

## WORKSHOP: INCULTURATION AND THE WORLD CHURCH

### *Introduction*

The linkage between the two elements in the title of this workshop is at once natural and challenging. Avery Dulles' major address made it clear that the growing reality and awareness of a world Church naturally leads to a focus on the question of inculturation. In fact, world Church is taken here not as the geographical, international, physical worldwide Catholic Church. It rather means the active presence of different local and regional Churches which are rooted in various cultures within the one Catholic Church. On the one hand, those Churches become more and more aware of the significance of their cultural traditions. On the other, they realize how much the Roman Catholic Church has been overwhelmingly shaped and determined by the Western cultural tradition of European extraction. World Church means the rising consciousness of their corresponsibility for and subsidiary contribution to the Church in the world which local churches share both for understanding and expressing the Christian faith in terms of their own cultural identities. The challenge here is how to allow for such an expanding diversity without breaking down the universal Church's painfully built and longlasting unity and continuity. In other words, how does the Church announce the Christian message to various cultures and achieve a solid unity consciously built on an accepted diversity and not on the uniformity of its cultural foundations and expressions?

This is a central issue confronting the world Church. This is what inculturation is all about.

### *The semantic problem*

The term — inculturation — is a recent theological creation. Succinctly stated, it refers to a demand felt by the local churches to understand, express and live the gospel message according to their own particular cultural geniuses. Thus, the gospel must penetrate the whole way of life, the cultural fabric of a people; this involves a continual search for meaning, it implies a holistic and a critical approach to culture, and demands a dialogical methodology.

First of all, inculturation has to be distinguished from enculturation and acculturation. *Enculturation*, a word from the vocabulary of cultural anthropology, corresponds to the more familiar sociological and psychological term, *socialization*. Enculturation denotes the process by which a human person is introduced to and becomes inserted into his/her own culture. *Acculturation* is also a major anthropological concept. It means the encounter with a culture other than one's own or the contact between cultures and the change such contact provokes. In our current

interdependent world of accelerated changes and exchanges, we all are constantly exposed to the need for some acculturation. Most of the evangelizing process in the modern historical period has involved a process of acculturation, with Western culture as the dominant point of reference and major criterion. It is important not to equate inculturation and acculturation, even though this has sometimes been done even by official church documents.

### *The history of the word*

The word *inculturation* was used by Cardinal Sin of Manila in the Synod on Catechesis held in Rome in 1977. In the following year, 1978, inculturation was the topic of an influential letter addressed to all Jesuits by their Superior General Pedro Arrupe. The word was first included in an official papal document by John Paul II, in the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae* of October, 1979.

Underlying the word inculturation is the problem of how one relates faith and culture. This had been one of Paul VI's major concerns since his first visit to India in 1964 and in subsequent visits to Kampala, Uganda, as well as to Manila, Philippines, in 1969. Distancing himself from the accepted culturally dominant expression of the Christian message in European terms, the Pope stressed the relative autonomy of cultures in shaping their own way of linking faith and culture. This point became a crucial issue in the Synod on Evangelization in 1974. Beyond *adaptation*, a trend that characterized missionary activity from the pontificates of Benedict XV through Pius XI to Pius XII, and beyond Vatican II's use of the notion of *accommodation*, the 1974 Synod highlights other terms, such as *insertion*, *incarnation*, and *indigenization*. It is not until 1976, however, with the publication of *Evangelii nuntiandi*, that we find the full and precise meaning and description of *inculturation*, even though the term itself is not actually introduced into the text (EN 19,20). Thus, when we put together some intuitions of Pius XII's *Fidei donum* and the document *Ad gentes*, from Vatican II, plus *Evangelii nuntiandi* and *Catechesi tradendae* we have a solid foundation for theological research and reflection on inculturation.

### *Inculturation as a theological and pastoral problem*

Inculturation is not just a new fad in theology, a kind of subdiscipline or a specific subject that can be researched and treated separately. Rather it is a new all embracing direction or a comprehensive dimension, which pertains to the whole process of evangelization. Inculturation, therefore, permeates theological reflection as a whole and leads to a different, holistic understanding of the Church's mission.

Three major events or processes contributed to make explicit the need for inculturation.

The first one was Vatican II with the factual emergence of a world Church as Rahner put it and Dulles has just analysed in his Wednesday

evening's address. Some immediate implications of the Council's teaching also clearly lead to inculturation, e.g., the documents on Liturgy, on the Missions, on Ecumenism, the openness towards non-Christian religions and towards non-believers. But a very influential feature throughout the Council is the new reading of the Church by itself in *Lumen gentium*, stressing episcopal collegiality and the new relationship between Church and the modern world as it was phrased by *Gaudium et spes*.

