

# SOME INS AND OUTS OF INCULTURATION

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## Introduction

The word inculturation is of recent coinage and has rapidly been accepted within theological debate. This would appear to imply that it meets a real need, and that there is general agreement on its significance. Not all is well, however. In fact there is considerable controversy surrounding the very meaning of inculturation. So much so, that the Holy Father has asked for a clarification, which has resulted in a document of the International Theological Commission prepared in conjunction with the Pontifical Council for Culture. In a recent speech to this Council he commented: «I wish to underline the active role which the Pontifical Council for Culture has played in the work of the International Theological Commission on the subject of *faith and inculturation*. You participated closely in the drawing up of the document which has just been prepared under this title and which will further our understanding of the biblical, historical,

anthropological, ecclesial and missionary significance of the inculturation of the Christian faith. The stakes here are decisive for the Church's activity, both within the various traditional cultures and within the complex forms of modern culture»<sup>1</sup>.

The essence of the controversy appears to be that some people who claim to have coined (or helped to coin) the concept of inculturation feel that they have, so-to-speak, suffered a «hijack» and that the term is now being given a significance (specifically, by the Church's Magisterium) which both empoverishes and betrays its original meaning. These people would like to restore the original significance to the term.

Our view is that we cannot exclude *a priori* that these people may be right in claiming that the Magisterium has altered the meaning of inculturation<sup>2</sup>. Our main purpose in this article, however, is not to establish whether they are right or wrong but rather to understand what inculturation means when it is used by the Church's Magisterium. As we shall see, the matter is somewhat complicated, because the Magisterium is itself finding its way to understanding what it means by inculturation and is clearly aware of what these critics think<sup>3</sup>. In order to grasp the meaning of inculturation in the Magisterium we shall be reviewing a number of places where it has been employed, especially by Pope John Paul II.

Our manner of proceeding is as follows. In Part One, after stating briefly the significance attached to the term by the Magisterium and giving an account of the genesis of inculturation, we examine, in some depth, a divergent view which, in our opinion, expresses effectively the reservations of some critics.

In Part Two, we attempt to map out how the Magisterium understands inculturation, its necessity and advantages, and what areas it affects. We then discuss possible dangers connected with incultu-

<sup>1</sup> *Addr. to the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 13-I-89, 5, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (Engl. ed.) 23-I-89, pp. 3-4. The document of the International Theological Commission has been published with the title *Fede e Inculturazione* in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3326, 21-I-89, 158-177.

<sup>2</sup> Alterations have taken place in other fields. Thus, it is a well-known fact that some religious institutions as approved by the Church are very different from the organisations originally conceived by their founders.

<sup>3</sup> It is also important to bear in mind that in this matter, where we are dealing with a theological neologism, with whose users the Magisterium is seeking to establish dialogue, divergence from the Magisterium's views need not have the same negative connotations which dissent from clearly stated Church doctrine would have.

ration and, finally, we look at the ideal aimed at. In our Conclusions, we try to take into account the questions raised regarding a possible empoverishment of the term. Our findings would indicate that there are certain interpretations of the word which the Magisterium appears deliberately to avoid and/or exclude<sup>4</sup>. The problems raised by those who are critical are often real, but their proposed solutions are at times inadequate. The answer is to find adequate solutions.

## Part One. Meaning or meanings of inculturation?

### 1. *What is inculturation?*

In words of Pope John Paul, inculturation signifies «the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures»<sup>5</sup>.

### 2. *Genesis of the term inculturation*

A careful study of the origin and meaning of the term was published in 1978 by Fr. Ary Roest Crolius, S.J.<sup>6</sup>. To summarise Roest Crolius' findings, it would seem that the first time the word appears in print may be in 1962 in an article by Fr. Masson, S.J.<sup>7</sup>. Between then and 1977 approximately, there is a period of gestation, when different forms of the term (specifically «acculturation», «enculturation» and «inculturation») are jostling for position. To sort

<sup>4</sup> It is legitimate to hypothesise that the Magisterium has so acted because it suspects that such interpretations could be detrimental to the faith.

<sup>5</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Enc. *Slavorum Apostoli*, 2-VII-85, 21, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* (henceforth abbreviated to IGP2) VIII, 2 (1985) 51: «"inculturazione" — l'incarnazione del Vangelo nelle culture autoctone» (the original Latin text is on p. 24). The wider context of this quotation reads as follows: «In the work of evangelisation which they (Saints Cyril and Methodius) carried out — as pioneers in the lands inhabited by the Slav peoples — is contained both a model of what now bears the name of "inculturation" — the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures — and at the same time the introduction of those cultures into the life of the Church». This text is quoted in INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, Document *Fede e Inculturazione* (1988), I, 11, in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3326, 21-I-89, 163.

<sup>6</sup> See A.A. ROEST CROLIUS, *What is So New about Inculturation?*, in *Inculturation. Working papers on Living Faith and Cultures*, Pont. Greg. University, Rome 1984, V, 1-18; first published in «Gregorianum» 59 (1978) 721-738.

<sup>7</sup> J. MASSON S.J. *L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde*, in «Nouvelle Revue Théologique» 84 (1962) 1038, where Masson uses the expression «un catholicisme inculturé»; see ROEST CROLIUS, *What is So New*, *cit.*, p. 2. I note that Fr. Masson does not present his use of the word «inculturation» as an innovation (there are no inverted commas, for example), so it is quite possible there may be earlier uses of the term.

out the difficulties, Roest Crolius proposes the following: «For the sake of clarity, we propose to consider *enculturation* as a technical term in cultural anthropology for indicating the learning experience by which an individual is initiated and grows into his culture, while reserving the term *inculturation* to denote the process by which the Church becomes inserted in a given culture. *Acculturation* could then also retain its anthropological signification, as synonymous with “culture-contact” and is better not confounded with “inculturation”»<sup>8</sup>.

One page 7, he explains further: «The transposition from the anthropological “enculturation” to the missiological “inculturation” can be considered as an application of the principle of analogy. Just as we say that the individual becomes inserted into his own culture (becomes enculturated) we can speak of the Church becoming inserted into a given culture (becomes inculturated). Analogy does not only express a similitude but also a difference. The main difference between enculturation and inculturation is that in the first case, the individual does not yet have a culture, and acquires his culture in the process of enculturation, whereas the Church, though it is bound to no particular culture, does not enter into a given culture unless already linked with elements of another culture. And even, depending on the definition given to “culture”, we can say that several elements which belong to the very nature of the Church are of a cultural character. Therefore, from an anthropological point of view, the process of inculturation has also the characteristics of a process of acculturation».

Later in the article he writes: «Recapitulating, we can describe the process of inculturation in the following way: *the inculturation of the Church is the (p. 16) integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal*»<sup>9</sup>.

Finally, on page 18, he quotes the Message of the 1977 Synod of Bishops and adds «this may well be the first time that the word

<sup>8</sup> ROEST CROLIUS, *What is So New*, cit., p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> ROEST CROLIUS, *What is So New*, cit., pp. 15-16.

“inculturation” has been employed in a document meant for the entire Church». The quote says: «The Christian message must find its roots in human cultures and must also transform these cultures. In this sense we can say that catechesis is an instrument of “inculturation”»<sup>10</sup>.

The first time Pope John Paul II used the word in a Papal document appears to be in April 1979 in his *Discourse to the Pontifical Biblical Commission*<sup>11</sup>. He has had recourse to it on frequent occasions since<sup>12</sup>. So too have various organs of the Holy See<sup>13</sup>.

From my understanding of Fr. Roest Crolius' 1978 article, the meaning he proposes to give to inculturation is perfectly compatible with the usage which Pope John Paul II makes of the term from 1979 onwards. So far so good.

### 3. A term betrayed?

However, others think otherwise. In a recent article, Fr. N. Staendaert, S.J., reviews the use of the term inculturation in what he

<sup>10</sup> *Message of the Synod of Bishops to the People of God*, 28-X-1977, 5 in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Engl. ed., 3-XI-1977. The official Latin text says: «Nuntium christianum oportet ut in culturis humanis radices agat assumendo eas atque transformando. Hoc sensu dicere licet catechesim quoddam instrumentum “inculturationis” esse. Quod significat eam evolvere et insimul ab intra illuminare vitae formas illorum ad quos sese dirigit. Fides christiana per catechesim in ipsas culturas inserenda est. Vera “incarnatio” fidei per catechesim supponit non solum processum “dandi” sed etiam “accipiendi”» (SYNODUS EPISCOPORUM (1977), *Nuntius Cum iam ad exitum*, 28-X-1977, 5, in *Enchiridion Vaticanum*, 6, 1977-1979, 12a ed., Dehoniane, Bologna 1983, n. 385).

See also A.A. ROEST CROLIUS, *Inculturation and the Meaning of Culture*, in *Inculturation. Working papers on Living Faith and Cultures*, Pont. Greg. University, Rome 1984, V, 33-54.

<sup>11</sup> 26-IV-79, in IGP2 II, 1 (1979) 980-981. This text is quoted in note 70, below.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Ap. Exh. *Catechesi Tradendae*, 16-X-79, 53; *Meeting with the Bishops of Zaire*, Kinshasa, 3-V-80; *Addr. to Kenyan Bishops*, Nairobi, 7-V-80; Ap. Exh. *Familiaris Consortio*, 22-XI-81, 10; *Addr. to the Congress on Matteo Ricci*, 25-X-82; *Addr. to the world of culture*, Seoul, Korea, 5-V-84; Enc. *Slavorum Apostoli*, 2-VII-85, 21; *Meeting with intellectuals and university students*, Yaoundé, Cameroon, 13-VIII-1985, 8; *Addr. at the inauguration of the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa*, 18-VIII-85, 7; *Addr. to the Pontifical Council for Culture*, 13-I-86, 4; *Addr. to the Indian Episcopal Conference*, 1-II-86, 5-6; *Homily*, Cartagena, Colombia, 6-VII-86, 7-8; Ap. Lett. *Vicesimus Quintus Annus*, 4-XII-88, 16 & 20, in *L'Osservatore Romano* (Engl. ed.), 22-V-89.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Instr. on Christian Liberty and Liberation*, 22-III-86. Also (it should be noted, though, that the output of this Commission does not form part of the Church's Magisterium), INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Selected themes of Ecclesiology...* (1984), 4, in *Documenta* (1969-1985), Vatican City 1988, 494-505, and the Document referred to in note 5, above.

denominates «the Roman documents» and expresses his deep dissatisfaction<sup>14</sup>.

Standaert's article is a plea to preserve the original meaning of the word inculturation which, he says (in language which wishes to be respectful) is being watered down in the texts of the Magisterium. Given the seriousness of these charges we shall analyse them carefully (Section 4) and then offer a commentary (Section 5).

#### 4. Contents of Standaert's article

Father Standaert's article has an introduction, three sub-sections and a conclusion<sup>15</sup>. In the introduction, Standaert says he is going

<sup>14</sup> N. STANDAERT, S.J., *L'histoire d'un néologisme. Le terme «inculturation» dans les documents romains*, in «Nouvelle Revue Théologique» 110 (1988) 555-570.

The first thing which emerges from this article is that Standaert supplies further evidence (confirming that provided by Roest Crollius) that the Society of Jesus has been deeply involved in the genesis and early development of the concept of inculturation. This in itself is a good thing, given the long experience and outstanding efforts of the Jesuits in over four centuries of service to the Church.

