

INCULTURATION
God's Presence in Cultures

One World Theology
(Volume 12)

INCULTURATION

GOD'S PRESENCE IN CULTURES



Edited by
Klaus Krämer and Klaus Vellguth

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(One World Theology, Volume 12)

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Preface

The neologism “inculturation” has been described as a new “programme for mission theology”. Inspired not least by the Second Vatican Council’s broader interpretation of revelation, it accentuates the importance of culture and has come to replace terms used earlier, such as accommodation, acculturation, adaptation, adjustment, assimilation, indigenisation, con-naturalisation, pre-evangelisation, transformation, etc. The term describes intercultural processes in the encounter between Christianity, or the Christian message, and a non-Christian culture. It needs to be borne in mind, however, that the Christian message has already undergone a specific cultural mediation before it encounters a different culture and that inculturation encompasses reciprocal hermeneutical processes which contribute to the mutual enrichment of different cultures.

The five chapters in this One World Theology volume throw light on the complex concept of “inculturation”, which has become a key term in mission theology debates. The first chapter examines early approaches to inculturation in Church history while the second looks at the connections between the understanding of revelation and the concept of inculturation. The chapter headed “Models of Inculturation” shows the practical outcome of inculturation in different contexts. Chapter Four deals with the relationship between contextualisation and inculturation, while the final chapter looks at the strained connection between inculturation and interculturality.

In the first chapter on “Early Approaches to Inculturation in Church History” Mariano Delgado points out that a capacity for inculturation was an intrinsic quality of Christianity from the very outset. He regards the incarnational route taken by the Gospel through history not as one among many but as the point of departure for other forms of inculturation right up to the present day. A special aspect of inculturation from his point of view is the transformation of the ban on visual imagery

in Christianity into a veneration of images. He considers this a major achievement in inculturation which “has had a lasting impact on the historical development of Christianity”.

In his contribution entitled “The Event of Tepeyac” Juan Manuel Contreras Colín looks at the document *Nican Mopuha* which records the tradition surrounding the apparition of the “Virgin of Guadalupe”. He believes the authors of *Nican Mopuha* to be a team of indigenous writers from the Nahuatl people who articulated a new cultural understanding of the narrative which is both Amerindian and European in character. Intercultural dialogue is conceived and structured from within the cultural universe of the indigenous population, although European Christianity is given the same theological status as the beliefs of the *Indios*. Colín regards the *Nican Mopuha* text as the most important document of indigenous Christian theology in the early modern age. “Being the product of genuine inter-faith dialogue, it lays the ground for a totally new experience and a totally new theological understanding that is both indigenous and Christian.”

Daniel Assefa explores the significance of rain in the *Dægwa*, the antiphony of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. He illustrates the way in which the Ethiopian antiphony takes up the biblical tradition of treating rain as a crucial, life-giving element in its texts. However, since it does not reflect the Palestine context, including its climate, the *Dægwa* goes beyond biblical tradition and is adapted to the Ethiopian context: “The particular attention given to nature and to the indigenous climate is a good example of inculturation and the antiphony is a remarkable synthesis of biblical themes and the Ethiopian context.”

The first chapter ends with an article by Edmund Kee-Fook Chia on “Early Approaches of Inculturation in Church History”. The author makes a fundamental distinction between two phases of inculturation. The first phase, which is as old as Christianity itself and lasted up to the Second Vatican Council, is characterised by an implicit inculturation of Christianity and by the struggle to find an appropriate form for it. Chia sees the second, “modern” phase as beginning in the middle of the twentieth century, when the concept of inculturation was coined as a neologism from the terms “incarnation”, on the one hand, and “enculturation” or “acculturation”, on the other. A concept was thus available which opened up the path to dialogue with other cultures

which Pope Paul VI had already called for in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*. It is not only with an eye on the FABC's Triple Dialogue that Chia sees inculturation as the "litmus test" for successful evangelisation: "This can even be regarded as a new measure of success for evangelisation. It is when the peoples are able to give the good news a new look and a new face. It is when the Gospel speaks to them through the language and idioms of their own culture as a result of having been immersed and involved in it."

The second chapter on "Understanding Revelation and Inculturation" begins with a contribution by Klaus Krämer in which he draws attention to the ambivalence inherent in inculturation. On the one hand, it absorbs context-related and cultural elements in a positive manner in order to give the most authentic expression to the Gospel message in a specific context. On the other hand, it is critical of the culture concerned in its preaching of the Good News as a life-giving provocation. Krämer deals with models of theological interpretation in respect of the relationship between revelation and culture. These are to be found, in particular, in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* and in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*. In conclusion he traces the paradigmatic processes of inculturation with which the Early Church was confronted and builds a bridge to inculturation as intercultural dialogue. In doing so he points to the importance "of a theological exchange, which is contingent upon the inculturated forms presenting themselves theologically in a manner that expedites discussion."

In his article entitled "Understanding Revelation and Inculturation" Sebastian M. Michael starts out by discussing the status culture has in people's lives before going on to reflect on the relationship between revelation and culture and then considering the specific features of Christian revelation. He concludes with an examination of the relationship between Christian revelation and inculturation and investigates the prospects for a dialogue which addresses the challenges to openness and orthodoxy alike.

Francis Anekwe Oborji deals with "Inculturation in the Changing Face of African Theology". Beginning with the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) held in Accra (Ghana) in 1977, which looked at questions of inculturation without making any explicit mention of the term, Oborji examines previous terms

used for inculturation and describes the way in which the concept of inculturation has found its way into the works of African liberation theologians. He highlights the significance of inculturation theology for the development of an African theology of reconstruction and points to the specific contribution made by African theologians in the search for a new hermeneutics for African theology. Oborji sees one of the main challenges for an African theology resting on a theology of inculturation as being its development based on Christian life as it is lived in Africa today, the aim of which is “the transformation of Africa through the gospel values and authentic matrix of African cultural heritage.” He warns against a “theology without any practical application to the concrete situation of the people of Africa” and sees the strength of a future African theology as lying in its quest to “match theoretical and academic elaboration with social and practical commitment.”

In the last of the articles in the second chapter Francisco Taborda explores the connection between inculturation and the Paschal mystery. As regards the relationship between inculturation and incarnation, he says that incarnation moves through three stages: from closeness through solidarity to identification. In respect of the Paschal mystery, however, he points out that inculturation signifies not only closeness, solidarity and identification with a culture, but also the elimination of cultural aspects which contradict the Gospel. In the light of the Pentecost, Taborda sees inculturation as a process of “breaking down the barriers of racial and religious prejudice”. He thus extends the theological interpretation of inculturation beyond the concept of incarnation to include the Easter process of death and resurrection and the Pentecostal dynamic of overcoming ethnic boundaries: “Jesus, who became one of us in this world (the kenotic incarnation), brings forth life from death (the mystery of Easter) by sending his Spirit (Pentecost) so that his disciples can fully accept their human condition and fight for life in a world of death – thanks to the Spirit which is the giver of life everywhere (through inculturation).”

The third chapter on “Models of Inculturation” commences with an article by Martin Üffing who delves into the terminological history of the neologism “inculturation” and discusses what kind of accentuation can be achieved by its use. In reviewing models of inculturation Üffing takes his lead from David Bosch, Robert Schreiter

and Stephen Bevans in distinguishing between translation models, adaptation models and contextual models. He regards inculturation as an ongoing process and a permanent challenge: "People must explore their culture – which always constitutes a dynamic reality – for expressions of Christian identity and ways of living a Christian life. This will always be a process of dialogue and will transform both parties to it – cultures and Christianity."

Approaching the topic from an African perspective, Rodrigue Naortangar advocates a perichoresis of Gospel and culture, although he points out that, despite complete interpenetration, there is no coalescence between them. He says: "An interpretation of the dynamic of inculturation in Africa as the perichoresis of cultural identity and the Gospel enables Africans, who are all too frequently pushed to the margins or who isolate themselves, to become participants in the common history of humanity with all its achievements and setbacks: the history in which Christians seek to live out their faith authentically in the here and now."

Julian Saldanha from India examines inculturation as an expression of holistic creativity and dynamism. He contrasts the "cloning model" attributed to the colonial mission period with the "holistic model" associated with the Second Vatican Council. The latter model, he says, should be reflected in the development of an Asian pedagogy, catechesis, theology and spirituality as well as of training rooted in Asian culture. "Rome's adherence" to a Eurocentric approach leads him to complain that the local churches in Asia are in a state of paralysis rather than simulating processes of inculturation. He calls for a surge in inculturation so that "the faith is grasped in a more profound and personal manner by the local people and it can take deeper root among them."

In his essay on "Working with Models of Inculturation" Paulo Sérgio Lopes Gonçalves first examines the translation model, the adaptation model and the model of contextualisation and liberation and then goes on to establish connections with the doctrine of the Trinity, the doctrine of creation and the doctrine of incarnation. He points out that the various models of inculturation should be conceived of not in an exclusive but an inclusive manner and that the models can be linked with each other. He considers inculturation to be crucial for an "efficient" proclamation of the Gospel and draws attention to the

pneumatological perspective of inculturation: “The true model of inculturation is that expressing the spirituality which, despite the historical forms of inculturation with their inherent values and limitations, brings life to the full (John 10:10) for everyone.”

Chapter Four addresses the uneasy relationship between contextualisation and inculturation. Hans Waldenfels, author of a textbook on contextual fundamental theology, starts his article by looking into the terms “contextuality” and “inculturation”. He makes it clear that the development of contextual theologies has its origins in the exhortation in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* which encouraged “scrutinising the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.” He points out that “while perspective is paramount with regard to “contextuality”, “inculturation” is largely dependent on action.” He stresses that the requisite interest in contexts “should not result in the text being lost from sight. The text is the Gospel. However, the Gospel is a person – Jesus of Nazareth.”

“Understanding the Church’s Mission in the Context of the Philippines Today” is the title of the contribution by Andrew Gimenez Recepción, in which he describes social institutions, on the one hand, and the transformation of cultures, on the other. He sees the challenge for all members of the Church as being “to become living witnesses of the Gospel in every sector of society.”

Chibueze and Monika Udeani make it clear in their joint essay on “Inculturation. Boldly Trusting in the Transforming Power of Contextuality” that “the power of contextuality resides in an awareness of those life-enhancing elements which, for good reasons, are already in place or have developed in a specific culture and society over many generations.” They say that “the countries of the South have a responsibility both to themselves and to the other churches and theologies to develop their own theological systems as an expression of their specific contextuality. These systems will continually rewrite and reflect anew on the Christian faith from an internal perspective in respect of their own particular socio-historical and cultural embeddedness.”

José María Vigil examines questions relating to inculturation from a Latin American vantage point. He rejects any understanding of it that distinguishes between a substance of the truth and the means of expressing it, which require inculturation. He points to the hostile

structures that can be inherent in religions and sees the need for inculturation as a concept to accept the challenges of a “new axial age”, to embrace the new social requirements that arise in times of radical change and to usher in a process of reinvention based on the new paradigms.

The authors contributing to Chapter Five, which is devoted to the path “From Inculturation to Interculturality”, focus on the development the concept of inculturation has undergone. In his essay entitled “Finding New Faith in Cultural Encounters” Klaus Vellguth investigates the part played by missiology in inculturation and explores Hellenisation as a process of “proto-inculturation”. He goes on to show that theologians from the southern hemisphere, in particular, take a critical view of the intertwining of culture and Eurocentric Christianity and that they do not share the notion of pre-culturality. On the contrary, they see interculturality as a basic theological principle in which openness to others and to otherness is taken for granted, as is the ability to meet others not with anxiety but with a strong sense of trust that the one God can be discovered in other contexts, cultures and religions.

Viewing developments from an Asian standpoint, John Mansford Prior looks into the intercultural processes initiated by the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences. He begins with a speech given by Joseph Ratzinger in Hong Kong, where he first heard the term “interculturality”. He includes it among the efforts made by the Asian Church to inculturate the Gospel and, referring to workshops held by his own order (the Society of the Divine Word), shows how it contributes to a greater awareness of the emergence of a culturally coherent faith.

Wilfred Sumani from Nairobi describes the challenge the Church in Africa faces in developing an intercultural theology. He concentrates on religious festivals as privileged locations for intercultural theology and, in view of the significance of such sacred occasions, urges theologians to pay special attention to them “so as to discover not only African symbols that augur well for the process of inculturation but also how these symbols can be exploited for the construction of a more reconciled and inclusive society.”

In conclusion, Thomas Fornet-Ponse considers intercultural theology as a transformation of theology. He distinguishes in the understanding of inculturation between a “peach model”, which is

characterised by ontological and metaphysical dualism, and an “onion model” in which the essential is not contrasted with the inessential but there are instead various layers and skins which form a whole. This is more in line with indigenous and Eastern Asian traditions of wisdom, in which the essential features cannot be separated from their manifestations. He sees intercultural theology as having three tasks to perform: an analysis of the context and the respective culture; an intercultural hermeneutics; and an examination of the criteria for Christian identity. He defines interculturality as “as the *ex negativo* identifiable space of differences which constitutes the discursive conditions and thus brings into the open what is excluded, unsaid or repressed”; the tension between universality and particularity is not resolved in favour of one or the other but rendered productive instead.”

All five chapters in this volume on “Inculturation – God’s Presence in Cultures” enable authors from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe to put forward their views and to examine questions of inculturation from their own specific perspective or academic tradition. Their contributions to this volume in the One World Theology series, which reveal the influence of different standpoints and contexts, provide a stimulus for discussion within the universal Church across continental borders in which the focus is on dialogue between the local churches with the aim of fostering discussion between them on an equal footing.

We owe a debt of gratitude not only to the authors who have contributed to this twelfth volume in the One World Theology series, but also to the *missio* staff members Lydia Klinkenberg, Katja Nikles, Dr. Michael Meyer, Dr. Marco Moerschbacher and Dr. Stefan Voges, without whose conceptual advice this volume would not have been possible. Our thanks also go to Larissa Heusch and Martina Dittmer-Flachskampf for the careful preparation of the manuscripts and to Judith Lurweg and Christine Baur for their attentive proofreading. We hope very much that this latest volume in the One World Theology series will generate interest in the theological discourse within the universal Church.

Klaus Krämer
Klaus Vellguth

Early Approaches to Inculturation in Church History

Inculturation –

An Intrinsic Quality of Christianity

Mariano Delgado

The desire to translate and inculturate has been part of the Christian faith from the very beginning. This is indicated quite clearly by the fact that most of the New Testament texts were written neither in Aramaic nor in Hebrew, but in Greek, i.e. the common language of the Hellenistic world, which was the best way to ensure that the Gospel of God's Kingdom could be translated and understood by other nations and cultures. For Christians the Word of God became flesh through Jesus of Nazareth. It did not become a document in a particular language. Therefore, God's Word does not manifest itself in a sacred or taboo language as a vehicle of revelation. Rather, the resulting Holy Scriptures have to be translated into the languages of the people targeted for conversion. This capacity for inculturation prompted one religious historian to say of Christianity: "Almost no other religion displays such changes and transformations."¹

"Inculturation" has become a key concept in contemporary theology for a variety of reasons. Responses to the Vatican Council have led to a re-awakening of local churches and to reflections on the form Christianity should take in each particular context and culture. At the same time the process of globalisation has given rise to two contradictory developments: increasing worldwide unity based on our modern global culture and increasing differentiation based on regional cultures. Furthermore, globalisation challenges us to be more sensitive participants in the ongoing discourse on inculturation. Recognition of the gulf between present-day secular culture and the Gospel as the drama of our times has led to an understanding of mission as the evangelisation of culture and of cultures, so that they can become regenerated from within by an encounter with the Good

¹ Fritz Stolz, *Christentum* (Religionen vol. 3), Göttingen 1985, 7.

News. This understanding dates back at least as far as *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975).² It is well known that Pope John Paul II described inculturation as “the heart, the means and the aim of the new evangelisation”³. He maintained that unless faith becomes culture it has not been fully accepted, thought through or become an authentic part of life.⁴ Finally, in trying to establish why the issue of inculturation is so frequently described as “summarising the fundamental task of the Church”⁵ in an increasingly global world, both in academic theology and in doctrinal documents, we also come up against the new theology of religions.

Theologically, the term “inculturation” is a little unfortunate. In linguistic terms, it presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture “whereby two subjects, formally unknown to each other, meet and fuse”.⁶ However, there is no such thing as faith stripped of culture, nor is there any culture without religion – at least not outside our modern technical civilisation. Theologically, “inculturation” only makes sense if we see it as the traditional, ongoing task of the Church’s mission, i.e. of proclaiming the Gospel by entering into an intensive dialogue with the cultures and religions of the world so that churches are planted which are recognisable as such in “teaching, life and worship” (DV 8).

“Inculturation” is in fact a comparatively new term. Although used occasionally in the 1950s, it did not become widely known until 1977, when it was used in the papal document *Catechesi Tradendae*⁷,

² Paul VI. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, no. 20, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.pdf (13.11.2018).

³ Cf. Talk given to the International Congress on Catechesis, 26 September 1992, quoted here from *Neue Evangelisierung – Förderung des Menschen – Christliche Kultur*. Final Document of the Fourth General Meeting of the Latin American and Caribbean Bishops in Santo Domingo (Stimmen der Weltkirche 34), Bonn 1992, no. 229.

⁴ Cf. Internationale Theologenkommission, *Das Christentum und die Religionen* (Arbeitshilfen 136), Bonn 1996, no. 26.

⁵ Konrad Hilpert, “Inkulturation – Anspruch und Legitimierung einer theologischen Kategorie”, in: idem et al. (Eds.), *Der “eine” Gott in vielen Kulturen – Inkulturation und christliche Gottesvorstellung*, Zurich 1993, 13–32, here 16.

⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Der christliche Glaube vor der Herausforderung der Kulturen”, in: Paulus Gordan (Eds.), *Evangelium und Inkulturation (1492-1992)*, Salzburg 1995, 9–26, here 1.

⁷ Cf. also the following entries in various encyclopaedias on the term “inculturation”: Christoffer H. Grundmann et al, entry: “Inkulturation”, in: *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*⁴ IV, 143–149; Giancarlo Collet et al., entry: “Inkulturation”, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und*

thanks to a paper submitted by Pedro Arrupe, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, at the Roman Synod of Bishops that year. Two elements are mentioned as characteristic features of inculturated evangelisation: “On the one hand, the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the biblical world or, more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived). Neither can it without serious loss be isolated from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries. It does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures. On the other hand, the power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates.”⁸ Church documents – in particular *Gaudium et Spes* (GS 58) – emphasise that inculturation requires plenty of time and that, wherever this process reveals its compatibility with the Gospel and with the fellowship of the universal Church, it leads to a situation of “giving and receiving”, benefiting both the Church and the various cultures.

The stages in the process of inculturation are the proclamation of the Gospel, the transformation and regeneration of cultures and people, and finally the enrichment of humanity and the Church.⁹ Obviously, the proclamation of the Gospel does not merely come from outside. Rather, as Paul and the Church Fathers were well aware, the initial stage that precedes proclamation is the kenotic investigation of traces which are already available in other cultures and people because God has left them there. This means finding everything in other cultures and people that is compatible with the

Kirche³ V, 504–510; idem, entry: “Inkulturation”, in: Peter Eicher (Eds.), *Neues Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, Munich 1991, 394–407; Karl Müller, “Inkulturation”, in: idem/Theo Sundermeier (Eds.), *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe*, Berlin 1987, 176–180; Anton Quack, “Enkulturation/Inkulturation”, in: Hubert Cancik et al. (Eds.), *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, Stuttgart 1990, 283–289; Paulo Suess, “Inkulturation”, in: Ignacio Ellacuría/Jon Sobrino (Eds.), *Mysterium liberationis – Grundbegriffe der Theologie der Befreiung*, vol. 2, Lucerne 1996, 1011–1058; Hans Waldenfels, “Inkulturation”, in: idem (Eds.), *Lexikon der Religionen*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1988, 307–309.

⁸ Catechesis Tradendae, no. 53, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.pdf (13.11.2018).

⁹ Cf. Arij A. Roest Crolius, “Inkulturation als Herausforderung”, in: Michael Sievernich/Günter Switek (Eds.), *Ignatianisch – Eigenart und Methode der Gesellschaft Jesu*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1991, 613–623.

Gospel, because “God is there before the missionary”¹⁰ and because he is already at work in all cultures and in everyone. It follows that the most important vehicles of inculturation are converts who know their cultures from within – theologians like Paul, who was at home in two worlds, or Clemens of Alexandria, Origen and Augustine, who were both Christian theologians and Hellenistic or Roman philosophers.

Theologies which endeavour to combine the paradigms of inculturation and liberation put a particular emphasis on the elements of kenosis and learning within the Church.¹¹ If, “by His incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion to every man” (GS 22), should we not pay more attention to the way people in other cultures and religions have experienced God? Likewise, the new theologies emphasise the liberating aspect which characterises the incarnational concept of inculturation. Just as the Lord “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave” for us (Philippians 2:6–7), became poor, even though he was rich (2 Corinthians 8:9), and was sent by the Father “to bring the good news to the afflicted, [...] to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:18), the Church, too, must realise its mission in humility and self-denial and must see the poor and suffering as the image of its poor and suffering Founder” (LG 8). Inculturation understood in practical terms means seeking Christ in the poor and suffering and restoring the maltreated face of the world.

Fundamental inculturation in antiquity

Borne by the desire to proclaim the Good News of God’s Kingdom throughout the known Gentile world, Christianity gradually succeeded in winning over the entire Hellenistic/Roman cultural area. In this process Christians consistently drew on aspects of antiquity that were compatible with the Gospel. They were ready to engage with these elements and to be transformed, as long as this did not lead to a fundamental metamorphosis but to a better understanding of their own identity within the new cultural context.

¹⁰ Cf. Leonardo Boff, *Gott kommt früher als der Missionar – Neuevangelisierung für eine Kultur des Lebens und der Freiheit*, Düsseldorf 1991.

¹¹ Cf. Paulo Suess, *op. cit.*; *ibid.*, “Kontextualität, Identität, Universalität – der Streit um das Inkulturationsparadigma”, in: Andreas Lienkamp/Christoph Lienkamp (Eds.), *Die “Identität” des Glaubens in den Kulturen – das Inkulturationsparadigma auf dem Prüfstand*, Würzburg 1997, 309–328.

One formative aspect of Christianity in its early stages was that doctrinal positions were elaborated not in the important cultures of the Middle East, but in the Hellenistic world. One major reason was that Judaism – the very root of the Christian tree – had already established close contacts with this culture. Hence the so-called “Hellenisation” of Christianity was not just one historical route among many potential options but the incarnational route in the history of the Gospel. The resulting synthesis, too, was not one among many but the starting point for further inculturations – including those of today.

For many centuries this Hellenisation was never questioned, being accepted as an obvious fact. At the beginning of the 20th century, however, some Protestant theologians – such as Adolf von Harnack and Emil Brunner – described it as a departure from Christianity in its original form. They claimed that Hellenisation had adulterated the biblical message by adding ecclesial structures and a philosophical and theological doctrinal edifice. Today the Hellenisation of Christianity is seen as a fundamentally positive “paradigm of inculturation”, even though there is a certain ambivalence in theologising the kerygma based on Greek metaphysics, which has both advantages and disadvantages.

Alois Grillmeier succinctly described this process of “theologisation” as follows: “The Christian kerygma and the entire structure of the Christian faith encountered [...] a world that was asking questions and had a great spiritual past. This past led to attitudes of rejection as well as certain expectations, which put pressure on Christians and challenged them to keep making new efforts in presenting their faith. The more such inquirers joined the Church itself, the faster the kerygma became ‘theologised’ – with all the pros and cons such a process involves. Both within and outside the Church its simple core message – particularly in the Vulgar Latin writings of early Christianity – came up against ‘philosophy’. This marked the birth of ‘theology’ as such, i.e. an understanding of faith that could now also be derived from intellectual reflection. Right from the outset, however, two totally different attitudes began to emerge towards Gentile philosophy, Gentile culture and the *intellectus fidei* they nurtured. There was a dispute between strict ‘traditionalists’ who, misusing Paul’s teachings, focused solely on the ‘crucified Christ’ (1 Corinthians 1:23 and 2:2)

and the 'progressive' wing who, like Apollos, were constantly in touch with ideas outside the Church and who wished to gain a deeper understanding and find new expression for their own faith. The dispute has continued throughout the history of theology right up to the present day."¹²

This process can be described as two-track inculturation. It led not only to a missionary "Christianisation of Greek metaphysics", but also to a – legitimate – "Hellenisation of Christianity".¹³ This prompted the Catholic theologian Peter Neuner to write: "Unlike the hypothesis that the Hellenisation of Christianity meant a departure from its origins, this process should be valued as one of the great achievements of Christianity, i.e. the inculturation of the biblical message in a changing world. If the Church had turned its back on this solution, then its origins would not have been salvaged in their authentic form. Rather, the proclamation of the Gospel would have gone unheeded or been misunderstood. Answers would have been given to questions which nobody had asked and nobody was interested in."¹⁴ The Protestant theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg has the following to say on this point: "Without the so-called Hellenisation of the Gospel there would have been no Gentile Christianity and probably also no missionary penetration of other and ever new cultures."¹⁵ Thanks to this inculturation, the Jesus movement of Jewish Christians turned into a world religion which transformed the society of antiquity "in teaching, life and worship" (DV 8). Yet at the same time – as Adolf von Harnack has emphasised – Christianity remained distinct "from all polytheism and idolatry".¹⁶ Roman and Greek polytheism and the national monotheism of Judaism were replaced by the Christian doctrine of the

¹² Cf. Alois Grillmeier, *Mit ihm und in ihm – christologische Forschungen und Perspektiven*, Freiburg, 1975, 589f.

¹³ Even Jürgen Habermas (*Texte und Kontexte*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, 135) believes that this synthesis resulted from an encounter between the faith of Israel and the Greek spirit, although he emphasises the "ambiguity" he sees in the missionary Christianisation of Greek metaphysics.

¹⁴ Peter Neuner, "Die Hellenisierung des Christentums als Modell von Inkulturation", in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 213 (1995) 6, 363–376, here: 371.

¹⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, "Notwendigkeit und Grenzen der Inkulturation des Evangeliums", in: Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz (Eds.), *Christentum in Lateinamerika*, Regensburg 1992, 140–154, here: 148 (similarly: 144f and 147).

¹⁶ Adolf von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten*, Leipzig 1924 (reprint: Wiesbaden 1984), 528.

Trinity as a *genus tertium*, with a new concept of personhood as well as a new understanding of politics. The master morality of antiquity made way for a new morality, the hallmark of which was the dignity of every human created in the image of God, this being described by Nietzsche as a “slave morality”.¹⁷ Idolatry and emperor worship were eventually replaced by a form of worship without bloodshed. Although it took over many formal elements from ancient religions, its emphasis was very clearly Christian.

The Iconic Turn

During the period of antiquity, Christianity went through inculturation in a variety of instances, but I shall focus here on what has been termed the Iconic Turn. This is the transformation of Christianity from a religion with a strict ban on visual imagery to one incorporating a veneration of images, the aim being to enable Christians to communicate their message more easily among the uneducated classes of the Roman/Hellenistic world, whose culture was highly pictorial in character. Contemporary authors report that there were numerous discussions about this transformation which sought to clarify and legitimise the practice of venerating religious imagery, both theologically and practically. Graeco-Roman culture is generally regarded as favourable towards imagery, as it had developed various forms of venerating images in which the image of a god or emperor was itself seen as divine. However, even pre-Christian antiquity made a clear distinction between the pro-image, almost magical beliefs of the population at large and the intellectual approach of its spiritual leaders. Whereas, initially, the latter totally rejected any veneration of images, during Hellenistic times they largely adopted an apologetic and, indeed, tolerant approach to popular beliefs. During the most formative period in the emergence of Christianity around 100 A.D. toleration turned into affirmation. In the subsequent period – marked by an intellectual climate in which Christianity turned from a forbidden

¹⁷ This new morality is impressively documented by an early Christian Apologist who says of the Christians: “They marry like everyone else, they produce children like everyone else, but they don’t abandon them after birth.” (A Diogenète [vol. 5]), Eds. by Irénée Marrou, Paris 1965, 63–65). In fact, even “Nietzsche’s” Emperor Julian confirms this in the fourth century, when he says that the kindness of Christians towards strangers, their funeral preparations and their exemplary purity of lifestyle are the elements which most promote their “sect”. Quoted here from Kurt Koch, *Christsein im neuen Europa – Provokationen und Perspektiven*, Freiburg (Switzerland) 1992, 202.

into a public religion – the prevailing philosophy of Neoplatonism was “very much based on popular beliefs”.¹⁸

When Christianity entered the cultural scene of antiquity, it was initially accompanied by biblically based polemics against idolatry and idol worship, as expressed, for instance, in the Book of Wisdom, chapters 13-15: “For the worship of idols with no name is the beginning, cause, and end of every evil.” (Wisdom 14:27) and in Romans: “(they) exchanged the glory of the immortal God for an imitation, for the image of a mortal human being, or of birds, or animals, or crawling things” (Romans 1:23). Such polemics clearly hinged on the principle that God “cannot be represented” in images – a principle that continued to apply to Christianity even after the Iconic Turn.

When Christianity was still a forbidden religion, the most that could be found, albeit very rarely, were “symbolic” representations of Jesus as a shepherd, teacher or fisherman. Bible stories, on the other hand, were depicted quite realistically. From the turn of the fourth century onwards we increasingly find simple narrative images as *biblia pauperum*. These were decorations for churches and graves, intended to help the illiterate faithful to remember the works of God and the deeds of the saints and to inspire them to imitate such deeds. The ascent of man into higher spiritual realms was still seen as the ideal, but it was accepted that for many people this ascent had to include the sensory dimension.

A “theology of imagery and the veneration of images” did not emerge until the sixth and seventh centuries, when a distinction was made between the Christian and antique veneration of images and, also, between images of Christ, the Mother of God and the saints. This distinction was based on the fundamental principle that the images themselves were not to be worshipped (Greek: *latreia*) and that veneration should not be given to an image as such but to the person depicted in it. Formally, the Christian veneration of images was modelled on the imperial cult and therefore involved prostrating oneself, bowing, holding processions, saying prayers and cultivating the use of incense and candles.

¹⁸ Herta Elisabeth Killy et al., “Bild II (griechisch-römisch)”, in: Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, vol. 2, Stuttgart, 302–318, here: 314.

The transition from an anti-image religion to a religion incorporating veneration of images was by no means uncontroversial, however, as is clearly apparent in the Iconoclastic Controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries. Theologically, the dispute focused to all intents and purposes on the depiction of Christ. The Iconoclasts, who opposed such imagery, based their argument on Christ being both truly divine and truly human. If it were argued that an image showed Christ in his humanity alone, then veneration of his image would be a Christological error, as it would separate the two natures from each other. The defenders of religious imagery, on the other hand, saw the depiction of Christ as an affirmation of his incarnation and thus of his human nature. After all, just as God expressed his own divine attributes in the form of Christ, so Christ, too, should be describable – an assertion which weakened the position of the iconoclasts. The purpose of images, the defenders argued, was to “remember” how God saved us and to recall the deeds of the saints, thereby encouraging us to be faithful imitators. The Western Church in particular, has developed the idea of an educational purpose in venerating an image: the object of veneration is not the image as such, but the original person to whom the image points as a mere copy. The Eastern Church, on the other hand, sees an icon as more than a depiction of something sacred or of a saint, treating it as something that is “sacred in itself”, maintaining that “something of the sacredness of the original is present in the image.”¹⁹ Nevertheless, both Churches distinguished sharply between an image, on the one hand, and the divine or a saint, on the other, believing that equating the two was a hallmark of pagan religions (although the educated among the pagans also objected to such an equation).

The Iconic Turn was the struggle of Christians in antiquity to come to grips with a question of fundamental theological legitimacy: whether it was right to venerate images and how to distinguish between Christian and pagan forms of such veneration. The outcome must be seen as a major achievement in inculturation and a process which has had a lasting impact on the historical development of Christianity.

¹⁹ J. Kollwitz, “Bild III (christlich)”, in: *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 2, op. cit., 318–341, here: 337.

Ambivalent outcome

The Christian faith was undeniably “successful” in antiquity. Whereas around the year 100 A.D. not even every 10,000th inhabitant of the Roman Empire was a Christian, “only two centuries later about one in ten Romans belonged to a Christian church.”²⁰ Another 100 years later Augustine was able to say to pagans who demanded miracles that they were inexcusably shutting themselves off from the compelling “evidence of the true God”, as the existence of the Christian God, he said, was based on facts and therefore immediately obvious: “Now that the world is converted to Christianity, he who still demands miracles is himself a miracle.”²¹

The reasons for this success are now largely seen in the “convergence” of Christianity and the culture of antiquity, i.e. in its capacity for inculturation, of which the Iconic Turn is just one example. Christianity developed the concept of *praeparatio evangelica*, seeing the culture of antiquity as preparing for the arrival of the Christian faith in two ways: firstly, through the unity Augustus had created in the culture, which enabled Christianity to spread rapidly, and secondly through a philosophical tradition whereby the foremost function of philosophy was seen as residing in ethics, and its highest aim was seen as understanding the divine, thus paving the way for the Christian synthesis of theology and philosophy.

Moreover, Christianity fitted in well with further developments of religious and cultural history in antiquity: “Its religious understanding (redemption through a ritual re-enactment of the death and resurrection of the divinity) had its parallel in the mystery religions which experienced an upturn in the Roman Empire at the same time as Christianity. The Christian message of a final judgement came at a time when pagan religions, too, increasingly came to associate notions of a person’s destiny in the hereafter with moral conduct in the here and now. Christianity’s extremely optimistic view of death and the hereafter was paralleled by a gradual increase in more hopeful inscriptions on pagan graves. Even the Christian method of burial was

²⁰ Andreas Merkt, “Die Profilierung des antiken Christentums angesichts von Polemik und Verfolgung”, in: Dieter Zeller (Eds.), *Christentum I, Von den Anfängen bis zur Konstantinischen Wende (Die Religionen der Menschheit 28)*, Stuttgart 2002, 409–433, here: 430.

²¹ “Magnum est ipse prodigium, qui mundo credente non credit”. St. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, XXII, Chapter 8: CCL 48/815.

accompanied by a gradual shift away from the practice of cremation and subsequent scattering of the ashes in the environment. In other words, Christianity corresponded in many ways to the spirit of the times.²²

In addition, Christianity displayed a number of features which made it attractive:

- its simplicity compared with the confusing diversity of polytheism;
- the clear instructions in Christian ethics;
- martyrs testifying to a complete lack of fear before their meeting their death;
- Christian fellowships being so credible and approachable: “Christian churches would take full care of their sick, poor, elderly, widows, orphans and hungry, in other words those marginalised individuals whom paganism, according to a modern historian, ‘left to their own devices [...] without any notable pangs of conscience’”.²³

Christianity’s missionary concept of “going out” and its universal message of becoming children of God succeeded in unhinging the world of antiquity – much to the regret of Celsus, Porphyrius, the Emperor Julian, Nietzsche and his post-modern imitators. The general feeling on the eve of the migration of Germanic and Slavic peoples was aptly expressed by Paulus Orosius, the Hispanic church elder and student of Augustine of Hippo, who wrote enthusiastically around 420 A.D.: Wherever one goes as a Roman and Christian, one finds a “refuge”, as there is “one homeland, one law and one religion” everywhere.²⁴ This happy state of affairs did not last long, however, as several younger races were *ante portas*, and evangelising these people would present a new challenge of inculturation. Waiting in the sidelines, too, was a new and radically iconoclastic religion which sought to replace Christianity, thus making the Iconic Turn and its image-friendly theology seem an ambivalent event.

²² Andreas Merkt, “Die Profilierung des antiken Christentums...”, 431.

²³ Ibid., 432.

²⁴ Paulus Orosius, *Die antike Weltgeschichte in christlicher Sicht – 2 volumes*, translated into German by Adolf Lippold, with an introduction by Carl Andresen, Zurich and Munich 1985–1986, here: II:9.

The Event of Tepeyac – A Model for Cross-cultural Dialogue

Juan Manuel Contreras Colín

At the beginning of the early modern period – in the 16th century when the world system was coming into being – the American continent underwent a process which, by way of an analogy, was just as significant and important with regards to religious and cultural renewal as the Hellenisation of Palestine-based Christianity during the first century A.D. This process, too, was an inculturation of the Gospel. An outstanding source of evidence for it was what experts call the “event of Tepeyac”.

There are two historical records relating to this event: firstly, the *amoxtili* or codex of Tonantzin Guadalupe – more commonly known as the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe – and, secondly, the indigenous story of *Nican Mopohua*, a Nahuatl tale about the apparitions of Tonantzin Guadalupe.

The first of the two records is without doubt a major attraction for millions of believers throughout the world, especially on the American continent. Situated in Mexico City, at the *Insigne y Nacional Basilica de Santa Maria de Guadalupe*, the shrine and its sacred image are visited every year by around 23 million pilgrims. This makes the Basilica the most important religious centre in America and, after St. Peter's Basilica in Rome, the most frequently visited Roman Catholic place of worship in the world.

In the course of history the image of Tonantzin Guadalupe has played a role extending far beyond the realm of religion to which it traditionally belongs. It can, therefore, also be regarded as a phenomenon accompanying movements and processes of a social and political nature or in which social demands are raised.

The second record is a written document, called *Nican Mopohua* by its authors, meaning “Here It Is Told”. An indigenous, 16th-century Nahuatl narrative based on an apparition of the Virgin Mary, it presents a genuinely indigenous, Christian theological reflection upon the faith and religious practice of ordinary local believers in relation to the image of Tonantzin Guadalupe.

Bearing witness to the “event of Tepeyac”, the painting and the narrative are among the most important and effective examples of critical cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue. Moreover, they form a critical model or archetype of cross-cultural evangelisation, a model which necessarily presupposes respect and recognition for those who are different.

The main objective of this article is to present the Nahuatl narrative *Nican Mopohua* in its entirety and thus to demonstrate its philosophical significance for critical cross-cultural dialogue and its theological and pastoral relevance for genuinely inculturated evangelisation.

The narrative

The rich diversity of the translations and different literary versions of *Nican Mopohua* notwithstanding, they all basically share the same content.

In 1531, ten years after the capital of the most important indigenous territory of Amerindia was destroyed, a poor Indio by the name of Juan Diego from Cuauhtitlan crosses the Hill of Tepeyac on his way to the Amerindian Christian fellowship at Tlatelolco. As he walks along, he hears some rare birds singing and it seems that the hill is answering them. So much does he like the sound that he feels as if he is in *Xochitlalpan* (the “blossoming country”, in *Tonacatlalpan* (the “country of our livelihood”) or in *Ilhuicatlalpan* (the “heavenly land”) which the ancient sages once spoke of. Then he hears a voice calling him. As he gets closer, he realises it is a lady of noble birth. She introduces herself as the *in inantzin in huelnelli Teotl* (the “little mother of the true God”), the mother of the *in ipalnemohuani* (the “giver of life”), the *in Tloque nahuaque* (the “Lord who is close to you and with you”) and then instructs him to give a message to the Bishop of Mexico, the Franciscan brother Juan de Zumárraga. She wishes the bishop to build a *teocaltzin* (a “worthy little house of God”)

or shrine at the foot of the hill where the “compassionate one”, as she calls herself, can provide love, help and protection to all those whose lives are in danger and where she can relieve them of their distress, misery and burdens.

Juan Diego encounters numerous problems as he tries to gain access to the Bishop of Mexico via his servants. He then fails twice in his attempts to convince the Bishop that he has indeed met the Virgin Mary. The Bishop merely requests that this unknown woman send him a “sign” of some kind that will convince him. When Juan Diego embarks on a journey to obtain spiritual assistance for his dying uncle, Bernardino, the Virgin appears to him again, even though he tries hard to avoid meeting the Lady of the Hill. She puts his mind at rest about his uncle and then asks him to take proof to the Bishop, as requested. The “sign” takes the form of some precious flowers which the Virgin tells him to cut at the top of the hill in a place where there are otherwise only thistles, prickly pears and mesquite trees. Although it is a time of severe frosts (*çetl*), being the coldest season of the year, Juan Diego finds numerous beautiful fresh flowers in full bloom, which he gathers in his cactus fibre cloak and lays at the young woman’s feet. She touches them and asks him to take them to the Bishop of Mexico.

Again, Diego encounters many difficulties as he tries to negotiate his way past the Bishop’s servants, but he eventually gets through to him and presents the proof he has been given by the young woman. The moment he spreads out his cloak with the flowers, an image takes shape in his cloak – the picture of the *in itlaçomahuiznantzinin Totemaquixticatzin, Totecuiyo Jesucristo* (the “admirable and revered little mother of the one who set us free, our Lord Jesus Christ”), the picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe, as she called herself. Returning home, Juan Diego finds his uncle Bernardino alive and well. Bernardino says that he, too, had an apparition of the Virgin and that she healed him.²⁵

²⁵ Cf. Miguel León-Portilla, *Tonantzin Guadalupe – pensamiento náhuatl y mensaje cristiano en el “Nicanmopohua”*, Mexico 2002, 19; Richard Nebel, *Santa Maria Tonantzin Virgen de Guadalupe – Continuidad y transformación religiosa en México*, Mexico 2002, 167.

The context of *Nican Mopohua*

The invasion, the conquest and the destruction of Mexico/Tenochtitlan, followed by the consolidation and expansion of European colonialism and dominion over the indigenous peoples of Central America provide the general terms of reference and socio-historical background of *Nican Mopohua*. It is in this context that the document arose, to which it refers and which it seeks to influence.

The ruthless war waged by European Christians when they invaded Amerindia resulted in almost total devastation. It led to the complete destruction of the Indio lifestyle²⁶, determining how the survivors viewed themselves and driving them to existential despair. *Nican Mopohua* reflects this in a masterly formulated sentence uttered by Juan Diego, the Indio: “As it is true that we were born for this purpose, we have come to expect the labour of our death.”²⁷

Despite the difficulties associated with “evangelisation” – e.g. campaigns against idols and indigenous religious “syncretism” – the Franciscans had dominated the religious scene in New Spain from the very beginning in 1524, encountering no major problems until 1553. Nevertheless, a number of events gradually undermined the church model the Franciscans tried to establish in the “New World”. These were the Reformation (initiated by Luther in 1517), the abdication of their great patron Charles V (1556), the accession of Philip II (whose religious policy was marked by intolerant orthodoxy), the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which condemned the works of Erasmus of Rotterdam, banned any direct reading of the Bible and put the emphasis on external ceremonial practice instead,²⁸ and above all the investiture of the new Archbishop of Mexico, the Dominican Alonso de Montúfar, who saw himself as an opponent of Erasmus and his ideas.²⁹

Having assumed office, the new bishop set about giving the Church an institutional structure, which meant enforcing strict orthodoxy, sub-

²⁶ Cf. Miguel León-Portilla, *Visión de los vencidos – relaciones indígenas de la conquista*, Mexico 2004, XIII.

²⁷ León Portilla, *Tonantzin Guadalupe*, 114.

²⁸ Cf. José Manuel Villalpando, *La Virgen de Guadalupe – una biografía*, Mexico 2004, 30.

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*

mission to Church law and obedience to the Church hierarchy³⁰. He sought to achieve these aims by vehemently defending the Church's jurisdiction, i.e. the leadership and the legislative powers which Church law had given to bishops.³¹ At the same time he attempted to strengthen liturgical and ceremonial aspects and to promote respect for the traditions and customs of popular piety. In ecclesiological terms he therefore established a church model that was the direct opposite of the charismatic model regarded as ideal by the Friars Minor.³²

Open hostility between the Bishop and the Franciscans had an influence on many aspects of colonial life, particularly affecting the *Indios*, who were regarded by both contending parties as integral objects of their respective Church projects. Both sides therefore felt authorised to control the *Indios* – the Franciscans by providing a form of paternalistic “protection” and the Archbishop by demanding their obedience to Church law.³³ Each benefited in their own way from the work of the *Indios*.

The pilgrimage chapel of Tepeyac³⁴ and the associated indigenous veneration of the saint were also affected by this dispute within the Church. In the Archbishop's strategy, Tepeyac was to play a central role in gaining support from the indigenous people and thus warding off any direct influence from the Franciscans.

It was probably in early December 1555 that a picture appeared on the wall of the pilgrimage church³⁵, painted by an indigenous artist³⁶

³⁰ Cf. Eduardo O'Gorman, *Destierro de sombras – luz en el origen de la imagen y culto de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe del Tepeyac*, Mexico 1986, 115–119.

³¹ Cf. Francisco Morales Valerio/Oscar Mazín, “La Iglesia en Nueva España. Los modelos fundacionales,” in: Bernardo García Martínez (Eds.), *Gran historia de México Ilustrada*, vol. 2, Mexico 2001, 135; Eduardo O'Gorman, *op. cit.*, 120.

³² Cf. *Ibid.*

³³ Cf. *Ibid.*

³⁴ Torquemada reports that it was the first twelve Franciscans who ordered the building of the first pilgrimage chapel in Tepeyac, probably in the 1530s. Dedicated to the “Virgin Mother”, the chapel was intended to replace the “idolatrous worship” of the goddess *Tonantzin* by the *Indios*, a practice which provided considerable competition at the time. Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana*, Mexico 1975, 262–273.

³⁵ It should be pointed out, that there was a custom throughout New Spain whereby faithful *Indios* would display their own paintings in churches and shrines. Cf. Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl y Guadalupe – la formación de la conciencia nacional*, Mexico 2006, 30; Francisco Miranda, *Dos cultos fundantes – los Remedios y Guadalupe (1521–1649)*, Mexico 2001, 240.

³⁶ Some historians take the view that the presentation of the painting or *amoxtili* in the

and apparently depicting the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary.³⁷ The picture, which was hung up in secret, made a profound impression on the local population as it reflected their indigenous roots. Not only did the woman in the picture have clearly indigenous features but, even more importantly, the picture also expressed the overall religious and cultural symbolism of their worldview. The indigenous population saw this picture as an *amoxтли*, a codex³⁸. They had no problems in reading it, interpreting its indigenous symbolism straight away as referring to their goddess Tonantzin, “our venerable and worthy little mother”, for whom a cult of reverence had sprung up on the Hill of Tepeyac.³⁹

A rumour spread that a Spanish cattle breeder had been miraculously healed by the picture of Tepeyac, prompting a sudden increase in the veneration of the image⁴⁰ by European Christians. The Spanish colonisers⁴¹ therefore began to seek recognition of the place (the pilgrimage church of the Indios) and of the indigenous picture (the *amoxтли* of the Tonantzin), which they were now beginning to call Guadalupe.

On 15 May 1556 the Archbishop of Mexico wrote a letter to the Council of Indios⁴² announcing his division into parishes of the area that had previously been looked after by the mendicant order. The letter shows that Montúfar had been informed of the large numbers of faithful Indios participating in these cultic practices and of a growing trend among the Spanish to visit the chapel. In April/May 1556⁴³, therefore, he removed this pilgrimage church of the Indios of

pilgrimage church of Tepeyac must have taken place in 1555/56. Cf. Francisco Miranda, *op. cit.*, 239. According to Eduardo O’Gorman, the indigenous image was painted shortly before September 1556. Cf. *idem*, *op. cit.*, 14.

³⁷ According to an accusation made by Fray Francisco Bustamante, the Provincial Superior of the Franciscans, in a sermon on 8 September 1556, the creation of the Codex of Tonantzin was ascribed to the indigenous tiacuilo (painter and author) Marcos Cipac; cf. Richard Nebel, *op. cit.*, 127.

³⁸ Cf. Francisco Miranda, *op. cit.*, 241.

³⁹ Cf. Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, 1576, 352.

⁴⁰ Cf. Ernesto de la Torre/Ramiro Navarro, *Testimonios históricos guadalupanos*, Mexico 2004, 149.

⁴¹ Cf. Eduardo O’Gorman, *op. cit.*, 33.

⁴² Cf. *Epistolario VIII*, 70–96.

⁴³ Cf. Eduardo O’Gorman, *op. cit.*, 40.

Tepeyac⁴⁴ from Franciscan supervision and placed it under the direct jurisdiction of the metropolitan episcopal see.

Representatives of the Church hierarchy had no compunction in quickly adopting the “new” cult of Guadalupe. After all, it gave them an opportunity to win over the indigenous population and thus to weaken and eventually terminate Franciscan control. Such a decision inevitably came at a price, since it meant tolerating some of the practices and customs of the ancient indigenous cult that were more or less compatible with Christian doctrine. Obviously, the Indios very much appreciated this new development, as the mendicant order had been quite intolerant on this point.⁴⁵

The Archbishop’s ruthless enforcement of his decision⁴⁶ was met with envy, indignation and hostility on the part of the Franciscans, who felt his action was by no means inspired by the Gospel or by care for the Indios, but purely by economic interests and political pragmatism.⁴⁷ After all, as the Archbishop knew nothing about the indigenous culture of these people nor did he take their religious syncretism in Tepeyac very seriously and was therefore encouraging their return to idolatry.

On Sunday, the 6th of September 1556, Archbishop Montúfar gave a highly charged sermon, exacerbating the open confrontation between himself and the Franciscans.⁴⁸ In it he paid special homage to Our Dear Lady of Guadalupe of Tepeyac and renewed his episcopal recognition of her veneration. He encouraged the European colonisers to adhere to this veneration and encouraged the Indios to follow the edifying example of the Spanish.⁴⁹ As he believed the indigenous population were “not admirers of Our Dear Lady”, he was keen to find a way of making this cult attractive to them. He, therefore, confirmed

⁴⁴ Cf. Francisco Miranda, *op. cit.*, 236–367.

⁴⁵ Cf. Francisco Miranda, *op. cit.*, 138.

⁴⁶ Cf. Francisco Morales Valerio/Oscar Mazín, *op. cit.*, 135.

⁴⁷ Montúfar’s desire to promote the indigenous cult in Tepeyac was interpreted by the Franciscans as an initial blow to the “Indian church” they had tried to establish in Mexico – cf. Jacques Lafaye, *op. cit.*, 318–319. In reality it was by no means the first blow, but merely the latest in a whole series, although one which produced unexpected effects, as documented in the *Información* of 1556.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Información* 1556, 218–250.

⁴⁹ Cf. Eduardo O’Gorman, *op. cit.*, 69.

the genuineness of the miracles wrought by the image of Our Dear Lady⁵⁰, even though they were based on mere rumours.⁵¹

The Franciscans considered Montúfar's sermon nothing short of scandalous. Two days later, on Tuesday, 8 September, they replied to the Archbishop in the form of an address given by the Provincial Superior, Fray Francisco Bustamante. The place chosen for his response was the Chapel of St Joseph. Used regularly by indigenous believers, it was located at the most important Franciscan convent, the Convent of St Francis of Mexico. In his address, attended by all the civil leaders, the Viceroy and the members of the Council, Bustamante denounced any veneration of the image at the pilgrimage church of Tepeyac, called Guadalupe by the Spanish, describing it as harmful to the Christian faith of the indigenous people. He said it was irresponsible for someone with no knowledge of the religious syncretism at Tepeyac to promote the veneration of an image which had been painted only shortly beforehand by an Indio called Marcos. It was wrong, he maintained, that such veneration should be supported on the basis of some alleged miracles with no prior confirmation of their genuineness. Bustamante then proposed that whoever was responsible for inventing the miracle story about the indigenous image should be whipped as punishment. He vigorously urged the Crown to use its privilege as patron of the Church and undo the damage caused by the Archbishop. Clearly, the Provincial Superior added, the Archbishop had no idea what to do with all the generous alms donated by the pilgrimage church.⁵²

Archbishop Mantúfar did all he could to refute the two most damning accusations levelled at him by Bustamante, i.e. that he had been encouraging the Indios to commit idolatry and that he had been preaching unconfirmed miracles.⁵³ Indeed, he even went so far as to deny the accusations outright. The next day, Mantúfar instigated a biased investigation against Bustamante with a view to obtaining a court decision that would impose disciplinary penalties on the

⁵⁰ Información in 1556 testifies to the Archbishop's large-scale ignorance of the religious beliefs and practices of the Indios. Apparently, far from merely admiring Our Dear Lady, they actually worshipped her. After all, she was their goddess Tonantzin.

⁵¹ Cf. José Manuel Villalpando, *op. cit.*, 31.

⁵² Cf. Jaques Lafaye, *op. cit.*, 140.

⁵³ Cf. Eduardo O'Gorman, *op. cit.*, 97.

Provincial Superior for the scandal he had caused and the insubordination he had shown. In no way was the Archbishop prepared to accept any lack of respect and even less would he tolerate any public allegations concerning his person.⁵⁴

At the centre of this dispute between the Archbishop of Mexico and the Franciscans was the image of the Virgin that was venerated in Tepeyac. Consequently, the *amoxtli* of Tonantzin, now known as Guadalupe, faced potential destruction.

The author of the narrative

The authorship of *Nican Mopohua* is a complex issue which still has not been fully resolved. Most scholars agree that the text is of indigenous origin. However, opinions differ on whether the literary origins of the text can be ascribed to a single person.

Some scholars tend to ascribe the authorship of *Nican Mopohua* to a Nahuatl man called Antonio Valeriano. They include the clergyman, Luis Becerra Tanco (1603–1672)⁵⁵, the scholar, Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645–1700)⁵⁶, the chronicler, Lorenzo Boturini (1698–1755)⁵⁷, and two historians, Edmundo O’Gorman (1906–1995)⁵⁸ and Miguel León-Portilla.⁵⁹

Some of the reasons given by these scholars for Antonio Valeriano’s authorship of *Nican Mopohua* are based on his personal and intellectual biography. He was a man of the people, an Indio, a *macehual*.⁶⁰ In 1536 he was chosen as a student for the newly founded College of Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco. One of his teachers and subsequent colleagues there was Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, who described Antonio Valeriano as “the first and wisest”⁶¹ among his

⁵⁴ Cf. Francisco Miranda, op. cit., 265.

⁵⁵ Fortino Hipólito Vera, quoted by Richard Nebel, op. cit., 208.

⁵⁶ Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, *Piedad Heróyca de don Fernando Cortés*, Madrid 1960, 24.

⁵⁷ Lorenzo Boturini, quoted by Miguel León-Portilla, op. cit., 25.

⁵⁸ Eduardo O’Gorman, op. cit., 32–33.

⁵⁹ Cf. interview by Adriana Cortés with Miguel León-Portilla, in: *Jornada Semanal*, 17 December 2000, 2.

⁶⁰ Cf. Hernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, *Crónica Mexicáyotl*, Mexico 1998, 171.

⁶¹ Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, Mexico 1988, 79.

trilingual students. He was part of the research team which produced two major works: *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* and *Colloquios y doctrina christiana*, both erroneously ascribed to Sahagún. Valeriano was also the “Governor” of Azcapotzalco and, soon after, “Judge and Governor” of the Indios of Mexico Tenochtitlan right up to his death in 1605.

The priest and Nahuatl expert, Ángel María Garibay (1892–1967), believed that the *Nican Mopohua* had been compiled and drawn up at the College of Tlatelolco between 1560 and 1570 and that it was the work of a literary team of young Indios put together by Fray Bernardino de Sahagún to help him with the “editing and publication of ancient documents”. The team comprised Antonio Valeriano from Azcapotzalco, Alonso Vejerano from Cuauhtitlán and Martín Jacobita and Andrés Leonardo from Tlatelolco. All of them worked “under the supervision and leadership of Fray Bernardino”.⁶²

Garibay considers Sahagún’s Indios to be the authors of *Nican Mopohua*. He concedes, nonetheless, that these writings also reveal Sahagún’s influence, “albeit remotely”.⁶³ This latter remark prompted Edmundo O’Gorman⁶⁴ and Richard Nebel⁶⁵ to reject his entire hypothesis on the grounds that Bernardino de Sahagún clearly opposed any form of religious syncretism between the “idolatrous religious convictions” of the indigenous population and European Christianity. Researchers subsequently ignored Garibay’s hypothesis.

The Nahuatl Community of Tlatelolco

In my view⁶⁶, the drafting of *Nican Mopohua* between 1557 and 1565 was the outcome of some complex and profound intellectual work carried out by a group of Nahuatl Indios. This group, which I will refer to as the *Nahuatl Community of Tlatelolco*, consisted of some outstanding *tlamatinime* – wise men from among the Nahuatl – along with several indigenous intellectuals: Antonio Valeriano from

⁶² Ángel María Garibay, *Historia de la literatura náhuatl*, Mexico 2000, 761.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 764.

⁶⁴ Eduardo O’Gorman, *op. cit.*, 155–159.

⁶⁵ Richard Nebel, *op. cit.*, 214.

⁶⁶ Since I regard this approach as the most sensible, I will examine the first part of Garibay’s views but from a critical perspective and with new lines of argument.

Azcapotzalco, Alonso Vejerano and Pedro de San Buenaventura, both from Cuauhtitlán, Martín Jacobita and Andrés Leonardo, both from Tlatelolco, and possibly also Agustín de la Fuente.⁶⁷

Unlike Garibay, I am working on the assumption that Bernardino de Sahagún was not involved in writing *Nican Mopohua*. After all, as he himself said in his writings, he was against any form of religious syncretism. Moreover, the mendicant monk felt he knew exactly what had been happening on the Hill of Tepeyac – something which he openly rejected because, in his eyes, it involved worshipping an invention of the devil and glossed over the idolatry that was taking place.⁶⁸

The wise old *tlatatinime* who had been involved in writing *Nican Mopohua* were among the few survivors of the invasion, the conquest and the campaigns against idolatry conducted by the mendicant monks in their endeavour to “eradicate the demonic cult at its very roots”. The *tlatatinime* had taught in one of the seven *calmecac*⁶⁹, the places in Mexico / Tenochtitlan where the most advanced knowledge and teachings of their culture were to be found.⁷⁰

The members of this group were aged between 40 and 45. In their childhood, the youngest among them had experienced the traumatic invasion and conquest of all the Nahua dominions in Central Mexico. During the first few years, when the Spanish were still consolidating their rule around 1536, these youngsters were selected as students for the newly founded College of Santa Cruz in Tlatelolco. The original aim of the college was to train indigenous clergy. Students received the same education as European clergy, i.e. *trivium* (grammar, rhetoric and logic), *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry and a modicum of astronomy and music), philosophy and theology. In addition, they acquired some rudimentary knowledge of indigenous and European history. The students knew three languages. In view of their high academic standards, they were to form an elite of indigenous intel-

⁶⁷ Cf. Ángel María Garibay, op. cit., 761.

⁶⁸ Cf. Bernardino de Sahagún, *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*, 1576, 352.

⁶⁹ Calmecac were schools for the sons of the Aztec nobility (translator's note).

⁷⁰ Cf. Ángel María Garibay, op. cit., 761.

lectuals destined to assume teaching, management and government posts in the society of New Spain.

The final version of the document reveals two things. Firstly, its authors were extremely knowledgeable about the world of the Nahua and the deliberate structuring of its ethical and mythical core. After all, they themselves were, or at least had been, part of this culture and had received knowledge which was only accessible to the *tlamatinime*. Secondly, the text shows great skill in the clear handling of rhetoric and of Christian theological terminology, as the six above-mentioned indigenous intellectuals had acquired all the relevant knowledge in Tlatelolco.

The hidden agenda of *Nican Mopohua*

So what was the intention or hidden agenda of the Nahua Community of Tlatelolco in writing *Nican Mopohua*? There are various answers to this question. As Eduardo O’Gorman sees it, the author’s intention was to “ascribe the status of sacredness to the image of Guadalupe by giving it a supernatural basis”.⁷¹ Richard Nebel takes the view that “the author aimed to establish an inextricable link between the Gospel and the event of Guadalupe and to turn this link into a ‘Mexican’ foundation for the Christian faith in both literary and historical terms.”⁷² León-Portilla speaks about “a notorious attraction” that was “exercised by the pilgrimage church of Guadalupe in Tepeyac, where [...] Tonantzin was venerated”. It was a place, he says, where “the authors felt compelled to write a narrative that spoke about the origin of the painting and its subsequent veneration”.⁷³

When *Nican Mopohua* was written, it was based on the oral tradition of the various indigenous communities, drawing mainly on the Nahua poem *Cuicapeuhcayotl* and using the structure of a *neixcuitilli*,⁷⁴ (the same structure is also found in the Spanish legend of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the Extremadura).⁷⁵ In my view, there were

⁷¹ Eduardo O’Gorman, op. cit., 54.

⁷² Richard Nebel, op. cit., 235–236.

⁷³ Miguel León-Portilla, op. cit., 44.

⁷⁴ Neixcuitilli were theatrical performances, written or rewritten by mendicant monks to show the Indios that God, the Virgin Mary and the saints have many ways of favouring those who seek refuge in them. Cf. Miguel León-Portilla, op. cit., 44.

⁷⁵ Richard Nebel has written a comparative historical study of the legend of Guadalupe

a variety of reasons for the writing of *Nican Mopohua*. First of all, there was a desire to salvage and justify the indigenous cultic veneration that had been accorded to the image of Tonantzin Guadalupe on the Hill of Tepeyac by applying all the depth and all the metaphorical and conceptual wealth of the philosophical language of the Nahuatl.⁷⁶ Secondly, the authors wished to restore the place, image and original meaning of Tepeyac to its real masters, the indigenous people. Thirdly, it was their intention to give a critical exposition of the way in which cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue should have proceeded between the Europeans and the indigenous population and, in doing so, to employ the same editorial principles that had been used in two other works: *Colloquios y doctrina christiana* and *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España*. Fourthly, the authors planned to demonstrate how two seemingly contradictory cultural and religious traditions could be consciously and critically reconciled based on respect for, and mutual recognition of, the other party's dignity and culture. Finally, they were keen to show the indigenous population that it was possible to build a social order which was new and fair for all and would pay due respect to them as the victims of the invasion, conquest and colonial rule.

Cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue in *Nican Mopohua*

Nican Mopohua is a deliberate attempt to initiate cross-cultural dialogue between two totally different worldviews from a critical perspective and with an emphasis on justice. Encounters, mutual complementation and enrichment pave the way for a new cultural understanding which is both Amerindian and European in character and, as the *tlamatinme* would put it, is *paca, iocuxca*, "without violence, without death, in peace and tranquility."

The critical process embarked upon by the Nahuatl community of Tlatelolco in writing the narrative has a number of distinctive features. It starts with an emphatic affirmation of the authors' own matrix of cultural roots: their language, history, traditions, worldview, religion, philosophical thinking and social organisation. The hegemonic colonial

in Spain and the narrative of Guadalupe in Mexico in order to bring out the influence of the former on the indigenous narrative; cf. Richard Nebel, *op. cit.*, 39–164.

