

Prenotes to the Contextualization of Theology

INTRODUCTION

1. To address ourselves to "Gospel and theology in context" is (from one standpoint) to join a growing ecclesial movement which looks to a more authentic evangelization both within (*ad intra*) and outside (*ad extra*) the Christian community. The contextualization of theology is thus to be seen as a task at the service of a more authentic Christian and evangelical life, and at the service of a more authentic and more effective evangelization.

It seems to me of capital importance to note this at the very beginning. We are not involved here primarily in the study and discussion of an academic activity or an academic undertaking, but at an effort to make evangelization and Christian life and praxis more authentic, more interiorized — more true to the Gospel, more true to its task in history and beyond history, as well as more truly ours.

We see at once, I think, the breadth of the theme to which we address ourselves, and the danger of going off on false leads if we narrow our perspectives too soon, without having seen the entire context of the problematic, if we make the focus of our discussion immediately the academic concern without first considering the broader dimension which the "doing of theology" — especially the doing of *contextual* theology — is functional to.

2. This makes it obviously quite difficult to select points and questions for development, in an introductory paper such as this one is meant to be. (The focus of this conference is, after all, contextual theology.)

I would think, then, that the service this paper could give to the present discussion is — to lay down a few elementary premises for the doing of contextual theology (and in this I will only be recalling things you already know); — to attempt some sort of working description/definition of the task;

— to suggest some 'ground rules' that are to be kept in mind in this endeavour. (In doing this I hope to say something of the challenges contextualizing theology places before us, and some demands it will surely make from several segments of the Christian community.)

I have thus called the paper "Pre-Notes to the Contextualization of Theology."

3. Somewhat parenthetically, we must simply mention that we presume the important distinction between faith and theology, and secondarily, between the expression of faith found in the Scriptures, in the creeds or confessions of the believing and praying Church, and — on the other hand — theology and various theological systems. Our theme, in the present conference, is the contextualization of theology: obviously we are dealing with our reflection on faith, *with theology*.

We have also distributed the *thesarium* of the International Theological Commission on "The Unity of Faith and Theological Pluralism" (1973). What *Theses 1-12* (especially) say may be worth our recalling; they may help focus some of our thoughts and answer some of our questions.

I. SOME PREMISES

I. 1. First, *the premises*. Point One: I would assume that the participants of this colloquium have accepted, from the texts of the Church's magisterium, the necessity and desirability of the task of inculturating/contextualizing theology.

We have Vatican II's decree on missionary activity, *Ad Gentes*, section 22, which holds that for the process of the inculturation of the Christian life, "theological investigation must necessarily be fostered in each major socio-cultural area".¹

To this we might add the votum expressed by the Asian Bishops gathered in Manila in 1970, stating that they pledged themselves "to develop an indigenous theology and to do whatever they can do so that the life and message of the Gospel may be ever more incarnate in the rich historic cultures of Asia."²

Fr. Pizkaty has just cited, in his opening remarks, the rather lengthy section in the statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences in Taipei, 1974, on making the Gospel and the Church truly incarnate in our peoples.³

Then the "message to the People of God" from the Synod of Bishops of 1977 speaks of "inculturation" as an objective of catechesis.⁴ (Incidentally this seems to be the first entrance of the word *inculturatio* into an official text of this sort.)

We will assume then, that the task of inculturation/contextualization of theology is one that *must* be done in our local churches, and that it demands no further justification.⁵ (We have cited a paragraph from the article by Fr. Charles Nyamiti in *The Emergent Gospel*. Is what he says about Africa in that text applicable to our Asian scene, or to the Christian communities in each of our countries?)

¹ Vatican II, on missionary activity, *Ad Gentes*, no. 22, in W. Abbott, DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II, London-Dublin, 1966, p. 612.

² Message and Resolutions of the Asian Bishops' Meeting, Manila, 23-29 November 1970, Follow-up Committee, Hong Kong, 1971.

³ *Evangelization in Modern-day Asia*, Statement and Recommendations of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, Taipei, Taiwan, 22-27 April, 1974, Office of the Secretary-General, FABC, Manila, 1974.

⁴ Cf. text as reproduced in WORD, MEMORY, WITNESS, the 1977 Bishops' Synod on Catechesis, Loyola Papers 14, edited by P. S. de Achutegui and J. L. Roche, Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, 1978, 40-58.

⁵ Cf. Charles Nyamiti in THE EMERGENT GOSPEL, Theology from the Underside of History, edited by Sergio Torres and Virginia Fabella,

I. 2. *Ad Gentes* sees the work of inculturation as an "imitation of the plan of the Incarnation" as a means of assuming the philosophy and the wisdom of various peoples into the life of the Church, a means of much more profound insertion of the meanings and values of divine revelation in the life and cultures of these peoples, a way toward assuming these traditions and cultures into catholic unity — enriching that manifold oneness, each people and culture finding its place within the fulness of ecclesial communion.⁶

This contextualization of theology is a demand, then, stemming from the mystery of the Incarnation, and its continuation, in an analogous but true way, in the life and history of the Church.⁷

The ninth ITC thesis (cf. the thesarium distributed) states that because the Christian faith is universal and missionary, revelation needs to be re-thought, re-formulated, lived out anew from within each human culture, otherwise it will no longer give a genuine response to the real problems found in the heart of every person, in every age and place — and we might add, of every human community; otherwise it will no longer inspire the people of God to prayer, worship, and in their daily lives and action.⁸

Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, 1978, "Approaches to African Theology," esp. "Contextualization of African Theology," 33-35: "It is no longer necessary to emphasize the need or possibility of an African theology. The time for such discussions is now passed; we are actually at a higher stage of the question. Essays confined to such topics are at present justly considered out of date. Failure to see such need or possibility may now be rightly judged as unjustified conservatism."

