ASIAN
HORIZONS
Vol. 5, No. 2, June 2011
Pages: 242-253

TOWARDS ASIAN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES
Reflections on *Fides et Ratio*, art. 72

Tord Fornberg♦

In his encyclical *Fides et Ratio*[1] (1998) the late Pope John Paul II has discussed the question of the relationship between faith and reason, between theology and philosophy. One of the many issues taken up in this important document is the need for the newly introduced concept of inculturation, whenever and wherever the Gospel is to be proclaimed and communities have to be formed in a land, different from the Greco-Roman world, where it first spread during the formative years of the apostolic ministry and thereafter. In article 72 of this Encyclical the Pope goes on to specify the Asian countries and, in particular, the Indian subcontinent where this inculturation should take place in a more meaningful manner, and then he urges the theologians and the philosophers of this country "to draw from [its] rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich the Christian thought." Never has any other Pope gone to the

♦**Tord Fornberg,** born in Sweden in 1943, Doctor of Theology with a thesis on 2 Peter (1977), Associate professor of New Testament Exegesis at Uppsala University, now at the Newman Institute (Uppsala). He has been guest teacher in Hong Kong, Bangalore and Jerusalem and a member of the Commission for Inter-Religious Dialogue of the Catholic Diocese of Stockholm. He is the author of *Jewish-Christian Dialogue and Biblical Exegesis* (1988), *The Problem of Christianity in Multi-Religious Societies of Today* (1995) and *The Bible in a World of Many Faiths* (2000). Email: tord.fornberg@telia.com

[1]*Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 91, 1999, 5–88 (in Latin), in *Catholic International* 9:12, 1998, 531–580 (in English). See also the web-site www.vatican.va. For a more or less complete documentation of the teaching of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, see Francesco Gioia, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue. The Official Teaching of the Catholic Church from the Second Vatican Council to John Paul II (1963–2005)*, Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2006.

extent of specifying a country and exhorting its theologians and philosophers for such a responsible task in the Church.

However, a somewhat different tone and approach to the question of theology and its inculturation was given by Pope Benedict XVI in his famous speech in the University of Regensburg in 2006,[2] when he emphasized that the Greco-Hellenistic culture was and must remain the prime vehicle for Christian theology. Christianity developed in the Mediterranean world, where that culture had reigned supreme, and with the help of Greek philosophy the Fathers of the Church intellectually penetrated the gospel.

Without going for a comparison between these two approaches, it seems that a more serious and relevant question has to be posed in our times. It is not a question of going to the past, but of confronting the present. Now that Christianity is challenged in a globalized world not only by its growing secularism and the advance of modern technology but also by great religions like Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism in a religiously pluralistic world, the question is whether it is possible in our times to use interpretative patterns and approaches other than those used by the early church during the first centuries. A quick survey of the New Testament will bring out some useful insights.

The New Testament

When we look through the various books of the New Testament, we can see that different interpretative patterns were used already by the first generation of Christians in dealing with the events and sayings related to the ministry of Jesus.

(1) The evangelists sometimes describe the same event with words taken from different cultural worlds. Thus the Roman centurion who carried out the execution of Jesus concluded his feelings and emotions saying either that Jesus was "God's Son" (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39) or that he was "innocent" (Luke 23:47).[3] Whereas two Evangelists referred to the divine sonship, the other evangelist is impressed by his innocence.

(2) The term "the Kingdom of Heaven," which is a direct translation of the Aramaic expression *malkuta dishmaya*, is used 35 times by

[2] *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 98, 2006, 728–739 (in German). See also the web-site www.vatican.va.

[3] Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, New York: Doubleday, 1994, 1160–1167 and Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, New York: Doubleday, 1985, 1520.

Matthew with his Jewish[4] background but never by Mark or Luke, these evangelists theologically being more at home in the larger Greco-Roman world. Hence they use the more generic expression "the Kingdom of God." The title "the Son of Man" (in Aramaic *bar 'änash*, Dan 7:13) is another example.[5] The evangelists used this title, time and again, as Jesus' self-designation, but it was never used by Paul, who wrote to an audience where few knew any Hebrew or Aramaic. Moreover, the deeper theological meaning of the Aramaic expression cannot be brought out in the Greek language.

