

THE ENCOUNTER OF THE GOSPEL WITH CULTURE
A SHORT SYMPOSIUM

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I. REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEM OF INCULTURATION

by Parmananda R. Divarkar, S.J.

The encounter of the Gospel with culture has always been a problem for the Church. She realizes, on the one hand, that such an encounter is necessary if the Christian faith is to be meaningful and effective in the lives of men, and on the other, that it is all but impossible to achieve a fully satisfactory measure: "The split between the Gospel and culture," says Pope Paul, "is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was at other times" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20).

What is the tragic impediment that comes in the way of a fruitful encounter and that has been a problem at all times? We have a clue to the answer in the realization that in fact it is not the Gospel as such that meets culture as such. The meeting is between people, human beings, men and women: people who have found faith in Christ and want to

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share that faith with others by proclaiming the Gospel, and people who have evolved a way of life that gives them the means of self-expression and development, and which conditions their response to any experience. Moreover, the people who have found faith in Christ also have a way of life of their own which provides them with the means for developing and expressing their faith, and which conditions their activity for the spread of the Gospel, and the people who have evolved a way of life, which we call culture, also have a faith of their own which is deeply embedded in their culture and is not altogether unrelated to faith in Christ.

Consequently, the dialogue is between people who have, all of them, both a faith and a culture, intimately united. If the dialogue were to take place just at the deepest level of faith, there might perhaps be instant mutual recognition and mutual acceptance, with a sense of being meant for each other, to use the popular phrase. But almost inevitably, at least in the initial stages, this deepest level is accessible only to the extent that it finds expression, and this expression is determined by culture and much affected by cultural differences, with a resulting difficulty in mutual communication and comprehension, and a possible mutual rejection.

It is like people who have no common language: they may in fact be saying the same thing, but they do not understand each other and cannot reach an agreement. What is true of language in the strict sense is true of the whole complex or system of ways of thinking and acting among men which is included in culture: "The word 'language,'" Pope Paul reminds us, "should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense which one may call anthropological and cultural" (*EN* 63). Cultural differences are among the greatest obstacles to satisfactory communication among men, and the communication of the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ, which is the Gospel, does not escape the difficulties. Even if the messenger of the Gospel can surmount psychological obstacles and overcome prejudices, there are still many objective practical problems, the greatest being that of disengaging the content of the message from its concrete expression.

Pope Paul tells us that "the Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures" (*EN* 63). But the evangelizer, the messenger of the Gospel and indeed the Church as a whole, is not independent of culture, for, as the Pope himself has explained, "this universal Church is in practice incarnate in the individual Churches made up of such or such an actual part of mankind, speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, of a vision of the world, or an historical past, of a particular human substratum" (*EN* 62).

Obviously the Christian faith must be a vital and active reality in the hearts and lives of people; it cannot remain as a lofty abstraction

enshrined in a neat set of doctrinal formulae. Hence a concrete expression in human culture — that is, in the way that men actually conduct their lives — is essential to the faith; yet no particular concrete expression is essential; rather it is essential that the expression change according to circumstances, so that it is always adequate and effective. So, on the one hand, faith must never be separated from its living manifestation, and on the other, it must always be distinguished from it.

It is fairly easy to see this in theory but almost impossible to realize it satisfactorily in practice; and the problem becomes all the greater when it is a question of evangelization, of communicating the Good News. For our desire and capacity to communicate presuppose a faith that is lively and deep in us, a faith that is very much our own, very much at the heart of what we are, with all our background and experience; yet in sharing it, we cannot transpose to others what is peculiarly our own; they must receive the faith and in their turn express it in the context of their own background and experience.

This is the problem of inculturation. It affects not only evangelization, that is, the conveying of the Gospel to others, but the ongoing fidelity of those who have already accepted the Gospel and must live it in the midst of constantly changing circumstances. Today particularly, culture changes very fast, and the faithful Christian must keep pace with changes precisely in order to remain steadily and totally faithful and to give a witness that is relevant and meaningful in the situation in which he lives.

“The question is undoubtedly a delicate one,” says Pope Paul. “Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it” (*EN 63*).

Elsewhere in the same context the Pope speaks of “the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth” (*EN 63*). The idea is simple enough, but it raises yet one more and very fundamental difficulty, which is this: the essential truth of the Gospel message is not an abstraction but a concrete reality: it is Christ himself, who is the Truth, and who is a particular man, a Jew of his day, who thought and acted as a Jew, who spoke and made disciples among the Jews. Do we abstract from the Jewishness of Christ and of his whole way of being when we transpose the essence of the Gospel? Many of his disciples did in fact think that in order to be a Christian one must first of all have the mind and manner of a Jew. The Apostles rejected

this view at the Council of Jerusalem, but the underlying problem has remained with the Church; and the difficulties it raises have increased as the passage of time has added many particular features to the understanding and practice of the saving message of Christ. It is enough to recall, even briefly and inadequately, some moments in the ecclesiastical history of the modern age, to get an idea of the present state of the question.

At the Council of Trent the Roman Catholic Church opted for a highly specified way of being a Christian, which became the officially approved way, practically the only way. Since the sixteenth century also inaugurated an age of great missionary expansion for the Western Church, following upon the discovery of new lands or new ways to old lands, this one way of being a Christian spread and was cultivated all over the world. In the seventeenth century, in 1659 to be exact, the recently established Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, addressing the Vicars Apostolic of China gave a strong and clear directive to missionaries with regard to the people they were evangelizing: "Do not waste your zeal or your powers of persuasion in getting these people to change their rites, customs, or ways of life, unless these be very obviously opposed to faith and morals. For what could be more ridiculous than to import France, Spain, Italy or any other part of Europe into China? What you carry with you is not a national culture but a Message which does not reject or offend the sound traditions of any country, but rather wants to safeguard and foster them."

Realizing that difficulties arise not so much from principle as from almost inevitable prejudice, the Sacred Congregation also warned of the psychological problems involved. But the tragic story of the Chinese rites at the dawn of the eighteenth century shows how little the Church was able to practice what she preached. The nineteenth century witnessed a new upsurge of missionary zeal, with the foundation of many new missionary congregations of men and women. More movement and better communication, the progress of science in general, and of the human sciences in particular, a new sense of national identity in many parts of the world, and many other factors, too numerous to be mentioned, contributed to a deeper understanding of cultural differences and their importance. There was more and better organized effort to learn about peoples and their ways of life, and some account was taken of the knowledge thus acquired when the Gospel was presented to them. But in the Catholic Church at least, a maximum of uniformity was regarded as the ideal, and there was a tendency to identify the Western Church with the Universal Church.

In the early part of the twentieth century the idea gained ground that the missionary task was to plant the local Church — that is, the effort should not be conceived as that of saving individual souls by

bringing them over to a Church that was and remained foreign, but rather as of establishing a native Church, with its hierarchy and structures suited to the need of the people, wherein they might recognize and find salvation. This marked a theological and practical advance; adaptation was the favorite word in the missionary vocabulary of the day, and the policy that it implied gained impetus with the rise of so many new nations in Asia and Africa after the last World War.

At this time, the encounter of the Gospel with culture did make some progress in the so-called mission territories, but it was a very limited progress, the most fundamental deficiency being that the point of reference for introducing any new feature was not the Christian message as such but the Western Church, with its scholastic theology, its tridentine liturgy and its more recent Code of Canon Law and its multitudinous devotional practices: implicitly or explicitly these were regarded as the norm, as the normal and proper way of being a Christian, from which one departed only by way of exception granted as an indult or a grudging concession. Moreover, effort in this direction was confined almost exclusively to what was regarded as the specifically religious sphere — and indeed to rather superficial aspects — and did not extend to the secular concerns of Christians who often found themselves involved in the nation-building activities of their fellow citizens.

Today, a decade after the Second Vatican Council, we would rather see the encounter of the Gospel with culture in the following way: the Church is indeed like a tree, as the Gospel itself tells us — a large tree that harbors many and varied birds — but it is not transplanted from one soil to another with just the necessary adjustments to enable it to survive and thrive in its new surroundings; rather it grows anew in each soil, from a seed that is sown. The seed that evangelization sows is the word of God; falling on the ground, even on good ground and precisely because the ground is good ground the seed must die if it is to bear fruit. This, too, we know from the Gospel; and we have the seed which in dying does not lose its life and identity; rather it manifests a new power, it draws elements from the native soil, and grows into a tree that has an appearance all its own but is in perfect continuity with the seed from which it springs. It may not look exactly like other trees that have grown elsewhere from the same seed, but it has the same life and bears the same fruit as they do.