⁶ Cf. Jules Gritti, *L'ESPRESSION DE LA FOI DANS LES CULTURES HUMAINES, Croire et Comprendre*, Le Centurion, Paris, 1974, and the three-volume *acta* of the International Congress of Missiology, Rome, 5-12 October 1975, *EVANGELIZZAZIONE E CULTURE*, Pontificia Università Urbaniana, Roma, 1976. — Yves Congar has dealt with the property of "Catholicity" in *L'EGLISE UNE, SAINTE, CATHOLIQUE ET APOSTOLIQUE*, in *Mysterium Salutis*, 15, Paris, Cerf, 1970, 149-179, with a good bibliography. During the last ten years the writing on inculturation has grown considerably. Cf. inter alia Pedro Arrupe, *The Task of Inculturation of Faith and Christian Life*, texts published by the Loyola School of Theology, Ateneo de Manila University, Manila, 1978.

⁷ Vid. Jules Gritti (cf. footnote 6, above), 21-30, 93-118, and P. Arrupe (cf. footnote 6, above), 23-ff., with the accompanying bibliographies.

⁸ From the International Theological Commission, *PLURALISMO: UNITA DELLA FEDE E PLURALISMO TEOLOGICO*, Ed. Dehoniane, Bologna, 1974, Tesi 9, "L'Aspetto Missionario" (P. Nemeshegyi) 58-69.

If theology is, according to the medieval formula, faith seeking understanding, and if theologizing means to appropriate and express the realities of faith for one's self and for the community, to communicate that appropriation to others, both within the Christian community or beyond it — then we must accept what cultural anthropologists tell us, "that theology, in its questions, its method, and its language, is extremely dependent on conceptual resources that belong to the human culture of theologians",⁹ and the human culture of the Christian community, and of those to whom the work of evangelization is addressed. Theology is thus culturally conditioned every step of the way.

To take just the last point: theology as a process of communication. "The very act of communication in its essence automatically and necessarily belongs to a culture. There are *no* non-cultural media, and there is no such thing as a knowable and communicable message apart from whatever means are used to express it in each particular context, i.e. language and other symbolic cultural forms."¹⁰ — Thus far, I believe correctly too, the cultural anthropologist.

I. 3. Secondly, I suppose that we can presume as accepted, at least in substance, what Dr. Emerito Nacpil, who will later address this conference, has called "the critical Asian principle". This is stated eloquently, in the statement issued by the EACC Consultation held in Sri Lanka in 1965.¹¹

II. SOME TYPES OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY PRESENTLY BEING "DONE"

II. 1. Before attempting a working definition of contextualization in theology, let me try to line up some sort of rough inventory

⁹ Charles Taber, in the new periodical, *GOSPEL IN CONTEXT*: "Is there more than one way to do theology?" *GOSPEL IN CONTEXT*, I (1978) 4-16

¹⁰ Charles Taber, in the article cited in footnote 9, above, 5.

¹¹ Vid Statement issued by the EACC Consultation, December 1965, Kandy, Sri Lanka, "The Task of Theology in the Asian Churches," in Gerald H. Anderson (editor), *ASIAN VOICES IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY*, Orbis, Maryknoll, 1976, vii.

of the *actual* attempts in the Christian communities, especially in the non-Western areas of the churches (i.e., in the North Atlantic theological communities) to "localize" or inculturate theology. The inventory we make indicates that the three types of contextual theology roughly correspond to the three tasks assigned by the final statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the FABC in (1974), indigenization, dialogue with the religions and religious traditions, the search for justice in our societies.¹²

II. 2. (a) There is *first*, then, the endeavour to "indigenize" or *inculturate theology* by integrating and evaluating elements of the mentality and thought, imagery and sensibility, literary forms and "language" (language, in both its narrower and more comprehensive senses) of local and traditional cultures. This sort of indigenization seeks the goal of "authenticity" first of all (African theology often refers to African authenticity) — a theology with which the "ordinary adult Christian" in a given non-western culture would genuinely feel at home. One might suggest that this is one principal concern of some of the recent better-known African works of African theological writers (relating, for example, the concept of God in traditional religions to the Scriptures and the models of Christian thought.)¹³ Perhaps Fr. Mercado's

