

Inculturation and Moral Theology

By

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How should we understand inculturation or the dialogic encounter between foreign thought and native culture? In what sense is it philosophically possible to inculturate morality in general and value in particular? What significance would such an inquiry have? Let me offer some introductory notes towards an understanding of some key concepts and concerns as well as a statement of certain views regarding inculturation¹ and moral theology.

THE CULTURAL QUEST

Recent as the term may be, inculturation is not a new phenomenon, merely a contemporary concern. When thinkers survey significant periods of history, not only to take stock of where a society or culture finds itself but also to propose new directions, they are engaging in inculturation. Philosophers and theologians do it each time they attempt to fall in step with the culture which considers itself modern and the time. The compass of such an updating or *aggiornamento* can be rather vast (embracing continents) or fairly restricted (limited to nations); the reasons and urgency can also be quite diverse.

The notion has gone some way since it was borrowed from the social scientists, particularly those engaged in cross-cultural research. Despite its transformation it is popularly understood to refer to the contact that occurs between two distinct cultures as well as to the processes that accompany them. Broadly understood, therefore, inculturation concerns the way a native and foreign culture relate to and fuse with each other.

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¹For a rapid sketch of inculturation in general, see for example the last chapter of Franz-Josef Eilers. *Communicating Between Cultures*. Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992.

Inculturation is a neologism which combines two different concepts. One is inculturation or the process by which an individual becomes part of a given culture; it is parallel to, but not synonymous with socialization or the process by which an individual becomes part of a given society. The other is acculturation or the process which occurs when two cultures (rather than societies) come in contact with each other and exchange items and units with each other. Inculturation draws from both ideas insofar as it is a process wherein the acculturated is encultured with greater consciousness of the distinction between the original and borrowed cultural items. The concerns of normativity (whether assimilation is desirable or acceptable, what its substance is and degree, etc.) will depend on the discipline that considers the cultural process as a problem or possibility.

CULTURE

But what is culture in the first place? After reviewing 150 definitions current among social scientists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn suggest this central idea:

- ^ Culture consists of patterns, explicit or implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached value; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action.²

Other social scientists have other views, and this is usually due to the aspects of culture that they wish to emphasize. In any case, a working definition that would adequately serve part of our purposes is that culture is an "identifiable group with shared beliefs and experiences, feelings of worth and value attached to those experiences, and a shared interest in a common historical background."³

This definition has the advantage of reminding us that culture does not occur as an abstraction nor in a vacuum; it is borne by a social group. This is important to note because although culture and society are truly distinct in theory, in practice culture is identified with some particular society and a society is identified by its particular culture. Very often they will refer to the same reality; at other times they will clearly not be synonymous with each other. Several and differing cultures may coexist in one society; several and differing societies may share a common culture. It is not always easy to keep

²A. Kroeber and C. Kluckhohn. *Culture*. Cambridge: Papers of the Peabody Museum, 1952, 47, no. 1, p. 180.

³Richard Brislin. *Cross-Cultural Encounters*. NY: Pergamon Press, 1981. p. 2. For other definitions, see Eilers, p. 18ff.

the theoretical distinction in mind, since what belongs to one often belongs to the other too. Still, one must bear in mind both the unity as well as the distinction between culture as such and its culture-bearers (society).

The distinction between society and culture is important for yet another reason: in the context of inculturation the distinction forewarns us against the pitfalls of cultural idealism and romanticism, as we shall later see in the discussion of inculturation as indigenization and contextualization or even of primary and secondary inculturation.

My own preference is to consider culture in its most generic meaning as the conceptualizing of reality and responding to the same which persons learn as members of a social group. This would seem no different from the shorthand popular understanding of culture as the life-ways of a group, be this a small community, a people, a nation or even some larger aggrupation. But there is a difference, for the former wishes to underline the dynamicity of culture, a quality that is not sufficiently found in the latter. It is a difference, in a sense, of product and process, of culture as the life-ways of and for a people.

THE SPECIFICITY OF CULTURE

What makes a culture specific? What distinguishes cultures from each other? The world of culture is different from the world of physical nature where distinctiveness is more easily located. Nitrites and sulfates belong to chemical families even while each specific compound differs from the others. Chromosomes XX and XY share the same function of determining gender, but with a world of difference. Human blood is not indiscriminately generic; RH+ and RH- factors preclude certain bondings between specific types. For the empirical sciences, determining the specificity of types is quite straightforward.

The case of culture is somewhat more complex. As with most human sciences, determining what differentiates units and groups (in this particular case, culture) irreducibly from each other is highly problematic. It is not the particularity as such which is problematic, since on that a whole inventory could be constructed. It is rather the radical or irreducible particularity which is theoretically more difficult to define.

The specificity of cultures is not primarily due to the artifacts or other units of culture, not even to distinctive emphases and blending, but according to the general view, to their configuration or constellation.⁴ It is its particular

⁴Cf., e.g., John Carroll. "Philippine Values in Context." pp. 34-46 in Richard Schwenk (ed.) *Moral Recovery and the Democratic Vision*. Manila: SEED Center, 1989. "What distinguishes one culture from another normally is the *priority* assigned to a particular value, how strongly and in what circumstances a value is expected to be actualized, and the manner in which one value relates to another." Americans value *pakikisama*, but the reluctance to give offense may take backseat to "getting the job done." Filipinos value efficiency, but will more often not sacrifice it for *pakikisama*." (p. 36) Values are general to Filipinos on the average, meaning not all Filipinos, with differences between male female, ethnic group, social class and so on.

arrangement which lends to culture a structure, dynamics and hence definable identity. Nativeness or indigeneity is to culture what identity or individuality is to human persons. Although all cultures belong to the human family, single cultures retain their uniqueness within that community. It is their particularities, idiosyncrasies if you wilt which mark them out from each other.

