Landas 25 (2011) 83–134

"INCULTURATION" AND THE CHURCH

The Asian Context*

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Our first purpose in preparing this paper is to "present a report" of some theological thinking and writing being done in Asia "toward a relevant ecclesiology"—a report, we would stress, without explicit critique or evaluation. Hence, *Section 1* is an attempt merely to give a somewhat analytic exposition of three different texts issued by as many recent theological conferences held in Asia, texts explicitly engaged in "the search for an ecclesiology in the Asian contexts."

Section II is a summary presentation of how declarations of several Asian Bishops' assemblies (Roman Catholic), from 1970–1984, have sketched the mission of the Church in Asia. Once again it is a report, drawn up in more synthetic form, of pastoral and missionary reflection. An analysis of these texts has yielded a more balanced formulation of concrete imperatives for the Church in Asia, discerned as its pastoral leaders face the concrete challenges of rapidly changing societies, the context wherein the proclamation of Jesus and the Gospel, and the building up of the Church, must today be realized.

*Paper written as a personal contribution to the International Theological Commission (Rome: October 1984 session).

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In *Section III*, more by way of positing a set of interconnected questions than by formulating answers, the "principles of inculturation" seen as "building up the local church" are (somewhat tentatively) laid down; the methodology of the "hermeneutical circle" is summarized, and some urgent questions posed in its regard, and lastly, a sort of "field theory"—the hypothesis of ecclesiogenesis—is drawn from some contemporary authors for discussion and evaluation.

We hope that by thus presenting our paper we will, in some measure, attain our second purpose, to "thematize the issues" with some clarity, so that they may be fruitfully addressed. We would be presumptuous if we pretended that in a paper of this sort (merely a survey), we could do more than place in the hands of others a compendium (long enough as it is) of what is being said, of questions that are being asked with some urgency, and some seemingly promising lines of reflection on, and perspectives for, discernment regarding ecclesiological developments in the Asian (as well as other "ex-mission") churches.

We will have accomplished our objectives if this paper primed such reflections, discussion, and discernment in the service of the Church and its mission.

Section I: Some Ecclesiological "Projects"

1. Introduction

All that can be attempted in a "survey-type paper" like this present one is to indicate the principal elements for reflection on the theme we are addressing, the lining up of the principal questions which are being asked. Rather than attempt definitive solutions (which would, of course, be premature!), we would do a better service in these pages by setting up the questions with some care and sharpness, so that they may be discussed more fruitfully.

By way of introduction, it seems that a convenient way of replying to the question "*qu'est-ce qui est passe dans la conscience et vie de l'Eglise*?" as far as the Church in Asia—or perhaps better, "the local churches in

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Asia"—is concerned is to turn to a few statements,[1] relatively recent, wherein (hopefully!) responsible church bodies in Asia have tried to articulate in some detail their reflection on the mission of the Church in Asia, or even more pointedly, their "project" for an ecclesiology for the Asian Church or for the local churches in Asia.

ITA/1983. The first is the statement "Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology," issued by the Indian Theological Association (Roman Catholic theologians and professors of theology; forty in number) at the conclusion of their annual conference (St. Charles Seminary, Nagpur: October 21–23, 1983).[2]

CTC-CCA/1982. The second is the official report written by D. Preman Niles from the Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia (Singapore) which sums up the discussions of an exploratory meeting held in Kandy, Sri Lanka, from August 23–27, 1982, on "our understanding of the Church or the Doctrine of the Church [ecclesiology] and the various patterns of the Church life and worship [ecclesial models] that we have inherited."[3]

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[1]There are a good number of statements as well as collective works from Asian sources which in recent years have essayed theological (and ecclesiological) "projects." For example, M. Amaladoss, T. K. John, & G. Gispert-Sauch, eds., *Theologizing in India: Essays and Research* (Bangalore: Bishops' Conference [CBCI] Commission on Seminaries/Theological Publications in India, 1981), 445 pp. The work of Fr. D. S. Amalorpavadass, until recently director of the National Biblical, Liturgical, and Catechetical Centre at Bangalore, is well-known throughout Asia (cf. the book by Anto Karokaran, referred to in Section II). Also Robert Hardawirjana, *Building the Church of Christ in a Pluricultural Situation* (Yogyakarta: 1982). The three texts analyzed here were chosen because they are somewhat more manageable for the purpose of a summary study.

[2]For a report on the conference, *vid.* S. Arulsamy, "Searching for an Indian Ecclesiology," News and Comments: *Indian Theological Studies* 20/4 (December 1983): 348–356. The complete final statement itself appears in *Vidyajyoti*, Delhi (February 1984): 99–107.

[3]*Tradition and Innovation: A Search for a Relevant Ecclesiology in Asia* (Singapore: Commission on Theological Concerns, Christian Conference of Asia, 1983). CTC-CCA is an ecumenical body, in a way analogous to the World Council of

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EATWOT/1981. The third is a cluster of statements rather than a single document, the statements of Conferences sponsored by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). We will limit ourselves to the last conference held in Asia at New Delhi (August 17–29, 1981).[4]

FABC/1970–1983. Lastly, there is another cluster: the official and non-official statements of the (Roman Catholic) Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (1970–1984).[5] Here we will consider especially the Declaration of the First Asian Bishops' Meeting (Manila: 1970), on the occasion of the first visit of Pope Paul VI to Asia and Australia, and the three Plenary Assemblies of the FABC (Taipei: 1974; Calcutta: 1978; Bangkok: 1982), where the basic elements of an "ecclesiology of mission for Asia" appear with sufficient explicitness.

These documents will be studied a) to derive the common questions and orientations which have emerged in the last fifteen years or so after the Second Vatican Council, and b) to ask if there are some fundamental ecclesiological questions and orientations which can be brought into clearer relief—for our consideration and reflection (Section 2).

Churches, for Asia. The consultation at Kandy, Sri Lanka, was also ecumenical (largely Protestant) in composition. Bishop Leo Nanayakara, O.S.B., the only Roman Catholic who had been asked to participate, died three months before the conference was actually held.

[4]V. Fabella & S. Torres, eds., *Irruption of the Third World: Challenge to Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983). In the organizing committees and in the actual conference, Roman Catholics played an important, perhaps the principal, role (the editors of the proceedings are a Filipina Maryknoll Sister and a Chilean priest).

[5]Cf. the series of booklets published by the Office of the Secretary General, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Hong Kong. Many of the more important texts have now been gathered together in *For All the Peoples of Asia: The Church in Asia: Asian Bishops' Statements on Mission, Community and Ministry, 1970–1984, Volume I: Texts and Documents* (Manila: I. M. C. Publications, 1984), hereafter referred to as FAPA. For an excellent overall commentary, with much relevant information, cf. Marcello Zago, *La Chiesa in Asia Oggi: Situazione e Prospettive*, "La Missione" 4 (Bologna: E. M. I., 1983).

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These analyses, except for the reflection on the FABC statements, will be kept brief; the constraints of space forbid anything more developed than a few paragraphs. Our effort will be to disengage the main lines of questions and orientation—the lines especially which move toward convergence (more exact and more detailed analysis has to be set aside for another time and another setting). What these texts (*ITA/1983*; *CTC-CCA/1982*, et al.) say will be set down *without evaluation or criticism*, positive or negative, in this part. The first two sections of the present study will thus be primarily "informational," a sort of exercise in data-processing.

ITA/1983 and *CTC-CCA/1982*.[6] The two programmatic statements (*ITA/1983* and *CTC-CCA/1982*) show sufficient convergence, I believe, to be taken together, at least for our present purposes.

2. "The Burden of the Past"

There is the first issue, "the burden of the past." We might, in passing, note that this is no longer (in the 1980's) treated with over-heavy a hand. In fact, the *CTC-CCA/1982* statement explicitly says that "little purpose is served in analyzing and categorizing models of church life in Asia so that so called 'western' elements may be identified and jettisoned while the so-called 'authentically Asian' and 'biblical' may be preserved."

> Instead of seeing the search for an ecclesiology in Asia essentially as a negative process of discarding the "foreign and inherited" as opposed to the "authentically Asian" and "biblical," the search was seen in the imagery of continuing journey—"a journey in search of our identity in the contemporary situation." (*CTC-CCA*, 13)

The *ITA/1983* statement is somewhat more negative than this with regard to the "burden of the past."

> Offering the past as a paradigm for the future easily prevents people from creatively responding to the challenges that shape their destiny.

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[6]Since what we are, at the moment, emphasizing is "what is different," the points brought into relief will of course be somewhat negative: what needs changing, so that the ecclesiology will be relevant for the Asian contexts.

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> The past, however, has to make its contribution, but should not become a dead weight on the life and activity of the Church. (*ITA/1983*, 17)

Some concrete embodiments of this "burden of the past" which were explicitly mentioned—sometimes without further clarification (which clarification we have tried to add in the briefest way possible)—in these texts are:

- ecclesiologies originating from outside the area ("western/Roman," with basic elements deriving from "western institutions, Roman law and political order" and the like), imposed *en bloc* on our Asian contexts;
- similarly, inherited structures and institutions (e.g., the concrete forms and ordering of ministries, power-distributions in the Church, hierarchy-clergy vis-à-vis laity relationships);
- influences of western-feudal ordering of society, as reflected in the Church, in the colonial period and in contemporary vestiges; the bourgeois-mentality, once again imported from the West, present as inner-consciousness and determinant mindset within the Church, even today;
- the continuing remnants of the "colonialist connection," and of the often syntonic collaboration of the missionary endeavor (in some respects at least) with colonialist policies and strategies;
- alienation from indigenous cultures (meanings, values, symbolic worlds) and thus ordinarily, distancing from the poor classes and milieux in our Asian societies;
- in general, a mentality which identifies the Church *simpliciter* with the sum total of theologies, structures and institutions, formulations of teaching, etc., which *de facto* are "simply inherited western forms," with no differentiation between what are authentically "trans-cultural" and irreversible non-negotiable Gospel meanings and values and what are their variable and changeable inculturated expressions.

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3. "Status Quo" Petrified in Our Churches

The second issue is "the fixity of the *status quo* in our churches." This would be, for a fact, merely the carrying over and the imposition of the "burden of the past" onto our present "cult, code, creed"—perhaps more clearly onto our existing "cannons, customs, clerisy."[7]

- Lack of structures, processes and activities which generate authentic sharing of gifts and responsibilities within the Church, and which enable genuine co-responsibility especially with regard to lay people, women, and youth.
- Lack of a genuine desire to "open out," to reach out to urgent secular tasks of the surrounding human milieux; to participate in the transformation of Asian societies, moving toward construction of just and human communities; to take part in the "redemption of the histories of our peoples," and to find the meaning and implications of our faith in the context of this endeavor and the struggles it necessarily implies.
- Lack of genuine openness to (a climate of superiority? a form of the counter-reform ghetto mentality?) and dialogue with the cultural and religious traditions of our Asian peoples and the contemporary social currents which are most active in our countries.

4. The Call to Renewal

The third issue also flows out of the two preceding ones: there must be a return to the faith-experience, in the Spirit, of the Risen Lord.

There must be an "opening out of the Church" to the totality of the human reality which surrounds her; her endeavor must reach out to the "realization" of the Kingdom.

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[7]"Canons, customs, clerisy": *Customs* is here taken to mean usages, rites, symbols, patterns of behavior, et al. *Canons* = legal prescriptions, liturgical regulations, and the like. "*Clerisy*" = structures in community and ecclesiastical society, inter-relationships between hierarchy/clergy and the laity, especially with regard to sharing in ministerial tasks and functions, in power and participation in consultative and deliberative processes and the like.