¹² Cf. footnote 3, above. Cf. EUROPEAN THEOLOGY CHALLENGED BY THE WORLD-WIDE CHURCH, Report of a Consultation at Geneva, Switzerland, 29 March — 2 April 1976, Conference of European Churches, Geneva, 1976; Henri Denis, LES CHEMINS DE LA THEOLOGIE DANS LE MONDE DE CE TEMPS, Le Centurion, Paris, 1977; Equipo SELADOC, PANORAMA DE LA TEOLOGIA LATINOAMERICANA, Ediciones Sigueme, Salamanca, 1975, two volumes; Georges Casalis, LES IDEES JUSTES NE TOMBENT PAS DU CIEL, Cerf, Paris, 1977; Charles Nyamiti, AFRICAN THEOLOGY, ITS NATURE, PROBLEMS AND METHODS, Gaba Publications, Pastoral Institute of Eastern Africa, Kampala, Uganda, no date (197?); Aylward Shorter, AFRICAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, ADAPTATION OR INCARNATION? London, G. Chapman, 1975; Emerito P. Nacpil and Douglas Elwood, THE HUMAN AND THE HOLY: ASIAN PERSPECTIVES IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY, New Day Publishers, Quezon City, 197; Ian Fraser, THE FIRE RUNS, God's People Participating in Change, London, SCM Press, 1975. Also A. B. Lambino et al., TOWARDS DOING THEOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT, Loyola Papers 9, LST, Manila, 1977.

¹³ Cf. references to African Theology in footnote 12, above: Nyamiti, Shorter, and the various writings of John Mbiti (e.g., THE PRAYERS OF AFRICAN RELIGION, Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, 1975.)

work falls, roughly, within this category (if he is willing to have it thus classified).¹⁴

II. 3. (b) There is a more special form of this first type: *the endeavour to take some significant areas* — or even an entire system of *religious thought*, eg Buddhism, some forms of Hindu religious thought, — and link these up and in some true sense integrate them with biblical theology and the Christian tradition, using them in a way analogous to St. Thomas Aquinas's use of Aristotelianism, as a kind of philosophical dialogue-partner or "underlying philosophical grammar". Much of this has been attempted already, I believe, in India and (in lesser degree perhaps) in the Republic of China (Taiwan).¹⁵ This effort is admittedly of special importance in Asia, the birthplace of the great religions of mankind. The FABC 1974 statement — *a statement of Asian bishops* — speaks of this effort of inculturation with a certain eloquence; some commentators have seen in these paragraphs the most moving part of the statement.¹⁶

II. 4. (c) Then there is *the attempt to contextualize theology by 'immersing it within the Asian reality' in its broadest modern social, economic, political, cultural context* — a context analyzed according to the best given paradigms of social interpretation available to us¹⁷ — and expressing the Christian and ecclesial responsibility for those who live the Christian faith within this

¹⁴ Leonardo Mercado, SVD, *ELEMENTS OF FILIPINO THEOLOGY*, Tacloban City, Divine Word University Publications, 1975.

¹⁵ Cf. Douglas J. Elwood, "Emerging Themes in Asian Theological Thinking," in *THE HUMAN AND THE HOLY*, ed. E. P. Nacpil and D. J. Elwood, New Day Publishers, Quezon City, 1978, and the two anthologies, *WHAT ASIAN CHRISTIANS ARE THINKING*, A Theological Source Book, edited by Douglas J. Elwood, New Day Publishers, 1976, with its very good bibliographies, and Gerald H. Anderson, *ASIAN VOICES IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY*, Orbis, Maryknoll, New York, 1976, with a carefully selected bibliography, 261-321. Also Choan-Seng Song, *DOING THEOLOGY TODAY*, Madras, The Christian Literature Society, 1976.

¹⁶ Cf. footnote 3, above, par. 13-18.

¹⁷ Some remarks, by way of footnote: (a) "The best given paradigms of social interpretation given to us": here I am not endorsing any given contextual analysis (cf. my remarks on marxist social analysis in *LOYOLA PAPERS* 10, *Faith, Ideologies and Christian Options in the Philippines Today*). Fr. Juan Carlos Scannone of Buenos Aires insists strongly that the framework of social interpretation should be derived from the local context itself, and not brought in "bodily" from outside.

context in terms of human development and historical (personal and social) liberation from situations of dependence, oppression, poverty, injustice. This is the type of contextualization practised in the diverse types of liberation theology developed in Latin America in our days, in Asia by writers like Tissa Balasuriya and Sebastian Kappen, in the Philippines by Edicio de la Torre and (at the Dar-es-Salaam conference) in the papers of Carlos Abe-samis and Orlando Carvajal.¹⁸ The Dar-es-Salaam colloquium of Third World theologians' final statement (which has also been distributed to you, along with the commentary by D. S. Amalorpavadass) might stand as a good example of this latter thrust of contextual theology.¹⁹

III. A DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY

III. With the three-fold classification just given, we can now proceed to some sort of working-description of inculturation and contextualization in theology.

What I here set down is a rambling sort of description, deliberately rough hewn and repetitive, because I would hope that the workshops will tear it apart and build up their own description/definition as this colloquium reaches its term. (But even such a definition will be more of a heuristic description: definitions should come when the items to define are already present in good number!)

¹⁸ (b) We must be knowledgeable and careful enough to distinguish, as the recent text of the International Theological Commission does, *various types* of liberation theology. Surely Cardinal Eduardo Pironio's theology of liberation belongs to a different *type* of theology than that in which we will include work by Hugo Assmann and Paolo Richard!

