

CULTURES, RELIGIONS, AND POWER: PROCLAIMING CHRIST IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY

PETER C. PHAN

[The author describes three challenges that the current cultural, religious, and political contexts of the United States present to the Church's mission: cultural diversity caused by new waves of immigration, religious pluralism by the increasing presence of non-Christian religions, and political hegemony by the collapse of the Soviet Union. With insights from the experiences of the Asian churches, the author then discusses inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation as constitutive dimensions of the Church's mission in the United States.]

THE BURDEN OF THIS ARTICLE is how to proclaim Christ in the current cultural, religious, and political context of the United States.¹ The expression “proclaiming Christ” is shorthand for the whole range of activities of the Church included under the umbrella terms of evangelization or mission.² It refers not only to the communication by means of *words*,

PETER C. PHAN is the Ignacio Ellacuría, S.J., Professor of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University, Washington. He received his S.T.D. from the Salesian Pontifical University (Rome) and the Ph.D. and D.D. from the University of London. A frequent contributor to *Theological Studies*, he has recently completed a trilogy on *Asian Theology: Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Orbis, 2003), *In Our Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Orbis, 2003), and *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Orbis, 2004). Currently he is preparing *A Handbook to Roman Catholic Theology* (Westminster John Knox).

¹ Note that the focus of the present article is the *how* not the *what* of the Christian proclamation. The content remains what God has done for the world in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Of course, methodology cannot be divorced from content. Both mutually influence one another. Indeed, implicit in my reflections is the contention that God's action in the world determines the triple dialogue in which the Christian message is proclaimed.

² In his 1990 encyclical on mission, Pope John Paul II writes “Mission is a single but complex reality, and it develops in a variety of ways” (*Redemptoris missio* no. 41). He goes on to list several activities: witness, initial proclamation, conversion, and baptism, forming local churches, forming “ecclesial basic communities,” incarnating the gospel in peoples’ cultures, dialogue with our brothers and sisters of other religions, and promoting development by forming consciences (nos. 42–59). For the English text of the encyclical, see *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading*

written and oral, of the good news of God's salvation of humanity in Christ but also, and more importantly, given the current American context, to such activities as personal witness, catechesis, worship, inculturation, liberation, health care, social services, education, and interreligious dialogue.

The Church's evangelizing mission must of course always be carried out in a manner appropriate to the context in which the Church finds itself. The three terms: "cultures," "religions," and "power," indicate the three aspects of the American society as the foci for my reflections on the Church's mission in the United States. No doubt there are other more pressing problems demanding immediate attention on the part of church leaders such as sexual abuse by members of the clergy, or the shortage of priests, or the diminishment of the laity, or the loss of the hierarchy's credibility, and these issues must be taken into account in any discussion of the Church's mission in the United States. As important and urgent as these issues are, they will not be explicitly dealt with here, not only because space does not permit it, but also because, in my judgment, they can be resolved satisfactorily only when considered in the wider context of the Church's mission.

The three aspects of the American society under consideration are of course very vast and complex, and no exhaustive description of them is attempted here. They have been objects of extensive study in various disciplines, and the findings have been widely popularized and are assumed in this study. I first highlight some key features of the current cultural, religious, and political context of the United States. Secondly, I enumerate the challenges presented by this triple context to the Church's evangelizing mission. Thirdly, I draw insights from Asian theologies and church experiences to shed light on how these challenges can be met.

In outline, my argument runs as follows. Culturally, the United States is greatly enriched by the various and variegated cultures of its new immigrants; religiously, it is pluralistic and even conflictive, with the increasing presence particularly of Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism; and politically and militarily, it is hegemonic, being now the only superpower in the world. In terms of the Church's mission, the challenges posed by this triple context are as follows. Culturally, how can the American Catholic Church relinquish its Eurocentrism and welcome and foster the cultures of recent immigrants who come from Africa, Asia, and Latin America? Religiously, how can the American Catholic Church "acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual and moral good, as well as the socio-cultural values"³ of non-Christian religions? Politically, how can the American Catholic

Redemptoris missio and Dialogue and Proclamation, ed. William Burrows (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1993) 5-55.

³ Vatican II's decree *Ad gentes* no. 2. English translations of ecclesiastical docu-

Church credibly preach Jesus' teaching on non-violence, peace, and justice and act in solidarity with those crushed by the economic, political, and military power of the United States? From the perspective of the Asian churches, the answer to these three questions is a triple dialogue: dialogue with the people's cultures (inculturation), dialogue with their religions (interreligious dialogue), and dialogue with their poor and marginalized (liberation).

CULTURES, RELIGIONS, AND POWER: A NEW CONTEXT

Non-European Immigrants and Cultural Diversity

Contrary to the prediction of most demographers that the flow of immigrants into the United States would trickle down after the immigration laws of the 1920s established an extremely restrictive quota system, the country now receives near record numbers of legal immigrants each year, and the second-generation—those born in the United States with one or both parents born abroad—is larger than ever before. This dramatic increase of immigration is due to the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 and recent amendments to it, especially the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 and the Immigration Act of 1990. Between 1920 and 1965 legal immigration to the United States averaged about 206,000 per year, most of it from northern and western Europe. On the contrary, between the mid-1960s to the mid-1990s, the number of immigrants averaged over 500,000 per year, not counting illegal or undocumented immigrants.⁴

What is of great significance in this unexpected phenomenon is that these new immigrants hail from parts of the world other than Europe and therefore bring with them challenges as well as resources vastly different from those of the still dominant White, Anglo-Saxon Americans, whether Catholic or Protestant.⁵ Recently much publicity has been made of the

ments are taken from *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, 7th rev. ed., Josef Neuner and Jacques Dupuis, ed. (New York: Alba House, 2001).

⁴ Under the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act any illegal resident who could demonstrate that he or she had lived in the United States before 1982 was eligible to apply for citizenship. Three million undocumented aliens took advantage of this opportunity. At the end of the amnesty program in October 1988, it was estimated that 2.7 million illegal residents remained in the country who would provide the social networks for the coming of more illegal immigrants. During the decade of 1990–2000, according to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), another 2.4 million immigrants have entered the United States illegally. The INS estimates that as of October 1996 there were five million illegal aliens living in the U.S.A.

⁵ Before 1925, 85 percent of all international migrants originated in Europe, but

findings of the 2000 census regarding the dramatic growth of minority groups and their impact on the American society. With regard to the influx of Hispanics (Latinos/as) into the United States, already in 1989, Allan Figueroa Deck referred to it as “The Second Wave.”⁶ According to the 2000 census, the Hispanic population increased by more than 50 percent since 1990, of whom Mexicans constitute 58.5, Puerto Ricans 9.6, Cubans 3.5, Central Americans 4.8, South Americans 3.8, Dominicans 2.2, Spaniards 0.3, and all other Hispanics 17.3.⁷ Native Mexicans aside, Hispanic immigrants came mainly from Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the countries of Central America (in particular El Salvador). In sum, the number of foreign-born residents in 2003 was 33.5 million, 5% increase since 2001, and the number of Hispanic residents was put at 38.8 million in 2003, surpassing African Americans in 2002 to become the largest U.S. minority.

Asians too have experienced an enormous increase in the past decades. Prior to 1965, immigration from Asia, especially from the so-called Asia-Pacific Triangle, had been prohibited on the basis of prejudices about the racial and ethnic inferiority and cultural unassimilability of Asians.⁸ But things have changed drastically since then. During the last decade the Asian-American population grew nearly 50 percent to reach a little over 10 million in 2000. The five largest groups as reported by the 2000 census are: Chinese (2.4 million), Filipino (1.8 million), Indian (1.6 million), Vietnamese (1.1 million), and Korean (1.0 million). In addition to Hispanics and Asians, mention should be made of a significant number of immigrants from the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands.

