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THEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY: TIME FOR DIALOGUE

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THE CHURCH has had a love-hate relationship with anthropology since the latter developed as a social science last century. This is understandable. Anthropology had its origins in an atmosphere of Comtism, utilitarianism, agnostic biblical criticism, and the beginnings of comparative religion, an atmosphere which in no way was favorable to religion. Its immediate founders, e.g., Edward Tylor (1832–1917) and James Frazer (1854–1941), were firm believers in social evolution; religion was part of the evolutionary process and it would eventually die away. For both Tylor and Frazer, religion was but an illusion, its place to be taken finally by the all-seeing authority of science. Even today, certainly in Britain, the conclusion of the anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard in 1959, then professor of anthropology at Oxford, remains true: the "majority of anthropologists are indifferent, if not hostile, to religion—atheists, agnostics, or just nothing—and a minority are Christians."[1]

But no matter what the origins of anthropology are or what anthropologists might feel about the supernatural, the Church must come to a love relationship with anthropology. The Church needs the help of specialists in the study of culture, and anthropologists are precisely those specialists. Vatican II turned the Church once more to face the world and its problems and hopes; the Church must understand the world if it is to serve it in a spirit of justice and charity.[2] This means that the Church must understand the nature and complexity of culture and cultures. Not surprisingly, therefore, the word "culture" is used frequently in the Vatican documents, especially in *Gaudium et spes*. But it is not always immediately clear what particular meaning is being given to the word at a particular place in the texts. For example, the word can be used to signify the magnificent creative achievements of the human

[1] "Religion and the Anthropologists," Aquinas Lecture, 1959, in E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Essays in Social Anthropology* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962) 45. He adds the interesting comment that of those anthropologists who are Christians "a considerable proportion are Catholics. In fact the situation is more or less that on the one side are the indifferents and on the other side the Catholics with, as far as I am aware, little in between" (ibid.). I suspect his comment remains true.

[2] See *Gaudium et spes*, no. 1.

person. At other times it is used in a descriptive or phenomenological way to refer to customs, structures, and values of people. However, it is Paul VI, ten years after the Council ended, who used the term with an anthropological precision and sensitivity that had never before appeared in any ecclesial document.[3] Summarizing a thrust of Vatican II in *Evangelii nuntiandi*, he sees the mission of the Church "to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth, and right to their very roots).... Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols...."[4] The distinction between signs and symbols is significant. We will later see that the distinction marks a remarkable breakthrough, a major step by the Church to understand culture and the contemporary insights of anthropology.

About the time *Evangelii nuntiandi* was published, the expression "inculturation" started to become popular among theologians. The word came out of the deliberate effort by theologians to express the dialectical relationship that should exist between the gospel and cultures. Hence it has been defined as the dynamic, ongoing, reciprocal, and critical interaction between the gospel message and culture.[5] This is the same type of process that Karl Rahner has in mind when he says that "theology consists in conscious reflection upon the message of the gospel in a quite specific situation in terms of the history of the human spirit (i.e. culture)."[6] While, however, this recognition of the role of culture as the object of evangelization and as being critical to the evolution of realistic theology is encouraging to the concerned anthropologist, theologians have still a very long way to go before they fully appreciate the complexity and the nature of culture. They must tap the rich scholarly research and reflections of major anthropologists. But this is demanding work, espe-

[3] See analysis of the approach to culture by the Church over the centuries in Gerald A. Arbuckle, "Inculturation and Evangelization: Realism or Romanticism?" in *Missionaries, Anthropologists, and Cultural Change*, ed. Vinson Sutlive (Williamsburg: Studies in Third World Societies, 1985) 171–214. For an overview of how culture is used in Vatican II, see Alberto M. Ferre, "Puebla: The Evangelization of Culture," in *Apostolate of Culture* (Vatican: Pontifical Council for Laity, 1981) 60–68.

[4] Nos. 20 and 63.

[5] See Marcello de Azevedo, *Inculturation and the Challenge of Modernity* (Rome: Gregorian Univ., 1982) 11.

[6] "Ecumenical Theology in the Future," in *Theological Investigations* 14 (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1976) 256; Bernard Lonergan would see the role of theology as that which "mediates between a cultural matrix and the significance and role of a religion in that matrix" (*Method in Theology* [London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972] xi).

cially for those who are not used to the diversity of technical terms used by various anthropologists. To the uninitiated, the terms and jargon can at times be almost overwhelming. To provide some clarifications for interested theologians, I will therefore in this article aim at (1) providing a brief overview of key schools of thought in American and European anthropology, (2) explaining briefly contemporary insights into the nature of culture, and (3) summarizing the insights of three influential contemporary anthropologists.