(c) Again, not every writer on liberation theology should be called a "liberation theologian": surely Pope Paul VI's paragraphs on liberation give some reflection on liberation theology, and the text of the International Theological Commission, whose principal redactor was Dr. Karl Lehmann, has much to say on liberation theology. But one would *not* call Pope Paul or Dr. Lehmann "liberation theologians". Perhaps when Fr. Mercado, in his paper on beginnings of contextual theology in the Philippines, mentions Father de la Costa, Lambino and myself in the context of liberation theology, this remark could be of some application.

¹⁹ (d) Fr. D. S. Amalorpavadass, in his report on the Dar-es-Salaam meeting, has provided us with a good introduction to the text. He reports on the differences between the perspectives of theologians of the three continents. I would like to call attention to the points he makes, and thus I have included some paragraphs of his text in the appendix giving some questions and problems for discussion.

- (a). Re-reading the Gospel and the Christian tradition from within the total human situation,
- (b). as interpreted by the (best) analytical methods or by given paradigms of interpretation at our disposal, —
from the standpoint of the real human experience, and from within a given cultural/historical collocation
- (c). in the light of the felt or implicit questions and concerns, of the projects of men and women of our time.
- (d). towards *discerning*,
- (e). within the Christian community and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit,
- (f). the shape of "the Christian vision" that speaks most deeply and most urgently to us, where we are, at this moment of history,
- (g). and towards discerning also the imperatives, decisions, commitment and action, which Christian faith and worship and Christian responsibility point to,
- (h). with a view to our ongoing present and the future of the societies we are committed to help to build in obedience to God's designs for mankind and in relation to the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God.

I would be really grateful if, in the course of our present meetings, this rambling description could be pulled together to see where in this particular gathering we are moving, in our understanding of inculturation/contextualization.²⁰

IV. SOME CLARIFICATIONS

This working definition must be clarified by several *notae ad calcem*:

²⁰ Of interest are, of course, the discussions on contextualization in MINISTRY IN CONTEXT, The Third Mandate Programme of the TEF (Theological Education Fund) 1970-1977, 13 London Road, Bromley, Kent, England, 1972, especially, "The Fundamental Stance", 18-21, the definition of contextualization is given on p. 20. The description given in my text is repetitive, deliberately so. Hopefully it will be tightened and sharpened. Our own contexts may suggest developments of the notion.

IV. 1. Inculturation/contextuality in theology surely presupposes a horizon of Revelation/Tradition; included within it is the important task of *Christian anamnesis*. We are agreed, I believe, that inculturation/contextualization has no intention of "erasing the Christian past"; the task is collocated within the broader horizon of God's revelation in Jesus Christ and of Christian thought and life in history.

Hence the integral task of contextualization presupposes "the permanent tasks of theology as classically understood" (e.g., as Gustavo Gutiérrez affirms in his *Theology of Liberation*).²¹ *Theology as wisdom; theology as "science" or rational knowledge*, what some have called the "library and classroom tasks of theology". Contextualization, if understood in the "narrower sense" we will immediately define — as "*critical reflection on historical praxis*" (Gustavo Gutiérrez) or as "faith-reflection responding — towards decision and action — to the movement and crises of contemporary history within our peoples" is a third task, a "new way of doing theology" which presupposes the other two, assumes from them what feeds into it, focuses (on what Avery Dulles has called) "performative faith", faith in its responsibility in history.²²

IV. 2. The Theological Education Fund (TEF) has sharpened its understanding of contextualization in this distinction which I believe is some interest for us:

Contextualization, the *TEF* text says,²³ means all that is implied in the familiar term "indigenization" and yet seeks to press beyond. Contextualization has to do with how we assess the peculiarity of Third World contexts. Indigenization tends to be used in the sense of responding to the Gospel in terms of a traditional culture. Contextualization, while not ignoring this, takes into account the processes of secularity, technology and the struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical moment of nations in the Third World.

²¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION*, History, Politics and Salvation, trans. and edited by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, ORBIS Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1973, 3-15.

²² Avery Dulles, "The meaning of faith considered in relationship to justice," in *THE FAITH THAT DOES JUSTICE*, ed. John Haughey, Woodstock Theological Center, Paulist Press, New Jersey, 1977, 1-46; cf. specially "Performative approaches," 32-ff.

²³ Cf. footnote 20, above, 18-21.

The TEF text further notes that contextualization does not mean uncritical accommodation to a given situation but is a critical and prophetic confrontation with the society as it is and as it moves towards the future. Hence contextualization will have its own priorities according to local and situational discernment, but it moves *toward* the larger context of the one Gospel for the whole world.²⁴

Understood in this narrower sense, contextualization is *one* way of doing theology, with its own — mainly societal — concerns, but mindful of and ultimately inserted within into both the broader horizon of Revelation/Tradition and also into the broader horizon of the Church as catholic, the Gospel as one.

IV. 3. Perhaps at this point I may revert to the word “inculturation” as including *both* “indigenization” and “contextualization” in the senses just discussed.