The changes in the origin, size, and composition of these newer immigrants have contributed to what has been called the “browning of America.” As the authors of a recent study on these new immigrants put it,

since 1960 there has been a dramatic increase in emigration from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

⁶ Allan Figueroa Deck, *The Second Wave: Hispanic Ministry and the Evangelization of Cultures* (New York: Paulist, 1989). See also his recent reflection on practical theology from the Hispanic perspective, “A Latino Practical Theology: Mapping the Road Ahead,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004) 275–97.

⁷ These figures are taken from the U.S. Census Bureau, compiled by Betsy Guzmán in an essay entitled “The Hispanic Population” (May 2001). In the census, by “people of Hispanic origin” are meant those whose origin was Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or some other Hispanic origin. The terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” are also used interchangeably.

⁸ Anti-Asian immigration legislation culminated in the Tydings-McDuffe Act of 1934 which can be traced back as far as the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the Gentlemen’s Agreement of 1908, and the 1917 and 1924 Immigration Acts. For an exposition of the U.S. anxiety about the “Yellow Peril,” see David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University, 1999) 31–42.

“These so-called new immigrants—those arriving in the post 1965-period—are phenotypically and culturally distinct from the old immigrants, who more closely resembled Anglo-Americans in terms of their physical characteristics and cultural patterns. . . . Moreover, research shows that the new immigrants are less inclined than the old immigrants to blend fully into American society. Most prefer, instead, to preserve and maintain their own cultural heritages and identities. . . .”⁹ This shift is evidenced in the fact that instead of speaking of “assimilation,” research on recent immigrants now refers to their “adaptation” to and “incorporation” into the American society which no longer possesses a single core culture but much more diverse cultural matrixes.¹⁰

It goes without saying that this recent immigration has had a profound and extensive impact on all sectors of the American society, not only in terms of what the United States as the receiving country has to do for these migrants, whether short-term, cyclical, or permanent,¹¹ but also in terms of the multiple benefits they indisputably bring to the American society. For good or for ill, the shape of the U.S. political, social, economic, cultural, and religious landscape has changed as the result of the massive presence of these non-European immigrants.

Among the many effects of this new, non-European immigration is the change in the very model of American culture itself. Whereas there had been a tendency to conceive American culture as the product of the amalgamation or melting of the cultures of different groups of immigrants into a uniform whole and to promote various policies to achieve this goal (the melting pot model), there has recently been a movement called multiculturalism in which the cultures of all groups are preserved and promoted in

⁹ James H. Johnson Jr., Walter C. Farrell, and Chandra Guinn, “Immigration Reform and the Browning of America: Tensions, Conflicts, and Community Instability in Metropolitan Los Angeles,” in *The Handbook of International Migration*, ed. Charles Hirschman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999) 391.

¹⁰ See Richard Alba and Victor Nee, “Rethinking Assimilation Theory for a New Era of Immigration,” in *The Handbook of International Migration* 137–60; Herbert J. Gans, “Toward a Reconciliation of ‘Assimilation’ and ‘Pluralism’: The Interplay of Acculturation and Ethnic Retention,” *ibid.* 161–71; Rubén G. Rumbaut, “Assimilation and Its Discontents: Ironies and Paradoxes,” *ibid.* 172–95; and Min Zhou, “Segmented Assimilation: Issues, Controversies, and Recent Research on the New Second Generation,” *ibid.* 196–211.

¹¹ A study published by the Rand Corporation in November 1985 entitled *Current and Future Effects of Mexican Immigration in California* suggests that there are three types of Mexican immigrants: short-term (usually tied with agricultural, seasonal jobs), cyclical (with regular returns to the same employers), and permanent (usually with families settled in the United States). See Allan Figueroa Deck, *The Second Wave* 12–15.

their distinctiveness (the salad bowl/stew/mosaic model).¹² Multiculturalism rejects not only the outright exclusivism that bars entry of foreigners into the United States on the basis of race, ethnicity, and religion, but also the no less exclusionist policies of the melting pot model (symbolized by the *e pluribus unum* motto) whereby the cultures of minority groups are assimilated into the dominant White, Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture. Rather, it promotes cultural pluralism whereby the distinctive gifts and energies of all peoples are brought together, each group preserving and fostering their cultures and religions, into an ongoing, ever-to-be-recomposed harmonious symphony of different notes and voices. In the salad bowl/stew/mosaic model, each element retains its identity and yet is enriched by the others, and together form a new reality, in which the whole is more than its parts. Perhaps the salad bowl paradigm is at best an intermediate phase. It serves to preserve the distinctiveness and integrity of the culture of each ethnic group. But, in long run, the more adequate model is that of a stew or a mosaic in which each culture, while preserving its distinctive characteristics, contributes to the making up of the American culture as a whole and in turn is itself modified and enriched by the cultures of the other groups.

One of the reasons for this movement is not only pride in one's own cultural heritage but also the perception that the so-called common American culture is nothing more than a particular culture, namely, Anglo-Saxon, which is imposed on other ethnic and racial groups. Assimilation into such culture, which was natural for European or White immigrants, is strongly resisted by the newer immigrants who have been called the "unmeltable ethnics."¹³ Thus, while there is still the desire among these immigrants to move into the American economic and political mainstream, culturally and, as we see below, religiously, they wish to maintain, for themselves and their descendants, their own languages and cultural customs. A visit to any so-called ethnic town of Cubans, Chinese, Vietnamese, Mexicans, Central Americans, and Koreans, with television programs, newspapers, restaurants, shops, churches, and street signs in their own languages, will convince any skeptic of this fact. This preservation of minority cultures and languages is also greatly facilitated by worldwide telecommunication networks and transnational travel which allow immigrants to maintain strong ties with their homelands and by the continuous stream of new arrivals from these non-European parts of the world.

¹² For a discussion of multiculturalism, particularly in education, see Peter C. Phan, "Multiculturalism, Church, and the University," *Religious Education* 90 (1995) 8–29.

¹³ See Michael Novak, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics: Politics and Culture in the Seventies* (New York: Macmillan, 1973).

From a “Christian Country” to “the World’s Religiously Most Diverse Nation”

This section heading, borrowed from the subtitle of Diana L. Eck’s book *A New Religious America*,¹⁴ paints in a nutshell the dramatic transformation of the American religious scene in the last 40 years. Based on the Pluralism Project which investigated the presence of non-Christian religions in the United States and which she directed at Harvard University, Eck alerts Americans to the new reality of religious diversity in their midst, that is of America as “the world’s religiously most diverse nation.” As mentioned above, with the 1965 abolition of the restrictions imposed on the immigration of Asians into the United States initiated in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act, people from all over the world poured into America—and along with them came not only different cultures but also religious traditions other than Christianity and Judaism: Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Hindu, Jain, Sikh, Zoroastrian, Islamic, African, and Afro-Caribbean. The American landscape, even in middle America and on Main Street, is now dotted with temples, pagodas, mosques, and gurdwaras cheek-by-jowl with churches and synagogues. As Eck puts it graphically:

Envisioning the new America in the twenty-first century requires an imaginative leap. It means seeing the religious landscape of America, from sea to shining sea, in all its beautiful complexity. Between the white New England churches and the Crystal Cathedral of southern California, we see the sacred mountains and the homelands of the Native peoples, the Peace Pagoda amid maples of Massachusetts, the mosque in the cornfields outside Toledo, the Hindu temples pitched atop the hills of Pittsburgh and Chicago, the old and new Buddhist temples of Indianapolis. Most of us have seen too little of this new religious America. But having seen, with my own eyes and through the eyes of my students and colleagues, this is the landscape I now call home. This is the America I find rich and full of promise precisely because of all it embraces.¹⁵

It is important to note that religious diversity as a fact does not by itself constitute religious pluralism. Pluralism goes beyond diversity or plurality

¹⁴ Diana L. Eck, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” Has Now Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2001). See also CD-ROM, *On Common Ground: World Religions in America*.