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There must be the realization within the Church of communion and participation: a genuine sharing of gifts, of rights, of responsibilities and tasks toward the construction of "communities of faith for the building up of the Kingdom."

Participation within the Church's life, ministry, and action must be "inclusive," being especially sensitive to the place and role of women.

Thus, communion and participation both *ad intra* and *ad extra*; *ad intra*, in the structures and life of Christian communities; *ad extra*, participation in the action for the transformation of human society toward justice and brotherhood.

Thus, there has to be a renewal of ministerial structures toward communion and toward this twofold participation: in processes of selection, formation, accountability (responsibility) to the "people of God" vis-à-vis exercise and duration of ministries.

There must be an openness of the Church to the living cultural and religious traditions in the places where she is present, in turn to make Christ and the Gospel present.

5. Methodology

The methodology of the two documents being considered here show lines of convergence:

A. starting point for *theological reflection*: the total social reality (sociopolitical, economic, cultural, religious) as context, as experienced, and as thematized by Christian consciousness from experience and praxis;

B. *analysis and evaluation*: analyzed and evaluated according to given canons of analysis, some deriving from social and human sciences, others deriving from faith and religion, from theology;

C. responses called for: imperatives discerned, as to goals and *as to means*: responses discerned: responses of Christian faith, hope and love; personal and ecclesial responses; imperatives, goals and means defined vis-à-vis given

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situations and contexts; constant and mandatory reference given to Christian faith-experience within the contexts, accompanying praxis;

- Reference to contextual belief and value systems (culture, religion, ideology);
- Reference to contextual livelihood and power systems (economic and socio-political realities), and to the Kingdom of God (rather than just the Church) as ultimate point of reference.

For any "search for a valid and relevant ecclesiology in Asia," the reflection and praxis (in hermeneutic circle) must move within these parameters and realities and be unfailingly referred to them.[8]

6. The EATWOT New Delhi 1981: Perspectives

Those familiar with EATWOT documents will know their general orientation and their predominant "ideological thrust." They will be familiar also with EATWOT's use of the tools of Marxist analysis, as generally participants in EATWOT conferences are "agreed about the continuing relevance of Marxist analysis" and agreed too on commitment to searching and working out "viable forms of socialism that would bring about economic development, as well as respect [for] the religions, cultures and human freedom [of Third World countries]" (Fabella/Torres, 196–197).

[8]The matter of methodology is crucial, and this paper will return to it at greater length both in Section II and in Section III, below. A comparison with the methodology used in documents from the Holy See and also by the Second Vatican Council, on "the signs of the times," would be both necessary and instructive. Cf. Angel Anton, "Abierta a los 'signos de los tiempos'," in *La Iglesia de Cristo: El Israel de la Vieja y de la Nueva Alianza* (Madrid: B. A. C., 1977), 773–782, and Paul Valadier, "Signes des temps, signes de Dieu?" *Etudes* 335 (1971): 261–279. "(Valadier) no esconde su preocupacion ante un recurso facil, y prevalentemente sociologico o fideista, a la nocion de signos de los tiempos con el peligro de hacer de Dios un *Deus ex machina* y de presentar, en vez de una teologia de los signos de los tiempos, un antropomorfismo camuflado" (Anton, "Abierta a los 'signos de los tiempos'," 780).

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The New Delhi EATWOT statement is thus—as expected—very strong on presenting situations of massive "poverty and oppression of the Asian peoples" as starting point and framework for "doing theology" in Asian contexts; on insisting that all relevant theology—and thus all relevant ecclesiology—in the Third World and Asian situations must begin with commitment to the struggles of the poor and oppressed and with the "liberated consciousness" which understands the meaning of these struggles within the history of salvation.

> The starting point for Third World theologies is the struggle of the poor and oppressed against all forms of injustice and domination. The committed involvement of Christians in this struggle provides a new *locus* for theological reflection. Their participation is faith in action and the manifestation of Christian commitment, which constitutes the first act of theology. (Fabella/Torres, 199)

Thus, for EATWOT theology, any ecclesiology relevant for Asian contexts must be a "liberation ecclesiology," and participation in the struggles of the poor and oppressed for their own liberation is the beginning as well as baseline for "doing ecclesiology" in the local churches in Asia.

As I have indicated above, re: the first two statements presented, a careful evaluation of "liberationist ecclesiology" is not in order here. What I would like to draw attention to, in the New Delhi EATWOT statement, is the attempt to explicitly spell out what are considered necessary factors for a valid methodology in service of a relevant ecclesiology (Fabella/Torres, 198–199).

The elements are:

> (#39) Commitment to the people's struggle for social justice and the contemplation of God within this involvement—"both form the essential matrix of theology."
>
> (#40) The poor and oppressed, Christians at the grassroots, as they reflect on "their own liberating praxis" are doing their own theological thinking, to which they have *in faith* a right.
>
> (#41) "The faith-based life interpretations of the masses, expressed in their cultural idioms, liturgies, workshops, storytelling, drama, songs, and poems, constitute genuine theology." The "more formal"

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> method of theological reflection "requiring technical and academic competence"—is relevant only if [it stems] from involvement and a liberated consciousness.
>
> (#42) The principles of contemporary hermeneutics affirm that interpreting the Bible "from the underside of history" is a valid way of reading the Scriptures, as all reading of the Scriptures is partial and conditioned by the historical experience and particular perspectives of the reader/interpreter. No single reading of the text thus exhausts its total meaning.
>
> (#43) "Social analysis is an indispensable mediation and basic equipment for a liberating theology …. Without an adequate understanding of our societies, theologians cannot interpret the will of God for our societies and our times."
>
> (#44) Such social analysis must necessarily investigate both "religio-cultural and socio-economic aspects of people's lives" as part of the task of "doing theology" in Third World contexts. (Fabella/Torres, 198–199)

Insistence on these elements as necessary for any "valid and relevant ecclesiology" for Third World contexts is characteristic of EATWOT theological approaches. In many ways, they are also the decisive features of this "theological school."

In the EATWOT perspectives, any ecclesiology within the Asian contexts must thus prime the commitment to the struggles of the poor and the oppressed, for integral human liberation is "the essential matter" for theological reflection. It will regard as constitutive of the Church's mission in Third World countries participation in such struggles, seeing them as at least partial realizations of the effort of the redemption of human society and human history, moving toward the Kingdom of God. The methodology of such an ecclesiology would then move within the hermeneutical circle of commitment to struggle, liberative action and praxis, reflection on action and praxis, etc.

7. Conclusion

The content of this first section has been for the most part merely a "report of sorts." It has attempted to draw up (with some analysis, inevitably) the "lines of force" sketched in efforts to "search for an

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ecclesiology relevant to Asian contexts." The presentation, it is hoped, is reasonably objective.

By way of personal conclusion, I will note that while most points of these ecclesiological essays deserve attention, their overall content and methodology call for comprehensive critique: much is ambiguous; much needs questioning and thus clarifying; presuppositions have to be examined; balancing-off of various factors is required. This (it seems to us) goes without saying! But they are *de facto* essays at "relevant Asian ecclesiologies." As they stand, they are "first drafts" in need of thoroughgoing discussion, and where called for, correction and modification.

Section II: Asian Bishops' Reflection on the Church's Mission

1. Pre-Note

In Section II, a "more serene" presentation of a pastoral and missionary ecclesiology will be given, drawn from statements of meetings and assemblies of pastoral leaders—for the most part Bishops—of the (Roman) Catholic Church in Asia. We move from "somewhat high-pressure theological congresses" to pastoral conferences and assemblies of bishops and their immediate collaborators. It is disputed today whether these are "statements of the Magisterium" in the technical sense.

> However, one would have to be quite blind and deaf to reality if he denied that the statements of episcopal conferences do have an effective impact on the pastoral life of local dioceses and beyond.[9]

The topic assigned for this paper was Church/ecclesiology and cultures; "inculturation." The foregoing considerations were necessary to discover what, *de facto*, in the perceptions and perspectives of pastoral

[9]Francis A. Sullivan, *Magisterium*: *Teaching Authority in the Catholic Church* (New York: Ramsey, 1983), 121. Remarks of Archbishop William Hickey (Collegeville: June 1982).

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leaders and theologians in the churches in Asia, is the generally received meaning of "inculturation" (This is necessary, so that we do not impose meanings as given by others *from outside* these contexts, but recognize the meanings actually accepted and in possession).

2. Inculturation: Building-up the Local Church

At the outset, it is important to distinguish between two understandings of inculturation in the theological/ecclesial milieux of the Asian churches—a wider and more comprehensive sense, and a narrower, more limited one.

The two paragraphs of "identity of the Church," in the two common declarations we have dealt with above, lead us to the "wider, more comprehensive meaning" indicated.

> *The identity of the Indian Church.* It has to be conceived as the mystery incarnate in the particular conditions of the local community, gathered around the celebration of the Eucharist. It is also found in the dynamism of the believing group which not only prays together and suffers together, but also fights together against evils of all kinds. A church that identifies itself with the joys and sorrows, struggles and endeavors of a human community, is liable to become conscious of the conditions of being dominated. When it begins to say "*No*" to what impedes its liberation, a genuinely dynamic Church is born …. Involvement in people's struggles will help the Church to realize its own identity more authentically and transform its own structures in a healthy renewal of itself. (ITA/1983, #25)

> *The identity of the (Asian) Church.* The identity of the Church, in one sense, is given by its ever-present Lord. In another sense, that identity will only be found as our churches discover their place within the wider religious life, among the diverse cultures of Asia, and amidst the social struggles.
>
> We recall the One who established his identity by entering fully into the condition of others (incarnation), and by giving himself in self-emptying love for all (*kenosis*). Ecclesial identity, too, will be found through incarnation and *kenosis*. These have powerful implications for how churches shape their efforts at evangelism and church growth, as well as the way in which they use their human and material resources. (TCT-CCA/1982, II, #3)

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These texts are good samplings of the literature. Here, the inculturation of the Church is seen as a total project (hence, "towards a relevant ecclesiology"), and it means the "building up of a truly local church." In this sense, though the term is *not much-used as yet* in Asian contexts, the more comprehensive sense of inculturation is that of "ecclesio-genesis," *the realization of the Church in a given place, a given time, within a given people and culture*.

To cite just one individual theologian in support of what has just been said: D. S. Amalorpavadass, who has had considerable influence on Asian thinking and writing on this theme, says that "indigenization or inculturation of the Church in India means the actualization of her mystery through an incarnation in the life-situation in India."[10]

> The local church is precisely that realization by which the full mystery of the Church will be incarnated in each place, time and people …. The local church is a dynamic process by which the Christian community shares its Christian experience with its contemporaries from within, fully integrated into their socio-cultural-religious milieu. (Karokaran, 159)

Summing up Amalorpavadass' thought on inculturation, Anto Karokaran writes:

> The Church does not become universal just because the Gospel is preached to all men and when all of them are saved, but when the spread of the Gospel permeates, purifies and perfects all the realities of the temporal order, when each Christian community becomes an "event," gets incarnated in its soil, enters into the mainstream of its national life … and offers its *diakonia* through full solidarity and genuine involvement.
>
> This makes necessary the entry of the local church into the dynamism and adventure of human history with all that they imply, and in all that they demand: problems of hunger and disease, ignorance and illiteracy, unemployment and frustration, struggles of men for liberation from all the forces of oppression and injustice. (Karokaran, 160)

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[10]Anto Karokaran, *Evangelization and Diakonia: A Study in the Indian Perspective* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1978), 159. Also D. S. Amalorpavadass, *Gospel and Culture: Evangelization and Inculturation*, *Mission Theology of Our Times* 11 (Bangalore: National Biblical and Liturgical Centre, 1978).