(3)While the historical Jesus most often approached his own people, there are indications in the Gospels that he also reached out to the peoples all around (in Hebrew: *hag-goyim*). Often he was not properly understood.

a) After a visit to Capernaum Jesus went to "the country of the Gerasenes" (Mark 5:1–20 par.) on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. There he cured a demoniac, after which a herd of swine rushed into the lake and got drowned. Consequently, the people pleaded with Jesus to leave their region. The reason was that they did not understand the inner meaning of what had happened. Since they did not have any relevant interpretative pattern to follow, they considered the dramatic event only from an economic perspective; the swine had a considerable economic value.

b) On another occasion Jesus went to the northwest direction into Phoenicia and met with a Canaanite woman (Mark 7:24–30 par.), whose daughter he cured after a conversation. The woman had addressed Jesus as "Lord, Son of David" (*kyrie*, *hyios david*, Matt 15:22). But this was no confession of Jesus as the Jewish Messiah. She was not a Jew, but she had evidently heard about Jesus as a great miracle worker. She also may have listened to Jewish folklore according to which Solomon, David's son, had powers over all kinds of demons.[6] Thus she might have believed that Jesus could liberate her daughter from the power of demons. This interpretation, which did not come from the biblical tradition, but from local folklore, certainly was something defective from the perspective of what later on became the Church's Christology. But Jesus accepted her

---

[4] Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, 135.

[5]Joseph Fitzmyer, "The New Testament Title 'Son of Man' Philologically Considered,"in *A Wandering Aramean. Collected Aramaic Essays*, Missoula: Scholars Press 1979, 143–160.

[6]See Dennis Duling, "Solomon, Testament of," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* 6, 117–119, New York: Doubleday, 1992 and Dennis Duling, "Testament of Solomon," in James Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* 1, New York: Doubleday 1983, 935–987.

confession and did help her daughter according to her prayer; one might even say that he obeyed her and her demanding request.[7]

c) During a visit to Jerusalem Jesus went to the Pool of Beth-zatha (John 5:1–9). This was an Asclepius shrine during the 2nd century CE and probably already in Jesus' days as well.[8] There Jesus cured a man who had been sick for 38 years, a fact for which the visitors but not the god who was worshiped there gets the blame. The text does not raise a polemic in any way against Asclepius or the man who had put his trust in this god, but the silent message is that Jesus supersedes the Greco-Roman god of healings.

(4)As soon as the apostolic Church moved out from the cradle of the Jewish Synagogue, the early preachers had to express their faith with the help of Greco-Roman religious and philosophical categories rather than those which were derived from the Torah. Thus Paul's sermons to the Gentile audiences in Lystra (Acts 14:15–17) and in Athens (Acts 17:22–31) differ profoundly from his earlier sermons in various synagogues with their intermittent references to the writings of the Old Testament.[9]

A very clear example of how the early and the second century Christian authors, such as the author of 2 Peter, used an outspokenly Hellenistic vocabulary with no parallels anywhere else in the New Testament is to be found in 2 Pet 1:3–4, where God is mentioned as "divine power" (*hē theia dynamis)* and those who are saved are said to be "participants of the divine nature" (*theias koinōnoi fyseōs*). Here we have a typically philosophically formulated expression. It seems that by then there arose the need to find new ways to express the Christian message without being restricted by old wordings and phrases from the Hebrew Bible or from the emergent Pharisaic language.[10]

The East Meeting the West: the Emperor Asoka

The Mediterranean world was an international hub during the early centuries of the growth and expansion of the early church. Almost

---

[7]Joel Marcus, *Mark 1–8*, New York: Doubleday, 2000, 461–471.

[8]Antoine Duprez, *Jésus et les dieux guérisseurs. A propos de Jean, V*, Paris: Gabalda, 1970 and Max Küchler, *Jerusalem. Ein Handbuch und Studienreiseführer zur Heiligen Stadt*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2007, 313–346. See also Jerzy Klinger, "Bethesda and the Universality of the Logos," in *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 27 (1983) 169–185.

[9]E.g., Richard Pervo, *Acts*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 2009, 356–359 and 429–442.

[10]Tord Fornberg, *An Early Church in a Pluralistic Society. A Study of 2 Peter*, Lund: Gleerup, 1977 and James Starr, *Sharers in Divine Nature. 2 Peter 1:4 in Its Hellenistic Context*, Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 2000.

everything thrived under the umbrella of Hellenism. In the border regions to the East this was still more evident as could be seen in the encounter between the East and the West after the conquests of Alexander the Great in the late 4th century BCE. After some decades the empire of his successors in the region of the Indus valley had to meet with the growing Mauryan Empire. This reached its climax during the mid-3rd century BCE with the Emperor Asoka.[11] He wanted a peaceful situation at his north-western border, in what is today known as Afghanistan and Pakistan. For this purpose he made a number of inscriptions, on cliffs and on pillars, mainly in border regions, stating his peaceful ideology. Five of these texts are in Aramaic and two even in Greek, the two eastern-most Greek texts ever found.

