

Finding New Faith in Cultural Encounters

From the missiological paradigm of inculturation to the fundamental theological principle of interculturality

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The fruitful discourse between the two Council theologians, Karl Rahner and Dominique Chenu⁵⁰⁴ had a profound influence, especially on the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council. The statements made in *Gaudium et Spes* appear similar to an ellipse in that they are formulated around two centres, the first being society and the second the Church.⁵⁰⁵ Acknowledging this duality, the Council Fathers pointed out in the first footnote to the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” that the Pastoral Constitution itself consists of two parts which constitute an organic unity. This footnote, which was hotly disputed, highlights in two sentences the opposite poles to which the Church is committed. It explains that the Constitution is called “pastoral”, “because, while resting on doctrinal principles, it seeks to express the relation of the Church to the world and modern mankind. The result is that, on the one hand, a pastoral slant is present in the first part, and, on the other hand, a doctrinal slant is present in the second part.”⁵⁰⁶ In this programmatic footnote, the substance of which determined the entire genealogy of the Pastoral Constitution, a new relationship is established between pastoral care and dogmatics and between the Church and the world. This

⁵⁰⁴ On the creative tension between the Council theologians, Karl Rahner und Dominique Chenu, cf. Christian Bauer, *Konzilsrezeption in Deutschland. Anmerkungen zur Nachgeschichte des Zweiten Vatikanums*, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge* 123 (2012) 10, 32–37.

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. Hans-Joachim Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralconstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute *Gaudium et spes*”, in: Peter Hünemann/Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *Heders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil* vol. 4, 581–886, here: 590.

⁵⁰⁶ The fact that this explanation was incorporated in the form of a footnote to the title of the Pastoral Constitution “The Church in the Modern World” is an indication of its programmatic character for the Council document.

understanding, which is seminal to the Pastoral Constitution, is an invitation to no longer conceive of the Church and the world, the faith and culture as separate realities but as one unique reality. By analogy with kenotic Christology the Church incarnates itself in the world and, at best, remains “without separation” and “without confusion”.

The reason for these ecclesiological reorientations was an epistemological broadening in the thinking of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. This gave rise to an inclusive understanding of revelation, which is reflected in the Constitution on Divine Revelation and more clearly in the firm commitment to universal salvation in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. It was explicitly stressed that neither ecclesial nor religious boundaries are identical with the limits of salvation. Ottmar Fuchs says in this context: “It is an inalienable characteristic of the Christian faith that God loves all human beings and includes them in His salvation.”⁵⁰⁷

Accompanying this opening in revelation theology was the use, in response to the Council’s deliberations, of the neologism inculturation and of the term contextualisation⁵⁰⁸ to replace previous terms such as accommodation, acculturation, adaptation, adjustment, assimilation, indigenisation con-naturalisation, pre-evangelisation⁵⁰⁹, transformation, etc. The term inculturation was initially introduced into missiology as a new “programme for mission theology”.⁵¹⁰ It

⁵⁰⁷ Ottmar Fuchs, “Mission’ mit einem ‘überflüssigen Glauben’”, in: Thomas Schreijäck/Martin Bröckelmann-Simon/Thomas Antkowiak/Albert Biesinger/Ottmar Fuchs (Eds.), *Horizont Weltkirche. Erfahrungen – Themen – Optionen und Perspektiven*, Mainz 2012, 441–458, here: 448.

⁵⁰⁸ In contrast to the hermeneutics used in linguistics and philosophy, contextuality in theology means not only the contextual or environmental reference of a text or its setting in the life of the biblical text. Giancarlo Collet points out that an unambiguous clarification of the theological concept of context is still pending. Cf. Giancarlo Collet, Stichwort “Kontextuelle Theologie”, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* vol. 6, Freiburg 1997, 327–329, here: 329.

⁵⁰⁹ The concept of pre-evangelisation goes back to the Jesuit missionaries in Japan, whom the Visitor Alexander Valignano (1539–1606) instructed to adapt their mission strategy to the indigenous customs. He regarded familiarisation with a foreign culture as the first step to preaching the Gospel to people and to conveying a thorough understanding of the Christian message. Cf. Shun’ichi Takayanagi, “Für eine neue Missionsstrategie im säkularisierten Japan”, in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 234 (2016) 1, 15–22, here: 20.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. Walter Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, Freiburg 2011, 459. On the concept of contextualisation see also Darren C. Marks, *Shaping a Global Theological Mind*, Aldershot 2008; Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual theology*, Maryknoll 2002; Clemens Sedmak, *Lokale Theologien und globale Kirche. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Grundlegung in praktischer Absicht*, Freiburg 2000; Dean Gilliland (Eds.), *The Word Among Us. Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, Dallas et al. 1999; Klaus Vellguth, “Die Kirche muss raus. Frischer Wind

also became clear, especially in the encounter with non-European cultures in the post-colonialist era, that there is not one single Gospel as a context-free “depositum fidei” excluding any hermeneutics which has been handed down unaltered through the ages and across all cultures. On the contrary, it was apparent that the Gospel has to be constantly “renegotiated”⁵¹¹ in its encounters with culture or cultures and that it emerges from these encounters in a new guise, especially in its translations or relations.⁵¹²

