

INTRODUCTION: OLD POSITIONS AND NEW CONCERNS

W. S. F. PICKERING

THE five essays that constitute the core of this special issue of *JASO* are all concerned with the findings of anthropologists concerning the work of missionaries and its effects. The essays were originally given, along with a number of others, in a seminar series held at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Oxford, during Trinity Term, 1990.¹

The seminar series was the idea of R. H. Barnes and myself and came about as a result of conversations we had with a number of anthropologists who were visiting Oxford at the time. By a strange coincidence there appeared to be a common interest among them and us in the role and work of missionaries, as well as local churches, in societies in which they were doing their fieldwork. Later, other scholars and students, who were known to be concerned with the subject, were asked to contribute to the series.

During the past decade or so, the relations between anthropologists and missionaries have not been given as much scholarly attention in Britain as they

1. For various reasons, the following papers could not be included here: Stephan Dietrich, 'Mission and Religious Politics in Flores'; W. S. F. Pickering, 'Catholic and Protestant Missionary Work: Ideals and Ideal Types'; Aylward Shorter, 'Issues in Inculturation and Its Application in Africa'; and Harald Skar, 'Inculturation, Liberation and the Role of the Catholic Priest in Highland Peru'.

have in the United States.² The present upsurge of interest in the United States is in part due to the persistent and energetic activities of missionaries from that country, both Catholic and Protestant. But in the UK, where secularization has bitten more deeply into the way of life, there has been relatively less missionary activity in recent years and anthropologists have generally steered clear of analysing the work of missionaries. To become acquainted with anthropologists' attitudes to missionaries as recorded in the literature, one has to look at rather dated material, which in any case is not very substantial, and at just a few recent articles.³ These essays can in no way be said to make up the deficiency, but at least they make a contribution to a neglected area. Further, it is hoped that they will encourage others to contribute to the subject, through both general discussions and by providing case-studies.

Past Relations

It might be argued that anthropologists and missionaries have nothing or little in common, save that they work amongst foreign peoples, and that they are mostly Westerners. One group claims to study a society objectively or, some would say, scientifically; the other has the aim of changing a society, or at least a radical part

2. See Luzbetak 1983: 2. Among recent books published in the United States that have dealt exclusively with the relations between anthropologists and missionaries, and related issues, may be mentioned Whiteman (ed.) 1983 and Salamone (ed.) 1985. The meetings of the American Anthropological Association in 1977 and 1982 included discussion of missionary work. Moreover, some anthropologists have given space in standard textbooks to the work of missionaries: see Hiebert 1983; Keesing 1976: 462 ff. In addition, the anthropologist Mary Taylor Huber has published a book on contemporary developments in the Catholic Church in Indonesia (Huber 1988).

3. In an article in the *International Review of Missions* Malinowski made a plea for a greater understanding between missionaries and anthropologists (1936: 495). Around the same time, Schapera showed an interest in missionary work, both religious and educational (1934: 54-5; see also Eiselen 1934). The contribution of missionaries to social anthropology was praised by R. R. Marett (1938: ix). R. Piddington, in his introductory books, referred to the achievements of missionaries in quite positive terms (1950: 10-12; 1957: 670-80). More recently, an article by a Dutch scholar appeared in *Man* suggesting that the aims and pursuits of anthropologists and missionaries have a lot in common (Geest 1990). Earlier, in 1982, a controversy broke out in *RAIN* between some anthropologists and alleged fundamentalist missionaries (see Merryfield 1982 and correspondence in subsequent issues). It is difficult, if not impossible, to point to an article of recent times, let alone a book, written by a British anthropologist that focuses on the relations between anthropologists and missionaries. This assertion takes into account the fact that British anthropologists have often had to deal with the work of missionaries in their field studies.

of it, in a Christian direction. Nevertheless, the two have inevitably come into contact and, as a result, a sort of love-hate relationship has grown up, often more strongly felt by anthropologists. The various phases of this love-hate relationship have still to be carefully and systematically analysed (but see Arbuckle 1983: 182). Suffice it to say here that the love part of the relationship was stronger in the early days when missionaries had been in the field long before the anthropologist arrived. What missionaries had achieved was of considerable help to many anthropologists (see Rosenstiel 1959). Missionaries often knew the local people well, and often better than many European administrators did. They were pioneers in searching out hidden tribes. Their reports were used by early 'armchair' anthropologists to build up their new 'science'. They sent back to their home countries artefacts and 'peculiar objects', which later found their way into various museums. Not only did missionaries tend to have specialist knowledge of local religious practices, but they were also amongst the first to master local languages and dialects and to produce written forms of them, including grammars and dictionaries. All this was necessary for preaching and for translating the Bible, and for making converts. Moreover, some missionaries have produced excellent ethnography. Since they often remain in the field for a long time—Catholic missionaries usually more or less all their lives—they have often been in a position to become far more authoritative than the relatively short-stay anthropologist. Again, some missionaries, especially from the inter-war period, have also been academically trained anthropologists.