In these texts the Indian emperor used Greek philosophical terminology to express the ideal of peace and harmony between the peoples. A few quotations will suffice to show this. The Greek version of Kandahar Bilingual Rock Inscription[12] reads "king Piodasses [Asoka] showed piety for humans" (*basileus Piodassēs eusebeian edeixen tois anthrōpois*). Where the Greek version reads *eusebeia*, the Aramaic text reads *qshyt,'* 'truth,' evidently corresponding to the central Buddhist term *dhamma*, but emptied of much of its specific Buddhist meaning. In Kandahar Greek Inscription[13] we find several Greek words that were used in Hellenistic philosophical and ethical teaching, words like *eusebeia*, *engkrateia* and *eleos*. It is clear that the Emperor wanted to express his own ethical values with the help of concepts taken over from the Western world.

Asoka saw the *dharma* with its Buddhist background as a righteous path showing the utmost respect for all living things. The *dharma* would bring harmony and unity in the form of much needed compassion. Serving as a guiding light, a voice of conscience, the *dharma* can lead one to be a respectful and highly responsible human being. Edward D'Cruz interprets the Asokan *dharma* as a "religion to be used as a symbol of a new imperial unity and a cementing force to weld the diverse and heterogeneous elements of the empire." Asoka's

---

[11]Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas*, revised edition, Delhi: Oxford University, 1997. See also, e.g., Jonathan Walters, "Asoka," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* 1, 2nded., New York: Macmillan, 2005, 553–557, and Tord Fornberg, "Religion, Politics and Milestones. Two Asokan Milestones in Afghanistan," in *Svensk Exegetisk Årsbok* 70, 2005, 63–71.

[12]Daniel Schlumberger *et al*., "Une bilingue gréco-araméenne d'Asoka," *Journal Asiatique* 246 (1958) 1–48.

[13]Émile Benveniste, "Édits d'Asoka en traduction grecque," *Journal Asiatique* 252 (1964) 137–157.

intent was to instigate "a practice of social behaviour so broad and benevolent in its scope that no person, no matter what his religion, could reasonably object to it."[14]

We may also mention the Buddha statues in the Gandhara province with their Greek characteristics.[15] At least since Roman times trade contacts existed between the Mediterranean world and India, and an author like Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata* 1.71,6) mentioned Buddha positively as an Indian philosopher: "Among the Indians are some who follow the precepts of Buddha (*Boutta*), whom for his exceptional sanctity (*semnotēs*) they have honored as a god (*theos*)."[16]

The Asian scene during the Twenty First Century

The encounter between East and West in the centuries before and after Christ proves the adaptability of philosophical and theological terminology to function outside of their original cultural context.[17] In the Asian scene of today it is urgently necessary to penetrate the possible use of non-Western categories in the service of the Church. This may make it easier for us to see to what degree we can share the faith of each other as believers in a divine reality. What follows are some examples of difficulties and possibilities that present themselves when concepts from other religions are used.

(1) It could happen that sometimes religious terminologies or liturgical objects or ceremonies function better in another cultural environment than in the one where they were originally created. But often this is not the case. Thus the Jesuit chapel in Bangkok does not have a crucifix as is normal in Roman Catholic churches but only a naked cross. The reason is that a crucifix would give a visiting Buddhist the impression that a sinful Jesus had to carry his own bad *karma*, from which he must liberate himself. A naked cross in contrast can positively be looked upon as a sign of resurrection, as it is in the Oriental Christianity, e.g. in the chapel of Dharmaram College in Bangalore.[18] Standing or hanging crucifixes came into frequent use

[14]See www.porchlight.ca in an article on Asoka.

[15]E.g., Frank Reynolds and Charles Hallisey, Buddha," in *Encyclopedia of Religion* 2, 2nd ed., New York: Macmillan, 2005, 319–332, esp. p. 326.

[16] David Scott, "Christian Responses to Buddhism in Pre-Medieval Times," *Numen* 32 (1985) 88–100.

