

## What is so new about inculturation?

A concept and its implications.

The question of the relation between the Christian message and the cultures of mankind may be said to be as old as the Church. It is not this question that is new. But the *status quaestionis*, the way the problem is envisaged, is new. Evidently, this is a consequence of a new historical situation. The « state of the question » corresponds to the « state of those who ask the question. »

The scope of this article is not to examine the various factors that have led to the present situation, in which there is a new awareness of the cultural plurality of humanity.<sup>1</sup> Its intention is more elementary and modest. In these pages, an effort will be made to clarify what is meant when the word « inculturation » is used. Such an undertaking is a matter of interpretation. In order to be faithful in this interpretation, one has to try to understand the expression in the setting of its first appearance and its actual employment. One difficulty is here that « inculturation » is a neologism. Its meaning and employment have not yet become standardised by frequent and repeated use. What follows is therefore presented as one possible way of understanding this expression. Another factor that complicates this undertaking is the fact that this term is situated in the borderlands between anthropological sciences and theology. It is heavy with implications from both these areas of knowledge. In this first article, therefore, the signification of this term will be examined against the background of its anthropological origins. The analysis of the transposi-

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<sup>1</sup> A brief analysis of cultural pluralism is given by H. CARRIER, S.J., *Les universités catholiques face au pluralisme culturel*, *Gregorianum* 58 (1977) 607-640. Cfr. also our *Inculturation and Incarnation. On Speaking of the Christian Faith and the Cultures of Humanity. Bulletin, Secretariat pro non Christianis*, 13 (1978) 134-140.

tion of this term from anthropology to missiology<sup>2</sup> will help to identify the elements it implies and by which it sets new emphases in the discussion of the relation between Church and cultures. In this analysis, we do not yet consider the actual way in which the question of inculturation is put in the various cultural areas. This could form the matter of a subsequent article. A reflexion on the theological thinking on the cultural reality of man would, finally, complete these *prolegomena* to the study of the problem of inculturation.

*The term « inculturation. »*

Not long ago, « inculturation » made its appearance in missiological discussions.<sup>3</sup> It gained a wider acceptance at the time of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> Those who contributed to its formation 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 the most widely

<sup>2</sup> « Missiology » is understood here not as the study of « the missions » and the missionary activity of the Church as these are defined in AG 6, but in a more basic sense, as the theology of the mission of the Church as indicated in LG 13-17. Cfr. J. RATZINGER, *Das neue Volk Gottes. Entwürfe zur Ekklesiologie*. Düsseldorf 1969. S. 376ff..

<sup>3</sup> « Inculturation » is here meant as an expression of the process by which the Church becomes inserted in a given culture. The word has also another meaning, though then it is mostly written « enculturation. » (See below, n. 12.) It is not impossible that, in the sense meant here, the term has been introduced by J. MASSON, S.J., *L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde*, NRT 84 (1962) 1032-1043. Here he uses the expression: « un catholicisme inculturé » (p. 1038). The Final Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (Taipei, 22-27 April 1974) speaks of « a church indigenous and inculturated. » « *His Gospel to Our Peoples ...* » Vol. II. Manila, Cardinal Bea Institute, 1976. p. 332. According to Fr. Congar, the word « inculturation » has been coined in Japan, as a modification of « acculturation. » Y. CONGAR, O.P., *Christianisme comme foi et comme culture. Evangelizzazione e Culture. Atti del Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia*, (Roma 5-12 ott. 1975). Roma 1976. Vol. I, 83-103. p. 100. No reference is given to Japanese sources.

<sup>4</sup> This General Congregation took place between December 1st, 1974 and April 7th, 1975. In two places, the texts issued after this meeting speak of inculturation: in the nrs. 36 and 53 to 56 of the Fourth Decree (on « Our Mission Today ») and in the short Fifth Decree, which is specially dedicated to this: « On promoting the Work of Inculturation of Faith and of Christian Life. » The word figures once more in the Decree on Formation (Decree VI, n. 29).

used.<sup>5</sup> In employment and meaning, it could be considered as identical with « accommodation. »<sup>6</sup> Both terms, however, were felt as expressive more of an extrinsic contact between the Christian message and a given culture. The same may also have been the case with the expression « contextualisation. »<sup>7</sup> The term « indigenisation » was rejected, because in some languages, « indigenous » and its cognates have an all too restricted meaning.<sup>8</sup> Another expression, borrowed from cultural anthropology, was also used in this context: « acculturation. »<sup>9</sup> In

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. A. SANTOS HERNÁNDEZ, S.J., *Adaptación Misionera*. Bilbao 1958. The Author distinguishes between the adaptation of the missionary and that of the presentation of the Gospel message. Various definitions are given of the term (p. 17ff.). The bibliography on p. 54ff. gives an impression of the wide-spread employment of this word in various languages.