THE EMIC-ETIC DISTINCTION

One way of conceptualizing the unique traits of a culture is with the help of the emic-etic distinction. In linguistics a phonetic system is one which documents all meaningful units of sound (*phonemes*) present in a language, analyzes them and then integrates them into a general framework that spreads over as many languages as possible. Cross-cultural research has transferred this to mean documenting principles which are valid in all cultures and establishing theoretical frameworks useful in comparing human behavior in various cultures.

More particularly, a phonemic analysis documents sounds which a specific language finds meaningful. In cross-cultural research the transferred meaning is the documentation of valid principles of behavior within a given culture, focusing on what that people considers as familiar and important to itself. To do this the tools and frameworks used must be indigenous, not foreign.

For example, a phonemic system will have to include an initial "ng" sound, an initial "l" sound, and an initial "r" sound since these are important in at least one language in the world. An English phonemic system will have the "l" and "r" but not the "ng" phonemes. Japanese does not have "l" and "r" phonemes. Pacific island cultures have the "ng" phoneme.

Accordingly, cross-cultural research distinguishes between etic and emic goals (from phonetic and phonemic analysis respectively). The emics and etics of linguistics, transferred to research in cross-cultural interaction thus point to what is present and absent, what is meaningful and abstruse, between cultures. It gives special attention to items which may be common in one system but not in another. It also compares what can be systematized into larger and more integrative frameworks. One practical implication is to remind expatriates that highly important concepts are likely to have emic and etic aspects. Keeping this in mind will put them on the alert; they can expect such differences rather than be constantly surprised and upset of them.⁵

⁵Brislin illustrates the difference in the uses and care of cattle between Europe and North America with the Masai of East Africa. The etics are the provision of milk, fertilizers, and manpower for the care of cattle. The North American and European emics are the following: cattle are raised primarily for meat and for sale; they graze over large areas; there is an emphasis on both quantity and quality; they are one sign among many of wealth and prestige; the experience with conservation is utilized. On the other hand Masai emics are the following: cattle are not primarily used for meat and not generally raised for sale; the stress is on quantity; they are the major sign of wealth and prestige; the struggle to maintain limited herds allows them no chance to think about conservation. Cf. Brislin, pp. 84-85.

CULTURE AS A VALUE

Culture can be regarded as a value, and its value is premised on the inevitable absoluteness of the particular. This principle of the particular has been affirmed in different ways by different thinkers working out of different contexts. It could be shown, for example, that what we have here is actually an old philosophical issue dislodged from its highly idealist contexts into more concrete settings. Rather than review that jaded debate in philosophy, the same point can be urged by referring to a quite disparate suggestion coming out from another field. What I have in mind is a study of the *stages of faith* where James Fowler points out that the absolute or transcendent never discloses itself or comes to expression except in particular historical moments and communities.⁶

The question of particularity is important in view of the fact that any faith tends to make universal claims for truth and validity for itself. Indeed particular faith communities often go further and explicitly claim exclusive possession of the truth. Philosophers grappling with the relationship between the universal and the particular have sometimes dreamt of that ideal philosophical community which could "generate criteria, independent of any tradition, but which the truth claims of each and all can be tested, evaluated and generalized in relation to presumably more universal standards." They have generally failed.

In the end, Fowler argues, one can only take his tradition as seriously as he can, looking carefully at those moments in his tradition which bear the quality of ultimacy, notwithstanding its particularity. These are the moments or instances in which the unconditioned has come to expression in the particular tradition. The critical point is the Absolute, not absolutes (whatever it is that expresses the Absolute); the content, not the forms; the core and not the superstructures.

Note that Fowler speaks of faith without restricting his conclusions to religious faith. What he does say about faith in the Absolute can thus be made to apply in analogous ways to other realities. To my mind they can also apply, for example, to the Unconditionality of the Human (in culture), or the Unconditionality of the Ought (in morality), or the Unconditioned Holy (in religion).

What every effort at inculturation implicitly appeals to is the value of the particular, i.e., despite its particularity it can not but be the incarnation of the Absolute, indeed the only way that the Absolute can become available to human beings. Absolute Value, in our present context, can and is only made known through particular, inevitably cultural, values. Culture, in other words, is a value because it is one of the principal ways, if not the only way, for humans to be human. Chronologically and philosophically culture

⁶James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith* (The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning). San Francisco: Harper & Row. 1981.

is the first teacher of what it means to be human in all concreteness and how to be such in direct and specific ways. Hence the necessity of inculturation is premised on the value of the individuality and uniqueness of cultures *qua* cultures.

INCULTURATION AS A PROBLEM

In the context especially of ex-colonies of the Third World, inculturation has become a matter not only of national identity but even of survival, particularly where their cultural contact with the outside has been less than agreeable. Resenting the loss of an original and integral individuality, entire societies are feeling the need to recover their identities and retrieve the uniqueness of their cultures after centuries of alienation due to domination or even suppression.

Among the many factors defining cultural identity religion is a prime example and it can serve to illustrate the implications of inculturation. Theological inculturation accepts in all seriousness the fact that the most important concepts of the diverse cultures within the Catholic unity do have emic and etic aspects. Indeed, as an advocacy enterprise inculturation cannot but focus on such emics of the particular culture. In fact the concentration of inculturation in its initial stages has been, as expected, less on the culture-common and more (sometimes exclusively) on the culture-specific, due in no small measure to the peculiarities of the "third culture" (the hybrid product of the encounter between the catechumenal and missionary cultures).

Inculturation can be seen as a religious problem not only in the sense that it presents human concerns for theological interpretation; the very nature and function of theology itself may come under review. Theology will have made a significant contribution even if all it did were to evaluate the processes of previous contact in order to render theological judgment. Beyond the historical review, however, theology is caged upon to take other steps, e.g., proposing criteria for more acceptable interactions between faith and culture, establishing the substance of the dialogue, anticipating negative consequences and so on. More significantly, it may call for the revaluation of the inculturation concern not only as an adjunct of the theological sciences, but as a mode itself of doing theology today. It is more and more in this sense that the task of inculturation in view of the fact of acculturation is being understood today.

