christianity*, Vol. 8, Part I, (2002), p. 74. *Italics mine*.

¹² A concrete example in this regard is the work of James Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

culture of the evangelizer.”¹³ Although this has been the case, differences within western Christianity has tended towards greater homogeneity¹⁴ throughout the first millennium so that with the coming of Columbus to the Americas in 1492, a “Christianity that had become thoroughly identified with and conditioned by the lands and life and thought of Europe had to extend its consciousness, its vision and eventually its theology to cope with the realities of the world beyond Europe.”¹⁵ Western Christianity has wakened again to the reality of the *other*.¹⁶

¹³ Robert Schreiter, “Inculturation of Faith or Identification with Culture?” *Concilium* 1994/2, p. 16. Aylward Shorter makes the same point: “the Christian Faith cannot exist except in a cultural form” (p. 12).

¹⁴ This “homogeneity” is shaped to a large extent by the idea of culture at that time. Bernard Lonergan points out that “On the older view, culture was conceived not empirically but normatively. It was the opposite of barbarism. It was a matter of acquiring and assimilating the tastes and skills, the ideals, virtues and ideals that ... [are learned] through a curriculum in the liberal arts. It stressed not facts but values. It could not but claim to be *universalist*”... On classicist assumption, there is just *one culture*...” (Quoted by Shorter, p. 19) Emphasis is mine. Evidently, this universalist view of culture is, to a significant extent, responsible for ethnocentrism.

¹⁵ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 28.

¹⁶ It is well to note that this view is not the final word concerning the expansion or diffusion of Christianity. It is well to note here a different but complementary perspective. Philip Jenkins in *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) demythologizes the conventional view that there is a singular history of mission and that this history, after St. Paul’s missionary endeavors, has been totally westernized. An unfortunate corollary to this view is the attitude of blaming everything that is perceived to be wrong on Christian mission that is perceived to have become inseparable from western colonization. The idea of Christendom, a territorial Christianity that is co-terminus with the Holy Roman Empire gave rise to the notion of Western Christianity. Jenkins’ account of mission history tries to show that the equivocation of Christianity with Christendom rests on false assumptions. Christianity in fact goes beyond the limits of Christendom. Jenkins’ contribution to Church history is his scholarly effort to *write back* into history the Churches which have been “oppressed by the tyrannical rulers of Rome and Constantinople”. He restores the “forgotten” Churches of Ethiopia, Armenia, Egypt, Syria etc. to their rightful places in history. He also demonstrates that what missionaries thought to be the proclamation of the Gospel for the first time in Africa or Asia is in fact a *re-proclamation* of the Gospel where churches existed in earlier times e.g. in Kongo, India etc. He thereby writes back into history even the churches that had ceased to exist.

H. Richard Niebuhr suggests that beginning with the tension between the Judaizers and the Hellenizers of the early Church, the relation between Christ and Culture has become a *perennial* problem.¹⁷ Though the five typologies of Christ (1) against (2) of (3) above (4) in paradoxical relation (5) and transformer of Culture do not pretend to be exhaustive and even seem to be open to other possible relationships, the choice of "Christ" as a subject for relating with culture(s) either runs the risk of making the Person of Christ too abstract or ignores the fact that the very understanding of "Christ" is dependent on the religious concept of Messiah that arises out of the Jewish milieu. The first one juxtaposes the Second Person of the Trinity with human cultures while the second pairs the Judaic religio-cultural tradition with other cultures.

Since Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and his call for the "evangelization of cultures" (EN 29), theological reflection on the "enduring problem" has focused on the relation between Gospel and Culture or Faith and Culture.¹⁸ J. Schrerer and S. Bevans hold that the pairs differ not in substance but merely in emphasis: "*Gospel* and Culture" lays the emphasis on *proclamation* of the Gospel among cultures while "*Faith* and Culture" highlights

¹⁷ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Collins, 2001 Expanded Edition), p. 10 ff. Since the book's publication fifty years ago, Niebuhr's characterization of Christ and Culture and the typologies of their relations have been criticized for a number of reasons e.g. "Christ" is presented as too abstract and the understanding of "culture" as too broad. The juxtaposition of "Christ" and "culture" ignores the fact that the Greek "Kristos" and the Hebrew "Messiah" are themselves arising out of a particular cultural understanding of God's redemptive action. Notwithstanding these critical remarks, Niebuhr's work takes the important direction of examining the importance of culture and bringing it to the heart of theological reflection.

¹⁸ The publishers of Orbis Books prefer this juxtaposition in their "Faith and Culture Series." The *Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen* also shows the same preference in putting up a Professorial Chair on Faith and Culture. It is well to note that "Gospel" and "Faith" are by no means the only terms that are juxtaposed with "culture." For instance, Graydon Snyder prefers the term *Jesus tradition* instead of Gospel or Faith. He propounds that "the Jesus tradition enters a social matrix, uses cultural elements and may in an undetermined way create a new culture that expresses the Christian faith for that matrix." *Inculturation of the Jesus Tradition: Impact of Jesus on Jewish and Roman Cultures* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1999), p. 4.

the *faithful response* of the believing community within a culture.¹⁹ This article shall take both senses of proclamation and faithful response especially because the *reciprocity* in the relation of a faith that is lived within a specific culture with that of another cultural milieu shall be examined. Emphasizing the Gospel without considering the faithful response means a unidirectional movement of proclamation that remains unaffected by the response of faith. Conversely, emphasizing the latter without the former makes the relationship lose its Christian specificity.

In the 1970's, *inculturation* had gained importance not only as a theological concept but as a theological task that took into serious consideration the relationship between Gospel/faith and culture. Recently however, the neologism *intercultural theology* seems to be gaining currency especially after the thoughtful criticisms leveled against the theology of inculturation. The Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen in the Netherlands has recently opened the Graduate School of Intercultural Theology in 2000. The renaming of the Chair of Ecumenism at the University of Utrecht as Chair of Intercultural Theology and the proposal by some to rename the theological discipline of Missiology as Intercultural Theology seem to suggest strongly that this neologism is a replacement, if not a refinement of the theology of inculturation.

Mindful of the aforementioned, this article shall seek to answer these two central questions: After three decades of theological reflection on inculturation, what are its strengths and weaknesses *vis-à-vis* the relationship between Gospel/faith and cultures? How and to what extent did the changing concept of culture in anthropology²⁰ and the tides of globalization affect the understanding of the same relationship e.g. in a multicultural society, into which culture should the Gospel/faith be inculturated?

¹⁹ James Scherer and Stephen Bevans, "Introduction" in *New Directions in Mission and Evangelization*, J. Scherer and S. Bevans, eds. (New York: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 1.

²⁰ Kathryn Tanner points out that previous conceptions of culture have been inattentive to the fact that cultures are not exempt from historical processes and therefore undergo change. Confer *Theories of Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 40 ff. Robert Schreiter also notes that the mixing of cultures in a globalized world presents a challenge to the earlier integrated concept of culture and calls for additional approaches. See Schreiter, TNC, p. 61.

Theology, as Yves Congar points out, is "the cultivation of the faith by the use of the cultural means available at the time".²¹ Theological reflection is always *cultural*.²² It can never be otherwise because every theologian is situated within a particular cultural milieu. This *situatedness* determines to some significant extent the language, focus and even content of a particular theology. Paradoxical as it may seem, to be contextual in theologizing is to be *traditional*.²³ For the whole tradition of great theologians is a mosaic of people of faith who exerted their best efforts to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus in diverse contexts. Logos is a heavily philosophical word in Hellenistic culture that was re-interpreted by the evangelist John within a Christian context. Tertullian (3rd century) employed Roman juridical terms in explaining theological concepts e.g. baptism as "breaking of a contract with the world and entering into a new contract with Christ."²⁴ Clement of Alexandria adopted some insights from the Stoics and was convinced that the influence of

²¹ Yves Congar, OP, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* Vol. III, p. xiii. Quoted by Peter Lobo, OP, *The Pneumatological Dimension of the Inculturation of Gospel-Faith and the Evangelization of Culture* (Rome: PUST, 1997), p. 15.

²² Robert Schreiter avers that culture is the concrete context in which integral incarnation of the Gospel takes place within the Church: "Without sensitivity to the cultural context, a church and its theology either become a vehicle for outside domination or lapse into Docetism as though its Lord never became flesh." *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 21. Kathryn Tanner categorically asserts, from an anthropological perspective, that theology is a human activity and therefore, part of culture. See *Theories of Culture* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 63 ff.