It is this new understanding of a very old problem that justifies the use of a new word, "inculturation". It is now found in standard dictionaries and it is gradually gaining acceptance. Obviously it is not a magic word that automatically solves the problem of the encounter of the Gospel with culture; but the new understanding that it implies does throw light on some practical aspects of evangelization, and the most important insight that it provides is that the messenger of the Gospel

is faced with the mystery of death and new life. The older idea of planting the Church drew inspiration from the mystery of the Incarnation, the Word made Flesh: the Church, it was said, is a prolongation of the Incarnation, and the Word must take flesh in every culture. This is true, but in this process also, we now realize, the Incarnation finds fulfilment in the Paschal Mystery.

There is already a self-annihilation in the Incarnation, the kenosis in which the Son of God empties himself, taking the form of a servant; but having become like us in all things he humbled himself yet more submitting to death on the cross; and it is in being raised up by the Father's will and power that Jesus is constituted Lord of the Universe and of human destiny. In the Paschal Mystery the particularity of the Incarnation is transcended and Christ fills all creation with his life-giving presence. It is this mystery that is at the heart of the Good News that the Gospel proclaims and that the Messenger of the Gospel must carry to the ends of the earth. But in this process both the messenger and the message itself must not only become incarnate in the lives of the people to whom Christ brings new life; they must also die and rise again in these people.

That both the evangelizer and the evangelized must make sacrifices for the Gospel is not a new idea; that they can be called upon to die for the faith is neither new nor just an idea; it has been a heroic reality in the history of the Church throughout the ages. What comes to us today as a fresh realization is the startling truth that in some mysterious way the Gospel itself must die as Christ died: the word of God, like good seed falling on good ground, must die that it may bear good fruit. No formulation in human terms of God's message is exhaustive or even adequate; hence this message, which ultimately is Christ himself, must constantly find new expression in the language and life of man: this is the mystery of the Church, which is "the fullness of him who fills the whole creation" (Eph 1:23).

Pope Paul reminds us that the Church does not become the fullness of Christ merely by numerical increase: "for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographical areas or ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting through the power of the Gospel mankind's criteria of judgement, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation" (EN 19). The human values that are upset by the power of the Gospel are not only those of the people who are evangelized and of their culture; they can also be those of the evangelizer himself and of the Church that he represents: these, too, can sometimes be in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation; for instance, to absolutize what is but one particular expression of the faith, to fence around what should be open and free,

can also be a betrayal of the Gospel. It is not the enemies of the Gospel only but also its defenders and propagators that must realize that "the word of God is not shackled" (Tim 2:9).

A Church that does not set bounds to God's message of merciful love for man but rather lives by the freedom and magnanimity of that message — such is the entrancing vision that Pope Paul puts before us, whilst at the same time recognizing that this vision will always be somewhat blurred by our own human limitations. "This is how the Lord wanted his Church to be: universal, a great tree whose branches shelter the birds of the air, a net which catches fish of every kind, or which Peter drew in filled with one hundred and fifty-three big fish, a flock which a single shepherd pastures. A Universal Church without boundaries or frontiers except, also, those of the heart and mind of sinful man" (EN 61).

The realization of this ideal will undoubtedly lead to an ever wider pluralism which, in its proper dimensions, will in no way endanger the unity of faith but rather enrich and emphasize it. An analogy may help to elucidate this point. Just as we find not only many languages in the world but also a constant evolution within the same language, as men strive to give adequate expression to their experience — an experience which is basically human, and hence common to all men, yet varied according to an endless variety of situations, so, too, our response to the word of God will be varied, though fundamentally we share the same faith. Moreover, we see that that despite the multiplicity of languages, communication is possible even on the international level, though ultimately each one of us has his own peculiar way of expressing himself. So, too, with our faith: there will be a basic oneness in its expression; there will be broad lines of convergence within a culture; and finally there will be something that is unique to each believer if his faith is really a personal experience. All these differences must be respected and even cultivated if the faith is to be a reality that is alive, meaningful, effective.

It is Pope Paul, once again, who tells us: "Legitimate attention to individual Churches cannot fail to enrich the Church. Such attention is indispensable and urgent. It responds to the very deep aspirations of people and human communities to find their own identity ever more clearly" (EN 63). As against this, there are those who lament that growing pluralism is responsible for the crisis of faith that so alarmingly manifests itself in every quarter. But one could argue credibly that the crisis is due precisely to insufficient pluralism: that is, there is reason to believe that it is not the faith that has lost its meaning for many people, but rather the way in which they are expected to live it, which does not correspond to their experience of life and its problems.

This is the challenge of inculturation that faces the Church everywhere, whether in areas and communities that have just been

evangelized or in the traditionally Christian ones: new ways of living the faith must be found to satisfy new and more varied needs, arising from new and perhaps strange situations — ways that are rooted in the past but creatively alive to a present that is so quickly overtaken by the future; hence also, men and women must be found who can trace these ways for others, people who are solidly established in tradition but alive and vibrant to the Spirit as he acts in all the ambiguities of the present hour, opening out into the uncertainties of the future.

II. UNIVERSAL CHURCH AND LOCAL CHURCHES: RESPECTIVE TASKS IN THE ENCOUNTER OF THE GOSPEL WITH CULTURES

by Marcello Zago, O.M.I.

When I arrived as a missionary in Laos in 1959, I was full of desire to bring the non-Christians to know and love Jesus Christ. I thought it essential to get to know the people to whom I had been sent. I began straightaway to observe and study their culture, i.e., all the aspects of their personal and social lives and, in particular, in the lived religion. This approach helped me to adapt to the new situation. This approach is still valid.

Missionary experience and especially the needs of the people, together with the new elements in missionary vision, have forced me to make continual adjustments . . . both in missionary activity as well as in the understanding of it! Adaptation has become incarnation. The extension of the Church has become the birth of the Church. I will refer to this experience, which is not extraordinary, in Part III. Each one of us, however, has to use the tools at his disposal and to the best of his ability.

Today new problems affect the encounter of the Gospel with cultures. Whose is the task of incarnation? Certainly not just individuals, but also the Christian communities and the Churches. But if this is the case, is it the task of local Churches only or of the universal Church as well? What are their respective roles? I wish to point out straightaway that we are not dealing with academic problems. The practical consequences could be tremendous. But to understand the

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respective task of each we must make clear what we mean by universal Church and particular Churches. So I shall begin here.

This paper is in two parts. In the more general Part I, I shall first make clear the idea of universal and local Church, beginning with an example from the history of the missions and a few features of the present situation, before pointing out the respective and complementary tasks of the Church in its two spheres. In Part II, beginning with my experience in the field of Buddhism, I shall show the principles of action for inculturation. I shall conclude by recalling what the religious can and must do in this field.

On reading over this paper I realize I have kept to the theme of encounter of the Gospel with cultures. But the encounter of my message with your cultures may not be easy. I take comfort in realizing that this encounter also takes place, thanks to the goodwill of those involved and above all to the gift of God. I had overlooked this point in my paper.

Part I: Universal Church and Local Church

Since Vatican II the universal Church has often been distinguished from the particular or local Church. The magisterium has taken note of this double dimension of the Church without coming to a precise definition or siding with any particular school of thought. Vatican II documents understand local and particular Churches mean either communities grouped around a bishop (dioceses) or communities localized in a specific culture, in one country, or according to an autonomous juridical structure (rites, patriarchates).¹

The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* mentions only the universal Church and particular Church, without ever using the term "local Church". It is a case of "the Church's two spheres":

This universal Church is in practice incarnate in the individual Churches made up of such and such an actual part of mankind, speaking such and such a language, heirs of a cultural patrimony, a vision of the world, a historical part, of a particular human substratum. . . . According to the word of the Lord, it is the Church, universal by vocation and by mission, that puts down roots in the various cultural, social, human soils, and takes on different features, exterior expressions in each section of the word. . . . Only by paying constant attention to the two spheres of the Church will we be able to see the richness of this relationship between the universal Church and the individual Churches (*EN* 62).

In the subsequent paragraphs, (*EN* 63-65) the respective roles of the universal Church and individual Churches in the inculturation of the Gospel are described.