What has been said of theological inculturation can definitely be said, *mutatis mutandis*, of other factors of cultural identity, such as language, and law. To say that the concern of theological inculturation is to review and examine aspects of the bonding between the religious tradition within Filipino culture and the tradition of Catholic theology received from the West is to imply that acculturation is basically the welding or wedding of traditions both as a religious and as a secular process. The lessons learned from secular inculturation can be applied to religious inculturation; equally the lessons

learned from theological inculturation can be applied to philosophical inculturation.

INDIGENOUS AND CONTEXTUAL

It must be admitted that at this juncture, inculturation is more often a state of mind than a rigidly defined methodology. The field being relatively new, one must tolerate a fair amount of creativity and flexibility as investigators of all types grope to design suitable methods of investigation.⁷ My limited experience tells me, however, that methods must be designed in conjunction with the field of investigation since it is the nature of the issue itself which dictates its methods. Inculturation being a focus on aspects of cultural particularity, and culture being a complex of various particularities, methodologies must perforce be as particular as the items investigated. One must concentrate, therefore, not on *the* method of inculturation but on methodical inculturation, i.e., the focus must be on particular rather than all-encompassing methods.

My own proposal for methodical inculturation in the area of philosophical and theological inculturation consists basically of a two-pronged approach to the culture issue. Those prongs are indigenization and contextualization. Granted, one or the other must and will predominate depending on the concern or specific objective in view. Still inculturation as such must embody these two dimensions. Indigenization and contextualization are distinct from each other since they emphasize different aspects of culture; but they must somehow converge with each other since they emphasize conjoined aspects, in fact the essential poles of culture. Without this complementarity, inculturation is bound to be sterile, irresponsible and futile. To further underline their inseparability one should speak more precisely of inculturation-as-indigenization and inculturation-as-contextualization. For purposes of economy, however, they shall be designated more simply as indigenization and contextualization.⁸

INCULTURATION AS INDIGENIZATION

Indigenization is inculturation as it focuses on the "substantive," "constitutive," or "structural" emics of a particular culture. Invariably, the first concern is with the identification of those aspects which are unique to the

⁷Cf. Rogelia Pe-pua Ang *Pagtatanong-tanong: Katutubong Metodo ng Pananaliksik*, pp. 416-432 in A. Aganon and M.A. David (ed.), *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*. Manila: National Book Store. 1985. Cf also Timothy Church, *Filipino Personality* (A Review of Research and Writings) (Monograph Series No. 6). Manila: De la Salle University Press. 1986.

⁸Most authors make a distinction only between inculturation and contextualization. Because the difference is seen as one between culture and context principally, the content of the discussion tends to subsume concerns of indigenization under inculturation. While this may be valid generally, my misgiving is that this tends to diffuse the notion of indigenization, diminishing the force it needs to have in certain contexts.

culture. Another concern is the integration of other elements, deriving from whatever source, unto this foundation and base. Still another concern is the development of the original base in line with modern needs and pressures.

Indigenization must distinguish between *material* and *immaterial* culture, taken in their customary meanings. Material culture is the mass of artifacts and the technology developed to create them. Immaterial culture would refer to the human elements having to do basically with the mind, heart, psyche or spirit of the culture in question. With regard to material culture, there will foreseeably be less and less space for indigenization. That is to say, with the rapid growth of the international community, native materials may continue to impose certain restrictions, but technology as a whole will yield more and more to a certain leveling, even if this will hardly ever be complete. There will always be space and meaning, on the other hand, to the indigenization of immaterial culture. The primary matter of immaterial culture (conceptions of nature, the world and so forth for philosophy, law, and art for example, and religious experience for theology) will always remain.

It is too facile to dismiss this primary form of inculturation as nothing but extreme nationalism or *nativism*. The quest for the native or indigenous, the search for that which is deepest and inalienable in one's "nativity" is a legitimate one. Experience shows how, despite transmigration and even emigration, the native never fully loses his *nativity* - that complex of influence deriving from his milieu of birth. If nativity is regarded as a symbolic rather than geographic locus (granting that in many instances the geographic site is itself the symbol) its significance is that it seems extremely difficult to lose as a fundamental quality of individuals and groups. It stands to reason, if this is needed the case, that it defines the bearer at the roots of his identity. He must, at the very least, come to terms with it.

As a process indigenization is not without its paradoxes. If a culture is native by definition, what does indigenization mean for the native? If an original culture has been lost, can it ever be recovered, and up to what point? If culture is assimilative and grows principally by borrowing, what point is there in the retrieval of the anachronistic or the insistence on indigenization? There are no easy answers to these and other issues, but they are the crux of the inculturation project.⁹

Strategy-wise, indigenization can be viewed either as indigenization from within or indigenization from without.¹⁰ The latter is a form of inculturation whereby elements which are initially foreign are so integrated

⁹In his last chapter Eilers raises similar questions, but within the perspective of communication between cultures.

¹⁰Virgilio Enriquez distinguishes indigenization in the sense of source and direction of culture flow. Hence indigenization from within takes culture as source, whereas indigenization from without takes culture as target. See his *Filipino Psychology in the Third World*, Quezon City: Akademya ng Sikolohiyang Pilipino. 1989. esp. pp. 22-27.

into the culture that they become part of the culture itself. They are "rooted" or "re-rooted" (de Mesa), which is to say, fully received, appropriated and owned by the host culture. On the other hand, the former is usually considered as preferable because it is more native, i.e., it takes actual roots or elements which are peculiar to the culture and promotes their development and evolution. Since no one culture today carries within itself all the elements necessary to survive and grow in an international community, both strategies must be employed. The impression is wrong that indigenization must result in staticity, isolationism and nativism. On the contrary it is dynamic, indigenization is an activity which demands a high degree of concentration, focus and critique as it sorts, rejects and assimilates elements of both nativity and foreignness.