Inculturation is surely not a new process in the history of Christian thought and Christian theology: it is at least as old as the Scriptures themselves. It has been pointed out by biblical scholars, for instance, that there is a good diversity of anthropologies implicit within the sacred books.²⁵

Much recent study has been done on the diverse theologies in the New Testament texts themselves: St. Paul’s effort to make himself “a Jew with the Jews and a Greek with the Greeks” translates itself into the writings of the New Testament: from the Palestinian to the Hellenic. In this first transposition, Greek culture is made to bear the freight of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but it also vehicles that Gospel.

²⁴ Ibid., 20. “... a careful distinction must be made between authentic and false forms of contextualization. False contextualization yields to uncritical accommodation, a form of culture faith. Authentic contextualization is always prophetic, arising always out of a genuine encounter between God’s Word and His world, and moves toward the purpose of challenging and changing the situation through rootedness in and commitment to a given historical moment.”

²⁵ Cf. Taber, *art. cit.* in footnote 9, above; Daniel von Allmen, “The Birth of Theology.” *INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MISSION*, 64 (253) 37-52; in *CHRISTIAN BELIEVING*, London: Church of England, 1976, C. F. Evans, “The Unity and Pluriformity of the New Testament”; James D. G. Dunn, *UNITY AND DIVERSITY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, An Inquiry into the Character of the Earliest Christianity*, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1977; C. F. D. Moule, *THE BIRTH OF THE NEW TESTAMENT*, London, 1966.

From the late second century apologists to "the last of the Fathers" (in the 9th century?) there is a succession of efforts at the inculturation of the Christian faith in the categories — predominantly philosophical (platonic, neo-platonic) and legal (roman law) — of different cultural contexts. From the end of the patristic period this process has taken place almost exclusively in Europe.²⁶ What we thus arrived at towards the beginning of this century was Christian life and theology magnificently and almost totally inculturated in the Western Church, an inculturation so thoroughgoing, so successful and so genial that the slogan could be spoken with fearless assurance, "The Faith is Europe, Europe is the Faith."²⁷ It is only with the gradual dechristianization of the West and the gradual emergence of the culture of modernity "emancipated" (at least in large part) from the churches and the Christian faith that we can see, and admire, the thoroughness of the inculturation process which took place in the West and which has been embodied in the Christian life, Christian theology, and the Christian Church of Europe.²⁸

But now, for a multitude of reasons we cannot go into here, a new moment in the history of Christian life and thought, in the history of the Church, demands a multiplicity of new "inculturations" which have yet to assume more explicit forms, shapes, reality.

This will no doubt usher in a period, hopefully a fruitful — even glorious — one, of doctrinal development. For among many contemporary theologians (among them the great Dominican ecclesiologist and historian of theology, Yves Congar) the central operative principle in doctrinal development is that "doctrinal history is better described as *'a series of formulations of the one*

²⁶ Yes Congar's six theses, in his article in *EVANGELIZZAZIONE E CULTURE*, I, Pont. Univ. Urbaniana, Roma, 1976 and Jules Gritti, *L'EXPRESSION DE LA FOI DANS LES CULTURES HUMAINES*, Paris, 1975; Bernard J. F. Lonergan, *DOCTRINAL PLURALISM*, Pere Marquette Lecture, Marquette University, Milwaukee, 1971, and his *METHOD IN THEOLOGY*, Darton, Longman, Todd London 1971.

²⁷ The words are Hilaire Belloc's, in *EUROPE AND THE FAITH*.

²⁸ Cf. footnote 26, above: Congar's fourth thesis: "The actual crisis comes from this situation: in great measure that having created an ensemble of

content of faith diversifying and finding expression in different cultural contexts'.²⁹

Once again, here, we must note that we are not starting *ab ovo*, as if nothing has yet been done. One can agree, at least in some measure, — for Asia — with what Charles Nyamiti says in African theology:

Theological adaptation in Africa can be said to be as old as African Churches themselves, and in this sense African theology is, to a certain extent at least, as old as Christianity in our continent. For if African theology implies the expression and presentation of Christian doctrine according to the needs and mentality of African peoples, it is clear that missionaries, native priests, and catechists have regularly, in one form or another, endeavored to adapt the Christian teaching to the requirements and dispositions of their hearers. It is also natural that African converts have, up to a certain degree, always understood and lived their Christian faith as Africans, i.e., according to their cultural make-up. One may rightly presume, therefore, that a careful investigation will reveal an old(er), latent form of African theology among the African communities. But the conscious systematic efforts to build up such a theology are of recent origin. The first *ex professo* discussions on the subject occur, as far as I know, not earlier than the 1960s.³⁰

IV. 4. If the working definition seems to place a particular emphasis on the socio-economic-political context for the inculturation of theology, it is because I believe it is *a crucial* context, *not* because I think it ought to be an almost exclusive one.

In Abraham Maslow's self-actualization model of psychology, there are certain preconditions requisite to basic need satisfaction (freedom, justice, orderliness), and a whole hierarchy of basic

admirable expressions of her faith in a latin catholic culture, the Church has become too closely bound up with it: and this includes even the churches she has given birth to in her missionary self-expression. The middle ages and the counter-reformation have stuck to her very skin. She has thus misunderstood or refused new gifts."

