

FAITH AND CULTURES: CHALLENGES TO A WORLD CHURCH

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RELIGION IS the substance of culture; culture is the form of religion.¹ Paul Tillich's well-known dictum sets up the tension between two of the most dynamic principles of human life, but the principle does not of itself illumine their complex relationship. For Christianity, the relationship of religion—or better, faith or the gospel—to the many cultures in which it now finds itself has been subjected to ever-greater scrutiny in the last half century. This has been so not only because of the multiplication of cultures in which Christianity is now present in some form, but also because the modernization process has accelerated the process of cultural change to a pace that no one has been able to accommodate. The yawning divide between the proclamation of the gospel and the exigencies of culture was called by Paul VI “the drama of our time.”² John Paul II has been even more dramatic: “I have considered the Church's dialogue with the cultures of our time to be a vital area, one in which the destiny of the world at the end of this twentieth century is at stake.”³

To be sure, tensions between faith and cultures have existed at least since Paul confronted the Judaizers over the issue of Hellenistic converts (Acts 15). But the problem has now taken on an urgency accurately reflected in the words of the two popes just cited. The majority of Christians now live in the southern hemisphere, where the ties to Western European forms of Christianity are mediated through a dubious colonial heritage. Almost two thirds of the dioceses in the Roman Catholic Church are outside the U.S. and Europe, with Brazil being the largest Catholic country in the world. Karl Rahner's vision of what he called a “world Church,” first published in the pages of this journal ten years ago,⁴ is already a compelling and challenging reality.

It is more than appropriate, then, to consider what is happening in

¹ P. Tillich, *Theology and Culture* (New York: Oxford University, 1959) 42.

² *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 20.

³ Letter to Agostino Cardinal Casaroli, creating the Pontifical Council for Culture, *Osservatore romano* (English edition), June 28, 1982, 7.

⁴ K. Rahner, “Toward a Fundamental Interpretation of Vatican II,” *TS* 40 (1979) 716-27.

that interaction between Christian faith and cultures today, certainly one of the most bewildering and vexing areas facing theology. The past 50 years have been important to that discussion; indeed, it was just 50 years ago that Pius XII issued his instruction approving traditional Chinese rites venerating the dead, ending more than two centuries of their condemnation and opening up new avenues for thinking about how Christianity might be lived out faithfully in non-Western cultures.⁵

This article explores that relationship between faith and cultures as it has been shaping up over the last half century. I will begin with some observations about terminology, since there is still no consensus about how best to categorize the phenomena under study. The second section will trace major milestones in thinking about the issues, as found in official Roman Catholic Church documents and major theological works on the topic. Some attention will be paid to major resources available in this area as well. A third section will look at some of the major approaches that are being taken to address faith and cultures, and a fourth section will look both at the thorny points impeding theological development and at issues creating the principal challenges for the years ahead.

VOCABULARY OF FAITH AND CULTURES

A variety of different terms has been suggested in the course of the years to help situate and clarify the relationship between faith and cultures. Before looking at that terminology, however, it is important to examine the principal terms themselves: "faith" and "cultures."

The term that will be used for the first side of the equation here is "faith." "Religion" as a term, suggested above in the quotation from Tillich, has generally not been favored in these discussions, since it connotes Christian belief in an already culturally determined form. Also, in some circles it is no doubt still influenced by Barth's distinction between faith and religion. In many papal documents "gospel" rather than "faith" is preferred, in order to emphasize the insertion of the message of Jesus into a culture in the evangelizing process. However, as we shall see in the theological reflections of many engaged with this question, it is important to remember that the gospel never comes alone to a culture: it is always brought by someone who is part of some cultural form of Christianity. The use of the term "faith" connotes the message-quality of Christianity, as well as a sense of commitment that goes with accepting Christ. It represents also in the minds of some that sense of willingness of Christianity to undertake dialogue with the culture and to enter into culture via a dynamic process in order to come to its full expression. In this sense it is probably preferable to expressions like

⁵ *Instructio circa quasdam caeremonias super ritibus sinensibus*, AAS 13 (1939) 548-49.

“church” or “theology” to represent the first side of this equation.

In all of this no one has been able to make a totally compelling case for the use of one term or the other. The nuance one is seeking in describing how Christianity enters and dialogues with cultures has generally been the most determinative feature.