The paradoxes can be seen even better when one considers the agents of indigenization. Logically, it would seem, one can only speak of indigenization if one does not belong to the culture; presumably, indigenization is only a task for the stranger. And yet, the expectation that the emic be *ipso facto* specific to the native does not prove true; the native does not automatically take an emic view of his culture. Historical nativity will be the native's and always the native's; a "moral nativity" is possible, however, for anyone who chooses to be "reborn" is part of this culture. Indeed, following the logic at its reverse, indigenization involves some kind of "exculturation" or "alienation" in turn, since one cannot appreciate one's indigeneity unless one has also been able to see it from the outside. Unless one has arrived at a knowing liberated from one's cultural idiosyncrasies and historical particularities, one cannot be truly enabled to reinculture oneself, to become truly and consciously indigenous.

But how can a native, to be more indigenous, take an etic view of his own culture? The fact of cultural alienation indicates the possibility of its opposite. Indigenization, especially from the inside, is a process of cultural recovery which is both conscious and critical. Total recovery of original culture is highly improbable; any reflection on the culture is itself a transformation of the culture. Total recovery of original is perhaps not even desirable, for one cannot turn one's back on time. Authentic indigenization, by recognizing that the cultural core is no longer pure not even whole, goes beyond sheer nativism or an unthinking nationalism, even though it resembles them as conscious and systematic attempts to revive or perpetuate aspects of original culture.

In essence, these extremes reject the possibility and value of an etic view of culture, blinded as they are by their nativity and shackled as they are by their ethnocentrism. Culturality characterizes all thinking, feeling and behaving, and this holds not only for the native but also for the foreigner. But it is one thing to see value in affirming the native and another to raise the native to the absolute, affirming it no matter what its certain faults, aberrations perhaps or manifest inadequacies are to the present. The native was never meant to be a prisoner of his nativity, never meant to be definitively determined by it. Though permanent, nativity has its principal value only as a point of departure. One demonstration of that freedom is the determination

itself of the indigenous. The judgment of whether something is indigenous or not, particularly in a changing context, is beyond doubt an internal matter, a decision only the culture-bearers themselves are entitled and competent to make. The question to consider is whether they do so out of historical determinism or in freedom.

INCULTURATION AS CONTEXTUALIZATION

For its part, inculturation as contextualization is a process wherein the emphasis is on the "processual," "developmental" or "generative" emics of culture. It focuses on the creative changing of the culture's identity and hence on the temporal or historical contexts of culture. Quite often it refers to the renewal of existing structures and redirection of mentalities to meet the existential demands of relative modernity. If one wills, contextualization is the responding to the facticity of nativity as context. As in indigenization, this response can be at the level either of material or immaterial culture. Evidently, context has to be understood beyond the social-scientific senses to include the broad philosophical concept of situatedness as determinate or structured.

Whereas indigenization focuses on the "structural emics" of a culture, contextualization focuses on the "historical emics" of the same culture. Both are concerned with the specificity of a culture, but in different ways. One emphasizes nativeness or indigeneity (of identity); the other uniqueness and particularity (of context). Another way of putting it is to say that indigenization has a symbolic "local" focus or reference point whereas contextualization has a symbolic "temporal" focus or reference point. Indigenization emphasizes the "essential is-ness," the identity structure of the culture; contextualization stresses the "evolved is-ness," the identity dynamics of the culture. Contextualization marks more what the culture is here and now as a result of changes already undergone and changes yet impending. The contextualization process is not unlike identifying where an individual person is at present in view of the child he once was and the old man he will soon be. In more classical terms, indigenization focuses on the essential identity of a culture; contextualization on its existential identity.

The contexts under consideration here do not exclude local or geographic meanings, but they refer primarily to situations created and sustained by human agents. In that sense they are products of a history and determinants of history itself. Such contexts would for example be the political ordering of a society, its economic organization, its religious affiliation, its social patterns and so on. Contextualization means regarding human behavior within the fabric of such networks rather than as items of behavior abstracted from every historical mooring.¹¹

¹¹Despite their formal character, mathematical equations can also be used to make the same point. A sum of, for example, 3, is not arrived at, retrospectively, through only one single operation. There are potentially infinite ways of arriving at such a sum, as for example, $1+1+1$, or 15 divided by 5×1 , or $A[(B+C) \times (D-E)]$ and so on. Provided, however, that the sum is constant, provided that certain givens have been determined, and provided that some procedures have been fixed and stabilized, the total process, variables notwithstanding, will have assumed a certain definable configuration. Analogously, we might say of cultural value that the sum is the Universal, the givens

It must be pointed out that both indigenization and contextualization are processes which do not occur except as ends and goals of persons and societies. They are what human beings do with and through culture. They cannot remain static; they expand the more they are realized. Hence, despite the different yet interrelated perspective, the divergent and yet interacting dynamics, one must never lose sight of the fact that inculturation as indigenization and inculturation as contextualization are human goals, objectives and processes. There are concerns about freedom versus imposition, consciousness versus automatism, responsibility versus abdication. They are, to connect with another concern, highly moral concerns. Hence they are exercises not only in essential but existential authenticity.¹²

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY

For purposes of immaterial inculturation yet another distinction can be made, one which we shag roughly label as primary and secondary inculturation. Indigenization and contextualization focus on alienation and incongruence as well as imposition and impropriety. Primary and secondary inculturation consider culture more the intensification or deepening of the processes of indigenization and contextualization by emphasizing core as against peripheral inculturation. These admit that some indigenization and some contextualization have in fact occurred but also contend that these have not gone far enough. Primary and secondary thus have not only descriptive and chronological nuances but also normative and evaluation connotations. They have to do with the acceptability of the given results of the inculturation process too.¹³

From another viewpoint the stress in the distinction is more on the functional than on the structural, although the latter is by no means excluded. It is also more intentional rather than merely purposive, more conscious and selective rather than merely reactive and adaptive. The ideological problem concentrates on the problem of actual but inadequate inculturation. Which means that some inculturation, both indigenous and contextual has *de facto* occurred but is judged as ideologically unacceptable, at least not without serious qualifications. The primary inculturation is in

the cultural experiences, the procedures the cultural dynamics. The sum may be reached in more or less direct or devious ways, through simple or highly complex operations; but it is never reached, even formally, except through such particular operations. It is this combination of particulars which distinguishes cultures from each other.