²³ "Tradition" is here understood in its dynamic sense of the process of *tradere* i.e., "handing-down" and not the elements that are handed down i.e., *traditions*. The dynamic and developmental nature of tradition has been strongly propounded by Y. Congar who has been influential in the drafting of the Vatican II document *Dei Verbum*. Though "tradition," as a unitary term, primarily refers to Apostolic Tradition as a source of revelation together with the Sacred Scriptures, the term traditions (plural) have also been used in other documents. A. Dulles notes that the concern aired by Cardinal Meyer of Chicago concerning the problem of the possibility of distortion of tradition has not been sufficiently addressed. On a positive note though, Dulles takes it that the Sacred Scriptures are implied as the norm by which the authenticity of tradition is to be judged. Cf. Avery Dulles, "Tradition as a Theological Source" in *The Craft of Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992).

²⁴ Gerald Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 11.

the Logos transcends the Jewish milieu and extends to the philosophers, the “prophets” of the pagan world²⁵; Origen employed Platonic concepts; Augustine had drawn insights from Plato and the Neo-Platonists; Aquinas has creatively explained the Christian faith as he engaged the Aristotelian texts in dialogue. To be *traditional* in theologizing is to follow the lead of the great theologians who have communicated the Gospel in ways that are best understood in their particular milieu.

Tradition, in its dynamic sense of *tradere* i.e., “handing down” is the vital link of faith-communities not only to the previous generations of faith-communities (diachronic relation) but also to contemporaneous faith-communities (synchronic relation) especially in those cases that involve the missionary movements.²⁶ The fascinating thing that happens is that the “hand” that gives does not lose the gift even as it is given. However, just like any gift that is given, the faith that is handed-over is appropriated by the receiving community in ways that are aptly meaningful for them. Thus, tradition as a theological source is not to be seen as an archive of theological truths, but as a dynamic “series of contextual theologies”.²⁷ Following Henry Newman, R. Kinast points out that it belongs to the *living tradition* of the Church to “generate new forms [of theological reflection] through which the reality of that tradition may come through more richly and fully”.²⁸ The problem arises when a *local* theology, either in the past or in the present but belonging to a different cultural milieu, is made normative beyond the limits of its context e.g., Paul’s admonition to slaves to be

²⁵ Carl Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), p. 22.

²⁶ Tradition has often been understood as the bridge from the past to the present, thus the call of Vatican II to read the *signs of the times* (historical changes). But this understanding of tradition utterly forgets the category of space (cultures) as a significant factor in theological reflection. It is well to note that Schreiter’s characterization of contextual theology as *local* theology highlights the importance of the socio-cultural space.

²⁷ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001, 9th printing), p. 93.

²⁸ Robert Kinast, *What Are They Saying About Theological Reflection?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 3.

obedient to their masters is anachronistically preached to present hearers of the Word or the Latin American theology of liberation, in its entirety, is made "normative" in Japan.²⁹

BEGINNINGS OF THEOLOGY OF INCULTURATION

From its birth, the Church is a "community-in-mission".³⁰ The Gospels are unanimous in reporting the commission for mission: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel" (Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19; Luke 24: 47); "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (John: 20:21). The Church is a communion that is dynamically oriented towards the world, and therefore towards cultures. As the Church continues to "grow in age and wisdom", so is its understanding of culture. In what follows, a sketch³¹ of how "culture" was gradually appropriated by the Church shall be drawn. First, selected peak moments within the Church's understanding shall be discussed. This shall be followed with a brief discussion of some external conditions that have, to some significant extent, contributed to the development of the theology of inculturation.

A. Theological Antecedents

1. Judaeo-Christianity. Raymond Brown discerned three main types of early Judaeo-Christianity: (1) the type lived in Galatia and Philippi which imposed circumcision and the entire Mosaic law upon Christian converts; (2) the group associated with James and Peter (became dominant in Antioch and Rome) which did not insist on circumcision but was eager, nonetheless, in imposing

²⁹ This is not to suggest that local theologies be closed in on themselves like theological ghettos. On the contrary, they can expand each other's horizons in terms of sharing theological insights and offering criticism especially in those matters that are unnoticeable to "insiders" but are visible to those who are not immersed in the same situation.

³⁰ This is the phrase used by the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines to characterize the Church. Confer *Acts and Decrees of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines* (Manila: CBCP, 1992) Acts 102-104.

³¹ The relation of culture with the Old Testament shall not be dealt with in this sketch. It is well to note though that there are interesting works about the multi-cultural influences in its development e.g., Kenton Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1998).

Jewish purity laws on the converts; (3) and finally, the group associated with Paul which neither forced Jewish converts to abandon purity laws nor imposed it upon converts but remained attached to Jewish cultic practices.³²

Shorter concludes from Brown's typology that "early Christianity had the anterior problem of *extricating* the Gospel from the religious culture of Judaism, before it could begin to take seriously the religious culture of the non-Jews".³³ This view finds support in the attitude of Paul who seems to suggest strongly the abolition of cultural and all other differences: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male or female; for all you are one in Christ" (Galatians 3:28).

Shorter's passing remark, which does not reflect his position in the book as a whole, implies that the Gospel is intricately woven into Judaism and needs to be "liberated" from it in order that the Good News may be proclaimed to other cultures. Implied as well is that the parochial nature of the Jewish culture that is conscious of its unique separateness from all other nations as Yahweh's chosen people is a hindrance for the universal proclamation of the Gospel. Though this conclusion may be partly true, it fails to take into account that it is humanly impossible for the apostles to shed off totally the Jewish religious culture as though one could change "cultural clothes" at will. The apostles did struggle to go beyond the mindset of a "chosen people" that is circumscribed by the Jewish milieu. But the same Jewish milieu also contained "universalist" themes e.g. "I will give you as a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). The metaphors and symbols for the Kingdom proclaimed by Jesus and even the sacred symbols for worship like baptism and the breaking of bread were drawn from the same cultural context. The Gospel was not "extricated" but was presented as a fulfillment and even a re-interpretation of what will later be referred to as the "Old" Testament. Shorter rightly notes though that Paul's speech at the Areopagus is a good example of a strategy of acculturation that

³² Raymond Brown, cited by Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), p. 128.

³³ Shorter, p. 128.

paved the way for an intercultural dialogue with the Graeco-Roman cultures.³⁴

2. *Early Christian Mission.* This period shall be taken to cover the expansion of Christianity from Asia into Europe until the Reformation.³⁵ It is interesting to note that during the Asian Synod, John Paul II was reported to have said: "Jesus was born in Asia... in that part of Asia that looked out to Europe."³⁶ Indeed, from its birthplace, Christianity met greater success in its westward rather than its eastward movement.

Justin Martyr, who exalted Socrates as a proto-Christian, was one of those who creatively engaged the Graeco-Roman culture. The Nicene Creed is an excellent example of how Hellenistic philosophy had been creatively woven into Christian thinking. Others like Tertullian may have protested about "what has Jerusalem to do with Athens?" but the richness of Medieval philosophy, the hierarchical structure of Church organization, and elaborate liturgy, among others, testify to the openness and receptivity of Christians to whatever is deemed true and good in the Graeco-Roman, and later, Gallic-Anglo Saxon milieus.

Gregory I's letter to Abbot Mellitus has been cited as one of the classics in mission history that points to the Church's struggle concerning its relationship with culture. Gregory admonishes: "We wish to inform you that we have been giving careful thought to the affairs of the English, and have come to the conclusion that the temples of the idols in that country should on no account be destroyed, he is to destroy the idols, but the temples themselves ... are

³⁴ Shorter, 127.

³⁵ I shall follow Shorter's periodization rather than Karl Rahner's tripartite periodization of Christian history, namely: brief Jewish Period, European epoch (two millennia) and the World Church epoch (after Vatican II). In Rahner's scheme, the period of colonization that coincided with the Reformation period still belongs to the European epoch. In some sense this is true because the missions in colonized lands were really "copies" of their "mother churches". Yet it was also at this time that the Church was making the first unsure steps to become a truly World Church.

³⁶ James Kroegeer and Peter Phan, *The Future of the Asian Churches: The Asian Synod and Ecclesia in Asia* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), p. 7.

to be dedicated to the service of the true God..."³⁷ While the letter does not show any evidence of what is called today as "inculturation", it is important to stress that *much thought* was given about a people in another land and that such discernment had led Gregory I to counsel missionaries not to destroy everything but build on something useful, albeit materially, in the culture.

