

Inculturation and the Meaning of Culture

Investigation on the phenomenon of inculturation is a typical example of interdisciplinary research. Theologians and historians, philosophers and anthropologists all have their word to say on the encounter between the Christian faith and the cultures of mankind. No wonder that, as soon as the problem of this encounter is formulated, « the road gets lost in the forest of languages. »¹ Each of the various disciplines to which the partners in the research belong has its own, distinct language. Not only is there little agreement on the wording of the relation between faith and cultures,² but even the basic terms of this relation are far from enjoying a common acceptance. This applies especially to the term « culture. » Even in the various single disciplines, there is often little consensus on the meaning of « culture. » Thus an anthropologist writes: « the term ' culture ' has by now acquired a certain aura of ill-repute in social anthropological circles because of the multiplicity of its referents and the studied vagueness with which it has all too often been invoked. »³ When the discussion then goes beyond the limits of a single discipline, and becomes « inter-disciplinary, » the number of referents of the term in question increases. Maintaining a certain vagueness may then well be the condition of the possibility of any discussion at all.⁴

¹ J. GRITTI, *L'expression de la foi dans les cultures humaines*. Paris, Centurion, 1975. p. 6.

² For expressing this relation, we have proposed to reserve the term « inculturation, » as distinct from « acculturation » and « enculturation. » Cfr *Gregorianum* 59 (1978) 721-738.

³ C. GEERTZ, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London 1975. p. 89.

⁴ It is perhaps for this reason that a definition of culture is rarely found in writings on the encounter between faith and culture. In most cases, the author appears to suppose that everyone knows what is meant by this term. Sometimes, a reference is made to the description of « culture » in GS 53. Cfr e.g.: P. POUPARD, *Évangélisation et nouvelles cultures*, *NRT* 99 (1977) 532-549, and also the special issue of *Jeevadhara*,

It is difficult to see how one single concept of culture could satisfy all those who speak about it. Any attempt to clarify the term « culture » on the level of this « interdisciplinary no-man's land » would almost certainly fail to gain the approval of most of the participants in the discussion, insofar as they choose to remain immured in their own, particular conception of their own, particular discipline.

Well aware, therefore, of exposing ourselves to the wrath of more disciplined specialists, we will nevertheless try to formulate at least the requirements which an adequate concept of culture should fulfill in order, precisely, to be practicable in an interdisciplinary discussion on inculturation. In a further explicitation of a philosophical concept of culture, we hope to show how the various moments which constitute the cultural reality, on the one hand, explain the existence of the many acceptations of the term « culture, » and, on the other hand, render possible an analogical understanding of the diversity of cultures. This analogical understanding serves to clarify the relation between inculturation and the dialogue among cultures.

1 *The Requirements of a Concept of Culture.*

In the introduction of his work *L'expression de la foi dans les cultures humaines*, J. Gritti sets out to clarify what he means by « culture » with a comparison of the terms « Humanisme, » « Civilisation » and « Culture. » Then, in a brief survey of the history of the term « culture, »⁵ he shows that with the « anglo-saxon » ethnologists and sociologists, the term takes on a descriptive sense. He gives the well known definition of

Incarnation now, (n. 33) 6 (1976) 253-324, pp. 283ff. The description which the Constitution « Gaudium et Spes » gives of « culture » remains rather general, and does not intend to be a definition. Cfr R. TUCCI, S.J., « 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. 256. — The well documented work of E. QUARELLO, *Morale cristiana e culture* (Roma, LAS, 1979), gives an excellent analysis of the various ways in which « culture » has been understood.

⁵ For a more extensive treatment of this subject, see J. NIEDERMANN, *Kultur. Werden und Wandlungen des Begriffes und seiner Ersatzbegriffe von Cicero bis Herder*. Bibliotheca dell'Archivum Romanum, Vol. XXVIII. Firenze 1941. For the more recent history of the term: V. MELCHIORRE, *Promozione e cultura*, in *Communio*, num. spec. 28 (1976) 41-44.

E. B. Tylor and also one of B. Malinowski. To these are added an opinion of C. Lévy-Strauss and a definition by G. Rocher. Gritti then distinguishes various levels in the employment of the term culture, and proposes the distinction between two levels: the « practical » and the « symbolical » level, which he describes in the following way:

The practical aspect of culture bears on tangible realities: the activities and ways of conduct of social life, tools and techniques, customs, forms of apprenticeship and instruction, etc. In one word: the social « practice. » The symbolical aspect indicates all what transmits meanings (be they conscious or unconscious) and representations between the members or the generations of a society: rites, traditions, myths, language, etc.»⁶

The first part of the book, then, consists of various historical examples of the relation between Christian faith and human culture. In the second part, the author presents elements for a more theological reflexion on the encounter between faith and culture. At the beginning of this second part, he states as a conclusion from the preceding historical consideration, that « the word which expresses the faith is said as part of a human and cultural reality. »⁷ Before going on with a reflexion on the basis of the documents of the Christian faith, Gritti puts the question of the validity of the equivalence between « human » and « cultural. » He notes that « nowadays, man is defined as a cultural being. »⁸ This affirmation is illustrated by a comparison between two ways of considering human reality, the manner of the Ancients (with whom are meant men from « l'Antiquité » and the Middle Ages) and that of modern thinkers. According to the latter, man is to be considered as a « cultural being. » Neither the validity of the various successive positions, nor that of the actual affirmation of the « Moderns » is demonstrated. Such a demonstration does not even seem to be the intention of the author. The present-day affirmation of the « quasi-synonymity » of

⁶ J. GRITTI, *L'expression de la foi dans les cultures humaines*. Paris, Centurion, 1975. p. 13.