⁷⁶ I therefore assume that the image was salvaged and continued to be venerated resulting from its Christian sanctification through a historical narrative.

system, on the other hand, which has its own culturally conditioned social structure, worldview and values, follows the logic of its own definition and reproduction, which means totally disparaging, negating, concealing, ignoring and destroying the matrix it has colonised.

Secondly, the authors of the narrative subject it to thorough self-criticism to forestall any naïve, apologetic or fundamentalist exaltation of their own cultural tradition and to develop the critical elements and the potential inherent within it. The authors perform their analysis on the hermeneutical and critical premises of their own culture, which enables them to read, understand and reconstruct it in a way that brings out all its liveliness, fruitfulness, sustainability and vigour.

Thirdly, since they are fully aware of their own cultural tradition, they use it as a starting point to develop a critical cross-cultural and inter-faith dialogue between two traditions which had already become constituent of, and fundamental for, the indigenous community, i.e. the original Nahua traditions and the European Christian traditions. Their purpose in doing so was to provide the recipients of their narrative with ways and means of offering cultural resistance, to give them fresh hope and to create ideological conditions for them (awareness raising) which, by explaining and justifying historically and materially liberating practices, would help them overcome the situation that was annihilating them.⁷⁷

The philosophical and theological narrative pursues a fundamental aim which is critical, positive and forward-looking in character. The authors' far-reaching criticism is readily apparent throughout the document and stands in stark contrast to much of the systematic, hegemonic, theoretical and material output of the time. It focuses primarily on presenting an alternative way of proceeding that involves contact and dialogue. It entails two cultures living together rationally, fairly and peacefully on the basis of mutual respect and in mutual recognition of each other's dignity.

Critical cross-cultural dialogue

The authors of *Nican Mopohua* were fully aware that any "dialogue" conducted by the European members of the Franciscan

⁷⁷ Cf. Enrique Dussel, *Filosofía de la cultura y la liberación*, Mexico 2006, 54–56.

order with the Nahua leaders (*hueytlatoanime*) and their wise men or philosophers (*tlamatinime*) was not a real dialogue at all, because it ignored the most fundamental rules of interaction, thus making it impossible to develop any dialogue-focused relationship based on equality.

To prevent any repetition of this practice they took special care to reveal and thus unmask any instances of asymmetry in situations where genuine dialogue might turn into its opposite. At the same time, they drafted an ethical and critical proposal for an inter-subjective relationship that would ensure equality of material and formal conditions among the participants.

They presented the first aspect of this line of argument in several encounters between Bishop Juan de Zumárraga and the *macehualli* Juan Diego, all of which provided examples of asymmetrical, inter-subjective interaction. The dialogue between the two men follows a systemic logic whereby each encounter and interaction eventually degenerates into a monologue, in which allowance is only made for the “reasoning” of the more powerful personage who forces his will and his conditions on the other in the guise of an “agreement”. Needless, the outcome of such interaction in no way changes the social structure of the system in which it takes place. On the contrary, it reinforces or reproduces its existence. The asymmetries forming part of the logic in such interaction are many and varied. They are interconnected and, together, form an authoritative whole:

- social asymmetry (the Lord who commands versus the Indio who obeys);
- economic asymmetry (the rich versus the deliberately impoverished);
- racial asymmetry (white European versus dark-skinned Indio);
- geopolitical asymmetry (hegemonic centre versus periphery reduced to misery);
- religious and cultural asymmetry (educated bishop versus ignorant new convert);
- symbolical and geographical asymmetry (Mexico City versus Hill of Tepeyac);
- symbolical and theological asymmetry (representative of God versus member of an idolatrous culture).

This monologue is the product of an asymmetrical relationship which “naturally” exists between the ruler (i.e. the rich, white, educated European bishop) and the ruled (the poor, dark-skinned, ignorant Indio – the *macehualli*). The authors of the narrative then show the difference between a monologue of this kind and – as the second plank in their narrative strategy – the dialogue that develops between Tonantzin Guadalupe and Juan Diego, which is characterised as follows:

- it takes place on the periphery at Tepeyac;
- it is conducted in the language of the oppressed and reflects their symbolical and cultural mindset;
- it involves recognition and respect for the poor as well as acknowledgement of their dignity;
- it is full of kindness, affection, intimate familiarity and sensitivity. – It provides all the information that the other person needs to decide. – It respects the other person's way of accepting decisions. – Not only is the Indio's aspiration to the truth recognised, but his understanding of the truth is also respected and acknowledged. – Ethical responsibility is accepted for someone who has suffered violence. – The relationship between the two people engaged in dialogue is symmetrical in every possible way. – There is honest recognition of everything that is factually correct and of the critical points raised by the other person. Such points are accepted, expected and encouraged. – Both parties are prepared to retract a personal standpoint to arrive at a consensus. – The principle of coherence is of the essence: where there is consensus, agreement is followed by implementation. – Any power that is invested in the other person through consensus is understood to constitute a service and is exercised accordingly.

This dialogue represents a new critical and alternative logic of inter-subjective interaction in both its deconstructive and positive aspects. A detailed examination of it reveals the criteria of a genuine cross-cultural encounter based on respect and mutual recognition of dignity.

All this shows that the Nahua Community of Tlatelolco was not endeavouring to restore the old indigenous worldview and social order,

nor was it simply attempting to adjust to the ideological and social model of European Christianity. On the contrary, it wished to create something new and to do so in a realistic and responsible manner in light of the prevailing circumstances and the challenges they posed.⁷⁸ The idea was to blend the ethically and critically dynamic substance of both cultural and religious traditions on the basis of equality and in such a way that the resulting new system would serve as an inspiring principle and a normative point of reference as regards unity and coherence between the communities.⁷⁹

To achieve this, the authors of *Nican Mopohua* accorded equal theological status (theological and cultural symmetry) to the sacred faith of the Indios and to European Christianity. They created a dialogue between the two traditions to understand and interpret them not just conceptually and semantically, but also in respect of their worldviews. In other words, they sought to approach them in a holistic manner and to harmonise them. This is borne out by their use of various theological concepts, each consisting of two words, one in Spanish and the other in Nahuatl, e.g. *Dios inantzin* (“little mother of God”), *nelly Teotl Dios* (“true God”). It is also manifest in the attribution of characteristics to the Christian God which typically described their indigenous divinity. Moreover, new concepts were created in the Nahuatl language, describing theological ideas that were of a strictly Christian nature:

- *in teoyotl* (“divine things”): the essence of what is proclaimed through the Gospel;
- affirmation of numerous dogmas central to the Christian faith: the uniqueness of God, the incarnation of God, Jesus as Messiah and Redeemer, and the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God and humankind⁸⁰; and

⁷⁸ Cf. Richard Nebel, *op. cit.*, 289.

⁷⁹ What they aspired to here was genuine inculturation, understood as follows: “[...] the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular local cultural context in such a way that the experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs, and unifies a culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about ‘a new creation’”. Cf. letter of Pedro Arrupe (translator’s note: former Superior General of the Jesuit Order) 1978, quoted in: R. Mate, *Inculturación*, <http://cdn.theologicalstudies.net/55/55.1/55.1.4.pdf> (10.11.2018).

⁸⁰ Cf. Richard Nebel, “Santa Maria Tonantzin Virgen de Guadalupe – Religiöse Kontinuität und Transformation in Mexiko”, in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 40 (1992), 214.

- recognition of the offices of priests and bishops and of the Church as an institution, encompassing its pastoral practice and territorial jurisdiction.

In view of the killings and oppression the indigenous people had suffered through the rule of their colonial masters and the European motherland, the authors decisively affirmed everything that was life-giving and liberating in the two traditions:

- Tonantzin is the bearer of a life-giving divinity;
- the project of Tepeyac, which she herself promotes, leads to comprehensive liberation – subjectively, socially, historically, universally and transcendentally;
- her son, Jesus Christ, is openly and readily described as *temaquixtiani*, i.e. “redeemer” or “liberator”;
- the redemption/liberation that is proclaimed starts here and now, just as the Kingdom of God does.

The locus enuntiationis

The cross-cultural dialogue was designed and structured with reference to the cultural universe of the indigenous population. Although the *locus* of the Indios was deemed contemptible, dispensable, worthless and irrational⁸¹ in the context of European Christian rule over the Central American cultures, it was to assume a major role in *Nican Mopohua* at the levels of academic theory, hermeneutics, ethics, politics and theology. It was to be the place which presented challenges to the authors, determining the substance and method of their thinking, and which they consciously adopted as their own *locus enuntiationis*. This origin and this source of inspiration and procedure gave rise to a positive critical discourse which culminated in the *qualcan, yeccan*⁸² (“the proper, good and appropriate place and the proper, good and appropriate time”⁸³), thereby helping to effect far-reaching changes to the reality to which they referred.

⁸¹ Cf. Clodomiro Siller, “El método de la evangelización en el Nicamopohua”, in: *Estudios Indígenas* 2 (1981), 281.

⁸² Bernardino de Sahagún, *Coloquios y doctrina cristiana*, Mexico 1986, 193.

⁸³ Analogously, this is time in the sense of *kairos*, i.e. the right time in the biblical and prophetic tradition or the now time referred to by Walter Benjamin.

Not only did the authors base their theological practice on the real-life situation of the Indios. They went a step further by including the negative aspect (i.e. vulnerability and death) of this situation in a manner which revealed critical discernment and commitment. In social and historical terms it was treated as the *locus* from which their discourse emerged and developed.⁸⁴ The suffering body of the indigenous people was a collective victim of socio-political processes and structures that had been forced upon them by the hegemonic motherland and instrumentalised by its colonial slaves. This body functioned as the *locus enuntiationis* of their theoretical argument.

The elevation of this *locus enuntiationis* in ethical and epistemological terms enabled the authors to develop an awareness that the indigenous people – the victims of European invasion, conquest, colonisation and rule – were not merely an inevitable by-product of these events (i.e. a necessary and thus unavoidable evil) but were rather an integral part of the very system of dominion itself, which the European motherland had thrust upon its colonies. They were two sides of the same coin, with the Indios forming the hidden, negated, despised and concealed side.⁸⁵ On this basis it was not difficult to develop an awareness that the indigenous population and the wealth that had been stolen from them were the most important condition for the superiority displayed by the Spanish motherland. There could be no hegemonic centre of a European motherland without rule over a non-European colonial system on its geographical periphery. There could be no accumulation of wealth without robbery, exploitation and impoverishment; no rulers without the ruled; no perpetrators without victims.

By adopting a partisan stance of proclamation and accusation the authors showed clearly that the alleged innocence of the Spanish hegemonic system in respect of the transformation of the indigenous people into victims was nothing of the kind. The authors' epistemological and hermeneutical starting point was their people's "location" of socio-historical pain, from which they moved on to show that the European hegemonic motherland was directly responsible for the

⁸⁴ Cf. Enrique Dussel, *Política de la liberación – historia mundial y crítica*, Madrid 2007, 15.

⁸⁵ Cf. Enrique Dussel, "Europa, modernidad y eurocentrismo", in: Edgardo Lander, *La colonialidad del saber – eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales – perspectivas latinoamericanas*, Buenos Aires 2000, 49.

situation of vulnerability and death suffered by the indigenous population – a situation brought about by means of systemic, structural and ideological mechanisms which it had imposed and enforced in order to exercise its colonial rule of exploitation and oppression.

This epistemological and hermeneutical location also enabled them to draw up and apply categories which gave them the theoretical tools to look at reality from a radically new and critical perspective. What the totalitarian system deemed to be the truth for its victims was revealed as a lie; what the powerful understood to be good was felt by those they oppressed as evil; what the rulers defended as justice for the weak was clearly exposed as injustice; what constituted wealth, abundance and comfort for the rich meant nothing but misery, hunger and disease for the poor. From this standpoint the authors could discern, criticise and denounce the fundamental inconsistencies of the hegemonic system: the unreasonableness of its reasoning, the lie behind its truth, the unfairness of its justice, the violence of its peace, the asymmetry of its equality, the perversity of its ethics, and the deadliness of its life.

The vulnerable indigenous people, symbolically represented in the narrative by Juan Pablo and Juan Bernardino, are thus a focus of articulation that can be seen throughout *Nican Mopohua* as the key criterion in an assessment of the positive claims of truth, universality, justice, goodness, equality, integrity, beauty and significance raised by the ruling hegemonic system of both the motherland and of New Spain.

Conclusions

Nican Mopohua is the first and most important document of indigenous Christian theology in the early modern age. Being the product of genuine inter-faith dialogue, it lays the ground for a totally new experience and a totally new theological understanding that is both indigenous and Christian. As we have seen above, it is not a translation or reiteration of fundamental Christian basics in Nahuatl, nor is it a subordination or adaptation of the indigenous faith to the Christian faith. Rather, it is an endeavour to devise a new and authentic philosophical and theological approach with a claim to universality or general validity. It incorporates and integrates the fundamental critical aspects of both religious traditions and thus

provides a genuine response to the cultural reality of those to whom it is addressed.

The theologians and philosophers among the Nahua appropriated, recreated and absorbed the Gospel message based on their own cultural worldview, while at the same time respecting their own cultural identity and that of the Gospel itself. In doing so, they properly “indigenised” the Christian faith. This process of genuine inculturation was by no means alien to the Christian faith. After all, it was itself Semitic in origin. At other times and in other places and regions it had already been “Hellenised”, “Romanised”, “Germanised” and “Slavicised”.⁸⁶ This honest and respectful effort at inculturation enabled the authors to develop a theology that was both cross-cultural and trans-cultural in character, one that was based on a conscious and respectful endeavour to integrate the message of the Gospel and the experiences of European Christians into the sacred worldview, lifestyle and environment of the indigenous Nahua in Central America.⁸⁷

The Nahua Community of Tlatelolco makes a clear statement on faithfulness to the Gospel of the *in Totemaquixticatzin, Totecuiyo Jesucristo* (“the one who set us free, our Lord Jesus Christ”). It requires a process of inculturation that involves choosing a hermeneutical and theological *locus enuntiationis* that focuses on the situation of others, i.e. the poor, the sick, the marginalised, the strangers and the orphans, in other words those who have fallen victim to the ruling hegemonic system, and then redrawing reality in its entirety.

The modern world we live in is characterised by a series of inter-related, contradictory global phenomena. These phenomena constitute and define the various societies within the global system, while at the same time bringing forth complex socio-cultural changes and causing clashes and conflicts of all kinds, both within and between them. The criticism, the structural design and the solution advanced by the Nahua Community of Tlatelolco in *Nican Mopohua* are undoubtedly helpful in understanding, tackling and resolving many of today’s problems and cross-cultural regional or global conflicts. After all, this indigenous narrative provides a historical

⁸⁶ Ibid. 261.

⁸⁷ Cf. Richard Nebel, *op. cit.*, 233.

and perceptive example of an attempt to understand and handle the problems arising from a clash of cultures and how a solution can be found in the context of a reasonable, critical, ethical and political framework.

Rain in the Ethiopian Antiphony (Dəgwa)

A case of inculturation

Daniel Assefa

Agriculture and cattle breeding depend heavily on rainfall in Ethiopia. Many aspects of Ethiopian life, including the cultures, follow the rhythm of the rainy and the dry seasons. How far are these aspects present in the Christian liturgy? Does nature, as reflected in the Ethiopian environment, have a place in the liturgical cycle? The motif of rain in the *Dəgwa*, the antiphony of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahədo* Church (hereafter EOTC), will be the focus of our attention. Among the hymns of the rainy season only those dedicated to Sundays will be discussed. The paper aims at showing an ancient process of inculturation whereby biblical themes enlighten the perception and appreciation of creation and whereby nature is integrated in liturgical prayers.

Background

The Dəgwa

The *Dəgwa* consists of hymns for major Christological feasts, for Sundays, for the Divine office and the veneration of saints, the martyrs and angels.⁸⁸ The liturgical periods structure the *Dəgwa* in three parts, namely, the season of John the Baptist, the season of mercy (*Astaməhero*) which include Advent (*Səbkat*) and the season of Easter which includes Lent (*Arbə'a Şom*). Besides the seasons and sub-seasons based on the liturgical celebrations, the *Dəgwa* includes another category, based on meteorological conditions. Under this category fall the rainy season, the season of fruits and the season of flowers.

⁸⁸ Cf. a monograph on the *Dəgwa* by Habtemichael Kidane 1998; cf. also Habtemichael Kidane 2005.

Rain in Ethiopia

Praying for rainfall is part and parcel of Christian liturgy. The lack of rain provokes special supplications and intercessions in Churches.⁸⁹ The scarcity of rain, leading to drought and famine, inspires also several songs and poems by peasants.⁹⁰ On the other hand, abundant rain often implies good harvest⁹¹ and a sign of God's blessing. One may expect some analogy between eager expectation of rainfall in Ethiopia and Palestine, unlike Egypt who depends on the river Nile. The main rainy season in Ethiopia is from mid-June up to mid-September. Liturgically, the season extends from the beginning of July (*sāne*) up to the beginning of October (*Mäskäräm*).⁹²

Beginning of hymns for the rainy Season.⁹³

The antiphony for the rainy season, corresponding with the solemn vespers of Sundays, begins with the act of sowing. The person who sows, scatters and reaps with trust in God. Yet, the poem evokes the richness of God's grace in many respects. From agriculture one passes to the praise of Sabbath⁹⁴, a work of God, a gift so that humanity may take rest.⁹⁵ The next sentence returns to agriculture, mentioning cosmological phenomena related to rain. God rolls up clouds, giving hope to the one who sows. The stanza closes with a theological motif: who is merciful like You (God)? Rain

⁸⁹ For the practice of rainmaking in Ethiopia among Christians and Muslims or practices in traditional religions, cf. Bustorf, D. *Encyclopedia Aethiopica*, vol. 4, 328.

⁹⁰ Oral and written literatures on peasants' feeling about the lack of rain are available in Ethiopia.

⁹¹ Too much rain with hail, especially outside the season, is harmful or destructive.

⁹² Emmanuel Fritsch, "The Ethiopian Liturgy" in *Warszawskie Studia Teologiczne* XII/2/1999, 71–116, here: 107.

⁹³ Cf. 546 of the *Dəgwa* published in 2006 according to the tradition of Misraq Godjam, in North West of Ethiopia.

⁹⁴ For the significance of Sabbath in the Old Testament, cf. E. Stolz, 1997. "Šbt, to cease, to rest", In: *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament* Ernst Jenni/Claus Westermann, translated from German in 1976, 1297–1302.

⁹⁵ In Gen 2:1- The Sabbath is blessed by God as the seventh day, the Day in which God ceased the work of creation. According to Exod 20:10–11, the people of God is summoned to respect the Sabbath because it is the Day of Rest. Deut 5:15 gives another reason for the need of respecting the Sabbath. The act of liberation or redemption becomes an important reason for the respect of the Sabbath.

is God's providence, the fruit of his mercy.⁹⁶ Most of the hymns often quote or allude to biblical passages, especially the Psalms, as shown below.

Give thanks to God⁹⁷, call his name
 Tell his deeds to nations
 Seek God and you will stand firm
 Seek his face all the time and pray God
 He will give you rain⁹⁸ of Tsädäy⁹⁹, He will shower blessings

After the insertion of material from the Psalms, probably the next stanza¹⁰⁰ focuses on the theological meaning of the Sabbath, created for human beings. One reveres the Sabbath through righteousness and proper conduct. The motif of the Sabbath is then intertwined with the motif of rain as shown below.

Revere the Sabbath, make righteousness
 For the Sabbath has been created for human beings
 (He is) the Lord of the Sabbath and the Father of mercy
 In whom islands put their hope
 You who open the rainy season each year
 Give us, O Lord, eyes that see

Next, follows the providential action of God vis-à-vis animals, beasts and birds. Sabbath is for human being and here the rain is for animals.

Blessed and glorified are you
 Great is your power that rests in heaven
 You who made Sabbath for Rest
 You gave food of righteousness
 To all animals of the fields and the birds of the sky

⁹⁶ The antiphony, perhaps for the sake of space, does not present the sentences in a poetic form; yet it is possible to detect here five sentences or lines that rhyme, as they finish with the same syllable.

⁹⁷ Cf. Ps 105:1; the Ethiopic term means also "to bow down".

⁹⁸ For rain as gift of God, cf. Wilfried Thiel, "God as creator and Lord of Nature in the Deuteronomistic Literature", in *Creation in Jewish and Christian Tradition* (JSOT supp. 319) London: Sheffield, 69–71, here: 66.

⁹⁹ Short rainy season or the time of sowing.

¹⁰⁰ The book does not have signals to distinguish one Stanza from another. It is easy to identify the shift when the rhymes change. But it is not always so.

If heavens are covered by clouds it is to “give food to all flesh”; the calming of the sea and the Sabbath rest are put in parallel. The sea is in fact personified and seems to echo the biblical symbolism of the sea. At the word of God and of Jesus in the New Testament, the sea that represents the powers of evil is silenced. Sabbath, the day of Christ’s resurrection is hence explained as the silence that comes from God, the redemption of God.

He who covers heaven with clouds
 He who gives food to all flesh
 He who irrigates the furrows
 The sea kept quite after hearing the word of her creator
 A great silence took place at Sabbath

Theological themes

God’s providence

In the *Dəgwa*, human beings are the object of God’s love. The rain as well as the rainy season is a manifestation of God’s love, especially for those who are hungry and poor. God is the one who loves human beings (*māfqāre sāb’*). Mercy is a consequence of such love as expressed in the hymn below.

He is the Lord of Sabbath
 King of Kings
 Glory of the angels
 He showers rain on earth
 He is the Lord of Sabbath
 Slow to anger and abundant in mercy
 God who changes (causes change)
 Who helps the poor, who comforts the afflicted
 God of hidden treasure, inaugurates the rainy season,
 bestows mercy
 From heaven, He gives rains
 He is the Lord of Sabbath
 Christ, God of mercy

God is asked to gladden human hearts and the face of the Earth as well. The joy comes from the blessing of earth, the gift of rain, but also the gift of rest and the gift of redemption. A synthesis is made of the three themes.

Bestowal of the Torah, gift of rain

An interesting analogy between the Torah and the rain is articulated in one of the hymns. Moses looks up towards heaven and prays. God tells Moses to respect his Law and his Sabbath. The gift of the Torah and the gift of rain are intertwined here.

Moses went up on a Mountain
 He called God on account of plagues
 For the sake of Israel
 Looking up to heaven, through his prayer,
 He brought down the Torah
 God spoke to Moses
 He said: "keep my commandments and my decrees"
 Revere my Sabbaths in righteousness
 I give to the Earth peace and rain
 That irrigates the Earth
 And he blesses the fruits

Personification of the earth

He who commands the clouds
 So that they may pour rain over all the earth
 In the place where God has willed,
 So that both the one who sows and the one who harvests may
 rejoice
 The earth saw Him and blessed Him and the Sea prostrate before
 Him

According to the above-mentioned hymn (*Dægwa*, p. 547), nature obeys God. Clouds, rain, the earth and the sea, personified, obey God. The Earth gives thanks to God and the Sea prostrates itself. The Earth praises God for the gift of water while, the Sea submits itself to God.

The life of Jesus

The hymns of the antiphony refer often to the Gospels. In a number of places, Jesus' entry in a synagogue and his call to revere his Sabbath is pointed out. First, it is not clear which biblical passage is meant. Was not Jesus frequently accused of not respecting the Sabbath? How can then the hymns put in the mouth of Jesus the

order of respecting the Sabbath? The possessive adjective offers perhaps a hint to get an answer. The Sabbath is the property of Jesus.

The hymn reads:

Jesus entered in the synagogue of the Jews
 He taught them and said to them: "respect my Sabbath"
 Jesus entered in the Synagogue of the Jews on Sabbath day
 He cast out demons and through his word he purified the lepers
 Jesus entered in the Synagogue of the Jews on Sabbath day
 He spat on the ground and made mud with his saliva and healed
 the blind

The allusion to John 9:6 where Jesus heals the man who was born blind seems to be obvious:

When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, (Joh 9:6 NRS)

In connection with what has just been said, several hymns affirm that Christ is Lord of Sabbath and master of nature.

He is the Lord of Sabbath (Sabbath)
 King of Kings
 Glory of the angels
 He showers rain on earth
 He is the Lord of Sabbath
 Slow to anger and abundant in mercy
 God who changes (causes change)
 Who helps the poor, who comforts the afflicted
 God of hidden treasure, inaugurates the rainy season,
 bestows mercy
 From heaven, He gives rains
 He is the Lord of Sabbath
 Christ, God of mercy

In the following hymn, Jesus is called the "Son of God" generous in his deeds, large in his gifts of rain and of the blessings of the Sabbath.

Praise to you Lord of Sabbath
 Who inaugurates the rainy season every year

The Lord who does according to his will
 The deeds of the Son of God are rich
 According to the time, you inaugurate the rainy season
 He made the Sabbath for rest

The theme of redemption is then added to the gift of Sabbath and the rainy season. Peace and salvation are intermingled with the gifts of nature, namely time (Sabbath) and rain.

Delightful is the Word of the Unique Son of God
 Good are his deeds
 He is giver of peace and savior of the World
 He inaugurates the rainy season every year
 He irrigates the earth
 He is the Lord of Sabbath and Father of Mercy
 Unique Son (p. 549)
 Guide of righteousness and Peace
 The Son of God entered in the Synagogue on a Sabbath Day
 The one who commands the clouds
 So that they shower rain upon the earth
 He blessed the Sabbath because He rested on it from all his
 work.¹⁰¹

The peace of the resurrection

The connection of the theme of Sabbath with the resurrection is visible in the following hymn which evokes Jesus' greetings at Easter.

Moses and Aaron praise you
 So that you may pour rain with your word of command
 He inaugurates the rainy season
 He shows forgiveness
 He gives blessings
 He made the Sabbath, Rest for human beings
 He taught them and He said: "Peace be with you".

Significance of Sabbath

The relation between Jesus and the Sabbath seems to have been inspired by Mk 2:28 whereby Jesus says that the "Son of Man

¹⁰¹ Cf. Gen 2:3.

is the Lord of the Sabbath". Yet, in the latter, the call to respect the Sabbath is not Jesus' initiative but the claim of the Pharisees. One possible explanation for the apparent contradiction or anachronism would be that the hymn is giving a more comprehensive connotation to the term "Sabbath". If the Sabbath belongs to Jesus, it means it touches the various dimensions of his ministry, including his death and his resurrection. The apparent anachronism disappears if one understands by Sabbath of Jesus his resurrection.

Now the Sabbath has a variety of significance in the Old Testament¹⁰² and in Judaism.¹⁰³ One may notice that several layers of meaning of the Sabbath are already present in early Christianity, especially among the Church fathers. Sunday, the first Day of Creation, by also being the Day of Resurrection acquires a rich range of meaning. The resurrection brings about a new creation, that is, the link with the theme of creation. From the point of view redemption, Sunday is connected to the celebration of the Rest which is bestowed by Christ.¹⁰⁴ The Ethiopian Antiphonary too reflects various meanings some of which are most probably inspired by the Patristic writings. The antiphonary combines the weekly feast of Sabbath with the yearly ones like Christmas or Easter.

The Hope of creatures

In the solemn vespers of the weekly feast of Sabbath during the rainy seasons, hope is among the most important motifs. One verse reads: "the eyes of all souls hope in you". In fact, the very first line of the first stanza affirms that the one who sows scatters, hoping in God. Hope as the virtue that accompanies the sower who runs short of water becomes more significant; the sower looks at the sky and at the clouds with humility and trust.

In the following hymn the act of hope is extended to other creatures. Reference is particularly made to islands but also to animals of the field and birds of the sky. The Lord of Sabbath inaugurates the rainy

¹⁰² For the meanings of the term "Sabbath" and for the relationship between different biblical texts that deal with the theme of Sabbath, cf. Michael Fishbane. *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel*, Oxford 1988, 130–134, 145–51, 478–479, 482–487.

¹⁰³ Cf. Daniel Falk, "Sabbath" in: *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, Michigan, 2010 1174–1176.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Jean Danielou. *The Bible and the Liturgy*, Notre Dame 1956, 222–241.

season, blesses the fruits of the earth and gives peace to those who are near and far.

God says: “islands hope in me
 On me lean Islands, animals of the field and birds of the sky
 All creatures look up towards me with devotion¹⁰⁵
 I am the one who inaugurates the rainy season every year
 I prepare the rainy season for the Earth
 I bless the fruit of the Earth
 I give peace to those who are far and those who are near
 I am the Lord of Sabbath

Inculturation

Proximity to nature

The environment and the climate are part of the land, well before the introduction of Christianity in Ethiopia. One would imagine expressions and prayers to deities to obtain fertility. The dependence on heaven does not disappear at the preaching of the Gospel. On the contrary, hope in Christ's salvation and hope in God's providence are intertwined. The hymns have inserted several natural phenomena of their surroundings. They invite the Christian to observe the clouds, to hear the thunders, to see the lightning and the rains. Besides, attention is given to the gradual progress of the natural phenomena. From sowing, through the various stages of rain, one passes to the last stage, namely the one of harvest.

In a secular setting one would admire the events, maybe compose a poem or entertain a scientific outlook. This does take place in today's Ethiopia too. In the Ethiopian antiphony, without rejecting the other attitudes, it is an approach enlightened by faith which is proposed.

The Ethiopian environment is, in other words, taken seriously. As an important experience that marks ordinary life and culture, it is not disconnected when people express their Christian faith in prayer. If what one believes is also what one prays, liturgy has served to link nature's manifestation and the teachings of the Gospel. Christian truths are joined with the blessings of nature.

¹⁰⁵ That is with hope.

Enriching of the perception of nature

The Antiphonary offers a deep and multifaceted contemplation of the Sabbath in the light of the resurrection. Drawn from the Scriptures, the Sabbath is linked with the motif of nature, more specifically with rain, due to its divine source. God is the source of creation, of the Sabbath and of the rain. Besides, as the Sabbath implies freedom from slavery or exploitation, nature's blessing guarantees freedom from starvation, misery and humiliation. Creation, Providence, Redemption are interweaved. The rain reflects God's care for his creation, God's providence and God's redemption. Some analogies may be made with the relationship between nature and the liturgical Cycle in the Old Testament.

The contextualization is however not just a mere borrowing from O.T texts that reflect the Palestine context, including its climate. There is more to that. Surely, the psalms and other O.T texts have been used in the Ethiopian Antiphonary. Yet, the prayers are adapted to the Ethiopian context. The action of introducing the motif of rain in the liturgy and the antiphonary might have also been done in other ancient Churches and there could have been influences that may be clarified through further studies. Yet, one may not speak of Egyptian influence on Ethiopia in this regard, given that the motif is rare in Egypt.

Conclusion

Much reference to rain is not expected from people who do not depend on rainfall. In the *Dəgwa* rain becomes important and is observed in the light of Christian faith. The Antiphonary begins with God the creator, who rested on the Sabbath, who gives the Torah, renews the covenant with Noah and redeems. Prayers are addressed, especially during the rainy season, to God who is the only responsible of rain. Biblical themes are integrated with the daily life of the faithful. The particular attention given to nature and to the indigenous climate is a good example of inculturation and the antiphonary is a remarkable synthesis of biblical themes and the Ethiopian context.

Early Approaches of Inculturation in Church History

Edmund Kee-Fook Chia

Two Phases of Inculturation

Even if the term “inculturation” is of recent origins, the process it points to is as old as Christianity. That the good news of Jesus of Nazareth was first recorded in Greek rather than in Hebrew is testimony to this. That there are different accounts of the Gospel is yet another verification that the early church felt it necessary that the good news be presented through the theologies and visions that the different communities could resonate with. This process of enabling the Gospel to be more readily understood and accepted by the peoples from a variety of cultural and linguistic traditions continued over the centuries and millennia. Pope Francis makes this point in his first apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “The history of the Church shows that Christianity does not have simply one cultural expression, but rather, ‘remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving fidelity to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, it will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root’” (§116).¹⁰⁶ This expression of the faith in the cultures of the peoples was part of the natural and subtle course of development demanded by the exigencies of the space and time.

With the advent of the Christian Empire, however, this original and natural process of inculturation did not proceed as naturally and at times was even forbidden altogether. With the European

¹⁰⁶ Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*: On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World (24 November 2013), http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html#_ftn88.

captivity¹⁰⁷ of the religion in the first millennium and the missionary movement which accompanied what is sometimes audaciously called the “age of discovery” in the second millennium, the Gospel began to be transmitted uniformly throughout the empire, even to communities in non-European cultures. The Christian faith was thus presented in European garb, to the extent that faith and culture was almost indistinguishable. The disintegration of the colonial empire towards the end of the second millennium gave rise to independent nation-states which in turn gave rise to the search by native Christians of their own indigenous identities. The process of inculturation took center stage again, this time on a more conscious and explicit level. This process is better known as the engagement or dialogue between Gospel and culture.

Thus, in discussing the early approaches to inculturation, it is necessary to look at both the original and natural phase as well as the modern and more conscious phase. The two phases differ qualitatively in approach and the means employed are a function of the theology which inspires them. Therefore, this article will begin by exploring the original phase of inculturation which took place from the beginnings of the Christian movement, going through the early church and the medieval period and missionary phase, right down to the period shortly before the Second Vatican Council. Next, it will focus on the modern phase, an engagement which actively began only in the mid twentieth century, especially in the churches at the peripheries and margins of Christendom. This is because these churches had been functioning for centuries as colonies or branches of their mother-churches in Europe. Inculturation, therefore, was at once an individuation and liberation process as it was a self-determination endeavor. It enabled the local churches to express themselves in the symbols and theologies consistent with their own national and cultural identities.

The Original Phase of Inculturation

In a 1988 document on *Faith and Inculturation*, the Vatican’s International Theological Commission posited that the “typical beginnings of the inculturation of the faith” is the first Pentecost event in Jerusalem. It was on this day, which symbolically marks the birth

¹⁰⁷ Joseph Mitsuo Kitagawa, *The Christian Tradition: Beyond its European Captivity*, Philadelphia 1992.

of the church, that “the breaking in of the Holy Spirit inaugurates the relation of the Christian faith and culture” (§23).¹⁰⁸ Pentecost was when the twelve disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak to the crowds in tongues, although “each one heard them speaking in the native language of each” (Acts 2:6). Even as the disciples were all Galileans, Christian scriptures tell us that they were able to reach out personally to the crowd who had come from at least a dozen different cities or regions.

Two important themes can be discerned from this New Testament event. Firstly, cultural pluralism was already very much present among the first Christians, as it would continue to be throughout the history of the church. Secondly, the disciples’ approach was to reach the diverse crowd in ways they could best understand the Gospel message, beginning with enabling them to hear the good news in their own languages. This is the approach to inculturation inaugurated by the first disciples of Jesus. It was precisely in view of the diversity and the church’s response to it that Pentecost can be seen as providing guidance for how the universality of the church is to be understood. Indeed, French ecclesiologist Yves Congar regards Pentecost as the celebration of the universality of the One Holy Catholic Church.¹⁰⁹

To be sure, New Testament theology insists that “faith in Christ does not require that new believers abandon their culture to adopt that of the law of the Jewish people” (§25).¹¹⁰ This was the approach taken by the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) which taught that Gentile Christians did not have to convert to Judaism nor abide by the Jewish religious practices such as circumcision and the strict dietary laws. German theologian Karl Rahner regards Jewish Christianity as the first moment of the church, with the second moment being that of Gentile Christianity. He calls the third moment—which began only in the mid-twentieth century—World Christianity.¹¹¹ Each of these moments involved different ways in which the Gospel was accom-

¹⁰⁸ International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation* (1988), http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_cti_1988_fede-inculturazione_en.html (02.03.2017).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Yves Congar, *The Mystery of the Church*, London 1960, 47.

¹¹⁰ International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation*, op. cit., no. 25.

¹¹¹ Cf. Karl Rahner, “Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council”, in: *Theological Investigations*, vol. 20, New York 1981, 77–89.

modated to the differing circumstances and cultural practices of the people of the time.

In inculturating their newfound faith during the first moment, the Jewish Christians had to engage in a conversation with their Jewish heritage as well as with the Greco-Roman and Hellenistic ethos and contexts which pervaded the Mediterranean. It was in view of these influences that the dialogue between Gospel and culture intensified. With the advent of Gentile Christianity soon after, the emerging Christian movement had to discern which aspects of the Hellenistic's religion and culture could be accommodated to their faith in Jesus the Jew whom they proclaimed as Christ, the messiah. Entranced by the mystical insights and philosophical speculation of Greek culture, the Christians found it fit to incorporate them into Christian theology. Hence, Greek ideas such as *Logos* and *Sophia* were inculturated into the new faith. Likewise, the theology of classical Greek which emphasized the oneness of Truth was also incorporated especially since it augmented the Jewish monotheistic tradition. This, however, was not the case with the Hellenistic religious practices. According to Indian theologian Sebastian Painadath, the mythologies and mystagogies were abhorred as superstitious and idolatrous. In analysing this era of the church's engagement with religion and culture, Painadath has this to say: "In short, Christians adopted Greek philosophies but rejected Greek religions."¹¹²

The extent of the Greek culture's influence upon Christianity can never be overstated. Pope Benedict XVI even advanced the thesis that the Hellenistic synthesis of the New Testament was indeed "an initial inculturation" of the Christian faith and insists that the "Greek heritage forms an integral part of Christian faith."¹¹³ While most will agree with his first clause, many theologians vehemently disagree with the second as it simply means that any attempts at dehellenizing Christianity is in part illegitimate.¹¹⁴ Pope Francis seems to disagree

¹¹² Sebastian Painadath, "The Church's Theology of Religions: The Early Christians," in: Edmund Chia, *Dialogue: Resource Manual for Catholics in Asia*, Delhi 2002, 92–94, here: 93.

¹¹³ Benedict XVI, *Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections* (Regensburg, Munchen, 12 September 2006), http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html (02.03.2017).

¹¹⁴ For a critique of Benedict's thesis, cf. Peter. C. Phan, "Speaking in Many Tongues: Why the Church Must be More Catholic," in: *Commonweal*, 08.01.2007, 16–19.

with the assertion as well, as evidenced by this statement in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “While it is true that some cultures have been closely associated with the preaching of the Gospel and the development of Christian thought, the revealed message is not identified with any of them; its content is transcultural”.¹¹⁵

Inculturation in Early Church History

In any case, the adaptation of the Gospel message to the local culture continued in the theology and practice of the church fathers and especially in the liturgical expressions of the early Christian communities. As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, the empire’s juridical and cultural vocabulary was employed to facilitate understanding of Christian practices. The rite of baptism, for example, was explained in contractual terms; the ritual of anointing was described according to Roman athletic customs.¹¹⁶

With Constantinian Christianity, the church’s ecclesiastical structures followed closely the political arrangements of the time, as succinctly expressed in this statement by American missiologist Stephen Bevans: “Bishops were treated like members of the imperial court, wore vestments that rivalled those of the emperor, and presided over imperial political divisions called dioceses.”¹¹⁷ With Christians taking charge of state institutions, worship took on a grander scale and shifted from homes to basilicas, and whistles and bells were introduced to the liturgies which became ever more auspicious, complex, and ritualized. The early ecumenical councils also used non-biblical Greek philosophical concepts, such as *homoousios*, to define Christological doctrines and, in the Western church, Latin culture was introduced as the official ecclesiastical norm, including the use of Latin as the liturgical language.¹¹⁸ This was to last for centuries and imposed all over, including in churches outside of Europe.

During the Middle Ages theologians strove hard to inculturate the Gospel message, enabling it to cohere with the philosophical and

¹¹⁵ EG 117.

¹¹⁶ Desmond Crowe, “Inculturation: Challenge to the Local Church”, in: *East Asian Pastoral Review* 18 (1981) 3, 204–298, here: 264.

¹¹⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, New York 1992, 8.

¹¹⁸ Gavin D’Costa, “Inculturation”, in: Ian A. McFarland et al, *Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology*, Cambridge 2011, 237–239, here: 237.

theological systems of the time. The theology of Thomas Aquinas, for example, had as its foundation the newly discovered works of the pre-Christian Aristotle, just as Augustine was postulating his theology a few centuries earlier on the basis of the pagan Plato's thought.¹¹⁹ It was also during this era that the scholastic theologians were interpreting the story of the Tower of Babel as divine teaching that it was human arrogance and sin which caused ethnic and linguistic diversity.¹²⁰ Unfortunately, this theology that pluralism is a form of punishment from God contributed in part to the decline in future efforts of inculturation.

Inculturation during the Mission Phase

The so-called discovery of the "new world" was accompanied by large-scale missionary activity to what was hitherto known as the heathen lands. This phase saw the Gospel transplanted, along with European culture, to mission territories with radically different cultures and religious traditions. Even as sacred texts were translated into the languages of the people, Indian ecclesiologist Evelyn Monteiro avers that "the association of Catholic faith with European culture, transplantation of feudal ecclesial structures in the 'new world', and the fear of pagan beliefs and practices affecting the purity of Christian faith proved great stumbling blocks for inculturating the Christian message."¹²¹ As such, most attempts at inculturation were generally viewed with suspicion.

Instead, what happened was, according to Sebastian Painadath, "the type of Christianity that evolved within the political structures and cultural fabric of Europe was exported to the other continents as the normative type of the Church."¹²² Evidence that this was indeed a reality of the times can be gleaned from a 1659 document issued by the Sacred Congregation *De Propaganda Fide*, part of which reads: "Do not attempt in any way, and do not on any pretext persuade these people to change their rites, habits and customs, unless they

¹¹⁹ Cf. Francis X. Clark, "Inculturation: Introduction and History", in: *Teaching All Nations* 4 (1978), 211–225, here: 215.

¹²⁰ Cf. Bernhard Anderson, "The Babel Story: Paradigm of Human Unity and Diversity", in: *Concilium* 1 (1977), 63–70, here: 63.

¹²¹ Evelyn Monteiro, *Church and Culture: Communion in Pluralism*, Delhi 2004, 55–56.

¹²² Sebastian Painadath, *op. cit.*, 105.

are openly opposed to religion and good morals. For what could be more absurd than to bring France, Spain, Italy or any other European country over to China?"¹²³

Exceptions, of course, do abound. The efforts of a number of Jesuit priests such as Matteo Ricci in China, Roberto de Nobili in India, José de Anchieta in Brazil, and Alexandre de Rhodes in Vietnam are some of the more well-known. Ricci's case deserves further elaboration as it goes to the heart of the challenges confronting inculturation. Often known as the Chinese Rites Controversy, it has even been described by a writer for the USF Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History as "the greatest internal struggle in the long history of the Catholic Church notwithstanding the early councils."¹²⁴ A variety of issues resulted in the controversy—which began in the seventeenth century—being prolonged. The gist of it can be deduced from the following statements:

[W]hether a handful of Chinese Christian converts might or might not continue to perform rituals in honor of their ancestors, and some related problems such as how to render the name of God in Chinese (the 'terms' question); whether Christian mandarins might perform rituals to Confucius and other official rituals such as those to the guardian spirits of their city; and more general issues still of accommodation of Western Christian liturgy and church law and practices to Chinese conditions.¹²⁵

Ricci and his confreres justified the participation of Christians in ancestor veneration as they considered the rites to be purely civil acts, devoid of any religious significance. It was their way of saying that Christians need not shun the cultural practices of their ancestors. The contemporary missionaries of their time disagreed on grounds that it promoted superstition and idolatry. No resolution was forthcoming for almost a century until Pope Benedict XIV issued the 1794 bull *Ex quo singulari* prohibiting the rites. The prohibition was enforced for almost two centuries until its reversal in the 1930s. Meantime, many Catholic

¹²³ Joseph Neuner/Jacques Dupuis (Eds.), *The Christian Faith in the Doctrinal Documents of the Catholic Church*, New York 1982, 309.

¹²⁴ Paul A. Rule, "The Chinese Rites Controversy: A Long Lasting Controversy in Sino-Western Cultural History", in: *Pacific Rim Report* 32 (2004) 1, 2–8 www.ricci.usfca.edu/research/pacrimreport/prr32.pdf (08.05.2017).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

converts in China, Korea, and Vietnam were persecuted on account of their refusal to participate in the rituals. Such can be the life-or-death consequences of the engagement—or lack thereof—of the Gospel with the culture in some contexts. Fortunately, things have changed in the modern era as, according to Malaysian theologian Jonathan Tan, “East Asian Catholics worldwide are allowed to participate in modified forms of ancestor veneration rites which comprise only the supposedly civil ritual elements and such other elements which have been secularized over the passage of time.”¹²⁶

The Modern Phase of Inculturation

As alluded to earlier, “inculturation” is a neologism and its concerns arose on a more conscious level only in the middle of the last century. The word itself results from an integration of the theological significance of *incarnation* with the anthropological concepts of *enculturation* and *acculturation*.¹²⁷ Incarnation, as we know, is the act of the divine taking on human form. Enculturation, also known as socialization, refers to the learning process necessary for one to be inserted comfortably into a new culture. Acculturation, on the other hand, refers to the encounters of two cultures and the resultant changes arising from such encounters. Inculturation, therefore, entails both learning about the new culture as well as contributing towards its development as a result of the encounter. It is a theological act if it reflects the incarnation and the life and message of Jesus as, according to the *Faith and Inculturation* document, “every Church sent to the nations witnesses to its Lord only if, having consideration for its cultural attachments, it conforms to him in the first *kenosis* of his incarnation and in the final humiliation of his lifegiving passion”.¹²⁸

Pedro Arrupe, the Jesuit superior general of the 1970s, is often regarded as the one who popularized the term in his 1978 letter to the whole Society of Jesus, part of which reads:

¹²⁶ Jonathan Y. Tan, “Encounter between Confucianism and Christianity”, in: Felix Wilfred, *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*, Oxford 2014, 428–443, here: 437.

¹²⁷ Cf. Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, New York 1988, 1–16.

¹²⁸ International Theological Commission, *Faith and Inculturation*, op. cit., no. 29.

Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about “a new creation.”¹²⁹

Inculturation is thus an active and dynamic process. It has also been described as, in the words of American theologian Thomas Groome, a “*dialectical encounter* between an already cultured version of Christian faith and another culture that is either new to Christianity or has aspects not yet explicitly permeated by it.”¹³⁰ In other words, essential to the process of inculturation is mutual criticism and enrichment between the local culture and the Christian faith. A variety of other terms have been used to signify this task: contextualization, indigenization, localization, etc. This is an approach to inculturation more pervasive in the modern phase of the church’s history. The uniqueness of this approach is that the Christian faith needs to be in dialogue with the local cultures. Dialogue is an active verb and begins with mutual respect and entails a two-way process of learning and contributing to each other’s development.

Sri Lankan theologian Aloysius Pieris points out that inculturation can never be effected by a mere translation or adaptation of Christian symbol systems, as was done in the missionary phase of the church’s history: “It can never be induced artificially. The Christian tends to appropriate the symbols and mores of the human grouping around it only to the degree that it immerses itself in their lives and struggles. That is to say, inculturation is the by-product of an *involvement* with a people rather than the conscious target of a program of action.”¹³¹

It is therefore not enough to merely have changes in liturgical practices so as to incorporate the symbols of the cultures or to use indigenous art in church buildings or music in Christian worship or local terminologies in Christian theology. The methods of creative

¹²⁹ Cf. Pedro Arrupe, “Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation”, in: *Studies in the International Apostolate of Jesuits* 7 (1978), 2.

¹³⁰ Thomas Groome, “Inculturation: How to Proceed in a Pastoral Context”, in: *Concilium* (1994) 2, 120–133, here: 121.

¹³¹ Aloysius Pieris, *An Asian Theology of Liberation*, Quezon City, 1988, 38.

assimilation and dynamic equivalence and other versions of the translation and adaptation models as used in earlier times fulfilled these previous approaches of inculturation.¹³² They were useful first steps but do not really represent a true two-way encounter and dialogue with the local cultures. Authentic inculturation, as the modern phase has come to understand it, entails nothing short of a total commitment to the culture and its people. Its means is through participating in the life-space of the people, including the joys and struggles of their daily living.

Inculturation and Vatican II

The opening sentence of the Vatican document on the Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) informs this modern-day approach to inculturation: “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ” (§1).¹³³ It speaks of how the church must be engaged with the true realities of the people and especially the poor. The message of *Gaudium et Spes* has to be read alongside a number of other fundamental documents of the Second Vatican Council. In particular, the documents on the church (*Lumen Gentium*), its statement on religious freedom (*Dignitatis Humanae*) and on other religions (*Nostra Aetate*), as well as on missionary activity (*Ad Gentes*), together with *Gaudium et Spes*, constitute the corpus of teachings on the relationship of the church *ad extra*. They provide the vision for its engagement with the world outside of Catholicism.

While prior to Vatican II the vision emphasized that of the church against or above the world,¹³⁴ with Vatican II the focus has shifted to seeing how the church can best continue its mission within the world, at once animating it as well as being animated by it. In other words, the world outside of Catholicism has now become a dialogue partner. The word “dialogue,” in fact, was first introduced into the vocabulary

¹³² Cf. Robert J. Scheiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, New York 1985, 6–12; Anscar Chupungco, “Liturgical Inculturation: The Future That Awaits Us”, in: Rhoda Schuler *Liturgy in a New Millennium: Occasional Papers #1*, 2000–2003, Indiana 2006, 248–260, www.valpo.edu/files/assets/pdfs/chupungco2.pdf (02.03.2017).

¹³³ GS 1.

¹³⁴ For a discussion on the various approaches the church has taken towards the world and its culture, cf. H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York 1951.

of official church statements only during the Second Vatican Council and specifically with Pope Paul VI's 1964 encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, where he insists that "the Church must enter into dialogue with the world in which it lives" (§65).¹³⁵

As for the term inculturation, the first time it entered into the vocabulary of official church documents was when Pope John Paul II used it in his 1979 apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*. The text was actually based on an intervention by Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila at the Synod on the topic of catechesis which was held two years earlier. John Paul II states:

As I said recently to the members of the Biblical Commission: "The term 'acculturation' or 'inculturation' may be a neologism, but it expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of the Incarnation." (94) We can say of catechesis, as well as of evangelization in general, that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches (§53).¹³⁶

John Paul II repeated these assertions and elaborated on them in a 1980 address to the bishops of Kenya in Nairobi: "The 'acculturation' or 'inculturation' which you rightly promote will truly be a reflection of the Incarnation of the Word, when a culture, transformed and regenerated by the Gospel, brings forth from its own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought" (§6).¹³⁷ He further discussed what he meant by inculturation in yet another address, this time to the participants of the national congress of the Movimento Ecclesiale di Impegno Culturale in 1982 when he said: "The synthesis between culture and faith is not only

¹³⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*: On the Church (6 August 1964), http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_06081964_ecclesiam.html (25.03.2017).

¹³⁶ John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*: On Catechesis in Our Time (16 October 1979), no. 53, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_16101979_catechesi-tradendae.html (25.03.2017).

¹³⁷ John Paul II, To the Bishops of Kenya (7 May 1980), no. 6, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/speeches/1980/may/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_19800507_vescovi-kenya.html (25.03.2017).

a requirement of culture, but also of faith [...] Faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, nor entirely reflected upon, or faithfully experienced.”¹³⁸

In short, inculturation had been conceived by the church’s magisterium from very early on as not only necessary and essential to the faith but also involving a two-way process of dialogue. Both sides need each other; they are mutually involving entities. It is only in dialogue that the church can fulfil its vision of evangelization in the spirit of the incarnation. And it is only in dialogue that the church can inculturate itself to the local cultures. To do this the church has to be fully immersed in the contexts and cultures of the people and participate in their lives and everyday struggles.

Inculturation and World Christianity

This participation in the lives of the people is part of the new openness to the world inspired by the *aggiornamento* or renewal council of Pope John XXIII. Aloysius Pieris posits that the transformation resulting from renewal councils “irrupts from below and works its way up to the top volcanically.”¹³⁹ In other words, the implementation of Vatican II, especially regarding the dialogue between Gospel and culture, comes primarily through how Catholics at the peripheries interpret and implement its teachings. This is another way of saying that the churches from the rest of the world will be the ones providing leadership to the church in the West in attending to the challenges of inculturation. This is in keeping with Rahner’s vision of the movement of the church from the “rest to the West,” resulting in what has now come to be known as World Christianity.

Since Vatican II each of the continents in the southern hemisphere has made a unique contribution to World Christianity. The Latin American church’s concerns with political and economic issues such as poverty and oppression gave rise to Liberation Theology.

¹³⁸ As cited in Francesco Follo, “Inculturation and interculturality in John Paul II and Benedict XVI”, Oasis: Christians and Muslims in a Global World (29 March 2010), <http://www.oasiscenter.eu/articles/interreligious-dialogue/2010/03/29/inculturation-and-interculturality-in-john-paul-ii-and-benedict-xvi> (25.03.2017).

¹³⁹ Aloysius Pieris, “The Roman Catholic Perception of Other Churches and Other Religions after the Vatican’s Dominus Jesus”, in: East Asian Pastoral Review 38 (2001) 3, 207–230, here: 215.

Inculturation in Latin America, according to Chilean Holy Cross priest Diego Irarrazaval, begins with the realization that it is “a many-sided process, given the many-sided presence of the Spirit of God in the peoples and religions of the earth.” He then quickly adds that “this inculturation makes a preferential option for the poor and their cultural capabilities, that is to say, both catechizers and catechized are agents of inculturation in community.”¹⁴⁰

From the culturally diverse tribal-based continent of Africa it was the church’s engagement with the challenges brought about by centuries of colonial cultural and anthropological domination that is its most significant contribution to the universal church. As Nigerian philosopher Kanu Ikehukwu notes, inculturation in Africa begins with recognizing that “Africans have come of age and can no longer be treated as footnotes in missiological activities in their home land. They have the right to reflect on Christianity in their own terms and express their faith in a theology and religious life relevant to their cultural situation.”¹⁴¹ Elaborating on that, Tanzanian theologian Laurenti Magesa has this to say: “The foundations of the faith have already been laid in Africa. [...] What the African church needs now is to grow into them in maturity. This is possible only by taking seriously and accepting the process of inculturation.”¹⁴²

Meanwhile, the church’s irruption in Asia—the cradle of all the major religions of the world—is primarily in the area of interreligious relations and the development of theologies of dialogue and theologies of religions. But Asia is also at the same time a region of the many poor and of the many cultures. Thus, in the context of Asia, inculturation is brought about, first of all, through dialogue with Asia’s poor, in view of facilitating their integral liberation. Secondly, because other religions have their own views of what liberation and salvation mean and because the majority of Asia’s poor owe their allegiance to these other religions, the process of inculturation must also include the dialogue with the religions. In short, inculturation, interreligious

¹⁴⁰ Diego Irarrazaval, “Inculturation”, in: *New Dawn of the Church in Latin America*, New York 2000, 42.

¹⁴¹ Kanu Ikehukwu Anthony, “Inculturation and the Christian faith in Africa”, in: *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 17 (2012) 2, 236–244, here: 238.

¹⁴² Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa*, New York 2004, 155.

dialogue and the process of integral liberation are mutually involving ministries, all of which are integral to the evangelizing mission of the Church in Asia.¹⁴³

These three ministries of inculturation, interreligious dialogue and the process of integral liberation constitute what the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) call the Triple Dialogue.¹⁴⁴ In a message to his brother bishops at the most recent FABC plenary assembly held in Vietnam in 2012, Cardinal Rosales of the Philippines recounted that it was at the first assembly, held in 1974, that "Asia's bishops, reflecting on the situation, history and needs of the Asian people decidedly assigned to themselves the challenges of Evangelization among the people: the Triple Dialogue." (p. 2).¹⁴⁵ The Triple Dialogue takes its lead from *Ecclesiam Suam* but expands on it to urge Catholics to be in dialogue (i) with the poor, (ii) with the cultures, and (iii) with the religions of Asia.

Inculturation as Evangelization

This doctrine of the Triple Dialogue has been asserted as "mode of life and mission" for the church in Asia. It is the new way of being church and it is what evangelization in Asia stands for. It is Asia's contribution to the universal church's understanding of evangelization. The call for a dialogical church is at once a call for authentic evangelization in view of facilitating a truly inculturated church. It is a church which seeks to express the message of the Gospel in the culture and milieu of the people, much the same way the early Christians proclaimed their faith in Jesus in the Greco-Roman context of their time. It does this by engaging in a true dialogue with the local realities and by immersing itself in the lives of the people. In so doing the Gospel is expressed in new forms each and every time a new culture embraces it. This is the contemporary approach to inculturation.

¹⁴³ Cf. Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, "Toward an Asian Theology of Dialogue," in: Edward Schillebeeckx and Interreligious Dialogue: Perspectives from Asian Theology, Eugene 2012, 133–134.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. "Instrumentum Laboris of FABC X Plenary Assembly", in: Catholic Bishops' Conference of Vietnam, 10 December 2012, <http://cbcvietnam.org/Church-Documents/instrumentum-laboris-of-fabc-x-plenary-assembly.html> (02.03.2017).

¹⁴⁵ Renewed Evangelizers for New Evangelization in: Asia: Message of X FABC Plenary Assembly, Xuan Loc 2012, 2, http://www.fabc.org/index_10th_plenary.html (02.03.2017).

This can even be regarded as a new measure of success for evangelization. It is when the peoples are able to give the good news a new look and a new face. It is when the Gospel speaks to them through the language and idioms of their own culture as a result of having been immersed and involved in it. When that happens, the Gospel reveals itself in the culture just as the culture expresses the Gospel. In *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis avers to this when he says that “once the Gospel has been inculturated in a people, in their process of transmitting their culture they also transmit the faith in ever new forms; hence the importance of understanding evangelization as inculturation”.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ EG 122

Understanding Revelation and Inculturation

Inculturation and Revelation

Klaus Krämer

Inculturation is one of the key concepts in post-conciliar mission theology. The special significance of this relatively recent concept derives initially from the fact that it lays the ground for the theological interpretation of a process which has exerted considerable influence over the past few decades, especially in former mission areas: that of implanting the faith in different social and cultural contexts. The diversity of this process highlights the wealth of cultural and religious experiences, which gives the faith a distinctive form in its respective context. On the one hand, inculturation is bound up with religious doctrine. It can be understood as a concept in contextual theologies that focus on the relationship between the faith and other religions and the cultural forms to which they have given rise. On the other hand, inculturation also has to do with liturgy, religious art and the nature of Christian life in marriage, the family and society.

The missionary encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* defines inculturation as “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures”.¹⁴⁷

Inculturation brings the values of the Gospel to life in the respective cultures by positively absorbing what is good in them and regenerating them from within.¹⁴⁸ The ambivalence inherent in inculturation requires distinctions to be made. Where, on the one hand,

¹⁴⁷ Johannes Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* on the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate, 7 December 1990, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html, no. 52; abbreviated below to RM.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*; cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* On Evangelisation in the Modern World, 8 December 1975, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html, no. 20; abbreviated below to EN.

can context-related and cultural elements be positively absorbed in order to give the most authentic expression to the Gospel message in the respective life context? Where, on the other hand, does the Gospel message, as a normative requirement, adopt a critical stance towards people's lives and their culture, call them into question and confront them with new challenges? It is in this second dimension that the critical function of the Gospel in particular, becomes apparent with regard to the culture concerned. Wherever this critical function is not taken seriously enough, allusions to culture can quickly turn into an excuse to justify the existing relations in an inappropriate manner and thus ultimately to fight shy of asserting the Gospel's claim. Having said that, I should make it quite clear that there is a Gospel claim which is non-negotiable, because it calls people's lives and deeds into question irrespective of their culture.

The two fundamental dimensions of inculturation are closely connected with the theological understanding of divine revelation. Firstly, the experience of creation means that every person has access to the dimension of the divine, which finds expression in the religious traditions of individual cultures.¹⁴⁹ This understanding of revelation based on creation theology must be seen in connection with access to the sacred story. In God's history of salvation with his people of Israel, which culminates in the Christ event, God turns to man with a demand to which he expects a response. The faith response itself remains context-related; it is formulated within the respective culture. That raises the question of how this normative demand of the Christian faith, which is founded in the revelation, can be so clearly grasped that both the potential for an inculturated form of belief can be tapped and its limits readily discerned. What is required here is an appropriate set of criteria accompanied by the corresponding methods and procedures.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Pope Paul VI, *Nostra Aetate*, Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, no. 2. The Pope refers here to precepts and teachings in other religions which, though differing in many aspects from the ones the Catholic Church holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a "ray of that Truth which enlightens all men". His remarks are based on the realisation that the divine message of salvation is present, in embryonic form at least, in all cultures. Cf. the article by Martin Üffing on "The Dynamic Impetus of Believing Differently" in this volume, 129–150.

Models of theological interpretation for the relationship between revelation and culture

This issue hinges on clarification of the relationship between culture and revelation in the process of inculturation. Potential answers come in the form of various models of inculturation, which I can deal with only briefly here.¹⁵⁰ The mission theology debate began with the theory whereby inculturation was seen essentially as a pastoral method in which due account was taken of the culturally determined comprehension of the addressees in order to facilitate access for them to the essence of the Christian faith (accommodation theory). Underlying this theory was the concept of a normative core of Christianity in which a distinction is made between essential and non-essential elements.¹⁵¹ Hence, cultural adaptation takes place predominantly in liturgy, architecture and religious art. Ultimately, however, and notwithstanding all the adjustments undertaken, Christianity remains a Western, European-influenced religion.¹⁵²

The theological understanding of inculturation took a major step forward with the realisation that the relationship between culture and the Gospel cannot be conceptualised in solely external terms – rather like the notion of a core and a shell – but that the starting point should be an interpenetration of both realities. This is the only way in which evangelisation can be interpreted as an inner process of transformation and regeneration within the respective culture. Of significance here is the realisation that, from the very beginning, we encounter the Gospel in a culturally determined form. Hence there can be no “culture-free” Christianity. In this respect Delgado rightly criticises the term “inculturation”, which implies that there is a faith, as if stripped of culture which has to be implanted in a “religiously indifferent culture”. However, there is no such thing as a faith stripped of culture or a culture free of religion.¹⁵³

A theological interpretation of this inner penetration rests essentially on the fundamental Christological statements on the incarn-

¹⁵⁰ Cf. the article by Martin Üffing on “The Dynamic Impetus of Believing Differently” in this volume, *ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Cf. the article by Mariano Delgado in this volume entitled “Inculturation – An Intrinsic Quality of Christianity”, 3.

ation.¹⁵⁴ The formula of Chalcedon clearly defines the unity and diversity of divine and human nature in the person of Jesus Christ: “one and the same is Christ (...), who is recognised in two natures as unalloyed, immutable, inseparable and indivisible, although this union in no way precludes the difference between these natures”.¹⁵⁵ This notion is developed in depth in the concept of perichoresis, which highlights the duality of the natures communicated in the singularity of the person: the two natures penetrate each other as fully as body and soul do in a human being.¹⁵⁶ The Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium* makes analogous use of this Christological figure in order to clarify the relationship between the earthly church and the mysterious body of God. It says they should not be seen as two separate entities; rather “they form one complex reality which coalesces from a divine and a human element.”¹⁵⁷

While the complex reality model (LG 8) provides a useful point of departure for determining the relationship between culture and revelation, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei Verbum*) – with its analogous application of the incarnation paradigm to an understanding of the Holy Scripture as God’s Word expressed in human language – takes us closer to the issue at hand. According to this constitution, God spoke to us through human beings in the manner in which humans communicate. The conciliar text compares this “marvellous condescension” of eternal wisdom with the incarnation: “just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men”, so the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse.¹⁵⁸ The interpreter of Sacred Scripture, in order to see clearly what God wanted to communicate to us, must carefully investigate what meaning the sacred writers really intended, and what

¹⁵⁴ On theoretical lines of argument in pneumatology and creation theology cf. the article by Martin Üffing on “The Dynamic Impetus of Believing Differently” in this volume, 129–150.