The brothers Cyril and Methodius departed from the conventional mission strategy of *Latinization*³⁸ but neither did they proclaim the Gospel according to the resources (language, symbols, etc.) of the culture. Rather, they created the Glagolitic (precursor of the Cyrillic) alphabet, thereby creating a "Slavonic Christianity." In and through their efforts to evangelize, they played pivotal roles in "creating" the Slavonic culture. Their achievement is akin to what anthropologists like Van Binsbergen would call "cultural constructivism" where the ethnographer's effort to "name" and commit into writing a "culture" actually constructs it.³⁹

3. Post-Reformation Mission. This period coincided with the expansion of European powers to the *novus mundus*. A. Walls describes this period: "The missionary movement was the great learning experience of Western Christianity. By its very nature it brought the Christian faith, when it has become thoroughly accommodated for the life and thought of the West and the conceptual categories of western Europe, into massive interaction with totally different styles of life and thought."⁴⁰ While ethnocentrism is to be expected as normal, the "newness" of the new mission territories has proved to be a learning experience that is marked by unsure faltering steps (e.g. Chinese rites controversy⁴¹) as well as strong

³⁷ Gregory I quoted by Shorter, pp. 141-142.

³⁸ Shorter, p. 143.

³⁹ Wim Van Binsbergen, "Cultures Do Not Exist: Exploding Self-Evidences in the Investigation of Interculturality" in 12 December 2003" [http://www.shikanda.net/general/12 December 2003](http://www.shikanda.net/general/12%20December%202003). The author draws on Austin's theory of performativity in propounding that the power of "naming" actually constructs what is deemed as "cultural reality".

⁴⁰ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 238.

⁴¹ The efforts of Mateo Ricci have been finally vindicated when Pope Pius XII approved traditional Chinese rites in 1939.

steps to a respectful attitude to *others*. Landmarks in relating with the *culturally other* during this period can be gleaned from the following:

What could be more absurd than to carry France, Spain, or Italy, or any part of Europe into China? It is not this sort of things you are to bring but rather the Faith, which does not reject or damage people's rites and customs, provided these are not depraved.⁴²

The foundation of numerous missionary congregations in the 19th century ensured a consistent supply of missionary religious and clergy especially to colonized lands. Cultural sensitivity has gradually grown as can be discerned from this letter by a superior to his confreres in the mission lands:

Do not judge according to appearances or to what you have been accustomed in Europe. Forget Europe with its customs and its spirit. Become Negroes with the Negroes, and then you will regard them as they should be regarded. Become Negroes with the Negroes, to form them as they should be formed, not after the fashion of Europe, but by letting them keep what is proper to them.⁴³

Such prudent counsel to missionaries would have been less necessary had the missionary movements successfully formed a well-trained local clergy. Yet the very problem of engaging another culture is significantly related with the retarded growth of a native clergy (both secular and religious). This becomes all the more conspicuous, even highly suspicious, in view of the numerous Papal Encyclicals and other Church documents that explicitly lay down the need for the training of the native clergy. Hereunder are but a few:

Propaganda Fide's Instruction of November 23, 1845:

"The native levites must be formed in instruction in all knowledge and piety, and carefully trained for the sacred ministry, and that in such a way, that, in accordance with

⁴² *Propaganda Fide* Circular to Vicars Apostolic in Foreign Missions 1659, quoted by David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 449.

⁴³ Francis Liebermann, "Letter to Missionaries in Africa" quoted by Shorter, p. 168.

the long cherished wish of the Apostolic See, they may become fit for every ecclesiastical office, even that of governing the missions and of becoming worthy of the Episcopal character... Hence the custom of lowering the native priests to the status of clerical assistants, a custom justly obnoxious to them, must be done away with and entirely abrogated."⁴⁴

Pope Benedict's Encyclical Letter *Maximum Illud* (November 30, 1919): "The main care of those who rule the missions should be to raise and train a clergy from amidst the nations among whom they dwell, for on this are founded the best hopes for the church of the future."⁴⁵

Pope Pius XI's Encyclical Letter *Rerum Ecclesia* (February 28, 1926): "Let us recall to your attention how important it is that you build up a native clergy. If you do not work with all your might to accomplish this, we maintain that your apostolate will not only be crippled, but it will prove to be an obstacle and an impediment for the establishment and organization of the Church in those countries."⁴⁶

It is clearly discernible from the aforementioned that in the mind of the Church, the success of its missionary activity can be measured by the degree to which a truly native Church, under the care of a native hierarchy, is well founded. Unfortunately, a "caste" system existed in the Church: "In this new church... there are two different kinds of Christians. The first are *cristianos viejos*, who are Spaniards together with others from diverse kingdoms and provinces of Europe. The second are the *cristianos nuevos*: the natives of this new world of the Indies."⁴⁷ The works of Schumacher,⁴⁸ De la Rosa and De la Costa⁴⁹ provide ample documentary evidence

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴⁵ Quoted by Horacio de la Costa, SJ in *The Filipino Clergy: Historical Studies and Future Perspectives* (Manila: Loyola Papers, 1980), pp. 16-17.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Pedro Martin Fernandez, Bishop of Mexico quoted by Rolando de la Rosa, OP, *History of the Filipinization of the Religious Orders in the Philippines* (Quezon City, DPP, 1990), p. 13.

⁴⁸ John Schumacher, SJ, *Readings in Philippine Church History* (Quezon City: Loyola School of Theology, 1979).

⁴⁹ Horacio de la Costa, SJ in *The Filipino Clergy: Historical Studies and Future Perspectives* (Manila: Loyola Papers, 1980).

about the racial prejudice of the Spanish hierarchy against the *Indios* of the *Novus Mundus*. And as the Bishop of Mexico suggests, this racial prejudice is shared by the kingdoms of Europe. Hence, the (European) Church was reluctant to assimilate "inferior" cultures in its catholic embrace.⁵⁰

A very important landmark in the Church's view of the relationship between faith and culture was Pius XII's acknowledgment of cultural pluralism.⁵¹ Cultural evolutionists like E.B. Tylor have theorized that the North Atlantic *culture* is at the forefront of evolution, while that of savage tribes are at the tail end and all the rest are situated in the middle at various stages of development.⁵² Modern anthropologists, on the other hand understand culture in the plural; as Tanner puts it succinctly: "All people have culture but they do not have the same one".⁵³ For the first time, an Encyclical has embraced this pluralistic view:

The herald of the Gospel and messenger of Christ is an apostle. His office does not demand that he transplant European civilization and culture, and no other, to foreign soil, there to take root and propagate itself. His task in dealing with these

⁵⁰ Dennis Smith offers an explanation in this regard: "Educated Europeans had no interest in the different ideas of perfection pursued in other cultures: Hence the trained blindness to the alien way of life, so striking in the medieval pilgrims to the Holy land and the tardiness with which Europe came to consider freshly discovered civilizations and cultures as a challenge to its own smugly assumed righteousness". See Dennis Smith, *Zygmunt Baumann: Prophet of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), p. 90.

⁵¹ Shorter, pp. 183-186.

⁵² E. B. Tylor's ethnocentric and evolutionist worldview can be clearly gleaned in his assertion: "The educated world of Europe and America practically settles a standard by simply placing its own nation at one end of the social series and savage tribes at the other, arranging the rest of mankind between the limits according as they correspond more closely to savage or to cultured life". [Quoted by Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 17.] Tylor believes in the fundamental uniformity of the human mind. Differences among societies are not essential differences. When two societies obviously differ, it is simply because one is lower and the other higher in the same path of cultural evolution. [Confer Daniel Pals, "Animism and Magic: E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer" in *Seven Theories of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 16-29].

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

peoples, who sometimes boast a very old and highly developed culture of their own, is to teach and form them so that they are ready to accept willingly and in practical manner the principles of Christian life and morality; principles, I might add, that fit into any culture, provided it be good and sound, and which give that culture greater force in safeguarding human dignity and in gaining happiness. Catholic inhabitants of missionary countries, although they are first of all citizens of the Kingdom of God and members of his great family, do not for all that cease to be citizens of their earthly fatherland.⁵⁴

John XXIII did not only affirm the plurality of cultures but went further to suggest their equality: "Whenever authentic values of art and thought can enrich the culture of the human family, the Church is ready to encourage and give her patronage to these products of the spirit... [The Church] does not identify herself with any one culture to the exclusion of the rest."⁵⁵ Such affirmations of plurality and equality of cultures that are akin to the modern anthropological understanding are huge leaps toward a more profound reflection on how faith and culture relate with each other.

4. *Vatican II.*

*Sacrosanctum Concilium*⁵⁶ clearly states one of the aims of the Council which is "to adapt more suitably to the needs of our times those institutions that are subject to change" (SC 1) Four chapters (SC 37-40) were devoted to the principles, criteria, and practical norms pertaining to adaptation. Chupungco notes that the term *aptatio*, which was translated as "adaptation," is intimately related with the vision of John XXIII's celebrated goal of

⁵⁴ Pius XII, *Evangelii Praecones*, quoted by Shorter, p. 185.

⁵⁵ John XXIII, *Princeps Pastorum*, quoted by Shorter, p. 187.