¹⁵ D. Eck, *A New Religious America* 11. Philip Jenkins has found fault with Eck’s findings which he says are motivated by a political agenda in debates concerning the separation of church and state. Even if the number of new immigrants who practice non-Christian religions is far less than is often supposed (for example, Jenkins puts the number of Muslims in the United States at four million rather than at eight), still the important point is that these new immigrants strongly and loudly insist that they will continue to practice their religious faiths publicly and refuse to be subsumed into some kind of civic religion or Christianity. See P. Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (New York: Oxford University, 2002) 104–5.

to a critical and serious intellectual and religious engagement with that plurality's implications for the ways one should understand reality, relate to others, and behave religiously. Pluralism also goes beyond tolerance to acceptance of the other as an other with whom one enters into a respectful and mutually challenging exchange. Furthermore, pluralism is contrary to a lazy relativism which regards differences as mere tastes and moves to an open discussion of the truths of particular beliefs and commitments. Finally, pluralism is not a finished product but a process that requires constant adjustment as new elements are brought into the cultural and religious mix. Thus the challenge for America, often proclaimed as the "Christian Nation," is whether it views this religious pluralism as a clash of civilizations and a threat to its identity or whether, on the basis of the twin principles of religious freedom and nonestablishment, it can imagine itself as a new multicultural and multireligious community.¹⁶

The Sole Superpower with Preemptive Strike Policy and Unilateral Actions

With the collapse of the Soviet Union symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the United States of America today enjoys the status of the only superpower. Through the process of globalization it parlays its economic and military might into new forms of colonialism and imperialism, and, when convenient, uses its military arsenal to "shock and awe" other nations into compliance with its will. Furthermore, in addition to military hardware and manufactured goods, the United States exports to the whole world its values—but mostly vices—through its entertainment industry.

This superpower status is all the more liable to abuses given the current administration's open contempt for the United Nations and cavalier disregard of world opinion—including the moral voice of Pope John Paul II—that were in abundant display before and after the war against Iraq. Despite the Bush administration's opposition to the possession of weapons of mass destruction by countries it demonizes as the "axis of evil" and its policy of "preemptive strike," it is important to recall that the United

¹⁶ It is symptomatic that Samuel P. Huntington, who popularizes—though not to be credited with coining—the expression "the clash of civilizations," is viewing with alarm what he considers the erosion of national identity by people who he thinks are less than wholehearted in national pride, patriotism, religious faith, and work ethic. The people included are heads of transnational corporations, members of the liberal elite, holders of dual citizenship, Mexican Americans, and "deconstructionists." Huntington believes that the United States should remain a Christian and Anglocentric country. See his *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

States is so far the only nation in world history to use weapons of mass destruction—twice. In the name of homeland security and fighting against terrorism, human rights have been violated with impunity and even certain forms of torture have been tolerated. Unfortunately, in face of these immoral and illegal behaviors, not only the voices of small nations are ignored but also the moral authority of the hierarchy of the American Catholic Church was effectively incapacitated, this time by the scandals in its midst.

THE NEW CONTEXT AND THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

This triple context of the United States—diverse cultures, multiple religions, and political hegemony—presents a series of difficult challenges to the evangelizing mission of the Church. I will highlight the more salient of these.

The Presence of Non-European Catholic Immigrants

The American Catholic Church has been justly described as, in the words of church historian Jay P. Dolan, an “institutional immigrant.” While the immigrant character of the U.S. Catholic Church appeared most pronounced after the 1820s with the arrival of large numbers of European immigrants, with time its face as a mosaic of different ethnic groups became blurred, especially after World War II, as American Catholics merged into the economic and political mainstream of America. This Americanization of U.S. Catholicism has been a long, gradual, and at times fiercely opposed process. The American Catholic Church was often portrayed as a foreign transplant, mainly from conservative European churches, ill-suited to the American ideals of religious freedom, separation of church and state, and religious pluralism. Nevertheless, Catholics were, it is said, able, by dint of accommodation and struggle, to become truly American in the second half of the 20th century.¹⁷ By the mid-1960s, Catholics, who had been for the most part poor and uneducated blue-collar workers, were as well educated as other Americans, and as a group, would be indistinguishable from

¹⁷ For helpful surveys of American Catholicism, see Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* (New York: Columbia University, 1999); Charles Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Vintage Books, 1997); David J. O'Brien, *Public Catholicism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1996); Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1985); idem, *In Search of American Catholicism: A History of Religion and Culture in Tension* (New York: Oxford University, 2002). For a collection of documents dealing with the American immigrant Catholic Church, see *Keeping Faith: European and Asian Catholic Immigrants*, ed. Jeffrey M. Burns, Ellen Skerrett and Joseph M. White (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2000).

Americans as a whole. With the election of John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic president of the United States, the Americanization process of the American Catholic Church is said to have been completed: to be a faithful Catholic and a loyal American were now one and the same thing. In the words of church historian David O'Brien, "spurred by postwar educational and economic opportunities, millions of second- and third-generation Catholics had entered the middle class and moved to the suburbs."¹⁸

With this Americanization process, coupled with a drastically reduced European immigration in the 1920s (after the 1924 Reed-Johnson Act which limited the number of European immigrants to 153,714 per annum) and the ban on Asian immigration (the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, reaffirmed in 1924), the immigration era of the American Catholic Church is said to be over. Speaking of the American Catholic Church in the late 1960s, O'Brien writes about how its immigrant era has come to an end: "American Catholicism had been shaped by the three factors of the conservative, dogmatic, and authoritative ultramontane Church, the fluid social structure and stable democracy of the United States, and its own experience as an immigrant people. *Now the immigrant era was over.*"¹⁹

This version of the history of American Catholicism, with its Americanization thesis, perhaps unobjectionable in its general outline, needs to be challenged, on at least two grounds. First, it assumes that the American Catholic Church from its inception was exclusively White and European, and more precisely, Irish and German. Indeed, the Catholic hierarchy was dominated by these two ethnic groups, and the much-vaunted upward mobility of the American Catholic population was disproportionately represented by them. Missing from this picture is the story of Catholics of other European extracts such as the Italians, the Poles, the Lithuanians, the Czechs, and the Slovaks, and Eastern-rite Catholics, who not rarely were marginalized both within and without the Church.

No less tragic is the near-complete erasure from the collective memory of the older presence of native Mexican and African American Catholics in the country. It is only recently that the history of these two groups of American Catholics was told, their presence recognized, their contributions appreciated.²⁰ But even now, their histories have not yet made to the central pages of standard textbooks on American Catholicism. If men-

¹⁸ David O'Brien, *Public Catholicism* 232.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 234. Emphasis added.

