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and becoming, knowledge and the object of knowledge, ceases to exist. Being in this p. 49 kind of samadhi, consciousness has the revelation of the self (*purusa*), and thereby the mode of matter (*prakriti*) is transcended. In the transcendence of matter lies liberation—and to realize this transcendence in one's lifetime is the aim of yoga.

By now we have covered a tortuous road. The aim of yoga should be clear by now: it is to realize liberation from the human condition. To achieve this liberation, various methods have been devised: psychological, physical, mental, mystical, etc. All these methods are antisocial, and sometimes even anti-human, in that yoga prescribes a way of life which says: this life of ours is not worth living. Yoga refuses to live a natural life, and thereby aspires for a kind of life which is non-natural. In other words, yoga conceives the natural form of life as unfreedom precisely because it is characterized by a continuous flux of subconscious forces. On the other hand, a life which is beyond nature is free from the influences of the subconscious, and therefore is spoken of as freedom. This freedom is liberation, and in it lies the culmination of yogic techniques, ideology and methodology.

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Second Thoughts on Contextualization

Simon Chan

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This article explains why the author does not share his Third World colleagues' enthusiasm about contextualization. As a catalyst, he seeks to stimulate discussion on the issue which points to new areas of study and reflection that are important for pursuing our theological task.

(Editor)

It has become quite popular nowadays, particularly in the Third World, to begin the discussion on contextualization by accentuating the differences between East and West. Recent articles in the *Evangelical Review* bear ample testimony to this. The differences usually centre on two issues: the epistemological (the 'Hebrew' versus the 'Greek' way of thinking) and the cultural. The Western way of thinking, we are told, is abstract and rationalistic; it relies heavily on Aristotelian logic (the law of the excluded middle: the 'either-or'), and consequently, it is reductionistic. The Eastern way, on the other hand, is concrete and holistic; it employs the category of the 'both-and' and allows for paradoxes and mysteries.¹ A major task of contextualization is to extricate the biblical message from its 'Greek' trappings. After all, we are further told, the Hebrew mind-set has closer affinities with the Eastern way of thinking.

¹ J. Y. Lee, 'The Yin-Yang Way of Thinking', *What Asian Christians Are Thinking* (Quezon City, Phil., 1976).

There is no doubt that the goal of contextualization is entirely worthy, if not noble. It seeks for no less than the recovery and effective communication of the biblical message within a specific cultural context: in short, a coherent hermeneutics. The programme, if successful, would certainly enrich the Church in whichever part of the world it is intended to be for. Yet, it seems to me that the programme as a whole may be quite mistaken in some of its fundamental assumptions and tendencies. As a result it may actually be endangering its avowed aims. In this short essay, I would like very briefly to highlight a few points of observation. My own limitations would necessarily confine these observations to the context in which 'we live and move and have our being', namely, the Asian context. [p. 51](#)

SOCIOLOGICAL OR BIOLOGICAL

First, much of the attempt at contextualization which presupposes the problems attendant on cultural and epistemological incompatibilities may be questioned from its uncriticized reliance on the sociological paradigm for understanding the human phenomenon.² This has resulted in a view where cultural peculiarities and barriers (some even speak of 'cultural totalities')³ become greatly exaggerated. Yet there is reason to believe that the sociological model may not be the only model for understanding human nature, nor is it even the most determinative. For from the monumental vision of Teilhard de Chardin⁴ to the structuralism of Levy-Strauss⁵ and the linguistic theories of Noam Chomsky⁶ we are singularly impressed with the more basic fact of mankind's unity. And surely such a fact (which could no longer be considered to be merely a construct of theological anthropology) must have more than a perfunctory influence on our hermeneutical task? Teilhard, for instance, schematizes his concepts around his theory of 'convergence', the significance of which may be noted in his own words:

Anthropologically, ethically, socially, morally, we understand nothing about man and can make no valid forecasts of his future, so long as we fail to see that, in his case, 'ramification' (in so far as it still persists) works only with the aim—and under higher forms—of agglomeration and convergence.⁷

Convergence, then, for Teilhard, is even more basic than 'ramification' or diversification—shall we say cultural diversification?

The contextualization programme, therefore, must take more serious cognizance of the *total* human phenomenon and not just focus on aspects of it. It needs to supplement its sociological paradigm with—for want of a better term—the biological paradigm. The latter may in fact be more relevant to the issue on hand since it is also concerned with the psycho-spiritual aspects of man. But contextual [p. 52](#) theology, in over-emphasizing the

² Although Peter Chang seeks to locate the different ways of thinking in the fundamental operations of the brain, the preponderance is still on cultural diversity: 'Linear thinking' is identified with 'Western thinking'. See 'Steak, Potatoes and Chopsuey: Linear and Non-Linear Thinking in Theological Education', *Evangelical Review of Theology* (Oct, 1981), pp. 279–286.

³ E.g., Denis Nineham, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible* (London, 1976).

⁴ Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York, 1959).

⁵ Claude Levy-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (New York, 1963).