However, this does not mean – to pre-empt any suspicion of relativism expressed in critical and disparaging terms – that, as a result of the processes which have regularly left a different stamp on the Gospel at different times and in different cultures, evangelisation has proved only partially successful, because in the hermeneutical process of the encounter between culture and the Good News a part of the Gospel “gets lost on the way” since it cannot be conveyed or is simply indigestible. On the contrary, culture becomes a theological location of crucial significance in the quest for theological truth in a universal Church in the throes of overcoming Eurocentrism.⁵¹³ The hermeneutic process of intercultural encounter does not lead to the subjective feeling of a loss of faith. Indeed, quite the opposite is the case. Given the revelation potential of intercultural processes it becomes a place of new and deeper religious experience. “Cultural encounter is perceived as a location which generates talk of God and brings forth theology – interculturality is thus understood be a *locus theologicus*.”⁵¹⁴

durch Evangelisierung, Inkulturation und interreligiösen Dialog”, in: Pastoralblatt 60 (1998) 10, 302–303; Peter Beer, Kontextuelle Theologie. Überlegungen zu ihrer systematischen Grundlegung, Paderborn 1995; Volker Küster, Theologie im Kontext. Zugleich ein Versuch über die Minjung-Theologie, Nettetal 1995, also Heidelberg University, Dissertation 1994; Robert J. Schreiter, Abschied vom Gott der Europäer. Zur Entwicklung regionaler Theorien, Regensburg 1992; idem. constructing Local Theologies, Maryknoll 1985.

⁵¹¹ Judith Gruber, “Auf der Suche nach dem Göttlichen Wort in der Begegnung der Kulturen. Theologische Überlegungen aus dem Süden der USA”, in: Verbum SVD 58 (2017) 1, 18–30, here: 19.

⁵¹² Cf. Klaus Vellguth, “Relationale Missionswissenschaft. Wenn Mission dazwischen kommt”, in: Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft 101 (2017) 1–2, 190–195.

⁵¹³ Cf. Margit Eckholt, Poetik der Kultur. Bausteine einer interkulturellen dogmatischen Methodenlehre, Freiburg 2002, 479.

⁵¹⁴ Judith Gruber, op. cit., 19.

Inculturation: a terminological clarification

Such a respectful understanding of interculturality only emerged because theologians and the Church used the revelation theory potential inherent in the concept of inculturation to build on prior concepts and thus move beyond the limited theological understanding of inculturation as “cross-cultural, universal Church correlation didactics”, to identify the *locus alienus*⁵¹⁵ of cultures as a source of theological knowledge and thus to extend the traditional doctrine of *loci theologici* first formulated by Melchior Cano in the 16th century in his work *De locis theologis*.⁵¹⁶

In the first instance, inculturation describes the process whereby Christianity as a culture – in the form of a specific cultural mediation – encounters a different culture, as a consequence of which both are enriched as part of a reciprocal hermeneutic process.⁵¹⁷ As stated in *Gaudium et Spes*, culture can be interpreted as “everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labour, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, in order that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family⁵¹⁸.”

In terms of substance, the concept of inculturation is based on the thought expressed in the Letter to the Hebrews that God has consistently revealed himself in His creation: “At many moments in the

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Peter Hünermann, *Dogmatische Prinzipienlehre. Glaube – Überlieferung – Theologie als Sprach- und Wahrheitsgeschehen*, Münster 2003, 232.

