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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The four essays presented here all deal with issues that are of special relevance to Chinese-Filipino Catholics. Under the general theme of “Challenges to Inculturation among Chinese-Filipino Catholics,” these essays explore various topics and questions that are of special interest to Chinese-Filipino Catholics; however, they are also applicable to Chinese Catholics in general.

The first essay provides a context for the other three essays by outlining the history of the Church’s relationship with the Chinese in the Philippines. It is out of this context that the subsequent study of the issues takes place. The three essays that follow treat doctrinal and pastoral issues: Christology, grace, and the communion of saints and its relation to the veneration of ancestors. A historical context is provided for each issue, showing how the issue has been experienced or understood in the past. The reflections offered in each essay end with possible directions for the future.

The topics covered in these essays belong to the broad area of local mission studies. More specifically, the essays are all contributions to the urgent task of inculturation, or the rooting of the Gospel in the culture of the Chinese, especially the Chinese Filipinos. This is an area where theological output is still very modest. As contacts have increased between Catholic Christian faith and Chinese culture, questions arise regarding the compatibility of the two. The trend has been to say that the two are in fact compatible, but there have been diverse opinions regarding the several frameworks used to show the compatibility.

As faith and culture continue to interact, greater effort is needed to work out the relationship between the two so that the integrity of the faith is not compromised, and the culture, especially in its expressions, is afforded due respect. As Pope Paul VI has said in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (4): “The whole problem of evangelization depends on our fidelity to the message of which we are servants, and to mankind to whom it is our duty to transmit that vital, universal message.” Exploring this “double fidelity”—to the Christian faith and to humankind—is the approach taken in the four essays.

The importance of integrating faith and culture may seem obvious today, but the four essays show that historically, such integration often did not take place. After the early Church adapted Christianity to Greco-Roman culture, standardization of liturgy and Church life gradually developed such that the missionary approach came to be characterized as “transplanting the Church.” Latin became the language of liturgy and Church government. Prior to Vatican II, one could attend Mass anywhere in the world and expect to hear the same words and see the same symbols. Some of these symbols, like the priestly vestments, originated in the fourth century and became the standard throughout the Church. Down through the centuries, missionaries converted the “pagans” in non-Christian lands and introduced them to the Christian way of life. These conversions most often entailed a turning away from the converts’ indigenous cultures. There were also non-Christians who refused to convert because the Christian faith contradicted their own culture.

In the first essay on history, for example, the author shows that the incompatibility of certain elements of Chinese culture like the veneration of ancestors

with the practice of Christianity at that time proved to be an obstacle for Chinese acceptance of the Christian faith. The second essay on developing a Chinese Christology also demonstrates how the incarnation and the Paschal mystery were realities that the Chinese found difficult if not impossible to accept.

In these examples it is apparent that while there was fidelity to the Christian message, fidelity to the complexity of humankind was lacking. Non-Christian cultures were deemed inferior and converts were asked to make the “better” choice of becoming Christians. Except for a few isolated examples, such as the missionary approaches in India and China (partly treated in the fourth essay), indigenous cultures were not given much importance.

Vatican II has reversed the trend and the Church now assigns much more value to indigenous cultures. Inculturation as an integral part of evangelization is now taken for granted. The four essays contribute to the task of inculturation by studying past approaches, examining present realities, and suggesting directions for the future. Each essay strives to maintain the “double fidelity” spoken of by Pope Paul VI, a fidelity to both the Gospel message and to the people to whom the message is addressed.

As an overview, the author will present each essay’s “Statement of the Problem,” “Scope and Limitations,” and “Significance of the Study.” The general introduction ends with pertinent information on the thesis’ “Methodology,” “Definition of Terms,” and “Related Literature,” and a brief summary of the introduction.

## **Building a Bridge: History of the Catholic Christian Apostolate with the Chinese in the Philippines**

### **Statement of the Problem**

The essay outlines the history of the Catholic apostolate to the Chinese in the Philippines and analyzes the cultural elements that became obstacles to their inclusion in the Catholic faith community. The historical survey shows that while cultural obstacles to evangelization were present from the beginning of the apostolate, it was only in the latter part of the twentieth century that these began to be addressed.

