

Cultural Particularity and the Globalization of Ethics  
in the Light of Inculturation

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Increased interest in the so-called "globalization of ethics" has led to a number of studies which utilize various hermeneutical and communicative theories to sketch out viable paradigms for developing a fundamental Christian ethics as a whole, as well as its various components such as moral reasoning, which together would be capable of entering into and maintaining such discourse. The accent of most of these studies falls on the universalizability of ethical discourse and scant attention has been given to the cultural *particularity* of each and every ethos and ethical system. This article briefly rehearses the principal elements of the concerns raised by the globalization of ethics and then focuses on the *particularity* of culture using insights from both cultural anthropology and inculturation. The Confucian context of Korea is employed to illustrate some of the issues raised by greater attention to cultural particularity.

by

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# Cultural Particularity and the Globalization of Ethics in the Light of Inculturation

## Introduction

Two recent gatherings have highlighted aspects of one of the ongoing tensions in contemporary Christian ethics, namely confronting the problems associated with the quest for a coherent universal morality on one hand, while on the other hand, maintaining a proper attention to and respect for the individuality of the particular situation of a local Christian community called for contemporary church documents.<sup>1</sup> The Synod for Africa, which concluded on Pentecost Sunday 1994 in Rome, addressed specifically the concerns posed by one particular set of local contexts coming out of one continent.<sup>2</sup> From an ecclesial point of view the problem might be cast in terms of the challenges posed by developing an African Christianity that is both authentically African and at the same time clearly linked with the universal Church. However, seen through the optic of fundamental ethics, the African Synod focuses on a host of other interesting issues, such as the inter-relation between the universal moral order, the natural law, as well as the specificity of concrete moral norms tied to a particular time, place, and culture. Examples, such as the question of the so-called "progressive marriage by stages," or the issue of polygamy are not merely canonical conundrums, but real moral dilemmas as well.

If the African Synod symbolizes concern for the "particularity" raised by culture in relation to the universal, then the 1993 the self-constituted "Parliament of the World's Religions," might serve as a representative for the stress on the "universal" in the midst of cultural diversity.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, especially #20 and #63; *Ad gentes*, especially #22, and *Gaudium et spes*, especially ch. 2.

<sup>2</sup>The Synod's final message can be found in *Origins* 24 (19 May 1994): 1-11.

The Parliament gathered over two hundred fifty religious leaders from all over the globe,<sup>3</sup> and concluded its assembly with the issuance of what was meant to be its key text, entitled, "The Declaration of a Global Ethic."<sup>4</sup>

Hans Kng was both the Declaration's initial drafter and the principal driving force for its adoption.<sup>5</sup> However, concern for the so-called "globalization of ethics" is hardly a recent development, and one might argue that a good part of the whole natural law tradition could be construed as an effort at the globalization of ethics.<sup>6</sup> Still, the Parliament's "Declaration of a Global Ethic" does reflect both new interest as well as a new twist in humanity's collective efforts to come to better grips with what ethics means, as well as how to communicate this meaning in an increasingly complex moral world. With the collapse of most of the Communist bloc the globalization of ethical discourse does have a undeniable urgency as we struggle to fashion a new world order out of a vast array of competing claims and interests. In this light, the globalization of ethics might be viewed as a much-needed antidote to the poison of exaggerated ethnicity and internecine conflict.<sup>7</sup>

Among ethicists in the academy this same interest in the globalization of ethics has led to a number of recent studies which have utilized various hermeneutical and communicative theories to sketch out viable paradigms for developing a fundamental ethics as a whole, as well

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<sup>3</sup>For a brief discussion of the origins of this meeting see Dennis P. McGann, "The World's Parliament of Religion, Then and Now: From Social Gospel to Multiculturalism," The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics (1993): 291-296.

<sup>4</sup>The text of this declaration was published in a number of popular fora such as the National Catholic Reporter (24 September 1993): 11-14 and Studies in Interreligious Dialogue 3 (1993): 101-113. I shall refer to A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions, ed. and commentaries by Hans Kng and Karl-Josef Kusche, trans. John Bowden, (New York: Continuum, 1993).

<sup>5</sup>Kng's interest is seen in, for example, his article "Towards a World Ethic of World Religions: Fundamental Questions of Present-Day Ethics in a Global Context," Concilium (2/1990): 102-119; as well as his Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic, (London: SCM, 1991), originally published in German as Projekt Weltethos, (Mnchen/Zrich: Piper, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>Bernard Haring makes this point about the natural law in Chapter 7, "Traditions, Laws, Norms and Context" in Volume 1 of his Free and Faithful in Christ: Moral Theology for Priests and Laity, (Middlegreen, Slough: St. Paul Publications, 1978), and especially pp. 310-324.

<sup>7</sup>See H. Neill McFarland, "Religion and Ethnicity," Shingaku Kenkyu 40 (March 1993): 1-9.

as its various components such as practical moral reasoning which taken together could be capable of entering into and maintaining such discourse.<sup>8</sup>

The accent of most of these studies falls on the universality of ethical discourse and its impact on normativity, values, and so on. Yet, surprisingly scant attention seems to have been given to the particularity of the individual culture which is found both necessarily at the very core of each and every ethos and ethical system. We might wonder, therefore, how we could hope to realize either the project of an authentic globalization of ethics, or pay the proper attention to the individuality of the particular situation of a local Christian community, without taking better stock of this essential aspect of cultural particularity. Christian ethicists might reply that the theological import of the particularity and cultural dimension of different ethoses really falls more properly in the domain of evangelization, and would find its appropriate expression in what is usually termed "contextualization"<sup>9</sup> (by Protestants) or "inculturation"<sup>10</sup> (by Roman Catholics).