⁵⁶ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, Solemnly promulgated by his Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 4, 1963, [archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html) http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html.

aggiornamento.⁵⁷ However, Shorter critically notes that the Constitution on the Liturgy suffers from an immature ecclesiology.⁵⁸

*Ad Gentes*⁵⁹ has enriched the concept of adaptation with that of *incarnation*: "If the Church is to be in a position to offer all the mystery of salvation and life brought by God, then, it must implant itself among every group of people in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the people among whom he lived" (AG 10). Making the mystery of incarnation as a theological model for the Church's relationship with cultures complements and even corrects the apparent superficiality of "adaptation". Analogically, this makes the Church and the faith "hypostatically" united with the cultures of local Churches.⁶⁰ Another important contribution of *Ad Gentes* is its affirmation of a culturally plural Church: "...the Christian life will be adapted to the mentality and character of each culture, and local traditions together with the special qualities of each national family, illumined by the light of the Gospel, will be taken up into Catholic unity. So new particular churches, each with its own traditions, have their place in the community of the Church." (AG 22).

While previous documents have referred to "culture", the term remained undefined. It is in *Gaudium et Spes*⁶¹ that the Church sought to clarify what it means by identifying the content of the concept as "all those things which go to the refining and developing of man's diverse mental and physical endowments" (GS 53). Though culture was understood in a broad and general way that is even

⁵⁷ Anscar Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 24.

⁵⁸ Shorter, p. 203.

⁵⁹ *Ad Gentes* (AG) *Decree On the Mission Activity of the Church* http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651207_ad-gentes_en.html.

⁶⁰ Chupungco, p. 18.

⁶¹ *Gaudium et Spes* (GS) *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Promulgated by his Holiness Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html.

suggestive of an evolutionary model with its concept of "refinement," *Gaudium et Spes* reaffirmed the plurality of cultures and their value in human development. The document also highlights the important bond between Gospel and culture:

There are many links between the message of salvation and culture. In His self-revelation to his people culminating in the fullness of manifestation in his incarnate Son, God spoke according to the culture proper to each age. Similarly, the Church has existed through the centuries in varying circumstances and has utilized the resources of different cultures in its preaching to spread and explain the message of Christ, to examine and understand it more deeply, and to express it more perfectly in the liturgy and in various aspects of the life of the faithful (GS 58).

The document further stresses that the Church is "not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation." The Church serves cultures by renewing, correcting, purifying, causing their spiritual endowments to flourish, fortifies and completes them in Christ. This does not all mean that the Church relates with cultures in a unilateral fashion because the document also stresses that the whole process enriches "both itself (Church) and the cultures themselves" (GS 58). Shorter observes that the document clearly tends towards what theologians would later call *inculturation*.⁶²

B. Significant External Conditions

1. *Advancement in Social Sciences/Cultural Studies.*

John Paul II has succinctly summed up Christian theology's confidence in reason: "faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of the truth".⁶³ When all knowledge was considered *philosophia*,⁶⁴ it was but natural for

⁶² Shorter, p. 202.

⁶³ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, Encyclical Letter, 14 September 1998.

⁶⁴ Until Isaac Newton's time, even science is considered "philosophy" as can be gleaned from the title of his major scientific work: "Principia Mathematica Philosophia Naturalis."

theologians to engage philosophers as dialogue partners.⁶⁵ But with the growth of science as an independent discipline and the eventual “emancipation” of the human-social sciences as *sciences* in their own right,⁶⁶ theology has broadened its horizons as it engaged the human-social sciences in dialogue. Pastoral theology, missiology and ecclesiology now draw heavily from the insights and principles of sociology and anthropology. The faithful are not just seen as a “church” but also as a human society bound together by faith.

It seems that the first interaction between theology and the human sciences arose out of pragmatic reasons. When the first anthropologists were mainly theoreticians and suffered from a paucity of field experience, missionaries during the 1860s supplied veritable field data. Charles Taber notes that anthropologists like E.B. Tylor “actively corresponded with missionaries, asking them questions and suggesting specific lines of inquiry”.⁶⁷ These initial contacts proved mutually beneficial as theologians appropriated the insights of anthropology and the social sciences. The anthropological understanding of culture as common to humanity yet plural

⁶⁵ Avery Dulles makes an interesting list of the philosophical grounding of recent influential theologians: “Hegel is the chief philosophical influence behind Jürgen Moltmann and Hans Küng; Friedrich Schelling inspired Paul Tillich and Walter Kasper; Classical Marxism has influenced Liberation Theology; the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl had a major impact on Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II), Edward Schillebeeckx and Bernhard Häring; Ludwig Wittgenstein had a profound impact on Hans Frei; Martin Heidegger has made a deep impression on Rudolf Bultmann and James Robinson”. Avery Dulles, SJ, *The Craft of Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), pp. 124-126.

⁶⁶ Dilthey’s distinction between the explanation of nature and the understanding of history (and the human sciences) or the difference between the *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences) and the *Geisteswissenschaften* (human sciences like anthropology) has paved the way for this development. While nature and its processes can be explained in terms of laws and mathematical formula, the human sciences seek to understand the human life-world because of the capacity of the human mind to understand another person. This distinction legitimized the human sciences as science in their own right without the need to approximate the mathematical rigor of the natural sciences. It also inaugurated the interpretive turn in science. See Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 49.

⁶⁷ Charles Taber, *To Understand the World, To Save the World: The Interface Between Missiology and the Social Sciences* (Harrisburg, Trinity Press, 2000), p. 95.

in forms has undoubtedly contributed to the Church's positive appreciation of the plurality and value of cultures. It is between the frontiers of theology and anthropology that theology of inculturation has grown. Though some social scientists may have critical views about "inculturation" as an amateurish incursion of theologians into anthropology,⁶⁸ both disciplines can mutually benefit from their unique perspectives as shown by collaborative efforts that started more than a century ago.

2. *Post-Colonialism.*

The contemporary critique against universalizing metanarratives has wakened up Western rationality from its centuries of slumber in the dreamland of "western centrism" into the reality of the Other/s. This came in varied forms like the breaking of epistemological solipsism and the awareness of the ethical demand of the *visage* or face of the *Other* as presented by Emmanuel Levinas. It must be noted though that the current discourse remains in a state of half-wakefulness. This can be gleaned from "new" terms like "Asian-Theology," "African-Theology," "Indian-Philosophy," etc., that happily bestow a "hyphenated" identity to the *Other* yet the Western Self/Identity remains universal, or more aptly, *universalizing*, and normative as implied by the unqualified terms "Theology," "Philosophy," i.e., "Western." As noted by those who follow Foucault, all judgments of value and worth are constructed by the dominant and *domineering* culture. At present, this unenviable position seems to be occupied by the North Atlantic cultures.

Samuel Bellow's thoughtless pronouncement epitomizes the arrogance of Eurocentrism: "When the Zulus produce a Tolstoy, we will read him".⁶⁹ The *other* becomes valuable and worthy only to the extent that he/she approximates or copies the image and values of the West. The other is always an *inferior-other*. Charles Taylor, following Frantz Fanon, acknowledges that the "major weapon of

⁶⁸ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 5. Schreiter notes that some anthropologists like Clement Godwin do not share such view and have even argued cogently for the acceptability of the term within the social sciences.

⁶⁹ Samuel Bellow quoted by Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 42.

the colonizers was the imposition of their image of the colonized on the subjugated people."⁷⁰ Even in post-colonial times, the West i.e., the North Atlantic civilization remains incurable in constructing the image of the *rest of the world*. Uma Narayan's carefully crafted critique of the West's concern for a "value-neutral-anthropological" perspective *vis-à-vis* "other/s" showed that the West still tends to project its own self image upon the "Third" World.⁷¹

Interestingly, culture and colonization have the same Latin root: *colere* which means "cultivating, inhabiting, worshipping and protecting."⁷² The founding of cities in the new world like New York, New Orleans (North America) and dioceses like *Nueva Caceres*, *Nueva Segovia* (Philippines) manifest a desire for newness while holding on steadfastly to what is old yet familiar. Colonization has been deeply motivated by the quest for the *new*: new land, new sources of wealth, new adventure, and for the Church, new converts and new churches. But the familiarity of the "old world" was simply impossible to let go. Convinced of the superiority of their culture, the colonizers judged the host culture according to their ethnocentric criteria and "colonized" it in the agricultural sense of "cultivating" it out of primitivism. Following Troeltsch and Bosch, William Burrows points to the misunderstanding of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* as one of the significant factors in the medieval ideal of creating a "Christian civilization" and the employment of "missionary warfare" as an important means to achieve this.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

⁷¹ Uma Narayan, "Through the Looking-Glass Darkly" in *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions and Third World Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 121-157. Interestingly, Narayan argues that even the avoidance of Western thinkers to criticize the former "Third World" (Non-West) for fear of being accused of having colonialist tendencies and the habit of "Non-Western" thinkers to blame everything on the "Big Bad West" actually makes the West an agent-in-its-own-right and reduces the "Non-West" to mere "passive victims." Spelled out simply, even in this "blame-game," it is still the "West" who is the main agent even in its remorseful act of *mea culpa*. It is as though the West looks at the Third World as its mirror and sees its own fault, not that of the *other*. But to claim that we (Non-West) are not blameworthy is worse than what the colonizers had made of us. Because this means that we are reducing ourselves to a level that is below the status of free, intelligent agents who are fully responsible for our actions and the destiny of our countries.