Looking a little closer, one finds recurring references to Matteo Ricci and his attempts to live the faith in 17th Century China. Now, one of the results of Vatican II was to call for a renewal of the religious orders (cf. PC 1) and, in particular, a return to their original spirit (cf. PC 2b; see also SACRED CONGREGATION FOR RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR INSTITUTES, Ap. Exh. *Evangelica Testificatio*, 29-VI-1971, 11, in *Vatican II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (1981 edition), ed. A. FLANNERY, O.P., Dominican Publications, Dublin 1980, 685).

It would seem that in the postconciliar process of self-examination and renewal, the Society of Jesus has asked itself if anything needs to be done regarding its missionary efforts (ROEST CROLLIUS, *What is so New*, cit., p. 2, refers to the 32nd General congregation of the Society of Jesus — 1 Dec 1974 to 7 Apr 1975). In this context, a deeply felt concern of the Society appears to be what Navarrete has called «the disastrous matter of the Chinese rites» (cf. U. NAVARRETE, S.J., *Privilegio de la Fe: Constituciones pastorales del Siglo XVI. Evolución posterior de la práctica de la Iglesia en la disolución del matrimonio de infieles*, in *El vínculo matrimonial*, ed. T.G. BARBERENA, BAC, Madrid 1978, 285: «la desastrosa cuestión de los ritos chinos»).

In a nutshell, it would seem that — as a way of obeying the injunctions of Vatican II — there is a desire to raise again the question of how the Catholic faith is to be communicated in the missions and, specifically, to propose a more effective way of ensuring that Christianity becomes fully at home in countries like China, India and in Africa.

In studying this matter, the «new» input appears to be the contribution which the local people themselves make to the process of evangelisation, plus a greater openness on the part of the missionaries to this contribution, an openness which will lead them not just to tolerate but actively to encourage it.

<sup>15</sup> The article was written in French. The English translations offered here are our own. In some cases, I have thought it correct to transcribe as well the French original.

to analyse briefly the usage of the neologism inculturation «in the Roman documents».

He adds that his purpose is «not to find out what the Magisterium is teaching, but to examine how the originality of inculturation has been transmitted» and, as a result, to see «some tendencies which can be deduced from these texts, with the hope of understanding their dynamics better» (p. 555).

The first sub-section is titled: *Adaptation - Inculturation*. Standaert says these terms differ in meaning. He tells us that *adaptation* (or accommodation) was widely used in missionary thinking in the 1950s and 60s to signify two things: first, that *missionaries* should adapt *themselves* to the cultures of the people to whom they take the Gospel; second, as regards the *contents* of their message, that it *should not be adapted* (missionaries should preach the Gospel, which is a universal and changeless message) but simply be rendered intelligible.

*Inculturation* (which, Standaert tells us, presupposes a previous process of adaptation) differs on both counts. As regards the *actors*, inculturation refers not so much to the missionaries as to the local people, to the local culture. As regards the *message* (which has been brought by the missionaries and been made intelligible), inculturation refers not to its translation into local terms but rather to «a new creation within the culture» (p. 556). Standaert illustrates what he means with examples from theology and liturgy. In liturgy, he says, whereas adaptation will lead to using the vernacular or perhaps changing the colour of the vestments, «in the project of inculturation, liturgy will take on forms that are completely new (for example, the Zaire rite)» (p. 557). Standaert says that adaptation and inculturation go ahead hand in hand, but insists that inculturation goes a stage beyond adaptation and will almost necessarily have to be done by *local* people, since missionaries are usually incapable of becoming sufficiently inserted into their new culture to do it.

Having distinguished inculturation from adaptation, Standaert says that «this distinction does not always appear in some official texts» (p. 557). Thus Matteo Ricci and Saints Cyril and Methodius are quoted by Pope John Paul II as examples of inculturation when, according to Standaert, what they were doing was not inculturation but adaptation.

On the other hand, Standaert continues, «other texts show that inculturation refers to local cultures» (p. 558)<sup>16</sup>.

The second sub-section of Standert's article is titled: *Incarnation - inculturation*. Standaert provides ample evidence that the present Pope associates incarnation and inculturation (pp. 559f). He then (p. 560) quotes Fr. Arrupe, S.J.: «Inculturation is the *incarnation* of the Christian life and message in a specific area»<sup>17</sup>.

The problem, says Standaert, is the meaning of *incarnation* in this context. Standaert proceeds to exclude a major part of the concept of incarnation from inculturation, saying that what Christ did in becoming man was more in line with what we would expect from a model missionary (in Standaert's view, therefore, Christ's incarnation is more a work of adaptation than inculturation).

Whereas incarnation tells us that «God (becomes) man», inculturation — says Standaert (p. 561), quoting P. Beauchamp — tells us «God (became) this man», and «he cannot be *this* man except through this society which is not like the other societies»<sup>18</sup>. As for the Christian *message*, when — in the context of inculturation — we say it must be incarnated, we are saying — says Standaert — that it needs to «take on a new flesh in the other culture, with all that this implies as regards growth» (p. 561)<sup>19</sup>.

Besides, Standaert adds, it is not so much *Christianity* that is inculturated, as *people*, and *local people* at that: «I inculturate to myself a foreign datum; thus the people of Zaire inculturate the Gospel to themselves; they incarnate the Gospel in their culture» (p. 562). Further, he stresses that the Christian message is basically «passive» in the process of inculturation, like Christ who becoming man underwent experiences like being wrapped in swaddling clothes. Standaert claims that this passiveness of Christianity to the local cultures leads

<sup>16</sup> The implication appears to be that the Magisterium is in two minds about this aspect of inculturation. However, we should point out that Standaert only gives references (p. 559), not direct quotations, to confirm his opinion. Also, what Standaert actually says in itself proves nothing, inasmuch as (following his definition) adaptation *also* refers to local culture (albeit in a different way).

<sup>17</sup> P. ARRUPÉ, *Lettre et document de travail sur l'inculturation*, in *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu* XVII/2 (1978) 283.

<sup>18</sup> P. BEAUCHAMP, *Le récit, la lettre et le corps*, Du Cerf, Paris 1982, 142-143.

<sup>19</sup> Presumably divesting itself of its previous flesh (the cultural trappings it brought with it from the missionary's culture). One of the major implications of this process is that the new culture will condition the Christian message, since the Christian message is taking root «not in a desert, but in a forest with great trees» (p. 561).

to an enrichment of the cultures concerned but requires the Church to accept she will be subject to a certain amount of *conditioning* (p. 562).

At the end of this sub-section Standaert returns to the Magisterium which he quotes to the effect that Christianity plays an *active* role in inculturation («the Church assumes everything in all peoples»). To this, Standaert adds a dissenting voice (on the basis of what he has just said about Christianity's duty to play a primarily *passive* role) saying: «inculturation is not only an active process» (p. 562). In a footnote he quotes P. Beauchamp: «Let us not go on repeating, like a consecrated formula, that the Church has always adopted the most diverse cultures, etc. Certain great obstacles have never been overcome: that's a fact»<sup>20</sup>.

The third sub-section has as its title: *Evangelisation of cultures and inculturation of the Gospel*. Here is presented the third important distinction Standaert wishes to make. He quotes C. Geffré as saying: «The process of evangelisation follows a double movement. There is at the same time the inculturation of Christianity and the Christianisation of culture»<sup>21</sup>.

According to Standaert the Gospel message «is such an amazing event<sup>22</sup> for each individual and each culture that it necessarily brings about a break with the original culture» (p. 563). This conversion or change, brought about in a culture by contact with Christianity can be called, he says, «the evangelisation of cultures». He does not say this break is wrong. He sees it as something inevitable, given the *metanoia* demanded by Christ. But he implies that the resultant broken pieces (*my* image) need to be put together again.

For Fr. Standaert, this is where inculturation comes in: «Inculturation stresses an altogether different aspect (...): «Each culture expresses the Gospel in an original way and manifests new aspects (of it). Inculturation is thus an element of the recapitulation of all things in Christ (cf. Eph 1:10) and of the catholicity of the Church (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 16, 17)»» (p. 563)<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>20</sup> BEAUCHAMP, op. cit., 139, in STANDAERT, art. cit., 563, note 30.

<sup>21</sup> C. GEFFRÉ, *Le christianisme au risque de l'interprétation*, Du Cerf, Paris 1983, 222f (p. 563, note 32).

<sup>22</sup> In the original, «un fait si étrange».

<sup>23</sup> The text Standaert quotes comes from INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Selected Themes of Ecclesiology...* (1984), 4, 2, in *Documenta* (1969-1985), Vatican City 1988, 500-501.

Having made this distinction<sup>24</sup>, Standaert says that both aspects (evangelisation and inculturation) are necessary, but that the texts of the Magisterium confuse the two<sup>25</sup>. As a result, «the originality of inculturation» (p. 564) risks being lost. Standaert proceeds to suggest that all this may be due to the fact that the Magisterium has chosen a «minimalist» interpretation of Vatican II, *Ad Gentes* 22, against the «maximalist» interpretation which he attributes to de Lubac and K. Rahner. The «maximalists» would stress the autonomy of local cultures, allowing experimentation, which (despite the known risks) should *precede* theological reflexion (p. 564). Basically, confidence should be placed in the local Churches.

The «minimalist» view is, says Standaert<sup>26</sup>, afraid of experiments by local Churches and, though speaking vaguely of pluriformity, stresses the importance of not putting tradition in danger (p. 564).

Standaert proceeds to give evidence that this «minimalist» view is at work in Rome, by quoting an address of Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of India in 1986, where Paul VI's *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 63 is partially quoted, so as to stress the fact that there should not be «the slightest betrayal of the essential truth» (p. 565).

Standaert quotes other documents (the *Relatio Finalis* of the 1985 Synod; the 1986 *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation* and the 1986 *Report on «sects» or «religious movements»*) to show that the same «minimalising» tendencies are at work<sup>27</sup>.

As a result, Standaert says, «the essence of inculturation gets lost in vagueness»<sup>28</sup>.

Concluding this third sub-section, Standaert says we need to restore a clear distinction between «evangelisation of cultures» and

<sup>24</sup> The only authoritative backing Standaert gives for his definitions of these two elements is that of Geffré, which we have quoted. The two terms *are* used by the Pope and by the International Theological Commission, but it is not by any means clear that the Pope or the Commission accept the distinctive meanings given to them by Standaert.

<sup>25</sup> «In fact too often the Roman texts see inculturation as the contribution with which the Gospel enriches cultures, which enables it to “elevate them and transform them” (...) instead of seeing in it the contribution of cultures to the discovery, interpretation and carrying out (“*réalisation*”, in the original) of this same Gospel» (p. 564).

<sup>26</sup> Quoting A. CAMPS, O.F.M., *Évangile et inculturation: L'aspect théologique du problème*, in «Église et mission» 240 (1985) 29.

<sup>27</sup> He makes the point that none of these last named documents emanate from the Pope himself (p. 566).

<sup>28</sup> «L'essentiel de l'inculturation se perd dans le vague» (p. 567).

«inculturation of the Gospel» and (with a touch of humour) asks us to be aware that this minimalist Roman interpretation of Vatican II is itself a sign of inculturation «by the Roman Magisterium» (pp. 567f).

The Conclusion (pp. 568-70) is an appeal, quoting Fathers Arupe and Masson, to humbly welcome local cultures rather than disdainfully distrust them. Rather than stifle originality, we should encourage it, recognising we do not know Christ in his fulness but still have much to learn about him (and specifically from local cultures).

