

## INCULTURATION AND CULTURAL SYSTEMS (Part 2)

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THE FIRST PART of this article<sup>72</sup> introduced a method for deepening the study of inculturation as it has been understood since the Thirty-Second General Congregation of the Society of Jesus and the ground-breaking 1978 Instruction of Pedro Arrupe. I proposed there that the gospel can be more profoundly and pervasively incarnated within cultures if those who practice inculturation can learn what makes different cultures "tick," if Christians who belong to those cultures can reflect more critically on them. And I argued that Clifford Geertz's study of "cultural systems" presents us with a creative possibility. Geertz's research and reflection led him to propose four systemic dimensions of culture: ideology, religion, common sense, and art. While granting that there might be other systematic configurations, he found these four to be especially vivid examples of interrelated experiences describing cohesive cultural wholes.

In this concluding part, I propose ways in which theology might "interface" with a culture's ideologies, religion, common sense, and art. To this end, I shall introduce discussions of these areas by prominent twentieth-century theologians who have been concerned with them. While extensive exploration into incarnational praxis will not be possible here, I shall briefly suggest ways in which inculturation has been quietly and haltingly at work among North American aboriginal Christians, despite the disagreements which necessarily accompany such a sensitive process.

### THEOLOGY AT WORK IN CULTURAL SYSTEMS

Any theory of inculturation in a Christian context depends fundamentally on biblical interpretation and church history. It must examine in depth the relationships between the Church and cultures, starting from the beginnings of the community in the New Testament era and in the formative age of patristic theology, and continuing on through Christian history. In the present work we aim at a more modest contribution, concentrating on systematic and pastoral theology,

<sup>72</sup> TS 55 (1994) 66–81.

which have been strongly affected by the vigorous impulse given to the inculturation movement by the Second Vatican Council.

### *Inculturation and Ideology*

In order to reflect theologically on ideology as a cultural system, we shall examine two theoretical aspects of the term "ideology": the distinction between faith and ideology, and the complementarity between them. In this section we will treat Karl Rahner and Juan Luis Segundo as representatives of two contrasting positions on ideology. Finally we will present two contemporary examples of the interrelationship between Christianity and ideology.

In his discussion of ideology, Karl Rahner understood the term in the negative, basically Marxist way, and thus sought to distance Christianity from it. While this understanding is not my own, Rahner's argument carries important implications for inculturation, encouraging us in any case to clarify the distinction between Christianity and ideology. Ideology, after all, whether an "interest" ideology of the oppressor or a "strain" ideology of the oppressed, must not be identified with the gospel. While the gospel is to be proclaimed and lived as harmoniously as possible within a culture, its role is to discern not only the works of grace there, but the works of sin as well. The Creator gives culture, but every culture, in its relativity and limitation, calls forth both the challenge and encouragement of prophetic witness. Rahner's argument thus exercises a creative and prophetic function in theology by emphasizing a dialectic between ideology and Christian faith. This position holds that, if Christianity is to be a "corrective" to, and is to transcend ideologies, one must understand that the "essence" of Christianity stands "over against" all ideologies. Christianity is a paradoxical faith that always seeks the absolute mystery even while dwelling within cultural abodes, serving a critical as well as a supportive function. This gives theology a historical-critical role. Its vocation is not only to "unmask" ideologies, but also to sustain their aspirations to truth and authentic historical process.<sup>73</sup>

Recognition of this historical vocation of Christianity corresponds to directions opened up by the thought of Juan Luis Segundo. Segundo expresses difficulties with Geertz's distinction between interest and strain ideologies.<sup>74</sup> Yet he pursues the goal of a positive though critical

<sup>73</sup> For Rahner's fuller discussion of ideology, see his "Ideology and Christianity," in *Theological Investigations* 6, trans. Karl-H. and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore: Helicon 1969) 43-58, at 43.

<sup>74</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies: Jesus of Nazareth Yesterday and Today*, trans. John Drury (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984) 186-87.

analysis of ideology and perceives the probability of some partnership between faith and ideology. This aspect of Segundo's work points toward the challenge of actually inculturating faith in a system of ideology rather than rejecting every ideology a priori.

For Segundo, "ideology" stands for "all systems of means, be they natural or artificial, that are used to attain some end or goal."<sup>75</sup> Thus it has to do with human knowledge about efficacy.<sup>76</sup> This ethically neutral definition is ultimately determinative of Segundo's work, even though he recognizes that it is possible to understand ideology pejoratively as "all cognitive mechanisms which disguise, excuse, and even sacralize the existing modes of production."<sup>77</sup>

The possibility that Christianity may be contextualized within an ideology as a cultural system is basic to Segundo's argument. He believes there may be an "anthropological faith"—a faith in human beings and their endeavors and hopes<sup>78</sup>—that structures existence in a meaningful way,<sup>79</sup> and whose second dimension is ideology, or the structuring of means. In fact, faith needs ideologies as ways to structure the search for goals that it desires. Any faith (any particular system of meanings and values) gives rise to an ideology for its implementation in history.<sup>80</sup> Faith, for its part, generates "transcendent data" that give hope; it testifies to the grace that creates a "purposeful rationality."<sup>81</sup> If the faith is *Christian* faith, it rests on Jesus Christ and the gospel message in such a way as to free believers from *dependence* on ideologies, even though believers may make use of ideologies.