⁷² Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 2.

Eventually, this helped create a worldview that sees “non-Christian societies as objects of conquest”.⁷³

It is against this background that inculturation has also acquired a “political” significance *vis-à-vis* the “politics of recognition”:

Many nations that were under the grip of colonial powers have already gained political independence, in the wake of which there has developed among their people a greater sense of attachment to and appreciation for their national and cultural heritage. The progress of cultural studies and the advance in the means of communication and travel have also contributed to a growth in cultural consciousness of the people all over the world... [Thus] the local churches felt the need of making themselves at home in the cultures.⁷⁴

While the dangers the early missionaries encountered involved the risks of perilous overseas travel or meeting suspicious and even hostile peoples, there is a marked change in the difficulty foreign missionaries face in the contemporary world. “Today, there is another difficulty, and perhaps a harder one, namely, that of staying in regions which have become conscious of their own culture and traditions and which no longer appreciate the presence and activities of foreign missionaries, who are often suspected of colonialism, of exploitation and of bringing in a domineering civilization from outside.”⁷⁵ This suspicion is not entirely without basis because in most of these colonized countries, the missionaries came alongside the military and merchant colonizers. Certainly, this made it difficult for the natives to dissociate the missionaries from their colonizing compatriots. Consequently, the decolonization process that mostly took place after the Second World War also meant for many, “de-culturation” from the colonizer’s culture and the assertion and even construction of their cultural identity. To

⁷³ William Burrows, “A Seventh Paradigm? Catholics and Radical Inculturation” in *Mission in Bold Humility* ed. by Willem Saayman and Klippies Kritzinger (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 123.

⁷⁴ Jacob Mananadath, *The Inculturation of the Local Churches According to the Teaching of Pope Paul VI* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1984), p. xii.

⁷⁵ Paul VI, “Mission for Mission Sunday” Sept. 20, 1975; AAS 67 (1975) 551; Mananadath, p. 62.

some significant extent, these developments have become influential to that mode of theological reflection called inculturation.

INCULTURATION AS A THEOLOGICAL IMPERATIVE

With the developments in cultural anthropology, it has become axiomatic to say that "to be human is to be embedded in culture."⁷⁶ While there have been so many proposed definitions for culture, this paper shall follow Geertz's "interpretive turn" in the understanding of culture as a "complex web of significance people themselves have spun":

[Culture] denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [persons] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."⁷⁷

Geertz has made the important step away from the understanding of culture as referring to artifacts of great human achievements or social structures to that of culture-as-meaning. This notion is more dynamically presented by Ulf Hannerz in his *interactionist* conception of culture where the three dimensions of (1) ideas and modes of thought (2) forms of externalization or making meaning public and (3) their social distribution interrelate with each other.⁷⁸ Hannerz rightly points out that culture has two *loci*: the human mind (meaning) and public forms (externalization of meaning).

Mindful of theology's task as making the faith intelligible and therefore *meaningful*, it can readily be gleaned from the foregoing understanding of culture that it must be at the heart of theological reflection. The recognition that theologizing cannot but be *cultural* is an affirmation of the validity of present human expe-

⁷⁶ Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post-Modern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 147.

⁷⁷ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 89.

⁷⁸ Ulf Hannerz, *Cultural Complexity: Studies in the Social Organization of Meaning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 7.

riences as a *locus theologicus*.⁷⁹ The world, according to the poet Gerald Manley Hopkins, is “charged with the grandeur of God.” Bevens argues that “if the ordinary things of life are so transparent of God’s presence, one can speak of culture and events in history as truly *sacramental*... and so *revelatory*.”⁸⁰

In the same way that Christ dwelt and identified himself with the Jews, so the Church must also identify herself with the culture in which she proclaims the Gospel (AG 10). It demands from theology a capacity to make the Gospel become flesh and let it dwell among the people of a particular culture. *It is only when the Gospel finds a “home” in a particular culture that genuine evangelization takes place.* To evangelize is to proclaim the Gospel to all nations (Matt. 28:19). Thus, to evangelize is to *inculturate*, to let the Gospel be heard in different tongues as in the Pentecost event.

But what precisely is inculturation? As a theological term it must be distinguished from:

a. *Enculturation*, a sociological term that refers to the process by which a human person, specially a child, becomes inserted into his/her culture.⁸¹

b. *Acculturation*, a term in cultural anthropology that stands for the contact between two or more cultures and the cultural

⁷⁹ Melchor Cano (1509-1560) in *De Locis Theologicis* has outlined the sources of theology according to the degree of importance. Natural knowledge, philosophy and history were considered to be of lesser importance but were nonetheless acknowledged as valid sources of theologizing.

⁸⁰ Stephen Bevens, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 13. Italics mine.

⁸¹ Marcello Azevedo, SJ, *Inculturation and the Challenge of Modernity* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1982), p. 7. Chupungco notes however that enculturation may have been translated into Latin as “*inculturatio*” in Church documents simply because the prefix “en” does not exist in Latin and other languages. Anscar Chupungco, OSB, *Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity and Catechesis* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 25. Ary Crollius suggests that inculturation can be understood as an analogue of enculturation: “And because the establishment of a local Church is also a new beginning, the process of inculturation can be compared with the enculturative process of the individual.” “What Is So New About Inculturation?” *Gregorianum* 59 (1978), p. 732.

changes resulting from them that are often mere juxtapositions of unassimilated cultural expressions.⁸²

c. *Adaptation*, a term used in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (nos. 1; 37-40) which refers to a general program for updating. Chupungco says that the term remains fluid and flexible and liturgists would sometimes use it interchangeably with inculturation.⁸³ However, "adaptation theology" presupposes that Eurocentric theology simply contributes and gives to "other" theologies and has nothing to learn from them.⁸⁴ Adaptation assumes a unilateral relation between Gospel and culture.

d. *Indigenization*, a term that derives from a nature metaphor: "taking root in a soil." Historically, this term connotes either the mere recruitment of local (indigenous) people to the priesthood and religious life or simply a pastoral tactic to make the Gospel understood in a particular culture.⁸⁵ The "taking root" metaphor has "static" connotations and tends to be in danger of romanticizing culture i.e., everything in the culture is seen as good.⁸⁶ Yet the Gospel does not only affirm the positive values of a culture but is likewise counter-cultural i.e. criticizes cultural elements that run against Christian values.

e. *Contextualization*, a term introduced by the World Council of Churches in 1972 that expresses the need for the Church to be relevant.⁸⁷ However, its emphasis on the importance of social change has led to its identification with liberation theology.⁸⁸ Bevens argues that "contextualization" is broader in scope than "inculturation" for it considers four theological sources: Gospel,

⁸² Francis Vincent Anthony, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation* (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1997), p. 42. Also Chupungco, p. 27.

⁸³ Chupungco, p. 24. Also Arbuckle, p. 17.

⁸⁴ Arbuckle, p. 17.

⁸⁵ Arbuckle, p. 18.

⁸⁶ Rodrigo Tano, *Theology in the Philippine Setting* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1981), p. 9. Also Bevens, p. 22.

⁸⁷ Chupungco, p. 19.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

tradition, culture and social change.⁸⁹ Some authors remain critical of the term. Lucien Legrand notes that this approach views reality as a "text" to be read and deciphered which is hardly what life is all about; for life is irreducible to a script.⁹⁰ Max Stackhouse warns against the lapsing of contextualization into *contextualism* that implies "only those in a context can speak about it meaningfully," thereby according them an epistemological privilege and excluding those who are outside of it.⁹¹

Inculturation is a theological term that was first used to refer to the insertion of Catholicism into the culture of a people by J. Masson in 1962.⁹² The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is the first to use the term "inculturation" in an ecclesial setting: "The local Church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and *inculturated*."⁹³ This statement was made on 29 November 1970 while the first time the word "inculturation" was used in a Roman document was in *Catechesi Tradendae* (57) published seven years later in 1977. Legrand notes that Jaime Cardinal Sin of Manila and Pedro Arrupe, SJ were the ones who

⁸⁹ Bevans, p. 26. The opposition between Liberation Theology and Inculturation/Interreligious Dialogue was a hotly debated issue among Asian theologians (see Bastiaan Wielenga, "Liberation Theology in Asia" in Christopher Rowland, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999], pp. 39-62; also Aloysius Pieris, "The Problem of Universality and Inculturation With Regards to Patterns of Theological Thinking" *Concilium* [1994/6], pp. 70-79.) The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences saw no opposition but rather complementarity among these approaches as it declared during the *International Congress on Mission* held in Manila on 7 December 1979 that Asian theology must incorporate a *three-fold dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor*. Diego Irrazaval shows that even liberation theology must be inculturated; confer *Inculturation: New Dawn of the Church in Latin America* trans. by Philip Berryman (New York: Orbis Books, 2000). This point needs to be stressed because inculturation has to be sensitive to the culture of the marginalized. Otherwise, it may happen that only the culture of the elite class becomes the "subject" of inculturation which makes it elitist and even an instrument for oppression.

