

**GOSPEL AND CULTURE****Evangelisation and Inculturation**

by

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## INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the Gospel and the Culture is a difficult and complicated matter to understand and practise. The question of mutual interaction and influence has been a perennial problem. It posed itself right at the beginning of Christianity, at the very first preaching of the Gospel, and ever since it has continued over the centuries. But it has become a burning issue and an acute problem in these decades, with the process of decolonisation and attainment of political independence by many African and Asian countries and the consequent revival of nationalism and renaissance of indigenous cultures. In the mission of the Church it is a major issue which should be confronted and clarified. So Theological discussion followed suit and has become vigorous. The new theological reflection on the subject was recognized and confirmed by Vatican II. The debate reached its

climax, the issues got clarified further and the implications and consequences were articulated during the Synod of Bishops on Evangelization of the Modern World in September-October 1974. This came in the wake of a deeper and original understanding of the Local Church and its essential and ever urgent mission of evangelization.

# 1

## RELATION BETWEEN THE GOSPEL AND CULTURE

### Evangelization and Inculturation

#### 1. A Dilemma Between Two Dangers and Two Concerns:

The subject is of vital importance and has an inseparable character with regard to evangelization. The problem has been often evaded by playing two dangers one against the other.

##### a) **Westernization through Christianization in terms of socio-cultural life:**

On the one hand Christianity has projected a bad image of itself in the course of its missionary enterprise and in its work of evangelization during the last five centuries. The Christianization of a country, the acceptance of the Gospel and the expression of young Churches in these countries should also adopt the culture of the missionaries and their sending Churches. The Gospel had

the trade-mark of western Christianity. Correspondingly it contributed to the elimination or disparaging of the local cultures of the people evangelized. Christianization meant westernization in terms of socio-cultural life. Its consequence was alienation of Christian people from their own culture, social milieus and religious traditions, and evasion from their people's historical adventure and drifting away from the mainstream of national life. The Christians were considered as aliens or atleast as second class citizens and a marginal group living in a ghetto of their own. They were considered introverted or foreign-oriented, with their eyes directed either on themselves or on foreign countries, and not on their fellowmen.

The impact of this on the minds of non-Christians was harmful: missionary activity was looked upon as an act of spiritual aggression; preaching was translated as proselytism; conversion was considered as a denial of the country, a total rupture with one's past and social life; and an abandonment of all that one cherished most, especially one's religious tradition and cultural heritage. The non-Christians have become allergic to mission work and look upon the evangelizing Church as a foreign body, as a state within state, as a pressure group and alienating force.

**b) Possible loss of Christianity's identity, if incultured:**

On the other hand one was afraid—and one is still so—of any kind of adaptation or indigenization lest Christianity should be falsified. One feared that if the Church got involved too much in a particular culture, and if it assimilated even the values, good elements and inspiring practices of another religion, the Church might be absorbed by the culture and religion of the place and it would thereby lose its identity and distinctive character. So inculturation was viewed with caution and suspicion. So one was advised to preach a 'pure' and 'simple' Gospel or a 'neutral' Gospel, a Gospel divested of every sociological garb and of all cultural expressions. One is expected to preach the Gospel in an oral and verbal form, in a stereo-typed manner, in absolute, essentialist

and static terms, under the pretext of not adulterating God's word and for fear of betraying the Gospel. What is considered 'pure', 'simple', 'neutral', 'stereo-typed', 'static', 'unchanging' and 'safe' is in fact a socio-cultural expression of western Europe dating back to Middle Ages or the beginning of the modern era. Thus out of concern for saving the purity of Gospel, for preserving the identity of Christianity, for safeguarding doctrinal orthodoxy, and for avoiding the dangers of 'syncretism', superstition and doctrinal compromise, one wants to avoid indigenization. While so doing one could indulge in a camouflaged form of inculturation though unawares, namely, one could impose upon the evangelized people a western cultural form of Christianity.

Further it has been considered as a **peripheral concern**, a **secondary aspect** and a **non-essential dimension of evangelization** and so could be postponed to a later stage of the missionary activity.

c) **Neutrality and maintenance of status quo for continuation of westernization:**

Even today some shirk indigenization on the understanding that **there is no connection between culture and religion** or that **Western Christianity is identical with universality**. On the one hand one easily identifies Christianity with Western culture, calls it 'the Christian culture' and imposes it upon other peoples; and on the other, one would not like that our Christianity has anything to do with Indian culture or religions.

Theoretically one can profess to steer clear of the two possible dangers; namely the danger of alienation of evangelized people by an imposition of culturally western Christianity and the danger of loss of identity of Christianity by identification with a particular culture, especially with a religious culture. In fact one did make a choice and one did alienate the people of the young Churches.



#### d) Colonial legacy and mentality:

This alienation reached such a degree that even after a quarter century of political independence and one generation after the departure of the Colonial masters and the transfer of Church leadership to the local leaders, many Christians of the third world are by and large hostile to any effort of indigenization due to two or more centuries of westernization. They are unwilling to divest themselves of any western sociological and cultural expressions. They resist vehemently to change over from western theology, liturgy, spirituality, arts, architecture, church organisation and ministry to indigenous ones. One wants to be 'neutral' and 'careful' in such a delicate and controversial matter; but the neutrality and care are for the western culture, in the name of fidelity to Christianity. The same 'neutrality' is continued by a large section of those in authority.

Some of them do not take any action, if westernization is continued or intensified nor will they take any initiative or give any encouragement for even elementary forms of inculturation or de-westernization. If at all they do, it will be to forbid indigenous forms. 'Neutrality' is thus always on one side! and on the same side!! **This is another legacy of the colonial period** to which the colonised people even after decolonisation cling on more firmly than the colonisers themselves!!!

#### 2. Meaningful and Dynamic Relationship:

- a) **Culture and Religion are two distinct entities with a personality, identity and autonomy of their own:**

One could speak theoretically of a certain autonomy or even independence of each.

- b) **Yet for their vitality and growth, they are interdependent, need mutual sharing in openness and depth and undergo dynamic interaction and reciprocal influences:**

Both are living realities connected with people. Their vitality i.e. their existence or relationship consists in their openness to other realities of life, in their ability for growth, and in their dynamism for evolution, by a continuous process of acceptance of some elements and values and by the rejection of others. By this assimilation of certain elements, one realises a vital and dynamic synthesis, without for that matter losing one's identity. This is true of both religion and culture, the Church and Cultures. Hence one would be in illusion to think and act as though these were two separate and static realities, kept in two pigeon holes or in watertight compartments, without exerting any mutual influence, without being affected by each other, as though one could be neutral to the other. Whether one likes it or not, whether one is aware of it or not, whether one admits it or not, living realities undergo change and are subject to influence, though most of the time unconsciously. **Hence the first condition for a correct inculturation** is to be aware of and to admit the interaction and reciprocal influence between them. Culture influences religion; religion influences culture. In fact Culture has influenced Christianity; and Christianity has transformed many cultures. This is data of history and actual daily reality!

c) **And yet, in the process, they maintain their respective identity**

Now this mutual openness and influence while being helpful and necessary for their vitality and growth are not at all a danger or a threat to their identity, just as two persons, mature and adult, can enrich themselves by their friendship and sharing and yet maintain their personal identity and articulate their uniqueness. This is in fact a sign par excellence of their healthy relationship. When one is enslaved or suppressed or absorbed by the other, relationship ceases. This openness is a sign of maturity and strength. It is an ability to share: receiving from others and giving others. The attitude of closure and feeling of self-sufficiency, and the consequent unwillingness to receive or give can be detrimental. At

the same time, in this process of sharing, one should be aware of one's own identity and that of the other. This will prevent syncretism, hybrid complex, as well as absorption into the other and loss of identity. While one's identity should by all means be preserved, false identities should be shed. Unwillingness to change could also be a sign of false identity to which one is used and to which one clings on. Christianity has no identity except the spirit of Jesus Christ and the sign of fraternal love patterned on Christic love to the point of dying for others (Jn. 13, 35). The rest is only a cultural identity which is derived from a particular society and time and which should be shed in view of a new inculturation in a new milieu. The double dynamics and dialectics of the growth of the culture and the spread of the Gospel in the transformation of the Christian Community and wider society cannot but set in relief the identity of each: Culture and Christianity.