²⁹ "Doctrinal history is better described as 'a series of formulations of the one content of faith diversifying and finding expression in different cultural contexts'" (Congar, *CONCILIUM* VII, 6 [1970] 87), in Nicolas Lash, *CHANGE IN FOCUS, A Study of Doctrinal Change and Continuity*, Sheed and Ward, London, 1973, 165.

³⁰ Charles Nyamiti, in the *EMERGENT GOSPEL*, cf. footnote 5, above, 32-33.

needs, beginning with physiological needs (air, water, food, shelter, sleep, sex), moving on to the need for safety and security, and on to love and belongingness, and so on. His theory postulates that once the previous set of basic needs are substantially met, the next set of needs affirms itself with greater urgency, and so on.³¹ It is in this sense that the theology of liberation focuses almost exclusively on the socio-economic-political needs: they are the first set in a series of steps toward fuller humanity.

To understand what the theologians of liberation are urging, they must be seen as such. Gregory Baum somewhere explains Juan Luis Segundo's hermeneutical circle,³² which begins with the profound experience of the poverty, oppression and utter powerlessness of the majority of peoples in our countries, and goes on from there to a re-reading of the Gospel and the Tradition with the new eyes given by this shattering experience of the "dehumanization" of our peoples. Baum admits that this shattering realization is of first importance, especially in poor countries like ours. And yet finally he criticizes Segundo's circle as presupposing that this is the *only* experience of real meaning and value for the Christian today, and thus the only starting point and thrust, and uniquely determinative of the content and other features of contextual theology. There are after all other Christian experiences, other points of entrance into Christian faith and reflection.

Fr. Amalorpavadass already spoke, in the article previously referred to, of two points raised by some of the Asian and African theologians present at Dar-es-Salaam: the liberation problematic cannot be the exclusive one, and the marxian analysis is partial and a forced fit when applied to our own realities, and thus needs serious revision and relativizing, lest the ideological construct prime and shackle the theology — as can, and as perhaps has already happened in some theological work.³³

IV. 5. Fifthly, the starting point of contextual theology is the situation, or better still, if we are to use the language of the

³¹ Frank G. Goble, *THE THIRD FORCE, The Psychology of Abraham Maslow*, New York, Pocket Books, 1971, esp. Chapter 4, 37-53.

³² Gregory Baum, in *Seminar on Theology and Social Sciences*, 120-124. (incomplete reference)

³³ D. S. Amalorpavadass, in his report on the Dar-es-Salaam meeting of Third World Theologians, 5-12 August 1976 [distributed in mimeographed form at the Colloquium].

magisterium, "the signs of the times."³⁴ The expression "the signs of the times" which is of cardinal importance in contextual theology needs a great deal of precision. I cannot now go into it at great length. I notice that the new textbook of Angel Anton in the *Theology of the Church*³⁵ dedicates a good number of pages to it and says that the theology of the signs of the times is *terra quasi ignota* with regard to the concrete present of the world.

Its sociological portrait and analysis is essentially partial and transitory and will be easily transcended. Anton says that the "theology of the signs of the times" is accepted by the magisterium as a *locus theologicus* but it has hardly been developed with precision. It involves broad general movements from among human groupings, peoples, a whole generation, as interiorized and emerging from the consciousness of mankind (sociological context). But precisely as understood in the magisterium, it is seen *within the optic of faith*, as an attempt to discern the presence and the action of God as saving in history, as gracing men in history (theological context).

Thus, the "theology of the signs of the times" is primarily a theology of the discernment of the action of God and the grace of God in history. Not a reading of this from ideological spectacles: either from a *status quo* ideology or from a revolutionary ideology. The "signs of the times" as read through the eyes of faith can and do provide a valid point of departure for the theological task, as long as these are truly discerned in faith, and brought into a genuine relationship with the Word of God, by (to the extent possible) the totality of the ecclesial community. So taken, they do "open as it were a new chapter of theologico-pastoral epistemology. Instead of using only revelation and tradition as starting points as classical theology has generally done, it must start with facts and questions derived from the world

³⁴ Re: "the Signs of the Times", some references: Const. Apost. *Humanae Salutis*, 25 Dec. 1961 John XXIII, AAS 54 (1962) 5-13; *Pacem in Terris*, John XXIII, 11 April 1963: AAS 55 (1963) 257-304; Paul VI, *Ecclesiam suam*, 6 August 1964, AAS 56 (1964) 609-659; P. Valadier, "Signes des temps, signes de Dieu?" ETUDES 335 (1971) 261-79; J. Da Cruz Policarpo, "SINAIS DOS TEMPOS". Genese histórica e interpretação teológica, Lisboa, 1971; *Revista del CIAS*, Buenos Aires, Setiembre 1976 XXV/256 "Signos de los Tiempos, signos de Dios," M. A. Fiorito y D. Gil, 35-61.