⁹⁰ Lucien Legrand, *The Bible on Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), p. xv.

⁹¹ Max Stackhouse, "Contextualization, Contextuality and Contextualism" in *One Faith, Many Cultures* ed. by Ruy Costa (New York: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 9.

⁹² Anthony, p. 43, Crollius, p. 722.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 6. Emphasis is mine.

used it in the discussions of the Roman Synod on catechesis.⁹⁴ Arrupe's definition of inculturation in his letter to the Society of Jesus in 1978 has been one of the most quoted: "Inculturation is an incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a 'new creation'".⁹⁵ The 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops sought to differentiate it from adaptation as it declared: "Inculturation, however, is different from mere external adaptation, as it signifies an interior transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in various human cultures."⁹⁶ Azevedo points to a reciprocity in the relationship between the Gospel and culture as he defines inculturation "as the dynamic relation between the Christian message and culture or cultures; an insertion of Christian life into a culture; an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them."⁹⁷

From the aforementioned definitions, we can glean the following fundamental insights: (a) Inculturation is an *interaction* between Gospel and culture; (b) it is a process of *dynamic exchange*, of reciprocal assimilation between Christianity and culture; (c) which results in the *transformation* of cultures on the one hand and the rooting of Christianity in culture on the other.⁹⁸ Inculturation suggests a bilateral and concomitant movement: the inculturation of Christianity and the Christianization of culture.

LIMITATIONS OF THE THEOLOGY OF INCULTURATION

Theology of inculturation seriously seeks to proclaim the Gospel in the *here* and the *now with* a particular attention to the

⁹⁴ Legrand, p. xi.

⁹⁵ Anthony, p. 44; Carl Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), pp. 12-13.

⁹⁶ Chupungco, p. 29.

⁹⁷ Azevedo, p. 11.

⁹⁸ Chupungco, p. 29.

“rediscovery” of the plurality of cultures. It takes into careful consideration “the *who*, the *where*, the *with whom* and *for whom* one does theology and builds the church.”⁹⁹ Thus, it seems to be the theological reflection that is most appropriate for what Karl Rahner calls the epoch of a truly “world Church” that began with Vatican II in its acknowledgment of the particular or local churches. It shows an enlightening way out of the myopic ethnocentrism of a Eurocentric Christianity as epitomized in Hilaire Belloc’s pronouncement: the faith is Europe and Europe is the faith.

However, inculturation seems to be part of an evolving process to *name* the relationship between Gospel/faith and cultures. There remains an acute need to find a formulation that will explicitly take into serious account the meeting of cultures, including Christian cultures, and their mutual enrichment and refinement. Developments in theologizing, as manifested in the different terms to name the process, simply mean that there is a growth in the understanding of such relationship. They also suggest that there are limitations and inadequacies in present formulations that need to be complemented, even corrected. Though inculturation has served to supplement what was lacking in the earlier theories of *indigenization*, *adaptation*, *accommodation* and *acculturation*, it has also its own share of shortcomings. Owing to the fact that there are significant differences among theologians of inculturation, the following critical remarks may not entirely apply to all theologies of inculturation though at least one of the following certainly does. And, as will be argued in the end, even if a theology that calls itself a “theology of inculturation” is absolutely exempt from any of the following, it is rightly to be called *intercultural theology* and not *inculturation*.

1. Some theologies of inculturation assume the possibility of a “Pure and Culture-Free” Christianity. The very term *inculturation* smacks of externalism that implies a mono-directional movement. Ary Roest Crolius proposes that it can be seen as a

⁹⁹ Peter Schineller, “Inculturation as Pilgrimage to Catholicity” *Concilium* 204 (4/1989), p. 99.

contraction of "insertion in a culture".¹⁰⁰ But this suggests a faith that is disembodied, exists abstractly and apart from a concrete person and community of faith that can be inserted into any culture. It is the "pure" and "unadulterated" faith of the first community of believers which Harnack thought to have been rendered impure beginning with its contact with the Hellenized world. The noted historian of dogma propounds that one gets to the essence of Christianity by distinguishing the "kernel from the husk".¹⁰¹ Similar metaphors like "seed and soil", "content and form" and Paul's well known metaphor of "treasure and earthen vessel" have all been employed to distinguish the Gospel from its supposedly cultural accoutrements. But this view implies that it is possible to get to the core of the original experience of the Christ-event that is unalloyed and uncontaminated by what are deemed as non-essential and even harmful accretions when the faith in Jesus was received and appropriated outside the Jewish milieu and then Hellenized by the Greeks, Romanized in the Holy Roman Empire, Gallicized and Germanized as missionaries traveled to the north of Europe. This view proffers that the Christian missions that grew out of this development have so covered the "kernel" of Christ's message. Thus,

¹⁰⁰ Crollius, p. 724. One can discern here a certain "Platonism" where Christianity is conceived as an exemplar that exists in its pure form outside the concrete world, from which it can inform the plurality of cultures, and conversely, can be "extricated" in its pure form from cultures.

¹⁰¹ Adolf Harnack, *What is Christianity?* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1957). Harnack writes: "Truly, the historian's task of distinguishing between what is traditional and what is peculiar, between *kernel* and *husk* in Jesus' message of the Kingdom of God is a difficult and responsible one. How far may we go? We do not want to rob this message of its innate character and color; we do not want to change it into a pale scheme of ethics" (p. 55, emphasis is mine). Sharing the sentiments of Tertullian, Harnack laments the Hellenization of Christianity which he identifies as the unfortunate beginning of cultural accretions that thickened the "husk" that covered the purity and simplicity of the Gospel: "The identification of the Logos with Christ was the determining factor in the fusion of Greek philosophy with the apostolic inheritance and led the more thoughtful Greeks to the latter. Most of us regard this identification as inadmissible, because the way in which we conceive the world and ethics does not point to the existence of any logos at all... An unmixed blessing it has not been. To a much larger extent than the earlier speculative ideas about Christ, it absorbed men's interest; it withdrew their minds from the simplicity of the Gospel, and increasingly transformed it into a philosophy of religion (pp. 204-205).

subsequent missionary activities that went with the infrastructures of colonialism have become so far removed from the essence of faith in Jesus. Christian mission must be able to shed away the thick layers of these cumulative husks if it were to be authentic. It must be able to "bracket-off" the non-essentials and go back to the original message.

It is basically the same assumption that underlies the ideas of some proponents of inculturation as can be gleaned from the following:

[The Catholic faith must not be adulterated even when it is] *"clothed with the outward forms proper to each people, and made explicit by theological expression which takes into account differing cultural, social and even racial milieus, it must remain the content of the catholic faith just exactly as the ecclesial Magisterium has received it and transmits it."*¹⁰²

But how can this be precisely done? Some have suggested that if inculturation means the insertion of the "pure" Gospel; and since, admittedly, the Gospel exists already in inculturated forms, then it must first be *de-culturalized* before any authentic inculturation can ever take place. Jacob Mananodath and David Hasselgrave propose that:

"The cultures must show the readiness to be influenced and transformed by the 'Christian mystery'. The Church and the Gospel, in their turn, *must divest themselves of all the cultural and other traits that are not essential to them so that they may in their purity and genuineness encounter the cultures* and assimilate all that is of value in them. Inculturation is thus a slow process of creative confrontation, mutual purification and vital transformation."¹⁰³

Decontextualization is needed in order to arrive at the supra-cultural message which is conveyed in culturally meaningful forms. *The cultural wrappings must be folded back in order to get the gift of truth – the Western wrappings of the missionary's culture (where the missionary is a Westerner) and also*

¹⁰² EN no. 65; AAS 68 (1976) 55-56.