Once the initial help had been given, however, the anthropologist proceeded with little or no regard for the missionary. Indeed the latent 'hate' element began to appear. The common criticism was that the work of missionaries helped to break up age-long cultures. It was they, the missionaries, more than any other Western intruder, who wanted to change the ideological and 'philosophical' system at the heart of every local culture. In place of the old, bastard substitutes were created, which were half-European, half-native, and which gave rise to apathy or anomie (see Stipe 1980). The charge levelled against missionaries has been all the more strengthened in recent times by the emergence and legitimization of religious pluralism in Western society, a decline of adherence to Christianity in Europe and by the collapse of European empires—empires that propagated a sense of cultural and religious triumphalism.

More Open Churches

Especially since the end of the Second World War, the traditional Christian churches have taken on board a number of liberal and humanitarian ideals. In facing up to religious and cultural pluralism in their home countries, they have adopted a much less critical and destructive approach to the culture of missionized societies. They have become more sympathetic in their judgement of the local culture and, as a consequence, in their missionary policy. The policies of abolition

of the 'pagan' culture and the insertion of the trappings of European civilization have been replaced by policies of accommodation and acceptance of elements of the local culture. Today, missionaries sometimes go so far as to repent of the errors of their predecessors, who implanted a gospel embedded in, what are now held to be, some of the absurdities of nineteenth-century Western culture. To be sure, this more gentle, less assertive approach has been accompanied by a decline in missionary activity originating from many European countries. The decline is due to a variety of reasons, but the following may be considered the most important. First, a falling away in the numbers of individual men and women who feel themselves called to be missionaries. Secondly, the secularization of Western society. Thirdly, the new policy of many missionary societies that the best agents for evangelization are local clergy and laity, rather than expatriates: a policy determined, in part, by the fact that Christianity in many non-Western countries, especially in Africa, is growing through the work of local clergy and missionaries. This policy of restraint characterizes the traditional churches. It is not so evident in fundamentalist missionary societies, especially those based in the United States, most of which remain totally unsympathetic to local customs and traditions and continue to pursue a policy of cultural imperialism. Fourthly, some new, independent countries, such as India, formerly under colonial rule, refuse to allow Western missionaries to operate in their territory, unless they work as doctors, nurses, agriculturalists, teachers or engineers.

Anthropologists' New Attitudes

Anthropologists have also changed. A few decades ago, some began to turn their attention to groups or institutions that were not strictly parts of preliterate societies. The discovery of new tribes, relatively untouched by Western civilization, was becoming rarer and rarer, and interest switched to such previously overlooked areas as government administration, education, trade, the army, urbanization and tourism. It is hardly surprising that in the examination of the effects of colonization, the work of missionaries began to receive attention too. One approach of anthropologists interested in these matters has been to study the effects of local mission stations or churches on the local culture. In such studies, the following sorts of questions are asked. How far has the local society been Christianized? Do the local people try to combine Christianity with elements of the indigenous religion (see Schreier 1985: 145; Bastide 1959)? What are people's motives for converting to Christianity? What are the relations between the local Christian leaders and those of the native religion? Such questions have parallels with those asked by the sociologist of religion, who, amongst other things, attempts to analyse the inner structure of religion, its control over individuals, the distribution of power in religious institutions and the relation of religion to other institutions—all, of

course, within Western society. As the findings of the sociologist can be said to be of some help to church leaders, so one would imagine that the findings of anthropologists would be of importance for missionaries. Thus there is the possibility of a reversal in the roles that characterized the earlier period: the missionary can now learn from the anthropologist. This was the ideal of Pater Schmidt (see Dietrich below). But there have been other advocates, the anthropologist and missionary, Denys Shropshire (1938), for example, and the French Protestant anthropologist, Roger Bastide (1959). And in more recent times some fundamentalist groups in the United States have begun to utilize anthropology in their missionary work (see Stoll 1990: 84-90).