ANTHROPOLOGY IN AMERICA AND BRITAIN

Determinism connotes a doctrine which claims that all objects or events of some kind are determined, that is to say, must be as they are and as they will be, because of some laws or forces which require their being so. Determinism is in fact the name of a whole category of theories which have the above features in common. In the 19th and early 20th centuries biological determinism was a highly popular belief among the leaders of the emerging anthropology discipline. It is precisely against this form of determinism that the American Franz Boas developed his theory of cultural determinism.[7] This is the theory that a cultural system, or way of life, exerts or is capable of exerting a determining influence upon other aspects of human behavior. Hereditary influence, which the biological determinists considered primary, is severely downgraded by cultural determinists. Boas, supported by key contemporary American anthropologists, e.g., Robert Lowie, Alfred Kroeber, and Ruth Benedict, avidly sought confirmation for his theory. Margaret Mead[8] helped provide precisely the field-work support that he so much required. She left for the then-little-known Polynesian islands of Samoa in the late 1920s, young, very ill-prepared for participant field-work observation, and convinced that biological determinism is the thesis to which her own belief in cultural determinism must be the antithesis. Blinded by her own presuppositions and with little skill in firsthand research, Mead concluded that "human nature is not rigid and unyielding."[9] Culture deter-

[7] See analysis by Marvin Harris, *The Rise of Anthropological Theory: A History of Theories of Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969) 250–300.

[8] Ibid. 407–21; for a critique, Derek Freeman, *Margaret Mead and Samoa: The Making and Unmaking of an Anthropological Myth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1983) passim; for a critical review of her life, see Jane Howard, *Margaret Mead: A Life* (New York: Harvill, 1984).

[9] *From the South Seas* (New York: Morrow, 1939) x. In the Foreword to her major book *Coming of Age in Samoa* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1943), Franz Boas significantly writes: "The results of her [Margaret Mead] painstaking investigation confirm the suspicion long held by anthropologists, that much of what we ascribe to human nature is no more than a reaction to the restraints put upon us by our civilization" (6).

mined the differences of people, not heredity. Her unproven view that the Samoan people have relative freedom from sexually inspired frustrations was eagerly incorporated into the scientific foundation of the "sexual revolution" which the American middle class was in the process of experiencing.[10] Supported by her conclusions, a group of anthropologists and educationalists emerged particularly within America. They tried, writes Mary Douglas, "to link the manifestation of cultural distinctiveness to some kind of human action, even if it was only a feedback between the weaning and bodily training of babies, their subsequent personality development and cultural forms. This self-explaining circle bridged the gap from babyhood to adult behaviour in one leap."[11] All in all, it was a very gloomy approach to the human ability to adapt.

British anthropology in the 1930s, particularly under the leadership of Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942), generated a new way of looking at culture. Functionalism is a theory founded on an organic analogy: society is a bounded, self-maintaining system that keeps its equilibrium despite the challenges of difficult environments. In order to provide for a society's survival, its various social processes must interact smoothly together to meet the system's needs. Each process, institution, and practice is seen as performing a function that meets a cultural need and thereby helps to maintain the society's structure or equilibrium. Social processes and institutions are understood in terms of their contribution to an ongoing social whole, not in terms of what people in the system believe they are doing. Thus social practices must be understood in terms of their present contribution to a society. The basic functionalist explanation begins by identifying a problematic activity, one which seen in isolation may appear to make little or no sense. Then this activity is positioned in a wider social context and shown to be meeting some social need. Identifying the function forms the explanation of the activity. According to this approach, for example, the fact that a village comes together for Mass to pray for good weather for the crops appears to make no sense, because damaging rain does come. But the coming together means that the people reaffirm their faith in the collectivity. Hence the Mass, while it does not prevent the rain, has the key function of promoting social solidarity, which then helps the village cope with the failure of the weather. So in this case the act of religion is useful; it is functionally valid. The more

[10] See Harris, *Rise* 408.

[11] *Cultural Bias* (Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Occasional Paper No. 35, 1978) 2. It is precisely this type of determinism that John Paul II is reacting against in his apostolic exhortation *Reconciliatio et paenitentia* (Vatican Press, 1984) par. 18.

influential supporters of this approach, in addition to Malinowski, are the functional empiricists or behaviorists such as Arthur Radcliffe-Brown and Raymond Firth. They are prepared, says critic Edmund Leach, "to trust their senses and concern themselves primarily with supposedly 'objective facts' out there in the world."[12] Functional empiricists devoted themselves with considerable zeal and professionalism to in-depth studies of societies, particularly in Africa and in the South Pacific. Even allowing for the theoretical weaknesses of functionalism, the quality of their field work was indeed excellent; the field-work methods had been developed especially at the London School of Economics and Oxford and Cambridge Universities. Theoretically, however, functionalism has grave weaknesses. The failure to conceive a society as a dynamic and imperfect equilibrium unfortunately made it very difficult for functionalists to cope with cultures that "refused to return to perfect equilibrium" once social change had affected them. In addition, the ruthless support of positivism closed functionalists to the richness and power of religion in people's lives. The possibility that supernatural beings could exist would not even be considered. Functionalism was not to remain unchallenged for long. Alongside functionalism in effect a new approach was developing out of the increased stress upon field work, and it may be characterized as a shift from function to meaning. This shift and the attendant theoretical development are associated primarily with the brilliant works of Evans-Pritchard, who was to succeed Radcliffe-Brown as professor at Oxford. Evans-Pritchard, a convert to Catholicism, published his first major study in 1937.[13] His attack on functionalism in 1950 was aimed at drawing out the logical consequences of the theory. "In its extreme form," he wrote, "functional determinism leads to absolute relativism and makes nonsense not only of the history itself but of all thought."[14] Few would hold to functionalism today in its extreme form. Almost all contemporary anthropologists are cultural relativists to some degree or other; they are sceptical of the idea that there are universal "natural laws" from which a rational morality might be developed. However, functional empiricists are possibly much less extreme in their support of cultural relativity than some other anthropologists.[15]

[12] *Social Anthropology* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1982) 232.