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3. A key Text from FABC I

Hence, the paragraph on "the local church" in the final statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the Asian Bishops' Conferences, so frequently cited in Asian Church documents (as well as in European writing on inculturation), may be said to be a "classic description" of the meaning of inculturation, *sensu latiore* but also *magis usitato*, in the thought of the "local churches in Asia."

Because of its importance in our present discussion, it is here given in full:[11]

> 9. To preach the gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. The primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church.
>
> 10. For the local church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time.
>
> 11. It is not a community in isolation from other communities of the Church one and catholic. Rather it seeks communion with all of them. With them it professes the one faith, shares the one Spirit and the one sacramental life. In a special way it rejoices in its communion and filial oneness with the See of Peter, which presides over the universal Church in love.
>
> 12. The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a Church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its root deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own. It seeks to share in whatever truly belongs to that people: its meanings and its values, its aspirations, its thoughts and its language, its songs and its artistry.—Even its frailties and failings it assumes, so that they too may be healed. For so did

[11]From "Evangelization in Modern Day Asia," Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), Taipei, Taiwan: April 22–27, 1974, in FAPA, 123–133.

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> God's Son assume the totality of our fallen human condition (save only for sin) so that He might make it truly His own, and redeem it in His paschal mystery.

4. "Two Senses" of Inculturation

To conclude this point: as concretely understood in the Asian churches today and in most Asian theological writings on this issue, *the primary meaning of inculturation* is the building up of the local church. Since, as we shall see immediately, the subject—acting subject—of this endeavor of inculturation is itself the local church, inculturation can be equated with "the self-realization of the local church"[12] or its *Selbstvollzug, "l'Eglise se realise en un lieu."*[13]

A secondary, narrower sense is what is taken up below as "dialogue with the cultures"—culture then understood in a more restricted sense. *Tentatively*, we might say that if the wider sense includes *both* the elements in the "beliefs and values systems" *and* the "livelihood and power systems,"[14] the narrower sense addresses rather the "beliefs

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[12]Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Church and Religious Education in the 1980's," *The Living Light* (Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference) 19 (Fall 1982): 200–210. Also Joseph A. Komonchak, "The Church Universal as the Communion of Local Churches," *Concilium: Where Does the Church Stand?* (June 1981): 30–35; Joseph A. Komonchak, "Ministry and the Local Church," *Proceedings* (Catholic Theological Society of America) 36 (1981): 56–82.

[13]Hervé Legrand, "La Realisation de l'Eglise en un Lieu," in *Initiation a la Pratique de la Theologie*, Tome III: Dogmatique 2, contr. B. Lauret & F. Refoule (Cerf, 1986), 145–345. Cf. Bibliography, "Realisation locale de l'Eglise," 331–332.

[14]There is a rather broad convergence among church leaders and theologians that inculturation in Asia (and other Third World contexts) generally must include the areas of economics and political life in its purview. Cf. Section I, above, and the discussions in Virginia Fabella, ed., *Asia's Struggle for Full Humanity*, Asian Theological Conference, January 7–20, 1979 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1980), 3–15. "In analyzing their context, [Asians in the theological conference] found that the cultural-religious dimensions must go hand-in-hand with the socio-economic ones" (12). See also the report of the Fifth International Conference of the EATWOT as referred to in Section I of the present paper.

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and values systems or factors" in their varied expressions. These factors would of course denote outwardly observable and describable phenomena, the traditional/historical manifestations in customs, institutions, language, myth, symbol, artistic forms, and the like. The more comprehensive sense of culture would stress the inclusion of the total present societal context, explicitly including areas of economic patterns and political relationships (In passing, we might note that this distinction is not without importance when one considers the Asian disputes, in the EATWOT conferences, on the "matter" of Third World theological reflection).

5. The Local Church as Subject of Inculturation

It is affirmed in the FABC I statement just cited that the local church is a "church in continuous, humble and living dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, religions." The local church is the *acting subject* of its own up-building, of its own effort of inculturation.

Antonio Scarin remarks in his book on the African churches, *Chiesa locale, incarnazione e missione*,[15] citing precisely the FABC I paragraph *in re*:

> *Canale eminente e fondamentale dell'inculturazione del messaggio cristiano, e la Chiesa locale, lo quale, anzi, e gia incarnazione in atto "del Corpo di Cristo in un determinado popolo, luogo e tempo," come si desume chiaramente da una dichiarazione dei vescovi dell'Asia.* (Scarin, 141)

What is meant here by "local church"? In the texts of the Asian bishops we refer to preferentially in this paper, it would seem there is a certain overlapping and *glissement* with regard to the two possible

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Cf. *L'Actualité Religieuse* (Paris) 12 (Mai 15, 1984): 23, "Theologie: Recontre Euro-Africaine a Yaounde," Avril 4–10, 1984:

> Au sujet de l'inculturation qui, comme on pouvait s'attendre, a tenu une place de choix dans les debats, le rapport adopté par les participants précise: "Il est apparu clairement que la mission ne peut affronter le défi de l'inculturation sans prendre au sérieux l'appel a la libération dans tous les domaines: politique, economique, culturel et spirituel."

[15]Antonio Scarin, *Chiesa Locale Incarnazione e Missione* (Bologna: EMI, 1981), 141.

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senses: "diocese" and "local = socio-cultural grouping," as e.g., present in *Lumen Gentium* 13 and *Ad Gentes* 4, 10, 15, 22 and *al.* Hervé Legrand's remark might be cited as pertinent here: "*la perception de Vatican II, selon laquelle la 'particularite socio-culturelle* (*AG*, 22) *fait partie de la definition theologique d'une Eglise locale, est donc d'une grande portee.*"[16]

Local church in the texts referred to often has the meaning of a group of dioceses in a more or less unified (homogeneous) area (a region, a nation as occupied by a given people with its culture) bound by the boundaries of a national or regional episcopal conference. We might add, however, that this "definition" is (as far as I can gather) never made formally. There is, as in most post-Vatican II literature on this matter, a certain indetermination of usage.

The FABC I citation given above would prime the "definition" given in the preceding paragraph, although one could say, with another author:

> To avoid clumsiness, … I will regularly speak of the "local" church, hoping that the context will make clear whether I am speaking of small eucharistic communities, dioceses, larger groupings of churches, or even all three at once.
>
> More important than the Council's vocabulary are its major theological concerns in its statements about the local churches. These seem to me to be twofold: first, the assertion that the distinctive and constitutive principles of the Church's existence are realized in the local church, and second, the desire to stress that it is in the local churches that the Church's catholicity is concretely realized.[17]

The Consensus Paper of the second workshop in the Manila International Congress on Mission notes in its first recommendation that

> … The episcopal conference in each country should give positive encouragement to initiatives and programs of inculturation in

[16]Legrand, "La Realisation de l'Eglise en un Lieu," 153–154. A reflection on *Ad Gentes* 22.

[17]Komonchak, "Ministry and the Local Church," 56–57.

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> consonance with the spirit and directives of Vatican II, … *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the documents of the FABC.[18]

To this resolution we could add the grounding given by Robert Schreiter in the SEDOS 1981 seminar.

> Inculturation is not merely an option for the local church, but an imperative. The local church cannot be true to its Lord or its mission without attending to the dynamics of what constitutes the enactment of the Word of God, the questions of identity and social change, of understanding religion in its cultural setting.[19]

6. Towards a Definition of Inculturation

Having come to this point it might be useful to advance some sort of definition of the process of inculturation, presupposing that a general understanding can now be presumed, and also some delineation of its methodology.

In the summer of 1983, the Pontifical Gregorian University's Centre "Cultures et Religions" sponsored a workshop on "Christ and Cultures" at Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The participants, mostly theology professors, took advantage of the studies already undertaken on inculturation to formulate some tentative positions which are as useful as any available to us at present.[20]

> (*Definition*). Inculturation is a process by which an ecclesial community lives its Christian faith and experience within a given cultural context, in such a way that these not only find their expression in elements

[18]FAPA I, 230, #17.

[19]Robert Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion of Inculturation," in M. Motte & J. Lang, eds., *Mission in Dialogue: The SEDOS Research Seminar on the Future of Missions*, Rome: March 8–19, 1981 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1982), 544–553, at p. 552: an excellent article providing a brief overview of the process of inculturation and its broad trajectory.

[20]Seminar on "Christ and Cultures," sponsored by the Centre "Cultures and Religions," Pontifical Gregorian University. Reflections and perspectives at the conclusion of the seminar (Yogyakarta: June 23–July 2, 1983), 6 pp.

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> of a local culture, but also become a force that animates, reshapes and profoundly renews that culture, so as to create new patterns of communion and communication within that culture and beyond it.
>
> … [The] process of inculturation is an ongoing one, because of the dynamic character of each living culture; and because of the "ever-newness" of the Christian experience, every local Church is continuously involved in various inculturative processes. We believe that the main task of inculturation is not to salvage cultures of the past, but through a proper appropriation of past gains, to prepare Christians to live out their faith in a cultural context which is continuously changing.[21]

These descriptions of the process leave out some elements that, from some perspectives, would call for special emphasis, but as general guidelines, they will be of service. Sometimes a "rougher definition," as, e.g., that

> … inculturation is the dynamic relation between the Christian message and culture or cultures; an insertion of the Christian life into a culture; an ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between them …[22]

can prove more suggestive and more inclusive of the varied dimensions of the endeavor and tasks called for.

7. Towards a Methodology for Inculturation

Presuming that the reader is familiar with the "hermeneutical or pastoral cycle" in general (as made use of by contemporary pastoral theology, and in some measure, by recent documents of the *Magisterium*), we might, with Peter Schineller, see the process of inculturation as one way of putting the "hermeneutical circle" in practice.

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[21]Cf. Seminar on "Christ and Cultures," first page.

[22]Marcello de Carvalho Azevedo, *Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity*, Inculturation, Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures I (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, Centre "Cultures and Religions," 1982), 26. Cf. the study of the terminology, 1–10, and the valuable Chapter I, "The Christian Message and the Cultures," 11–29. The Bibliography is one of the best to orientate initial work on the theme (57–63).

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> … it is putting into operation the hermeneutical or pastoral circle …. The pastoral agent or minister or theologian immersed or inserted into the situation listens, studies that situation, with its problems and possibilities, facilitates the self-understanding of those in the situation, engages the resources of the social sciences, and then brings to bear "the Christian" (*intellige*: meanings, values, experience, life, symbols, et al.) upon that situation or culture/context. The comfort or challenge of the Christian message leads to action that confirms the good and challenges the evil of the situation. Movement around the circle is in both directions: elements of the solution (*semina verbi*) are already/always found in the situation; the pastoral agent functions as facilitator or catalyst to those persons in the situation.[23]

The description of the hermeneutical circle thus given is quite general, and perhaps not immediately geared to the "symbolic elements/dimensions" which are of importance (maybe first importance) in the inculturation process. But as a general description it is applicable and usable.

With that "definition" and "process-description" in mind, it is easy to understand why, in the Asian Bishops' FABC I text, the building up of the local church is said especially to "involve a dialogue with … all the life-realities of the people in whose midst the local church has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own." The methodology of inculturation begins with the imperative for dialogue, especially what in Asian contexts has been simply given the shorthand name "dialogue of life."

