

on-going process" (78) may sound like a platitude or truism, but if this involves a deeper commitment to the task at hand, then the phrase reflects a mature acceptance of *The Challenge of Cultures* (title of book).

Addressing changing culture, promoting faith and justice, fostering interfaith dialogue — evangelization itself — is always a dynamic, on-going never-fully-achieved process that demands a costly commitment. Thomas Menampampil has provided a modest, practical impetus for a renewed dedication to evangelization in our contemporary, complex, changing world of cultures, conflicts, and genuine inculturation.

Reviewed by James H. Kroeger, M.M.



CLASHING SYMBOLS: AN INTRODUCTION TO FAITH AND CULTURE by Michael Paul Gallagher, S.J. London: Darton, Longman and Todd Ltd., 1997; American Edition — New York: Paulist Press, 1998. vi + 170 pp. ISBN 0-8091-3784-4.

In recent years the faith-culture relationship has become a subject of great importance both within theology and the Church. In this book Michael Paul Gallagher, an Irish Jesuit who worked in the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture (1990-1995) and now teaches at the Gregorian University in Rome, presents a diversity of perspectives on this contemporary question.

Gallagher has a gift for clarity of presentation, manifesting his considerable scholarship and yet communicating on a popular level. He writes with a clear sense of mission, not only providing information, but also seeking to effect transformation. He notes that the "aim of this book is to provide a double theology — of nonpanic and of liberation — for believers faced with their surrounding cultures" (vi). He investigates contemporary realities, wondering with Lonergan if the

world today is actually undergoing “a crisis not of faith but of culture” (5).

This volume, clear in its structure and sense of direction, begins by clarifying the concept of culture. Because “culture” is a word that can be “exasperating in its inclusiveness” (11), Gallagher systematically presents in the first two chapters the views of various writers and theorists of culture and cultural change. This foundation is pivotal, particularly for Christian Churches, because throughout most of human history, “cultures have been rooted in religious consciousness [and] a central crisis of culture today comes from the split between culture and religion over the last two centuries or so” (23).

Subsequently, two chapters are devoted to recent Catholic developments concerning culture. A substantial portion of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* (Nos. 53-62) explored the proper understanding of culture; Gallagher comments on the Council’s insights, evaluates them from a three-decade perspective, and concludes that key issues identified in the Council “continue to be central” for the Church (43).

The story of Catholic approaches to the changing role of culture in the post-Vatican II era can be told in two parts: (a) the 1974 synod on evangelization and Pope Paul VI’s *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, and (b) the significant attention given to culture by Pope John Paul II since his 1978 election. Key thematic concepts are insightfully explored: “evangelization of cultures”; the gospel-culture split as the “drama of our time”; culture as central to personal and communal growth; the field of culture as a privileged space for dialogue; Pope John Paul II’s personalist, humanistic, and philosophical points of view on culture. In a separate, brief chapter Gallagher presents the view of the World Council of Churches, its insights and variances with the Catholic stance.

Three chapters are then devoted to the contemporary context of faith and culture; they address issues of modernity, postmodernity, and postmodernism. The author, employing simple yet scholarly distinctions and clarifications, enables readers to walk through this dense forest. Through creative approaches [e.g. the “ten commandments of

radical postmodernism" (88-90); the "faces of postmodernity" schematically presented in diagram form (94)], complex questions are outlined and critically evaluated.

The final four chapters address more "pastoral issues"—inculturation, discernment, youth ministry, and the outlines of a spirituality for today's culture. Each of these chapters is a significant piece in its own right; for example, much of Chapter Nine "Horizons of Inculturation" appeared in the *International Review of Mission* (85/1996, 173-180).

This reviewer found Gallagher's views on cultural discernment and spirituality genuinely perceptive and insightful. The author notes that there can be "three schools of Christian response to culture: tense hostility; innocent acceptance; discernment and creation of culture" (117). Gallagher vigorously promotes the discernment / culture-creation stance; he presents a New Testament model for this disposition based on Paul's Areopagus discourse in Chapter Seventeen of the Acts of the Apostles (120-124).

For a true spirituality of culture, "there are three converging strengths to be learned — skills of interiority, supports of community, and commitment to service of the wounded of the world. . . . Where all these flourish, we are well on the way to recreating a living Christian culture for our time" (144-145).

This genuinely helpful — and optimistic — volume concludes with a personal epilogue and an anthology of quotations on culture. Narrating some personal experiences from his native Ireland, from his years in Rome, and from the world of Windows 95 and the Net, Gallagher invites the reader to "ponder his or her story of this strange reality called culture" (147). Again, the appendix of quotations is judiciously chosen; it reveals the wide range of scholarship at the basis of this book.

In a word, this is a fine introduction to the state of the question:

the culture-faith relationship. This reviewer would have desired an index and a wider scope in the sources consulted and presented (e.g. all the bibliography is published in Europe or North America; all citations are in English with a mere one title in Spanish and one in Italian). Where are the voices, experiences, and contributions from Asia, Africa, and Latin America? Yet, on balance, the work has much to recommend it: clarity and depth of presentation; exploration of the Church's insights and contributions; analysis of contemporary cultural realities; and, challenges for the Church with possible pastoral responses.

Gallagher has provided a fine resource. He has effectively communicated how a Christian discernment of culture — with all its complexities — is a sign of the times, a pastoral imperative, and a pivotal hinge for the rebuilding of the Christian community in the Third Millennium.

Reviewed by James H. Kroeger, M.M.