In the 1974 Synod on Evangelization the distinction between universal Church and local Churches is often referred to, especially in relation to the inculturation of the message and the incarnation of Christian life². The Fathers stressed the necessity for the incarnation of the local Churches, the need for more creativity and autonomy in this field. But the nature of the universal Church and the individual Churches and their respective roles in inculturation have not been sufficiently elaborated. Certain bishops have asked the help of theologians.³

These theologians have taken some steps to clarify this problem. Father De Lubac proposes making a distinction between universal Church, individual Church and local Church⁴. Right from the beginning, Church and Churches have been referred to in the singular and in the plural.⁵ In the universal, or rather, Catholic Church⁶, we can consider the relationship between the different world churches, and the relationship of the Churches with Peter's successor. For the sake of clarity he suggests keeping the name "individual" Church for the Church presided over by a bishop, and giving the name local Church to a wider reality that is connected with culture, country and tradition, such as the Patriarchates and the Church in any one country. Nobody seems to have adopted these distinctions of Father De Lubac.

For my part, I think the mystery of the same Church, whether universal and individual or local, can be approached in two ways. We can consider the Church in its inner structure, as both universal and individual, with people responsible as signs and agents of this universality and individuality: they are the Pope and the bishops in their dioceses. We can also consider the Church in her cultural and spatial incarnation. Seen in this light the individual Church takes into account culture, human conditions, relationships, changes: thus we extend her limits. The patriarchates or all the diocesan communities situated together in a country or in a culture can then be called individual or local Churches.

This new concern to consider the Church not only in its inner structure (universal Church and diocesan Church, the role and relationship of the Pope and Bishops) but also in its relationship with culture as the global phenomenon of a society is very important and useful for the life and mission of the Church. The Church must become incarnate, must use the language and idiom, the forms and values of the human environment in which she is located, in order to be the fulfilment of a people's history of salvation and a sign understood by the members of that culture.

Of course we have this need of incarnation not only for the Church in so far as it is localized, but also for the Church in so far as it is universal. The service of Peter must become incarnate according to

the needs and cultural conditions of time and not solely according to the needs of faith which is itself situated in time. It is natural for a more unified world culture to carry out the service of Peter by extending its international structures vis-a-vis the world and the individual Churches.

In the present paper we are only considering the encounter of the Gospel with a particular culture and the respective roles of the universal Church and the particular Church in this process of incarnation.

From Historical Fact to the Present Situation

There is always the danger of oversimplification. Some think that inculturation is the exclusive work of the local Churches. The universal Church should not meddle; it should leave the field open for every experience and recognize their full independence in matters of research and of realization. Others, more attached to the ways and ideas of the past, think Rome should provide rules for everything, at least in the important fields of liturgy, catechesis etc.

The two spheres of the Church have a role of their own, complementary in this task of incarnation of the message and experience of Christ in a specific culture. In fact, a deep process is involved which affects the life and mission of the Church; it is not a question of something secondary and accidental or of an involvement that in no way touches upon the essential. An example taken from missionary history illustrates the impact of these two roles.

Fathers Ricci, Nobili and Valignano and their companions opened new roads for the encounter of the Gospel with cultures. Their method failed for many reasons: the divisions among missionaries, the separation of different groups in the same local Church according to the Indian caste system, the attitudes of counter-reform always spreading wider, the theological positions concerning the nature of adaptation, the role of religions, the nature of the message and Christian life. The local Church of that time, which was the missionary Church, needed not only different relationships with Rome and the other Churches, but also new theological approaches and a renewed awareness of the Church. (We need only to recall the role of the French Sorbonne theologians in the affair.) The pioneers, as well as their opponents, sought to adopt civil customs, rejecting the adoption of religious customs and values. Now it is impossible to separate the various aspects of culture; adaptation is not only an adoption of neutral customs — conversion is not a complete break but the fulfilment of a journey of people and their cultures. Religions in spite of their limits and errors are the crystallization of the good will of man and gift of God. The incarnation of a particular Church cannot come about in an

authentic way without the communion, the collaboration and the deep reflection of the whole Church.

Today the situation has changed. Adaptation has been requested by both Pontiffs and Vatican II. The awareness of this need and duty is more widespread. Enough people are convinced it is fundamentally a question of an incarnation of the message and the faithful and authentic Christian life and not solely one of adaptation. Important initiatives have been taken recently. The setting up of Research and Formation Institutes in Africa and Asia (at Abidjan on the Ivory Coast, Eldoret in Kenya, Kinshasa in Zaire, Bangalore in India, Nagoya in Japan) has no similar precedent. Serious minded theologians have become interested in the problem and have made contributions, as can be seen in the Acts of the last Congress organized by the Sacred Congregation for Evangelization⁷. But, a certain number of pastors, and especially administrators, have not taken this path, as can be deduced from the decisions taken with regard to the Zaire and Indian liturgies.⁸ The Lefèvre movement not only reminds us of the attitude of a considerable number of Christians, but also could have important negative consequences in the encounter of the Gospel with cultures. This shows that inculturation must be accompanied by reflection, conscientization and a deepening of knowledge at all levels and in all parts of the Church.

Respective Tasks in Inculturation

The universal and local Churches are involved in the encounter of the Gospel with cultures. Collaboration between them is necessary and must be intensified.

The local Church must be vitalized and again express the reality of the Christian message. It is not only a question of adaptation of rites, structures, or accidental exterior forms. It is a question of a process of incarnation of the Christian life. It can be a two-way approach using as a starting point either the Christian experience or the global experience of the people and culture. Starting from the Christian life lived in the Church, the experience of Christ — all he gives and asks of us — must be intensified. This must be lived and expressed in order to be a sign, a witness, an agent of Christ in culture and society. This experience must be accompanied by a deeper reflection on the origins of Christianity, on the kernel of the message, on the hierarchy of values. Starting from culture, the positive attitudes of the people must be kept, real values adopted, a Christian reply given to their expectations and roles, and a new creative dynamism instilled which has Christ as its centre. This progressive incarnation must be accompanied by knowledge of the culture, the discernment of the basic living values, presence, collaboration and dialogue. We must become involved in all fields: man's experience of the Absolute and of Christ,

evangelization, liturgy, service of our brothers and of society, etc., and at all levels, namely patterns, roles and values.⁹

The universal Church has tasks of its own in the inculturation process. The exhortation dealing with the process for the Gospel message (*Evangelii Nuntiandi* 61-65) assigns the role of incarnation to the local Churches and that of fidelity to the universal Church. This does not mean they are exclusive tasks but rather complementary ones: it is more a question of emphasis and particular contributions. Extending the discussion to the entire problem of inculturation, the tasks of the universal Church seem to me to be the following:

1. to favor the deepening and widening of the Christian experience. Each Church tends to have a preference for one aspect of the experience of the Christian Mystery. Communion in the universal Church helps us to remain open to the Church's totality, to be truly Catholic.
2. to keep unchanged the content of the Catholic faith that the Lord entrusted to the Apostles, favoring the understanding of the central unalterable core, favoring the authentic understanding of the sources of faith, in particular Scripture and Tradition. History proves that the communion of Churches has helped to outlive and overcome heresies and it has re-inforced the special role of the Pope as guardian of fidelity to the entire message of Christ.
3. to bring to man's attention and to encourage him to adopt "transcultural" and worldwide values. In a world that is becoming unified and is one in many respects, the Church should become incarnate on this level also. She should become a sign and sacrament of Christian salvation. She must reply to man's expectations and try to adopt these values.

All bishops as successors of the Apostles are called upon to strengthen the bonds among the Churches and to safeguard fidelity to Christ and to his message. Their individual initiatives, their meetings and their collaboration, their sharing and comparing of experiences can help this process of incarnation, universality and fidelity. The Pope in particular has not only the role of promoting and symbolizing the oneness of all Christ's disciples and Churches, but also the role of confirming them in their fidelity to the Master and his message.

Ways and means of faithfully effecting this incarnation and contributing to this incarnation vary according to the needs and conditions of the times and cultures. New institutions have grown up

and appear full of promise, such as the Synods, the regional meetings, bishops' conferences, etc. Other older ones continue to influence the Church, such as the encyclicals, the *ad limina* visits, pontifical representatives, the Roman congregations, etc. As the documents of the Council remind us, the role of these congregations should be less administration and more animation; they should have a greater theological and pastoral openness, a greater confidence in those responsible for the Churches. They should undertake the task of encouragement, discernment and evaluation in face of the experiences of incarnation. For it remains difficult for everyone to attain the ideal. Reciprocal collaboration and trust are helps to progress.

The theologians and experts have a contribution to make to the local Church and the universal Church, e.g., for the understanding of the fundamental values of a culture, for the ways of expressing Christian life and message in a given environment, for the deepening of the Christian kerygma, for the study of the unchanging elements of certain forms of incarnation, e.g., the matter of the sacraments.