Incidentally, one might point out that a deeper understanding, arrived at through life-experience, of this "dialogue of life" can only help toward the clarification of the "evangelism-vs-dialogue" controversy, which often turns into a vivisection of concepts rather than an understanding which arises from life-experience.

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[23]Peter Schineller, "Ten Summary Statements on the Meaning, Challenge and Significance of Inculturation," in *On Being Church in a Modern Society* (Rome: Gregorian University, Centre "Cultures and Religions," 1983), 55–56. Cf. also Peter Schineller, "A Method for Christian Ministry," *Emmanuel* 87 (March 1981): 137–144, and J. Holland & P. Henriot, *Social Analysis: Linking Faith and Justice* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1983).

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8. "The Three Dialogues"

The FABC I statement lines up the three major "dialogue-tasks" in this way:

- Dialogue with the cultures of our peoples;
- dialogue with the Asian religious traditions;
- and dialogue with the poor in their search for development, justice, brotherhood and peace.[24]

The theme of these three dialogues occurs again and again in practically every major statement of the Asian bishops and pastoral leaders in the 1974–1984 period. An editorial writer, commenting on the 1979 Manila International Mission Congress, even found the recurrence of this cluster of themes a tiring, because over-repeated, refrain.

Three other major concerns, presupposed in the 1974 statement, but made more explicit in later texts, were:

- Proclamation of the Gospel as an urgent commitment (the ongoing necessity of "first evangelization" in Asia);
- The necessary role of prayer and contemplation within the endeavor of mission in Asia (special relevance of this dimension in Asia);
- A truly contextualized formation for mission.[25]

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[24]FAPA I, 26, 29–33. See also Archbishop Gaviola's introduction, 2–4, and the Letter of Participants in the First Bishops' Institute for Missionary Apostolate (BIMA I), FAPA I, 157–158. Cf. *East Asian Pastoral Review/EAPR* 1 (1980): 3–4:

> … the Church here needs to start one major dialogue and three minor ones: the major dialogue is with the millions of unevangelized peoples in Asia; and within it, dialogues with the cultures, with the religious traditions … and a soul-searching dialogue with the poor. These ideas are not new; they have been recurring themes in the documents of the Asian Bishops for some time.

[25]Cf. FAPA, in Archbishop Gaviola's introduction, 1–4. The International Congress on Mission (Manila: December 2–7, 1979) was a massive reaffirmation of the necessity of ongoing "first evangelization" in Asia. The BIMA's, one after the

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Finally, the "restructuring of the Christian community in the local churches of Asia," calling for creative reflection and action *on ministries*, *especially lay ministries* for our Asian contexts, and on the emerging reality of the "*grassroots ecclesial communities*" has been increasingly addressed because of the growing importance of these realities in the ongoing life of the Church in Asia—as, in fact, in other parts of the world.[26]

9. Dialogue with the Cultures of Our Peoples

There is no need, after the foregoing discussion, to develop the topic of this first dialogue, with inculturation understood in our second sense (cf. above). It will suffice to list summarily some areas for inculturation.

We might begin with a reference to *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, nos. 62/63[27] where Pope Paul VI lists "liturgical expression, catechesis, theological formulation, secondary ecclesial structures and ministries." To these we might add this attempt at a more comprehensive enumeration: catechesis, theological education, forms of popular piety, liturgy, artistic expression as used, e.g., in worship, in teaching, architecture, music, crafts, use of materials; spirituality, e.g., methods and styles of recollection and prayer; life-styles in religious communities and seminaries; ministries as responding to given local needs; formation for community leadership; etc.

In all this there will be, explicitly or implicitly, directly or indirectly, some attempt at "transposing Christianity into indigenous terms/forms." Pope Paul VI adds that "the transposition of the essence of the Gospel" is to be carried out "with all the discernment, care,

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other, have insisted on this task also. FABC II (Calcutta: November 1978) addressed the theme "Prayer—The Life of the Church of Asia" (FAPA, 49–66).

[26]Asian Colloquium on Ministries in the Church (ACMC), in FAPA, 111–151, and FABC III on "The Church: A Community of Faith in Asia," 83–102.

[27]Cf. Desmond F. Crowe, "Consultation on Inculturation," *East Asian Pastoral Review*, Manila, 18 (1981): #2 (145–152) and #3 (203–299), with an extensive bibliography (295–299).

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respect and competence it demands." In an important clarification, he says: "The term 'language' should be understood here more in the anthropological and cultural sense than in the semantic and literary one" (*EN*, 63).

We may simply note that *popular piety* or *popular religiosity* is probably the single most important area for the study and practice of inculturation. It is often in this area that the "ordinary people" express most readily the imperative, felt in their own Christian lives, for inculturation. It is also in the popular "practice" of devotion, faith and moral and social behavior that the study and reflection on inculturation can find fruitful ground. The Puebla documents of CELAM III have said some things, prudent and perceptive, on the realities of popular piety. It would take us too far afield to dwell on this topic now.[28]

10. Dialogue with Other Religious Traditions in Asia

This is the second major dialogue which has been addressed as integral to the mission of the Church in Asia. It has been called "the particular Asian concern," since Asia is "the birthplace of the major religions of mankind," and since there are just about three percent (3%) of the two-and-a-half-billion people in Asia who are Christians. Less than a hundred million Christians; less than 65 million Catholics, of whom 45 to 47 million are in the Philippines (We limit ourselves to the Asia "covered" by the boundaries of the FABC).

Accurate figures on religious affiliation are hard to come by for Asia, but recent estimates yield this set of data:

> The number of Chinese to whom evangelization, as we understand it, is not possible, 827 millions; the number of Hindus and other non-Christians in the Indian subcontinent, 425 millions; those who are numbered as Muslims, more or less, in "Asia", 664 millions; others

[28]Pope Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* had already given special attention to "Popular Piety" in par. 48. CELAM III at Puebla, *Conclusions: Evangelization at Present and in the Future of Latin America*, 910–915, 935–937, 959–963, 461–468, etc., provides an overall orientation and guidelines which are useful for other contexts also.

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belonging to other Asian religions or to animistic religious groups, 403 millions—totaling 2,396 million = circa 2 billion, 400 millions.[29]

The "classic text" on the necessity of dialogue with the religious traditions is found in FABC I. Some points made:

- Acceptance of them "as significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design of salvation … [with] profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values … over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors … the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer." (par. 14)
- "They have helped to give shape to the histories and cultures of our nations." (par. 14)
- In "dialogue with these religions … we discover the seeds of the Word of God" (*Ad Gentes* I, 9), and "we [discover] many riches in our own faith." This dialogue teaches us "what our faith in Christ leads us to receive from these religious traditions, and what must be purified in them, healed and made whole, in the light of God's Word." (par. 16–17) (FAPA I, 30)

A much deeper and more nuanced knowledge and understanding of the contemporary realities of other religions in Asia today, plus a thorough grounding in *dialogue*: its authentic meaning, especially in the area of religious beliefs, its theological basis in the renewed "theology of other religious traditions," its "anthropological and sociological presuppositions," its particular Asian characteristics—given the specifics of Asian cultures—all these elements have been singled out

[29]Figures given by Jaime Cardinal Sin in an address at Vienna (October 11, 1981). "The Church in the Philippines and its Role in Asia Today," in *The City on the Hill* (Archbishop's Chancery: Manila, 1981), 6. Cf. also *Let the Earth Hear His Voice* (Lausanne: World Wide Publications, 1975), 288ff., and the chart "Hidden Peoples 1980: The World in Missionary Perspective" (Pasadena, CA: 1980).

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in the Asian bishops' statements as necessary themes for research, study, reflection, discernment, policy.[30]

Constantly stressed, more insistently of late, is the "dialogue of life," as a necessary preliminary and accompanying dimension of all other ways of dialogue with those "of other faiths." It is, incidentally, notable and corroborative of the FABC insistence that the new document from the Secretariat for Non-Christians, "The attitude of the Church toward followers of other religions," (10 June 1984) gives considerable importance to this factor.[31]

11. Dialogue "with Our Peoples, Especially the Poor"

> Even the most cursory survey of Asia, [Parig Digan writes in his recent *Churches in Contestation*] brings us quickly to one truly characteristic feature: its poverty. The continent that gave the world its cradle of civilization is today linked by its overall poverty with the underdeveloped continents …. It needs little reflection to see the explosive implications of a continental situation in which more than three-quarters of the world's poor, representing more than half the world's people, and concentrated on less than a quarter of the world's usable land, are systematically deprived of control of much of the little they had.[32]

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[30]Cf. FAPA; again the Asian Bishops' statements return to this "most Asian of mission concerns." The section in FABC I which deals with the dialogue with the religions is especially notable. *Vid.* in FAPA, 30 and—from the International Congress on Mission (Manila: 1979)—see FABC I, 232–235. FABC II on prayer was itself an exercise in this dialogue (FAPA I, 49–82), and the various Bishops' Institutes for Missionary Apostolate and for Inter-religious Affairs address the theme directly (FAPA I, 155–204).

[31]The term "dialogue of life," a notion borrowed from the thought of Pope Paul VI in "*Ecclesiam suam*," was first used by the FABC I in Taipei (FAPA, 31, #20). For an attempt at fuller explanation, see P. S. de Achutegui, ed., *Towards a "Dialogue of Life"*, First Asian Congress of Jesuit Ecumenists, June 18–23, 1975 (Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1976), 299. "Dialogue of Life" is taken to prime "grassroots involvement" and *orthopraxis*, in this sense, the *practice* of unity, love and justice as serving mutual growth in love and understanding, even where total theological convergence cannot yet be arrived at.

[32]Parig Digan, *Churches in Contestation: Asian Christian Social Protest* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1984), 18, 21.

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The FABC I statement has noted that:

> Most of Asia is made up of multitudes of the poor. Poor, not in human values, qualities, nor in human potential. But poor, in that they are deprived of access to material goods and resources which they need to create a truly human life for themselves. Deprived, because they live under oppression, that is, under social, economic and political structures which have injustice built into them.[33]

The response of the Church, sketched summarily in the same statement, the need of a "dialogue of life" with the poor, working for and above all *with* them, commitment and effort to join them in their effort and struggle "to bring about social justice in our societies," has in some ways remained a standing program. Various declarations from the Bishops' Institutes for Social Action (BISA)[34] have developed, not always in language and stance acceptable to all, these initial positions, veering in the direction of perspectives, analyses and action-thrusts usually found in liberation and EATWOT theologies.

The Manila 1979 Mission Congress defined poverty as the situation of people "deprived of access to a full sharing of human brotherhood," and pointed out that this is the context of evangelization in Asia now and "for nearly two millennia." "It is not without theological significance."[35]

Thus the discerned ecclesial response to this massive poverty is seen in making the Church in Asia more and more authentically "the

[33]FAPA I, 31, #19–24. The first paragraph (19) is drawn in substance from the first statement of the Bishops' Institute for Social Action (BISA) (Quezon City, Philippines: March 1–15, 1974).

[34]At least six BISAs have been held; five of these are: March 1–15, 1974 in Quezon City; April 7–19, 1975 in Tokyo; November 1–16, 1975 in Kuala Lumpur; February 28–March 8, 1978 in Antipolo, Rizal, Philippines; May 27–June 1, 1979 in Baguio City. Cf. Zago, *La Chiesa in Asia Oggi*, 122–127, 150, 163–165, and *passim*; Digan, *Churches in Contestation*, 56–60. "BISAs I through III … together … involved over sixty bishops from over twenty countries and a total of 147 participants. Feedback from BISA I showed that the idea that had sunk in best was '*the need to be a Church of the poor*'."