[13] The title of this landmark in anthropology was *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1937). For an overview of his contribution to anthropology, see Mary Douglas, *Evans-Pritchard* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1980).

[14] "Social Anthropology: Past and Present," Marett Lecture 1950, in Evans-Pritchard, *Essays* 20. See also I. C. Jarvie, *The Revolution in Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964) 34–47.

[15] See Leach, *Social Anthropology* 232.

Observers must wonder why the distinction exists between anthropologists who refer to themselves as "social anthropologists" and others who insist on being called "cultural anthropologists." Social anthropologists belong to the British tradition of anthropology, while cultural anthropologists belong to the American. It is not only a national issue; American anthropology stresses culture as its pivotal base for analysis, but British anthropology emphasizes social structure. The different emphases affect how field work is done. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz, an American, writes that "Culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the ... network of social relations. Culture and social structure are ... different abstractions from the same phenomena."[16] American anthropology, following for decades in the footsteps of Boas, Robert Lowie, Alfred Kroeber, Ralph Linton, Edward Sapir, Benedict, Mead, Melville Herskovits, and Clyde Kluckhohn, has long stressed cultures as the ideational heritage of communities. By comparison, British anthropology, seeing its task rather as a comparative sociology, has stressed social structure as an organizing framework for theory.[17] In recent years, however, the somewhat polarized academic differences of emphasis have tended to fade away because of the interesting influences on both sides of the Atlantic of people like Claude Lévi-Strauss, Victor Turner, and Mary Douglas.

CULTURE: DIVERSITY OF DEFINITIONS

The definitions of culture have over the decades multiplied considerably. Little wonder that an anthropologist reacts with amazement when theologians or liturgists glibly use the word unaware of the confusion that has often surrounded it. In order to highlight the diversity of definitions, and the different emphases given in the definitions, anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn in 1952 analyzed 160 definitions published in English by anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others. They found that there were no genuinely consistent tendencies characteristic of the various academic disciplines.[18] However, as far as anthropology is concerned, I believe anthropologist Ward Goodenough is right when he says that most definitions have failed to

[16] "Ritual and Social Change: A Javanese Example," *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957) 33 f.

[17] See Leach, *Social Anthropology* 37–41; and R. M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology: A Contemporary Perspective* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981) 74 f. Keesing's analysis is particularly clear.

[18] See *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Peabody Museum Papers 47, 1; Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ., 1952).

recognize the important distinction between "patterns *for* behavior" and "patterns *of* behavior." First, culture has been used to refer to the "pattern of life within a community—the regularly recurring activities and material and social arrangements" that characterize a particular group of people.[19] In this sense, culture has been used to refer to the realm of observable phenomena, of things and events *out there* in the world. This is what Roger Keesing calls the *sociocultural system* approach to defining culture. It stresses the pattern of visible residence, resource exploitation, and so on, that characterizes a group of people. Secondly, culture is used to refer to the organized system of knowledge and belief whereby a people structure their experience and perceptions, formulate actions, and choose between options. Culture is here an *ideational system.*[20] Culture then refers to a system of shared ideas, rules, and meanings, symbols that underlie and are expressed in the ways that people live. It refers to what people learn, not what they do and make.

It is culture as an ideational system that is really the most critically important emphasis in contemporary anthropology. The task of the anthropologist—and it is frankly a most difficult one—is to decode a particular people's interlocking system of meanings or symbols. An anthropologist will spend months, even years, in field work with a small group of people in order to realize this aim. Even after so long a period, most anthropologists will depart still feeling there is yet more to learn about a people's code.

In culture as an ideational system, symbols are referred to. The emphasis on symbols has helped to advance anthropology academically as well as unite previously divided anthropologists. Hence Geertz's ideational definition of culture would have wide acceptance: culture is "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life."[21] In this sense, culture is something living, giving meaning, direction, and identity to people in ways that touch not just the intellect but especially the heart. This is why symbols are of critical importance; they embrace the total person. A symbol is any reality that by its very dynamism or power leads to (i.e., makes one think about, or imagine, or get into contact with or reach out to) another deeper (and often mysterious) reality through a sharing in the dynamism that the symbol itself offers (and not by merely verbal or additional

[19] "Comment on Cultural Evolution," *Daedalus*, no. 90 (1961) 521.
[20] Keesing, *Cultural Anthroplogy* 69.
[21] *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 89.

explanations). So a symbol is not merely a sign, for signs only point to the signified. Symbols *re-present* the signified; they carry meaning in themselves, "which allows them to articulate the signified, rather than merely announcing it."[22] And the meanings that symbols carry are many, even at times contradictory. Take the photograph of my deceased mother on my desk. When I look at this photograph, my mother comes to me in a very real way; the photograph does not just announce her or remind me of her. No, in a very real way she is present to me. This makes me happy, since I recall what her love has meant for me over the years. But I am sad at the same time, because she is no longer physically present to me. Joy and sadness—contradictory meanings and experiences. Symbols form the very heart of a culture; a particular culture exists when a group of people share major symbols and their meanings in common. Because of the multiplicity and complexity of meanings within symbols, it is little wonder if it is so difficult for an anthropologist to break the symbols' code.