### 3. "The Split between the Gospel and Culture the drama of our time:" (Cfr. Paul VI)

This is well expressed by Pope Paul: "The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the Kingdom which the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.

The split between the Gospel and culture is without doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed." (No. 20, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*).

In this understanding of the relation between culture and religion, between the Gospel and cultures, inculturation is inevitable, necessary and fruitful.

#### 4. The Right Questions and Concerns:

It is against this background that we have to see whether inculturation is part and parcel of evangelization, whether it is a constitutive element and inseparable dimension of the mission of the Church. If it is so, what is an authentic process of inculturation? How can one avoid the two dangers described above? What is the theological basis for it? What are the conditions under which Christianity can legitimately influence an already existing culture? And inversely, to what extent can the Gospel and the Church be influenced by the cultures of a given region? More positively how can the Church identify, respect and appreciate various cultures in an attitude of openness, evaluate them dispassionately and critically, and assimilate their values and forms with a proper process of discernment and interpretation?

## 2

### THEOLOGICAL BASES OF AN AUTHENTIC INCULTURATION

- Inculturation A) supposes the Christian understanding of Creation.  
B) is based on the Incarnation of the Word,  
C) and follows the Constitution of the Church.

## A. *Theology of Creation:*

The attitude towards inculturation is primarily conditioned by one's understanding of creation and relationship with the world. The world has its origin and goal in God. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1, 1). The world and the whole of creation is the visible manifestation and dynamic effect of God's word. "In the beginning was the Word, the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through him all things came to be. All that came to be had life in him" (Jn 1; 1-3). "In him were created all things in heaven and on earth, everything visible and invisible" (Col. 1; 16). The world that God made through his Word is basically good. "God saw that it was good" (Gen. 1; 25). The Word is the purpose: "All things were created, for him" (Col. 1, 16). "He is the first born of all creation and... he holds all things in unity" (Col. 1; 15, 17).

Though the world is affected by sin and bears its imprint in all realities, the first creation through Christ's work of reconciliation and redemption has become good again. 'The hidden plan God so kindly made in Christ from the beginning was...to bring everything together under Christ, as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth' (Eph. 1, 10). "God wanted all things to be reconciled through him and for him, when he made peace by his death on the Cross" (Col. 1; 20).

The same Word has been present in the whole of creation and throughout human history revealing himself in various ways to various peoples. The seeds of the Word (AG) are found in all religion and temporal realities.

## B. *Theology of Redemptive Incarnation*

### 1. **The procedure of inculturation should follow the incarnation of the Word, and the constitution of the Church:**

The incarnation of the Word determines the nature of the Church; and the Church expresses itself and functions in indigenization.

So, in a theological perspective, indigenization is a logical consequence of the nature of the Church and the Incarnation of the Word. It is indissolubly connected with the very nature of the Church, and is an indispensable dimension and activity of its mission. If so, the choice is not between indigenization and non-indigenization, but between being an authentic Church of Christ and not being a Church at all. Again it is not for us to choose a Church of our own making. The choice is rather between the Church modelled upon the Incarnation of the Word (LG 8) and the Church that one would like to make according to one's own liking. The dogmatic constitution on the Church states:

“Christ, the one Mediator, established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth His holy Church... as a visible structure. Through her He communicates truth and grace to all. But the society furnished with hierarchical agencies and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things. Rather they form one interlocked reality which is comprised of a divine and a human element. For this reason, by an excellent analogy, this reality is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. Just as the assumed nature inseparably united to the divine Word serves Him as a living instrument of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the communal structure of the Church serve Christ's Spirit, who vivifies it by way of building up the body (cfr. Eph. 4:16)” (LG 8).

In virtue of this principle of incarnation the Church expresses herself, in her being and action, through an incarnational procedure. And this incarnational procedure is called indigenization or inculturation:

“In order to be able to offer all of them the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, the Church must become part of all these groups for the same motive which led Christ to bind Himself, in virtue of His Incarnation to the definite social and cultural conditions of those human beings among

whom He dwelt..." "Let them share in cultural and social life by the various exchanges and enterprises of human living. Let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions, gladly and reverently laying bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden in them" (AG 10b, 11b).

**Two equally important realities in both Incarnation and indigenization: in both the Church and Inculturation:**

The Word of God though invisible became visible by being incarnated. The humanity of Christ is the enfleshment of God's self-gift. The word was made flesh (Jn. 1, 12). This humanity is the visible sign, efficacious instrument, permanent agency of the Word in his work of salvation according to the present dispensation which is an incarnational economy. Likewise the spirit of Jesus, dead and risen, is invisible but becomes embodied and is manifest in the visible community of Christ's disciples.

A. Christian community is nothing else but a group of people imbued with the Spirit, transformed by him, and led by him. That is why we say: 'where the Spirit is there the Church is'. There is no Church if there is no Spirit. Likewise there is no Church if there is no visible community. Just as the Spirit chose the body of Christ's disciples as the sign and instrument of his active presence and transforming power so also the Gospel which is the power of God for salvation of all who believe (Rom. 1, 16) will be abstract and notional unless and until it is manifested in the history of the world, in the life of the Church and in the culture of a society. Just as Jesus was endowed with the power of God and manifested this power in words and deeds, in signs and wonders, (DV. 4) so the power of the Gospel, the saving influence of the Word, needs manifestation, concretisation and visibilization. Finally the values of the Gospel and of the Kingdom or the reality of the new era and new creation are to be translated in an embodiment and communicated to others by visible and concrete media. Now this structure, the visible community dimension, the lived experience, and the tangible

manifestation of life in various spheres and activities—all this is called integration of the Church in a socio-cultural-religious milieu, incarnation of the Church in a place, time and people. This is what is called indigenization or inculturation. The living Gospel lived by the Church in a living culture with all the transformations and realities it entails is what is called inculturation. Then there will be an authentic local Church in which the full mystery of Christ will be at work and in which the whole and universal Church will be present. Hence there is no preaching of the Gospel (evangelization) without inculturation. There is no Church without being localised, concretised and visibilised. There is no salvation without the incarnation of the word of God! It is good to note that the Incarnation of the Word, the localisation of the Church and indigenization should not be understood as referring only to externals. The humanity of Christ is the total and integral human nature with all its faculties and properties both internal and external.

Many might agree in theory with the analogy between the incarnation of the Word, the community, visibility and local concretisation of the Church, and inculturation in all her aspects and activities.

But when it comes to practice, when it is a question of implementing concrete projects of inculturation in theology, liturgy, spirituality, art or architecture when it comes to renewal and change there begins the point of departure. The basis of difference of opinion and issue of controversy is in the concrete consequence of inculturation which is change, transformation, new way of being and acting as Church. It is at this level of praxis, creativity and change that one finds it difficult to commit oneself to indigenization.



## 2. Dynamic character of inculturation and consequent transformation:

Some understand Incarnation in a static manner due to the one-sided essentialist philosophical background. They consider the union of two natures (divine and human) in one single person as a mere juxtaposition or a mere ontological unity, devoid of any interaction. Next to creation of the world the incarnation of the Word together with the death and resurrection of Christ is the most dynamic expression of God's word, the greatest intervention of God's power in human history, and the most decisive event in the life of mankind. Even though God had met man in the creation of the first human couple, in the covenant with Israel and in the life of other nations, Incarnation is the most dynamic and most personal encounter between God and man. This dynamic event of God-man encounter took place in the very dynamics of human existence and world history, and in the heart of a changing world, and in the midst of a concrete socio-cultural reality. The salvation of the humankind is the result of the dynamic meeting between God and man in a specific socio-cultural milieu. It also set in a dynamic process, an interaction and transformation in each man, in the entire human community and in the whole cosmos. Unless Incarnation had been dynamic there would have been no change, no transformation and no salvation. There would have been no wholeness realised within man, no community formed among all men, and no harmony in the whole creation (I Cor. 3, 25; 15, 28).