¹²To make these abstract concepts more concrete one could say, for example the emphasis on re-rooting the Gospel provides an illustration of indigenization. See Jose de Mesa, *In Solidarity with the Culture* (Studies in Theological Re-rooting) (Maryhill Studies 4), Quezon City: Maryhill School of Theology. 1987. On the other hand, certain critiques of Filipino morality would be exercises more in contextualization. See Vitaliano Gorospe, *Filipino Values Revisited* Manila: National Book Store. 1988. Contextualists are and always have been well represented; the indigenists have always been in the minority, as they are even today.

¹³See Anthony Gittins, *Gifts and Strangers* (New York: Paulist Press) 1989, pp. 37-49, on primary and secondary socialization, for an attempt to wrestle with the same problem with a different tool and out of different interests.

need of a secondary inculturation; the colonial reflexes must be replaced with more autonomous responses, the imposed must give way to voluntary appropriation. Secondary and subsequent inculturation demands a careful review of primary or antecedent inculturation.

Thus, to use Christianization as an example, primary inculturation or acculturation becomes the prolegomenon to the secondary inculturation process, which is the evangelization, Christification and ecclesialization of culture. The relation between primary and secondary inculturation should not be seen as a rupture (though that occurs on occasion) but as a continuity along a spectrum, since at some future time what has been already been judged as secondary can in its turn become primary in relation to subsequent inculturation. Theologically, the task of transformation of the culture with the values of the Gospel, the rendering explicit the presence of Christ, and the greater convergence with Christian theology are never definitive. In theological language, culture, like the Church, is *semper reformanda*, always in need of renewal.

It is understandable that Christian colonies emerging from minority should emphasize the native and autochthonous, the revival and retrieval of the native historical; in that sense primary inculturation is a natural theological concern. But theology also emphasizes the need for a secondary inculturation, one that extends the national history beyond itself, one that pushes the community outside of itself. Primary inculturation accents the value of the particular as a manifestation of the universal; secondary inculturation accents the value of the universal as the meaningful context of the particular. Seen from the viewpoint not of chronology but importance, primary becomes secondary and secondary primary. Primary inculturation means reaching to the essence and core of Christianity; secondary means expressing that in ways which suit the community's sense of itself and of its times. Once that has been grasped, it becomes clear why Christianity must insist that its understanding of inculturation is distinct from similar views.

FROM ABOVE AND BELOW

The distinction between culture and society is methodologically significant for yet another reason. Culture is bound to its society; it expresses society; it motivates society. Culture, therefore, never becomes autonomous of its society but is forever dependent on it. Without a sustaining society culture is reduced to a historical artifact and record; it dies. Inculturation, then, cannot prescind from a discussion of the concrete society that must ultimately undertake it. Inculturation is ultimately a discourse about society itself.

The social groups which constitute society are more often heterogeneous than not. They share the facticities of territory, language, race and others; they are also divided by the same. Culture cannot but reflect both those commonalities and divisions in its material and immaterial expres-

sions. Without entering into detail, one or the other example can serve as illustration of the implications this observation might hold.

Social class has always been a constant feature of both society and culture. One of the modern issues today is who "owns" culture? Which group can claim that its culture is "the" culture which must be considered general to all or dominant above others? On what should the claim be based? Racial superiority? Demographic majority? Control of the social institutions? Predominance of contribution to material culture? Gender and class?

If there is anything that should be clear from the previous discussions, it is that inculturation is not a neutral process. It is motivated by certain choices, propelled by certain advocacies. There are hidden premises which come to the surface when one asks, who is the native? what is the context? Hence it is imperative for inculturation to be self-conscious and critical of itself and its own projects.

Those questions, however, need not all be decided here since they are questions for the concrete social groupings to discuss and agree upon. They are the tasks of culture; they are the reasons why culture is what it is. They are the platform convictions which are the bases of the culture even as they remain its creations. They will remain for as long as societies create culture.

For our purposes, and focusing only on social class, my conviction is that inculturation belongs to the whole of society, to all its classes. As noted in the process of indigenization, there are the aims of identifying the native, consolidating the native, developing the native. Surely each and every class will find among those goals one that it can claim as its designated task. There are periods in history, indeed, where the accents must be stronger on certain groups and aspects than others.

In the Philippine case, my contention is that authentic inculturation cannot ignore the majority poor as its chief responsibility and resource. They are the ones who have endured basically untouched through the most visible transitions of elite culture. It is this majority who will survive to carry the basic traits of the Filipino culture beyond all economic, political, social and religious rearrangings. Without them there is and will be no meaningful Filipino culture to speak of. As the principal bearers of the culture, it is on them rather than on the middle and upper classes that the future culture of the country will hinge. Inculturation must begin, be sustained, and be authenticated from below.

To say this is not to say that other members of the culture have no place in the realization of inculturation. By definition all classes are dependent on each other and that there are tasks which others can fulfill better than others. For academicians whose specializations remind them that labor is divided, the need for interdisciplinarity is even more urgent.

PROCEDURES AND TOOLS

As more and more natives accept the necessity and value of inculturation, they will naturally inquire into how indigenization and contextualization can be implemented in their specific discipline, e.g. in philosophy and theology. Even among those working in other fields but sharing similar interests, a plurality of views and opinions is supposed to exist regarding what inculturation is, what they are expected to do, and how they should go about in order to achieve those expectations.