Segundo recognizes a profound interaction, perhaps a dialectic, between faith and ideology. Religious faith, which is "a prolongation of anthropological faith,"<sup>82</sup> and especially Christian faith, provides the transcendent data needed in all cultural evolution. Authentic Christian faith (and here Segundo seems to agree with Rahner) serves a certain "functional" role in respect to culture.<sup>83</sup> It fosters "flexibility" or resilience, and may thus liberate a people's thinking and acting as a free historical agent. In order to be flexible, cautions Segundo, Christianity must maintain a sufficient critical distance from "Christian traditions" to allow self-criticism by the Church as a community. Christianity would be guilty of denying its historicity if it refused to make discerning use of ideologies in order to realize the goal of creation. In the language of the present article, then, Christian faith must

<sup>75</sup> Ibid. 16.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. 97.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid. 25.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid. 263–66.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid. 337.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid. 27.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. 317.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid. 336.

touch all of the elements of a cultural system—in this case, the ideological elements and symbolism by which people either justify and further a system or seek to change it.

Two contemporary examples may serve to illustrate the Christian approach to ideologies—the ideological struggles in North America and in South Africa.

The tension between “mainstream” North American society and the still marginalized aboriginal peoples of the continent remains a dramatic one. The ideology of the mainstream, though now frequently and passionately challenged by social activists and scholars living within it, continues to follow many of the cultural patterns symbolized by the ardent nineteenth-century slogan “manifest destiny.” It is still an ideology of interest and advantage that seeks to expand the prosperity of those in the established mainstream, even though recent immigration patterns have been altering the identity of the mainstream. It is still this system that controls land distribution and administers legal decisions, and, by continuing in the United States to espouse a theory of evolutionary progress, it exacerbates the growing ecological crisis. Its fundamental symbol, the “Stars and Stripes,” is often identified with certain Christian groups for whom progress and prosperity are consequent upon submission to “Western” cultural norms.

In Canada, there is less temptation to a chauvinistic waving of the Maple Leaf, but the ideology of progress is likewise the dominant interest. There is in Canada, to be sure, the deep irony of the Quebec *fleur de lis*, which to the Quebecois, especially the separatists, symbolizes an ideology of strain and a struggle by Quebec to free itself from its “conquered nation” condition. But this symbol simultaneously represents an ideology of interest for prosperous Quebecois who are profoundly threatened by the struggles of aboriginal people to oppose such projects as the James Bay hydro-development program. And perhaps for all of North America, including Mexico, the present North American Free Trade Agreement, at least as seen by its liberal opponents, represents an interest ideology that further shores up the position of the “haves.”

Meanwhile, there is a strain ideology that pervades the aboriginal community. One could argue that “self-determination,” “aboriginal rights,” and “cultural identity” are flash words that best express this strain, as native communities struggle to preserve their cultures and the environments that nurture them. Increasingly these communities have come to identify with the ecological movement, and environmental groups in turn have identified with aboriginal cultures to combat spoliation of the earth. There is much ambivalence in this amalgamation of ideological movements, since native peoples also seek “prog-

ress" and some degree of "development" and prosperity within the dominant system. For example, there is ambivalence in the veneration accorded the American flag at tribal events; the presence of tribal flags alongside it presents some challenge to a melting-pot theory of culture.

The second, and no doubt most internationally publicized ideological tension has been the struggle over apartheid in South Africa, a struggle which, though now officially renounced, threatens to affect many generations to come. "Apartheid" became a slogan of the Afrikaner community in the 1940s, ironically representing a strain ideology destined to free the Afrikaners from British domination and to secure them against the black and colored majority. Apartheid and all its related symbols now enforce the interest ideology of all white South Africans who still seek to hold the advantages of a land rich in resources, all the while keeping the four-fifths majority in subjection within segregated areas such as townships or "homelands."

The strain ideology at present is the anti-apartheid movement, although this movement too is divided among integrationists and radical separatist groups, both black and white. One could study these systems by examining the various symbols, especially those of the African National Congress and the Inkatha Freedom Party. These symbols are constantly on display in parades and processions in the streets of the townships where political groups clash. A 1992 controversy over whether Zulus could legally carry traditional spears and clubs focused on whether these implements are weapons or cultural symbols. In 1994 that dispute has been part of the powerful separatist campaign of the Inkatha Freedom Party.<sup>84</sup>

How does Christian theology carry on its praxis in relation to such complex cultural systems or subsystems? While the actual implementation of Christian principles often involves deep dilemmas and divisions, Christian ideological discernment must certainly lead to a "preferential option for the poor." In this light, Christian theology would adopt a discerning "Christ against culture"<sup>85</sup> stance over against interest ideologies, as South African theologians have done by declaring apartheid a heresy, and as bishops' conferences in North America have done in supporting indigenous claims to aboriginal rights. Thus, again

<sup>84</sup> Developments in South Africa have moved so rapidly since this article was begun, that Christian discernment is growing increasingly difficult. At present, Christians with whom I remain in contact there rally around the ideal of national unity, upon which both the African National Congress and the National party agree. Opposed to this plan have been Inkatha and the right-wing white African Resistance Movement.

<sup>85</sup> I am of course using terminology made famous by H. Richard Niebuhr in *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper and Row, 1975).

in Niebuhr's terminology, Christian theology would relate to ideologies of strain, not with an "of culture" attitude, but with a transformational attitude, thus seeking to develop a system that recognizes equal justice for all. In Segundo's understanding, Christian theology, I suggest, finds its historical concretions by supporting strain ideologies, while seeking to transform them into vehicles for universal justice.