As Pope Paul says "For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the good news into all strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new" (EN 18). Now this transforming influence affects the life of man and society both internally and externally: "The Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieus which are theirs" (EN. 18). "What matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin

vener, but in a vital way, in depth, and right to their very roots, in the wise and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et Spes*" (EN. 20). Hence interior and exterior change—which we call renewal and updating, to which a clarion call was sounded by Vatican II is implied in every process of creating the Church in a place, and in every process of inculturation. Some regret it and even oppose it, because it implies change and insecurity. One cannot believe in the Incarnation as an article of faith "I believe in Jesus Christ, true God and true man" without experiencing and implementing the implications of the dynamic encounter between God and man, and without the radical changes in the heart of man and in his behaviour, without an ongoing inculturation in the life and ministry of the Church.

### C. *The Theology of the Church:*

#### 1) **Its nature and mission:**

The Church, the visible community of Christ's disciples, the Body of Christ, the embodiment of His Spirit, the historical and social prolongation of Jesus Christ in time and space has no other mission than that of Christ, namely, of recapitulating, reconciling and unifying all men and all things and making them all belong to God so that God may be all in all (LG 1, Eph. 1; 3, 14; Col. 1, 15-20; I Cor. 3, 23; 15, 20-28). The Word through whom all things were made and who has been present throughout history is made flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1; 12). Everything that was created needs to be saved, and nothing is saved unless it is taken up by the Word. Hence the Church and Christ should gather and assume all and everything in the Word Incarnated, purify and redeem them, fulfil and unify them and lead and consecrate them to God. This mission of recapitulation includes not only all men but also all the cultures and religions.

## 2) Its localisation and concretisation in view of mission and universality:

The Church becomes Church when it is incarnated in a place and this localisation is called the Local Church. The Church can fulfil its mission only by being local and incarnated. The Local Church is the realization by which the Universal Church, the full mystery of the Church, will be incarnated in each place, will express itself and operate through the social, cultural, religious realities of the place, time and people. The Local Church, as many imagine is not a division or a part of the Church, nor is it to be considered as a viable unit of administration within the Universal Church. It must and does contain the whole mystery of the Church; it is the microcosm of the whole reality of what is meant by the Church.

The Church as a mystery, is first of all something that happens to a group of people; it is an event that matters for them, it is the actualization of the whole mystery of the Church in a place, as the dynamic presence of God incarnate through the Spirit of His Son Jesus Christ in the world and history, gathering his people into a community from the four winds from among the nations, reconciling them with one another and with Himself and realizing fellowship of love through a process of sharing and giving. The Local Church is a dynamic process by which a Christian community share their christian experience with their contemporaries, in the context of the world and history from within, fully in the socio-cultural-religious milieu.

## 3. The Process and stages of founding a Church:

The process of founding and actualizing a Local Church consists of four stages, one leading to the other and all making a continuous and permanent one till the end of the world:

a) *The personal and vital encounter with the Risen Lord by an apostle or his successor, the bishop, or of an apostolic community, the transforming experience of reconciliation and salva-*

tion shared by them, the consequent inner urge felt and the external mandate received to share with others this transforming and saving experience. This is apostolate or evangelization springing thus from their personal and community experience with Christ in the Spirit.

b) This experience is shared with others by the *proclamation of the Word and deed*. Those who accept this witness desire to have the same experience with the same Risen Lord in faith, and form a community of believers, a group of those who want to belong to Christ by sharing in His paschal Experience.

c) These are gathered together for the breaking of the bread, *the celebration of the Eucharist*. The Community of faith becomes a *community of worship*. In the breaking of the bread they recognise the Lord and one another and experience a deep communion in the Spirit.

d) This deep experience of reconciliation and communion creates in them an irresistible urge and untold dynamism *to share this experience with others* (of the neighbourhood, the region, the country and the world and other Churches) in concrete situations, needs, aspirations and struggles. Thus the community of worship becomes a *missionary community*. They go forth and share this experience with their fellowmen in the very midst of their family, social and professional experience by word and life, by humble service and total involvement to the point of risking their life. Thus the missionary community becomes a *community of witness and service in love*.

This process of dynamic and transforming experience goes on continuously till the universal community is realized and perfected till the Lord returns and the Kingdom of God emerges as the heavenly Jerusalem, as the new heaven and the new earth.

#### **4. The Constitutive Elements of the Church:**

The constitutive elements of the Church are:

- 1) the action of the spirit of the Risen Lord, the visible manifestation of the Father's saving love,
- 2) which gives a paschal experience to people and makes them to be founders and heads of churches,
- 3) a community of believers constituted in Christ,
- 4) by the proclamation of the Word or sharing the good news of the paschal event,
- 5) by the celebration of the Eucharist which makes possible for all this paschal experience,
- 6) resulting in the brotherhood and communion with other Churches and other peoples,
- 7) in an openness to the world and society through witnessing to and loving service to others,
- 8) equipped with the ministry of unifying leadership: Episcopate.

#### **5. Fellowship of Churches:**

The consequences and implications of relationship among the Churches, and between the particular Churches and the Holy See are far reaching.

- a) The full mystery of the Church, the universal Church, the total Church is present in each particular Church, in each local Church.
- b) The equality of Churches becomes obvious. The ecclesiality is derived from the Spirit.

- c) Every Church has therefore, autonomy, freedom, viability and competence and is resourceful and fully equipped on its own title for its life and mission.
  - d) Each Church has the responsibility and initiative for mission and life.
  - e) Originality and Creativity on the part of the Church are necessary to meet the needs of the Church and of the Society.
  - f) Inculturation in all aspects and activities becomes natural and indispensable.
  - g) The ecclesial pluralism is based on social, cultural, religious, and theological pluralism and leads to pastoral pluralism.
  - h) Openness to and sharing with other Churches are equally necessary.
  - i) Unity in variety and universality through particularities and multiplicity becomes the axiom.
- 6) In this fellowship the function of the Church of Rome and Peter's Successor is unique.

This is a historical, positive and divine institution.

The Pope is the visible principle of unity, the bond of charity and president of universal fellowship of Churches.

His ministry of presiding is a humble service and not of domination; unification is realized from within by inspiration and not by imposition or uniformity from without.

His function is also that of facilitating openness and sharing among Churches, chiefly in faith and morals in resources and

personnel, in inspiration and challenge, in discernment and encouragement (paraclesis).

In short the relationship among the Churches and between the Church of Rome and other Churches will be one of fellowship and brotherhood (sisterhood), collegiality and co-responsibility, and subsidiarity, solidarity and collaboration.

With regard to inculturation every Local Church or Particular Church should take the initiative, enjoy the freedom, and be equipped and committed to indigenize all the aspects of its life and all the activities of its mission with reference to its context and culture: Contextualisation and inculturation.

Is this in any way a break with the tradition of the Church or a continuation with it?

### 3

#### INCULTURATION TO FOLLOW THE DYNAMICS OF SOUND TRADITION

**Inculturation should be in continuity with the healthy and venerable tradition of the Church and in discontinuity with the recent and ambiguous tradition:**

##### 1. Two Traditions:

The opponents of inculturation would wonder what was wrong with our present practice and with the present Church. They plead that its expressions have been handed over by tradition which is, after all, four centuries old. They argue that due to this long period, the western culture has become so to say our own culture. Within this tradition of the westernized Church many have lived; we ourselves have been brought up in piety and sanctity, why should we condemn and reject the whole past? What is wrong with the recent past that we have to change everything and to start all over again? Moreover people are in blissful ignorance. Why should we disturb them? Why not leave them in peace and attend to more serious and urgent matters?