It has already been argued above that indigenization and contextualization cannot be carried out in the same way in different fields. They must have differentiated procedures and correspondingly differentiated tools. The procedures and tools of inculturation in scriptural translation will not be the same for liturgical adaptation, and both will differ from those of moral application or pastoral accommodation.¹⁴ Furthermore, granted that the deliberate attempt at inculturation may conceivably obey a dominant method, it does not follow that the consequent strategies and tactics will be uniformed for the whole field of operation. The success of a general method does not automatically imply that procedures which have succeeded in certain areas can be directly applicable to others. A shift in the subject of investigation may require new procedures adapted to the new topics. From my own work, techniques that worked for certain subject areas, e.g., *loob*, may not work for others.¹⁵

All this does not mean that inculturation should be totally esoteric. There will always be some similarity in methods, particularly in their formal aspects. Broadly, the method which I continue to employ is one that I have loosely designated (for lack of a better term) as thematic socio-cultural exegesis. The term "exegesis" suggests some functions as found in scriptural studies. That can be illustrated in its analysis, e.g., of terms, themes, contexts and even authorship.

SEMANTIC OR LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

In identifying the key concepts of a culture in a given area (e.g., morality) one primary resource is language and even more specifically, words. In any culture some words are loaded with more meaning than others, i.e., in the totality of thought of a culture, there are certain words with a greater "substantive" and "functional" weight.

¹⁴For various attempts at inculturation in the Philippines, see the bibliography in Jimmy Belita, *From Logos to Diwa. A Synthesis of Theological Research in Catholic Graduate Schools in the Philippines (1965-1985)*. Manila: De la Salle University. 1986.

¹⁵For example, the tools developed by this author in *Loob: the Filipino Within* (Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1989) may not be effective for the investigation of Filipino values without modifications.

A large part of scriptural exegesis has to do with language. It is tasked with identifying meanings associated with certain concepts in Scripture. Moral exegesis adopts a similar goal: its task is to identify the moral vocabulary, if such one exists. This would mean collating terms which bear, directly or indirectly, on moral significations. This is inculturation as indigenization. In the most fundamental sense it is affirming the subjecthood of the culture, recognizing it as someone, giving it a voice, enabling it for dialogue. It is done concretely when the culture is provided with language, supplied with its very own words rather than with those of another culture.

Exegesis is quite aware that a concept may be expressed in words which may not seem to be immediately related to it. Consequently and as a matter of course, it also takes into account related terms that may not (but only at first glance) bear on the concept. Corresponding moral exegesis must follow this procedure; it must context the overtly moral vocabulary within the totality of the language as it manifests and expresses morality.¹⁶ This is inculturation as contextualization. It recognizes very seriously not only the specific meanings of words as cultural creations; it also emphasizes the fact that they are products of history, the full range of their meaning unexplainable except by reference to the creators' *Sitz-im-Leben* and the concept's *Redaktionsgeschichte*.

It should go without saying that the scientific value, reception among scholars, and general utility of this moral vocabulary will depend on the validity and correctness of the moral exegesis. What has not been said, but has always been assumed gratuitously, is that such an indigenous and contextual exegesis need not be attempted, inasmuch as the Western exegesis has universal validity. My preoccupation with moral vocabulary as prolegomena is based on the fact that such a wide-ranging and thorough native exegesis has hardly been attempted, despite its necessity. Granting that the Western exegesis has universal validity, one cannot rule out aprioristically that an accurate native exegesis could not possibly have equally universal validity.

THEMATIC EXEGESIS

Linguistic analysis, however, is only one element and one tool of socio cultural exegesis. Another concern of exegesis is to thematize its findings, to bind certain concepts together insofar as they relate to a more general theme. Moral exegesis attempts something similar when it not only identifies the moral vocabulary but also repropose certain concepts as agglutinating or

¹⁶Cf. Dionisio Miranda, *Hindi Kusang-loob* (Diwa 1990). One could say that the notion of "moral voluntariness" is a result of Western moral exegesis. That notion, via simple translation, would have resulted in the Tagalog term *kusang-loob*. But mere translation would never have drawn the native moral thinking into dialogue. On the other hand, as exegesis of the native ethos yields not only the notion of *kusang-loob*; it engages the matrix of the concept and commits a significant part of the ethical system into play. Translation succeeds only in bringing forth the etic significance for human acts. Analysis, however, succeeds in bringing out their emic differences as concepts.

synthesizing. It does so not necessarily by recreating the language altogether; it can also be done simply by retooling it for specific discourses. This is the case in moral discourse when, from among the mass of morally significant terms those are isolated which seem suitable for formal discussion. Assigned semi-technical meanings, they can then serve as tools for formal ethical discourse. An alternative is to redefine those already in actual use, those which already function, to convey new meanings (*e.g.*, *pagpapakatao* for ethics, *loob* for conscience, *kusa* for voluntary, *sadya* for intentional, *buti* instead of *halaga* for value, *dapat* instead of *batas* for moral law, and so on).

In the development of such a vocabulary, note that the objective is not so much to facilitate a dialogue with the West as to enable an eventual dialogue with the ordinary and non-academic members of the home culture. Thus, allied with the scientific interest is the practical concern that the terms be recognizable and communicable to the local culture-bearers, the common *tao*. The twin concerns are often happily met by focusing on the original meaning and import of the concepts behind most common terms rather than constructing an artificial vocabulary.