⁵¹⁶ Melchior Cano identified Holy Scripture, the oral tradition of Christ and the Apostles, the Catholic Church, the Councils, the Roman Church, the Church Fathers and theologians as *loci theologici proprii*. He extended these *loci theologici proprii* to include human reason, the philosophers and history as *loci theologici alieni*. Cf. Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Interkulturalität als locus theologicus. Zum Profil des Forschungsprogramms ‘Theologie Interkulturell’”, in: *Verbum SVD* 58 (2017) 1, 31–47, here: 36; Hermann Josef Pöttmeyer, “Normen, Kriterien und Strukturen der Überlieferung”, in: Walter Kern/Hermann Josef Pöttmeyer/Max Seckler (Eds.), *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* vol. 4: *Traktat Theologische Erkenntnislehre mit Schlussteil Reflexion auf Fundamentaltheologie*, Tübingen/Basel 2000, 85–108.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. Hans Waldenfels, Stichwort “Inkulturation”, in: Ulrich Ruh/David Seeber/Rudolf Walter, *Handwörterbuch religiöser Gegenwartsfragen*, Freiburg/Basel/Vienna 1986, 169–173, here: 171.

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past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets.” (Hebrews 1:1) Accordingly, the event of revelation extends far beyond the Church, the Christian faith and Christian culture(s). Giancarlo Collet defines the concept of inculturation in the “Theology and Church Lexicon” as follows:

Inculturation describes the reciprocal relationship between the Christian message or the Gospel and the multitude of cultures. As a mission theology ‘objective’, inculturation describes the continuous process in which the Gospel is discussed in a certain socio-political and religious-cultural situation and not only expresses itself using elements of this situation, but also becomes its inspirational, determining and transforming force and thus a parallel source of enrichment for the universal Church.⁵¹⁹

This definition brings out the twofold dynamism involved in (a) inculturating the Gospel into a specific social situation, which requires a certain adaptability on the part of the Gospel, and (b) in transforming society via the prophetic force of the Gospel. Not only does this pose a hermeneutic challenge, it also ultimately implies the acceptance of a paradox that regularly occurs when theological reflection does not revolve in concentric circles around a single focal point but is arranged elliptically around two focal points which are not identical but are absolutely vital for the shape of an ellipse.

Hellenisation as a process of inculturation

One of the earliest forms of inculturation took place when the Christian message came face to face with the Hellenistic world. Franz Gmainer-Pranzl rightly points out that “from earliest times Christianity harboured an intercultural potential that was of relevance for systematic theology”⁵²⁰. This meeting between Christianity and Hellenistic culture has remained a perpetual source of interest for theologians. Tertullian asked the (rhetorical) question “What have Athens and Jerusalem

⁵¹⁹ Giancarlo Collet, headword “Inkulturation”, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* vol. 5, Freiburg 1996, 504–505, here: 504. Cf. Hans Waldenfels, headword “Inkulturation”, *op. cit.*, 169.

⁵²⁰ Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Interkulturalität als locus theologicus. Zum Profil des Forschungsprogramms ‘Theologie Interkulturell’”, *Verbum SVD* 58, 36.

got to do with one another?”⁵²¹, insisting that the Christian faith came “though Solomon’s archway”. Different arguments were advanced by Clemens of Alexandria (d. 215 A.D.), Origenes (d. 253/254) and Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), who emphasised the propaedeutic value of Greek philosophy for Christianity.⁵²²

Friedrich Nietzsche coined the catchphrase “Christianity is Platonism for ‘the people’”⁵²³. In the 1990s the Hellenisation thesis was the subject of a dispute between Jürgen Habermas and Johann Baptist Metz.⁵²⁴ Joseph Ratzinger also turned his attention to the issue in the last decade of the 20th century. He examined the relationship between faith, religion and culture during the Salzburg University Weeks in 1992 and again a year later in a slightly modified form at a meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the Faith Commissions of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences in Hong Kong (as well as in a lecture he gave in Sassari).⁵²⁵ Of particular significance, however, was the Regensburg speech Benedict XVI gave a decade later on “Faith and Reason”, which also dealt with the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity.

The idea that Christianity underwent a process of Hellenisation is, in the first instance, a statement of fact that, in late antiquity, Christianity was greatly influenced by Hellenistic culture after Christianity had expanded into this cultural space. In historiographical terms this description is astonishing at first sight, given that Christianity spread in the late Roman Empire, which suggests that “Romanisation” might be a more fitting term than “Hellenisation”. However, Hellenisation is a concept inspired by the designation of the era as “Hellenism”. Coined by Johann Gustav Droysen, it referred to the politically, socially, culturally and religiously influenced cultural area which, in the wake of

⁵²¹ Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 7, 95.

⁵²² Cf. Robert M. Grant, “Civilization as a Preparation for Christianity in the thought of Eusebius”, in: Forrester Church/Timothy George (Eds.), *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History* (FS George Huntston Williams), Leiden 1979, 62–70.

⁵²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Jenseits von Gut und Böse”, in: idem, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Munich inter alia. 2¹⁹⁸⁸, 9–242, here: 12.