One admits that one should respect the tradition. Tradition is nothing less than the life of the Church under the guidance of the Spirit and with the leadership of the magisterium. Hence in general one should respect the whole tradition. Yet everything in tradition is not of the same value. Holiness and sin, fidelity and infidelity could co-exist in the Church. Likewise one period or one section of the Church could be more faithful to Christ and the Gospel than others. Respect for tradition also involves a critique and discernment. In this sense the recent tradition has not been fully in keeping with the principle of Incarnation due to a variety of factors.

## **2. In continuity with the long and venerable tradition of the Church:**

The effort to indigenize the Church today is very much in continuity with a longer, more ancient and venerable tradition that can be traced back to Jesus Christ, the Word Incarnate himself. When the Word was made flesh, when God became man, he identified himself fully with the Jewish people, spoke their language, (aramaic), followed their customs and traditions and was involved in the Jewish society of his time. The first Christian Community having been formed of converts from Judaism retained some of the religious traditions, practices and prayer forms. The early celebration of the Eucharist has been patterned on the Synagogue prayer service and the Paschal meal. There was also at the same time a danger to identify Christianity with one particular culture and religious tradition: it was the trend of the Judaisers (cf. Gal.). Paul was the champion of freedom and universality. The verdict of the council of Jerusalem was a first triumph for these values and an affirmation of the principle of Incarnation and hence of indigenization (Acts 15). When the Gospel penetrated into the Graeco-Roman societies, the languages of Greek and later on Latin, and socio-cultural signs were integrated into the liturgy. The theology of the Church was elaborated on the Graeco-Roman modes of thought. A similar process took place when the Gospel spread to



East Syria, Egypt and countries of northern Europe. Their languages and cultures, signs and symbols, customs and practices were adopted: new, original and authentic forms of liturgy, theology and spirituality were evolved. A similar process was evident when the Slavs were evangelized in Eastern Europe. The best example of in-depth and all-round inculturation was the transformation which took place in the culture of Western Europe. It was so all-embracing that it even went to excess by over-identification with the European culture and society as western Christendom.

In these and in all other instances the spirit of the Gospel permeated the cultures of the place, transformed them profoundly, and enriched them. It gave them, indeed new modes of existence, a new impetus and dynamism for growth, new meaning and orientation for their life. It made available new possibilities of expression for the Gospel and faith. Due to this inculturation the Gospel became a living reality; it could fulfil its creative and recreative functions; the Church became more catholic and was adorned with an ever richer variety.

### **3. In discontinuity with the ambiguous recent tradition:**

When the new Worlds of America, Asia and Africa were discovered or when communication with these countries was made easier and frequent the original principle of Incarnation and the traditional process of indigenization were not followed. Instead of taking the Gospel and announcing it to the new people in such a way as to facilitate sprouting and growth of a new Church, and spontaneous creative cultural expressions in those societies, they spread rather the already-developed western cultural expressions of the Gospel as they were used to in their home countries. This approach and practice prevented a normal inculturation process in the new areas.

Since missionary expansion chiefly started from those countries and since the major missionary enterprises coincided with

the period of western expansion through navigation, trade, colonization and conquest, it happened that the cultures of these countries were imposed upon the colonial people. The Church, being a part of society, knowingly or unknowingly transmitted along with the gospel the cultures of the countries from which missionaries came forth. The new christians accepted the faith along with the western cultural expressions. Later they identified them as "The Christian Culture."

Thus the type of Christianity that is found in the third world is a heritage of the colonial era. For the western powers using their political hegemony brought about also a cultural domination, while the Church and the missionaries of the West established the western form of Christianity and preached the Gospel as already incarnated in the western European culture.

Even though the countries of Asia and Africa have now become politically independent, they still continue to live in economic dependence and cling on to the cultural model and tradition of Western Christianity. The Church in India and other countries appears by and large as foreign institutions, extensions or branches of western cultural area. The Christians are by and large alienated from their own cultural and religious traditions. This alienation is so deep that several myths are invented and spread to justify its continuation.

#### 4. Inculturation implies and brings about not one single universal Christian Culture, but many particular 'Christian Cultures':

A myth that is often spread in order to oppose inculturation consists in stating that, after all, we have the Christian culture and there is no need for us to take things from secular culture or the religious cultures of our country. 'The Christian culture' as such does not exist anywhere. The so-called christian culture which one refers to and in which one prides is nothing else but the particular Christian cultures of western Europe or of America, not in their modern or latest forms but in their ana-

chronistic, decadent and degraded forms. African and Asian Churches are clinging on to them as sacrosanct, as part of their faith, while the rest of the world, even the countries of origin have rejected them or moved away from them.

Instead we should speak of many 'Christian Cultures'. That is to say, the indigenous culture of every country and region must be permeated by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, purified, enriched, and fulfilled by the gospel values. It should be lived by the people belonging to these cultural groups. Thus there could be as many Christian cultures as there are cultures in the world. For example, Indian Christian culture, Chinese Christian culture, African Christian culture, and within these vast regions there could also be many more sub-divisions or sub-cultures. Hence our faith in Jesus Christ and not in the secondary traditions of one of the civilizations in which it was first expressed. Our fidelity is to the Word of God and not to the culture of the missionary who announced this word.

It is fitting that Christians of these countries learn from and appreciate the values of their Christian inheritance from the West: but it is necessary and imperative that they should be, still more, aware and proud of their indigenous culture and profit by their national inheritance. The latter too is in some sense Christian since the word of God has been at work in the history of these countries as **Ad Gentes** speaks of certain values, elements, and good traditions, "the seeds of which were sometimes already planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the Gospel" (No. 18).

In this way the local Churches will profit by the rich inheritance of two traditions, their own, and that of the rest of the world.

### Conclusion:

Vatican II far from teaching a new doctrine and instead of initiating a new tradition re-affirmed the age-old Christian

principle of incarnation. In so doing, it re-launched the process of inculturation, which had been impeded during the last four centuries of colonisation and political expansion of the West. Thus Vatican II has facilitated the earlier and authentic Christian tradition to continue from now on, in spite of the break of four centuries and more.

## 4

### INCULTURATION AND HINDUISATION

**“Indigenization—Yes! but hinduisation—No!”**

Some of those who would agree on inculturation limit its scope to culture and will not extend it to religious realities. This opinion on indigenization, e.g. in India, can be expressed by this statement: “Indigenization—yes; but hinduisation—no!”

#### 1. Religious Cultures

As we have already mentioned above, due to the mutual influence of religion and culture, it is difficult to find a culture completely impervious to religion, or to keep a religion unaffected by culture. If one takes the Asian Countries for instance, the cultures of their Society are both secular and religious. For example, Indian culture has been formed and influenced by various religions as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It is hinduism that has predominantly though not exclusively, influenced and shaped the Indian cultures. Therefore inculturation in India involves incarnation into a largely hindu culture not excluding the Islamic, Buddhist and Jain religious elements in them.

2. **A global understanding of God's plan and creation, redemptive incarnation and the Church's mission.**

This should help us to overcome any compartmentalisation and to extend the scope of inculturation to all realities, including religions.

The **plan of God**, till now hidden, but now revealed—was to bring everything together under Christ as head, everything in the heavens and everything on earth" (Eph. 1, 9-10). Through the mystery of Incarnation he assumes the whole creation in order to redeem it and unify it. Nothing is saved unless it is assumed; and everything that has been created must be saved. And so everything created was assumed by Christ. On the cross he destroyed hostility and broke down the barriers and reconciled God with man, and men among themselves (II Cor. 5, 17-21, Eph. 2, 11-22, Col. 1, 20). Now the recapitulation of everything in Christ or the universal saving action of Christ includes not only the salvation of souls, but also of the whole man and all men, not only men but all that is human, not only cultures but also religions, all that is religious and cultural; in short, everybody and everything in the whole of creation (Rom. 8, 18-25). That is why by his death and resurrection Christ became the Lord of the universe, saviour of mankind, supreme norm of human existence and history. All authority is given to him in heaven and on earth (Mt. 28, 17). He is constituted judge of the living and the dead (Acts 10; 42).