¹⁰³ Jacob Mananodath, *The Inculturation of the Local Churches According to the Teaching of Pope Paul VI* (Rome: Pontificia Universitas Gregoriana, 1984), p. 77. Emphasis is mine.

the wrappings of biblical culture itself. When one comes to the Scriptures, he must be especially cautious, for in the Bible God Himself chose the language and forms by which the truth came to be unfolded.¹⁰⁴

Within the framework of the Incarnation as the motive and pattern for inculturation, R. Hardawiryana suggests that missionaries must also undergo a certain *kenosis*, an emptying undergone by Christ: "*Missionaries have first to set aside their own culture, their particular way of looking at things, to allow themselves to take on their newly adopted culture; a real death with all its pains, perhaps a harder sacrifice than the toilsome labor of their predecessors in the past.*"¹⁰⁵

Cardinal Ratzinger – presently Pope Benedict XVI – sharply criticizes the notion of culture-free faith or the possibility of a faith that can be extricated from its cultural wrappings: "Such thinking is at root Manichean. Culture is debased, becoming a mere exchangeable shell. Faith is reduced to disincarnated spirit ultimately void of reality... Faith itself is culture."¹⁰⁶ Indeed, a faith that is free from any cultural ties is a mere abstraction. The grace of faith is always received and lived by concrete persons in concrete cultural contexts.

2. *Some theologies of inculturation build on a romanticized understanding of Christianity that negates historical mediation.* The aforementioned have been reinforced further by what has been noted earlier concerning post-colonialism. The era of decolonization and nationalization also meant, for many, colonial "de-culturation" and the search for a "national culture" that existed during the pre-colonial era.¹⁰⁷ Such nationalist sentiment found

¹⁰⁴ David Hasselgrave, cited by Bevans, p. 46.

¹⁰⁵ Robert Hardawiryana, SJ, "Building the Church of Christ in a Pluricultural Situation" in *Building the Church in Pluricultural Asia* ed. by Ary Roest Crollius, SJ (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1986), p. 9. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁰⁶ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Christ, Faith and The Challenge of Cultures," Address given to the Presidents of Asian Bishops' Conferences and Chairmen of Theological Commissions in Hongkong, March 2-5, 1993.

¹⁰⁷ Frantz Fanon, "On National Culture" in *Colonial and Post-Colonial Theory* ed. by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 37.

its way among theologians as they used terms like *Indianization*, *Africanization*, etc. V. Anthony explains that these terms have become appealing because of their resonance with a previously colonized people who yearn for identity and belonging. Yet this also implied a reactive stance of distancing and disowning whatever is "Western" in favor of what is truly native; thereby leading to a strategy of "divesting" and "cancelling" rather than "adding" or "modifying".¹⁰⁸ Frans Wijsen notes that some missiologists hold this simplistic and theologically untenable view that "the abolition of Africa's indigenous cultures, as practiced by the first missionaries to the continent should now be followed by the abolition of Christianity in Africa and a reversion to the 'ways of the ancestors'".¹⁰⁹

But while political decolonization may be done, "de-culturation" or "going-back" to a golden pre-colonial past is hardly possible in its romanticist intents to reconstruct the past and return to a "golden age" that was vandalized by the colonizers. It is similar to Schleiermacher's project of reconstructing and going-back to the past in order to get to the original meaning of a text. But as Gadamer forcefully argues, historical distance and tradition are not debilitating factors in understanding but rather constitute a "bridge" to understanding.¹¹⁰ Historical distance and effective-historical-consciousness mediate our understanding of the past, and therefore, constitute the very conditions for the possibility, rather than the impossibility, of understanding. Human understanding is historical and it is simply humanly impossible for it to stand "above" and remain unaffected by history. Gadamer's defense of prejudice

¹⁰⁸ Anthony, p. 40.

¹⁰⁹ Frans Wijsen, "Mission and Multiculturalism: On Communication Between Europeans and Africans" *Exchange* 32/3, p. 264.

¹¹⁰ Gadamer writes: "Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates; it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted. Hence, temporal distance is not something that must be overcome. This was, rather, the naïve assumption of historicism, namely, that we must transpose ourselves into the spirit of the age, think with its ideas and its thoughts, not with our own, and thus advance historical objectivity. In fact the important thing is to recognize temporal distance as a positive productive condition enabling understanding. It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which, everything handed down presents itself to us." *Truth and Method* trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989 2nd rev. edition), p. 297.

or foreunderstanding against the prejudice against it by the Enlightenment has shown that we always understand something *as*. We always already “anticipate” meaning when we try to understand, though we do not remain imprisoned by such foreunderstanding by being open to corrections. Spelled out simply, foreunderstanding or “prejudice,” rather than its pretentious bracketing-off, is the first step in every human understanding that is historically situated. Gadamer’s critique of historicism finds expression in Richard Lints’ critique of an “ahistorical devotional piety” that smacks of subjectivism:

In banishing all mediators between the Bible and ourselves, we have let the Scriptures be ensnared in a web of subjectivism. Having rejected the aid of the community of interpreters throughout the history of Christendom, we have not succeeded in returning to the primitive gospel; we have simply managed to plunge ourselves back to the biases of our individual situations.¹¹¹

Such can be the consequence of *sola Scriptura* when pursued to its logical conclusion. As noted by Lints, Tradition serves to guard against mere subjectivism and serves as bridge, rather than a barrier, that makes Holy Scriptures accessible to us *here and now*. In the same way that the Hellenized creed of Nicea had been an important part of the Christian tradition that mediated the faith in its northward movement in Europe, the same is true with the Christian Faith already “inculturated” in the European missionary who is steeped in Scholastic and other European worldviews and mindset. This does not at all mean that they must be uncritically accepted as universally and perennially valid, but neither could they just be removed as the husk is removed from the kernel. They form part of the living tradition that communicates the faith that is always received by hearing it proclaimed by someone: *fides ex auditu*.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Richard Lints cited by Grenz and Franke, p. 109.

¹¹² Claude Geffré makes the same assertion: “It would be illusory to attempt to go back to an original Christian nucleus that predates later dogmatic developments. In spite of their typically Hellenistic character, these developments belong to the living tradition of the Church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.” Claude Geffré, OP, “The Word of God and World Religions and Culture” in V. Cajilig (ed.) *Kalatog: Theology in Context* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2003), p. 85.

While the blind and uncritical identification of Western Christianity with the Gospel/Christian Faith has been rightly criticized as tending towards what Collet calls "theological vandalism," the opposite tendency of being allergic and even antagonistic to whatever is European or Western also needs to be critically examined. On the part of westerners, this can tend to a "theological romanticism which sees only the positive element in the cultures of others and hardly dares to make critical remarks anymore, because they could hurt someone again."¹¹³

John Paul II in *Catechesi Tradendae* (53) presents a corrective to the limitations of the earlier theological reflections by being attentive to the importance of culture and tradition in the historical mediation of the Gospel message:

On the one hand the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the Biblical world, or more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived), nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.¹¹⁴

3. *Some theologies of inculturation do not only "essentialize" Christianity but cultures as well.* Granted that an ahistorical Gospel/faith i.e., abstracted from its concrete manifestations in lives of faith can be "inserted" into *the* culture of a people, there arises another question: "into *which* culture?" Globalization and migration undoubtedly hasten intercultural processes that tend towards *homogenization* e.g., shared lifestyles of globalized elite or the "McDonaldization" of the youth sub-culture.¹¹⁵ And yet, on the other hand, they also provoke counter movements of

¹¹³ Giancarlo Collet, "From Theological Vandalism to Theological Romanticism?" *Concilium* 1994/2, p. 31.

¹¹⁴ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae* (October 16, 1979), no. 53.

¹¹⁵ See Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

localization and even fundamentalism.¹¹⁶ A very important question to ask then is "Into which culture will be the Gospel be inserted in a "globalized context," or in multi-ethnic country like the United States, or in multi-cultural Churches in big cities?"¹¹⁷ Though international migration became noticeable during the mercantile period (1500-1800), it was only in the post-industrial period (1960-present) that it emerged as a truly global phenomenon.¹¹⁸ These phenomenally large numbers of transnational migrants live in "betwixt-and-between" cultural situations; consequently, a theology that takes seriously the experience of these people cannot but be *inter-multi-cultural*.¹¹⁹ Moreover, inter-multi-cultural contacts have led to the realization that cultures have an innate tendency for change and innovation.

As noted by Tanner, cultures are not exempt from historical processes of change.¹²⁰ It is well to note as well that cultural anthropologists like Ohnuki-Tierney, Marcus and Fischer¹²¹ have argued against concepts of culture that are immune to historical change. Though primarily concerned with liturgical inculturation, Chupungco

¹¹⁶ Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (New York: Orbis Books [5th printing], 2002), pp. 1-14.