[17]Western priests like Matteo Ricci (worked in China; died in AD 1610) and Roberto de Nobili (worked in India; died in AD 1656) attempted seriously to use Asian religious concepts to express the Gospel.

[18]Jose Nereparampil, "Artistic Symbolization in Dharmaram Chapel," *Journal of Dharma* 7 (1982) 217–231.

only during the 10th century, when Eastern and Western Christianity had already parted ways.[19]

Thus a crucifix, the presence of which is taken for granted in most Roman Catholic churches, may not be the best way to express the gospel in places where Buddhism or Hinduism is dominant. It is, however, also a matter of where to put the emphasis, on the death of Jesus or on his resurrection. It was only during the 13th century that crucifixes unequivocally emphasized Jesus' suffering on the cross. Earlier Jesus was considered as the King, being crowned on the cross. This perspective goes back all the way to the Gospel of John, where the crucifixion more or less is the first step in Jesus' ascension to heaven (John 3:13–15; 8:28; 12:32).[20]

If the emphasis is put on Jesus' suffering and death, the question must be answered why Jesus had to suffer. There are many answers, the three traditional Western answers being the classical (Irenaeus of Lyon, also the Eastern churches), the objective (Anselm of Canterbury) and the subjective (Pierre Abaelard) pattern. Regardless which answer is chosen, one of these or a more recent one, e.g. from the Jesus historians or from the liberation theologians, it must be understood together with the concept of *karma,* if it is to be useful in India. It may very well be that the background in Jewish sacrificial theology, so evident in the Pauline epistles,[21] is not relevant in a new cultural context, where it is impossible to make sense of the idea that someone suffers and dies vicariously to atone for the sins of other people. Or is the death of Jesus rather to be considered in the perspective of placating the evil spirits, as in Chinese Buddhism or Taoism, where there is hardly any concept of sin, but shame is a most important reality?

Another issue to be taken into consideration is the fact that the cross/crucifix can be looked upon as a symbol of violence and suppression. During past centuries, especially from the time of the Crusades in the late 11th century and all the way to the atrocities of the Nazis in the 20th century, Jews have been harassed and persecuted

---

[19]On crosses and crucifixes see, e.g., A. Schacher, "Crucifixion (in art)," in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 4, 1967, 486–497.

[20]Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St John* 1, New York: Herder and Herder; London: Burns & Oats, 1968, 394–397.

[21]See, e.g., James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 1998, 218–223, and Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007, 280–293.

by Christians.[22] The cross stood out as a symbol for this persecution, and when a big cross was erected and some years later a Carmelite convent was established in 1984 near the extermination camp of Auschwitz, it was met with fierce Jewish opposition: Auschwitz was their place of martyrdom, not a Christian place (even if many Christians also were among those murdered there). The same symbol may change meaning against a new cultural or religious background and even evoke contradictory reactions. Thus the frames of reference in each culture decide which symbols are possible to use and which must be dropped. Maybe the Jewish Kabbalistic concept of *tsimtsum*, 'divine contraction' is more useful. It refers to a situation of total divine absence, when God has withdrawn from the world and only darkness and evil are left:[23] Golgotha was such a place without any divine presence: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

(2) Most religions have a sacred tradition, describing how God acts in the world to save humanity from what is evil, described as death, sin, hell or something else. But the history described in these narratives differs vastly between the religions. Some narratives describe a linear history aiming at a distinct end point in time, and the divine emissary is a truly eschatological figure. And the history that leads up to this end time figure, in Christianity God incarnate, can be described as salvation history. Another possibility is a cyclical scheme, with roots all the way back to the vegetation year in Canaanite and many other religions. In mythology from the Eastern Mediterranean world this pattern has been most frequent, describing the vegetation (fertility) cycle in terms of events in the divine world, often telling about a God who cyclically dies and returns to life.[24] This scheme comes to the fore in various Indian religions, in Hinduism, to use an umbrella term coined by Western scholars. Here we do not encounter a historical once-and-for-all saviour figure scheme but a vast literature about ten mythical *avataras* of the god Vishnu, saving the world every time its future has been jeopardized.[25]

---

[22]John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University, 1983, and James Carroll, *Constantine's Sword. The Church and the Jews*, Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

[23]On the concept of *tsimtsum* in the Jewish Kabbala see, e.g., Alan Unterman, ed., *The Kabbalistic Tradition. An Anthology of Jewish Mysticism*, London: Penguin, 2008, 63–64 quoting Nachman of Breslav, *Likkutei Moharan* 1:33:2.