As a number of theologians have already observed, defining inculturation is problematic because the definition one chooses already indicates a number of presuppositions about just what is meant by, and involved in, the task of inculturation.<sup>11</sup> However, the definition advanced by Ary Rost Grilhus a number of years ago still seems serviceable for general discussion: inculturation is simply the "process by which the Church

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<sup>8</sup>See Gene Outka and John P. Reeder's, eds., Prospects for a Common Morality, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

<sup>9</sup>See David J. Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen's Contextualization: Meanings, Methods, and Models, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House: Leicester: Apollos, 1989).

<sup>10</sup>See Nicholas Sandert, "L'histoire d'un dogme: Le terme «Inculturation» dans les documents romains" Nouvelle Revue Théologique 110(1988): 555-570. Also see Robert J. Schreier "Faith and Cultures: Challenges to a World Church" Theological Studies 50(1989): 744-760.

<sup>11</sup>For a recent discussion of inculturation in light of the well-known anthropologist Clifford Geertz's work on cultural systems see Carl F. Stahlhoff, "Inculturation and Cultural Systems," Theological Studies 55(1994): 66-81; 274-294.

becomes part of the culture of a people.<sup>12</sup> Thus, inculturation refers essentially to the process by which the Gospel message, as well as its ecclesial embodiment, become rooted in the life of a particular people.

Viewed in this vein, such contextualization or inculturation might seem to be principally the matrix of problems that confronts missionaries and/or indigenous Christians in non-Western settings, but which need not overly concern academicians whose primary efforts are not aimed at direct evangelization in foreign settings. In the world of the University, perhaps the closest we might come to intellectual interest in these matters might be in terms of the study of comparative ethics. Comparative ethics is usually undertaken in one of two ways: either an investigation of a different culture's mores, belief systems, and the like (often done within the discipline of cultural anthropology), or an "ethical" treatment of an issue from a supposedly "neutral" (or "universalist" or "global") stance. Thus, comparative ethics in the first instance is pursued as an "interest" object, while in the second instance the aim would seem to be establishment of some common ethical platform for discussion of concrete issues which involve many if not all contemporary cultures. Much of the current work in the so-called globalization of ethics and human rights as the language of universal morality is an example of what I would call comparative ethics in the second instance.<sup>13</sup>

The issues I have touched upon are too numerous and too broad to be explored in this article. I propose only to focus on one aspect of this larger discussion, namely the particularity of culture, and set out some considerations for the challenges and promises that a proper attention to this particularity raises for both the globalization of ethics on one hand, as well as for the inculturation or contextualization of Christian ethics on the other. Since a fundamental tenet of my overall thesis is that any serious attention to particularity and inculturation must be in itself context-specific, I will illustrate certain aspects of my argument by making occasional references to one non-Western culture with which I am familiar, namely that of Korea.

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<sup>12</sup> Ary Roest Godlius, "What So New About Inculturation?: A Concept and its Implications," *Gregorianum* 59 (1978): 725. This definition also seems to be one most commonly found cited in the literature following its initial publication.

<sup>13</sup> See John Gaman and Mark Juergensmeyer, *A Bibliographic Guide to the Comparative Study of Ethics*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), and the series of essays on various aspects of contemporary comparative religious ethic published in the "Professional Resources" section of the 1993 *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, ed. Harlan Beckley, pp. 247-302.

Essentially this article concerns a question of perspective. I do not suggest that efforts towards the globalization of ethics and/or the universalizability of moral discourse are in themselves fundamentally misguided efforts. Rather, I simply propose that certain implicit methodological premises may be ill-founded, and that excessive concern with these projects may presume and/or create a certain perspective which in turn may blind us to moral elements that a sharper focus on the particularity of culture would help us to retrieve or see better. Stated in a slightly different way, I suggest that we have different projects with different trajectories and methodologies--trajectories and methodologies, which, even though they may not necessarily converge, nevertheless need not be inimical to one another. Thus, we can avoid the seemingly inevitable dilemma which would apparently force us to declare either for "globalization" at the expense of cultural particularity, or vice versa. That having been said, it will be helpful to consider briefly what are the trajectories and methodologies of these two projects.

### Trajectories and Methodologies of the Globalization of Ethics

The most obvious philosophical presupposition of the globalization of ethics project is that moral discourse should aim towards "universality," at least as a terminus ad quem. "Universality" in ethical discourse can be subdivided into two main species: 1) the "universal," in the sense that individual moral norms, concepts, etc., are transcultural or justifiable in the moral philosophy of each particular culture (e.g., each culture has some concept of justice); and 2) "universalizable," in the sense of devising rules or norms which would be applicable or justifiable in each culture (e.g., give to each her due).<sup>14</sup> Thus, universal moral discourse is seen as the more desirable alternative to moral relativism, indifferentism, and/or skepticism<sup>15</sup>

Consequently, according to this school of thought, one should ask what provides the basic legitimation of any particular morality. Framing the question in this way might lead us to conclude that if our own moral system is particular, i.e., one among others, we should then

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<sup>14</sup>Note that culture is essential to a proper grounding of universality. See Felix Wilfred, "The Language of Human Rights--An Ethical Esperanto?" *Vidyajyoti* 56 (1992): 194-214.