⁶ Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind* (New York, 1972); *Reflection on Language* (Glasgow, 1976).

⁷ *The Phenomenon of Man*, p.243.

sociological paradigm which is more concerned with man's social environment and external relations, may have failed to appreciate the deeper levels of religious consciousness with which Christianity is ultimately concerned.

CULTURAL OR UNIVERSAL

A second point of observation has to do with the sharp distinction between the Eastern and Western ways of thinking. That there are different ways of conceptualizing is patent; what is questionable is whether these differences can be demarcated along cultural lines. A closer examination of the spiritual traditions of the East and West will reveal that the so-called Eastern thought-category is not exclusively nor even predominantly eastern, but is a universal category that belongs to the larger *human* tradition.⁸ This is what phenomenologists of religion have taught us since Rudolf Otto; and there is no lack of examples of this method of conceptualizing in all the major spiritual traditions of the West: the medieval mystics from St. Bernard and the Victorines to St. John of the Cross;⁹ the thoroughly protestant English Puritans;¹⁰ the apophatic theology of Greek orthodoxy.¹¹ (It may be observed in this connection that contextual theologians are often highly selective in their use of examples to illustrate the differences between Eastern and Western Thought.) To speak of Eastern and Western ways of thinking, therefore, is quite misleading. It would be more appropriate to distinguish between two levels of conceptualization, a relatively superficial level which employs rational categories and a deeper level which touches primarily on man's religious consciousness and which finds verbal expression in what Otto calls 'ideograms'. **P. 53**

SYNCHRONIC OR DIACHRONIC

Thirdly, contextualisation as it is currently undertaken has the tendency to accentuate the synchronic difficulty in the hermeneutical task—one often hears of the alleged irrelevance of rationalistic western theology for the East—without an equal appreciation of the diachronic difficulty—one also often hears it confidently asserted that Asians have a spontaneous appreciation of biblical thought-patterns. That may be true (perhaps in some pickwickian sense?), but the fact of the matter is that the biblical culture is still a culture separated from our own by several millennia. Here we may refer again to Dennis Nineham's controversial book *The Use and Abuse of the Bible*: If Nineham has exaggerated the diachronic problem, he has at least shown that this is a problem which cannot be so easily bypassed.

RELEVANT OR THEORETICAL

⁸ This human tradition has been schematized into three universal spiritual models in Robert Neville's *Soldier, Sage, Saint* (New York, 1978).

⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Love of God* (London, 1937); St. John of the Cross, 'The Ascent on Mt. Carmel' and 'The Dark Night', in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross* (1964). St. John and his counterpart St. Teresa represent perhaps the best of the Catholic mystical tradition.

¹⁰ Studies in puritanism are massive. But William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York, 1938) and Perry Miller, *The New England Mind* (New York, 1939) may be cited as examples of studies which highlight its spiritual dimension.

¹¹ According to Vladimir Lossky, apophatism and, hence, mystery are basic to Eastern Orthodoxy. See *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (London, 1957), pp.25–43.

Fourthly, contextual theologians have often manifested an almost neurotic concern for cultural relevance in theological endeavours. To cite a case in point, it has become commonplace for theological students in Asian seminaries to be told, almost invariably, to adopt topics of research 'relevant to our context'. But this attitude may actually have serious drawbacks. It has resulted to use another analogy from science, in a tendency to concentrate on 'applied' research and to disparage 'pure' or theoretical research in theology. One engages in theological reflection for what immediate 'cash value' it has for a particular context. To be sure, such concerns must not be neglected; yet it is in the realm of 'pure' research that new and creative possibilities are discovered. This is true of science as well as of philosophy and theology. Perhaps Whitehead's philosophy may be cited as a case in point. It is a complex system and probably the most ambitious attempt in the 20th Century at a comprehensive cosmology. But who would have imagined that a philosophy couched in highly technical terms (rationalistic?) could have useful implications for liberation theology in Latin America? Thus, the pragmatic approach to theology is bound to have severe limitations in the long run. It can only lead to theological provincialism and obscurantism!

CONCLUSIONS

The question may then be asked: of what should the theological task in the Third World consist? Basically, two things. First, our hermeneutics [P. 54](#) must be informed by a wider circle of ideas. It must embrace both levels of conceptualization as indicated above. Here it may be of interest to note that much of the theology done in the Third World has been in reaction to Western academic theology, but little, so far, has been done vis à vis the 'mystical theology' of the Eastern Church. A theology that is more comprehensive in scope would then mean that what we call an 'Asian theology' (or any other 'theologies' for that matter) must be a theology not only for Asia but also *from* Asia. It must be addressed to the Church Universal. And this brings us to the second and more practical task. Third World theologians must not shun theoretical research, however abstract and removed from their present contexts it may seem to be. Theoretical thought cannot be considered a luxury even if there are issues of more immediate concern confronting us. An openness to truth should characterize our theological attitude—even when the truth should lead us beyond the confines of our particular cultural context.

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Contextualization and Theological Education

O. Imasogie