All faithful Christians are involved in this process of incarnation because each and everyone forms the Church and because all manifestations and dimensions of Christian life must become incarnate. The community is the normal way to progress in this field, because where two or three are gathered in his name Christ is with them. To consider acculturation as a simple administrative affair or as a task to be fulfilled by experts would be to forget its nature and depth.

Part II: Principles of Action Emerging from Experience

For a few years in Laos and Cambodia I was in charge of cultural research and acculturation in a Buddhist environment. My work was interrupted by the political events of 1975. The results were encouraging, although it was a long-term task. Here are some of the results:

- A knowledge of the global culture and the religion lived in these countries, which I have written about in a number of publications.
- A conscientization of the pastoral agents and their collaboration towards the knowledge of the environment, dialogue and acculturation.
- An attempt at re-expressing the Christian message in this environment and its adaptation in different aspects of Christian life.
- The discovery and adoption of certain values, such as mediation.
- The objectives were many and conditioned our steps and means. We tried above all to be present at everything that constitutes

their life and expressing their religious life (everyday life, feasts and religious rites, forms of meditation).

- Collaboration and friendship grew, especially between Catholic religious and Buddhist monks.
- Dialogue was the preferred means of reciprocal contacts.
- This enabled us to understand and appreciate more and more the people and the systems and structures that condition them, the values that animate them, and the symbols they use for self-expression.
- Progressively we became aware of new dimensions of our own Christian being and our message, and these we deepened.
- This enabled us to find new ways to express the message and Christian experience.

From this experience we can draw certain principles of action for working in the field of acculturation and for carrying out or intensifying this process:

1. Men are needed who are convinced of the necessity of this task, who are sufficiently prepared, are accepted by the group and are free enough to dedicate themselves to this task.
2. To get anywhere it is not necessary to wait until everything is perfect, even if one must be serious and careful in research and experiences.
3. The whole Church, bishops, priests, men and women religious, lay people, those most involved, those most enthusiastic, all must be conscientized and carried along. The work, even through very positive, when done by fringe people separated from the group, does not help the total process, as I had occasion to observe in several places.
4. From the beginning it is important to start a movement which is open to research and practical application. For example, for two years we concentrated our efforts on increasing our knowledge of Buddhism, on dialogue with Buddhists, then on Buddhist moral values and the education of the young, and lastly on the vision and experience the people had of God and their pastoral consequences, etc. This type of communal effort involves everybody and the results are less fragmentary.
5. This process should not be considered a task belonging exclusively to experts, nor a merely technical or administrative affair. The Christian experience should be employed at every step of the way from the planning to the execution. Our prayers and our commitment for the sake of others must be affected.

6. A periodic examination at all levels is important. The discussion of this within the episcopal conference was a great help.
7. The community is a privileged place for discernment and evaluation.
8. The role of the universal Church is considerable in any development. The bishops, missionaries and Christians were sustained in their efforts through the general encouragement of the Pope and, in their meetings with Buddhists particularly, by the authorities of the Secretariate for non-Christians and the regional conferences of the bishops of Asia. The constant exchange of information with Rome, the other episcopal conferences, and the men engaged in this field has established confidence and aided the same process elsewhere. Warnings issued on certain points have helped evaluation without inhibiting initiative.
9. It is a question of a way of life, which cannot be achieved within a given time limit and which can never be considered as over. Therefore, it is necessary to mold a temperament and attitudes which are ready to facilitate a Christian life which is dynamic by nature, seeking to incarnate itself in cultures which are always changing.

Religious and the Task of Inculturation

Religious have often served as a tie between the Churches and as a means of incarnating the faith; numerous historical events demonstrate this in different parts of the world. Their role in the meeting of the Gospel with other cultures in the local Churches is manifold. One may point out the following objectives:

1. Their basic contribution is to live and incarnate the general and specific charisms of religious life in the interior of each local Church. The religious life in fact corresponds to the fundamental expectations of man and culture, as one can see from the non-Christian traditions, and constitutes an important aspect of the Christian experience. The specific and concrete forms of religious life, with its different ways of service and enrichment of life, contribute to the constitution of the local Church. Naturally, these modes of life must adapt to the culture and to local needs. One must know how to overcome the concrete and historical forms of the charism in order to rediscover the spirit and to be able to incarnate it. To do that one must follow the processes of all Christian incarnation.
2. Religious must also contribute to the meeting of the Gospel with a specific culture, as must all the other members of the ecclesial community. Some members may be specially gifted for this work and therefore they should be freed to do this task.

3. Through their links with colleagues in other countries and because of their mobility they can contribute to the exchange of experiences between the Churches and to the knowledge of other Christians, especially those in authority.
4. They are also more aware of the world dimension of cultures and can collaborate in order to give to them an evangelical response and to assume their values.

Some courses of action to realize these objectives are possible:

- a) provide formation for all members which will help them to understand, discern and accept the stable and changing values of the culture in which they live.
- b) instruct them how to observe facts and events and above all how to meet and dialogue with people, because acculturation does not come about through ideologies or systems alone but through and between people.
- c) help them constantly to deepen their Christian experience and message in order to help them grow, while keeping the essentials but adapting themselves continuously with regard to the rest.
- d) create and promote communities which are places endowed with understanding and discernment for the deepening of this double incarnation—cultural and Christian.
- e) in the early stages of formation be watchful of progress and do not fail to start with concrete experiences.
- f) give some members a fuller preparation in this field and then make them free to work with other bodies constituting the local Church.
- g) collaborate with existing institutions engaged in this work, either by putting persons at their disposal or by sending them ideas and means.
- h) organize special meetings for religious working in the same field on the same continent. For example, the Oblates of Asia organized seminars on Buddhism, Islam, and social commitment. This enabled these men to meet, to compare notes and to become animators at the local level.

These thoughts serve as my contribution to the effort towards incarnation — felt by many to be urgent. We all bear the responsibility, particularly as we are the specialists in evangelization.

“To preach the Gospel in Asia today we must make the message and life of Christ truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our peoples. The primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church.”¹²

III. INCULTURATING CHRISTIANITY IN EAST ASIA

by Jaime Bulatao, S.J.

Those of us who were already living in the year 1961, the year when Vatican II opened, will remember perhaps with nostalgia the forms in which ecclesiastical life appeared. Priests still wore the habit, an evolved relic of the Roman toga. Cardinals were called Roman princes and their regalia (up to 1969) included long trains originally designed to cover with dignity the rear end of the horse when they rode on horseback. Music for worship was the stately Gregorian chant and the only allowable instrument in church was the organ. Sisters who ran girls schools were terribly concerned over skirt-lengths, and contemplative sisters lived poorly in expensive stone monasteries built like the castles of southern Europe.

At an even deeper, more important level, Romanization was even more entrenched. Latin was not only the language of worship, it was also the medium whereby the seminarian and the scholastic absorbed into his innermost being the Scholastic system of thought, which began with a denunciation of subjectivity: *Skepticismus universalis rejiciendus est, secus ruit totum systema*. Textbooks too were Gregorian or at least approved by a Roman censorship ever watchful against divergencies from approved thought systems. There was a sense of sureness about the whole system and a feeling that gave support.

In East Asia, as probably in other parts of the world, it was this sense of security that appealed to many and gave direction to the lives of Catholics while building a wall against the disturbance of encountering non-Catholics. Protestants and Muslims were tolerated but were looked on with a sort of distrust. In Indonesia, for instance, converts to Catholicism from Islam were prohibited from mingling with traditional festivities of the region. Manila Catholics were not allowed to swim in the YMCA pool or their priests to address Rotary clubs. Yet all these restrictions on freedom were tolerated out of a desire and a need to belong to the Roman Catholic Church, outside of which there was no salvation.

Perhaps most noteworthy of Catholic practices in that era was the close association between conformity to Church-established norms and

This paper by Father Jaime Bulatao, S.J., along with the comments of Father John Reilly, S.J., Father John Wilcken, S.J., and Bishop Francisco F. Claver, S.J., was prepared for the Joint Meeting of the Major Superiors and Apostolate Secretaries of the Jesuit East Asian Assistancy, held in Manila August 8-20, 1976. Father Bulatao is presently Chairman of the Department of Psychology in the Ateneo de Manila.

“salvation”. Abstinence from meat on certain days, even in fish-eating countries, was made a condition for entrance into heaven. So was adherence to certain aspects of Canon law. In marriage, for example, both “impediments” and “forms” were drawn directly from Roman law and imposed on all Roman Catholics no matter what their own legal customs and practices were. The Roman breviary read in Latin was obligatory under mortal sin even to Chinese priests and certain rubrics of the Mass were similarly binding. One had to be careful when brushing one’s teeth before Holy Communion, lest by swallowing some water one could not receive Holy Communion.

