

Intercultural Theology as a Way of Doing Theology

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ABSTRACT

This article seeks to answer this central question: Does Intercultural Theology adequately name and describe the dynamic relationship between Gospel/faith and culture(s)? It proffers Intercultural Theology as a refinement of the concept and practice of inculturation and as the most apt mode of theological reflection in a Word Church that is composed of local Churches who do not only test, challenge and even help correct each other's biases but also complement, contribute to, enrich and expand each other's horizons.

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Intercultural Theology is born out of the need to come to terms with new realizations that the Gospel/Faith and the ecclesial communities that live them are in themselves religious cultures; that theological reflection itself does not stand outside culture and historical processes; that cultures also undergo processes of change and are not just assumed by persons in *enculturation* but are likewise *constructed* by the participants themselves; that *local Churches (ecclesiae particulares)* in dialogue with one another can make their own contributions to a "universal hermeneutic community" that is called to practice and preach the universal message of God's saving love. It builds on the insights of the theology of

inculturation and seeks to complete what it lacks and complement its correct insistence on the importance of culture in theological reflection. In a way, it is proffered as a refinement of the concept and practice of inculturation in the same way that the latter has served to bring to greater fulfillment the latent inspiration behind the earlier reflections on accommodation, adaptation and indigenization.

Convinced of the inappropriateness of the prefix *in* to describe the process by which the Gospel/Faith is appropriated by a culture, Bishop Joseph Blomjous wrote in 1980:

The period 1960-1980 can be considered as the main transition period from the traditional Mission to the new Mission of the future. It has been characterized as the period of 'inculturation', though the better term would be that of '*interculturation*' in order to express that the process of inculturation must be lived in *partnership* and *mutuality*. It seems that we are now living at the peak of this movement, the critical phase which demands from us a real decision for profound and courageous reform.¹

The Dutch Bishop of Tanzania, who "navigates" between two cultures, is keenly aware of the need to transcend and transform unilateral Eurocentrism. Partnership and mutuality are values that are in themselves expressive of the ecclesial values of collegiality and solidarity. Blomjous sketched in broad outline the challenges of interculturation as "development of ecclesiology, reality and appreciation of pluralism of human community, an increasing sense of history, the recent historical facts of colonization, decolonization, secularization, the recognition of Non-Western cultural values etc."² But this general theological and pastoral program in itself does not yet categorically lay down the justification for the transition from "*inculturation*" to "*interculturation*".

¹ Bishop Joseph Blomjous, "Development in Mission Thinking and Practice 1959-1980: Inculturation and Interculturation" *AFER* vol. 22 no. 6 cited by Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), p. 13. (Emphasis is mine.)

² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

It is another episcopal figure who has cogently substantiated such shift. In his address to the Presidents of Asian Bishops Conferences in 1993, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, asserted formally:

For this reason, we should no longer speak of inculturation but of the meeting of cultures or "inter-culturality," to coin a new phrase. For inculturation presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture whereby two subjects, formally unknown to each other, meet and fuse. But such a notion is first of all artificial and unrealistic, for with the exception of modern technological civilization, there is no such thing as faith devoid of culture or culture devoid of faith. It is above all difficult to envision how two organisms, foreign to each other, should all of a sudden become a viable whole in a transplantation which stunts both of them. Only if all cultures are potentially universal and open to each other can inter-culturality lead to flourishing new forms.³

Clearly, intercultural theology serves to correct the notion of an abstract, disembodied and culture-free Christianity. It is fully cognizant of the fact that the Church, Gospel/Faith and even theological reflection are within cultures and are in themselves religious cultures. But wherein lies the "potential universality" of cultures? Ratzinger explains that "The fundamental openness of each person to the other can only be explained by the hidden fact that our souls have been touched by truth; and this explains the essential agreement which exists even between cultures most removed from each other."⁴ Though truth is probably grasped differently in different times and cultures, the very quest for truth and, it is important to add, justice, are universal yearnings. These common aspirations pave the way for the mutual enrich-

³ Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Christ, Faith and The Challenge of Cultures," Address given to the Presidents of Asian Bishops' Conferences and Chairmen of Theological Commissions in Hongkong, March 2-5, 1993. <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/RATZHONG.HTM> 19 May 2004.

⁴ Ibid.

ment and critical refinement of theological reflection among the local Churches.⁵ Intercultural theology also serves to remind local theologies that are already *at home* with cultures that they cannot simply be *too local* and be content in the secure confines of a theologico-ecclesial “ghetto”; or be blindly convinced that their lived-interpretation of the Gospel is the best one or the only valid one. The intercultural perspective calls attention to the importance of dialogue among local churches in a Catholic communion. It widens the horizons of a local Church even as it promotes *catholicity* and ecumenism. In a word, intercultural theology is the most apt mode of theological reflection in a World Church.⁶

From the incipient insight of Blomjous, the concept of intercultural theology appears to be gaining significant inroads in theological circles. This is evident from the growing number of Chairs of Intercultural Theology in the following schools of Theology: Tilburg, State University of Utrecht and Kampen (all in the Netherlands); Institut für Theologie Interkulturell (Universität Salzburg, Austria); Stiftungs Gastprofessur Theologie Interkulturell (Universität von Frankfurt, Germany); and Chair for Pastoral Theology and Missiology (Faculty of Theology, Innsbrück, Austria). A growing number of books (e.g., *The Many Faces of Jesus Christ: Intercultural Christology* by Volker Küster and *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity* ed. by R. Friedli and T. Sundermeier) and Journals (e.g., *Wereld en Zending: Tijdschrift voor Interculturele Theologie*, *Chakana: Intercultural Forum for Theology and Philosophy*) help circulate widely this “new” perspective.

⁵ It is well to note as well that the direction intercultural theology takes can lead to fruitful interreligious dialogue. After all, interreligious dialogue is always and already an *intercultural* dialogue.

⁶ This claim is presented as an improvement, even correction of Shorter’s assertion: “The theology of this multicultural Church is Inculturation Theology, the recognition that faith must become culture” Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1988), p. xi. As Walter Hollenweger rightly points out: “Intercultural theology is not just something that might be useful for students from the Third World, but is part and parcel of any theology that pretends to be scholarly”. See Walter Hollenweger, “Intercultural Theology” in *Theology Today* Vol. 43 (1986), p. 29.

Provisional Definition

Blomjous and Ratzinger have provided fundamental insights concerning the notion of interculturalization and interculturality. But what intercultural theology precisely means remains to be defined or described. Friedli offers a definition, and Wijzen a description that can provide the ground on which this mode of theological perspective can grow further:

Intercultural theology is that scientific discipline concerned with God and the offer of salvation which operates in a given culture without absolutizing it. Its method depends on the social context; the research methods of Western academic theology remains useful but must be enriched by alternative forms of doing theology. Thus, intercultural theology does not dispense with the methods of rational and analytical science developed in Western culture. It demands however, that this critical examination be applied also to the total process of intercultural, inter-ecclesiastic, and inter-religious communication in which the West is only one of the participants.⁷

Though Friedli is keenly aware of the need to liberate theology from its “Western captivity” and is open to non-Western methods, his perspective concerning science and method remains “western”. This is not to criticize his viewpoint but rather to stress that the very definition conveys what intercultural theology is all about: it is theologizing from one’s own point of view without pretending that one can adopt too easily the point of view of the *other*; it is about being conscious of the limitations of such a stance and leaving it open for revision, without refusing to be critical of the point of view of the *other*. It is the stance that is mid-way the excesses of absolutizing or universalizing one’s perspective on the one hand, or being fully open in accepting the *other* perspective and exempting it from any critical analysis for fear of being suspected of *colonizing* or reducing the *other* to an inferior status all over again. In other words, it accepts that all perspectives

⁷ Richard Friedli, “Intercultural Theology” in *Dictionary of Mission* ed. by K. Müller and T. Sundermeier (New York: Maryknoll, 1998), pp. 221-222.

are valuable yet limited, hence, must be subjected to a dialogue of mutual appreciation and criticism.

Wijzen situates intercultural theology within an explicit ecclesiological context:

Intercultural theology is a new attempt to do justice to local theologies and particular experiences of churches within the universal church. It deals with such old issues as unity and diversity in theology; particularity and universality of churches; localization and globalization of contexts; in short: inculturation and interculturation.⁸

This description recognizes the tension arising from the rightful need of local Churches to craft their own “local theologies” on the one hand, and the demand of belonging to a universal Church, on the other hand. It is mindful that theology is an activity that is done within and for the service of the ecclesial community. It is aware not just of the tension between the *local* and the *universal* Church but also of the wider tension affecting the contemporary situation, namely, that of localization and globalization. But the description seems to suggest that inculturation corresponds to localization, as interculturation to globalization. While this is true, it seems to see inculturation within the purview of a “culture-free” Gospel/Faith. But, as argued elsewhere⁹, even the evangelization of a local Church already involves interculturation simply because the Gospel-Faith cannot exist in the abstract apart from its concrete praxis in a culture.