Stated otherwise, inculturation's emphasis on language is due to reasons that are both philosophical and strategic: philosophical because there are few things as indigenous and yet as contextual as a culture's native tongue; strategic because there are few things as readily available to all for common discussion as language itself, whether as content or as means. Language is in fact the quintessential avenue to cultural understanding.¹⁷

CONTEXT

Linguistic analysis and semantic development need verification in another sense: they must constantly be referred back to their contexts.¹⁸ A more complete moral exegesis would have to describe the ethos from as many indicators and as many disciplines as possible. Examples would be local wisdom as found in proverbs and sayings, morality plays, political drama, folk literature,¹⁹ economic history, religious art²⁰ and many others. These too must be subjected to analytical perspectives beyond the customary and conventional if they are to be meaningful for morality and ethics. Interdisciplinarity implies evolving a variety of ponding tools.

¹⁷Cf. Gittins, *Gifts and Strangers*, pp. 56-63 on language, thinking and evangelization.

¹⁸Cf. *e.g.*, Vicente Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism* (Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule). Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press. 1988.

¹⁹Francisco Demetrio, for example, takes a look at some values proposed for emphasis by the program of value education in five Filipino epics. Cf. "Humanity in Philippine Epics," pp. 332-383 in his *Myths and Symbols Philippines*. Manila: National Book Store. 1990).

²⁰Cf. Soledad Reyes (ed.) *Reading Popular Culture*. Quezon City: Office of Research and Publications, ADMU, 1991. pp. 147-156.

Ethos and ethics are systems. As such they should be studied systematically, i.e., in a wholistic and integrated way. For all that, systems do consist of many pieces which hang together, of diverse perspectives that intersect each other. One possibility is to work towards the systemic view by first looking at specific components, always conscious that these are parts rather than the whole. It is precisely for this reason that the method is better characterized as thematic (rather than systematic) socio-cultural exegesis. The metaphor of the mosaic has its uses in rendering this idea, provided one remembers that culture is more integrated than any mosaic can ever be. Having determined the field of investigation, one then exercises sustained and systematic pressure upon it.

Morality and ethics are wholes in yet another sense, i.e., they are part of larger units. Thus the moral vocabulary with its concepts and themes must be examined in their cultural and social settings. I challenge the assumption that we have done with the theoretical analysis of the culture. I believe, for example, that the Filipino ethos has not yet been satisfactorily "exegeted". The importance of correct analyses does not have to be argued. Indeed, before an ethics can be proposed, the actual ethos must first be defined. For one to consider the ought, the ideal or the imperative, one must initially define the given, that is, the indicative. Without this thorough-going understanding, any critique is bound to be misdirected and ineffective. This may explain in part why, for example, most of our social reform programs have failed. If theoretical analysis is to lead to more critical performance, a fresh understanding of the value ethos must occur before actual values can be realigned. For spiritual and moral transformation both value analysis and value formation must work in tandem.

INCULTURATION AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY

To talk of inculturation in generic terms is to lose oneself in vacuous statements and empty theorizing. Inculturation is not an abstract idea; it is a practical process that occurs in the concrete. The validity of its strategies and efficiency of its tools can be tested only within particular contexts. There is no such thing as inculturation *per se* but only the inculturation of concrete aspects of culture. Accordingly one must begin by aiming at a particular culture and zooming in on particular elements of that culture.

Since part of contextualization is the identification of one's social position, let me state that my interest in Filipino culture, though general, is professionally limited. Academically, my particular interest is moral theology; the specific cultural processes and interactions that interest me are those which bear on the field of ethics in both the philosophical and theological variants. Edging towards a more relevant moral theology it became evident that inculturation cannot be content with merely comparing and contrasting the Catholic moral theology received from the West with the ethical tradition(s) of the local culture. To be truly relevant, ethics must focus on the moral emics

of the Filipino, i.e., the praxis of the culture issuing from the being-emics and context-emics of Filipinos.

This can be specified even further by saying that my concern is rooted in the area of fundamental and/or general moral theology. It is not primarily concerned with the concrete and specific issues which comprise the content of special moral theology. There are two basic reasons for this.

a) I am convinced that the state of development of moral theology in the Philippines demands at least two types of ethicists. There will always be a need for casuists who will attend to the urgent problems of Filipino culture and society. Quick responses are required for the immediate guidance of people caught in contemporary moral dilemmas. On the other hand, there will always be a need too for theoreticians who will engage in basic research and fundamental reflection on issues which undergird such problems since these will still be there long after the immediate and particular crises have passed. Such commitment looks to the long-term and will appear to have little immediate relevance.

b) It seems to me that beyond addressing concrete and pressing modern-day issues, we must also begin to look to the intractable fundamental problems of moral responding. When highly particular discussions no longer lead to light and solution the conclusion may be that the point has been reached where a refocusing can no longer be avoided. Indeed it may even be necessary not only to adopt different perspectives but to reshape the very issues themselves.

Within fundamental moral theology one is embarrassed by the choice of starting points, since there are so many. On one hand the choice is critical for the imprint it stamps on subsequent investigations as well as the total project. On the other hand the field is so vast and unexplored that it probably makes little difference which fundamental concept is considered first. As a matter of course any major ethical topic will inevitably bear on others in good time.

INCULTURATION OF FILIPINO VALUES

Various prolegomena will have to be articulated before one can undertake the comprehensive inculturation of moral theology. My work previous to this concentrated on the meaning and activity of the moral subject, convinced of its cardinal role particularly in the indigenization of Filipino ethics. The exploration of Filipino values would be a fitting continuation of that quest, one more indigenous prolegomenon.

By itself, of course, value is without doubt an important part of general ethical discourse; indeed, it is the topic most often discussed in the consideration of any local ethical system. It is one of the things that most people point to as distinctive of the culture. While all these make it a good choice for direct

investigation, there is a reason for taking a good look at it at this particular point. *Loob* is an important concept, but it is a formal one; a discussion of value would provide it with more specific content. That is in fact what I attempt in *Buting Pinoy*.²¹ Without going into detail, some points of methodological interest would be the following.