### 5. Critique of Standaert

Though his tone is moderate, Fr. Standaert makes severe accusations against the Church's Magisterium. One's first instinct, as a Catholic and student of theology, is to reject them out of hand. We have chosen not to do this, not because we doubt the validity of the Magisterium, but because, in our opinion, Standaert has done a service in expressing in (relatively) respectful language what a number of other people feel and are acting out in different parts of the world. If we can establish a real dialogue, good can emerge, for the Church and for souls. We shall comment therefore on a number of points arising from Standaert's article.

On page 555, he tells us frankly that in analysing the texts of the Magisterium his aim has *not* been «to find out what the Magisterium is teaching<sup>29</sup>, but to examine how the originality of inculturation has been transmitted». There is a danger here: as Catholics we should always strive to approach the Magisterium (or Scripture) with an attitude of filial love and respect, even when the Magisterium, as often happens in our present case, is approaching a matter with a spirit of dialogue rather than seeking to lay down the law.

In distinguishing (pp. 555-59) between adaptation (or accommodation) and inculturation, Standaert has the support of Roest Crollius. The latter, however, is more modest in his language: «Those who contributed to its formation (that is, to the formation of the term inculturation) and adopted it as an expression of the dynamic relation between the Church and the variety of cultures had several other terms at their disposal. The word «adaptation» was perhaps

<sup>29</sup> In the original: «non pour y chercher un enseignement du Magistère».

the most widely used. In employment and meaning, it could be considered as identical with «accommodation». Both terms, however, were felt as expressive more of an extrinsic contact between the Christian message and a given culture»<sup>30</sup>. It is worth nothing that, unlike inculturation, the term adaptation was used extensively by Vatican II<sup>31</sup>. What is open to question is the accuracy of Standaert's definitions. Of the four authors he cites, two (Arrupe and Roest Crollius) are not explicit; the other two (Maurier and Geffré) are, and confirm Standaert's view that inculturation (as opposed to adaptation) cannot be done by the missionaries but must be done by the local people<sup>32</sup>. However, these two authors write in 1986 (Maurier) and 1983 (Geffré), whereas the works quoted of Arrupe and Roest Crollius are dated 1978. The Magisterium, which by Standaert's own admission has *not* accepted his way of distinguishing inculturation from adaptation (but instead gives the name of inculturation to what Standaert would call adaptation)<sup>33</sup>, was already using the term inculturation in 1979 and applying it to Matteo Ricci in 1982<sup>34</sup>.

From the above data I deduce the following:

1) the term adaptation was certainly in use long before inculturation and was adopted by the Second Vatican Council.

2) However, this word has evident drawbacks, which the Council itself notes, by stressing that adaptation must not lead to an altering of the Christian message and that, whereas adaptation (in the sense of ensuring that the Christian message effectively reaches the

<sup>30</sup> ROEST CROLLIUS, *What is So New, cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example: GS 44a; AG 22c; SC 37-40; SC 119. See also, after the Council, PAUL VI, M.P. *Ecclesiae Sanctae*, 6-VIII-1966, III, 18 (2), which implements AG 22; and also SACRED CONGREGATION OF RITES, Instr. *Musicam Sacram*, 5-III-67, 61.

<sup>32</sup> STANDAERT, *art. cit.*, 556 note 3. Maurier writes: «On a répété que l'inculturation ne pouvait être faire que par les autochtones» (H. MAURIER, *Réflexion d'un participant* at the Annual Congress of the SEDOS on third world theologies, in «Spiritus» 27 (1986) 251). Geffré for his part says: «L'émergence d'un christianisme africain, japonais ou chinois ne peut être l'oeuvre de missionnaires étrangers, mais la création — dans l'Esprit du Christ — par les Églises locales elles-mêmes de figures historiques différentes du même christianisme» (C. GEFFRÉ, *Le christianisme au risque de l'interprétation*, Du Cerf, Paris 1983, 306).

<sup>33</sup> See above, Section 4 and note 16.

<sup>34</sup> What I am saying is that, to prove his case, Standaert would need to show that inculturation meant what he says it means well *before* (not *after*) the Magisterium began to use it in a different sense.

people to whom it is addressed) has always taken place<sup>35</sup>, it is *not* the main thing: «The principal instrument of this work of implanting the Church is the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ»<sup>36</sup>.

3) Hence, the word inculturation was coined<sup>37</sup>.

4) (This next step is my contribution) the Magisterium has accepted the word *inculturation* to cover, in a broad sense, *both* what Standaert considers adaptation and what he considers inculturation. And the Magisterium has done this *deliberately* in order to prevent a dichotomy developing between the work of the missionaries and that of the people receiving their message (the «missioned»), a dichotomy which — though *humanly* explicable — the Church cannot accept. Both missionary and «missioned» are Catholics, united, members of the One Body of Christ and they would be betraying Christ if they allowed their differences (which are *minor* matters compared with the Good News of salvation) to divide them. In acting this way, the Church is «drawing the poison» from a potentially toxic brew.

5) This broader definition in no way prevents the work of inculturation (in Standaert's narrow sense) from being done. But it restores it to its rightful place in the Church: it is not a question of «local people versus the missionaries» but of loyal hardworking cooperation between all members of the one Catholic communion.

6) Finally, it should be noted that this unifying concept of inculturation ensures a continuing role for people like Fr. Standaert (who I am assuming is a «Westerner»). Otherwise, following his logic, all the work of inculturation — including the *theory* of inculturation in each local place — would have to be done by the local people; and the missionary would not only have to hand over the reins of the *practical* aspects of inculturation to the local people, but also have

<sup>35</sup> «The Church learned early in its history to express the Christian message in the concepts and languages of different peoples and tried to clarify it in the light of the wisdom of their philosophers: it was an attempt to adapt the Gospel to the understanding of all men and the requirements of the learned, insofar as this could be done. Indeed, this kind of adaptation and preaching of the revealed Word must ever be the law of all evangelisation» (GS 44a).

<sup>36</sup> AG 6c. See also AG 6a: «This task (the Church's missionary activity) (...) is one and the same everywhere and in all situations. (...) The differences which must be recognised in this activity of the Church, do not flow from the inner nature of the mission itself, but from the circumstances in which it is exercised».

<sup>37</sup> As Roest Crollius explains, see above Section 2.



to exercise mental and writing silence about the *theory* of inculturation (at least about inculturation in the «mission lands») because, if not, he would be threatening to impose his (Western) view of inculturation on the «missioned».

Turning to the second sub-section of Standaert's article<sup>38</sup>, we can say that there is general agreement that incarnation and inculturation are related. The problems begin when we ask what is meant by «incarnation» in this context. This is a key issue because Standaert agrees that if we understand incarnation in the normal sense (of God becoming man, and the analogies which are drawn directly from this fact) we are not talking about (what he sees as) inculturation but adaptation.

Standaert proceeds to offer alternatives: either avoid using the word incarnation altogether in the context of inculturation<sup>39</sup>. Or, given the commitment of the Magisterium to the relation incarnation-inculturation, to restrict the meaning of incarnation in this particular context. Here, it seems to me that Standaert becomes rather complicated. He not only suggests that the verb inculturation should be used not of the missionaries but of the local people, but then goes on to propose that it should be used primarily in a reflexive («I inculturate the Gospel to myself») <sup>40</sup> or passive form («the Gospel is inculturated by the local culture») <sup>41</sup>.

Focusing his attention on Christ, Standaert suggests we leave aside Christ's *active* role in becoming man and concentrate on his *passive* role (the example given, as we have already mentioned<sup>42</sup>, is Christ's being wrapped in swaddling clothes)<sup>43</sup>.

<sup>38</sup> Pages 559-563; see also, above, Section 4.

<sup>39</sup> He tells us (p. 561 note 26) that Roest Crollius never uses the word incarnation in this context; Standaert also suggests alternatives, such as insertion, integration, etc.

<sup>40</sup> «Je m'inculture (à moi-même) telle donnée étrangère; ainsi les Zaïrois s'inculturent l'Évangile» (p. 562).

<sup>41</sup> Page 562. In my opinion, to attempt grammatical limitations of this kind on the usage of a new term is to threaten the term with immediate obsolence.

<sup>42</sup> In Section 4.

<sup>43</sup> Why this stress on the convenience of being *passive* which, at first sight, appears a distinctly odd thing to ask of a Christian? Standaert does not explain, but it seems likely that it is an attempt to correct a certain attitude among some missionaries who could have been too *active*, implanting not only the message of Christ but also inducing their «missioned» to adopt all kinds of practices (belonging to the missionaries) that did not pertain to the essence of Christianity. For Standaert to stress the *passive* role is a way of telling the missionaries to be humble, docile, unassuming, not overbearing, but rather detached

The conclusion of all this is Standaert's stress that inculturation is not so much an activity of the Church or of Christianity, but of the local culture to which both the Church and «the Christian experience» subject themselves, accepting a certain amount of conditioning<sup>44</sup>. If the Church does not accept that it must play a somewhat passive role, then the risk, says Standaert quoting Beauchamp (p. 563)<sup>45</sup>, is that there will be areas of local cultures which Christianity, despite all the talk about «assuming everything in all peoples», will never in fact reach<sup>46</sup>.

The problem posed is real and not easily answered. I will attempt to reply with two lines of argument, the first based on our *real* notion of the Church; the second, on the importance or lack of it of inculturation<sup>47</sup>.

For a Protestant, it is feasible to hold that the visible Church of Christ may have erred on essential matters and done so for centuries. A Catholic, however, believes that the Church cannot err in this way, either in theory (she is protected by the Holy Spirit), or in fact (in her nearly two thousand years journey through history she has always been *Mater et Magistra*). What errors there have been, have been committed by men *who have been unfaithful to Christ's teaching*, a teaching given once and for all by Christ to the Apostles and which the Church preserves and hands on as a sacred deposit<sup>48</sup>.

from themselves (and their culture) and open to all the good and noble features of the local people and *their* culture.

Seen in this light, *passivity* becomes quite attractive. However, I think the matter deserves some comment:

i) is the picture here given of missionaries in the past based on a serious historical analysis or — to put it bluntly — on a *parti pris* approach that would interpret *all* missionary work as a form of «imperialism»?

ii) is the adjective *passive* the most felicitous to describe what is wanted of the missionaries today? I would have thought the process of detachment from self and openness to others (for God's sake) would more accurately and more attractively be described as a highly *active* role.

<sup>44</sup> «Ceci implique également que l'Église et l'expérience chrétienne se soumettent à certains conditionnements» (p. 562).

<sup>45</sup> See above, Section 4 note 20.

<sup>46</sup> Once again visions of the «impenetrability» of some aspects of Chinese culture loom large; cf. Section 3 note 14, above.

<sup>47</sup> A third line of argument is that the entire analysis outlined in the previous paragraph leaves an unwelcome taste in one's mouth. To oppose «the Church» (with «Christianity») to «local culture» is a sign of a deficient ecclesiology: are the local people *not* the Church, are they *not* Christians? Is Standaert identifying the Church with the (Western) missionaries? I judge it best not to follow this line, since I think Standaert does not really hold these views, though his expressions at times open themselves to these interpretations.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. 1 Tim 6: 20.



When someone raises the question of Chinese rites<sup>49</sup>, a Catholic cannot let himself get disconcerted. The principal answer, in all cases, is to preach the Gospel of Christ. If someone says that the local culture is likely to be endangered as a result, the Catholic replies: «If it is true culture, it will stand. If it is false, it will wither». And sometimes (like Paul and Barnabas, whom the people of Lystra wished to worship as the gods Mercury and Jupiter), Christians — out of loyalty to God — will have to actively denounce its falsehood: «You must turn away from follies like this to the worship of the living God»<sup>50</sup>.