⁵²⁴ Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, “Athen versus Jerusalem? Über die Verbergung der anamnetischen Grundverfassung des europäischen Geistes”, in: Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, Freiburg i. Br. 2006, 236–244. idem, *Diagnosen zur Zeit*, Düsseldorf 1994.

⁵²⁵ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2003, 46.

Alexander's campaigns, stretched from southern Italy via Greece to India and from Egypt to the Black Sea.⁵²⁶

Hence, the concept of Hellenisation cannot be understood primarily in historiographical terms but, above all, in relation to the history of ideas in the form of the social, cultural, literary and theological influence exerted on Christianity by the Hellenistic cultural area, since its use "obviously related to the question in systematic theology and philosophy of the relationship between Christianity and culture in general and the relationship between Christian theology and philosophy in particular"⁵²⁷. Ultimately the term has to do with the processes of assimilation, adaptation, transfer and appropriation as well as inculturation in the different walks of life to which Christianity was exposed from the very beginning. In addition to this descriptive exploration of Hellenisation the term is understood in doctrinal history as the reception in Christianity of Hellenistic philosophy, above all in the development of its theological reflections and its incorporation in the teachings of the Church.

The traditional interpretation of the Hellenisation of Christianity – one which is based on the theory of decline (advocated among others by Adolf von Harnack⁵²⁸) – is that this process constituted an apostasy from original, biblical Christianity. Johann Baptist Metz takes up this interpretation, although he sees the main breach as being between the relatively brief period of "Jewish Christianity" and that of "pagan Christianity", as a consequence of which Christianity became estranged from its Jewish roots and the intellectual heritage of Israel.⁵²⁹ Metz talks in this context of "the Word of God being exiled in Greece"⁵³⁰. This idea has been called into question by recent theological research, however, according to which the Jesuanic

⁵²⁶ Cf. Georg Evers, "Hellenisierung des Christentums? Zur Problematik und Überwindung einer polarisierenden Deutungsfigur", in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 87 (2012) 1, 1–17, here: 4.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵²⁸ Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte 1: Die Entstehung des kirchlichen Dogmas*, Darmstadt 41990.

⁵²⁹ Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, "Im Aufbruch zu einer kulturell polyzentrischen Weltkirche", in: Franz-Xaver Kaufmann/Johann Baptist Metz, *Zukunftsfähigkeit. Suchbewegungen im Christentum*, Freiburg i. Br. u. a. 1987, 93–113.

⁵³⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, *Christliche Anthropozentrik. Über die Denkform des Thomas von Aquin*, Munich 1992, 105.

movement should be integrated into a long chain of inner-Jewish revival movements which aimed “to preserve or redefine Jewish identity in view of the immense pressure for change exerted by the all-powerful Hellenistic culture”⁵³¹.

In his Regensburg speech Benedict XVI looked at the Hellenisation of Christianity from a different perspective, arguing (on the basis of earlier statements in which he had described the Hellenisation of Christianity as the “finger of Providence”⁵³² and as “belonging to the essence of Christianity”⁵³³) that the “encounter between the biblical message and Greek thought”⁵³⁴ was not an accident and that the critically purified Greek heritage formed as essential part of the Christian faith.

From inculturation to interculturality

Exploring this line of argument, theologians from the southern hemisphere are not alone in asking whether the faith can be identified in this Hellenistic guise as the real Christianity or whether contingency is not confused with Providence, “if we drape the cloak of providential normativity around the original Hellenistic culture, which served as the model for the definition of the Church’s first dogmas”⁵³⁵. In doing so they emphasise that people only absorb the Christian faith in a culturally mediated form during the process of inculturation and that the cultural context Christians encounter, which has its own traditions and social processes, must be made the reference and starting point for theological reflection. The practical challenge consists, for example, in proclaiming Christianity in Arab or African countries with an expansionist Islamic religion, in evangelising in India with its Hindu influence in such a way that the Christian message can be readily understood, in passing on the faith in fidelity to the Gospel in the Arab world, where

⁵³¹ Gerd Theißen/Annette Merz, *Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch*. Göttingen 32001, 143.

⁵³² Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg i. Br. 42005, 78.

⁵³³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte*, Leutesdorf 2004, 8 (new edition of: Joseph Ratzinger, *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte*, Freiburg 1997).

⁵³⁴ Benedict XVI, *Glaube und Vernunft. Die Regensburger Vorlesung. Vollständige Ausgabe. Kommentiert von Gesine Schwan/Adel Theodor Khoury/Karl Lehmann*, Freiburg i. Br. u. a. 2006, 18.