Earlier in this article I praised the approach of Paul VI in *Evangelii nuntiandi* from an anthropologist's point of view. Now we can understand why: he spoke of symbols and of the enormous challenge that faced the evangelizer, since the faith must come alive within the symbols of a people if it is to take root at depth. This is an extremely slow and complex process, since it is a question of culture change, of new meanings to old symbols, and even new symbols also. So when a theologian states glibly that theology needs to interact with culture and conveys the impression that it is as simple as buying groceries, it is little wonder if the anthropologist becomes suspicious about the intellectual and professional standing of such a theologian. The anthropologist would rather appreciate the sensitivity of Paul VI's warning: the interaction between theology and cultures "has to be done with the discernment, seriousness, respect and *competence* which the matter calls for .... The question is undoubtedly a delicate one."[23] If theologians are to develop a love relationship with anthropology (and culture), they need to be prepared for hard work.

THREE CONTEMPORARY INFLUENTIAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS

I have chosen three anthropologists, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, and Victor Turner, because of their deep influence on the development of anthropology today. From different approaches all three emphasize the power and importance of symbols. I will summarize the main thrusts in their writings.

[22] Louis Dupré, *The Other Dimension: A Search for the Meaning of Religious Attitudes* (New York: Seabury, 1979) 105.

[23] No. 63.

Structuralism of Lévi-Strauss

Structuralism is a form of analysis developed first in linguistics between 1900 and 1930. In the late 1960s, partly in reaction to existentialism's emphasis on experience or intuition,[24] structuralism acquired prominence in the social sciences, particularly in France. Lévi-Strauss emerged as the acknowledged leader of structuralism in the social sciences, in anthropology in particular. The root idea of his approach is that cultural forms have patterns that express in visible ways very fundamental configurations of human thought. The main work of the anthropologist is "not the understanding of particular social systems but the decoding of the principles through which the human mind operates."[25] Sense perceptions are to be distrusted. The emphasis must be on the patterning of ideas as shown through symbolism and linguistic usages.

Lévi-Strauss asserts that he has been deeply influenced by various emphases of Freud and Marx, though it is difficult to know just how much in fact he has been influenced by Marx.[26] He holds that both these authors used the structuralist approach by reducing surface reality to a deeper structural level. He was also influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), a Swiss linguist, founder of the Geneva school of structural linguistics, and by Roman Jakobson, the Russian structural linguist. However, despite the many influences by these scholars, Lévi-Strauss developed his own original approach. For him there are universal rules, much like syntax and semantic structures in linguistics, beneath the visible everyday customs, such as kinship, cooking, and table manners. These structures can be expressed by looking closely at compatibilities and incompatibilities: what goes with what, and what are considered binary opposites and even taboo. Even the most simple of actions is found to be a symbolic mediation between opposites such as nature and culture, heaven and earth, man and woman, left hand and right hand. He believes that all cultures have the same basic structural transformations, reflecting the essential qualities of the human mind, operating according to binary classificatory principles. For him the chief concern of social anthropology is with "the internal logical structure of the meaning of sets of symbols."[27] The anthropologist must build models

[24] See *Structuralism* (Rome: Herder, 1975) 15.

[25] Leach, *Social Anthropology* 238.

[26] Some comments by David Pace, *Claude Lévi-Stauss: The Bearer of Ashes* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983) 95–98. For an example of how he uses the binary opposition, see C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). It is difficult to know just how far the opposition approach came from Marx's influence or rather from Hegel; possibly more the latter.

[27] Edmund Leach, *Lévi-Strauss* (London: Fontana, 1970) 98.

which are quite distinct and not to be reduced to the observable social relationships in a particular culture.[28]

While Lévi-Strauss has challenged anthropologists to look at culture in a different way, not many would have accepted fully his revolutionary approach to anthropology. Rightly do critics charge him with oversimplification of reality, postulating the existence of universals without sufficient evidence, treating as an attribute of all people what may well be common only to a particular group.[29] The desire to find basic universals in culture moves him to explain thought in terms only of its binary structure. But although the mind does work in this way, it can act in other ways also.[30] The criticisms are many indeed. One author claims "that Lévi-Strauss' structuralism is in fact just a new version of psychoanalysis, but one which, like all psychoanalytic heresies, denies the body and in this case dresses up the ideas of Freud in the trappings of cybernetics."[31] Despite the criticisms, some of them well founded, Lévi-Strauss' contribution to anthropology has been immense. The positivism into which anthropology had fallen had become increasingly arid and uninspirational. His injection of an epistemology, difficult though it be to follow, was like a fresh breeze to British anthropology. Edmund Leach, Lévi-Strauss's sympathetic critic and who later became professor of anthropology at Cambridge University, believes that Lévi-Strauss drew attention to the complexity, inner logic, and importance of symbols. In so doing, however, he oversimplified his analysis of customs and sought to de-emphasize the key role for social anthropology as a discipline concerned with the de facto social behavior of human beings.[32]

Cultural Typology of Douglas

Until recently, Mary Douglas was professor of social anthropology at University College, London. She is now professor of humanities at Northwestern University, U.S.A. Possibly the leading figure in symbolic and anthropological approaches to religious ritual and belief, she has castigated British anthropologists because they "have paid little attention to culture. We have given little help to understanding how it interacts with the social dimension." The consequence, she claimed, is that anthropologists are "poorer for there being no general theory of how culture

[28] See C. Lévi-Strauss, *Anthropologie structurale* (Paris: Blon, 1958) 306.