The Process of Canonization

How did such a social system grow out of a religion which could once be simply summed up in the Apostle’s Creed? And even after it had grown up in Europe through feudal times and the Renaissance and Jansenism, how could it have been imposed on an innocent non-European world? Were there no brave souls to question these overzealous religious practices in the same way as there were once brave souls who questioned that the Inquisition could have come from the gentle Christ?

“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” It may be well to apply these words of Christ to us, his followers, who suffer from cultural blindness. The strength of culture is overpowering and it is only the exceptional mind that can free itself from the cultural blindness of his own age, and then he has to suffer the condemnations of his contemporaries. By hindsight one can see the evolving process: imitation → institutionalization → canonization. A laudable form of behavior, be it priestly celibacy or the Eucharistic fast, is admired and imitated. Then it becomes the rule for a community. Then it is justified by theologians and sanctioned by canonists. It is “canonized” and is taught to ensuing generations as *the* Catholic way. There are only a few who can openly say: “This is the Catholic way for now, or for this part of the world. We follow it while it is useful and sanctioned by authority. We reject it when it is no longer truly Christian.” These are the few who have seen the problem of inculturation in the Church because they are aware of culture, what it is and what it can do to the human mind.

Culture

What is this “culture” that is so powerful as to blind even the greatest minds? How is it acquired? How does it break down?

Culture, for our purpose, can be described as the learned system of thought and behavior common to a group and transmitted within the group. Being learned, it embraces everything that does not come

inborn with one's genes, which then comes together into a more or less consistent system, a pattern which marks this unique group, makes the members hang together in their similarity to each other and separates them from others not of the group. Because of the similarity of the pattern, the group members "understand" each other and communicate easily with one another. And when the culture itself conditions them to be afraid of other cultures, a fear spontaneously erupts when a member is faced with an outsider.

Language, of course, has much to do with culture and may rightly be called the main vehicle of culture. Not only is culture stored in and transmitted through language, but one's worldview itself is formed by one's language because the "gestalt" of the language forms the mind that thinks in it. The language that refers to outsiders as "foreign devils" is bound to transmit a peculiar view of the outside world.

Therein lies the force of culture to compel minds. My culture is second nature to me. In fact, unless I become culturally aware, I shall mistake my culture for "natural law" and shall demand that others obey this natural law. Without experience of another culture, cultural awareness cannot come. Like the fish in the water who is not aware that he lives in "water" (N.B. the apostrophes, the sign of reflective awareness), so also the man who has lived all his life in an Italian village cannot become aware of "culture".

Awareness of culture loosens some of the power that culture has over the mind. Pluralism on the other hand gives birth to another culture. In fact, so dynamically changing can a culture be that one has to be ever alert lest while condemning the blindness of the people in one culture one runs the danger of being blind within one's own.

Inculturation

Inculturation can be made to mean various things (according to one's culture), but for the purposes of this paper let it be described as the process whereby a person or a thing or an institution assumes an "insider" position in the culture system. Once upon a time Brother Guiseppe Castiglione was an Italian lay brother but after a long time in China as Lang Shih Ning he became so inculturated that the pictures he painted were accepted as Chinese paintings and are today national treasures. Once upon a time Islam was an outsider to Malaysia but it has become so inculturated that the Malay identifies freely with it and considers it as his own. Parliamentary democracy was once an outsider to the Philippines but then it almost became inculturated into Philippine culture.

One sees then that to become inculturated, a person, thing or institution must undergo some change for his or it to be an insider.

The culture is the organism that digests and makes it part of itself. The undigestible object it throws away.

Theological Reflection

Revelation is not a culture. It is a fact. That the infinite God out of love for man became man himself was a fact that the Jewish culture could not accept. The Jewish culture, once the carrier of revelation, had grown old and rigid, resting on the boast of being "sons of Abraham" and unable to see the reality of the here and now.

It was in the Greco-Roman world that the seed found root. In the ensuing process, the Greco-Roman culture itself was changed. It inculturated the new insights brought by revelation. Around these insights there grew a system or structures, a theology, an authority system, a moral system, a whole pattern of thought and behavior. As it grew older, the pattern like the Jewish culture before it, began to grow rigid. Imitation, institutionalization, canonization. By the time the Pope, at the height of his institutional power, divided the world into two between Spain and Portugal, the fact of Revelation and the European culture had so merged that it was humanly impossible to separate the two. Add to this impossibility the fact that the European powers, thanks to their ships and cannons, were in the position of being set up as cultural models, and one can see how the newly converted Christians were literally forced to adopt Catholicism in its Roman cultural forms.

What was the outcome of such "Romanization"? It was different in different countries. In some countries the Christians simply became a ghetto apart. In others, as in Japan, they were expelled. In others, as in the Philippines, the two cultures took a "split-level" relationship toward each other: the Roman theology living side by side with the simple, lawless life of a happy people.

But the fact remains that nowhere in Asia is Christianity an "insider" in the way Islam is in Malaysia or Buddhism is in Thailand or Hinduism is in India or Western technology is in Japan.

What is it that prevents the inculturation of the Church in East Asia? Or turned the other way, why cannot the East Asians be "at home" in the Catholic Church but are forced to be not-themselves in a foreign Church? May I be allowed to submit two hypotheses:

1. There is a lack of awareness of culture, a lack which results in the blurring of the distinctions between culture and revealed religion, between revelation and theology, between shame for violating the culture and guilt for offending God.

2. People in authority, with the best will in the world, often

do not have the attitudes and skills needed to allow their subjects to discover themselves and grow in spiritual freedom.

Neither of these two hypotheses intend to throw blame on any one. The situation is one of a growing *kairos*. Most of the people in authority today were themselves brought up in a spirituality which emphasized conformity. What it was they were to conform to was rarely questioned, whether it was to rules or to a "common life" or to a patron saint, with whom one tried to identify in all things. Rarely was the question raised: to what extent should we conform to 16th century rules of Spanish modesty or imitate the Dutch or Polish saints of the 17th century? (Rodriguez was required reading till the 1960's and Kempis still fills many a lonely hour.) But the two world wars and Vatican II have brought about a new mixing of peoples and the rise of peoples long oppressed and different culturally from their former masters. Conformity which was once seen as a measure of spiritual growth is now often seen as a renunciation of the Holy Spirit within oneself, who urges on to justice, to a sense of honesty to one's true self, to true growth in Christ, the obedient, the cultural non-conformist.

The *kairos* comes precisely from the fact that the Roman culture of monsignori and chamberlains, of cultural imperialisms and misplaced "natural" law, is falling apart. It has been said that the system was doomed to fall once Pius XII allowed the first glass of water to be drunk before Holy Communion. Once such a long, grievous tradition was officially broken, awareness of what was "cultural" and what was "revealed" began to burst like water from a dam. The "loss of faith" quite observable today (83% of American Catholic women favoring the pill, Italians turning to divorce and the Communist party, priests leaving to get married) may not be so much a breakdown of faith as a rebellion against the identification of faith with a particular culture. A new Catholic Church, more truly catholic, is probably being born among us. A culture falls apart, but Christ remains. And a new culture is being born.

Defenses Against Change

But the old culture is not quite dead yet. It remains alive, thanks in great part to a thought system that acts as a defense, making it extremely difficult for people to see what they are looking at or understand what they hear. The two levels of reality, namely the level of "object" and the level of "object of a concept" are confused. People think that the object of their concept is on the level of fact. They consider as objective reality whatever is the "conclusion" of their philosophical or theological reasoning, without need of "validating" such hypotheses in reality. They act as the Jews did in John, chapter 9, when the blind man (and his parents) insisted on the fact of

the cure, while the Jews were unable to see the cure because of their theology:

“When the Pharisees asked him how he had come to see, he said, ‘He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I can see.’ Then some of the Pharisees said, ‘This man cannot be from God; he does not keep the Sabbath.’ Others said, ‘How could a sinner produce signs like this?’ ”

The right approach for the Jews would have been to start from the empirical fact of the cure, but they were prevented from doing so by the “functional autonomy” of their thought systems, which substituted for reality. Their life was imprisoned by the tyranny of what “should” be, instead of being liberated by what was.