¹⁵⁵ Heinrich Denzinger, “Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen”, in: Peter Hünemann, Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen, 37th edition, Freiburg i.Br. 1991, no. 302.

¹⁵⁶ This notion was developed by Gregory of Nazianzus and Maximus the Confessor, cf. Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott*, Freiburg i. Br. 1997, 192–216.

¹⁵⁷ LG 8.

¹⁵⁸ *Dei Verbum* 13

God wanted to manifest by means of their words.¹⁵⁹ Consideration must, therefore, be given to the cultural and historical context in which the Scripture arose. Close attention must be paid to environmentally influenced thought, language and narrative patterns as well as to “patterns men normally employed at that period in their everyday dealings with one another.”¹⁶⁰ The text emphasises that the normative content of the biblical texts can only be grasped by means of a careful examination of its temporally and culturally determined form. It is crucial to point out here, too, that the biblical texts cannot be seen in isolation but must be interpreted in the light of the content and unity of the entire work – taking into account the living tradition and the analogy of the faith (*sensus plenior*).

That brief digression into the theology of the Holy Scripture makes it abundantly clear that listeners to the Word only ever encounter the message of the faith in a culturally determined form. This applies first of all to the initial proclamation, which was made in the Judeo/Grecian cultural context. An examination of the culture in which the biblical texts arose is indispensable in order to grasp the main substance of the Holy Scripture. What is true of the Holy Scripture can be transferred analogously to all the forms faith takes. We encounter the authority and relevance of the message of the faith in the culturally determined manner of its proclamation. However, it is not identical with the latter but must be consciously distinguished from it. Despite the ongoing relevance of the Jewish-influenced initial proclamation, the manner of the faith does not remain bound to this cultural context throughout all time; it can and, indeed, must be translated into other cultural contexts. This can only happen in a complex hermeneutical process in which the interacting cultural systems pervade each other to such an extent that the proclaimed content can be transposed in accordance with its deepest meaning from its traditional form of expression into the new context of meaning, thereby assuming a fresh but authentic guise. If this hermeneutical process is successful, it is then also of significance for the bringer of the message. For in the encounter with the new, hitherto alien culture and the associated clarification processes the content of the message can be discerned in a deeper and more distinct manner. To that extent, inculturation as

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 12.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

a hermeneutic process can also facilitate deeper penetration into the substance of the revelation itself (*sensus plenior*).

A paradigmatic inculturation process

The first major inculturation process in the early days of the church was the transition from the Jewish cultural environment to the Hellenistic world. Since a certain normative significance attaches to this inculturation process in respect of dealings with the church and the questions they prompt, it is necessary to take a closer look at the process itself. The Acts of the Apostles, in particular, gives an account of this decisive step. The book provides accounts of meetings with people influenced by ancient religiousness and Greek philosophy. Time and again it is Paul more than any other who tries to gauge what his listeners can grasp. An outstanding example of his efforts is the speech he gives to the council of the Areopagus¹⁶¹, in which he takes up ancient criticism of the gods and tries to link the Stoics' concept of the unity of the human race with biblical teaching on creation. However, Acts also provides evidence of how difficult intercultural dialogue can be, citing the popular response to the healing of the lame man in Lystra.¹⁶²

Notwithstanding all the difficulties and the resistance encountered, Acts tells of the positive response of gentiles listening to the proclamation of the apostles. Peter is said to have unconditionally baptised the gentile captain Cornelius.¹⁶³ This act sparked a conflict with the representatives of the Jewish Christian communities which revolved around the controversial question of whether gentiles were obliged to undergo circumcision and to comply with the principles of Jewish ritual law before being baptised. These two issues highlight the difference between Jewish culture and ancient Hellenistic culture. For non-Jews the obligation to undergo circumcision was one of the main obstacles preventing them from converting to the Jewish faith. This explains the large number of so-called "God-fearing" people who were attracted by the religious doctrine and spirituality of Judaism and participated, in as far as they were allowed to, in religious services in the synagogue, but who fought shy of taking the final step to

¹⁶¹ Acts 17:22–31

¹⁶² Acts 14:15–17

¹⁶³ Acts 10:44–48

conversion because circumcision was so alien to their culture that they were loath to take the step.

A comparable sense of oddness attached to the very detailed Jewish ritual laws, especially dietary rules and purity requirements, which were difficult to comprehend and accept for those with a Greek-influenced lifestyle. The resolution of this controversial issue was of great theological significance. Was formal affiliation to the chosen people of Israel, which was contingent upon circumcision and compliance with the law, indispensable before one could share in the promises of salvation and was it, therefore, a necessary prerequisite for baptism? Or did baptism open up a separate path for non-Jews, as a consequence of which circumcision and compliance with the law could be regarded as forms of cultural expression within Jewish Christian communities and hence were not indispensable for Christians from a Greek cultural background wishing to attain salvation?

This issue was resolved at the Council of the Apostles in Jerusalem.¹⁶⁴

It was rendered necessary by the conflict that had arisen in Antioch. Paul and Barnabas were sent by their community to Jerusalem to clarify the issue with the apostles and the elders. The gathering began with a fierce argument. The turning point paving the way to a resolution of the conflict was a speech given by Peter,¹⁶⁵ in which he recalled that, according to God's choice, the gentiles were to learn the good news from him and so become believers. For Peter it was clear from the revelation of God's will that Gentile Christians should not be burdened by any imposition of the law. His speech transformed the mood of the participants. Their silence indicated that a completely different atmosphere now pervaded the meeting.¹⁶⁶ The apostles and elders were absorbed in thought. They had not yet worked out their position, but their reserved attitude signalled that essentially they had an open mind. This cast a new light on the report given by Paul and Barnabas on what they had experienced

¹⁶⁴ Acts 15:1–35; in respect of what follows see the account of the Council of the Apostles given in: Klaus Krämer, *Den Logos zur Sprache bringen. Untersuchungen zu einem dialogischen Verständnis von Mission*, Ostfildern 2012, 170–171.

¹⁶⁵ Acts 15:7–11

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 12a

in their mission to the gentiles.¹⁶⁷ They dismissed the rigid notion that what happened to the gentiles should be treated solely as a transgression of the law. On the contrary, they could see in this signs and wonders, in other words a revelation of God's will, as a result of which the hitherto unquestionably valid boundaries of the law had been overstepped. James gave verbal expression to this new insight by showing that these events were in harmony with the words of the prophets and ultimately, therefore, with the recognised interpretation of Holy Scripture.¹⁶⁸ James' proposed solution proved amenable to all present. On the one hand, Gentile Christians were not obliged to satisfy the stipulations of Jewish law and, on the other, the proposal took sufficient account of the wishes of Jewish Christians, who still felt bound by the main stipulations of the law, that it was possible for both groups to coexist in harmony.¹⁶⁹

The Council of the Apostles thus constituted a paradigmatic process of clarification which, addressing the controversial issue at stake, set out where and to what extent new paths could and should be trod in order to do full justice to God's plan of salvation. This process, enabling decisions to be made, encompassed four aspects¹⁷⁰: (1) There is an authority responsible for resolving controversial issues that are constitutive for the identity of the religious community (apostles and elders of the Jewish community). There are elevated positions within the responsible authority (Peter and James). (2) There must an open discussion, a disputation, but one which adheres to certain rules that lay the ground for a resolution of the conflict. Everybody can express their views in public. (3) Conflict resolution is achieved not by one party asserting itself over another but through joint ascertainment of God's will. To this end the events that have taken place are evaluated and interpreted; a "discernment of spirits" occurs – God's will becomes manifest wherever the working of the Spirit can be established and, consequently, the road along which he wishes to lead his Church. (4) Conflict resolution rests on a uniformly agreed consensus. This consensus is the product of

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 12b.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 13–21.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 20–21.

¹⁷⁰ This largely corresponds with the explanation given in: Klaus Krämer, *Den Logos zur Sprache bringen*, op. cit. 171.

a conviction on the part of all parties that the solution found is in accordance with God's will. The rules are formulated in such a way that the community can be maintained. This requires mutual consideration: excessive burdens should be imposed on anybody. At the same time, due account must be taken of the religious feelings and cultural characteristics of the other group.

Inculturation as intercultural dialogue

Inculturation can thus be seen as a dialogue undertaken in accordance with internal rules, early instances of which are already apparent in the paradigmatic processes recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. In principle, the process of inculturation breaks down into three consecutive stages.¹⁷¹ A characteristic feature of the first stage of inculturation is that the promulgator of the message of the faith and the persons to whom it is addressed come from different cultural backgrounds. In other words, this is the classical situation of primary evangelisation in which the witness to the faith must endeavour to communicate the Gospel message in such a way that the recipient can grasp its original meaning, even though his attitudes have been moulded by a different culture. A dialogue of this kind is fundamentally different from the formal "accommodation" method in which, to put it bluntly, the objective is first and foremost to make sure the content is properly "packaged". Proclamation must go hand in hand with a serious dialogue about the world view and religious experiences of those who are party to it. Inseparably bound up with this is an inner appreciation and respect for the experiences and convictions of others. This finds expression primarily in a joint quest to find the path down which God has long since moved together with the partner in dialogue. Thus, witness to one's own faith is discussed together with the experiences of the other partners in the dialogue. Bridges of mutual understanding are built which are capable of transporting a person's own convictions and making them comprehensible to the partner on the other side. A successful intercultural dialogue on the substance of the faith lays the foundation for the emergence of a distinct cultural form of the faith in the cultural communication community concerned.

¹⁷¹ For more detail cf.: Klaus Krämer, *Den Logos zur Sprache bringen*, op. cit. 222–223.

Ultimately, the comprehensive inculturation of the faith into a communication community influenced by a particular culture will always have to be undertaken by the members of the communication community concerned, since only they have the requisite knowledge of the connotations of individual words and signs. This step can be seen as the second stage of inculturation by converted members of the cultural communication community. The outcome is a new form of the Christian faith into which previous religious experiences are incorporated but also greatly developed. This stage, with its opposing aspects of continuity and innovation / transformation, requires a very delicate balancing act in which both risks and opportunities are involved. The creative potential characteristic of this stage resides in the fact that the Gospel can find expression in a new, authentic cultural form. On the other hand, there is always the risk of a loss of continuity with the original message and its main substance (danger of syncretism). Therefore, great importance at this stage of the inculturation process attaches to dialogue with the missionaries active in the preceding phase. They provide, as it were, a critical counterpart, whose role is to make sure that the new way of expressing the Gospel is valid in terms of its substance and complies with the whole religious community.

The third stage in the process begins when the new cultural form of the faith is incorporated into the communication community of all believers within the Church in its entirety. The universal Church presents itself here as a network of different cultural forms of the faith which engage in a lively mutual exchange, thereby pre-empting in sacramental terms, as it were, the universal unity of all humankind.¹⁷² For the inner life contexts of such a universal community this means that intercultural dialogue within the faith constitutes a key element of the Church as a holy people of many nations (the universal Church as an intercultural communication community). The various manifestations of the common faith enrich all the members of the communication community, because untenable personal experiences of the faith can be comprehended in a new way and in greater depth in the light of the experiences gathered in other cultural contexts. Thus, the universal communication community forms an important corrective for the individual cultural communication communities.

¹⁷² Cf. LG 1

It follows from the community of the faith that responsibility for the claim of the Gospel in respect of the individual cultures must be exercised jointly and in respect of each other. No one culture can define itself alone. No cultural character may claim superiority over any other. This was true of the Jewish character and it applies analogously to the European and Latin character of the Christian faith. However, since inculturation is also part of the transposition process of the Christian faith, the later forms must be appropriately related to the previous cultural forms from which they emerged in order to ensure that proper accounts are given of continuity and authenticity in the passing on of the faith. This can only take place in the context of a theological exchange, which is contingent upon the inculturated forms presenting themselves theologically in a manner that expedites discussion. There is a need, above all, for exchange forums at the theological level and for rules governing the binding resolution of conflicts in which the Church Magisterium must perform its tasks in all propriety. This process of clarification will prove all the more successful if it is perceived and conducted as a spiritual act. More than anything else it is a question of ascertaining the way in which the Spirit wishes to lead the Church of Christ. As at the time of the Apostles, this presumes a willingness to embrace processes of change and to tread new paths with boldness, confidence and mutual consideration.

Understanding revelation and inculturation

Sebastian M. Michael

Among all creation, human beings are unique with a capacity to create cultures to organize their lives in their encounter with nature, with other human beings and seeking meaning for their lives. Thus, culture is human specific.

When Christianity encounters cultures, there are many interactive processes that take place: assimilation, adaptation, absorption, inter-culturation and inculturation. This article tries to understand the relationship between Christian revelation and cultures, concentrating itself on the process of inculturation.

The paper consists of five parts. Inculturation is related to Christianity and cultures. Hence, the first section deals with the place of culture in human life. Since God reveals Himself in cultures, the second part analyzes the revelation in all cultures. It is important to know what Christian revelation is in the midst of revelation in all cultures; hence, the third part studies the characteristics of Christian revelation. From the light of Christian revelation, the fourth part considers the relationship between Christian revelation and inculturation. The fifth part is the conclusion.

The Place of Culture in Human Life

One commonly understood meaning of culture is that it is a learned behaviour as opposed to the instinctual behaviour of animals. All through human history, people as individuals and as groups have been coping with their individual and social needs. Through trial and error, they have been learning their life lessons. These include how to produce, distribute and consume material goods, how to relate to one another as social beings leading to family, kinship and other social organizations, how to organize society politically so that every member of a group may feel safe and secure, how to recreate through

sports and other activities for relaxation and rest. And lastly, but most important of all, how to give meaning to one's life experiences through religion, philosophy, world-view, and so on. All this learned and accumulated wisdom of humanity is known as culture.

Thus, culture becomes a kind of a plan or a design by which older members of a society educate the younger members to meet their life needs. The experience of different groups of people at different places and times bring forth innumerable cultural ways. Cultures are but different answers to essentially the same human needs and the search for meaning in life. In the words of Clyde Kluckhohn "culture refers to the distinctive way of life of a group of people, their complete design of living"¹⁷³.

A society is a group of people having a common cultural behaviour. Through the accumulation of experiences in the course of time, society refines, transforms and modifies its culture so that it can be more and more successful in meeting its members' needs. Hence culture becomes the accumulated experiences of a community. The experiences are called traditions of a society. These accumulated experiences of a society are transmitted to the members sharing that particular culture. An individual born in that culture inherits all the traditions and accumulated experiences of his/her society. All the traditions of his/her society become a common property not only for him/her but for all the members belonging to his/her society.

Revelation in All Cultures

The English term "revelation", a derivative of the Latin term '*revelatio*', is a translation of the Greek word '*apocalypsis*'. Etymologically both '*apocalypsis*' and '*revelatio*' signify the act of unveiling, uncovering, exposing, or manifesting something hidden under a veil. When the veil is removed, the hidden reality is revealed/unveiled/exposed/manifested. In the context of religious experience, revelation will mean coming to understand the hidden reality of God.

We may distinguish between two forms of revelation, historical and cosmic. They have given rise to two basic types of religious experiences which are embodied in the various cultures. While these

¹⁷³ Cf. Clyde Kluckhohn, *Mirror for Man. The Relation of Anthropology to Modern Life*, New York 1949, 17; also 1967, 86–102.

two types of experience do not belong exclusively to any particular religion, they appear to predominate in them, depending on the form of revelation from which they originate.

In this context, the distinction made by the well-known scholar Friedrich Heiler may help us to understand the different complexities of revelation. He distinguishes between prophetic or biblical religion and mysticism. This latter he defines as: "that form of intercourse with God in which the world and self are absolutely denied, in which human personality is dissolved, disappears and is absorbed in the infinite unity of the Godhead"¹⁷⁴. From this perspective, Hinduism, for example, has been called a mystical religion as contrasted with Christianity which is said to be prophetic. The core of Hindu thinking is the 'undifferentiated consciousness' of all being. This consciousness is frequently called the 'non-discriminating consciousness' because no distinction is made between subject and object and there is no reasoning or thinking or conceptualization in the mind. It stresses the immanence of God and has a sense of God in all things. Its basic experience is that of '**advaita**' – the unity of all things in the Absolute. It is neither fusion nor dualistic separation.

Based on this distinctions people of different cultures and religions claim their origin to a divine revelation and the response given to it by people. Believers of theistic religions understand revelation as a conscious experience of the ultimate reality in its self-gift inviting people to a divine – human communion. This revelatory experience forms the fundamental core of the faith vision of a believing community, leading to the discovery of certain universal values that guide the individual and collective life, while being frequently celebrated in community worship.

Thus, when we try to understand the relationship between revelation and cultures, we see different notions of revelation but at the same time there is a commonness of search for the ultimate meaning of life. Human mind gets illuminated to see things in ultimate perspectives of life beyond this material and seeable world. This illumination may come from various sources, from nature, interaction of human beings with one another, from seeking explanations for the realities of life and death; and different life experiences of joy,

¹⁷⁴ Friedrich Heiler, *Prayer*, New York 1958, 136.

sorrow, scarcity, powerlessness, uncertainty and unpredictability of life events.

Thus, we can say that there is revelation in all cultures and religions, but the nature of it may differ from culture to culture and religion to religion. Tribal cultures are said to be very close to nature. So, much of the revelation in these cultures may come from nature. For example, tribal religions in India have long been described as animistic, a kind of primitive attitude in which spirit worship is predominant. Henry Morgan, an eminent anthropologist, said, "Religion deals so largely with imaginative and emotional nature, and consequently with such uncertain elements of knowledge, that all primitive religions are grotesque and to some extent unintelligible"¹⁷⁵.

We cannot take for granted as primitive the revelation in tribal religions. Victor Turner asserts emphatically that "in matters of religion, as of art, there are no 'simpler' peoples, only some peoples with simpler technologies than our own. Man's 'imaginative' and 'emotional' life is always and everywhere rich and complex"¹⁷⁶. He also demonstrates this assertion through his study of the religion of the cultures of Ndembu tribals from Northwestern Zambia¹⁷⁷.

It is very common among the simple tribal cultures to have a conception of the supernatural centered on impersonal power which transcends the phenomena of ordinary life. This impersonal power or force exists everywhere and acts in all ways for good and evil. In one way we can say that revelation among the tribals is through these forces.

Today, there is a common theoretical assumption that revelation as religious facts should be analyzed in terms of the totality of cultural and social forms in which they arise. As Evans-Pritchard has suggested, religious facts should be seen "as a relation of parts to one another within a coherent system, each part making sense only in relation to others, and the system itself making sense only in relation to other institutional systems, as part of a wider set of relations"¹⁷⁸.

¹⁷⁵ Henry L. Morgan, *Ancient Society*. Chicago, 1877, 5.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process, Structure and Anti-Structure*, London 1969, 3.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Cf. Edward Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, Oxford 1965, 112.

Modern psychology understands the human mind as a huge iceberg of which only the tip rises above the water, while underneath lies a whole world of wonder and terror, of light and of darkness, of good and of evil. The inner universe of the mind is investigated by psychologists. What is at the deepest realm of the psyche? What is the basis of centre or root of all? Put in Jungian terms: When we go beyond the ego, beyond the personal unconscious, beyond the collective unconscious, beyond the archetypes, what do we find? And in answer to this all the religions speak of a mystery which they call by various names: the Buddha nature, Brahman and Atman, the divine spark, the ground of being, the centre of the soul, the kingdom of God, the image of God and so on. The tribal cultures and religions are also an answer to this longing of human beings according to their environment and cultural development.

Most of the time, the simple tribals are not concerned with abstract truth but with the reality and power of the forces on which their life depends, and their culture and religion finds expression in myths and rites or sacred techniques. It is only at a later stage of culture, when social organization is sufficiently advanced to leave room for learning and study that we can expect to find any systematic tradition of rational thought.

Unique Characteristics of Christian Revelation

When the Bible speaks of revelation, quite often what is intended is God the Creator actively disclosing to human beings His power and glory. His plan and will, in short, Himself in relationship to the human beings and human history. The Hebrews conceived God as a Person, a moral being, who is known by his action in history and his providence over the life both of nations and of individuals. Human beings can be called to a knowledge that surpasses the natural order. This is possible only when this personal Absolute and Ultimate Source, whom we call God, freely and lovingly reveals the God-self to us, in a gracious act of self-giving¹⁷⁹.

The beginning of Judeo-Christian revelation is also through the action of God in nature. God's revelation is reflected in the forms in

¹⁷⁹ Cf. Paul Puthanangady, and others, *Revelation and Faith*. Indian Theological Series. Bangalore 2013.

which God shows Himself: the storm, the pillar of cloud and of fire, the rustling of the trees and the whispering of the winds, the whole majestic work of creation, all placed in the context of the great event of the Exodus. These natural phenomena appear as commentary on God's revelation in the world, through historical events. This historical character of the Old Testament makes the Jewish religion become an historical religion unlike the religions of the neighbouring peoples.

God discloses His will in history and the disclosure of God's will in human history becomes the setting of human beings' religious decisions. The human persons are to respond, to accept God's purposeful guidance, to be thankful for this help and be ready to serve God's saving will manifested in history. To belong to the people of God, for the Jews, meant sharing participation in the revealing intervention of God in the history of the people.

The core of New Testament revelation is that God incarnates in the humanness of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity and of the whole universe. This is in continuation with the Old Testament revelation.

In the first book of the Bible and in its first chapter, namely in 'Genesis' we read "God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen 1, 27). This implies that God created human beings in His image with dignity, freedom and creativity to be ever with Him. But, according to the Bible, human beings sinned, and their image, dignity, freedom and creativity were tainted by their sin. The sin has contaminated all areas of our human life, namely, family, society, culture, religious beliefs and practices, politics and, economics and even the ecology. It is the Christian belief that Jesus came to restore this tainted image of humanity to its original intention and purpose.¹⁸⁰

This purpose and vision of Jesus comes out very clearly from the New Testament of the Bible. At the beginning of his public ministry after his baptism and forty days of retreat in the wilderness, Jesus goes to the synagogue at Nazareth and stands up to read: "*The Spirit*

¹⁸⁰ Cf. S. M. Michael, "Christian Vision of Human Life and Dalit and Tribal Response to Christianity in India", in: Challenges to Christian Mission. Problems and Prospects, Ishvani Kendra (Eds.), Pune 2014, 47-63.

of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". Having read this prophecy of Isaiah, he said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4).

This shows that from the very beginning, Jesus asserted that His mission is to restore the tainted image of human beings by restoring their dignity by curing the blind, the leper, the lame, the deaf, and being in solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Further, He reiterated that He has come in order that we may have life – life in all its fullness (Jn 10,10). Still further, He told his followers that all the commandments of God can be summarized in 'Love of God and love of the neighbour' (Mt 22,36–40) and this is the only criterion by which he will judge people for the final reward in His Kingdom (Mt 25,31–44). Thus, the very life of Jesus, his teachings, miracles, his suffering and death are meant to restore the dignity of human beings. Thus, Jesus Himself becomes the revelation; His life, vision and mission are revelatory for human salvation.

Why should we accept this revelation as authentic and true? What is the criterion by which we can ascertain its universal validity and relevance? These are vital questions for the acceptance of Jesus as revelation and the consequent organization of life for the salvation of humanity according to the vision of Jesus.

After a deeper reflection, understanding and an analysis of comparative religious facts, one will come to realize that the very life of Jesus, His Passion, Death and Resurrection are **historical events**, not a fiction, nor a myth nor the imagination of the mind. If Jesus' Resurrection is an historical event, then, this indicates that He has power over Life and Death. If so, the question arises "Who is He?". What is His identity? His Resurrection takes us to the heart of Christian revelation. His Resurrection is the authentication of His Divinity. If Jesus is not risen, then He could at the most be a good person and a moral teacher. But his resurrection makes Him unique among the religious teachers of the world. His Resurrection authenticates His life, His teaching as life giving not only for the Christians but for the whole of humanity. So, Jesus becomes the revelation to humanity.

Revelation and Inculturation

This historical event (fact) and experience of the Risen Christ ultimately transformed the discouraged, bewildered, frightened and cowardice disciples to have a new life. This gave them the courage to cross seas, climb mountains and encounter all kinds of difficulties and even death in proclaiming the Good News of salvation in Jesus. The Christian mission was taken forward in the then existing world. Proclaiming Jesus Christ as the Saviour of the world and participating in this redemptive act of Christ in the transformation of the world became the Vision and foundation of Christian mission.

In apostolic times, what kind of world did they encounter and how did they respond to different cultures?

History tells us that at that time, Israel was a nation at the crossroads of empires and civilizations. In the first century, the eastern Mediterranean was part of a much wider network of cities and civilizations that stretched across the ancient world. This urban network connected several broad, overlapping cultural regions on three continents in a continuous flow of politics and trade that reached from the Atlantic to the Pacific oceans. The first Christians emerged from this crucible. The apostles faced a foreign and a hostile world. The early history of Christianity is one of continuous reformulations and re-appropriations of this ancient covenantal faith in new and varying political-cultural contexts (White 1985). Studies on Christianity and cultures reveal that Christianity has been influenced by many cultures in the course of its history. In this encounter between Christianity and cultures, Christianity had to fight to keep its original message in the context of several Christological controversies. Irvin and Sunquist explain this:

One common theme we encounter in the second-century letters and treatises written by leaders of the churches concerns the immediate threat perceived to be made by false teachers in the region. The network of leadership among churches was strong. The bishops knew one another's names, wrote to one another, and analyzed one another's interpretation of apostolic traditions. The network they formed across the region as successors of the apostles provided the churches with a sense of both community and continuity. By the same token, however, as groups of bishops

determined that one or another church leader was wrong, or heretical, in his teachings, they did not hesitate to name names and expose the errors. The rhetoric was often strong, for Christian truth was considered a matter of utmost moral and spiritual concern. Many of these disputes spread across great geographical expanses and involved the churches in continuous controversy over generations¹⁸¹.

Hence, the vision of Christian movement initiated by the apostles is the proclamation of the historical Jesus who died on the cross and rose from the dead, and the very meaning of His Death and Resurrection for human life. The apostles who came from the Jewish tradition understood the identity of Jesus as God and Saviour from His Resurrection. Proclaiming Him as the Saviour of the world and participating in this redemptive act of Christ in the transformation of the world became the Vision and foundation of Christian Movement.

This brings us to the question; if Christian vision has to influence and penetrate all cultures, then, don't the cultures have their own truth, merit and worth for the people of their respective cultures? Is not God present in all cultures?

Christianity believes that not only Christians but also all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. This implies that God created human beings with dignity, freedom and creativity to be ever with Him. Hence, the cultures created by human beings reflect this image and likeness. So, all cultures contain life giving values and they are worthy to be lived. Having said that, there is another dimension to human existence; that is, according to the Bible, human beings have sinned, and so, their dignity, freedom and creativity are tainted. The sin has contaminated all areas of human life in common, namely family, society, culture, religious beliefs and practices, politics and, economics. It is the Christian belief that Jesus came to restore this tainted image of humanity to its original purpose in their respective cultures.

From its very inception the Church carries this vision of Jesus in transforming the world being like 'salt' and 'light' (Mt 5,13–16), in spite of all its frailties, political, economic and cultural upheavals. Through

¹⁸¹ Dale T. Irvin/Scott W. Sunquist, *History of the World Christian Movement*, Bangalore 2004, 73.

the course of Church history, it has learned that it should respect cultures and preserve the truth, goodness and holiness in cultures. It realizes that the mission of the Church is to participate in the mission of God in Jesus to restore the fallen humanity to its God given dignity.

Even today the mission of the Church is the same. The social teachings of the Church are based on the Christian belief that men and women are endowed with an inborn dignity and greatness. The Christian faith affirms that human persons enjoy an intrinsic worth which cannot be taken away by colour, wealth, stature or any other considerations. The implication of this is that human persons can never be used as a means. All forms of exploitation and oppression of human persons diminish and destroy their intrinsic dignity and worth.

Bringing this life-giving message and transforming cultures is known as "Inculturation". Through the process of inculturation, the Church inserts itself in the culture of a people. It integrates the Christian life and its message into a given culture. This implies that the Church involves itself in the life-realities of people by participating and struggling in their historical search for meaning and emancipation. This process of inculturation is very important for the Church to play a creative role in the midst of constant change. The emerging culture is greatly influenced by globalization, mass media and internet, and they are providing opportunities as well as challenges to traditional cultures and values. Growing secularization and materialism are silently undermining the values and principles of traditional cultures. By the process of inculturation, Christians play a vital role in giving direction to culture change through their selective assimilation and cultural continuity. In the process of inculturation the symbol-creativity of a people and their search for meaning are manifested in the changing cultural scenario without alienating themselves from their cultural roots.¹⁸²

The inherent nature of inculturation has two important dimensions. One is the celebration of cultures of its life-giving values and the second is the transformation of (challenge) of values which are life

¹⁸² Cf. S. M. Michael, "Beyond Inculturation" in: Vidya Jyoti, *Journal of Theological Reflection*, No. 54, 1990, 6–18; Ders. "Cultural Diversity and Inculturation" in: Vidya Jyoti, *Journal of Theological Reflection*, Vol. 73 (2009) 1, 43–56.

negating.¹⁸³ Thus, inculturation implies two important processes. One is the celebration of truth, goodness and holiness in all cultures. The second is the processes of challenging the life negating values with an ultimate goal of bringing transformation in cultures for the fullness of life.

This is the way the early Church grew, by assimilating Greek, Roman, Germanic and other cultural symbols and meanings which it encountered. Thus, inculturation is an important and valid process in the encounter between Christianity and cultures even today.

For historical reasons the Christian message has been developed in Western cultural institutions with Greco-Roman thought patterns. Today there is a greater realization that these one-sided thought patterns and cultural symbols are inadequate to express the message of Christ to all nations.¹⁸⁴ Moreover, there is a growing awareness that the perspectives of the Third World peoples can bring insights to the desperate human struggle to avert ecological, demographic, or nuclear disaster.¹⁸⁵ As Bateson points out, it is the exaggerated emphasis on rationality and control over nature that has brought great technological power to the West. And it is precisely this philosophy and this technology that is being exported to the Third World through 'modernization'. It may well be that the West has as much to learn from Third World peoples as to teach them.¹⁸⁶ In this context, an inculturated Christian message integrating the various cultural insights of the world within the universal Church may be just what is needed today for the welfare of humanity. Inculturation makes possible the reciprocal incorporation of each other's cultural values. Local churches, for example, must contribute to the universal Church in order to allow for mutual fecundation and enrichment, which will enable world cultures to come closer together.

¹⁸³ S. M. Michael, "Inculturation in the Context of India", in: *In His Foot Steps. Together Towards the New Millennium. Divine Word Missionaries 1875–2000*, Clarence Srampical and others (Eds.) Divine Word Missionaries, Indore 2000, 167–173.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Bede Griffiths, *The Marriage of East and West*, London 1982; Richard W. Rousseau, *Christianity and the Religious of the East*, Scranton 1982; Raimundo Panikkar, *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, London 1981.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. Roger M. Keesing, *Cultural Anthropology. A Contemporary Perspective*, New York 1976, 527–545.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, San Francisco 1972.

Conclusion

After the historical Resurrection-Experience of Crucified Jesus, the timid, discouraged and disillusioned apostles began to share their New Life in Jesus to people of all cultures by crossing the sea, climbing the mountains and facing all persecutions. Thus began the Christian Movement and encounter between Christianity and cultures.

This relationship between Christianity and Cultures is a dynamic process in human history involving cultural adaptation, accommodation, indigenization, contextualization, inculturation and inter-culturation. It includes challenge and celebration of cultures, dialogue, mutual fecundation, transformation, liberation and conversion.

Today, this movement is challenged by ethnocentrism, narrow cultural nationalism, religious pluralism, relativism and Post-Modern liberalism. In order to find new paths in Christian Mission, a deeper understanding of culture in the lives of people is a must. If Christianity has to be relevant today, it must rediscover its foundation. It needs to dialogue with the world. The dialogue has to be twofold: it is a challenge to openness, but also a challenge to orthodoxy. Living in a Post-Modern World which does not believe in any absolute truth, rediscovering the historical roots and foundations of Christianity and inculturating itself in the cultures of the world by the process of celebration and challenge is the mission of the Church today. This could be done in collaboration with people of good will from all religions and cultures.

Inculturation in the changing face of African Theology

Francis Anekwe Oborji

Beginning from the mid-1970s, inculturation has been the most discussed trend of contemporary African theology.¹⁸⁷ Today, however, there are three main trends of African theology, namely, inculturation, liberation and reconstruction.¹⁸⁸ The meeting of these three trends in the writings of African authors has raised the question of new hermeneutics for the paradigm shifts in African theology.¹⁸⁹ It has challenged not only the dominance of inculturation theology in the writings of African authors but also has put into question the relevance of inculturation itself in African theology today. The paradigm shifts, however, has helped to bring out the central place of inculturation in African theology.¹⁹⁰

In what follows, we shall make an overview of the meaning of inculturation in the writings of African theologians vis-à-vis the on-going debate between exponents of inculturation-liberation and those of reconstruction trends of African theology. The aim is to bring out the uniqueness of inculturation in African theology while advancing the question of new hermeneutics for the theology. Our topic shall be discussed as follows: 1. Inculturation in the Writings of

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Trends in African Theology since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*, Leberit Press, Rome 2005 (2nd Edition), 2.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Andre Karamaga, *Problems and Promises of Africa: Towards and Beyond the Year 2000*, AACC Publications, Nairobi 1991; Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi 1995.

¹⁸⁹ Cf. A.E. Orobator (Eds.), *Theological Re-imagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi 2014; E. Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, W.B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 2011.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "African Theology", in D.F. Ford – R. Muers (Eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA (USA) 2005, 496.

African theologians, 2. African liberation theology, 3. African theology of reconstruction, 4. The Contribution of African Women theologians. Finally, we shall conclude with the question of new hermeneutics for the future of African theology.

Inculturation in the Writings of African Theologians

It was at the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) in 1977, held in Accra (Ghana), that African theologians appropriated the term “inculturation”. This Conference brought together, for the first time, Catholic and Protestant Francophone and Anglophone African theologians. The Conference placed the theme of “liberation” in its theological agenda. However, at the end, its new concept of theological unity came to be expressed in the term “inculturation”.¹⁹¹ So that it could be said that when Father Arrupe, Superior General of the Jesuits defined the term in 1978, inculturation had already become a popular term among the African theologians.¹⁹² The theme of inculturation is at the heart of African theology, as we know it today. Thus, in the Final Communique of the above-named Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians (December 17–23, 1977), the theologians declared:

We believe that African theology must be understood in the context of African life and culture and the creative attempt of African people to shape a new future...from the African situation... defining itself according to the struggles of the people in their resistance against the structures of domination. Our task as theologians is to create a theology that arises from and is accountable to African people.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Cf. Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, New York 1993, 67ff.

¹⁹² Father Arrupe defines inculturation as “the incarnation of the Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation”; Pedro Arrupe, “Catechesis and “Inculturation”, in *Afer*, 20 (1978), 97–134; cf. also id., “Letter du T.R.P. Pedro Arrupe” (14.05.1978), in: *Telema*, 17 (1979), 42–43. However, for more information on the history and development of the term (inculturation), cf. Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 10ff; Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 5ff.

¹⁹³ Kofi Appiah-Kubi & Sergio Torres (Eds.), *African Theology en Route* (Papers from the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, December 17–23, 1977, Accra, Ghana), New York 1979, 193.

It is from this background that one of the organizers of this Conference, Appiah-Kubi says:

That the Gospel has come to remain in Africa cannot be denied, but now our theological reflections must be addressed to the real contextual African situations... "How can I sing the Lord's song in a strange land," in a strange language, in a strange thought, in a strange ideology? (cf. Ps. 137, 4). For more than a decade now the cry of the psalmist has been the cry of many African Christians. We demand to serve the Lord in our own terms... The struggle of African theologians, scholars, and other Christians in ventures such as this consultation is to find a theology that speaks to our people where we are, to enable us to answer the critical question of our Lord Jesus Christ: "Who do you (African Christians) say that I am?"¹⁹⁴

African theologians did not just appropriate the word "inculturation", but also offered their definitions of it. Peter Sarpong for instance, defines it as a way of evangelization which embraces the whole of Christian life and thinking. Sarpong argues that inculturation is not just a question of liturgical adaptation or innovation, much less of the use of drums or materials. Rather, it involves "concepts, symbols, and a whole new way of thinking and doing things (demanding) imagination, courage and initiative".¹⁹⁵

In the same spirit, Jose Antunes da Silva points out that inculturation implies that Christianity can only take root in the new culture if it assumes those cultural forms. However, he quickly adds that, "there is need for a critical symbiosis. The faith criticizes the culture, and the culture enriches the Christian faith".¹⁹⁶

For John Mary Waliggo, inculturation is that movement which aims at making Christianity permanent in Africa by making it a people's religion and a way of life which no enemy or hostility can ever succeed in supplanting or weakening. It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly "feel at home" in the cultures of the people.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ Kofi Appiah-Kubi, "Preface", in Kofi Appiah-Kubi & Sergio Torres (Eds.), *African Theology en Route*, viii.

¹⁹⁵ Peter K. Sarpong, "Evangelism and Inculturation", in: *West African Journal of Ecclesial Studies*, 2 (1990) 1, 8.

¹⁹⁶ Jose Antunes Da Silva, "Inculturation as Dialogue", in *Afer*, 37 (1995) 4, 203.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. John Mary Waliggo, "Making a Church that is Truly African", 12-13.

Justin Ukpong has eloquently described all that is entailed in the inculturation process:

In this approach, the theologian's task consists in re-thinking and re-expressing the original Christian message in an African cultural milieu. It is the task of confronting the Christian faith and African culture. In the process there is inter-penetration of both. Christian faith enlightens African culture and the basic data of revelation contained in Scriptures and tradition are critically re-examined for the purpose of giving them African expression. Thus there is integration of faith and culture, and from it is born a new theological reflection that is African and Christian. In this approach therefore, African theology means Christian faith attaining cultural expression.¹⁹⁸

Some of the theologians emphasize the prophetic role of inculturation to cultures. For instance, Efoé-Julien Pénoukou says that inculturation implies that cultures need to be opened to the Gospel and converted to Christ, and the Gospel also needs to be opened to African culture so that it may attain fullness of meaning.¹⁹⁹ In the same manner, A. Shorter begins by defining it as "the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. Morefully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and culture or cultures".²⁰⁰ Furthermore, Shorter says that the fact that Jesus died and rose points to the fact that inculturation involves challenging cultures to a new life.²⁰¹ Here, Shorter has identified the close link between the Incarnation (inculturation) and the Paschal mystery.

As the Fathers of the 1994 Synod for Africa, tell us, inculturation must be founded on the whole aspect of the mystery of Christ if it is to challenge and transform the culture.²⁰² In the same vein, C. Geffré, cautions that inculturation must ensure that the Gospel message penetrates into and assumes or influences every culture without

¹⁹⁸ Justin S. Ukpong, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*, 30.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. Julien Efoé Pénoukou, *Églises d'Afrique: Propositions pour l'Avenir*, Desclée, Paris 1994, 10ff.

²⁰⁰ Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 11.

²⁰¹ Cf. Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, 84–87.

²⁰² Cf. Synod of Bishops, *Special Assembly for Africa, Message 9, 14 & 16; Propositio 28–30; EA 60–61.*

compromising its identity.²⁰³ It must also endeavour to engage the whole culture, with all its values and defects, in order to transform it from within with the Gospel values. In this way, inculturation ought to bring about mutual enrichment, which usually occurs when the Gospel engages the culture.²⁰⁴ African inculturation theology in this sense is an attempt by the African Christian theologians to reflect on the meeting of the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the African cultures and people. It is the effort of the African Christians themselves to interpret the Christian message and to provide models from their own cultural heritage for an African reading of the Christian mystery.²⁰⁵

Many more reflections on the meaning and significance of inculturation by African theologians could be mentioned, but much has been said already. Therefore, it suffices to say that inculturation theology is indeed very much alive in Africa.

Inculturation: Previous Terms

The preceding discussion shows that it would certainly be wrong to assume that the use of the word “inculturation” in missiological discourse began with the African theologians.²⁰⁶ In fact, the word “inculturation” was already in use among missiologists before it was appropriated by the African theologians. Before that, they were using different terms, for example, “adaptation”, to describe the encounter between the Christian message and African cultures. Now that the emphasis has shifted to a new term, one may need to ask, “Is this passage from ‘adaptation’ to ‘inculturation’ a mere change of terminology or a real paradigm shift in the theologians’ understanding of the Church’s evangelizing mission?” To answer this question, I wish to consider next, though briefly, some previous terms used by the African theologians and how they came to appropriate the new term “inculturation.”

“*Adaptation*” as already indicated, was the first term used by the African theologians in this effort of the meeting of the Gospel with

²⁰³ Cf. Claude Geffré, *The Risk of Interpretation*, New York 1987, 236.

²⁰⁴ Cf. RM 52.

²⁰⁵ Cf. Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*, ix.

²⁰⁶ Pierre Charles was the first theologian to use the term in an article he published in 1953 (“*Missiologie et Acculturation*”, 15–32).

African culture and reality in general. According to Peter Schineller, even though this term has more recently been criticized as inadequate, in principle, it refers to a more creative method of pastoral activity, by which the missionary tries to adapt the Christian message and liturgy to the customs of those among whom he works.²⁰⁷ Several documents of the Vatican Council II speak positively of the necessity of adaptation in describing the same reality which the word “inculturation” today addresses.²⁰⁸ However, one specific occasion where adaptation was called into question was in 1974 Synod of Bishops on Evangelization. Here the African Bishops declared “completely out of date the so-called theology of adaptation”.²⁰⁹ The new strategy to be adopted was incarnation of the Gospel into African culture. This declaration infused new spirit into the African theologians as they began to reflect on a more profound process of incarnating the Gospel in Africa.

Another popular term used by the theologians was “*indigenization*”, often used alongside “*Africanization*” and “*Localization*”. For example, Emmanuel Martey writes that in an effort to express the Christian message with African idioms and conceptual tools, expressions such as “*indigenization*”, “*localization*”, “*Africanization*” and so forth have been employed.²¹⁰ Peter Schineller notes that most of these expressions are used interchangeably.²¹¹ According to Patrick Kalilombe, “*indigenization*” means the effort “to Africanize Christian doctrine, cult, pastoral practices and art, basing them on African culture and religious tradition”.²¹² However, in practice indigenization meant the gradual replacement of foreign missionaries with African personnel and to give an “African face” to ecclesiastical structures, so that the Church may appear less foreign. During the struggle for political independence in the first part of this century, the Church

²⁰⁷ Cf. Peter Schineller, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, op. cit., 16–17.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 4 December 1963 (hereafter referred to as SC), 37–40: AAS 56 (1964), 97–134.

²⁰⁹ Cf. Synod of Bishops, “*Declaratio Patrum Synodaliūm*”, in: Giovanni Caprile, “*Il Sinodo dei Vescovi (3a Assemblea Generale, 27 Settembre – 26 Ottobre 1974)*”, Roma 1975, 146.

²¹⁰ Cf. Emmanuel Martey, op. cit., 65.

²¹¹ Cf. Peter Schineller, op. cit., 14–24.

²¹² Patrik A. Kalilombe, “*Black Theology*”, in: David Ford (Eds.), *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology in the Twentieth Century*, New York/London 1989, 202.

was accused of collaboration with Western colonialism.²¹³ Thus, indigenization was intended to show that the Church was at home in Africa and that Christianity was truly an African religion. However, like adaptation, indigenization did not go beyond adaptation of peripheral matters in the liturgy, such as translation of liturgical texts, dancing, drumming and colourful vestments.²¹⁴

Another term is “*contextualization*”, used mainly by the Protestant theologians and among the Catholics of Southern Africa. For the latter, “contextualization” is synonymous with “inculturation”. It is “a weaving together” of the Gospel with every particular situation. It does not speak of cultures but of contexts or situations into which the Gospel must be inculturated”.²¹⁵ According to B. Haushiku (of Namibia), “a true *contextual* theology must of necessity be an inculturated one”.²¹⁶ Therefore, contextualization is part of the process of inculturation.²¹⁷

There is also the term “*acculturation*”. This term is not common in the writings of the African theologians. It is found mainly in the works of anthropologists and sociologists. Here it denotes the “culture contact”, or the interaction which results when two or more cultures come into contact. The related word, “*enculturation*” is used by anthropologists “to describe the manner in which an individual achieves competence in his culture.”²¹⁸ Used analogically in theology, acculturation refers to the process of insertion of the Gospel in cultures. In this context, it is much closer in meaning to inculturation, because it emphasizes the two-way process in the encounter of the Gospel with cultures. The Gospel always encounters a culture in an inculturated form, and between the evangelizer and the evangelized there has to be some

²¹³ Cf. Peter K. Sarpong, “Christianity should be Africanized, not African Christianized”, in: *Afer*, 17 (1975), 322–328.

²¹⁴ Cf. Edward Tamba Charles, *Inculturing the Gospel in Africa: From Adaptation to Incarnation*, 10–11.

²¹⁵ IMBISA (Inter-Regional Meeting of Bishops of Southern Africa), *Inculturation*, Gweru, Zimbabwe 1993, 45.

²¹⁶ Bonifatius Haushiku, “Being authentic Christians and authentic Africans”, in: *L'Osservatore Romano* (Weekly English Edition), 27 April 1994, 14.

²¹⁷ Cf. Edward Tamba Charles, *Inculturing the Gospel in Africa: From Adaptation to Incarnation*, 11.

²¹⁸ Merville J. Herskovits, *Man and His Works: The Science of Cultural Anthropology*, New York 1960, x–xi.

form of acculturation if there is to be effective evangelization.²¹⁹ Thus, inculturation theologians have much to learn from the cultural anthropologists' elaboration of the term "acculturation".²²⁰

Finally, there is the term "*incarnation*". Inspired by the Vatican Council II's teaching on the Incarnation as the theological basis for understanding the different cultures and philosophies of people,²²¹ African theologians now speak of the *incarnation* as the model for inculturating the Gospel in Africa. It is often used interchangeably with inculturation. Justin Ukpong notes that *incarnation* is preferable because it involves "immersing Christianity in African culture so that just as Jesus became man, so must Christianity become African".²²²

The basic argument of the theologians is that just as Jesus Christ, the Word of God became *incarnate* in a human culture, in the Jewish milieu, the Gospel of Jesus Christ should be allowed to be inculturated (or incarnated) in an African culture and context (Matt. 5,17; Acts 10,34). In this context, Edward Tamba Charles explains that the term "incarnation" is used by the African theologians in two senses. In the first sense, it means the process of mutual penetration of the Gospel and culture so that Jesus Christ may be present "today" in every culture. In this particular sense, the event of the incarnation continues in time; it happens each time the Gospel is made to penetrate a cultural milieu so that the people could welcome Christ in their midst as their Saviour.

The second sense refers to the unique event of Bethlehem, when "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1,14). It is the primordial inculturation of the Word of God in human flesh and history, and therefore the foundation and the model for all subsequent inculturation.²²³ Tamba Charles sums up the two senses thus:

Incarnation means, in the broad sense of the term, the general, universal aspect: God became man, who belongs to a particular

²¹⁹ Cf. G. A. Arbuckle, *Earthing the Gospel*, New York 17; P. Rossano, "Acculturazione del Vangelo", in AA.VV., *Evangelizzazione e Culture: Atti del Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia (5-12 Ottobre 1975, Roma)*, PUU, Roma 1976, 104.

²²⁰ Cf. Peter Schineller, *op. cit.*, 22.

²²¹ Cf. AG 10.

²²² Justin S. Ukpong, *African Theologies Now: A Profile*, Gaba Publications, Eldoret 1984, 27.

²²³ Cf. Edward Tamba Charles, *op. cit.*, 12.

people, and shares all their peculiarities; he became this man in this people. The general side of incarnation insists upon “man like all men”, while the “inculturation” side points to the differences and peculiarity: a man unlike all men, because he belonged to a particular people and culture. Like the incarnation, inculturation does not take place in the abstract: it happens in a concrete cultural space.²²⁴

Nevertheless, it is in terms of analogy that one could say that the Gospel should be inculturated or incarnated in a culture just as Jesus Christ, the Word of God (took flesh and lived among us (John 1,14), became incarnate in a human culture. Analogy is a great word which involves drawing of similarities and differences between two or more realities. Analogy does not mean total identity between the realities so compared. The incarnation of Jesus Christ is a mystery. It is a divine act, a unique and entirely singular event. The mystery of the incarnation points to other realities beyond the issues of inculturation. Therefore, its usage by the theologians should be understood in terms of analogy. This is a basic clarification that one should always bear in mind with regard to relating the “*incarnation*” to the process of inculturation.

Some of the terms discussed above still appear in the writings of the theologians, with different nuances which must be determined by the context in which they are used. But none of them has been used so frequently by the African theologians as the word “*inculturation*.”

All this shows that the shift from adaptation to inculturation (incarnation theology) is indeed a progressive development of the theological thinking before the same problem: Gospel – African cultures. With the new development,²²⁵ theologians have become more aware of the fact that the mystery of incarnation is the model

²²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 73–74.

²²⁵ It is a new development inspired by the Vatican II mission theology, which promotes theological investigations in various cultural contexts for the sake of proper incarnation of the gospel in the area. The bottom-line in the Council’s theology of mission is the emphasis on cultural diversity in the Church and the role of local Churches (in communion with the universal Church), for the work of evangelization through inculturation in various cultural contexts. Another side of it is the Council’s recovery of the theology of reciprocity. In addition to assuming all that the Church has acquired in its earthly pilgrimage, each local Church is challenged through inculturation to contribute something from its cultural-setting to the patrimony of the universal Church (cf. LG 13; AG 22).

and theological foundation for the process of inculturation. In this case, the incarnation theology has given the term “*inculturation*” a new significance, beyond its anthropological use. The term “*inculturation*”, over and above being a process of rooting the Gospel among any given people and their culture, has also become one of the ways through which the church expresses more forcefully, the Second Vatican Council’s teaching on church communion and the diversity of cultures.²²⁶ Furthermore, the incarnation theology itself brings out the dynamism in the process of inculturation. Inculturation is a continuous process; it must go on as the culture continues to evolve.²²⁷

What all this means in effect, is that the term “*inculturation*” augments or rather complements the inadequacies found in the theology of adaptation of the old. Moreover, it implies that for any meaningful inculturation to take place, theological investigation is needed.²²⁸ Theological research helps to develop a new cultural language for the word of God and a new cultural form for the Christianity that will emerge in the process of inculturation.²²⁹ In other words, theological investigation helps to establish the main ground and rules for inculturation, and to clarify the principles, concepts, and symbols to be utilized.²³⁰ For inculturation is not limited to some particular area of Christian life and mission. Rather it involves all aspects of being a Christian.²³¹ Therefore, inculturation, even though it aims at the evangelization of a particular cultural-context, yet it must emphasize compatibility with the Gospel and communion with the universal Church.²³² Moreover, no matter how effective inculturation may be, it will never be the same as the first incarnation of the Son of God.

²²⁶ Cf. LG 4, 13; GS 53–62.

²²⁷ Cf. Synod of Bishop, Special Assembly for Africa, *Instrumentum Laboris* 65. For various aspects of inculturation emphasized by the African Bishops, cf. *ibid.* 18–19.

²²⁸ Cf. AG 22.

²²⁹ Cf. Thomas Groone, “Inculturation: How to Proceed in a Pastoral Context”, in: Norbert Greinacher/Norbert Mette (Eds.), *Christianity and Culture (Concilium 1994/2)*, London, New York 1994, 126; David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination*, Crossroad, New York 1989, 132.

²³⁰ Cf. Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, no. 56.

²³¹ Cf. Peter Schineller, *op. cit.*, 23.

²³² John Paul II calls on the Bishops, as guardians of the “deposit of faith”, to take care so as to ensure fidelity and to provide discernment, for a deeply balanced approach to inculturation; cf. RM 54.

Furthermore, African inculturation Christology, when compared to other efforts in African theology, is more widespread, more developed, and exhibits more originality and variety of method.²³³ For a good number of the theologians, the „African ancestor“ is a most appropriate cultural concept for an African Christian theology. This is the view of the 'Ancestorship Christologists', such as Bénézet Bujo²³⁴ and Charles Nyamiti,²³⁵ among others.²³⁶ Theologians of African inculturation employed the ancestor model in providing an African reading of the mystery of Christ, the Church, Morality, Spirituality, and in developing African forms of liturgical celebrations.²³⁷

African Liberation Theology

African liberation theology has a broader perspective and exhibits a variety of method. The theology endeavours to integrate the theme of liberation in the rest of the African cultural background and socio-political and economic spheres. Advocates of African theology of liberation include, Jean-Marc Éla, Engelbert Mveng, and Elochukwu Uzukwu, Kwame Bediako, among others. For lack of space, our analysis of African liberation theology in this essay is limited to Éla's theology since he could be regarded as the most representative of theologians of the African liberation theology. A Catholic priest and theologian from Cameroun, among his most important works on this theme are his two Magnus opus: *African Cry* (1986) and *My Faith as an African* (1995). The starting point of Éla's theology is on the relationship that should exist in works of inculturation and liberation in Africa. Hence, he is critical of an African theology that bases its concern mainly on anthropological and cultural problems, as if African society and churches "can achieve their identity by considering only anthropological and cultural problems." In his view, such pre-occupation with cultural identity could be a dangerous alibi, so as

²³³ Cf. Charles Nyamiti, "Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions", in: Rosino Gibellini (Eds.), *Paths of African Theology*, London 1994, 64–65.

²³⁴ Cf. Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology in Its Social Context*, New York 1992.

²³⁵ Cf. Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor: Christology from an African Perspective*, Gweru Harare 1984.

²³⁶ Cf. Charles Nyamiti, "African Christologies Today", in: Robert J. Schreiter (Eds.), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, London 1992, 11.

²³⁷ Cf. Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*, cf. specifically, chapter 4.

to ignore the more burning issues in contemporary Africa. What is needed instead, according to him, is an inculturation which is relevant to the culture that is being born out of daily struggles of Africans for survival. In a sense, Éla is advocating a mid-way between inculturation and liberation theologies in Africa. This is why it is not all that correct to group him among authors of African theology of liberation. In fact, he belongs to both sides or rather, transcends them.

In his theology, Éla begins his reflection with what he calls the tensions that mark the life of ordinary African Christians. For him, in African churches, a person exists as a Christian in a "Church", which, despite its catechism and sacraments, really amounts with no real influence on social problems. Because the Christianity of missionaries supplies no answers to the difficulties of daily life, Christians continue to follow the traditions of their villages or districts." This ambivalence, Éla contends, is the source of many tensions that mark the people. Such situations have consequences, including the proliferation and strong influence of sects among young people confused about the future, and the polite indifference of African intellectuals who view Christianity as an out-of-date religion in a world come of age. In the opinion of Éla, these factors should force the church to re-examine its faith and its presence in African society, or else Christianity will be seen as a religion only for women and children.²³⁸ In any case, Éla's criticism is directed toward the forms of disembodied spirituality and not that he thinks that the church should not understand itself in sacramental and spiritual terms. Given this background, one might imagine that Éla's response would be to call the church to engage in more advocacy to help improve the economic and political institutions, which itself would be a bold suggestion. This, however, is not the direction in which Éla's theology moves. Instead, he is primarily concerned with the church's own existence and ministry among the people who have become the victims of such a history. Éla invites the church to rethink its social mission so as to embody an alternative, more hopeful history than is proffered through the colonial history. The challenge of the gospel, for Éla, is one of "re-thinking the whole question of understanding and experiencing faith."²³⁹ For Éla this task requires nothing less

²³⁸ Cf. Jean-Marc Éla, *African Cry*, op. cit., 7, 31.

²³⁹ Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African*, op. it., xvii.

than an honest and critical look at the current models of church and Christian practice in Africa.²⁴⁰

Éla insists that the root of the problem is Africa's colonial legacy and history by which the church in Africa is reduced to a spiritual sphere in which its institutional existence and "security is promised by the powers that be on condition it accepts the privatization and marginalization of the Christian faith."²⁴¹ Such a history, however, only succeeds in rendering the church apolitical, thereby reducing Christianity "to a relationship with the supernatural", a relationship that "wafts above the everyday ... [with] no impact on social, economic, political, and cultural realities."²⁴² In fact, in the thinking of Éla, to the extent the church in Africa fails to question and supplant this history, the African church itself, just like African politics and economics, will continue to reproduce the same alienating stagnation and paralyzing confusion as the other neo-colonial institutions. This is the reason why, Éla notes, the churches in Africa tend to lack creativity and initiative and are instead, characterized by mimicry and smug conformism, a situation that means that even the "so-called young churches are born with symptoms of early senility."²⁴³ The crucial challenge therefore, according to Éla, is for the African churches to face this colonial heritage and thus reinvent new styles of presence and activity different from colonial inspired models of disguised apolitical and dematerialized spirituality. Unless such a challenge is faced, the danger is that the church itself as well as its practices will become "locus of our daily alienation."²⁴⁴

In a book co-authored with R. Luneau, entitled, *Vioci le temps des Héritiers: Eglises d'Afrique et voix nouvelles*,²⁴⁵ Jean Marc Éla speaks of African time in relation to history. According to him, history is about "yesterday", "today" and "tomorrow", at the same time. Such a double "regard" or "view" of the past and the future requires fidelity to the past, to our "dangerous" memories (J.B. Metz)²⁴⁶ and

²⁴⁰ Cf. E. Katongole, *The Sacrifice of Africa: A Political Theology for Africa*, 106.

²⁴¹ Jean-Marc Éla, *African Cry*, op. cit., 52.

²⁴² *Ibid.* 48, 91.

²⁴³ *Ibid.* 108.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 4.

²⁴⁵ Jean-Marc Éla/René Lune, Paris 1981.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Towards a Practical Fundamental Theology*, New York 2007, especially chapter 6.

our pathetic and heroic memories. It also involves creativity to make new paths into the future with hope and optimism. This creativity is what Éla calls the “ethics of transgression” for the sake of epistemological rupture.”²⁴⁷ Such creativity led him to articulate theologically his pastoral experience with the Kirdi people of Tokombèrè village in northern Cameroun and turn it into a theological paradigm. He extrapolated from it a theology of revelation that takes seriously God’s self-communication in history and a theology of salvation as liberation in the name of God’s kingdom of peace and justice.²⁴⁸

As I discussed elsewhere,²⁴⁹ there is need to link this theological approach of Éla with what the Nigerian author and novelist, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, calls “The Danger of a Single Story.”²⁵⁰ For Chimamanda Adichie, the modern history of Africa is always replete with a single story. The African poverty is the single story. A single story of catastrophe: “In this single story there was no possibility of Africans being similar to their *foreign counterparts*, in any way. No possibility of feeling more complex than pity. No possibility of a connection as human equals.” But it is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another, but to make it the definitive story of that person; the simplest way to do it is to tell the single story over and over again. A single story creates stereotypes. But one major problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story. The single story robs people of dignity; it makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how

²⁴⁷ Cf. his article “The Memory of the African People and the Cross of Christ”, in: Yacob Tesfai (Eds.), *The Scandal of a Crucified World: Perspectives on the Cross and Suffering*, New York 1994, 17–35.

²⁴⁸ Cf. his books, *African Cry*, and *My Faith as an African*. Cf. also, Bienvenu Mayemba, “The Promise of a New Generation of African Theologians: Reimagining African Theology with Fidelity and Creativity,” in: Agbonkhianmegbe Orobator (Eds.), *Theological Re-imagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*, 158.

²⁴⁹ Cf. Francis-Anekwe Oborji, “The Role of Story in Nation-Building: A Challenge to the Nigerian Local Church”, in: *Encounter (A Journal of African Life and Religion)*, 11 (2015), 87–107.

²⁵⁰ Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *The Danger of a Single Story*, TED Global Conference, Oxford 2009, www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story (10.05.2017); cf. also, Francis-Anekwe Oborji, *Mission and Reconciliation: Theology and Social Violence*, Roma 2015, 318ff.

we are similar. But assuming that you start from the bottom up, you will have a different story. What the Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe calls “a balance of stories.”²⁵¹

However, for Jean Marc Éla, the mission of the church in Africa, he notes, must be placed in the context of the search for another history. For him, the search for another history is not a search for another grand narrative of Africa. It is, rather, a concrete praxis, that involves everyday realities like food, security, vegetables, drinking water and housing. All of these must be placed within the context of a struggle for another society, another humanity, another system of production, another style of living together, both within the family and society as a whole.²⁵² “We must struggle against alienating forces and, at the same time, give back to people their responsibility for themselves and their bodies, teaching them to challenge anything that smacks of chance and destiny.”

Particularly very striking is the fact that such search for an alternative history is neither initiated by, nor grounded in, the politics of inculturation theology or that of liberation which seeks to contribute its social-cultural and ethical pronouncements for the fixing of the existing structures and systems. Neither is such a search for an alternative history for Africa grounded in the politics of the nation-states and its ideologies (globalization, new world order, and so on), to which the church can contribute its moral pronouncements or spiritual inspiration. For Éla, these are the very ideologies whose top-down structure perpetuates patterns of alienation and dependency. Thus, the search for alternative history takes place at the grassroots in communities of faith and in the ordinary realities of everyday life. The challenge therefore is whether the church in Africa is part of this everydayness and part of search for an alternative history. For this to happen, Éla suggests, the church in Africa would have to reinvent itself. As he puts it: “In the churches of Africa ... The time has come to reinvent Christianity, so as to live it with our African soul.”²⁵³

If advocates of inculturation theology helped us to see the incarnation of the gospel values in African culture as the most crucial

²⁵¹ Cf. Chinua Achebe, *Home and Exile*, New York 2000.

²⁵² Cf. Jean-Marc Éla, *My Faith as an African*, op. cit., 84.

²⁵³ Jean-Marc Éla, *African Cry*, op. cit., 120.

task of the church for the future of African Christianity and society, Jean Marc Éla, now makes it clear that such a task for inculturation requires the church in Africa, to reinvent itself. Such a task requires courage, since it calls for thorough revision of church theology and practice. Thus, while on one hand, Éla's theology may on the surface appear antithetical to the theology of inculturation, on the other, it is a recognition of the enormous work that await advocates of African inculturation theologians in the task of reinventing Christianity for the future of the church in the continent.