From the foregoing considerations, it is clear that the prefix *inter* signifies the values of mutuality and reciprocity in relating with the *other*. This of course flows from the humble acknowledgment that the understanding sought by faith (*fides quaerens intellectum*) remains human and therefore limited. An illustrative story will hopefully complement such assertion. The famous Indian story of *The Blind Men and the Elephant* which underscores the

⁸ Frans Wijzen, “Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church” in *Sedos* <http://www.sedos.org>.

⁹ Gerard Francisco P. Timoner III, OP, “Theology of Inculturation: A Critical Appraisal” *Philippiniana Sacra* Vol. XL, No. 119 (May-August, 2005) pp. 313-352.

greatness of the truth that exceeds one's perception (one blind man who held the trunk thought that an elephant is slender and soft; another one who held the tusk thought that the elephant is hard and even pointedly sharp) can be retold with this interesting ending: the blind men *talked* to one another with open-minds (even though their eyes remain closed) and were able to combine their partial findings about the elephant and came closer to what the elephant looks like had they seen it! *Dialogue* opens us to a greater perception of the truth.¹⁰

Levels of Interculturality in Theological Reflection

Intercultural theology may be seen as (a) a theological reflection on the encounter *between/among* theologies arising from different cultural settings e.g., Latin American Christology and African Christology; and/or (b) as a theological insight that comes as a result of a dialogical encounter between (among) these two (or more) theologies (e.g., Latin American Christology and African Christology) wherein such new insight is akin to the concept of "fusion of horizons" in hermeneutic understanding.¹¹ This can be

¹⁰ The aim of dialogue is always to come to an agreement with the dialogue partner(s). But what if what started as a dialogue degenerates into a stubborn debate? Following Gadamer, Thomas Carr still finds something positive: "Even if our 'conversation' degenerates into debate and we find nothing on which to agree, we still have accomplished something: for we will have re-defined the borders of our horizons by clarifying them *over against* 'the other', thus extending the range of our self-interpretative vocabularies." Thomas Carr, *Newman and Gadamer: Toward a Hermeneutics of Religious Knowledge* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), p. 59.

¹¹ Hendrik Vroom asks: if the "term 'intercultural' could suggest an ability to emerge from our different cultural contexts and create a kind of common area, which in a certain way would be 'intercultural', and thus common to all, ... how does it differ from the old idea of universality?" [See "Contextual Theology Revisited" in *One Gospel, Many Cultures* ed. by Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Hendrik Vroom (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V., 2003), p. 227.] But Intercultural Theology is not a *universal* that exists apart from the particulars. Otherwise it becomes "trans-cultural" rather than "inter-cultural". The very concept of intercultural theology is a critique of the notion of a culture-free theology, simply because every theology is always a theology by a church or theologian. Intercultural theology stresses that theologies of *ecclesiae particulares* have something to say to other churches precisely because the Gospel values of love, justice and peace

viewed as operative on two main levels according to the categories of space and time. The Church, after all, is *catholic* both in *space* (especially now in the era of a World Church) and in *time* (i.e., its historical relation with the churches in the past that are rooted in the apostolic tradition).¹²

A. *Synchronic Interculturality*

Whenever one talks about the *present*, one means *here* and *now*. But although all living persons share the *same now*, their *here can be entirely different!* This is a crucial distinction that was often glossed over in the past whenever people think of “contemporarizing” theology or making theological reflection up to date. Taking seriously the different “*heres*” means taking into careful account *cultural loci*. Andrew Walls notes that the spatial dimension of the body of Christ refers to the different manifestations that make up the body which are contemporaneous with one another.”¹³ The *here* is inseparable from the *now*: “space is precisely that in which things are present, are now to me. Space is that in which *presence* occurs. The things in space are those that are now there for me that neither no longer are nor not yet

are universal i.e., common to all or, at least, commonly accepted by all who believe they are members of the Body of Christ.

¹² F.V. Anthony also sees interculturalization as operating on both the synchronic and diachronic levels. In its diachronic sense, interculturalization means a “retrospective dialogue” with the cultures that have given rise to the present form of ecclesial faith. On the synchronic plane, it means a dialogical encounter among the local churches, cultural groups within a local church, and even among the various denominations of Christian churches. Confer *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation* (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1997), p. 47. Spelled out simply, interculturalization on the synchronic plane involves encounters among Christians on various levels of cultures and sub-cultures. It must be noted that the distinction is meant to clarify, not to radically separate the two levels. As Anton Houtepen rightly points out: “Intercultural theology is a *synchronous* and *diachronous* discourse at the same time”. See Anton Houtepen, “Intercultural Theology: A Postmodern Ecumenical Mission” in M. Frederiks, M. Dijkstra and A. Houtepen, eds., *Towards an Intercultural Theology* (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Meinema, 2003), p. 33.

¹³ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) p. 75.

are”.¹⁴ Interculturality on the synchronic plane can be classified as of two kinds:

1. Missionary Moment. The proclamation of the Christ-event for the first time always involves the intercultural encounter between the Christian religious culture of the missionary or community of evangelizers and the culture that is as yet not Christian, at least explicitly.¹⁵ With a special reference to Paul's speech at the Areopagus, Shorter calls this initial encounter as acculturation which eventually leads to an intercultural dialogue.¹⁶ Carl Starkloff asserts that the Apologists like Justin, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria who creatively engaged and even borrowed heavily from Greek philosophy were all seeking for “that integration, that synthesis, which [is called] the syncretic process”.¹⁷ While carefully distinguishing between good from bad syncretism (a demonic

¹⁴ Robert Jenson, *Essays in Theology of Culture* (Grand Rapids: W. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), p. 10.

¹⁵ I add “at least explicitly” because of the theological principle of the universality of the saving action of Christ's Paschal mystery. Some missionaries have highlighted this by saying that Christ actually calls and then welcomes the missionary i.e., Christ is already present in a culture even before the missionary has arrived.

¹⁶ Shorter, p. 127.

¹⁷ Karl Starkloff, *A Theology of the In-Between: The Value of the Syncretic Process* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), p. 23. Starkloff argues that the syncretic process – the intermingling of pagan or gentile spiritual and philosophical elements with the Christian tradition is very much part of the history of theology. Though “syncretism” came to mean pejoratively “unprincipled commingling” (bad syncretism), the term is, in fact, ambivalent. It was first used by Plutarch to describe the alliance between the Cretan tribes, thus the name *syn-kretismos*. But the term's association with the Cretans who were called “liars” by Paul (Titus 1:12) was also one of the reasons for the negative meaning it acquired later on. The word was later adapted positively by Erasmus in his call for other humanists to unite against barbarism. But it was with the Protestants' concern for the purity of faith, and, later on, by the Catholics too, that the term acquired the meaning of “theological distortion.” Using Voegelin's notion of metaxy and theological insights from Lonergan, Starkloff argues that a *good syncretism* that aims for synthesis is in fact an antidote to Julianism. Julian the “Apostate” believed that each ethnic group has its own unique character and god, and therefore it is not good to change their ways and even their religion. Julianism is therefore diametrically opposed to the concepts of mission and conversion.

form of syncretism he cites is *apartheid* – a mixture of religion and racism), Starkloff avers that “mission and syncretism are companion phenomena”.¹⁸ In fact, a type of good and thoughtful syncretism is called *synthesis*¹⁹ like the Scholastic synthesis (of pagan philosophy with Christian theology; nature with grace) that reached its apex in Thomas of Aquinas.

The work of James Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity* is a fine example of how the Christianization of the Germanic cultures also involved a reciprocal and mutual *Germanization* of Christianity. Russell’s thesis is that a Romanized and Hellenistic Christianity has transformed Germanic religiosity, which has, in turn, significantly Germanized European medieval Christianity. He claims:

That pre-Christian Germanic values, particularly those relating to the Germanic code of honor, retained acceptance in Western European Christian circles in the thirteenth century seems to indicate that, as Christianity expanded to include the Germanic peoples, some of its core values such as its world-rejecting notion of honor, its pacifism, and its focus on individual posthumous salvation, were substantially transformed in a process of Germanization. With the additional impetus of an ‘Ottonian Captivity of the Church’, these Germanized ethics, along with Germanic liturgical and spiritual developments, eventually became normative throughout European Christendom.²⁰

One of the many evidences he cites is that the “magico-religious effects of the Germanization of Christianity such as Masses offered at the shrines of saints for special intentions, remain formidable elements of contemporary Catholic religiosity.”²¹ Other Germanic reactions against Arianism that have found their way to Rome and spread throughout Christianity were: “increase

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

²⁰ James Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 124.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 210-211.

in votive masses commemorating Mary, multiplication of signs of the cross in the Mass and the introduction of silent prayer with hands folded, which derived from the posture of a vassal pledging fealty to his lord".²²

It must be noted that genuine interculturality that is marked by mutuality and reciprocity was, to a large extent absent, except for some outstanding examples like that of Mateo Ricci, during the missionary movement that coincided with the colonial era. This can be attributed to the way the *cultural* and *religious others* were viewed through the optic of racial prejudice. Certainly, there is no place for mutuality and reciprocity in intercultural relations when, in the first place, the *other* is seen as someone who badly needs to be "cultured" and be weaned from primitivism or barbarism.