[35]FAPA I, 236.

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Church of the poor, the Church on the side of the poor," thus renewing *modo suo* the "preferential option for the poor" spoken of by the Holy Father in his Asian journeys of 1981 and 1984.[36]

> But what does it mean to be the Church of the Poor? Is not the Church for all men and women, rich and poor, for saint and sinners? We found an answer in the way many churches of Asia are moving in the direction of greater and greater involvement in the life of their people; their simply being with the poor; their attempts at working out programs of human development—integral, respectful of the people's destiny, attuned to their cultures; their standing with them in their hard struggle for justice and self-empowerment; their insistence that the rich become themselves real members of the Church of the Poor by fulfilling their obligations in justice and charity toward the poor. The Church of the Poor must do all this.[37]

> Our theological vision must be turned ever more resolutely to the Church's responsibility in the world, in the public spheres, in the construction of a more fully human future for Asian peoples. We must go beyond merely seconding Pope John Paul II's words, that "the preference for the poor is a Christian preference," and that "it expresses the concern of Christ who came to proclaim a message of salvation to the poor, … the poor who are indeed loved by (the) God … who guarantees their rights." We must now make them the pattern of our daily praxis.[38]

13. Conclusion

Largely drawn from Asian bishops' statements, this section took up the "wider understanding" of inculturation as the building up of the local church in its own place and time, with the local church itself

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[36]E.g., Pope John Paul, in the Philippines, addressing the people in the sugar plantations in Negros island: "*Yes, the preference for the poor is a Christian preference!* It is a preference that expresses the concern of Christ who came to proclaim a message of salvation to the poor, for the poor are indeed loved by God, and God it is who guarantees their rights" (Bacolod: February 20, 1981).

[37]FAPA I, 238, drawn from BISA V (Baguio City, 1979), II, par. 5–6.

[38]FAPA I, 100, from FABC III, Final Statement, #17, 1.

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as acting subject of its own self-realization, through a process which has—though not in Asia—received the name "ecclesiogenesis."

The heuristic structure of the process of inculturation has been seen as following, in its own ground and from its own particular premises, the "hermeneutic or pastoral circle"—a methodology which places a premium on "dialogue" as understood, once again, in a pastoral and missionary context. Thus the FABC I statement collocates, among the primordial tasks of the Asian local churches today, the "three dialogues"—dialogue with the local cultures, dialogue with the religions of our peoples, and finally dialogue with the poor in their movement toward integral human development and the construction of communities of justice and brotherhood in Asia.

The understanding is that by addressing the concrete challenges to the Christian message and life which are present in the varied Asian contexts, the local churches in Asia will fulfill the task of inculturation, the dynamic

> insertion of the Christian life into a culture and the ongoing process of reciprocal and critical interaction and assimilation between the Christian message, its meanings and values, and the culture of the receiving people, so that ultimately a "new creation" comes as issue of this process.

Up to this point, this paper has largely been a report in answer to the question, "*qu'est-ce qui est passe dans la conscience et vie de l'Eglise?"*—as far as the Church in Asia is concerned. It has tried to provide a very summary survey on ecclesiological developments in the area in question. In so doing, the reply to a second question, "*Qu'est-ce qui fait probleme?*" has also (so it would appear) emerged. The local churches in Asia, addressing the challenges and questions which historical developments in their surrounding milieux pose to them, begin increasingly to experience the need of their own "local" theological reflection (as foreseen in *Ad Gentes* 22): and their own re-understanding, for the present moment, of their tasks of mission today. Now it is time to turn to the underlying theological issues raised by these developments and by the growing new consciousness of "truly being Church" that is present in the local church communities in Asia.

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Section III: Towards a Theology of *"the Coming-To-Be" of "Catholica Unitas"*

1. The Inculturation Process: Heuristic Model

We might begin by positing what we believe to be the useful heuristic model for the process of inculturation. This is necessary as a point of departure and as grounding for methodology.

In addressing this process we are not to look on Gospel faith and Christian life as constituting "platonic universals" which exist in a pure state somewhere "up there," and which can be "brought down" (like Jerusalem descending from above) into a given people and culture. There is no pure *Wesen des Christentums* existing in an abstract state in the empyrean; every existent Christianity is in fact an "inculturated Christianity."[39]

Hence Christianity is said to be a "concrete historical universal" which is successively "incarnated" in history in different peoples and cultures, by a "transplanting" process first, and then by endogenous development subsequent to its first implanting. Christianity is, after all, the person of Christ, the message of Christ, the Christ-life in the Spirit

[39]Cf. Yves Congar, "Christianisme comme foi et comme culture," in the acta, Congresso Internazionale di Missiologia, Roma, ott. 1975, *Evangelizzazione e Culture* I (Roma: Pont. Univ. Urbaniana, 1976), 83–103. Also Yves Congar, "L'Eglise est catholique," in *L'Eglise une, sainte, catholique et apostolique*, in *Mysterium Salutis* 15 (Paris: Cerf, 1970), 149–179. The "ecclesiological projects" taken up in Section I operate from this premise. See also "Towards an Indian Ecclesiology," *Jeevadhara* (Kottayam, Kerala, India) 70 (July–August 1982), and articles by various authors, among whom, Thomas Manickam, "An Inculturated Ecclesiology," 297–304; J. M. Ela & R. Luneau, *Voici le Temps des Heritiers: Eglises d'Afrique et voies nouvelles* (Paris: Karthala, 1982). Especially relevant to points made in this paragraph, though published more than a decade after the writing of this article, is the "friendly exchange" between Walter Kasper ("On the Church," *America* [April 23–April 30, 2001]: 8–14) and Joseph Ratzinger ("The Local Church and the Universal Church," *America* 185 [New York] [November 19, 2001]: 7–11).

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as present and "received" within persons and communities (the Church) in a given place and time. It is then transmitted, through the sum-total of the tasks of evangelization, to its "realization" in another presence and life within persons and communities of yet another culture.

> *Le christianisme n'est pas un abstrait universel qui doit se concretiser dans chaque culture; il est un concret particulier qui doit s'universaliser par la predication de l'Evangile de Jesus-Christ a tous les peuples. Le christianisme est la particularite singuliere de l'homme Jesus de Nazareth qui a une destinee universelle par la force qu'il a de briser toutes autres particularites.*[40]

Thus in time and space the *catholica unitas* is progressively enlarged in the communion of Churches—with the See of Peter as center and touchstone of that oneness. Thus does the *unitas*, already *virtute et potentia* universal at Pentecost, become *realiter et acta catholica*.

If we recall the definitions of inculturation given earlier, its process is then seen as moving forward from one concretely inculturated Christianity to another people and culture. Always (necessarily) there is first an "acculturation" process.[41] From that it goes onward to initial and then progressive stages of the mutual and reciprocal relationship from which eventually issues a new "inculturated Christianity."

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[40]Theoneste Nkeramihigo, "A propos de l'Inculturation du Christianisme," *Telema* 3 (1977): #4, 19–26, at p. 23. A valuable contribution, which deserves to be reflected on. The citation is from a sub-section entitled, "L'illusion d'isoler le christianisme a l'état pur."

> *Si le sort du christianisme a été historiquement lié au destin de l'europe, comme il l'est encore en grande partie, il est normal, en vertu de la particularité de l'incarnation, qu'en accueillant le christianisme on ait en méme temps accueilli l'Occident et inversement. Il s'ensuit donc que dans les pays ou il doit 's'inculturer,' le christianisme vit inévitablement de la contingence de la recontre de l'Occident avec les autres peuples.* (Nkeramihigo, "A propos de l'Inculturation du Christianisme," 22)

Cf. also *Inculturazione: concetti, problemi, orientamenti* (Roma: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1979), 67–88.

[41]Cf. the remarks just cited, from Nkeramihigo, "A propos de l'Inculturation du Christianisme," 19–26.

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This movement brings with it some measure of necessary transformation in the receptor culture and people. The newness of Christ and all he brings with him is after all the point of evangelization. It is thus also the point to inculturation. Jesus enters into the life of a people and culture as fully as possible (thus did he enter into the Jewish culture of his time), to assume it and to invite it in turn to enter "into his own story," to summon it toward the Kingdom. If the entrance is incarnation, we will not forget that incarnation, in the pattern that is Gospel, leads towards passion and death, the "realization" of the law we call the Paschal Mystery.

Most of those who have written on inculturation see the "guiding principles" of inculturation as constituted by three phases:

- Robert Schreiter speaks of inclusion, judgment, service (Schreiter, 546–547);
- Ary Roest Crollius, of assumption, cross and resurrection, recapitulation (CIS, 44–45);
- Bruno Secondin, after I. Mancini, links the phases with Christ made man, Christ crucified, Christ risen (Secondin, 54);
- The *documento di lavoro* (DL) issued by Father Pedro Arrupe with his "Letter on Inculturation" (May 14, 1978) lines up the operative analogical movement as: incarnation, cross and resurrection, pentecost (and catholicity).[42]

[42]To gather the references together:

- Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion of Inculturation," 544–553, at 546–548;
- Ary Roest Crollius, "Per una teologia practica dell' inculturazione," in *Inculturazione: concetti, problemi, orientamenti* (Roma: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1979), 36–53, at 44–45.
- Bruno Secondin, in *Messaggio evangelico e culture: Problemi e dinamiche della mediazione culturale* (Roma: Ediz. Paoline, 1982), 54.
- For the Letter of Father Pedro Arrupe on Inculturation (Letter on Inculturation) and the "Documento di Lavoro (DL) sull'inculturazione," see *Inculturazione: concetti, problemi, orientamenti* (Roma: Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, 1979), 144 ff., at 156–157.

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Since there is general convergence, we might simply indicate (without too full a development) the general process here:

A. *Incarnation* or *assumption* means that Jesus' invitation to all "to enter into the Church and the Kingdom" is a vocation "in grace" to the people and culture to whom the Word is preached; in principle no people or culture are excluded (hence Schreiter's term, *inclusion*). We are not to limit this assumption and call too readily: "he was made like us in all things, sin alone excluded."

B. *Judgment, Death* and the *Cross* : The Word summons to conversion, to purification, to "elevation." Every human culture historically is touched by sin; the Gospel passes judgment on the idolatries and self-seeking present in them. It challenges individuals and peoples to the Father of Jesus and to the maturity of the Beatitudes which is the human vocation. Hence from the very beginning inculturation demands a task of discernment, and, as Gospel enters more fully into all the dimensions of a people's ways of life, the counter-cultural thrust may assume an increasing role.