### **Scope and Limitations**

The scope of the essay is in the area of historical study on the Catholic apostolate with the Chinese in the Philippines from the sixteenth century to the present. The paper limits itself to a modest evaluation of official Church efforts to evangelize the Chinese. After surveying the history of these efforts, the paper presents some fruits of the apostolate and the obstacles encountered by the Church in evangelizing the Chinese. The paper historically shows how commitment to this apostolate has led to the majority of the Chinese in the Philippines today to profess membership in the Christian faith.

### **Significance of the Study**

Drawing upon an examination of the history of the Catholic apostolate with the Chinese in the Philippines, this paper proposes a future direction for the apostolate. The essay affirms the many accomplishments of the apostolate, both in material and human terms, throughout four centuries of the Church's missionary work. The essay examines

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the present state of the apostolate as well as the social and religious profile of the Chinese-Filipino Catholic community today. The essay proposes the task of inculturation as urgently needed in the community for purposes of both cultural preservation and renewed evangelization.

### **Developing a Chinese Christology: Inculturation and Christology in the Chinese Context**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

The essay deals with Chinese attitudes towards Jesus Christ, and is concerned with how Jesus Christ can be intelligible to the Chinese, who belong to a civilization that is older than Christianity. The incarnation, and Jesus' passion and death, prove to be the most difficult aspects of Catholic Christian faith for the Chinese to accept.

#### **Scope and Limitations**

The scope of this essay is the area of Christology as it has been presented to Asians in general and to the Chinese in particular. The essay begins with a presentation of the concept of inculturation, and then, using the method of Filipino theologian José de Mesa, it examines native Christologies that have emerged in Asia, giving particular attention to Korean, Hindu, and Chinese contexts. Emphasizing the necessary dialogue between faith and culture, the author focuses on specific elements of Chinese culture as these relate to the Gospel message and the person of Jesus Christ. The author concludes by proposing a direction for the project of a Chinese Christology.



### **Significance of the Study**

Based on the foregoing material, this essay deals with the way Christology has been done in the Asian context. Affirming that a Western Christology has been transplanted in Asia, the essay begins the process of inculturation proposed in the first essay by presenting the necessary elements in the development of a Chinese Christology. In the methodology of José de Mesa, this process involves deciphering the culture's ideas of soteriology, engaging these ideas with Christian faith in Jesus Christ, and then regauging the results in the light of the Gospel. The essay shows that Christology must be developed from within a culture, and that in the Chinese context, distinct Christologies are needed to serve Chinese communities that have become geographically and culturally diverse.

### **Exploring *Omitofo*: Grace in Pure Land Buddhism**

#### **Statement of the Problem**

This essay deals with the "Christian" elements in the dominant form of Chinese Buddhism, and what this fact can mean in the dialogue between Christianity and Chinese Buddhism. The paper explores the conclusions that can be drawn from the similarities and differences between the two traditions, especially as they relate to the faith of Chinese-Filipino Catholics.

#### **Scope and Limitations**

The scope of the essay is the area of grace as it is found in Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity. The paper limits itself to drawing out general similarities in the two

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traditions as part of interreligious dialogue. The essay provides a brief presentation of Buddhism, especially Chinese Buddhism in its dominant form of the Pure Land school; it then examines the notions of grace that are found there. These Buddhist notions are compared with the Christian understanding of grace. Pastoral implications are then proposed as signposts that must guide the future of dialogue. Values that are held in common in the two traditions are also outlined.

### **Significance of the Study**

This essay deals with the striking similarities in the notion of grace that can be found in Pure Land Buddhism and Christianity. The essay is another effort at dialogue between faith and culture, given that Pure Land Buddhism is the dominant form of Chinese Buddhism, even in the Philippines. Religious syncretism is a reality among Chinese Filipinos: this fact means that many practice elements of both Buddhism and Catholic Christianity. The absolute necessity and gratuitousness of grace, the importance of faith, and the place of merit in both traditions are focal points of the paper. The author draws out an understanding of these elements as they are practiced in each tradition and proposes that the similarities can only be understood analogically. The paper tries to show that dialogue is important for purposes of better mutual understanding and solidarity.

## **Retrieving the *Communio Sanctorum*: A Theological Basis for the Veneration of Ancestors**

### **Statement of the Problem**

The essay is an effort to assess the role of the ancestors in the communion of saints, an effort that displays profound respect for Chinese culture; at the same time this paper recovers the meaning of the doctrine for all Christians. The question of compatibility between ancestor veneration and the Catholic Christian faith is at least four centuries old, especially in the Asian context. The essay presents the communion of saints as a theological basis for ancestor veneration, thereby proposing a specific model of inculturation.