For the other side of the equation, “cultures” rather than “culture” seems increasingly to be preferred, unless the subject of discussion is a single culture. This not only reflects the large number of different cultures with which Christianity must come into dialogue, but also something about the very concept itself. “Culture” in the singular summons up what Bernard Lonergan has called a “classicist” notion of culture, one that understands culture as a normative category, in which “there was but one culture that was both universal and permanent; to its norms and ideals might aspire the uncultured. . . .”⁶ “Cultures” reflects the shift from a metaphysical and deductive notion to the more social-scientific and empirical understanding of human culture that has developed in the West during the last century. Official church documents have represented, for the most part, this same shift.⁷

How, then, is the relationship between faith and culture to be construed? The term longest used was “adaptation,” i.e. that faith would adapt or accommodate itself in a limited fashion to the exigencies of cultural expression for the sake of the communication of the message. The idea behind this concept goes back to the patristic period;⁸ the term itself became popular in missiological circles between the two World Wars, and continued to be used down to the time of the 1974 Roman synod on evangelization. The concept today, however, is generally considered inadequate because of its simplistic and too static understanding of culture—as if a culture can be so easily read that an adaptation can be readily prescribed, and that this process takes place once and for all in an unchanging culture.

“Incarnation” came to be popular in missiological thinking immediately prior to and during the Second Vatican Council. The analogy is with the incarnation of Christ, who emptied himself and took on flesh as one of us. Christian faith, therefore, must imitate its Lord in becoming truly part of a human culture. *Ad gentes* (no. 22) speaks of an “economy

⁶ B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1972) xi.

⁷ H. Carrier documents this move in “Understanding Culture: The Ultimate Challenge of the World-Church?” in J. Gremillion, ed., *The Church and Culture since Vatican II* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1985) 13–30. The development in papal teaching he traces in more detail in *L’Eglise et cultures de Léon XIII à Jean-Paul II* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1987).

⁸ Cf. the study of Chr. Gnllka, *CHRESIS: Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der antiken Kultur* (Basel/Stuttgart: Schwabe, 1984).

of incarnation," implying thereby a more ongoing process than merely an initial entry into a culture. The term is still used from time to time today, but has generally been superseded by the term "inculturation." Aylward Shorter has recently examined "incarnation" more closely and has noted its shortcomings; however, if the term is used to embrace also the paschal mystery (namely, not only entry into a culture but transformation within culture), it could be considered adequate. But in most cases, as Shorter rightly notes, it has been used analogously only to refer to Christ's embracing human nature.⁹

"Inculturation" is now the most widely used term in Roman Catholic circles to describe the proper relation between faith and cultures. The term was perhaps first used in the 1960s but gained currency in the 1970s through its use in the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, its subsequent appearance in the Jesuit General Pedro Arrupe's letter to the Society, and its use by Arrupe and Jaime Cardinal Sin at the 1979 Roman synod.¹⁰ It first appeared in a papal document in John Paul II's *Catechesis tradendae* in 1979 and has been widely used since. A somewhat ungainly neologism in the eyes of many, it nonetheless has the advantage of echoing the concept of incarnation, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of culture and lifting up the relationship of faith and cultures as an ongoing process rather than a once-for-all encounter. It often gets confused, however, with "enculturation" (the learning of a new culture) and "acculturation" (the encounter between cultures).¹¹

The closest rival to inculturation is the term "contextualization," first introduced in 1972 by a study team for the Theological Education Fund.¹² It has been the favored term in circles of the World Council of Churches and has the advantage of emphasizing the importance of context. While it has a slightly different theological resonance than does inculturation, many authors have come to use the two terms interchangeably.

The plethora of terms and the disagreement on their usage bespeak a situation that continues to be fluid, whose conceptuality is still far from clear.¹³ As we shall see, that derives at least in part from just how culture

⁹ A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 75–88.

¹⁰ Shorter (*ibid.* 10) traces the use back to J. Masson in 1962. Carrier (*L'Eglises et cultures* 140) maintains that the term has been in use since the 1930s but gives no references.

¹¹ For a sorting out of the terminology, see Shorter, *Toward a Theology* 3–16, and L. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 69 ff.

¹² Shoki Coe et al., *Ministry in Context* (Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund; Bromley: New Life, 1972). For a thorough study of this term, see K. Hableblian, "The Problem of Contextualization," *Missiology* 11 (1983) 95–111.

¹³ As examples of the continuing confusion in the terminology, one can turn to recent lexica that incorporate entries on this subject. The *Handbuch missionstheologischer Grund-*

is to be understood, as well as how one understands the dynamic of faith vis-à-vis cultural process.