2. Intercultural Theology Between/Among Local and Regional Churches. It is on this plane that interculturality is most clearly manifested. In the years that followed Vatican II with its affirmation of the local Church (*ecclesiae particulares*), *local* religious experience and *local* theological reflections have increasingly become part of the way *local* theologians do theology. During the first plenary assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishop's Conferences (FABC) held in Taiwan on April 27, 1974, the Asian Bishops declared: "The primary task of our evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly *local church*... The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated."²³ But this renewed vision of the Church in Asia did not mean a Church that is closed in on itself. From its foundation in Manila in 1970, the Bishops have been ever mindful of the "spirit of collegiality and dialogue so earnestly

²² Ibid., p. 42.

²³ FABC, "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia" Statement of the First Plenary Assembly in *For All the Peoples of Asia: FABC Documents from 1970-1991* Vol. 1 ed. by Gaudencio Rosales DD and Catalino Arevalo, SJ (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), p. 14. (Emphasis is mine.) During this period theologians were still grappling with the theologies of indigenization and inculturation. In fact, it was at this time that the term "inculturation" was first used in a Church document and in an ecclesial context.

urged by the Council.”²⁴ On its 10th foundation anniversary, the FABC stated its keen awareness of its role not just in Asia but in the Universal Church: “We have also been enabled by our joint reflection and discernment, by pastoral options and policies we have taken together, *to contribute to the ongoing reflection and discernment of churches in other continents and to the thinking and policies of the central administrative offices of the Church.*”²⁵ There is then a clearly discernible vision for an authentic intercultural enrichment and dialogue. And interculturality here refers to both inter-continental and intra-continental exchange because Asia itself is a colorful mosaic of cultures and religious traditions.

David Bosch’s vision of the Church as a “universal hermeneutic community of Christians and theologians from different lands”²⁶ is a community whose members, especially theologians, do not only check one another’s cultural biases as Bosch proposes, but more positively, a community whose members have something valuable to contribute by way of intercultural exchange. Consequently, this would lead to an expansion of their limited theological horizons. The following are examples of how theological developments in Local Churches (on the macro level of continents) become enriching and enlightening moments of learning for the Church.

a. A European Theology and Its Contribution to Intercultural Theology

Europe has contributed significantly to Intercultural Theology (the chairs of Intercultural Theology mentioned earlier are all in Europe). The consideration of one of the contributions of European theology shall be limited within the specific parameters of the intercultural dialogue/exchange between Edward Schillebeeckx, OP of the Netherlands and Gustavo Gutierrez, OP of Peru. Thus, only *a* specific contribution of *a* European theologian shall be discussed.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 3.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 54. Italics supplied.

²⁶ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 457.

Latin American Liberation Theology is a shining example of how a socio-cultural context becomes a fertile ground for the discovery of new insights from Holy Scriptures. The liberationist message from Exodus, the Prophetic tradition, up to the Gospels, are brought to bear upon contexts of unjust structures that cause dehumanizing poverty. It must be noted though that liberation theology is not *sui generis*. The first Latin American liberation theologians were educated in Europe at a time when theologians like J.B. Metz are "protesting the privatization of religion and are rethinking the social responsibility of Christians".²⁷ This trend in theologizing was then called "political theology". It is acknowledged that European political theology provided the seminal ideas that led to the eventual development of liberation theology when the Latin American students returned home from their studies in Europe. The genius of this first generation of liberationist theologians was their attempt at a new form of theological reflection within their contextual experience of poverty and unjust social structures. This view however, tends to see the development of liberation theology in a *mono-directional* fashion. The subsequent impact and challenge of Liberation Theology to European theology remain hardly examined. Spelled out simply, the reciprocal relationship or exchange between theologians from both continents is not given much thought.

From M.D. Chenu's theology of the *signs of the times*, his students Schillebeeckx and Gutierrez have engaged the questions of their *time* (as contemporaries) but have pursued and reached different (though complementary) theological directions/conclusions on account of the different *cultural loci* from which they theologized. The cooperation and mutual critical exchange between Schillebeeckx and Gutierrez²⁸ have opened up for scrutiny "blind sides" in their theological projects. This mutual critical exchange may be described as a concrete example of what happens in an *intercultural theology*

²⁷ Gerald Collins, SJ and Edward Farrugia, SJ eds. "Political Theology" in *A Concise Dictionary of Theology* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2001), p. 205.

²⁸ Eric Borgman, "Theology as the Art of Liberation: Edward Schillebeeckx's Response to the Theologies of EATWOT" in *Exchange* 32 (2003) 2, pp. 98-108.

i.e., in the dialogue between theologians who are deeply immersed in different cultural milieus.

For Gutierrez, the *sign of the times* in Latin America is the “irruption of the poor”.²⁹ For Schillebeeckx, an alternative to the discernment of the *signs of the times* is the experience of contrast between the present world of suffering and evil and the world as it should be or as intended by God.³⁰ Considering that both are *contemporaries*, (they are not related *diachronically* but *synchronically*), one can clearly see that the difference between the two (Gutierrez’s very concrete face of the poor and Schillebeeckx’s abstract picture of suffering) is not the category of time but the category of place or cultural location. This, in my view, is an evidence for the necessity of a new perspective in theological reflection. *Just as the “signs of the times” brought into focus the historical perspective, so the importance of differences even in contemporaneous contexts brings into focus the “intercultural perspective”.*

Intercultural Theology as mutual critical exchange is clearly discernible in the dialogue between the two theologians. Gutierrez’s critique that Schillebeeckx’s theological reflection on contrast-experiences is too abstract points to the general Platonic heritage of western thought (after all, *scientia est universalis*) to which Schillebeeckx is immersed. On the other hand, Schillebeeckx’s critique of Gutierrez’s zealous commitment to the concrete suffering of the poor points to the danger of theology becoming partisan. Schillebeeckx quotes the prophet Amos to point out that God could not be limited to a particular group of people: “Are not you and the Cushites the same to me, children of Israel? (Amos 9:7) Borgman’s lucid presentation of the debate shows how the critical exchange exposes and corrects the “blind sides” of their theological reflections.

One fruitful locus of intercultural theology is precisely this dialogical exchange that corrects and enriches theological reflection. The perspectival character of human truth is not only limited by

²⁹ Borgman, p. 102.

³⁰ Ibid, p. 104.

historical distance which early hermeneutic theories seek to address but also by *cultural distance*. Just as *hermeneutic dialogue* has been proposed to bridge historical distance, so the same dialogue may be employed in order for us to understand the *cultural-other* and be mutually enriched in the process.

b. Some Contributions of Latin American Theology to Intercultural Theology:

Latin American theology is often held to be synonymous with *Liberation Theology*.³¹ This liberationist orientation is not altogether new but has its nascent beginnings in the 16th century when the missionaries to the *Novus Mundus* were grappling with issues of injustice the *conquista* has brought to bear upon the indigenous population of the Americas. The dynamic exchange between the academic theologian Francisco de Vitoria (acknowledged as forefather of international law) and Bartolomé de las Casas can be viewed as a fruitful collaboration between an academic theologian in a European university and a mission practitioner in the new world.³² One can therefore say, in general, that the *poor-other* and the *oppressed-other* have been part of theological reflection in Latin America, though they have been probably neglected during the period between the time of Las Casas and modern-day liberationist theologians like Gutierrez, Boff, Sobrino et al. The impact of the Las Casas et al. on the international scene can be seen in the development of thinking concerning international law. The impact of the modern day theologians of liberation is readily observable in the way North Atlantic, Asian, African and feminist theologians have tried to appropriate the liberationist theme in their theological reflection.

A second important contribution of Latin American theologizing is *the recognition of the oppression of the cultural-other*:

³¹ As demonstrated earlier, Latin American Liberation Theology can be viewed as a product of the dynamic exchange among the theologians of Europe and of Latin America; hence it is itself the product of intercultural exchange.