<sup>15</sup>For a helpful discussion of this point see Jeffrey Stout's essay, "On Having a Morality in Common," in *Prospects for a Common Morality*, 215-232.

inevitably look for an universal basis for morality, and thus, this universality becomes the new ultimate criterion of the validity of moral truth.<sup>16</sup> Seen in this light, the goal of cross-cultural communication would be to achieve a better mutual understanding, and this goal in turn would seem to be coincident with rational discourse, and therefore with rationality itself.

In a recent article Thomas Kopfensteiner outlined the import of the concerns of globalization for fundamental ethics. Kopfensteiner indicated three conceivable theological responses: "a renewed search for universalist criteria, a sophisticated but ultimately nihilistic contextualism, or the creation of a dialogic methodology which presupposes a solidarity upon which to reason about differences."<sup>17</sup> Kopfensteiner goes on immediately to state his own conclusion: "In a global culture only the creation of a dialogical or hermeneutical methodology will be the adequate response if tyranny or chaos are to be avoided."<sup>18</sup>

Dialogue clearly is key, and Kopfensteiner's call for greater reflection and attention to its methodology is important and worthy of further discussion. Yet, might not this concept of a "global culture" in fact be a construct which may subconsciously reintroduce into the whole discourse on cross-cultural and/or comparative ethics an academic approach based on, for example, a contemporary variety of German rationalism. Following up Kopfensteiner's lead, we might do well to consider better the methodologies and strategies involved implicitly in the globalization of ethics project.

Briefly put, these methodologies and strategies aim first at creating a consensus on the type of philosophical language used, and then move on to the creation of shared values and common commitments. This overall methodology is evident in the Parliament of the World's Religions "Declaration of a Global Ethic." Early on in the Declaration's text, for example, we find this basic assertion: "We affirm that a common

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<sup>16</sup> See Bernard Quelquejeu, "Diversity in Historical Moral Systems and a Criterion for Universality in Moral Judgment," *Concilium* 150 (1981): 51.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas R. Kopfensteiner, "Globalization and the Autonomy of Moral Reasoning: An Essay in Fundamental Moral Theology," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 485.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*

set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic.<sup>19</sup> The Declaration recognizes that there are cultural and religious differences which lead to different ethical understandings, but these particularities often seem to be perceived more as a threat to the new world order, rather than as a resource for closer cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. This fear is captured well in the following statements: "Our different religious and cultural traditions must not prevent our common involvement in opposing all forms of inhumanity and working for greater humaneness. ..." <sup>20</sup> [and, further on in the next sub-section] "We do not wish to gloss over or ignore the serious differences among the individual religions. However, they should not hinder us from proclaiming publicly those things that we already hold in common and that we jointly affirm, each on the basis of our own religious or ethical grounds."<sup>21</sup>

The Declaration acknowledges that progress has already been made towards the establishment of a rudimentary global ethic, such as the 1948 United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, but the Parliament's own Declaration points out that this sort of formal agreement still needs to be confirmed and deepened "from the perspective of an ethic: the full realization of the intrinsic dignity of the human person, the inalienable freedom and equality in principle of all humans, and the necessary solidarity and interdependence of all humans with each other."<sup>22</sup>

All of this is well and good, of course, and our global human society, which is at one and the same time so diverse and yet so interdependent and interconnected, certainly does need what might be termed a "Lowest Common Denominator (LCD) Ethics." However, as the term suggests, the practical ethical directives themselves often tend to be minimalistic at best. Moreover, we need to go beyond LCD ethics methodologically because discourse on the level of universal rights language alone, or the natural law, or any other such universal mode

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<sup>19</sup> Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

of discourse, can exhibit what I term a certain "teflon" characteristic.<sup>23</sup> Thus, even though such arguments can, and do, make a strong rational appeal, nevertheless, when it comes to the concrete formulation and implementation of actual policies, it is hard to make these rational agreements "stick" to definite, specific actions. In this context we witness the perennial difficulty of translating "morality" into realizable political policies. Consequently, it will take much time, as we have seen graphically repeated throughout the world today, to arrive at a practical and effective moral consensus on what can be done, what should be done, and what is being done for the resolution of concrete socio-political problems such as the plight of the refugees, tribal massacres in Africa and resolution of ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia, fair treatment of prisoners-of-war, or any other specific moral issue which the Declaration of the Global Ethic might logically hope to address effectively in a concrete and practical manner.

While the globalization of ethics does have certain advantages, the project may prove to be unrealistic as it rests upon the congenial, though apparently false, premise of an overly facile "universalizability" of moral discourse.<sup>24</sup> Thus, a move made too quickly to the abstract and universal runs the risk of missing several relevant features, with the result that the composite picture drawn of what is meant by allegedly universal concepts such as "human" and "moral" are themselves distorted right from the outset.<sup>25</sup>

### The Voice of Cultural Anthropology

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<sup>23</sup> See my article "Christian Solidarity and the Refugee Problem: A Challenge for the Understanding of Christian Ethics" forthcoming in a book to be published by the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People.