⁵³⁵ Paulo Suess, “Zum Transfer des Evangeliums in andere Sprachen, Sprechweisen und Lebenswelten”, in: Mariano Delgado/Hans Waldenfels, *Evangelium und Kultur. Festschrift für Michael Sievernich SJ*, Fribourg 2010, 271–287, here: 274.

terms such as “Zion” and “Israel” trigger specific associations, and in living the faith in the slums of São Paulo in such a way that Christology is stripped of its aspiration to dominion and is convincingly preached with a kenotic accent.⁵³⁶ Thus the concept of inculturation, in which the focus was initially on the encounter between (European) Christianity and agrarian, non-European cultures, has been extended to include global contexts of migration, ethnic identity, forms of family life, youth cultures, globalisation, urbanisation and post-colonialism.⁵³⁷

Moving beyond this practical theological perspective, the issue is to take the Christian faith and academic theology forward in a manner appropriate to the beginning of the third millennium and to “move with the times”. Judith Gruber rightly warns that a theology “which seeks to conceive the universal claim of the Christian message in an abstract manner and in isolation from its cultural contexts and which makes use of essentialist categories in its quest for the core of Christianity [...] appears suspicious in the post-modernist paradigm”⁵³⁸. Of interest here is not just her justification based on epistemology⁵³⁹ or cultural sciences, but also her theological explanation. Gruber points to the conceptual proximity between an essentialist understanding of Christian identity and the ideas enshrined in docetism, which was dismissed early on by the Church because it assumed that Jesus always remained God and that his physical existence had nothing to do with his being. The Church countered this docetistic dualism, which distinguishes between matter and being, by asserting its belief in “without separation” and “without confusion”. The conclusion Gruber draws from this is that “by analogy with Christology we must begin to conceive of the Gospel and culture as being “without confusion” and “without separation” – we must search for the *logos*, the Word of God,

⁵³⁶ Cf. Frederic Ntedika Mvumbi, “In Search of a Common Ground for a Fruitful Inter-religious Dialogue in Sub-Saharan Africa”, in: Klaus Krämer/Klaus Vellguth (Eds.), *Mission and Dialogue. Approaches to a Communicative Understanding of Mission (One World Theology 1)*, Freiburg 2012, 122–141; Sylvia Schroer, “Die Bibel in der neuen Evangelisation”, in: *Orientierung* 54 (1990) 15/16, 175–177, here: 176.

⁵³⁷ Cf. Roger Schroeder, “Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue”, in: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2013) 1, 8–21, here: 19.

⁵³⁸ Judith Gruber, “Auf der Suche nach dem Göttlichen Wort in der Begegnung der Kulturen. Theologische Überlegungen aus dem Süden der USA”, *Verbum SVD* 58, 21.

⁵³⁹ Cf. Judith Gruber’s remark on interculturality as a resource in epistemological theology in: Judith Gruber, *Theologie nach dem Cultural Turn. Interkulturalität als theologische Ressource*, Stuttgart 2013, 206.

in cultural encounters without lapsing into metaphysical 'two-storey thinking'.⁵⁴⁰

While the concept of inculturation has developed into a missiological paradigm and is highly plausible (in *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis also points to its relevance with respect to the missionary activities of the Church⁵⁴¹), Joseph Ratzinger advocates moving the concept of inculturation in the direction of the term interculturality.⁵⁴² He strikes a critical note in saying: "Inculturation presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture whereby two subjects, formally unknown to each other, meet and fuse. But such a notion is first of all artificial and unrealistic, for with the exception of modern technological civilization, there is no such thing as faith devoid of culture or culture devoid of faith. It is above all difficult to envision how two organisms, foreign to each other, should all of a sudden become a viable whole in a transplantation which stunts both of them."⁵⁴³ Ratzinger holds that interculturality can only prove fruitful if it can be assumed that there is a potential universality of all cultures and an inner openness in relations between them. As regards the distinction between religion and culture he says: "If you remove from a culture its own religion which begets it, then you rob it of its heart. Should you implant in it a new heart, the Christian heart, it seems inescapable that the organism which is not ordered to it will reject the foreign body. A positive outcome of the operation is hard to envision. The operation can only have sense if Christian faith and the other religion, together with the culture which lives from it, do not stand in utter difference to each other. It only makes sense if they are interiorly open to one another, or to put it differently, if they naturally tend to draw near and unite. Inculturation therefore

⁵⁴⁰ Judith Gruber, "Auf der Suche nach dem Göttlichen Wort in der Begegnung der Kulturen. Theologische Überlegungen aus dem Süden der USA", op. cit., 22.