C. *Resurrection, Pentecost, communion* and *participation*. Through the Spirit, given at Pentecost as fruitfulness of the Resurrection, the "new creation" constructed from each assumed and purified culture emerges to become, *in suis* (with its own identity taken up in faith and grace) part of the *catholica unitas*. Each people and culture called to Church and Kingdom are "given their own fulfilled identity" not so that it can construct higher walls of separation from others, but so that it can grow into its fullest capacity for service, communion and participation. The process of inculturation is *not an end in itself*, but precisely a call to realizing the catholicity of the one Church, and thus a call to communion and sharing. Thus Roest Crollius prefers the analogy of "recapitulation of all things in Christ"—to that merely of the incarnation. The "Arrupe DL" speaks of the mystery of the Eucharist as symbol of the end-term of catholicity, "the eschatological banquet" to which all peoples are called.[43]

[43]"Documento di Lavoro (DL) sull'inculturazione," 156–159. The "analogies" of DL bring in the incarnation as model of inculturation, the cross and

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"When these three principles are held together, the transformation that the Gospel brings changes the culture, but in an organic way. It helps the culture become more truly itself, more truly alive, more redolent of the image of God which … it was meant to be" (Schreiter, 548). "In so doing, the culture grows into a fuller realization of the kingdom of God and the explicit manifestation of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ. It becomes a dwelling-place for God."[44]

2. The Issue of Method: The Hermeneutical Circle

The second issue that ecclesiology "developed in Asian contexts" must examine is the "interface between Christian experience and action/praxis and the human—especially the social—sciences, and theological reflection." Here we touch the key area of "the new methodology" already being followed by those who are "doing theology" in Asia and elsewhere, "in a new key." The first section of the present paper precisely tried to give a sampling of this sort of theological reflection. Perhaps the longest reach and the strongest influence of Latin American theology into Asia is the explicit formulation of its method, the pattern of its "new way of doing theology."[45]

We might submit that no area of theological work is of more crucial importance than the evaluation of this "new way of doing theology"—

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resurrection as part of the pattern and process, Pentecost and the catholicity of the Church—leading to the Church as eucharistic community (The "eucharistic community" as one way of describing the endterm of inculturation seems to me an especially rich "analogy" which has not been sufficiently developed.).

[44]Schreiter, "A Framework for a Discussion of Inculturation," 548. Cf. Pedro Arrupe, Letter on Inculturation.

[45]The "new way of doing theology" is a constant refrain in much Latin American writing. Cf. for example, *Fe cristiana y cambio social en America Latina* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme/Instituto Fe y Secularidad, 1973), 37–372 (Juan Carlos Scannone's summary). See also Xose Miguelez, "El metodo teologico," in *La Teologia de la Liberacion y su Metodo* IV (Barcelona: Herder, 1976), 75ff. Conclusion: "La teologia de la liberacion mas que un nuevo tema es una nueva manera de hacer teologia."

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characteristic not only of Latin American theology, but of almost all "local theological reflection" in so-called "Third World contexts."

We have already indicated the overall structure of this methodology. Perhaps we can here gather its main lines together once more. The "hermeneutical (pastoral/missionary) circle" has these components:

A. The role of personal (Christian) and community (ecclesial) experience of human personal and societal situations, as "received." This is regarded as the point of departure for this "new way of doing theology."

B. An "interface" is set up between Christian experience and action/praxis, and reflection and the methods of the social sciences (sociology, anthropology, political science, political economy, et al.). There is prime attention to the societal dimensions of the human reality.

C. Discernment is the first response to the preceding experience and analysis—not deduction, not conceptual dissection. It is of course understood that ecclesial discernment, if it is to be genuinely ecclesial, presupposes as referents the "Tradition" (the whole of Tradition as received in both its synchronic and diachronic senses; *catholicity* or *catholica unitas* through space and time.)

D. *Decision and action must then follow.* The process is intrinsically action-oriented. From ecclesial discernment the flow is into ecclesial action—pastorally, in missionary endeavor, or in the response of Christians to contemporary total contexts (e.g., by socio-political presence and action). Without action or praxis the hermeneutical circle ends. With it, the process moves again to a new start; the struggle to "realize" the Kingdom goes on.

E. The successive acts of discernment, decision, action, praxis, when reflected on in faith yield the possibility of systematization, of correlations and generalization, of the construction of parallels and analogies with Revelation and the Tradition as referents. Thus "local theologies" are

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gradually built up, stone by stone, parallel with the building up of authentically "local churches."

Thus "local theologies" concretely are very often "theologies of ecclesiogenesis," theologies of local communities and churches *in fieri*. They are theologies of the historical self-realization of churches "*realizing themselves in a given time and place*," but also simultaneously *et eodem motu* the historical self-realization of the Church *actu et realitate catholica*, on its way to become the one Church of the Lord found in every land and people, race and culture, living by the power of the Spirit of Jesus, realizing in *signo et sacramento* the foreshadowing of the Kingdom over the earth.[46]

F. From what has just been said, especially in (e) above, the corollary follows: there has to be ongoing dialogue and "joint reflection" with other local churches and the See of Peter. If the finality is the realization of catholicity, both synchronically and diachronically, this dimension is constitutive (and happily, in our time, increasingly attainable in "the global village" that is the modern world) and, all along the way, enriching and fruitful.[47]

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[46]Inevitably, "ecclesiogenesis" (in its "generic" meaning) is the underlying thematic in "local theologizing." This is already implicit in *Ad Gentes* 22. Cf. Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, unpublished ms. (Chicago, 1977), soon to be published by Orbis Books (Maryknoll, New York); Robert Schreiter, "Local Theologies in the Local Church," *Proceedings* (New York: CTSA) 36 (1982): 96–112.

[47]Cf. n. 63, where we refer to some points which might be fruitfully made re: the relationship to the See of Peter and the local churches—citations from Archbishop Mariano Gaviola, then Secretary-General of the FABC, and Avery Dulles. A study of the documents of the FABC published in FAPA I will show how the "desire and intent of communion with the Petrine See" is explicit in every major FABC document: the plenary assemblies invariably begin with a reference to the Holy Father and renew the reference in the concluding section, making clear its will-to-unity.

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3. Some Questions on Methodology

"Doing theology" in the pattern of the "hermeneutical circle" presents the most fundamental, and, for the theological enterprise, the gravest issue which must be addressed. Here we can only indicate a few questions which must be asked, by way of example.

- What is the correct manner of "discerning the signs of the times" (*Gaudium et Spes* 4, 44) which since Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* (as a convenient *terminus a quo*) Vatican II's *Gaudium et Spes* and Church documents (both Roman and "local") have so often referred to?[48]

  From actual practice, "discerning the signs of the times" is not infrequently converted into a slogan which in turn justifies any position which "advocates" wish to pressure an ecclesial community to adopt. The word *discernment* is crucial: what are the norms and the process of *genuinely Christian discernment* which is grounded on the Word of God and illumined by the Spirit?

- In what measure are we to regard the methods of analysis of the human and social sciences as truly scientific, i.e., objective, "neutral and value free" (are they ever that, when placed at the service of an ideologically-determined framework of interpretation, i.e., whose premises derive from ideological presuppositions)?

- As a particular instance of this, how are we to evaluate, e.g., the use of even modified forms of Marxist analysis

[48]On "discerning the signs of the times," we have already cited Anton's "Abierta a los 'signos de los tiempos'," 773–782, perhaps one of the more carefully worked-out presentations of this theme presently available. Anton refers to J. da Cruz Policarpio, "Sinais dos tempos," in *Genese historica e interpretacao teologica* (Lisboa, 1971)—a work not available to us. A. Rotzetter has a more recent essay, "I segni dei tempi secondo l'interpretazione francescana," in L. Boff & W. Buehlmann, "*Costruisci la mia chiesa*": *Ispirazioni francescane per e dal Terso Mondo* (Bologna/Padova: E. M. P., 1983), 79–95.

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> not only in Latin American liberation theologies, *but in almost every form of "reflection on society"* as practiced increasingly by Church groups, ecclesial communities, etc. in many areas of the Church today?[49]

Excursus: After this text was written the new text from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith entitled "Instruction on certain aspects of the 'theology of liberation'"[50] became available. This document deals directly with the issues raised by *various* liberation theologies, and in section VII addresses itself to Marxist analysis in relation to this "new way of doing theology." Since this is the first official text from one of the Vatican dicasteries on this new worldwide theological movement, it should render valuable service to those who adopt or study one or other form of liberation theology. Hard-nosed questions and exigent dialogue are tributes to any theological enterprise, and the pity is that little by way of careful questioning and receptive dialogue has taken place up until now. As several years ago many welcomed a by-now well-known letter on Marxist analysis (from Father Pedro Arrupe),[51] all the more should the present document meet attentive study, so necessary—especially in our Asian contexts—at the present time.

We might here recall the conclusion given in the Arrupe text:

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[49]Cf. Paul Valadier, "Marxisme et scientificite," *Etudes* 344 (Mai 1976): 713–726, on the "scientific character" of Marxist analysis. The instruction from the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (SCDF), *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation"* (Vatican City: Polyglot Press, August 6, 1984), in its section on Marxist Analysis (nos. 1–13), has some important cautions to set down on this matter. Cf. also the final statement of the Jesuit East Asian Assistancy Conference of Theologians (July 29, 1981), "Theological Reflection and Analysis of the Human Situation" (Manila: 1981), 2 pp., mimeographed, where the points made in the SCDF instruction are also stressed from convergent viewpoints.

[50]*Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation,"* signed by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger.

[51]Pedro Arrupe, in *La Iglesia de hoy y del futuro* (Bilbao/Santander: Sal Terrae, 1982), 151–158.

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> *En suma, aunque el analisis marxista no incluye directamente la adhesion a la filosofia marxista en todo su conjunto y menos todavia al 'materialismo dialectico' en cuanto tal, sin embargo, tal como se le entiende de ordinario, implica de hecho un concepto de la historia humana que no concuerda con la vision cristiana del hombre y de la sociedad y desemboca en estrategias que ponen en peligro los valores y las actitudes cristianas.*[52]

The new document from the *S. C. de Doctrina Fidei* has this judgment:

> In the case of Marxism, … a preliminary critique (of methods and viewpoints) is all the more necessary since the thought of Marx is such a global vision of reality that all data received from observation and analysis are brought together in a philosophical and ideological structure, which predetermines the significance and importance to be attached to them. The ideological principles come prior to the study of the social reality and are presupposed in it. Thus no separation of the parts of this epistemologically unique complex is possible. If one tries to take one part only, say, the analysis, one ends up having to accept the entire ideology [Then explicit reference is given to the well-known paragraph 34 of Pope Paul VI's *Octogesima Adveniens*].[53]

- What are the various relationships between *theoria* and *praxis* which underlie diverse understandings of the theological work itself? This is an area which has not received the attention it merits.[54]
- Is theology, necessarily at the service of "the supreme law of charity," thus necessarily "ordained to action and praxis" in the endeavor to build up the kingdom of God even initially within history? How are "action," "praxis," and "the Kingdom in history" to be understood?

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[52]Arrupe, *La Iglesia de hoy y del futuro*, 151–158.

[53]Cf. the text of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's critique of liberation theology in *Il Regno* 29 (1984): #504, 220–223, and the *Instruction on Certain Aspects of the "Theology of Liberation,"* #6. The reference is given in #7 to the well-known text of Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens*, #34, *AAS* 63 (1971): 424–425.

[54]Cf. the various papers in the symposium on "theory/praxis" of the *Proceedings* CTSA 32 (1977), and also the important book by Matthew Lamb, *Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation* (New York: Crossroad, 1982).

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We can only point to these questions. This is not the place to address them at greater length. But once again, we must submit, that in the area of methodology, in the issues touched on briefly above, we meet the key points of the entire movement of "theology from below" which is emerging in a particularly acute way in "Third World countries." The entire theological community across the world neglects to address these questions "at its own peril."