²⁰ For a history of Black American Catholics, see Cyprian Davis, *The History of Black Catholics in the United States* (New York: Crossroad, 1992) and his "African American Catholics," in *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History*, ed. Michael Glazier and Thomas Shelley (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1997) 6–13. For the Hispanic presence in the U.S.A., see Moisés Sandoval, *On the Move: A History of the Hispanic Church in the United States* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990) and Jaime

tioned at all, their presence is reported as a recent—and problematic—addition, and not as something important, already present at the very birth of the American Catholic Church.²¹ Missing too from the master narrative is an account of Asian American Catholics, especially the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Filipinos, of the 19th and early 20th century.²² Their absence from American church history is all the more poignant since “Asiatics” were until recently considered culturally incapable of amalgamation into the American society—their inclusion into America being likened to the mixing of oil and water, neither capable of absorbing the other—and constituting a “Yellow Peril” for America. Last but not least, absent too are the faces of Native American Catholics with whom missionaries had been in contact already since 1529, and now safely segregated in self-enclosed and distant reservations.²³

Secondly, the standard account of the Americanization of American Catholicism prematurely presumes that with the end of European immigration, the immigrant phase of American Catholicism is over.²⁴ As men-

Vidal, “Hispanics Catholics in America,” in *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History* 635–42. From a theological point of view, the contributions of Black and Hispanic theologies have recently been studied by two important issues of *Theological Studies*: vol. 61, no. 4 (2000) (*The Catholic Reception of Black Theology*) and vol. 65, no. 2 (2004) (*Encountering Latino and Latina Catholic Theology*).

²¹ I am not suggesting that standard works of American church history ignore the presence of Black and Hispanic Catholics in American Catholicism as a whole. Rather, I argue that the Americanization thesis does not take into account their presence from the beginning of the American Catholic Church and throughout the whole process of Americanization.

²² On Asian Catholic immigrants, see *Keeping Faith*, ed. Jeffrey Burns et al., 229–307.

²³ For an informative essay on Native American Catholics, see Carl F. Starkloff, “Native Americans and the Catholic Church,” in *The Encyclopedia of American Catholic History* 1009–20. See also *The Crossing of Two Roads: Being Catholic and Native in the United States*, ed. Marie Therese Archambault, Mark G. Thiel, and Christopher Vecsey (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003).

²⁴ Again, I am not saying that standard works do not take into account the recent waves of Catholic immigrants. Indeed, Jay Dolan discusses at length the impact of these newcomers, mainly Hispanic and Asian, for the North American Church. See his *In Search of an American Catholicism* 211–24; 238–48. David O’Brien, in the second edition of his *Public Catholicism* (1996), acknowledges the presence of African American, Native American, and Spanish-speaking Catholics (he does not mention Asian Catholics), about whom almost nothing is said even in the second edition. However, O’Brien says: “Each group deserved closer attention when I last wrote; each will need to play a central role in the story yet to be told” (x). The point I am making here is that the Americanization thesis assumes that with the end of European immigration, the immigration of Catholics into the United States has ceased, marked by the closing of Ellis Island, the preeminent symbol of immigration, in 1955.

tioned above, contrary to the prediction of most demographers that the flow of immigrants into the United States would trickle down after the restrictive laws of the 1920s, the country now receives near record numbers of legal immigrants each year, and the second-generation—those born in the United States with one or both parents born abroad—is larger than ever before.

In addition to the older Catholics among Blacks, Mexicans, Chinese, Filipinos, and Native Americans, there are newer cohorts of Catholics coming from Africa, Central and South America, and Asia whose presence brings to the American Catholic Church both difficult challenges and enriching opportunities. With regard to these newer Catholic immigrants, it is well known that a great majority of Latinos/as are Roman Catholic, though the Protestant, especially Pentecostal, presence among them is growing. While Roman Catholicism forms but a tiny minority in Asia (some three percent of the total Asian population), a significant number of Asian Americans are Roman Catholic. It is estimated that in the United States, 19 percent of Chinese (393 thousand), 65 percent of Filipinos (1.4 million), 30 percent Vietnamese (329 thousand), and 8 percent of Koreans (91 thousand) are Catholic.

No doubt the American Catholic Church is significantly affected by the presence of its newest members. Not only new forms of church organization are needed to respond to their pastoral needs such as the revival of the old national parish system (or some adaptations thereof) but also, and more importantly, there is the urgent need to preserve the different cultures and the divergent forms of Catholicism of these different ethnic groups while incorporating them as full and equal members into the common life of the American Catholic Church.²⁵

These efforts are known today under the neologism of inculturation or interculturalism.²⁶ Inculturation is essentially an encounter between at least two cultures, that of the Christian message and that of the local society.²⁷ It is a double process comprising (a) insertion of the gospel into a particular culture, and (b) introduction of the culture into the gospel. The

²⁵ The importance of Asian and Pacific Catholics in the United States has recently been recognized by the United States Catholic Conference of Bishops in its pastoral statement *Asian and Pacific Presence: Harmony in Faith* (Washington: USCCB, 2001).

²⁶ Theological literature on this theme has grown by leaps and bounds in recent decades. Theologians whose writings in this area have been influential include Robert Schreiter, Stephen Bevans, Anthony Gittings, Gerald Arbuckle, Vincent Donovan, Aylward Shorter, Anscar Chupungco, and many African, Asian, Latin American, and Latino/a contextual theologians.

²⁷ For a discussion of inculturation, see "Introduction: The Gospel in Cultures," in Peter C. Phan, *In Our Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003) 3–10.

Christian message or the gospel is not a culture-free reality; rather, it comes to us already clothed in cultural layers—Hebrew, Hellenistic, Roman, Teutonic, and so on. The gospel, though not to be identified with any culture, is never independent of culture. For their part, the addressees of the Christian message do not receive it in a culturally naked manner; they too are inextricably enmeshed in their cultures in which they live, and move, and have their being. Hence, one of the fundamental tasks of inculturation is to discern the gospel apart from the cultural forms in which it is clothed and to re-express it in new cultural forms. The result of inculturation is both the transformation of the culture from within by the gospel and the enrichment of the gospel by the culture with its new way of understanding and living it. Hence, the end result of inculturation is something new, a *tertium quid*, going beyond the current culture and the previous ways of understanding and living the gospel.

In the case of immigrants from what was once called the Third World, the inculturation of the gospel is a complicated task. Not only must they engage with the encounter between the gospel and their own cultures but they must also deal with the encounter between their own, often premodern, cultures with the American culture, which is predominantly modern and even postmodern and from which they are for the most part marginalized. In other words, these new members of the American Catholic Church must negotiate the extremely complex task of interculturalization among three distinct cultures, i.e., that of the gospel, that of the United States, and their own. The question is not whether inculturation should be attempted—it is an integral and constitutive dimension of the Church's evangelizing mission²⁸—but *how*, especially in the complex predicament of immigration in the United States.

Catholic, Protestant, Jew, and Much More: A Harmony of Differences

The notion of America as a Christian nation, or at best as a mixture of Christian denominations with Judaism added to the mix, as described by Will Herberg's 1955 book *Protestant, Catholic, Jew*, has been shattered.

²⁸ In his 1999 postsynodal apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* Pope John Paul II writes: "Culture is the vital space in which the human person comes face to face with the Gospel. . . . Evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other. The Gospel and evangelization are certainly not identical with culture; they are independent of it. Yet the Kingdom of God comes to people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building of the Kingdom of God cannot avoid borrowing elements from human cultures." The pope goes on to insist that the process of inculturation "*must involve the entire People of God*" (no. 21). The English text of the exhortation is available in *The Asian Synod: Texts and Commentaries*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002) 286–340.