[29] See Leach, *Lévi-Strauss* 113.

[30] Ibid. 88.

[31] C. R. Badcock, *Lévi-Strauss: Structuralism and Sociological Theory* (London: Hutchinson, 1975) 14; see also the critical evaluation by J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1976).

[32] See Leach, *Lévi-Strauss*, 98.

and society are related, no special theory of cultural change, still less one about cultural stability."[33] Her own writings form a brilliantly stimulating effort to respond to her own criticisms.

Like Lévi-Strauss, Douglas approaches culture from the viewpoint of everyday life: food, bodies, jokes, dirt, material possessions, and speech. Following Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of contemporary anthropology, she sees that ritual and symbol have a critical role in the emergence and changing of social relations. "Ritual," she writes, "is preeminently a form of communication.... (Ritual) forms, like speech forms, (are) transmitters of culture, which are generated in social relations and which, by their selections and emphases, exercise a constraining effect on social behavior."[34] The rituals she has in mind are so often of the simplest kind, e.g., cleaning, tidying the house or the desk, placing things in some kind of order. In all social relationships, no matter how weak they appear to the observer, some kind of social order is to be found. It is ritual that establishes the social order, the distribution of rights and of power, social relations. Her style is very human, her analyses down to earth. She sees this approach as being a very necessary corrective to deterministic and impersonal implications of traditional anthropology. Commenting on this point, she writes: "The first source of our troubles as cultural anthropologists is that we have no adequate conception of the individual."[35] Her approach to the notion of religion is refreshing; religion, she argues, does not cease to exist with modernization. What is very dubious, she notes, "is the general nineteenth century presumption that modernity adversely affects religion by taking wonder and mystery out of the universe—as if religion depends more on the physical environment than on the quality of social relations."[36] Tribal people who have very primitive technology can be very modern indeed in their acceptance of secularization. As she sees it, religion then can take many forms; it expresses itself in such rituals as cleaning one's room or political rites that characterize even the most modern secularized state.

One of Douglas' publications is called *Implicit Meanings*. The title emphasizes well the importance of her contribution to our knowledge of culture. She writes that "The implicit is the necessary foundation of social intercourse."[37] Her major concern is with symbolism that is con-

[33] *Cultural Bias* 3.

[34] *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1970) 20 f.

[35] *Cultural Bias* 5.

[36] "The Effects of Modernization on Religious Change," in Mary Douglas et al., eds., *Religion and America: Spirituality in a Secular Age* (Boston: Beacon, 1982) 26.

[37] *Implicit Meanings: Essays in Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975) 5.

tained neither in words nor in conscious action, but lies within the organization of social life itself: of meals, of eating habits, in rituals about pollution and social movements. Culture, for her, is made up not just of explicitly stated symbols but above all of "cues inherent in all collective activity."[38] Take, for example, her analysis of how the human body relates to how people see social relations: "The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived.... The more the social situation exerts pressure on persons involved in it, the more the social demand for conformity tends to be expressed by a demand for physical control."[39] This necessarily becomes reflected in a society's symbolic system in general and in its ritual in particular. An analysis of Soviet ritual proves her insight. So great is the control over the body and dislike of most body processes that the first impression is of body symbolism being non-existent in Russian ritual. But, as one specialist in Russian society notes, only body movement resulting from a loose control—wild or ecstatic movement, organic processes, trance, unconventional appearance—is excluded from ritual. Body movement which expresses very careful control and precise co-ordination in the movement of a number of human bodies, in contrast, is very specially valued and frequently presented for public display and involvement, e.g., the mass military parades, massed choirs, and mass gymnastic displays.[40]

To understand change in rite, symbol, and myth, Douglas has developed a typology which allows her to examine social relations analytically in any social context.[41] The four models within the typology are related by her to differences in cosmologies, so that a comparative study of culture and belief is possible. In her formulation of the typology, Douglas uses two variables, "group" and "grid." The group is the experience of belonging to a social unit, the feeling that "I belong to this group of people and not that group of people." The grid is the rules, the tangible and intangible structures or systems that relate one person to others on an ego-centered basis. I will explain briefly each of the four types.[42]

[38] Robert Wuthnow et al., *Cultural Analysis: The World of Peter Berger, Mary Douglas, Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984) 132.

[39] *Natural Symbols* 12, 93.

[40] See Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Rituals in Industrial Society—The Soviet Case* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1981) 224; also Robert Bocock, *Ritual in Industrial Society: A Sociological Analysis of Ritualism in Modern England* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974) 98–117.

[41] The typology is best explained in *Cultural Bias* 19 ff.; particular applications are in M. Douglas, ed., *Essays in the Sociology of Perception* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982) passim.

[42] For an application of these models to religious life, see Gerald A. Arbuckle, "Innovation in Religious Life," *Human Development* 6, no. 3 (1985) 45–49.