4. The Ecclesiogenesis Hypothesis

The final theme for reflection that is possible in a summary presentation—as the present paper might be an attempt at sketching (what might be called) a "field theory" for the theology of the local church *in fieri*—is the local church, at this moment of history, moving towards its self-realization within and towards the *catholica unitas*. We might speak of the hypothesis of "ecclesiogenesis."[55]

To begin with, it might perhaps be suggested that there was no explicit and self-conscious ecclesiology when the local churches of Europe were in *their* own period of "self-realization." The genesis of the Church in North America and in some measure in South America was largely a transplantation of European communities "in exile" to new land. The "two great ages of mission," that which accompanied the age of exploration and was mainly the enterprise of the Iberian kingdoms, and the second one which came in the wake of the 19th century and early 20th century period of colonization, were ages of the implantation of the Church largely "in transplant mode"—for the most part, *inevitably*, *necessarily* in the transplant mode. Hence it may also be suggested that the post-World War II (and "post colonial") phenomenon of scores of local churches developing out of what were

[55]May I make it explicit that the term "ecclesiogenesis" is not used here in the precise and developed meaning given it by Leonardo Boff (*Eclesiogenesi: Las comunidades de base reinventan la Iglesia* [Santander: Sal Terrae, 1981]) and Iglesia (*Carisma y Poder: Ensayos de Eclesiologia Militante* [Santander: Sal Terrae, 1982], 207–217) since we have not read these works as of the present writing. *Here the term is used in a more generic way*, as understood, e.g., by Joseph Komonchak, who will be cited somewhat fully in the texts and the notes below.

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"missions" (foreign mission territories), the phenomenon of *ecclesiae novellae* in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and *suo tamen modo* in Latin America, was qualitatively something really new, a *novum* in the post-medieval history of the Church.

From "missions" to "young churches" to "local churches" in the full process of ecclesial *fieri*, of ecclesial *Selbstvollzug*: how are we to consider this historical moment in the development of the *Una Sancta*? How are we to think of these local churches *theologically*? To us in the *novellae ecclesiae* (*novellae*, even if in some cases—as in this writer's country—hundreds of years old, but *novellae* in the sense of a new consciousness, truly qualitatively new, of "being Church"), this is one of the fundamental theological questions, a "burning issue" which at least among us cannot be sidestepped or wished away. Perhaps, if we are to address it in all its complexity, it is *the* fundamental theological concern.[56]

Here we might give some citations which in their way support the previous paragraphs.

> The problem of the inculturation of Christianity is … posed with a special urgency in regard to the young churches of the Third World …. It is not only a question of adaptation, of renewal within one and the same culture-in-movement. It is a matter of constructing a comprehensive and explanatory theology, a theology in which local cultures are not merely described but actually integrated into a larger conceptual whole, allowing a critical re-examination of the very fundamentals of Christian revelation (*Ad Gentes* 22). This is an extremely difficult task and one for which historical information (research) and good will are not sufficient.[57]

Karl Rahner's reflections on "the basic and fundamental significance of the Second Vatican Council for the church" are by now well-known, and have had remarkable influence in our part of the world. He believed that it

[56]Cf. the article, already referred to, by A. Mushete Ngindu, "The Church of Christendom in the Face of New Cultures," *Concilium: Where Does the Church Stand?* 146 (6/1981): 53–61, and also the papers studied in Section I of the present essay.

[57]Ngindu, "The Church of Christendom in the Face of New Cultures," at 54–55.

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> was something which happened in the very processes of the Council itself: for the first time in its history, the Roman Catholic Church *began to become the world-Church*. [Before this] the Church had existed in all parts of the world but it existed as a European export, not as a church with roots in all the various cultures of the world. It was during and through the Council that this European or Roman church took its first few steps toward becoming a really catholic or universal Church.
>
> So big is this break with the past that a change of such magnitude faced the Church only once before in its history: when it moved from being a Jewish church to becoming a church of the Gentiles and pagans who lived in the Hellenistic world of the first century.[58]

Yves Congar's retrospect on the twenty years after Vatican II has convergent views.

> … An evolution has been taking place after the Council. The local churches have been taking up, much more than before, the work of evangelization into their own hands. It has been said: St. Paul did not found missions; rather, he founded churches. They were themselves supposed to grow. This is quite true, but Paul also sent out Timothy, Titus, Sosthenes, Silvanus and others off on missionary tasks. There has to be missionary activity and evangelization by the "locals" themselves.
>
> The great issue which confronts us today, and which demands a renewed effort in theology, is that local churches must be, fully, the *subjects* of their own life and their own questions, that is to say, they must be responsible agents.
>
> Pope Paul VI at Kampala, and Pope John Paul II in six different countries proclaimed the right and the duty, for the Church, to be African in Africa. But what a problem this is! Pope Paul VI rightly insisted on the unity of Faith. But within that unity, diverse theologies can take their places. Here we meet the problems of African inculturation: African values, marriage problems, questions regarding Christian initiation, the veneration of ancestors, etc. … In Latin America, we meet the theology of liberation …. A Church is born from the people, by the renewed action of the Gospel …. There was not a single black bishop at Vatican I; there were a hundred-odd at Vatican II. They met and gathered together and grew into a sense of their own

[58]Karl Rahner, "Zukunft der Kirche," in *Sorge um die Kirche*, Schriften zur Theologie, Band XIV (Zurich/Einsiedeln: Benziger, 1981), 287–332.

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> identity. This same movement goes on. Africa (and Asia) have received the heritage of Catholic Christianity. Now they, the heirs, have found their voice. Always it is the one and the same problem: *that Christians, and their churches, should become and be subjects of their own lives*.[59]

Having said this, we must at once admit that not very much theological reflection has been (perhaps?) going on *in depth*, at least not in Asia. The Latin American theologians have centered their reflection very decidedly around the "liberation problematic." Not having studied this growing body of literature with the time and energy it demands, I *do not attempt* to evaluate it from within the present perspectives.[60]

As to the term "ecclesiogenesis": it is a handy shortcut name for what is here addressed. Theologians writing from other contexts (i.e., different from Latin American), though doubtless influenced by the Latin American problematic, are Joseph Komonchak in the United States, Hervé Legrand in France, Severino Dianich in Italy, et al. Legrand's phrase, "*l'Eglise se realise en un lieu*," is a good and perhaps "more neutral" way of laying down plumb lines for this reflection.[61]

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[59]Yves Congar, "Les theologiens, Vatican II et la theologie," in G. Defois, ed., *Le Concile: 20 Ans de Notre Histoire* (Paris: Desclee, 1982), 172–183, and Yves Congar, "Situation ecclesiologique au moment de 'Ecclesiam suam' et passage a une Eglise dans l'itineraire des hommes," in *"Ecclesiam suam" Premiere Lettre Encyclique de Paul VI*, Colloque International, Octobre 24–26, 1980 (Brescia: 1982), 79–102 and the discussion which follows.

[60]Msgr. Bonaventura Kloppenburg, "Pluralismo eclesial," in *La Iglesia del Señor: Algunos aspectos, hoy* (Bogota: CELAM, 1983), 93–193, and Bonaventura Kloppenburg, "Teologia de Liberracao e Igreja Popular," paper for the October 1984 meeting of the International Theological Commission, 4 pp.

[61]Komonchak, "Ministry and the Local Church," 56–82; Komonchak, "The Church Universal as the Communion of Local Churches," 30–35; Joseph Komonchak, "Ecclesiology and Social Theory: A Methodological Essay," *The Thomist* 45 (1981): 262–283.

Hervé Legrand, "Le développement d'Eglises-sujets, a la suite de Vatican II. Fondements théologiques et réflexions institutionelles," in G. Alberigo, ed., *Les Eglises apres Vatican II: Dynamisme et Prospective*, Actes du Colloque International de Bologne (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), 149–184.

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Parenthetically, the reality of "basic Christian communities" or "grassroots ecclesial communities," more than any other single phenomenon, has given the decisive impulse toward the theological study of "local churches *in fieri*." This needs to be stated here, but it cannot be developed in a paper like the present one. Latin American theological writing on these "BEC's" is abundant and well-known internationally, but Africa and now Asia have already begun to produce a considerable body of books and articles on this topic also.[62]

In the pages which follow we will sketch rapidly "the ecclesiogenesis hypothesis"—as it has been developed in some of the authors cited above. What is given (in the brief space here available!) is merely a summary presentation. An adequate exposition of the hypothesis would call for spelling out of premises in greater detail, more nuanced definitions and positions, and the like. It is not possible to say everything in one paper!

It also goes without saying that if we have not taken up *ex professo* and dwelt at length on the teaching of the magisterium on "inculturation"—Vatican II and the Roman Pontiffs—it is mainly because: a) such an enterprise would require an entire paper of its own (the teaching of Popes Paul VI and John Paul II is extensive enough to

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Yves Congar, "Les implications christologiques et pneumatologiques de l'Ecclesiologie de Vatican II," in G. Alberigo, ed., *Les Eglises apres Vatican II: Dynamisme et Prospective*, Actes du Colloque International de Bologne (Paris: Beauchesne, 1981), 117–130, esp. 123ff: "Une des grandes nouveautés de Vatican II dans le domaine des documents du 'magistere' a été l'introduction du point de vue eschatologique, et donc aussi de l'historicité," and the paragraphs which follow, until 129.

Severino Dianich, "Soggettivita e Chiesa," in *Teologia e Progetto-Uomo in Italia*, Associazione Teologica Italiana (Assisi: Citadella, 1980), 105–128 (also in *Rassegna di Teologia* 21 [1980]: 415–418).

[62]Cf. S. Torres & J. Eagleson, *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities*, International Ecumenical Congress of Theology, February 20/March 2, 1980 (Sao Paolo, Brazil/Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1981) (mainly on Latin America). *Pro Mundi Vita* dossiers have regular updates and reflection on the movement of Basic Christian Communities all over the world.

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warrant a dissertation); b) this paper presupposes that teaching and is in agreement with its directives and its "caveats"; and c) recent studies, e.g., Alfredo Marranzini and Jesus Lopez-Gay, have done this quite excellently and already at considerable length.

But perhaps it will not be otiose to say that we take for granted what we believe must here—as we address the theme of the "self-realization of the local church"—be taken for granted: *the full Catholic understanding of the one Church over which the See of Peter presides with authority and in love*. It may be useful to recall not only the reservations summed up by Monsignor Philippe Delháye in his "*pluralisme culturel et pluralisme ideologique*"—reservations echoed more recently by, e.g., Pedro Arrupe, Ary Roest Crollius and Theoneste Nkeramihigo, but also to bear in mind that *a wise pastoral sense*, conscious of history and its lessons, is a necessary dimension in all "operations of change."

The points made in the following two citations, one from a very recent (June 1984) address by Avery Dulles, and the other, from a 1974 address by Archbishop Mariano Gaviola, then Secretary-General of the FABC, might also be worth referring to:

> If the Catholic Church is to continue in its role as a great international force for unity and truth, justice and peace, it is important to preserve solidarity among regional churches. Dialogue is needed both because each particular church may have special insights of value to the others and because each, being immersed in a particular culture, has its own characteristic blind spots. Each local or regional church is accountable to its sister churches and to the Church of Rome, which presides over the whole assembly in charity. As noted in *Lumen Gentium*, the Petrine See has a dual responsibility: to protect legitimate differences and to see that these differences do not hinder unity. Far from becoming less important, the papacy takes on greater responsibilities than ever as the new world Church becomes a reality. The papacy has been effectively used as a symbol and agent of unity by recent Popes, including Pope John Paul II. (Avery Dulles)

The second-to-last sentence cited above bears repeating, and we record full agreement with it. "Far from becoming less important, the papacy takes on greater responsibilities than ever as the new world Church becomes a reality." The detailing of these greater responsibilities will be one of the large concerns of the coming decade and beyond.