³⁵ Angel Anton, LA IGLESIA DE CRISTO, B.A.C., Serie mayor, 15 Madrid, 1977, 773-782.

and from history... if the Church wishes to deal with the real questions of the modern world and to attempt to respond to them."³⁶

IV. 6. The sixth point. Lastly, the objective of contextual theology especially seen in the TEF definition, is Christian decision, commitment, praxis, deeds. Or in Dulles' language, "faith as performative."³⁷ This is to be seen as a welcome dimension in theological concern. The motivation, the generation, the liberation of Christian and ecclesial action in history. Fr. Thomas likes to say that perhaps the greatest need of the church today is liberation for action.³⁸ There has been a large emphasis on faith as intellectualist, as Dulles has pointed out. There has also been emphasis on faith as fiducial, on spirituality, on the way of holiness. But there is, at this moment of history, the necessity of seeing faith as orientated to seconding God's work in the world in history, as motivating, generating, liberating Christian action in history. I submit that this is one of the most important new dimensions in theological undertaking that contextual theology brings us to.³⁹

SOME 'GROUND RULES' FOR CONTEXTUALIZATION

V. Now, for some ground rules for the task of contextualizing theology in our local churches in Asia.

V. 1. From "local theologians" the new endeavour asks for a certain largeness and boldness of vision. It always takes courage to take a step which is not along a well-worn path, especially for us who have all our lives worked under the shadow of our western

³⁶Yves M. J. Congar OP, *SITUATION ET TACHES PRESENTES DE LA THEOLOGIE* Cerf, Paris, 1967, 72-3.

³⁷Avery Dulles, "The meaning of Faith considered in relationship to justice," in *THE FAITH THAT DOES JUSTICE*, ed. John C. Haughey, Woodstock Theological Center, Paulist Press, New York, 1977, 10-46.

³⁸Remarks made at the Jesuit Institute on the *Spiritual Exercises*, Baguio, 1976 — Cf. T. E. Clarke and A. B. Lambino *On The Ignatian Exercises: Experience, Discernment* Loyola Papers 2, Manila 1977.

³⁹Cf. A. B. Lambino et al., *Loyola Papers* No. 9 (cf. footnote 12, above), and *THEOLOGY IN ACTION*, A Workshop Report, EACC, Tokyo, 1973; Avery Dulles, *art. cit.*, 32-44; Henri Denis, *LES CHEMINS DE LA THEOLOGIE DANS LE MONDE DE CE TEMPS*, Le Centurion, Paris, 1977, 96-115.

teachers and have grown up on an almost exclusive reading of their books, who are ever looking over our shoulders, concerned with what *they* will say. Fearful also (overly so) of how our bishops will react, of how authorities "higher up" might react. We will have to admit, many of us, that we have acquired something a "colonial mentality" which has become part (at least a small part) of our theological existence. We will have to gather a certain resoluteness and nudge our creativity quite a bit more in the years to come.

Courage, we have said. And perhaps the only way to find this courage is through a process of conversion. A conversion that leads us to care more passionately for our people and *the faith of the people* of our country. To care more passionately that the message of the Gospel may really penetrate the life of the Church and the movement of our societies toward the future that is "laid up in the heart of Asian man". To live close enough to our people so as to really catch their heartbeat — and in this country, as in most countries of Asia — our people are by and large *the poor* and *the young*. What are their hopes? What are the issues which really concern them? What questions do they address to the God of their hearts, to the Christian faith — without perhaps being able to give words or voice to them? Perhaps if we are in touch with them sufficiently, we can try to articulate these concerns and questions: the real ones, and in the way they really experience them. This is no small and easy task: *to ask the right questions, in their name*. And when one has asked the right questions, it has been said, one is already halfway there.

Ian Fraser, writing before the Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches, said:⁴⁰

The shattering thing is this: properly understood, the Church's theological tasks simply cannot be tackled by professional theologians. They are not where it matters. They do not have what it takes.

Those of us who profess theology in academic settings must try "to be where it matters", and thus painfully acquire "what

⁴⁰ Ian Fraser, "A Wish Towards Nairobi," INTERNATIONAL REVIEW OF MISSION, July 1975, 240-249.

it takes". The way to overcome the academician's temptation to play with concepts, to worry about the exact footnote reference, is perhaps to gain the passion, to learn the kind of love which will free us to become true Asian theologians at last.

V. 2. From those in our midst who come from other local churches, the foreign-born teachers of our seminaries and theological schools — by far the dominant majority in the staffs of seminaries here in the Philippines (and as far as I can gather, in practically all of Asia) — there is the demand in the theological field which is analogous to that which is asked for in the total field of Christian mission today. We ask them to consider the contextualization of theology, if anything, *more seriously, more urgently* even than their locally-born brethren. In fact I might suggest that at this hour of the local church, *this constitutes the specifically missionary contribution that they are asked to make as theologians-in-mission* to our Asian Christian communities: this concern to "enable" the creation of contextual theology in "the young churches".

Two rather pedestrian consequences follow on this: *First*, the scrupulous care not to prolong the continual, unreflective and uncritical importation of theological thematizations and problematics from abroad. The adjectives "unreflective and uncritical" are important. We do not oppose all importation, but stand against those attitudes which assume that the best thing to do is "to bring in whatever is being said or written abroad, where the true theological work is being done". (The same dynamics which are operative in the strategies and activities of transnational corporations are, *mutatis mutandis*, operative too in the matter of "theological production" and the fostering of contextualized theology.)

The *second* corollary: a "critical collaboration" in this area will not be afraid of constructive criticism, but on the other hand will not seek to re-impose the canons of what has been called "the teutonic captivity of theology".