<sup>6</sup> F. KOLLBRUNNER SMB, *Die Akkommodation im Geist der Katholizität (1919-1959)*. NZM 28 (1972) 161-184; 264-274. The Author, however, prefers the word « Akkommodation, » because there would be less chance that it can be misunderstood in a subjectivistic sense (p. 161).

<sup>7</sup> This term occurs with a certain frequency in papers and documents emanating from the World Council of Churches in Geneva. It appears to have been coined around 1972 by the Staff members of the Theological Education Fund. Dr. Shoki Coe, General Director of the TEF, and Dr. Aharon Sapsezian, one of the four Associate Directors, have been the first ones to use it. In its original employment, the term referred primarily to theological education in non-Western countries, but soon it was felt that the concept could be used also for other aspects of the life and mission of the Church. « Contextuality » is another expression which made its first appearance in these circles. Cfr. F. ROSS KINSLER, *Mission and Context. The Current Debate about Contextualization, Evangelical Mission Quarterly* 14 (1978) n. 1. The term received a wider acceptance at the Lausanne Congress of 1974, where one seminar studied the topic « The Gospel, Cultural Contextualization and Religious Syncretism. » Cfr. J. D. DOUGLAS, ed., *Let the Earth Hear His Voice*. Minneapolis 1975. pp. 1216-1228. At the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC in 1975, Bishop Mortimer Arias spoke of « contextual evangelism. » Cfr. D. M. PATON, ed., *Briser les Barrières. Nairobi 1975*. Paris 1976. pp. 45ss., p. 54. « Contextualisation » should be distinguished from « contextualism. » The latter term occurred in discussions on Ethics among Reformed theologians in the United States towards the end of the 1950's. Cfr. R. B. BRANDT, *Ethical Theory*. Englewood Cliffs 1959. p. 41ff., and P. L. LEHMANN, *Ethics in a Christian Context*. London 1963. p. 245ff.. The Editorial in *IRM* 61 (1972) 321-325 appears to read a missiological significance also in this term. — Unless referring to the writing and interpretation of texts, the expressions « contextualism, » « contextuality » and « contextualisation » are metaphors which do not necessarily add to the clarity and precision of the discourse.

<sup>8</sup> For some people, « indigenous » and « natives » can be found in exotic countries, or everywhere except where they themselves come from.

<sup>9</sup> « Acculturation » is a term widely accepted in anthropological sciences. In 1935 it was defined by the American Social Science Research Council in the following way: « Acculturation comprehends those phe-

anthropological sciences, it denotes the contact between cultures and the ensuing changes. The adoption of this term, 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. »<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the process that had to be described was not just any kind of « contact, » but a profound insertion, by which the Church becomes part of a given society.<sup>11</sup> The choice of the word « inculturation » might thus be understood as an obvious one. It can be seen as the contraction of the expression « insertion in a culture. »

The term « inculturation » is also known in cultural anthropology. Normally it has there a slightly different form: « enculturation. »<sup>12</sup> By this is meant the process by which an in-

nomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups. » (Quoted by M. J. HERSKOVITS, *Man and His Works*. New York (1947) 1952. p. 523.) Among anthropologists with a British background, the term culture-contact is used. (Cfr. E. H. SPICER, art. *Acculturation*. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. MacMillan etc. 1968. Vol. I, 21-27.) P. CHARLES, S.J. has employed this term for indicating the role of the Christian message in transforming a given culture. (*Missiologie et acculturation*. *NRT* 75 (1953) 15-32.) He has been followed in this by others, such as J. MASSON, S.J., who speaks of « une acculturation chrétienne » in the sense of a « christianisation » of culture (*Fonction missionnaire, fonction d'Eglise*. *NRT* 80 (1958) 1042-1061; 81 (1959) 41-59. p. 49).

<sup>10</sup> Vatican II, GS 42. At the same time, it is evident that the « trans-cultural » message of the Church can only reach people when it is embodied in a culture. — The Documents of Vatican II are quoted according to the English Edition prepared by W. M. ABBOTT, S.J., *The Documents of Vatican II*. London/Dublin 1966.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Vatican II, AG 10: « In order to be able to offer to all men the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, the Church must become part of [Lat.: *sese inserere debet*] all these groups for the same motive which led Christ to bind Himself, in virtue of His Incarnation, to the definite social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He dwelt. »