⁵⁴¹ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, nos. 68, 69, 122, 129, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (07.05.2017).

⁵⁴² Cf. Hans Waldenfels, "Fünfzig Jahre später", in: Mariano Delgado/Hans Waldenfels, *Evangelium und Kultur. Festschrift für Michael Sievernich SJ*, Fribourg 2010, 256–270, here: 266f. Cf. Hans Waldenfels, headword "Inkulturation".

⁵⁴³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2003, 53.

presupposes the potential universality of each culture.⁵⁴⁴ Ratzinger defines culture as the historically evolved communal expression of insights and values, in which “the question of divinity is included as the preceding and fundamental issue”⁵⁴⁵. He regards transcending the visible world and opening up to the divine as an essential characteristic of culture, which can never exist in an areligious form⁵⁴⁶ and which he describes as a phenomenon related to community and history.

Inculturation and pre-culturality

In examining Adolf von Harnack’s Hellenisation theory Joseph Ratzinger argues that, when it comes to inculturation processes, there is no point in assuming there is a pre-cultural Gospel or in attempting to identify one. “Inculturation presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture”⁵⁴⁷, which leads to a meeting and fusion of both cultures. The notion of a culture-free, pre-cultural or de-culturated faith or Christianity is at best a cognitive construct devoid of any real existence. Christianity, in particular, is based on the fact that God was incarnated into a certain culture and “that, in the New Testament, Christianity already bears within it the fruit of an entire cultural history, a history of acceptance and rejection, of encounter and change”⁵⁴⁸. Ratzinger, therefore, proposes renouncing the term inculturation and talking instead of a meeting between cultures or of interculturality.⁵⁴⁹ The term interculturality describes “the entire complex of communication and interaction between different cultures, whereby culture should be understood broadly as the life form of a large community founded on a common tradition”⁵⁵⁰. However, Joseph Ratzinger combines his understanding of interculturality with

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 49f.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. also Donath Hercsik, “Glaube und Kultur. Der Beitrag Johannes Pauls II. zu einem aktuellen Thema”, in: Mariano Delgado/Hans Waldenfels, *Evangelium und Kultur. Festschrift für Michael Sievernich SJ*, Fribourg 2010, 288–298, here: 290.

⁵⁴⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, op. cit., 53.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁵⁰ Giancarlo Collet, “Akkulturation – Inkulturation – Interkulturalität. Neue Fragen für ein altes Problem oder alte Fragen für ein neues Problem”, in: *Theologie der Gegenwart* 58 (2015) 2, 131–143, 139.

an understanding of incarnation which is seen to be closely tied to Hellenistic culture. Hence, he adopts a contrary position to the atopia formulated by intercultural theologians (in reference to *Ad Gentes* 21) as the sign of an intercultural understanding of mission.

Interculturality in the Bible

Interculturality in the sense of an acknowledgement of otherness in different cultures, of respect for cultural differences and of beneficial interaction between cultures, which is experienced as mutual exchange and enrichment, is a fundamental attribute of the Judaeo-Christian tradition that can be found in biblical records.⁵⁵¹ Not only Abraham and Sarah adopt the foreign cultures they encounter in the land of Cana (this is particularly apparent in the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek, see Genesis 14:18–20); the meeting between Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:15–18) and between Elisha and the widow (2 Kings 4:1–7) as well as the conversion of Niniveh (Jonah 3:1–10) can also be interpreted as examples of intercultural experiences in the Old Testament. In the New Testament there are traces of intercultural openness in the behaviour of Jesus who, although he knows he has been sent primarily to the people of Israel (Matthew 15:24), also healed a Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24–30) and a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21–28) and talked to a Samaritan woman at the well in defiance of all conventions (John 4:4–42). Moreover, the deeds of the Apostle Paul recorded in the New Testament, especially his speech at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–34), exemplify an approach relating to the context or target group of the proclamation, the hallmarks of which are flexibility, creativity and humility.⁵⁵² Further examples of context-sensitive encounters in the New Testament are the meeting between Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–18)⁵⁵³, Peter's behaviour in Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14) and the message to the church in Ephesus recorded in the Revelation (Revelation 2:1–5).

⁵⁵¹ Cf. van Thanh Nguyen, "Biblical Foundations for Interculturality", in: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2013) 1, 35–47.

⁵⁵² Cf. Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament. Patterns for Theology and Mission*, Downers Grove 2005, 92.