While Christianity and Judaism still continue to be the dominant religious forces in the American society, the “American way of life” made up exclusively of Christianity and Judaism has long passed as other religions are making rapid inroads into it. A statistic may well prove the point: There are more American Muslims than Episcopalians; more Muslims than members of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.; and as many Muslims as Jews—that is, about six million. The challenge of religious pluralism for America is well summarized by Eck:

The story of the new religious America is an unfinished story, with both national and global implications. The chapters of the story are still being written in cities and towns all over the country. Whether the vibrant new religious diversity that is now part and parcel of the United States will, in the years ahead, bring us together or tear us apart depends greatly on whether we are able to imagine our national community anew.²⁹

In this regard, it is important to note that in the United States the relation between Christianity and other religions is no longer a mere theological issue but has become a practical and even legal problem as recent controversies surrounding the display of the crèche and the Ten Commandments in government buildings, the recitation of Christian prayers in public schools, the zoning restrictions against the construction of places of non-Christian worship in certain areas, and the vandalism of sacred objects of other religions have amply demonstrated. The question is whether the American Catholic Church will be able to contribute effectively to this imagining of a new, multireligious and multicultural community, marked not by indifferent tolerance (which is at bottom disguised intolerance) but by sincere respect and genuine equality, especially in carrying out friendly life in common, mutual collaboration, sharing of spiritual experiences and worship, and theological exchange. All these activities, which are often included under the rubric of interreligious dialogue, describe the four areas in which the American Catholic Church is challenged to meet religious pluralism creatively.

Such interreligious dialogue is of course by no means easy, even for the Catholic Church, which, different from any other Christian church, has had longstanding, extensive, and fruitful experiences of it, especially under John Paul II, who without a shadow of doubt has contributed more than any other pope to the cause of interreligious dialogue. Nevertheless, as evidenced by the declaration of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith *Dominus Iesus* (June 2000) and by the Jacques Dupuis affair, essential theological issues such as the locus of divine revelation, the role of Christ as the universal and unique savior, the function of the Church as the

²⁹ D. Eck, *A New Religious America* 385.

necessary means of salvation, the role of non-Christian religions as possible ways of salvation, and the nature and purpose of Christian mission, are far from being settled. But challenges to interreligious dialogue are by no means merely doctrinal. Other challenges are perhaps more intractable and have more immediate impact on the daily life of Catholics such as living in genuine friendship and collaborating with followers of other religions, especially Muslims (given the current political situation of the United States), sharing of worship and common prayer, and even multiple religious belonging.

The American Catholic Church is in a unique position to make innovative contributions to interreligious dialogue. Whereas religious diversity is dominant in Asia, the Catholic Church in Asia, given its minority status, lacks the necessary resources to carry out a full dialogue with other religions. On the contrary, in the United States, now “the world’s most religiously diverse nation,” the Catholic Church is the largest denomination, endowed with abundant financial and intellectual resources and even political influence, can take a lead in interreligious dialogue. It can serve as a useful laboratory for interreligious dialogue and its achievement in this field will no doubt have an impact on religious pluralism in the Catholic Church as a whole.

Option for the Poor, Peace, and Justice

The mention of the political influence of the American Catholic Church brings us to the third context’s challenges to the Church’s proclamation of Christ.³⁰ Against an administration committed to “preemptive strike” against nations perceived—even on fallacious and fabricated grounds—to be threats to America’s national security, the American Catholic Church is challenged to reiterate its traditional teaching on just war, even in the context of stateless terrorism, and to raise its voice in unambiguous and forthright condemnation when the conditions for a just war are violated, without fear of charges of unpatriotism. Against the widespread propensity for the use of war to settle international disputes, the American Catholic Church is called to proclaim Christ’s teaching on non-violence and his gift of peace to the world. Against fiscal policies that favor the wealthy and expand evermore the gap between the rich and the poor, the American Catholic Church is challenged to practice God’s preferential love for the poor and to stand in effective solidarity with them. Against the abuses of human rights in the name of homeland security, the American Catholic

³⁰ For a helpful report on the current “state of the union,” especially the U.S. economy, society, and governance, see *The Atlantic Monthly* (January/February, 2004) 110–62.

Church is urged to speak truth and justice to power and to do whatever it can to protect and promote human dignity.

All these activities go under the rubric of liberation, which is also an integral and constitutive dimension of the Church's mission. Without the work for liberation and justice, inculturation runs the risk of élitist nostalgia for the past; without it, interreligious dialogue is reduced to academic chatter and a religious feel-good exercise.

INCULTURATION, INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE, AND LIBERATION AS PART OF THE MISSION OF THE AMERICAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The juxtaposition of these three activities, i.e., inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation, is by no means arbitrary. Rather they have repeatedly been grouped together by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) as three forms of dialogue by which the Church's mission is to be carried out in Asia.³¹ It is important to note that dialogue is understood here not as a separate activity—for example, ecumenical and interfaith dialogue—but as the *modality* in which everything is to be done by and in the Church in Asia, including inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation. It is through this triple dialogue—with the Asian peoples, especially the poor, their cultures, and their religions—that the Church in Asia performs its evangelizing mission and thus becomes the local church. Hence, dialogue is not a substitute for proclamation or evangelization; rather, it is the way, and indeed the most effective way, in which the proclamation of the good news is done in Asia.

It is also important to note that dialogue as *a mode of being Church* in Asia does not refer primarily to the intellectual exchange among experts of various religions, as is often done in the West. Rather, it involves a fourfold presence:

(a) The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. (b) The

³¹ The FABC was founded in 1970, on the occasion of Pope Paul VI's visit to Manila. Its statutes, approved in 1972 by the Holy See *ad experimentum* were amended several times and were also approved again each time by the Holy See. For the documents of the FABC and its various institutes, see *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1970 to 1991*, vol. 1, ed. Gaudencio Rosales and C. G. Arévalo (New York/Quezon City: Orbis/Claretian, 1992); *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1992 to 1996*, vol. 2, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian, 1997); and *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. Documents from 1997 to 2002*, vol. 3, ed. Franz-Josef Eilers (Quezon City: Claretian, 2002). These will be cited as *For All Peoples*, followed in parentheses by their years of publication.

dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. (c) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. (d) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute.³²

In the remaining pages I will indicate, from the perspective and insights of Asian theologies and church experiences, how the challenges facing the American Catholic Church as already presented can be met.

The Church as an "Institutional Immigrant": Inculturation

With the arrival of new immigrants since 1970s the American Catholic Church has rediscovered its identity as an "institutional immigrant," but this time with a significant difference. Along with them came a plethora of diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious heritages, and not the European one. Church historian David O'Brien has written of the three "styles" of public American Catholicism, namely, the republican, the immigrant, and the evangelical:

The *republican style*, with its dualism of citizenship and discipleship, remains the best articulated, but still searches for a pastoral and political strategy. The *interest group* or *immigrant style* remains an impulse of institutional interest and is always attractive to powerless groups seeking a place at the table. It has a rich history and a relatively clear pastoral and political strategy, but it has yet to find a persuasive theological articulation. The *evangelical style* continues to grow, reflecting the dynamics of American democratic religious and cultural pluralism. It is the approach most affirmative of American individualism and personal freedom, the most open to the pull of the spirit of religious and social renewal movement of all sorts. It is the hardest to contain within institutional boundaries, the least "Catholic" but the most "Christian" of the styles. Among middle class, "postethnic" Americans evangelical piety will most likely be the starting point for evangelization and pastoral planning. The interaction among these three styles will shape the future of public Catholicism in the United States.³³

The immigrant style O'Brien is describing refers to the kind of public Catholicism that became dominant after 1840s, with the coming of a large number of Irish and German Catholics. Prior to this massive influx of immigrants, the American Catholic Church adopted the Republican style that "opened the door to distinctive national traditions, to an ecclesiology that allowed local churches to adapt to their unique circumstances, to

³² The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation* no. 42 (May 19, 1991). The English text of the document is available in *Redemption and Dialogue*, ed. William Burrows, 93–118; see also *For All Peoples* (1997) 21–26.