<sup>12</sup> M. J. HERSKOVITS has, apparently, been the one who coined this term: « The aspects of the learning experience which mark off man from other creatures, and by means of which, initially, and in later life, he achieves competence in his culture, may be called *enculturation*. » (*Man and His Works*. New York 1952. p. 39.) « Enculturation » is a perfectly correct English form, since the prefix « en- » can be used « on nouns, with [the] sense 'put (the object) into or on something' (embed, engulf, entrust). » *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*. London 1964. s.v. en- (1). HERSKOVITS may have preferred this form above « inculturation, » because of the possible equivocation given with the prefix « in- » which can also express

dividual becomes part of this culture. The term « enculturation » is of recent origin, and has not been universally accepted by anthropologists.<sup>13</sup> Given the fact that « enculturation » denotes the process by which an individual becomes inserted in his culture, it is evident that the missiological use of this term implies an important change in its application. Here is intended not the insertion of an individual in his culture, but the process by which the Church becomes part of the culture of a people. The minute change from « enculturation » to « inculturation » might be seen as a sign of this shift in meaning.<sup>14</sup> 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. »

a negation, as in the English word « incult. » Since the same difficulty exists in several other languages, the form « enculturation, » rather than « inculturation, » has been adopted by anthropologists writing in these languages. Thus in German: *Enkulturation* (W. HIRSCHBERG, *Wörterbuch der Völkerkunde*. Stuttgart 1965. s.v.); French: *enculturation* (R. KÖNIG, *Sociologie*. Paris, Flammarion, 1972. p. 54. — Translated from German); Spanish: *enculturación* (H. SCHÖCK, *Diccionario de Sociología*. Barcelona 1973. — Translated from German). In Latin languages, however, we also find the form with « in- »: Italian: *inculturazione* (L. GALLINO, *Dizionario di Sociologia*. Torino 1978. s.v. « socializzazione. »); French: *inculturation* (in its anthropological sense thus mentioned by P. CHARLES, S.J., *Missiologie et acculturation*. *NRT* 75 (1953) 15-32. p. 19.)

<sup>13</sup> The term « socialisation » is still often used. HERSKOVITS proposed to replace it by « enculturation, » since the process of becoming inserted in one's culture is not only in view of an « adjustment to social living, » but has also, and prominently, aspects which concern the growth of the individual. (Cfr. *Man and His Works*. New York 1952. p. 39f.) Others proposed « culturalisation. » (Cfr. J. W. M. WHITING, art. *Socialization, anthropological aspects*. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*. MacMillan etc. 1968. Vol. 14, 545-551.)

<sup>14</sup> The adoption of the form « inculturation, » at the time of the 32nd General Congregation of the Society of Jesus, may be explained by the fact that this international gathering used Latin as a common language for papers and in discussions. In Latin, however ill-treated by some who manipulate it in the 20th century, only the form *inculturatio* is possible. Thus it was the form with « in- » that stuck.

P. AGIRREBALTZATEGUI, in his important thesis *Configuración eclesial de las culturas* (Bilbao 1976), appears to hesitate between the two possibilities. In the text of his book, he speaks of *enculturación* (in a missiological sense), but in the Index this becomes *inculturación*.

It should be noted that the difference between enculturation and inculturation does not consist in a change of subject alone, in consequence of which we speak of the insertion of the Church in a culture, and not of that of an individual. When we accept «inculturation» as a tool in a theological discourse, it enters into a system of language that is different from that of cultural anthropology. The theological discourse corresponds to the consideration of the salvific event in Jesus Christ. The theology of man — and of culture — considers human reality in its relation to this event. Theological anthropology, therefore, acknowledges facts, relations and attitudes which in themselves are not relevant to cultural anthropology. The theological relevance of the concept of inculturation will be discussed later. Since, however, the process of inculturation can also be considered from the point of view of cultural anthropology, we will first indicate those elements of the concept of enculturation which may help to clarify the notion of inculturation and thus prepare for a more explicitly theological consideration. In doing this, we do not make abstraction from theology. E.g., we do not work with a merely sociological concept of the Church, but understand its reality in the light of its own self-understanding. The theological implications of the inculturation process, however, will not be explicitated beyond the degree that is necessary for an explorative comparison between the process of inculturation and the enculturative experience.

*Inculturation and enculturation.* 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.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, from an anthropological point of view, the process of inculturation has also the characteristics of a process of acculturation.

Granted this difference between enculturation and inculturation, there remain several points of resemblance in both concepts, which, even if not all of them may have been actually present in the minds of those who first employed the term «inculturation,» bring out and illustrate the convenience of this term for expressing the process by which the Christian life and message become integrated into a given culture. These points of resemblance can be identified by comparing the concept of inculturation with the explanation M. J. Herskovits gives of that of enculturation.

a. *The growth into one's own culture.* We have already seen that enculturation is understood as the learning process by which a person «achieves competence in his culture.»<sup>16</sup> Also in this respect, it differs from acculturation, which is defined as the encounter with a culture other than one's own.