⁵⁵³ Cf. Roger Schroeder, "Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue", op. cit., 20; van Thanh Nguyen, *Peter and Cornelius. A Story of Conversion and Mission*, Eugene 2012.

Interculturality as “post-colonial semantics”

Joseph Ratzinger is not the only one to question the concept of inculturation. Theologians from Africa, Asia and Latin America, in particular, point to the historical strands of its development and note that Western theology was exported to the “mission regions” at the time of colonialism, although they are at pains to make clear that this was by no means “a universal, culturally neutral, absolute theology which obscured and then universalised its cultural dependence”⁵⁵⁴.

More and more theologians from the South, therefore, distinguish between “inculturation”, on the one hand, and “intercultural encounter” or “interculturality”, on the other. They find fault with the general understanding of inculturation, i.e. that it is a term introduced by Western missionaries in the churches of the South which ultimately views the embedding of the Western-influenced religion in a specific culture from a Western-influenced vantage point.⁵⁵⁵ The Indian theologian Felix Wilfred, for example, argues that this vantage point is not “specifically Christian”, saying that it arose in the course of the inculturation of Christianity in the “Christianised” cultures (in the countries the missionaries came from) and that it assumed a different relevance in other contexts. At the same time, however, Wilfred concedes that inculturation always also implies a respectful concept of culture: “Whereas inculturation in the parts of the world with a long Christian tradition entails a dialogue with contemporary culture and an endeavour to give a meaning to the Christian faith with due account being taken of modern cultural and philosophical developments, the term means a great deal more in [...] many Third World countries. [Here] inculturation means primarily acknowledgement of cultures as something positive which must be related to the Christian faith.”⁵⁵⁶

Theologians from the South, in particular, regard the undifferentiated transfer of a form of Christianity already inculturated into a specific (“Western”) context as a process influenced by a post-colonial

⁵⁵⁴ Judith Gruber, “Auf der Suche nach dem Göttlichen Wort in der Begegnung der Kulturen. Theologische Überlegungen aus dem Süden der USA”, op. cit., 20.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Giancarlo Collet, *Akkulturation – Inkulturation – Interkulturalität. Neue Fragen für ein altes Problem oder alte Fragen für ein neues Problem*, op. cit., 139f.

⁵⁵⁶ Felix Wilfred, *An den Ufern des Ganges. Theologie im indischen Kontext*, Frankfurt am Main 2001, 46.

mode of thinking⁵⁵⁷ (which can still be encountered even today in the economic and social sphere as well as in theology and mission). The German-Brazilian theologian, Paulo Suess, for example, says the three main goals of a new understanding of inculturation are decolonisation as self-determination, multi-cultural linguistic competence, and a universal dissemination embedded in a public relevance for the poor and others. He describes this form of inculturation as a “location of the question of truth, of Pentecostal pluralism and of inter-faith and ecumenical dialogue”⁵⁵⁸.

In order to dissociate themselves semantically from post-colonial thought patterns numerous theologians from the South propose the designation “intercultural encounter” as an alternative term for the concept of inculturation.⁵⁵⁹ This would make it clear that Christianity today encounters a culture not as a “pre-cultural Gospel” or as an “unadulterated Christian message” but always as a creed that has already been absorbed by another (generally Western-influenced) culture. Only after this process of absorption (generally in a Western guise) does Christianity enter into a dialogue with another culture.⁵⁶⁰ At the same time, according to Suess, this alternative term takes account of the fact that the Gospel is not identical with a culture⁵⁶¹ and that “no culture has generally valid rights to ownership of the Gospel, but that the religious message always extends beyond all cultural boundaries”⁵⁶². Arguing along similar lines, Roger Schroeder says: “Interculturality offers a new

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Roger Schroeder, *Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue*, op. cit., 9.

⁵⁵⁸ Paulo Suess, *Zum Transfer des Evangeliums in andere Sprachen, Sprechweisen und Lebenswelten*, op. cit., 285.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. Giancarlo Collet, *Akkulturation – Inkulturation – Interkulturalität. Neue Fragen für ein altes Problem oder alte Fragen für ein neues Problem* op. cit., 140; Felix Wilfred, “Inkulturation oder interkulturelle Begegnung”, in: idem, *An den Ufern des Ganges. Theologie im indischen Kontext*, op. cit., 45–68.

⁵⁶⁰ Another argument Felix Wilfred puts forward points out “that the Gospel is more than a set of doctrines; ultimately it is a mystery”. (Felix Wilfred, *An den Ufern des Ganges. Theologie im indischen Kontext*, 117). The transition from inculturation thinking to an understanding of intercultural encounter would be an appropriate response to the challenge of “discovering [from the others] and undergoing from our own roots the Christian experience in its many dimensions and facets” (ibid., 131).