One has but to recall the overworked but true case of Galileo to realize this conflict between what is and what “should” be according to an a priori thought system. The equally overworked case of the Church’s condemnation of “usury” is another example. In both of these the Church ultimately did change its teaching, but until that blessed day what was a Christian to do, agonizing between culture compelling to conformity and his own honest loyalty to empirical truth perceived at gut level. Those less strong, out of fear of being expelled from the group, resort to evasive tactics like the blind man’s parents:

His parents answered, “We know he is our son and we know he was born blind, but we don’t know how it is that he can see now, or who opened his eyes. He is old enough; let him speak for himself.” His parents spoke like this out of fear of the Jews, who had already agreed to expel from the synagogue anyone who would acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, ‘He is old enough, ask him.’

We see even in the case of the Jews and the blind man that the two oppressive forces are the ones mentioned in the preceding hypotheses, namely, 1) lack of awareness and 2) an over-anxious authority preventing the rise of new insights.

But at this time of a growing *kairos* and in the increasing clamor for justice inside and outside the Church, it becomes necessary to assert the inner gut-feeling of what is right, here and now. If God is with the inculturation movement, it will survive. If he is not, it will die.

An Action Program

The “Inculturation Problem” may be summed up in the two hypotheses above. To one who is able to view the problem this

way, it will become clear that the inculturation movement is meant not to destroy but to fulfill. It is the renewal of the Church that one seeks and the burgeoning of the life of the Spirit. To spell out these two hypotheses into an action program, the following steps may be suggested.

1. The empirical behavioral sciences be given prominence in seminary training. A balance must be reached between the deductive approach (philosophy, theology) to learning and the inductive; otherwise there can be no deep awareness of oneself, one's culture and the reality of our times. A main objective of these sciences should be cultural awareness, to combat the first hypothesis mentioned above.

2. A new approach to prayer be taught, borrowing deeply from the Asian tradition, which is deeply human and less conceptual than the models of prayer taught to a previous generation. Such deep prayer brings with it a discovery of the Holy Spirit in one's deepest self. It is this Holy Spirit who strengthens and gives the self confidence to follow the true path. (N.B. In Asians the Holy Spirit lives not above the neck but at gut-level, i.e., between the bottom of the breast bone and the navel.)

3. Everyone, but foreigners in particular, should be thoroughly trained to be able to keep internal silence. This is the prerequisite to be able to see the person in front of you as he is and not as you think he is. Without internal silence in the authoritative foreigner, the native person feels himself categorized, judged, confined, misunderstood. He gets angry but has no way of expressing his anger because often he is only vaguely aware of its source. External silence is not enough. There must be an internal silence, a silence of the heart, a poverty of spirit, a deep opening to the other. Retreat directors may be able to teach this particular way of acting since they are the experts for inner space.

4. The emphasis of "inculturation" should be placed not on the minor externals of buildings, bells, incense and dress, but on the true spiritual liberation, intellectual, emotional, of the native Christians. He it is who will determine the course that his local Church will take and in the process "inculturate" the Catholic faith. If unliberated, the native becomes a worse authoritarian than his foreign predecessor. He becomes spiritually what the Tagalogs call a *tuta*, a puppy. Liberation comes about through a proper methodology that is truly educative (*e-ducere*) rather than a brain-washing or a mere transfer of information.

5. The foreign missionary should become thoroughly aware of his total effect upon the native Christian. When and where does he oppress and when and where make live? "Feedback" mechanism should be set up so that he too can in total freedom plot his own

course, to the point of disappearing from the scene if necessary. The study of the local language is absolutely necessary. T-group sessions, encounter groups, group dynamics sessions may be of practical help.

6. Seminars should be set up to teach modern counseling to priests, religious and bishops. These new "person-centered" techniques teach the counselor to "accompany" a person in his journey to life and thus help him grow as a person instead of merely forcing him to conform to the counselor's superego. "God sees you with the same eyes that you see yourself," is a truth highly productive of internal peace on the one hand and responsibility on the other. Love, when it comes, drives away fear and, after all, Christ's emphasis always was on love.

Conclusion

These are my thoughts on inculturation. They may, or may not, coincide with yours. I suggest you consider just the fact that Christianity is not yet truly a part of the Asian way of life. If your experience agrees with mine, why is this so? I offered two hypotheses: a lack of awareness for culture and its power over each of us, and the incapacity of Church leaders to appreciate new and different ways of being Christian. Are these the reasons? Are there other reasons besides?

Finally, what do we do about it? I feel the service of Faith and the promoting of Justice for us Jesuits in Asia is completely tied up with this matter of inculturation. Inculturating the Faith is our service of the Faith here in Asia now in 1976. Not to inculturate is disservice to Faith, because it distorts Faith. And any promotion of Justice that is not an increase of people's self awareness and self-esteem is specious at best. But here we are not talking about inculturation in the Society—that would be only navel-gazing. We are talking about what we as Jesuits must be doing with the whole Church for the people of Asia.

The bishops of Asia in their FABC meeting at Taipei raised their voices in support of two things: the voiceless poor and the local church. These new directions emphasize the growing need to strengthen the inner forces and lend confidence to a people who up to now have relied on authority figures in another continent to do their thinking for them. A mature Church is an inculturated Church. So long as a Church cannot be truly itself but must forever model itself upon another and continually await that other's approval, it remains in the state of childhood. The adult is internally free, so too should the adult local Church be. Until then the local Church remains the voiceless poor.

Comments by John Reilly, S.J.

First of all, I am aware of the privilege permitted to me, which no missionary can ever claim as a right, to speak to you in my own native language. The paper of Fr. Jaime Bulatao creates within me a mixed reaction, for there is in me both a heart and a head, the missionary and the theologian.

The missionary within me resonates strongly with the message which is being communicated. If I understand this properly, it is a plea for more flexibility, breadth and freedom of action in the local Church, in place of the rigidity, narrowness and control of an institutionalized Church which still remains largely the prisoner of her own European and Roman cultural forms, with the cultural impoverishment and psychological suffering this has brought to Christians of other than European backgrounds.

On the other hand, the theologian within me cries out in protest, for the paper seems to be recommending as a remedy for the local Church in Asia the very medicine which has proved eventually by its effects to be a poison in the local Church of Europe. Although it may be historically necessary for the Church in Asia to go through a similar process of institutionalization of the Christian life within the life and culture of each nation as occurred centuries ago in the nations of Europe, this is not a desirable thing theologically, nor perhaps, is it really demanded by the conditions which now exist in the world of the 20th century.

There are two important theological principles which must not be forgotten when we discuss inculturation. Firstly, there is the link between Incarnation and Redemption. Inculturation points directly to the necessary Incarnational aspect of Christian faith, by which faith is open to union with authentic human values of any culture. Inculturation, however, points only indirectly and implicitly to another equally basic aspect of Christian faith. This is the Redemptive aspect, which is necessary for all that is human, because of our sinful condition. The synthesis of Christian faith and the values and customs in any culture, brought about through inculturation, must sooner or later become the painful but purifying submission and self-emptying of the cross.

The second theological principle concerns the local Church. This remains always a particular sacramental expression of the mystery of the universal Church. Christian faith can never be so completely identified with any one culture that it becomes sufficiently and definitively expressed by it alone. It is for this reason that some prefer the term "acculturation" rather than "inculturation". Although a faith which is separated from all culture would be a disincarnated faith and so no reality at all in this world, a faith which becomes too closely

identified with any one culture, by the same degree ceases to be the Christian faith meant by Christ for all men, and ceases to signify the universal Church of which each local Church is meant to be the sacrament not the substitute.

Fr. Bulatao, I know, did not intend to advocate such an exclusively localized Church, where the faith becomes immersed totally within the culture, yet the extension of his line of thinking does, I feel, lead to such a reduction of the essential universal nature of the Christian Church. The culturally transcendent dimension of the Church always defies definition by any particular culture. On the contrary, it calls each culture to a conversion from a proud particularism and inward nationalism towards a humbling but liberating participation in a catholic brotherhood within a world society.

On the practical level, the problem is that we do not yet have a Christian world society. We still live in a world where the rich grow richer and the powerful become more powerful, always at the expense of the poor and the weak. For this reason, I feel that Fr. Bulatao's remarks on inculturation must not be listened to with our intellectual ears only but with the ears of the heart, for he speaks from an experience of concrete situations which still persist in many parts of this post-Vatican II Church of Asia and the Pacific. As the paper expressed it, "Awareness of culture loosens some of the power that culture has over the mind." The Christian view of culture, while not replacing patriotism and loyalty to the land of one's birth, nevertheless elevates it to a level where it can free itself from restrictive nationalism and perceive more easily the essential value of all men before God as brothers of Christ.