When we speak of the inculturation of the Church, what can then be the meaning of «own culture»? Has the Church an «own culture»? In order to answer this question, the problem of inculturation has to be considered in the concrete situation in which it arises today. This situation is first and before all that of the local Church. One of the characteristics of the local Church, in a developed status, is precisely that it is «already rooted in social life and considerably adapted to the

<sup>15</sup> As such can be considered rites and dogmas, spirituality, discipline and Church structures. In virtue of the reality of Incarnation (cfr. *LG* 8), several of these elements have an absolutely universal value and cannot be exchanged for or transmuted into other elements in a process of inculturation. The transcendence of the Church and its message with regard to «culture and cultures» (cfr. *EN* n. 20) is not an abstraction consisting in a mere detachment from all cultural reality. In God's salvific action, of which the Church is the sacrament, elements of human culture can receive a universal value and validity. Important is here the distinction between the «essential content, the living substance» of the message which the Church proclaims and the «many secondary elements,» which are subject to change (cfr. *EN* n. 25). But even then, «das schwierige Problem bleibt bestehen, wie 'das Wesentliche' der Botschaft überhaupt von der Verschmelzung mit den kulturell bedingten 'sekundären' Elementen getrennt werden kann.» (O. BISCHOFBERGER, *Die Evangelisierung der Kulturen. Zur Frage der Anpassung in Evangelii Nuntiandi*. *NZM* 32 (1976) 315-323. S. 319f.)

<sup>16</sup> M. J. HERSKOVITS, *Man and His Works*. New York 1952. p. 39.

local culture.»<sup>17</sup> This note was also stressed by the Bishops of Asia at their meeting in Taipei in 1974: «The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions—in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own.»<sup>18</sup>

The present day discussion on inculturation, therefore, has to be seen in the context of the new awareness of the reality and the mission of the local Church.<sup>19</sup> The particular Churches, «in and from which comes into being the one and only Catholic Church,»<sup>20</sup> are called upon to undertake the work of inculturation, not only in view of the communion they seek to establish with the peoples among which they live, but also, in virtue of their catholicity, which means both universality and unity, in view of the enrichment of the entire Catholic Church. Thus the ensuing cultural plurality, far from being in contradiction with the unity of the Church, may be seen as the «expression of its very unity.»<sup>21</sup> Of this unity in diversity, the Oriental Churches are a historical anticipation, which has for other particular Churches the value of an example.<sup>22</sup>

Thus understood, the term «inculturation» refers primarily to the dynamic relation between the local Church and «its

<sup>17</sup> Vatican II, AG 19.

<sup>18</sup> Final Statement of the FABC Assembly, n. 12. «His Gospel to Our Peoples ....» Vol. II. Manila 1976. p. 332

<sup>19</sup> On the ecclesiology of Vatican II in its relevance to inculturation, cfr. J. L. WITTE, S.J., *Ecumenism and Evangelization*. In: M. DHAVAMONY, S.J. (ed.), *Evangelisation*. (Docum Miss. 9) Roma 1975. 191-244. p. 197ff.

<sup>20</sup> Vatican II, LG 23.

<sup>21</sup> «La Chiesa accoglie [...] un tale pluralismo come articolazione della sua stessa unità.» Paul VI, to the Participants in the celebration of the 4th Centenary of the Pontifical Greek College. *OssRom*. 15.77.

<sup>22</sup> «E proprio nelle Chiese Orientali si ritrova storicamente anticipato e esaurientemente dimostrato nella sua validità lo schema pluralistico, sicché le moderne ricerche intese a verificare i rapporti tra annunzio evangelico e civiltà umane, tra fede e cultura, hanno già nella storia di queste Chiese venerande, significative anticipazioni di elaborazioni concettuali e di forme concrete in ordine a detto binomio di unità e diversità.» *Ibid.*

The doctrine of the 2nd Vatican Council on the Oriental Churches has appositely been called «the 'Magna Charta' of the indigenization of the local Churches.» J. L. WITTE, S.J., *art. cit.*, p. 238.

own culture,» i.e. the culture of its own people. Accordingly, it presents itself as an expression that brings out the endeavour which is formulated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* in the following way: «The individual Churches, intimately built up not only of people but also of aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and world which distinguish this or that human gathering, have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language.»<sup>23</sup>

b. *An ongoing process.* The anthropological concept of enculturation denotes a process that is not limited to the first infancy of the individual but which continues throughout his life.<sup>24</sup> It means not only the introduction of an individual into his own culture, but comprehends every new situation in later life where adjustments have to be made in ways of thinking and acting. In a similar way, it can be said that for a particular Church the process of inculturation continues throughout its life. The culture in which it is embedded is such a vast and complex reality, that its exploration and assimilation can hardly ever be said to have reached its fulfilment. Moreover, a culture is a living reality, in a continuous process of change. The changes that take place in the local culture, in its customs and values, represent new choices for the Church. This is especially evident when we consider the acculturative processes which take place between the various cultures, and by which entire societies are brought into a crisis of identity.