African Theology of Reconstruction: Origins and principal Authors

If Jean Marc Éla assigns the new task of reinventing Africa to the theologians of inculturation for the sake of the future, it is not so with the advocates of African theology of reconstruction. In fact, for authors of the reconstruction theology, both inculturation and liberation trends in African theology have served their purpose and therefore no longer relevant for the African church and society come of age. Advocates of African theology of reconstruction called for the reconstruction of Africa based, not on the inculturation and liberation motifs, but on the biblical motifs of Old Testament post-exilic era of Nehemiah and the New Testament Resurrection-Event, – the building of a new society, based not on the logic of market economy but on the logic of Christological-Resurrection-Event of Jesus Christ.²⁵⁴

The theology of reconstruction is a new trend in African theology. It is still in its infancy stage. With the fall of Communism in 1989 and the end of Apartheid regime in South Africa in the early 1990s, a new orientation in African theology among the Protestants was launched. The African theology of reconstruction got institutional backing and orientation in its early development from the continental Conferences organized under the auspices of All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) as well as at the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) meetings. It was launching a theology that puts special emphasis on social transformation of the continent through the gospel values.

The beginning of the 1990s was characterized by positive

²⁵⁴ Cf. Kà Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa: Salvation in Christ and Building a New African Society*, New York 2004, 64ff.

changes both at the African and international levels. It was the end of the Cold War in which African countries had been caught up for decades. The end of the Cold War marked the end of communism. Before that, Africa had been a battlefield where the capitalist bloc and the communist bloc were fighting for geopolitical strategies and control of African natural and mineral resources. It was also the end of Apartheid in South Africa and the independence of Namibia, Zimbabwe as well as Mozambique and Angola. The fall of communism and the beginning of democracies in Africa was welcomed as a time for *African renaissance*. This international political situation called for a new theological response in Africa. Prior to 1990 African theology was mainly motivated by a struggle for African cultural identity and liberation from Western colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of the continent. With the new wind of change, the African Church felt the call to positively respond to this new situation which was for many a sign of hope. Also, the release of Nelson Mandela from prison in South Africa was significantly important for Africa. Mandela had been in prison for 27 years. He was released on February 11, 1990.

In November (9–16, 1991), the All Africa Council of Churches (AACC) met in Mombassa (Kenya) to reflect on the adequate response of the church in the post-apartheid era. The Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu, then President of the AACC, asked the Kenyan theologian Jesse N.K. Mugambi to reflect on the theological implications of African the changing situation in the Southern part of Africa and in Africa in general. The Mombassa meeting issued a document: *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*. Mugambi became the architect of this shift in African theology. As Innocent H. Maganya noted, it can be questionable if one should speak in terms of shift from previous theological emphases to the reconstruction paradigm. As the themes of inculturation and liberation come back often in the writings of the proponents of the theology of reconstruction. It would be better to speak of a “new liberation theology” or a new awareness of the role of theologians in the social transformation of the society.²⁵⁵

²⁵⁵ Cf. Innocent H. Maganya, African Christian Theology of Reconstruction (unpublished work) 2014, 1.

Advocates of African Theology of Reconstruction

Apart from Mugambi, another theologian that presented a paper at the Mombassa Conference was Charles Villa-Vicencio (of South Africa). Moreover, among the guests of the Mombassa venue was Kā Mana (from the Democratic Republic of Congo), who also has written a lot on the reconstruction. Mugambi, Villa-Vicencio and Kā Mana are so far the leading theologians in the field of reconstruction. In what follows, we shall attempt to articulate, though briefly, their individual perspectives of African reconstruction theology.

The theology of reconstruction of Mugambi, was first articulated in a book: *From Liberation to Reconstruction: African Christian Theology after the Cold War*. This book was published in 1995. Since then Mugambi has received some constructive remarks, which brought him to publish another volume on reconstruction under the title: *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi 2003). Charles Villa-Vicencio (of South Africa), reflecting on the meaning of the events in the context of South Africa, proposed a theology of reconstruction based on the respect of laws and human rights. He called the church to take part in the building of a new South Africa. Villa-Vicencio later published these points in his book: *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights*.

Although Villa-Vicencio's work was published first, Mugambi had already been propagating the idea of a theology of reconstruction in the early 1990s in the context of AACC consultations. It was, of course, *perestroika* (reconstruction), which inadvertently led to the break-up of the old USSR, which helped to popularize the notion of reconstruction. For Mugambi, both the inculturation and liberation paradigms within which African theologies had been undertaken are no longer adequate frameworks for doing African theology after the Cold War. Both inculturation and liberation responded to a situation of ecclesiastical and colonial bondage which no longer obtains. In place of the inculturation – liberation paradigm, which was mainly 'reactive', we should install a 'proactive' theology of reconstruction. Instead of calling for the ascendancy of liberation over inculturation or vice versa – a 'game' well rehearsed in African theologies – Mugambi calls for an innovative transcendence of both. When Mugambi and Villa-Vicencio first proposed the theology of reconstruction, they

assumed that the time of resistance, characteristic of inculturation and liberation movements was over. Mugambi questioned the relevance of liberation theology and the methodological approach of African theologians. He says that inculturation and liberation paradigms emphasized the negative role of Western missionaries and western negative influence on Africa. In his view, the object of inculturation and liberation movements was to fight against external forces. Mugambi's aim was to move forward and take distance from what he calls a reactive theology to a constructive theology.²⁵⁶ Hence, he called for self-critique. This critique includes the methodology used so far as well as the academic formation of African theologians.²⁵⁷

Mugambi insists that with the end of the Cold War over, inculturation and liberation had no *raison d'être*. The Exodus motif of the liberation was irrelevant for him. Time has come to look for motifs which would inspire the reconstruction movement. Together with Charles Villa-Vicencio, he proposed the Post-Exilic motifs as suitable for a nation-building theology of reconstruction. But while Mugambi challenges the previous theological models, his theology seems to be essentially based on African cultural and religious heritage. Was it not the same objective that the proponents of inculturation had in mind, namely to recapture the value of African cultural and religious identity? Mugambi calls for the re-mythologisation of African myths and symbols in order to revitalise the African cultural values. Even though he criticizes the liberation movement as a reactive movement, his theology of reconstruction still accuses somehow the Western missionaries.

Furthermore, in his theology, Mugambi insists very much on the physical reconstruction of Africa and does not deal with the victims of the different crises. Nor does he speak of reconciliation and forgiveness as ways of reconstructing the shattered human lives of many Africans. We acknowledge at this stage that we have not yet come across African theologians who think reconstruction from the point of view of the victims of the conflicts on the continent.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Cf. Innocent H. Maganya, *op. cit.*, 3.

²⁵⁷ Cf. Jesse N.K. Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi 1991, 23.

²⁵⁸ The topic of reconciliation from the point of view of the victims is one of the major issues I discussed in my recent book. Cf. Francis Anekwe Oborji, *Mission and Reconciliation: Theology and Pastoral Challenges of Social Violence*, 137ff.

Nevertheless, the strong point of his reflection is that reconstruction is an ecumenical project. All forces, like in the time of Nehemiah, are to be mobilised in the project of rebuilding Africa. How could it have been otherwise as the reflection on theology of reconstruction was initiated by the All Africa Council of Churches which is an ecumenical body? The ecumenical aspect will be perhaps one of Mugambi's great contribution to the reconstruction of the continent. This is in keeping with the Second Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops (2009). The collaboration with other Christians is very important.²⁵⁹ Mugambi argues that the churches have to play the role of catalyst as they did in Europe at the end of the medieval time. Indeed, the Church has been very instrumental in accompanying the political changes of the early 1990s. They largely supported this new wind of change on the African.²⁶⁰

Villa-Vicencio, on his part, argues that the task of liberation theologians had essentially been to say *No* to all forms of oppression. He agrees with Mugambi that Africa needs a theology that is more than a theology of resistance. According to him, time had come for the African Church to move from the prophetic 'No' to the prophetic 'Yes.' This 'Yes' is 'Yes' to options for political and social renewal.²⁶¹ This new era is no longer an era of vindication and violent struggle, as it was the case during Apartheid time. Now Apartheid is over, the new era is that of peace and justice. Villa-Vicencio says that the Church should take up her responsibility, "to restore justice and affirm human dignity within the context of God's impending reign, ... to join with others to ensure that 'new' which emerges in those region where renewal now seems possible, is qualitative improvement of the old."²⁶²

Villa-Vicencio's theology is based on the conviction that in a post-apartheid era, South Africa needed a different type of liberation theology based on human rights, justice and the respect of the law. According to him, they are the basis for a social renewal. In his view, Religion and Law are the vital point at which theological growth should

²⁵⁹ Cf. Synod of Bishops, II Special Assembly for Africa, *Lineamenta*, 129.

²⁶⁰ Cf. Innocent H. Maganya, *op. cit.*, 4.

²⁶¹ Cf. Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights*, Cambridge 1992, 1.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 3.

take place.²⁶³ He calls for the homecoming of all South Africans to build a new society based on justice and human rights. But as Innocent H. Maganya has noted: How can people who still bear the scars of the wounds of the past be able to work together? Villa-Vicencio seemed to be in a haste in calling for reconstruction based on human rights prior to some pre-conditions. Like Mugambi, he does not take into consideration the victims of the Apartheid system.²⁶⁴

Among the many books of Kä Mana on the theme of African theology of reconstruction, it suffices to mention, *L'Afrique va-t-elle mourir: Bousculer l'imaginaire africain. Essai d'éthique politique*. Kä Mana starting point is lucid critical analysis of the African reality. For this, he shares the same methodological approach with Mugambi. His main thesis is that the African crisis is to be situated at a profound level, that is, at the level of the social *imaginaire* of the Africans with their magico-religious mentalities. In his view, the concept of reconstruction is a political issue which project is to mobilize the creative forces of the individuals, of churches and African societies for a deeper transformation, in all the areas and at all levels, that is at the political level, social, economic and cultural levels.²⁶⁵ The reconstruction is in fact the beginning of a process of restructuring the mentalities, societies and attitudes.²⁶⁶ Kä Mana proposes a model of reconstruction of Africa based on the theology of resurrection and salvation in Christ. He appeals to the model of the Egyptian mythology of *Isis* and *Osiris* – their struggles for life and rebuilding of existence, and of the model of the life-death-resurrection of Christ event. From these two distinct backgrounds, Kä Mana proposes a new society that passes from political ethics to Christological ethics and politics.

The Christians of today are called to articulate in public domain, Jesus Christ as the horizon of our existence or as he before whom one is to reconstruct the humanity. The theology of reconstruction comes with the challenge of what to do between the place of the logic of market economy and the logic of love as manifested by

²⁶³ Ibid., 12.

²⁶⁴ Cf. Innocent H. Maganya, "African Christian Theology of Reconstruction", 5.

²⁶⁵ Cf. Kä Mana, *Théologie africaine pour temps de crise, christianisme et reconstruction de l'Afrique*, Paris 1993, 57–61.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Kä Mana, *La Nouvelle Evangélisation en Afrique*, Paris 2004, 163.

Christ. In this regard, the reconstruction of Africa must begin with the principles of structuring of our social consciousness: The dictatorships of the belly, of alienation and powerlessness, are the arena from which the struggle for the future must begin. What is at stake is changing these realities and introducing a new way of thinking, to promote an “Africa” which is responsible for its own destiny. It is neither optimism nor pessimism but a desire for hope in the building of a new society.²⁶⁷

Mugambi, Villa-Vicencio and Kä Mana are so far the leading theologians in the field of Reconstruction. But since then others have studied their works and have brought constructive remarks to the development of this new paradigm. Among these figures is Tinyiko Maluleke. He questions the wisdom of advocates of reconstruction theology of asking Africans to forget their past history and culture in order to face the new challenges? For Maluleke, authors of theology of reconstruction appear to jump too quickly from Egypt to Canaan, from exile to post-exile, skipping the meandering and the long journey in the wilderness. African continent and peoples have spent a long time in the wilderness since the beginning of the modern era. Any African theology that skips this experience or that asks the African people to forget their past and historical experience in the rush to reconstruct and rebuild in the emerging realities miss an essential point in the contextual reality of Africans as well as a key methodological.²⁶⁸

It is interesting to see that there is nothing on the theme of theology of reconstruction from the side of Catholic theologians, except one of the last works of Jean-Marc Éla, *Repenser la Théologie Africaine*. As we saw earlier on, his theology is not directly dealing with the theme of reconstruction but joins Mugambi in the sense that there was a crisis in the hermeneutics of African theology which was calling for a new way of doing theology in the continent.

The Contributions of African Women Theologians

Not forgotten in this search for a new hermeneutics for African theology are the contributions of African women theologians, who are

²⁶⁷ Cf. Kä Mana, *Christians and Churches of Africa*, see specially chapter 12.

²⁶⁸ Tinyiko S. Maluleke, *op. cit.*, 496.

indeed charting a new path in African theology itself.²⁶⁹ “Women’s issues” have been on the agenda of the EATWOT and many church organizations since 1980s. However, it is a serious indictment of African male theologies that women’s issues have not received immediate and unreserved acceptance. From its inception, EATWOT has always had a strong contingent of women in its ranks. But the women felt that “our voices were not being heard, although we were visible enough ... We demand to be heard. The result was the creation within EATWOT of a Women’s Commission.”²⁷⁰ A significant consultation of Third World women took place under the auspices of EATWOT in 1986 at Oaxtepec, Mexico. One of the results of this event was the publication of *With Passion and Compassion*.

On the African continent, however, African women theologians gathered for the first time in August 1986 at Yaoundé (Cameroun), to deliberate on themes they considered important for the development of African theology. The following themes were listed, among others: a) Woman and the Church, b) Woman and the Bible, c) Woman and Theology, d) Woman and Christology, e) Woman and Struggle for liberation, f) Woman and Spirituality. For the participants at the Yaoundé conference, the spiritual experience of life shows that God gives and *reveals* himself in a way known to him alone to each human person, without discrimination. Because of this, the African women theologians at the conference invited the church to give the woman her right place, also within the ecclesial structures. According to the women theologians, African anthropology considers the human being as bi-dimensional: man and woman, male and female; a man without a woman is not a complete person, but simply a project; the same thing is of a woman without a man. The human person complements one another: male and female God created us. All the structures: political, economic, cultural or religious, are institutions at the base of which there is complementarity of our being created, male and female by God. In this case, the complementary nature of human beings, male and female, comes to be interpreted in terms of its role and functions.

²⁶⁹ Though not the object of this article, it suffices to say that African women theologians are key players in the call for a new hermeneutics for the African theology. Publications of good number of them point to this direction.

²⁷⁰ Virginia M.M. Fabella/Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Eds.), *With Passion and Compassion*, New York 1988, x.

From 1986 onwards, African women theologians have had other occasions of meeting together, especially, under the auspices of the so called, *Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, which was started by Mercy Amba Oduyoye of Ghana. They have expressed themselves in various meetings and congresses on the theme of African woman from the perspective of culture and religion. Leading voices among the African women theologians are: Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Bernadette Mbuy Beya, Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, Teresa Okure, Theresa Souga, Elizabeth Amoah, Luise Tappa, among others. The Circle of Concerned Women in Theology, with its Biennial Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture, was established in 1989 in Accra, Ghana. Some of the papers read at the Accra meeting were published in the book *The Will to Arise*.²⁷¹ Since then, a continent-wide multi-religious women's organization called the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians (CIRCLE) was formed – initially under the leadership of Mercy Oduyoye of Ghana, succeeded by Musimbi Kanyoro of Kenya, and more recently with Isabel Phiri of Malawi at the helm. One specific objective of the CIRCLE has been the production of African women literature and their output in this regard has been impressive. And it would be a mistake to limit the influence of the CIRCLE only to those publications linked directly to their consultations. What the CIRCLE has managed to do is to create space and inspiration for African women to dialogue and to publish.

Whereas authors of different trends of African theology have for the past half-century argued for the *validity* of African Christianity and the *legitimacy* of African culture, African women theology is charting a new way. This theology is mounting a critique of both African culture and African Christianity in ways that previous African theologies have not been able to do. From these African women theologians, we may learn how to be truly African and yet critical of aspects of African culture. African women theologians are teaching us how to criticize African culture without denigrating it. As some have argued, the prediction is that the twenty-first century will produce an even more gendered African theology. "All theologians and African churches will be well advised to begin to take heed."²⁷²

²⁷¹ Mercy Amba Oduyoye/Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro (Eds.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*, New York 1992.

²⁷² Tinyiko S. Maluleke, "African Theology", op. cit., 494–495.

Towards a New Hermeneutics for African Theology

Valentin Dedji from Cameoun, in his study of works of leading proponents of theology of reconstruction in relation to inculturation theology in Africa, has made some constructive remarks, showing that African theology is facing a new hermeneutical problem. In a work with the title: *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, Dedji is critical of the contribution of the following “Reconstructionists” and “Inculturationists”: Mugambi, Kä Mana, Éla, Bujo, Mveng, Uzuoku, Bediako, among others. He finds that all these African theologians have a common interest. Dedji’s work is interesting. He says that the crucial issue today in Africa is that of gospel and justice rather than gospel and culture. Dedji calls for an African theology which gives priority to biblical motifs such as reconstruction, forgiveness and repentance. Though, Dedji does not develop these themes in link with the previous trends of African theology as such, he has brought out important themes for Africa of today which are lacking in the early works of proponents of inculturation, liberation and reconstruction trends of African theology.²⁷³ Luckily, the themes of reconciliation, justice and peace have started to receive some attention in some of recent works of African theologians and the pastoral concerns of the African bishops as well.²⁷⁴

Speaking on the need for a new hermeneutics for African theology, Emmanuel Katongole, a Catholic theologian from Uganda (whom we cited earlier on), adds the dimension of “story and imagination” in theological discourse. For him, African theology today should concern itself with the question of stories and their role in social regeneration of the continent. At the heart of Katongole’s theory of story as a new hermeneutics for African theology is a conviction that the course of social regeneration of Africa and the role of the local church in that regard must not ignore the fact that all politics are about stories and imagination. Katongole appears to be in agreement with Jean Marc Éla, that African theology should not ignore grassroots

²⁷³ Cf. Valentin Dedji, *Reconstruction and Renewal in African Christian Theology*, Nairobi 2003, 48.

²⁷⁴ They formed the subject of the two volumes recently edited by a Nigerian Jesuit theologian, Agbonkhanmegbe E. Orobator. The volumes are Agbonkhanmegbe E. Orobator (Eds.), *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace: The Second African Synod*, New York 2011, Idem, *Theological Re-imagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*, Nairobi 2014. The first volume was a collection of essays on the theme of the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa, which took place in Rome in 2009.

community-based theologizing. For Katongole, however, it is at this narrative level of stories that a fresh conversation about the Christian theological social engagement in an African context must take place.²⁷⁵ The new conversation for African theology is about stories and imagination, specifically, the story about the regeneration of the continent and the role of the local church to that effect. The question is, what sort of difference, if any, can Christian story and African story in theological discourse make in relation to Africa's regeneration?²⁷⁶ Contributing to this debate is Bienvenu Mayemba, a Congolese Jesuit priest. According to Mayemba, a story tells us about the past, supports us in the present, and prepares us for the future: "It involves the memory of the past and the memory of the future. ... It also involves a promise and tells us we should not move forward without looking back."²⁷⁷ Since our African memory is future-oriented despite John Mbiti's phenomenological interpretation of African concept of time.²⁷⁸ According to Chinua Achebe, we look back to the past, to the myth of our ancestors for the sake of the future and future generations.²⁷⁹

Conclusion

The current debate about the need for a new hermeneutics in African theology is a welcome sign. This wave of theological creativity in African churches indicates that African theology is a dynamic, growing, multifaceted, and dialectical movement built diachronically and synchronically upon contextualization and constant introspection. But for the African theology to grow and effect meaningful paradigm shifts, careful note of the ground already captured must be made. This is to prevent an unbridled manufacturing of an infinite number of supposedly 'new' and 'projective' African theologies which are not always thoroughly informed by what has been done before. We

²⁷⁵ Cf. Emmanuel Katongole, *op. cit.*, 2.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 2–3.

²⁷⁷ Bienvenu Mayemba, "The Promise of a New Generation of African Theologians: Reimagining African Theology with Fidelity and Creativity", in: Agbonkhianmegbe E. Orobator (Eds.), *Theological Re-imagination: Conversations on Church, Religion, and Society in Africa*, *op. cit.*, 158.

²⁷⁸ Cf. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd Eds., Oxford 1989, especially chapter 3.

²⁷⁹ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Heinemann, London 1958, v.

have to guard against making African theology look like a frivolous and merely cerebral activity, which is unconnected either to African Christian life or previous theologies.²⁸⁰

It is our conviction that over the past fifty years African theology, in all its varieties, has laid a solid basis on which to tackle the challenges of the future. African inculturation theology has remained the bedrock upon which other trends of African theology were born and nurtured. It is still the identity of African theology and so cannot be dismissed as something irrelevant in the present dispensation. Today, what is required is collaboration among the theologians, since all of them appeared to have common interest, namely the transformation of Africa through the gospel values and authentic matrix of African cultural heritage.²⁸¹

This is in keeping with the theologians' idea of an integrative African theology.²⁸² The issue today is not only about a shift from one trend of African theology to the other. It is also about the change in methodology. Time is for practical orientation of the theological thinking. The era of beautiful and intelligible theoretical elaboration in theology without any practical application to the concrete situation of the people of Africa is challenged today.²⁸³ As we noted at the opening introduction of this article, the 1977 Pan-African meeting of theologians in Accra had already called for a new theological methodology that is accountable to Africans, a theology that pays attention to issues of social transformation of Africa as it grapples with the question of faith commitment in the continent.²⁸⁴ Viewed from that perspective, the strength of African theology lies on the fact that it seeks to match theoretical and academic elaboration with social and practical commitment. This is what is going to make the difference in the future.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Kwesi A. Dickson, *Theology in Africa*, New York 1984, 8.

²⁸¹ Tinyiko S. Maluleke, *op. cit.*, 496–497.

²⁸² Cf. Emmanuel Martey, *op. cit.*, 141.

²⁸³ Cf. Innocent H. Maganya, *op. cit.*, 7.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Kofi Appiah-Kubi/Sergio Torres (Eds.), *op. cit.*, 193.

Inculturation and Paschal Mystery

Francisco Taborda

The term “Paschal Mystery” sums up God’s entire act of salvation for us, accomplished in the Spirit through Christ. It relates to the climax that sheds light on the entire Christ event: his death and resurrection, his ascension and Pentecost.²⁸⁵

When we talk about the Paschal Mystery, we tend to give particular emphasis to just two aspects of it: Christ’s death and his resurrection. We should bear in mind, however, that this does not exclude all the other mysteries of the life of Christ, nor does it deny the significance of his whole life for the salvation of humankind or indeed the fact that “the kindness and love of God our Saviour for humanity were revealed” (Titus 3:4) through the incarnation of the Word. When we talk about the death of Christ, we do so with reference to everything that preceded it. For Christ died in a certain way – condemned as a blasphemer and agitator, because he lived the way he did. The death of a condemned person only makes sense with reference to his entire life, the way this life was assessed by the court and judged to be harmful to society. If that is the case, this person can and must be “removed”. And in speaking of his resurrection we refer to both his life and his death. Christ was raised by the Father from the dead because he had lived and died in a certain way, being faithful to his mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and of manifesting it on earth. So when we recall

²⁸⁵ Cf. Francisco Taborda, *Nas fontes da vida cristã – uma teologia do batismo-crisma*, revised edition, São Paulo 2012, 3; Odo Casel, *Das christliche Kultmysterium*, Regensburg 1960; Angelus Häussling, “Pascha-Mysterium”. A critical perspective on an article in the third edition of *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, in: *Archiv für Liturgiewissenschaft* 41 (1999), 157–165; Susan K. Roll, *Paschal Centrality in the Liturgical Year According to Sacrosanctum Concilium*, in: Mathijs Lamberigts/Leo Kenis (Eds.), *Vatican II and its Legacy*, Leuven 2002, 385–394. I would particularly recommend pages 386–389, which offer an interesting summary of the way in which the term “Paschal Mystery” has been used throughout its history, although there are grounds for refuting the author’s interpretation and, in particular, his conclusions.

the Paschal Mystery, this encompasses the entire mystery of Christ, not just his death and resurrection. The term “Paschal Mystery” also includes his incarnation, his proclamation of the Kingdom of God, his closeness to the poor and abandoned, his care for the sick and his fellowship with the marginalised (tax collectors, sinners and prostitutes). All these must be acknowledged as relevant to salvation, adding substance to his death and resurrection.

Moreover, we should not forget that Pentecost also forms part of the Paschal Mystery, as it is the disciples’ public proclamation of their encounter with the risen Lord. In fact, the resurrection of Jesus would not have been sufficient for our salvation without the fellowship of the faithful, who accepted the good news and recognised it as the source of our salvation.²⁸⁶ This makes Pentecost the culmination of the Paschal Mystery and, therefore, of the incarnation.

The final document of the 4th General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo (1992) proposes the following approach to inculturation: “The Gospel must be inculturated in the light of the three great mysteries of salvation: the Christmas event which shows us the way of the incarnation, encouraging the evangelist to share his life with the evangelised; the Easter event which, through suffering, leads to our cleansing from sin; and the Pentecostal mystery which, through the power of the Holy Spirit, enables everyone to understand the wonders of God in their own language.”²⁸⁷ I will pursue the same threefold division in what follows.

Christmas – Incarnation

The most common way of providing a foundation for inculturation is to relate it to God becoming flesh among us (i.e. his incarnation). The analogy between the two has been widely researched. The incarnation places inculturation in the context of patristic interpretation: *If something is not accepted, it cannot be redeemed*. The Gospel must accept all cultures to make it quite clear that everyone has a part to play in Christ’s work of redemption.

²⁸⁶ Cf. Karl Rahner/Wilhelm Thüsing, *Christologie – systematisch und exegetisch*, Freiburg im Breisgau 1972, 38; Jon Sobrino, *Cristologia desde América Latina*, Mexico 21977, 92.

²⁸⁷ *Neue Evangelisierung – Förderung des Menschen – Christliche Kultur. Schlussdokument der 4. Generalversammlung der lateinamerikanischen Bischöfe in Santo Domingo (Stimmen der Weltkirche 34)*, Bonn 1993, no. 230.

The incarnation can be expressed in three stages: *from closeness through solidarity to identification*.²⁸⁸

The dogma of the incarnation declares that the Word of God *drew close* to fallen humankind by living among us (John 1:14), becoming one of us and being on the same level as all of us in every way, apart from sin (Hebrews 4:15). By drawing close to us, God moved downwards in two senses. Firstly, the infinite drew close to the finite, the transcendental became immanent, and the divine assumed human form. Secondly, humanity (whom God approaches) is a fallen race because of sin and so the incarnation means that the holy one becomes the brother of sinners, yet remains without sin. The biblical characters of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37) and the Good Shepherd (John 10:11 and Luke 15:4–7) shed light on the action that God performed through his Son, Jesus Christ. He draws close to the person lying on the edge of the road and sets out in person to try and find the lost.

Closeness, therefore, incorporates an important additional aspect: *solidarity*. God does not reach out to humans from a distance. Rather, he enters human history and shows full solidarity with mankind. Moreover, his solidarity is taken to the ultimate extreme. He chooses companions who are considered to be the scum of the earth, people who – through discrimination and injustice – have been assigned the lowest places among humans: the poor and marginalised. In drawing close to them, however, he does not observe certain limits and keep his distance. On the contrary, he becomes one of them. He enters the world in poverty (Luke 2:7), he lives a life of poverty (Matthew 8:20), he declares that the Kingdom of God is for the poor (Luke 6:20) and he exemplifies this in both word and deed (all four Gospels in their entirety). He shares his life with sinners and tax collectors, in other words with the outcasts of his society (Luke 15:2), and he dies the same death as the lowest in society, unjustly crucified and stamped an evildoer (Mark 15:27).

His solidarity culminates in his *identification* with others. Jesus' contemporaries see him as a poor man: someone who works with his hands, a carpenter (Mark 6:3) and the son of a carpenter (Matthew

²⁸⁸ Cf. Cleto Caliman, *Aproximação, solidariedade e identificação – uma leitura cristológica do Documento de Santo Domingo*, in: Ernanne Pinheiro (Eds.), *Santo Domingo – Uma leitura pastoral*, São Paulo 1993, 73–89, here: 81–88.

13:53) who was presumably uneducated (John 7:15); someone who came from an insignificant provincial place, a miserable little hole in the contemptible region of Galilee (John 1:46 and 7:40); someone who is often impure because he touches a leper, for instance (Mark 1:40–45), allows himself to be touched by a sinful woman (Luke 7:39), eats with sinners and tax collectors (Luke 15:2 and Matthew 9:10) and does not expect his disciples to undertake ritual washings (Mark 7:2). Not only do others identify him with the lowest, he *himself* actually identifies with the lowest among brothers, with those suffering hunger and thirst, with outsiders who have nowhere to go, with those who have no clothing, with the sick and with prisoners (Matthew 25:40).

The Letter to the Hebrews sums up the full mystery of Christ's closeness, solidarity and identification by saying that Christ was equal to us in every way, apart from sin (Hebrews 4:15). The patristic axiom shows us why this could not have been any other way: If something is not accepted, it cannot be redeemed.²⁸⁹ The incarnation sums up and reveals the whole of creation in Christ as the head, and it thus reveals the Christ-like dimension of everything that is real – the dimension which makes it permeable so that the Christian revelation can be expressed. Whereas someone like Terence concluded in his pagan wisdom that “I’m a human being, therefore nothing human can be alien to me”, Christian wisdom would declare: “I’m a Christian, therefore I do not regard anything human as alien.” If anything human were alien to a Christian, such a person could not have been touched by Christ's incarnation and redemption nor by the wind of the Holy Spirit. Inculturation forms part of this perspective. It means accepting any and every culture as being able to communicate the life and an understanding of the mystery of faith and even opening up new horizons for it.

Death and resurrection – the Paschal Mystery in a narrower sense

The relationship between inculturation and the Paschal Mystery of Christ is less familiar, but it is no less revealing. The Paschal Mystery is the transition from death to life and the outcome of the incarnation as something that has occurred in a world which has fallen on account of sin. By drawing close to the victims of human sin, by

²⁸⁹ Cf. Alois Grillmeier, *Quod non assumptum – non sanatum*, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*², vol. 8, Freiburg i. Br. 1963, 954–956.

entering into solidarity and identifying with them, the Word immerses itself into the universe of death that was created by sin. Through Christ, however, humankind breaks through the vicious circle of sin and death and obtains new life. Not only did the Righteous One, who declared solidarity with us, die as the victim of the world in which he was rooted, but the world that condemned him has itself been condemned to death by his life. His death itself is a judgement upon the world which is condemned by the very fact that it prefers darkness to the light (John 3:17–21).

Inculturation includes death – the death of the person accepting a culture other than his own as well as the death of the culture this person accepts. Anyone who becomes inculturated must do without the things that were once trusted and familiar parts of his or her life and accept something else instead. This is far from easy. It really is a form of death at the heart of life. Thus it is that inculturated proclaimers of the Gospel become partakers of Christ's death. They may even need to radically rethink many of their "dogmas" and reconsider some culturally or historically conditioned interpretations of the Gospel. This is the case if the other culture exposes those interpretations as ways of imprisoning God's truth in the dungeons of Western culture. Burying such certainties can be far more cruel and painful than abandoning certain everyday habits and customs from one's native culture. By becoming inculturated, however, a proclaimer of the Gospel will discover new beginnings by taking root in the other culture.

The culture that encounters the Gospel also experiences a form of death, however. When the Gospel enters a culture, it means renouncing elements of that culture where they contain the seed of sin. In a way, accepting the Gospel can be more akin to death than life. However, once a culture has been penetrated by the Gospel, it acquires its own new and characteristic vitality. Inculturation is therefore both judgement and salvation – for those who become inculturated as well as for the culture as the recipient of the Gospel.

The secret of death and life, contained within inculturation, takes us on to another classical axiom of soteriology, which in this case expresses the redemptive significance of Christ's work: *If there is no shedding of blood, there is no remission.* (Hebrews 9:22) This is clearly a principle of Old Testament cultic practice, which justified ritual sacrifice. In the Letter to the Hebrews, however, it assumes a

historical dimension because it sheds light on the mystery of Christ while also being transformed by it.²⁹⁰ The blood of Christ is the source of everlasting redemption (Hebrews 9:14). It is shared not in a cultic act, but in a sacrificial death on behalf of brothers and sisters, in solidarity with the least (Matthew 25:40) and in obedience to the Father's will (Hebrews 5:8). Like all the marginalised throughout the ages, Jesus is forced to bear the shame of the cross, to which he is nailed outside the gates of the holy city (Hebrews 13:12f). In a world full of sin, redemption can only be found through a historic act involving solidarity with the marginalised, those on the fringes of society, moving out of one's own camp and meeting these people where they live their lives. It means accepting the burden of humiliation, caused by the racist, cultural or social apartheid to which they have been condemned.²⁹¹ Inculturation is redemptive, in fellowship with Christ the high priest – a fellowship that finds its climax in the Paschal Mystery.

Pentecost – “The wind blows where it pleases” (John 3:8a)

The relationship between inculturation and Pentecost, on the other hand, is more familiar. The event at Pentecost has always been associated with the need to preach the Gospel in the language of those to whom it is addressed. However, we must look beyond the second chapter of Acts if we are to grasp the full wealth contained within the mystery of Pentecost. This narrative is merely a grand overture or prelude heralding the many Pentecosts in which people were sent out by the Holy Spirit and thus helped to spread the Church, as described in Acts.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ Cf. Manuel Diaz Mateos, *Jesucristo ayer, hoy y siempre*, in: *Páginas 17* (1992) 177, 58–71.

²⁹¹ Social apartheid is understood to be the phenomenon whereby a population is divided into two worlds that exist alongside one another and are functionally related, but which are hermetically sealed off from one another in everyday life. One group has all the privileges on its side (economic, legal, educational, healthcare and housing), while the other has neither means nor rights, is excluded from all the benefits of modernisation and systematically condemned to unemployment. The integration of this group into the capitalist system is purely passive and inherently perverse. What apartheid effects on racial grounds can be achieved in social apartheid by social and economic means. Cf. Cristóvão Buarque, *O que é apartheid social?*, São Paulo 1993.

²⁹² On Acts cf. Rudolf Pesch, *Die Apostelgeschichte – Teilband I: Apostelgeschichte 1–12*, Zürich 1986; idem, *Die Apostelgeschichte, Teilband II: Apostelgeschichte 13–28*, Zürich 1986; Alfons Weiser, *Die Apostelgeschichte – Chapters 1–12*, Gütersloh 1981; idem, *Die Apostelgeschichte – Chapters 13–28*, Gütersloh 1985. Franz Mußner, *Apostelgeschichte*, Würzburg 1984; Rinaldo Fabris, *Atos dos Apóstolos*, São Paulo 1989; Charles K. Barrett,

The event at Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2) was the counterpart of the linguistic confusion at the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). Whereas humankind was once split up through the multiplication of its languages, Pentecost offered a return to unity through the work of the Holy Spirit. Everyone understood each other and heard one another speaking in their respective languages. It is important to note both aspects of the account in Acts. On the one hand, Luke reports that the Apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, began to speak in other languages (verse 4); on the other hand, he emphasises that although the listeners came from all the different regions of the Roman Empire – i.e. the world as it was known at the time (verses 9–11) – everyone heard them speak in their own language (verses 6–7).

Seen in the light of Pentecost, two aspects of inculturation must be taken into consideration. Firstly, there is the person preaching the Gospel who endeavours to express himself within the other person's culture, summed up here as "language". Secondly, there is the listener who hears the message from within his own culture without having to resort to a different reference framework. The outcome is an encounter which follows the model of the incarnation, i.e. one person enters the world of another and demonstrates solidarity and identification with that person through the working of the Holy Spirit, thus enabling mutual understanding to take place.

For both the one party and the other – the Apostles and their listeners – the Holy Spirit is a third party which disrupts the familiar order whereby everyone stays within their own confines, fails to understand others and possibly makes no great effort to understand them. The Spirit comes from above ("from heaven"), like "a violent wind", causing "bewilderment" in everyone who perceives it (verses 2 and 6). The Gospel is, therefore, not an invention of the person preaching it. It comes down from God and primarily shakes up the persons proclaiming it into action, demanding an about turn, a change in lifestyle, openness to God and openness to others whom they approach and in whom God is already at work. Those who feel called to be messengers of the Gospel face a major challenge: to help their listeners gain a critical perspective on any distortions of the Gospel which the messengers wish to convey as they endeavour

to communicate their message as the most legitimate and unsurpassable expression of the Gospel. On the other hand, of course, evangelisation also challenges the listeners to whom the message is directed, inviting them to undergo a personal conversion, to unmask the anti-values of their own culture and thus to transform them in the spirit of Christ.

The account in Acts 2 continues in Acts 8:14–17, the *Samaritan Pentecost*. Sent out from Jerusalem, Peter and John pray for the Samaritan believers who have been baptised by Philip, and when the two men lay on hands the new believers are filled with the Holy Spirit. The conversion and baptism of Samaritans caused astonishment in the Jerusalem Church, which is why Peter and John were sent out to investigate. After all, the Samaritans were heretics who had split off from Judaism and it was, therefore, alien to the Jewish mentality to accept that Samaritans could be saved without first converting to the dogmas of Jerusalem (John 4:20). In the structure of the book of Acts, Samaria is the first stage in the spreading of the Gospel (Acts 1:8) and it involved breaking out of the narrow circle of a Jewish sect. To become universal the Gospel disseminated from Jerusalem and overcame its first obstacle through the conversion of Samaritans. This was followed later by the conversion of gentiles (Acts 10) and ultimately the Good News was taken to the ends of the earth (Acts 28).

In the light of the Samaritan Pentecost, inculturation means breaking down the barriers of racial and religious prejudice. It is also important to note that the breakthrough for the Gospel outside the narrow circle of Judaism did not take place on the initiative of the Apostles, but through one of the seven who had been appointed to a less significant ministry within the Church (Acts 6:2–4), yet who had nevertheless received the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:39). Inculturation originates in the Church and takes place on the initiative of someone who is close to the recipients of the Gospel. It cannot be decreed from above. The function of the higher-ranking level is to confirm it as a work of the Holy Spirit.

The next Pentecostal event takes place in the *family of Cornelius*, a captain in the Roman army (Acts 10:44–48). This is another new and fundamental stage in the spreading of the Gospel, leading to the acceptance of gentiles into the Church. Once again, the preacher is surprised by the Spirit, as God needs to overcome the resistance of

Peter and his companions. Luke brings out this aspect succinctly by repeating several times that Peter feels compelled to go and preach to the gentiles, because God himself has prompted him to do so (Acts 10:1–11:18 and 15–7:11) through a number of signs. It is in the very act of preaching the Gospel that he learns something essential about it,²⁹³ i.e. that God acts without respect of persons. God himself enforces this learning process and pre-emptly any initiative on the part of Peter by prompting Cornelius to call for Peter (Acts 10:17, 22 and 32) and by pouring out his Spirit over the gentiles before it occurs to Peter to baptise them or to lay on hands (Acts 10:44–48).

Two aspects in particular are worth emphasising in this Pentecost of the gentiles. Firstly, there is the resistance of the person preaching the Gospel, with Peter initially refusing to enter the “unclean” world of his target group. Yet it is precisely in the face of this resistance that God shows what inculturation means, i.e. the ability to learn from those who are the object of evangelisation and in whom the Holy Spirit is already at work independently of the messengers sent out by the Church.

Acts 19:1–7 is about a *Pentecost for imperfect Christians*. They are referred to as “disciples” even though they have not yet been baptised in the name of Jesus. In the course of the narrative, however, they undergo baptism. The lesson to be learned from this passage is that, although inculturation means encountering other people in their otherness, it does not entail indiscriminately accepting everything they say or do. The twelve or so Ephesians, who have already undergone baptism by John, are baptised in the name of Jesus, as is right and proper for Christians, even though they evidently already regard themselves as Christians and endeavour to live as such. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit confirms that it was correct for them to be baptised.

The incarnation, Easter and Pentecost are not isolated occurrences. They constitute the entire process of the mystery of God, revealed in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, who became one of us in this world (the kenotic incarnation), brings forth

²⁹³ Cf. David J. Bosch, “Evangelisation, Evangelisierung”, in: Karl Müller/Theo Sundermeier (Eds.), *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe*, Berlin 1987, 102–105; Walter J. Hollenweger, “Evangelisation”, in: *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 10, Berlin/New York 1982, 636–641.

life from death (the mystery of Easter) by sending his Spirit (Pentecost) so that his disciples can fully accept their human condition and fight for life in a world of death – thanks to the Spirit which is the giver of life everywhere (through inculturation). Whenever the Christian Church of Christ becomes uniform, it rises to the challenge of accepting all cultures, transforming them and giving them a fresh impetus. The Church does not do this on the basis of some external “authority”, however, as if there were something superior about the culture in which first-century Christianity originally took root. Rather, the Church does so from within every culture, in the form of human beings who are agents of the various cultures and are moulded by them.

Models of Inculturation

The Dynamic Impetus of Believing Differently

Martin Üffing

The word “inculturation” has been part of theological vocabulary for almost 40 years now, although the process it describes is as old as Christianity itself. The term was used in non-theological contexts from the late 1950 onwards.

Inculturation is about the relationship between faith, Christianity or church and culture/cultures and how that relationship should be defined. David Jacobus Bosch says that “from the very beginning the missionary message of the Christian church evolved naturally in the life and world of those who had internalised it”²⁹⁴. This essentially contextual nature of the Christian faith was not acknowledged until fairly recently, however. Prior to the Second Vatican Council the Church had increasingly become a “Western Church”. For centuries, any deviation from what the Church had defined as the orthodox faith was considered an expression of heterodoxy or heresy even. In his outstanding “Essential Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council”²⁹⁵ Karl Rahner divides the history of the Church into three distinct ages: firstly, Jewish Christianity (from Jesus Christ to the Council of Jerusalem in 48/49 A.D.), secondly, Western European Christianity (from the Council of Jerusalem to the Second Vatican Council) and, thirdly, World Christianity (since the Second Vatican Council). Whereas Western culture and theology were predominant and, at times, even normative in the second age, a culturally and theologically polycentric Christianity is the hallmark of the present age. After the two world wars in the twentieth century and following the independence of almost all the former European colonies the question of how Christianity could

²⁹⁴ David Jacobus Bosch, *Mission im Wandel. Paradigmenwechsel in der Missionstheologie*, Gießen 2012, 495 (Original: *Transforming Mission*, New York 1991/2011).

²⁹⁵ Cf. Karl Rahner, “Theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils”, in: idem, *Schriften zur Theologie XIV, Zurich/Einsiedeln/Cologne 1980*, 303–318.

become indigenous to different cultures and contexts took on a completely new dimension.

In an article entitled “Conversion must not uproot” Mahatma Gandhi wrote:

“[...] In those days Christian missionaries used to stand in a corner near the high school and hold forth, pouring abuse on Hindus and their Gods. I could not endure this. I must have stood there only once but that was enough to dissuade me from repeating the experiment. About the same time, I heard of a well known Hindu having been converted to Christianity. It was the talk of the town that when he was baptised he had to eat beef and drink liquor, change his clothes and henceforth go about in English costume including a hat. I also heard that the new convert had begun abusing the religion of his ancestors, their customs and their country. All these things created a dislike in me for Christianity.

Jesus takes a place in my heart as one of the great teachers of mankind who have had a great influence on my life. I say to Hindus that their lives will be incomplete if they do not respectfully study the teachings of Jesus. We do not need to proselytise in what we say or in what we write. We can only do so by the way we live. Our lives should be like an open book, there for all to read. If I could only convince my missionary friends to see their mission that way. Then there would be no mistrust, no suspicion, no jealousy and no disagreement between us in these religious matters, but only harmony and peace. We in India have become suspicious of the institution of mission in the guise in which it has reached us from the West. Do not confuse what Jesus taught with what is regarded as modern civilisation. I ask you missionaries: are you not unconsciously inflicting violence upon those you live with? I assure you it is not part of your calling to uproot the people of the East.”²⁹⁶

Arij A. Roest Crollius considers the term “inculturation” to be as old as the Church itself, even though new historical situations change the

²⁹⁶ Quoted from: Heinz-Jürgen Loth/Michael Mildenberger/Udo Tworuschka, *Christentum im Spiegel der Weltreligionen*, Stuttgart 1978, 203f.

way it functions.²⁹⁷ The Christian faith never exists in any other form than one that is translated into a culture.²⁹⁸ Pedro Arrupe, a former Superior General of the Society of Jesus, said that “inculturation is a dimension we can describe as new in some of its aspects, at least as regards the clarity with which we now comprehend its necessity, legitimacy and enormous apostolic potential – especially, although not exclusively, in the young churches and nations.”²⁹⁹

I will look now at a number of developments before going on to examine some examples of inculturation models with the help of approaches to contextual theology.

Developments

Delving into the history of the term inculturation, we soon come across the expression “un catholicisme inculturé” (inculturated Catholicism) coined by Joseph Masson in 1962.³⁰⁰ He used the term inculturation to describe a process whereby the Church is inserted into a certain culture. As early as 1953 Pierre Charles interpreted the term in an anthropological sense when referring to the process by which an individual is integrated into the order or structure of the group (or culture) to which he belongs. Charles pointed out that this process had already been described as inculturation “for some twenty years”.³⁰¹ He was alluding here to M. J. Herskovits, who had talked of “enculturation” in the world of anthropology as far back as the 1930s.³⁰² “The learning experiences, by means of which a human being is distinguished from other living creatures and which enable to him comprehend his culture from the very beginning and through the rest of his life, can be described as enculturation.”³⁰³

²⁹⁷ Cf. Arij A. Roest Crolius, “What is So New about Inculturation?” in: idem/Théoneste Nkéramihigo (Eds.), *What is So New about Inculturation?*, Rome 1984, 1–18; also in: *Gregorianum* 59 (1978), 721–738; cf. Fritz Frei, “Inculturation”, in: Giancarlo Collet (Eds.), *Theologien der Dritten Welt*, Immensee 1990, 162–182.

²⁹⁸ Cf. David Jacobus Bosch, *op. cit.*, 527–539.

²⁹⁹ Pedro Arrupe, “Discurso inicial a la Congregación de Procuradores” (27.03.1978), in: idem, *La identidad del jesuita en nuestros tiempos*, Santander 1981, 36.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Joseph Masson, “L’Église ouverte sur le monde”, in: *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 84 (1962) 10, 1032–1043.

³⁰¹ Cf. Pierre Charles, *Missiologie et acculturation*, in: *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 75 (1953), 15–32, here: 20.

³⁰² Cf. M. J. Herskovits, *Man and His Works*, New York, 1950.

³⁰³ Cf. Arij A. Roest Crolius, *op. cit.*, 724.

Roest Crolius also thinks there is a close connection between the terms enculturation and inculturation and that the term inculturation, used later in a theological sense, can only be understood in relation to anthropological enculturation.³⁰⁴

It was initially used in a Church context at the First Plenary Session of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) in Taipei in 1974, at which there was talk of an "indigenous and inculturated Church".³⁰⁵

It was in the 1970s that the relevant terminology was found to express recognition and exploration of the problematic relationship between faith and culture. The term inculturation – by analogy with the socio-psychological term enculturation and the ethnological term acculturation – found its way into ecclesial and theological vocabulary at the 32nd General Assembly of the Society of Jesus and at a subsequent synod of bishops in 1977. It quickly replaced other terms, such as assimilation and adaptation, and has since developed into a fundamental theological concept.

Since the early twentieth century various terms have been in use, such as accommodation, inculturation and interculturalism, a brief description of which will help to illustrate the different interpretations and approaches they represent.³⁰⁶

Accommodation

At the beginning of the twentieth century, missiologists developed a territorial understanding of mission in line with the missionary objective of the *plantatio ecclesiae*, i.e. the geographical dissemination of the visible, institutionally constituted Church. Mission has repeatedly been seen in connection with European colonialism and, in that context, as a process of "civilisation". But even at that time –

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Cf. Final Statement of the FABC Assembly, 12, "His Gospel to our Peoples", Vol. II, Manila 1976, 332.

³⁰⁶ In these brief descriptions I will adhere closely to the excellent description given by Judith Gruber in her dissertation entitled "Theologie nach dem Cultural Turn. Interkulturalität als theologische Ressource", Stuttgart 2013. Gruber begins by putting "Theology Interculturally" in a historical context and examining it under three separate headings: "Missiology" (with the leading metaphor "accommodation"); "Contextual Theologies" (with the leading metaphor "inculturation"); and "Theology Interculturally" (with the leading metaphor "interculturalism").

and, indeed, in every other era – the missionary Church came face to face with unfamiliar cultures which it could not simply ignore.

Christianity, exported from Europe in a missionary guise, met with cultural plurality and diversity and found itself confronted with the question of what the universality of the Gospel meant in practice. Missionary experiences, rendering cultural otherness both visible and tangible, threw a stark light on the cultural nature of European Christianity which, in view of its confrontation with cultural plurality, could no longer simply claim to be universal in nature and transferred univocally to other cultural contexts.³⁰⁷

Accommodation is the term used in this connection to describe the relationship between culture and Gospel. Christianity, which is deemed to be an essentially constant factor, has to be accommodated, adjusted or adapted to “other” cultures. In the process of accommodation, missionaries are the agents who adapt themselves to the object of the mission. Thomas Ohm makes a distinction between accommodation, assimilation and transformation. “Accommodation”, he says, “is ‘the adaptation by the missionary subject, with everything he has to communicate to the heathens, to the unique character of the heathens. Assimilation is ‘the incorporation of the heathen’s own values and insights into the Christian canon of truth and set of values’. In a further step, that of transformation, the elements that have been incorporated are transformed, refined and baptised, as it were.”³⁰⁸

Accommodation is based on the concept of the normative character of Christianity which distinguishes between essential and non-essential elements. Certain kinds of adaptation to different cultures, for instance in the liturgy, religious customs and church architecture, are possible, while the essence of Christianity remains immutable. Thus, the accommodation of the Christian message to another culture does not necessarily lead to a deep understanding of Christianity, since essential elements of it remain alien. Accommodation notwithstanding, Christianity remains a Western, European religion.

³⁰⁷ Judith Gruber, “Theologie nach dem Cultural Turn. Interkulturalität als theologische Ressource”, Stuttgart 2013, 28.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

Inculturation

In the second half of the twentieth century – as a consequence of the world wars, decolonisation and a growing acceptance of plurality – recognition was increasingly accorded not just to the contextual nature of Christianity and church, but also to theology and mission. On the one hand, there was a realisation that Christianity could no longer be explained and understood solely on the basis of European or Western interpretations, since in fact it was already resident in various contexts/cultures. On the other hand, this contextuality posed a very new challenge to the consolidation of cultural Christian identities. In Church terms the Second Vatican Council marked a paradigm shift, the consequences of which gradually began to emerge. The churches in Asia, for instance, talked of the need for a dialogue between Gospel and cultures.

As pointed out earlier, the term “inculturation”, which was probably coined by the Belgian Jesuit, Joseph Masson, in connection with the Second Vatican Council’s call for an inculturated Catholicism, came into its own at the 32nd General Congregation of the Jesuits in Rome in 1974/75. This congregation called for an “inculturation – by which it meant an ‘incarnation of the Gospel’ – into the cultural values of individual peoples”³⁰⁹. Pedro Arrupe, then Superior General of the Society of Jesus, regarded inculturation as the fundamental principle underlying the encounter between Gospel and cultures. He said it was “the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular local cultural context in such a way that the experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs, and unifies a culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about ‘a new creation’.”³¹⁰

Judith Gruber says that Arrupe’s definition documents the breach between the paradigms of accommodation and inculturation. The building of a relationship between culture and Gospel is no longer seen as the mere external adaptation of inessential elements of the Christian message to culture(s), but as a far-reaching interpenetration.

³⁰⁹ Michael Sievernich, “Von der Akkommodation zur Inkulturation”, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 86 (2002) 4, 260–276, here: 267f.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, letter from Pedro Arrupe, 268.

Cultures are accorded theological relevance, since the Christian message can only be expressed in cultural ways. At the same time, the message calls for a *metanoia* on the part of the cultures. At this point it is useful to recall what is stated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, which can be summed up as follows.

What matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in *Gaudium et Spes*, always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

Needless to say, the Gospel and, by extension, evangelisation do not identify with the culture and are independent of all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom the Gospel proclaims is experienced by people who are very closely bound up with a particular culture. Therefore, the establishment of God's kingdom cannot avoid making use of certain elements of human culture and cultures. While the Gospel and evangelisation are independent of cultures, they are not necessarily irreconcilable with them. On the contrary, they are capable of penetrating all of them without submitting to any one of them.

The split between Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the drama of our time, as it was in other times. Every attempt must, therefore, be made to boldly evangelise culture or, to be more precise, individual cultures. They must be renewed from within by their encounter with the Good News. This encounter does not take place, however, if the Good News is not proclaimed.³¹¹

The neologism "inculturation" emerged in conjunction with the paradigm shift referred to above. It was developed by way of association with, but simultaneous dissociation from, the concepts of "acculturation" and "enculturation" that were in use in cultural studies. Acculturation refers to phenomena arising from cultural contact and concomitant cultural change, while enculturation describes the

³¹¹ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation of his Holiness Pope Paul VI on Evangelisation in the Modern World, 8 December 1975, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html (10.05.2017), no. 20; abbreviated below to EN.

“embedding” of an individual in a culture and the resulting acquisition of cultural competence. In contrast to these analytical concepts from the realm of cultural studies, the normative term inculturation³¹² underlines the extent of its theological significance.

Given the nature of the Christian message, which is never extra-cultural but always trans-cultural, the encounter between Gospel and culture(s) has acculturative and enculturative aspects: “Because it is the same Church, universal by vocation and mission, which puts down her roots in a variety of cultural, social and human terrains, the process of inculturation has the characteristics of an acculturative encounter between cultures. And because the establishment of a local Church is also a new beginning, the process of inculturation can be compared with the enculturative experience of the individual.”³¹³

The inculturation paradigm serves as a vehicle for theological reflection on complex, (inter)-cultural communication processes, including those that can be described in cultural theory. Reference is made to different models of theological justification which give rise to a plurality of inculturation concepts resulting from the different aspects they emphasise. Most of the approaches to inculturation (including the doctrinal texts incorporating the term³¹⁴) see it as being analogous to incarnation: “Inculturation and incarnation are not identical in meaning but there is an analogous relationship between them.”³¹⁵

In the various approaches to inculturation the Gospel and the Church appear as the agents of inculturation, while cultures are its passive recipients. The analogy between inculturation and incarnation cannot make a constructive contribution to tradition-building (by reformulating Christian identity in the transformations of its cultural codes) and thus to the conceptual understanding of inculturation. Similar problems are encountered in approaches which place inculturation in an ecclesiological context in the tense relationship between catho-

³¹² Konrad Hilpert talks of the normative nature of inculturation, in: Konrad Hilpert (Eds.), *Der eine Gott in vielen Kulturen. Inkulturation und christliche Gottesvorstellung*, Zürich 1993, 13–32.

³¹³ Arij A. Roest Crolius, *op. cit.*, 13.

³¹⁴ Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (1975); *Catechesi tradendae* (1979) no. 53; *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) no. 52.

³¹⁵ Paulo Suess, *Inkulturation*, in: Ignacio Ellacuría/Jon Sobrino (Eds.), *Mysterium liberationis. Grundbegriffe der Theologie der Befreiung*, vols. 1–2, Lucerne 1995/96, 1011–1059, here: 1047.

licity and locality. Here again, the Church figures as the subject of inculturation which makes use of alien cultural codes. While models drawing an analogy with incarnation emphasise a fixed Christian identity in the inculturation processes, pneumatological and creation theology models have a stronger focus on the respective cultural identity.

Assuming that the divine revelation of salvation is present – in embryonic form at least – in all cultures, inculturation is understood to be not so much the implanting of an external message in a local culture but rather the discovery of God's hidden presence in that culture. The Christian message has an important heuristic function for the search process involved. This model lays greater stress on the transformation processes which give new expression to the Gospel in an alien cultural code, whereas the immutable nature of its message, which calls for a transformation or *metanoia* of cultures, tends to be neglected. An inculturation concept which takes due account both of the challenge facing cultural and Christian identity respectively and of the mutual transformation processes, to which both are subjected as a result of the contacts between them, will consequently build its theological foundation on the integration of various mutually corrective justification models.

According to David Jacobus Bosch, inculturation differs in various ways from its predecessors.³¹⁶ *Firstly*, with regard to the agents: in inculturation the main agents are the Holy Spirit and the local community, above all the lay people, whereas in earlier models the focus was on the missionaries from the West. *Secondly*, the emphasis really is on the local situation. "The universal word speaks only in dialect" (Pedro Casaldáliga³¹⁷). *Thirdly*, inculturation is not only a local occurrence; it also has a regional, macro-contextual or macro-cultural dimension. Inculturation takes place at the local level but always in dialogue with other contexts, cultures and concepts of what is Christian. *Fourthly*, inculturation deliberately follows the pattern of incarnation. The task is to ensure that the Church is reborn in each new context and in each new culture. *Fifthly*, inculturation emphasises the two-way process involved: the inculturation of Christianity and

³¹⁶ Cf. David Jacobus Bosch, op. cit., 534–536.

³¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 534.

the Christianisation of culture take place simultaneously. *Sixthly*, if culture is an all-encompassing reality, then so is inculturation (see EN 20).

Interculturation³¹⁸

The term “interculturation” was coined at almost the same time as the metaphor of inculturation in the missiological debate. Over thirty years ago Joseph Blomjous³¹⁹ raised the question of whether it was perhaps more appropriate to speak of interculturation rather than inculturation. However, there was little response to the term interculturation in theological and missiological circles. The concept shows very clearly that we operate not “between two monolithic meaning systems” but “between multiple cultural orientations”.³²⁰

By treating the relationship between them as a theological problem, inculturation offers several new theological perspectives. Since cultures are acknowledged as unavoidable *loci theologici*, the theological focus is on the uncircumventable contextuality of faith and talk of God. Nevertheless, the metaphor of inculturation suggests stasis and one-dimensionality in the relationship between Gospel and culture, which ultimately enables the Gospel to be perceived as an extra-cultural quantity. It consequently runs the risk of being equated with its Western culturization and therefore of laying the ground for the culturalistic conclusion of the universal Christian message. The morphological change made in the term interculturation, on the other hand, draws on the reorientations in theology and cultural studies which spring to mind in the context of a theology that operates interculturally. The prefix *inter* implies a plurality of cultures and their indissoluble networking. Whereas inculturation sees the relationship between Gospel and culture as a linear, one-dimensional process in which the Gospel is related to a culture, interculturation draws attention to mutual communication processes between cultures.

³¹⁸ Cf. Judith Gruber, op. cit., 78–81; cf. also David Jacobus Bosch, op. cit., 537–539.

³¹⁹ Catholic theologian, bishop, White Father.

³²⁰ Quoted in: Frans Jozef Servaas Wijsen, “Intercultural Theology and the Mission of the Church”, in: *Exchange* 30 (2001) 3, 218–228, here: 221. For more information see Joseph Blomjous, “Development in Mission Thinking and Practice,” 1959–1980. Inculturation and Interculturation”, in: *African Ecclesial Review* 22 (1980) 6, 293–298.

Francis D'Sa talks in this context of involuntary osmotic interactions: "Interculturation has to do first and foremost with a perception of the osmotic and symbiotic interactions between cultures and then with the ascertainment of the resulting changes. Interculturation is a phenomenon which functions behind the scenes without taking any account of human intentions. It is only later that interculturation becomes discernible, mostly when there is some negative interaction. The extraordinary outcome of interculturation is that it draws our attention to what is going on without there being any active intervention or volition on our part. No matter what underlying intentions there may be in the things people do, their actions have a dynamic of their own."³²¹

In a publication entitled "Experiences, Theological Orientations and Prospects for Engaging with Communities with a Different Language and Origins" the Protestant Church in Germany (EKD) talks of a "phase of interculturation". It says that indigenous Europeans have found their way into the community in the phase of interculturation and that they have the right to a say in the respective bodies (e.g. the presbytery).

"It makes sense to talk of interculturation because a mutual exchange prevails. Experiences of migration, homeland customs and elements of European tradition provide mutual enrichment. The members move back and forth between different cultural environments and in doing so they engage in a mutual exchange. There is a definite intention to carry out missionary work among Europeans and to win over members for the community. Different forms of evangelisation are part of 'everyday business'. This means that in some respects the Europeans have to inculcate themselves in their host country. Sermons are mostly translated into the language of the European country they are in or are even given in that language. The topics addressed in the sermons usually relate to challenges encountered in everyday life in Europe."³²²

³²¹ Francis D'Sa, "Interkulturelle Bildung – ein Menschenrecht", in: *Bildung. Ein Menschenrecht*; GLOBART Academy 2006, Vienna 2007, 72–78, here: 73.

³²² Evangelische Kirche Deutschlands (Eds.), *Gemeinsam evangelisch! Erfahrungen, theologische Orientierungen und Perspektiven für die Arbeit mit Gemeinden anderer Sprache und Herkunft*, Hannover 2014.

Interculturation takes account of the contextuality of the Gospel, which is never situated outside a culture but can only be communicated between disparate cultural contexts. Translation processes between different cultural systems of meaning are thus crucial for the proclamation of the Gospel. The metaphor of interculturation thus focuses attention on intercultural transformation processes, which means that Christian identity can no longer be postulated as static and preordained. On the contrary, it transpires – particularly in post-modern and post-colonial theories of identity – that the meaning of what is Christian has to be re-ascertained in processes of translation and communication. Intercultural spaces and thus differences between systems of signs prove to be highly productive places for the negotiation of Christian identity. The term “interculturation” implies reciprocity – it brings out the mutual influence of the translation processes of Christian identity between cultures. Peter Phan has described this reciprocity as the key element in the encounter between Gospel and culture, although he does not use the term “interculturation” as opposed to “inculturation”. “Inculturation”, he says, “is the process whereby the Christian faith is integrated into the culture of the people to whom the Good News is preached in such a way that *both* the faith is expressed in the elements of this culture and transforms it from within, *and* the culture in turn enriches and transforms the previous expressions of the Christian faith brought in from outside. Essential to inculturation is the *mutual* criticism and enrichment between the local Church and the Christian faith.”³²³

The reformulation of Christian identity in other cultural contexts necessitates its transformation, which leads to differences in comparison with other identifications. It thus preserves the overriding significance of the Christian message which can never be fully expressed in a particular context. Interculturation reduces the tension between universality and particularity, between the universally significant message and its uncircumventable particular formulations by interpreting the relationship between Gospel and cultures as an open-ended process of communication between its cultural contexts. The universal unity of Christian identity – its apostolicity and catholicity – takes the form of a translation process between

³²³ Peter C. Phan, *Mission and Catechesis. Alexandre de Rhodes and Inculturation in Seventeenth-century Vietnam* (Faith and Cultures series), New York 2005, 199.

disparate local churches. The one, universal Church is “a universal hermeneutical community”³²⁴, which engages in a discursive negotiation, interpretation and formulation of the significance of the universal Christian message in particular contexts.