If the need for inculturation in East Asia, with the theological cautions mentioned, is granted, the following suggestion for Jesuits of the East Asian Assistancy is offered for consideration. It is offered within the context and spirit of the 32nd General Congregation's decree on Union of Minds and Hearts, as a possible preliminary step towards a better inculturation of our Jesuit life-styles and apostolates in East Asia. This suggestion concerns an exposure to one another as Jesuits on three levels which may make us more conscious of a basic union which likely already exists among us, or to foster such a union, if it does not. The exposure suggested is on the three levels of 1) Presence, 2) Communication, and 3) Collaboration.

1) Presence. As many Jesuits of the Assistancy as possible, either during the years of formation or afterwards, should be given the opportunity of a prolonged exposure through physical presence to Jesuits of another culture. This should be done in simplicity within a life-style close to that of ordinary people. Jesuits need this exposure to a culture other than the one in which they were born and

may have lived all their lives. As every missionary will surely testify, it is only when one has lived for some time outside one's own native culture that he learns to give something more than a notional assent to the basic difference between Christian faith and culture.

2) Communication. Living in another culture is not enough. One must begin to receive from that culture not only superficial things but new values which can develop and broaden his life both as a human being and as a Christian. Jesuits, therefore, during their stay in another culture must begin to learn from their fellow Jesuits of that culture. This will require a readiness and a sensitivity to listen to what is being said to him both by word and by action. We can claim to know another culture and respect its values only when we have begun to learn from it how to become better Jesuits, more human and more Christian.

3) Collaboration. Some things can be learnt only by doing. Jesuits need to work with Jesuits of other cultures in team efforts and projects. In this way they will not only learn in a concrete manner tolerance and appreciation of the gifts of others, but the complementarity which is possible in an intercultural undertaking, with the increase in apostolic effectiveness this can produce.

From such a cultural mixing among Jesuits of the East Asian Assistancy, by living together, talking together and working together, the rich variety in this Assistancy may be better utilized, the problems of inculturation may be more sympathetically approached by more Jesuits, and more effective interprovincial works may suggest themselves for a better service of the faith by Jesuits of the East Asian Assistancy.

Comments by John Wilcken, S.J.

I find the task of providing these comments a difficult one. In the "Tentative Plan for the East Asian Assistancy Meeting" which I received, the topic was set down as 'Inculturation'. I notice that the title of Fr. Bulatao's paper is a little different: 'Inculturating Christianity in East Asia'. This gives the topic a more directly practical slant, which is certainly good, but it makes my task more difficult. The only part of East Asia I really know is Australia, a country quite different from the rest of the Assistancy. The very language in which Fr. Bulatao and I are both writing could be taken as a symbol of Western cultural imperialism. And that I — culturally a Westerner — should have agreed to provide these comments could be interpreted as a further indication of the West's desire to guide the East in matters of Church life. So I must try to proceed as cautiously as I can.

First let me make a general point: the notion of 'inculturation' is linked with the third of the notes of the Church given in the Creed, that is, catholicity. Christ meets each person in his or her own culture; or, to express the idea in terms of its New Testament manifestation: one does not have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. In today's terms one might say: one does not have to become a European, or a Westerner, to become a Christian. But the Church's catholicity is in constant tension with the first note given in the Creed: unity. The more diverse the Church becomes, as it adapts to various cultural contexts, the more difficult it becomes to preserve that unity, or *koinonia*, which is at the heart of the Church's life. This was found in New Testament times: there was a deep split between the Jewish Church of Jerusalem and the Gentile Churches which resulted from the missionary work of Paul and others. Paul tried to heal this split by his 'Collection', that is, the gift of money from the Christians of Achaia and Macedonia to supply the needs of the Jerusalem Church (cf. Rom 15:25-32). The tension between unity and catholicity will always remain. If unity is preserved by imposing uniformity of Church life, then catholicity is lost; on the other hand, there can be such an emphasis on cultural diversity that the problems of maintaining unity become insuperable. The current reaction is against uniformity — a uniformity along the lines of Western culture. But one does have to keep in mind the possibility that at some time in the future the danger may be a loss of unity. Another way of putting it is to say that the Church must preserve its international character. Complete identification of the Church with any culture, whether Western or Eastern, means a loss of this internationalism.

Let me now comment on some of the point made in Fr. Bulatao's paper. He writes: "The strength of culture is overpowering and it is only the exceptional mind that can free itself from the cultural blindness of his own age. . . ." This is undoubtedly true. And as is later remarked, an essential requirement for this liberation is experience of another culture. Precisely here the internationalism of the Church can help.

Culture is described as: 'the learned system of thought and behavior common to a group and transmitted within a group'. A little later it is stated that language 'has much to do with culture and may rightly be called the main vehicle of culture'. This is a key point and recurs at the end of the paper in the Action Program: 'The study of the local language is absolutely necessary'. This seems to me to be a point of central practical significance: the foreign Christian who works through the medium of his own language can scarcely avoid being, in some sense, a cultural imperialist. The Chris-

tianity he brings will inevitably be molded according to his thought patterns, and not those of the people among whom he works.

The description of 'inculturation' given later I am not quite so happy with: 'the process whereby a person or a thing or an institution assumes an "insider" position in the culture system'. In general I accept the point being made, but am not happy with the formulation, or the consequences of this formulation. Although the word 'inculturation' is positive in form, I think its main theological meaning is negative: a rejection of cultural imperialism. What is not wanted is that Christianity embodied in alien cultural forms be imposed on a people. But neither is it desirable that Christianity be simply identified with local cultural forms. Christian faith always remains to some extent in tension with culture—with any culture. (The classic work on this is H.R. Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, Harper, 1951.) Christ transcends every culture, including that of first century Palestine, and to some extent at least the Church must do the same. In the New Testament period, where the battle for cultural catholicity was fought and won (cf. Acts 15; Gal 2:1-14), there does not seem to have been a conscious effort positively to 'inculturate' Christianity. Rather, Church life seems spontaneously to have taken on the cultural forms it found in its surroundings—Jewish in Jerusalem, Greek in Corinth, etc. Meanwhile the internationalism of Christianity was stressed (e.g., Acts 2:1-13; Gal 3:27-28). To return to Fr. Buatao's description of 'inculturation'; Christianity should certainly not exist in such forms as to be simply an 'outsider' to the local culture. But if it becomes completely an 'insider', then perhaps it will have lost its prophetic force, its capacity to challenge, correct and change the local scene. And one might well argue that in many Western countries, where Christianity is an 'insider', it has lost this prophetic force.

The two reasons, given for the failure of the Church to be 'inculturated' (in the right sense) in East Asia seem convincing: lack of awareness of culture, and lack of the ability to allow people to discover themselves.

All of the points given under the Action Program seem important; but I am not happy with the presuppositions and the formulation of the first point. These days one surely cannot, or should not, identify philosophy and theology with 'the deductive approach'. Perhaps the situation which is being reacted against here is one in which Western scholastic philosophy and theology were simply imposed on Eastern students. If this is what happened, the situation was unsatisfactory on two counts: the scholastic approach no longer meets the needs even of Western students; and anyway, Western philosophy and theology, of whatever kinds, should not simply be imposed on Eastern students. A really creative effort is needed here: by prayerful and

keen reflection on the actual experience of living the Christian faith according to one's own cultural forms, one must discover one's own insights into the nature of the world and human life, and into the reality of the Gospel message. This is not a simply 'deductive' approach: it is reflection on experience.

However, it presupposes that there has been experience of trying to live the Christian life in close contact with local people. This is a challenging task. In an extreme form it is the Robert de Nobili or Matteo Ricci kind of life. Now we are not all heroes of the stature of these giants, but at least it is important for the Christian community not be positively segregated from the life of the local people. Segregation may give a sense of security to the Christians, but it makes impossible that 'dialogue of life' that is an essential prerequisite for 'inculturation'. Hence a great Christian compound surrounded by barricades, (especially if seminarians are being trained in that context), would seem to make 'inculturation' virtually impossible.

If a 'dialogue of life' does take place, thorny theological, moral and canonical problems are likely to arise: this was the experience of de Nobili and Ricci. Their experience also was that those of their brethren who did not share their style of life often disapproved of their theological decisions, and the result was opposition to their work. Today, after the lapse of centuries, we can see the value of their work, but this was far from obvious to many of their fellow-Christians and fellow-Jesuits at the time. The lesson is that those today who take 'inculturation' seriously are likely to encounter opposition, and even persecution, from within the Church and within the Society of Jesus. It is not difficult to imagine some of the issues that could arise: can other elements than bread and wine be used for the Eucharist? where marriage customs differ widely from those of the West, to what extent should current canon law prevail? where social structures are radically different from those of Europe, can radically different ecclesiastical structures be established? and so on. If 'inculturation' is taken seriously, it may well be a Way of the Cross.