From this follows an important precision of the reality that is envisaged when we speak of inculturation. Since inculturation takes place not only in the formative period of a local Church but throughout its existence, it becomes evident

<sup>23</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 63. It may be noted that the Pontifical Document, in explaining the inculturation process, refers explicitly to cultural anthropology, by making use of the term «language,» which, it says, «should be understood [...] in the sense which one may call anthropological and cultural» (*ibid.*).

<sup>24</sup> «Yet the enculturative experience is not terminated at the close of infancy. As an individual continues through childhood and adolescence to achieve adult status, he is continuously exposed to this process of learning, which can be said to end only with his death.» M. J. HERSKOVITS, *Man and His Works*. New York 1952. p. 40.

that inculturation is the concern of every local Church without exception. The task « to evangelise man's culture and cultures, not in a purely decorative way as it were by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots, »<sup>25</sup> has to be accomplished not only by the so-called « young Churches, » but remains also incumbent upon the Churches in areas where the Gospel has been preached long ago. In its formative period, a Church is confronted with special problems in this area. These are traditionally studied under the aspect of missionary adaptation or accommodation. But « this accommodated preaching of the revealed Word ought to remain the law of all evangelisation. »<sup>26</sup>

The term inculturation, considered against its anthropological background, thus shows its appropriateness also in this, that it brings out the relevance of the « evangelisation of culture » for all local Churches and for the entire Church.

c. *Cultural stability and change.* The enculturative experience, as seen by the anthropologist, not only extends itself over the entire lifetime of the individual, but it manifests also a remarkable difference according to whether it takes place in the beginning of the life of a person or in his later years. In the early stages of life, enculturation has the scope of enabling the individual to function as a member of his group. He has to become accustomed to the basic patterns and values of the culture that is to be his own. E.g. he has to learn to understand the various signs of language, and also how to express himself with the help of these signs. He has to conform to the norms of his social group. Through the experience of positive and negative reactions, he learns to handle the signs and to conform to the norms. This early enculturative experience can be called a « conditioning process. »<sup>27</sup> In this conditioning process, the individual has little freedom of choice. He becomes assimilated to the culture of his surroundings. Thus the enculturation of the individual in this early period is the mechanism by which culture is transmitted and it makes, in this way, for cultural stability in a given society. Because, in less technical language, a person does not invent his culture but has to learn it.

<sup>25</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 20.

<sup>26</sup> Vatican II, GS 44.

<sup>27</sup> M. J. HERSKOVITS, *Man and His Works*. New York 1952. p. 41.

In later life, the individual remains exposed to this learning experience. But in the measure he grows to maturity, he can confront the new norms and forms of culture that present themselves to him with an increased degree of reflection and a greater freedom of choice. Precisely because he has learned how to function within his culture, he can meet these new situations with a more independent mind. By making a choice in rejecting or accepting the element of culture presented to him, he contributes to a new orientation of his culture. Thus, « in its later aspects, where enculturation operates on the conscious level, it opens the gate to change, making for the examination of alternate possibilities, and permitting reconditioning to new modes of thought and conduct. »<sup>28</sup>

This relation between stability and change in culture, as it can be observed in the experience of enculturation, obviously is not found in the same way in the process of inculturation. It has already been noted that the inculturation of the Church in a given culture has also some characteristics of an acculturative process, in which two cultures meet. Moreover, the members of the local Church normally comprehend many individuals who already operate with a certain measure of consciousness and freedom within their own culture. From the very beginning, therefore, the encounter between the Church and a culture will make for cultural change. However, it is also true that in its formative period, the local Church has to become accustomed to the basic patterns of the culture of its people and to acquire the ability of operating with their forms of thought and expression. In its beginning, the local Church can be compared with an *infans*, which has still to learn to speak the language of its people. In a perspective of missionary theology, this « infancy » of a new local Church receives a more profound signification. The birth to new life, « in the womb of the baptismal font, » of those who believe in Christ, coincides with their being gathered into the one People of God as a new Christian community.<sup>29</sup> The establish-

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 491. The Author resumes the difference between the two stages of the enculturative experience in the following way: « The enculturation of the individual in the early years of his life is the prime mechanism making for cultural stability, while the process, as it is operative on more mature folk, is highly important in inducing change. » (*Op. cit.*, p. 40.)