GROWTH IN UNDERSTANDING OF FAITH AND CULTURES

The literature on inculturation has become massive in the period since 1975. Attempts to survey this literature have been undertaken elsewhere,¹⁴ and what may be more helpful is to focus upon important developments that lead us to the "high ground" in the inculturation discussion.

The 1940s witnessed the first developments of a newer understanding of the relationship between faith and cultures. Pius XII's 1944 speech to the directors of the Pontifical Aid Societies¹⁵ started to open up on an official level the possibility of acknowledging the validity of a plurality of cultures and showed some cautious openness to nonclassicist and more empirical views of culture. Even such tentative suggestions represented a significant departure from seeing the Church as representing its own (and superior) culture, over against the culture of the modern world and the presumed inferior cultures of the colonial world. At a more grass-roots level, a Flemish missionary working in the Belgian Congo published that same year a remarkable little volume in which he gathered together Bantu concepts into a coherent Western-style philosophical system.¹⁶ The proposal was that this might provide the basis for an adapted theology more suited to Africa. Although the recasting is done in neo-scholastic terminology, it represents a pioneering attempt to address a question still with us nearly half a century later.

By the 1950s the missiological preoccupation was with the impending independence of many European colonies. There was a practical consideration about the indigenization of local hierarchies, but also one about how the new nationalisms in those former colonies might press for more independent modes of thought—and therefore independent theologies—in the Church. These different concerns were reflected in John XXIII's 1959 missionary encyclical *Princeps pastorum*. For the first time in a

begriffe (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1987) has overlapping entries on inculturation, contextual theology, and intercultural theology. The *New Dictionary of Theology* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1987) has overlapping entries on church and cultures, and inculturation.

¹⁴ Among the recent overviews of research into the relation of church and cultures (none of which presumes to be comprehensive), see J. Upkong, "Contextualization: An Historical Survey," *African Ecclesiastical Review* 29 (1987) 278–86, and C. Taber, "Contextualization," *Religious Studies Review* 13 (1987) 33–36. For a review of the developments in papal and conciliar teaching, see Shorter, *Toward a Theology* 177–238.

¹⁵ AAS 36 (1944) 207–11.

¹⁶ *Bantoe-filosofie* (Antwerp: De Sikkel, 1944); ET, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1959).

document on this level of magisterial teaching, John proposed the groundwork for a multicultural church by acknowledging that the Church was not bound to any culture, not even to European culture: "she [the Church] does not bind herself to any culture, not even with Western and European culture, with which her history is so closely linked."¹⁷ The ecclesiological implications of this are not worked out but would form the basis for such an elaboration during the Second Vatican Council.

Discussion of the relationship of faith and cultures was largely a missiological preoccupation prior to the Second Vatican Council, particularly as the Church faced the implications of its rapid growth in Third World countries. Along with political independence would come a certain ecclesiastical autonomy as mission fields were being elevated into dioceses. The renewal in theology in Europe, however, and especially the historical work that characterized the *nouvelle théologie*, would provide not only an important theoretical underpinning for a multicultural church but a multicultural theology as well. The tenor of the council on this matter, set by the strong collective will of the bishops to set aside the schemata that the preconiliar commissions had prepared for them, had been encouraged by words of John XXIII. The distinction he made in his opening address to the council between the substance of the deposit of the faith, on the one hand, and the manner of its expression, on the other, effectively paved the way for accepting legitimate, differing cultural modes of expression of the ancient faith.¹⁸

Two developments arising out of the teaching of the council were crucial for the development of the contemporary understanding of faith and cultures. The first was the ecclesiology presented in *Lumen gentium*, restoring the patristic concept of the particular church and envisioning the universal Church as a communion of churches under the headship of the bishop of Rome. Reconstructing the fundamental understanding of church in this fashion allowed for seeing local churches in different regions as having their own integrity and, in some measure, their own distinctive voices. Thus it became possible to think of local expressions of theology as well. This was picked up on in the decree *Ad gentes*, where a whole chapter was devoted to the local church (nos. 19–22). The consistent call for adaptation to the exigencies of local needs and regions in areas of seminary training, religious life, liturgy, and catechesis, as well as respecting the integrity of the Eastern churches in communion

¹⁷ AAS 51 (1959) 833–64.

¹⁸ This becomes even more evident when one compares the somewhat more cautious formulation in the *Acta apostolicae sedis* with the Vatican radio transcript that Peter Hebblethwaite unearthed in his research for his biography of the pope: *Pope John XXIII: Shepherd of the Modern World* (New York: Herder, 1985); see 430–32.

with Rome, was a natural theological consequence of this understanding.