Only when (and *as long as*) people are willing to listen first to Christ, can we seriously approach the question of appreciating local culture. Because «The Fathers of the Church constantly proclaim that what was not assumed by Christ was not healed»<sup>51</sup>.

Thus, it is wrong to start saying that we are not interested in a major part of Christ's incarnation, and will pay attention only to its passive aspects, such as his being wrapped in swaddling clothes. To divide Christ in this way is asking for trouble.

This brings us to the second line of reply. When we talk of inculturation, do we mean something of vital importance to the Church, or are we dealing with a minor matter?

If — speaking hypothetically — we were to accept Standaert's definition, that is, that inculturation refers to that part of the incarnation which is *passive* (and leaves aside all the active aspects of God becoming man); or — in the same line — if inculturation refers only to the way the local people and their culture contribute to the faith, leaving aside all that Christianity contributes *to them*, then the inescapable conclusion is that inculturation plays a very minor role in the Church's life. Standaert's example of the wrapping of Jesus in swaddling clothes here becomes particularly illuminating. Certainly

<sup>49</sup> Or their equivalents elsewhere, for example Latin American basic communities, or Zaire dances.

<sup>50</sup> Acts 14:14. In passing, let us recall that Paul and Barnabas «failed» in Lystra, Paul being stoned and left for dead (Acts 14:18). But Christians have never been over concerned about such «failures»; as we read in Matt 10:14-15: «Wherever they will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet as you leave that city or that house; (v. 15) I promise you, it shall go less hard with the land of Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgement, than with that city».

<sup>51</sup> AG 3b, which, in a footnote, quotes eight Fathers of the Church, thus underlining the importance the Council attaches to getting this point across.

it could be the object of an article in a learned theological journal («Hebrew-Aramaic forms of wrapping new born babes in swaddling clothes in Galilee in the times of the Emperor Augustus») but it is not a subject of vital, day-to-day importance to the Church.

Standaert and those who agree with him are, in my opinion, faced with a dilemma. Either, *with* the Magisterium, to accept a broad meaning for the concept of inculturation, a meaning which in principle includes the *whole* significance of «incarnation» when we say that inculturation signifies «the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures» (in this case, inculturation will play a major role in Christian thought and practice for the foreseeable future); or to invent a new term (since the Magisterium has already given *its* meaning to inculturation) to cover the much more restricted meaning Standaert proposes (but then no longer expecting many people to be concerned with it).

My opinion is that the first option is clearly the best, because important questions *are* being raised by Standaert and his colleagues and it would be a pity if these authors opted out of the general debate in the Church. Also, from *their* point of view, their contribution will only be fruitful if it is offered *in communion* with the Church. Not only because of the simple fact that every Catholic should obey (follow, respect, study, feed upon) the Magisterium. But also because the very notions of «Christ's *passive* role in the Incarnation» or «the contribution of local culture to Christianity» *only have a meaning* when seen together with, respectively, Christ's *active* role, and Christianity's redemption of man and culture.

Passing now to the third sub-section of Standaert's article and his distinction between the «evangelisation of cultures» and «inculturation of the Gospel», we cannot agree with the distinction as drawn by Standaert, a distinction which he admits with due frankness has not been confirmed by the Magisterium (p. 564).

Let us see what he says: «The annunciation of the Gospel, we underline this fact, the annunciation of Christ become man, dead and risen, is such an amazing event for each culture and for each individual that it necessarily brings about a break with the original culture or cultural milieu. Christ calls for a conversion, a renewal, a *metanoia*. What is happening here is an *acculturation*: the change brought about in a culture by coming into contact with Christiani-

ty. In this sense we can speak of evangelisation of cultures or Christianisation of cultures» (p. 563)<sup>52</sup>.

If we analyse this carefully, what Standaert is saying is that Christ provokes such a shock that he *necessarily* causes a break with human culture.

I venture to suggest that this is not compatible with Christian teaching, which tells us that Christ is the way, the truth, the life, and the light of the world<sup>53</sup>. Not compatible, that is, unless we identify human culture with the darkness which Christ came to dispel. Grace, we have always been taught, comes not to destroy nature but to perfect it. To allow ourselves to think, even for a moment, that Christianity *necessarily* brings about a break with culture, is to get things altogether wrong. And this wrong is not remedied by saying that inculturation immediately comes along to put the pieces together again. What Christianity defeats is not man, not culture, but death and darkness<sup>54</sup>.

<sup>52</sup> See also above, note 21.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. John 14:6 and 1:9; and also Matt 5:14. One of the most quoted texts in inculturation is Paul VI's fear of such a break coming about, through human neglect: «The break between Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the drama of our age, as it was also of other ages. We need therefore to make every possible effort to carry out a generous evangelisation of culture, or more accurately, of cultures. They need to be regenerated through meeting the Good News» (PAUL VI, Ap. Exh. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 8-XII-75, 20c, in *Insegnamenti di Paolo VI*, XIII - 1975 - 1449; our translation). In his recent Ap. Exh. *Christifideles Laici*, 30-XII-88, 34f, Pope John Paul writes: «To open wide our doors to Christ, to welcome him into the space of our own humanity is not at all a threat for man, but rather the only way to go forward if we wish to recognise man in the full truth of his being».

<sup>54</sup> Another point needs to be made about this paragraph in Standaert's article: the meaning he gives to *acculturation*. This appears to be significantly different from that given by Roest Crolius' (in *What is So New*, cit., p. 4) who says of it: «it denotes the contact between cultures and the ensuing changes. The adoption of this term (to describe the Church's insertion in a given culture), however, would also present some difficulties. First of all, the relation between the Church and a given culture is not the same as the contact between cultures. The Church "in virtue of her mission and nature, is bound to no particular form of culture" (GS 42)». Roest Crolius speaks therefore of a *contact* between cultures (and on page 7 of his article accepts that — although acculturation and inculturation are not identical — since the Christian message is always vested in *some* cultural clothing, «the process of inculturation has also the characteristics of a process of acculturation»). Standaert instead has just told us that Christianity is not just *having contact* with the local culture: it is bringing about a *break* («provoque nécessairement une rupture»). When two cultures meet and one destroys the other (which appears to be Standaert's supposition here) we cannot accept an analogy with Christianity. If instead (following Roest Crolius' view, as I understand it) two cultures meet and each both gives and takes from the other, which is what normally happens (for example, the English language, which still reflects the 1066 Norman Conquest, where the Normans took over as rulers but left much of the domestic Anglo-Saxon life as it was), then analogies can be made with Christianity.

What we *can* do is to admit that sometimes, to become Christians, people have had to make a complete break with their own culture. What we *cannot* do is to lay the blame for this at Christianity's door. If, as still happens not infrequently nowadays, a Jewish community tells one of its members that if he or she becomes a Catholic they must accept a total break with all their Jewish contacts, this is not Christianity's fault. Certainly, in an «either-or» situation, a Christian must be willing to forego everything in order to obey God<sup>55</sup>. However, in so acting, the Christian's deepening attitude to his culture is not one of rupture, but rather: «I love my land and people a lot, but I must love God first». Once this priority is established, his love for his own culture can find full expression<sup>56</sup>. Standaert could rightly point out that this is not automatic and that sometimes Christians remain for generations as a misunderstood (and non-integrated) community. Here we would agree that an important work of inculturation needs to be done, but we would add that *it will only be effective* if we never forget that Christ is light and life, that he does not destroy<sup>57</sup>.

Standaert next proceeds to suggest that, in his words, «some Roman documents» out of fear are not following (a «maximalist» interpretation of) Vatican II, AG 22. Here we are faced with a question of methodology. A Catholic theologian should surely start out with the conviction that the authentic interpreter of the Church's teaching (in this case, the Second Vatican Council) is the Magisterium? In our present case, as Standaert with all honesty points out, it is not just once, but a number of times that the Pope and various organs of the Holy See have given an interpretation different from the one he favours. The conclusion to be drawn should be obvious.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Luke 14:25-33.

<sup>56</sup> I would like to emphasise that this choice for God is not one which is incapable of being revoked. Once made, at the beginning of a person's Christian life (or at the beginning of the effective evangelisation of a country), it nevertheless has to be renewed and re-confirmed constantly. The devil is always trying to get both individuals and cultures to revert to sin and darkness; the fight to be faithful to Christ is never-ending: «that man will be saved, who endures to the last» (Matt 10:22).

<sup>57</sup> We must add, in honour of the truth, that when Christians have remained non-integrated for long periods the fault has usually been not theirs but of the local culture which has shown itself intolerant (one thinks of the Christians of Nagasaki, or the English Recusants, or dissident Christians in Soviet Russia).

Standaert claims (p. 565) that, on a certain occasion, Pope John Paul II quotes *Evangelii Nuntiandi* 63 partially. A sympathetic reading of the Holy Father's words would surely be that John Paul II has purposely chosen *in that particular context* to quote only part of Paul VI's text, and has done so to emphasise what he wants to say: he does not want «the least betrayal of the essential truth (of the Gospel message)»<sup>58</sup>.

Standaert complains that little reference is made in these documents of «the adaptation of the Church to cultures» (p. 566), that little importance is given to the local Churches (p. 567) and, with a touch of sadness, he tells us that the essence of inculturation has thus got lost in vagueness (p. 567). He pleads with the Roman Magisterium not to betray inculturation by carrying out its own (Roman) process of inculturation on the spirit of Vatican II (pp. 567f).

The answer to this has been given in our comments to the previous sub-section of Standaert's article. If inculturation were to be what Standaert claims it is, then inculturation is a trifling matter, to be ignored by all but a few specialists. If instead it is the «incarnation of the Gospel in local cultures», then it is of major import to the Church. In this case, if we are to do it effectively, we must strive to do so in close union with the Church's Magisterium, which our Faith tells us, is endowed with «the sure charism of truth»<sup>59</sup>.

Furthermore, I suggest that the very criticism which Standaert levels against documents of the Roman Magisterium, that they «constitute a particular "inculturation" of the spirit of Vatican II: inculturation by the Roman Magisterium»<sup>60</sup>, destroys the very basis of his thesis. If Rome itself can get inculturation wrong, what guaran-

<sup>58</sup> What I am saying is that we cannot take exception to the words quoted, which are perfectly Catholic. Pope John Paul II could have said them on his own authority. If he has wished to associate Paul VI with himself in this context, he has every right to do so. As he has every right *not to quote* other words of Paul VI, because in his judgement they may not be required *in the context*. Standaert's complaint is that what for Paul VI was an aside becomes, for John Paul II, the principal message. I do not know, and it is not for me to say, why John Paul II has chosen to quote just part of Paul VI's words. But since Standaert has drawn attention to the fact, one might speculate that John Paul II has wanted to redirect attention to what, for Paul VI, was obvious (and therefore could be said as an aside), because for some authors today it has ceased to be obvious.

<sup>59</sup> VATICAN II, DV 8b.

<sup>60</sup> In the original: «ils (les textes analysés) représentent une "inculturation" particulière de l'esprit de Vatican II: l'inculturation par le (p. 568) Magistère romain» (pp. 567-568).

tee can there be that *any local Church* will get it right?<sup>61</sup>. The Catholic answer is that there is a teaching authority in the Church, which is the living incarnation and (therefore) continuation of Christ, and is protected in important matters by the charism of infallibility. It is precisely our respectful obedience to Rome which gives us confidence that we can get inculturation right.