⁵⁶¹ Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi, Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Paul VI on Evangelisation in the Modern World*, no. 20, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html

⁵⁶² Paulo Suess, *Zum Transfer des Evangeliums in andere Sprachen, Sprechweisen und Lebenswelten*, op. cit., 275.

counter-colonial framework, which substitutes attitudes and actions of superiority and paternalism with those of self-determination and mutual interdependence.”⁵⁶³

Interculturality as a basic theological principle

Interculturality is not a specialist field of theology and certainly not an intercultural strategy for religious education or for missionary work. On the contrary, it considers itself to be “a basic principle of Christian theology”⁵⁶⁴. An intercultural theology providing scope for intercultural encounters should not simply pursue the objective of conveying what it has to say to others in foreign contexts. Rather, it is distinguished by an openness in integrating religious elements and insights from other religions, reflecting on them within the context of the Gospel and adopting them where appropriate. Interculturality takes as its starting point the multicultural reality of the age of globalisation, the hallmarks of which are global urbanisation, global communication (technologies) and global migratory movements. It is distinguished by the fact that it is multicultural or intercultural, that it is reciprocal in character and fosters reciprocal relations and that it facilitates dialogue.⁵⁶⁵ There are mutual, reciprocal relations between the various cultural areas which engage with each other in such a lively open dialogue that the cultural areas reinforce, enrich and transform each other.⁵⁶⁶ However, the cultural areas of the South must not be reduced to traditional cultures which are more in keeping with the cultural romanticism of the observers from the North than with the real living conditions of people in contexts that are changing (and often in the throes of urbanisation).

Intercultural theology of this kind presumes an openness towards others and to otherness as well as the ability to meet others without anxiety but with a strong sense of trust that the one God can be dis-

⁵⁶³ Roger Schroeder, *Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue*, op. cit., 9.

⁵⁶⁴ Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Interkulturalität als locus theologicus. Zum Profil des Forschungsprogramms ‘Theologie Interkulturell’”, op. cit., 43.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Phil Gibbs, “Interculturality and Contextual Theology”, in: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2013) 1, 75–89, here: 82.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Franz Xaver Scheuren, *Interculturality. A Challenge for the Mission of the Church*, Bangalore 2001, 232.

covered in other contexts, cultures and religions.⁵⁶⁷ A characteristic feature of such an intercultural theology, which can be understood to mean “inculturation in actu”, is the interpretation of history as the working out of God’s salvation, whereby the saving function of the Christian churches must be geared initially to the paradigm of the universal redemptive power of Christ. Moreover, against the backdrop of the “cultural turn” it develops a new understanding of the dependency on time and culture in Western Christian tradition and thus overcomes the essentialist worldview which continues to leave its stamp on Western theology, influenced as it is by Greek philosophy, right up to the present day. Finally, intercultural theology addresses pluralism in the theology of religions which, in contrast to exclusivism or inclusivism, reduces the person of Christ to a historical prophecy, and opens up to “macro-ecumenism” as an ecumenism of the world religions.⁵⁶⁸ One of the hallmarks of intercultural theology is an awareness that intercultural communication is an analogous (and not a univocal) way of speaking which has its origins not in concepts but in experience. It does not describe unambiguous facts in the realm of culture denotatively but points connotatively to the spiritual level of reality. Franz Gmainer-Pranzl sums up his understanding of an intercultural “global theology” of this kind as follows: “So what does engaging in theology under ‘global’ conditions really mean? It means acknowledging this world as a place where God is at work and as a place of human faith; it means loving people and facing up to the ‘signs of the times’ – vigilantly and critically, openly and in fellowship, boldly and discursively. In this sense intercultural theology can be the pacemaker for a form of religious responsibility which regards itself as ‘global theology’: as intellectual accountability for a hope which genuinely extends to all human beings.”⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. Joachim G. Piepke, “Theologie und Interkulturalität”, in: *Jahrbuch der Philosophisch-Theologischen Hochschule SVD St. Augustin/Theologie im Dialog mit der Welt*, Sankt Augustin 2013, 9–22, 20.

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. Thomas Fornet-Ponse, “Komparative Theologie und/oder interkulturelle Theologie? Versuch einer Verortung”, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 96 (2012) 3–4, 226–240.

⁵⁶⁹ Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Welt-Theologie. Verantwortung des christlichen Glaubens in globaler Perspektive”, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 38 (2012) 4, 408–433, here: 432.