⁷ « La parole qui profère la foi se dit dans l'humain, le culturel. » *Op. cit.*, p. 93.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

« human » and « cultural » is considered simply as « a way of seeing, » which is in no way definitive.⁹

The reader thus is left, as to the clarification of the term « culture, » with a variety of notions, in the employment of which various aspects or levels have to be distinguished. The only reason given by the Author for the choice of the two levels he distinguishes, is one of convenience,¹⁰ but neither the choice itself, nor the relation between the two aspects is explained. And when the question is posed, why culture is so important when speaking about human reality, then the affirmation of the close connection between « human » and « cultural » is treated as a transient fashion of looking at things. One has the impression of being confronted with a syllogism in which the minor is absent: faith has to do with man — hence it has to do with culture.

The discourse on culture in this book thus remains on the level of a contingent employment of language. This way of speaking and thinking is seen in historical perspective, but the use of the term « culture » is not explained beyond reasons of convenience and convention. One of the qualities of this work is, certainly, that it uses contemporary language. The confrontation of this way of thought and expression with moments from the history of the Church and the content of faith makes for refreshing and stimulating reading, and opens challenging perspectives for further exploration, as is evidenced in the concluding pages of the book.¹¹ Among these « perspectives » is also mentioned a further investigation of the relation between different aspects of culture and a study of the relation between culture and nature. One might have desired that a reflection on these points were more elaborated already in the present work — thus providing the reader with a clearer concept of culture and perhaps even with the « absent minor » in the transition from the first part to the second. The reason why this has not been done may well be the wide information of the author concerning studies on culture to which every page of the book bears witness. In a field with so many con-

⁹ « Il va de soi que cette façon de voir n'a rien de définitif, qu'elle sera suivie par de nouveaux déplacements de pensée et de langage, [...] » *Ibid.*, p. 98.

¹⁰ « Pour éviter le vrac. » *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹ « Pistes d'exploration. » pp. 141-149.

flicting opinions, it may be wise to adopt a common language, without scrutinising all the implications of the terms used.

However, when the term occupies such a central place in the discourse as « culture » does when the expression of the faith in human cultures is discussed, then it should be made clear why precisely culture is understood in one sense and not in another. In order to give such an explanation, a concept of culture should be provided which fulfills the following requirements: a) it should render intelligible the connection between human reality and cultural reality; b) it should provide an understanding of the cohesion of the various aspects or « levels » of cultural reality; c) it should explain the relation between « culture » and « cultures. » The establishing of such a concept of culture is necessary for a fruitful discussion on inculturation. Its absence can only lead to confusion.

It is evident that a merely descriptive notion of culture does not answer the demands that are put on such a concept. Description implies always a part of contingency, and even the enumeration of constantly recurring factors in descriptive definitions of culture leads to such a variety of notions that a whole book could be filled with them.¹² Hence it would seem that, in order to establish a coherent concept of culture which, in its very conception, provides an understanding of the various relations enumerated above, one would have to retrace the process of intellection by which man understands himself as existent, with others, in the world. Traditionally, such a reflection is the task of philosophers.

This brief article cannot retrace all the various philosophies which intend to offer an insight into the cultural reality of man.¹³ Moreover, one should not lose sight of the intention of our quest for a coherent concept of culture. This intention remains: a clarification of the discourse on inculturation. The following pages, therefore, are not even an adumbration of a philosophy of culture, but are intended merely to show one possible way of understanding the various aspects of cultural reality in their mutual relation, especially insofar as they are

¹² This has actually been done by A. L. KROEBER and C. KLUCKHOHN in: *Culture. A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions*. New York 1952.

¹³ See: J. SZASZKIEWICZ, S.J., *Filosofia della cultura*. Roma 1974.

of relevance to a discussion on inculturation. Since « inculturation » is a name given to an essential aspect of the mission of the Church, the discourse on inculturation is of a theological nature. Hence the concept of human culture which is requested should be such as to possess a basic openness for a fulfilment in theological anthropology.

The concept of culture which is evolved in the following pages does not claim to be original. It takes its basic inspiration from the Thomistic anthropology developed by K. RAHNER S.J.¹⁴ and follows as closely as possible the explication of the concept of man's self-realisation in the world as it is delineated by A. van LEEUWEN S.J.¹⁵ In this presentation of a concept of culture — which is really a re-presentation — certain metaphysical principles are assumed, for the demonstration of which the quoted works can be consulted.