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> We must point out right away [Archbishop Gaviola remarked at a press conference during the 1974 Synod] that this (up-building of the local church, affirmed as the overriding task of the Church in Asia) is not to be seen in any way as a "separatist move": at the Taipei meeting of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) it was stated quite clearly that "in Asia there does not exist that allergy with regard to the primatial role and teaching of the Holy Father which is said to be present in some places …."[63]

This said, we will not make the effort to line up a whole catalogue of premises re: the unity of the Church and the "*originalite chretienne*" (the "non-negotiables of Faith") which must be safeguarded. Hence if the presentation may seem to have its *lacunae*, it is not because of some sort of "selective orthodoxy," but merely due to constraints of space in an already over-long paper.

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[63]On the magisterium and inculturation, two papers: Alfredo Marranzini, "Il magistero al servizio della inculturazione," in B. Genero, ed., *Inculturazione della Fede: Saggi Interdisciplinari* (Napoli: Dehoniane, 1981), 129–173 and Jesus Lopez-Gay, "Pensiero attuale della Chiesa sull' Inculturazione," in *Inculturazione* (Roma: CIS, 1979), 9–35.

Msgr. Philippe Delhaye, "Pluralisme culturel et pluralisme ideologique," in *Evanggelizzazione e Culture* I (Roma: Pont. Univ. Urbaniana, 1976), 128–164. In 138–139, Msgr. Delhaye remarks that even some speeches which profess to strive for the double fidelity "*aux valeurs chrétiennes et aux valeurs africaines*" often are heavily loaded in favor of indigenous values. "*Mais l'impression plus générale allait dans un autre sens*." Perhaps such an impression cannot but be created in many writings on inculturation, as the effort to stress one set of values cannot be always *fully balanced out*, in any given short text, by the—presupposed—fidelity to the Christian "given" and the "givens" of the Tradition.

The citations: Avery Dulles, "The Emerging World Church: A Theological Reflection," address at the Catholic Theological Society of America annual convention (Washington, D.C.: June 13, 1984), ms. text; Archbishop Mariano G. Gaviola, then Secretary-General of FABC, in his press conference during the Roman Synod of Bishops 1974. Cf. the FABC booklet, *Evangelization of the Church in Modern Day Asia*, 3rd ed. (Office of the FABC Secretary-General: Hong Kong/ Manila, 1976), 70. It might be remarked that one of the main features of the FABC texts is their frequent reference to and citation of Vatican II documents and texts of the Roman Pontiffs.

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5. "Objective" and "Subjective" Poles in Ecclesial Self-Realization

In the transmission of the Word—the Christian message and life—we have a process which has necessarily

- an "objective pole," the pole of the Tradition (*the* Tradition in its past and present expressions, including the Church's living magisterium), and
- a "subjective pole," the pole of the reception and appropriation of the "given"—in a given community, in a given time and place.

The "objective pole," the pole of the Tradition, is made up of "objective representations" of the Christian message and the "objective elements" of the Christian life. We would include here the Scriptures, the *monumenta traditionis*, creed, liturgy and the sacraments, hierarchy and ministries, the *Magisterium*, institutions, roles and inter-relationships, customs, habits, stories and places of cult, lives of saints and exemplary believers.

> All of these are the very ways in which previous generations of Christians have objectified the interpretation and evaluation of human life which they have drawn from and centered upon Jesus Christ. They express and embody the Christian response to the basic questions of human existence in the world. Embodiments of meaning and value which directed the lives of a previous generation, they provide for succeeding generations a heritage by which they may locate themselves in the world, in history and before God.[64]

The "subjective pole" is (we said above) the pole of reception and appropriation. The "objective pole" communicates to us what the previous generation(s) has(have) received and appropriated; we are offered an interpreted, embodied, inculturated Christian message. Our "reception" and "appropriation" is reception and appropriation of the Tradition as handed down to us by the preceding generation.[65]

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[64]Komonchak, "The Church and Religious Education in the 1980's," #3, 204.

[65]Komonchak, "The Church and Religious Education in the 1980's," 205. Cf. also Schreiter, "Local Theologies in the Local Church," at 107–109:

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"Reception and appropriation" must recall to us the scholastic dictum *quidquid recipitur secundum modum recipientis recipitur*. The *recipiens* in this case is ourselves, our own generation in the Church.

Now we ourselves are neither *tabula rasa* nor wholly empty vessels. We must be people with our own thoughts, aspirations, questions … questions "which we have either brought with us or which the message has evoked" from us even as we "come up" to it. We have our fundamental questions about world and nature, self and neighbor, life and death and afterlife. Not every generation asks exactly the same questions, nor asks them in exactly the same way. As the message questions us, so in the very act of facing it, we question the message. Or the message itself may call forth from us the questions we address to it. And our questions vary, as season of life follows season of life, as life itself questions us.

> When one generation of Christians receives from an earlier generation its expression of Christian meaning and value, an interpretative process is going on …. The genesis of the Church in the always concrete process of reception and appropriation represents precisely that critical correlation of authority and situation (which has been called the "hermeneutical or pastoral circle"). The genesis of the Church is an interpretative achievement.[66]

The author just cited (Joseph Komonchak) had earlier written, regarding this theme, that if it can be rightly said that "the Church is something which must be made to come to be, and that this genesis of the Church is the responsibility of each generation of Christians," yet

> To avoid misunderstanding, let me say at the outset that I do not mean this is a creation out of nothing, as if the Church did not exist before or as if an entirely new and radically different Church has to be engendered …. None of this is meant to deny or to downplay the divine initiative. It was God who was in Jesus Christ, in the words he spoke, in the deeds he performed, in the community he gathered; and it was God's grace

"The tradition of response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is essential for the development of the self-understanding of the local church. It provides the touchstone against which it can measure its own responses."

[66]Komonchak, "The Church and Religious Education in the 1980's," 205.

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> that made it possible for certain men and women to recognize God's hand and his very self in Christ, to become convinced that death had not conquered him, and to come together in a new community.[67]

The genesis of the Church in each generation is also, and primarily, the doing of the Holy Spirit; in every generation the Spirit continues to animate the Church as *anima corporis Christi*, as in every generation, too, the Church grows in and through the development of each local church. None of this is for a moment denied when we speak of "the Church engendering itself everyday, reproducing itself over and over again" in every age. The "objective pole," that "horizontal continuity" of the Tradition, is not denied; it is not in the least downplayed. But here we are trying to give full weight also to what "the subjective pole, the pole of reception and appropriation," means in the process of the self-realization of the Church through history, and when we speak (as our theme demands) of inculturation—in every "receptor culture and people" and community.

It is, in fact, this understanding of the genesis of the Church out of the communication and reception of Christian meaning, value and life which allows us to grasp the concrete mode of actualization and coming-to-be of the universal Church in the richness and variety of local churches all over the world.

> There is a Catholic Christianity because there is an Irish, an Italian, a Latin American, a North American, an Asian, an African Christianity. We recognize each other as Christians because we all acknowledge the same objective representations of the Christian message …; but we also need all the adjectives because what we have all done in receiving and appropriating that message is marked by the economic, social, political, ethnic and cultural characteristics of our several circumstances. The Church is one throughout the world because one message gathers it together; but it is universal or Catholic in its unity because we all receive and appropriate that message in our distinct ways. The one Church is truly universal not in spite of, but precisely because of its manifold particular realizations throughout the many cultures of the world.[68]

[67]Komonchak, "The Church and Religious Education in the 1980's," 202.

[68]Komonchak, "The Church and Religious Education in the 1980's," 205.

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6. "Catholica Unitas" as End-term: *Lumen Gentium*

Having said all this, we must return to what was set down in the previous section: that the purpose of inculturation and its end-term is the actualization/realization of the *catholicity of the one Church*, St. Augustine's *catholica unitas*.[69]

Catholica unitas, implying as it does true oneness within cultural diversities, is by no means meant to set local and/or particular churches in opposition to a universal Church. The clarifications given by Msgr. Pierre Eyt[70] in his paper written for this same meeting can be repeated here, with total agreement. He points out that if we are to be faithful to the genuine thought of Vatican II, we are to recall that

> the mention of particular churches is always accompanied in the [Vatican II] texts with the explicit recall of the demands bound up with the visible unity of the Church and the universal ministry of the Roman Pontiff. In relation to our problem, it is to be noted that the particular church … cannot be opposed to the universal Church.
>
> In effect, the particular church "is not merely an administrative circumscription of the entire Church; it is not the product of a break-up process which would 'atomize' the space of the universal Church. Rather it is the issue of a concentration of the Church exercising its own capacity for self-realization" (Karl Rahner). In such wise that between the particular church and the universality of the Church "there is a kind of mutual interiority" (Yves Congar). "At the heart of every (particular) church," Cardinal de Lubac concludes, "the universal Church is, in principle, present."
>
> The universal Church is thus not an addition to the particular churches; it is not the federation of particular churches. Neither is it the product of splitting off from the universal Church considered as somehow

[69]*Lumen Gentium,* par. 8: "dona Ecclesiae Christi … ad unitatem catholicam impellunt" (a text which can be transposed for the theme at hand), also #13, 17, et al.; *Gaudium et Spes* 42, 53. Cf. Henri de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1982), 191–273.

[70]Msgr. Pierre Eyt, "L'Eglise comme sacrement universel et la 'catholicité': La discussion autour de l'université et de la diversité appliquee a l'Eglise," paper for the International Theological Commission (October 1984 session), at 11–12.

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> existing beforehand. We must emphasize here that it is through the episcopate—present in each one of the bishops—that the universal Church is wholly present in each one of the Churches. It is "the unity of the hierarchy which makes of the particular church 'one thing' with the universal Church." (Dom Grea)

When we speak of the coming of the "world Church," we recall what *Lumen Gentium* says of the Church: "sign and instrument of the unity of all mankind."[71] Hence the diversity of realizations of the one Church within the *catholica unitas* is not meant to be a reality of further division, but precisely a "sacrament" of oneness between diverse peoples, the coming-to-being of a family of peoples. The communion of churches with all their diversities within the Church is meant to be a sort of "soul" of the ultimate oneness, according to the design of God, of all men and all peoples in the Kingdom of God.[72]

The point to inculturation must ultimately be the point to Christianity itself. "That they may be one even as we are one: as you, Father, are in me and I in you, so also may they be one in us" (John 17: 21–22).[73]

Postscript

For the Asian churches and Church today, these issues are not merely academic. A few years ago, a member of the International Theological Commission from Africa spoke of the necessity of addressing ourselves to these questions, specifically to a comprehensive understanding of "local churches," lest, he said, events would settle them one way or the other before adequate thought and discernment

[71]Vatican II, in *Lumen Gentium* 1: "in Christo veluti sacramentum seu signum et instrumentum intimae cum Deo unionis totius generis humani unitatis …"

[72]de Lubac, *The Motherhood of the Church*, 210–211, 213–232.

[73]Crollius, "Per una teologia practica dell' inculturazione," at 44ff, opts for the mystery of recapitulation as principal "model"/analogy for inculturation. Cf. also "Inculturation and Incarnation," *Bulletin Secr. pro non cristianis* 13 (1978): 134–140. The *Documento di Lavoro* accompanying Father Arrupe's letter has a comprehensive pattern ("Documento di Lavoro (DL) sull'inculturazione," 156–159).

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could be brought to bear on them. Such theological effort, at once challenging and arduous, would seem to be an act of obedience to the imperatives of the Second Vatican Council, as well as an act of love for the Church, and the *catholica unitas* which is both God's gift to her, and our task and vocation as servants of her mission.

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