At present, the conversations between Christian theologians and aboriginal groups is receiving widespread, often naively romantic recognition. Many persons and groups are laying unrealistic expectations on aboriginal peoples, which simply aggravate their struggle for a distinctive identity. The situation in all such cases seems to call for extremely attentive dialogue and for the development of aboriginal leadership. From the perspective of aboriginal communities, whether North American, African, Australian, or other, their process of ideological discernment is never separate from their religious quest. So it is only logical that, with Geertz, we would see *religion* as a cultural system, and that the Christian "faith" (as distinct from religion) needs a "religion," even as it may challenge aspects of a religious system. We turn to the relationship between theology and cultural systems.

### *Inculturation and Religious Systems*

A basic premise for the inculturation of the faith in a religious system involves the much-discussed distinction between faith and religion, as it was proclaimed and upheld by Karl Barth, by Paul Tillich, and later by liberationist theologians, especially Leonardo Boff.

Being sensitive to the problem of proselytism mentioned earlier, Tillich called upon Christianity to "negate" itself as a religion, in order to let go of nonessential forms and thus be open to human communities and their rights to their own cultures even when adopting Christianity.<sup>86</sup> If one is to accept Tillich's argument, however, the word "negate" must be understood in the sense of "transcend" rather than "nullify" (the classic word-play in the German *aufheben*). Thus faith does adopt historical forms, and these forms, once adopted, leave their stamp on the future configuration of the universal Church and unavoidably cross boundaries into other cultures as well. A faith can never be a disembodied faith, or literally, lifted out, as a kernel from a husk, so that nothing remains from its previous historical incarnation. This is the continuing tension, not to say dilemma, of any "universal" faith: What does it mean to inculturate faith within a religious cultural

<sup>86</sup> For Tillich's discussion, see his *Christianity and the Encounter of the World Religions* (New York: Columbia University, 1966) 97.

system? At present, however, the European forms continue to dominate Christian pastoral practice, so that Tillich's advocacy of greater interior freedom in relation to outward forms continues to challenge Christian churches.

A historical note is helpful at this point. As early as the 1930s, the Belgian missiologist Pierre Charles was already arguing, quite boldly for his time, that mission thought must consider how cultures might express "the form of the Church," understanding as part of those cultures "even their religious rites."<sup>87</sup> Although he left some ambiguity as to what he meant by "the form of the Church" (*la forme de l'église*), Charles is known to have belonged to the "church planting" school of missiology. It is therefore pertinent to ask what this expression meant in Charles's vocabulary. Was it the "substantial form" of scholastic theology, thus referring to the Church's universal invisible "essence"? Or did Charles understand "form" in the sense of *Gestalt*, or configurational and structural thinking? The evidence remains unclear on this point, but it is clear that Charles intended to defend the principle of the seventeenth-century theologian Juan Ripalda, that no good human act posited in history is unrelated to divine grace.<sup>88</sup> Since Vatican II, by recognizing the presence of grace within cultures, opened up the possibility of investing traditional religious forms with new meaning, there has been a vigorous discussion of ways and means, as well as of limits.

It is possible here only to indicate directions that a theology of religion, or of Christian inculturation within a people's existing religious traditions, might take. At the present moment, the word "syncretism" figures prominently and has received attention from all thinkers across the Christian ecumenical spectrum, from fundamentalist and conservative evangelicals, to whom syncretism is an abomination, to adventurous mission practitioners prepared to experiment with a minimalist approach to historical ecclesial forms and symbols.<sup>89</sup> Without entering into the question of permanence or impermanence of existing forms, I suggest that syncretism has always been a natural human

<sup>87</sup> Pierre Charles, S.J., *Les dossiers de l'action missionnaire: Manuel de missiologie* (Louvain: Editions de l'Aucam, 1938) 66.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> For more concise summations of the question, see Jerald D. Gort, ed., *Dialogue and Syncretism: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989); see also the articles on syncretism in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 16/2 (April, 1992). A brief and neutral definition of syncretism can be noted here: "Syncretism . . . can be defined as religious interpenetration, either taken for granted or subject to debate" (André Droogers, "Syncretism: The Problem of Definition, the Definition of the Problem," in Gort, ed., *Dialogue and Syncretism* 7-25, at 20-21).

phenomenon, in religion as in all other departments of life, and that theologians will have to discuss it for a long time to come, if for no other reason than that it *has* become a shibboleth for identifying one's doctrinal position as a Christian.

Bypassing the fact (as discussed, for example, by Harnack) that syncretism permeated all religious culture at the time of Jesus, and thus of early Christianity as well, we can safely argue that syncretism has been occurring throughout mission history. Sadly enough, in most cases, this has happened as a surreptitious activity that grew out of the hostility of missionaries to indigenous traditions, and thus developed over centuries of underground practices and attitudes that pervaded the phenomenon of local Catholicism. In the few cases where a serious dialogue began to take place—the famous cases of the Chinese and Malabar Rites, and perhaps in some ways the efforts of North American Jesuits in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—there were no structures for sustaining the dialogue. In fact, the post-Tridentine aversion to dialogue permeated the North American scene, and the exclusivist assault on the Chinese Rites movement is well enough known.

Leonardo Boff, in his controversial *Church: Charism and Power*, has adopted the position that syncretism is an authentically human phenomenon, and is potentially an incarnational reality symbolizing “the catholicity of Catholicism.”<sup>90</sup> Boff's argument is that Catholicism by its nature has the potential to explore the meaning of incarnation, and that this implies an openness to deal positively with syncretism. Boff's own context, of course, is the “popular religiosity” of the poor in Brazil, the religion that subsists on “the underside of history,” and, as manifestation of a certain sustaining culture for the oppressed, contains the seeds of liberation. The fear of syncretism, on the other hand, is found in those who need to maintain strong institutional structures as they are.