1) *Group and grid are strong.* This is a highly structured and predictable type of culture; each individual has a definite place within society, roles are set. In this type of culture change takes place very slowly. Intense loyalty to the group and to the rules of living is expected, and anyone who deviates from the expected is punished in a variety of ways. The boundaries of the social body are very carefully guarded. Rituals celebrate and reinforce group identity and unity. Examples of this model would be contemporary Russia and the pre-Vatican II Church.

2) *Group is strong and grid is weak.* Here social structures and routines still grip individuals, but in a less personal and particularized way. Emphasis is very egalitarian, authority structures are little in evidence, and rules of interaction are minimal. Here the hold on the individual, because it is weak, allows for questioning of internal rules and regulations affecting social behavior. Rituals are directed to safeguarding the boundaries of the group; outsiders are considered "impure" as compared with group members who are "pure." This type of culture is helpful in understanding the power and the rituals of the Indian caste system. Douglas uses the model to explain reasons for the elaborate Levitical taboos among the Israelites.[43]

3) *Grid is strong and the group is weak.* Here people are individualistic, as in the previous model, but there is very little sense of obligation to the group. Group consciousness is very weak. Individuals come together for their own self-interest, e.g., for business reasons, but if a better possibility for gain arises, then individuals are apt to move elsewhere. This is a culture that encourages manipulation by skilled leaders; their task is to manipulate individuals into groups, but they cannot maintain their leadership if they are unable to respond to the needs of the individuals. This is a culture in which religion is very private indeed; it is a highly secularized culture. Interesting examples here would be the Melanesian cultures to be found in Papua New Guinea and elsewhere in the South Pacific, and the contemporary culture in America which stresses self-fulfilment, individualism, and private morality.

4) *Group and grid are weak.* Where this exists, the culture or society is in a transitional or temporary stage. The hippie culture of the mid-1960s (and its counterparts throughout history) would exemplify this type; previous structures have broken down, but new ones have not yet emerged. Formality is almost nonexistent; social consciousness is mini-

[43] See Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966) 41–57, 95.

mal. Rituals reflect these emphases. The cosmos is seen as unstructured and unmagical. Because group and grid are so weak, religion is even more personal and private than in the previous model. The major ethical challenge is that of self-justification: "What matters now is the actor's motive and intent, as in the Christian notion of sin and the modern legal distinction between manslaughter and murder."[44] This differs from the notion of sin and how it is removed in the "strong group and grid" culture. There the stress is on the automatic efficacy of the ritual itself to remove any danger coming from the transgression. The safeguarding of social solidarity is all-important. Hence symbolic rituals are felt to have magical efficacy, so that faults are automatically removed, quite independent of the actor's intent, and order is restored to social life.

This brief summary cannot do justice to the complexity of Douglas' analysis. For her "Most symbolic behaviour must work through the human body.... The human body is common to us all. Only our social condition varies. The symbols based on the human body are used to express different social experiences. We should therefore start with a principle for classifying the latter."[45] And that is precisely what she does. The typology that she constructs, like all models, highlights certain emphases. In reality, no particular culture will reflect the "perfect type."[46]

Processual Symbolic Analysis of Turner

The early anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep was the first to spot the processual pattern that characterizes rituals whereby individuals pass from one culturally defined state or status to another. In rites of passage from childhood to adulthood in tribal cultures, for example, he found that the first stage involves *separation* of the person being initiated from his or her previous ordinary state in life. This was followed by a stage of a separate extraordinary existence that he calls *margin*, which is marked by a stripping of the previous identity and a ritual in which all individual differences among the novices are removed. After a sufficient period and after the necessary ritual degradations are completed and the novices have learnt the values of adulthood, the period of statuslessness is ended and the third stage, *aggregation*, is begun. This is the period of reintegration and reincorporation of the individual back into the community or

[44] James L. Peacock, *Consciousness and Change: Symbolic Anthropology in Evolutionary Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1975) 32.

[45] *Natural Symbols* vii.

[46] See clarifications of David Ostrander, "One- and Two-Dimensional Models of the Distribution of Beliefs," in Douglas, ed., *Essays in the Sociology of Perception* 14–30.

group as a "new" person with the new identity of being an adult.[47]

Victor Turner, formerly professor of anthropology and social thought at the University of Chicago, takes Van Gennep's analysis of the tripartite phases of change from one psychosocial state to another and further elaborates it in ways that bring new insights into the nature of change and the power of symbols.[48] His methods of analysis and his ritual theory were developed during his researches into African tribal societies and their ritual processes. He later broadened his approach to include the analysis of ritual forms in larger and more complex societies. His insights provide us with a rich source of analysis into contemporary needs of people whether in tribal or industrial cultures.[49] It is not easy to do justice to his thinking in so short a space.

In his analysis Turner uses the words "preliminal," "liminal," and "postliminal" to refer to the three stages that Van Gennep spotted. He then distinguishes two types of culture. First, there is *societas*, a type in which there is role differentiation, structure, segmentation, and a hierarchical system of institutionalized positions. Most people live most of their lives in cultures that come close to this model. The second type is called *liminal*, that is, a type of culture that is undifferentiated, homogeneous, in which individuals meet each other integrally, not as segmented into statuses and roles. In the liminal state people are "neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, ceremonial."[50] In the liminal state people are apt to experience a uniquely intense and friendly companionship that Turner calls *communitas*. He states that "it is in *liminality* that *communitas* emerges, if not as a spontaneous expression of sociability, at least in a cultural and normative form—stressing equality and comradeship as norms rather than generating spontaneous and existential *communitas*, though of course spontaneous *communitas* may and does arise

[47] See analysis in Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1969) passim.