[24]E.g., William Dever, *Did God Have a Wife? Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel*, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2005.

[25]Tord Fornberg, "The One Incarnation of Christianity and the Many *Avataras* of Hinduism," in Augustine Thottakara, ed., *Indian Interpretation of the Bible. Festschrift in honour of Prof. Joseph Pathrapankal*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2000, 329–342.

The very concept of Incarnation, central as it is for Christianity, by definition states that God really has lived a human life in this world. At least in theory Christians must be able to say when and where the important salvation events have taken place. It is consistent that history is a basic theme in the biblical world. It is no coincidence that Roman Catholic worshipers bow, when the passage in the Nicene Creed about the Incarnation is read during the Sunday Mass. It is important to emphasize the historicity, even in a secular sense of this word, of the events in salvation history.[26] As a consequence, the Christian faith is open to criticism from secular historical scholarship in a way that many other religions, e.g., Islam and Hinduism with its vast mythology, are not.

This topic, however, has sometimes been overstated. Many biblical texts of a narrative character are not intended to be historical in the modern secular sense of that word. The use of *mythos* is more widespread in biblical texts (e.g., the narratives about the first humans in Genesis 1–11) than the contemporary biblical Fundamentalism wants it to be. In order not to create a false conflict between the Christian revelation and modern science it is necessary to distinguish between history and myth in the narrative texts in the Bible,[27] and certainly also in many traditions about saints and other great figures all through the history of the Church. But one must never disregard the fact that Christianity stands and falls with the truth that Jesus really was God incarnate, that he died on the cross and that he then conquered death through his resurrection (1 Cor 15:17–19).[28]

During recent years this emphasis on the historical character of divine revelation has been introduced where it was hardly to be found earlier. Two examples may be mentioned. Hindus of today point out the alleged birthplace of the Lord Krishna in the city of Vrindavan, south of Delhi, and also the place for his adventure with the shepherd girls. Something similar can be noted for the God Rama. Some of his adherents now state that he was born not only in the city

---

[26]Oscar Cullmann, *Salvation in History*, London: SCM 1967. See also Birger Gerhardsson, *The Reliability of the Gospel Tradition*, Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001, and Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses. The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006.

[27]Pope Pius XII emphasized the importance of taking the Biblical genres into consideration in his Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943); Latin text in *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* 35 (1943) 297–326, see also the web-site www.vatican.va. This position has been repeated in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum* and in later texts from the Pontifical Biblical Commission.

[28]Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, San Francisco: Ignatius, 1969, 230–237 and Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, New Haven and London: Yale University, 2008, 557–567.

of Ayodya but on the very spot where Muslims erected a mosque in the 17th century. In the year 1992 a Hindu mob rallied and tore down the mosque. These two examples may show the influence of Christian teaching on the exact places of religious importance in schools and churches. The claim that the Gospel is based on historical events has caused adherents of other faiths to state the same about their gods and their places of birth.

(3) In Christian theology it has always been taken for granted that the Old Testament with the history narrated therein and the revelations made through the holy persons of Israel, prepared the background for the fuller message of the gospel. It served as a *preparatio evangelica*.[29] This is hardly problematic. But here is a basic question, only seldom posed, which must be answered: Is it really credible that God did not pave the way for the Gospel also among other peoples and not only for the few and poor Israelites? Egypt and Mesopotamia nurtured a much higher culture. This question was posed already by an early Christian author like Justin the Martyr in the 2nd century. He spoke about the *logoi spermatikoi*, which God had planted everywhere in the humanity.[30]

It may very well be that Indian texts like the Vedas and the Bhagavad Gita at least sometimes can serve as possible gates to the gospel. Otherwise the conclusion lies near at hand that God's care for humanity in pre-Christian times was limited only to the Israelites. Goddesses like Tin Hau (=Mazu) or Kun Yam (with or without child), worshipped in South Chinese popular piety, may also be considered as points of departure for an understanding of the Blessed Virgin.[31] Kun Yam is the goddess of mercy, dressed in white, often carrying a child (not her own, however) in her lap. In Japan she has become the male Kannon, a bodhisattva helping humans to liberation from this world and its deficiencies, instead of saving himself. It may be possible to see this concept as pointing forward to the Christian message about Christ, and we should not dismiss him as a pagan figure, an idol or still worse, a demon.