³³ D. O'Brien, *Public Catholicism* xi.

define a relative independence of [from?] Rome and a vision of the universal Church as a communion of local churches, to open an apologetics of convergence, one that emphasized what men and women held in common rather than what separated them.”³⁴ Based on the principles of religious freedom, separation of church and state, and religious pluralism (that is, various Christian denominations), such a style was favored by John Carroll and was especially suited to the religious and political temper of relatively prosperous, mostly native-born Maryland Catholics.

By contrast, the immigrant style that followed was characterized by “group consciousness, defensiveness, willingness to use power to achieve concrete results.”³⁵ Geared to the needs of the largely uneducated, poor, and unchurched new immigrants, especially from Ireland and Germany, the strategy was now designed to preserve their faith and loyalty by insisting on ecclesiastical centralization, especially around the parish, on separate education in Catholic schools, and on using political power to combat anti-Catholic nativism, especially that of the Know-Nothing party. While the immigrant style strengthened the American Catholic Church as a religious and political institution, the price it paid was the social and cultural segregation of the Church from the larger American world, reducing it to a ghetto subculture.

Needless to say, the American Catholic Church as a new immigrant institution is now facing challenges different from those of the 19th century, and the strategies of the “immigrant style” are hardly suitable to the new Catholic immigrants. Their life is not centered around neighborhood or national churches; most of them cannot afford private education in Catholic schools; and even though anti-Catholicism still exists, rather than rejected, they are assiduously courted by political parties, both Democratic and Republican. Their unity does not seem to derive from ecclesiastical centralization, Catholic education, and political arrangements, but from the preservation of their cultural and religious heritages.

The immigrants’ desire to maintain their distinct cultural and religious identities is also militated against by the assimilationist assumptions of the republican style. On the other hand, the republican principles of religious freedom, separation of church and state, and religious freedom are congenial to the immigrants’ projects of cultural and religious autonomy. Furthermore, its underlying ecclesiology which gives priority to the local churches and which views the universal Church as a communion of churches is theologically fruitful for the task of inculturation to which the American Catholic Church is now called.

Communion ecclesiology, as such a theology of the Church is now known, is indeed a *sine qua non* for a vigorous and genuine inculturation.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 33.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 55.

This ecclesiology has been repeatedly promoted by the FABC which describes it as a new way of being Church in Asia. It is characterized by four features. First, the Church is a “communion of communities,” in which there a fundamental equality of all the local churches (including the Church of Rome, without prejudice to the pope’s primacy) and of all Christians. Secondly, the Church, constituted by the “discipleship of equals,” must be fully participatory and collaborative in which there is mutual learning and mutual correction among all the members of the church as well as among all the local churches, including the Church of Rome. Thirdly, the life of the Church must be animated by an authentic dialogical spirit, fully engaged in the triple dialogue mentioned above. Fourthly, the Church fulfill its prophetic mission, that is, it must be concerned not with its own welfare and self-aggrandizement but with the building up of the kingdom or reign of God in the world by promoting justice, peace, reconciliation, the integrity of creation, and harmony.³⁶

Within this communion ecclesiology the American Catholic Church, I submit, should carry out the complex task of helping each ethnic group of immigrants inculcated the Christian faith in their own culture in dialogue with the culture of the gospel, the American culture, and the cultures of other ethnic groups. Inculturation in the United States involves therefore an interaction among at least five elements: the message of the gospel itself (divine revelation), the cultures in which the gospel has been transmitted (the Christian tradition), the American culture (modern and postmodern), the predominantly premodern culture of one particular group (e.g., Vietnamese), and the usually premodern cultures of other ethnic groups (e.g., Black, Mexican, Caribbean, etc.).

The areas in which inculturation must be carried out cover all the activities of church life. The Asian bishops enumerate five key areas: theology, liturgy, ministerial formation, catechesis, and spirituality.³⁷ No doubt these areas are extremely vast and enormous, and unfortunately the work is barely begun. With regard to theology, the very experience of being an immigrant provides fresh ways of doing theology, leading to an “intercultural theology.”³⁸ Substantively, the key theological themes to be incultur-

³⁶ For a lucid exposition of communion ecclesiology from the Asian perspective, see James H. Kroeger, *Becoming Local Church* (Quezon City: Claretian, 2003). See also for a fuller exposition of the FABC’s communion ecclesiology, see Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003) 176–82.

³⁷ See *Ecclesia in Asia* no. 22.

³⁸ On this intercultural theology, see “The Experience of Migration as Source of Intercultural Theology in the United States,” in Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face* 3–25 and “The Dragon and the Eagle: Toward a Vietnamese American Theology,” *ibid.* 228–47. For a different way of doing theology in Asia, see the

ated are the image of God, Christ, Spirit. Concerning Christ in particular, the Asian bishops suggest that images of Jesus that are attractive to Asian minds should be employed such as: "Jesus Christ as the Teacher of Wisdom, the Healer, the Liberator, the Spiritual Guide, the Enlightened One, the Compassionate Friend of the Poor, the Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd, the Obedient One."³⁹ The presence and activities of the Holy Spirit must be discerned in the Asian religious traditions and the sociopolitical realities of Asia.⁴⁰ In liturgy and worship, inculturation is most needed in sacramental celebrations connected with birth, sickness, marriage, and death, where cultural traditions and customs are most numerous and pervasive. There is also the vexed issue of how to relate liturgy with popular religion which plays a vital role in the immigrants' Christian life.⁴¹ For example, for Asians of Confucian background, the veneration of ancestors is a sacred practice, and it is still a major question of how to incorporate it into liturgical celebrations of baptism, the Eucharist, marriage, and funerals.⁴² The formation of future priests and ministers, in view of service to ethnic groups, still leaves much to be desired.⁴³ Catechesis, too, is still excessively anchored in traditional doctrinal formulas and remains largely unaffected by the immigrants' cultural contexts.⁴⁴ Finally, while there has been an attempt to adopt spiritual practices of other cultures and religions, especially in meditation techniques, it is still very much confined to monastic communities and a small circle of lay practitioners.

This focus on inculturation of course should not neglect one of the strengths of the older immigrant style, namely, the mobilization of immigrants, especially lay, for public goals and for change in policy. This will be dealt with later when speaking of the third challenge facing the American

extensive document of the FABC's Office of Theological Concerns *Methodology: Asian Christian Theology* in *For All Peoples* (2002) 329–419.

³⁹ *Ecclesia in Asia* no. 20. For an attempt to imagine Jesus as an Asian and an ancestor, see "Jesus the Christ with an Asian Face"; "Jesus as the Eldest Son and Ancestor"; "Jesus with a Chinese Face," in Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face* 98–170.

⁴⁰ For an extensive elaboration of an Asian Pneumatology, see the lengthy and insightful document of the FABC's Office of Theological Concerns *The Spirit at Work in Asia Today* in *For All Peoples* (2002) 237–327.

⁴¹ On popular religion and liturgy, see "Popular Religion and Liturgical Inculturation: Perspectives and Challenges from Asia," in Peter C. Phan, *In Our Tongues* 65–91.

⁴² For a discussion of ancestor veneration and liturgy, see "Culture and Liturgy: Ancestor Veneration as a Test Case," in *ibid.* 109–29.

⁴³ On formation for multicultural ministry, see "Crossing the Borders: A Spirituality for Mission in Our Times," *ibid.* 130–50.

⁴⁴ On catechesis, see Peter C. Phan, "Catechesis and Catechism as Inculturation of the Christian Faith," in *Christianity with an Asian Face* 202–27.