The *second* significant factor leading to inculturation is the new awareness of the local churches. This is a direct consequence of episcopal collegiality. The implications of this element will progressively unfold in the Church's life through the synod of the bishops every three years, National and/or regional bishops conferences, the kind of contextualized re-reading of Vatican II that took place for the Latin American Church at Medellin and Puebla; the rise of contextualized theological reflection of which liberation theology, feminist theology and black theology are recent examples. Two important areas have still to be affected by inculturation: religious life and the laity.

The *third* element contributing to an awareness of and need for inculturation is the reemergence of an explicit consciousness of the diversity of cultures all over the world and an increasing perception of the linkage between cultural and religious universes that has led also to thriving religious revivals with unexpected characteristics.

#### *Some major areas of discussion connected with inculturation*

First, the meaning of culture and the approach to culture. The cultural anthropological, the philosophical and the theological focus on culture and the integration and interaction of the three aspects in the process of inculturation.

Second, the problem of a church unity built upon the diversity of cultures and its consequences; it is not so much the problem of pluralism but the fact of a cultural plurality compatible with a deeper level of unity.

Third, the methodological and substantive theological problem of taking actual cultural or social reality as the starting point of theological reflection and hence the importance of social and cultural analysis with their related problems of social location and ideology.

Fourth, the double approach to culture in the dynamics of inculturation: on one hand, a need for identification of the culture, looking for its fundamental compatibility with the gospel; on the other hand, a critical reading of the culture that reveals absolute or relative incompatibilities between the culture and the gospel.

Fifth, the levels of inculturation. Inculturation on the level of cultural practice and of communication (the phenomenological level) — liturgy, music and choreography, etc.; inculturation on the deeper level of meanings, values, symbols and patterns of the culture.

Sixth, the double movement of inculturation. The centripetal

movement, leading to the perception and affirmation of cultural identity, of its values and original traits; the centrifugal movement, leading to the awareness of cultural limitations and the need for active communication among different cultures.

*Suggested questions for discussion in the CTSA Workshop*

Which definition or notion of *culture* will be more meaningful for the theological approach of inculturated evangelization?

Is there a Christian or Catholic culture?

In order to obtain an inculturated evangelization, is it necessary and is it possible to disconnect the Christian message from its older cultural expression which was so much shaped by the pre-modern Western European, mediterranean, Roman-Greek heritage?

With regard to the inculturated evangelization of African and Asian cultures with well defined religious traditions, what is the significance of the Jewish and/or Judaeo-Christian tradition as a primary cultural source of Christian Revelation?

Besides the three major factors (Vatican II, local and regional churches and the revival of cultures) which triggered the pastoral and theological concern with inculturation, what actually is the rationale for inculturation?

- To make the Christian message intelligible to people?
- To bring the gospel into the depth of people's lives?
- To bring the gospel to bear on a given society?
- Is inculturation more needed today than in the past? If so, why?

Today we are experiencing both the presence of a constantly expanding technological culture and the affirmation or revival of traditional cultures. How can the Church bring about the insertion of the Christian message into these totally different cultural universes?

Can a Church that simultaneously moves in these diverse directions keep enough internal homogeneity to remain a single body?

Throughout the process of inculturation can the Church adopt new symbols, languages, structures, and behavioral patterns on a massive scale without losing continuity with its own origins and its own past?

What are the contributions that American culture can make to world Catholicism? What has it already contributed?

What can Catholic tradition contribute to American national culture? How can this be done in a constructive way?

What are the cultural blind spots to which American culture is vulnerable?

*Summary of the discussion*

Sixty-five people attended the workshop on Inculturation and the



world Church. After a brief presentation by the moderator, the following points were stressed in the discussion.