2 Toward a Concept of Culture.

In establishing a concept of culture, the process of knowledge by which man understands himself in his self-realisation in the world has to be retraced. The reason for it is that the self-realisation of man is specified by his intellect. Knowledge, or the act of knowing, « is the being-present-to-self of being. »¹⁶ Man, because of his material condition, is not present-to-self.¹⁷ His knowing, therefore, is always a return:

For Thomas, human knowledge means a complete return, but essentially in such a way that this coming-to-oneself (*Zu-sich-selbst-kommen*) is a coming-from-another (*Von-einem-andern-kommen*), to which mode of being-present-to-oneself the image of return (*reditio*) is most suitable [there follows a quotation from S.c.G. IV, 11]. »¹⁸

Man, as being-present-to-himself, is a spiritual being, which, insofar as he is present-to-himself by way of a return to himself from another, exists also in the alienation of being-present-to-

¹⁴ Specially in: *Geist in Welt*. München 1957. English translation: *Spirit in the World*. Transl. by W. DUCH, S.J. London and Sydney 1968.

¹⁵ *Compendium praelectionum ethicae*. Nijmegen, Berchmanianum, n.y. (ca. 1960). (Mimeographed.)

¹⁶ *Spirit in the World*, p. 69.

¹⁷ *Spirit in the World*, p. 228.

¹⁸ *Spirit in the World*, p. 229.

another. The ontological constitution of man, as « spirit in the world, » is thus a composition or synthesis of self-ness and other-ness. Man's very self-ness or identity is the composition of self-ness and other-ness. In this other-ness, one should distinguish between what is other as opposed to man: the external world *in* which man exists as present-to-another, alienated from himself, and what is other within the very identity of man, « his own » other-ness, *through* which he is present to the external world, i.e. his body. This self-intellection of man is specific for his self-realisation. The self-realisation of man in his world will be understood here as culture.

2.1 Man as Being-in-the-World.

The self-realisation of man is the actualisation of his identity insofar this identity is a composite of being-self and not-being-self in the other-ness of the external world. According to the correlation of self-ness and other-ness within the identity of man, a twofold relation between man and the world can be distinguished. On the one hand, there is the relation of man to the world, by which man exists in the exteriority of the world and is bound, in his self-realisation, to « return » to himself through the world. On the other hand, there is the relation of the world to man, by which the world is fundamentally united with man and can only be understood in this relation. Accordingly, the world acquires its own identity through the self-realisation of man. This correlation between man and the world exists in one single historical process, which is at the same time the self-realisation of man by means of the world and the humanisation of the world through the self-realisation of man.

Concretely, this means that, on the one hand, man develops himself and acquires his perfection by means of his activity in the external world. By developing techniques of agriculture and building, by conquering the world in his knowledge, by the exercise of arts, by devising means of organising and shaping his environment, man develops his talents, brings to fulfilment his potentialities, in one word, becomes more human. This aspect of the self-realisation of man in the world could be called « culture as the refinement of man. » It would cover that aspect of culture which « consists of learned behaviour

patterns.»¹⁹ On the other hand, in and through this manifold human activity, the world is «humanised.» This means: it is re-shaped according to the image of man. Fields and gardens, huts and houses, roads and harbours make the pristine world into a human landscape. In this sense, anthropologists speak of culture as «the man-made part of the environment.»²⁰

The correlation between these two aspects of the single process by which man becomes «cultivated» by cultivating his world can be illustrated by that activity from which, not without reason, the very notion and term of culture takes its origin in the Western languages: agriculture. In tilling the soil, man transforms a part of the external world and makes it subservient to his own ends. The new finality he imposes upon the field which he has prepared corresponds to the potentialities of the soil: its products are «fruits of the soil.» But the soil produces its fruits because it has become a cultivated field through the activity of man. In this cultivating activity, man devises tools and evolves techniques. With the development of these techniques, new patterns of distribution of work emerge. Moreover, on the basis of rights of ownership, a new social structure takes shape. Thus man acquires a new «way of life,» of which the most salient factor may be seen in the fact of his becoming settled. He becomes an *agricola*: a man who dwells on his field,²¹ works on it, and asserts his rights of ownership.

This example shows that cultural activity involves also the relations of man to his fellow beings. Hence, in order to establish a notion of culture, the concept of human sociality should be explicitated.

22 *Man as Being-with-Others-in-the-World.*

Man exists and realises himself as a social being, i.e. as man among his fellow men. The sociality of man has a twofold principle. On the one hand, man is essentially limited in the realisation of his perfection by the other-ness which belongs

¹⁹ K. YOUNG, *An Introduction to Sociology*. New York 1934. p. 15.

²⁰ M. J. HERSKOVITS, *Man and His Work*. New York 1952. p. 17.

²¹ The basic meaning of the Latin *colere* is: «to abide, to dwell, etc.,» hence *colonus*, «settler» and *incola*, «inhabitant.» Cfr CH. T. LEWIS and CH. SHORT, *A Latin Dictionary*. Oxford 1958. s.v..

to his ontological constitution as «spirit in the world.» This other-ness, since it affects man in his very being-what-he-is, results in man's being-what-he-is in a plurality of human beings which are «others» with regard to every single one of them. And also, since the other-ness affects man's being-what-he-is, the plurality of human beings does not mean a simple multiplication of human beings, but also a diversification within the very humanity in which all human beings participate and are similar to each other.²² Hence the plurality of human beings is shaped according to relations of subordination and coordination and forms thus a community. Man, therefore, exists as a member of the community of mankind. Moreover, since the other-ness affects man's being-what-he-is, it is also found as a principle of multiplicity and diversity in the human sociality itself. Hence mankind is divided in diverse communities, such as the family, the social class, corporations, nations and states etc.. These communities, as partial realisations of the community of mankind, are related to each other according to relations of subordination and coordination and thus effectively constitute the human community.