Catholic Church. Suffice it to note here that the presence of diverse cultures, which the Church professes to respect and promote, and the consequent task of inculturation in the five areas of church life mentioned above— theology, liturgy, catechesis, ministerial formation, and spirituality—introduce a totally new perspective into the immigrant style.

Christians amid Other Believers: Interreligious Dialogue

The Catholic Church is long past considering the followers of other religions as “infidels” or “pagans” and no longer teaches, as the Decree for the Jacobites of the Council of Florence did in 1442, on the basis of Matthew 25:41, that those who remain outside the Catholic Church, including pagans, Jews, heretics, or schismatics, will go to the “eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” unless before the death they join the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church no longer holds Pius IX’s teaching in his allocution *Singulari quadam* (1854) that “no one can be saved outside the apostolic Roman Church, that the Church is the only ark of salvation, and that whoever does not enter it will perish in the flood” and that they are exculpated only in virtue of their “invincible ignorance.”⁴⁵

On the contrary, Vatican II affirms the possibility of salvation for Jews, Muslims, those “who without fault on their part do not know the Gospel of Christ and his Church, but seek God with a sincere heart, and under the influence of grace endeavor to do his will as recognized through the promptings of their conscience,” and even for those “who, without fault on their part, have not yet reached an explicit knowledge of God, and yet endeavor, not without grace, to live a good life.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, Vatican II recognizes the presence of “elements of truth and of grace”⁴⁷ in non-Christian religions and acknowledges them as “seeds of the Word” implanted by God before the preaching of the gospel that “may sometimes be taken as leading the way (*pedagogue*) to the true God and as a preparation for the Gospel.”⁴⁸ Pope John Paul II has undoubtedly made enormous contributions to interreligious dialogue, not only in his extensive and ground-breaking writings on the subject, but also, and perhaps more significantly, through his numerous symbolic actions such as his visits to places of worship of other religions and his several gatherings of leaders of various religions in Assisi for prayer.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ English text in *The Christian Faith*, ed. J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, 423–24.

⁴⁶ Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium* no. 16.

⁴⁷ Vatican II’s Decree *Ad gentes* no. 9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* no. 3.

⁴⁹ Two recent statements of the papal magisterium deserve special notice. In his 1990 encyclical on mission, Pope John Paul II declares that the Holy Spirit is present “not only in individuals but also in society and history, peoples, cultures,

Given the predominance thus far of Christian denominations in the United States, the American Catholic Church has had more experience in ecumenical dialogue than in interreligious dialogue, except in relation to Judaism. By contrast, the Asian Catholic churches have had more experience in interreligious dialogue than in ecumenical dialogue. Hence, in fulfilling its task of interreligious dialogue, the American Catholic Church can look eastward with great profit.

Perhaps one of the most valuable lessons from Asian Catholic churches' experience with interfaith dialogue is that this dialogue must be accompanied by a comprehensive program of inculturation and by effective solidarity with the poor people (liberation). Inculturation, interreligious dialogue, and liberation form the three-pronged approach to Christian mission in Asia. The necessity of doing these three dialogues together has been argued most forcefully by Asian theologians such as Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris and Indian theologian Michael Amaladoss and has been repeatedly affirmed by the FABC.⁵⁰ These three dialogues must be practiced together; only then can each guarantee the authenticity and success of the others. Indeed, theoretically, it is impossible to draw a clear dividing line among these three dialogues, since not rarely it is, as Jesus' ministry has made it abundantly clear, the poor and marginalized people who are most religious and most attached to their cultures. Dehumanizing poverty, deep religiousness, and a wealth of cultures—these are the context in which the Asian churches carry out their evangelizing mission.

Another important lesson is that interreligious dialogue must not be reduced to an intellectual exchange among theologians, important though it is, but must embrace all four dimensions, namely, life, action, theological exchange, and religious experience. Indeed, it is arguably the last—the sharing of religious experience—that is most life-transforming, though un-

and religions" (*Redemptoris missio* no. 28). The 1991 document *Dialogue and Proclamation* of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue says that because of "the active presence of God through his Word" and "the universal presence of the Spirit" not only in persons outside the Church but also in their religions, it is "in the sincere practice of what is good in their own religious traditions . . . that the members of other religions correspond positively to God's invitation and receive salvation" (no. 29). Unfortunately, the 2000 declaration *Dominus Iesus* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has dampened the efforts toward interreligious dialogue. For a balanced evaluation of this document by the Asian bishops, see *For All Peoples* (2002) 143–44.

⁵⁰ See *For All Peoples* (1992) 22–23. For a helpful synthesis of the activities and theology of the FABC on this point, see Edmund Chia, *Thirty Years of FABC: History, Foundation, Context and Theology*, FABC Papers, no. 106 (16 Caine Road, Hong Kong: FABC, 2003).

fortunately, it is also the one seen as the most dangerous and consequently the most strongly resisted against.

Needless to say, interreligious dialogue in its fourfold aspect of life, action, theological exchange, and religious experience is of particular relevance for Catholic Asian immigrants whose families more often than not include followers of other religions. Given the regrettable fact that among Asian Catholics there still persists the belief that only Christians can be saved, Asian Catholic parents usually require the conversion of their non-Christian (and also non-Catholic Christian) potential sons or daughters-in-law. Though their desire that their children and their spouses share the same faith is understandable and even laudable, still the Church needs to do a better job at preparing Asian Catholic immigrants for interfaith dialogue and for the practical problems arising from interfaith marriages such as the religious upbringing of offspring and the sharing of religious worship.

Ironically, despite Asian Catholic parents' strong insistence on their sons and daughters-in-law joining the Catholic Church, one widespread feature of Asian religious life is what has been called multiple religious belonging.⁵¹ In the West, religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are seen as mutually exclusive, so that membership in one precludes participation in another. Not so with most other religions, particularly in Asia. In Asian countries such as China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam, India, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, multiple religious belonging is a rule rather than an exception, at least on the popular level. Indeed, the very expression "multiple religious belonging" as understood in the West, that is, as two or more memberships in particular systems of beliefs and practices within bounded communities, is a misnomer in Asia where religions are considered not as mutually exclusive religious organizations but as having specialized functions responding, according to a division of labor as it were, to the different needs and circumstances in the course of a person's life. Such is the case, for instance, with Shinto and Buddhism in Japan, and with Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism in China. Thus, not rarely do Asian people go to pray and worship in pagodas, temples, and shrines, without giving much consideration to what religion these sacred places belong to, but to whether the local deity or spirit is reputed to grant a favor tailored to one's particular needs and circumstances.