1. The approach to culture in the inculturation process should be diachronic and synchronic as well. The identification of a culture requires not only the analysis of its present or the way it is interpreted by its natives. This identification demands an accurate knowledge of the historical formation of a culture and the major sources for its interpretation.
2. Concrete life and experience of people are central dimensions to be reckoned with in order to set a criterion for and a possible evaluation of the inculturation process.
  - There are different ways of being human without destroying humanity; so too, there are different ways of being Christian and Catholic without damaging the unity of the Church.
  - The interaction between cultures and their openness to each other — i.e., consciously affirming differences but also recognizing possibility of reciprocal interrelation — is a more effective way to achieve unity than a moralising imposition of norms by some external authority.
  - Trying to isolate a kind of abstract, transcultural Christian core to be transplanted in the process of evangelization, does not eliminate the problem of centric bias. Christian living is more conducive to defining what actually can or must be inculturated and how.
  - Time is a key factor in cultural change and inculturation always involves cultural change and inculturation always involves cultural change.
3. A particular culture should not be absolutized. In fact, any culture is only one among many other cultures. Culture, therefore comprises richness and poverty, affirmation and negation, value and limitation. Culture is affected both by its intrinsic limits and human sinfulness. Any particular culture, therefore, has its own blind spots, mechanisms of oppression, dehumanizing rules and taboos. Consequently critical approach to culture is a major requirement for an authentic inculturated evangelization.
4. One should always be more suspicious of the authenticity of one's own culture than that of another. The conscious experience of change over long periods of time in one's own culture helps crosscultural understanding.
5. Evangelization is not a process of delivering a package of ideas, rituals and institutional organization. It is important to the theologian and to the evangelizer, first, to take a contemplative look at a culture, trying to identify how God has acted there before he/she arrived to announce the gospel.

6. Women always have been prevented from participating in the decision making process. It is important in the process of evangelization to consider not only at the geographical and/or ethnic bases of cultures, but also subcultures within culture, e.g., the women, the poor, the minority groups, etc. as they relate to the dominant culture.

Theological reflection on inculturation should be nourished by social and cultural analysis before one examines the influence of larger schemes of thought and philosophical systems. These tend to narrow one's focus and overlook the universal potentiality of particular events, features, and dimensions which are embedded in diverse cultures.

#### *The bibliographical state of the problem*

Though a relatively recent problem in the theological arena, *inculturation* and issues related to it have already been the subject of extensive research and publication. To my knowledge the most recent and comprehensive bibliography was the one published by Angelo Amato, "Inculturazione-Contestualizzazione-Teologia in Contesto," in *Salesianum* 45/1 (1983) 79-111. A rich bibliography with most entries in English was printed by *The East Asian Pastoral Review* 18/3 (1981), 295-299.

I list below some seminal articles which seriously treat inculturation from a theological point of view. They can be considered as classical resources on the topic.

Congar, Yves, "Christianisme comme foi et comme Culture," in *Evangelizzazione e Culture* [Roma, Pontificia Università Urbaniana] 1, (1976), 83-103. Published also in English as "Christianity as Faith and Culture," in *East Asian Pastoral Review* 18/3 (1981), 304-319.

Roest Crolius, Ary, "What is so new about Inculturation?" *Gregorianum* 59 (1978), 721-738 and "Inculturation and the Meaning of Culture," *Gregorianum* 61 (1980), 253-274.

The editorial, "Il probema dell'inculturazione oggi," in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 129/IV, 3082 (Nov. 18, 1978), 313-322; *Idem*, "Condizioni e limiti dell'inculturazione," *ibidem* 129/IV, 3083 (Dec. 2, 1978), 417-427.

De la Potterie, Ignace, "La notion biblique de la Vérité et sa rencontre avec la notion hellénistique dans l'Eglise ancienne," in *Pontificia Commissione Biblica, Sessione Plenaria 1979, Fede e Cultura alla luce della Bibbia*, (Torino, Editrice LDC, 1981). (The second part of this article is one of the best introductions to the inculturation theme.) Most of the specialized literature listed by Amato and the *East Asian Pastoral Review* with inculturation in Asia and Africa. Less attention has been given to the problem of inculturating the Christian message in the *modern world*. This European and American modern and post modern society exerts a major impact on the whole world. In itself and in its expansion *modernity as a culture* poses a real challenge to evangelization and therefore to inculturation. I called attention to this aspect in a monograph two years

ago: Azevedo, Marcello de C., *Inculturation and the Challenges of Modernity* (Rome: Pont. Biblical Inst. and Pont. Gregorian Univ. Press, 1982).

See also: Poupard, Paul, "Évangélisation et nouvelles cultures," *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* (1977), 532-549 and Geffré, Claude (éd.), *Théologie et Choc des Cultures* (Paris: Cerf, 1984).

For a creative application of contemporary inculturated evangelization to the specific issue of peace in the American Culture, see Clarke, Thomas E., "To Make Peace, Evangelize Culture," in *America* 150/21 (June 2, 1984), 413-417.

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