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. Vatican II, AG 15. The definition this document gives of the

ment of a local Church, therefore, is not merely an extension of the universal Church, but is also the birth, from the seed that is the Word of God, of a Church which, in a real sense, can be called « new » or « young. »<sup>30</sup> Thus Saint Paul could consider himself as the father of the Church in Corinth: « For I became your father in Christ through the Gospel. »<sup>31</sup>

These two aspects of the relation of the newly established particular Church to the universal Church — that of continuity and that of a new beginning — have always to be considered together. Because it is the same Church, universal by vocation and mission, which puts down her roots in a variety of cultural, social and human terrains,<sup>32</sup> the process of inculturation has the characteristics of an acculturative encounter between cultures. And because the establishment of a local Church is also a new beginning, the process of inculturation can be compared with the enculturative experience of the individual. According to this second aspect, two moments or stages can be distinguished in the process of inculturation. The initial stage is that in which the Christian community has to assimilate the language and symbols of the local culture and to learn how to function according to the basic cultural patterns of the surrounding society. In this stage, the local Church can be said to find itself in a « conditioning process, » in which it can not always exercise a perfect freedom of choice. Certain elements may be assimilated, at least provisorily, which later prove to be conflictual with the core of its message and identity.<sup>33</sup> When, in a later stage, the local Church has effectively become present in its own culture and has learned to

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missionary activity of the Church unites precisely these two aspects of its specific purpose: « preaching the gospel [in view of the baptismal rebirth of those who believe] and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ » (AG 6).

<sup>30</sup> Vatican II, AG 6. The Latin text speaks of *novitas* and *iuventus*.

<sup>31</sup> 1Cor 4,15. « By establishing the new church in a pagan city, the apostle becomes the father of the believers. » W. F. ORR and J. A. WALTHER, *The Anchor Bible. I Corinthians*. New York 1976, p. 182. This fatherhood of the apostle does not only exist in relation to the individual believers, but it has also a corporative sense. Thus Saint Paul has the role of a father with regard to this church, over which he jealously guards, in order to present her as a pure bride to Christ (cfr. 2Cor 11,2).

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* n. 62.

<sup>33</sup> One can think here of examples as the evaluation of slavery in the first centuries of Christianity, or the initial assimilation of some aspects of the caste system in Churches in Southern India.

live with the language and values, the norms and expectations recognised by the surrounding society, then it is in a position to display a greater freedom in regard to the various alternatives in thought and conduct, in order to make choices which influence the local culture, reorienting it in accordance with the message of the Gospel.

It thus becomes possible to distinguish three moments in the process of inculturation, which are predominant in three consecutive stages, but which, given the continuous development of culture and the nature of the local Church — both particular and universal —, never cease to be concomitant. In a first stage, the Church comes in contact with a new culture, presenting the Christian message and life in the forms of another culture. Though minor adaptations are made, translations prepared, the Church has a foreign outlook, and becoming a Christian often implies leaving behind one's own culture. In this first stage, a process of acculturation takes place, in which missionaries and local Christians assimilate elements of each other's cultures. But when larger numbers of the local population join the Church, and especially when a local clergy develops, the Church is bound to become more assimilated to the culture of the surrounding society. At this stage, the proper inculturation process begins, of which we have seen that the principal agents are those who belong to the local culture. While in its beginning the young Church may sometimes tend to adapt itself more passively to the surrounding culture,<sup>34</sup> it will have, in a later stage, a more active role in transforming this culture. This is then the third stage, in which the moment of active reorientation of the local culture is predominant. The three moments thus distinguished can be characterised, respectively, as *translation*, *assimilation* and *transformation*. The entire process of inculturation is one of *integration*, both in the sense of an integration of the Christian faith and life in a given culture and of the integration of a

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<sup>34</sup> In a slightly different perspective, D. M. MCGAVRAN says of this stage: « During stage two, major adaptations take place. [...] The hard problem is neither to make the Church indigenous, nor to give culture a chance. The hard problem is to make the Church Christian, to communicate the essential gospel, to prevent Christopaganism from developing. » *The Adaptation-Syncretism Axis*. In: T. YAMAMORI and C. R. TABER (edd.), *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* South Pasadena 1975, 225-243, p. 230f.



new expression of the Christian experience in the life of the universal Church.

