

**TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF INCULTURATION** by Aylward Shorter. *George Chapman*. London. 1988. Pp. xii + 291. £19.95.

As liberation theology has captured theological interest in South America, so inculturation, what might be called cultural theology, has become important in decolonized countries, especially in Africa. Based on anthropological and theological concepts, inculturation is just as radical as liberation theology, and in some ways more so. It arises not so much from economic oppression as from a yearning for a 'true' cultural setting for Catholicism in various societies around the world.

The term inculturation emerged during Vatican II due to Jesuit influence. An advocate, Masson, wrote: 'Today there is a most urgent need for a Catholicism that is *inculturated* in a variety of forms' (p. 10). But the term has now become more than the notion of Catholicism expressed in various cultures—more than an empirical or sociological analysis of 'a variety of forms'. This is really enculturation, a term commonly used by anthropologists to describe cultural encapsulation of some institution, group of people or way of thinking. In dealing with the Christian situation, the words 'indiginization' or 'contextualization' have been used for some time, especially in traditional Protestant and W.C.C. circles. The reference is frequently to churches outside Europe which have come under the influence of a European country. But more came out of the Council than a search for empirical analysis: concern was shown for the future, and so theology became coupled with anthropology. What theologians and Church leaders, including parish priests, must do is to instigate 'an on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures' (*ibid.*). Basing his argument on the Incarnation, Arrupe asserted that the Christian message by being contained in a cultural context must give rise to a new creation. Here is not Christianity utilizing culture for its own purposes but transforming it. The in-phrases are employed—that there is to be a dialogue—a partnership—a mutual understanding between Catholicism and a given culture. There must be no question of dominance or the use of power.

Aylward Shorter, who has been a missionary with the White Fathers in central Africa and an anthropologist, shows himself to be an ardent enthusiast for inculturation. His book on the subject, perhaps one of the first of its kind to be published in English, is both fascinating and provocative.

It is fascinating because he opens a heretofore closed door, connecting sociology and anthropology on the one hand, and theology on the other. Much of the value of the book, at least in the eyes of this reviewer, lies in the early chapters, where he defines a number of anthropological terms and thus carefully sets the scene for what follows. He implies that Christianity does not appear in a pure, 'bodiless' manifestation—'the Christian faith cannot exist except in a cultural form.' (p. 12). Thus, we may deduce that throughout the world there are n. number of cultures and they are all subject to change, some slowly, some rapidly. By implication, therefore, Catholicism is found in n. societies and, there must be n. forms or variations of it. Further, as each culture changes, so Catholicism must change. We are immediately plunged right into the heart of the age-long problem of the one and the many—the one and the several Catholicisms (see *New Blackfriars*, February 1987, p. 56ff.)—and what *can* be changed and what cannot.

The book is provocative because Shorter not only poses radical questions but also does not consider many of the logical consequences of this type of theology and its taking on board anthropological thinking. In the hoped-for dialogue between faith and a recipient culture, Shorter assumes that the faith is Catholicism. What if the culture has been or is being 'invaded' by several forms of Christianity, each of them culturally different? In the work of cultural transformation, does the Catholic Church proceed ecumenically or go its own way, and 'religio-culturally' dominate the scene? Some religious groups are culturally stagnant and Shorter maintains they will consequently die: others of a fundamentalist kind are not seriously interested in culture and proceed along their own cultural path in a blinkered way.

The second part of the book is devoted to applying the concept of inculturation to the development of Catholic Christianity, beginning with early Judaism and going as far as Vatican II. Needless to say he is critical of various stages of the history of the Church, notably the Council of Trent, together with the notion of canon law, which imposed the idea of a single, dominant, triumphant, European culture, and which is still advocated in high places in Rome. He points to exceptional supporters of cultural flexibility, if not inculturation, such as Ricci, working in China, and de Nobili in India, both of them Jesuits.

The issues involved in cultural encapsulation and inculturation are of a fundamental kind. They apply as much to the western world as to the Third World. Shorter's enthusiasm for what the present Pope has called a neologism seems to blind him to rationally insoluble problems. What of the possibility of an enculturated Christ? And the challenge of relativism in trying to judge cultures, and especially where a culture is totally alien to Christianity? He is to be congratulated, however, in opening up, at least to the English-speaking world, an extremely important issue which should engage sociologically-minded theologians, Catholic and Protestant, for a good while to come.

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**THE ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM. THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN A.T. ROBINSON** by A. Kee. *S.P.C.K.*, 1988, pp. 190 + xvi. £8.95.

This is a dissatisfying book. It examines the work of the late Bishop John Robinson under three headings, Biblical Exploration, Theological Exploration and Social Exploration. The Bishop is neither described as a conservative nor a liberal but as a radical conservative. This is not very illuminating. The labels need decoding. Finding consistency in the Bishop's thought is not easy. Thus, in his biblical exploration he is 'conservative'. Seemingly that means he was more disposed to accepting the historical authenticity of the texts, and an earlier date for them, than many of his 'liberal' colleagues. Yet, he left the biblical categories unexplained for today's readers, as though his work was done when he showed how the inspired writers had used them. Unlike Bultmann, he would not demythologize the Bible; this he reserved for later Church doctrine. So he avoided biblical hermeneutics. Why this was so Dr. Kee never really