<sup>24</sup> James M. Gustafson is one ethicist who has already alerted us well to this faulty premise; see his Theology and Ethics, vol. 1 of Ethics from a Theocentric Perspective, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981): 126.

<sup>25</sup> This is essentially the same critique many feminist ethicists level against many ethical theories which claim to be "universal" in their grounding and formulation. See for example, Margaret Farley, "Feminism and Universal Morality," in Prospects for a Common Morality, p. 171.

Besides skewing some morally relevant features, current efforts towards the globalization of ethics often seem to overlook another important source for ethics, namely the contribution from the social sciences, such as cultural anthropology. Consider the lament voiced by British anthropologist, Mary Douglas:

Anthropology writings on morals are not generally regarded as contributing to debates on moral philosophers. At least moral philosophy does not draw upon them. Their painstaking accounts of particular cultures, based on particular moral systems, are read, to be sure, for they enter as exotic examples of altruism or barbarity.<sup>26</sup>

Douglas goes on to note that "Two conversations are running parallel, one the philosophers', about the rational foundation of ethics, one the anthropologists', about the interaction between moral ideas and social institutions."<sup>27</sup> Unfortunately, according to Douglas, these "conversations" will never converge if each follows its present trajectory, and this would certainly be much to the detriment of any credible, comprehensive moral philosophy.

Why is this so? Douglas answers this question by stating that one reason is found in the fact that moral philosophers tend to operate on an inaccurate premise about both culture and humanity:

According to this view, culture consists of many layers: peel off the top one and the next and the next, with every step toward conceiving a decultured human being we could be arriving at the moral principles which drive us all. But this superficially attractive idea presupposes an inner homunculus, the core rational being. It also presupposes this feral child, stripped of all cultural adhesions, to be the locus of moral principles.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Mary Douglas, "Morality and Culture" *Ethics* 93 (1983): 786. Douglas made these remarks in her introduction to a review essay of four books which have themes which touch on culture and morality: Adrian Mayer, ed., *Culture and Morality: Essays in Honor of Christoph von Ermer-Haimendorf*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1981); Mary McGeeley, *Heart and Mind, the Varieties of Moral Experience*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981); Rodney Needham, *Circumstantial Deliveries*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); and Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Female Power and Male Dominance: On the Origins of Sexuality Inequality*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 787.

I believe that Douglas is not tilting at windmills here, and if space allowed much evidence could be marshalled to support her charge.<sup>29</sup> In the spirit of Mary Douglas I posit that such a conception of nature is certainly not human, and therefore, by logical extension, both "unnatural" and "irrational." Culture is an intrinsic part of human nature which cannot be rationally dismissed<sup>30</sup>

### The Problem of Language

Several other troubling issues intrude as well, which here can only be mentioned. For instance, any concrete project aimed at the globalization of ethics must be written in a particular language, and this involves the problematic of implicitly surrendering to a certain cultural hegemony and/or ethical imperialism. Whose language will furnish the ethical grammar, syntax, vocabulary and nuances for the actual speech of our "universal" moral discourse? Logically, only two options would seem to present themselves as possible alternatives. The first would be to impose a culturally specific language (which might lead us, for example, to the de facto acceptance of some universal moral motto such as "West is Best." The second option would be to attempt to speak in no one's extant or native language. This second option would amount to what Jeffrey Stout has critically termed "moral esperanto"<sup>31</sup>. However, we must realize that even esperanto is hardly "culturally free," linguistically speaking—not to mention the obvious drawback of using a moral language that nobody speaks as his or her mother tongue!

### Trajectories and Methodologies of Particularity of Culture

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<sup>29</sup>Let it suffice here to quote one Christian ethicist who reports this view starkly: "Nature is now understood, on the one hand, as a necessary structure, which emerges all the more clearly the more the cultural superstructure is stripped away. It therefore becomes important for nature to be liberated and for all human activity to be consistently understood as natural. Alternately, nature can be viewed as mankind's pure and hypothetical original condition, preceding human history." Franz B. Delle, "Nature as the Basis of Morality," in Readings in Moral Theology, No. 7: Natural Law and Theology, ed. Charles E. Curran and Richard A. McCormick, (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1991): 392.

<sup>30</sup>In the same vein, Alasdair MacIntyre remarks pithily in the Postscript to the second edition of his After Virtue: "Morality which is no particular society's moral is to be found nowhere." After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory, 2nd ed., (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981, 1984): 265-266.

<sup>31</sup>See especially Stout's two books, The Flight From Authority: Religion, Morality, and the Quest for Autonomy, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), and Ethics after Babel: The Languages of Morals and Their Discontents, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988).

Emphasis on the particularity of culture in fundamental ethics also carries with it a number of basic philosophical presuppositions.<sup>32</sup> Principal among these is my assertion, in the spirit of Mary Douglas' remarks, that there is no such thing as "culture-less" human nature. We cannot ever strip the layers of culture away from any human individual or group in order to reach some pristine state of moral nature which would then shine forth unclouded by the accretions of particular cultures. Methodologically, this fundamental assertion of the basic "ontology" of cultural particularity translates into greater respect for, and attention to, culture itself as a "morally relevant feature" of the highest order.