Having dealt with developments leading from accommodation via inculturation to interculturalism, I come back now to the term which is most used around the world: inculturation. The models which follow are examples taken from contextual theology, compiled and explained by Robert Schreiter and Stephen Bevans.

Models

In 1987, Justin Upkong identified two main types of contextual theology: the indigenisation model and the socio-economic model.³²⁵ Bosch says that each of these models can be broken down into two main types: “The leitmotiv in indigenisation is either a translation model or an inculturation model. The socio-economic model of contextualisation can be either evolutionary (political theology or development theology) or revolutionary (liberation theology, black theology, feminist theology, etc.).”³²⁶ In his book *Constructing Local Theologies*³²⁷

Robert Schreiter presents “models of regional theologies”³²⁸. Various criteria can be applied for their classification. Schreiter believes that each model can be seen in relation to its cultural context and he proposes three main categories: translation, adaptation and contextual models. Stephen Bevans, meanwhile, presents six models of contextual theology³²⁹ which are of interest here: the translation model, the anthropological model, the praxis model, the synthetic model, the transcendental model, and the “counter-cultural” model.

All these classifications and models which begin with contextual theology, have consequences for models of inculturation.

³²⁴ David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, New York 2005, 457.

³²⁵ Cf. Justin Upkong, “What is Contextualization?”, in: *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 43 (1987) 2, 161–168. Quoted and examined by David Jacobus Bosch, *op. cit.*, 495.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ Cf. Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Orbis Books 1985.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

³²⁹ Cf. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, New York, 2002 (revised and extended edition; the first edition of *Models of Contextual Theology* appeared in 1992).

The Translation Model

These two-tier models, which are most frequently employed in practice, take a look first at the Christian message in order to liberate it from all earlier cultural accretions and thus to penetrate to the core of Christian revelation. The image of kernel and husk immediately springs to mind here. The basic Christian revelation constitutes the kernel, while the earlier cultural circumstances in which it arose make up the husk. "From time to time, therefore, the husks must be removed in order to expose the kernel and to place it in a new cultural context."³³⁰ In a second step the kernel should then be transposed to new situations.

The translation model is used primarily in the pastoral context, which requires special adaptation to regional conditions. Regional customs, melodies and texts can be taken over in the liturgy, for example, without adapting the substance of the ceremony in any major way to regional concepts.

Although the translation model often discovers opportunities for direct adaptation to regional situations, it does have two fundamental weaknesses. Firstly, it proceeds from a positivist view of culture and assumes that outsiders can quickly grasp and comprehend the regional culture. Instead of conducting a thorough analysis of the cultures, users of the translation model often remain at a superficial level and think they have found parallels at that level with traditional forms of European Christianity.

The second weak point in this model is that it rests on a kernel-and-husk theory which assumes that the Christian message appears in a supra-cultural sphere which can be transferred to any culture. Theoreticians of this model overlook the fact that even in the Bible the kernel and the culturally determined husk belong inseparably together.

I will now look briefly at the description of the translation model³³¹ given by Bevens, who also talks of accommodation and adaptation.

Scripture provides the following sources for this model: Acts 14:15–17 and 17:2–13. In Church history, reference can be made to

³³⁰ Robert J. Schreiter, *op. cit.*, 23.

³³¹ Cf. Stephen B. Bevens, *op. cit.*, 37–53.

the following personages (or events): Cyril and Methodius, Matteo Ricci, Roberto de Nobili and the opening of the Second Vatican Council by Pope John XXIII.

The theological foundation of this model derives from an “understanding of revelation based on instruction theory”, which regards revelation essentially as a doctrine to be passed on and thus sees it as concentrating on the substance. Scripture and tradition are superior to, and independent from, every context; they are already complete. In principle, the context is good and trustworthy. As regards the method, a distinction must be made between kernel and husk; it is crucial to be familiar with the context in order to insert the Gospel into it. The agents are primarily missionaries who arrive in new contexts from outside and act as guarantors of the essence of the Christian message. Their task is to bring in the seeds of the message and to plant them in the local soil.

The fact that this model takes the Christian message seriously can be seen as positive; it recognises the contextual ambiguities and can be used by both participants and non-participants in a culture. Criticism can be levelled at the naive understanding of the Gospel and culture and at the understanding of revelation based on instruction theory.

Bevens cites Pope John Paul II among the advocates of this model. *Redemptoris Missio* contains the following statements: “As she carries out missionary activity among the nations, the Church encounters different cultures and becomes involved in the process of inculturation. The need for such involvement has marked the Church’s pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent.”³³²

The process of the Church’s insertion into peoples’ cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation “means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.”³³³ The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian

³³² Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* on the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate, 7 December 1991; abbreviated below to RM.

³³³ Cf. RM 52

message and also the Church's reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.

Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission.

Thanks to this action within the local churches, the universal Church herself is enriched with forms of expression and values in the various sectors of Christian life, such as evangelisation, worship, theology and charitable works. She comes to know and to express better the mystery of Christ, all the while being motivated to continual renewal. During my pastoral visits to the young churches I have repeatedly dealt with these themes, which are present in the Council and the subsequent Magisterium.

Inculturation is a slow journey which accompanies the whole of missionary life. It involves those working in the Church's mission *ad gentes*, the Christian communities as they develop, and the bishops, who have the task of providing discernment and encouragement for its implementation."

Adaptation models

Adaptation models are often employed in response to long-term weaknesses of the translation model when a regional theology enters the second stage of its development. Schreiter distinguishes three stages in adaptation models, a common feature of which is that they attempt to give a voice to regional cultures, albeit in varying degrees. "In the first model, foreign and local theologians jointly endeavour to formulate a readily understandable philosophy or worldview of the culture in question"³³⁴ as the basis for the development of a theology.

³³⁴ Robert J. Schreiter, op. cit., 27.

The second model foresees local theologians being taught how to use Western categories so that they can then use them to formulate their local indigenous worldview.

The third model dispenses completely with any philosophical framework for the understanding of other cultures. The seed of belief is simply sown and interaction with the indigenous soil effected in the course of a long-term process.

The weakness inherent in the first two adaptation models is that cultural data are often squeezed into alien categories. This is avoided by the third model which, in ideal circumstances, can develop a highly contextual theology. Unfortunately, these ideal circumstances are rarely to be found. It is mostly the case that, when the seed of faith is sown, a specific form of Christianity is also introduced, which can then be linked by regional theologies to fundamental traits of Christianity.

Contextual models

In contrast to adaptation models, which emphasise the belief that has been passed down, contextual models take the cultural environment as their point of departure. They “note the persistent social changes with which virtually every culture is confronted”³³⁵. Schreiter distinguishes between ethnographic and liberation models.

Ethnographic models start with the specific cultural needs of a population and proceed from there to religious traditions. They are used primarily at the end of the colonialist phase in order to restore the dignity and identity of oppressed peoples. The strength of this approach is that the questions the people affected have are raised at the beginning of the theological explorations. Weak points are the danger of a cultural romanticism overlooking the inhumane and unchristian elements of a culture as well as the difficulty involved in non-specialists using this approach and taking it beyond the initial stages.

“Whereas [...] ethnographic models primarily address questions of identity and continuity, liberation models focus on social changes and discontinuity. [...] These models analyse the practical

³³⁵ Ibid., 31.

experiences of a people in order to highlight the structures of oppression, struggle, violence and power.”³³⁶

The strong points of this approach are that the real life situations of a people are linked directly to God’s saving word, thereby releasing energies and nurturing hopes. However, liberation models run the risk of taking over aspects of Marxism considered to be negative from a theological point of view and thus of neglecting the biblical testimony of other churches, of putting action before reflection and of overlooking elements of God’s mercy by concentrating on shortcomings.

Other models

I will now deal briefly with the other models Bevens presents. They reveal different approaches, focuses and methods arising from the relationship between Gospel and culture. An in-depth examination of Bevens’ models can lead to an enhanced understanding of inculturation.

The Anthropological Model

Alternatively, we can talk of indigenisation or of an ethnographic model. The anthropological model is concerned primarily with laying the foundations or preserving Christian cultural identity. In answer to the question of whether someone should become a Christian Filipino or a Philippine Christian the anthropological model will say: a Christian Filipino. The focus in this model is first and foremost on the person and his or her fulfilment. Scripture and tradition provide the following sources for this model: Matthew 15:21–28; Mark 7:24–30; John 3:16; the development in Acts; Justin the Martyr – “seeds of the truth”; *Gaudium et Spes* (44); *Ad gentes* (11); *Catechesi tradendae* (53).

Revelation is understood to be the personal present. Scripture and tradition are influenced by culture and, like all human forms of expression, are incomplete. The context is fundamentally good and trustworthy and is on a par with scripture and tradition.

The method employed in the anthropological model is to comprehend the culture and to extract the Gospel from the culture. By

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

way of an analogy, the seeds are already in the soil and must be watered so that they sprout. Citing Max Alexander C. Warren, Bevans says that he advocated “a deep humility, by which we remember that God has not left himself without a witness in any nation at any time. When we approach the man of another faith than our own it will be in a spirit of expectancy to find how God has been speaking to him and what new understandings of the grace and love of God we may ourselves discover in that encounter. Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on men’s dreams. More serious still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival.”³³⁷

- A positive feature of the anthropological model is that it takes contexts seriously, opens up new prospects for Christianity and begins with people as and where it finds them.
- A negative feature is that it has a tendency towards cultural romanticism.

The Praxis Model

Alternatively, we can talk about a theology in situations, a theology of the signs of the times or a liberation model. The praxis model emphasises Christian identity within a context, especially since the context is considered to be changeable. Virginia Fabella says: “Though theologians continue to employ adaptation, which seeks to reinterpret Western thought from an Asian perspective [...], or indigenization, which takes the native culture and religion as its basis [...], there is the newer thrust to contextualize theology [...] As a dynamic process, it combines words and action, it is open to change, and looks to the future.”³³⁸

Sources in scripture and tradition are the prophetic tradition, James 1:22, Irenaeus and Karl Barth. In its understanding of revelation, God is seen as the one who is active in the world and turns to men and women as partners. Scripture and tradition are conditioned by culture; like all human modes of expression they are incomplete. The context is fundamentally good and trustworthy but it can be

³³⁷ Quoted from Stephen B. Bevans, *op. cit.*, 56.

³³⁸ Virginia Fabella (Eds.), *Asia’s Struggle for Full Humanity*, New York, 1980, 4.

distorted; it should be treated with caution. One question which arises is whether scripture and tradition can be on par.

The inculturation method based on the praxis model is an inter-minable spiral of practice – reflection – practice. By way of an analogy, the garden must constantly be kept free of weeds; the work never ends; practice makes people better gardeners. “To know Christ is to follow him.” (Alfred Hennelly)

- Positive features of this model are its strong epistemological foundation, an “alternative vision” and its influence on theology.
- Its close ties with Marxism give cause for criticism.

The Synthetic Model

Alternatively, we can talk about the dialogue model or the analogue model. Bevans begins with a quote from the Philippines. The historian, Horacio de la Costa, once wrote: “We, as a nation, have received a rich intellectual legacy from the West; our religious faith from Spain, our democratic institutions from America. But this legacy, rich as it is, has blank spaces which, in providence of God, we are meant to fill.”³³⁹

Sources in scripture and tradition are the genesis of the Bible, the development of the doctrine and *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (64). The understanding of revelation reveals elements of the three previous models. Hence, scripture and tradition are conditioned by culture and are incomplete. The context is ambiguous and incomplete; the “other” is needed for completion. The method employed in the synthetic model is that of a dialogue with all partners.

- Positive aspects are the dialogue approach; the emphasis on an unfolding process; the testimony of universality; the simplicity of entering into a dialogue with other churches.
- The threat of a “sell-out” as well as a certain imprecision give grounds for criticism.

The Transcendental Model

Alternatively, we can talk of the subjective model. The source in scripture is Mark 2:21–22 (“new wine in old wineskins”). Revelation is

³³⁹ Quoted in Stephen B. Bevans, op. cit., 88.

regarded as a personal experience which is subjective (personal or collective) in nature. Scripture and tradition are thus culturally determined and incomplete. The context is good and trustworthy. Individual experiences are the key to further experiences. Personal experience depends on man's radically collaborative nature. The method is sympathy and antipathy. By way of an analogy, if I cultivate my garden somebody else will be inspired to cultivate his or her garden ...

- Positive aspects are the emphasis on theology as activity and the acknowledgement of the contextual nature of all theology.
- Critical aspects of this model are that it is too abstract, has a false claim to universality and is too idealistic to be practical.

The Countercultural Model

Alternatively, this model is called engagement model, prophetic model or contrast model.

Sources in scripture and tradition are the prophetic tradition, the Johannine understanding of "world"; Romans 12:2; 1 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Peter 1:1; Tertullian; Letter of Diognetus; monastic tradition; Anabaptists; Dorothy Day. In this model revelation is narrative in character and understood as history; Jesus Christ as a "fact" is the hub.

Scripture and tradition are thus the key to understanding history; they are complete, although that is not the human understanding of them. Script and tradition can be comprehended better by an understanding of other cultures. The context is radically ambiguous and consistent in respect of the Gospel – not equal to scripture and tradition.

- Positive aspects are the strong commitment to context and loyalty to the Gospel; the model is also relevant in Western contexts.
- Points of criticism are the danger of anti-culturalism and sectarianism plus a tendency towards mono-culturality and the danger of exclusiveness.

This essay, which in some cases offers no more than hints or references for further exploration of the topic, has drawn attention, on the one hand, to developments within inculturation and, on the

other, to different approaches to the understanding of inculturation. The “models” dealt with can also be understood as models of inculturation.

Questions about the relationship between Gospel and culture have long been of relevance for Christians and churches in Europe, where “the split between Gospel and culture” (EN 20) or between churches and people, at least, has steadily widened. The task at hand is to find new ways of communicating the Christian message. One or the other model – or a combination of different models – could prove useful in this respect. Inculturation was, is and remains primarily a task for the “local population”, be they in Africa, America, Asia, Europe or Oceania. People must explore their culture – which always constitutes a dynamic reality – for expressions of Christian identity and ways of living a Christian life. This will always be a process of dialogue and will transform both parties to it – cultures and Christianity.

In Advocacy of a Perichoresis of Gospel and Culture

Remarks on the dynamic of inculturation in African theology

Rodrigue Naortangar

This article seeks to reconstruct the dynamic which has determined the development of models of inculturation of the Gospel in African theology in order to highlight both impasses and some promising approaches. It is less concerned with mapping in detail the traces and paths of various models of inculturation – an exercise precluded by its very brevity. Rather it endeavours to pinpoint the basic categories into which these models fall, the aim being to separate approaches which lead nowhere from those with a potential future. This exploratory undertaking is guided by the concept of perichoresis. Just as the bond between the three divine persons is characterised by interpenetration without coalescence, so too the relationship between Gospel and culture, i.e. inculturation, should remain poised between conflation and separation. After an initial elucidation of this concept, I will look at the foundations of the various theologies of inculturation in African theology. In conclusion, I will examine both the impasses and the progressive approaches which emerge from this schematic background.

Inculturation as perichoresis of Gospel and culture

A key term in the field of systematic theology, perichoresis (*perichóresis*) or, in the Latin form, *circumincessio*, characterises the relationship between each discrete element and the reciprocal interpenetration of the three divine persons.³⁴⁰ John of Damascus (650–754) used it to elucidate the nature of the relationship between

³⁴⁰ Cf. Gisbert Greshake, art.: "Perichorese" in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 8, 31.

the three divine persons and to describe the entity as a dynamic fellowship: the reciprocal nature of their relationship ensures that they are inextricable, yet they pervade one another without coalescing or intermingling entirely.³⁴¹ This relationship between the three divine persons was formulated in the papal bull *Cantate Domino* during the Council of Florence (1439).³⁴² However, the term “perichoresis” first emerged in theology in the Christology of Gregory of Nazianzus (329–390) before being developed by Maximus the Confessor (580–662) in order to express the unity of the dual nature of Christ: the human and the divine. Thus soul and body are distinguished from one another, yet form a single entity within the individual. Divine and human nature are united in Jesus Christ.³⁴³ This Christological application of perichoresis is expressed in the doctrine of hypostatic union. Christ is understood to be “the only begotten Son and Lord who is acknowledged as possessing a dual nature which is unalloyed, immutable, inseparable and indivisible, although this union in no way precludes the difference between these natures; rather the singularity of each is preserved and united within an individual and a hypostasis”³⁴⁴.

The German theologian Margit Eckholt draws, on the one hand, on the notion of a unity “without coalescence” and “without separation”, as formulated in the doctrine of hypostatic union, while, on the other, referring back to the notion of reciprocity as characterised by perichoresis in order to qualify the relationship between culture and Gospel. Her prime concern here is to make the Western guise of Christianity, which is predominant in the Catholic

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 32f.

³⁴² “Because of this unity the Father is entire in the Son, entire in the Holy Spirit; the Son is entire in the Father, entire in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is entire in the Father, entire in the Son. None surpasses the other in eternity, exceeds the other in magnitude or is superior to the other in power. That the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son is eternal and without beginning. Whatever the Father is or has, He does not have from another, but from Himself; and He is the principle without principle. Whatever the Son is or has, He has from the Father, and is the principle from a principle. Whatever the Holy Spirit is or has, it has simultaneously from the Father and the Son. But the Father and the Son (are) not two principles of the Holy Spirit, but one principle, just as the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit are not three principles of creation, but one principle.” (Heinrich Denzinger, *Kompendium der Glaubensbekenntnisse und kirchlichen Lehrentscheidungen*, Eds. by Peter Hünermann, Freiburg i. Br. 2014, 1331).

³⁴³ Cf. Gisbert Greshake, *Der dreieine Gott. Eine trinitarische Theologie*, Freiburg i. Br. 1997, 93.

³⁴⁴ Heinrich Denzinger, *op. cit.*, 301.

Church, accessible to cultures to which it is alien, yet which accept the Christian faith. Following Marie-Dominique Chenu, who views culture as a “consubstantial element” of theology³⁴⁵, she seeks to envisage the opening of this Christianity in a theological sense by endorsing the theory of culture as *locus theologicus*, which means that it is not accidental but constitutive to the process of theological understanding. She holds that culture, which could justifiably be included among the *loci theologici* in the system of theological understanding developed by Melchor Cano, can be placed in a dialectical relationship with the *loci proprii* of that system.³⁴⁶ Hence cultures are involved in an interpenetrative relationship with the heart of theology itself – the revelation witnessed by the Holy Scripture and tradition and interpreted by the Catholic Church, the councils, the Pope, the church fathers and theology. The Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* (GS), paved the way for theological elucidation of a dialectical relationship of this nature. In fact, this doctrinal document abandons the notion of a strict separation between “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” to the Church. It replaces this notion by a concept of “in the modern world” and wishes the Church to demonstrate solidarity with the great human family (GS 1; 40). If it does so, then those characteristics specific to the Church and the faith become receptive to a relationship of enriching reciprocity with what, at first glance, does not appear to belong to it.

³⁴⁵ Cf. Marie-Dominique Chenu, foreword, in: Tharcisse Tshibangu Tshitshiku, *La théologie comme science au XXème siècle*, Kinshasa 1980, 8.

³⁴⁶ The places inherent within theology which it can call its own (*loci proprii*) and which are at issue here were listed and elaborated by the Dominican theologian Melchor Cano (1509–1560) in his work *De locis theologicis* (1563) which was published posthumously. They included the Holy Scripture (*scriptura*) and the tradition (*traditio*) as the constitutive places of Divine Revelation (*revelationem constituentes*); the authority of the Catholic Church (*ecclesia catholica*), the councils (*consilia*), the authority of the Roman Church or the popes (*ecclesia romana*), the witness of the church fathers (*patres*) and the theology of the scholastics (*scholastici theologici*) as places of interpretation of the content of Divine Revelation (*revelationis interpretationem continentes*). Margit Eckholt posits that these places inherent in theology must always be viewed in the context of their dialectical, hermeneutic relationship to the three *loci theologici alieni* (alien theological places) which were also listed and developed by Melchor Cano. These are human reason (*ratio humana*), philosophy (*philosophia*) and human history (*historia humana*), which incorporates culture. (Cf. Margit Eckholt, *Poetik der Kultur. Bausteine einer interkulturellen dogmatischen Methodenlehre*, Freiburg i. Br. 2002, 403.) According to Eckholt, a dialectical relationship of this kind can also be applied to that between the Gospel and culture. It can be defined as a perichoresis and as a form of unity without coalescence or intermingling, as a consequence of which culture can be interpreted not as accidental but as substantial to the process of theological understanding. (Ibid., 471).

This act of opening finds concrete expression in the relationship between the Gospel, or the Christian message, and culture (GS 11; 58). Indeed, the Gospel evinces a cultural countenance, for the manifest form it took had its roots in Jewish culture and it was subsequently proclaimed throughout the world on that basis, the proclamation itself being rendered possible through the vehicle of culture. Although cultures facilitate a more intensive awareness and a deeper understanding of the message of salvation (GS 58), Margit Eckholt nonetheless insists that the Gospel remains a criterion (*kritérior*) of differentiation and distinction between cultural forms of expression.³⁴⁷ An interpenetrative relationship between Gospel and culture thus takes shape precisely on the basis of difference, a relationship which is analogously connected to the notion of the hypostatic union without coalescence and intermingling as well as to that between reciprocity and interpenetration.³⁴⁸ This is the essence of perichoresis.

I share the view elaborated by Margit Eckholt on the relationship between Gospel and culture and apply it in what follows to inculturation. This term was initially paraphrased in the context of the “evangelisation of [non-Christian] peoples”³⁴⁹ before it became a theological problem for everyone, i.e. for the “substance of theology”³⁵⁰. In so far as it characterises the relationship between Gospel and culture, it addresses a long-standing reality which has undergone various transformations in the course of theological development, even though the term itself only emerged around the

³⁴⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, 303

³⁴⁸ One significant immediate conclusion that can be drawn from an understanding of the relationship between Gospel and culture as perichoresis is that no “Christian culture” can exist. No culture can coalesce with Christianity in such a way that it can imagine itself to be Christian (cf. Paul VI., Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on Evangelisation in the Modern World, 8 December 1975 [Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls no. 2], edited by the Secretariat of the German Bishops’ Conference, Bonn 2012, 20; hereinafter abbreviated to EN).

³⁴⁹ The expression “evangelisation of cultures” was used for the first time in a doctrinal document in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* by Paul VI, which dates from the year 1975 (no. 20). Cf. Robert Schreier, “Zur Bereicherung sowohl der Kirche wie der verschiedenen Kulturen”, in: Mariano Delgado/Michael Sievernich (Eds.), *Die großen Metaphern des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Ihre Bedeutung für heute*, Freiburg i. Br., 2013, 252.

³⁵⁰ Cf. John Paul II, speech to the Council for Catechesis of 26 September 1992, cited in: Hervé Carrier, *Guide de l’inculturation de l’évangile*, Rome 1997, 18.

year 1974.³⁵¹ How is this process of change manifested in African theology?

Changes in inculturation in African theology

The African theory of inculturation is largely attributable to the combination of two factors: the denial of Africa's cultural identity and its emergence within the Catholic Church, as it rediscovered its cultural diversity.

The trade in black slaves and the colonisation of Africa forced blacks and colonised Africans against their will to enter a world over which they had no symbolic control. The colonial rulers followed in the footsteps of the slaveholders in introducing various mechanisms designed to keep blacks in a state of mental subservience.³⁵² Black people and Africans fell victim to racist prejudice and were subject to the most deplorable treatment, literally used as beasts of burden or treated as animals with a human face, at best as primitive or culturally degenerate human beings. According to Engelbert Mveng, they endured a form of impoverishment, i.e. an anthropological annihilation, which paralysed them over a long period of time.³⁵³ There have always been movements to strengthen black identity as well as movements advocating independence and autonomy for black and African peoples.³⁵⁴ The most influential of these with the greatest impact on African thought are the "Négritude" movement, which is more prominent in the former French colonies, and the "Pan-Africanism" movement, which has greater currency in the former British colonies. These two movements form part of a historical dynamic triggered during the 19th century by the "cultural renaissance" movement, which had its origins in West Africa and was boosted by the fight for equality between blacks and whites in the USA.³⁵⁵ The third wave of evangelisation in Africa, initiated

³⁵¹ Cf. Michael Sievernich, *Von der Akkommodation zur Inkulturation. Missionarische Leitideen der Gesellschaft Jesu*, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 86 (2002) 4, 260–276, here: 267f.

³⁵² Cf. Frantz Fanon, *Schwarze Haut, weiße Maske*, Frankfurt a. M. 1985.

³⁵³ Cf. Engelbert Mveng, *L'Afrique dans l'Eglise. Paroles d'un croyant*, Paris 1985, 203f.

³⁵⁴ Cf. Achille Mbembe, *Afriques indociles. Christianisme, pouvoir et Etat en société postcoloniale*, Paris 1988.

³⁵⁵ Cf. Oscar Bimwenyi-Kweshi, *Discours théologique négro-africain. Problèmes de fondement*, Paris 1981, 202–205; Simon Matondo-Tuzizila, *Afrikanisches Christentum –*

in the early 19th century, heeded the lessons learned from the two that had gone before. The first of these waves dates back to the apostolic era itself, engendering a vibrant form of Christianity in northern and parts of eastern Africa which endured at least until the advent of Islam in the 7th century. The second wave of evangelisation followed on the heels of European expansionism in the 15th and 16th centuries and extended to the western and central coasts of the Dark Continent.³⁵⁶

Many of the missionaries pioneering this third wave of evangelisation were undoubtedly convinced that they were advancing civilisation by proclaiming the Gospel. They were, after all, a product of their age. However, these missionaries gradually came to favour the formation of an African clergy and the rooting of the Church in African soil³⁵⁷, their ulterior motive certainly being to counter the emerging popularity of the independent African churches. At all events, it was this nascent clergy which gradually took the fate of the African churches into its own hands, ultimately representing Africa, to a limited though significant extent, at the Second Vatican Council.³⁵⁸ A refusal to accept African cultural identity despite its ever stronger presence within the Catholic Church led to the first tentative attempts at theology on the part of blacks and Africans. The birth of African theology was marked by the issuing of an anthology entitled *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent* ("Black Priests Ask Questions")³⁵⁹, 62–1992, Nairobi 1994 which was published by fifteen black and/

Anspruch und Theologie. Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Offenbarung und Kontext, Hamburg 2008, 218–222.

³⁵⁶ Cf. John Baur, 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa. An African History, 62–992, Nairobi 1994.

³⁵⁷ In his Exhortation *Maximum Illud* (1919) Pope Benedict XV warned the predominantly European missionaries against any nationalist or political urge to exert colonialist influence in favour of their homelands, advocating instead the establishment and training of an indigenous clergy which would gradually supersede the missionaries. This stance was also taken by Pius XI and Pius XII. Cf. Johannes Dörmann, *Das II. Vatikanum. Radikale Zäsur in der Missionsgeschichte?*, in: *Theologisches* 17 (1987), 22f.; Aylward Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, Eugene 2006, 180f.

³⁵⁸ The first African priests were ordained during the papacies of Pius X and Benedict XV. The first African bishop was ordained under Pius XII in 1939 and the first cardinal (Laurean Rugambwa from Tanzania) was created in 1960. Fourteen African bishops and two periti from Africa attended the Second Vatican Council. Cf. Tharcisse Tshibangu Tshitshiku, *Le concile Vatican II et l'Eglise africaine. Mise en oeuvre du Concile dans l'Eglise d'Afrique (1960–2010)*, Paris 2012, 41f.; Engelbert Mveng, *op. cit.*, 222f.

³⁵⁹ Léonard Santedi Kinkupu et al. (Eds.), *Des prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, Paris 1956.

or African priests and seminarians.³⁶⁰ The tender shoots of a future African theology of inculturation were already perceptible here, as the anthology addressed the relationship between cultural African identity and Christian identity. The fundamental question posed by this volume was whether Africans could only become Christians if they sacrificed their identity as Africans. This question had already been asked two years previously at a congress in Accra (Ghana) on the theme of “African Christianity and Culture”.³⁶¹ The anthology’s authors, the majority of whom were influenced by the “Négritude” movement, asserted that it was possible to be both a Christian and an African. Their line of argument rested on the theology of adaptation or the theology of “pierres d’attente”³⁶², according to which the Christian message can be adapted to the African cultural context, because it fulfils the expectations of the African cultures in which the Word of God has already been disseminated (*lógói spermatikoi*).

The work of the theologian Vincent Mulago, who hails from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, illustrates the endeavour to link African cultural identity with the Christian message.³⁶³ The theology of adaptation or the theology of “pierres d’attente” constituted progress as compared with the theology of the implantation of the Church (*implantatio Ecclesiae*) in mission territory and the theology of the conversion of souls (*conversio animarum*) propagated by the missionaries. The theologies of adaptation and “pierres d’attente” respected African cultural identity to a greater extent than the other approaches and did not encumber them with any pointless tension between an African and a Christian identity. They held that it was possible to be both an African and a Christian in the fullest sense.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁰ Cf. Bénézet Bujo, “Afrikanische Theologie” in ihrem gesellschaftlichen Kontext, Düsseldorf 1986, 61f.

³⁶¹ Cf. Heribert Rucker, “Afrikanische Theologie”. Darstellung und Dialog, Innsbruck 1985, 39f.

³⁶² This is an architectural term. It refers to the stone blocks protruding from the end of a wall enabling another wall to be subsequently attached to it; a possible translation might be “a theology of dovetailing” (translator’s note).

³⁶³ Cf., for example: Vincent Mulago, “Le pact de sang et la communion alimentaire, pierres d’attente de la communion eucharistique”, in: Léonard Santedi (Eds.), *Des prêtres noirs s’interrogent. Cinquante ans après*, Paris 2006, 171–187; Mulago gwa Cikala M., *La religion traditionnelle des Bantu et leur vision du monde*, Kinshasa 1980, 133f.

³⁶⁴ Cf. Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Ganz Christ und ganz Afrikaner?”, in: Franz Gmainer-Pranzl/Rodrigue M. Naortangar (Eds.), *Christlicher Glaube im heutigen Afrika. Beiträge zu einer theologischen Standortbestimmung*, Innsbruck 2013, 167–208.

This can be inferred, incidentally, from the comments of the first Congolese cardinal, Joseph-Albert Malula (Democratic Republic of the Congo), for whom the African Church was required to practise a twofold fidelity – to the Holy Spirit and to Africa.³⁶⁵ In his exhortation in Kampala in 1969, Pope Paul VI urged Africans to become their own missionaries, and his call for an independent, African expression of the faith³⁶⁶ constituted a confirmation of this as well as a doctrinal assurance. This encouraged a theological enthusiasm, the effects of which heralded the end of the theology of adaptation in the 1970s. It went out of existence for two reasons:

Firstly, because of the correlation this theology had established between elements of African culture and the Christian faith – this being the outcome of a quest for congruence which gave the theology an extrinsic character in a fundamentalist and historicist sense, thus making it redolent of the Neo-Scholasticism denounced by the Second Vatican Council³⁶⁷; and secondly, because of an erroneous notion inherent in the theology of a preceding core of the Gospel, around which the culture should be wrapped³⁶⁸. Thus, the age of the theology of inculturation in the proper sense of the word dawned.

The contrast which emerged in the 1980s between the theology of inculturation and the theology of liberation was, in truth, a welcome one. It was important to avoid inculturation being limited to an “archaeology” of traditional cultural values with the aim of relating those values to the Christian message. This would have meant neglecting the very real social challenges of the present. Oscar Bimwenyi-Kweshi from the Democratic Republic of the Congo

³⁶⁵ Cf. Joseph-Albert Malula, “Die Kirche zur Stunde der Afrikanität”, in: Ludwig Bertsch (Eds.), *Laien als Gemeindeleiter. Ein afrikanisches Modell. Texte der Erzdiözese Kinshasa*, Freiburg i. Br. 1990, 8.

³⁶⁶ Cf. Paul VI, sermon on the occasion of the Eucharistic mass marking the conclusion of the Symposium of African Bishops held in Kampala (Uganda) on 31 July 1969, available at: https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/fr/homilies/1969/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19690731.html (05.05.2017); Bénédet Bujo/Juvénal Ilunga Muya (Eds.), *Théologie africaine au 21^{ème} siècle. Quelques figures*, vol. 2, Fribourg 2002, 573f.

³⁶⁷ These reasons were seminal to the decision taken by the bishops of Africa and Madagascar attending the Synod on the Evangelisation of Cultures in Rome in 1974 to abandon the theology of adaptation. Cf. Ngindu Mushete, *Entretien avec Professeur Ngindu Mushete autour de la théologie africaine (avec Raphael Bazebizonza)*, in: *Akwaba 10* (2014), 38.

³⁶⁸ Cf. Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, New York 2002, 43.

is one of the many African theologians who have analysed the issue of “inculturation” in great detail in and for their respective times. In his view, Africanity, or the locus of African socio-cultural and religious experience, is the epistemological key enabling the Christian message to be deciphered for Africans. He considers Africanity to be a constitutive element of revelation in Africa.³⁶⁹ However, there is nothing to prevent us from believing that what he terms “Africanity” is simply the disinterment of obsolete cultural realities which have very little significance for the world in which we live. The stance adopted by Jean-Marc Éla, a liberation theologian from Cameroon, endorses this criticism. He draws attention to the precarious social situation and material poverty of marginalised contemporary Africa. In his view, the quest for “African authenticity” is less important than the places where the Christian message becomes subversive, where the face of God assumes the countenance of a liberator urging commitment and dedicated service to the poor and marginalised.³⁷⁰ At all events, the contrast between African liberation theology and the African theology of inculturation failed to prevent the former from being influenced more strongly by culture from the outset than its Latin American counterpart. This contrast has diminished increasingly since the 1990s, however, thanks not least to the emergence of the “theology of reconstruction” as propagated by Jesse Mugambi from Kenya and Kä Mana from the Democratic Republic of the Congo as well as to the “life theology” of his fellow countryman Léonard Santedi Kinkupu.

Impasses and paths to the future opened up by the dynamic of inculturation

What image of the dynamic of inculturation has emerged from this historical overview? It is no exaggeration to state, along with Ngindu Mushete, that the issue at stake here is the Africanisation of theological thinking. It represents a continuation of the historical

³⁶⁹ Cf. Claude Ozankom, *Christliche Botschaft und afrikanische Kultur. Zur Bedeutung der afrikanischen Tradition in der afrikanischen Theologie am Beispiel des Kongo*, Neuried 1999, 193; id., “Oscar Bimwenyi. Fin d’une période de discussion sur la possibilité d’une théologie africaine” in: Bénézet Bujo/Juvenal Ilunga Muya (Eds.), *Théologie africaine au XXème siècle. Quelques figures*, vol. 1, Kinshasa 2004, 99.

³⁷⁰ Cf. Jean-Marc Éla, *Ma foi d’Africain*, Paris 1985.

dynamic launched by the African emancipation movement.³⁷¹ In the words of Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, a philosopher and theologian from Cameroon, this is the “schematic background” of African liberation which is “in constant flux”³⁷² and of the dynamic which entitles individuals to “believe differently”³⁷³, preventing them from getting lost in this difference and, instead, enabling them to accept themselves as Christian Africans in the fullest sense. The principle of twofold fidelity to the Holy Spirit and to Africa mentioned earlier is focused on this objective.

A dynamic of this nature may be deemed auspicious if it presents the interpenetration of African cultural identities and the Gospel in a differentiated manner. If it fails to do so, it ends up in a theological impasse. Portrayed as the interpenetration of cultural identities and the Gospel, it is above all suspicion of cultural essentialism. It does not constitute a definition of immutable cultural characteristics, which can be said, in many respects, of the term “Africanity”. It is, rather, a cultural dynamic which has always existed in perichoresis with the Gospel, which functions as a criterion of the differentiation and distinction of cultural forms of expression. In fact, while cultural essentialism inhibits all commitment, renewal and *aggiornamento* on the grounds of its exaggerated idealisation of cultural values, the dynamic of “believing differently” gives rise to a balanced perichoresis between cultural identity and the Gospel and is conducive to renewal. It cannot stagnate or be used to resist every attempt at liberating change; it does not deny history, but instead engages with it in an *aggiornamento* in order to remain true to the spirit of the Gospel. At the same time, this interpretation of inculturation makes the African world accessible to others sharing this common path of humanity. It ensures that the subversive potential of the Gospel does not fossilise. This Gospel cannot identify itself with a given culture to such an extent that it tolerates possible cultural deviations.

I return in conclusion to the argument which prompted Margit Eckholt to conceive of a theological interpretation of the relationship

³⁷¹ Cf. Ngindu Mushete, *Les thèmes majeures de la théologie africaine*, Paris 1989, 34.

³⁷² Cf. Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, *Christianisme sans fétiche. Révélation et domination*, Paris, undated, 19.

³⁷³ Fabien Eboussi Boulaga, “L’enjeu de Dieu en Afrique”, in: id., *A contretemps. L’enjeu de Dieu en Afrique*, Paris 1990, 213–214.

between culture and the Gospel as a perichoresis, i.e. an opening out to other people. An interpretation of the dynamic of inculturation in Africa as the perichoresis of cultural identity and the Gospel enables Africans, who are all too frequently pushed to the margins or who isolate themselves, to become participants in the common history of humanity with all its achievements and setbacks: the history in which Christians seek to live out their faith authentically in the here and now. It seems to me that inculturation thus also becomes receptive to the intercultural and to encounters between cultures encompassing all the challenges of our globalised world.

Inculturation as holistic creativity and dynamism

Julian Saldanha

The holistic model

Inculturation began when “the Word became flesh”. He assumed a full human nature, which included a specific culture imbibed through his family and the place where he was born. The Fathers of the Church were emphatic in asserting that because Christ came to redeem the whole person, he assumed a full human nature: “What is not assumed, is not healed: but that which is united to God attains salvation”³⁷⁴. It was what we may call a *holistic* model of inculturation. This model takes seriously the historical and geographical context: “That context exercised an important influence on the life and mission of the Redeemer as man”³⁷⁵. This implies that the life and mission of Jesus would have assumed a different form and expression, if he had been incarnated in another context.

The infinite, eternal Word used a particular culture with all its limitations, to communicate a divine and perennial message to us. In so doing, he enriched his culture by re-interpreting it in the light of the centrality of the command of love, flowing from the loving Father. Consider the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the good Samaritan, the healings on the Sabbath, his rejection of the laws of ritual purity and of unclean foods, his table fellowship with ‘sinners’, his acceptance of women disciples. Truly he assimilated his culture in a critical manner. No one doubted his humanity or that he was a Jew from Galilee; the charge against him clearly proclaimed, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (Jn 19:19). He was circumcised

³⁷⁴ St. Gregory Nazianzen, in *Patrologia Graeca* 37, 182.

³⁷⁵ John Paul II, “Ecclesia in Asia”, N. 5.

on the eighth day. It was his custom to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day (Lk 4:16). He accepted the scriptures; he also celebrated the major festivals of his people. He had not come to abolish but to fulfil the Jewish law (Mt 5:17–18).

After the resurrection, the early disciples of Jesus in Jerusalem continued to follow his example. It was difficult for them to understand how one could be a good disciple of Jesus, without being like him: a good Jew. “They spent much time together in the temple” (Acts 2:46). However, some went too far when they insisted in regard to Gentile converts: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). Peter, enlightened by a special revelation (Acts 11:1–18), convinced them that “we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will” (Acts 15:11). Paul would put it so to the Galatians: “a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:16). The way was now open for the holistic model of inculturation to be replicated outside Palestine! And that is exactly what happened. It was not a question of exporting or imposing on the Gentiles the Palestinian way of being Christian. That would be cloning (see n. 2 below). The life and message of Jesus was meant to transform people in their concrete life; for this purpose it must find expression in their socio-cultural realities. Paul understood clearly that Jesus, in his person and through his death and resurrection, had himself become the way of salvation for all peoples; he had freed religion from exclusive bondage to any particular culture or society. Consequently Paul exercised great freedom in regard to the Mosaic Law. Although he staunchly opposed imposition of the Mosaic Law on the gentiles as a general rule, nevertheless he had Timothy circumcised and himself underwent a Jewish purification ritual, due to exceptional circumstances (Acts 16:3; 21:20–26).

Thus it was that a great diversity entered the Church, as it took root in various socio-cultural areas. This has left the Church, till today, with a legacy of more than twenty Rites which “in no way harms her unity, but rather manifests it”³⁷⁶. Unfortunately, this process was not repeated when the Christian faith was brought to people who lived outside the sphere of the Mediterranean cultures. The Syrian Christianity which

³⁷⁶ *Orientalium Ecclesiarum*, N. 2.

spread to Mesopotamia and Persia, south India, central Asia and China, did not attain full independence from Syrian culture. Outside the Roman empire in Europe, firm State-support contributed to the Church's consciousness of power, so that the need for assimilating the characteristics of the peoples was not felt. This sort of natural support for the Church seemed superfluous. The liturgy gradually moved away from easy elasticity to rigidity in the middle ages.

The cloning model

During what is known as the 'colonial mission period' (16th – 20th centuries), the Church became geographically universal but not more Catholic, because the feel for diversity was gone. The Catholic church was largely limited to southern Europe. Unity was reduced to uniformity. The whole missionary method tended to make of the mission Churches clones of the mother Church, whose characteristics they bore right down to minute details of their art, architecture, liturgy, devotions and pastoral methods. This may be called the *cloning model* of missionary activity. It shows a disrespect for other cultures. The colonies were viewed as extensions of the colonial countries: politically and ecclesiastically. The exclusive identification of the Christian faith with forms and expressions developed in the Mediterranean cultural sphere reached its highest peak. The Church had reverted to a posture like that which Paul had challenged in the council of Jerusalem. The Church had wholly departed from the holistic model of inculturation, seen in Jesus and the early centuries of the Church. It was like a reversion to the position of the early Judaisers.

It was only outside colonial domains that M. Ricci and De Nobili were able to function, not without raising one the most intense and prolonged controversies in mission history. Yet they were not trying to implement the holistic model of inculturation, but merely aiming to introduce the *adaptation model* (see n. 4 below) of some externals. This only goes to show how closed the mentality had become in the Church. De Nobili narrowly escaped being hauled before the Inquisition in Goa. When the Church finally (1935) relaxed her stand on the Chinese rites, these were fast losing value in the eyes of the Chinese themselves. It was a case of 'too little too late'. The 'mission churches' seemed to lack creativity, because they received Christianity in its finished western form.

Vatican II seeks to restore the holistic model

The Second Vatican Council courageously faced the situation, as it sought to revert to the holistic model of inculturation. The council contemplated the two billion human beings who had scarcely heard the gospel message: These are formed into large and distinct groups by permanent cultural ties, by ancient religious traditions, and by firm bonds of social necessity. The mission of the Church is described in terms of the holistic model of Jesus himself: "In order to be able to offer all of them the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, the Church must become part of all these groups for the same motive which led Christ to bind himself, in virtue of his incarnation, to the definite social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom he dwelt"³⁷⁷. The council recognised the issue of inculturation (though the term was not yet in use) as one of great importance and as having many diverse aspects. Hence instead of dismissing the topic in a single number, the council ensured that the idea would permeate the Decree and emerge throughout it. And so, in treating any subject – liturgy, religious or contemplative life, formation of priests and catechists, and so on – the Decree never fails to add that it must be adapted to local traditions and ways.

The council also used the imagery of the seed to recommend the holistic model of inculturation. The Church is to be established among the peoples, not as a transplanted, highly-developed system, but as a seed which assimilates the nourishment of the already existing soil and bears much fruit³⁷⁸. "Thus, in imitation of the plan of the Incarnation, the young Churches [...] take to themselves in a wonderful exchange all the riches of the nations which were given to Christ as an inheritance"³⁷⁹ the customs and traditions of their people, their wisdom and their learning, their arts and sciences, in short all those things which can contribute to living and celebrating the Christian life. GS 57 describes the exchange which takes place between the Church's message and cultures, "to her own enrichment and theirs too."³⁸⁰ As this process is repeated among diverse peoples, it is visualized that a communion

³⁷⁷ AG 10.

³⁷⁸ AG 22.

³⁷⁹ GS 22.

³⁸⁰ GS 58.

of particular Churches will arise: “So new particular Churches, each with its own traditions, have their place in the community of the Church”.³⁸¹ This responds, among others, to the repeated interventions of Athanasius Welykyj, Superior of the Order of Basilians of St Josaphat. He wanted a solemn declaration and assurance from the Council, that “in due time, applying the requisite prudence and with mature preparation, also other Rites or Particular churches may arise and flourish ...”³⁸² And *Sacrosanctum Concilium* states that “the Church holds all lawfully recognized rites to be of equal right and honour”³⁸³ the earlier draft had read, “lawfully existing rites”. The change was meant to leave open the recognition of newly emerging rites in future.³⁸⁴ A Rite should be understood as including liturgy, ecclesiastical discipline, spiritual and theological heritage.

The adaptation model

However, after the council there has been a retreat from this vision of a holistic model of inculturation, to the adaptation model. In an Instruction in 1994 the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments rightly critiqued the term “adaptation”, since it could lead one to think only “in terms of modifications of a somewhat transitory and external nature”. We might add that this adaptation model betrays a superficial understanding of culture, reducing it to externals. Nevertheless the Congregation’s subsequent assertions allow only for adaptation: “the work of inculturation does not foresee the creation of new families of rites; inculturation [...] leads to adaptations which still remain part of the Roman rite [...] adaptations of this kind do not envisage a transformation of the Roman rite [...] the Roman Missal must remain a sign and instrument of unity of the Roman rite in different languages”.³⁸⁵ Likewise “The General Instruction of the Roman Missal” (N. 398) states: “The pursuit of inculturation does not have as its purpose in any way the creation of new families of rites [...]”. The position at present supports the adaptation model of a few externals, but certainly not the holistic

³⁸¹ AG 22.

³⁸² Observations, Prot. N. 4/24–27.

³⁸³ SC 4.

³⁸⁴ Cf. P. Puthanangady in *Word & Worship*, 2002, N. 1, 82.

³⁸⁵ J. Saldanha, “Instruction on Liturgical Inculturation”, in: *Vidyajyoti*, 9 (1996), 618–621.

model of inculturation. Due to this, any serious attempt at inculturation is blocked.

Bold directives of pope John Paul II

On the other hand, Pope John Paul II called for “a wider inculturation of the Gospel at every level of society in Asia” (“Ecclesia in Asia” [EA], N. 22). He went on to mention explicitly the following areas:

- a) Pedagogy: We need to present Jesus as the fulfillment of the yearnings expressed in the mythologies and folklore of the people, according to their cultural patterns and ways of thinking. Preferred are “narrative methods akin to Asian cultural forms ... using stories, parables and symbols so characteristic of Asian methodology in teaching ... Be open to the new and surprising ways in which the face of Jesus might be presented in Asia ... the Asian countenance of Jesus”. We should include images which appeal to Asian sensibilities: Jesus as Teacher of Wisdom, the Enlightened One, the Spiritual Guide or Sadguru, the Obedient One, or among tribals: Jesus the Healer and Liberator from the fear of spirits.
- b) Catechesis: We should take with wise discernment, certain elements, even religious elements, from the cultural heritage of a human group to explain the whole of the Christian faith.³⁸⁶ This would include: terms, concepts, examples, stories, quotations. This calls for the composition of inculturated catechisms.
- c) Theology: Theologians are encouraged to “develop an inculturated theology, especially in the area of Christology”³⁸⁷. The Synod of Bishops of 1998 rejected a Curial suggestion that Roman manuals be used in Asian Seminaries. Paul VI wanted the individual churches to “translate the treasure of faith into the legitimate variety of expressions of the professions of faith”³⁸⁸.

³⁸⁶ Catechesi Tradendae, N. 53.

³⁸⁷ EA 22; cf. Fides et Ratio 72.

³⁸⁸ EN 64.

- d) Spirituality: There is a need to imbibe what “are considered great values by the followers of all religions”, e.g. renunciation, detachment, humility, simplicity, silence and awareness of the divine presence, harmony, compassion for all beings, closeness to nature, filial piety (parents, elders, ancestors), thirst for learning and philosophical inquiry.³⁸⁹ The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (1978) has pointed out how we may benefit from Asian ways of praying: “a richly-developed prayer of the whole person in unity of body-psyche-spirit ... techniques of contemplation”.
- e) Formation: “In the past, formation often followed the style, methods and programmes imported from the West.” Hence there is need “to adapt the formation to the cultural contexts of Asia”.³⁹⁰
- f) Liturgy: We need to use “elements drawn from the local cultures ... appropriate forms of worship in the Asian context”.³⁹¹ We have to move beyond mere adaptation in externals to a deeper level of inculturation. This requires, it seems to me, original compositions of Eucharistic and other liturgical prayers, marriage and funeral rites, sacramentals, devotions, use of extra-Biblical readings in liturgy (including the Divine Office).

Implementation wanting

If the Asian churches were to implement seriously all these directives, it would result in the emergence of new Rites. However, Rome is currently opposed to this and has not entirely shaken off its Eurocentric bias. As a result, there is a huge gap between statements and implementation. The local churches in Asia are presently in a state of paralysis, as far as inculturation is concerned. The initiative and creativity released by Vatican II has been subdued;³⁹² the fear which had grasped editors of theological journals is still partially

³⁸⁹ EA 6; 23.

³⁹⁰ EA 22.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

³⁹² The five Special Masses for India have been omitted in the revised English version of the Roman Missal. These included “Mass for Christ the Light of the World” (Diwali) and “Mass for a Harvest Festival” (Pongal).

at work. Rome needs to initiate a dialogue of equals with the local churches, with a view to encouraging them. Rome also needs to be seen as solidly behind the movement of inculturation. Bp. Francis Hadisumarta raised the issue quite bluntly in the Asian Synod in Rome in 1998. Speaking on behalf of the Indonesian Bishops' Conference, he said: "Do we have the imagination to envisage the birth of new Patriarchates, say the Patriarchate of South Asia, of Southeast Asia and of East Asia? [...] Thus, we envisage a radical decentralization of the Latin Rite – devolving into a host of local Rites in Asia ..."³⁹³

Culture is that which gives a people their identity and makes them what they are. Hence it is a great injustice to substitute another culture when it comes to living and expressing their faith in Christ. Just as there are Italian, African and Indian ways of being human, there must also be Italian, African and Indian ways of being Christian. Hence nothing short of the holistic model of inculturation will suffice. This model takes people seriously in the totality of their lives. It ensures that inculturation is not reduced to making a few changes in externals "in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer"³⁹⁴. It seeks to affect cultures "in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots", by "affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, humankind's criteria of judgment, 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"³⁹⁵. The faith is not truly lived unless it becomes culture, that is, unless it transforms mentalities and behavior: "A faith which does not become culture, is a faith which is not fully received, entirely reflected upon and faithfully lived"³⁹⁶.

Inculturation in the holistic model refers to the process by which a particular Church expresses its faith and life in and through the local culture. "Inculturation is not mere adaptation of a ready-made Christianity into a given situation but rather a creative embodiment of the Word in the local Church"³⁹⁷. This results in a mutual enrichment: on the one hand, the culture in question receives a new dynamism,

³⁹³ Thomas Charles Fox, New York 2003, 178.

³⁹⁴ EN 20.

³⁹⁵ EN 19.

³⁹⁶ John Paul II, Letter instituting the Pontifical Council of Culture, 20.05.1982.

³⁹⁷ Workshop Report, International Congress on Mission, 1979.

and on the other hand, fresh ways of understanding and living the Christian faith are opened up. Thus, Pope John Paul II noted that evangelization has to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures, so that they may bring forth from their own living tradition, original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought. In this way, the faith is grasped in a more profound and personal manner by the local people and it can take deeper root among them. “Inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel in the autochthonous cultures and, at the same time, the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church”³⁹⁸.

³⁹⁸ John Paul II, cf. *Slavorum Apostoli*, 02.06.1985, N. 21.

Working with Models of Inculturation

Paulo Sérgio Lopes Gonçalves

Status quaestionis

The purpose of this essay is to examine models for the inculturation of the Gospel from a theological standpoint. This is an understandable undertaking, since “inculturation” is a significant issue that has been on the agenda since the early days of Christianity. The proclamation of the Gospel by the early Christians, who were motivated by their experience of encountering the resurrected Christ, found in culture a suitable vehicle with which to pass on the Good News to people of different origins. Church tradition itself testifies to cultural mediation in the proclamation of the Gospel. This assumed a practical dimension in the theological formulations found by the Fathers and Doctors of the Church; they made use of Hellenistic culture in order to express the essential theological content of their reflections and so contributed both to the establishment of the *corpus theologicus* and to the formulation of the dogmas. Examples that come to mind here are the categories of substance (*ousia* and *substancia*), of person (*prosopon* and *persona*) and of the mutual relations between the divine persons (*perichorese* und *relatio*), which were of fundamental importance for the dogmatic concepts of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit. And what about Augustine, who incorporated Neoplatonism in his theological work, and Thomas Aquinas, who learned Aristotelianism from the Arab philosophers Avicenna and Averroes? The Christian liturgy itself evolved in the course of history through encounters between the Gospel and culture; it paved the way for various changes in the categories and allowed scope for the creativity of the local churches despite the strong emphasis that was placed on uniform liturgical rites.

While inculturation is a phenomenon that goes back to very early times, it was only comparatively recently that it became the subject

of theoretical theological reflection on the part of the Magisterium. In his Encyclical *Evangelii Praecones*, published in 1951, Pope Pius XII says the process of evangelisation cannot avoid taking account of the cultural values of the peoples to whom the Gospel is preached. In its Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), meanwhile, the Second Vatican Council stressed that the Church could not refrain in its mission from giving careful consideration to the culture of the modern world in the course of dialogue, especially since culture was the key factor for humanisation and the integration of people into society. In his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, published after this Council, Paul VI referred to dialogue between the churches and cultures as a source of mutual enrichment and a way of making the Gospel visible. In his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1991) John Paul II recognised the need for the inculturation of the Gospel in the Church's mission. It was, therefore, only logical that he should use the Synod of Bishops – an instrument of episcopal cooperativeness in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council's Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* (1965) – to draw attention to the inculturation of the Gospel by holding synods on the various continents.

The local churches, whose dignity had been recognised by the Council, were thus made the subjects of inculturation, which then became a priority in their proclamation. Pope Francis also defined inculturation as necessary in his Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) so that the Good News of joy can faithfully be passed on and received.

While, as indicated in this description, the Gospel is spread by means of culture, there is no culture which exhausts the beauty of the Good News of the Gospel. Therefore, when the Gospel is disseminated with the help of cultural mediation, it comes face to face with a different culture which absorbs it with the aim of really becoming the Good News. In theological terminology the encounter between Gospel and culture is described as inculturation. This gives rise to a whole complex of terms enabling it to be understood as a theological concept which is written into evangelisation. The aim is to establish the importance of culture and its derivations and to underline the significance of the assertion that the Church's mission is the inculturated preaching of the Gospel. Thus an understanding of models of inculturation exposes the historical and theological

character of each one.³⁹⁹ The classification as a “model” refers to the way in which the Gospel is inculturated in the actual mission of the Church in its relationship with the various cultural locations. This classification, therefore, refers to the method employed in the encounter between Gospel and culture, in other words it illustrates the way in which inculturation takes place.

There is no one exclusively valid model of inculturation. On the contrary, there are at least four models: translation, adaptation, contextualisation and liberation⁴⁰⁰. I will deal below with the first two and the last two in their respective contexts. Each of these models has its own history and theology, and the elements which constitute them give credence to the observation that there is a mutual encounter between the Gospel and culture. That is why I take the historical and theological construction of the models as my starting point. This leads to an understanding of the concept of “inculturation” with its concomitant theoretical status and its evolution in the relationship between the models and the setting for inculturated proclamation of the Gospel today.

Models of inculturation

Translation model

This model is imposed on the various cultural locations by missionary practice⁴⁰¹, especially in catechesis and liturgy. The Gospel must be stripped of any trimmings so that it can be communicated to others in their cultural environment. The consequence in hermeneutical and methodological terms is that the Gospel is considered to be a kernel within an outer husk, each of which can be separated from the other. The practical strength of this model is that it has an affirmative approach to culture and thus adapts the ecclesial translation process to the new cultural circumstances. In other words, it seeks parallels with an already inculturated form of Christianity capable of passing on the Good News without its cultural and historical accretions.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁹ Cf. Mario de França Miranda, *Inculturação da Fé. Uma abordagem teológica*, São Paulo 2001.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. Giancarlo Collet, article on “Inculturation”, in: Peter Eicher (Eds.), *Neues Handbuch theologischer Grundbegriffe*, vol. 2, Munich, new edition 2005, 204–216, esp. 207–210.

⁴⁰¹ Cf. Paulo Suess, “Inculturation”, in: Inacio Ellacuría/Jon Sobrino (Eds.), *Mysterium Liberationis. Grundbegriffe der Theologie der Befreiung*, vol. 2, Lucerne 1996, 1011–1059.

⁴⁰² Cf. Manuel M. Marzal et al., *O rosto índio de Deus*, São Paulo 1989, 11–25.

Examples of the way this model functions can be found in the liturgy, the translation of the Bible and the teaching of the dogmas. The Second Vatican Council prepared the ground for a renewal of the liturgy, as explained in the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, the foundations of which led to the liturgical movement and the theology of mystery⁴⁰³. The liturgy took Roman customs as a point of departure, the objective being to adapt them to local circumstances but without altering the essentials in any way. This hermeneutical principle also applies to the translation of the Bible into vernacular languages. An attempt is made to find linguistic equivalents in other cultures in order to express theological content or convey certain biblical images and transpose them to other locations. This is only plausible and viable if the “essence” is preserved. A similar process takes place in respect of the dogmas, which have their linguistic foundations in their own special contexts. To translate them into the various cultures, efforts are made to seek expressions in the language of the respective culture so as to make the dogmas understandable. The kernel of truth which found expression in the original language is not subject to any hermeneutical changes, however.

Although the uniqueness of every culture is stressed, the marked difference between the culture and the Gospel that is passed on from another culture is not really evident in this model. What remains in place is a hierarchical upgrading and a superiority on the part of the person preaching the Good News over the person listening to it because to translate the Gospel, the bringer of the Good News must be familiar with the culture to which he is conveying it while at the same time being superior to it. The low level of otherness rules out any evangelising dialogue, in which it is possible to discover the presence of the Good News of Christ and the intrinsic new cultural form of the Gospel in one’s own culture, thereby enabling the Good News to be genuinely proclaimed within the recipient culture. The biggest hurdle in this process is that the other⁴⁰⁴, i.e. the specific culture which receives the message of the Gospel, is not seen in its otherness, but only as something different which requires evangelisation. This limitation notwithstanding, there is no denying that the

⁴⁰³ Cf. Odo Casel, *Das christliche Kultmysterium*, Regensburg 41960.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. Enrique Dussel, *Caminhos de libertação latinoamericana*. vol. 3: *Interpretação ético-teológica*, São Paulo 1985.

inculturation of the Gospel in the sense of a translation takes place to the extent that the cultural husk preserves the main substance of the Gospel as it was in the original culture of the person proclaiming the Good News.

Adaptation model

Those using this model need to understand the culture they are addressing and so they elaborate a comprehensive world view in order to effect a more meaningful encounter with Christianity. The point of departure, then, is the essential role of the Western categories in explaining the world. These, in turn, penetrate the world of the culture receiving the Gospel in order to explain it.⁴⁰⁵ The Western categories that have been formulated and internalised with a view to understanding the culture have their own historical and philosophical value, but they remain outside the culture to which the Gospel is to be communicated. Inter-cultural understanding takes place to the extent that there is an encounter between the culture of the person who is bringing the Good News and the culture of the person who is to be evangelised, but the bringer's understanding remains in accord with his Western categories. In addition, there is the notion that the seeds of the Christian faith – based on a categorical understanding of them – are sown in the expectation that they will spread within the foreign culture and go on bearing fruit until such time as a form of Christianity emerges exhibiting characteristics which clearly stem from the local environment.⁴⁰⁶

This model is limited in scope because it is impossible to understand the conflicts within the foreign culture which result from the dynamic process of maturity within the culture itself, as it takes no account of its otherness. It offers no comprehension or analysis of the conflicts which can occur in the meeting between the Gospel and the culture – and these are likely to take place, given that the Gospel is communicated via the culture to which it originally belonged. Even if the foreign culture is seen in a positive light and endeavours are

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. Victor Codina, "Fe latinoamericana y desencanto occidental", in: José Comblin/José González Faus/Jon Sobrino (Eds.), *Cambio social y pensamiento cristiano en América Latina*, Madrid 1993, 271–296.

⁴⁰⁶ Cf. Paulo Suess, "Evangelição e inculturação. Conceitos, questionamentos, perspectivas", in: Márcio Fabri dos Anjos (Eds.), *Inculturação. Desafios de hoje*, Petrópolis 1994, 19–47, here: 41–44.

made to accept it in order to evangelise it, there is no way of unrestrictedly bringing its otherness to bear, because the evangeliser's own categories of understanding originate outside the culture to be evangelised.

One need only picture the challenge facing the evangeliser in having to find his bearings in regions in which Christianity as a religion is clearly in the minority or has yet to properly develop and where other religions are prevalent which have a tradition stretching back centuries. Even in cultures in which Christianity already predominates it is possible to detect a cultural, Christian and religious pluralism, the consequence of which is a need to recognise the otherness which also applies in this situation. Put as a question, how can Christianity preach the Gospel in cultures where Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Candomblé⁴⁰⁷ or indigenous traditions predominate in such a way that a genuine meeting can take place between Gospel and culture? Does not Christianity limit its own potential for rendering the Gospel clearly visible within cultures if the communication of the Gospel is placed above the cultures to which it is being conveyed? How can one authentically proclaim and bear witness to the Gospel within a Christianised culture in a way that ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue can be fostered? These questions provide plenty of food for thought.