³² Timothy Radcliffe, OP, "Study: The Wellspring of Hope" in *Sing a New Song: The Christian Vocation* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1999), p. 77.

an important facet of the *colonized-other* in Latin America who has been invisible for many centuries. This recognition is significant for it reflects a sharpening of the Church's critical self-reflection when it recognized that it has played a significant role on the side of the oppressor. R. Van Rossum puts it succinctly:

In religion and politics the opponent is outside, it is the dominating classes, it is the State. The church was often persecuted on account of its progressive stand. But with regard to the issue of culture, *the church itself immediately shines as the oppressive power*, and proves to be marked by white, male and Western culture, which certainly in its administrative context, finds it extremely difficult to accept a genuine inculturation of religions in African, Indian and female worlds.³³

The Western Church that had been creative in assimilating the cultural heritage of the Greeks, Romans, and then the Gallic and Germanic peoples during the first millennium had eventually become fearful of syncretism and other cultural accretions that could destroy the "purity" of the faith. To a significant extent, preoccupation with "purity of the faith" became intimately connected with the ideal of "purity of blood" or purity of race. Rolando de la Rosa's inquiry into the late emergence of native Filipino religious clergy points to the *liempieza de sangre* statute, a juridical instrument that excluded Moors, Jews, and convicts of the Inquisition from holding public and ecclesiastical offices from the 15th to the 19th centuries, as a major cause for the retarded growth of the native religious clergy.³⁴ Though the *liempieza* statute was originally employed as a "defensive mechanism," it became an

³³Rogier Van Rossum, "Beyond Confessional Borders: The Other in Latin-American Context" in L. Lagerwerf, K. Steenbrink, F. Verstraelen, eds. *Changing Partnership of Missionary and Ecumenical Movements* (Leiden: Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research 1995), p. 193. Emphasis mine.

³⁴ See Rolando de la Rosa, OP, *History of the Filipinization of the Religious Orders in the Philippines: Beginnings of the Filipino Dominicans* (Quezon City, DPP, 1990). He avers: "The preoccupation with the degree of lineage, the equation of orthodoxy to purity of ancestry, the belief that converts, by nature, had the tendency or the necessity to reject the faith or to regress into their former ways, had become the yardstick for judging the *indios*" (p. 15).

instrument for a certain form of “racism” within the Church. The statute may be limited to the Spanish church of the period, yet it is reflective of a Eurocentric view of Christianity that finds succinct expression in Hilaire Belloc’s claim: *The Faith is Europe and Europe is the Faith*.³⁵

The third important contribution builds upon the second: the “*mestiçagem* as a goal of inculturated evangelization.”³⁶ This declaration of Sto. Domingo (4th General Assembly of the Latin American Episcopate) aims to repair the damage wrought upon the colonized culture. Formerly, *mestiçagem*/*mestizaje* is a taboo because it is the bodily and spiritual transgression of the purity of races/faiths. It is a threat to the radical distinction between the superior white race and the colored; it even threatens the degeneration of the white race.³⁷ But it is in this *in-between* status of the *mestiçagem*/*mestizaje* that the unity of two radically different entities can meet and socio-cultural synthesis can be forged. This is best exemplified in the widely venerated *mestiza* image of Our Lady of Guadalupe.³⁸ The image of our Lady, according to V. Elizondo is “not merely an apparition, but a perfect synthesis of the religious iconography of the Iberian peoples with that of the native Mexican people in one coherent image”.³⁹ Is the *mestiçagem*/*mestizaje*, one of the concrete images of what *intercultural* theology means?

c. Some Contributions of African Theology to Intercultural Theology

The first important contribution of African Theology is the declaration by the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar that there ought to be a “methodological shift from a theology of adaptation

³⁵ Hilaire Belloc quoted by Avery Dulles, *The Catholicity of the Church* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), p. 75.

³⁶ Van Rossum, p. 195.

³⁷ Virgil Elizondo, “Mestizaje: The Birth of New Life” in *Concilium* (1999) 2, p. 48.

³⁸ Van Rossum, p. 190.

³⁹ Elizondo, p. 51.

to that of incarnation".⁴⁰ *Adaptation* is a term used in *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (nos. 1; 37-40) that refers to a general program for updating. However, "adaptation theology" presupposes that Eurocentric Theology simply contributes and gives to "other" theologies and has nothing to learn from them.⁴¹ Adaptation assumes a unilateral relation between the Christian message and culture. The bishops' preference for a theology of incarnation over that of adaptation is aimed to take seriously the values of their own cultural tradition. Their collective action at the Extraordinary Synod held in Rome in 1974 bore fruit when the 1985 Extraordinary Synod of Bishops declared: "Inculturation, however, is different from mere external adaptation, as it signifies an interior transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in various human cultures."⁴²

The second contribution clarifies further the first: *the relation between the Christian message and culture is characterized by reciprocity*. In one of his lectures, Albert Nolan, OP of South Africa remarked: "Our question about the impact of Christianity upon Africa will always be incomplete unless we also ask 'what is the impact of Africa upon Christianity?'" E. Uzukwu, quoting John Paul II in *Slavorum Apostoli*, concisely presents this reciprocity: "inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of Church."⁴³ The introduction of the African culture(s) into the life of the Church can be seen in the festive liturgical celebrations that are gaining their rightful place in the Church even outside the African continent. It is interesting to note that even before the official use of the neologism "inculturation", African spirituality has already gained steady ground in churches in the United States of America in the form of the "negro spirituals."

⁴⁰ Elochukwu Uzukwu, "Inculturation and the Theological Education in Africa: Explorations in Sacramentology" in *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* (2001), p. 18.

⁴¹ Gerald Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel* (New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p. 17.

⁴² Anscar Chupungco, OSB, *Inculturation: Sacramentals, Religiosity and Catechesis* (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1992), p. 29.

⁴³ Uzukwu, p. 19.

The third contribution is the *concretization of inculturation in African theological education itself*. Though demonized by the missionaries of the colonization period, the African initiation rites persisted on account of their foundational character in the “transmission of living tradition through what is shown/seen, what is said or recited, and especially what is done or acted out”.⁴⁴ The paschal mystery, when interpreted within the purview of African initiation rites, becomes an extraordinary event of meaning that resonates deeply within African culture. Conversely, the African initiation rites become more meaningful or are opened to a critical inspection (e.g., female circumcision) when viewed from the “initiation underwent by Jesus” on account of his saving love.

In addition to the aforementioned, it must be noted that the African continent has already made significant and enduring contributions to the Church during the first millennium. Interestingly, Walls points out that: “Western theology was first made in Africa, because the North African Church pioneered the vernacular use of Latin at a time when the Church in Rome was still using Greek, the language of Paul and the other missionaries.”⁴⁵ It is also well to remember that the renowned theologians of the first millennium came from continental Africa: Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine. Surely, it is intriguing to note that the founder of “western monasticism”, Anthony of Egypt, came from that continent as well.

d. Some Contributions of Asian Theology to Intercultural Theology

The first contribution of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) is its theological method that can be rightly called *inductive theology*. In the message and resolutions of the first meeting of the Asian Bishops held in Manila on 29 November 1970, the bishops started with a careful examination of the context

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁵ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002), p. 87.

of Asia.⁴⁶ Henceforth, every FABC document begins with an examination of context. The contextual realities of Asia are resources for theology. They are not simply the background for theologizing, but are in themselves *loci theologici*, places where theology happens.

From this general methodological orientation, the FABC has formulated its now famous three-fold dialogue with cultures, religions and the poor. In the *International Congress on Mission* held in Manila on 7 December 1979, the delegates declared:

The starting point of Mission Theology in the Asian Context is the present-day situation of the realities of Asia... The focus of evangelization is the local Church which, in order to be fully built up, must engage:

- a. in dialogue with local cultures;
- b. in life-dialogue and life-solidarity with the masses of the poor and the oppressed in the region;
- c. in dialogue with the religious traditions of our Asian neighbors.⁴⁷

The three-fold dialogue clearly demonstrates the fruit of intercultural theology as it integrates the areas of concern highlighted in the theologizing of other continents: inculturation (dialogue with cultures) in Africa and liberation theology (dialogue with the poor and oppressed) in Latin America. The genius of the FABC theology is the creative combination of these with one of its unique concerns: the dialogue with the other great religious and spiritual traditions and presenting them not as independent but intimately related with each other.⁴⁸

The third contribution of Asian theology is the *Theology of Harmony*. In its first meeting in Manila, the FABC made the fundamental orientation of the Church in Asia clear: "We pledge

⁴⁶ G. Rosales and C. Arévalo, SJ, *For All the People's of Asia: FABC Documents from 1970-1991* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1997), pp. 3-7.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁴⁸ See Office of Theological Concerns of the FABC, "Methodology: Asian Christian Theology" in Franz-Josef Eilers, ed., *For All the People's of Asia: FABC Documents from 1997-2001* (Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 2002), pp. 329-419.

ourselves to an open, sincere and continuing dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other great religions of Asia, that we may learn from one another"⁴⁹ This awareness of the plurality of religions in Asia led the bishops to a uniquely Asian mode of theologizing: the *Theology of Harmony*. M. Amaladoss describes the ground of the relationship between theology of harmony and dialogue as: "a logic that does not operate on the principle of contradiction and exclusion (either/or) but of identity and inclusion (both/and)"⁵⁰

The aforementioned include some concepts that have been criticized earlier (e.g., incarnation as paradigm for inculturation⁵¹) yet it is well to ponder how the manifold ways by which churches and theologians affirm, criticize and appropriate in their unique socio-cultural contexts the fruits of each other's theological reflection truly saves the Church from the insularity of ethnocentrism and makes the Church truly *catholic*.

e. "Global Theological Flows" as Intercultural Theology

Within the framework of exclusionary and dehumanizing globalization, Robert Schreiter identifies conscious and deliberate counter movements in theology which he calls "theological flows". He explains that these flows are "theological discourses that while not uniform or systemic, represent a series of linked, mutually intelligible discourses that address the failures or contradictions of the global system".⁵² Like globalized capitalism, these theological flows circulate and move across geographic and cultural boundaries. Schreiter identifies four of these flows: (a) Theologies of Liberation (b) Feminist Theologies (c) Theologies of Ecology (d) and Theologies

⁴⁹ Sebastian Paidanath, "FABC's Theology of Dialogue" in *Dialogue: Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia* (Bangkok: FABC-OEIA, 2001), p. 102.