Boff is far from uncritical of naive syncretistic practices. He carefully distinguishes five models of historical syncretism, which can signal for us the presence or absence of authentic inculturation within a local system:<sup>91</sup> (1) syncretism by addition, in which persons simply add other practices and beliefs to their own religion; the only unity here is in the experience of the believer, and Boff considers this syncretism in the bad sense; (2) syncretism as a mixture, in which the individual or group “pours together” various elements in order to satisfy needs,

<sup>90</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church*, trans. John W. Diercksmeier (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 89.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 89–93.



though lacking any coherent religious vision of the world; (3) syncretism as agreement, or a superficial use of the valid belief that there are diverse paths to ultimate reality; in this process, a group tries to harmonize conflicting religious experiences into an amalgam that lacks organic wholeness; (4) syncretism as translation, the practice by which a "universal" religion *uses* the expressions of other religions to communicate its own central message; and (5) syncretism as adaptation, a long and almost imperceptible organic process not unlike the process of bodily nourishment; if a religion manages adaptation in Boff's sense,<sup>92</sup> it is practicing authentic incarnation within culture.

Echoing Harnack, whom he cites in a footnote but with whom he differs on the point, Boff understands Christianity as one huge syncretism. There is no "pure Christianity," for "the Divine is always made present through human mediations which are always dialectical."<sup>93</sup> Boff suggests ways in which Christianity might carry on as a process of authentic rather than pathological syncretism. To begin with, Christianity is a universal religion of salvation; this process is divinely initiated and responded to by humankind in an inevitably syncretic, historical fashion. The history of Catholicism, from the earliest Christian apologists, especially beginning with the "acute" questions arising from the Roman establishment of Christianity, is at its best the quest to find "seeds of the Word," as alluded to at Vatican II.

Boff shows an appreciation of the tension between Catholic and Protestant thinkers: the belief in divine transcendence on the Protestant side, and the more Catholic concern to render the divine present. Boff appreciates the value of the Protestant critique, and considers it a necessary dimension to theology. But here he defends the Catholic principle, when purified by critical discernment, as a practice of syncretism that "achieves the concrete essence of the Church" and is thus inevitable as part of the catholicizing process, which intends to make the good things of God possible within diverse cultures.<sup>94</sup>

I suggest that Boff's criteria for discernment of legitimate syncretism should serve as provisional criteria for facilitating the insertion of the gospel within cultural systems. Religion, which of itself is no more than sociologically functional, must be vitalized by faith and serve as mediation for faith. Conversely, the idea of a "pure faith" denies the sociological, indeed, the incarnational reality of faith; obviously, faith and religion are inseparable in reality. There are also criteria arising from Christian self-understanding: thus, if a cultural system adopts

<sup>92</sup> Boff's understanding of adaptation differs from that of most missiologists; here he clearly means what they mean by inculturation.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 92.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 99.

Christianity, it must experience a genuine conversion that reaffirms the Christian faith. The contrary of this occurs if a culture merely absorbs Christianity, or simply some Christian phenomenological aspects, and employs them for its own cultural purposes.

Boff is cautious in stating what essential Christianity is: certainly it is a way of life grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, in whose life God is active as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God, the absolute mystery, has created the world for final realization in the Kingdom of God. The historical process of lived faith includes a sacramental and ethical dimension, especially the building of a community that transcends individual cultural systems.

From this discussion, Boff emerges with four fundamental criteria for true syncretism: (1) Scripture, which already presents a purification within Judaism and primitive Christianity; (2) Christian praxis supported by the traditions of the universal Church; (3) the decisions of episcopal synods; and (4) "the tradition of the prophets and of Jesus in the defense of human freedom and spontaneity in the cultural universe."<sup>95</sup> Boff adds two other fundamental specifics to these: spiritual worship and ethical commitment. Spiritual worship is the authentic expression of faith that uses but also transcends ritual and symbolism. Such true worship, more specifically, is ethical commitment, in which true faith redeems religion and resists false syncretism.

In citing Boff's defense of authentic syncretism and his concern for the Church to do justice to cultures, especially the cultures of the oppressed indigenous peoples, I am emphasizing the necessity of the gospel, in the language of Geertz, to touch the networks of cultural systems. If, as Boff says, the future of Christianity depends on its ability to formulate new syncretisms and to develop a "pedagogy of flexibility,"<sup>96</sup> we are dealing here with a call both to a courageous new faith and to painstaking scholarship and field work within cultures. This courage of faith applies most emphatically to our work within indigenous communities, given the Church's long history of neglect of, and even hostility towards, native cultural symbol systems.

Boff concludes his remarks on syncretism in this way: "To trust in the religious experience of indigenous peoples is to surrender oneself to the Spirit who is wiser than all ecclesial prudence and who knows the true paths far better than the theological search for the purity of Christian identity."<sup>97</sup> If Boff's trust seems a bit excessive, at least it serves as a corrective to the top-heavy manner in which missions have thus far dealt with indigenous experience.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 104.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.* 106.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 107.

*Inculturation and Common Sense*

From a pastoral perspective, for Christianity to be inculturated within the common-sense system of a community may be the most crucial dimension of all, touching as it does on the more spontaneous traits of a society. Having already described Lonergan's philosophical analysis of common sense in Part 1 of this article, I shall here apply his theological operation to the issue of inculturation within a people's common-sense experience.