In his conclusion, Standaert, as we have already said, makes an appeal for the respect and welcome of cultures. On this we can all agree<sup>62</sup>, but without forgetting our Catholic faith. Here, perhaps, can be found our original point of divergence with Standaert. He refers to the welcome of cultures and speaks of «cette inspiration première». If, as I suspect may be the case, he means that the primary inspiration behind his notion of inculturation is the need to welcome cultures<sup>63</sup>, then I think the Church's Magisterium is giving him this answer: «Our primary inspiration is, has been and will always be, the message of Jesus Christ. Once this is respected, we will by all means give a sincere welcome to all cultures. But if there is any doubt as to the primacy to be attributed to Christ, then the Church will resolutely refuse to walk down such a path. Because, in the event of having to make a choice between Christ and any other value, she will always — infallibly — choose Christ».

## Part Two. Inculturation in the light of the Magisterium

We return now to the usage made of inculturation in the Magisterium. As we have said, Pope John Paul II has used the concept often, and understands it as «the incarnation of the Gospel in

<sup>61</sup> Unless, that is, we are being asked to abandon the criterion of objective truth, and to say that «what is local is right» (just because it is local).

<sup>62</sup> Remembering, however, that this welcome should extend also to the decision of local cultures to welcome «Western culture». It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that some false sympathisers of indigenisation might seek to prevent local people from opening out to the riches of other cultures. I recently heard that in Lagos (Nigeria) many parishes have a well attended Latin Mass on Sundays. This too is an aspect of *local culture* that deserves to be welcomed.

<sup>63</sup> On reading Fr. Masson's 1962 article (cf. note 7, above), I think it would not be unfair to say that the impression given is of a quasi-Teilhardian hymn to the Church's «opening to the world»: for example, «the Church by its very nature cannot but seek to rejoin, in order to save it, a World which groans throughout its being, as it awaits a new birth, more admirable than that of its early days. What was marvellously created, must be even more marvellously assumed in its entirety in an immense cosmic (act of) praise by the Redeemer Son to the Creator Father» (*art. cit.*, p. 1033) (the translation is mine).

native cultures»<sup>64</sup>. By inculturation, the faith is introduced into a local culture. Another term which is sometimes used as a synonym of inculturation is *indigenisation*<sup>65</sup>.

An important aspect of the work of inculturation is to avoid a rupture between the faith and local culture taking place. Local cultural values should be integrated<sup>66</sup>.

John Paul II stresses that inculturation is not a simple certification and confirmation of local cultures. The Faith does not just consolidate culture: it criticises, purifies, converts<sup>67</sup>. In Vatican II we read, of the Church, that «the effect of her work is that whatever good is found sown in the minds and hearts of men or in the rites

<sup>64</sup> See above, Section 1, and Section 2 note 12.

<sup>65</sup> For example, «In this work of inculturation, of indigenisation, which is already well begun, as in the whole work of evangelisation, many particular matters will arise along the way, concerning such and such a custom — I am thinking in particular of the difficult problems of marriage —, such and such a religious sign, such and such a method. These are difficult questions and the finding of answers to them is entrusted to your pastoral responsibility, to you Bishops, in dialogue with Rome» (*Meeting with the Bishops of Zaire, Kinshasa, 3-V-80, 6, in IGP2 III, 1, (1980) 1087; the translation is ours*). Note how *inculturation* and *indigenisation* are seen by the Pope as more or less equivalent. And his admission that there are knotty problems, for example, in the field of marriage; and how it is for the local people to work out solutions, with Rome's help. We will see more of this in Section 8.

<sup>66</sup> «Evangelisation cannot but borrow elements from cultures. The break between Gospel and culture would be a drama (cf. PAUL VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20). The positive elements, the spiritual values of African man need to be integrated, integrated even more. Christ has come to fulfil. We must therefore strive to make a *tireless effort of inculturation* to ensure that the faith does not end up superficial» (*Meeting with intellectuals and university students, Yaoundé, Cameroon, 13-VIII-1985, 8, in IGP2 VIII, 2 - 1985 - 371; our translation*). The text of Paul VI has been quoted above, in note 53. On the need to avoid superficiality, see also below, Section 10, where we also touch on another problem of this kind, the temptation of returning to old pagan ways, when Christianity has proved to be a tough way of life.

<sup>67</sup> John Paul II says clearly that the Gospel does not come only to consolidate human states of affairs: «But, and we should not forget this either, the Gospel Message does not come simply to consolidate human things, just as they are; it takes on a *prophetic and critical role*. Everywhere, in Europe as in Africa, it comes to overturn criteria of judgement and modes of life (cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 19). It is a call to conversion. It comes to regenerate. It passes through the crucible all that is ambiguous, mixed with weaknesses and sin. It carries out this function with regard to certain practices that have been brought by foreigners along with the faith; but also with regard to certain customs or (p. 372) institutions which it has found among you. The Gospel of God comes always furthermore *to purify and elevate*, so that all that is good, noble, true, just, may be saved, cleansed, developed and may bear its best fruits» (*Meeting with intellectuals and university students, Yaoundé, Cameroon, 13-VIII-1985, 8, in IGP2 VIII, 2 - 1985 - 371-372; n.b. this passage follows on from the one just quoted above*).

and customs of peoples, these are not only preserved from destruction, but are purified, raised up, and perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man»<sup>68</sup>.

### 6. *Is inculturation necessary?*

«The Church (...) is aware that for her a tremendous missionary work still remains to be done. There are two billion people (...) who have never (...) heard the Gospel message (...). If the Church is to be in a position to offer all men the mystery of salvation (...) it must implant itself among all these groups in the same way that Christ by his incarnation committed himself to the particular social and cultural circumstances of the men among whom he lived»<sup>69</sup>. This passage of Vatican II, helps us understand that inculturation is not a luxury, an optional extra. It is essential to the make up of the Church, both as a historical fact, and from the nature of revelation and God's plan of salvation. The Church has always used, and continues to use, human cultural expression to convey its Gospel. One need but consider its employment of Classical philological terminology, terms such as person, hypostasis, ousia, nature, substance, etc.

But this usage is not just a simple historical fact. Inculturation is a basic component of the mystery of the Incarnation: God uses human language to communicate himself<sup>70</sup>.

<sup>68</sup> LG 17. See also AG 9b.

<sup>69</sup> VATICAN II, AG 10.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. *Discourse to the Pontifical Biblical Commission*, 26-IV-79, in IGP2 II, 1 (1979) 980-981. The Pope admits that inculturation is a neologism, but «it expresses very well one of the components of the great mystery of the Incarnation». The Word became flesh, therefore in the flesh we see God. God has chosen to reveal Himself in human terms: «making use of the language and expressions of men» (*ibid.*).

The Discourse was given in French. This is our translation: «The theme before you is one of great importance. It affects, indeed, the very methodology of Biblical Revelation as it is put into effect. The term "acculturation" or "inculturation", despite the fact of being a neologism, expresses very well one of the components of the great mystery of the Incarnation. We know that "The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us" (John 1:14); in such a way that, in Jesus Christ "the son of the carpenter" (Matt 13:55), we can contemplate the very Glory of God (cf. John 1:14). And even before this the word of God had become human language, in taking up modes of expression of different cultures which, from Abraham to the Seer of the Apocalypse, have pronounced the adorable mystery of God's saving love, the possibility of making himself accessible and understandable for succeeding generations, despite the multiple diversities of mankind's historical situations. Thus

It is instructive to look at the praxis of the Bible when we think of inculturation. In Biblical communication we find two clear facts: first, God speaks his message; second, man listens. In delivering his message, God adapts to man, uses his language, respects his culture. But first and foremost God reveals *his* message to man, and man's duty is to listen and follow, and, having done so, to resist the temptation to revert to his old ways. The basic Biblical message is that God calls, and man — responding to the divine call — gives up his old ways and takes on a new life (we see this happening both in the Old Testament, with such as Abraham or Moses; and in the New: Jesus asks his disciples to abandon all and follow him). Only after man has undergone this basic change, this conversion, does God make it clear that he is willing to *build on* human customs, understanding our ways, sanctifying them and approving them... but always on this condition: God is first and it is his revelation that liberates us from slavery<sup>71</sup>. We therefore must avoid the temptation of accepting God's liberation and then promptly forgetting whence it came and attributing to ourselves and our culture a self-sufficiency they have

“many times and in diverse manners” (Hebr 1:1) God has established contact with men and, in his benevolence and fathomless condescendence, has dialogued with them through the prophets, the apostles, the sacred writers and, above all, through the Son of Man. God has always communicated his marvels using the language and expressions of men. The cultures of Mesopotamia, of Egypt, of Canaan, of Persia, Hellenic culture and, as regards the New Testament, Greco-Roman culture and the late Jewish culture, have served, day by day, for the revelation of his ineffable mystery of salvation, as your present plenary session manifests».

We should remember that the content of revelation and of the Church's Magisterium is divine. The human aspect is simply the vehicle. In using human words, the Church sometimes coins new ones (such as incarnation or transubstantiation). And when it uses old ones, it often gives them a much deeper meaning (for example, Father, Word, Grace, person, substance). Also, as well as using the *via affirmativa* (which uses human concepts and applies them to God), the Church also uses the *via negativa et via eminentiae*, which remind us that human language is of its very nature insufficient to speak about God and ultimately must often fall silent, incapable of expressing the ineffable. Here we link up with the experience of the mystics.

<sup>71</sup> Speaking of the development of the liturgy, Cardinal Ratzinger has said: «Conversion to Christianity means, initially, turning away from pagan forms of life. There was a very clear awareness of this in the first Christian centuries. (...) Not until a strong Christian identity has grown up in the mission country can one begin to move, with great caution and on the basis of this identity, towards christening the indigenous forms by adopting them into the liturgy and allowing Christian realities to merge with the forms of everyday life» (J. RATZINGER, *Change and Permanence in Liturgy*, in *The Feast of Faith*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco 1986, 82; this book is a translation of *Das Fest des Glaubens*, Johannes Verlag, Einsiedeln 1981).

never had. This temptation shows itself typically in a hankering after our old ways. When the Jews in the desert want to go back to Egypt, they are told they must not do so, very clearly<sup>72</sup>. The importance of receptiveness to God as man's first and basic step comes out clearly in the vision Paul received which led to the evangelisation of Greece. A Macedonian appears, pleading: «Come over into Macedonia, and help us!». He recognises they need God's help and does not lay down pre-conditions<sup>73</sup>.

One of the great roles of inculturation is to repair the damage done by the Tower of Babel<sup>74</sup>. Ever since then, human culture has been an excuse for dividing men from God. Proper inculturation can rebuild the alliance with the Wisdom of God<sup>75</sup>.

### 7. *Is inculturation a good thing?*

Inculturation is a good thing and this is worthwhile stressing, since some people see it simply as a necessary evil, something to be put up with. This standpoint is unacceptable. To say that the ideal would be an instantaneous and effortless communication of Christianity to mankind, would be like saying that the Messiah should have appeared suddenly from nowhere. Whereas in fact Christ became man, spending nine months in his Blessed Mother's womb, and then he grew like any other child in and into a family, in and into society. Inculturation, then, is a good thing. For the Church to neglect culture would be «like fleeing from her own responsibilities, an omis-

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Exod 16:3. It should be added that the Jews in the desert had the honesty, not always evident in some 20th Century liberationists, to admit that they were opting to return to their former state of bondage (cf. Exod 14:12).