If God has submitted everything under Christ, if the saving action of Christ extends to the whole of humanity and creation, if the Spirit of the Risen Lord fills the universe and permeates everything, we have no right to exclude anything—especially religions—from the object of Christ's salvation, the Church's mission and the process of inculturation. We cannot "call profane what God has made clean" (Acts 10, 15). "God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable

to him" (Acts 10, 34-35). The Holy Spirit is poured out even on the so-called pagans like Cornelius (Acts 10, 45). If so hinduism and other religions are not outside the plan of God but take their place and come within God's one plan of salvation which is centred in Christ through whom all things and all men are led to their fulfilment.

The Church rightly recognizes the universal presence of the Spirit of the Risen Christ, and proclaims the all-embracing effect of Christ's redemption. The Church which continues the mission of Christ has no other task but to be the sign and instrument of gathering all things and uniting all men with one another and with God (LG 1). It is constituted as 'the universal sacrament of salvation'. The Church like Christ cannot save anything unless she assumes it even before transforming it. The various documents of Vatican II are clear and emphatic in this regard. Truth, goodness, beauty, purity and holiness—wherever found—originate in God and belong to God. They have God for author and goal. They should be recognized by the Church as gifts of God and inheritance of Christ (Ps. 2, 6). So the Church has to gather into unity the whole of creation and humankind and consecrate them to God through Christ, that is, she should make them belong to him. The Church cannot disown them as alien, as 'theirs'. Everything belongs to us, we belong to Christ, and Christ himself belongs to God (I Cor. 3, 23), so that God may be all in all.

This is the goal and fulfilment of creation, this is the full effect of Christ's redemptive work, this is the total mission of the Church to be carried out.

### **3. Inculturation includes religious traditions as part of the total reality**

Hence the Church and all her members should "prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration, acknowledge,

preserve and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture" (NA 2). We are expected "to learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a bountiful God has distributed among the nations of the earth" (AG. 11 d). We are supposed to save "whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations, as a sort of secret presence of God" (AG 9). Inculturation means that "the young Churches in imitation of the plan of Incarnation, rooted in Christ take to themselves, in a wonderful exchange, all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance (Cf. Ps. 2, 8)." With this clear statement and teaching of Vatican II none can say that elements from religions cannot be integrated into Christian theology, worship, prayer life and spirituality provided, of course, they can all be christianised as we shall explain better later. So inculturation includes, in this correct sense some kind of "hinduisation".

#### **4. Inculturation supposes participation in the paschal mystery**

Though Inculturation is based on the mystery of the Church which is analogically modelled upon the mystery of Incarnation, it is not a simple incarnation but a redemptive one. Inculturation recognizes the presence of evil in the world, reality of sin and its imprints, forces and consequences in all realities of the world and human life. Christ became similar to us in all things but sin: "For our sake God made the sinless one into sin, so that in him we might become the goodness of God" (II Cor. 5, 21). He took upon Himself the whole of humanity and redeemed them in his body through his death and resurrection. That is why sin has a place at the core of the Christian kerygma: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; he was raised to life on the third day (for our justification) according to the Scriptures" (I Cor. 15, 4). The Church itself can become the body of Christ only if it participates in his death and resurrection. Hence the Church is a community of those who have died and risen with Christ by being identified with his body. The Church should continue to live the paschal mystery in her life and mission as an on-going reality.

The process of redemptive incarnation or participation in the paschal mystery comprises three stages:

- a) **incarnation:** presence to and assumption of everything and everybody
- b) **death:** crucifying sin, destroying hostility, putting to death the body of sin, liberating men and all realities from sin, error, falsehood, superstition from the dominion of the evil one, and from corruption and death.
- c) **resurrection and glorification:** Salvation in Christ is not only a liberation from sin and all its forces but positively it is the realisation of a new **creation**, leading a new kind of existence, learning a new way of being man, having deeper and fuller unity, and reaching total fulfilment in wholeness and harmony: peace and bliss.

If the purpose of Church's mission is to gather and consecrate everybody and everything to God through Christ then only those who have been Christianised and who conform to Christ can be taken up in the unity and fellowship of the Church. The same holds good for inculturation. We do not indiscriminately admit anything and everything from the doctrines and practices of other religions into the Church whether in the liturgy, theology or spirituality, etc. nor can we indiscriminately assume them as they are. They should be first brought to the touchstone of Christ and his paschal mystery. They should be first made to pass through Christ's death and resurrection.

## 5. It calls for a prophetic critique and a Christian interpretation

They should be subjected to Christian scrutiny and interpretation. Any authentic inculturation will reject false doctrines, superstitions, all forms of sin and evil and whatever cannot be



christianised. Nothing can be integrated into our theology, liturgy, spirituality unless they have values in them, unless they can survive a prophetic critique, unless they acquire a Christian meaning through a Christian interpretation; unless they are oriented towards a christian goal, under the guidance of the Spirit. This is an important and indispensable condition for inculturation. Most of those who are opposed to indigenization are obsessed by this fear that doctrines, practices, signs and other elements might be just taken into the Church as they are without any check or purification. "The words of Christ are at one and the same time words of judgement and grace, of death and life. For it is by putting to death what is old that we are able to come to the newness of life. This fact applies, first of all, to persons, but it holds also for the various goods of this world which bear the mark of both man's sin and of God's blessings" (AG 8b).

This inculturation therefore has a double task of discernment and interpretation: liberating them from sin, evil, error and falsehood, and giving them a true christian meaning, orientation and fulfilment: "This activity (mission or inculturation) frees from all taint of evil and restores to Christ its maker. And so whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples, is not lost. More than that, it is healed, ennobled and perfected for the glory of God, the shame of the demon and the bliss of men" (AG 9c cfr. LG 17). "Let them try to illumine these treasures with the light of the Gospel, to set them free, and to bring them under the dominion of God, their saviour" (AG 11d). In practice, this process will take a long time as Christians and others will have to dissociate the earlier significance from these signs and give them a new Christian meaning. Then emotionally they have to get used to them and feel at home with them. It calls for prudence, and discretion, patience and understanding, education of the people, gradual introduction of new elements, continuous enlightenment and consultation, and periodic evaluation and a slow realisation of new and dynamic synthesis and coherent whole. "Thanks to such a procedure, every appearance of syncretism and of false particularism can be excluded, and Christian life can be accommodated to the genius and the disposition of each culture" (AG 22c).

## 6. The Church is not a self-sufficient and exclusive monopoly The Kingdom is bigger than the Church

Many do not consider inculturation as useful and much less necessary, since the Church is the universal sacrament of salvation, since the spirit of the Risen Lord is actively present in the Church, since it has the fulness of revelation in Christ, and therefore since she possesses all the truth and means of salvation. So there is no need "to borrow" anything from other religions or ape others. Nay inculturation would be even harmful as it might indirectly show that the Church does not have fulness.

We should distinguish between God and Christ, and between Christ and the Church. Even though Christ is the total, ultimate and definite revelation of God, and even though this Christ is present in the Church, one cannot and should not identify Christ with the Church. Nor can one limit his presence and gift to the Church alone. He is present everywhere and always as the word of God, as the risen Lord and saviour of mankind. He is not imprisoned in the Church. Likewise the one true Church founded by Christ subsists in the Catholic Church (LG 8) but is not exhausted by it. The Church is the sign and instrument of salvation for all men: universal sacrament of salvation. Yet salvation is also possible under certain conditions for those not visibly integrated with the Catholic Church (LG 16). In a word, self-sufficiency can be attributed only to God and to Christ but not to the Church. The Church has truth and goodness, grace and salvation, but she cannot exhaust them, she does not have a monopoly of them. She cannot be "possessive" in an all-exclusive sense. The Church is a contingent, historical, temporary and relative realisation; its period is between the Pasch and the Parousia. Like every other sign, it is less than the reality; the Kingdom is present in the Church, but the Church and the Kingdom are not identical. That is why the Church is in continuous pilgrimage and tends towards fulness and total consummation.