Contextualisation and liberation model

This model, which has its origins in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, throws light on the cultural situation in which the Gospel is preached. A hermeneutic perspective is taken in order to understand culture, regardless of whether it is present-day global culture, which may well be greatly influenced by modernism or post-modernism, or a contextual constellation in which its uniqueness is asserted. This model draws on ethnography and ethnology in order to demonstrate its sensitivity towards the relationship between cultural identity and the human dignity of the people to whom cultural recognition was refused and on whom ethnocide or even genocide was practised.⁴⁰⁸

⁴⁰⁷ One of the Afro-Brazilian religions (translator's note).

⁴⁰⁸ Cf. Leonardo Boff, *Nova Evangelização. Perspectivas dos oprimidos*, Fortaleza 1990, 9–17.

The objective here, then, is to overcome analytical universalism, which renders cultures uniform and does not acknowledge their material and spiritual uniqueness, and to provide scope instead for the local context, in which the culture can develop, assert itself and consolidate its identity. The vibrancy of the culture thus stems from its social and historical vitality, the characteristic feature of which is that it lives its ethnic and particular uniqueness to the full. In other words, the culture cannot be comprehended without the social and political contexts which are closely bound up with its identity and thus with the dignity of the people who develop it. This model, therefore, also has a socially liberating thrust, which means that the culture is related to liberation processes in a situation in which oppression leads to the gradual and all-consuming impoverishment of the people.

Seen from this vantage point, inculturation requires an understanding of the culture in its specific context, an open-minded attitude towards religious plurality and customs indigenous to the local ethnic community as well as a keen eye for the processes arising from the oppression and impoverishment of many people. If inculturation incorporates this understanding, it can develop a vitality in which the encounter between Gospel and culture assumes a dimension of interpenetration. This, in turn, has an impact on religious rites, which can be syncretistic from a liturgical point of view, on the activities which stimulate social intercourse, on the formulations in the catechesis and theology associated with the Good News of the Christian faith and on the instigation of movements which can alter unjust and politically authoritarian structures and transform them into structures marked by equality, democracy and participation.⁴⁰⁹

Inculturation which takes place in an environment of contextualisation can concentrate exclusively on the culture without developing an awareness of the liberation dimension. If this is the case, inculturation is subject to a self-imposed restriction which prevents it from seeing the culture in its social, political and economic dimensions. Contextualisation in its deeper sense presumes that there is an otherness which lays the ground for sensitivity through difference, facilitates an understanding of it and, above all, leads to an integrating relationship that is crucial in generating life. If inculturation

⁴⁰⁹ Cf. Hans Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, Paderborn 32000.

incorporates the perspective of liberation, it can provide impetus for a movement which questions and denounces oppressive structures and can usher in complete liberation, in which the Good News of the Gospel touches people in every conceivable way.⁴¹⁰

The contextual and liberating perspective of inculturation espouses the category “poor” in order to establish a dialectical relationship between poverty and the Christian faith. This category is understood in its economic, political, social and cultural dimensions as well as in the dimension concerning gender relations and the dimension that is appropriate to the Gospel.⁴¹¹ The term “poor” thus expresses a number of things: a lack of the economic means to survive and to ensure positive social interaction; the need for the people to become an historical subject capable of setting up its own democratic and participatory structures; the different types of vulnerability to which people and ethnic groups are exposed in society; the plight caused by negation of the otherness of an ethnic group, of an age group or of the other sex, to say nothing of machismo, a characteristic feature of which is serious violence against women, especially the economically poor; the way poor people have of living, feeling and loving others. Combining all these aspects, the category “poor” comes to mean a *locus theologicus* in its association with the faith and conveys a notion of the material circumstances which facilitates a broadening of the understanding of “culture” in the process of inculturation. This explains how effective inculturation can be if there is acknowledgement of the culture of the others – i.e. those receiving the Good News preached to them – and of their poverty in the broad sense of the word.

This model makes it possible to conceive of overcoming Eurocentrism and Occidentalism⁴¹², which are an historical fact of missionary practice and largely coincide with the translation and adaptation models. It is a model which satisfies the urgent need for otherness, which expresses the uniqueness of the universality of culture by revealing its difference, which authenticates its identity. Inculturation thus develops as a process of evangelisation in which

⁴¹⁰ Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *La verdad os hará libres*, Salamanca 1990, 182–196.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Paulo Sergio L. Gonçalves, “A relação entre a fé cristã e os pobres na Teologia da Libertação”, in: *Perspectiva teológica* 43 (2011), 315–331.

⁴¹² Cf. Víctor Codina, “Desocidentalizar o cristianismo”, in: *Perspectiva Teologica* 40 (2008), 9–23.

the mediation of culture in the preaching of the Good News and, at the same time, the identity of the culture are acknowledged to the extent that they give expression in their own way to the wealth of the Gospel.

The epistemology of the inculturation of the Gospel and how it takes effect in the models

The concept of culture

In anthropological terms culture is defined as the complex formed by knowledge, religious convictions, art, morality, laws and customs adopted by people as members of a community.⁴¹³ Culture thus appears to make people humane and socially competent, since it gives them a sense of values and enables them to develop a civilisation. Because culture is both human and social, it has pairs of opposite terms which reflect its dynamic nature: it is subjective and objective, material and immaterial, real and ideal. Culture is thus the product of the human subject or of human subjects and, at the same time, that which is preordained for man when he comes into the world or when he is integrated into an ethnic or some other group. Culture is made visible in works of art as the products of a certain skill in handling and building things, the content and substance of which surpass and define the material itself. Furthermore, culture is real to the extent (a) that it manifests itself in history and becomes an ideal and (b) that it brings with it foresight and development, which are distinguishing features of its stimulating vitality.⁴¹⁴

Culture is remarkable for the fact that it is symbolic, social, imbued with tradition, selective, simultaneously universal and regional, determined and indeterminate. By means of symbols culture acquires a meaning of its own which it develops and communicates through history in order to initiate a tradition while at the same time giving external shape to the collective memory of various groups and societies.⁴¹⁵

Culture is thus the product of human relations which give rise to the morals, customs and values that stabilise society and provide a

⁴¹³ Cf. Claude Lévy-Strauss, *Strukturele Anthropologie*, vol. 1, Frankfurt am Main 1967.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. Ralph Beals/Harry Hoijer, *Introducción al la Antropología*, Madrid 1971, 293–321.

⁴¹⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, 278–290.

foundation for culture.⁴¹⁶ Within a culture, tradition is not synonymous with something old or static but with the *arché* itself, which simultaneously lends the culture vitality and stabilises it. Stability wrought by tradition is dependent upon the institutionalisation of certain customs and patterns of behaviour, and culture stimulates dynamism if it succeeds in guaranteeing the vibrancy and variability of these aspects in accordance with the historicity that stems from human activity. The selective character of culture makes itself felt because it evolves in the course of a process and is imbued by conscious and, indeed, unconscious equivalences, which make sure that certain elements are overcome and replaced by new elements.⁴¹⁷

The simultaneity of universality and regionality becomes apparent if a distinction is made between the essence of a culture and the manner of its realisation. Universality rests on the assertion that culture is a characteristic hallmark of humankind, and regionality can be ascertained by the way in which culture is generated and is identified in its uniqueness in time and space.⁴¹⁸ The dialectical character of “determined” and “determining” in culture means that, on the one hand, human beings determine culture and, on the other hand, are determined by it. This enables the creation of a tradition which thrives in history in a consistently creative manner. Every culture can be changed and adapted to its environment in order to ensure survival, consolation and human satisfaction in the fields of aesthetics, intelligence, biology and religion.⁴¹⁹

Culture goes hand in hand with the terms enculturation and acculturation. Enculturation is a process in which people are familiarised with their own culture before turning their attention to a different culture; this ensures that every individual has a deep-rooted cultural identity. Acculturation refers to the movement which enables people from different cultures to come closer to one another and to join together in initiating a process of adaptation. In the course of this process they depart from the path of integration, in which the recipient passively takes over the culture of the bringer without making him a

⁴¹⁶ Cf. Davis A. Kingsley, *Sociedade humana*, vol. 1, Rio de Janeiro 1964, 48–56.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. Luiz Gonzaga Mello, *Antropologia cultural, Iniciação, teoria e temas*, Petrópolis 1992, 46–54.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. Davis A. Kingsley, *op. cit.*, 242–250.

⁴¹⁹ Cf. Alfred Louis Kroeber, *Antropologia general*, Mexico 1945, 121–124.

gift his own culture. What we have here, therefore, is an exchange process and, at the same time, the establishment of an inter-cultural relationship. Enculturation strengthens culture both in its universality as an essential human factor and in its distinctive uniqueness, but it also facilitates the process of acculturation, by means of which the basic significances and the characteristic features of the culture are consolidated in equal measure.⁴²⁰

The terms culture, acculturation and enculturation precede the theological concept of inculturation, because the cultural dynamism of anthropology is at the same time the foundation which enables inculturated evangelisation to be set in motion. It is in the combination of these terms and in the elaboration of the concept of inculturation that the theological paradigms of the mystery of the Trinity, creation and incarnation can be situated. This, in turn, makes it possible to understand the immanence of the transcendence of the Gospel in cultures.

Theological paradigms

The concept of inculturation rests on three major theological paradigms: the Trinity, creation and incarnation.⁴²¹ The Trinitarian concept of God is a special characteristic of Christianity and refers in its original sense to the mystery that is considered to be *absconditus et revelatus* (hidden and revealed). Hence the mystery is not synonymous with something secret. Rather it means the hidden which reveals itself and, even as it reveals itself, signifies its inexhaustibility. The distinctive features of this mystery are the uniqueness of the substance; the *koinonia* (community) and *perichoresis* (interpenetration) of the divine persons; and the distinction between the propriety and mission of every individual. Hence there is a single divine substance made up of three divine persons. They are distinguished by what is peculiar to them (*proprietas*) and by their respective mission. They relate to each other by means of perichoresis and, in doing so, substantiate the statement that God is one in terms of the substance and several

⁴²⁰ Cf. Leonardo Boff, *op. cit.*, 19–25.

⁴²¹ Cf. Paulo Sergio L. Gonçalves, “Cristianismo hoje e amanhã: fé e cultura”, in: Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer/Paulo Fernando Carneiro de Andrade (Eds.), *O mistério e a história. Ensaio de teologia em homenagem ao Pe. Félix Pastor por ocasião dos seus 70 anos*, São Paulo 2003, 173–205.

in terms of the persons. Inner-Trinitarian life is, in a mysterious way, the love between the Father and the Son in the working of the Holy Spirit, which is love itself between the other two divine persons.

Inner-Trinitarian love intensifies as love in the movement of the revelation in creation and history. This movement has its origins in the mystery of the Trinity itself, in which it is the mission of the Father to bring forth creation through the Son and in the working of the Holy Spirit. Creation is, therefore, a revelatory act by God, as a result of which His creatures are distinguished by otherness, which gives them their own specific identity.⁴²² In the biblical sense, creation is regarded as the diversity of created forms of existence and is described as good, even before the appearance of man on the sixth day. However, with the presence of man created in the image and likeness of God, as God's partner in the covenant and endowed with responsibility for pressing ahead with the *creatio continua* (the continuous process of creation), creation becomes good. The completion of the work of creation on the seventh day – a number symbolising perfection – is sealed by the use of three crucial verbs: rest, bless and sanctify. The combination of these verbs means that God is inherent in creation, that God accepts its diversity in unity and ensures that creation becomes the revelation of God's presence and is consequently good and sanctified.⁴²³

If creation is deemed to be good and sanctified, it is then possible to understand suffering, the presence of which does not stem from the *creatio originalis* (the original creation). Suffering is, therefore, the other face of love which originates in God and is God himself. Since suffering is the other face of love, revelation occurs within creation in the form of compassion for those who suffer throughout creation. The exercise of compassion presumes the otherness of God and the human being and a face-to-face meeting between the two. God is filled with compassion and feels human pain, not because of any ontological impotence but because of ontological power, which manifests itself in human weakness.⁴²⁴

⁴²² Cf. Juan L. Ruiz de la Peña, *Teologia da criação*, São Paulo 1989.

⁴²³ Cf. Luis F. Ladaris, *Antropologia teológica*, Rome 1995, 15–55.

⁴²⁴ Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *Wissenschaft und Weisheit. Zum Gespräch zwischen Naturwissenschaft und Theologie*, Gütersloh 2002.

God's compassion with creation gives rise to the third paradigm, that of incarnation, in which God's Word becomes flesh in history. This hypostatic union of the Word, in which it assumes human form as the Divine Word in everything except sin, illustrates Jesus Christ's deep immersion in Jewish culture. He internalised the customs and the social and religious values of Judaism, understood and abided by them as required in his time, interpreted the law and ultimately engaged in disputes with the "teachers of the law" and the Pharisees. He lived together with the poor of his time and was condemned as the result of a combination of Jewish and Roman law. He felt deep compassion with humankind when he died on the cross, was buried, remained dead for two days and then rose from the dead on the third day. This heralded the coming of the glory of God and humankind.⁴²⁵

These theological paradigms set out the perspective of transcendence in close alliance with immanence; consequently, God's revelation becomes historical. Hence, since it is God who reveals himself, the revelation has an eschatological meaning within history itself. The paradigms thus prepare the ground for the inculturation of the Gospel by drawing attention to the possibility of community within a culture itself and in the relations between cultures, to the beauty inherent within culture as stated in the Gospel and to the necessity of immersion in culture in order to bring about an effective encounter between Gospel and culture. These paradigms, on which the vitality of evangelisation rests, are a source of orientation for the Church enabling it to realise its evangelising mission.

The inculturation of the Gospel in the mission of the Church

The Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council *Lumen Gentium* (1965) describes the Church as the mystery of community (*communio*) which has its origins in the mystery of the Trinity. The Church interprets its close relationship with the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost in carrying out its mission. The term used to describe this mystery is *sacramentum*. It is thus possible to assert that the Church is the "universal sacrament of salvation"⁴²⁶ in that it offers

⁴²⁵ Cf. Jon Sobrino, *Christologie der Befreiung*, Mainz 1998.

⁴²⁶ LG 48.

itself to the world as a sign of salvation for all humanity. It is in the category of “people of God” that this sacramentality locates the distinguishing missionary and eschatological hallmark of the Church, which has the world as its partner in the fulfilment of its mission.

The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, therefore, reaffirms the relationship between the Church and the contemporary world. In doing so it draws on the inductive method which enables the Church to communicate with the world in the form of a dialogue and to consider the various challenges it faces. It was for this reason that theological anthropology came to assume fundamental importance for the Church; it enables her to say who man is and how he finds his bearings in the current historical situation in the world (GS 11–18).

The essence of the Church as a sacramental mystery and its constitutive role as the people of God (LG 9–17) form the foundation for its mission, which is to preach the Gospel to the nations. The Gospel is the Good News of salvation which was brought by Christ, is present in him as a person and is addressed to all nations of the earth with their respective cultures. Hence there is a relationship between the Church and the culture of every nation to which the Gospel is proclaimed. It is, therefore, of fundamental importance that the concept of culture and the aforementioned theological paradigms should be brought out with the utmost clarity in each evangelisation process. Thus, it is legitimate to assert that the inculturation of the Gospel is not merely an admonition but a binding imperative, an intrinsic necessity for the work of evangelisation begun by the Church.

Since inculturation is imperative for the Church itself, it is crucially important that the perception of culture should not deviate from the discoveries made in anthropological science, which has been brought up to date in recent decades by developments in the theory of knowledge.⁴²⁷ As far as culture is concerned, these developments make it possible to overcome uniform universalism, which neglects the specificity, the uniqueness and the material and spiritual peculiarity of each nation. If culture is interpreted in accordance with the dialectics of universality and singularity, of diversity and uniqueness, of materiality and spirituality, the Church is better placed to recognise the wealth of cultures as well as the universal epochal character of

⁴²⁷ Cf. Clifford Geertz, *Interpretação das culturas*, Rio de Janeiro 1989.

culture, thereby rendering effective its proclamation and bearing of witness to the Gospel.

In its mission to preach the Gospel the Church is called upon to bring about a meeting between Gospel and culture and, in doing so, to take account of the cultural mediation which is present in the Gospel and of the richness of the Gospel which is present in cultures. The Gospel itself through its cultural mediation conveys the truth about God, mankind and the world, which is Christ himself. While the relationship is dialectical, the Gospel is preponderant. It “ensures that culture can again find its centre and depth, from which reality may be viewed with all its aspects together, discerning them in the light of the Gospel and granting to each its place and proper dimension.”⁴²⁸

Moreover, in view of the various Christian denominations, religious pluralism and the universality of salvation, inculturated evangelisation must lay the ground for both ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue. Ecumenism implies the unity of Christians, although it constantly endeavours to respect the distinctive features of every denomination and, above all, to initiate activities which make it very clear that all the faithful are united in denominational diversity in Christ.⁴²⁹ Inter-faith dialogue is the process of communication whereby religions speak, listen and establish a consensus as the outcome of this communicative process. The main aim of ecumenism and inter-faith dialogue is not that one Christian denomination or one religion should have supremacy over others, but that all Christian denominations and religions should respect one another, assume responsibility for each other and work together for world peace and a holistic approach to ecology.⁴³⁰

The main subject of inculturation is the local church itself – a category the Second Vatican Council recognized and which expresses the universality of salvation in its firm grounding in the place where the Good News is preached. The local church is thus the Church which acts freely and brings salvation to the nations, whose cultural identity is acknowledged. In other words, the local church is

⁴²⁸ Aparecida 2007. Concluding document of the 5th General Conference of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean, N. 41.

⁴²⁹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Ut unum sint* on Commitment to Ecumenism, N. 121.

⁴³⁰ Cf. Pope Francis, Encyclical *Laudato si'* on Care for our Common Home, N. 202.

already embedded in the culture and therefore able to address the indigenous culture through having recognised its religiousness, its religious pluralism, its social issues, its suffering and, above all, its evangelising potential. The soteriological commitment of the local church seen from a universal perspective is crucial in ensuring that inculturation is treated as a task of the entire Church, the objective of which is to integrate the Gospel into the culture, and the faith into all facets of life.

Consequences: the models of inculturation

The models for inculturation of the Gospel illustrate the ways in which the Church has proclaimed the Gospel to the nations. Thus, the models relate to the mission of preaching the Gospel itself, which is not limited to the development of the catechesis, the teachings and the liturgy, although these aspects and other pastoral activities demonstrate the life-enhancing content of the Gospel. The first major consequence of this is that the Church does not see inculturation coming to full fruition in a single model, because all models have their own inherent potential as well as their limitations. To relate inculturation solely to the translation model would mean assuming that the culture only needs to translate the Gospel, which has been communicated in one cultural language, into the other culture and its way of understanding. It would also mean neglecting the mediation of culture in the Gospel and depriving the culture itself of its potential for transcendence. If inculturation were to be realised in the adaptation model, it would mean ignoring the wealth to be found in the Gospel, which is present even in culture itself, and not engaging in ontological depth with the hermeneutics of culture. The contextual model and the liberation model overcome Eurocentrism and the central status of the West, but they do not fully tap the potential of inculturation, because they concede that the Gospel which encounters culture has elements of its essence within the culture and transcends this culture itself.

The second consequence is that, while the models can be interconnected, since there are fundamental elements in all of them, translation and adaptation can only serve as first steps. Contextualisation and liberation, by contrast, can provide the next steps so that inculturation can effectively be put to work. Translation and adaptation can, therefore, be seen as analogous to what anthropology calls

enculturation and acculturation, whereas inculturation as such takes place in the process whereby the Gospel is inserted into the context of the culture itself and initiates a process of holistic liberation which affects every aspect of people's lives.⁴³¹

The third consequence is that inculturation is the method which ensures efficient proclamation of the Gospel. It is not possible to convey the Gospel holistically without its inculturation. This is achieved by employing a method which presumes that the Church divests itself in order to begin a dialogue with the cultures and to offer the joy of the Good News. There is a link here between the assertion that the local church is the main actor and the realisation that the others, to whom the Good News is to be preached, are likewise subjects. And since the others are also poor in all things or in respect of one of the meanings listed above, the Church has a growing responsibility to proclaim the Gospel in an inculturated form. It should be borne in mind in this context that the poor have an "evangelising"⁴³² and "liberating"⁴³³ potential and that the historical experience deriving from this potential makes it possible for the inculturated proclamation of the Gospel to accept "the ethnic-cultural difference of all as the Pentecostal experience of God in the diversity of the Spirit"⁴³⁴.

The fourth consequence relates to the theological hermeneutics of both scripture and tradition. Here again reference is made to the Second Vatican Council, in particular to the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, *Dei Verbum* (1965), and to the Decree on Priestly Training, *Optatam Totius* (1965), which confirm the possibility of using philosophical hermeneutics in theology in order to penetrate the whole of theology, the epistemological centre of which is the revelation. Building on the fundamental guidelines set out in Pope

⁴³¹ Cf. *Libertatis conscientia*. Instruktion der Kongregation für die Glaubenslehre über die christliche Freiheit und Befreiung (Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls no. 70), Bonn 1986.

⁴³² Concluding Document of the 3rd General Assembly of Bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean in Puebla 1979, in: Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Eds.), *Die Kirche Lateinamerikas. Schlussdokumente der II. und III. Generalversammlung des lateinamerikanischen Episkopats in Medellín und Puebla* (Stimmen der Weltkirche 8), Bonn 1979.

⁴³³ Gustavo Gutiérrez, "Die Armen und die Grundoption", in: Inacio Ellacuría/Jon Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis. Grundbegriffe der Theologie der Befreiung*, vol. 1, Lucerne 1995, 293–311.

⁴³⁴ Paulo Suess, *Evangelização e inculturação*, op. cit., 47.

Pius XII's 1943 Encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, which accepted the historical-critical method of reading the bible, it proved possible to devise a hermeneutical procedure enabling the world of the biblical text to be understood in accordance with the preaching of the Gospel. The different methods of reading the Bible were confirmed in the document issued by the Pontifical Bible Commission entitled *Reading the Bible in the Church Today* (1983), which established the ongoing presence of inculturation in the reading of the Bible. Examples of this are "reading the Bible with the eyes of ordinary people"⁴³⁵, as developed in Latin America, and Bible reading from the standpoint of gender difference⁴³⁶.

Theological hermeneutics is also applied to dogma, the aim being to supply definitions which relate to the faith and the revelation. "The liberating dogma"⁴³⁷ is the dogma which states the dogmatic truth in permanence and in contemporaneity with each historical epoch. In dogmatic theology the hermeneutical procedure is that the substance of the dogma – in the form in which it is communicated – is expressed in a consistently topical and novel way. This avoids fundamentalism and dogmatism and produces in the dogmatic statement a liberating truth which is genuinely faithful to the Gospel.⁴³⁸

Finally, the Trinitarian paradigm also emphasises the pneumatological perspective which is present in inculturation. If the Spirit is treated as the divine person who represents God's strength and actions in history, as articulated through the Word, the experience of communal coexistence, prayer and changing and life-enhancing activities⁴³⁹, then this constitutes the spirituality of the inculturation of the Gospel. We are talking here of a spirituality which reviews the actions of the Spirit of the Gospel as manifested in the experience of inculturation, in which the poor and the others experience God in their own lives of poverty and otherness, i.e. in the form of hospitality,

⁴³⁵ Cf. Carlos Mesters, *Flor sem defesa. Uma explicação da Bíblia a partir do povo*, Petrópolis 1983.

⁴³⁶ Cf. Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is. The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, New York 1992.

⁴³⁷ Juan Luis Segundo, *El Dogma que libera. Fe, revelación y magisterio dogmático*, Santander 1989.

⁴³⁸ Cf. Claude Geffré, *Le christianisme au risque de l'interprétation*, Paris 1983.

⁴³⁹ Cf. José Comblin, *Der Heilige Geist*, Düsseldorf 1988.

generosity, solidarity, compassion, friendship, brotherhood and joy.⁴⁴⁰ The true model of inculturation is expressing that spirituality which, despite the historical forms of inculturation with their inherent values and limitations, brings life to the full (John 10:10) for everyone.⁴⁴¹

⁴⁴⁰ Cf. Gustavo Gutiérrez, *op. cit.*

⁴⁴¹ Cf. Pedro Casaldáliga/José Maria Vigil, *Espiritualidade da Libertação*, São Paulo 1983.

Contextualisation and Inculturation

Contextuality and Inculturation

Hans Waldenfels

Nowadays, the use of the terms “contextuality” and “inculturation” is a given in theological discourse, although they have only recently gained currency, and theology has managed without them for many years. “Contextuality” includes the word “text”, while “inculturation” contains “culture”. The correlation of these two terms is due, in all probability, to the fact that humanity has never been as aware of the diversity of social interrelationships as it is today: a diversity of peoples, races, languages, religions and cultures. At the same time, the world is increasingly becoming a global village or melting pot in which the known and unknown meld in a unique manner, creating something new. In respect of Christianity this development has resulted in a relativisation of Western Europe’s long-standing claim to dominion, as a result of which the European style of Christianity was grafted onto subjugated peoples as a matter of course, a modern European colonisation. This process ceased at the end of the Second World War with the subsequent renunciation of the colonial status of the countries of Africa as well as of the residual colonies in Asia, Hong Kong and Macao.

The new global situation influenced not least by modern forms of communication technology and the increased contacts between and migration of peoples, in addition to other progress in science and technology, has led in many cases to a loss of original identity and the emergence of new identities. Germans become Americans and Australians, Poles and Turks become Germans, and Christians become non-denominational and Islamist, just as believers in different faiths became Christians in the past (and still do today). Medical technology now even enables people to change their sexuality, altering their gender in specific cases. What once appeared sacrosanct as far as the laws of nature were concerned can now be manipulated.

Given the fast pace of modern life, which is accompanied by a drastic loss of history and in which often limited contemporary opinions are declared to be universally valid, it is imperative to foster a culture of commemoration and remembrance. For memories relativise personal standpoints by placing later events in broader contexts and calling narrow contemporary perspectives into question. On the one hand, we must endeavour to preserve the treasures of the past while, on the other, practise self-restraint and refrain from spoiling the future – both for ourselves and for the generations to come.

Contextuality

The German *Historical Dictionary of Philosophy* (*Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*) does not contain the term “contextuality”. The 19th edition of the *Brockhaus Encyclopaedia* (*Brockhaus Enzyklopädie*), published in 1990, includes the entries “context”, “contextual grammar, context-sensitive grammar”, “contextualism” and “contextual theology”. Hence, it is quite clear that the original source of contextual thought is philology; this perspective only broadens or shifts in the entry entitled “contextual theology”. The term “contextualism” was coined by the English philologist, John Rupert Firth (1890–1960), who used it to designate an English version of structuralism.

From a theological perspective, “contextuality” has its origins in the Age of Enlightenment when, thanks to the influence of the historical and critical sciences, a different approach was adopted to text analysis of the Holy Scripture first in Protestant theology and, much later, in Catholic theology. This resulted in the emergence of historical-critical methods of biblical exegesis.

Analysis pursued two distinct courses. In the first, attention concentrated on the original text, the authors, the date and places of origin, the contemporary mental and linguistic horizons, the linguistic and literary forms and, in the case of edited text, on redaction criticism. In the second, an examination of the addressees shifted the focus to the recipients and readers of the texts and, consequently, to their reception and reception history. This is an approach which has been pursued up to the present day and hence encompasses contemporary readers and their grasp of things.

The very mention of all the different aspects and factors involved affords a glimpse of the enormous ramifications in potential fields of analysis which emerge when account is taken of the many background factors that come into play, i.e. all the latent, unobtrusive elements accompanying a text – in other words the various contexts. In biblical exegesis this entails the need to draw on non-theological disciplines such as linguistics, sociology and psychology and other sciences, which in turn necessitates an interdisciplinary approach. Several important consequences arise.

Firstly: that which applied in theological terms to the original text, the Bible, was soon transferred to the entire body of ecclesiastical literature, especially in respect of the normative, doctrinal texts. These were acknowledged as constituting responses, i.e. answers to historical and contemporary questions and developments, and as such were localised “contextually”, although that term as such was not used. The discussions held under the heading “the development of dogma” since the Second Vatican Council invariably refer to aspects which must be incorporated in a contextual consideration of the issues.

Secondly: the term “contextuality”, devoid of all connection with text analysis in the strict sense of the word, can also be used when a certain problem is, in general terms, pinpointed more precisely. Theologically, this is the case when, in the question of the *logos* of God, it is God who speaks and expresses Himself, and again, it is God whom humans seek to understand. In this sense, God is the subject and object of theology. The focus is invariably on the Word of God addressed to humans. However, when the latter comes into play, so does his world with its time and space, its history and all the factors which define human life. As attention came to focus on human historicity and concrete historical situations – which in the Western world is largely a modern phenomenon – interests began to shift. They were no longer dominated by atemporal or transtemporal concepts but rather by a specific period of time or, more precisely, specific eras.

Thirdly: derivative modern interpretations hold a significance which cannot be overlooked in respect to Christianity, inasmuch as the historical figure of Jesus as the Son of God incarnate leads to the true understanding of God. There is, without doubt, a strong tendency

today to see Jesus solely on a human plane. However, that does not apply to theology, which adheres to the polarity of faith expressed in the formulation “true man, true God”. Yet perhaps Christian theology has pursued its philosophical search for God too far, bypassing the figure of Christ in the process. If Jesus has become a *concretum universale* today, in other words the historical human figure of Jesus is considered in the context of its universal significance – and Pope Francis repeatedly insists that Christianity is rooted in a person – this must be construed as a strong summons to rethink. This line of argument tallies with the Pope’s thinking as expressed in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*: “Realities are more important than ideas.”⁴⁴² In respect to the encounter with God, this implies that even if man seeks God, the experience of God remains His gift. We may seek Him for as long as we wish – it is He who allows Himself to be found. This prompts us to refer back to history, in which only Jesus, as the Son, leads us to Him who is both His Father and the one Father to us all.

Contextual theologies

In my view, access to what we nowadays refer to as “contextual theology” is made abundantly clear in the exhortation in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*:

To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinising the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognise and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics. (GS 4)

Here, attention is directed initially to the time (and place) in which people live and, secondly, to the Gospel. This is a new approach to both thought and action. As Pope Francis stresses very emphatically, the hearers of the Word become *a priori* accessories to the

⁴⁴² Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, no. 231, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.htm.

Word. The light of the text, of the Gospel, falls on life in its specific circumstances.

The term “contextual theologies” was coined in the 1970s and has its roots in the theology which emerged in Latin America particularly in the wake of the Second Vatican Council. The textbook I published in 1985 called *Contextual Fundamental Theology* (*Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*) prompted a twofold reaction. One group of critics treated the contextualisation of theology as a self-evident fact, while the other found the title difficult to comprehend. This dual reception is also apparent from the different titles given to the translation of my book. Thus, the French translation (1990) and the Polish translation (1993) evaded the term “contextual”, while the Italian (1988), Spanish (1994), Croatian (1995) and Czech editions (2000) retained it.

The Chinese edition, due for publication shortly, uses the translation *chu jing hua* = contextual.

Assuming listeners to the proclamation of the Gospel are individuals capable of mature judgment, it is essential to speak their language and be familiar with their world in order to comprehend their needs, thoughts and actions. This necessitates a social analysis which is assimilated by the proclaimer extrinsically. The theology of liberation which originated in Latin America initially appeared to assume a predominantly Marxist slant, as seen in Magisterium circles in Rome. This new and highly context-specific theological approach was pursued on a global scale wherever oppression was involved, under the heading of “liberation” as opposed to “contextualisation”. It was applied to black people and those of colour in the USA and later on in other continents, to women in respect of male hegemony, also initially in the USA and then worldwide, in India with its caste system and wherever economic and political circumstances resulted in class-based societies and a disparity between rich and poor.

However, the various economic and political environments were not uniquely responsible for this new context-specific theological approach. Religious pluralism and cultural diversity came to the fore, in particular in the wake of developments in Asia and religiously pluralist North America and then, after the end of the colonial period, in the

reborn continent of Africa. This gave rise to additional perspectives as a basis for the pursuit of contextual theology.

Furthermore, global assessments of the future of religions underwent a drastic shift as the new millennium dawned, this in conjunction to a certain extent with the terrorist attacks of September 2001. The widespread previous conviction that “secularisation” would supersede religions the world over, leading to the absolute autonomy of man, was replaced by the concept of a “revival of religions”. This, in turn, necessitates at the very least the inclusion of religions in a discussion of the future global outlook.

Quite clearly a shift of emphasis is taking place. A context-sensitive form of theology is certainly coming more and more to the fore. At the same time, it is becoming increasingly normal for this to no longer require explicit articulation. Instead, the theologies take their name from their respective orientation. Hence reference is made to liberation theology(ies), black theology, feminist theology, religious theology and, more recently, to the theology of the people of God in respect of the Argentine form of liberation theology as well as to several others. From a methodological point of view, mention should also be made of comparative theology, which has been imported to Europe from the USA.

Inculturation

In contrast to contextuality, “inculturation” is a term which is now employed predominantly in a missiological sense. While perspective is paramount with regard to “contextuality”, “inculturation” is largely dependent on action. In the past, a range of different terms was used to express, each in their own way, the act of engaging with alien contexts; first “accommodation”, followed by terminology incorporating the word “culture” (“enculturation”, “acculturation”), and then “inculturation”, which gained currency theologically in the 1960s and officially within the Church in the 1970s.

Here, “culture” stands for the world and nature as shaped by man. This act of shaping the world has not been the same everywhere, as the Western world has had to acknowledge since the age of discoveries. However, the Europeans, the majority of whom espoused Christianity as their religion, were convinced that the European culture

was superior to all others. In this respect, the Christian mission and the proclamation of the Gospel went hand in hand with a civilising cultural approach from the outset.

The missionaries realised early on that it would be difficult to win the hearts of the foreigners without an understanding of their languages. This triggered a twofold reaction. While the languages of the newcomers were imposed on the inhabitants in America – English and French in North America (the USA and Canada respectively), Spanish in Central and South America (with the exception of Brazil, where Portuguese was introduced) and primarily English and French in Africa –, the missionaries posted to India, China and Japan swiftly realised that they had to learn the local languages and dialects.

Endeavours at “accommodation” soon came to be associated with prominent Jesuit missionaries in India and China, such as Robert de Nobili (1577–1656) and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). They realised the intrinsic value of the foreign cultures, familiarised themselves with the indigenous literature and scholarly research, and embarked on an academic discourse with the countries’ savants. It is well known that these efforts came to abrupt end as a result of the unfortunate Rites Controversy, which led to a temporary cessation of contacts between Asia and the Western world.

Meanwhile, international contacts are many and varied. Economic issues frequently predominate. In addition, academic cultural exchange no longer takes place primarily among representatives of religions. Nonetheless, given the significant role currently played by religions in Asia, interreligious exchange remains a fundamental element of intercultural discourse.

Another important aspect needs to be mentioned at this juncture. While the Christian population in Asia, with the exception of the Philippines, is little more than marginal in size, Latin America is now the continent with the largest number of Catholics. At the same time, Christianity has spread throughout Africa in a variety of different ways. North America can be included more or less, within the Western world. However, because the so-called global mission was associated to all intents and purposes with Western Christianity (i.e. Catholicism and Reformed Protestantism) up to the end of the colonial era, the churches established within the so-called mission territories are now

calling for a restructuring geared to a stronger “domestication” of Christianity among the peoples they serve.

“Inculturation” signifies greater regard for local values, traditions and customs. This applies in particular to the organisation of church services. In the Catholic Church the replacement of Latin by local languages since the Second Vatican Council has resulted in a radical reform of church services in Africa, particularly in respect of the atmosphere generated. The same is true of India and other countries around the world. In China, the inhabitants were only able to express their declared belief in a universal Church when permitted to speak the Eucharistic Prayer aloud, with audible mention of the name of the Pope. When Benedict XVI was elected Pope, the posters which appeared in Germany were also displayed in many places in China.

Interculturation

The liturgical proclamation of the Gospel in believers’ mother tongues ensures that an understanding of the doctrine takes on a new significance. Modern educated individuals wish to understand what they believe. This not only poses a problem in contemporary Europe, but also affects educated people in other countries in which the Church is active and, indeed, the so-called common people too.

In this regard, I have fond memories of a trip to Papua New Guinea with the Suffragan Bishop of Essen, Julius Angerhausen. Sheep are virtually unheard of in the country, but pigs are numerous there and respected for their usefulness. We paid a visit to a catechetical institute. Where the Bishop was asked the following question: if, in the Holy Scripture, which originated in an agrarian culture, the image of the shepherd and his flocks of sheep was so easy to comprehend that Jesus was described as the Good Shepherd, why could one not substitute this image for the swineherd in a culture in which everyone is familiar with pigs?

In a major speech he held as cardinal in various cities around the world, Benedict XVI emphasised the fact that the Holy Scripture itself originated within a specific culture. As a result, the Gospel message never reaches another culture as a ‘naked Gospel’, but is invariably clad in a specific cultural guise. As a result, it is perhaps more

appropriate to replace the term “inculturation” by “interculturalism”, i.e. an already inculturated Gospel which demands a new form of inculturation. Although this suggestion has met with little support, it nonetheless highlights a problem which needs to be addressed.

Although Pope Francis refrains from adopting the term used by his predecessor, he nonetheless states in *Evangelii Gaudium*: “We cannot demand that peoples of every continent, in expressing their Christian faith, imitate modes of expression which European nations developed at a particular moment of their history, because the faith cannot be constricted to the limits of understanding and expression of any one culture. It is an indisputable fact that no single culture can exhaust the mystery of our redemption in Christ.” (EG 118) As a result, inculturation is an invariable part of evangelisation. However, since the people of God have many faces due to the sheer diversity of nations on this earth, this will continue to apply (cf. EG 115).

In Christian theology there can be no contextuality without a text

Let us return in conclusion to the issue of contextuality. Today, evangelisation takes place, to a large extent, using the familiar three-step approach of “seeing, judging, acting”. As I pointed out earlier, contextuality, or the analysis of contexts, entered theological consciousness in tandem with the rise of diverse social pluralism. However, the two other steps should not be neglected in any analysis of contextual diversity. Before what has been recognised becomes relevant in terms of action, it needs to be assessed “in the light of the Gospel”. It is not just because he is a member of the Jesuit order that Pope Francis emphasises the Discernment of Spirits. This occurs “in the light of the Gospel”, which means that the “signs of the times” must be seen and interpreted in the same light. Personally, I would phrase it thus: the requisite interest in contexts should not result in the text being lost from sight. The text is the Gospel. However, the Gospel is a person – Jesus of Nazareth. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis expresses this in the words of his predecessor: “I never tire of repeating those words of Benedict XVI which take us to the very heart of the Gospel: ‘Being a Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.’” (EG 7) Or, in the opening words of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of

the Second Vatican Council: Christ is *lumen gentium*, the “Light of nations”.

All other pursuits and activities, however useful they may be, must not detract from this fundamental view of things. Ultimately, all research relating to, and reflections on, theology should serve the sole aim referred to by Karl Rahner as “mystagogy”. i.e. an act of guidance towards the mystery of God. In the context of the Christian faith this process leads us to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth. He, who described himself as “the Way” (cf. John 14:6), is the path all people can take in the context of human history. It is up to us to discover Him.

Understanding church's mission in the Context of the Philippines

Andrew Gimenez Recepción

Scanning the Ecclesial Horizon

The perspective of this presentation does not exhaust all the possible insights on mission from the context of the Philippines today particularly from the experience of the Philippine local Church. Nonetheless, there are two ways of scanning the ecclesial horizon from the optic of mission: 1) look for the signs of the times from the current events of the Philippine society and from the perspective of the Gospel indicate pointedly the mission of the Church; 2) take a sampling of the present experience of faith vis-à-vis current Filipino core values and disvalues and attempt to interpret it from the optic of faith within the ecclesial horizon of a living faith renewed by the Word of God. In other words, the first way simply wants to know what is going on and how the Church can respond with clarity to the present challenges. The second way indicates ways of renewal in mission that go beyond mere perception and hasty interpretation of present situation in the light of the Gospel and instead locate mission as the heart of being Church today.

We shall try to understand the mission of the Church in the context of the Philippines today by taking the second way of scanning the present ecclesial horizon.

Mission in Crisis

One of the major misperceptions on mission is the idea that mission belongs to the competence of religious orders or institutes of consecrated life. Diocesan priests and seminarians are simply being formed for parish apostolate. Another misperception is the romantic image of a missionary as somebody endowed with a special charism of ministering to peoples in distant foreign lands in spite of the

dangers and difficulties that such mission work entails. This paradigm has considerably pushed mission to the sidelines of ecclesial life as though mission is the “foreign affairs” department of the Church that is simply concerned with the remote, the exotic and the road-less-traveled when it comes to evangelization and proclamation of the Gospel. These misperceptions have been reinforced by the general perception of the laity that mission is all about money or collection of offerings during World Mission Sunday.⁴⁴³

Misperceptions on mission indicate that the traditional understanding of mission is in crisis. Many Christians think that mission is optional because it has always been associated with a specialized work reserved for the brave-hearted who knew with clarity what they had to do since in the past, the purpose of Christian mission was clear: to ‘save souls’ by converting people to Christ. In the theology of the day, conversion implied baptism and membership of the visible Church as the (only) means of salvation. Christian missionary strategy was equally clear: ‘implant the Church’ wherever it did not exist and ‘extend the Church’ (especially through schools, hospitals and development agencies) where it did exist. The model of Church being reproduced was predominantly European and worked well where Christian mission was aligned with Western colonization.⁴⁴⁴

It is impossible to separate mission from the Church because by its very nature the Church is missionary (AG, 2). Thus, if mission is in crisis the deeper reason is that “the Church is always in a state of crisis and that its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it” for crisis springs from “the abiding tension between the church’s essential nature and its empirical condition.”⁴⁴⁵ In other words, “to encounter crisis is to encounter the possibility of truly being the *church*”⁴⁴⁶ because new missionary situations call for new priorities in mission as well as new strategies that respond to the signs of the times and that are sensitive to context. On one hand, crisis in mission could be seen as a danger because the Church simply maintains the

⁴⁴³ Cf. J. Rojas/Andrew Recepcion, “Globalization and Youth”, in: *Vinculum*, 24 (2007) 2.

⁴⁴⁴ Cf. Gerald Hall, “The Christian Mission Today”, in: *Compass* 41 (2007), 3.

⁴⁴⁵ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, New York 1991/2011, 2.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

status quo. On the other hand, it could be an opportunity to allow the Gospel to change structures and transform values and relationships according to the Gospel of Christ.

Meaning of Mission

David Bosch has brilliantly crafted the statement that there is a “pluriverse of missiology in a universe of mission,” that is, there are different ways of understanding mission or doing mission but there is only one mission of the Church. In more straightforward way, we can say that “mission is not merely a matter of spreading information; nor merely something we do for others; it is something *we are*.”⁴⁴⁷ In other words, faith “consists in fully living our faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ as individuals and communities—as Church living out faith has an effect in society at every level.”⁴⁴⁸

To understand more simply the dynamics of mission one could use the following metaphors: 1) *Sending out*: priority to evangelization through direct proclamation of the Gospel; 2) *Gathering in*: evangelization is through witness, worship and fellowship; 3) *Living with*: solidarity with people particularly with those at the margins of society. These three missionary metaphors should ideally “co-exist in every local Church.”⁴⁴⁹ Furthermore, mission could also be described in terms of images that capture the identity of a missionary: 1) *Treasure hunter*: a missionary not only brings the message of the Gospel to cultures but also invites them to unearth the treasures already buried in peoples’ history, cultures and traditions; 2) *Educator*: a missionary captures the imagination of others to invite them to reflection and action arising from their life experiences; Jesus as a visionary educator becomes the model for a missionary because Jesus’ teaching appeals to the whole person and denounces oppressive structures and attitudes and calls for personal, social and cosmic transformation; 3) *Guest*: a missionary incarnates in his life when working in other cultures, the values of hospitality, respect and friendship.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁷ Dennis Murphy, op. cit., 11.

⁴⁴⁸ Gerald Hall, op. cit., 3.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. Gerard Hall, op. cit., 4–5.

It is important to point out, however, that mission is neither simply a question of what has to be done nor what results to expect but it is primarily an evangelical life-project of every Christian; of every Christian community.

The State of Mission in the Philippine Local Church

At the outset given the present situation of the Philippines, it seems simple enough to read the signs of the times and to point out the mission of the Church in the context of the Philippine society today. However, going beyond the surface of the recent events often steeped in political partisan issues one finds that there are two main missionary situations that need to be seen from the optic of the Church's mission, namely, *institutions of society* and *dominant secular cultures*.

Social Institutions

In a homily⁴⁵¹ given by the late Archbishop Leonardo Legazpi, one finds a realistic assessment of social institutions in the Philippines today:

We are experiencing in our history as a people what seems to be a crushing tidal wave of social malaise – a feeling that there is a terrible sickness in our society. This feeling is exacerbated by the knowledge that the cycle of poverty, ignorance and class exclusion that pervades in our society is not caused by poor natural resources or a state of war, or oppression by foreign power. Our country's afflictions are, therefore, not due to natural causes.

There are many manifestations of this social malaise. Many scholars and pundits believe we have a 'flawed' culture. The electorate attributes our condition to a corrupt political leadership. Politicians, on the other hand, say that the only way to stay in power is to be corrupt because the electorate demands constant Handouts. In effect, they blame a so-called corrupt electorate that has to be bribed in every election.

⁴⁵¹ Archbishop Leonardo Legaspi, Graduation Homily, March 10, 2008.

The CBCP's recent Pastoral statement speaks of the "culture of corruption from top to bottom." Corruption has become systemic to the extent that it has become a way of life for the typical government bureaucrat. The corrupt politician has become the rule and the honest politician is considered eccentric or a relic of the past.

Nationalism, an ideology which assumes love of country, has been abandoned even by its last bastion – the intellectuals and the youth. I recently met a former activist now considered one of the country's leading female journalists who told me that nationalism is *passé*.

Who is responsible for our social malaise? The answer is obvious. These are the people who have held or are holding leadership positions in all sectors of society: in government, in business, in society, media personalities and church leaders.

The question is how does a change from the top begin? By passing new laws? Certainly not since morality and character cannot be legislated. By relying on the electoral process? One only has to watch the antics of our Senators and congressmen during the debates and hearings in aid of legislation to realize that this is a doomed scenario. People Power? If there is another one, remember, it will be our fourth... and nothing has changed!

Can we still rely on the idealism of the youth? Unfortunately, this is a fading prospect as even leaders of the university that used to be the bastion of nationalism now speaks of a borderless world which finds it acceptable to migrate and considers staying and leading the fight for change an obsolete idea.

How about our moral and religious leaders? Listen to the loud criticisms around us: our religious are divided! Disunited! Political illiterates! As these criticisms apply to CBCP I think they stem from misinformation. But the negative perception is there staring us to our faces. There is a diminishing credibility of our institutions which are necessary for our political and social stability.

The analysis above speaks about the breakdown of fundamental institutions in our society today or to say the least a loss of credibility of social institutions including the Church.

The mission of the Church in the Philippines has to focus primarily on the renewal of institutions beginning with itself. In other words,

mission has to take the form of liberation from sinful structures by way of personal and communal conversion.

Ecclesia in Asia has indicated that the vocation of the Christian laity is to renew society from within through a Gospel way of life that impacts on structures and relationships in community.

In the light of the social teaching, the prophetic role of the Church entails giving the *right names* to all forms of social evils in our society today. This is a crucial task of the Church's prophetic role since contemporary society has given the wrong names to social and structural evils by making them look good and right even if in reality they are evils in disguise. Thus, the social teaching calls for or even demands from God's people a prophetic anger before all forms of injustice, oppression and violation of human dignity.

The Church's prophetic role should permeate the strata of humanity – the worlds of politics, economy, media, entertainment, culture, education, and sports – by renewing them from within so as to bring about a new civilization of love. The social teaching gives the Church the clarity of prophetic identity vis-à-vis the dictatorship of relativism and the reign of complacency before social and structural evils.

In the road map presented in *Philippines 2030 Journey to Nationhood* by the Institute for Solidarity in Asia (ISA), Jesus Estanislao says that "institutions are absolutely critical: through them we get continuing reinforcement and encouragement, and by them we get help as try to hang on to our core values, despite the odds and through all the travails and circumstances of life and work."⁴⁵² The Church's mission has to help in strengthening the fundamental institutions of society not only by way of pastoral statements but by forming socially responsible Catholic Christians who has a sound social conscience. This perspective is shared by the Institute for Solidarity in Asia when it emphasizes the need for commitment in strengthening key institutions when it reiterates that it is also this task of strengthening these key institutions in which all of us can and should be involved. We all are in them; we should therefore get started with the families, the schools, and enterprises where we are. The responsibility for strengthening

⁴⁵² Jesus P. Estanislao, *Philippines 2030 Journey to Nationhood: Towards A National Community of Responsible Citizens*, Institute for Solidarity in Asia, 2006, 63.

them is in our hands. It is clear that we do not have to look far and wide in order to contribute to the task of further building our nation. We just have to be where we are and there ensure that core values are observed and properly transmitted.⁴⁵³

It is not within the competence of the Church's mission to propose technical solutions to the problems of social institutions. Nevertheless, it is necessary to affirm the indispensable role of the Church in the renewal of institutions through the Filipino Christian family. With nationalism considered as obsolete, institutions could be renewed by way of the Filipino family. In fact, "the hope for our future rests on the ability of the families to positively influence other families in the key task of creating united and cheerful homes, where proper values are nurtured by their observance."⁴⁵⁴

Transformation of Cultures: Towards a Church of Counter-Cultures

The Philippine Mega Malls: Global Culture for Sale

It is projected that in 2008, the Philippine population will reach 88.7 million.⁴⁵⁵ Metro Manila, the capital city of the Philippines, is "expected to have 15 million people in 2015."⁴⁵⁶ However, the great majority of the additional five million to Manila's population will be poor people.⁴⁵⁷ "At present, the urban poor are 40-50% of the population, about 4-5 million living in hundreds of those so-called "slums."⁴⁵⁸ The poverty incidence is growing as indicated by the fact that "Filipinos find their life in their own country bleak and hopeless"⁴⁵⁹ and prefer to leave the country for in 2006, 1.52 million Filipinos work abroad as compared to 782 thousand in 1995."⁴⁶⁰ Nevertheless, three forms of global popular culture have been influencing the majority of Filipinos in spite of pressing social problems, namely: [1] Television; [2] cellular or mobile phone; [3] mega malls. "Eighty percent of all Filipino homes

⁴⁵³ Institute for Solidarity in Asia, 63.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁵⁵ <http://www.census.gov.ph> (08.10.2007).

⁴⁵⁶ Dennis Murphy, "Metro Manila 2015: The Democratic Scenario," in: World Mission 9 (2007), 20–23.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁵⁹ Bernadette M. Gavino-Gumba, "GMA's Choice" in: Vox Bikol (2007), 5.

⁴⁶⁰ Ibid.

own a TV set.”⁴⁶¹ “In 2000, the Philippines was recognized as the texting capital of the world with close to 300 million text messages sent daily through the country’s mobile networks.”⁴⁶² Let us now explore Philippine mega malls as a popular vehicle of cultural globalization in the Philippines and its implications for mission.

The biggest and hottest mall in the Philippines today is called the Mall of Asia that opened in March 2006. The Mall of Asia is the largest shopping mall in the Philippines and the 7th largest shopping mall in the world in terms of gross floor size, after the South Dongguan Mall (China), Golden Resources Mall (China), Central World Plaza (Thailand), Seacon Square (Thailand), and Runwal Arcade (India).⁴⁶³ It is built on 19.5 hectares of reclaimed land and has a gross floor of 386,224 square meters.⁴⁶⁴ It has a parking lot for 5,000 cars, 600 shops, and 150 dining establishments.⁴⁶⁵

The Mall of Asia, more than the enormous size of its physical structure, is a metaphor that captures the context of the Philippines today. There are five kinds of Filipinos that enter the Mall of Asia representing different sectors of Philippine society today. The first group is composed of the richest and Western educated Filipinos who can buy anything they want from the wide array of shops that carry expensive imported goods from Italy, United States, London and Paris. They can spend from two hundred to a thousand US dollars for their one-day shopping. They can dine at a steak house that serves steak for the price of a month’s salary of a cashier in one of the Mall’s shops or a two-year salary of a street sweeper in Manila’s streets. The second group is composed of middle class Filipinos who frequent the malls simply to get away from the pollution and humdrum of the city while experiencing first world amenities by sipping cold Starbucks frappuccino while surfing the web through WiFi connectivity via an Apple MacBook, or by grabbing a McDonald’s Big Mac for lunch or by taking a stroll along the Mall’s corridors ready to spot any shop that offers discounts and big sales. Others simply while away their

⁴⁶¹ http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_hb5026/is_200010/ai_n18241543 (08.10.2007).

⁴⁶² http://www.digitalfilipino.com/softtech_article.cfm?id=31 (08.10.2007).

⁴⁶³ Staff of Shopping Centers Today (2006-05-20). Mall of Asia opens in Philippines. News. International Council of Shopping Centers (15.02.2007).

⁴⁶⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SM_Mall_of_Asia (08.07.07).

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

time by watching the latest movie at the biggest IMAX theater in the Philippines.

The third group at the Mall of Asia is composed of the mass of working Filipinos who have to wake up early in the morning with a piece of *pan de sal* and a cup of instant coffee for a quick breakfast before their daily commute via public jeepneys in order to be on time for the store hours of the mall's shops and different establishments. They receive a monthly salary that is not even enough to buy a pair of shoes in the shops where they work as sales clerks or errand boys. The fourth group is composed of Filipinos who enter the mall to temporarily escape their abject poverty and to feel as if they were rich even without having a single penny in their pockets. The fifth group is composed of faceless Filipinos who go as far as the glass doors of the mall but are denied entrance to the mall since they are simply too dirty and smelly or are suspected as possible terrorists because they live near the mall's Muslim mosque with residents resisting eviction from local authorities.

In the dynamics of cultural globalization, a mega mall is one of the indicators of the Philippines as one global nation. It could be considered as a new temple of Filipinos where they can come in contact with the values of the global village through the various manifestations of global culture offering promises of flawless beauty, better comforts, new identity and virtual reality. On the other hand, it can also create new avenues for reaching out to the un-churched and opening up new practical pastoral strategies like celebrating Sunday masses in mega malls and putting up prayer rooms or chapels as one of the services provided by mall operators. A mega mall captures cultural globalization in the local scene.

From the Philippine experience of global popular culture, this paper will now briefly outline some insights on mission as counter-cultures in the global village.

Mission as Counter-Cultures

Lesslie Newbiggin's question on Gospel and culture captures the problematic of mission and culture at the crossroad of the Global village: "Suppose instead of trying to understand the Gospel from the point of view of our culture, we tried to understand our culture

from the point of view of the Gospel?"⁴⁶⁶ To avoid the danger of making culture a sort of a conceptual stew, one has to clarify that "culture can be understood as the order of life in which human beings construct meaning through practices of symbolic representation."⁴⁶⁷ The cultural dimension of globalization has to take culture not simply as an expression of *instrumental symbolization*, that is, as attached to economic practices with its market-based and technology-intensive meanings but more essentially as *existential symbolization*, that is, "meanings as ends in themselves, as distinct from simply instrumental meanings."⁴⁶⁸ "Culture makes us what we are, and explains what we do."⁴⁶⁹

The transformation of culture in the global village has to take the Gospel like a white light that when it passes through a prism of the Church's Mission could be refracted into seven counter-cultures before the dominant cultures proposed by cultural globalization.

Culture of Generosity vis-à-vis Culture of Consumerism

Consumerism is the insatiable desire to possess in order to keep pace with a particular lifestyle that is dictated by wants and not by needs. Thus, a consumerist culture locates the meaning of life in the volume of consumed goods and in acquired possessions. The more one accumulates goods, the more life becomes worth living. This is the deception of consumerism that could end up in wanting to have more at the expense of others' basic needs.

Mission brings about a culture of generosity characterized by an evangelical lifestyle that is based on needs and not on wants. Generosity is not simply almsgiving or even a corporate philosophy based on social investment that parcels out surplus to the poor for some future corporate gains; it is not simply a personal virtue. On the contrary, a culture of generosity involves a radical transformation that happens at the level of being in which the center of existence is no longer the ego but the other. As a consequence, the very fiber of

⁴⁶⁶ Leslie Newbigin, "Can the West Be Converted?" in: *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 11 (1987) 1, 5.

⁴⁶⁷ John Tomlinson, *Globalization and Culture*, United Kingdom, 1999, 18.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴⁶⁹ *Regional Report on East Asia (2005) and the Pacific* by the Jesuit Task Force on Globalization and Marginalization, 14.

existence in the global village is changed by a Trinitarian relationship that places the needs of others before one's personal wants; that locates Christian identity in sharing rather than in having.

Culture of Hospitality vis-à-vis Culture of Individualism

The particularity of hospitality is becoming more challenging in a culturally globalized world. People in remote areas in the Philippines often seek to find a way to buy a bottle of Coca-Cola to entertain a visiting priest instead of giving him their typical rice coffee or open a can of sardines for him instead of offering a native chicken cooked in coconut milk. The power of media has made some people think that Coca-cola or a can of sardines is the sign of true hospitality for somebody who comes from a city. Hospitality, however, is not only their capacity to make a guest at home but also the guest's capacity to enter into the life of the people and share and enjoy life with them to the full.

There is a growing cult of the ego in a culturally globalized world. Restlessness, isolation and loneliness are experiences that characterize a culture of individualism that preoccupies itself with self-survival in a competitive global world. What matters in such a culture is that an individual makes his way to the top by elimination of the others who are perceived as competitors. However, mission brings about a culture of hospitality that makes life a journey with the other. The very life of Jesus has shown that the way to life is the way of love that takes the life of the other as one's own. In fact, the other is not an obstacle to growth and fulfillment but a companion along the way that leads to the fullness of life.

Culture of Interiority vis-à-vis Culture of Superficiality

The popular vehicles of cultural globalization from fast food, fast music, fashion and trends to fast computers have contributed to making humans incapable of depth, that is, an experience of meaning drawn from the very core of one's being independent from changing trends and fashion. Thus, a culture of superficiality is not just about useless chatter or a mere familiarity with somebody, but it is the absence of a meaningful relationship. Furthermore, we can say that superficiality is the absence of an inner personal experience of God thus making life rootless in a world of fast-changing trends.

Mission in a global village realizes a culture of interiority that entails a conversion from superficiality to depth through an affirmation of God's presence in the humanization process. Interiority is the fullness of God's presence in every person that brings out the real meaning of what is human and makes humanity capable of remaining deeply rooted in authentic values amidst the changing standards of the global village.

Culture of Solidarity vis-à-vis Culture of Marginalization

As global cities multiply in the global village, movements of people from the periphery of global culture increase, but there is an equal proportion of displacement due to lack of access to basic shelter, goods and services as well as lack of opportunities to competitively find a job and earn a living in the big city. Thus, "in the context of the global world apparently promising prosperity to all, marginalization appears as a process *denying opportunities and outcomes to those living 'on the margins' and enhancing opportunities and outcomes of those who are at the centre* (sic)."⁴⁷⁰

Furthermore, "combining discrimination, and social exclusion, marginalization offends human dignity and involves a denial of human rights, especially the right to live effectively as equal citizens."⁴⁷¹ A culture of marginalization due to globalization can create the sub-cultures of criminality, exploitation, fundamentalism and terrorism. The irony is that the geographical movement of peoples from the margins to urban centers results in marginalization. In fact, "despite their [marginalized people] large contribution to economic growth through cheap labor, the marginalized of today often remain invisible and voiceless; while some of the poor have been able to enjoy the new benefits of globalization, many others have been further disadvantaged by the entrenched social, cultural, political and ethnic divisions which increase their marginalization and exclusion."⁴⁷²

Mission has to bring about a culture of solidarity that puts the primacy of person before anything else. Instead of taking the poor

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid.

⁴⁷² Ibid.

and the weak in the community as blocks to global cultural flows, the poor and the weak have to be *included* in the interconnectedness of the global village, and they have to be allowed to “participate in society in the way that others are allowed and encouraged to do.”⁴⁷³ Solidarity becomes an experience of the all-embracing love for humanity. Solidarity is not just a top-down charity often reduced to almsgiving and corporate philanthropy but it becomes a permanent experience of a global destination of goods. Thus, “according to the Church Tradition, *solidarity is a form of reciprocity* between God and human beings that is extended to relationships among men and women.”⁴⁷⁴ Solidarity “implies a close commitment to those suffering marginalization by sharing the concerns and perspectives of the marginalized and looking forward to a transformed reality.”⁴⁷⁵

Culture of Harmony vis-à-vis Culture of Conflict and Violence

The experience of violence and conflict goes beyond mere physical violence. There is a non-physical violence that impacts on the quality of relationships in the community based on reciprocity or mutuality. In fact, a great deal of violence is hidden and silent and it is inflicted on victims who perpetuate violence even if they are not aware of it. There is also the violence to Mother Earth that has “reached a stage where we have crossed some points of no return.”⁴⁷⁶

A Culture of Harmony highlights the conjunctive dimension of relationships that taps the interconnectedness of life and the cosmos. If in a culture of conflict and violence there is a “bleeding web of interconnectedness,”⁴⁷⁷ a culture of harmony heals the bleeding web by walking together through the path of dialogue and peace, forgiveness and reconciliation, justice and equity, sustainability and care for the earth.⁴⁷⁸

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Cf. Sean McDonagh, “Mission and Ecology in the Catholic Church”, in: DIWA 31 (2006) 1–2, 94–111.

Culture of Introspection vis-à-vis Culture of Information

Information is a significant source of power in the global village. In fact, more information yields more power. Nonetheless, in spite of the breakthrough in information technologies that constitute a culture of information through faster internet and computers, through wireless technologies and digital innovations, through business process outsourcing (BPO) and knowledge process outsourcing (KPO), and through video-conferencing, the appetite of humanity has become more and more insatiable for the latest information, always in search of what could fill up the void of meaning that one feels even when all the senses are saturated by a continuous flow of information.

Mission brings about a Culture of Introspection because the Wisdom of the Gospel when listened to, meditated upon and lived in daily life transforms the angst of life caused by the fast-paced rhythm of the information culture. Doing mission in the context of a culture of information entails a horizon of meaning that can only come internally, that is, from intimacy with Jesus Christ. Thus, the need for personal intimacy can never be fully satisfied by virtual reality. It is only friendship with Christ that can bring about an authentic faithing experience in the global village where union with God is “not only in moments of silent prayer but also in being with another human person.”⁴⁷⁹

Culture of Community vis-à-vis Culture of Communication

Different forms of communication, that compress time and space, have been used to bridge distances and create a sense of unity among countries, peoples, neighborhoods and families. When one takes a closer look at a culture of communication, one finds a growing homelessness, that is, “an abstract and mechanistic pattern of being, thinking, acting and producing”⁴⁸⁰ that results in community becoming a functional mechanism more than an existential and ecclesial need.