<sup>73</sup> Acts 16:9.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Gen 11:9; and VATICAN II, AG 4. See also INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, Document *Fede e Inculturazione* (1988), II, 23, in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3326, 21-1-89, 168. Talking of Pentecost, the Holy Father has said: «In opposition to the Babel of languages and peoples described in Genesis (11:1-9) (n. 6) (...) it is the Holy Spirit who intervenes to ensure that each one understands at least something in his own language: “We hear, each of us in his own native language” (Acts 2:8). Today we would speak of an adaptation to the linguistic and cultural conditions of each one. One can see in all this a primary form of “inculturation”, effected by the work of the Holy Spirit» (*Gr. Audience*, 20-IX-89, 5-6, in *L'Observatore Romano*, Engl. ed., 25-IX-89, p. 2).

<sup>75</sup> «It is through “inculturation” that we move towards the complete reconstitution of the alliance with the Wisdom of God» (JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 10c, in IGP2 IV, 2 (1981) 1053).

sion, given the "wound" it would inflict on the Church's own evangelising function»<sup>76</sup>.

### 8. Aspects to bear in mind

The Magisterium tells us that some of the areas which are particularly implicated in the task of inculturation are: a) catechesis, b) theological reflection, c) liturgy, d) sacred art, e) community forms of Christian living, f) ethics, g) marriage questions<sup>77</sup>.

#### a) catechesis

If we look first at catechesis, the Pope has said in Zaire: «In the field of catechesis, there can and there should be presentations which are better adapted to the African soul, without losing sight of the ever more frequent cultural exchanges with the rest of the world. It is important simply to take care that this work is carried out by teams and overseen by the Episcopate, to ensure that the expressions used turn out to be correct and that the whole of the teaching is presented»<sup>78</sup>.

#### b) theological reflection

The International Theological Commission, in their recent Document, outline a number of areas for theological reflection: 1) in Chris-

<sup>76</sup> «If man — as I have written in my first Encyclical — constitutes "the first and fundamental way of the Church" (*Redemptor hominis*, III, 14), how could the Church neglect anything which, even at a simple natural level, directly affects the elevation of man? How could she remain extraneous to the demands and ferments, to the travails and goals, to the difficulties and conquest of today's culture? Would not such a neglect and estrangement be as it were like fleeing from her own responsibilities, and an act of omission, given the "wound" it would inflict on the Church's own evangelising function? In interpreting Christ's supreme command, I hold that we can never insist too much on the pregnant significance and multiple implications of the words *docete* and *docentes* (cf. Matt 28:18-19)» (*Addr. to the Institutes of Catholic education of Rome*, 4-IV-79, 1, in IGP2, II, 1 (1979) 787; the translation is ours).

<sup>77</sup> The Pope in 1980 listed a number of aspects of inculturation: «Africanisation covers broad and deep areas which have not as yet been sufficiently explored; areas such as the language with which to present the Christian message in such a way that it reaches the souls and the hearts of the people of Zaire, catechesis, theological reflection, finding the most suitable expressions in liturgy or in sacred art, community forms of Christian living» (*Meeting with the Bishops of Zaire*, Kinshasa, 3-V-80, 4, in IGP2 III, 1 (1980) 1085; the translation is ours).

<sup>78</sup> *Meeting with the Bishops of Zaire*, Kinshasa, 3-V-80, 5, in IGP2 III, 1 (1980) 1086; the translation is ours.

tian anthropology, the relations between nature, culture and grace; 2) in the history of salvation, the process of inculturation in the Old Testament (which has been tackled also by liberation theology), in the life and works of Christ, and in the early Church; 3) areas of current concern, such as the link between Christian faith and popular piety; attitudes towards non-Christian religions; the «young Churches» and their own traditional cultures; problems posed by industrial and post-industrial culture<sup>79</sup>.

Some would see the work of inculturation leading to a comprehensive revision of how theology has been done in the Church hitherto. While admitting this as a possibility, one would have to add a word of caution. Much is spoken of the differences between the theology of Western and that of Eastern Christianity. The differences exist, but they should not be exaggerated. The faith of the Church is one, and the insights of the East are valid not only for the East but for the whole Church. Thus it is not a sign of good theology to say something like «in my country we do not like St Thomas Aquinas, we need something different». Besides, it is important not to forget that good theology requires good (that is, above all, *saintly*) theologians.

#### c) liturgy

In the wake of the Second Vatican Council, attitudes towards the liturgy have changed considerably. Previously, the liturgy in the Latin rite had been strictly centralised. However, deep down the Church has always been aware of the aspect of inculturation of the liturgy<sup>80</sup>. Local customs have their place in liturgical practice, provided they retain, or can be given, a Christian significance. As the Pope says: «In the field of sacred gestures and liturgy, there is a vast area for enrichment (cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 37 and 38), on the condition that the significance of the Christian rite be retained always and that the universal, catholic, aspect of the Church

<sup>79</sup> Cf. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, Document *Fede e Inculturazione* (1988), I, 88, in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 3326, 21-1-89, 160.

<sup>80</sup> One thinks of the charming (though to foreigners disconcerting) Sevillian custom of page boys dancing during Corpus Christi week before the Blessed Sacrament — the famous *seises*. When the Pope visited Spain in 1982, he gladly accepted to watch these young boys doing their piece. Or the Japanese custom of bowing, rather than kneeling, before the Blessed Sacrament. A custom which the Japanese share with others, such as the Ukrainians.



appear clearly ("the substantial unity of the Roman rite"), in union with the other local Churches and with the agreement of the Holy See»<sup>81</sup>. And he has also said: «Once the elements of a particular culture are seen truly to conform to the revealed message as held and transmitted by the Church, then they can be incorporated into the worship, life and ministry of the ecclesial community»<sup>82</sup>.

A practical example was given by the Holy Father when speaking in the Cameroon to a group of people about to be baptised. He referred to their joyful clothes: «Truly you are being clothed in Christ, a fact signified by the festive clothes you are wearing today. You shall be consecrated to Christ by the anointing of the holy chrism. You shall receive his light»<sup>83</sup>.

#### d) sacred art

This is another fruitful area for inculturation. The Church relies on local people and their customs to find native ways of expressing in art the wonders of the faith: leather work altar frontals in Mexico; pictures of the Holy Family of the *escuela quiteña* (Ecuador); Gothic cathedrals in Europe; African madonnas, etc. Referring to Anglo-Saxon art at the end of the 7th Century, which produced masterpieces like the Lindisfarne Gospels and the Codex Amiatinum, Godfrey writes: «In these various manifestations of art the Anglo-Saxon found an expression of himself which he could scarcely have even imagined in heathen times. He made his priceless contribution to Western culture. It should hardly be necessary to labour the point that this art was carried out under the auspices of the Church and in her practical service. In stone architecture, in sculpture, in painting, the original inspiration and the constant encouragement came

<sup>81</sup> *Meeting with the Bishops of Zaire*, Kinshasa, 3-V-80, 5, in IGP2 III,1 (1980) 1086-1087; the translation is ours. Following this praxis of union with other local Churches, St Monica gave up her North African custom of «taking food to the dead» when she visited cemeteries in Milan, because the custom could be misunderstood (cf. ST AUGUSTINE, *Confessions*, 6, 2, 2).

<sup>82</sup> *Addr. to Kenyan Bishops on the Ad Limina visit*, 20-II-88, 6, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 21-II-88, p. 4. It should be added that, in incorporating these elements, local Christians are not only doing a benefit to themselves. They are also enriching the whole Church, for those customs, as the Pope says to the Ukrainians, «belong to the full catholicity of the Church» (Message *Magnum Baptismi Donum*, for the Millennium of Ukrainian Christianity, 14-II-1988, 6c, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 20-IV-88).

<sup>83</sup> *Homily at Garoua Airport*, Cameroon, 11-VIII-85, 4, in IGP2 VIII, 2 (1985) 316. For further aspects of inculturation and the liturgy, see sub-sections e) and g) below.

from Christianity. The Conversion (that is, to Christianity) found the Saxon a barbarian and left him a man of accomplished attainments. The power of the Christian Faith to transform (p. 185) a people is nowhere more clearly demonstrated. And yet the English remained English. Despite the many influences from Ireland, Rome, and the East, the Anglo-Saxons never lost the character of a Germanic people»<sup>84</sup>.

#### e) community forms of Christian living

The Church always looks for ways of living Christianity better, not only on a personal basis, but also in community. One of the first effects of Christian preaching was that the Apostles, in obedience to the new Commandment of fraternal love<sup>85</sup> created a community where «there was one heart and soul in all»<sup>86</sup>. Down the ages many ways of community living have been practised. One can cite the total renewal, under Christian influence, of family life in Rome and the gradual abolition of slavery. Another example is the long tradition of monastic living. But that is not the end of the story. The Church is constantly renewing herself. One can think of Chesterton and the distributist experiments in England, residences for university students, schools (seen as communities of Christian life), the following up of the idea that the family is the *domestic church*<sup>87</sup>, the family seen as the seedbed of vocations and so on. This community aspect also affects the liturgy. Speaking of «the many positive results of the liturgical reform», *Inaestimabile Donum* cites «a growth in the community sense of liturgical life»<sup>88</sup>.

#### f) ethics

In speaking to the Bishops of Zaire, the Pope told them: «In the ethical aspect, it is right to bring out all the resources of the African soul, which form as it were the bedrock for Christianity. Paul VI had already recalled this in his message to Africa, of 29 October

<sup>84</sup> J. GODFREY, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge University Press, 1962, 184-85.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. John 13:34.

<sup>86</sup> Acts 4:32.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Gal 6:10.

<sup>88</sup> S.C. FOR THE SACRAMENTS AND CHRISTIAN WORSHIP, Instr. *Inaestimabile Donum*, 3-IV-1980, Foreword, in AAS 72 (1980) 333. One thinks of the vast increase in active lay participation in the liturgy in recent years.



1967, and of course you know them better than anyone else, inasmuch as they refer to the spiritual outlook on life, to the sense of the family and the value set on children, to community living, etc. As in all civilisation, there are other aspects that are less favourable»<sup>89</sup>.

g) marriage questions

The Church has a lot of experience of this. The so-called «Petrine privilege» comes immediately to mind<sup>90</sup>. Often, and it is natural that it should be so, the Church will have to uphold the ideals of Christianity, in the face of local resistance, due to the influence of the «old man»<sup>91</sup>. However, not all is difficulty. One thinks nowadays, in particular, of the clear ideas existing in Africa regarding the goodness of having children: here a local culture can give solid support to the Church's traditional teaching. What is clear is that there is a task of inculturation to be done<sup>92</sup>.

### 9. General considerations

A number of general considerations regarding inculturation are: first, the Church protects local culture: «Keep your African roots!» is the Holy Father's call to Africa<sup>93</sup> repeated in other ways to other continents.

<sup>89</sup> *Meeting with the Bishops of Zaire*, Kinshasa, 3-V-80, 5, in IGP2 III, 1 (1980) 1087; the translation is ours.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. article by Fr. Navarrete, quoted in note 14, above; see also A.M. ABATE, O.P., *Il matrimonio nella nuova legislazione canonica*, Urbaniana University Press, Rome 1985, 273-349.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. 1 Tim 4:3 «Some teachers bid them abstain from marriage». A recent example of this firm stand, is that the Church cannot accept the custom in some countries of not celebrating marriage until the spouses have proved their fertility by having their first child: see JOHN PAUL II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 81b. See also E. NNAJIOFOR, *The Problem of Sterility in Igbo Marriage*, unpublished doctoral thesis, Centro Accademico Romano della Santa Croce, Rome 1988.

<sup>92</sup> As regards the liturgy of marriage, Pope John Paul says, speaking of «the competent authorities of the Church» that «It is also for them (...) to include in the liturgical celebration such elements proper to each culture which serve to express more clearly the profound human and religious significance of the marriage contract, provided that such elements contain nothing that is not in harmony with Christian faith and morality» (*Familiaris Consortio*, 67b; see also *ibid.*, 67d).