Culture: Meeting-Place of Anthropologists and Missionaries

Because the anthropologist attempts to be ideologically and, therefore, religiously neutral, he cannot commit himself, in his professional capacity at least, to the truth-statements of a religion. By contrast, every missionary projects an ideology that he or she wishes to propagate, expressed in such concepts as Truth, the Gospel and the Church. This ideology, or 'block of truth', is not open to radical change. It may be seen as timeless, or universal, or divine—perhaps a divine revelation—and as such is not to be tampered with.

The missionary is thus propelled by an inner conviction that he has to propagate the truth, no matter the cost, and missionary history is full of accounts of those who have been prepared to go to the extremes of suffering to proclaim their convictions. Such an attitude transcends the relativism of the anthropologist, who views all religious systems as being man-made and may hold further that particular systems are necessary or the 'best' for given societies.

To understand the work of the missionary, it is necessary to come to terms with the conviction about the truth that the missionary holds. That a missionary does or has done damage to the evangelized society has to be accepted as a consequence of the conviction. But it might also be interjected that what counts as 'damage' is open to debate and involves the application of what are very often unacknowledged criteria. Deciding what is 'good' for a society is at the very edge, if not within, the realm of the normative.

But do such contrary attitudes create an unbridgeable gulf? For some, that is precisely the position and there the matter rests. For the more liberal-minded and sensitive, however, there is the possibility of bridging the gulf: not with regard to the central issue perhaps, but through a mutual concern for the culture of the society studied by the anthropologist and in which the missionary operates. It is impossible in this short introductory essay to develop the idea, other than to say that the anthropologist and the missionary would more than likely agree that culture is man-made and is, therefore, man-altered. For example, the missionary

might be prepared to alter or utilize components of the culture if it would advance the work of evangelization or strengthen the local church. It is precisely here, however, that missionaries are divided amongst themselves: some would value the work of the anthropologist in analysing culture for this purpose, others would not.

The possibility and/or desirability of missionary-engineered change has, over time, given rise to one of three outcomes. The first is where the missionary either disregards totally the local culture or openly condemns it. Whichever, the missionary imposes his own culture on his converts. This can be called cultural colonization. The second response occurs where the missionary, sensitive to the local culture, evaluates it and decides which parts of it can be utilized by convert Christians and which parts have to be rejected. Such a policy or attitude is referred to here as cultural accommodation; another term might be missionary acculturation. The third possibility is when Christianity is absorbed into the local culture with little or no discrimination. This cultural absorption is very near to, if not identical with, syncretism and has always been feared by missionaries, since, like syncretism, it means the denial of the eternal nature of the central truths of the message. All these responses may be seen as lying along a continuum, with total cultural colonization at one extreme and total absorption at the other.

The variations in denominational policies with regard to such positions is too complex to be dealt with here. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some degree of cultural accommodation has been the policy of the Church from earliest times. It first emerged when Christians, constituting nothing more than a Jewish sect, began to proselytize around the Mediterranean and farther afield. In this process the Church had to come to terms with alien religions and diverse cultures. As a result it 'naturally' adopted cultural accommodation, often with much debate and division.

The missionary is not always aware that he or she is in fact the carrier and transmitter of three cultures. First, the missionary is a member of the general culture in which he or she is brought up—middle-class American, working-class French. Secondly, as a bearer of Christianity, the missionary proclaims a religion whose doctrines and forms of practice emerged in a particular culture or set of cultures two thousand years ago. A third cultural component is, however, also present in so far as Christianity is itself historically and culturally interpreted, giving rise, for example, to the ultramontane form of Catholicism, or to the neo-orthodox Calvinism of the mid-twentieth century. Thus, three cultures are intertwined within the individual missionary, though that does not mean they cannot be separated for analytical purposes. If the missionary or church leader can accept the man-made nature of the culture in which she or he is immersed, then the possibility arises of some kind of positive and creative relation between the missionary and the anthropologist. Such a possibility has recently been opened up further by the ecclesiastical policy of inculturation, to which attention must now be given.

Inculturation

Farther along the continuum than cultural accommodation, closer to absorption, stands the notion of inculturation, which has now become widespread as a result of Vatican II (1962-6). In the history of the Catholic Church there have been a few missionaries who have advocated cultural accommodation by being sympathetic towards and actually retaining some religious or semi-religious components of the local culture. The most famous of these pioneers in post-medieval times were de Nobili in India and Ricci in China. At Vatican II it was acknowledged that much missionary work undertaken by the Catholic Church had been accompanied by what might be called cultural colonization, or very limited cultural accommodation. In this respect, both early and later missionaries had been guilty of foisting alien cultures on to missionized people. Further, Euro-American culture, with its superior technology and science had carried with it elements that have been instrumental in producing secularization and an erosion of moral values. In trying to negate these trends, a policy of inculturation was introduced, a policy that implies that the importation of Western culture into missionized societies should be cut back to a minimum and its alleged deleterious effects on local Christianity greatly reduced. In practice this means that as much as possible of the local culture is to be incorporated into church life. This means the utilization of a culture, different from those of the missionizing church, by which it is hoped that the preaching of the Gospel or the establishing of a church will be more effective and offer a 'truer' Christianity. There is nothing new in this, of course, other than that it has become an official policy of the Catholic Church.