On the other hand, man, as a spiritual being, transcends in the realisation of his perfection the limitation of the other-ness of his being-in-the-world. Insofar as he is present-to-himself, he realises his specific perfection with the universality and the inalienability of the spirit. The universality of the spiritual perfection transforms the plurality of the human individuals, which thus are not only «others» with regard to each other, but are related in such a way that each human being possesses its humanity in an intimate unity and communion with his fellow men. The inalienability of the spiritual perfection transforms the diversity of the human individuals, which thus not only complete each other (in subordination and coordination) in the realisation of their specific perfection, but each human being possesses its humanity in an indivisible and non-multiplicable originality of self-ness. Hence it follows that man, as a spiritual being, or as a person, is social in an eminent way: open toward a universal communion which takes its origin in the free self-communication of the spirit.

²² In the language of the School, one would say: man exists as an *individuum* of the human *species*.

These two principles of human sociality are distinguishable within the unity of the human being. Man, as a synthesis of spiritual being and corporeal being, is also a synthesis of personal being and individual being. This means that he is person in an « individual » way and *individuum* in a personal way. Hence the sociality of man as a person is restricted by his sociality as an *individuum*, and the sociality of man as an individual being is broadened by his sociality as a person. Thus the spiritual values, which are *per se* universal,²³ are realised by way of man's being-in-the-world in multiple and diverse forms of social life. These various communities, because of the other-ness that is inherent in the being-in-the-world, contain in their correlation also a moment of mutual exclusion, which manifests itself in the natural or self-imposed limits of these communities, in conflicts of interest and in various forms of rivalry. Thus human groups, in the pursuit even of the highest spiritual values, are always exposed to the danger of an « individualistic » assertion of these values while excluding the rights of other persons (as can be seen in the totalitarian imposition of a state-ideology, or in various forms of religious wars). At the same time, in the realisation of the values which are *per se* connected with man's being-in-the-world, and thus are essentially particular (e.g. the values of the economic order), the concrete community can be called upon to surmount the exclusiveness inherent in the pursuit of such a value, when this is demanded by a more universal good. In this way, these values are ennobled by the spirit. The nobility of the spirit shines forth most of all in the sacrifice, in which the human person, alone or together with others, gives up from what he has or is, for the sake of a superior and more universal good.

The universality of the spiritual perfection is not an abstract universality, but is inherent in the human person as such, together with its inalienable originality. The human person thus possesses a character of absoluteness which transcends the person at the same time as it constitutes it. Any attempt at realising universality while overlooking this ultimate selfness of the human person would result, not in the creation

²³ Saint Thomas characterises the spirituality of man by its universal comprehension: « Anima est quodammodo omnia. » S.Th. I.16.3; cfr I.80.1; I.84.2 ad 2.

of a community, but in the « massification » of man in an anonymous collectivity.

The twofold principle of human sociality allows us to distinguish two aspects in the concrete forms of human society. These two aspects can be designated by the terms « individual sociality » and « personal sociality. » Individual sociality is that aspect of human social life which expresses the need of the individual human being to be assisted by others in the realisation of his ends. This sociality is primarily receptive. Personal sociality is that aspect of human social life which results from the free self-communication of the spirit, insofar as the person realises its perfection in sharing it with other persons. This sociality is primarily communicative.

Human sociality, intrinsically diversified and united according to the various modes of relation of its constituent principles, is thus realised in various forms of society in an analogical way. Analogy expresses the relation between beings which are diverse precisely in the characteristic or quality that unites them. Such a diversification within a unity implies that the characteristic or quality is realised in a different degree in the various beings in which this quality is found. This means, in the present context, that in some forms of society human sociality is realised in a more perfect way than in other ones. It is this qualitative difference that renders possible the coordination and subordination of various forms of social life in one society.

This analogical understanding of human sociality is fundamental for a coherent concept of culture in general and of the relation between the various particular cultures. In the next section, this concept of culture will be delineated.

23 *The Various Aspects of Cultural Reality.*

It has been shown that cultural reality comes into being in the process by which, on the one hand, man realises himself in and through his world, and, on the other hand, the world is humanised. In this active correlation between man and his world, the particular ends or values pursued by man in his self-realisation can be distinguished according to the twofold aspect of human social life.

(1) Thus the self-realisation of man in the world, as a social being who needs others in order to accomplish his ends, manifests itself in the formation of patterns of division of work, in the evolvment and apprenticeship of techniques, in economical and political organisations within human society etc.. (2) And the humanisation of the world, through the self-realisation of man in this aspect of his sociality, becomes manifest in the results of agriculture and architecture and in the various products of handicraft and industry. According to this aspect, the world is transformed primarily insofar as it is of utility to man.