7. **The Church should be an all-inclusive movement, an ever-widening fellowship and a dynamism towards universality**

She is meant to be universal; catholicity is a note of hers; but full catholicity has not yet been realised in her and by her. She yearns and tends towards it. "Many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside of her visible structure. These elements, however, as gifts properly belong to the Church of Christ possess an inner dynamism towards Catholic unity." (LG 8). By evangelization and inculturation the dynamism of the Church towards her catholicity is made operative and effective. The elements outside her want to be integrated into the Catholic fellowship and unity. Thus there is a double movement towards Catholicity from two different directions, one towards the other.

8. **The Church can and should "borrow" from other religions**

So Vatican II asks the Church to realise its insufficiency and to borrow from other religions without the least hesitation or shame or complex: "From the customs and traditions of their people, from their wisdom and their learning, from their arts and sciences, these churches borrow all those things which can contribute to the glory of their creator, the revelation of the Saviour's grace, or the proper arrangement of Christian life" (AG. 22). "Particular traditions, together with the individual patrimony of each family of nations, can be illuminated by the light of the Gospel, and then be taken up into Catholic Unity" (AG 22). But in fact, there is no borrowing; all that she appears to borrow is in fact what already belongs to Christ by creation, and by resurrection and hence what the Church should **claim and gather as her own!**

Further the Gospel requires a ground, rich soil and depth so that the seed of the word may sprout, grow, mature and bear fruit. "The seed which is the Word of God sprouts from the good ground watered by divine dew. From this ground the seed draws

nourishing elements which it transforms and assimilates into itself. Finally it bears much fruit" (AG. 22) "From the seed which is the word of God, particular Churches can be adequately established and flourish the world over, endowed with their own vitality and maturity". (AG 6e) "Thus the congregation of the faithful endowed with the riches of its own nation's culture, should be deeply rooted in the people." (AG 15d).

## 9. Practical and emotional difficulties

Though this may be correct in theory many Catholics find it **difficult in practice to accept customs, practices, signs and symbols, of other religions.** This is due to their earlier training by which they were made to think that the other religions are erroneous, idolatrous, magical and superstitious and therefore they should carefully avoid hindu and other religious practices. For such people it is emotionally and psychologically difficult to accept the new theological understanding of world religions and the change of attitude brought about in the church by the Vatican II theology. This difficulty can be overcome only with passage of time supported by on-going education, patient dialogue and experiential participation in indigenous forms of prayer and worship.

## 10. Conclusion: Unity and fulness in variety and pluriformity. Uniqueness in universality and commonness

Thus Inculturation will lead the Church to realise the **Plenitude of Catholic fellowship** in the variety and uniqueness of each individual local/particular Church: "The individual young Churches adorned with their own traditions, will have their own place in the ecclesiastical communion" (AG 22).

The greatness and uniqueness of the Catholic Church will be set in evidence not by setting up barriers between the Church

and other religions, not by speaking a 'we'-and-'they' language, not by contrasting the two as white and black, true and false, good and bad, presence of God and absence of God, salvation and damnation, Christian and non-Christian. Her uniqueness can only be shown by the universal Christian vision, by dynamic persevering effect and by relentless and unbroken movement to embrace everything, to claim everybody as her own, to integrate all traditions and values within her Catholicity. *Ad Gentes* advises the church to be Catholic.

In this sense the prophecy of Isaiah is fully applicable to the Church: "To this people it was said in prophecy: enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly (Is. 54, 2)" (AG. 9a).

## 5

### INCULTURATION REALISES THE CHURCH'S UNIVERSALITY, FULLNESS AND UNITY

1. **It overcomes particularities of all sorts and prevents the imposition of uniformity:**

Some oppose indigenization as a tendency towards division and separatism. They fear that it could become a means to promote particularism, nationalism and chauvinism. They consider it as a potential danger for realising the universality of the Church. This is obviously an apparent fear on the part of those who have been used to thinking of the universal Church as something abstract, and consider uniformity as the means of unity. It is the opinion of those who attribute authenticity and loyalty to those who conform to a particular cultural model of a place and time.

On the contrary, universality can only be realised through particularities and localisation, unity through variety, and pluriformity, and authenticity through freedom and originality. Even though God is universal and eternal transcending space and time the encounters between God and men have always been particular and specific, local and temporal, concrete and historical. He revealed himself to particular persons and groups in a particular place and time, within a specific socio-cultural milieu. He chose Abraham to be the father of the nations. He called Israel into a covenant fellowship as his instrument to reveal his glory and fulfil his plan for all nations.

Likewise the Word of God who came to save the whole world and all men did not assume a merely abstract and general human nature but a specific and concrete one as realised in Jesus of Nazareth. The Word of God was made flesh and became man as a Jew in a Jewish society and community, in a particular place Palestine and time, the first century (Luke). This particularity is the guarantee for and basis of the authenticity of his incarnation, and the source of a whole gamut of his total identification with man. It also served as the means for realising the universality of his mission. In the same way, the Church has to be localised in order to be visible and concrete. It has to be incarnated in a particular place and time and to be an event for a particular group of people. The universality of the Church is realised not by remaining abstract and dwelling in the realm of ideas and notions, but by incarnating the mystery and reality of the Church in every people and culture. Hence all Churches have to be local or particular Churches; but in each of these particular Churches the full and universal Church is present and is at work.

In the same way, inculturation necessarily supposes particular cultural expressions in all domains. Universality and unity are realised by the one Spirit who is present everywhere, by the one faith in Christ who is the bond of unity and single source of all expressions, and by the values of the Gospel which are shared,

expressions, and by the values of the Gospel which are shared, lived and communicated. Universality cannot be realised by spreading a single particularity and uniformity through dictatorial edict. It would amount only to imposing a particular cultural expression on all peoples and on all cultures. If done so, it would be nothing but an imperial imposition and colonial domination of a particular culture on all peoples in the name of Christian unity and faith (in this case, western culture/hence neo-colonialism).

Unity and universality are to be found at the core of realities: God, Spirit, the Gospel and faith. They will spontaneously manifest themselves in a variety of expressions and signs. Pluriformity and variety are necessary requisites for Catholicity or ecumenicity which the true Church of Christ claims as one of its marks.

## **2. Inculturation covers the total reality of the Church:**

Indigenization is concerned with every aspect of the Church's life and with every sector of its activity. Indigenous expressions refer to (1) the formation of the local community of Christians and training of the clergy and the religious, (2) their life-style or sociological adaptation, (3) the incarnation of the gospel in concrete life situations and in every sphere of personal and family life, social and civic activities, economic and political systems, and the cultures of each country, region and place. It refers to (4) the domains of art, architecture, sculpture, painting, decoration, music, dance and drama. It refers to (5) theology (6) spirituality, (7) the triple ministries of the word (preaching, evangelization, catechesis) worship (liturgy) and service (formation in faith and organisation of Christian community towards Christian maturity, witness in society and humble service in love). There is a connection among all of them.

**Ad Gentes** outlines a whole gamut of programme to be covered by inculturation:

“If this goal is to be achieved, theological investigation must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area, as it is called. In this way, under the light of the tradition of the universal Church, a fresh scrutiny will be brought to bear on the deeds and words which God has made known, which have been consigned to sacred scripture, and which have been unfolded by the Church Fathers and the teaching authority of the Church. Thus it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek for understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples. A better view will be gained as to how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. As a result, avenues will be opened for a more profound adaptation in the whole area of Christian life. Thanks to such a procedure. Christian life can be accommodated to the genius and the dispositions of each culture” (AG 22 b & c).

“Working to plant the Church, and thoroughly enriched with the treasures of mysticism adorning the Church’s religious tradition, religious communities should strive to give expression to these treasures and to hand them on in a manner harmonious with the nature and the genius of each nation. Let them reflect attentively on how Christian religious life may be able to assimilate the ascetic and contemplative traditions whose seeds were sometimes already planted by God in ancient cultures prior to the preaching of the gospel” (AG 18 b).