⁵⁰ M. Amaladoss quoted by Jonathan Tan in "Theology of Harmony" *Dialogue: Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia* (Bangkok: FABC-OEIA, 2001), p. 118.

⁵¹ Cf. Timoner, pp. 340 ff.

⁵² Robert Schreiter, C.P.P.S., *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (New York: Orbis Books [5th printing], 2002), p. 16.

of Human Rights. These theologies have the potential to “mobilize the antisystemic feeling in cultures, especially when global systems fail to live up to their ideals of progress, equality and inclusion”.⁵³ As modes of theological reflection, they have sprung from specific milieus e.g., Theologies of Liberation had its roots in European “political theology;” Feminist Theologies began in North America and Europe. But these have “flowed” into other continents and cultural settings and have been *transformed* by the new “cultural terrain” into which they have flowed. As discussed earlier, European political theology was transformed into liberation theology in Latin America. Feminist theology, which, in the beginning appeared, as “gender-wars” as it highlighted the oppression of women, became acutely aware of marginalization and exclusion not only of women but also of men of color and low economic status when it “flowed” into the “Third” World and the formerly colonized countries. The critical appropriation of feminist theology by the underdeveloped and developing countries made the earlier proponents in North America and Europe aware of other marginalizations that have been “at the margins” of their earlier reflection. A good representative of this transformation is Elizabeth Shüssler Fiorenza who talks about the marginalization of “*wo/men*” (the term is meant to highlight the exclusion that involves both men and women) in her analysis of a “pyramid of multiplicative oppressions” where women are oppressed not only by sexism but wo/men are also oppressed by racism, classism and colonialism.⁵⁴ This refinement in the analysis of marginalization is largely due to the widening of horizons when these theologies “flowed back and forth” into different cultural terrains, in other words, by intercultural exchange.

Schreiter shows that the aforementioned are constructive efforts to humanize globalization. They are hopeful alternatives to

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Shüssler Fiorenza, *But She Said: Feminist Practices of Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), p. 114. See also *Wisdom Ways: Introducing Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001). In Fiorenza’s systemic analysis, oppression is not limited to the realm of gender because elite and powerful women can also oppress and marginalize poor men e.g., the Abu Ghraib prison scandal in Iraq depicted female and male soldiers (under the command of a woman, Gen. Janis Karpinski) abusing male Iraqi prisoners.

other counter-global movements that, in the end, also exacerbate oppression and exclusion: fundamentalism, especially of the militant kind, and xenophobic ethnification that demonizes the *cultural* or *ethnic* other. Schreiter rightly discerns the tension between the global and the local. Though this tension is often characterized by the conflict of the opposing forces of *homogenizing yet exclusionary globalism* on the one hand, and *relativizing localism* on the other, Schreiter proposes to find a creative and healthy balance between the two through the ecclesial mark of *catholicity*, *kath'holon* i.e., "throughout the whole". It is an understanding of the whole that respects the parts and an understanding of the parts as integral to the whole. While economic globalization rides on the tides of communication and transport technologies that compress time and space, Schreiter points to the promise of *intercultural hermeneutics* to bridge the gap among cultures. Certainly, this hermeneutics must be informed by the ideals of the theological flows. Schreiter strongly proposes:

A new catholicity, then, is marked by the wholeness of inclusion and the fullness of faith in a pattern of cultural exchange and communication. To the extent that this catholicity can be realized, it may provide a paradigm of what a universal theology might look like today, able to encompass both sameness and difference, rooted in orthopraxis, providing *teloi* for a globalized society.⁵⁵

While Bauman⁵⁶ highlights the ambivalence and even contradictions of a globalization that has found a powerful engine in extra-territorial capitalism but has no clear direction except the creation of a new class of global rich and localized poor around the globe, Schreiter soberly finds hope in the global theological flows that strongly seek to address the malady of exclusion and marginalization created by globalization. A humane alternative to a heartless globalization driven by *mammon*, the god of money, is a new catholicity. It is *new* because the "old" practice of "catholicity" has also been marked by the exclusion of peoples (e.g., purity

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 132.

⁵⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

of faith was tied with purity of blood at a certain period in colonial history).

B. Diachronic Interculturality

Interculturality seems to be proper only to synchronic relations i.e., those that involve shared *now* but with different *heres* or socio-cultural circumstances. It involves the expansion of viewpoints when people and communities engage in dialogue, thereby allowing for the expansion, even “fusion” of horizons. But how can there be an intercultural relation of the *present* with the *past*? If mutuality and reciprocity are cardinal values in intercultural theology, how can the *past* ever enter into a dialogical relationship with the *present*, simply because the past can never reply to the questions of the present?

Christian faith is not only “heard from another” who proclaims but it is also the faith of our foreparents, for our God is the God of Abraham and Sarah, of Isaac and Rebecca, and of Jacob and Rachel. Walls notes that:

[the] Christian faith, therefore, is necessarily ancestor-conscious, aware of the previous generations of faith. It cannot divinize the ancestors, however, for their continuing significance comes only from God’s activity in and towards them. The work of salvation is cross-generational, and never completed in one generation. And the generations – two millennia of them since the incarnation – are parts of a single body, and that body needs them all.⁵⁷

It is the dynamic process of *tradition* that “hands down” the faith of our fore-parents to the present. In Gadamer’s understanding, tradition must be principally understood as *transmission* rather than as mere *conservation*; it means grasping the past and expressing it anew.⁵⁸ This certainly has important implications in

⁵⁷ Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (New York: Orbis Books, 2002) p. 75.

⁵⁸ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Relevance of the Beautiful* trans. by Nicholas Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 49.

how the faith is “handed down” in space and time. Thomas Carr explains further Gadamer’s insight:

Mediation does not imply that one simply passes on unchanged body of beliefs. It signifies an active process of appropriation in which each historical epoch learns to grasp and make present past beliefs in new and fresh ways, ways that are faithful, not to some idealized event in the past, but to the *fundamental continuity of history itself* as the infeasible medium encompassing every interpretation.⁵⁹

It is this fundamental continuity of history, of the past with the present that guarantees unity. However, the dynamic process that brings the past into the present is not mere transmission but trans-mediation wherein whatever is received is creatively appropriated by those in the present. Thus, there is *sameness* and yet *difference* in whatever is received in the present.⁶⁰ The following example will help clarify this point further.

Extra ecclesiam nulla salus. Though the question of salvation outside the Church had a long history even before Cyprian of Carthage (e.g., the question concerning the salvation of the Jews before Christ came), the axiom has been associated with him. For Cyprian, it referred to those who are in danger of excommunication or were already separated by heresy or schism.⁶¹ Centuries later, the axiom concerning the necessity of belonging to the Church and faith in Christ is interpreted by St. Thomas within the context of his firm belief in the universal salvific will of God: “It is due to the mercy of Him ‘Who will have all men to be saved’ (1 Timothy 2:4) that in those things which are necessary for salvation, man

⁵⁹ Carr, p. 165.

⁶⁰ While this is true to the entire Christian tradition, there were also instances wherein “transmission” (i.e., the insistence that what is handed down must remain exactly the *same*) actually took place in some “fundamentalistic” moments in history; the earliest example would be the insistence that all men who embrace the Christian faith ought to be circumcised.

⁶¹ Francis Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church? Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), p. 20.

can easily find the remedy.”⁶² In the “world” known by St. Thomas, everyone has known Christ; even Jews and Moslems are presumed to have heard enough of Christ. And since belief in Christ is necessary for salvation, refusal to believe in Christ with its dire consequences is due to the unbeliever’s own fault. Thus, he makes great allowance only for those who have possibly not heard of Christ: “those who were brought up in the wilderness or with animals”.⁶³ Again, centuries later, the Dominican theologians of Salamanca, Francisco de Vitoria, Melchior Cano and Domingo Soto, interpreted the same axiom within a very different setting: the *novus mundus* has been “discovered” and what vexed them was that the unbelief of the *Indios* in Christ has been used as justification for the *conquista*. De Vitoria, who will later on be acknowledged as “forefather of international law,” argued that just as the *Indios* were not faulted for their lack of belief in Christ before the Gospel was preached to them, neither are they to be faulted for not believing because of the unconvincing way it was proclaimed to them. In what amounts to be an indictment of the *conquistadores*, De Vitoria explains the reason for the *Indios*’ inculpability: “I hear of many scandals and cruel crimes and acts of impiety. Hence, it does not appear that the Christian religion has been preached to them with such sufficient propriety and piety that they are bound to acquiesce in it...”⁶⁴ Domingo de Soto applied the teaching of St. Thomas but reinterpreted it within the context of his *expanded* world. Just as for St. Thomas the “implicit faith” of the gentiles who came before Christ was sufficient for salvation; the same is true with the *Indios* before they heard the Gospel. And such proclamation must be done in a convincing way; otherwise, they are not to be blamed for persisting in their unbelief.