The second development was the council's attitude toward culture. In the second chapter of *Gaudium et spes*, a long and carefully written section is devoted to that topic (nos. 53–63). Here, for the first time, culture as a category is embraced at the highest level, a category others are encouraged to use in their analysis of the current situation and in their response to the needs that surface from that analysis. While not wishing to reduce culture to only an empirical or sociological concept, the document clearly embraces this approach (no. 53) and stresses the plurality of cultures. It notes that the Church is not tied to any culture but may enter into communion with a variety of cultures and is indeed enriched by them (no. 58). The Church sees its task as entering into dialogue with those cultures, renewing, correcting, strengthening, purifying, elevating them (no. 58). An important element to be stressed often in subsequent papal teaching was the right of each individual to his or her own culture without the interference of outside domination (no. 60).

The most important theoretical work on culture and the relation of faith and culture is to be found in *Gaudium et spes*. However, in the decrees *Ad gentes* and *Nostra aetate* consequences of this thinking are amplified. Perhaps the most significant of these is the respect that is to be accorded to non-Christians and non-Christian cultures. That respect is to be extended to their beliefs as well, at least to those who participate in the great literate religious traditions, and certainly to all who try to follow the dictates of their consciences as best they can. This tone of respect for cultural formations created the environment in which inculturation could take place. *Gaudium et spes* formed the foundations, but it was these more practically-oriented decrees that set the tone for pursuing further reflection on the relation of faith and culture.

With this supportive work the scene was set for the development of the relation between faith and cultures. Paul VI was to return frequently to this theme. His 1967 letter to the bishops of Africa, *Africae terrarum*, must be seen as a landmark in this development. In that letter he identifies a number of positive values in African cultures (pervasive concept of God, concern for human dignity, profound sense of the family) that may form the basis of an African theology that would be both genuinely African and authentically Catholic.¹⁹ What makes this so significant is that here we have a first instance of application of some of the general principles affirmed at the council.

In light of this letter Pope Paul's visit to Africa in 1969 was eagerly anticipated. In his allocution to the bishops in Kampala he returned to

¹⁹ AAS 59 (1967) 1073–97.

the theme, showing a certain ambivalence which has ever since characterized most papal statements on this topic. In the first part he stresses the importance of maintaining the unchanging patrimony of the Church given to it by Christ, including in that certain verbal formulas. These are to be preserved, even when they are "difficult." The tone here is austere. But in the second part he seems to take almost the opposite tack: "The expression, i.e. the language and mode of expressing this one faith, may be manifold. . . . From this point of view a certain pluralism is not only legitimate but desirable." He goes on to say: "And in this sense you may, and you must, have an African Christianity."²⁰

The 1974 Roman synod was devoted to the theme of evangelization, and bishops, especially the bishops of Africa, pressed for a greater local cultural expression of faith, complaining of too tight a control from Rome. Pope Paul's concluding address was found by many to be disappointing on this topic, but in the apostolic exhortation he issued on the results of this synod, *Evangelii nuntiandi*, what is said about faith and cultures still stands as the single best statement from the papal magisterium on this issue.

What makes *Evangelii nuntiandi* so valuable is its emphasis on the evangelization of cultures (no. 20) and its analysis of the inculturation process (no. 63). The concern for the evangelization of cultures, and not just individuals within a culture, underlines how much humans are cultural beings and how much, therefore, culture has to be taken into consideration in any theological reflection. *Gaudium et spes* (no. 58) had spoken in general terms of the impact of the gospel on a culture, but in *Evangelii nuntiandi* Pope Paul goes into much more detail on how the gospel actually interacts with a culture, and he does this from the perspective of the receiving culture. In no. 63 he speaks of "the task of assimilating the essence of the gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language." He makes the point that this process of transposition cannot be effected by the evangelizers but is ultimately the task of the members of the culture themselves.

The pontificate of John Paul II has been marked by a profound interest in the question of faith and culture. As was noted above, he was the first pope to use the term "inculturation"; this occurred in his apostolic exhortation summing up the results of the 1978 Roman synod. He gives an extensive treatment of inculturation in the evangelization process in his 1985 encyclical *Slavorum apostoli*. In his many travels around the

²⁰ AAS 61 (1969) 577.

globe he routinely has at least two addresses devoted to culture: one to intellectuals and artists, and one to an ethnic minority whose culture is threatened by the majority culture. In the first of these he stresses the responsibilities of those who have such a strong hand in shaping the dominant culture. In the second he defends, often passionately, the right of a people to their own culture. These two themes of shaping and of defending culture form the ongoing agenda of the Pontifical Council for Culture which John Paul II formed in 1982.