But the same church has also given inculturation a more metaphysical meaning. As a result of Jesuit influence at Vatican II, a significant advance was made in viewing the inculturating process in theological terms—for example, defining it as the incarnation of the Gospel in particular cultures (see Shorter 1988: 10). The use of theological language may also be seen in the way a local Catholic church sets about its task to 'purify', 'elevate' and 'perfect' the local culture. As in the case of cultural accommodation, so in inculturation, the Church makes normative judgements about cultures. It is as much concerned for the evangelization of a culture as a whole as for the conversion of individuals. Pope John Paul II (1991: 177) has declared that the process is 'not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures'. This, however, involves a selection process for determining what is authentic and what is not, what can become part of a Christian, indigenous culture and what cannot. This is no longer a utilitarian position but a socio-theological one about the nature of specific cultures. It is, of course, not free from sociological and theological challenges. (For further comments on inculturation, see Barnes below.)

Protestants, like Catholics, have always had to deal with the problem of the relation of the Gospel to local cultures, not least on account of translating the

Bible into local languages. Perhaps prompted by the Catholic policy of inculturation, some Protestants have attempted recently to look at the issue systematically, in a way they have never done before. In so doing, they have adopted the concept of contextualization. The concept is, of course, viewed differently by different groups, but generally speaking there are three schools of thought. One sees contextualization as applicable only to preaching the Gospel and advocates the use of cultural forms, symbols, language etc. as a means of communicating the missionary's message. Cultural knowledge has a simple function for the missionary; it is solely utilitarian. A second use of 'contextualization' is rather more sophisticated. Here a distinction is made between the unchanging component of the Gospel and those cultural aspects with which the Gospel may be associated. There are clear similarities in this case with cultural accommodation. The third usage of 'contextualization' implies the examination of a whole culture and the attempt to discover the 'needs' of the people. Having discovered these 'needs', action is taken according to biblical principles. The difficulty here, of course, is to interpret precisely these 'needs'. Interpretation can range from the need to translate the Bible into the local language to the need for liberation theology, or African or Black theology. Today, Protestants are agreed that the old Gospel theology was often deficient, not least in being totally unconcerned with social justice and the culture of the local society.

In using the term 'contextualization' Protestants are thus divided and lack that coherence evident in the Catholic policy of inculturation. In relating inculturation to the doctrine of incarnation, Catholics give it a firm, unified theological basis. Protestants, on the other hand, see contextualization either in relation to such utilitarian functions as preaching the Gospel, or in relation to bringing about social reform in the name of the poor. Of course, opposition to inculturation on the part of some Catholic theologians arises from the fact that it makes no judgement about social justice and in particular about the need for the Church to be biased towards the poor.

Some Protestants prefer the notion of 'indigenization' to that of contextualization. 'Indigenization' implies the creation of independent churches out of those founded by Western missionaries. Many traditional Protestant churches had this as an ideal at the turn of the century, if not before. It is, however, an impossibility for the Roman Catholic Church, since every church has to be controlled by the centralized authority, Rome. But in practice, indigenization can also mean that when Christianity is implanted in an alien society it is to some extent modified and moulded by the local culture. When the degree of indigenization becomes excessive and the Gospel radically changed (from a Western theological position), something akin to syncretism results. The result may be seen as heresy, to be avoided at all costs.

It is not the purpose of this collection of essays to deal systematically with issues relating to inculturation, especially as the movement is in its early days. It has, however, been put into practice and some of its effects have been observed first-hand by contributors to this collection (see especially Burke and Barnes). It

is hoped that readers might welcome the opportunity to reflect on some of the issues at stake in implementing this new policy. There are, doubtless, those, both inside and outside the Roman Catholic Church, who would question whether inculturation is an altogether moral procedure. Is it moral to analyse local culture for the purpose of interfering with it and as an aid in preaching the Gospel (see Barnes below)? And there are great hermeneutical problems in interpreting a particular culture, let alone upholding a particular theory of culture (see Schreiter 1985: ch. 3). Who makes the decisions about which elements of a culture are acceptable for incarnating the Gospel? Further, if the wish is to restore the 'genuine' or indigenous culture of a people who have in some way become Westernized, how can one be sure of reproducing the original culture? And should not this whole process apply with equal validity to Western society?