It is interesting to note how *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* has been *transmediated* and appropriated differently in different epochs. Though the text of the past cannot enter into a “dialogue”

⁶² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q. 67 a. 3. (CD edition by Harmony Media, 1996).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁶⁴ Francisco De Vitoria, quoted by Sullivan, p. 72.

in the same way that contemporaries do, its meaning can become a new event of meaning in the present.

A Hermeneutic Framework for Intercultural Theology

At this juncture, it would be well to recall David Bosch's vision: "If the Church is the Body of Christ, it can only be one. In this sense, then – and not as an idealistic supra-cultural entity – the church is a kind of 'universal hermeneutical community, in which Christians and theologians from different lands [and cultures] check one another's cultural biases'".⁶⁵ Intercultural theology affirms both the particularity of Local Churches with their *local* theology and the Catholicity of the Church. But how should the tension between particularity and universality be viewed? Will not the *plurality of local theologies* eventually lead to debilitating *relativism*?

One can re-frame the problem of the dynamic and reciprocal encounter between Gospel/Faith (understood as religious culture) and cultures within the framework of the relation between *universality* and *particularity*, between the *one* and the *many*.⁶⁶ Why is it that there is ONE Jesus and yet FOUR (OR MANY) Gospels? Why is there only ONE invitation: "come follow me," and yet there are MANY ways to do so? Why is there only one *catholic* i.e., *universal* church and yet many different *local* i.e., *particular* churches

⁶⁵ Bosch, p. 457.

⁶⁶ The Problem of the One and the Many is one of the first problems in the history of Western Thought: whether Reality is ONE (Parmenides) or MANY (Heraclitus/Atomists). Plato, Aristotle and the rest grappled with balancing a dialectical tension between the two. Although one can protest with Tertullian that Athens (philosophy) has nothing to do with Jerusalem (faith/religion), the fact of the heritage of philosophical language informing theological language shows the intimate connection between the two. Odo Marquard observes that: "The tradition of universalizing philosophies brings to bear 'the precedence of the one before the many... Wherever multiplicity rules, we have an unfortunate situation that must be remedied; it must be universalized, totalized, globalized, egalitized, emancipated, revolutionized'. By contrast, the tradition of pluralizing philosophies brings to bear 'precedence of the many before the one... [the rule of the one] must be detotalized, decentralized, differentiated, pluralized, regionalized..." [Quoted by M. Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Pub.Co., 1998), p. 193.]

that are the same yet different? What happens when the SAME Gospel is proclaimed, heard and lived in MANY cultures?

These questions shall be treated within the purview of Gadamer's concept of hermeneutic understanding: "If the heart of the hermeneutical problem is that the *same* tradition must always be understood in a *different way*, the problem, logically speaking, is that of the relationship between the *universal* and the *particular*. Understanding, then, is a particular case of the application of something universal to a particular situation."⁶⁷

The Christ-Event as an Interpretive Moment

Christianity was born in a hermeneutic situation. With the coming of Jesus, the awaited Messiah, the Judaic Scriptures assumed a newer and deeper significance. God, who formerly spoke through the prophets, now reveals Himself in Jesus (Hebrews 1: 1-2). After the resurrection, Christ appeared to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and explained the Old Testament in terms of the *present* events of the Paschal Mystery. Palmer⁶⁸ sees in the Emmaus event a very clear example of the hermeneutic relation of the New Testament to the Old Testament.

"Oh, how foolish you are! How slow of heart to believe all that the prophets spoke! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them what referred to him in all the scriptures (Luke 24: 25-27).

The Kerygma, therefore, is not just a proclamation but also a *profound re-reading* of the Scripture.⁶⁹ The Emmaus event

⁶⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* trans. by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. 312 (Emphasis is mine). Henceforth shall be referred to as TM.

⁶⁸ Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger and Gadamer* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 24.

⁶⁹ Paul Ricoeur, "Preface to Bultmann" in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation* ed. by Mudge Lewis (Philadelphia: Fontana Press, 1980), p. 51.

clearly shows that the Christ-event is the fulfillment of the latent and antecedent meaning of the Old Covenant. There is then a hermeneutic bond between the two Testaments.

However, the novelty of the New Testament does not merely *fulfill* the Judaic interpretation of Scripture but also *revises* it. It fulfills it as far as all the prophecies and typologies are now incarnated in Christ. Yet, it also rectifies the Judaic anticipation of a politically victorious messiah. The revision of this "prevailing interpretation" began on the road to Emmaus. Ricoeur points to this mutation, the notion of the Christ-event as the continuity and change in the meaning of the Judaic Scripture, as the first moment of Christian hermeneutics. This hermeneutic moment was effected only by "placing the Old Testament texts in the context of the present events of Jesus' messiahship."⁷⁰ The disciples understood better the Old Law when they looked at it from the perspective of recent events: the death and resurrection of Jesus. The present, therefore, has re-defined the meaning of the ancient prophecies. *The past can no longer be understood only in its own terms.*

The Gospel⁷¹ as a Classic

Gadamer's rehabilitation of *prejudice* against the prejudice of the Enlightenment has reminded us that whenever we try to understand a text, or a person, or a situation, we always begin with the assumption of familiarity.⁷² Fore-understanding or prejudice is the starting point, in fact, the very condition for the possibility of understanding.⁷³ The context, in fact the culture, is the source of

⁷⁰ Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1980), p. 17.

⁷¹ "Gospel," in the singular, primarily refers to the *evangelion*, the Good News of God's salvific love. Though it appears to be abstract, it refers to the concrete experiences of salvation that were put into writing by the evangelists of the "four" Gospels.

⁷² Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 166.

⁷³ Gadamer explains: "A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only

the “foremeanings dwelling within a person.”⁷⁴ In this regard, Thomas Carr raises a critical question: “If the temporal-regional world that limits human cognition projects itself into every interpretation as both its confining medium *and* the condition of its possibility, how is interpretative understanding ever to bring to maturity results that pass the test of time? How can the interpretations inextricably linked to the here and now claim to speak for all times and places?”⁷⁵ Gadamer’s idea of the classic is proffered as an enlightened answer to this question, which evidently, is at the heart of the claim that the Gospel speaks to all times and places.

A classic is at once *timeless* and *timely*.⁷⁶ It is *timeless* not because it lies beyond the vicissitudes of history, but because it becomes an event of meaning in every moment of history. It is *timely* precisely because it is “a timeless present that is contemporaneous with every other present.”⁷⁷

Sacred Scripture is eminently *classical*. Paradoxical as it may seem, the Bible is at once old and new. To a significant extent, it is closely related with what Augustine has contemplated about God, a *beauty ever ancient, ever new*. It is old for it was written by ancient hagiographers and addressed the people of their milieu.

because he is reading the text with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there”(TM, p. 267). This succinct description shows how “prejudice” actually becomes the starting point for understanding which grows as it is continually “revised”. As Gadamer has demonstrated, this is true to all human understanding which includes even scientific reasoning where one begins with a “theory”, a fore-understanding or anticipation of the probable results of an experiment that is either confirmed or revised as one goes through the path of discovery. The very questions researchers pose or scientists set out to answer are in themselves part of what constitute fore-understanding. Objectivity is thus understood as the acute awareness that one actually begins with fore-meanings or fore-understandings.

⁷⁴ TM, p. 267.

⁷⁵ Carr, p. 30.

⁷⁶ TM. p. 285 ff.

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 288.

Yet, Sacred Scripture is also forever new because it addresses *us here and now*. Scripture lays a claim on us. It is normative. It applies and must be applied to our life. It addresses us in our present *cultural situatedness*. It is historical yet it transcends history for it has the power to become a gracious event of meaning in every time and place. Gadamer explicates how the classical is both timeless yet timely:

The classical is truly a historical category, precisely because it is more than a concept of a period or a historical style, and yet it nevertheless does not try to be the concept of a supra-historical value. It does not refer to a quality that we ascribe to a particular historical phenomenon but to a notable mode of being historical: the historical process of preservation (*Bewahrung*) that, through constantly proving itself (*Bewährung*), allows something true (*ein Wahres*) to come into being... The classical is something that resists historical criticism because its historical dominion, the binding power of the validity that is preserved and handed down, precedes all historical reflection and continues in it.⁷⁸

Gadamer is careful to point out that the classical is not a supra-historical entity like the Platonic forms that exist on an exalted realm that is untouched by time and change. Rather, the classical is historical (it has a beginning in time) and yet has the capacity to become a *new* event of meaning when appropriated in the present. The notion of the classical becomes clearer when considered in the light of certain elements of hermeneutic experience: application, authority and tradition.