(3) At the same time, the self-realisation of man as a social being who freely communicates his own personal perfection with his fellow men, manifests itself in language and literature, in music, dance and play, in manifold forms of pursuit and transmission of knowledge and in the search and cultivation of the ultimate and transcendent ground of his spiritual being. (4) And the humanisation of the world, through the self-realisation of man in this aspect of his sociality, shows forth in those results of human activity which, without directly belonging to the sphere of utility, are manifestations of the human spirit, such as the products of the arts and all those realities to which man has given a new meaning so as to make them expressive of his own transcendence. Under this aspect, the world is humanised so as to become an « epiphany » of the human spirit and a symbol of its transcendent reality.

The study of the process and requirements of inculturation has to take into account these four aspects of cultural reality, in all their complexity, whereby « the spiritual qualities and gifts of every people and age » (GS 58) are more immediately concerned because of their more direct relevance in view of « the integral perfection of the human person and the good of the community and the whole of society » (GS 59). One thus notices that « cultural » is said in an analogous way of the various aspects of human reality and activity. Writing a poem and building a bridge are both cultural activities, though in different ways. This analogous concept of culture makes it possible to avoid the often confusing distinction between « civilisation » and « culture, » and to consider all aspects

of the self-realisation of man in his world as pertaining to his cultural reality.²⁴

These four aspects of cultural reality are distinguishable as aspects of one and the same reality. They do not exist in and by themselves. They do not exist *in* themselves, but are aspects of a reality which can also be considered from another point of view. The self-realisation of man with others in his world can also be viewed, for instance, under the aspect of human society as such. In such an approach, social processes and structures are the object of the study.²⁵ Neither do these aspects exist *by* themselves, *i.e.* they are not found in a pure state, but in one of mutual permeation, of « contamination. » This follows from the ontological structure of human society as explained above. Hence, what is useful for man not only can also be a manifestation of the human spirit, but is, in its very transformation into utility for man, a manifestation of the creativity of the spirit.

What holds together these aspects, and thus constitutes the specificity of cultural reality, is precisely this ability of the spirit to express itself in the world, by giving to it a new finality or meaning and thus transforming it. And, since man exists as a social being, the meaning he gives to a part of his world — be it a gesture, a sound or a piece of stone — is determined by and influences the meanings held by the society in which he lives. This implies that such a meaning forms part of a system of meanings, which the members of a society assimilate and can further develop. The world of man can be called a cultural reality precisely insofar as it expresses and transmits a definite system of meanings.

Thus the determination of the specificity of cultural reality which meets the first two requirements of a coherent and

²⁴ This concept of culture precludes also an all too clerical idea of inculturation, limited to the main areas of theology, liturgy and religious life. Also the socio-economic conditions of a people form an important area of inculturation, as has been pointed out by S. RAYAN, S.J., *Flesh of India's Flesh*, in *Jeevadhara* 6 (1976) 259-267. p. 266f., and by J. NEUNER, S.J., *Inkulturation in Indien*, in *GuL* 52 (1979) 171-184. S. 182ff..

²⁵ This would be the approach of sociology. In order to define the formal object of their discipline, sociologists sometimes distinguish three different points of view according to which human reality can be considered: the individual, the society, culture. Thus: P. A. SOROKIN, *Society, Culture and Personality*. 1947. p. 39ff., and T. PARSONS, *The Social System*. 1952. p. 3ff..

practicable concept of culture as indicated above, leads to a definition of culture which could well be expressed in the terms used by one of the leading anthropologists of today, C. GEERTZ. For him, culture « denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life.»²⁶ The word symbol in this definition need not be the starting point for another long clarification, if one follows the author in the choice he makes among the various ways of employing the word symbol: « In yet other [hands], however, it is used for any object, act, event, quality or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception — the conception is the symbol's « meaning » — and that is the approach I shall follow here.»²⁷

Since the purpose of this article is not to present a general theory of culture, but only to establish a concept of culture that is practicable in a discussion on inculturation, the various implications of this definition of culture cannot be developed here. The problem of inculturation, moreover, does not arise so much from the way one understands and defines cultural reality — however desirable clarity in this matter be — as from the confrontation between various cultures and their relation to Christianity. Hence it would be necessary now to reflect on the third requirement of a practicable concept of culture, and see more closely the plurality and diversity of cultures.

3 *The Diversity of Cultures.*

It has been shown that human sociality necessarily takes form in a plurality of societies which are diverse and united according to the twofold principle of this sociality. Since each form of social life has its own specific finality — in a relation of subordination and coordination to other societies — it can be said that each society possesses its own culture: its own inherited system of meanings — which are the expressions of its finality — embodied in symbols. It thus is possible to speak of « culture » when considering the cultural reality of

²⁶ C. GEERTZ, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. London 1975. p. 89.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91. For the purpose of this definition, this rather rough notion of « symbol » will do.

any human group or segment of a larger society, as « the culture of the working class, » or « youth culture. » However, when one speaks of « a culture » in a general sense, then, primarily, the culture of a people is meant.²⁸ When not further specified, the word « culture » will be used in this sense in the following pages.