Before moving on to some of the ramifications of this basic premise I believe it would be helpful to establish briefly a few working definitions of some of the principal concepts which come into play in a moral methodology which would claim to pay sufficient attention to cultural particularity. Three terms in particular are indispensably propaedeutic to any authentic understanding of inculturation: namely, culture, enculturation, and acculturation.<sup>33</sup>

#### Culture, Enculturation, and Acculturation in Light of Inculturation

"Culture" is obviously the root concept for these other three terms, and yet we must caution against any description or definition of culture which would be too narrow or monolithic, focussing on only one aspect of culture, such as the arts. Elaborating on his definition of inculturation as "the process by which the Church becomes part of the culture of a people," Ary Roest Crolius raises an important caution on any conceptualization of culture which would impede the stance of dialogue necessary for both effective evangelization and a genuine globalization of ethics. He notes that a

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<sup>32</sup>In this context the whole debate over "foundationalism" comes into play. See John Reeder, Jr., "Foundations without Foundationalism" in Prospects for a Common Morality, pp. 191-214.

<sup>33</sup>For a theological discussion of these terms see Aylward Shorter's Toward a Theology of Inculturation, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, Maryknoll: Ohio, 1988).

univocal conception of culture would accept only one way of understanding cultural reality and measure all other cultural expressions according to the standards of this culture. In the encounter among cultures such a conception would bar the way to dialogue, leaving room only for a monologue. This 'cultural monologue' has often characterised the approach of exponents of occidental cultures to cultures other than their own.<sup>34</sup>

Since culture is a most difficult concept to define with precision it might be better to settle for a description of the basic characteristics of culture. One religious group that has wrestled with the complexity of this issue, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, listed a number of general descriptive observations on the multifaceted aspects of "culture," but finally settled for suggesting that perhaps culture could be described in a more summary fashion as

an integrated system of beliefs (about God or reality or ultimate meaning), of values (about what is true, good, beautiful and normative), of customs (how to behave, relate to others, talk, pray, dress, work, play, trade, farm, eat, etc.), and of institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs (government, law, courts, temples or churches, family, schools, hospitals, factories, shops, unions, clubs, etc.), which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security, and continuity.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ary Roest Grollius, "The Meaning of Culture in Theological Anthropology," in John Mary Waliggo, Ary Roest Grollius, Theoniste Nkeramhigo, and John Mutiso-Minda, Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency, (Nairobi: St. Paul Publications--Africa, 1986): 62-63. Roest Grollius' article first appeared in Gregorianum 61 (1980): 253-274.

<sup>35</sup> Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, The Willowbank Report: Report of a Consultation on Gospel and Culture, Lausanne occasional papers, 2, (Wheaton IL: Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978): 7. The Lausanne Committee's definition is in basic agreement with the work of most contemporary cultural anthropologists. For example, Clifford Geertz defines culture as "A system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which human beings communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about, and their attitudes towards, life." Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, (New York: Basic Books, 1973): 89.

Related intimately to culture are the human processes of "enculturation" and "acculturation." Basically, enculturation<sup>36</sup> refers to the initial and primary insertion of an individual into his or her own native culture. Enculturation essentially involves, through both formal and informal processes, the learning of one's culture, including its principal belief system, mores, symbols, dominant images, etc. Acculturation presumes individuals or groups of individuals who have already been enculturated into different cultures, and thus acculturation refers to either the result of cultural change or the process of cultural change itself when representatives (groups or individuals) from two different cultures meet. Acculturation also occurs in terms of moral values, as witnessed positively in the case of someone who has grown in a deeper appreciation for another culture's moral sensitivities after prolonged contact, to the extent that this appreciation translates into that person's revision of his or her matrix of moral values. Acculturation can function negatively too, occurring much in the same way as close contact with "bad examples" of moral living. As with culture, these related processes of enculturation and acculturation are dynamic and thus are both ongoing and open-ended to a definite extent.

If Christian ethicists are to take cultural particularity seriously in their efforts at the inculturation of the Gospel message, they must first take greater care in the use of the terms.

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<sup>36</sup>This term was first used in this manner by Melville J. Herskovits to speak of the transmission of culture, defined as shared understandings, from one generation to the next. Cf. his Man and his Works: the Science of Cultural Anthropology, (New York: AA Knopf, 1948, 1952, 1964). Among contemporary anthropologists the term "socialization" has now gained wider acceptance.

Particularly in recent times, we have tended to mistake "acculturation" for inculturation.<sup>37</sup> For example, one hears of individuals (often missionaries) speaking of becoming "inculturated" in their non-native locale. In this instance it would probably be more accurate to speak of becoming better "adapted" after undergoing a successful process of acculturation (in which both the individual and the foreign host culture learn to coexist peacefully). One common error is to speak of "acculturated" moral theology or Christian ethics.<sup>38</sup> In this case we should speak more precisely of attempts to let our Christian ethics become "inculturated" as the fruit of the Gospel taking root in a different soil. My basic point is that only as a lived extension of the practical Gospel message can we speak of Christian ethics as becoming genuinely "inculturated."

Moreover, in the past the error often made was to demand of non-Western indigenous Christian converts a de facto attempt at re-enculturation into some variety of Western cultural Christianity (e.g., French, Spanish, Italian, German). If enculturation refers to the initial and primary insertion of an individual into her or his culture, and if we accept the premise that there is no "culture-less" human being in the concrete, then it follows that enculturation must take place at a relatively early age of each individual. "Re-enculturation," if it were to be "successful" would involve such a radical re-alignment of values, symbol systems, worldview, etc. that a more likely

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<sup>37</sup> Even Pope John Paul II expresses some ambiguity on the distinction of these two terms: "The term «acculturation» or «inculturation» may well be a neologism, but it expresses very well one of the elements of the great mystery of the incarnation [my translation from the French original]." Pope John Paul II Admembra Pontificae Commissionis Biblicae, 26 April 1979, AAS 71:8 (1979): 607.