Christian Life as *Interpretative Application* of the Gospel

The translation of text to action is an eminently interpretive moment. It is a moment of words coming to life, of words being lived out. Ricoeur notes that it was St. Paul who initiated the second modality of Christian hermeneutics when "he invites the hearers of the Word to decipher the movement of their existence

⁷⁸ TM, p. 287.

in the light of the Passion and Resurrection of Jesus.”⁷⁹ The exegetical tradition of deciphering the moral and allegorical⁸⁰ meaning of Scriptures points to the interpretive relation between the Word of God and human existence. There is reciprocity in this relation: Scriptures give meaning to life and life lived according to the Scriptures makes the Word of God an event of meaning *here* and *now*.⁸¹

The moral and allegorical meanings of Scriptures show that interpretation is more than exegesis. The reflection on life by means of the “mirror” of the text is another interpretive moment. This moment seeks the conformity of human existence with the demands of the Gospel. It is when we make Scriptures the mirror of life that the Word speaks as St. Bernard says: *hodie usque ad nos*, “even to us today.”⁸² To let the Scripture *speak to us even today*⁸³ is to make it contemporary. Moreover, to contemporarize the meaning of Scripture is to interpret it within the ever-changing conditions of historical-cultural existence.

Gadamer’s rehabilitation of the hermeneutic significance of *application* provides a very important insight concerning the relation between the *one* and the *many*: the general is *determi-*

⁷⁹ Ricoeur, p. 52.

⁸⁰ The interpretation of Scriptures according to present life-situations (moral and allegorical interpretation) is not uniquely Christian. The Jews also employ the midrash, a literary device of the Rabbis to deepen the sense of Scriptures according to their present life-situations.

⁸¹ See Gerard Timoner “A Filipino Interpretation of the Vows: Gospel’s Creative Dialogue with Culture” in *At Nanahan Sa Atin: Coming Home to the Roots of Filipino Religious* ed. by Q. Pedregosa, OP, C. Marquez, OP, and G. Timoner, OP (Quezon City: Asia Pacific Formation Center, 2002), pp. 52-63.

⁸² Ricoeur, p. 54.

⁸³ For Paul, the hermeneutic bond that ties Sacred Scripture (Old Testament) with the Good News about Jesus Christ is the principle that Sacred Scripture is written *for us now* (I Cor. 9:10; 10:11; Rom. 4:24; 15:4). Holy Scripture is thus read as giving testimony to the “present” experience of God’s saving action in the person of Jesus Christ. Confer Wilhelmus Valkenberg, *Words of the Living God: Place and Function of Holy Scripture in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), p. 218 also footnote 26.

*native of and determined by the particular.*⁸⁴ This means that the general cannot be pre-known fully because it is determined by the particular application even as it determines the particular. For instance, Christian lives as lived by the local Church in the Philippines or in Europe are not just *mere Platonic instantiations* of the unchanging ideal of the call to follow Christ. The concrete living out of the baptismal vows makes Christian life a concrete event of meaning that enriches the understanding of what it means to follow Christ. One cannot understand what Christian life entails apart from its concrete application. Moreover, every concrete application enriches the meaning of the abstract ideal. Filipino Christian piety lived in a country where seventy to eighty percent of the population is Catholic is certainly quite different from that which is lived in the many parts of Europe where Christians live in the context of religious plurality and secularization. But these local Churches, though different, form part of the richness of the meaning of what Christian life is all about. A Filipino immigrant who experiences the “shock” of living outside the familiar becomes acutely aware of his/her identity (sameness) by being confronted with *another* way of life (difference). Hopefully, such awareness leads to the realization that the familiar is *not the only way* to live the Christian life. The general and the particular supplement and complement each other *reciprocally*. Application, therefore, is not reductive but productive. Application, which is an integral part of hermeneutic understanding, is *creative* because in every moment of application, the interpreter cannot “disregard himself and his particular hermeneutical situation. He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all.”⁸⁵ It must be noted, however, that concrete application cannot be arbitrary because of the normative claim of the text. Thus, *creative application does not amount to relativism and subjectivism.*⁸⁶

⁸⁴ TM, p. 307.

⁸⁵ TM, p. 324.

⁸⁶ It must be noted that Gadamer has been accused of relativism. An interesting collection of essays concerning the issue can be found in *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics* ed. by Lawrence Schmidt (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995).

An example from legal hermeneutics may help clarify these points. A law is enacted by a legislative body. However, such enactment is not a once-and-for-all event. The law, to a significant degree, is also “enacted” every time a judge acts on it and applies it to varying concrete cases. That is why every decision on a case does not only involve a careful study of the meaning of the law when it was first enacted but also its subsequent applications. Legal precedents like decisions of supreme courts form part of the meaning of the law. *Particular* applications clarify and even enrich the *general* meaning of the law. Nevertheless, this does not mean that only the particular application determines the meaning of the law. An application of the law must also be determined by the law for it to be a faithful interpretation of the law. There is then a reciprocal relation between the *general* and its *applications*. Interestingly, Gadamer makes this point by making a parallelism between law and Gospel:

A law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Similarly, the gospel does not exist in order to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in such a way in which it exercises its saving effect. This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly, i.e., according to the claim it makes, must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application.⁸⁷

The analysis of ethical knowledge (Aristotelian *phronesis*) also shows the same reciprocal relation. Ethical knowledge is applied knowledge in the *here and now*, in historical life that is continuously varied and continually new.⁸⁸ What is virtuous cannot be definitively codified apart from concrete circumstances. Thus, the need for *epikeia*, the interpretation of the law not according to the letter, but according to its spirit. There is only one virtue of love yet there is a love that reproves and a love that affirms. And each act of the virtue determines more fully its meaning.

⁸⁷ TM, p. 309.

⁸⁸ TM, p. 312.

Every valid⁸⁹ application or interpretation, therefore, is a *creative* realization of the meaning of the text (e.g. Scriptures). Schneiders' imagery illustrates this more clearly: "Every valid interpretation ... is a unique actualization of the meaning. The text functions like a musical composition, which cannot be rendered except by genuine fidelity to the score but which will be rendered differently by each artist."⁹⁰ There is only *one* musical piece that is rendered uniquely each time on account of different circumstances. The enjoyment and experience of music does not happen in reading the musical score but in the actual event of playing it. Each performance in a concert by different musicians or even by the same musicians in another context are not just "copies" of the exemplar in the composer's mind but are in themselves "creative events".⁹¹ Interpretive understanding, Gadamer points out, is not a reproductive procedure, but also a productive one. "It is enough to say that we understand in a *different way*, *if we understand at all*."⁹²

Authority of Tradition and Fusion of Horizons

If understanding involves understanding *differently* on account of different historical and cultural circumstances, what guarantees the authenticity of such understanding? In so far as differences entail a certain kind of plurality, will this pluralism not lead eventually to relativism?⁹³

After cogently arguing for local theologies, Schreiter also carefully asserts: "Any local theology that is truly Christian has to be engaged with the tradition, however a church might understand that tradition: the Scriptures, great conciliar and confessional statements, the magisterium. Without that engagement, there is no

⁸⁹ "Validity" here means the creative fidelity to the text or the ideal.

⁹⁰ Sandra Schneiders, "Faith, Hermeneutics and the Literal Sense of Scripture" *Theological Studies*, 39 (1978), p. 731.

⁹¹ Thiselton, p. 298.

⁹² TM, p. 297.

⁹³ The question of relativism becomes central because of Gadamer's insistence on the historicity i.e., the situatedness of human understanding.

guarantee of being part of the Christian heritage".⁹⁴ His assertion that tradition is in fact a series of local theologies⁹⁵ includes both the *traditio* (the dynamic process of "handing down") and the *tradita* (those that are handed down). Ecclesial communities that uncritically hold fast to the axiom *sola Scriptura* rightly point to the eminent place given to Sacred Scripture as *norma normans non normata* but incorrectly views it as the *only* norm because Scripture is never *sola*. Spelled out simply, it is within tradition that the experience of God's salvific action is continually handed-down even when it has been committed into inspired writing, proclaimed, and appropriated by each generation according to their cultural milieu. Tradition guarantees faithful continuity and "provides the hermeneutical trajectory through which theological construction emerges."⁹⁶ Voicing his strong reservation against those who attack the "imperialistic hegemony of tradition", Anton Houtepen strongly asserts:

The disclosure of God is a time-bound *oikonomia*, of which, for the Christians at least, Jesus of Nazareth is the historical center and norm. Who he was and what he wanted has been transmitted through the testimony of the faith of the communion of saints of all ages. These testimonies – of people among whom some have given their lives as martyrs – cannot simply be left out in constructing local theologies.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p. 95.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

⁹⁶ Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post-Modern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 113.