The diversity of cultures is to be understood in the same way as the diversity of human societies. Cultures are diverse according to the two aspects of human sociality: the « individual sociality » and the « personal sociality. » In the sense of « individual sociality, » cultural diversity springs from the limitation of the other-ness which affects man's being-what-he-is. In this sense, the diverse cultures have to be seen as partial realisations of what could be called « the cultural project of mankind. » They depend on each other and can be fully understood only in their mutual relationship.²⁹ Their diversity, however, cannot be seen merely in the line of complementarity. Because of the moment of other-ness which constitutes the delimitation of the various cultures, they are in certain aspects also mutually exclusive. In this sense, therefore, the diversity of cultures can be a source of conflicts.

In the sense of « personal sociality, » cultural diversity is to be seen, primarily, as a manifestation of the superabundance of the human spirit. *Per se* it tends toward universality — not that of some imaginary supra-individual humanity, but as a communion of persons who originally create and spontaneously communicate their « meanings and symbols. »

Cultural diversity is thus, at the same time, a manifestation of the limitation and the riches of the various cultures. The mutual relation between different cultures is one of necessity and mutual exclusion on the one hand and of spontaneous communication on the other. The encounter between cultures thus holds a foreboding of conflicts and the promise of mutual

²⁸ « People » is understood here as a group whose members have in common distinct historical, linguistic and, often, religious traditions, while geographic and racial factors can also play a role in the constitution of such a group.

²⁹ « Par conséquent, la diversité des cultures humaines ne doit pas nous inviter à une observation morcelante ou morcelée. Elle est moins fonction de l'isolement des groupes que des relations qui les unissent. » C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Race et Histoire*. Paris, Gonthier, (1978). p. 17.

enrichment. And, more often than not, enrichment is achieved at the price of a conflict.

In order to clarify these two aspects of cultural diversity, one could employ two images: that of the house, and that of the light that irradiates.³⁰ Human society, when seen more under the aspect of a community of individuals, can be said to have a culture as its habitat. This « house » delimitates the cultural reality in space and time. A house is, at the same time, a shelter and a repository for treasures, but also a place of encounter. The walls of the house give protection against others, and, in moments of conflict, the home is to be defended. But through its windows, man can discover the existence of other houses, and through the door he can admit guests and go out himself to meet others. Thus he will discover that his house is part of an *ensemble* and will better know and value all he has and is. « In other words, he who always has remained at home, does not really know his own country: he cannot rightly appreciate the refinement of the customs, the value of the institutions. He is not conscious of these particularities, because he lacks the possibility of comparing. All consciousness is the consciousness of a difference. »³¹ This process of understanding is another instance of the *reditio* of the human spirit: through the contact with other cultures, man acquires a deeper understanding and firmer possession of his own culture, whereas, in his own culture, he discovers the openness toward the values of other cultures.

The self-understanding of man, as a cultural being, is thus always the understanding of a cultural particularity in relation to other distinct and particular cultures in which he recognizes himself as both diverse and similar. In other words, a true understanding of culture can only be found by way of analogy.

This intimate relation between diversity and similarity is more evident still when cultural reality is considered from the point of view of « personal » sociality. As an « epiphany of the human spirit, » a particular culture irradiates its light with the strength of the creative originality of the spirit and the

³⁰ Cfr J. PUCELLE, *Das Erwachen einer Universalkultur*. In: R. SCHWARZ (ed.), *Menschliche Existenz und Moderne Welt*. 2 Vols. Berlin 1967. I, 562-577. Pucelle speaks of « cultures as windows » and « cultures as irradiations. »

³¹ J. PUCELLE, *op. cit.*, p. 568.

amplitude of its universality.³² But since the spiritual perfection of man does not exist unless embodied in the world, these irradiations are refracted, in their very origin, by the particularity of a given culture.³³ These distinct particularities gain new depth and « consistency, » insofar as they participate in the inalienability of the human person, and, at the same time, they acquire a wider communicability, insofar as they are assumed by the universality of the spirit.

31 *The Dialogal Form of Communication Among Cultures.*

The experiences of our history make us painfully aware of the fact that not all contact between different cultures means automatically an enrichment for the cultures concerned. Culture-contact can also be destructive. Our world knows many groups of people who live in a state of « cultural schizophrenia, » becoming gradually alienated from their own culture without finding a home in the culture that pretends to absorb them. Every one-directional process of cultural assimilation ignores the riches of originality and creativity in a given culture and leads to an impoverishment of human values. A fruitful communication between cultures has to take on the form of a dialogue.

This dialogue is, itself, a cultural fact or « symbol. » Its « meaning » — one might use here the word « logos » — consists precisely in the formal characteristic of its being a mutual communication of diverse meanings, a « dia-logos. » The purpose of this communication is not to cancel the diversity of the various meanings in making them coalesce into one single meaning. Rather, in and through the dialogue, the originality of the diverse meanings becomes manifest. But, at the same time, their communicability in the dialogue shows forth a universality of these meanings beyond the confines of a particular culture.