There is no order in which the process should be initiated. Each person or group or Church could start from one aspect according to one’s circumstances, needs, and resources, and from there, under the dynamism of one’s commitment to the cause, could proceed to cover the other aspects and dimensions. For



example, one could begin from one's life-style and then reach out to liturgy or theology or ministries; another could begin with liturgy and then go to indigenize the life-style. Thus various efforts, initiatives and dimensions could gradually converge and contribute to one and the same cause: all-round and all-level inculturation.

### 3. Indigenization should embrace the three dimensions of history:

In the mind of many, inculturation connotes a return to vedic times and to the ancient or dead culture of the people, a mere revival of the irrelevant past and a retrograde movement to result in anachronism. Naturally they ask themselves why should one go backwards while the world and each country in it is moving forward and is set in the dynamic movement towards shaping its future. What is still worse: should the Church adapt herself to a culture which is not current and the values of which are being thrown overboard by the 'westernized' elite and the values of modern technological culture are avidly swallowed! Still others wonder whether the Church should incarnate herself in the national or regional or local culture of people and undertake so late a programme of inculturation while the modern, scientific, technological, international culture is sweeping across the whole world submerging local cultures. Still others will say: Culture is in the melting pot; let us wait for the period of stability. Many more questions of this sort are raised.

We do grant that culture is a complex and dynamic reality, in a process of continuous growth due to inter-action and change. Culture, as a living and dynamic reality will always be in continuous evolution, open to influence both by assimilating new elements and values and by rejecting some others and thereby realising a fresh, vital and dynamic synthesis. We can never come to a state of cultural stability; hence inculturation cannot wait till then.

All will admit that we witness today not only the emergence and spread of international culture but the renaissance and growth of national cultures. The identity of a national culture and an ex-

perience of and a participation in it is a necessary condition for one's own national personality and identity as well as for the ability to relate oneself with other national cultures and to participate meaningfully and fruitfully in a world culture, just as only a mature person having an identity and personality of his own can relate in an adult way with other persons.

In the same way indigenization should address itself to both ancient and modern culture in so far as the values, elements and aspects of the ancient culture continue to be in vogue today and permeate the modern form of one's national culture. Therefore indigenization does not refer exclusively or unilaterally to traditional cultures and religions. It is not a mere going back to the source, it is not a mere recognition of one's heritage. It means, above all, being present today and looking to the future, being taken up in the very dynamism of personality development, group life and historical adventure; though always rooted in one's past. Indigenization takes account of all the realities that constitute human existence today, that shape the life of societies and nations, and that mark the history of the world: problems of hunger and disease, ignorance and illiteracy, unemployment and frustration, struggles of men for world peace, social justice and integral development of man, contemporary culture and its all-pervading effects. Indigenization means solidarity with men and involvement in all issues and problems, and entry into the dynamism and adventure of human history with all that they imply, and in all that they demand. It means the Church being present everywhere with her humble diakonia in testimony of the Gospel and of the kingdom. Thus indigenization is a concern for the contemporary reality and integrated in the culture and life of today's man. The present may have its roots and moorings in the past, its dynamic orientation may be towards the future, but the Church is indigenous in so far as it is relevantly present to the living, moving and actual reality of today.

Finally within the same country or region or even in the same diocese or place there may not be a single monolithic culture, but a variety of cultures and sub-cultures. If we take, for example

India, there is a variety of cultures since the country is a mosaic of everything, and cultural differences are great among various regions. In such a situation inculturation does not mean one single uniform expression for the whole country, but a variety of forms. At the same time one cannot fail to recognize a basic core or dynamic unity underlying and inter-connecting all of them. If so, certain aspects of inculturation will be the same for the whole country.

Some argue that, after all, due to five centuries of westernization we have taken to foreign habits and way of life. It is important to make good the 5 centuries of time-lag. Further we are comfortable in it and recognise it as our identity.

It is granted that it is a laborious task and it appears impossible to revert back to what we should have been. It is not possible either to make history begin once again ignoring what has happened between the 16th and 20th centuries. There is of course some truth in it.

However any length of time lapse does not justify us to maintain and to continue with a false identity. It is part of the total alienation to be ready to accept and to live with it, and to perpetuate this false identity. Since it is a long standing false identity we need a more radical and long-drawn out effort to be liberated from this alienation and to regain gradually, but definitely our real identity and authentic personality. The means for this is precisely the process of inculturation.

#### **4. Mission and Indigenization are simultaneous and not successive actions:**

There are those whose axiom is: evangelization first and inculturation later; the former is essential and the latter is secondary. It is not enough to announce the Word, calling men to faith and conversion, to gather the believers for worship in the cele-

bration of the Eucharist, and to form them for a life of witnessing and service in charity, but in all this, i.e. at every stage and in every form of ministry, the Church must adapt herself to the country and region, to the milieus and traditions, to the forms of cultural and religious expressions, and to the present concern of contemporary society.

In the past many were, and even today many are still, under the impression that at a first stage the word is simply announced, celebrated and lived, and it is at a later stage that all these activities are to be adapted to the country and integrated in its culture: first evangelization and then inculturation; first liturgy as celebrated in the culture of the missionary, and then adaptation to the mission country, etc. Historically there has been, by and large, a divorce between the two; but in reality both are so intimately connected that they should constitute a single whole. Inculturation should be part and parcel of the very process of evangelization.

We do not announce the gospel purely and simply in an abstract manner. The Word of God passes through a human word: and this word to be a meaningful human word should be expressed in the language, in the categories of thought, in the images and forms of speech, through the current means and techniques of communication, and according to the pedagogy prevalent in a region and suitable to a human group. This is hermeneutics and a means of communication.

Likewise we do not first celebrate an ethereal or other worldly, or disincarnated liturgy and then adapt it; but in its very first act of worship the community gives expression to its aspirations and sentiments, to its relationship with God and men, to its response and attitudes to God's on-going self-revelation in history, to its beliefs and practices, through the signs proper to its culture and religions, traditional and actual.

Finally the forms of structures and institutions of witnessing and service in charity should be relevant, functional, ever-

changing to the human group in the midst of which they live; should meet the current needs of the people for whom they are meant, and should enlighten them in their problems and in the fulfilment of their deepest yearnings.

Thus the mission of the Church at every stage and in every form of ministry should be adapted to the country, to its culture and religious tradition. Inculturation or adaptation is a simultaneous act of every form of ministry, whether missionary or pastoral activity and an integral part of the whole mission of the Church.

**5. Inculturation should include Liturgy, as it is the fount and summit of Church's Mission:**

Some will grant indigenization of everything except the liturgy. This is due to the understanding that the liturgy is a water-tight compartment, that it is something sacred while the rest is considered profane. If liturgy is the supreme manifestation of the mystery of the Church and the most efficacious means of fulfilling her mission, if it is the fount from which all her power flows, and the summit towards which all her activities are directed (SC. 10) it follows that the mission of the Church and inculturation which are carried out throughout the day in various spheres should reach their culmination in the celebration of the liturgy in indigenous forms. Hence Liturgy should be the most indigenous and deepest form of inculturation.

That is why among the basic principles of the reform of the sacred liturgy (SC. 21-40) the Council has given us norms for liturgical inculturation: "Anything in those peoples' way of life which is not indissolubly bound up with superstition and error she studies with sympathy and, if possible preserves intact. Sometimes in fact, she admits such things into the liturgy itself, so long as they harmonize with its true and authentic spirit" (SC. 37).

Provision is made for both ordinary and partial adaptation to the Roman Rite (SC. 38-39) and for more radical ones: the overall inculturation of the liturgy (SC. 40). In the latter case the

initiative must be taken by the Episcopal conference of each country.

## 6

### SOME PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

At the end of this practical theological reflection it is good to make a few remarks in order to link it up with what is taking place in many Churches of the third world.