Doing mission in the context of communication culture realizes a culture of community that mirrors the Trinitarian reciprocity. In other

⁴⁷⁹ Cf. Andrew G. Repeccion, “Globalization and Youth”, in: *Vinculum* 24 (2007) 2, 38.

⁴⁸⁰ David Schindler, “Homelessness and the Modern Condition” in: *Communio: International Catholic Review* 27 (2000), 415.

words, the “other” becomes the point of reference and the “self” finds its fullness not in isolation but in communion with the other. In practical terms, a culture of community creates diverse forms of interdependence and synergy that bring out the real identity of self and its contribution to the network of relationships that build up the Church.

Conclusion

The mission of the Church in the context of the Philippines today has to give priority to the strengthening of institutions and transformation of culture. The real challenge of every Christian is to get out of complacency, that is—to borrow the expression of a columnist—the *can't do mentality*. In fact, “Filipinos will remain a pitiful lot unless we rise above our dysfunctional mindset and values that find satisfaction with lesser evils.”⁴⁸¹ However, more than a mere human struggle towards liberation from evil structures and disvalues present in the Philippine society today, mission has to draw its force from Christ who invites every member of the Church to become living witnesses of the Gospel in every sector of society. It is fundamental that mission is seen not as an optional task but as an existential commitment, a life-project of every member of the Church.

⁴⁸¹ William Esposo, “Who is Stopping the Filipinos?”, in: *The Philippine Star* 8 (2008), 17.

Inculturation

Boldly Trusting in the Transforming Power of Contextuality

Chibueze C. Udeani and Monika Udeani

In the discourse on inculturation the focus is generally placed on non-European or non-Western nations, these being essentially the countries of the southern hemisphere. Approximately two thirds of all Christians worldwide live in countries of the South. Cultures and societies there were first exposed to Christianity during the missionary drives which accompanied Europe's economic and colonial expansion between one hundred and five hundred years ago.

Although many men and women in these countries have considered themselves Christians for generations and lead their daily lives accordingly, a good number of theologians and church officials suspect them of harbouring syncretic beliefs. This suspicion is accompanied by the mostly latent insinuation of a distortion of the Christian deposit of faith, a term used by Western and especially European theologians conditioned by their own socio-historical and cultural backgrounds. The present article seeks to encourage advocates of resolute steps towards inculturation and a critical review of the outcomes. They need to boldly draw attention to the transforming power of socio-historical and cultural contexts in which the constitutive elements of the Christian faith can manifest themselves in new and manifold different ways. The very nature of the Christian faith means that it has always required materialisation in the ordinary everyday activities of individuals and life movements. Hence there are no convincing grounds for reservations about mutual contacts between the Christian faith and the socio-historical and cultural frameworks in which it is lived out. On the contrary, this contextuality is the soil in which Christ's message can take root and flourish, as stated in the prologue to the Gospel of St. John: "The Word became flesh, he lived among us." (Jn. 1:14)

Ever since the very first mission campaigns, attempts have been made in the inculturation process to adapt Christian religious practice in order to facilitate winning over new adherents. Hans Waldenfels notes that for a long time, non-essential aspects such as language, rituals, clothing etc. were subjected to a largely “superficially effective process of accommodation” during inculturation. He contrasts these inconsequential aspects with the need for a deeper understanding of people’s images of God and man, of ideologies, ethical conduct, notions of time and history etc. which are crucial to the process of inculturation.⁴⁸² He feels that much can be gained from fundamental exchanges on these matters, which call for both patience and inter-cultural tact.

To what extent must account be taken of the socio-historical and cultural framework of the respective societies to ensure the successful inculturation of Christ’s message? How is it possible to ascertain whether adequate allowance has been made for contextuality and whether Christ’s message enters into a fruitful symbiosis with it? Pursuing Waldenfels’ ideas and taking them a little further entails examining a few examples.

First of all, we need to look at society and its members in their respective socio-historical and cultural frameworks. What valuable foundations are already in place in the form of traditions? These include an understanding of power and how it should be handled. Is power wielded in an empowering or disempowering manner? What obligations do powerful individuals assume in respect of others? What forms of compensation exist in practice? What status is accorded to the weak and marginalised? How is respect for life expressed?⁴⁸³

On the individual level, close attention must be paid to the question of how people actively take responsibility for their own lives in society. What significance attaches to the development of personal skills and talents – or does a debilitating form of resignation to fate, dressed up as spirituality, prevail instead? What aspects of a critical orientation to life on earth are part of the traditions and do they encourage people to transform the world as God’s creation into a place worth living in

⁴⁸² Cf. Hans Waldenfels, “Gottes Wort in der Fremde. Inkulturation oder Kontextualität?”, in: Monika Pankoke-Schenk/Georg Evers, *Inkulturation und Kontextualität. Theologien im weltweiten Austausch*, Frankfurt/M. 1994, 114–123, here: 120–121.

⁴⁸³ Cf. Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation.

for everybody here and now? Or does a narrow, occult attachment to the hereafter influence daily rituals, thereby trapping those affected in the role of victim and in the suffering and endurance of suffering that go with it?

The power of contextuality resides in an awareness of those life-enhancing elements which, for good reasons, are already in place or have developed in a specific culture and society over many generations, in gaining an appreciation of their inherent merit and in building on them. True Christian proclamation assumes that God has already manifested Himself in the various cultures and societies and has a common history with their inhabitants that began well before the era of Christianisation. True Christian proclamation does not take note of socio-historical and cultural characteristics merely to facilitate the successful dissemination of an individual's personal understanding of Christ's message. On the contrary, it attempts to learn from what is unfamiliar – including for the individual with regard to his own context.

Waldenfels states quite clearly: "Being a Christian [...] is being in the discipleship of Christ. This must [...] lead to a creative, Christ-like way of life appropriate to the respective historical moment in time and space. Therefore, a mere 'imitation' in the sense of His Jewish thought patterns and lifestyle habits, i.e. a perpetuation of the cultural situation which existed at the time of Jesus, [...] is inadequate."⁴⁸⁴ It should be added that the European transformation of the understanding of an adequate discipleship should under no circumstances be imposed on the peoples and societies of the South. The apostles devised a useful foil for this challenge at their first council in Jerusalem (Acts 15:5–29).

What remains of the message of Christ in the light of its symbiosis with what we subsume under the heading 'contextuality'? Robert Schreiter cautions against naive concepts advocating the "core and shell" theory, "namely that the 'core' of the Gospel message can be re-branded in the 'shell' of another culture"⁴⁸⁵. Instead, "Christ's encounter with all cultures could be a prerequisite for a potentially full manifestation of the significance of the incarnation. Through this manifestation we may come closer to a fuller understanding of the

⁴⁸⁴ Hans Waldenfels, *op. cit.*, 120.

⁴⁸⁵ Robert Schreiter, "Mission in der Spannung von universalem Anspruch und partikularem Kontext", in: Markus Luber (Eds.), *Kontextualität des Evangeliums. Weltkirchliche Herausforderungen der Missionstheologie*, Regensburg 2012, 51–67, here: 51.

missio Dei in the world, in terms of God's work in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit."⁴⁸⁶

A process of inculturation which takes account of socio-historical and cultural circumstances not only comprises an adaptation of Christ's message to the respective society; it also requires a ceaseless struggle with the sharp thrust of this message. As Franz Weber is at pains to point out, it causes "profound conflicts, which are unavoidable because the Gospel message cannot simply be adapted to existing social and cultural circumstances in a reckless, casual manner. On the contrary, it invariably has to take a stand against inhumane conditions for the sake of man and his liberation."⁴⁸⁷

Such an approach to inculturation implies interpenetration between culture and lifestyles, on the one hand, and the message of Christ, on the other. It has an impact on all fundamental pastoral functions, transforms them and encourages a comprehensive reinterpretation of both the socio-historical and cultural framework and of Christ's message. So, while the issue of adequate language, rites and manners is not omitted, it remains subordinate to other aspects.

I come now to five propositions relating to this understanding of inculturation.

Incarnation is essential to Christ's message

Transformational contact with the concrete environment in which people live is a constitutive, quintessential aspect of the message of Christ. In Magnus Striet's opinion, it is time to bid farewell to the notion of a "Gospel per se": "The Gospel does not exist in the super-temporal intelligibility of a Platonic heaven of ideas, but only in the interpretative ambit of the God who was made flesh, thereby paying infinite tribute to man in all his finiteness and fragility. [...] If a culture generates knowledge of human beings which is new compared to other eras, this knowledge must be considered from the point of view [...] of whether it gives expression in a new way to the Gospel of God, who wishes to see fellowship among men and thus finds recognition

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁸⁷ Franz Weber, "Inkulturation auf dem 'Missionskontinent' Europa. Orden als Träger inkultrierter Evangelisierung", in: Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft 86 (2002) 3, 192–205, here: 196.

of himself. It follows that the Gospel and culture can per se never constitute an antithesis."⁴⁸⁸

It is clear, therefore, that an incarnational interpretation of inculturation need not fear a distortion of the message of Christ when confronted with a specific type of contextuality. Outright success is only possible, however, when Christ's message has tangibly taken root in the lives of people in a specific environment in conjunction with the related processes of change.

The Christian message in its respective traditions

The consequence of the reflective and disputed access to Christ's message in Europe to date is that the resultant theology is European in nature and a product of the European socio-historical and cultural context, notwithstanding the valuable stimuli it has received from outside, e.g. from liberation theology. In the process of transferring the Christian message to the countries of the South and in dialogue with believers and theologians there it now has, more important than ever before, to refrain from employing European coordinates, on which Christian theology in Europe is largely based and by dint of which it sets itself apart, this serving as a means of differentiation between the categories of Christian and compliant with Christ's message, or non-Christian and syncretic or even anti-Christian.

Waldenfels introduces a note of caution here:

From the very beginning the discipleship of Christ was an immense act of translation, which was only suspended temporarily in places where Christianity became the definitive force shaping culture in the Western world and the symbiosis of Christian inspiration and Western cultural heritage began to impose itself on the world as a whole. What was recognised too late, however, was the fact that, in the long term, it was no longer the original source which determined definitive standards but rather Council decrees and disciplinary and ritual stipulations [...].

The upshot was that Western methods of inculturation [...] along with incidental and therefore changeable factors became the

⁴⁸⁸ Magnus Striet, "Evangelium und Kultur – ein Gegensatz? Theologische und anthropologische Grundsatzbemerkungen (nicht nur) zur 'Pastoral'-Konstitution", in: Pastoraltheologische Informationen 25 (2005) 2, 27–39, here: 28, 39.

substantial and indispensable core of what it means to be a Christian.”⁴⁸⁹

Legitimate claim to inculturation as opposed to an act of clemency

The countries of the South have a legitimate claim to inculturation of the message of Christ. This is by no means an “act of clemency” on the part of the Western Church and its theology with respect to believers and theologians of the South, in which the former profess to represent the “true” faith and merely ascribe a qualified version of Christianity to their fellow believers.

Acknowledgement of an individual’s contextual situation in his or her social frame of reference is part of the affirmation given by God in the process of His continuous creation. Hence incarnation within this unique contextuality, i.e. incarnation, requires no permission or validation from any authorities. It constitutes a form of inheritance granted by God to man in the moment of his being called into life. If disputes arise over this inheritance, they will inevitably have distorting effects on the tenor and content of Christ’s message. *Evangelii Gaudium* provides unique encouragement in this connection: “God’s word is unpredictable in its power. The Gospel speaks of a seed which, once sown, grows by itself, even as the farmer sleeps (Mk. 4:26–29). The Church has to accept this unruly freedom of the word, which accomplishes what it wills in ways that surpass our calculations and ways of thinking.”⁴⁹⁰

Challenged to embark on proactive searches and life movements

The countries of the South have a responsibility both to themselves and to the other churches and theologies to develop their own theological systems as an expression of their specific contextuality. These systems will continually rewrite and reflect anew on the Christian faith from an internal perspective in respect of their own particular socio-historical and cultural embeddedness. With that in mind, it is essential to discard inflexible and alien interpretations of

⁴⁸⁹ Hans Waldenfels, op. cit., 120.

⁴⁹⁰ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World, 24 November 2013 http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, no. 22.

ministry and, instead, to consider and develop local socio-historical and culturally mature traditions of ecclesiastical office in view of the positive contribution these can make. Those who aspire to develop a theology of the message of Christ within their own contextuality need no longer waste any energy on providing justifications for external observers. Instead, they can critically analyse their own approaches and devise theologies which may well prove uncomfortable. Those who emerge from the theological faculties and seminaries willing to examine the ways in which God shows Himself here and now in the “hot spots” of their societies will be acting as pioneers. Theologies relevant to everyday life and proven in practice will be formulated and take shape through cooperation with men and women of the “laity”, who are already endeavouring to live their lives in accordance with the Christian faith.

Specific experiences of faith as a basis for coexistence

The Christian faith of the people of God needs to be embedded in the specific socio-historical and cultural contextuality of Christians in many different societies. The people of God are the focus of the message of Christ on our planet Earth. However, the local environments in which Christ’s message must become manifest for every individual as a message of joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties (GS 1) vary greatly. This very diversity reveals an abundance of differentiations in terms of wealth and poverty; political inclusion and styles of governance ranging from the authoritarian to the totalitarian; ready access to education and censored information; multi-religious environments and fundamentalist monocultures; a high-tech lifestyle and helpless exposure to natural forces in the throes of change.

It is essential that the message of Christ should be perceived and experienced by the individuals and societies in question as a source of strength, providing help and succour in tackling these challenges and hardships, and that it should receive attention and acknowledgement in the context of this diversity. The local churches therefore need each other in order to grasp more of the entirety, acting as a community of faith, learning and solidarity and eschewing any inalienable differences. Failure to do so will result in a diminishing of the Christian message, which John Paul II cautioned against in *Redemptoris Missio*, albeit with a different objective (he urged circum-

spection in the process of inculturation): “But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.”⁴⁹¹ This is the only way to ensure that the Pentecost can be experienced in the present and that people confess in amazement: “We hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God.” (Acts 2:11b)

Conclusion

Christians speak of what gives them cause to live, believe and hope. They do so in the sense of an invitation to share experiences, joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties. They bear witness to the ways in which the Gospel challenges them and is reflected in their lives. Together with other civil-society actors, Christians are committed to justice, peace and the integrity of creation. They make an active contribution and, in prophetic manner, raise their voices locally and globally in favour of life-affirming structures. Christians believe that God is able to reveal Himself in innumerable different ways and contexts, in encounters with those of other cultures and religious traditions as well as in the respective “signs of the times”. They address the unfamiliar with attentiveness and curiosity and are thus receptive to the concomitant process of encountering God and His world.

Efforts at inculturation undertaken seriously and supported by Christians in these acts of faith and a mission which consistently considers Christ’s message in its socio-historical and cultural contextuality should be encouraged to move forward gradually, step by step. This may result in some surprises at the ways in which the message of Christ can have an unlocking effect. However, Jesus’ promise remains forever valid: “And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.” (Mt. 28:20)

⁴⁹¹ Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* on the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate, 7 December 1991, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio.html, no. 52.

Inculturation in the Light of New Paradigms

José María Vigil

A persistent stereotype

I would like to comment on a number of fundamental principles underlying the most common ecclesial and pastoral approaches to inculturation. In doing so, I shall employ the hermeneutical principle based on a legitimate distinction between an assumed core or “depository of truths”, on the one hand, and different “material forms of expression”, on the other, which can encapsulate these truths in different places, at different times and, above all, in different cultures. This is by no means a one-sided, semi-official view or one that is unknown within the Catholic Church. Rather, it is a hermeneutical principle that was applied by Pope John XXIII at the grand opening of the Second Vatican Council, its validity being confirmed by Pope Francis in his encyclical letter *Evangelii Gaudium*.

In his opening address at the Second Vatican Council on 11 October 1962, John XXIII established the following principle: “For this deposit of faith, or truths which are contained in our time-honoured teaching, is one thing; the manner in which these truths are set forth (with their meaning preserved intact) is something else.”⁴⁹² Thirty years later John Paul II repeated this thought in his encyclical letter *Ut unum sint*: “The expression of truth can take different forms. The renewal of these forms of expression becomes necessary for the sake of transmitting to the people of today the Gospel message in its unchanging meaning.”⁴⁹³ He called the Church to engage in a “new

⁴⁹² http://www.metanoiaproject.co.uk/beone/vatican_two/talks/Pope%20John%20XXIII.pdf, Latin original: “Est enim aliud ipsum depositum fidei, seu veritates, quae veneranda doctrina nostra continentur, aliud modus, quo eadem enuntiantur.”, https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/la/speeches/1962/documents/hf_jxxiii_spe_19621011_opening-council.html, no. 6

⁴⁹³ John Paul II, *Ut unum sint* Commitment, 25 May 1995: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint.html, no. 19.

evangelisation” – a key phrase conveying an evangelisation that is new in its fervour, methods and forms of expression, but not in its content. It is taken for granted that the essence of evangelisation is a message independent of any specific time or culture, which forms part of a permanent heritage of faith and cannot and must not be changed.

In his encyclical letter *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis again highlighted this fundamental distinction between the truth and its forms of expression. He did so in a way that is easy to understand, partly to justify the renewal he wished to initiate within the Church and partly to reassure conservative circles who insisted that what had been said by the Church in its traditional doctrine should never be contradicted in any way.⁴⁹⁴

Hence, we are talking here of a general principle which has latterly acquired increasing relevance. According to Francis, a clear distinction must be made between two things. On the one hand, there is the “deposit of faith” (*depositum fidei*), in other words the unchangeable truths intrinsic to this depository which constitute the official truth of the Church that originated in the revealed Word, of which truth the Church is the responsible guardian and sole authorised interpreter⁴⁹⁵. On the other hand, there are the expressions of these truths which change over time and vary from one geo-cultural area to another. Such changes need not alarm us, as they merely concern different forms of expression and are therefore external to the abiding, unchangeable and eternal core or heart of the truths to be found in the deposit of faith.

Following this hermeneutical principle, we can clearly see both the potential and the essence of inculturation. Inculturation takes place at a level outside of the truth, i.e. in the form of expression it assumes. Hence inculturation is based on the distinction between the content of the truth and the form in which this content is expressed. The content is timeless, transcends cultures and can be described as a metaphysical, supernatural truth which God has entrusted to

⁴⁹⁴ “At the same time, today’s vast and rapid cultural changes demand that we constantly seek ways of expressing unchanging truths in a language which brings out their abiding newness.” (EG 41). Cf. also nos. 41–45.

⁴⁹⁵ Cf. Dogmatic Constitution of the Second Vatican Council on Divine Revelation of 18 November 1965, *Dei Verbum*, no. 10. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651118_dei-verbum_en.html (07.02.2019).

the Church as a deposit of faith. The form of expression, on the other hand, manifests itself in different cultural configurations which the Christian message can and must assume in each specific time and place. Those forms are subject to change and development, they depend on decisions being made and they are negotiable.

This division may conceal a kind of metaphysical dualism, making it possible to derive a truth – or truths – allegedly detached from the resulting forms of expression, truths that exist outside the scope of human discussion and therefore outside the only thing which we as humans can contend with.

An outmoded notion

It is right to engage our critical faculties if we persistently come across such traditional and outmoded images and metaphors. In the cultural environment in which we live, these metaphors clearly violate all currently accepted epistemological standards. In today's world with its perpetual development of knowledge it is impracticable and virtually pointless to confess faith in a "deposit of unchangeable truths" preserved by a privileged person with a claim to exclusivity and a God-given commission. Modern epistemological thinking finds this simple image utterly incomprehensible.

On the other hand, adopting a different philosophical approach, it would be wise to remind ourselves that everything we might say about a deposit of truths entrusted by Christ to the Apostles as the guardians of the Church will totally contradict historical reality as we know it today. Everything we now know about the historical Jesus and his association with the movement that arose years after his death clearly makes all the assertions about this deposit appear unreal.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹⁶ It is advisable to bear in mind that the historical reality with which we are familiar is totally alien to this supposed deposit that was handed to the Apostles for safekeeping. Jesus never formulated any deposit of truths, nor did anybody receive one. Rather, the beginning of the Jesus movement lay outside all human expectations. Perhaps Christianity is the worldwide institution that can claim to have created the biggest possible imbalance between its impressive dimensions today, on the one hand, and the humbleness and disparagement of its uncertain origins, on the other. The notion of a deposit that had been entrusted to the Apostles by Jesus was a fiction created by Irenaeus of Lyon. However, the idea gained ground straightaway, as it compensated for a deficit that was seen as extremely painful. Anyone continuing to profess faith in a deposit entrusted to the Apostles in person must be regarded as highly naïve and ignorant of history. Cf. John van Hagen, *Rescuing Religion – How Faith Can Survive Its Encounter with Science*, Salem 2012, 131f.

The new biblical archaeological paradigm

The notion is unacceptable for a further reason, as we are now aware of the dubiousness of supposedly historical biblical accounts, such as Abraham, the Patriarchs, the Exodus, the Covenant and the seizure of land. There has been talk recently of a new paradigm – that of fully emancipated and scientific archaeology⁴⁹⁷, which forces us to radically rethink the historical foundations of faith and theology.⁴⁹⁸

Yet none of this has had any impact on large parts of official theology. Preferring to ignore the facts, scholars keep saying the same things and go on using the same data and references as though they still possessed historical validity or belonged to some timeless, disembodied sphere. The most recent official Catholic documents continue to use quotations from the Old and New Testaments, taking their dubious historical character as absolute. Their quotations are simply used as convenient elements for a symbolical, Bible-based line of argument which has been the same for the last 50 or indeed 500 years. This puts us in an ethereal space, outside of reality and history and therefore out of touch with the requirements of stringent academic discourse. It is baffling to see how many of our official Church documents and “contemporary” theologies are still “rooted in biblical mythical thinking”. This ignores the criterion of epistemological rigour that is demanded of all other types of discourse open to public debate in modern-day society.

As the new biblical archaeological paradigm shows, we know now that the Bible narrative and its spiritual message – irrespective of any historical facts on which they are based – are not really historical but a spiritual recreation of the hope and identity of the people of

⁴⁹⁷ Cf. booklet published by *Voices* magazine 38 (2015) 4: on “The New Biblical Archaeological Paradigm”, <http://www.eatwot.net/VOICES/VOICES-2015-3&4.pdf> (03.03.2017).

⁴⁹⁸ Old Testament scholarship is currently undergoing a process of radical transformation. It has been under persistent scrutiny since the beginnings of academic exegesis, i.e. since about the 16th century, but even more intensely since the archaeological findings of the last century, since the discovery and deciphering of inscriptions, chronicles, libraries, manuscripts, commemorative stones, etc., ... and of all the remnants of the ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian and Jewish civilisations ... In the past few years a number of works have questioned biblical historiography as a whole, and highly respected authors now talk openly of the fictitious nature of the Bible as well as of the Jewish people. It has been established that the entire Pentateuch was written in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE and that all the stories about the Patriarchs, the Exodus from Egypt and the taking of land are the stuff of legend. Cf. Josef Moingt, *Croire quand même*, Paris 2010, 96–97.

Israel at certain significant moments in their history. The truly “historical” element is not the “biblical narrative” itself, i.e. the story told by the Bible, but the “story behind the story”: a human narrative full of creative spirituality which present-day archaeology has revealed to us and which we are now able to appropriate.⁴⁹⁹ In Western societies today we fail to satisfy even the most basic demands for plausibility in human thought if we continue to speak of a “deposit of truths” or an “eternal and unchangeable inventory” of truths, as opposed to the transient and external sphere which characterises the various ways in which those eternal truths are expressed.

A new epistemological perspective

I have already said that if the way we think and express ourselves is based on a “distinction between the substance of truth and its forms of expression”, we are out of sync with today’s epistemology.

Firstly, we live in a world in which metaphysical objectivism has evaporated; it survives only in the worlds of religion and theology. Traditionally, following Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, the truth was regarded as *adaequatio rei et intellectus*, i.e. a person’s intellect must correspond to (“be adequate to”) the thing they know: a statement is true because it matches an objective reality. While this may be obvious for the factual “truths” of the physical world, it cannot be generalised to include the wider world of knowledge. Today’s epistemology tends to de-objectify human understanding. There is no correspondence with (“adequacy to”) an “objective” reality that can consistently support our understanding. Rather, it is an ensemble of models developed by man to handle reality. It is implausible to postulate a number of objectives, fundamental and almost reified truths buttressed by a physical or metaphysical objectivity.

It makes no sense in today’s epistemology to speak of an uncreated truth or of a totality of uncreated truths that have been revealed, which come from above and are regarded as eternal and immutable. Today’s epistemology is profoundly anthropocentric in its human concept of truth, acknowledging that everything we can say about truth is filtered through our own human nature. The truth and

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. John van Hagen, op. cit., “The Story behind the Story”, 27f. The “story behind the story” was referred to as early as 2001, in William Dever’s book, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?*, Grand Rapids 2001.

the world of understanding are our own human constructs and we are in no position to handle truths of a different kind, including those of a supposedly divine nature.

Today's epistemology knows of nothing static or fixed with regard to the truth. I would say that it is experiencing a crucial rediscovery of Heraclitus as opposed to Parmenides. Everything is in motion, everything is in a continuous state of flux, forever emerging and evolving. To talk of eternal truths would be to talk of the truths of a different world, the heavenly or metaphysical world, the world of Platonic gods, and not of our own real human world here on earth (in which we can say, "It is amazing how much eternal truths can change"). There is no longer any room for the aforementioned division between the substance of the truth and its forms of expression – a dualism which ascribes immutable permanence to the substance. There is no such division, no matter how much Christian theoreticians of inculturated evangelisation may desire it. Rather, everything is equally subject to development and is constantly in motion.

Ultimately, this means that there is no specific eternal message. Everything keeps changing, everything can change and everything has to change. There is nothing eternally good as far as human understanding is concerned. Everything that was good – even very good – is prone to lose the meaning it once had. It may even become harmful and require replacement by a different message.⁵⁰⁰ Veneration of the eternal and unchangeable has changed in our contemporary thinking. Today we see no need to express the things of the other world. Rather, we have a need to develop by ourselves the content of what goes on in our minds.

The new epistemology takes the principle of a "hierarchy of

⁵⁰⁰ "People keep forgetting that something which used to be good does not stay good forever and ever. Instead, they still move along the old paths that were once good and they continue to do so long after those things have already turned bad. It is only with the greatest sacrifice and tremendous effort that they can rid themselves of the delusion that what was once good may perhaps have become old and no longer be any good. This happens in both trivial and important matters. People are barely capable of shedding the old ways of their childhood that were once good, even though their harmfulness has long been proved. The same, albeit magnified to gigantic proportions, is true of changes in attitude over time. A general attitude corresponds to a religion, and changes in religion are among the most embarrassing moments in world history." Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychologische Typen* (Gesammelte Werke, vol. 6), Zurich 1960, 197.

truths” to its radical conclusion. It recognises that not all truths are equal, and a flexible hierarchy of truths emerges in that a certain truth can cease imposing itself on another, lower-ranking truth. The novelty of today’s epistemology is that this hierarchy of truths is itself in flux. It is not static and fixed for all time. It undergoes constant cultural development.

Other new paradigms

New paradigms include, for instance, religious pluralism. Traditionally, in a religious context, inculturation has been expressed against the background of exclusivism or, more recently, inclusivism, which is the same from a structural perspective. It involved translating a single religious message into different cultures, a message that qualifies for expression in other, lower cultures which are predestined to be stimulated by this high-ranking message. Such theoretical approaches to inculturation almost never covered the aspect of passive inculturation, i.e. being open to absorbing and receiving input from outside. Exclusivist and inclusivist attitudes only ever move in one direction. They are prepared to implant their own message in the foreign culture, but not the other way around. The new pluralistic paradigm, however, completely reverses such traditional approaches to inculturation. The aim is no longer to inculturate in one direction, but to achieve inter-culturation in both directions, without any priority being accorded to one side or the other. This is a new approach and a new paradigm.

The post-religious paradigm

A new paradigm recently in demand – though it clearly continues the repeated call for secularisation – has become known as the post-religious paradigm.⁵⁰¹ No matter what religions may think of themselves, they are not eternal. They have accompanied humans for no more than a few thousand years. In every instance they are forms of expression characteristic of an agricultural society – the Neolithic age – which, according to many researchers, can be

⁵⁰¹ The best academic treatment of this paradigm by several authors can be found in issue 37 of the journal *Horizonte*, published by the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte (Brazil), <http://periodicos.pucminas.br/index.php/horizonte/issue/view/682/showToc> (13.04.2017).

regarded as the historical stage which ended with the advent of what is known as the knowledge-based society, a society revolving around a new axis of accumulation: that of knowledge. This is apparently not a problem attributable to the religions themselves, but to a change in human beings, who are shedding their millennia-old Neolithic approaches to knowledge (particularly their mythical approach). In this newly emerging epistemological context people feel out of place with religions that were fashioned in an era which is now coming to an end, that were created for people who are now disappearing. This mythical way of thinking, which was the traditional religious approach to knowledge, no longer functions.

The days of the “religional” structures of religions – their striving to bring people to heel, to demand faith and the sacrifice of rational faculties; their dualism of body and soul that scorns the earthly and the physical; their externally imposed structures (i.e. regulations from outside or from above); their ineradicable conviction that this world is merely a “moral testing ground” decreed by a *theos*, a test we must pass in the “history of salvation” and to which everything is reduced – would appear to be numbered. After all, more and more people are turning away from them and yet, paradoxically, they are still looking for a free and creative spirituality without “mythical religious convictions”, without doctrines and dogmas, without official truths, free from the duty to “repeat the history” our ancestors experienced.

Once we accept the depth that goes with a social and anthropological transformation of this magnitude, which is characteristic of a “new axial age”⁵⁰², we can ask what it might mean to “inculturate” the Gospel for our contemporary culture or for different local cultures. Perhaps it means ignoring the most profound issue of human change that is currently in progress and limiting ourselves to finding a “cultural expression” for the truth.

Conclusions

The inculturation that is really on the agenda and is urgently required entails accepting the challenge presented by the current paradigmatic shifts, which by their very nature bring about radical

⁵⁰² José María Vigil, *Theologie des religiösen Pluralismus – eine lateinamerikanische Perspektive*, Innsbruck 2013, 358–385 (Chapter 19: “Eine neue Achsenzeit”).

changes. There can be no doubt that the meaning of inculturation in the traditional sense resonates with all the cultural dialects of modern human society. The purpose of this short overview has been to make it clear that a totally different type of inculturation is now of the utmost urgency due to the major epistemological transformations mankind is currently experiencing. Such an inculturation would need to be one that addresses the new paradigms, a small selection of which I have sketched out here.

The inculturation required would mean complete acceptance of the new cultural paradigm. It would be the sum total of all the different “new paradigms” currently in circulation. The issue at stake here is not to change merely the language, the categories and the culture, nor is it about the “zeal, methods and forms of expression” of John Paul II’s “new evangelisation”. Rather, it is a matter of putting everything on a new footing. We do not need any new (inculturated) proposals based on the old assumptions (i.e. content that is supposedly contained in the deposit of faith). What we need are new proposals that take account of the new situation. As we are at the transition to a new axial age which is accompanied by profound transformations (amounting to a paradigmatic shift), we can only stay the same if we allow ourselves to be transformed by a radically new situation. At a time of radical change, people can only remain true to themselves if they are prepared to change.⁵⁰³ That means accepting the new situation and reinventing oneself on the basis of the new paradigms. This is the new and most profound inculturation that should now be undertaken.

⁵⁰³ Cf. Herbert Haag, *Nur wer sich ändert, bleibt sich treu*, Freiburg i. Br. 2000.

From Inculturation to Interculturality

Finding New Faith in Cultural Encounters

From the missiological paradigm of inculturation to the fundamental theological principle of interculturality

Klaus Vellguth

The fruitful discourse between the two Council theologians, Karl Rahner and Dominique Chenu⁵⁰⁴ had a profound influence, especially on the Pastoral Constitution of the Second Vatican Council. The statements made in *Gaudium et Spes* appear similar to an ellipse in that they are formulated around two centres, the first being society and the second the Church.⁵⁰⁵ Acknowledging this duality, the Council Fathers pointed out in the first footnote to the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” that the Pastoral Constitution itself consists of two parts which constitute an organic unity. This footnote, which was hotly disputed, highlights in two sentences the opposite poles to which the Church is committed. It explains that the Constitution is called “pastoral”, “because, while resting on doctrinal principles, it seeks to express the relation of the Church to the world and modern mankind. The result is that, on the one hand, a pastoral slant is present in the first part, and, on the other hand, a doctrinal slant is present in the second part.”⁵⁰⁶ In this programmatic footnote, the substance of which determined the entire genealogy of the Pastoral Constitution, a new relationship is established between pastoral care and dogmatics and between the Church and the world. This

⁵⁰⁴ On the creative tension between the Council theologians, Karl Rahner und Dominique Chenu, cf. Christian Bauer, *Konzilsrezeption in Deutschland. Anmerkungen zur Nachgeschichte des Zweiten Vatikanums*, in: *Anzeiger für die Seelsorge* 123 (2012) 10, 32–37.

⁵⁰⁵ Cf. Hans-Joachim Sander, “Theologischer Kommentar zur Pastoralkonstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute *Gaudium et spes*”, in: Peter Hünemann/Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *Heders Theologischer Kommentar zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil* vol. 4, 581–886, here: 590.

⁵⁰⁶ The fact that this explanation was incorporated in the form of a footnote to the title of the Pastoral Constitution “The Church in the Modern World” is an indication of its programmatic character for the Council document.

understanding, which is seminal to the Pastoral Constitution, is an invitation to no longer conceive of the Church and the world, the faith and culture as separate realities but as one unique reality. By analogy with kenotic Christology the Church incarnates itself in the world and, at best, remains “without separation” and “without confusion”.

The reason for these ecclesiological reorientations was an epistemological broadening in the thinking of the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council. This gave rise to an inclusive understanding of revelation, which is reflected in the Constitution on Divine Revelation and more clearly in the firm commitment to universal salvation in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church. It was explicitly stressed that neither ecclesial nor religious boundaries are identical with the limits of salvation. Ottmar Fuchs says in this context: “It is an inalienable characteristic of the Christian faith that God loves all human beings and includes them in His salvation.”⁵⁰⁷

Accompanying this opening in revelation theology was the use, in response to the Council’s deliberations, of the neologism inculturation and of the term contextualisation⁵⁰⁸ to replace previous terms such as accommodation, acculturation, adaptation, adjustment, assimilation, indigenisation con-naturalisation, pre-evangelisation⁵⁰⁹, transformation, etc. The term inculturation was initially introduced into missiology as a new “programme for mission theology”.⁵¹⁰ It

⁵⁰⁷ Ottmar Fuchs, “Mission’ mit einem ‘überflüssigen Glauben’”, in: Thomas Schreijäck/Martin Bröckelmann-Simon/Thomas Antkowiak/Albert Biesinger/Ottmar Fuchs (Eds.), *Horizont Weltkirche. Erfahrungen – Themen – Optionen und Perspektiven*, Mainz 2012, 441–458, here: 448.

⁵⁰⁸ In contrast to the hermeneutics used in linguistics and philosophy, contextuality in theology means not only the contextual or environmental reference of a text or its setting in the life of the biblical text. Giancarlo Collet points out that an unambiguous clarification of the theological concept of context is still pending. Cf. Giancarlo Collet, Stichwort “Kontextuelle Theologie”, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* vol. 6, Freiburg 1997, 327–329, here: 329.

⁵⁰⁹ The concept of pre-evangelisation goes back to the Jesuit missionaries in Japan, whom the Visitor Alexander Valignano (1539–1606) instructed to adapt their mission strategy to the indigenous customs. He regarded familiarisation with a foreign culture as the first step to preaching the Gospel to people and to conveying a thorough understanding of the Christian message. Cf. Shun’ichi Takayanagi, “Für eine neue Missionsstrategie im säkularisierten Japan”, in: *Stimmen der Zeit* 234 (2016) 1, 15–22, here: 20.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. Walter Kasper, *Katholische Kirche*, Freiburg 2011, 459. On the concept of contextualisation see also Darren C. Marks, *Shaping a Global Theological Mind*, Aldershot 2008; Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual theology*, Maryknoll 2002; Clemens Sedmak, *Lokale Theologien und globale Kirche. Eine erkenntnistheoretische Grundlegung in praktischer Absicht*, Freiburg 2000; Dean Gilliland (Eds.), *The Word Among Us. Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*, Dallas et al. 1999; Klaus Vellguth, “Die Kirche muss raus. Frischer Wind

also became clear, especially in the encounter with non-European cultures in the post-colonialist era, that there is not one single Gospel as a context-free “depositum fidei” excluding any hermeneutics which has been handed down unaltered through the ages and across all cultures. On the contrary, it was apparent that the Gospel has to be constantly “renegotiated”⁵¹¹ in its encounters with culture or cultures and that it emerges from these encounters in a new guise, especially in its translations or relations.⁵¹²

However, this does not mean – to pre-empt any suspicion of relativism expressed in critical and disparaging terms – that, as a result of the processes which have regularly left a different stamp on the Gospel at different times and in different cultures, evangelisation has proved only partially successful, because in the hermeneutical process of the encounter between culture and the Good News a part of the Gospel “gets lost on the way” since it cannot be conveyed or is simply indigestible. On the contrary, culture becomes a theological location of crucial significance in the quest for theological truth in a universal Church in the throes of overcoming Eurocentrism.⁵¹³ The hermeneutic process of intercultural encounter does not lead to the subjective feeling of a loss of faith. Indeed, quite the opposite is the case. Given the revelation potential of intercultural processes it becomes a place of new and deeper religious experience. “Cultural encounter is perceived as a location which generates talk of God and brings forth theology – interculturality is thus understood be a *locus theologicus*.”⁵¹⁴

durch Evangelisierung, Inkulturation und interreligiösen Dialog”, in: Pastoralblatt 60 (1998) 10, 302–303; Peter Beer, Kontextuelle Theologie. Überlegungen zu ihrer systematischen Grundlegung, Paderborn 1995; Volker Küster, Theologie im Kontext. Zugleich ein Versuch über die Minjung-Theologie, Nettetal 1995, also Heidelberg University, Dissertation 1994; Robert J. Schreiter, Abschied vom Gott der Europäer. Zur Entwicklung regionaler Theorien, Regensburg 1992; idem. constructing Local Theologies, Maryknoll 1985.

⁵¹¹ Judith Gruber, “Auf der Suche nach dem Göttlichen Wort in der Begegnung der Kulturen. Theologische Überlegungen aus dem Süden der USA”, in: Verbum SVD 58 (2017) 1, 18–30, here: 19.

⁵¹² Cf. Klaus Vellguth, “Relationale Missionswissenschaft. Wenn Mission dazwischen kommt”, in: Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft 101 (2017) 1–2, 190–195.

⁵¹³ Cf. Margit Eckholt, Poetik der Kultur. Bausteine einer interkulturellen dogmatischen Methodenlehre, Freiburg 2002, 479.

⁵¹⁴ Judith Gruber, op. cit., 19.

Inculturation: a terminological clarification

Such a respectful understanding of interculturality only emerged because theologians and the Church used the revelation theory potential inherent in the concept of inculturation to build on prior concepts and thus move beyond the limited theological understanding of inculturation as “cross-cultural, universal Church correlation didactics”, to identify the *locus alienus*⁵¹⁵ of cultures as a source of theological knowledge and thus to extend the traditional doctrine of *loci theologici* first formulated by Melchior Cano in the 16th century in his work *De locis theologis*.⁵¹⁶

In the first instance, inculturation describes the process whereby Christianity as a culture – in the form of a specific cultural mediation – encounters a different culture, as a consequence of which both are enriched as part of a reciprocal hermeneutic process.⁵¹⁷ As stated in *Gaudium et Spes*, culture can be interpreted as “everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives by his knowledge and his labour, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, in order that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family⁵¹⁸.”

In terms of substance, the concept of inculturation is based on the thought expressed in the Letter to the Hebrews that God has consistently revealed himself in His creation: “At many moments in the

⁵¹⁵ Cf. Peter Hünermann, *Dogmatische Prinzipienlehre. Glaube – Überlieferung – Theologie als Sprach- und Wahrheitsgeschehen*, Münster 2003, 232.

⁵¹⁶ Melchior Cano identified Holy Scripture, the oral tradition of Christ and the Apostles, the Catholic Church, the Councils, the Roman Church, the Church Fathers and theologians as *loci theologici proprii*. He extended these *loci theologici proprii* to include human reason, the philosophers and history as *loci theologici alieni*. Cf. Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Interkulturalität als locus theologicus. Zum Profil des Forschungsprogramms ‘Theologie Interkulturell’”, in: *Verbum SVD* 58 (2017) 1, 31–47, here: 36; Hermann Josef Pöttmeyer, “Normen, Kriterien und Strukturen der Überlieferung”, in: Walter Kern/Hermann Josef Pöttmeyer/Max Seckler (Eds.), *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* vol. 4: *Traktat Theologische Erkenntnislehre mit Schlussteil Reflexion auf Fundamentaltheologie*, Tübingen/Basel 2000, 85–108.

⁵¹⁷ Cf. Hans Waldenfels, Stichwort “Inkulturation”, in: Ulrich Ruh/David Seeber/Rudolf Walter, *Handwörterbuch religiöser Gegenwartsfragen*, Freiburg/Basel/Vienna 1986, 169–173, here: 171.

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past and by many means, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets.” (Hebrews 1:1) Accordingly, the event of revelation extends far beyond the Church, the Christian faith and Christian culture(s). Giancarlo Collet defines the concept of inculturation in the “Theology and Church Lexicon” as follows:

Inculturation describes the reciprocal relationship between the Christian message or the Gospel and the multitude of cultures. As a mission theology ‘objective’, inculturation describes the continuous process in which the Gospel is discussed in a certain socio-political and religious-cultural situation and not only expresses itself using elements of this situation, but also becomes its inspirational, determining and transforming force and thus a parallel source of enrichment for the universal Church.⁵¹⁹

This definition brings out the twofold dynamism involved in (a) inculturating the Gospel into a specific social situation, which requires a certain adaptability on the part of the Gospel, and (b) in transforming society via the prophetic force of the Gospel. Not only does this pose a hermeneutic challenge, it also ultimately implies the acceptance of a paradox that regularly occurs when theological reflection does not revolve in concentric circles around a single focal point but is arranged elliptically around two focal points which are not identical but are absolutely vital for the shape of an ellipse.

Hellenisation as a process of inculturation

One of the earliest forms of inculturation took place when the Christian message came face to face with the Hellenistic world. Franz Gmainer-Pranzl rightly points out that “from earliest times Christianity harboured an intercultural potential that was of relevance for systematic theology”⁵²⁰. This meeting between Christianity and Hellenistic culture has remained a perpetual source of interest for theologians. Tertullian asked the (rhetorical) question “What have Athens and Jerusalem

⁵¹⁹ Giancarlo Collet, headword “Inkulturation”, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* vol. 5, Freiburg 1996, 504–505, here: 504. Cf. Hans Waldenfels, headword “Inkulturation”, *op. cit.*, 169.

⁵²⁰ Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Interkulturalität als locus theologicus. Zum Profil des Forschungsprogramms ‘Theologie Interkulturell’”, *Verbum SVD* 58, 36.

got to do with one another?”⁵²¹, insisting that the Christian faith came “though Solomon’s archway”. Different arguments were advanced by Clemens of Alexandria (d. 215 A.D.), Origenes (d. 253/254) and Eusebius of Caesarea (d. 339), who emphasised the propaedeutic value of Greek philosophy for Christianity.⁵²²

Friedrich Nietzsche coined the catchphrase “Christianity is Platonism for ‘the people’”⁵²³. In the 1990s the Hellenisation thesis was the subject of a dispute between Jürgen Habermas and Johann Baptist Metz.⁵²⁴ Joseph Ratzinger also turned his attention to the issue in the last decade of the 20th century. He examined the relationship between faith, religion and culture during the Salzburg University Weeks in 1992 and again a year later in a slightly modified form at a meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the Faith Commissions of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences in Hong Kong (as well as in a lecture he gave in Sassari).⁵²⁵ Of particular significance, however, was the Regensburg speech Benedict XVI gave a decade later on “Faith and Reason”, which also dealt with the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity.

The idea that Christianity underwent a process of Hellenisation is, in the first instance, a statement of fact that, in late antiquity, Christianity was greatly influenced by Hellenistic culture after Christianity had expanded into this cultural space. In historiographical terms this description is astonishing at first sight, given that Christianity spread in the late Roman Empire, which suggests that “Romanisation” might be a more fitting term than “Hellenisation”. However, Hellenisation is a concept inspired by the designation of the era as “Hellenism”. Coined by Johann Gustav Droysen, it referred to the politically, socially, culturally and religiously influenced cultural area which, in the wake of

⁵²¹ Tertullian, *De praescriptione haereticorum*, 7, 95.

⁵²² Cf. Robert M. Grant, “Civilization as a Preparation for Christianity in the thought of Eusebius”, in: Forrester Church/Timothy George (Eds.), *Continuity and Discontinuity in Church History* (FS George Huntston Williams), Leiden 1979, 62–70.

⁵²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, “Jenseits von Gut und Böse”, in: idem, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Zur Genealogie der Moral*, Munich inter alia. ²1988, 9–242, here: 12.

⁵²⁴ Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, “Athen versus Jerusalem? Über die Verbergung der anamnetischen Grundverfassung des europäischen Geistes”, in: Johann Baptist Metz, *Memoria Passionis. Ein provozierendes Gedächtnis in pluralistischer Gesellschaft*, Freiburg i. Br. 2006, 236–244. idem, *Diagnosen zur Zeit*, Düsseldorf 1994.

⁵²⁵ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2003, 46.

Alexander's campaigns, stretched from southern Italy via Greece to India and from Egypt to the Black Sea.⁵²⁶

Hence, the concept of Hellenisation cannot be understood primarily in historiographical terms but, above all, in relation to the history of ideas in the form of the social, cultural, literary and theological influence exerted on Christianity by the Hellenistic cultural area, since its use "obviously related to the question in systematic theology and philosophy of the relationship between Christianity and culture in general and the relationship between Christian theology and philosophy in particular"⁵²⁷. Ultimately the term has to do with the processes of assimilation, adaptation, transfer and appropriation as well as inculturation in the different walks of life to which Christianity was exposed from the very beginning. In addition to this descriptive exploration of Hellenisation the term is understood in doctrinal history as the reception in Christianity of Hellenistic philosophy, above all in the development of its theological reflections and its incorporation in the teachings of the Church.

The traditional interpretation of the Hellenisation of Christianity – one which is based on the theory of decline (advocated among others by Adolf von Harnack⁵²⁸) – is that this process constituted an apostasy from original, biblical Christianity. Johann Baptist Metz takes up this interpretation, although he sees the main breach as being between the relatively brief period of "Jewish Christianity" and that of "pagan Christianity", as a consequence of which Christianity became estranged from its Jewish roots and the intellectual heritage of Israel.⁵²⁹ Metz talks in this context of "the Word of God being exiled in Greece"⁵³⁰. This idea has been called into question by recent theological research, however, according to which the Jesuanic

⁵²⁶ Cf. Georg Evers, "Hellenisierung des Christentums? Zur Problematik und Überwindung einer polarisierenden Deutungsfigur", in: *Theologie und Philosophie* 87 (2012) 1, 1–17, here: 4.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵²⁸ Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte 1: Die Entstehung des kirchlichen Dogmas*, Darmstadt 41990.

⁵²⁹ Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, "Im Aufbruch zu einer kulturell polyzentrischen Weltkirche", in: Franz-Xaver Kaufmann/Johann Baptist Metz, *Zukunftsfähigkeit. Suchbewegungen im Christentum*, Freiburg i. Br. u. a. 1987, 93–113.

⁵³⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, *Christliche Anthropozentrik. Über die Denkform des Thomas von Aquin*, Munich 1992, 105.

movement should be integrated into a long chain of inner-Jewish revival movements which aimed “to preserve or redefine Jewish identity in view of the immense pressure for change exerted by the all-powerful Hellenistic culture”⁵³¹.

In his Regensburg speech Benedict XVI looked at the Hellenisation of Christianity from a different perspective, arguing (on the basis of earlier statements in which he had described the Hellenisation of Christianity as the “finger of Providence”⁵³² and as “belonging to the essence of Christianity”⁵³³) that the “encounter between the biblical message and Greek thought”⁵³⁴ was not an accident and that the critically purified Greek heritage formed as essential part of the Christian faith.

From inculturation to interculturality

Exploring this line of argument, theologians from the southern hemisphere are not alone in asking whether the faith can be identified in this Hellenistic guise as the real Christianity or whether contingency is not confused with Providence, “if we drape the cloak of providential normativity around the original Hellenistic culture, which served as the model for the definition of the Church’s first dogmas”⁵³⁵. In doing so they emphasise that people only absorb the Christian faith in a culturally mediated form during the process of inculturation and that the cultural context Christians encounter, which has its own traditions and social processes, must be made the reference and starting point for theological reflection. The practical challenge consists, for example, in proclaiming Christianity in Arab or African countries with an expansionist Islamic religion, in evangelising in India with its Hindu influence in such a way that the Christian message can be readily understood, in passing on the faith in fidelity to the Gospel in the Arab world, where

⁵³¹ Gerd Theißen/Annette Merz, *Der historische Jesus. Ein Lehrbuch*. Göttingen 32001, 143.

⁵³² Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg i. Br. 42005, 78.

⁵³³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte*, Leutesdorf 2004, 8 (new edition of: Joseph Ratzinger, *Vom Wiederauffinden der Mitte*, Freiburg 1997).

⁵³⁴ Benedict XVI, *Glaube und Vernunft. Die Regensburger Vorlesung. Vollständige Ausgabe. Kommentiert von Gesine Schwan/Adel Theodor Khoury/Karl Lehmann*, Freiburg i. Br. u. a. 2006, 18.

⁵³⁵ Paulo Suess, “Zum Transfer des Evangeliums in andere Sprachen, Sprechweisen und Lebenswelten”, in: Mariano Delgado/Hans Waldenfels, *Evangelium und Kultur. Festschrift für Michael Sievernich SJ*, Fribourg 2010, 271–287, here: 274.

terms such as “Zion” and “Israel” trigger specific associations, and in living the faith in the slums of São Paulo in such a way that Christology is stripped of its aspiration to dominion and is convincingly preached with a kenotic accent.⁵³⁶ Thus the concept of inculturation, in which the focus was initially on the encounter between (European) Christianity and agrarian, non-European cultures, has been extended to include global contexts of migration, ethnic identity, forms of family life, youth cultures, globalisation, urbanisation and post-colonialism.⁵³⁷

Moving beyond this practical theological perspective, the issue is to take the Christian faith and academic theology forward in a manner appropriate to the beginning of the third millennium and to “move with the times”. Judith Gruber rightly warns that a theology “which seeks to conceive the universal claim of the Christian message in an abstract manner and in isolation from its cultural contexts and which makes use of essentialist categories in its quest for the core of Christianity [...] appears suspicious in the post-modernist paradigm”⁵³⁸. Of interest here is not just her justification based on epistemology⁵³⁹ or cultural sciences, but also her theological explanation. Gruber points to the conceptual proximity between an essentialist understanding of Christian identity and the ideas enshrined in docetism, which was dismissed early on by the Church because it assumed that Jesus always remained God and that his physical existence had nothing to do with his being. The Church countered this docetistic dualism, which distinguishes between matter and being, by asserting its belief in “without separation” and “without confusion”. The conclusion Gruber draws from this is that “by analogy with Christology we must begin to conceive of the Gospel and culture as being “without confusion” and “without separation” – we must search for the *logos*, the Word of God,

⁵³⁶ Cf. Frederic Ntedika Mvumbi, “In Search of a Common Ground for a Fruitful Inter-religious Dialogue in Sub-Saharan Africa”, in: Klaus Krämer/Klaus Vellguth (Eds.), *Mission and Dialogue. Approaches to a Communicative Understanding of Mission (One World Theology 1)*, Freiburg 2012, 122–141; Sylvia Schroer, “Die Bibel in der neuen Evangelisation”, in: *Orientierung* 54 (1990) 15/16, 175–177, here: 176.

⁵³⁷ Cf. Roger Schroeder, “Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue”, in: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2013) 1, 8–21, here: 19.

⁵³⁸ Judith Gruber, “Auf der Suche nach dem Göttlichen Wort in der Begegnung der Kulturen. Theologische Überlegungen aus dem Süden der USA”, *Verbum SVD* 58, 21.

⁵³⁹ Cf. Judith Gruber’s remark on interculturality as a resource in epistemological theology in: Judith Gruber, *Theologie nach dem Cultural Turn. Interkulturalität als theologische Ressource*, Stuttgart 2013, 206.

in cultural encounters without lapsing into metaphysical 'two-storey thinking'."⁵⁴⁰

While the concept of inculturation has developed into a missiological paradigm and is highly plausible (in *Evangelii Gaudium* Pope Francis also points to its relevance with respect to the missionary activities of the Church⁵⁴¹), Joseph Ratzinger advocates moving the concept of inculturation in the direction of the term interculturality.⁵⁴² He strikes a critical note in saying: "Inculturation presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture whereby two subjects, formally unknown to each other, meet and fuse. But such a notion is first of all artificial and unrealistic, for with the exception of modern technological civilization, there is no such thing as faith devoid of culture or culture devoid of faith. It is above all difficult to envision how two organisms, foreign to each other, should all of a sudden become a viable whole in a transplantation which stunts both of them."⁵⁴³ Ratzinger holds that interculturality can only prove fruitful if it can be assumed that there is a potential universality of all cultures and an inner openness in relations between them. As regards the distinction between religion and culture he says: "If you remove from a culture its own religion which begets it, then you rob it of its heart. Should you implant in it a new heart, the Christian heart, it seems inescapable that the organism which is not ordered to it will reject the foreign body. A positive outcome of the operation is hard to envision. The operation can only have sense if Christian faith and the other religion, together with the culture which lives from it, do not stand in utter difference to each other. It only makes sense if they are interiorly open to one another, or to put it differently, if they naturally tend to draw near and unite. Inculturation therefore

⁵⁴⁰ Judith Gruber, "Auf der Suche nach dem Göttlichen Wort in der Begegnung der Kulturen. Theologische Überlegungen aus dem Süden der USA", op. cit., 22.

⁵⁴¹ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* of the Holy Father Francis on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, nos. 68, 69, 122, 129, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html (07.05.2017).

⁵⁴² Cf. Hans Waldenfels, "Fünfzig Jahre später", in: Mariano Delgado/Hans Waldenfels, *Evangelium und Kultur. Festschrift für Michael Sievernich SJ*, Fribourg 2010, 256–270, here: 266f. Cf. Hans Waldenfels, headword "Inkulturation".

⁵⁴³ Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, Freiburg i. Br. 2003, 53.

presupposes the potential universality of each culture.⁵⁴⁴ Ratzinger defines culture as the historically evolved communal expression of insights and values, in which “the question of divinity is included as the preceding and fundamental issue”⁵⁴⁵. He regards transcending the visible world and opening up to the divine as an essential characteristic of culture, which can never exist in an areligious form⁵⁴⁶ and which he describes as a phenomenon related to community and history.

Inculturation and pre-culturality

In examining Adolf von Harnack’s Hellenisation theory Joseph Ratzinger argues that, when it comes to inculturation processes, there is no point in assuming there is a pre-cultural Gospel or in attempting to identify one. “Inculturation presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture”⁵⁴⁷, which leads to a meeting and fusion of both cultures. The notion of a culture-free, pre-cultural or de-culturated faith or Christianity is at best a cognitive construct devoid of any real existence. Christianity, in particular, is based on the fact that God was incarnated into a certain culture and “that, in the New Testament, Christianity already bears within it the fruit of an entire cultural history, a history of acceptance and rejection, of encounter and change”⁵⁴⁸. Ratzinger, therefore, proposes renouncing the term inculturation and talking instead of a meeting between cultures or of interculturality.⁵⁴⁹ The term interculturality describes “the entire complex of communication and interaction between different cultures, whereby culture should be understood broadly as the life form of a large community founded on a common tradition”⁵⁵⁰. However, Joseph Ratzinger combines his understanding of interculturality with

⁵⁴⁴ Ibid., 49f.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁴⁶ Cf. also Donath Hercsik, “Glaube und Kultur. Der Beitrag Johannes Pauls II. zu einem aktuellen Thema”, in: Mariano Delgado/Hans Waldenfels, *Evangelium und Kultur. Festschrift für Michael Sievernich SJ*, Fribourg 2010, 288–298, here: 290.

⁵⁴⁷ Joseph Ratzinger, *Glaube – Wahrheit – Toleranz. Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, op. cit., 53.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 58.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 53.

⁵⁵⁰ Giancarlo Collet, “Akkulturation – Inkulturation – Interkulturalität. Neue Fragen für ein altes Problem oder alte Fragen für ein neues Problem”, in: *Theologie der Gegenwart* 58 (2015) 2, 131–143, 139.

an understanding of incarnation which is seen to be closely tied to Hellenistic culture. Hence, he adopts a contrary position to the atopia formulated by intercultural theologians (in reference to *Ad Gentes* 21) as the sign of an intercultural understanding of mission.

Interculturality in the Bible

Interculturality in the sense of an acknowledgement of otherness in different cultures, of respect for cultural differences and of beneficial interaction between cultures, which is experienced as mutual exchange and enrichment, is a fundamental attribute of the Judaeo-Christian tradition that can be found in biblical records.⁵⁵¹ Not only Abraham and Sarah adopt the foreign cultures they encounter in the land of Cana (this is particularly apparent in the meeting between Abraham and Melchizedek, see Genesis 14:18–20); the meeting between Naomi and Ruth (Ruth 1:15–18) and between Elisha and the widow (2 Kings 4:1–7) as well as the conversion of Niniveh (Jonah 3:1–10) can also be interpreted as examples of intercultural experiences in the Old Testament. In the New Testament there are traces of intercultural openness in the behaviour of Jesus who, although he knows he has been sent primarily to the people of Israel (Matthew 15:24), also healed a Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24–30) and a Canaanite woman (Matthew 15:21–28) and talked to a Samaritan woman at the well in defiance of all conventions (John 4:4–42). Moreover, the deeds of the Apostle Paul recorded in the New Testament, especially his speech at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16–34), exemplify an approach relating to the context or target group of the proclamation, the hallmarks of which are flexibility, creativity and humility.⁵⁵² Further examples of context-sensitive encounters in the New Testament are the meeting between Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–18)⁵⁵³, Peter's behaviour in Antioch (Galatians 2:11–14) and the message to the church in Ephesus recorded in the Revelation (Revelation 2:1–5).

⁵⁵¹ Cf. van Thanh Nguyen, "Biblical Foundations for Interculturality", in: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2013) 1, 35–47.

⁵⁵² Cf. Dean Flemming, *Contextualization in the New Testament. Patterns for Theology and Mission*, Downers Grove 2005, 92.

⁵⁵³ Cf. Roger Schroeder, "Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue", op. cit., 20; van Thanh Nguyen, *Peter and Cornelius. A Story of Conversion and Mission*, Eugene 2012.

Interculturality as “post-colonial semantics”

Joseph Ratzinger is not the only one to question the concept of inculturation. Theologians from Africa, Asia and Latin America, in particular, point to the historical strands of its development and note that Western theology was exported to the “mission regions” at the time of colonialism, although they are at pains to make clear that this was by no means “a universal, culturally neutral, absolute theology which obscured and then universalised its cultural dependence”⁵⁵⁴.

More and more theologians from the South, therefore, distinguish between “inculturation”, on the one hand, and “intercultural encounter” or “interculturality”, on the other. They find fault with the general understanding of inculturation, i.e. that it is a term introduced by Western missionaries in the churches of the South which ultimately views the embedding of the Western-influenced religion in a specific culture from a Western-influenced vantage point.⁵⁵⁵ The Indian theologian Felix Wilfred, for example, argues that this vantage point is not “specifically Christian”, saying that it arose in the course of the inculturation of Christianity in the “Christianised” cultures (in the countries the missionaries came from) and that it assumed a different relevance in other contexts. At the same time, however, Wilfred concedes that inculturation always also implies a respectful concept of culture: “Whereas inculturation in the parts of the world with a long Christian tradition entails a dialogue with contemporary culture and an endeavour to give a meaning to the Christian faith with due account being taken of modern cultural and philosophical developments, the term means a great deal more in [...] many Third World countries. [Here] inculturation means primarily acknowledgement of cultures as something positive which must be related to the Christian faith.”⁵⁵⁶

Theologians from the South, in particular, regard the undifferentiated transfer of a form of Christianity already inculturated into a specific (“Western”) context as a process influenced by a post-colonial

⁵⁵⁴ Judith Gruber, “Auf der Suche nach dem Göttlichen Wort in der Begegnung der Kulturen. Theologische Überlegungen aus dem Süden der USA”, op. cit., 20.

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. Giancarlo Collet, *Akkulturation – Inkulturation – Interkulturalität. Neue Fragen für ein altes Problem oder alte Fragen für ein neues Problem*, op. cit., 139f.

⁵⁵⁶ Felix Wilfred, *An den Ufern des Ganges. Theologie im indischen Kontext*, Frankfurt am Main 2001, 46.

mode of thinking⁵⁵⁷ (which can still be encountered even today in the economic and social sphere as well as in theology and mission). The German-Brazilian theologian, Paulo Suess, for example, says the three main goals of a new understanding of inculturation are decolonisation as self-determination, multi-cultural linguistic competence, and a universal dissemination embedded in a public relevance for the poor and others. He describes this form of inculturation as a “location of the question of truth, of Pentecostal pluralism and of inter-faith and ecumenical dialogue”⁵⁵⁸.

In order to dissociate themselves semantically from post-colonial thought patterns numerous theologians from the South propose the designation “intercultural encounter” as an alternative term for the concept of inculturation.⁵⁵⁹ This would make it clear that Christianity today encounters a culture not as a “pre-cultural Gospel” or as an “unadulterated Christian message” but always as a creed that has already been absorbed by another (generally Western-influenced) culture. Only after this process of absorption (generally in a Western guise) does Christianity enter into a dialogue with another culture.⁵⁶⁰ At the same time, according to Suess, this alternative term takes account of the fact that the Gospel is not identical with a culture⁵⁶¹ and that “no culture has generally valid rights to ownership of the Gospel, but that the religious message always extends beyond all cultural boundaries”⁵⁶². Arguing along similar lines, Roger Schroeder says: “Interculturality offers a new

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. Roger Schroeder, *Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue*, op. cit., 9.

⁵⁵⁸ Paulo Suess, *Zum Transfer des Evangeliums in andere Sprachen, Sprechweisen und Lebenswelten*, op. cit., 285.

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. Giancarlo Collet, *Akkulturation – Inkulturation – Interkulturalität. Neue Fragen für ein altes Problem oder alte Fragen für ein neues Problem* op. cit., 140; Felix Wilfred, “Inkulturation oder interkulturelle Begegnung”, in: idem, *An den Ufern des Ganges. Theologie im indischen Kontext*, op. cit., 45–68.