Thus, in and through the dialogue, the diversity of cultures reveals itself as a synthesis of inalienable originality and

³² J. PUCELLE, *op. cit.*, p. 569.

³³ This « refraction » occurs not only at the origin of these irradiations, but also when they are received by people living in another culture, according to the *dictum* of the School: « omne quod recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur. » This « second refraction » can reveal hitherto unknown dimensions in the original culture and thus add to its splendor.

communicable universality. It should be stressed that this is a synthesis, and not a juxtaposition. Cultural meanings do not float in the air, but are embodied in symbols, and form part of a definite, inherited system of such meanings. It is precisely as such a particular, embodied meaning that it can be communicated. In other words, in their very originality cultures are communicable and their universality can only be conceived as a communion of distinct and diverse cultures.

As already briefly indicated, such a conception of universality, as a synthesis of unity and diversity, corresponds to what is meant by the word «analogy.» According to the doctrine of the School, analogy is «a mode of communication which holds the middle between pure equivocity and simple univocity.»³⁴ A univocal conception of culture would accept only one way of understanding cultural reality and measure all other cultural expressions according to the standards of this culture.³⁵ In the encounter among cultures, such a conception would bar the way to dialogue, leaving room only for a monologue. This «cultural monologue» has often characterised the approach of exponents of occidental cultures to cultures other than their own.³⁶

With the new awareness of the cultural diversity of mankind, and, especially, as a result of the sobering experience of the destructive conflicts which during the recent decennia are convulsing the world, no culture really dares to impose its own norms and ideals as universally valid. It has, therefore, become «axiomatic in contemporary thinking that each culture has a right to live its own life.»³⁷ This is a highly ambiguous axiom. If it means that all cultures are invited to take part,

³⁴ Cfr S. Th. I, 1, 5.

³⁵ Univocity, in this context, is formulated by D. TRACY as «The imposition of one cultural apprehension of values upon all alternatives.» D. TRACY, *Ethnic Pluralism and Systematic Theology: Reflections*, in: A. M. GREELEY and C. BAUM (edd.), *Ethnicity*. (Concilium n. 101.) New York 1977. 91-99. p. 96.

³⁶ This attitude is often called «ethnocentric.» At its origin is the naive evolutionistic conception according to which all cultures are bound to develop in conformity with the model of occidental culture. Cfr TH. NKÉRAMIHIGO, S.J., *La création comme condition de la révalorisation d'une culture*, in: *Bulletin Secr.n.Chr.* 14 (1979) 48-63. pp. 49f.. And: C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *Race et Histoire*. Paris, Gonthier, (1978). pp. 19-26.

³⁷ D. MCGAVRAN, *The Clash Between Christianity and Cultures*. Washington 1974. p. 2.

in their own way, in the dialogal community of cultures, thus striving toward mutual completion and enrichment, then it would be the expression of a splendid ideal. But if it means that all cultures, with their own blend of perfection and imperfection, are «equally valid,»³⁸ then this axiom would lead to the «cultural relativism» which is so strongly opposed by MCGAVRAN.³⁹ From a philosophical point of view, this cultural relativism could be considered as founded upon an equivocal conception of culture. Equivocity is precisely the negation of an intrinsic relation between what is expressed by a predicate that is said of several subjects. In the context of cultural diversity this would mean «the assertion of an unreflexive pluralism comprised of unrelated and exclusive cultural particularisms.»⁴⁰ It is evident that such a conception, which might be seen as a reaction against a monopolistic and ethnocentric assertion of one single culture, means only a falling into the same error which it opposes, but then in a fragmented way. Instead of one single ethnocentric monologue, it produces a plethora of minor ethnocentrisms. Cultural relativism is the affirmation of the absoluteness of each culture within its own realm. Apart from being a historical absurdity, since no culture can claim an isolated and exclusive realm, such an affirmation is also philosophically unsound, because culture can only be conceived in an analogical way.

The dialogue among cultures is based upon analogy. In order to encounter the other, one has to be someone and, at the same time, one should be able to find a point of meeting and understanding in the other as other. Through this dialogue, one not only learns to understand the other, but acquires also a deeper understanding of oneself. The cognition of the

³⁸ Thus in the description of the ideal of «cultural relativity» proposed by RUTH BENEDICT in the conclusion of her famous *Patterns of Culture* (1934). According to this ideal, one should accept «as grounds of hope and as new bases for tolerance the coexisting and equally valid patterns of life which mankind has created for itself from the raw materials of existence.» R. BENEDICT, *op. cit.* (New York 1960), p. 240.

³⁹ D. MCGAVRAN, *The Clash Between Christianity and Cultures*. Washington 1974. pp. 2-6. Cfr also the discussions in: T. YAMAMORI and CH. R. TABER (edd.), *Christopaganism or Indigenous Christianity?* South Pasadena 1975. *passim*.