Lonergan does not devote a specific chapter of his *Method in Theology* to common sense, but numerous reflections throughout the work bear on his understanding of the relationship between theology and common sense. He reminds us of the opposition between theory and the world of common sense:<sup>98</sup> the work of grace is grounded in the stage of meaning where the world of theory and that of common sense are distinct. That is, grace is at work in both common sense and critical theology, but it is in this world of interiority, rather than in theory, in which the love of God finds its experiential context. It is first common-sense experience to which the gospel directs its call to conversion, and so the gospel must be proclaimed in the ordinary language of local culture.<sup>99</sup> This is the chief objective of pastoral theology.<sup>100</sup> Preaching and exhortation must become incarnated in the immediate, the concrete, the particular, the spontaneous, the categories of the world.<sup>101</sup>

Common sense is not "primitive ignorance"; it is one of the "realms of meaning."<sup>102</sup> It is a specific form of wisdom that is best typified in proverbs, or in generalities differing from abstract principles in that they impart knowledge useful to various circumstances and often issue warnings about the failure to put this wisdom into practice.<sup>103</sup> There will always be a unique value in common sense, since human beings are not meant to lose spontaneity or the capacity to respond authentically to the concrete and the everyday world of reality.

But common sense, while expressing ordinary generalities, does not "universalize" under its own power. It is therefore blind to long-term consequences of policies and courses of action. It tends to overlook the presence of "common nonsense" in its cherished convictions and slogans.<sup>104</sup> These two dimensions of common sense indicate the ways in which inculturation must occur within the webs of meaning of the cultural system. All of us dwell within common-sense systems, and all must be able to benefit from the Christian witness as it touches these

<sup>98</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972) 96.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid. 107.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. 257.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid. 303.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid. 265.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 230.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. 53.

systems. In the first instance, we all need to be touched by effective preaching and sacramental symbolism, so that our affectivity may be moved towards living out the commitment of divine love. The present troubled state of both preaching and sacraments testifies to this failure of integration, not only within common-sense experience, but within the webs of art, ideology, and general religious experience as well.

But common sense must likewise be subjected to a certain refinement that occurs within reflection, and this is the work of inculturated pastoral theology. Though Lonergan does not discuss it, such theology can be seen functioning in the teachings of Jesus, especially throughout the Sermon on the Mount, and more particularly in his challenges to conventional wisdom ("You have heard it said . . . but I say to you . . ."; Matthew 5:17-49), and his challenge to local particularism (cf. Luke 4:14-30). Such pastoral reflection appears among the early Christians, especially in Acts 10 and 15 where the commonsense wisdom of religious identity-reduced-to-exclusivity is challenged by the teaching based on God's universal love for humankind. Thus it is urgent that theology learn the *art* of insertion into common-sense experience. Common sense will always remain its unique self within its own unique expressions, but it will receive effective leadership from those in the community who have gifts that reach beyond common sense into critical thought. For this reason, one might argue that the pastoral theologian must be the most diversely talented of all who work within theological disciplines.

Considering Lonergan's discussion of theological method and common sense, pastoral theologians must be blessed with, or must have acquired, a profound patience and a capacity for "attending" beyond the realm of their own theory. That is, they must have not only the capacity for seeing and hearing, but also for doing it without rapid depletion of psychic energy. If the theologian is also a person indigenous to the culture with which he or she is conversing, the ability to "transcend" is required. Such a theologian must be able to stand "over against" his or her own cultural context sufficiently to offer creative criticism. This act is the act of standing beyond the realm of one's own "interiority."

Whenever theologians from indigenous and missionary contexts collaborate on inculturation within common-sense systems, Lonergan's comment is apropos: "As consciousness differentiates into the two realms of common sense and theory, it will give rise to special theoretical questions concerning divinity, the order of the universe, the destiny of [mankind], and the lot of each individual."<sup>105</sup> In brief, all of

<sup>105</sup> Ibid. 266.

those involved must reach for new levels of conversion in acts of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding.

To provide a closing concrete illustration, when Lonergan writes about moving beyond the realm of common sense "into the realm in which God is known and loved,"<sup>106</sup> he could be writing about the widespread common-sense (and religious) topic of sorcery or "bad medicine" within aboriginal societies. How does the indigenous theologian, or the "expatriate" theologian when invited, deal with this phenomenon and the possible Christian responses to it?

Within aboriginal Australian cultures, if one person "sings" another so as to lay a curse on the other, does the one who has been sung seek to hurl back the sung curse, or rather to find a way to heal the original offense? African cultures face the same problem in dealing with witchcraft, with "witch doctors" employed in defending victims of sorcery. How does the healer go about this work so as not to perpetuate the evil use of power? North American aboriginal cultures also deal with homologous phenomena whenever ritual power (not evil in itself) is misdirected towards "making medicine" against another.

In order to understand traditional common sense here, it is important to realize that the use of sorcery or cursing probably originated as a form of social control and of protection of the common order. Common sense likewise says that where a person or family is thus cursed, it must seek out another adept practitioner who can reverse the medicine and "turn it back" on the original perpetrator. In recent years, at least among some North American native Christian communities, spiritual healers have sought to transform the whole process of breaking a curse. Since the Christian sees all spiritual power as deriving from God, that power is understood as good in itself. Consequently, a prayer, perhaps a ritual, is performed in the name of Jesus, and the community prays that the power hitherto wrongly projected might "turn around" and return to the one who sent it in such a way as to heal that person. Thus an act of inculturation takes place in the realm of common sense, without needlessly destroying symbols, without overturning a whole worldview with the bald accusation that the persons concerned are practicing nothing but vile superstition.