V. 3. With regard to interdisciplinary dialogue in the doing of the theological task: the need of this is readily seen. Theology must enter into dialogue with the human sciences, the social sciences, psychological disciplines, local philosophical forms. To

evaluate, for instance, the marxian social analysis so widely used in our country today, there is need, first, to use the tools of social science. Perhaps theologians tend immediately to turn to theological language and theological argument before the analysis has been examined for validity or non-validity on the very grounds it claims as its own.

In a recent conversation with a couple of sociologists in a local university, one candidly stated, "We do not feel any need to converse with theologians, Father." Whether that is true or not, I believe we theologians — today above all! — should feel the need to talk with social scientists and should be willing to take the first steps to open communications and exchange with experts in other disciplines. In general, I think, our theological faculties have been seriously neglectful in this regard.

V. 4. The major rule of thumb is that whatever work be done in theological contextualization remain in genuinely valid relationship with the Church *catholic* — both *diachronically*, i.e., with all of Revelation and Tradition, and *synchronically*, i.e. with all the other churches in the Christian/Catholic communion, with the magisterium, with the Roman Pontiff, [*qui*] *universo caritatis coetui praesidet*. For it is the Church catholic which is the one, unique and adequate believing subject of the Christian faith. Each local church, whether it be in Japan or France, in Italy or in the Philippines, is part — *and only part* — of that communion of local churches which is the *katholike ecclesia*. And, in all fidelity and loyalty, with unfeigned sincerity — but joined to an honesty, courage, and a boldness born of obedience to the Spirit — the discerning and judging function of the Church's teaching office, as guardian of the integrity and fullness of the one Faith, is to be accepted. There is, with all creativity, no need for us to carry in ourselves, that allergy to the magisterium that Karl Rahner has more than once lamented. For if theology is a charism in the Church, theologians are called to work within their charism in the totality of God's people and within the Faith of the Church — not beyond it, nor yet with small-heartedness and pusillanimity.

The recent book by Laurens van der Post on Carl Gustav Jung bears this motif on its title page: "We live not only our own lives, but whether we know it or not, also the life of our time." The

Christian Faith is one, because it is rooted in Christ, and when we reflect on it — from any situation in the Church — reflect on it, through its vision, we believe, we profess, we hope, we love, we act, not on our own only, but as bearing in ourselves the response of the whole of God's People to the Word of God.

V. 5. And lastly, we ask individual bishops, the hierarchy in our local churches, the various dicasteries of the Holy See, to foster this work. To tell us that this Faith is ours as much as it is the Faith of Europe and the peoples of ancient Christendom, not to be folded in ancient theological napkins and buried, but to be "traded till he comes". We raise a plea for patient accompaniment and encouragement. To have the willingness to try to understand the difficulty of the task in our situations, not to move too quickly "to quench the smoking flax".

After all, it took the theologians of Europe a good thousand years to achieve what we now see as the magnificent and many-sided *corpus* of western theology. There were many mistakes and many false trails taken along the way. St. Thomas himself did not come on the scene like Methuselah, without father or mother, without ancestors. The great flowering of medieval studies in the pre-Vatican II period showed us how even the work of his genius grew out of the theological "pyramid-building" of his times and from the labor of his masters. (Yet not many years after his death, his books were burned as heretical.)

In the 1960's I was struck that official teaching bodies in the Church said practically nothing against the theologies of secularization in Europe, even against the extreme forms of it, in some of the "Death of God" writings. And I felt this was because those who have acted more vigorously at another time perhaps, could understand — in the religious crises they were meeting in their own cities, in friends, in relatives, perhaps even in their own hearts — the pain and doubting and anguish which gave rise to the construction of those attempts to contextualize.

This same spirit of large-hearted openness and understanding would seem to be "extendable" to those who labor and henceforward will labor at the contextualization of theology. A vigilance for the faith and its wholeness, that is necessary. But so is a true grasp of the context from which the attempts of doing contextual

theology arise and to which the theologian tries to address the word of faith and the invitation to the saving grace of God.

V. 6. Finally, we must return at the end to those who are being challenged to be the creators of this theology-in-context. I am afraid we are already talking too much about it. We do not anything — not much anyway — to talk about as yet; the creative work is simply not being done — as yet.

(Parenthetically, perhaps funding agencies from abroad will begin to see that the raising of buildings and the tasks of community organization and basic christian communities have *some* need of local theologies to evaluate their meaning, to evaluate the priorities to be followed, to prime the right choices that are to be made. Perhaps events like this colloquium are just as, or even more, deserving than what is done with cement and mortar and the expenditure of other energies.)

But, with or without the encouragement of bishops and/or funding agencies, with or without the expensive libraries of Europe and America, the task of truly appropriating the Faith, — experiencing, understanding, interiorizing, expressing, confessing, rejoicing in, the faith — with our own sensibility, our own mind, our own hearts, and in our own ways, so as to foster christian life and christian *praxis* which are truly ours... the task of translating the Gospel in our own "language, time, and place", to meet our own needs, our own questions, our own aspirations, to speak to the grandeur and misery of our own lives as Asians, *must be done*. It may no longer be postponed or evaded. And we are summoned to its doing, if — from where we are — we should lay down our gifts at the feet of the Lord whose heritage and patrimony we and our peoples are.

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