⁴⁰ D. TRACY, «Ethnic Pluralism and Systematic Theology: Reflections.» In: A. M. GREELEY and G. BAUM (edd.), *Ethnicity*. (Concilium n. 101.) New York 1977. 91-99. p. 96.

other has here always an element of re-cognition. TRACY aptly describes this attitude: « the genuinely analogical mind, precisely by its responsible commitment to its own cultural apprehension of values, is freed to understand others. »⁴¹ Without such an attitude, the coexistence of cultures means only the existence, side by side, of isolated patterns of life, and « tolerance » would be another name for « indifference. »

3.2 *Inculturation and the Dialogue among Cultures.*

The awareness of the dialogal character of the encounter between cultures is essential for a fruitful discussion on inculturation. « Inculturation » is not just another name for « adaptation, » as a condition or concomitant factor in the process of evangelisation. When we asked: « What is so new about inculturation? » we found as one of the elements of the novelty of this concept precisely the more vivid awareness of the dialogal character of the relation between Church and cultures. This enabled us to identify the aim of the process of inculturation as « the creation of a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal. »⁴²

The problematic of inculturation arises « in a society which is touched by the phenomenon of cultural encounter, » and can therefore be seen « as the deliberate and organised effort [---] in view of the formation of an appropriate and satisfying culture which takes into account the contingent event of cultural encounter and considers this event as being, henceforth, fundamental and constitutive of the future history » of such a society.⁴³

Inculturation thus means a vitalising challenge and a vivifying force both with regard to the creative originality of a given culture and its ability to communicate in dialogue with others. Neither the mere conservation of traditional cultural values nor the seclusion of cultural *apartheid* contains a promise of life. With such a conservative and defensive attitude one may, one day, be found defending an empty fortress.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Cfr *Gregorianum* 59 (1978) 721-738. p. 735.

⁴³ TH. NKÉRAMIHIGO, S.J., *A propos de l'inculturation du christianisme*, *Telema* 3 (1977) n. 4, pp. 19-26. p. 20.

The concept of culture developed in these pages has put into evidence the close relation between originality and communicability of a culture. The encounter between cultures manifests the originality of a culture and sets free its creative energies, and this creativity is, again, a condition for a fruitful dialogue.⁴⁴ Thus, the purpose of inculturation is not to salvage a traditional culture, but rather to render present in the galloping process of change which affects all cultures the light and the life of the Gospel, so that each culture may become a worthy « habitat » of God's pilgrim people — a tent rather than a fortress — and an irradiating light that adds to the splendor of the entire cosmos.

ARY A. ROEST CROLLIUS, S.I.

SOMMAIRE

La discussion autour du problème de la relation entre la foi chrétienne et les cultures humaines se meut sur un terrain « interdisciplinaire ». Si déjà dans une seule discipline, il est difficile de se mettre d'accord sur les termes utilisés, à fortiori la confusion risque de devenir inextricable dans une recherche pluri-disciplinaire. L'article énumère trois conditions auxquelles un concept de culture devrait répondre pour être utilisable dans une étude de ce genre sur l'inculturation de la foi chrétienne: ce concept devrait a) éclaircir la relation entre réalité humaine et réalité culturelle; b) rendre intelligible la cohésion des différents « niveaux » de culture; c) expliquer la pluralité des cultures.

En se basant sur l'analyse du devenir humain comme l'auto-réalisation de l'esprit dans le monde (K. Rahner, A. van Leeuwen), on démontre que ce qui fonde la réalité culturelle est la corrélation active entre l'homme et son monde. Ensuite, la constitution corrélationnelle de l'esprit comme « être-en-soi » et « être-hors-soi » permet de distinguer un double aspect de la socialité humaine. Conjuguant ce double aspect avec la corrélation active entre l'homme et son monde, on est conduit à la distinction de quatre aspects de la réalité culturelle, lesquels manifestent le caractère analogique de la notion de culture.

⁴⁴ « C'est au niveau de la créativité que les cultures peuvent s'affronter et se féconder mutuellement en communiquant par leurs efforts créateurs. » TH. NKÉRAMIHIGO, S.J., *La création comme condition de la réévaluation d'une culture*, in: *Bulletin Secr.n.Chr.* 14 (1979) 48-63. p. 63.

Le même double aspect de la socialité humaine explique, en outre, la diversité des cultures comme étant l'irradiation de la richesse de l'esprit humain dans son « en-soi » et aussi comme l'expression de la nécessité dans laquelle l'esprit hors-soi se trouve de revenir à soi-même par la voie de l'autre. L'auto-intellection de l'homme comme être culturel est donc toujours une intellection de soi-même en relation à d'autres qui, dans leur être-culturel, sont semblables à lui et différent de lui; en d'autres termes, elle porte la marque de l'analogie.

Cette conception analogique de la pluralité culturelle fonde ainsi le dialogue entre les cultures. Ce dialogue n'a pas pour but de supprimer les différences: il en dévoile plutôt l'originalité comme étant le point de créativité à partir duquel l'homme-dans-sa-société réalise ses valeurs dans le monde et les communique à d'autres. Illuminée par la conviction évangélique de la valeur inaliénable de chaque personne humaine et de sa vocation à faire part d'un seul peuple de Dieu, l'inculturation signifie alors l'effort de libérer les forces créatrices dans l'espace du dialogue. En effet, « c'est au niveau de la créativité que les cultures peuvent s'affronter et se féconder mutuellement en communiquant par leurs efforts créateurs » (Nkéramihigo).