John Paul continues Paul VI's emphasis on the need to take culture seriously in the evangelization process. In the kind of clear language one has come to expect from his philosophically trained mind, he said in an address to the National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement of Cultural Commitment, and reiterated in his letter establishing the Pontifical Council: "the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith. A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been . . . thoroughly received, not fully lived out."²¹

Aylward Shorter, in his reading of John Paul's reflections on faith and culture, does not detect any genuine theoretical advancement of the issues, although he has brought some intellectual precision to them, and his defense of peoples' right to culture has surely been unequivocal.²² Rather, two characteristics stand out in this pope's many reflections on culture. The first is his more philosophical approach to the meaning of culture. As we shall see in the fourth section, a clear foundation for the meaning of culture is generally lacking in anthropological and sociological models, so reflection on this is welcome. However, it runs the risk of setting up an ideal culture that draws its principal features from the culture of the one doing the reflecting. Shorter and others have reflected how, no doubt unconsciously and unintentionally, this pope's model of the interaction of faith and culture is Poland in the last two centuries. The state of inculturation in other cultures comes to be judged against this standard. And cultures that have not accepted the gospel would, under this criterion, not need to be accorded the respect given to evangelized cultures.²³ This danger of ethnocentrism is one that needs a constant vigilance, for it can unintentionally but nonetheless effectively lead one back to the monocultural mentality of the 19th-century Church.

The second characteristic of John Paul's reflections is a much stronger emphasis on a people's ability to change their culture at will, and concomitantly the role of the Church in directing these changes. Such

²¹ *Osservatore romano* (English edition), March 8, 1982, 8.

²² Shorter, *Toward a Theology* 222-38. For a different exposition of John Paul's teaching on this subject, see Carrier, *L'Eglise et cultures*.

²³ Shorter, *ibid.* 233.

an ability to change culture is not supported by contemporary anthropological theory but would be consistent with the more philosophical approach he has taken. Such an emphasis on the conscious changing of culture can lead to blunting of the awareness of the complexity of culture, and a depreciation of the role of members of the culture in the inculturation process. If this view is indeed being encouraged among those who read these addresses, it may account for what many perceive to be the gap between the papal magisterium's official statements on inculturation and how the Vatican bureaucracy has been reacting to requests for permission to carry out policies based upon those statements.

Since the publication of *Evangelii nuntiandi*, there has been a veritable explosion of literature on inculturation. Once seen as the province of missiological reflection, concern for inculturation has taken its place more and more in the mainstream of theology. Reflection on the relation of faith and culture had long been part of theological work, but there were some new impulses, succinctly summed up in a programmatic article by A. A. Roest Crolius in 1978. He defined inculturation in this way:

Inculturation of the Church is the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal.²⁴

He goes on to note that three things were new about the inculturation movement when compared to earlier reflections on faith and culture: (1) a more social-science-oriented concept of culture, (2) an awareness of a more dialogical relationship between the Church and culture, and (3) the role of the local church as the prime agent of inculturation.²⁵

It would be impossible in an article of this length to assess developments in inculturation in each of the continents of the world. A good deal of the literature about inculturation often does not end up actually dealing with it but simply issues a call for it to be done. *Theologie im Kontext*, a semiannual abstract service of the Missionswissenschaftliches Institut in Aachen, provides the best single access to Third World (and selected First World) periodical literature on this subject.²⁶ It also reports on conferences and research projects.

A number of series are being published that address issues of contex-

²⁴ A. A. Roest Crolius, "What Is So New about Inculturation? A Concept and Its Implications," *Gregorianum* 59 (1978) 721-38, at 735.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 735-36.

²⁶ Postfach 1110, D-5100 Aachen. This service began in 1980.

tualization. Among them is the Inculturation series, now running to ten volumes, from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.²⁷ The Spearhead series, published by the Gaba Institute in Eldoret, Kenya, on the other hand, shows how local churches are undertaking the task of inculturation. It presently runs to 104 volumes.²⁸ The projected 50-volume Theology and Liberation series, jointly planned and published among several Latin American nations and appearing on a selected basis in English in the United States via Orbis Books, represents an attempt to cover the full range of traditional theological topics from the inculturated perspective of Latin America.