<sup>93</sup> «Keep your African roots, protect the values of your culture» (*Homily for students*, Yamoussoukro, Ivory Coast, 11-V-1980 in IGP2 III, 1 (1980) 1339).

Second, the importance of freedom for inculturation. The Church has always defended freedom, which is essential if people are to love God. Inculturation cannot be imposed. It must be freely undertaken. At the same time — while granting that inculturation is very important — we need to realise that the fact that inculturation has not been properly effected in a particular place is not a sufficient reason for the people there not to embrace the faith. A lack of inculturation does not take away true freedom, which is internal. Experience indicates that external freedom on its own is not enough<sup>94</sup>. In a Gulag, Solzhenitsyn finds God. In prison, Ghandi finds the strength to fight, as have done the Christian martyrs of each century, whether it be an Edmund Campion or a Maximilian Kolbe. It is worthwhile asking ourselves if sometimes we complain too much. Though we can never justify oppression, a minority (the Basques, English Catholics, Ukrainians, Igbos, Malabarais, etc.) might be better off *with difficulties* than with too much human understanding. Citizens need to be free to express their faith, but it would be naive to think that external freedom is everything. To be a Christian is a tough proposition, always. If there are no external enemies, there will probably be internal ones (such as difficulties of our own making)<sup>95</sup>.

A third general point: inculturation needs to be done carefully, with maturity: in order to get to the truth, we need a critical assessment of the environment in which we move<sup>96</sup>. Inculturation needs to be worked at<sup>97</sup>. Solutions are not always easy to arrive at. They

<sup>94</sup> I am thinking of the lack of freedom hitherto in countries like Communist-run Poland and Russia; and, conversely, the great freedom that exists, apparently, in the West and, with it, widespread religious indifference.

<sup>95</sup> These remarks are not written with the intention of discouraging a proper work of inculturation from being done. They are simply meant as a reminder that inculturation is not *everything* and that, if we make the mistake of regarding it as everything, we will be doing a disservice to Christians and their cultures.

<sup>96</sup> «A university student ought, therefore, to have a permanent programme for attaining the truth. This is not an easy task. It requires study and perseverance; it demands generosity and abnegation. (p. 364) The assimilation of the truth is conditioned by the surrounding culture. Above all you must each one of you make a critical examination and strive to arrive at an *organic synthesis*. Only thus will a university student be in a position to contribute the qualified, committed and creative service which society expects from him or her» (JOHN PAUL II, *Addr. to the students of the University of Santo Tomas*, Manila, 18-II-81, 3, in IGP2 IV, 1 (1981) 363-364, which has an Italian text; this English translation is ours).

<sup>97</sup> Cf. SECRETARIAT FOR NON-CHRISTIANS, *Letter on the pastoral attention to African traditional religion*, 1988, published in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 24-IV-88, p. 5.

take time<sup>98</sup>. A final point worth making is that of humour. Humour is an aspect of culture and therefore of inculturation. Humour is a means to get across a message to others and of helping one not take things too seriously. Of course, it needs to be purified. Examples of humour which can help inculturation? Ronald Knox, in his *Let Dons Delight*, and Chesterton with his Father Brown. In preaching, it was always traditional advice that preaching should not only teach and move, but also please: *delectet*<sup>99</sup>.

### 10. Dangers connected with inculturation

Inculturation is now an «in-thing» and it is tempting to get on what we might call the «inculturation band-waggon». The term did not exist in the past. Why? Some people would say that it was because the Church was not aware of the problem. This is not the case. Having said that inculturation is a good thing (because it makes us aware of an important dimension of the Church's apostolic activi-

<sup>98</sup> «For the people taken as a whole, inculturation cannot be other than the fruit of a progressive maturing in the faith. Because you are convinced, as I am, that this task, in which I wish to express my full confidence in you, requires much theological lucidity, spiritual discernment, wisdom and prudence; and, as well, not a little time» (*Meeting with the Bishops of Zaïre*, Kinshasa, 3-V-80, 5, in IGP2 III, 1, (1980) 1085) (our translation).

We see an example of this need of time in the controversy among the early Christians as to what obligations of the Old Testament were to be considered binding in the New. In Acts 11:17-18, Peter convinces the Church in Jerusalem that he was right in baptising Cornelius. Then Paul and Barnabas are criticised for being too easygoing on the Gentile converts. The Council of Jerusalem decides that they are right, but in its message writes «you are to abstain from what is sacrificed to idols, from blood-meat and meat which has been strangled» (Acts 15:29). Clearly, the Church leaders do not want to be too hard on the Jewish Christians. But later, writing to the Galatians, Paul explains how he had to speak to Peter (Gal 2:11), for giving in too much to the judaizers. In 1 Cor 8:4-13, we see Paul explaining the question of avoiding scandal: hence, it is permissible to eat what has been sacrificed to idols if one's conscience is happy, but not if it is uneasy. The value of making the effort to get inculturation right comes out clearly when the Gentile Christians receive the message from the Council of Jerusalem: «they, upon reading it, were rejoiced at this encouragement» (Acts 15:31).

<sup>99</sup> In the secular field, the Hungarian George MIKES, with his books *How to be an alien* (first ed. A. Deutsch, London 1946; 25th Penguin printing, Penguin Books, London 1988) and others, explores very successfully and humorously the difficulties a foreigner finds in becoming accepted in his new country (in his case, Britain). In this case, the inculturation process is, as it were, in reverse: not so much local culture inculturating a foreign datum as a foreigner digesting the local culture. I think, though, that Mikes makes the point very well that all genuine inculturation includes an element of give and take (on both sides).

ty), we now add that it is our view that inculturation becomes a *problem* when the faith weakens. Inculturation becomes a *problem*, it would seem, when the missionaries of Christ, the apostles of Christ, begin to weaken in their Faith; when they cease to believe that Christ really *is* the answer, Christ pure and simple, Christ crucified... and they begin to *study* the recipient (who resists accepting the simple Christian message, or might it be a *weakened* Christian message being communicated by missionaries?) in order to see how best to get that message across to him.

St Francis Xavier had no complexes or «hangs-ups» about inculturation. Perhaps some of those who followed up later in India and China did? Why? Could it be that the fire of their faith was burning less warmly? Missionaries in Africa in the 19th Century and in the first 60 years of the 20th Century simply got on with the job of preaching the faith; but came the 1960s and things changed...

With these remarks, I do not wish to imply that *inculturation* does not need to take place. It does. As we have already stated<sup>100</sup>, the whole of Revelation is, in a way, an exercise in inculturation. God speaks to man in human terms<sup>101</sup>. But such inculturation is not a *problem*, because the main force is in the message, which comes *from God*: «I am who am — Go to my people and tell them He who is has sent me to you»<sup>102</sup>.

The problem arises when the faith weakens. And then it can become insoluble, because if the apostle is not bearing Christ (and his *verba vitae aeternae*), he can well find himself bearing *nothing*. Because, as a man, the apostle need be no better than others: not a better politician, nor a more «cultured» type. God, we read, has chosen the foolish and the weak of the world, to abash the strong<sup>103</sup>. Christians will only do this if they stick to the message of Christ.

Furthermore, inculturation is not to be an excuse for *superficialising* the faith. Inculturation needs discernment and time; evaluation of local «values» and a «holding on to what is good»<sup>104</sup>. Faith has

<sup>100</sup> In Section 6.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. VATICAN II, DV 4: «Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, sent as «man to mankind», «speaks the words of God» (John 3:34)».

<sup>102</sup> Exod 3:14.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 1:27.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. 1 Thess 5:21.

come to transform and purify human culture, not simply to adopt it<sup>105</sup>. Missionaries are to preach Christ, and this will lead to a purification of the local culture where they live. However, in evangelising, they must be careful not to confuse Christ's message with the baggage of their own culture. This baggage they must be willing to discard, if it turns out to be a burden not a benefit. What they must not discard is the Christian message (or any part of it), because that is not *theirs*; it has simply been entrusted to them, to hand on with a hundred per cent integrity.

We must also remember that «no one is a prophet in his own country»<sup>106</sup>. Experience shows that often one will accept the message of salvation from a stranger more willingly than from a fellow countryman (whom one thinks, wrongly perhaps, that one knows thoroughly and therefore one tends to *discount*)<sup>107</sup>. Thus the effort to make the Christian faith *at home* should not be so stressed that it prevents the *difference* between Christianity (as a supernatural faith) and local culture (and its natural human values) from being perceived. A foreigner can, in this sense, often act, as it were, as a *catalyst*<sup>108</sup>.

Inculturation can be superficial if the local grasp of the faith is superficial<sup>109</sup> and people are trying to justify an adaptation of Christianity to their own less demanding way of life.

It can be superficial if the carriers of the faith have not integrated sufficiently, into their preaching and practice, those elements of the local culture that can be integrated, and hence the faith in that locality is still in some way (and unnecessarily) *foreign*. In the Pope's often cited words: «A faith that does not become culture is a faith not fully received, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived»<sup>110</sup>. It is not difficult to think of examples of the Church's constant approach to this matter: one is that of Pope St Gregory telling St Au-

<sup>105</sup> See quotation in note 67, above.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. Luke 4:24.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Matt 13:55-57. This is one answer to the argument of authors like Maurier and Geffré (see note 32, above) that inculturation must be done by local people.

<sup>108</sup> St Anselm who started in Aosta, then went to Bec, in Normandy, and was finally Archbishop of Canterbury, could be an example of this work of inculturation done by a *foreigner*. Of course, the examples in the Church are countless.

<sup>109</sup> This applies everywhere, not only to a primitive tribe but also to countries which have reached a considerable degree of development; one can think of the question of Americanism in the United States, or that of Modernism in France.

<sup>110</sup> *Addr. to the National Congress «Impegno culturale»*, 16-I-82, 2, in IGP2, V, 1 (1982) 131.

gustine of Canterbury that he should accept all local English customs, provided they do not go against the Catholic faith<sup>111</sup>.

There is also the temptation of superficiality when people are coming forward in masses to be converted. We cannot reject the notion of mass conversions. The Church herself began with three thousand being converted at Pentecost<sup>112</sup>. But such conversions need to be followed up, with a programme of continuing formation, so that the seed initially sown and enthusiastically welcomed, is not lost when difficulties arise, but takes root and bears fruit<sup>113</sup>.

As well as superficiality, there is the danger, the temptation, of returning to paganism, to the «old life». For Christianity is tough. After a period of initial enthusiasm, it is easy to want to return to one's own local, more familiar (and more easygoing) customs: «Because the human tendency, and very understandable it is, is to cling to or return to the past, to that which we know, which is familiar to us, which we have already lived. Renewal can appear even as a lack of faithfulness to the past. At any rate it constitutes to some extent an adventure, a risk and, above all, it demands a certain renunciation, a certain break»<sup>114</sup>. This is not a new problem. It goes back to Gospel times<sup>115</sup>. Christianity is tough. It demands renunciation. The Christian is asked to forget and abandon the past and its comforts<sup>116</sup>. It is urgent to carry out *a good work of inculturation* to make this particular temptation less attractive.

Another factor to be borne in mind is that, in incorporating pagan virtues into Christian living, one must remember that such vir-

<sup>111</sup> Cf. BEDE, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Lib. I. Cap. XXVII, in PL 95, 57-59. See also the Apostles' decision in the Council of Jerusalem: «It is the Holy Spirit's pleasure and ours that no burden should be laid upon you beyond these, which cannot be avoided...» (Acts 15:28).