⁵⁶⁰ Another argument Felix Wilfred puts forward points out “that the Gospel is more than a set of doctrines; ultimately it is a mystery”. (Felix Wilfred, *An den Ufern des Ganges. Theologie im indischen Kontext*, 117). The transition from inculturation thinking to an understanding of intercultural encounter would be an appropriate response to the challenge of “discovering [from the others] and undergoing from our own roots the Christian experience in its many dimensions and facets” (ibid., 131).

⁵⁶¹ Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi, Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Paul VI on Evangelisation in the Modern World*, no. 20, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html

⁵⁶² Paulo Suess, *Zum Transfer des Evangeliums in andere Sprachen, Sprechweisen und Lebenswelten*, op. cit., 275.

counter-colonial framework, which substitutes attitudes and actions of superiority and paternalism with those of self-determination and mutual interdependence.”⁵⁶³

Interculturality as a basic theological principle

Interculturality is not a specialist field of theology and certainly not an intercultural strategy for religious education or for missionary work. On the contrary, it considers itself to be “a basic principle of Christian theology”⁵⁶⁴. An intercultural theology providing scope for intercultural encounters should not simply pursue the objective of conveying what it has to say to others in foreign contexts. Rather, it is distinguished by an openness in integrating religious elements and insights from other religions, reflecting on them within the context of the Gospel and adopting them where appropriate. Interculturality takes as its starting point the multicultural reality of the age of globalisation, the hallmarks of which are global urbanisation, global communication (technologies) and global migratory movements. It is distinguished by the fact that it is multicultural or intercultural, that it is reciprocal in character and fosters reciprocal relations and that it facilitates dialogue.⁵⁶⁵ There are mutual, reciprocal relations between the various cultural areas which engage with each other in such a lively open dialogue that the cultural areas reinforce, enrich and transform each other.⁵⁶⁶ However, the cultural areas of the South must not be reduced to traditional cultures which are more in keeping with the cultural romanticism of the observers from the North than with the real living conditions of people in contexts that are changing (and often in the throes of urbanisation).

Intercultural theology of this kind presumes an openness towards others and to otherness as well as the ability to meet others without anxiety but with a strong sense of trust that the one God can be dis-

⁵⁶³ Roger Schroeder, *Interculturality and Prophetic Dialogue*, op. cit., 9.

⁵⁶⁴ Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Interkulturalität als locus theologicus. Zum Profil des Forschungsprogramms ‘Theologie Interkulturell’”, op. cit., 43.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Phil Gibbs, “Interculturality and Contextual Theology”, in: *Verbum SVD* 54 (2013) 1, 75–89, here: 82.

⁵⁶⁶ Cf. Franz Xaver Scheuren, *Interculturality. A Challenge for the Mission of the Church*, Bangalore 2001, 232.

covered in other contexts, cultures and religions.⁵⁶⁷ A characteristic feature of such an intercultural theology, which can be understood to mean “inculturation in actu”, is the interpretation of history as the working out of God’s salvation, whereby the saving function of the Christian churches must be geared initially to the paradigm of the universal redemptive power of Christ. Moreover, against the backdrop of the “cultural turn” it develops a new understanding of the dependency on time and culture in Western Christian tradition and thus overcomes the essentialist worldview which continues to leave its stamp on Western theology, influenced as it is by Greek philosophy, right up to the present day. Finally, intercultural theology addresses pluralism in the theology of religions which, in contrast to exclusivism or inclusivism, reduces the person of Christ to a historical prophecy, and opens up to “macro-ecumenism” as an ecumenism of the world religions.⁵⁶⁸ One of the hallmarks of intercultural theology is an awareness that intercultural communication is an analogous (and not a univocal) way of speaking which has its origins not in concepts but in experience. It does not describe unambiguous facts in the realm of culture denotatively but points connotatively to the spiritual level of reality. Franz Gmainer-Pranzl sums up his understanding of an intercultural “global theology” of this kind as follows: “So what does engaging in theology under ‘global’ conditions really mean? It means acknowledging this world as a place where God is at work and as a place of human faith; it means loving people and facing up to the ‘signs of the times’ – vigilantly and critically, openly and in fellowship, boldly and discursively. In this sense intercultural theology can be the pacemaker for a form of religious responsibility which regards itself as ‘global theology’: as intellectual accountability for a hope which genuinely extends to all human beings.”⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁷ Cf. Joachim G. Piepke, “Theologie und Interkulturalität”, in: *Jahrbuch der Philosophisch-Theologischen Hochschule SVD St. Augustin/Theologie im Dialog mit der Welt*, Sankt Augustin 2013, 9–22, 20.

⁵⁶⁸ Cf. Thomas Fornet-Ponse, “Komparative Theologie und/oder interkulturelle Theologie? Versuch einer Verortung”, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 96 (2012) 3–4, 226–240.

⁵⁶⁹ Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Welt-Theologie. Verantwortung des christlichen Glaubens in globaler Perspektive”, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 38 (2012) 4, 408–433, here: 432.

Interculturality:

Appreciating the Process Promoted by the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

John Mansford Prior

Understanding Culture

Since the Johannine Council (1962–1965) the Catholic Church has striven to develop more just and peaceful societies that support the principle values of the *humanum*. For at the heart of each culture we encounter our deepest values whose principle function is to humanise society through its moral and ethical system. One important dimension of culture underscored by *Gaudium et Spes*, and also emphasised during the early years of the Pontifical Council for Culture (PCC),⁵⁷⁰ is the engagement of the Church in the development of society as *communitas communitatum*, through the struggle for justice, peace and the care of creation, through basic human rights and duties, and through international solidarity with the oppressed and the marginalized.⁵⁷¹

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has never defined culture as such.⁵⁷² However, Francisco F. Claver, bishop, theologian and cultural anthropologist, and for years a leading light in the FABC,⁵⁷³ states: "the most general definition [of culture], and yet the most accurate, is that culture is the way of life of a particular

⁵⁷⁰ For the early horizon of the PCC cf. Joseph Gremillion (Eds.), *The Church and Culture since Vatican II*, Indiana 1985.

⁵⁷¹ Hervé Carrier (first PCC secretary), "The Church Meeting Cultures: Convergences and Perspectives", in: Joseph Gremillion, *ibid.*, 140–152.

⁵⁷² For a detailed description cf. "Thesis 5", in: "Theses on the Local Church", FABC Paper No.60 (1991).

⁵⁷³ Francisco Claver (1929–2010) ordained bishop of Malaybalay (1969–1984) in Mindanao, Philippines, a year before the meeting of Asian bishops in Manila; later appointed bishop of Bontoc-Lagawe (1995–2004).

people.”⁵⁷⁴ Within the FABC culture has always been understood holistically. In numerous documents, from their first message onwards (Manila, 1970), Asian bishops have made it clear that the Church, with its theology, ethos, spirituality and worship, needs to dialogue with “all the realities of Asia”, undertaken as a triple dialogue with culture, the poor, and adherents of other faith traditions.⁵⁷⁵ Concomitant with the preferential option for and with the poor is the option for popular culture, for the Church’s principle dialogue partners are the cultures of the “little people”, the marginalised, minorities.

Ratzinger and Interculturality

I was introduced to the term interculturality by Joseph Ratzinger through his address to the presidents of the Asian Bishops’ Conferences (Hong Kong 1996).⁵⁷⁶ He explained how he found the term inculturation problematic and why he preferred term interculturality. He argued that the process we have been calling inculturation is but a false grafting: “it is difficult to see how a culture, living and breathing the religion with which it is interwoven, can be transplanted into another religion without both of them going to ruin”. Thus, “we should no longer speak of inculturation but of the meeting of cultures or *interculturality*. For inculturation presumes that a faith stripped of culture is transplanted into a religiously indifferent culture whereby two subjects, formally unknown to each other, meet and fuse... The true encounter of cultures and religions, an encounter not characterized by loss of faith or truth, but by a deeper contact with truth which makes possible giving all that which went before its full and deepest significance... a process of lived faith is necessary which creates the capacity for encounter in truth...” Ten years later Ratzinger opinions that inculturation implies a process that is “coarse” and “lacking in precision”.⁵⁷⁷ It must be stated at once that this “coarse” concept is

⁵⁷⁴ Francisco Claver, *The Making of a Local Church*. Quezon City, 2009, 133.

⁵⁷⁵ In their first message (Manila 1970) and since then in final statements after General Assemblies (FABC I Taipei 1974, FABC II Kolkata 1978, FABC III Bangkok 1982, FABC IV Tokyo 1986, FABC V Bandung 1990, FABC VI Manila 1995, FABC VII Samphran 2000, FABC VIII Daejeon 2004, FABC IX Manila 2009, FABC X Xuan Loc, 2012).

⁵⁷⁶ Joseph Ratzinger, “Christ, Faith and the Challenge of Cultures”, in: FABC Paper No. 78, 1–19.

⁵⁷⁷ The terms “coarse” and “lacking in precision” are taken from Benedict XVI’s Regensburg address, “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections” (12th September 2006).

not found in any FABC document. For while the term inculturation has been consistently used by the FABC since the first meeting of Asian bishops with Pope Paul VI (Manila 1970), FABC documents lay out a complex process for the ongoing encounter between Local Churches and “all the realities of Asia”, which is similar to Ratzinger’s notion of interculturality.⁵⁷⁸

Right Words, Right Deeds

From Sri Lanka Aloysius Pieris notes that there is more than one model of relationship between faith and culture in the New Testament.⁵⁷⁹ He observes a leap from Galilean village culture (Jesus’ proclamation in the popular linguistic categories of Aramaic) to urban Mediterranean cultures (Paul’s proclamation in koine Greek). Pieris describes this fundamental shift as a “leap from a local to a global world”, made possible by Resurrection faith and the outpouring of the Spirit. He then notes how a narrowing process ensued from the first to the fourth centuries, from the popular cultures of the apostolic Churches to the elite culture of urban intellectuals. Paul the Pharisee’s teaching model through popular Galilean and Greek cultures was replaced by a philosophical understanding from the intelligentsia. According to Pieris, the theological paradigm of the fourth century is nothing more than an “inculturation without a soteriology”, for the dogmatic formulas of the fourth century councils explain correctly who Jesus is (orthodoxy), without demanding *metanoia*, a correct transformation (orthopraxis). This is no “Christianisation of Greek philosophy”, but rather a “Hellenisation of Christianity”, for faith statements have been separated from faith commitment.⁵⁸⁰ And so, according to Pieris, while the categories of Greek philosophy are capable of expressing

⁵⁷⁸ Cf. Ladislav Nemet, “Inculturation in the FABC Documents”, in: East Asian Pastoral Review 31 (1994) 1/2, 77–94.

⁵⁷⁹ Lucien Legrand from India, has researched the complexity of faith-culture configurations in the Bible. Cf. The Bible on Culture: Belonging or Dissenting? Bengaluru: Theological Publications in India, 2001. A preesis of the study has been published as, “Inculturation in the Bible”, in Mario Saturnino Dias (Eds.), Rooting Faith in Asia: Source Book for Inculturation. Bengaluru/Quezon City 2005, 209–222.

⁵⁸⁰ Aloysius Pieris, “The New Quest for Asian Christian Identity: Guidelines from the Pioneers of the Past”, Third Millennium, XI (2009) 3, 9–28; quote from 15. Andrew Walls details the “leap” from the Gospel in Aramaic-Hebraic culture in rural Palestine to popular urban Greek culture around the Mediterranean in the NT. See, “The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture”, in The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in Transmission of Faith. New York 1996, 3–15.

Christian teaching clearly, biblical-Semitic categories draw us into *metanoia*: in the Scriptures there is no word without deed (e.g. Is 55:11; Jac 2:14–26). This is very much in line with the FABC's developing concept of inculturation praxis. And so, our focus should be on living correctly rather than simply articulating accurately.⁵⁸¹ For Pieris biblical soteriology – and thus authentic inculturation – should, “free the poor from their poverty, free the rich from their riches, and free both from the sin of greed”.⁵⁸² We need to go beyond Anselm's “*fides quaerens intellectum*” – faith seeking understanding – to “faith nurturing life and love, justice and freedom”.

The FABC and Inculturation

This leads us onto FABC's understanding of inculturation – the ongoing dialogue between faith and culture – as it has developed over the years. In the early 1970s the FABC understood inculturation as a two-way movement. Christianity must “accept into Christian life everything that is good, valuable and alive in the cultures and traditions of Asia while at the same time bring all the seeds of the Gospel which have been planted by the Lord in Asian cultures before the process of evangelization”.⁵⁸³ In this early period the FABC viewed the purpose of inculturation as an effort to build up Local Churches that were truly Catholic because they were rooted in local situations.⁵⁸⁴ Since the mid-1970s this church-centred model shifted to a Reign of God-centred model, namely the building up of Asian societies that are imbued with the values of the Reign of God.

⁵⁸¹ In the Bishops' Synod for Asia (Rome, April-May 1998) the Roman Curial cardinals continually underlined the importance of Jesus as the only saviour of the world (orthodoxy), while the Asian bishops spoke of how they could convincingly witness to Jesus in daily life (orthopraxis). See, John Prior, “A Tale of Two Synods: Observations on the Special Assembly for Asia”, *Sedos Bulletin* 30 (1998) 8–9, 219–224.

⁵⁸² Aloysius Pieri, *op. cit.*, 17.

⁵⁸³ Cf. General Assembly FABC II (Kolkata 1978), *For All the Peoples of Asia I*. Vol. I, No. 11.

⁵⁸⁴ Cf. Carolus Putranta, “The Idea of the Church in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC): 1970–1982”. Rome: Universitas Gregoriana, 1985. Stephen Bevans, “Twenty-Five Years of Inculturation in Asia: The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1970–1995”, *FABC Papers* No. 78, 20–36. J. Thoppil, *Towards an Asian Ecclesiology: Understanding of the Church in the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) 1970–1995 and the Asian Ecclesiological Trends*. Rome: Universitas Urbaniana, 1998. A. Kadaliyil, *Toward a Relational Spirit Ecclesiology in Asia: A Study on the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences*. Berkeley 2006.

The International Mission Congress in Manila (1979) viewed inculturation as not simply “an adaptation to a particular situation by an already formed Christianity, but rather a creative materialization of God’s Word in the Local Church.”⁵⁸⁵ For the 1979 Mission Congress inculturation was neither an evangelist’s technique nor tactic, but a way of understanding Christian faith more deeply. The inculturation process purifies, perfects and transforms not only the cultures of Asia and the life situation of the Asian Churches, but also the Church itself. This insight was discovered in the pastoral practice of the Asian Churches. Thus, the dialogue between the Gospel and life’s realities is a process that enriches the Church – its theology, spirituality and liturgical worship.⁵⁸⁶

A dozen years later in “Theses on the Local Church” (1991), the FABC Office for Theological Concerns (FABC-OTC) saw inculturation as an “on-going correlated process whereby the Gospel and cultures critique each other”. The agent of inculturation is the Christian community while the function of the theologian is to accompany the process. The religious cultures of Asia have to purify the way the Gospel is announced, while opening up aspects of the Gospel that had not been noticed, for inculturation is an “encounter with the Spirit”. The Spirit of God is present and active in the peoples of Asia beyond the Christian communities.

Thus, while the term inculturation has been maintained, other terms are also used such as interculturality and contextualization. In line with the interculturality thinking of Ratzinger, the FABC-OTC emphasizes that authentic inculturation occurs when, “Christians live out the tradition of faith and their own people’s tradition.”⁵⁸⁷ As with Ratzinger, the FABC-OTC acknowledges that the Gospel is always encountered in a form that has already been inculturated. The Gospel is not “culture-free”, but is concretely present as the faith of a particular people, adapted to and expressed in their cultural context. The encounter between a people and the Gospel, “happens also to be a

⁵⁸⁵ Second Workshop, “The Inculturation Process”, For All the Peoples of Asia, Vol. I, 138.

⁵⁸⁶ Twelve years later in Thailand (1991), inculturation is still seen as a “two-way process” undertaken with respect for “the other”, and marked by openness and a willingness for mutual transformation. See, BIRA IV/I, “Brief Report on the Assembly”, Thailand 1984, No. 12a–14c.

⁵⁸⁷ “Theses on the Local Church”, FABC Paper No.60, 1991. For description of “Culture” 8–9, for “inculturation” Thesis 5, 18–23.

meeting with another culture animated by faith”.⁵⁸⁸ Each culture needs to meet, even fuse with another culture; and the existence of a variety of cultures is because “no single one can understand the whole.” If diverse cultures meet then a mosaic is created, “... that shows complementarity and interdependence ...” When a culture embodies the value system of a society, and potentially all cultures are open to universality, then, “the meeting [of cultures] becomes an opportunity for mutual enrichment and mutual purification ...” and, “the means by which they gather is only the truth that they share about human beings, who should make present also the truth about the God and reality as a whole ...” (Thesis Nos. 5 & 6). “Encounter means mutual enrichment and influence (No. 5.04)... What stands out concerning cultures today is that their amazing ability to transform which has not happened before ...” (No. 6.01, 6.03) And so, while maintaining the term inculturation, the FABC speaks about the relationship between “the Gospel and culture” in all its intercultural complexity.

Also in line with the thinking of Ratzinger, the FABC-OTC points to the historicity of a culture, namely its openness towards change and its potentiality for universality which can give rise to a deep evolution from its original cultural configuration.⁵⁸⁹ In the Asian Churches this process is seen in liturgy,⁵⁹⁰ in the formation of priests and religious,⁵⁹¹ in catechesis⁵⁹², and in spirituality.”⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁸ Ibid., Thesis 5.10.

⁵⁸⁹ FABC-OTC, “Methodology: Asian Christian Theology: Doing Theology in Asia Today”, FABC Papers No.96, 2000. Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “Theologizing at the Service of Life: The Contextual Theological Methodology of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC)”, FABC Papers No.108, 2003. Michael Amaladoss, ‘From Experience to Theology: Methodological Explorations’, *Vidyajyoti*, 61 (1997) 6, 372–385. Dionisio M. Miranda, “Outlines of a Method of Inculturation”, *East Asian Pastoral Review* 30 (1993) 2, 145–167, and “Fragments of a Method for Inculturation”, *East Asian Pastoral Review* 30 (1993) 2, 168–197.

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. Jonathan Tan Yun-ka, “Constructing an Asian Theology of Liturgical Inculturation from the Documents of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC)”, *East Asian Pastoral Review* 36 (1999) 4, 383–401. Anscar J. Chupungco, “Liturgical Inculturation”, *East Asian Pastoral Review* 30 (1993) 2, 108–119.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. Dominc Tran Ngoc Dang, *Inculturation in Missionary Formation according to the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents (1970–2006) with Special Reference to the Mission in Vietnam*. Rome: Universitas Urbaniana, 2010. Charles Boromeo, *Priestly Formation in the Light of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC): Towards a Model in the Burmese Context*. Rome: Collegio Teresianum, 2002. Anthonipillai Stany, *The Role of the Religious in the Life of the Church in Asia: A Study in the Light of FABC Documents*. Rome 2003.

⁵⁹² Cf. Ladislav Nemet, “Inculturation of Catechesis and Spirituality in the Documents of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines”, *East Asian Pastoral Review* 32 (1995) 1/2, 148–180.

⁵⁹³ John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Asia*, No. 21 e.

The Four Moments of Inculturation

Nevertheless, Asia's experience of inculturation does not entirely cohere with the interculturality thinking of Ratzinger. For instance, bishop, theologian and cultural anthropologist Francisco Claver accepts the concept of interculturality, but only for the initial phase of an inculturation process that passes through four moments.⁵⁹⁴ During the first moment, an outside evangelizer begins a dialogue with interested listeners from another cultural domain. In this encounter evangelizers are limited by their cultural frame, just as the listeners are limited by theirs. This moment, according to Claver, is accurately entitled "interculturality": the enculturated faith of the speaker is heard by persons inhabiting another cultural domain with all its presuppositions and pre-understandings.

In a second moment, the listeners, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, accept the faith that has been preached by the evangeliser. On accepting the faith, on conversion, a crucial change occurs, first in the dialogue partner, then on the level of discourse. At this second moment dialogue is no longer occurring between an outside evangelizer and a listener, but rather between a listener and the source of faith itself, the Holy Spirit, the gratuitous grace of God. The entire subsequent deepening of faith comes from the Holy Spirit in the heart of the converted. Listeners converse with the Spirit in and through their own culture. In this phase the ideals of faith, that is the gifted grace of the Spirit, encounter the actual values of the culture of the listener.

In a third moment, the listener becomes an evangelizer, and in a fourth moment a new listener converses with the Spirit.

While Claver accepts the concept of Ratzinger on interculturality for the first moment of inculturation – where outside evangelizers preach the Gospel from within their cultural frame to listeners who accept the message according to their different cultural frame – Claver emphasizes that the actual moment of inculturation occurs during the second moment. This moment, when an encounter occurs between the Gospel and another culture, between the listener and the Spirit of God, the very moment of conversion, at this crucial time there is no

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. Francisco Claver, *op. cit.*, 138–140.

interculturality. My own experience in Eastern Indonesia accords with Claver's insight.

Living Interculturality

But that initial interculturality phase is vital if the Gospel is to be announced in new and ever-changing cultural environments. This brings to the fore the crucial role of the cross-cultural evangelizer.

The Divine Word Missionaries (Steyler Missionare, SVD) have embarked on a programme of interculturality workshops. For the key issue is no longer the inculturation process but rather personal practice. Cross-cultural evangelisers do not always appreciate differences between their home culture and that of the people they serve, but rather tend to look for common cultural traits at the expense of the other's uniqueness, and so fall into some form of lowest common denominator, stripped of cultural distinctiveness. As Philip Gibbs of Papua New Guinea points out, "We can succumb to what is called minimisation whereby it is assumed that deep down everyone is the same and that this commonality can serve as the basis for our communication. It assumes that one's ideas and behaviour are easily understandable by others with a different worldview and allows one to maintain a fairly comfortable state of ethnocentrism. Minimisation, through the use of strategies of commonality, is a way to focus attention away from deeper cultural and personal differences. A personal appropriation of interculturality involves celebrating sameness and difference together. Ways of sharing between different backgrounds, personalities and cultures is precisely where cross-cultural missionaries can contribute to overcoming attitudes of defensiveness, fear, indifference and marginalisation that are common in our world today. Appreciation of what we share in common and the recognition and acceptance of our differences can be the basis of our unity as international communities as we seek to contribute to a better, more just world."⁵⁹⁵

Jon Kirby, founder-director of TAMALE Institute in Ghana, has developed professional interculturality workshops using action methods, whereby participants confront the task of exiting their

⁵⁹⁵ Personal reflection of Philip Gibbs after an Intercultural Competence and Sensitivity Workshop, at Nemi, January 2015.

home culture and entering into another's through psychodrama, culture-drama, sociodrama and bibliodrama as applied to intercultural relationships. This naturally involves knowledge, but just as importantly skills, emotions, and behaviour patterns.⁵⁹⁶ Just as crucial as the process of inculturation itself is the personal ability to inculturate oneself.

To conclude

The term inculturation is still used in FABC documents. However, the complexity of the process of animating the pluralistic societies of Asia with Gospel values by Christian communities which are historically Western is acknowledged. This has been articulated in some detail. "Interculturality" describes the first moment of this ongoing, dynamic process. The aim is to birth a culturally coherent faith that leads to a prophetic engagement with society. Both the process and praxis are widely understood. A crucial issue today is the need for interculturality workshops that trigger deep awareness of the issues involved, and indeed bring about a personal conversion in the evangeliser. This would certainly deepen the incarnational process.

⁵⁹⁶ Jon Kirby is director at Culture-Drama Solutions, Los Angeles, CA. Cf. John Mansford Prior, "Learning to Leave: The Pivotal Role of Cross-cultural 'Conversion'", *Verbum SVD* 53 (2012) 2, 219–235.

Dancing with strangers:

A heortological approach to intercultural theology

Wilfred Sumani

The accelerated pace at which people from different cultural and geographical backgrounds interact these days, thanks to the phenomenon of globalization, is fast liquidating territorial boundaries that hitherto marked people's identities. As communities from different parts of the world listen to the same music, watch the same films, root for the same football teams, and eat the same food, the sense of common humanity is heightened. In the daily consumption of the products of the market economy, considerations of one's cultural affiliation may seem to be of marginal concerns.

While in the past language was one of the barriers of cross-cultural communication, today it is estimated that of the world's 7.2 billion inhabitants of the earth, 527 million can speak English.⁵⁹⁷ These developments create the impression that the world is already living a common culture endowed with analogical experiences, metaphors, images, struggles and aspirations. The expansion of common fields of experience would naturally diminish the importance of translation in cross-cultural communication. New technologies are generating a new language that cuts across linguistic groups.

A similar development obtains on the theological plane, with the emergence of what is called 'global theological flows', defined as "theological discourses that, while not uniform or systemic, represent a series of linked, mutually intelligible discourses that address the contradictions or failures of global systems."⁵⁹⁸ Ecological concerns

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. Rick Noack and Lazaro Gamio, "The world's languages, in 7 maps and charts", *The Washington Post* (23 April, 2015); https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/23/the-worlds-languages-in-7-maps-and-charts/?utm_term=.5dbf8b14ef42 (20.04.2017).

⁵⁹⁸ Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*, New York 1997, 16.

and the rights of minorities, for instance, cut across national or regional boundaries. Thus, in theology, just as in popular culture, people seem to be speaking the same language already. Is it superfluous, then, to speak of inter-cultural theology? Haven't the contours of the rocks of the formerly diverse cultures been smoothed out by the swift currents of globalization? Where is one to find the dialogue partners of the diverse cultures so as to engage in inter-cultural theology? Many African theologians, for instance, tend to use past tense to describe African cultures as if to suggest that these cultures are no longer extant. The number of young Africans who cannot speak, let alone write, in their mother tongue is growing. As Paul Gifford observes, "In Kenya's informal settlements, what would most naturally be regarded as culture (even language) seems fast disappearing. Some presentations of African culture seem rather idealized."⁵⁹⁹ Is it plausible, therefore, to speak of African traditions as a source of intercultural theology?

Recent developments, however, especially in the world of politics, suggest that the thin skin of the homogenous consumer culture hides the old skeletons of the fear of the Other. All over the globe anti-immigration political movements are gaining ground. Even within national borders, political battles are waged on the fault lines of ethnic or regional differences. Beneath the globalizing narratives of a common destiny are undercurrents of mutual suspicion, often characterized by the demonization of the Other. It is evident that cultural or regional differences cannot be swept under the carpet of a superficial *sensus communis* orchestrated by the consumerist culture. It is imperative, therefore, to anchor the foundations of shared life on the bedrock of mutual understanding rather than the quicksand of fashion, fads and fast foods.

This essay argues that one of the privileged places to engage in inter-cultural theology is the feast (in Greek *ἑορτή*, hence *heortology*), a space when a community expresses its identity in a more intense and profound manner. The feast, unlike many rites of passage which are often shrouded in secrecy, is open to outsiders. It is at the feast that one can dance with strangers and eat the food of the oft-demonized Other.

Inter-Cultural Theology: A New Task for Africa

In his book on the idea of reform, Gerhart B. Ladner affirms, "The history of man can be seen as a sequence of new beginnings. Such

⁵⁹⁹ Paul Gifford, Paul Gifford, "Africa's Inculturation Theology: Observations of an Outsider", in: *Hekima Review* 38 (2008), 18–34, here: 22.

a view in fact underlies in one way or another almost all historical interpretation, be it based on the belief in cyclical recurrence or in conversion and redemption, in decline and fall or in *corsi* and *recorsi*, in progress and evolution or in challenge and response, in rebirth and reform or in revolution.⁶⁰⁰ As African theologians begin to celebrate the coming of age of African theology,⁶⁰¹ new challenges provoked by the process of globalization are calling African theologians to a new task of intercultural theology.

Before and after independence, the inculturation stream of African theology has preoccupied itself with the exposition of African traditional religious beliefs and cultural systems in response to the Western claim that Africans did not have religion or culture. Building on the works of anthropologists, African theologians have endeavored to (re)construct African traditional religious and cultural systems not only to respond to the Western supremacist claims but also to lay foundations for the inculturation of the Christian faith.⁶⁰² The emphasis on pre-colonial African traditions as a mark of cultural authenticity is premised on the assumption that colonialism brought about the contamination of African cultures. As Cheik Anta Diop writes, "A close look at the African reality reveals that there is on the one hand, a part of tradition that has remained intact and continues to survive despite modern influence and on the other, a tradition that has been altered by contamination from Europe."⁶⁰³

The desire to highlight differences between the two worldviews has sometimes led to reductionist claims that are patently more reactionary than reasonable. For instance, it has sometimes been claimed that emotion is proper to the African and rationality to the European.⁶⁰⁴ The African has been described as a communitarian person whose life

⁶⁰⁰ Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, New York 1967, 1.

⁶⁰¹ Cf. Laurenti Magesa (Eds.), *African Theology Comes of Age (The Ecumenical Symposium of Eastern Africa Theologians, no. 5)*, Nairobi 2010.

⁶⁰² Cf. John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophies*, Doubleday & Company, Inc., New York 1970; Idem, *Introduction to African Religion*, Oxford 1975; Aquiline Tarimo, *Applied Ethics and Africa's Social Reconstruction*, Nairobi 2005; Laurenti Magesa, *Christian Ethics in Africa*, Nairobi 2002; Jesse N. K. Mugambi, *African Heritage and Contemporary Christianity*, Nairobi 1989; Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African*, New York 1988, and others.

⁶⁰³ Cheikh Anta Diop, *Towards the African Renaissance: Essays in African Culture and Development 1946–1960*, London 1996, 33.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 42–43.

is guided by axiom, “I am because we are”, while the European’s life is said to be guided by the Cartesian maxim, “I think, therefore I am.” The tendency to create an ontology out of cultural accidentals would unwittingly justify discriminatory political systems such as apartheid and Rhodesia’s two-pyramid policy of development – one for settlers, the other for indigenous people.

Today, decades after independence, it is dawning upon Africans that the values of *Ubuntu*, such as solidarity, communion and hospitality, often touted as the hallmark of African life are not visible in the manner Africans transact political and socio-economic business. Indifference to the suffering of fellow Africans, even within the same nation, on the one hand, and, on the other, blatant disregard of the humanity of others are becoming commonplace on the continent.⁶⁰⁵ After independence new ‘flags’ – often bearing ethnic and regional colors – have emerged as new identity markers. The danger of cultural romanticism in African theology is therefore palpable. Consider Matthew M. Theuri’s description of social organization in traditional Africa:

Within the traditional African Social organization there was no class struggle because a single community member’s problem, was a moral responsibility for all the other society members – everyone was ‘equal’ to each other; resources were well and equally distributed among all. The sick, the orphaned, the widows, the Africans lived in the model that is only reflective of the Early Church. The old and the disabled, were all taken care of by other members of the community.⁶⁰⁶

Theuri idealizes African traditional systems of social organization and attributes such vices as individualism and consumerism to foreign influences,⁶⁰⁷ an affirmation that makes Paul Gifford wonder whether the peoples of Africa “are the only humans untouched by

⁶⁰⁵ The Zimbabwean theologian Masiwa Ragies Gunda makes the sobering observation that African theology has tended to blame the West for the continent’s woes; it is time, he argues, Africans accepted responsibility for the deterioration of life in Africa and in aiding the West to exploit the continent. Cf. Masiwa R. Gunda, “African Theology of Reconstruction: The Painful Realities and Practical Options!” *Exchange* 38 (2009), 84–102, here: 97–98.

⁶⁰⁶ Matthew M. Theuri, “Religion and Culture as Factors in the Development of Africa”, in *Quests for Abundant Life in Africa*, Eds. Mary N. Getui/Matthew M. Theuri, Nairobi 2002, 187–97, here: 194.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 194.

original sin.”⁶⁰⁸ As Robert Schreiter warns, “An inherent danger for local theology...is a certain cultural romanticism. Reminiscent of Enlightenment concepts of the natural person, this cultural romanticism will tend to see only good in a culture and to believe that the ideal state of the culture would be reached if it were left untouched by the outside world.”⁶⁰⁹

In addition, African theologians have been addressing their Western counterparts more than the people back home, especially in the wake of the proliferation of departments of African studies in Western universities. Such scholarship accentuates that which is exotic in African cultures, partly pandering to the tantalizing aphorism, *Ex Africa semper aliquid novo*. To borrow Robert Schreiter’s concept of three ‘publics’ for theology – academy, church, and society⁶¹⁰ – it can be argued that African inculturation theology has addressed itself to the academy and to the church (as the institution).

There is a danger, therefore, that intercultural theology may simply perpetuate the tendency among African theologians to address themselves to Westerners, the academy and the hierarchy. In his article on intercultural theology, for instance, Franz Gmainer-Pranzl dwells on the pertinence of the Europe-Africa dialogue⁶¹¹, though he also mentions that the Africa-Europe dialogue is but a thread from the complex web of intercultural theology that includes such issues as the interplay between religion and society, economy, international migration, globalisation, new religious movements and gender, among others.⁶¹²

The importance of the North-South dialogue notwithstanding, the emerging issues of international migration and globalisation should not distract African theologians from the equally urgent task of lateral cultural dialogue on the continent. One can borrow a leaf from the Latin American theologian Diego Irarrázaval, who not only fuses liberation theology with inculturation but also advocates “multiple

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. Paul Gifford, *op. cit.*, 23.

⁶⁰⁹ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, second edition, New York 2015, 32–33.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁶¹¹ Cf. Franz Gmainer-Pranzl, “Intercultural Theology: Towards a Discourse Between Africa and Europe”, *Hekima Review* 55 (2016), 151–62, here: 155.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*, 152.

inculturation,⁶¹³ taking into account the multicultural landscape of Latin America. In other words, in addition to talking to the Christian faith and Western cultures, African cultures need to talk to one another. African theologians cannot continue to read the anti-colonial script – which is essentially a theology of lament – to the detriment of the equally pressing duty of forging a sense of common belonging and building cultural bridges at home.

It is worth mentioning that African inculturation theology tends to be mono-cultural. Many dissertations in the field of inculturation focus on one (often the writer's own) culture.⁶¹⁴ Inter-textuality is thus limited to the comparison between a particular African culture and an analogous Christian tenet. The almost exclusive concentration on one's own tradition can lead to cultural myopia, that is, the temptation to draw the line of humanity too close to the threshold of one's own culture. This ethnic shortsightedness has led to ethnic violence and discrimination in Africa. To borrow Isaiah's invitation, African cultural groups need to widen their tent in order to accommodate other ethnic groups.⁶¹⁵

The Scope of Intercultural Theology in Africa

The first scope of intercultural communication and theology in Africa is to discover common wisdom that serves as the pathway to the *humanum*, which, in turn, is the pathway to God. Human cultures are like a tortoise: the shell shelters a living being. Intercultural dialogue will therefore reveal the *humanum* sheltered by various cultural expressions without, however, resorting to the essentialist temptation to get rid of the shell that houses the tortoise. In fact, just as a tortoise cannot survive without the shell, the *humanum* cannot endure without the shell of cultural embodiment. Values remain vacuous until they find some concrete cultural expression.

⁶¹³ Cf. Volker Küster, "From Contextualisation to Glocalisation: Intercultural Theology and Postcolonial Critique", in: *Exchange* 45 (2016), 203–226, here: 209.

⁶¹⁴ Cf. Paul Gifford, "Africa's Inculturation Theology", *op. cit.*, 21. One of the exceptions are text books in African theology or philosophy, which tend to feature many African tribes. These books, however, discuss the various African traditions as proof-texts for certain pre-determined themes rather than 'thick descriptions' of cultural systems. One of the deficiencies of such expositions is the absence of a diachronic study of African traditions. It is apparently presumed that the traditions have always been the way they are.

⁶¹⁵ Isaiah 54:2.

The discovery of common wisdom will lead to the fusion of horizons between or among cultures.

Second, the interaction of cultures leads to the formation of hybrid cultures. The hybridization of cultures is a historical fact and needs to be embraced rather than rejected.⁶¹⁶ The cross-pollination of cultures can contribute to the strengthening of social bonds across ethnic groups. One of the characteristics of African cultures, like all other cultures, is the openness to receive other people's cultural elements, as long as these augur well for the wellbeing of the recipient. Western clothes were adopted by Africans long before colonialism. Africans also borrowed from other African communities such things as musical instruments, dances,⁶¹⁷ tools and foods, to mention but a few. This mutual borrowing continues in our day.

Third, lateral cultural communication in Africa will bring to the fore important differences that sometimes degenerate into mutual deprecation, prejudice and snobbery. Sometimes the search for common ground leads to the masking of cultural differences. Unfortunately, like a festering wound, such differences are not healed simply by being hidden away from the public eye. Cultural borders have to be engaged rather than merely crossed, so that differences may be lifted up and unmasked with a view to creating "a new way for people to live with one another, respecting our differences while living across them."⁶¹⁸

Fourth, intercultural communication will serve as a "cultural audit"⁶¹⁹ by those outside the culture in order to help a particular culture to be accountable to the values of the *humanum*. The pre-colonial Lozi of Zambia, for instance, did not practice the killing of twins while some of the tribes conquered by the Lozi used to kill twins because the latter were considered unlucky.⁶²⁰ The preservation of twins among the Lozi would likely question the twin-killing practice

⁶¹⁶ Cf. Robert Schreier, op. cit., 27. Christianity borrowed so many elements from the Greco-Roman cultures that Christianity can rightly be called a hybrid religious tradition.

⁶¹⁷ John Munonye's novel "The Only Son" describes how a group from another village comes to Nnanna's village to teach the boys there a new dance seen to be prestigious.

⁶¹⁸ Gary Riebe-Estrella, "Engaging Borders: Lifting Up Difference and Unmasking Division", in: *Theological Education* 45 (2009), 19–26, here: 21.

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁶²⁰ Cf. D. W. Stirke, *Barotseland: Eight Years among the Barotse*, New York 1922, 62.

among the tribes absorbed by the Lozi. Nothing is more challenging to an eccentric cultural tenet than a counterinstance.

The Feast as a Privileged Locus of Intercultural Theology

It is one thing to propound the principles of intercultural theology and another thing altogether to identify the *loci* for this theological enterprise. Where are we to do this theology? Broadly speaking, intercultural theology can be done at the crossroads of cultures. To borrow Jesus' saying, where two or three cultures are gathered⁶²¹ can become a hearth for intercultural theology. This space can be the classroom comprised of students from different cultural backgrounds.⁶²² The intercultural synapse can also be the feast.

The thesis that the feast is a privileged occasion for intercultural theology is based on two premises. The first premise builds upon the following law of liturgical evolution enunciated by Anton Baumstark: "Primitive conditions are maintained with greater tenacity in the more sacred seasons of the Liturgical Year."⁶²³ In his study of the evolution of various liturgical traditions, both East and West, Baumstark discovered that celebrations in the 'ordinary time' of the year were more amenable to change than those in the *tempi forti* of the liturgical year. For instance, long after its disappearance from ordinary celebrations of the year, the universal prayer (prayer of the faithful) maintained its place in the Good Friday service. It is also in the strong moments of the liturgical year that the Church expresses her faith more intensely.

This law applies not only to Christian liturgy but to other traditions as well. Many African communities exhibit the 'spirit' of their traditions more eloquently in the more 'sacred' seasons of life. These moments are marked by various feasts that evoke key elements of the community's history and worldview. In Zambia, for instance, there are more than twenty annual traditional ceremonies during which various linguistic groups (tribes) express their cultural identity. These annual cultural events include *Kuomboka* (annual migration of the Lozi paramount chief), *Nc'wala* (a first-fruit festival of the Ngoni), and

⁶²¹ Cf. Matthew 18:20.

⁶²² Cf. Michel Elias Adraos, "Engaging Diversity in Teaching Religion and Theology: An Intercultural, De-colonial Epistemic Perspective", in: *Teaching Theology and Religion* 15/1 (2012), 3–15.

⁶²³ Anton Baumstark, *Comparative Liturgy*, Westminster 1958, 27.

Kulamba (an annual Chewa feast that brings together the Chewa from Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique). During these ceremonies, participants often wear traditional costumes⁶²⁴, perform traditional dances, carry out rituals particular to the community and consume traditional foods that do not often appear on the daily menu.

Other intense moments in African communities are weddings and funerals, which are also characterized by the performance of particular rituals and the use of certain symbols that represent the *Weltanschauung* of the community.

The annual feasts – just as weddings and funerals – attract the participation of people from various cultural backgrounds. With the exception of a few secret rituals that may be accessible only to the ‘insiders’, the proceedings at such events are open to all. Thus, members of other ethnic groups can interact in a more direct way with the symbols and rituals of the Other, thereby making these feasts fertile spaces for intercultural semiotics, moments when communities discover how the ‘tortoise’ of the values they hold in common are housed in different symbolic or ritual ‘shells’. The presence of the ‘outsider’ is also sure to provide some form of ‘cultural audit’, thereby helping a community to question and outgrow certain eccentric practices and beliefs inconsistent with the quest for the *humanum*.

The feasts of a community are also a moment to take stock of the evolution of culture. As Gifford rightly observes, “cultures are never static, for people pick and choose from their cultural pool as they respond to new circumstances.”⁶²⁵ As people interact with new realities, additions and subtractions are made to and from, respectively, cultural heritage. The evolution of culture can clearly be seen in the growing repertoire of masks used for the Chewa *Gule Wamkulu* in Malawi. When Christianity came, the Chewa created new masks to represent Mary, Joseph, Peter and other Christian personages. After independence, the *Nalikwanda* (the boat used by the Lozi paramount chief for the ceremony of *Kuomboka*) bears not only the figure of an elephant (representing the chief’s authority) but also the Zambian

⁶²⁴ Among the traditional dances featured on Chewa feasts, for instance, is *Gule Wamkulu* (the Great Dance), in which dancers wear masks that represent different ‘spirit’. Cf. Claude Boucher, *When Animals Sing and Spirits Dance: Gule Wamkulu: The Great Dance of the Chewa People of Malawi*, Kungoni Centre of Culture and Art, Mtakatika 2012.

⁶²⁵ Paul Gifford, *op. cit.*, 32.

flag in recognition of the wider political community to which the Lozi people now belong.

Beyond traditional practices, Baumstark's law also applies to the practice of Christian inculturation in Africa. It is unfortunate that the concrete cases of inculturation are not documented. However, observation shows that the more sacred seasons or occasions of greater moment have become privileged spaces for interfacing the Christian faith with African cultures. Such occasions include the major feasts of the liturgical year, ordinations, religious profession, weddings and funerals, to name but a few.

Since in many African countries cultural groups are no longer confined to specific geographical locations (territories), the mixing of the peoples has intensified intercultural interactions, especially in urban settings. Consequently, the inculturation of Christian celebrations and rites involves not merely the interaction between the Christian faith and one African culture, but rather the Christian faith and several African cultures at the same time. In Lusaka (Zambia), for instance, the entrance procession is often accompanied by *Ubomba* (Bemba dance), while a Chewa or Ngoni dance may be executed during the offertory procession. The congregation thus learns to pray with symbols from traditions other than one's own.

Given the importance of the 'more sacred moments' of various cultural and ecclesial communities, it is important for theologians to pay special attention to these occasions so as to discover not only African symbols that augur well for the process of inculturation but also how these symbols can be exploited for the construction of a more reconciled and inclusive society.

Conclusion

The adoption of Western 'ways' in Africa often gives the impression that African cultures are dead and well behind us. That is why the persistent call for inculturation by some African theologians may come across as a contrived plea for a return to an irretrievable past. However, when one pays attention to the dynamics of the major feasts of various cultural communities, one will discover that African traditions are alive and well. The rituals and symbols executed during the 'strong' moments of these communities are open to outsiders, thereby making such feasts fertile moments for intercultural commu-

nication and, derivatively, 'inter-cultural inculturation' of the Christian faith.

The intercultural approach to inculturation has some methodological imperatives. First, it is no longer plausible to interface one African culture with Christianity; rather, following Anton Baumstark's method of comparative liturgy, inculturation in Africa has to take into account more than one culture, especially in areas inhabited by more than one cultural group. It is theologically naïve to do the theology of inculturation in a manner proper to a time when ethnic groups lived in geographically defined territories. Today, inculturation in Africa is necessarily inter-culturation, for there is more than one cultural 'text' to factor in the theological discourse.

Second, intercultural theology requires attention to the cultures of today. It is not enough to rehearse the reports of anthropologists and first-generation African theologians about the cultures of African peoples. Culture is not an object that exists only in the past. Culture is a product of living people. Thus, just as people in the past produced culture, the Africans of the twenty-first century also produce cultural artifacts.

Intercultural Theology as a Transformation of Theology

Thomas Fornet-Ponse

Globalisation is understood “in very general terms as the intensification and acceleration of cross-border relations in a wide variety of fields such as politics, the economy and culture”⁶²⁶, raises a number of philosophical and theological issues. They include its characterisation from various standpoints and the consequences it has for our understanding of “culture” and the phenomenon of interculturality. Thanks to globalisation there is now less scope than ever before for cultures to hermetically seal themselves off from each other or for them to be seen as largely uniform and static entities. Various explanatory models from the realm of cultural science (especially in connection with what is referred to as the “cultural turn”) can be employed for a theoretical description and examination of the changes resulting from encounters between different cultures. They include, for instance, hybridity⁶²⁷ and trans-difference⁶²⁸.

Culture is a term which initially suggests an inner unity of diverse behavioural patterns, mindsets and procedures in different spheres of life with a tendency towards “internal universality”, in other words to define all the areas of life and modes of expression of the people who represent it.⁶²⁹ However, for a number of reasons, including its historicity, this unity should not be misconstrued as constituting a uniform entirety. An intercultural dialogue is thus conceivable as a dialogue of processual identities. However, an interpretation of

⁶²⁶ Michael Reder, *Globalisierung und Philosophie*, Darmstadt 2009, 7.

⁶²⁷ Cf. in particular, Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London 1994.

⁶²⁸ Cf. inter alia Lars Allolio-Näcke/Britta Kalscheuer/Arne Manzeschke (Eds.), *Differenzen anders denken. Bausteine zu einer Kulturtheorie der Transdifferenz*, Frankfurt am Main/New York 2005.

⁶²⁹ Franz Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Eine Einführung*, Vienna 2004, 46.

culture and intercultural dialogue along these lines has serious consequences not just for missiology but for theology in general. It is possible, in reference to semiotic theories of culture following Clifford Geertz, which treat cultures as public, observable and communicated symbolic systems, to underline the importance of *semiotic holism*: “Theology is built up not just in written texts and dogmas, but also in ethics and etiquette, in social structures and mores and in semantic contexts which can vary from one cultural environment to another. Seen from this perspective, it can be doubted whether there is a universal ‘core’ of the message which requires translation.”⁶³⁰ This applies not just to missiology’s long-standing inculturation paradigm, but also to the question of whether theology as a whole is in need of intercultural transformation. The issue is exacerbated by the discourse theory perspective, according to which cultures can be defined as “hybrid und inherently inhomogeneous identity constellations that can be performatively reconstituted in discursive processes”.⁶³¹ Interculturality thus proves to be a key theological resource.

Accommodation – an early missiological paradigm

Theological reflection on interculturality may be a comparatively recent phenomenon, but it has been an intrinsic feature of Christianity from the outset. The relationship between particularity and universality has been seminal for the theological interpretation of the Christ event and of the Christian belief in the universal significance of the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth for the salvation of humankind down the ages. Consideration must also be given to the manifold encounters between different cultures in the history of Christianity, beginning with the transposition of Jewish-Semitic thought into the Graeco-Roman world. Explicit reflection on the existence of different cultures and their significance for, and impact on, theology began, in particular, in the wake of the missionary movements in the early modern period and led ultimately to the establishment of “missiology” as a discipline.

In accordance with a largely essentialist understanding of culture – reflected in the concurrent emergence of Western imperialism and

⁶³⁰ Henning Wrogemann, *Interkulturelle Theologie und Hermeneutik*, Gütersloh 2012, 135.

⁶³¹ Judith Gruber, *Theologie nach dem Cultural Turn. Interkulturalität als theologische Ressource*, Stuttgart 2013, 124.

colonialism – the primary aim of Catholic mission for a long time was to implant the Church in alien cultures, with missiology serving as an instrument to that end. No consideration was given to any possible influence exerted by others, the work performed being self-referential in character: “The purpose of mission methods and practice is to prepare those who have joined the People of God as a result of ‘pedagogical’ measures, carried out as part of an orderly missionary undertaking, for the second coming of Christ”⁶³². The implantation theory was accompanied by a territorial understanding of mission. A pietistic interpretation of mission, by contrast, attaches priority to individual conversion, which means that cultural differences are assessed more positively from the beginning.⁶³³ In the early days of missiology, therefore, the relationship between the universal Gospel and particular cultures was defined as being one of accommodation, i.e. the essential features of Christianity were to be adapted to other, alien cultures.

This was the principle underlying the activities of Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili in the 16th and 17th centuries, for example. A clear distinction is made here between a universal “core” and a matching particular “shell” (encompassing the liturgy, religious customs and church architecture) and between essential and inessential properties. Criticism can certainly be levelled at the static relationship between the Gospel and culture, the hierarchical structure and the fact that the Church is the sole subject in this scheme of things.⁶³⁴ Moreover, we are dealing with a somewhat abstract and ahistorical understanding of universality, in which it is interpreted without reference to any context or in disassociation from any contextuality and thus tends to imply the absolute nature of a particular position. By contrast, the understanding of universality advocated by intercultural philosophers as solidarity between different contextual positions or as the objective of intercultural dialogue would appear to be a more effective vehicle for addressing theological and philo-

⁶³² Klaus Hock, *Einführung in die Interkulturelle Theologie*, Darmstadt 2011, 16.

⁶³³ For a more differentiated distinction cf. Theo Sundermeier, “Theologie der Mission”, in: Karl Müller/Theo Sundermeier, *Lexikon missionstheologischer Grundbegriffe*, Berlin 1987, 470–495.

⁶³⁴ Cf. Volker Küster, *Die vielen Gesichter Jesu Christi. Christologie interkulturell*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1999, 25.

sophical challenges arising from cultural encounters and the inherent interculturality of Christianity.⁶³⁵

The emergence of contextual theologies and the inculturation paradigm

The advent of decolonisation was partly responsible for serious efforts at realignment undertaken by missiologists, which in turn resulted in a stronger concentration on basics and thus a clearer focus on the fundamental interculturality of Christianity. The “awakening of the Third World” and the concomitant surge in decolonisation also prompted the development of contextual theologies and the networking of various local discourses. Criticism of the Western claim to universalisation and of Eurocentrism introduced a new perspective on the definition of the relationship between culture and the Gospel; plurality was emphasised and the universality of any one theology was refuted.⁶³⁶ Instead of terms such as adaptation, adjustment, inculturation and indigenisation, in which the indigenous culture, religion and/or philosophy provide the foundation for a theological reinterpretation, the Theological Education Fund proposed the term “contextualisation”.⁶³⁷ Since account is also taken of secularisation, technologisation and the advocacy of justice, the focus comes to be placed on the specific historical, socio-economic, political, cultural, ethnic and religious context. The hallmark of contextual theology consists not in being determined to a greater extent than other theologies by context, but rather by context being made the starting point of the theological process, and the theology considering itself to be derived from, and designed for, its context.

Consequently, it is not a question of a “traditional” theology being imported or of the immutable Gospel being adapted to a culture.⁶³⁸ In methodological terms, therefore, an “epistemological breach” with

⁶³⁵ Reference must be made here, in particular, to Raúl Fomet-Betancourt's understanding of universality. Cf. Thomas Fomet-Ponse, *Freiheit und Befreiung. Untersuchungen zur Kontextualität und Universalität des Philosophierens*, Aachen 2013, 324–334.

⁶³⁶ Cf. Josef Estermann, “La ‘Teología Andina’ como realidad y proyecto. Una deconstrucción intercultural”, in: *Idem*, (Eds.), *Teología Andina. El tejido diverso de la fe indígena*, Tomo I, La Paz 2006, 137–162, here: 148f.

⁶³⁷ Cf. William Russell, *Contextualization. Origins, Meaning and Implications*, typewritten dissertation, Rome 1995.

⁶³⁸ Cf. Henning Wrogemann, *Interkulturelle Theologie und Hermeneutik*, op. cit., 162.

Western theology occurs here, in which the emphasis is placed on practical action and involvement becomes the first act of theology. Although certain overlaps exist, a rough distinction can be made between liberation theologies and inculturation or dialogue theologies. In both cases no change occurs in the basic structure of the hermeneutical circle bringing together the text (canon and Christian tradition) as a criterion of identity and the context as a criterion of relevance – a point which Volker Küster has emphasised – although the option for the poor and respect for cultural-religious (and ethnic) identities have latterly been joined by ecological sustainability and gender equality.⁶³⁹ While contextual theologies have been elaborated in the so-called Third World, they are by no means a matter for the “periphery”. On the contrary, every theological reflection is invariably context-related; it must draw on culturally or contextually determined systems of meaning and analyse its own particular context. Thus, the relationship between particularity and universality, together with the question of identity criteria, constitutes a fundamental tension in contextual theology.⁶⁴⁰

The emergence of contextual theologies heralds the replacement of accommodation – the key metaphor of early missiology – by inculturation, which Pedro Arrupe describes as follows: “Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular local cultural context in such a way that the experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies a culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about ‘a new creation’.”⁶⁴¹ In contrast to accommodation, the focus now is on a far-reaching penetration, in which cultures are accorded a theological relevance, although their transformation is seen to be necessary. In the frequently cited analogy with the incarnation⁶⁴² the aspect of reciprocity can easily be disregarded if a distinction is made between actively inculturating

⁶³⁹ Cf. Volker Küster, *Einführung in die interkulturelle Theologie*, Göttingen 2011, 60.

⁶⁴⁰ Cf. Judith Gruber, *op. cit.*, 42.

⁶⁴¹ Letter from Pedro Arrupe of 14 May 1978, quoted from Michael Sievernich, “Von der Akkommodation zur Inkulturation. Missionarische Leitideen der Gesellschaft Jesu”, in: *Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft und Religionswissenschaft* 86 (2002), 260–276, here: 268.

⁶⁴² Cf. Paulo Suess, “Inkulturation”, in: Ignacio Ellacuría/Jon Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis. Grundbegriffe der Theologie der Befreiung*, vol. 2, Lucerne 1996, 1011–1059, here: 1047.

Church and passively absorbing culture. From a pneumatological or creation theology standpoint, on the other hand, greater account can be taken of cultural identity, and inculturation interpreted primarily as the discovery of God's hidden presence. "This model thus places greater emphasis on the transformation processes which give expression to the Gospel in an alien cultural code, whereas the immutable nature of its message, which calls for a cultural transformation or metanoia, tends to be overlooked."⁶⁴³

"Peach model" and "onion model"

This reading of inculturation presumes the possibility of a fundamental distinction being made between an essential core, on the one hand, and historical and intercultural transformation processes, on the other, since the core remains unchanged while the "husk" is changeable and can be adapted to specific contexts. Josef Estermann contrasts this "peach model", which is closely related to ontological and metaphysical dualism, with the "onion model", in which there are many skins and layers but no hard core. The latter thus represents "a holistic and comprehensive notion of 'essential' and 'inessential' that tends to prevail in non-Western cultural circles"⁶⁴⁴. The peach model implies a theological or philosophical essentialism in which it is asserted that there are intrinsic elements of the Christian faith that are non-negotiable in cultural or religious terms since they transcend history and are by their very nature meta-cultural. The question then arises of what exactly constitutes this core, who determines what makes up this core, and whether the respective manifestation can readily be separated from the core.

On the other hand, the "onion model" is more in line with an indigenous and Eastern Asian tradition of wisdom, in which the essential features cannot be separated from their manifestations but are rather inherent in them, so that the essence of the onion is present in all its layers. Applied to theology, then, it can be said that "the essence of the Christian faith and its historical, cultural and civilisational manifestations are present in a 'mixed and integrated form' in all contexts

⁶⁴³ Judith Gruber, *op. cit.*, 50.

⁶⁴⁴ Josef Estermann, *Apu Taytayku. Religion und Theologie im andinen Kontext Lateinamerikas, Ostfildern 2012*, 53.

of religious existence.”⁶⁴⁵ While it appears possible in the peach model for a pure essential core of the Christian faith to be ‘excultured’ from a certain historical and cultural manifestation and to be ‘re-inculturated’ in a different form, it is considered out of the question in the onion model. This can be justified in Christological terms by the inseparable unity of the two natures of Christ by emphasising the conditions of human existence, which make an abstract essentialism impossible.

While this speaks in favour of the continuing development of the inculturation paradigm and its transformation into one which focuses on the reciprocal relations not just among the cultures themselves, but also between the Christian faith and its various cultural forms of expression, the terminological fuzziness of the key metaphor of “inculturation” raises a number of questions. It is not clear who or what is inculturated, nor is there any perception of “the interminable productivity of cultural spaces”.⁶⁴⁶ The concept of “interculturality” comes in useful in this respect.

Intercultural transformation of theology

The term “interculturality” takes up the intrinsic interculturality of Christianity and highlights the need for its theological reflection as a material and formal object, since theology must be located in the intercultural space and productively absorb the differences to be found there. However, (in contrast to Protestant approaches) a theology of this kind does not constitute a new branch of missiology or a transformation of it. Rather, it aims to reconstitute theology as a theology that functions interculturally, which explains why in German-speaking countries the term “theology interculturally” is used in an adverbial sense.⁶⁴⁷ The differences between Protestant approaches, which tend to emphasise a proximity to missiology, and Catholic approaches, which are geared more to epistemological theology or fundamental theology, make it clear that “intercultural theology” or “theology interculturally” is neither a clearly defined discipline nor an overall theoretical or methodical concept.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶⁴⁶ Judith Gruber, *op. cit.*, 52.

⁶⁴⁷ In Frankfurt am Main and Salzburg, for instance.

The initial approaches of such a theology share the background of contextual theologies and respond first and foremost to the challenges arising from the incursion of the new and unfamiliar, the questioning of Western tradition and the consideration given to the respective context.⁶⁴⁸ The contextual theologies emerging outside Europe see themselves, implicitly at least, as intercultural, since the contextuality of any theology is emphasised and the focus thus placed on the necessary dialogue between the different contextual theologies.

The discussion in intercultural theology of the interculturality of Christianity as a theologically normative basic structure means that the material object is redefined and the theology as a whole is reformatted: "To engage in theology interculturally means, on the one hand, to look at the thoughts which come to our minds in the light of *alien* experiences of the Gospel, i.e. on the part of Christians and communities with a culturally different background. On the other hand, it means taking consistent account in our theological work of what thoughts *our* experiences of the Gospel trigger in the minds of Christians and communities with a culturally different background."⁶⁴⁹ Not only does this approach positively absorb the differences brought out by encounters with the new and unfamiliar, it also reveals their potential revelatory character, since the surplus in significance of the Christian message cannot be fully expressed in any context. Attention is directed to "what has not been understood or realised, what is open, unfamiliar and eschatologically withheld"⁶⁵⁰ and thus to the difference between any necessary particular theology and the universal significance of the Christian message.

Apart from the reconstitution or intercultural transformation of theology, which is of paramount importance, intercultural theology – as a reflection upon interculturality – has three tasks to perform: an

⁶⁴⁸ This is associated initially with authors such as Walter Hollenweger, Hans Jochen Margull and Richard Friedli, followed later by Theo Sundermeier and Robert Schreiter, in particular, but also with Giancarlo Collet.

⁶⁴⁹ Hans Kessler/Hermann Pius Siller, Vorwort zur Reihe "Theologie interkulturell", in: Bénédet Bujo, *Afrikanische Theologie in ihrem gesellschaftlichen Kontext*, Frankfurt am Main 1986, 9–16, here: 12.

⁶⁵⁰ Hermann Pius Siller, Überlegungen zur Methode von Theologie interkulturell, in: Maria Hungerkamp (Eds.), *Grenzen überschreitende Ethik. Festschrift Hoffmann*, Frankfurt am Main 1997, 99–114, here: 110.

analysis of the context and the respective culture; an intercultural hermeneutics; and an examination of the criteria for Christian identity. The Bible and the dogmas specify a binding theological grammar here, but they are themselves contextual and thus in need of interpretation. The historical and cultural constellation of the early church in particular, is fundamental, inescapable and indispensable for Christian identity: "Its normative significance for the identity of Christianity must be constantly redefined in its intercultural mediation and translations – and thus in discursive transformation processes."⁶⁵¹

In intercultural theology the key metaphor of inculturation is replaced by that of interculturalisation, which points to the plurality of cultures and their networking as well as to reciprocal processes of communication. It thus embraces the unavoidable contextuality of the Gospel that has to be communicated between different cultural contexts. "Translation processes between different cultural systems of meaning thus prove constitutive for the confessional passing on of the Good News."⁶⁵²

The relationship between the Gospel and culture is thus an open-ended process of mediation between different cultural contexts. This conforms to the understanding of universality referred to above as a dialogue between different contextual theologies and philosophies or as an objective or regulative idea. It rests on the conviction that all thinking is rooted in contextuality or culturality, which is why the exchange between different contextual and cultural theologies and philosophies constitutes a process of universalisation. The universality aspired to does not bear the stamp of a certain culture, nor does it claim to be the home or the name of the whole. Rather it is "the universality which derives from the awareness of being related to, or part of, a perpetually open and ongoing process of totalisation".⁶⁵³

A theology committed to this understanding of universality can do justice to the interculturality of Christian identity and the resulting plurality and inhomogeneity as a *locus theologicus*. Interculturality is

⁶⁵¹ Judith Gruber, op. cit., 76.

⁶⁵² Ibid., 80.

⁶⁵³ Raúl Fomet-Betancourt, "La interculturalidad frente a los desafíos de la globalización", in: idem, *Filosofar para nuestro tiempo en clave intercultural*, Aachen 2004, 71–75, here: 75. Cf. also Michael Sievernich, *Konturen einer interkulturellen Theologie*, in: *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 110 (1988), 257–283, here: 266.

defined as the ex negativo identifiable space of differences which constitutes the discursive conditions and thus brings into the open what is excluded, unsaid or repressed. Hence it is not possible to universalise a certain particular witness, and the withdrawn and open-ended character of the Christian discourse about God becomes apparent. The tension between universality and particularity is not resolved in favour of one or the other but rendered productive instead: "If theology is designed to be a theological reflection of the interculturality of Christianity, if it is practised interculturally and thus with a sensitivity to differences, it can concede the universality of God in withdrawal mode a place in its particular discourse about God and thus incorporate the interpretativeness of its form of knowledge, which is rooted in revelation theology, in its language forms without disregarding the particular nature of its findings."⁶⁵⁴

⁶⁵⁴ Judith Gruber, *op. cit.*, 208.

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