Every continent has shown interest in what inculturation means for its own context. In North America inculturation has been or will be the theme of the annual meetings of the Catholic Theological Society of America three times in the last decade: in 1981, 1986, and 1990. In the Pacific Rim of Asia theologians have organized a Programme for Theology and Cultures in Asia, headquartered in Kyoto, to provide ongoing assessment of inculturation in Asia and regular workshops throughout the region in Asian theology.²⁹

To this point few books have tried to assess the theological implications of the inculturation movement as a whole; most have studied only specific areas. Four works, however, should be singled out as having made major contributions toward advancing the thinking about inculturation.

The first of these is Charles Kraft's *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*.³⁰ Writing from a conservative evangelical perspective, Kraft developed a model of inculturation that focused on the translation of the gospel message into a new cultural situation via "dynamic equivalence," a concept borrowed from Bible translation. Dynamic equivalence recognizes that univocal translation is rarely possible and that one needs to get to the "core" of the message and then transpose that core into the culture, where it is embedded within the forms of that culture. This approach to faith and culture continues to be the one most commonly held—that of moving from the gospel message to the culture. It can be found in denominational positions across the spectrum from conservative evangelical Protestant to official Roman Catholic. Kraft goes to great pains to develop a

²⁷ The most recent volume in this series is M. Dumais et al., *Cultural Change and Liberation in a Christian Perspective* (Rome: Gregorian University, 1987).

²⁸ The most recent volume in this series is J. K. Njino, *Institutes of Consecrated Life, Religious and Secular* (Eldoret: Gaba Institute, 1988). The volumes may be had through the Gaba Institute, P.O. Box 4002, Eldoret, Kenya.

²⁹ See my description of the project in "Theology and Cultures Project in Asia," *New Theology Review* 1 (1988) 88–89.

³⁰ Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979.

to official Roman Catholic. Kraft goes to great pains to develop a biblically based theology to support his model of inculturation. It remains one of the most valuable contributions to thought on inculturation.

The second major work is Robert Schreiter's *Constructing Local Theologies*.³¹ Whereas Kraft's work starts with the gospel message, Schreiter's work begins with culture. Great effort is made to balance faith and culture, but the cultural perspective is pursued throughout this work. Written with Roman Catholic concerns in mind, it addresses the impact inculturation will have on the nature of theology and upon tradition. It provides neither biblical foundations for inculturation nor a theology of inculturation. Rather, it addresses a number of theological problems that arise in the inculturation process (criteria for Christian identity, syncretism, dual religious systems, etc.). No other work has yet taken up some of these problems in the same detail.

The third major work is Louis J. Luzbetak's *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*.³² This is a complete reworking of a 1963 work of the same title that has been a classic in its genre. It is intended to be a practical handbook for persons working in cultures outside their own. It goes beyond providing some instruction in the operation of cultures, however, and addresses a good number of theological questions as well, including models of inculturation and models of church. Its value is precisely in bringing together anthropological tools in a clear and straightforward fashion with a well-informed theology. This puts its readers in a position to forge their own approaches to inculturation in ways appropriate to their contexts.

The fourth work is Aylward Shorter's *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*.³³ Shorter is a trained anthropologist (as is Luzbetak) who has worked for many years in Africa. The African perspective predominates in his book but by no means limits its value. Shorter's is the first Roman Catholic attempt to develop a theology of inculturation. The actual theological construct is rather general (the book had its origin in training courses for missionaries) and sometimes sketchy, but it does provide an outline upon which more can be built and from which a discussion about inculturation can be undertaken. A particular strength of the book is its reading of the development of church teaching on inculturation. His pessimistic assessment of the current state of inculturation would be echoed by many. His sections on the biblical foundations for inculturation continue the earlier work of Donald Senior and Carroll Stuhlmueller.³⁴

³¹ Ibid. 1985.

³² Ibid. 1988.

³³ Ibid. 1988.

³⁴ Ibid. 1982.

A final, brief word should be said about a document issued by the International Theological Commission in January 1989. Entitled "Faith and Inculturation," it speaks to the nature of inculturation, the biblical foundations of inculturation, and selected problems in inculturation.³⁵ After a rather curious attempt to wed a Thomistic notion of nature with social-scientific understandings of culture, the document explores biblical and theological foundations in Scripture and the beginnings of the Church. This is the strongest part of the document. Treatment of selected problems (popular religion, non-Christian religions, younger and older churches, challenges of modernity) shows little awareness of current discussions, especially in the case of popular forms of religion.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO INCULTURATION

A number of attempts have been made to classify the different methodological approaches to contextualization, but the most comprehensive remains that of Stephen Bevans.³⁶ His classification not only sorts out the methodologies but helps sharpen the methodological issues at stake in the inculturation process.