<sup>38</sup> For one example of this mis-identification see Tullio Goffi's "Etica cristiana acculturata," Part One, Ch. 3 in Problemi e Prospettive di Teologia Morale, 75-92, ed. Tullio Goffi, (Brescia: Queriniana, 1976). The idea that moral theology could be "inculturated" (even if mis-labeled as "acculturated") brought a swift and negative reaction from a well-known pre-Vatican II moral manualist, Cardinal Pietro Palazzini. Cf. his "Morale acculturata e compromesso etico," Studi Cattolici 21 (1977): 83-93.

result would be a tragic sort of identity crisis which we might term "cultural schizophrenia." Baldly put, then, "re-enculturation" is frankly impossible and any efforts made to this end will be severely stressful, both individually and collectively, for those involved.

Examples of such misguided attempts abound, and by way of illustration I would simply allude to the well-known case of the suppression of the ancestor rituals for Christian converts in Confucian cultures such as Korea and China. Thus, in order to become Christians, Koreans were asked to give up a key aspect of Korean culture, which if it had been better understood would clearly have been seen as not being "idolatrous" or against the Gospel. This whole affair<sup>39</sup> might be viewed as a tragic example of both a rush to an improper "universalization" of ethics, as well as what happens when insufficient respect and attention is given to the particularity of different cultures.

#### Inculturation and Particularity of Culture

If globalization of ethics moves to universality in the sense of a Lowest Common Denominator ethics accepted by all, genuine inculturation of Christian ethics might be perceived as striking off in the opposite direction. As I have already intimated, inculturation has as its premise a methodology which will not have as its terminus ad quem (at least not in the foreseeable future) a "universalizable" ethics of either the Lowest Common Denominator or Moral Esperanto. Rather, it is in focussing on the particularity of culture that the whole process and value of inculturation is discovered for moral theology. This need not condemn us to moral relativism, but instead merely demands genuine respect, dialogue, and understanding.

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<sup>39</sup>The first Korean Christians ceased their observance of ancestor rites after being so directed in 1790 by the Bishop of Peking, Alexandre de Gouvea. However, the Korean Christians' "non-observance" was viewed by the government as unfilial behavior that was so blasphemous that it threatened the social stability of the public order and therefore led in part to extreme anti-Catholic persecution. Rome finally reversed its ruling on the practice of ancestor veneration in 1939 with Pius XII's *Instructio circa quasdam caeremonias super ritibus sinensibus*, AAS 13 (1939): 548-549. For a good discussion of the entire Chinese Rites controversy see George Miramiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy From Its Beginning to Modern Times*, (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1985).

To this end, inculturation will demand a closer study, aided by the social sciences and in particular by cultural anthropology. As William Biematzki, has observed, genuine inculturation,

inevitably involves phenomena which must be studied empirically, using the full resources of social and cultural anthropology, if those phenomena are to be understood in depth and if a realistic approach is to be made to developing methods for systematically controlling or directing the process of inculturation in any way.<sup>40</sup>

While it is crucial to listen to social scientists like Biematzki, we must also recognize that greater attention to particularity of culture, as well as the required concomitant increased input from fields such as cultural anthropology, will certainly make a few moralists more than a little nervous. Some might feel that the philosophical or theological nature of the discipline would be replaced by a study which is merely descriptive and/or comparative.<sup>41</sup> Others may fear that the ethical drawbridge is being lowered to allow the invading hordes of relativists, moral, cultural, or otherwise, to rush in. Still others may be justifiably apprehensive of the specter of unbridled ethnicity and ethnocentricity which could be ushered in by an ethical methodology which centers its attention on the uniqueness of different cultures, rather than on a universalist methodology whose "preferential option" would be for working towards the explicit establishment of a global ethic for moral discourse.

These fears are realistic, and here we may well indeed have more to fear than simply fear itself. Yet, would not surrender to these fears mean simply the de facto avoidance of dealing adequately with the root causes of these fears themselves, that is to say, with the particularity of cultural diversity? Grappling with these concerns, raised by particularity of culture, will not only help to resolve the difficulties outlined above, when insufficient attention is given to culture as a significant moral feature, but may also actually foster a more genuine and valid global ethics.

As one example of how this might occur, let me return to the matter of ethnocentricity. Ethnocentrism is somewhat like original sin: you are born with it, you cannot rid yourself of it, and only God can forgive it! Put more scientifically and serenely, as Biematzki notes, "Ethnocentrism, the tendency to evaluate everything in terms of one's own culture, is the natural result of this cultural self-identification; but

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<sup>40</sup>William E. Biematzki, "Symbol and Root Paradigm: The Locus of Effective Inculturation," in *Effective Inculturation and Ethnic Identity, Inculturation: Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures*, 9, ed. Ary Roest-Grolius, (Rome: Centre "Cultures and Religions" - Pontifical Gregorian University, 1987): 51.