The Present Essays

Aware of what is happening in the churches in the areas in which they are working, some of those who contributed to the seminar series on which this collection is based were prompted to give papers concerning the socio-theological policies of inculturation or contextualization. This encouraged the organizers to include the word 'inculturation' in the title of the series. However, not all those who were asked to contribute a paper addressed themselves directly to the issue. All the contributions gathered here are, nevertheless, concerned with the relations between anthropologists and missionaries, and more specifically, with cultural accommodation.

Perhaps the first person to apply the techniques and findings of anthropology to assisting the work of missionaries was Pater Schmidt (1868-1954). In the light of the current interest in inculturation, his work needs to be widely known and carefully evaluated. He attempted to found a school of sophisticated anthropology that would offer a form of anthropological underpinning to Christianity. Inculturation, as has been noted, brings to the surface many issues, some of which are as theologically problematic as those raised by Schmidt's theories and assumptions. Stephan Dietrich's essay deals with such problems in detail.

A case-study that directly contrasts Catholic and Protestant approaches to mission work is presented by James Howe. The San Blas Kuna of Panama were missionized by a Catholic priest from 1907 to 1911. He left suddenly and was followed almost immediately by a Protestant woman missionary from the United States. She worked in the same community between 1913 and 1925, using the buildings erected by the Catholic missionary, and with many in her congregation who had once been Catholic. The Catholic missionary emphasized the social and cultural difference between himself and the Kuna. The Protestant missionary, however, had a policy of superficial universalism and saw all people as essentially

alike. Howe shows the ways in which the two missionaries tended to reflect their 'home' backgrounds. The Catholic, preaching about hell and God's wrath, reflected the right-wing, hierarchical aristocratic characteristics of contemporary Spain. The Protestant, emphasizing a personal relation to God, projected her working-class background, stressing literacy and teetotalism.

Charles Macdonald deals with the Protestant New Tribes Mission in Palawan in the Philippines. The mission began work in the 1960s, but due to health problems the outposts were soon abandoned. Today, only a handful of families consider themselves Christian. Macdonald holds that Christianity, as transmitted by the fundamentalist New Tribes Mission, has not brought about any lasting change in traditional values and beliefs. This is not so much because of active resistance, but rather because the new religion entails a complete rejection of local culture. Despite similarities between indigenous and Christian ethical values, the incoming religion offers a completely new ideological configuration. It also implies, of course, that the missionaries have not taken seriously enough the possibility of cultural accommodation or contextualization. They thus remain ignorant of, or indifferent to, the local culture.

As a theological policy, inculturation affects more than local churches. It has been applied in various institutions within the Catholic Church. In this respect, religious orders, which have undergone great cultural changes since the time of Vatican II, are no exception. Problems are particularly acute in indigenous orders in ex-colonial nations where the influence of European Catholicism has left an indelible imprint. Sister Joan Burke was commissioned by the provincial superior to study a predominantly African group in Lower Zaire. Much attention was given in her study to examining the way local concepts, values and decision-making processes were introduced into community life as a result of Vatican II, as well as the problems that have emerged subsequently. Burke's conclusion is that greater consideration should be given to anthropological analysis of what actually happens when inculturation is introduced.

On his recent return to Lamalera, Indonesia, R. H. Barnes was able to encounter at first hand the process of inculturation. He compares the recent policy of utilizing components of local culture with what went on in the past, when missionaries directed the Catholic community with a firm hand. Frequently, their approach was negative towards such matters as local marriage customs and pagan sites. Although there is today a more positive and subtle response from missionaries, Barnes holds that Catholic practice, both in the past and in the present, remains one of cultural intrusion. The policy of inculturation, he argues, is no exception.

It might reasonably be pointed out that this set of essays is one-sided, as nearly all the contributions are from professional anthropologists. In fact, two contributors to the original seminars were field missionaries who, at the same time, have had training and write as professional anthropologists. That more field missionaries did not contribute to the seminars is to be regretted. There are two reasons for this imbalance. First, the papers were originally given at the Institute of Social

and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford, by a number of anthropologists who happened to be there at the time. Secondly, it was difficult to find missionaries, especially Protestants, who could make a valid contribution to academic debate. With its greater resources in man-power, the Catholic Church is at an advantage in dealing with such issues as the relations between missionaries and anthropologists. It is to be hoped that the future may see some redress in these imbalances.

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