This brief comparison between the functioning of conservative and evolutive tendencies in the enculturative experience of the individual and the functioning of these tendencies in the process of inculturation of a local Church again shows that the analogy between the two concepts of enculturation and inculturation can be of help in clarifying what is meant with « inculturation. »

*Conclusion.* The foregoing analysis of the concept of inculturation has shown that inculturation works itself out on the level of experience. It is not primarily a matter of theory, and still less of legislation, but it is a process of growth towards maturity and — within present history never definitively completed — fullness of the Christian experience in the cultural setting which is specific for a local Church. In this experience, theological studies and anthropological research have their part,<sup>35</sup> and faithfulness to the norms of the universal Church is of vital importance. But these investigations and norms do not « make » the process of inculturation. This is lived by the actual Christian community in a given culture. The experience of the Christian faith, which is always concrete and particular, has in itself a universal value, because it is the answer to a divine initiative and a participation in the life of Christ.<sup>36</sup> In this very experience, in the measure in which it is genuine and authentic, is the guarantee of its faithfulness to the universal message lived in this particular situation. Both sign and fruit of this authenticity is the integration of this experience not only in the life of its people but also in the communion of the universal Church.

<sup>35</sup> The need for these studies has been stressed by the Decree on the Missions of Vatican II, where it is stated that « theological investigations must necessarily be stirred up in each major socio-cultural area, » so that « it will be more clearly seen in what ways faith can seek for understanding in the philosophy and wisdom of these peoples. A better view will be gained of how their customs, outlook on life, and social order can be reconciled with the manner of living taught by divine revelation. » AG 22. Cfr. GS 44.

<sup>36</sup> « [...] quand, par la foi, l'homme entre en participation de la vie de Jésus-Christ, il vit, dans les limites et les formes particulières de sa situation, un mystère concret, unique, de valeur absolument universelle. » Y. CONGAR, O.P., *Christianisme comme foi et comme culture. Atti del Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia. (Roma 5-12 ott. 1975). Roma 1976. Vol. I, 83-103. p. 85.*

Recapitulating, we can describe the process of inculturation in the following way: *the inculturation of the Church is the 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.*

When we now ask: « What is so new about inculturation? » then the answer can be resumed in three points. First of all, there is a change in the concept of culture, when we compare present-day discussions on the relation between Church and culture with studies made in the first half of this century. Instead of a more deductive, philosophical concept of culture, we now often encounter a more descriptive notion of it, which takes into account the investigations of cultural anthropology, sociology and ethnology.<sup>37</sup> Thus also the 2nd Vatican Council acknowledged « that culture necessarily has a historical and social aspect and that the word 'culture' often takes on a sociological and ethnological sense. »<sup>38</sup> In this sense, culture encompasses all aspects of the life of human society. This is a new element in the expression of the mission of the Church with regard to human culture. « For the first time, it seems, the Church has been led to envisage social and cultural life as a whole, at the central meeting point of all its problems, economic, political, domestic, philosophical, religious, etc. »<sup>39</sup> Thus the issue of inculturation, instead of being just one aspect of the missionary activity of the Church, becomes the central concern of the Church's evangelising activity: « what matters is to evangelise man's culture and cultures. »<sup>40</sup>

A second element which denotes a development in the way the relation between Church and culture is envisaged, is the more vivid awareness of the dialogal character of this

<sup>37</sup> See, e.g., L. J. LUZBETAK, S.V.D., *The Church and Cultures*. Techny 1963. And: H. R. NIEBUHR, *Christ and Culture*. New York 1956. p. 29ff.

<sup>38</sup> Vatican II, GS 53.

<sup>39</sup> *Constitution pastorale « Gaudium et Spes »* éd. par l'Action populaire, p. 214, n. 101. Cit. R. TUCCI, *The Proper Development of Culture*. In: H. VORGRIMMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*. Vol. V. New York/London 1969. 247-287. p. 259.

<sup>40</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 20.



relation. Recognising « how richly the Church has profited by the history and development of humanity, » Vatican II speaks of « a living exchange between the Church and the diverse cultures of people. »<sup>41</sup> The process of inculturation, in its various stages of translation, assimilation and transformation, comprehends different modes of this « living exchange. » It thus goes further than the concern of missionary adaptation or accommodation.<sup>42</sup> It envisages the reorientation and innovation of culture in view of « transforming humanity from within and making it new. »<sup>43</sup>

Finally, the notion of inculturation underlines the central role of the local Church. The primary subject of inculturation is not the missionary but the concrete Christian community which is the living, growing Church.<sup>44</sup> The recognition of this pivotal role of the local Church makes it possible to understand the concern of inculturation as being of paramount importance for every local Church and not only for the « young Churches. » In such a comprehensive sense, the word « inculturation » has been employed in a document addressed to the universal Church, issued at the close of the Synod of Bishops in 1977: « The Christian message must find its roots in human cultures and must also transform these cultures.

<sup>41</sup> Vatican II, GS 44.

<sup>42</sup> Because of the recognition of this dialogal character, the attitude described in this Document « goes further than the idea of apostolic "adaptation" which was developed particularly between 1920 and 1935. » Y. CONGAR, O.P., *The Role of the Church in the Modern World*. In: H. VORGRIMMLER (ed.), *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. V. New York/London 1969. 202-223. p. 221.