1. Even though a western form of Christianity was introduced into these countries, it is very difficult to assess the **responsibility of missionary societies and individual missionaries**. They were children of their times and countries; most of them were not fully aware what inculturation meant; the theological understanding and political situation of their times were far from helpful to it. In spite of it individuals and groups who had better enlightenment did their best to follow a different policy and to promote a limited programme of indigenization, but they could not succeed much due to opposition from various quarters and due to conditions of life and work in those pioneering periods. Hence our reflection is not at all a judgement on the past or a questioning of the motives of missionaries. If foreign missionaries could not do much in earlier centuries, the same missionaries have more than amply compensated for it by their efforts during the last two or three decades. Some of the best proponents of inculturation are foreign missionaries.

2. In spite of western cultural domination, **indigenization has been already realised in various degrees** in some areas and aspects of the Church. So it would be wrong to state that the Churches in the third world are totally western; this is far from the truth. While some aspects and areas are western and need to be indigenized, others have already been incultured.

3. Against this background the indigenous leaders should accept their responsibility and play their leadership role for indigenizing the Church today and forge ahead courageously with a well planned and well prepared programme of indigenization. We have today all facilities and resources needed for such a task. If we do not implement it in such a propitious moment we would be more guilty before history than all our predecessors, whether foreign or local.

4. **Inculturation implies creativity and originality, dynamism and relevance:** If the Local Church is considered as only a part of the universal Church and as a lower administrative unit, the attitude of the Local Church will be one of importing and copying, of implementing orders and conforming to what comes from the top, in a passive mentality of receiving. There will be uniformity and sameness everywhere; but it will be irrelevant and cease to be a Church. On the other hand, if every Local Church contains the full mystery of Christ and expresses it in its socio-cultural milieu, then there will be creativity and originality.

Likewise the local Church to fulfil such a function, can no more be either a duplicate copy of foreign models, or aping whatever is found in the west, or a perpetuation of them in terms of organisation, preaching, church structures, ministries, etc.; nor can it be a monotonous repetition in art, architecture, language and music of the model of the countries of origin from which these Churches emanated. It is high time that we started being ourselves, started being conscious of what we are, started joining with our fellow men in full solidarity and commitment in the historical process, sharing their concerns, struggling for the same cause. It is high time that we started reflecting on our faith from this commitment and looked for means to express our Christian experience and sharing them with our fellow men, in the reality of our life.

5. The variety and the changing character of reality calls for and necessitates **liturgical pluralism**, starting from cultural, ecclesial, theological and pastoral pluralism. It will have to

take the initiative, become competent and responsible, have the imagination and daring to invent relevant forms and patterns, structures and institutions for her various activities and services, and project an image of solidarity and incarnation.

6. This calls for a correct understanding of the theology of the relationship between the Universal Church and the Particular Churches; accordingly an all-round change will be called for in the relation between the Mission Societies, Church union and the dioceses, between the Holy See, Episcopal Conferences and the dioceses. In this sense we must all go back to the pattern of autonomy preserved still in the oriental churches. The administrative set-up of the Churches has to be very much decentralised and the principle of subsidiarity must be followed to its last exigencies and implications. This calls also for the recognition of the value of the Local Church and respect for their freedom, autonomy, initiative and original ways. It is then that the Church as a whole, and each Local Church in particular, will be relevant to peoples' life-situations and historic movements and contribute to the progress and concerns of the local society. By that very fact the Church will become a meaningful sign of Jesus Christ.

It is in this way that we can be creative and original in the strict sense of the term. In our identification with our fellowmen, in our integration with our surroundings, in the communion of many things with our co-citizens, in our incarnation into culture, social way of life and traditions, the uniqueness of Christ's openness, Christ's spirit of Service, and Christ's existence for others up to the point of dying for others, will be luminous and attractive. Thereby we will be both faithful to the Lord and will be living witnesses, proclaiming Him and His message, in this momentous period of our history.

A further remark is pertinent here: the point at issue, is not so much that the higher authority is unwilling to grant this autonomy, as that, the Local Churches whether dioceses or parishes are reluctant or afraid to exercise their freedom and responsibility under the pretext of loyalty and obedience, tradition and unity.



**7. Inculturation is a Community responsibility and concerted action:**

If the Church's mystery is expressed and its mission fulfilled through inculturation it follows that the community character of the Church should shine out in the total process and at every stage. It is not a random effort of some enthusiasts, nor the luxury reserved to some specialists. It is a community venture. Obviously it is by stages and in successive waves that the whole community can be covered; yet from the outset, the group that takes the initiatives, makes the programmes and introduces the new elements, should be representative of the whole Church. It is inevitable that at the beginning stage, a small group alone will be convinced and be able to plan and execute things. This does not mean that a small minority imposes its views on the unwilling majority. Any movement has inevitably to start small, in a humble way. Gradually it will grow; so also here. The rest of the people should be prepared for it by enlightenment and education on the subject, should be taken into confidence by various means of consultation and feedback, kept informed by regular communication, and be given an experiential initiation into the new forms of indigenization before they are formally and widely introduced into the Church at any level. Collaborators at various levels should be enlisted, so that, through them the movement may spread and be accepted.

**8. Leadership of the Leaders:** In this community effort, the leaders of the Church have a special and unique role to play. More than others, they should be personally convinced about the necessity and benefit of indigenization. By their initiative and support, by their official acts and personal example they will promote it. "And so, it is to be hoped, and is altogether fitting, that Episcopal Conferences within the limits of each major socio-cultural territory will be so united among themselves that they will be able to pursue this program of adaptation with one mind and with a common plan" (AG. 22). In liturgical inculturation, they have even greater juridical responsibility at the various stages of the process (SC.40).

## 9. Inculturation whether accepted or resisted challenges our whole life:

It is a process that affects our whole person, our whole life, our whole surrounding. If we accept it in some aspects, we become incongruous for the rest of our life since we will be indigenous in some activities, and foreign in the rest. The effort that is demanded of us to convert ourselves and our whole life, is formidable and long-drawn out.

Indigenization is a global problem and hence:

- it is connected with every aspect of the Church, her nature and mission, with every field of human life: socio-cultural, religious and spiritual;
- it is basically and first of all, a theological question: theology of creation, incarnation and the Church;
- it is situated in the relation between the Church and the world, Christianity and the other religions, faith and culture;
- it touches catechesis and pastorage;
- it challenges every aspect of our personal and social life; our own attitudes and comportments, our way of life, our language and cultures, our values and relationships, our ways of thinking and speaking, acting and living, it questions us at the level of our innermost being; it challenges our authenticity and consistency;
- it interrogates our prayer life and our worship.

None of us is ready to meet such a challenge. That is why, every initiative in this matter sparks off a controversy. That is why, Christians take sides so quickly, for and against it, as never before in history. Acceptance of indigenization in one area would call for indigenization in all other habits, aspects, forms and areas of our life and we are not prepared for it.

The reaction of the public to indigenization in some countries, has unveiled beyond doubt, the type of Christianity that we have in Africa and Asia, the type of theology that is inspiring the action of the Church in these countries, the type of catechesis that has

formed and educated the faith of our Christians. It is the touchstone of the mentality of our bishops, the clergy and the laity. It indicates the degree of renewal that has taken place in these Churches. It\*has brought to the fore, deeper issues that need to be tackled in our onward march for renewal.

10. Above all, it is a **providential occasion** offered to us to pass from a notion of the Church that is sectarian and parochial, territorial and static, introverted and imported, to a notion that is catholic and universal, authentic and interior, adult and dynamic. We have to pass now from importing and copying, to creativity and originality. Christ's mission is to be no more understood in terms of imperialist conquest, geographical expansion, territorial limits, numerical additions, but by an all-round, ever-ready presence in the socio-cultural milieu through the spirit of Christ which is one of humble and loving service, losing one's false identity in order to find a new identity which will be genuinely Christian.