[48] The best summary of his theory is to be found in Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ., 1974); see also V. and E. Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978) 243–55.

[49] For applications to the Church in the post-Vatican II years, see Gerald A. Arbuckle, "Why They Leave: Reflections of a Religious Anthropologist," *Review for Religious* 42 (1983) 815–30. Also, there are insights helpful for formation planning; see Gerald A. Arbuckle, "Planning the Novitiate Process: Reflections of an Anthropologist," ibid. 43 (1984) 532–46.

[50] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ., 1969) 95.

in most cases of protracted initiation ritual."[51] For example, in a tribal initiation rite or in a novitiate for a religious congregation there is established a normative liminality process in which the novices are deliberately placed in a position of "statuslessness"; the structuring of the experience is apt to lead to the type of communitas defined above. Then there is spontaneous liminality, which normally begets the experience of communitas. For example, I suddenly lose a close friend. The normal supports of my life just seem helpless to assuage my grief. I see the apparent uselessness of "ordinary living" or societas; I am forced in this case to rediscover that which binds all people together—not statuses nor roles, but the very fact of being human.

According to Turner, therefore, life is a process whereby individuals or groups of people pass from structured "ordinary" living (societas and the preliminal stage) to liminality/communitas and back once more to "ordinary" living (societas and the postliminal stage). The process is constantly repeated if the particular society is to be maintained and if individuals are to achieve human satisfaction, stability, and growth. In his studies he seeks to clarify the nature of this process. He emphasizes the natural and normal character of the process, giving particular attention to liminality. Unlike Van Gennep, he does not limit the three-stage process to particular rites of passage, but sees it as integral to everyday living. He sees liminality described partly as "a stage of reflection."[52] Or, put in another way, "Liminality here breaks, as it were, the cake of custom and enfranchises speculation."[53] What does he mean by "enfranchises speculation" and why should liminality result in creativity for society and for individuals? The answer is to be found in Turner's insights into the power of symbols in the ritual process. Each stage of the ritual process has its own symbols. For example, in societas there are the symbols of statuses and roles, of hierarchical structuring in human and social relationships. In the liminality stage, however, there are what he calls "antistructure" symbols. They are symbols that refer to patterns of behavior that are contrary to the previously expected behavioral customs of people living in societas. The symbols connote a different stage in the ritual process, a stage that should be evocative of meanings about why society and life are important. One example. I once attended an international football game in London between teams from Australia and England. Like thousands of other spectators, I and my friends prepared

[51] Turner, *Dramas* 232.

[52] Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ., 1967) 105.

[53] Ibid. 106.

to break with "ordinary" living (societas) by a special pregame meal. We dressed somewhat less formally than we would in societas. Once in the park ground, I found myself talking in a very friendly way with strangers who surrounded me. We used Christian names. These are people who could well have been high government officials or street cleaners. That did not matter. What did matter was that we were all together to enjoy a first-class football game. Throughout the game the referee was shouted at by spectators in ways which would never have been legally and socially permitted in societas, that is, once the game had stopped and the spectators had left the ground. Notice the symbols of an antistructure type: speaking easily with strangers and using first names without any formal introduction, acceptable abuse of the referee, the informal style of one's clothing, the lack of rank or status symbols. All such symbols break the "cake of custom" (societas). The experience is enriching because, while structure is a normal part of life, and in fact essential for survival, it is always in danger of overpowering people with formalism. From time to time we need to be reminded that structures exist to serve people, not dominate. We came away from the football game refreshed. In our excitement we had together touched the vital underlying humanity of life. The consequence was that we all felt the richer for the experience. This is what Turner means when he speaks of liminality being a "stage of reflection" or "speculation." Liminality provides space for spontaneity, creativity, for which societas has little time. Those who come through liminality/communitas enter once more into societas, but envigorated, more sensitive to what really matters in life.

In his more recent writings Turner has changed the term "liminality" to "liminoid" when referring to the postindustrial world. Leisure he sees as an example of liminoid. That is leisure in the fully human sense: "leisure can be conceived of as a betwixt-and-between, a neither-this-nor-that between two spells of work or between occupational and familiar and civic activity."[54] Leisure is the time when people feel the urge and freedom to be poets, dreamers, sculptors, comedians, feel themselves not subject to the pressures and time demands of the workaday world. In leisure people have the space to come into contact with deep metaphysical realities, to ponder the mysteries of space, nature, the universe. Such reflection within the liminoid can result in even a subversive approach to the values and structures of societas from which one has temporarily removed oneself in leisure. The most recent dramatic example of an almost world-wide liminoid period of "subversion and creativity" is the

[54] Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," *Rice University Studies* 60, no. 3 (autumn 1974) 71.