### **Scope and Limitations**

The scope of this final essay is the area of the doctrine of the communion of saints as a theological basis for the veneration of ancestors. The essay limits itself to a study of the Chinese Rites Controversy and the arguments used to evaluate the compatibility of these rites with the Catholic faith. A brief history of the controversy is presented, and the religious-civil dichotomy is negatively evaluated as a criterion for the orthodoxy of the rites. In addition, the doctrine of the communion of saints is elaborated as a more fitting theological basis for the veneration of ancestors.

### **Significance of the Study**

The fourth essay reflects on the criteria used to evaluate the veneration of ancestors practiced in several East Asian cultures. Again, this is a topic that directly relates to Chinese culture, and is a special challenge in the task of inculturation. In the

debate that took more than three centuries to resolve, the chief consideration was whether or not ancestor veneration was a religious act. The missionaries who accommodated the practice justified it by presenting it only as a civil act, free of any religious significance. The paper presents the views of contemporary theologians who consider the religious-civil dichotomy to be a Western creation. The religious nature of ancestor veneration is recovered, and the doctrine of the communion of saints is expanded to include the ancestors in the "saints." The essay proposes the liberation of the communion of saints from the patronage model that has encumbered it for many centuries.

### **General Information**

#### **Methodology**

Each of the four essays begins with an introduction that presents the topic or issue to be addressed, including the significance of the study for Chinese Catholics and the basic outline of each essay. In addition, each paper devotes a significant portion to the history of the topic being treated, indicating what has and has not been done. The author next presents his reflection and analysis/evaluation of the specific topic presented; he then suggests directions for future research and theological reflection. Each essay concludes by recapping the main points discussed within the presentation.

#### **Definition of Terms**

Terms are defined and qualified within each essay.

## Related Literature

Related literature can be found in the footnotes and bibliographies of each essay.

## Summary

As dialogue between faith and culture moves beyond external and often token expressions, especially in the liturgy, more concentrated work is needed to articulate the relationship between cultural elements and the body of Catholic belief and practice. The four essays in this thesis contribute to the deepening of that relationship by outlining the history of evangelization among the Chinese in the Philippines and examining doctrinal and pastoral issues in Christology, grace, and the communion of saints and its relation to the veneration of ancestors.

Pope Paul VI called the split between the Gospel and culture the “tragedy of our time” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 20). The Society of Jesus, meeting as a General Congregation in 1995, issued a decree on “Our Mission and Culture.” The following excerpt from that decree summarizes the process of inculturation and its challenge for Catholic Christians in Asia:

The process of inculturating the Gospel of Jesus Christ within human culture is a form of *incarnation* of the Word of God in all the diversity of human experience, in which the Word of God comes to take up a dwelling place in the human family (Cf. Jn. 1:14). When the Word of God becomes embedded in the heart of a culture, it is like a buried seed, which draws its nourishment from the earth around it and grows to maturity. Inculturation can also be related to the *Paschal Mystery*: cultures, under the impact of the liberating power of the Gospel, rid themselves of their negative features and enter the freedom of God’s kingdom. The Gospel brings a prophetic challenge to every culture to remove all those things which inhibit the justice of the Kingdom. Inculturating the Gospel means allowing the Word of God to exercise a power within the lives of the people, without imposing, at the same

time, alien cultural factors which would make it difficult for them truly to receive that Word. . . .

This process has always been a part of the life of the Church: in the early Christian centuries the Church, while proclaiming its faith in ways that a Hellenistic culture could receive, was at the same time shaped by that culture. Insights which first originated outside the Jewish and Christian context came to find a place within the very heart of Christianity. A similar process is going on today. . . . In this way, the Church is recovering, in our times, the creativity shown in the early centuries and in the best of its evangelizing work.

Particular challenges must be faced today. . . . The great cultures of Asia, in spite of centuries of missionary activity, still do not regard Christian faith as a living presence at the heart of the Asian experience. In general, it is inseparably linked with a Western culture which they distrust. Many committed Christians in Asia feel a split between their Asian cultural experience and the still-Western character of what they experience in the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The author hopes that the four essays in this thesis contribute to making the Christian faith a “living presence in the heart of the Asian experience.” In particular, the author wishes to help narrow the gap between the Christian faith and Chinese culture.

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<sup>1</sup>Society of Jesus, *Decrees of General Congregation 34* (Rome: Curia of the Superior General, 1995), 25-26. 4.