<sup>41</sup>See, for example, Wolf Lepenies, "Difficulties of Basing Ethics on Anthropology," *Concilium* 5 (8/1972): 11.

it can be one of the largest stumbling blocks in the path to successful intercultural communication.<sup>142</sup> The theologian, John M. Hitchen, astutely observes, "Our cultural pre-suppositions are so all-pervasive we seldom realise how much they determine all we do [emphasis in the original]. It usually takes an extended cross-cultural exposure to reveal our own cultural biases."<sup>143</sup> Certainly most people who have had a chance to live in a foreign culture for any length of time could attest to the veracity of these points.

Building on these remarks, I suggest that one important way to mitigate the inevitable negative effects of ethnocentrism in moral discourse is precisely to adopt a methodology which will take better account of this factor through specific attention to the particularity of each moral system and ethos. Such a methodology would then avoid falling into the ethnocentric snare pit of speaking as if there were only one moral outlook, the one out of which this or that particular individual would speak. Alasdair MacIntyre addresses this same issue when he emphasizes the need to undertake first

a historical and comparative inquiry so that we can identify the specifically contemporary features of the morality dominant in our culture and society and discover what differentiates this morality from that of other times and places, including in those times and places the various predecessors of modernity in the ancient, medieval, and renaissance worlds. ... [M]oral philosophers have continued talking confidently of the moral point of view and the language of morals, rather than asking of any particular moral concept or belief 'Whose concept or belief is this?' and 'What is the particular historical and social setting in which it arose and flourished?' [emphasis in the original].<sup>144</sup>

Besides ameliorating the negative factors connected with our inherent cultural diversity, such as ethnocentricity, a greater attention to cultural particularity in moral discourse will make many other positive contributions to broadening our knowledge of what goes into making humans moral beings. While we would certainly join with philosophers such as Jeffrey Stout in rejecting the feasibility of trying to speak a version

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<sup>142</sup> William E. Biematzki, *Roots of Acceptance: The Intercultural Communication of Religious Meanings, Inculturation: Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures*, no 13, ed. Aay Roest Grolius, (Rome: Centre "Cultures and Religions" - Pontifical Gregorian University, 1991): 21.

<sup>143</sup> John M. Hitchen, "Culture and the Bible - the Question of Contextualisation," *Melanesian Journal of Theology* 8 (1992): 37.

<sup>144</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, "Moral Philosophy: What's Next?" in *Revisions: Changing Perspectives in Moral Philosophy*, ed. Stanley M. Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983): 6.

of moral esperanto, we might allow for the possibility of moving from moral pidgin onwards to a greater fluency in moral creole. Pidgin, as Stout notes, is essentially "a sparse dialect used entirely for communicating with members of other groups, nobody's native tongue or first language of deliberation but a handy mode of discourse with strangers."<sup>45</sup> Stout adds that this is what characterizes the "secularized language of human rights."<sup>46</sup>

We need not despair that our efforts at cross-cultural moral communication must remain at a rudimentary level. For, as Stout goes on to say, "what used to be a pidgin can undergo further development, catch on as a language to be learned in infancy, and function as a subtle medium for deliberation and discourse with friends and family."<sup>47</sup> Moral discourse that undergoes this sort of development moves from being a rather halting and inelegant pidgin to an elaborate and nuanced mode of discourse similar to creole. Such a moral creole would be "as rich a moral language as one could want—drawing vocabularies from diverse sources and weaving them together, if all goes well, into a tapestry well-suited to the needs of a time and place."<sup>48</sup>

Following Stout's general line of thought, I suggest an additional metaphor, namely cross-fertilization, to express what transpires in an ethical discourse that pays sufficient attention to the individuality and uniqueness of each cultural moral language. This cross-fertilization process is akin to what occurs when one begins to learn any foreign language: one's comprehension of the grammar, vocabulary, syntax, etc. of one's own native language is inevitably sharpened and enriched. So also, cross-cultural moral dialogue would help to clarify better, and/or expose philosophical difficulties, in one's own particular moral tradition, while at the same time broadening one's outlook and understanding of different

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<sup>45</sup> Stout, Ethics after Babel, p. 80.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* In an interesting essay which touches on the cultural dimensions of human rights discourse William O'Neill argues that human rights language is best understood rhetorically, "as a family of related claims and duties that delimit the boundaries of practical consensus." See William O'Neill, "Ethics and Inculturation: The Scope and Limits of Rights' Discourse," The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics (1993): 92.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

traditions. Through such cross-fertilization, a fuller understanding of the richness and complexity of the moral world could develop for both philosophical traditions. Moreover, with both creole and cross-fertilization, what comes into being is something actually new, not merely the common denominators between two moral languages nor the sum of the component parts of two philosophical systems. What we have in fact is a new product which may well be more fully human in its grasp and formulation of the complexity of moral truth.

As a concluding example which might illustrate what could be involved in a cross-fertilization of our moral languages as well as an attempt to move from moral pidgin to creole, consider the moral concept, "virtue."<sup>49</sup> For example, for St. Thomas, virtue tends to be seen functionally, and thus he refers to the virtues in terms such as "habits." The verbs associated with these virtues are likewise expressed functionally; hence, we tend to find terms such as "exercise" and "acquire" used frequently in this regard. Possession and/or technical proficiency are the ways in which virtues relate to humans in the Thomistic scheme, while the basic "unit" of moral agency in Thomistic (and Western!) ethics has always been the individual, l'homme tout seul.