⁹⁷ Houtepen, p. 32. He avers further that "without considering the 'faith of the church through the ages,' contextual theologies are in danger of becoming ideologically determined". Houtepen here refers to the thesis of Jan Hendrik Pranger in his dissertation *Redeeming Tradition: Inculturation, Contextualization and Tradition in a Postcolonial Perspective* (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit, 2003). Pranger argues against notions of "continuity" and "normativity" of tradition. He uses the image of *rhizomes*, plants with subterranean, horizontal root systems, growing in multiple directions at once (p. 394). Pranger, however, seems to forget that even the rhizome that sends out roots and shoots from its nodes is not radically plural but remains a single entity. I am convinced that the image of a

Tradition, in its dynamic sense of *tradere* i.e., “handing down” is our vital link to the past. Interpreting Gadamer’s concept of *wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewußtsein* (commonly translated as “effective historical consciousness”), J. Weinsheimer avers: “Our present, our difference from the past, is not the obstacle but the very condition of understanding the past in its truth, and this truth is at least in part the past to which we have access is always our own past by reason of our belonging to it.”⁹⁸ For Gadamer, it is in the same event of “handing down” that understanding happens. *Understanding happens as an event within a tradition.*⁹⁹ The Enlightenment’s confidence in the autonomy of reason has discredited tradition and its normative authority. Finding support in the romantic criticism of the enlightenment, Gadamer defends the normative authority of tradition. He argues that contrary to what the Enlightenment has supposed, there is no “unconditional antithesis between tradition and reason.”¹⁰⁰ In fact, the finitude and historicity of human reason simply means that it cannot pretend to escape the “history of effects” (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). Acceptance of the authority of tradition does not mean the abdication of reason or “blind submission” but rather the exercise of reason in acknowledging that someone or something is reasonable. Gadamer explains:

river he criticizes remains a good image for Christian tradition. A river has *ONE* source upstream. But as the river flows, it adapts to the varied terrain on which it flows: it becomes deep and shallow, it narrows and widens, it bends and goes straight. It may even form branches with different names (e.g., the lower Rhine and the Wal). It may look *differently* along its long stretch for it adapts to the *MANY* different conditions of the terrain, and yet it remains a river (or rivers, in the view of some) with *ONE* source.

⁹⁸ Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer’s Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p. 134. It is the consciousness that we cannot stand outside tradition and that history will always have an effect on us that makes us in fact vigilant concerning the possibility that tradition is “infected” by ideology, and, therefore, can distort our knowledge of truth. Conversely, interpretive communities that “seek an interpretation unencumbered by the ‘distorting’ influence of fallible ‘human’ traditions are in fact enslaved by interpretive patterns that are allowed to function uncritically precisely because they are unacknowledged.” Grenz and Franke, pp. 112-113.

⁹⁹ TM, p. 309.

¹⁰⁰ TM, p. 281.

...Authority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its limitations, trusts to the better insight of others...Thus acknowledging authority is always connected with the idea that what the authority says is not irrational and arbitrary but can, in principle be discovered to be true. This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert.¹⁰¹

In this sense then, "blind obedience" is a contradiction in terms. Obedience comes from the Latin *ob audire* and means the capacity to "listen". But such listening does not preclude the critical examination of what is heard or the exercise of freedom. For Gadamer, true authority need not be "authoritarian". It is not imposed from a position of power but acknowledged for its superior insight. True obedience then means to follow a course of action that is deemed to be reasonably good.

Though Gadamer found an ally in the romantic criticism of the Enlightenment's pejorative notions of tradition and authority, he also criticized Romanticist hermeneutics in its effort to overcome temporal distance as a condition for understanding a text that belongs to a distant and strange past. Gadamer situates understanding in the very continuity of tradition. "Time is no longer primarily a gulf to be bridged because it separates; it is actually the supportive ground of the course of events in which the present is rooted... It is not a yawning abyss but is filled with the continuity of custom and tradition, in the light of which everything handed down presents itself to us."¹⁰² Present under-

¹⁰¹ TM, p. 279-280.

¹⁰² TM, p. 297. Habermas has criticized Gadamer's all too positive account of tradition for being blind to the workings of ideology. Gadamer has countered that even Habermas' aim to "shake the dogmatism of life praxis" is also borne out of Habermas' own prejudice which can be as dogmatic as the dogmatism he criticizes in the first place. Confer Alan How, *The Habermas-Gadamer Debate and the Nature of the Social* (Aldershot: Avebury Press, 1995), p. 171. Paul Ricoeur has characterized the Habermas-Gadamer debate as the debate between "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Habermas) and "hermeneutics of faith" (Gadamer). David Tracy is convinced that since no classic is "innocent" (including Sacred Scripture), one of the best ways to retrieve the truth in Christian tradition is by way of

standing, therefore, cannot but be conditioned by the past; yet the understanding of the past, to some significant sense, is likewise conditioned by the present. Using the metaphor of horizon i.e., the range of vision one has from a specific standpoint, Gadamer calls this situation as the *fusion of horizons*:

In fact, the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence, the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.*¹⁰³

Gadamer's discussion of tradition and fusion of horizons is integral to his goal of establishing the historicity of understanding, that both the past and the one who seeks to understand it in the present belong to history. However, the horizons of contemporaries who belong to different cultural standpoints also need to be considered and acknowledged as integral to the fusion of horizons. The present cannot just be an all embracing term, for as pointed out earlier, though there is one *now*, there is a plurality of *here(s)*. Within the context of intercultural theology, therefore, fusion of horizons does not only refer to diachronic but also to synchronic relations. A Local Church that belongs to the Christian tradition is in a hermeneutic relation to the ecclesial communities in the past that have *applied* and appropriated the Gospel message in their life of faith as well as to contemporary Local Churches whose appropriation of the same Gospel and tradition is condi-

critique and even suspicion. To achieve this, a theory of hermeneutics and even a "revised correlational method for theology" are insufficient. He proposes that an apt hermeneutical practice for a living theology today is best described as "mystical-prophetic" where the mystic's intuition for God's love and the prophet's righteous and critical struggle for justice combine to make the Christian theological heritage relevant today. Confer David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other* (Louvain: Peeters, 1990), pp. 1-7; 95-123.

¹⁰³ TM, p. 306.

tioned by their “prejudices” which belong to culture. Culture is an essential part of the “lens” through which we see reality. Lawrence Schmidt avers that one inherits prejudices through acculturation.¹⁰⁴ Thus, from a Gadamerian standpoint, foreunderstanding embedded in tradition is culture. Consequently, Gadamer’s proposition that the horizon of the present is ever expanding by allowing prejudices to be open always for testing¹⁰⁵ also points to the epistemic value of intercultural dialogue, the arena where such revision and expansion inevitably takes place. Robert Bernasconi argues that while Gadamer explicitly aims to show how understanding is possible across historical distance, the breadth of his philosophical hermeneutics also takes into account how understanding is possible across cultural divisions.¹⁰⁶ Certainly, this hermeneutical theory is congenial to that vision of the Church as a “universal hermeneutic community of Christians and theologians from different lands”¹⁰⁷ who do not only test, challenge and even help correct each other’s biases but also complement, contribute to, enrich and expand each other’s horizon. It is in this communion and communication of Local Churches that the *catholicity* and *unity* of the Church becomes a meaningful reality. After all, the

¹⁰⁴ Lawrence Schmidt, “Between Certainty and Relativism” in *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics* ed. by L. Schmidt (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), p. 5. Joel Weinsheimer acknowledges that horizon is another way of describing context. And to the extent that context is identified with culture, then culture is also another name for what Gadamer calls “horizon”.

¹⁰⁵ TM, p. 306. The open-endedness for “testing,” critique and revision as well as the “consciousness of the effects of history” guard Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics against the blindness to ideological manipulation or the machinations of those who wield power.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Bernasconi, “You Don’t Know What I’m Talking About: Alterity and the Hermeneutical Ideal” in *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics* ed. by L. Schmidt (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1995), p. 178. He quotes Gadamer in one of his interviews: “That is the essence, the soul of my hermeneutics: To understand someone else is to see the justice, the truth of his position. And this is what transforms us. And if we then have to become part of a new world civilization, if this is our task, then we shall need a philosophy which teaches us to see the justification for the other’s point of view and which thus makes us doubt our own.”

¹⁰⁷ Bosch, p. 457. Bosch himself quotes Hiebert in this regard.

Church as a community of disciples is commissioned to “Go, therefore, and make *disciples* of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). But this commission is not a prescription for religious imperialism but a reminder that as the Church goes to all the nations, Christians must see *cultural others* as fellow listeners to the Word. “If we are to make disciples of all nations, then we must become *disciples*, students, ourselves.”¹⁰⁸ Thus, the Church, the community of disciples, is a community of *learners* that does not only teach but also learns from its members and *others* as it seeks to follow in faith and love the One who is Truth Himself. □

¹⁰⁸ Timothy Radcliffe, OP, “Go and Make Disciples of all Nations’ Preaching the Kingdom or Religious Imperialism?” *Australian E-Journal of Theology* 2 (February 2004) http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_2/timothy_radcliffe.htm 30 May 2004. The Latin *discipulus* (translated from the Greek *mathéteiv* i.e., “to make disciple”) means a *pupil* or *student*.