Using the language of models or paradigms, Bevans proposes six such models. The first, the translation model, starts from the gospel message (understood here as the Bible and/or church teaching, depending on one's ecclesial identification) and seeks out ways of inserting that into the culture. This approach has the advantage of keeping the gospel message in its pristine integrity but has the weakness of misconstruing the configurations of the receiving culture. Charles Kraft's work and current Vatican teaching on inculturation would be examples.

The second model Bevans calls the anthropological. Here the culture is the starting point, since issues of cultural identity are at stake for the receiving culture. It corrects the weakness of the translation model but, at least in its more radical form, can jeopardize the integrity of the gospel message by not attending adequately to it. Bevans cites the work of Philippine theologian Leonardo Mercado as an example of this.³⁷

The third model is the praxis model, which focuses on the process of social change within culture, since it is believed that God speaks through the events that mark change in history. Its strength is its dynamic engagement of the community in those events and experiences most pressing in their lives. Its weakness is that it might ignore larger cultural

³⁵ "Fede e inculturazione," *Civiltà cattolica* no. 3326 (January 21, 1989) 158-77.

³⁶ "Models of Contextual Theology," *Missiology* 13 (1985) 195-211.

³⁷ "Contextual Theology in the Philippines: A Preliminary Report," *Philippiniana sacra* 14 (1979) 36-58; "Notes on Christ and Local Community in the Philippine Context," *Verbum SVD* 21 (1980) 303-15.

ation theologies are the most common examples of this model.

The fourth model is the synthetic—synthetic in the sense that it consciously tries to combine the strengths of the three aforementioned models. It realizes the importance of all their elements and seeks to find ways to bring them into conversation with one another. Dialogue, then, and multidirectionality are important categories in such a model. Bevans identifies the work of David Tracy as exemplifying this model.³⁸

The fifth model, a variant on the synthetic, Bevans calls the semiotic model. It represents the same concern about holding the different positions in tension but mediates this through a semiotic model of cultural analysis. Semiotic approaches to culture emphasize the sign-making or symbolic nature of culture, following the work of anthropologists like Clifford Geertz, Mary Douglas, and Victor Turner. The strength of this model is that it has been able to deal with the tensions in the faith-and-cultures process perhaps better than any other model thus far presented, but is so complex to use that it would be beyond the reach of most practitioners. Bevans identifies this model with Robert Schreiter's work.

The final model is the transcendental, building upon the tradition of transcendental philosophy and theology. Here the turn is to the subject and an examination of the subjectivity of the individual as the basis for uncovering universal forms of knowing which in turn can lay the foundations for intercultural communication. The strength of this model is its grounding in actual participants in the culture and its quest for a common ground among discussants. Its weakness is that it may be too beholden to Western approaches to cognition and to communication. Bevans finds this approach in the work of Karl Rahner and especially in the cultural thought of Bernard Lonergan.³⁹

Bevans' approach via models highlights the major issues that shape discussions about inculturation: (1) Where is the appropriate place to begin: with the gospel message or with culture? (2) To what extent is the gospel message supracultural and to what extent is it inextricably embedded in a culture? (3) What is an appropriate model for the analysis of culture? To what extent should it emphasize cultural identity and to what extent social change? (4) Is there a dialogical model that can hold all the elements in tension? And might there be a privileged model, such as the semiotic one, that does it better than others? (5) Is there some philosophical high ground from which this can all be adjudicated (such as transcendental philosophy) or are we caught in a welter of pluralism

³⁸ See his *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981); *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987).

³⁹ See his *Method in Theology* (n. 6 above).

that erodes into relativism?

None of these questions has been answered to any degree of universal satisfaction. That shows, on the one hand, the progress the discussion has made from recognizing a plurality of cultures. On the other hand, it shows how far things still need to go.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN THE INCULTURATION DISCUSSION

What are the next steps in the examination of the relation of faith and cultures? Where are the roadblocks that are slowing progress? In this final section let me make some observations about what seem to me to be the most important elements in the discussion in the coming years.