### *Inculturation and Art*

During a workshop on inculturation held some two years ago for South African seminarians, I experienced a dramatic example of the necessity to recognize the profound inseparable relationship between art and religion, especially (but not only) in aboriginal contexts. When

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 84.

students rose to report on the manifestations of art within their communities, their reports were unable to distinguish artistic and religious symbolism. In a reflection following this experience, I recalled similar responses from North American aboriginal people, especially the more "traditional." Furthermore, I found that my own personal experience is quite similar. When artistic representations touch me most deeply—in a Beethoven symphony, a Bach orchestral suite, a Hopkins poem, or in my own experience of native art like the work of modern Ojibway painters—I am incapable of separating the artistic from the religious. When the gospel is inculturated within artistic systems it is simply realizing itself further in one more dimension of the Holy and opening up motivation towards ethical commitment.<sup>107</sup>

In this section we shall briefly consider two thinkers, Bernard Lonergan and Paul Tillich, who have addressed issues germane to our discussion.

Bernard Lonergan calls art one of the "carriers" of the Word,<sup>108</sup> which involves it in his functional specialty of communications.<sup>109</sup> Every work of art is itself the proper expression of elemental meaning. Art allows experience to "fall into its own proper patterns, and take its own line of expansion, development, organization, fulfilment."<sup>110</sup> Hence in *Method in Theology*, Lonergan can pass from art to symbols which "obey the laws not of logic but of image and feeling."<sup>111</sup> He cites the work of Mircea Eliade on the power of symbol in "primitive" religions.<sup>112</sup>

Lonergan's words well describe the intimate relationship between art and religion, especially as aboriginal cultures understand these experiences, because art is the "unmediated experience of the mystery of love and awe."<sup>113</sup> Art objectifies these experiences, so that the art of any particular culture is "the objectification of a purely experiential pattern."<sup>114</sup> That is, Lonergan says, in full agreement with Geertz, that a culture's art excludes alien patterns and renders its own pat-

<sup>107</sup> The Freudian analysis of culture is of value in connection with our subject, especially as developed by Herbert Marcuse, however it may demand qualification from a Christian viewpoint. The repressive character of culture and the instinctual human reactions to its limitations are important points in any analysis. One creative direction the discussion of aesthetics might take is indicated by Marcuse, whose Freudian reading of culture sees the realm of aesthetics as most closely approaching a possible integration of sense and intellect, nature and freedom, and thus a possible socio-ethical development; see his *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1962) 162.

<sup>108</sup> Lonergan, *Method* 112.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 62.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* 69.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.* 132.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 112.

terns experiential, which permits the full complement of feeling to take place, to transform the experiencing subjects and their world.<sup>115</sup>

Loneragan offers the Church a key to understanding its inculturational role within the cultures where it grows: "The work of art is an invitation to participate, to try it, to see for oneself."<sup>116</sup> It is an invitation, not only to members of the culture in which it originates, but to all who desire to reach beyond their own cultures and share some of the life of the members of other cultures, and thus to expand, at least to some degree, the experience of "common meaning." One can experience this common meaning as it occurs in aboriginal cultures by studying their works of art. The famous sand paintings of the Navajo, for example, may be one of the most dramatic instances of participation, since they are performed as curing ceremonies, and the sick person actually sits on the sand painting in order to participate in the healing power of the cosmos represented there. Contemporary Ojibway and Cree artists in Canada not only draw on the traditions of former generations for their paintings, but now use these forms to interpret their struggles with modern life. Australian aborigines, in a search to renew the power of the "dream time" or time of creation, have been renewing the artistic forms handed down on the walls of caves. For the Church to be able to proclaim the gospel in these contexts, it must recognize these acts of creativity as forms of ministry that represent the spiritual feelings of the people.

The work of another twentieth-century thinker, Paul Tillich, on art as a system of culture deeply expresses the need both to affirm art and to critique it, to balance religious authority and autonomous vitality.<sup>117</sup> Tillich briefly summarizes what might be taken to exemplify the work of the theology of inculturation in cultural systems.<sup>118</sup> First, he acknowledges the power of artistic expression to transform what it expresses by the ways in which it characterizes religious traditions. Second, art must express the "ecstatic character" of the Spiritual Presence through the authentic and enduring cultural symbols (as opposed, I would add, to "pop," or media-popularized culture). Third, on the other hand, art may also fall into idolatry, if the believer simply adores the work of art or the image rather than the Spiritual Presence it represents. The work of theology is thus a cognitive function that "formulates criteria of rationality" for discerning the place of art in the life of faith.

Theology is likewise characterized by a *meditative* element, by which

<sup>115</sup> Ibid. 63.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid. 64.

<sup>117</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1963) 3.14.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid. 197-203.

it penetrates into the substance of religious symbols. One thinks here of Karl Barth's famous identification of his own theological method with the pointing finger of John the Baptist in Matthias Grünewald's great Isenheim tryptich, or of the same theologian's devotion to Mozart, who almost in spite of himself so profoundly symbolized the joy of the free grace of God. But theology also has a *discursive* element, which analyzes and describes the focus through which the *logos* dimension is to function. Theology must both meditate and discourse without conflict; this is the challenge to the theology of inculturation. Through inculturational work the Church must verify Tillich's famous definition of culture, "the self-creativity of life under the dimension of spirit."<sup>119</sup>

Even though Tillich, in discussing culture, is talking about the high culture of his own tradition, his reflections on the relationship between Christianity and all works of culture express the application of the "Protestant principle" to all cultures and their aesthetic creations. In a famous essay,<sup>120</sup> he illustrates that the critical principle need not be an iconoclastic act of vandalism within cultures, but may mediate between art and the divine. For Tillich, of course, religion as such is "ultimate concern," but the artist who seeks to express form is pursuing his or her ultimate concern. The style chosen for the expression is the style common to the cultural group and thus an expression of commonly experienced ultimate concern. (Apparently Tillich believed that even the most unconventional artist has somehow to communicate with some community.) In any case, the inseparability of art and ultimate concern can certainly be verified in the work of aboriginal artists.