Tin Hau, according to a legend a fisherman's daughter around the 11th century CE, is said to have shown signs of divinity very early (she never cried as a child). After her death she was seen at the tiller

[29]Thus already Eusebius of Caesarea in the early 4th century with his important work *Praeparatio evangelica*.

[30]Chrys Saldanha, *Divine Pedagogy. A Patristic View of Non-Christian Religions*, Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 1984.

[31]In the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth there is a Madonna who is strikingly similar to Tin Hau (but with a Western face and a child), donated by Chinese Catholics.

of a boat trying to save fishermen in peril. She was later even given the title Queen of Heaven, just as the Virgin Mary. Of course, they have nothing historically to do with Jesus or the Blessed Virgin. Kun Yam is hardly a historical figure, and Tin Hau lived around a millennium after Jesus, but what is told about them is not anti-Christian in any way and must not be stamped as pagan. The appearance of positive figures like these two goddesses shows that revelations of divine goodness are to be found far outside of the Jewish-Christian tradition.

Concluding Remarks

Christian theology everywhere and at all times must answer real questions, questions that are relevant and meaningful, questions that have a reference to the life and problems of people living in a particular historical, cultural and religious context, and not those that were posed by someone long ago and far away. This truth may appear to be self-evident, but history has proved that this fact has not been seriously taken into account. Often theology has answered questions that have been posed somewhere in Europe, for example, during the 16th century or later, but not those of our times and our peoples. European Christians long encountered Orthodox Christianity and Islam, hardly anything else. Today, when the Church is really global, new questions are posed from the perspectives of Hinduism and Buddhism, to limit our discussion to the South and East Asian scene. The questions posed there can only be answered properly with the help of concepts taken from these cultures and religions.

At the same time, great care is also needed. Christian theology must not use elements, such as literary, artistic, and architectural from other religions in a way which the adherents of these religions may consider blasphemous and usurping. It may also be very difficult to use certain elements from other faiths without risking misunderstanding or even a backlash. Thus an Indian *dalit* may be estranged by the use of liturgical elements taken from the traditional Brahmanism, the Brahmins being considered the upper class in the Indian society and often associated with a lack of sensibility for social justice. And Thai Buddhists have reacted negatively to the building of churches which resemble Buddhist shrines.[32] At the same time a church building must not be a copy of a 19th century church somewhere in Europe. It must be a building where the local people feel at home and which helps propagate the Christian gospel. It is

[32]Tord Fornberg, *The Problem of Christianity in Multi-Religious Societies of Today*, Lewiston: Mellen, 1995, 164–165, on churches in Bangkok and Pattaya.

evident that inculturation is necessary but also difficult; there are dangers which must be evaded, but there are also possibilities to let the Gospel shine in a new way, thanks to concepts and ideas from cultures and religions far outside the Greco-Roman world.[33]

We can sum up these observations in a few words written by Pope John Paul II in *Fides et Ratio* 72:

> In India particularly, it is the duty of Christians now to draw from this rich heritage the elements compatible with their faith, in order to enrich Christian thought. [---] [T]he Church cannot abandon what she has gained from her inculturation in the world of Greco-Latin thought. [---] and equally the legitimate defense of the uniqueness and originality of Indian thought [---]

[33]Many books may be mentioned; a few examples: Augustine Thottakara, ed., *Indian Interpretation of the Bible. Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Joseph Pathrapankal*, Bangalore: Dharmaram, 2000; Thomas Thangaraj, *The Crucified Guru. An Experiment in Cross-Cultural Christology*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1994; Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, new ed., Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 1982; H. Sharma and Shilanand Hemraj, *Karunakariyam Upadesamrtam*, Ranchi: Satya Bharati, 1987; Ignatius Viyagappa, ed., *In Spirit and in Truth. Essays Dedicated to Fr. Ignatius Hirudayam*, Madras: Aikiya Alayam, 1985; Abhishiktananda, *Hindu-Christian Meeting Point*, revised ed., Delhi: SPCK, 1976; Abhishiktananda, *The Further Shore*, revised ed., Delhi: SPCK, 1984. Important examples of Indian Biblical exegesis are to be found in Stanislas Savarimuthu *et al.*, eds., *Out of His Treasure. Festschrift in Honour of Prof. Dr. Lucien Legrand MEP*, Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation 2010. Important principal questions are discussed in Z. Alszeghy, "Cultural Adaptation as an Internal Requirement of Faith," *Gregorianum* 63 (1982) 61–85.