<sup>43</sup> *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 18. Cfr. Vatican II, GS 40, 43, 57, 58, 62.

<sup>44</sup> The theology of the local Church has been highlighted at the 2nd Vatican Council. One easily sees the difference in approach between the way of envisaging the question of inculturation today and formulations in earlier works, as in the still very readable — but in this respect dated — study of L.J. LUZBETAK, S.V.D., *The Church and Cultures*. Techny 1963. In the definition the Author gives of « accommodation, »: « the respectful, prudent, scientifically and theologically sound adjustment of the Church to the native culture in attitude, outward behaviour and practical apostolic approach » (p. 341), the « Church » is understood primarily as « the religious worker in the Missions and the authorities to which apostolic work is entrusted » (*ibid.*). Without minimizing the role of the missionary, especially in the first stage of the inculturation process, the notion of inculturation indicates a process that goes beyond this initial stage, and understands the local Church as the primary subject in this process. It is then, within this community, that various functions can be distinguished.

In this sense we can say that catéchesis is an instrument of 'inculturation'. »<sup>45</sup>

An assessment of the various ways in which, in each local Church, the living message — « lived » and enlivening — is brought to enter into the different cultural strata of the people in order to reorient ways of thought and conduct and to find the enrichment of new expressions, would fill several volumes. Such a study would not only bring out the wide diversity of situations in which the process of inculturation takes place, but it would also give a deeper understanding of the mission of the Church today: to render present to man, in his historical situation, salvation in Jesus Christ. This historical situation is one of multiple dispersion, of which the plurality of cultures is a determining aspect.<sup>46</sup> For this study, however, it would be necessary to consider more specifically the reality of culture in its relation to the Christian life and message. Thus the theological implications of the concept of inculturation would become manifest. Only then can be said whether and in which sense this concept is an adequate instrument in the discussion of the relation between Church and cultures.

ARY A. ROEST CROLLIUS, S.I.

## SOMMAIRE

Au cours de ces dernières années, surtout depuis la 32ème Congrégation Générale de la Compagnie de Jésus, le terme « inculturation » est souvent utilisé pour indiquer la mission de l'Église à l'égard des cultures de l'humanité. Le présent article offre une analyse de ce terme nouveau, qui est situé aux confins de l'anthropologie culturelle et la théologie de la mission. Le mot « inculturation », dans le sens d'une insertion de l'Église dans une culture donnée, est distinct d'« enculturation », qui signifie l'insertion de l'individu dans sa propre culture, et d'« acculturation », qui veut dire la rencontre de cultures différentes. Puisque l'Église,

<sup>45</sup> « Message of the Synod of Bishops to the People of God, » n. 5. *OssRom*, English Edition, 3.11.77. This may well be the first time that the word « inculturation » has been employed in a document meant for the entire Church. The Latin text has also « *inculturatio*. »

<sup>46</sup> Cfr. J. AMSTUTZ, *Kirche der Völker. Skizze einer Theorie der Mission*. Freiburg usw. 1972. S. 94ff..

dans sa structure et ses traditions, possède aussi sa propre identité culturelle, le processus d'inculturation a également des caractéristiques d'une acculturation. Une comparaison entre les deux termes « inculturation » et « enculturation » montre comment l'expression « inculturation » peut être comprise comme soulignant le rôle propre de l'Église locale par rapport à la culture de son peuple. Cette comparaison permet aussi de relever qu'« inculturation » dénote un processus qui est donné avec la condition historique de l'Église et de chaque Église particulière. Finalement, on est ainsi amené à distinguer trois étapes différentes dans le processus d'inculturation, qui peuvent être caractérisées comme « traduction », « assimilation » et « transformation ».

Dans ce processus, l'essentiel ne consiste pas dans des idées et des normes, mais dans l'expérience concrète de la foi chrétienne dans l'Église locale. Ainsi on arrive à la description suivante de l'inculturation: elle est « l'intégration de l'expérience chrétienne d'une Église locale dans la culture du peuple qui la constitue, d'une telle manière que cette expérience non seulement s'exprime dans des éléments de cette culture, mais devient, à l'intérieur de cette culture, une force qui l'anime, l'oriente et la renouvelle, de façon à créer une nouvelle cohésion et communion, non seulement dans la culture en question, mais aussi comme un enrichissement de la communion de l'Église universelle ». — Un examen de la façon concrète dans laquelle la problématique de l'inculturation est envisagée dans les différentes aires culturelles et une réflexion sur la théologie de la culture devraient compléter ces prolégomènes à une étude de l'inculturation.