Expressive Revolution of the mid-1960s to early 1970s.[55]

Society for Turner, therefore, is "process rather than timeless entity."[56] It is created again and again out of the effort to overcome the dualistic tension between structure and communitas. Structure refers to differences between people, whatever constrains people's actions and holds them separated. Communitas refers to the essential and generic human bond without which no society can exist. So strongly powerful and critical is this ritual process that totalitarian regimes seek to control its subversive and creative force.[57] We have but to think of the publicly manipulated rituals of Nazi Germany and the ritual of Soviet political religion. In the latter case massive efforts are made to use the tripartite process to inculcate the norms and values of Marxism-Leninism. Even in the industrial democracies the mass-media machine recognizes the importance of controlling the ritual process. Hence the efforts to prepackage leisure time. Opportunities for people to have real leisure could lead to subversion of the consumer industry.

CONCLUSION

Vatican II committed the whole Church to listen to modern man and woman, in order to understand them and to help create a new kind of dialogue, "which would make it possible to bring the originality of the gospel message to the heart of today's mentalities."[58] In short, as John Paul II has said, the Church must give itself to the "long and courageous process of inculturation."[59] But there cannot be inculturation unless evangelizers "adopt resolutely *an attitude of exchange and of comprehension*, in order to understand the cultural identity of peoples, ethnic groups, and the various sectors of modern society."[60] The challenge to theologians is, therefore, how to comprehend culture and cultures, how to develop an attitude of exchange in evangelization. The temptation is to escape and for theologians to speak only with one another. Some grasp the challenge and use various forms of social or cultural analysis,[61] some emphasize

[55] See Arbuckle, "Why They Leave" 817 ff.

[56] *The Ritual Process* 90.

[57] See Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982) 111 f.

[58] John Paul II, *The Church Is a Creator of Culture: Address to Pontifical Council for Culture* (Sydney: ACTS, 1983) par. 2.

[59] Ibid., par. 4.

[60] Ibid., par. 5.

[61] E.g., see Joseph Holland and Peter Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984).

theological praxis methods,[62] others the methods of liberation theology. The thrust of this article, however, is that a dialogue between theology and anthropology has yet to begin in depth. Anthropology specializes in the understanding of culture and cultures, especially today in uncovering the nature and power of cultural symbols that form the very heart of cultures and therefore of people's lives. In fact, contemporary theology will progress only to the degree that it seeks to comprehend culture. For this, theology needs the professional insights of anthropologists.

For the nonspecialist, anthropology can at first appear confusing. Language is technical and authors do not always agree on terminology. In this article, therefore, I have tried to trace the agnostic and antireligion origins of anthropology. I have given a brief overview of some main schools of the discipline, then defined the term "culture" in a way that I believe would have fairly wide acceptance today among professional anthropologists.

Three anthropologists were selected for review because of their contemporary importance. One area they share in common is their interest in the nature and the power of symbols in the lives of people. We cannot begin to comprehend the nature of culture without grasping the reality and the force of symbols. Both Douglas and Turner happen to be committed Catholics. Both have criticized theologians and liturgists for what they claim to be insensitivity on their part to the insights of contemporary anthropology. Douglas complains that "there is a sad disjunction between the recognised needs of clergy, teachers, religious, writers and the needs of those they preach, teach and write for."[63] The cause of the disjunction, she asserts, comes from the fact that clergy and others have devised rituals and symbols of worship that suit themselves, but not the people they claim to serve. Turner argues that "one cause of the large-scale withdrawal of many Catholics from the institutional life of the Church who still think of themselves as Christians ... is the comprehensive transformation of ritual forms under the influence of theoreticians drawn from the positivist and materialist camps. ..."[64] In

[62] E.g., see Dermot A. Lane, *Foundations for a Social Theology: Praxis, Process and Salvation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1984).

[63] *Natural Symbols* 7.

[64] "Passages, Margins and Poverty: Religious Symbols and Communitas," *Worship* 46 (1972) 392. K. Seasoltz incisively notes: "It would seem imperative that liturgists who attempt to implement the insights of anthropologists should acquire a thorough grounding in anthropology if they are to avoid the pitfalls of naivete and superficiality. Likewise, anthropologists who attempt to criticize liturgical celebrations ... need adequate training in and understanding of Christology, ecclesiology ..." ("Anthropology and Liturgical Theology: Searching for a Compatible Methodology," in D. Power and L. Maldonado, eds., *Liturgy and Human Passage* [New York: Seabury, 1979] 12 f.).

brief, he asserts that the theoreticians have fallen victim unwittingly to the fallacies of functionalism and its views on ritual and religion. These are strong words from two sympathetic anthropologists of world repute. Are they correct? Are there other criticisms of theological approaches and pastoral methods that anthropologists might like to make that should be listened to? The love relationship with anthropology needs to begin on the side of theologians. "At first glance," says John Paul II, "the challenge may seem beyond our ability, but is it not proportionate to our faith and our *hope*?"[65] This is his response to the challenge of inculturation. The same comment applies to the challenge presented in this paper.

[65] *The Church Is a Creator of Culture*, par. 2. The kind of challenging co-operation that is possible between the two disciplines can be seen in the results of the meeting of theologians and anthropologists on sacrifice, sponsored by the Royal Anthropological Institute; see M. Bourdillon and M. Fortes, eds., *Sacrifice* (New York: Academic, 1980).