A final point: the person is more important than his or her culture, and it is to the person that the Gospel is preached. Both the person and the Gospel transcend culture. Yet, for all that, the influence of culture on both is probably deeper than we have yet realised, and this justified our preoccupation with the problem of 'inculturation'.

Some Notes on Inculturation by Bishop Francisco F. Claver, S.J.

A. Basic Presuppositions

1. The mandate of Christ to "preach the Gospel to every creature" makes a very fundamental but unexpressed assumption, to

wit, that there is such a thing as the psychic unity of people of all races, cultures, and times.

Gospel values are therefore pan-cultural, transcultural, in nature, and this only means they are eminently inculturable. Whatever the cultural configuration of a people, it can be enriched by the Gospel.

2. Yet, this Gospel is never transmitted in a pure state. It may be possible to isolate the "essence" of this Gospel in the manner of scholastics who talk of a *philosophia perennis*. I doubt they can express that essence through a culturally free medium. Every language is culturally conditioned.

In the context of preaching, the Gospel is always already inculturated, i.e., couched in the cultural dress of the preacher—who is by necessity a bearer of his own particular culture.

3. The Gospel, inculturated initially in the preacher or speaker of the Word and expressed within the mental framework of the preacher (even when he uses the language of the "preached-to"), must in turn become inculturated in the people who receive the Word. The message of the Gospel has to be integrated into the culture of the recipients of the Word.

Properly speaking, it is not this or that particular culture that must be infused with the Gospel and its values but the people themselves, bearers of a culture.

Hence, it is people, not culture, who inculturate the Gospel. And the inculturation of the Gospel will simply mean, therefore, that the recipient people make the values of the Gospel their own, and these values become motivating forces in their life as a people.

In practice, this will mean making Gospel values jibe with the values they have already interiorized in their socialization into their culture. (Or, for those who believe that Gospel values are already contained seminally in all cultures, inculturation of Gospel values will mean further evolvment of human into more explicitly Christian values.)

4. Inculturation, therefore, is a process (a form of socialization), and a never ending process—like culture itself.

Values are learned. Inculturation is a process of internalizing values, of deepening them. But a process can slack off or die down completely or give rise to a different and counter-vailing one.

5. In the context of the Gospel, inculturation can only mean metanoia, ongoing conversion, not only of individuals but, more importantly, of communities. The community aspect of inculturation as metanoia is, I would think, of prime importance in the whole question of structural change. (Inculturation is to a people what conversion is to the individual?)

Conversion is possible only by a free act of the will of the person being converted. The inculturation of Gospel values hence must also be done freely, consciously, deliberately.

If the Gospel is practiced simply because its values have been sucked in, as it were, with one's mother's milk in the process of socialization (in childhood), we have the phenomenon of social religion. It is not something to be despised, but at the same time I don't think it is a kind of religion to be satisfied with.

A corollary of all this is that only the "natives," acting as community, can truly indigenize the Gospel.

6. Assimilation (indigenization) of the Gospel is very much like the assimilation of food by the body.

Food is heavily cultural in its preparation. Nutrient substances are assimilated and the body conforms them to itself while expelling their cultural dross (dress?).

I wouldn't press the analogy too far, but the point is the Gospel is presented initially and always in an inculturated form. The recipients of the Gospel assimilate it in conformity with their own cultural patterns. But this first conformation is only the beginning of a process.

B. Cultural Facts

1. Every culture is mongrel, an amalgam of cultural borrowings. Cultural borrowing goes on all the time. There is no such thing as a "pure" culture. But neither does this mean there is no such thing as cultural identity.

2. In borrowing traits, artifacts, values, patterns of behavior, norms, worldviews, etc., people make them their own by making them over to fit their own cultural image, ethos, etc.

Countless examples can be cited to illustrate this phenomenon, from the borrowing of material items (jeeps, guns, coca-cola, etc.) to the acceptance of non-material ones (democracy, Moonism, Catholicism, etc.). In every instance of borrowing, the recipients give the borrowed item something distinctively their own.

3. The process of "making things over" entails changing mean-

ings. In the final analysis, this is what makes borrowed items different; e.g., a mere tool in one culture could be an emotionally laden status symbol in another. Or vice versa.

The problem of meaning is probably the most sensitive area of cross-cultural interaction and is only now, in Church circles at least, beginning to get the attention it deserves. The interest in popular religiosity is a most hopeful development.

4. Culture is a now event, a present process, continually evolving, but at the same time always rooted in its antecedents. The direction it may take at any given moment will not therefore be completely haphazard but will be dictated to a great extent by those same antecedents interacting with whatever influences are impinging on the culture from the "outside."

Revival and revitalization movements (cargo cults and the like) are attempts at a nostalgic return to an earlier form of a people's culture—often conceived of in terms of a "pure" culture. These attempts would be futile — if the past were really past and "purity" is thought of in too restrictive a fashion.

Past influences still operative in the present are much more to the point. "What are the operative traditions now?" is the question to ask. What are the prevailing values, what are the structures these values reinforce and support?

C. Indigenization in Practice

1. A primary principle in the indigenization process may well be that it will automatically (almost!) take place when the Church (however defined) gets deeply involved in the life of the people.

Involvement can mean anything. What is intended by the term is everything that total and integral human development stands for. The Gospel must penetrate the whole way of life (culture) of the people, and this whole must be the concern of the Church.

Hence, too, the Church's approach will necessarily have to be holistic.

2. Socio-political-economic-religious structures and cultural values interpenetrate and are supportive of one another.

The whole must come under the influence of the Gospel. If for reasons of strategy or economy, the Church must concentrate on valuational change, it must become more aware of the repercussions of such change on social structure. And vice versa.

3. Church involvement in the life of the people will mean taking seriously Vatican II ideas of participation, co-responsibility, dialogue.

This means that the Church must be a learning Church, open to change, adaptable.

The three ideas from Vatican II mentioned above are in essence the new values that have to be pervasive in the Church (people) in order for real indigenization to take place.

Indigenization means, sociologically speaking, the setting up of structures more in conformity (or at least built on) prevailing indigenous structures; and concomitantly, the inculcation of values supportive of the (new) structures. Structures are essentially people-relationships and new people-relationships arise much more quickly in dialogue situations. This holds true within the Church too.

4. Adaptation and experimentation will have to be accepted henceforth as ordinary and permanent "baggage" in the Church.

The principle was accepted by Vatican II. The practice is quite different. There is still too much suspicion by the Center (Rome) of what is happening in the Local Churches.

5. Finally, there must be a constant search for meanings behind religious behavior (culturally conditioned behavior) as well as greater freedom to "baptize" (or re-baptize) cultural facts.

The search for meaning is part of the whole problem of developing indigenous theologies.

The baptizing of cultural elements had the force of tradition in the early Church. It seems to have been forgotten in the freezing process that ensued in the Western Church in its excessive pre-occupation with verbal orthodoxy.

In a very deep sense, indigenization is a continual search or meaning and a continual attempt to articulate the Gospel in the language of the people (culture too is a language, the basic form of communication in fact).

Footnotes to Father Zago's paper:

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2. J. Saraiva Martins, "Il Vangelo e le culture nell'ultimo sinodo dei Vescovi", *Evangelizzazione e Culture*, Roma 1976, I, 58-69.
G. Butturini, *Le Nuove Vie del Vangelo*, Bologna 1975, 295-336.
M. Zago, *I semi del Vangelo*, Bologna 1975, 221-253.
3. cf. Picachy, Congr. 4; Rosales, Congr. 12; D'Souza, Congr. 15 bis; Gahamanyi, Congr. 19 bis.
4. H. De Lubac, *Les Eglises particulières dans l'Eglise universelle*, Paris 1971.
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6. "De Lubac et Congar préfèrent catholique à universelle", Y. Congar, *Christianisme comme foi et comme culture*. *Evangelizzazione e Culture*, I, 87-89.
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8. N. Hanca, "Polemiche sulla liturgia indiana", *Mondo e Missione*, 1976, 228-230.
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11. M. Zago, "L'annonce du message chrétien en milieu bouddhiste," *Lumen Vitae* vol. XXIX (1974), No. 1, 77-107.
12. "Official Statement of the Assembly of Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences", Taipei, 27 April 1974, No. 9.

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