While multiple religious belonging poses challenging theological problems, in particular with regard to the question of Jesus as the unique and universal savior and to the validity of non-Christian religions as "ways of

⁵¹ On multiple religious belonging, see *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002); and Peter C. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging: Opportunities and Challenges for Theology and Church," *Theological Studies* 64 (2003) 495–519.

salvation,”⁵² and brings with it dangers of syncretism, it will be the dominant issue in interreligious dialogue that the American Catholic Church will have to deal with in the future. Elsewhere I have made seven suggestions as to how the Church in the United States should promote a theological education that will deal with multiple religious belonging. Allow me here simply to list them briefly: sensitizing candidates for ministry to the fact of religious diversity; a theological curriculum requiring some courses on missiology and interreligious dialogue; requiring courses in religious pluralism; learning how to understand Christian faith through the non-Christian perspectives; participating in multifaith worship and prayer; working with the poor and the marginalized; and developing friendship with non-Christians.⁵³

Lastly, among Asian immigrants, there are many Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims. It is well known that in many Asian countries, followers of these religions are in mortal conflict with one another: Hindus against Muslims in India and Pakistan, Christians against Muslims in the Philippines, Buddhists against Muslims in Sri Lanka, and Christians against non-Christians in many other places. Catholic immigrants in America have the unique opportunity to show how adherents of different religions can live together in harmony and work together for world peace.⁵⁴

A Church of Affluence and Power in Solidarity with All Nations: Liberation

There is no doubt that the American Catholic Church, despite its relative youth, is one of the most powerful churches, perhaps even the most powerful one today. Whatever it says and does can serve as a precedent for other churches throughout the world. This power is due partly to the American Catholic Church's vast financial resources and its unique network of educational institutions. More importantly, it is a function of its being an inextricable part of the only superpower possessing an overwhelming political, economic, and military might. This power is both a blessing and a curse for the American Catholic Church. A blessing insofar as it has at its disposal resources and influence to do good and to bring the gospel values to bear on the American society and ultimately on the world. A curse insofar as in so doing it may adopt the way of the world, that is, through the use of power, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Or, for fear of conflict with the powerful, it will remain silent, under pretext of

⁵² On this point, see Peter C. Phan, "Multiple Religious Belonging" 499–504.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 516–19.

⁵⁴ For interreligious dialogue from an Asian perspective, see Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2004).

prudence, before the way the United States makes use of its power. As a consequence, it forfeits its prophetic voice and becomes complicit with the immoral policies and practices of the American government.

In his assessment of the earlier immigrant style of the American Catholic Church David O'Brien argues that one of its strengths is its recognition of the necessity of forceful activities by the laity in the secular order such as boycotts, demonstrations, marches, publicity, and unionization, beyond the emphasis on fidelity to the gospel (the "evangelical style") and on civic-mindedness (the "republican style"), to bring about social changes in favor of justice.⁵⁵ Such tactics are of course still legitimate and necessary even today to defend the rights and interests of minority groups and immigrants.

However, for good or for ill, the new immigrants now live in a country that will remain for the foreseeable future the world's only superpower. Rich or poor, they all benefit from the wealth and power of their adopted country. The passport they eventually hold carries much weight around the world and entitles them to the basic human rights denied to citizens of other countries. They participate in a free market economic system that has been by and large successful in producing financial gains for those able and willing to embrace it. These political and economic advantages do not however accrue to Americans without heavy costs to others. As a group, Americans consume a disproportionate amount of the earth's resources, with deleterious effects on the ecology, to enjoy and maintain their sacrosanct "American way of life." Their political and military leaders do not hesitate to use their country's massive military arsenals to "shock and awe" and crush not only the so-called "axis of evil" but also those who are perceived to threaten America's "vital interests" and its citizens' "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Through globalization, the United States extends its political and economic hegemony throughout the world, exercising new forms of imperialism and colonialism. As a result, the gap separating America from other countries grows larger and the very few rich get richer, while the teeming masses of the poor (among them, women and children in particular) get poorer.

New immigrants in America, willy-nilly, are part of this system of racial, gender, economic, and political exploitation and domination. None of them now have clean hands, even though they may have come to the United States from poor and oppressed countries. But precisely because of their backgrounds and histories, immigrants cannot forget or ignore the cries and tears of their fellow citizens in their adopted countries and of the people in their former homelands. Therefore, the pressure tactics mentioned above should not be used exclusively for the benefit of just immigrants but also, in the tradition of the republican style, for domestic and

⁵⁵ See David O'Brien, *Public Catholicism* 248.

foreign issues of wider impact such as environmental protection, defense of the life of the unborn, more equitable welfare benefits, full employment, priority given to the poor in planning budgets, adequate housing, the elimination of nuclear arms and weapons of mass destruction, and world peace. In this way there is a fusion of the immigrant style, which advocates the use of power to defend the interests of minority groups, and the republican style, which emphasizes the building of the public moral consensus through public debate and dialogue on the basis of natural law, human dignity, and human rights.

There is a further issue in which the American Catholic Church is urgently challenged, in view of its location in the military superpower, to take a stance with the immigrants, and that is non-violence and peace. A majority of recent immigrants to the United States are refugees from countries ravaged by civil wars and international armed conflicts, wars and conflicts in which the United States was directly or indirectly involved. Given what is judged by many to be the current militaristic posture and perhaps even imperialistic designs of the Bush administration, it is imperative that the American Catholic Church, with so many victims of war in its midst, courageously and prophetically bear witness to the teaching and example of Jesus on non-violence, forgiveness, and reconciliation. At the very least, the Church must insist on the absolute duty for the U.S. government to observe the conditions for a just war, and to condemn forthrightly and publicly any war that fails the test of a just war, no matter the political costs. Otherwise, the Church will be seen as benefiting from the booties of an unjust, unethical, and immoral war and its preaching on justice and peace will sound as self-serving rant.⁵⁶

In his book *A People Adrift* Peter Steinfels argues that the American Catholic Church is now facing a deep crisis leading to either “an irreversible decline or a thoroughgoing transformation.”⁵⁷ David Gibson, on his

⁵⁶ In developing a theology of non-violence and peace, needless to say, the North American Catholic Church can derive many useful insights from the non-violence tradition of Asia (e.g., Mahatma Gandhi, Buddhism, Jainism, and Thich Nhat Hanh) as well as from concrete projects to achieve reconciliation. See R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000) esp. 121–43. Concerning the traditional criteria of just war, a case has been made that, following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, war against terrorism has made at least some of the criteria obsolete. See George Weigel, “The Just War Case for the War,” *America* 188 (March 31, 2003) 7–10. For thoughtful reflections on the just war in our current context, see Drew Christensen, “Whither the ‘Just War’?” *America* 188 (March 24, 2003) 7–11 and Kenneth R. Himes, “Intervention, Just War, and U.S. National Security,” *Theological Studies* 65 (2004) 141–57.

⁵⁷ Peter Steinfels, *A People Adrift: The Crisis of the Roman Catholic Church in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003) 1.

part, has also offered a balanced analysis of the problems currently facing the American Catholic Church and detailed the contributions of the laity in leading the Church out of its quagmire.⁵⁸ In his insightful introduction to *American Catholicism*, Chester Gillis notes that the future American Church will be “bound by a core of central beliefs and divided by a multiplicity of practices, moral stances, and theological differences with Rome and with each other.”⁵⁹ Historian Jay Dolan argues that in its search for identity contemporary American Catholicism will have to deal with six issues, namely, democracy, national identity, political involvement, popular devotions, gender, and Americanization of doctrine.⁶⁰ While sharing these various analyses and prognoses of the American Catholic Church, my article highlights the oft-forgotten roles and contributions of America’s newer immigrants in proclaiming Christ in a new America, now characterized by cultural diversity, religious pluralism, and world domination. Whatever may be said about these new immigrants, it is clear that the American Catholic Church, to paraphrase Newman’s celebrated saying about the laity in the Church, will look foolish without them.⁶¹

⁵⁸ David Gibson, *The Coming Catholic Church: How the Faithful Are Shaping a New American Catholicism* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2002).

⁵⁹ Chester Gillis, *Roman Catholicism in America* 279–80.

⁶⁰ See Jay Dolan, *In Search of American Catholicism* 191–256.

⁶¹ This article originated as the Isaac Hecker Lecture sponsored by the Paulist community in Washington, D.C. I am grateful to James Donovan, C.S.P., for the invitation to deliver this lecture and to Robert E. Moran, C.S.P., Robert J. O’Donnell, C.S.P., and Steven Bell, C.S.P. for their responses and suggestions.