1. Note that the "raw material" or initial content is data from the social sciences regarding Filipino values. It is important to emphasize that we are dealing with the findings of contemporary social scientists (basically literature from sociology, psychology, anthropology, etc.) in the full awareness that such data very often do not include other important aspects which would provide a fuller understanding of Filipino values (e.g., researches into their precolonial roots, an analysis of their ethnic origins in Malay, Chinese or Hispanic acculturation, their historical transformation through socio-political revolutions, their religious reconstructions, etc.). Even within the restricted parameters of those fields we are also aware that writings on values have been faulted regarding their validity, adequacy and significance.²²

All these would seem to argue against the use of such data in the attempt at an exhaustive or critical analysis of the whole Filipino value system. Still, the mass of studies does constitute a good starting point for a reasonably critical assessment of the nature and dynamics of Filipino values if one hedges these with appropriate provisos (e.g., focusing on general features and deliberately obscuring the peculiarities specific to major regional groups such as Ilokano and Bisaya as well as, *a fortiori* other smaller subcultures).

2. To a lesser degree the history of philosophy constitutes another resource, certainly not for content (or what is indigenization all about?) as rather for its formal or methodological contributions. In essence crucial questions of philosophy are pressed on the social-scientific material. Are these true values? Which of them are key values? Which of these key values are truly operant? How do they generate other values? How do they relate to each other? How do they, together, constitute the ethos and ethics of the Filipino? The objective therefore is a critical rereading, or a reconstruction upon a philosophical base. Filipino values can then be reread in their new meanings and directions in the context of an indigenous philosophical ethics. Theology will complete the review evidently under theological formalities, towards a contextualized moral theology.

Subsidiary to the method are features of linguistic or semantic analysis. Within lexical domains such analysis aims to identify and delineate poles and ramifications of meaning insofar as values are concerned. Modifications, however, are introduced as needed, e.g., linguistic analysis is supplemented

²¹Dionisio Miranda, *Buting Pinoy* (Probe Essays into Moral Value as Filipino). Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1992. (In process of publication).

²²Cf. Pe-pua again, plus the surveys in Church, *op. cit.*

by revernacularization or reconstruction of the vernacular, and lexical domains are conducted into socio-moral domains.²³

3. In advocacies of value-change, what is really being asked of us? Is it a change so radical that we become completely different from what we (culturally) are? That conclusion does not seem to be only a mistaken impression; it is often what radicals and reformers ask unwitting (and sometimes witlessly). But is that desirable? And if so, is it possible?

Such a complete change, even were it desirable, would not seem possible in the sense described, since one can hardly divest oneself of culture any more than one can renounce one's identity. Culture, especially the indigenous, is as intimate as skin; it is not like a vestment that can be casually disrobed. Such a change is not desirable for we would no longer even recognize who we are, deprived as we are of our history. The values we had at other times cannot be the values we have today, that is clear, but to disown them completely is to cut ourselves from the reservoirs of memory, without which meaning has no roots. One cannot disown identity nor rewrite the past thus; one cannot so change as to be fully liberated of culture and history. But there is a change that is possible and desirable: it is to recover the original self and reshape it in more authentic ways. That is radicality in its true sense: to return to the roots of being and existence, to recover the originality of culture and the creativity of history.

CONCLUSION

The assertions of the foreign journalist James Fallows, the report of the Shahani Commission, the observations of Cardinal Sin, the complaints of writer Teodoro Benigno and many more lend urgency to the task of reviewing our culture.²⁴ There is no disputing the assertion that the Philippines is the "sick man of Asia" nor ignoring the point that moral poverty or decay has been identified as our social cancer. But where should such knowledge, apart from an enervating self-flagellation, bring us? Further, if we grant as accurate the Shahani list of Filipino strengths and weaknesses, is this not an invitation to take a closer look at its supposed main-springs or underpinnings in the culture?

²³Edward Hall takes off from linguistics to talk about culture as communication and Turner does something similar with values; Eilers extends these to his view of communication networks. All three are saying basically the same thing: cultural items are inserted in ever larger patterns. These are basically variations of the concept called lexical domains in linguistics. Cf. E. Hall. *The Silent Language*. NY: 1959 and Victor Turner. *The Forest of Symbols*. Ithaca. 1967.

²⁴James Fallows. "A Damaged Culture," *The Atlantic Monthly*. Nov. 1987. Leticia Ramos Shahani. "The Urgent Need for a Moral Recovery Program." pp. 5-9, in Richard Schwenk. Cardinal Sin's views on the immaturity of Filipino culture were reported in several newspapers at the time. Teodoro Benigno writes a column for the Philippine Star, often tracing our social and political problems to cultural disorientation.

The more I engage in the project of inculturation the more realizations I discover along the way. (a) Cultural change will come about not by way of negative critiques but through more positive appreciations or affirmations of the culture. One must love the own culture to affirm it, and by affirming it, change it. (b) Students and scholars can sometimes contribute best to social reform not by direct action but by being true to their task, which is to rethink, to retest, to sift existing paradigms in the laboratories of the academe. (c) Academic work is itself pastoral provided it assumes its responsibility of directing God's message to a particular people at a particular time. (d) The Philippine church, through theologians articulating and pastoral agents stimulating, must chart her own journey to God. That will not occur without theology of, from and by the Filipino church, hence a theology which take culture as seriously as it can. (e) Part of that task is liberation from the theological ethnocentrism (unconscious of course) we have uncritically accepted from others.

In its initial stages the method of inculturation will be more Socratic than Aristotelian; indeed the methods will be devised, so to speak, "on the wing." For now there are neither preset maps nor blueprints on how to proceed in inculturation. But it may help if searchers are presented, if not with a map at least with a chronicle of directions taken or a logbook of stages reached. Taking care, to explicate the steps reached might enable others to replicate the results or deviate at their chosen points. In these small ways one does not only ensure greater philosophical rigor; it makes it more possible for proposals of Filipino theory or whatever to transcend local color or folklore. At this juncture of our history we certainly deserve better. □