<sup>112</sup> Cf. Acts 2:41.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Matt 13:18-23.

<sup>114</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Homily*, Lomé, Togo, 8-VIII-85, 7, in IGP2 VIII, 2 (1985) 241. Incidentally, it is possible that the Pope is referring here to an over-tenacious holding on to old *Christian* traditions which the hierarchy now judges outmoded.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. Hebr 6:4-6; also the rich young man (Mark 10:22) and the sow going back to the mire (2 Pet 2:20-22). And it is widespread in the Old Testament too, cf. the books of Exodus, Numbers and Judges, where the Jews are constantly falling back into their bad old ways: see Exod 14:11-12; 16:3; Num 11:5-6, 18-20; 14:1-4; 21:5; Judg 2:11-13; 3:5-7; 6:1, 7-10; 8:33, etc.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Ps 44:1 («forget thy people and thy father's house») and the Apostles being asked to abandon all to follow Christ (Luke 5:11).

tues are by their very nature imperfect and will need purification if they are to be properly integrated into Christianity<sup>117</sup>.

Inculturation also brings up the problem of the local versus the universal. If an individual or a community give too much respect to a local culture, he or the community could lose their universal outlook. One can see this problem in Slav culture. In his 1985 Encyclical, *Slavorum Apostoli*, Pope John Paul points to Slav culture as an example of the vernacular well used. And this cannot be doubted. However, it is interesting to note that Poland, though very attached to its language, has always been part of the *Latin* Church. One could ask oneself to what extent have other Slavs, who have chosen to follow their own languages rather than Latin, been hindered as a result from carrying out a world-wide apostolate? A proper inculturation can help remind people to look beyond their narrow insularity to the needs of the whole Church, and to put universal concerns above local ones<sup>118</sup>.

Because of the difficulties attached to inculturation, it is worth bearing in mind that the concrete approaches to it will often be a matter of opinion. Thus, in early Christianity, St Justin Martyr, Athenagoras of Athens and Clement of Alexandria accept the challenge of Hellenist philosophy, whereas Tatian the Syrian rejects any Greek influence as poisonous and immoral. Both views are tenable. It is good to dialogue if dialogue is possible: but the Gnosticism of that age presented a special danger because it could enmesh Christians in its sophisticated ideas<sup>119</sup>. This means, in practice, that we should try to be very tolerant of others in their approaches to inculturation, slow to condemn, and prompt in our obedience to the indications of the competent authorities.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. D. PRUMMER, *Manuale Theologiae Moralis*, I, n. 461. Prümmer says that pagan virtues are real virtues, not just *secundum quid*, but they are imperfect.

<sup>118</sup> If not, this local spirit, instead of being a virtue, will become a cloak for selfishness, the selfishness of a group, not of an individual, but selfishness all the same. Against this narrowing of Christianity we have St Paul's «I have made myself everybody's slave, to win more souls. (v. 20) With the Jews I lived like a Jew, to win the Jews (...) (v. 21) with those who are free of the law, like one free of the law (...). (v. 22) I have been everything by turns to everybody, to bring everybody salvation» (1 Cor 9:19-22). On the dangers of insularity, the Pope says «we must avoid closing in on ourselves, our connection with Christ must be real, profound, primordial» and, he adds, we must avoid the pressures of «certain groups or certain theological tendencies which are partial» (*Addr. to the Bishops of Zaire*, 23-IV-88, 6, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Engl. ed., 16-V-88, p. 9).

<sup>119</sup> Cf. E. MOLINE, *Los Padres de la Iglesia*, Palabra, Madrid 1982, I, 149.

To avoid falling into the dangers which the work of inculturation presents, the Pope has insisted on the need to be faithful to the Scripture and the Church's Magisterium<sup>120</sup>.

### 11. *The ideal to aim for*

Where are present efforts and studies in inculturation leading us? Is their purpose just to preserve the faith in restless nations of Latin America or Africa? Surely not. It is something richer. At present we think of inculturation especially in relation to nations that have been evangelised relatively recently. It is worth remembering that it applies equally to nations with centuries old Christian traditions. In every country, the faith needs to become fully incarnate, to *come home*. Turning now to the recently Christianised nations, one could say that at present they are sometimes still treated by the rest of the Church as new born babes, with kid gloves. One dreams of the day when they will be able to be treated as grown ups<sup>121</sup>. France proudly vaunts the title of being the «eldest daughter of the Church»<sup>122</sup> and wishes to be treated in that way. We look forward to the time when other nations (the Faith having become deeply inculturated in them) will receive (and shoulder) similar titles and responsibilities<sup>123</sup>. In such a way that Mother Church can speak to all clearly and, if necessary, harshly, as Paul did to Titus and the Cretans. Paul's words are the inspired word of God<sup>124</sup>. Some peo-

<sup>120</sup> «All those who work at this undertaking must first of all deepen their understanding of the Bible, the Councils and the documents of the Magisterium. By assimilating in faith the universal message of the Christian mystery, they will be able to integrate it into their own culture. In the end, what is necessary for salvation is that Christ, the strength of the stock, enliven all the branches» (*Addr. to the Bishops of Zaire*, 23-IV-88, 5, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Engl. ed., 16-V-88, p. 8).

<sup>121</sup> Cf. LG 17: «until such time as the infant Churches are fully established, and can themselves continue the work of evangelisation».

<sup>122</sup> In French, «La fille aînée de l'Eglise».

<sup>123</sup> For this to come about, there is need also on the part of members of the older Christian nations to make an effort to show their appreciation for the virtues and qualities (for examples, sociability, cheerfulness) of the younger nations. We need to be convinced that each individual and each nation has a contribution to make to the common enrichment of mankind.

<sup>124</sup> «One of themselves, a spokesman of their own, has told us, The men of Crete were ever liars, venomous creatures, all hungry belly and nothing besides; (v. 13) and that is a true account of them. Be strict then, in taking them to task, so that they may be soundly established in the faith» (Tit 1:12-13).

ple nowadays would criticise St Paul's language here. It is harsh language. But it is the language of the Holy Spirit, who loves and trusts his listeners. There is a tradition in the Church for adopting such language<sup>125</sup>. As learners, we need at times to know how to accept what may appear to be insults from our teacher. Harsh language is often a sign of love and trust. One looks forward to the day, and perhaps it is already upon us, when the Church in recently Christianised countries can really shoulder weight and carry the evangelising work to the rest of mankind.

## Conclusions

Looking back on the use made by the Magisterium of the concept of *inculturation*, it is clear that Pope John Paul II is espousing it with a considerable measure of commitment. *Inculturation is on the map*. This importance brings responsibilities with it. The Magisterium is trying to give the guidelines for those responsibilities. At present, much of the work is still *to be done* and one could say that the fruits of this interest in inculturation are future promises rather than present actualities.

The argument by Father Standaert that an original meaning of inculturation has been lost does not appear proven. It seems more likely that the term inculturation has been adopted by the Magisterium to cover, more satisfactorily and in a wider context, the role assigned previously to the term adaptation which, unlike inculturation, was used by Vatican II.

We do not accept that «the essence of inculturation has got lost in vagueness». First, because there is a lack of evidence that that «essence» (as defined by those who speak of it) pre-existed the use of the word inculturation by the Magisterium. Second, because it is clear that inculturation as so understood has not been accepted by the Church.

The Magisterium, in attaching great importance to inculturation, does not accept that it affects only part of the Church. The «actors» of inculturation are not only local people, but also the mis-

<sup>125</sup> For instance, Christ's strong words to Peter «Get thee behind me, Satan» (Matt 16:23), when, just before, he had said to him, «Thou art Peter» (Matt 16:18).

sionaries. What is important is to *involve the local people* in this task (without excluding the missionaries). This local involvement is to be seen as an enrichment for the Church, not as something opposed to what had come *from outside*: the local implies the universal, and we are all members of the One Church. Furthermore, we should never forget that the missionaries have a specific contribution to make, for «no one is a prophet in his own country».

Passivity cannot be demanded *generally* of the Christians involved in inculturation, for several reasons: a) to centre inculturation on passivity is to impoverish it; b) local culture is not just confirmed by Christianity, it is purified (if not, it runs the risk of superficiality and returning to pagan ways); c) only in very limited senses could one accept that the Church is going to be *conditioned* by local culture, for the order to be followed must always be, God first (and without pre-conditions), then man.

The complaint that the Church has failed to reach all peoples is serious, but must be seen in its proper context. No other organisation in the world has even remotely approached the catholicity (in space or time) of the Catholic Church (one thinks of the Roman Empire, Arianism, Hinduism, Mohammedanism, Communism). And so, the only yardstick against which to measure the Church's success is *the vocation she has received from God*. When we go back to that yardstick, we see that the Church's primary job is *to preach Christ*, not to make herself acceptable to people. All the effort to achieve acceptability must come *after* (and assuming) being faithful to her primary task. Historically, it can be argued that it is precisely *because* (and inasmuch as) *she has been faithful to her primary task* that she has achieved the degree of actual catholicity she has attained.

The Magisterium has insisted on the need to avoid a rupture between faith and culture. We cannot therefore accept the argument that evangelisation as such brings about a rupture with local culture (which inculturation must then come to repair). What we can accept is that sometimes, out of fidelity to God, Christians have *temporarily* had to forego their local values; elsewhere, some lazy Christians may not have gone to the trouble to incorporate all their native values into their Christian living. In such cases, inculturation would face the task of having to rebuild; but not because the previous rupture had been inevitable.

As regards fearfulness of local culture on the part of *centralising forces* in the Church, it is true that the Magisterium stresses the importance of prudence in the task of inculturation. The reason for this, however, is not fear, but a deep awareness that what goes by the name of local culture is often false merchandise, and therefore Mother Church does not want her children to go down blind alleys, especially in matters like liturgy which are crucial for the salvation of souls.

Local cultures do need to be welcomed, and the Magisterium is going out of its way to do this. Could it do more? Two answers to this are: a) more could be done especially if those (both foreigners and locals) who rightly defend the need to be open to local culture, shewed in practice (not just in theory) how this openness enriches the Church universal; b) one needs always to be wary of fashions: at present the danger could be to bend over backwards to appreciate local culture, in such a way that things which have hardly any real value are being promoted (just because they claim to be local) whereas values which are real and appreciated by local people are being rejected (simply because they have come from abroad). In this sense one should pay special attention to the Magisterium's repeated call to maturity in the task of inculturation.

One problem which does not yet appear to have been fully faced up to is the right of a local culture to receive culture from another, more developed, culture. There is therefore (and not surprisingly) an imbalance at present, with most of the stress being laid on the need to appreciate *local* values. Uncorrected this imbalance could do harm, imprisoning primitive cultures in a state of primitivism.

So far, it is the recently evangelised nations that are being asked to make the running in this field. We can foresee that in the future, if inculturation truly comes into its own, we will realise that it affects the whole Church and is a non-ending process (rather than something which can be achieved and then forgotten).

In a different way, for a true awareness of inculturation, it will be interesting to *look back* into Church history to see how inculturation (or its equivalents before the term as such existed) was done before.

As a final comment, let us simply say that the very problem of inculturation is a compliment paid by mankind to the Catholic Church. Only a universal religion faces this problem. A local religion has no problem of inculturation. Only a religion which comes from outside, like Christianity — which, let us not forget, comes not so much *from abroad* as *from another world*, from Heaven — needs to become inculturated. The task of inculturation is a real task, but (and let us be grateful for this) it is a wonderful task to have.