Yet art (and religion too) may militate against authentic cultural concerns, as, for example, when it is used to express demonic ideologies or as a medium of antisocial magical practices. Tillich's example of art that does express the Protestant principle is Pablo Picasso's famous painting "Guernica," which was a protest against fascism and the human destruction it commits in the name of ideology. Fascism stands for humanity's estrangement from its true being and its bondage to demonic forces that have tried to present symbols of oppression as "symbols of glory."<sup>121</sup> While Tillich may be speaking here of any culture, the theologians of the missionary Church will be well advised to apply his point to their own secular and religious traditions, especially since

<sup>119</sup> Ibid. 57.

<sup>120</sup> Paul Tillich, "Protestantism and Artistic Style," in *Theology of Culture*, ed. Robert C. Kimball (New York: Oxford University, 1964) 68-75.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid. 75.



these traditions have accompanied the missionaries into the cultures they have sought to evangelize. Thus any study of art and religious systems becomes also a study of ideologies. To the degree that theologians can collaborate in "mapping" the intertwined cultural systems in their own home cultures and in the cultures of mission, to that degree the Church will possess the tools for inculturating the gospel.

*A Corollary: Inculturation and Common Meaning*

The webs of meaning in cultures, the systems about which Geertz has written, are of course webs of communication. It is illustrative of Lonergan's creativity that he saw this so clearly long before inculturation became a theological category. His chapter on the functional specialty of communication, brief and undeveloped though it may be, is concerned with the authentic development of Christianity from within each culture where indigenous people accept the message. Therefore, in considering the systems of ideology, religion, common sense, art, and other possible cultural systems, the systematic theologian and the pastoral practitioner must be aware of how these systems both originate in and give rise to common meaning. Common meaning, says Lonergan, is the formal constituent of any true community, if it is to be a true community and not simply an aggregate of individuals.<sup>122</sup> The community must have both a common field of experience and complementary ways of understanding. There will be a common language, a commonly understood way of transmitting knowledge and social patterns and of diffusing information. Above all, there will be a common will to maintain community, effected through intersubjectivity by means of gesture and interpretation, which all who "belong" to the culture will understand.

It is the spontaneous process of cultures to assure that their members do belong and are able to share in the symbols of the various systems within the culture. One who, because of various possible biases, cannot share in these systems or refuses to do so is to that degree "alienated." Lonergan describes the self-justifying conditions of the alienated person as "the basic form of ideology."<sup>123</sup> One sees here Lonergan's negative understanding of ideology (similar to Rahner's); but Lonergan makes the point (as Rahner also does) that whenever persons within a culture are divided by ideologies, they will tend to lose common meaning. The task of inculturation, as Lonergan points out without using the word, is that the Christian message should be proclaimed in such a way as to create common meaning, which will then establish communication between ideological systems. This point is

<sup>122</sup> Lonergan, *Method* 356.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.* 357.

critical, since inculturation must include cultural critique and not simply "belonging" at any cost.

For Lonergan, the ideal basis of society is community, and cultural systems must weave that sense of community together. Even in the case of ideology the tension between those who are guided by interest and those who are guided by strain must be mediated through efforts to establish or to widen common meaning. Lonergan tells us briefly what the role of the Christian message is in the search for common meaning and authentic inculturation. The message must have a "cognitive" dimension, through which it conveys what is to be believed; it must have a "constitutive" dimension, through which it crystallizes the hidden inner gift of love into overt Christian fellowship; and it must have an "affective" dimension, through which it directs Christian service to human society in order to bring about the kingdom of God. Christian communicators must grasp the virtual resources of a culture and language, using them creatively, "so that the Christian message becomes, not disruptive of a culture, not an alien patch superimposed upon it, but a line of development within the culture."<sup>124</sup> The best practitioners of this process will be persons indigenous to the culture, providing they are able to stand beyond their own interiority when necessary. When persons from outside the culture sufficiently transcend their own biases, especially their realms of theory if they are theologians, there may be effective collaboration in the praxis of inculturation.

Lonergan's description of what one might call a "program" for the Church in mission explains why the Church must be sensitive to and knowledgeable in cultural systems. The Church, he writes, must always have four special qualities: (1) it must always be in the process of constituting itself in a worldwide human society; (2) this process must be structural, promoting the good of order; (3) it must be outgoing, not just for itself but for the whole of human society; and (4) it must be redemptive, socially redemptive from the negative effects of ideologies. Lonergan sums up the socio-ethical role of the Church in cultures: "The moral principle is that [men] individually are responsible for what they make of themselves, but collectively they are responsible for the world in which they live."<sup>125</sup>

#### AN EXEMPLARY EVENT OF INCULTURATION

In this concluding segment, I should like to speak from a recent personal experience of a process that has a twelve-year history, in which inculturation has been applied to what we have been referring

<sup>124</sup> Ibid. 362.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid. 360.

to as cultural systems. The context is the Native People's Pastoral Seminar of the diocese of Thunder Bay, Ontario, with which I have been associated as a "resource person" some five times since its inception in 1981. From an extremely cautious and hesitant beginning and an initial membership of approximately twenty, this gathering of native persons and nonnative participants, encouraged by the very pastoral bishop of Thunder Bay, John O'Mara, has grown to the point where it has a general attendance of fifty to sixty and has gradually come under the administration of persons from the aboriginal community. It has addressed several issues over the years, but the general theme has always been the faith-culture encounter.

