

NORTH AMERICAN CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGIES

- Topic: Theology and Inculturation: Principles and Methods
Conveners: (Moderator) Robert Lassalle-Klein,
Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley
Nancy Pineda-Madrid, Graduate Theological Union
Presenter: Roger Haight, S.J., Weston Jesuit School of Theology
Respondent: Peter Phan, The Catholic University of America

Eighty-two persons attended. Roger Haight outlined five principles and three methodological points for the inculturation of theology. Haight stressed his "hermeneutical method of critical correlation" was not attempting to break new ground, but to accommodate the demands of both tradition and present-day cultural experience, unity with the larger church and local diversity.

First, Haight suggested that theology is a human, cultural activity, and part of our attempt to find coherent meaning in human existence. Second, he utilizes a "reconstructed" understanding of culture drawing from postmodern critiques of cultural anthropology, which frees theology for creativity. Third, his method combines a postmodern sense for the historicity of human consciousness with a belief in the basic unity of the human species. Haight argues for a posteriori anthropological constants (Schillebeeckx), utilizing the epistemology of abstraction and Tracy's notion of the classic. Fourth, he assumes that all theological language is symbolic, insofar as it is properly theological, or deals with transcendent reality. And, fifth, theology is understood as a normative, rather than merely empirical or descriptive discipline. This preserves a role for authority as the Christian community develops meanings that are inculturated.

Haight then enumerated three methodological points drawn from Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Tracy. These frame a cognitional structure for receiving tradition in a way that is both faithful and adaptive. He begins with "an account of the situation which gives rise to the interpretation, along with the questions it spawns." This corresponds to what Gadamer and others call the active subjective dimension of interpretation, drawing the connection between the lived experience of a community and their appropriation of the tradition.

Second, Haight calls for an "account of the tradition that is being interpreted." While he denies the existence of a preinterpreted objective tradition, he nonetheless distinguishes interpretations that strive for historical objectivity, from those that come to expression in more common existential forms of human experience. Interpretations that strive for historical objectivity correlate with Ricoeur's meaning "behind the text," while existential interpretations correlate with the meaning "in front of the text." Haight says these distinctions are exemplified by Tracy's notion of the classic wherein a particular phenomenon from the past bears universal relevance for the future by virtue of its role in mediating an experience of truth in the present.

This leads theology to insist, against literalism and various kinds of fundamentalism, that the particular, objective, historical form of the tradition does not and cannot be imposed as normative for the future. While objective historical forms of the past bear truth and contain normativity, they can only be retrieved by explicit efforts at retrieval and reinterpretation. Likewise, theology argues against forms of postmodernism that deny the relevance, truth claims, or normativity of traditions from the past. It insists on the universal or common dimensions of humanity, and the ability to cross reference symbolic testimonies to this defining reality.

Third, Haight says that "an inculturated theology represents an appropriation of the existential form of life borne by the tradition in critical correlation with the situation and questions of the present culture." Following Ricoeur, he says that appropriation entails "being impressed" or "shaped by" the existential meaning that the symbols of the past represent and mediate. The interpreter thereby internalizes a tradition in response to the questions, concerns, and language(s) of a given culture. Thus, while the process of inculturation is generic, it takes many specific forms within a generalized pattern.

In facing practical questions, Haight says that a theology that is being inculturated cannot not interpret, and that the final arbiter of the legitimacy of an interpretation cannot be an historically conditioned proposition. Theology's internal criterion is the existential question of how an interpretation correlates with and nurtures the praxis of the Christian community relative to its past. Haight acknowledges that Christianity has become a "world church," and that his principles allow for a considerable amount of pluralism, or difference within a fundamental unity. Thus he says that Christian unity is something the church must "continue to guard and nurture." However, he insists that Christian unity has to be protected by conversation, dialogue and argument, and grounded in an openness to other communities that also seek an inculturation of the Christian message for their particular cultures.

The response by Peter Phan began with a brief summary of Haight's "hermeneutical method of critical correlation." He said some would disagree with Haight's "view of the task of theology as a correlation, critical or otherwise," and with what some would call "an incoherent use of Wittgenstein's phrase of 'form of life.'" He added, "still others . . . would insist on some conceptual and even terminological continuity and identity between the tradition and the inculturated theology." However, he emphasized his overarching agreement with Haight "that theology is a human and cultural activity," and "that the ultimate criterion of orthodoxy cannot reside in a proposition."

Phan then worked to "expand" the "scope and methodology" of Haight's "understanding of inculturation" from the "perspective of an Asian theology . . . developed . . . in the context of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences." He asserted that Asian theologians and bishops have repeatedly insisted that the church's mission in Asia must consist of a triple dialogue "with Asia's teeming masses of poor struggling for survival, with Asia's ancient and rich cultures . . . ,

and with Asia's multifarious and vibrant religions which . . . continue to nourish the souls of billions of people." Then he argued that the mutual interaction of these dimensions in events like the Chinese Rites Controversy has taken the Asian church "beyond Roger's criterion" of existential correlation, by presenting real novums that do not "simply 'correlate with' or 'nurture the Christian praxis relative to the past.'" Indeed, such events have "introduced concepts, terminologies, theologies, and practices that the old Christianity could not but find theologically threatening, religiously superstitious, and practically immoral, and did not hesitate to proscribe by means of solemn edicts, oaths of fidelity, and penalty of excommunication."

Phan then proposed to "enlarge" Haight's understanding of Christian worship and moral life as a "forms of life" that "should be understood not only as an integrated and integrating organic whole, a consistent system of beliefs, values and behavior norms, but also as a ground of contest in relations." He said that the inculturation of Christian culture has often taken the form of a "hostile takeover" of the forms of life of another culture. He then reframed Haight's concept of "faithfulness" in terms of Asian understandings of "harmony." He said this move challenges "false irenicism," because "it recognizes and accepts the reality of conflict and disharmony as an essential part of life." Thus, the question becomes "not whether the new inculturated theology is 'faithful' to the tradition, but whether the tradition and the new inculturated theology can exist in harmony, in difference and variety." A broad ranging and vigorous conversation followed.

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KARL RAHNER SOCIETY

- Topic: Karl Rahner and *Missio Ad Gentes*
 Convener: Melvin E. Michalski, Saint Francis Seminary
 Moderator: Jennifer Rike, University of Detroit Mercy
 Presenters: William Clark, S.J., Weston Jesuit School of Theology
 David Coffey, S.J., Marquette University
 Conrad Gromada, Ursuline College
 John Perry, S.J., St. Pail's College, University of Manitoba

The presenters' ten-minute summaries of their papers, which had been made available in advance on the Society's web page (www.theo.mu.edu/krs/) provided an occasion for a lively discussion among twenty-five participants. The papers will be published in volume 14 of the Marquette University journal, *Philosophy & Theology*.

William Clark addressed the topic: "The Authority of Local Church Communities: Perspectives from the Ecclesiology of Karl Rahner." Clark emphasized