1. It is widely felt that the challenge to a greater inculturation of the gospel in the many cultures in which the Church finds itself is still largely unmet. There seem to be two major reasons for this: (a) a lack of methodologies with sufficient theoretical power to break through some of the conceptual logjams, and a lack of tools that can be used readily and easily by agents of contextualization; and (b) reluctance of church officials, at both the local and international levels, to permit legitimate experiments in inculturation and to sanction successful experiments for ongoing use. If anything, the process seems in some areas to be not just slowing but actually reversing itself. While these two reasons may seem on the surface to be unrelated (one the problem of theologians, the other the problem of bishops), there are some important connections.

2. A major issue remains the analysis of culture. This requires work on two levels. The first is the relation between philosophical, deductive models of culture and social-science, empirical models. Models of the first type provide a tidier point of departure for theological reflection but end up universalizing a particular culture's understanding of itself. They have the advantage of providing norms against which to judge performance, but these norms are often formed in a monocultural, isolated situation. Cultural difference gets read as deviation or failure, and the whole inculturation process can collapse into a new monoculturalism or a *henoculturalism*, i.e. there are many cultures but there is one culture superior to all. The more empirical models have the advantage of valuing and describing cultural specificities—one of the main reasons we engage in an inculturation process in the first place. But empirical models are often unreflective about their own foundations. Some of the models for understanding religion in society (including one quite widely used: the functional model) have their origins in antireligious sentiments. In ecclesiastical circles there has been an increasing tendency to retreat into philosophical models, stressing the similarities among cultures at the expense of differences, thereby defeating the purpose of inculturation.

The second level requires work on the empirical models of culture at a metatheoretical level. Some anthropologists have pointed to what they call a growing crisis in their discipline:⁴⁰ the field is no more unified on the nature and processes of culture than it was 50 years ago. And more alarmingly, some would say that there have been no really significant theoretical advances since the times of Durkheim and Weber.

If this is indeed the case, then the problem is not just the lack of theologians' sophistication in using anthropological models but may lie in the models themselves. Thus the inculturation process can be no stronger than the tools it utilizes. This cannot be used as a reason for abandoning the use of anthropology and sociology; they remain, after all, the best that we have for dealing with legitimate cultural differences. But it reminds us of the fragility of the entire undertaking.

3. Another issue that will need further discussion is just how culturally the Church's patrimony should be construed. No doubt there is a permanence in the Church's patrimony that speaks to every time and place, but there can also be no doubt about a certain cultural embeddedness. There are several important dimensions to this matter, which all in one way or another go back to the question of culture. First, does being embedded in a culture make something automatically contingent? Second, can a "core," to use Kraft's term, be identified to serve as the measuring rod for inculturation processes, and can that core be shown to be beyond culture?⁴¹ Is this even a useful way of proceeding? Third, does the identification of cultural elements in the patrimony mean that the Church may not only be "enriched" by contact with new cultures but perhaps even changed? Fourth, what impact will these kinds of reflection have on discussions of hierarchy of truths? This is a potentially explosive area but one that sooner or later will come to the fore. No one wishes to deny the enduring value of revelation or that the Church can speak to every culture (another way of speaking of its universality). But what will that mean concretely when the question of culture is taken in its full seriousness?

4. Lurking behind this entire discussion is the issue of pluralism. Pluralism is, of course, more than a strategic issue of ecclesiastical policy; it is a deeply theological one as well. Theology faces this issue in inculturation discussions because of the variety of cultural differences. Communication between cultures is manifestly possible and realizable, but the number of cultural universals that remain after such encounters

⁴⁰ For a trenchant analysis, see S. Barrett, *The Rebirth of Anthropological Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1984).

⁴¹ See, e.g., the proposal of Max Stackhouse et al. in *Apologia: Contextualization, Globalization, and Mission in Theological Education* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) Part 3.

continues to dwindle. A question to be pursued is whether current postfoundationalist discussions might benefit the inculturation discussion.⁴² If postfoundationalist thought can come to terms with pluralism within one culture, might that not help the calculus of cultures worldwide and provide us with a better basis for the inculturation discussion?

5. Finally, work is just beginning on a theology of inculturation. Shorter's initial contribution has already been noted, but how the diversity of cultures will impact upon our understanding of revelation, of Christology, of the meaning of grace, not to mention theological anthropology, still awaits greater exploration. It would seem that this will have to be undertaken within a milieu of cultural pluralism rather than too quickly finding a transcendental point of departure. But such efforts could help give guidance on a number of levels.

The challenges of inculturation as a theological undertaking parallel the challenges of becoming a genuinely multicultural Church. To the extent that the one succeeds, to that extent the other will flourish.

⁴² See, e.g., Richard Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1983).