In 1987 and 1988, the focus of the seminar was on explaining inculturation, not without many expressions of confusion and at times of gentle mockery at this offensively "intellectual" material. It was a remarkable experience to return to the 1993 gathering and witness how extensively this concept has taken hold and has even become a "buzz word." The most dramatic development has been the pervasive presence of aboriginal symbolism within every event of the three-day gathering, including two eucharistic celebrations, and the frequent desire expressed by persons to be "both native and Catholic." Symbolically this "common meaning" was expressed by the "sacred circle" format for all prayer—and prayer pervaded each session as part of the process. Each morning there was a sunrise ceremony held outside, with the traditional cleansing ritual of incense made of the sacred herbs cedar, sweetgrass, tobacco, and sage, and with the communion ritual of the pipe. A similar ceremony introduced both eucharistic celebrations as the opening reconciliation rite. A healing ceremony was conducted on the second evening, and a concluding rite of blessing with native symbols was held the final morning. On the second and third evenings, all were given the opportunity to participate in that best-known of healing ceremonies, the sweat lodge. One outstanding event during the conference was a demonstration of the still-experimental Ojibway baptism rite, in which an elder bestows an aboriginal name on the recipient prior to the water ceremony. Thus the 1993 seminar strikingly demonstrated the appropriation of the idea of inculturation within a community and within symbols of a cultural system.

For several years now, the ideology of strain has been manifest in most native gatherings in North America, as aspirations for self-determination, cultural identity, and aboriginal rights have been recognized by participants themselves, again not without strong disagreements on directions to be taken. Consciousness of how many elements in the aboriginal traditions relate to the ecological movement is also evident, and many native persons have admitted that they have not

practiced this social concern well. The Church, while it has not been spared sometimes-caustic criticism, has been perceived as basically desiring to enter into the symbols and events representing this ideology of strain and to transform it into the New Creation. While the seminars have not been "political" in the narrower sense, many members have been politically involved and see these events as supportive of their aspirations. Even expressions of anger, frequent in these sessions, were accompanied by an assurance that the speaker wanted a wider solidarity with the Church and with non-native brothers and sisters.

Aboriginal persons have always insisted that there is no dichotomy between religion and life for them, no "distinction of planes," as liberationists call it. This profession was certainly evident in the way in which one witnessed gospel values both incarnated in native ceremonies and often even compared to aboriginal values of a similar nature. Thus the religious "webs of meaning," traditional native and gospel, could be easily "mapped" in the ceremonies described above, mostly because all native ceremonies (and traditional Christian ceremonies as well?) pertain in some way to life, even if not all are narrowly "rites of passage."

The key principles we have cited from Lonergan and Tillich on the relation of faith to art were likewise evident from the way in which symbols functioned in the seminar. Perhaps the most striking example of this was the division into working groups designated by clan totem animals, in which each participant was given a jigsaw-puzzle piece of an artistic representation of the group animal. Because the very word "dodaim" is in the Algonkian language tradition and cultural systems of the Ojibways, this symbolism never appeared forced or artificial, although people understood that its usage here was only analogous to the traditional symbolism and not identical to it. The process placed all participants within the sacred Medicine Wheel, which symbolizes all of reality.

All other symbols besides the totem pictures were "natural symbols," to borrow a phrase from Mary Douglas.<sup>126</sup> That is, "objects of art" were directly featured as the elements of earth, air, fire, water, the eagle feather, the sacred herbs, the sacred pipe, and the culturally paradigmatic four-directional symbol of the Medicine Wheel. While the last two are artifacts, they are so close to the experience of nature as to be natural symbols.

The system of common sense received perhaps the least explicit at-

<sup>126</sup> See Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Random House, 1970).

tention in the seminar, simply because no one has introduced it in a reflexive manner. However, the events in which this category has been most dramatically introduced were those in which youth and elders were brought together. One entire recent seminar was dedicated to this process. The point was that the young persons renew their appreciation for the wisdom of the elders, and that the elders appreciate the painful struggles of youth in today's world.

Today's aboriginal people are not naive about their common-sense traditions, and they realize that contemporary adaptations are necessary as communities face new situations. But they also see the traditional teachings of the elders as universal values expressed in proverbial, narrative, or artistic forms. It is simply common sense that one practice love, truth, kindness, loyalty, courage, respect, and honesty—however they are to be fleshed out.

#### CONCLUSION

The patterns of aboriginal cultures everywhere, but especially in North America, have undergone profound changes, and some elements are gone forever. Even so, the Thunder Bay seminar and many other similar Christian native events demonstrate that much of the old culture can and should endure, or even should be "retrieved" into a contemporary system of symbols that unite a community. Such communities, even with their "brokenness," frequently show greater integrity than contemporary European and Euro-American communities. This helps to explain the fact that, as native persons often observe with a chuckle, the fastest growing native tribe today is "the Wannabees." However, if enduring values emerge from such struggles as this, subsequent analysts, writing collaboratively, may be able to map out new cultural systems that will have become symbolic of a certain world "mosaic" of interacting and collaborative cultures.

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