¹¹⁷ Emiko Ohnuki-Tierney, following Leach, distinguishes between society and culture: "...they cannot think of a culture in the same sense as they think of a society which is a bounded political unit. Culture, in contrast to society is never bounded." E. Ohnuki-Tierney, ed., "Introduction" *Culture Through Time: Anthropological Approaches* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 13.

¹¹⁸ Peter Phan, "The Experience of Migration in the United States as a Source of Intercultural Theology" in *Migration, Religious Experience and Globalization* ed. by Gioacchino Campose and Pietro Ciallella (New York: Center for Migrant Studies, 2003), 143.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-157.

¹²⁰ Tanner, pp. 40-42.

¹²¹ George Marcus and Michael Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986). They have noted that: "Fieldwork involves engagement between ethnographer and subject, an intersubjective sharing of the same historic time and space – what Fabian terms coevalness – whereas ethnographic rhetoric has systematically distanced the subjects of fieldwork primarily by denying them contemporaneity and a modern history of their own. The radical implication of this critique is that this denial in turn has served to block anthropology's awareness of its own politicized context and intellectual history" (p. 97).

warns against the yearning to go back to an uncontaminated culture: "Reversal to the indigenous form of culture or to an ancestral type smacks of archaeology and romanticism. We know that cultures are in a continual process of change due to the mutual influence encouraged by modern means of communication. A culture cannot be defined without giving due regard to its newly acquired ingredients".¹²²

Some theologies of inculturation do not only seek to distinguish the evangelical "kernel" from its "husks" but also the "cultural kernel" that is covered by layers of "colonial husks." In the Philippine context, Daniel Pilario has correctly detected this underlying assumption in Jose de Mesa's work on inculturation. De Mesa sees Filipino culture as damaged by centuries of colonization. Consequently, in his view, it is necessary to retrieve a "pristine pre-lapsarian cultural structure"¹²³ (assumed to be the "authentic" Filipino culture) that will serve as the cultural pole for an authentic inculturation of the Gospel in the Filipino culture. But as argued earlier concerning the "kernel-husk" theory about Christianity, the romanticist intents of such view is hardly attainable. Pilario even suggests that the work of a cultural exegete may actually be a subtle form of cultural construction.

4. *Some theologies of inculturation that are modeled on the Mystery of Incarnation are increasingly being criticized as inappropriate.* Reflecting within the framework of inculturation, Shorter has noted the inappropriateness of the mystery of the Incarnation as a theological paradigm for inculturation. The Incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity is inseparable from the Paschal Mystery. While the Incarnation made Jesus concrete and particular, it was the Easter mystery that made Jesus transcend physical limitations. "The Resurrection enabled Christ to transcend physical limitations of an earthly life bounded by time, space and of course, culture. The intercultural contacts of Jesus were necessarily limited. The Resurrection made it possible for him to identify explicitly with the cultures of every time and place, through the

¹²² Chupungco, p. 17.

¹²³ Daniel Pilario, "The Craft of Contextual Theology: Towards a Methodological Conversation in the Philippine Context" in *Chakana* Vol. 1 (2003) 1, p. 36.

proclamation of the Gospel to every nation.”¹²⁴ J.B. Metz asserts that the parallelism made between the Incarnation and inculturation is at best partially correct because it assumes that just as the pre-existent Second Person of the Trinity was incarnated in a concrete time, place and culture, so is a “pre-existent” Gospel/Faith is inculturated in a particular culture.¹²⁵ But there is no such parallelism simply because the Gospel/Faith is not pre-existent like the Incarnate Word. In fact, as E. Schillebeeckx has pointed out, the faith is not from the very beginning a “message that has to be believed ... but an experience of faith which is presented as a message”.¹²⁶ Similarly, Peter Turkson demonstrates that the Scriptures are truly a “cultural product, the work of a people imbued with a culture” but who, in faith, sought to transmit their experience of God’s word in written form i.e., Scriptures.¹²⁷

Spelled out simply, the supposed parallelism between Incarnation and inculturation reinforces the notion of a “pre-existent” Gospel/Faith that can be progressively and repeatedly “incarnated” in various cultures. This is untenable because, as shown earlier, the Gospel/Faith is from the very beginning already “inculturated”. While the Incarnation is the mystery of the Word becoming Flesh, the Holy Scriptures are actually **first** *flesh*, that is, the concrete experience of God’s salvific action in history which are eventually written and became *word*. It is this *flesh-made-word* that is proclaimed and becomes *flesh* anew in concrete lives of faith and experiences of God’s saving action in different times and places.

5. Theologies of inculturation conceive the Church/ Faith as standing outside culture. Another important criticism of the theology of inculturation is its naïve concept of the Christian Faith and the Church as existing outside culture. Again, this can be gleaned from the early formulations of inculturation: “First of

¹²⁴ Shorter, p. 83.

¹²⁵ Johann-Baptist Metz, “Unity and Diversity: Problems and Prospects for Inculturation” in *Concilium* 204 (4/1989), p. 81.

¹²⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), p. 62.

¹²⁷ Peter Turkson, “Inculturation: A Biblical Perspective” in *Inculturation: Abide by the Otherness of Africa and the Africans* (Kampen: JH Kok, 1994), p. 4.

all, the relation between the Church and a given culture is not the same as the contact between cultures."¹²⁸ While the important assertion of *Gaudium et Spes* (42) that "the Church, in virtue of her mission and nature, is bound to no particular form of culture" is indeed true, this does not necessarily entail that the Church itself stands outside culture. As Gregory Baum has pointed out, the Catholic Church itself is a religious and ecclesiastical culture.¹²⁹ In fact all religions, in so far as they are existing, i.e., living faith, are always already *inculturated*.¹³⁰ A Christianity existing *outside* culture and history is utterly impossible. However, the Church is bound to no culture not because it is not a culture in itself; but it is precisely this *religious culture* that orients it towards all cultures. The theological truth that the Gospel transcends all cultures is not due to the unwarranted supposition that a concretely "inculturated" living out of the Gospel transcends all cultures; but is grounded on "the theology of revelation that understands God's word as intimately bound up with creation yet always transcending it".¹³¹ The Holy Spirit who inspires Holy Scriptures transcends cultures but the inspired living out of the Word in their particular and manifold cultural forms cannot be supracultural. Verily, it is the Holy Spirit who is the principal agent of evangelization,¹³² the only one

¹²⁸ Crollius, p. 724.

¹²⁹ Gregory Baum writes further: Catholicism is a particular embodiment of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Catholicism is a religious culture. It is flexible, it exists in a variety of countries representing different cultures, and it has acquired slightly different faces in various parts of the world. Still, the self-organization of Catholicism, the concepts, ideals and practices of governance, constitute an ecclesiastical culture. This culture is not taken from the world in which the New Testament was written; it is derived rather, from the Catholic Church's experience in subsequent centuries; from the needs of local and regional churches, the concern of the universal church and the organizational forms existing in society at large." See "Two Question Marks: Inculturation and Multiculturalism" *Concilium* 1994/2, pp. 101-102.

¹³⁰ See J.B. Metz, pp. 79-87. Also Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" in Daniel Pals, *Seven Theories of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 233-263.

¹³¹ Robert Schreiter, "Inculturation of Faith or Identification with Culture?" *Concilium* 1994/2, p. 16.

¹³² Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 59-60; John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* nos. 63-76.

who can guide humanity on its way to the fullness of truth (John 16:13). As Walter Kasper avers: "The inner-divine Trinity is – so to speak – the transcendental condition of the possibility of God's self-communication in salvation history in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit."¹³³ It was at Pentecost that the community of Apostles began to proclaim to all peoples the Good News of salvation in Jesus. It is the same Holy Spirit who was received by the Apostles through Jesus (John 20:22) that "makes the Church catholic, both in space (i.e., in the world) and in time (i.e., in history)".¹³⁴

It is well to conclude this article with a quote from David Bosch: "If the Church is the Body of Christ, it can only be one. In this sense, then – and not as an idealistic supra-cultural entity – the church is a kind of 'universal hermeneutical community, in which Christians and theologians from different lands [and cultures] check one another's cultural biases'".¹³⁵ After all, any particular and local "theology is a discourse about a universal message".¹³⁶ Certainly, *inculturation* is insufficient to name this process which brings us to the proposal for an *intercultural theology*. □

¹³³ Walter Kasper, *Jesus the Christ* trans. by V. Green (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), p. 183.

¹³⁴ Peter Lobo, *The Pneumatological Dimension of the Inculturation of Gospel-Faith and the Evangelization of Culture* (Rome: PUST, 1997), p. 122.

¹³⁵ Bosch, p. 457. Bosch himself quotes Hiebert in this regard.

¹³⁶ Gustavo Gutiérrez, cited by Bosch, p. 457.