However, in traditional Confucian ethics, by counter-example, the basic unit of moral agency is never the individual tout seul. Rather, the individual is understood always and only in terms of a matrix of relationships. Thus, the moral agent is conceived as someone's son, father, elder brother, younger sibling, friend, etc.<sup>50</sup> Virtue, too, is conceived relationally and it would probably be more accurate to speak of the virtues themselves in more ontological terms.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, Confucius speaks of moral "seghood" and the ideal of the Ch' n-tzu

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<sup>49</sup> A number of good works have come out on this theme in recent years. See, for example, Alasdair MacIntyre's "Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation Between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues," in *Culture and Modernity: East-West Perspectives*, ed. Eliot Deutsch, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991): 104-123; Lee H Yearley's *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage*, SUNY Series, Toward a Comparative Philosophy of Religions, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990) as well several articles which discuss aspects of Yearley's book which were published in the *Journal of Religious Ethics* 21 (1993): 343-395.

<sup>50</sup> Here I am making reference to the Five Relationships which comprise the set of human relationships which in turn furnish the basis of the moral community. Traditionally these have been organized hierarchically into five paradigmatic pairs, namely, 1) Ruler and Ministers, 2) Father and Son, 3) Husband and Wife, 4) Elder and Younger (often portrayed as between elder and younger brother); and 5) Friend and Friend. See my article, "The Three Bonds and Five Relationships: A Korean Root Paradigm" *Inculturation* 5 (Summer, 1990): 16-18.

<sup>51</sup> For a fuller discussion of this point, see my article, "The Tao of Confucian Virtue Ethics," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (1995): 25-41. Through an investigation of Confucian ethics, I raise issues, such as the communal grounding of virtue-ethics, which might help to clarify

(which is difficult to translate, but which might be rendered as the "Superior Person" or "Paradigmatic Individual"<sup>52</sup>). Contrasted to this moral ideal would be the Siao-jen (the "mean" person, in the sense of being "small-hearted" or egoistic).

Verbs associated with concepts of virtue in Confucian ethics often have a more aesthetic nuance to them. Consequently, one finds terms taken from gemology, such as "cut and polish," "grind and hone," "cultivate," and so on used throughout the books of the Confucian Canon.<sup>53</sup> Possession of, and technical proficiency in, the virtues are not inconceivable in the Confucian scheme, but the artistic nuance of the language of a gem cutter suggests more accurately that moral "virtuosity" is the truest goal of the person who strives to be truly and fully human. I believe that the Confucian language of moral virtuosity and artistry would resonate well with much of the biblical Wisdom literature and thus the cross-fertilization of these two canons could help furnish us, along with the inclusion of Thomas' systematic insights, of what true human virtue actually embraces.

## Conclusion

The ways in which one understands fundamental concepts such as virtue, moral agency, and relationship, will have a great bearing on a whole range of practical moral matters. Though I am not claiming that the Confucian and Thomistic vocabularies are incommensurable, it still seems impossible to translate all of these basic concepts in terms of formal correspondence which will carry over the same exact range of meanings and nuances. Thus, to return to the globalization of ethics project, we might well ask what would be the language that could be "universalized" here and now for an authentic globalization of ethics? Would it be scholastic Thomism, Neo-Confucianism, or some Lowest

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and/or expose some of the philosophical difficulties in the current Western debate on ethics of virtue vs. ethics of duty.

<sup>52</sup>For one of the best contemporary interpreters of the Confucian notion of the Superior Person [Ch' n-tzu], as well as possible applications in Western ethics, see Antonio S. Guà's Dimensions of Moral Creativity: Paradigms, Principles, and Ideals, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978).

<sup>53</sup>For one instance of this usage see the exchange between Confucius and one of his prize disciples, Tse-kung as recorded in The Analects (1:15).

Common Denominator variety of moral pidgin? However, if the cross-fertilization begun by a dialogue among various moral languages were to bear fruit we might then be further on our way of developing a rich moral creole. Traditional Confucian ethics might certainly benefit from the more highly systematized treatise on the virtues found in St. Thomas, and our Western understandings of virtues could certainly gain from a fuller grasp of the individual moral agent's relationality in the moral community.

As I said at the outset, the issues raised are really too numerous to be treated fully here. What I have attempted to do is simply note where the accent seems to fall in current discussion of the globalization of ethics, and to indicate some caution about morally relevant features which may be eclipsed in such a project, as well as to raise some questions about the veracity of certain foundational pragmatic premises related to the universality of moral discourse.

Moreover, it is my contention that more focussed attention paid to the individuality of culture will also provide us with invaluable moral resources to deal with the concerns raised by ethnicity and the concomitant perennial problem of ethnocentrism, as well as to help actually to foster both a genuine and valid global ethics and also to answer the challenges posed by inculturation in all of the particular contexts of the Church, Asia, Africa, America, and elsewhere.

## Abstract

Increased interest in the so-called "globalization of ethics" has led to a number of studies which utilize various hermeneutical and communicative theories to sketch out viable paradigms for developing a fundamental Christian ethics as a whole. Scant attention has been given to the cultural particularity of each and every ethos and ethical system. This article rehearses the principal elements of the concerns raised by the globalization of ethics and then focuses on the particularity of culture using insights from both cultural anthropology and inculturation. The Confucian context of Korea is employed to illustrate some of the issues raised by greater attention to cultural particularity.