

## The usage of the Inculturation definition in the Church's documents

[Taken from: ACOSTA NASSAR, RICARDO JOSÉ; *La Inculturación en los trabajos de las Conferencias Generales del Episcopado Latinoamericano en Puebla (1979) y en Santo Domingo (1992)*. Roma 2001, pages 29-91.]

*“The synthesis between culture and faith is not only a cultural demand, but also a faith requirement... If, in fact, faith identifies itself with no culture and it is completely independent regarding all cultures, it is not less true, and it is precisely because of this, that faith is destined to inspire and permeate all cultures... Faith will not be fully possessed nor faithfully lived unless it becomes part of the culture.”* (JOHN PAUL II, *Speech given to participants in the National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment*, Rome, I-16-1982: IGP2 V/1 (1982) 131).

The following essay will explain chronologically the manner in which the *inculturation* definition and its theological meaning have been applied in the Church's Magisterium. The evolution that this definition or concept has undergone until our days will be demonstrated in a timeline, since we believe that this is the easiest way to comprehend it. Furthermore, the reader will find other definitions which are closely related to the object of this study, such as evangelization, culture, evangelization of the cultures, Christian culture, etc.; as well as other alternative definitions, like adaptation, assimilation, acculturation, etc.; even the definitive adoption of the *inculturation* definition.

This subject is not alien to the Church or to evangelization. To illustrate it, we cite the following text for its particular value from a document of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, dating from the year 1659:

*"Do not be zealous and make no arguments to convince the peoples to change their rites, livelihoods, and traditions; unless they be clearly contrary to morals and religion. Is there anything more absurd than wanting to import France, Spain, Italy or any other European country to China? Leave our countries behind and convey faith; that faith which does not reject nor hurt the rites and application in whoever peoples, unless they be detestable, but rather wants to preserve and protect them."*<sup>1</sup>

Although it is true that in order to study culture and *inculturation* deeply, we would have to necessarily go back to the beginning of mankind and especially -in the evangelization field- to the early first centuries of Christianity<sup>2</sup>, where the first experiences occurred, we will limit our essay to the Magisterium texts starting from the II Vatican Council to the late John Paul II.

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<sup>1</sup> Directive Note of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith to the apostolic vicars: F. Pallu, P Lambert de la Motte e I. Cotolendi regarding the missions in China during 1659, cfr. *Collectanea Congregationis de Propaganda Fide. Romae*, Ex Typographia Polyglotta, S.C. de Propaganda Fide, 1907, Vol. I (1622-1866), pp. 42.

<sup>2</sup> To make yourself acquainted with this idea, we invite you to read: RAMOS-LISSÓN, DOMINGO; MERINO, MARCELO Y VICIANO, ALBERT (EDITORES), *El diálogo Fe-Cultura en la Antigüedad Cristiana*, Ediciones Eunote, Pamplona, 1996.

We will mainly focus on the magisterium of John Paul II, 1992<sup>3</sup>, however we will make two necessary references following our timeline criteria: first, the shortest, the II Vatican Council's teachings, regarding the connection between faith and culture<sup>4</sup>, establish the essential basis to accomplish a deep understanding which will subsequently allow the development of the *inculturation* doctrinal definition; and, the second, a few documents of Paul VI's magisterium which will provide us with the critical and logical background.

## 1. II Vatican Council Documents

By addressing the relationship between the Church and the world, the II Vatican Council also reflects on the problem that arises when faith and culture meet. In addition, it recognizes the just autonomy of culture and, in consequence, cultural pluralism<sup>5</sup>. We, therefore, by affirming cultural pluralism and the universality of the evangelical message (to all peoples and all cultures in accordance with the apostolic mandate<sup>6</sup> and the Pentecostal event<sup>7</sup>), find ourselves before a new manner of resolving the problems of *inculturation* of the faith, since we

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<sup>3</sup>We would like to point out that various magisterial documents, which address the inculturation issue, will be left out of this study since their publication occurred after this period of time, such as:

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nn. 50-141; 2659-2654; 1204-1206.

2. PONTIFICAL BIBLICAL COMMISSION, *The interpretation of the Bible of the Church*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1993, pp. 110-112 (IV. B). (Reference can be made also in «Biblica» 74 (1993) 451-528, or in EV 13/2846-3150).

3. CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES, *Guide for Catechists* (3-XII-1993), 12: EV 13/3350-3352.

4. CONGREGATION FOR THE DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, *Instruction for Liturgia romana et Inculturatione* (25-1-1994): AAS 87 (1995) 288-314.

5. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* (14-IX-1995), 55-71: AAS 88 (1996) 34-47, 50-51.

6. ID., Apostolic exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25-III-1996), 79-80: AAS 88 (1996) 455-457.

7. CONGREGATION FOR THE CLERGY, *General Directory for the Catechesis* (25-VIII-1997), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1997, nn. 109-110 y 203-207.

8. JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Fides et ratio* (14-IX-1998), 70-72: AAS 91 (1999) 58-61.

9. ID., Apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America* (22-I-1999), 70: ASS 91 (1999) 805-806.

10. *Pontifical Council for Culture, Towards a Pastoral Approach for Culture* (23-V-1999), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 1999, nn.3-6.

11. *John Paul II*, Apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia* (6-XI-1999), 21-22: AAS 92 (2000) 482-487.

12. ID., Apostolic letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (6-I-2001), Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Città del Vaticano 2001, n. 41: AAS 93 (2001) 294-295.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. II VATICAN COUNCIL, Const. pastoral *Gaudium et spes*, 53-62 (II part, II chapter): AAS 58 (1966) 1075-1084; ID., *Ad gentes* Decree: 9-11, 22: AAS 58 (1966) 947-990.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr. II VATICAN COUNCIL, Const. pastoral *Gaudium et spes*. nn. 58 y 59: AAS 58 (1966) 1079-1080.

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. Mt. 28,19.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Acts 2.

now have a better and greater comprehension of: all different cultures, a new theological vision of humanity's value, the discovery of the Verb's seeds, the religious liberty doctrine, the role of dialogue in the evangelical mission, the theological worth of the local Church. With all these components, the Church is in the forefront of bringing light to the problems that emerge from one element of its fundamental mission: the *inculturation* of the Gospel and the evangelization of culture:

*"(The church) ...from the beginning of her history has learned to express the message of Christ with the help of the ideas and terminology of various philosophers, and has tried to clarify it with their wisdom, too. Her purpose has been to adapt the Gospel to the grasp of all as well as to the needs of the learned, insofar as such was appropriate. Indeed this accommodated preaching of the revealed word ought to remain the law of all evangelization. For thus the ability to express Christ's message in its own way is developed in each nation, and at the same time there is fostered a living exchange between the Church and the diverse cultures of people.<sup>8</sup>"*

The heart of the problem is how to evangelize not only the peoples but also the cultures; without harming the integral and radical truth of the Gospel and unnecessary altering the cultures (historical domain where Christians must precisely live their faith), considering that everything that is good, noble, and human that is found within the cultures is part of that assumed humanity by the Divine Verb<sup>9</sup>.

In the years previous to the II Vatican Council and in the missionary or evangelization spheres, the *adaptation* or *accommodation* definitions were being discussed in order to characterize the contact between the Christian message with a certain culture. In some instances, it was even proposed the *indigenization* definition.

During the whole of this essay, we will use the concept of culture just as the Vatican II defines it:

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<sup>8</sup> II VATICAN COUNCIL, Const. pastoral *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 44: AAS 58 (1966) 1064-1065

<sup>9</sup> Not pretending to be thorough, we consider that the most significant references of the II Vatican Council regarding our subject of study are contained in the following documents: SC: 37-40; AG: 3, 8, 9, 12 and 22; GS: 1, 42, 44, 57 and 58. LG: 1, 13, 16, 31, 35, 48, and 69. NA: 2.

*“The word "culture" in its general sense indicates everything whereby man develops and perfects his many bodily and spiritual qualities; he strives, by his knowledge and his labor, to bring the world itself under his control. He renders social life more human both in the family and the civic community, through improvement of customs and institutions. Throughout the course of time he expresses, communicates and conserves in his works, great spiritual experiences and desires, that they might be of advantage to the progress of many, even of the whole human family. Thence it follows that human culture has necessarily a historical and social aspect and the word "culture" also often assumes a sociological and ethnological sense...(GS n. 53)”<sup>10</sup>.*

## **2. Documents from the period of Paul VI**

In his Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, Paul VI discusses the need to dialogue with the world, as a mean for the Church's apostolic mission. He asked himself where does everything start to become everything to all:

*“Since the world cannot be saved from the outside, we must first of all identify ourselves with those to whom we would bring the Christian message -like the Word of God who Himself became a man. Next we must forego all privilege and the use of unintelligible language, and adopt the way of life of ordinary people in all that is human and honorable. Indeed, we must adopt the way of life of the most humble people, if we wish to be listened to and understood. (...) The desire to come together as brothers must not lead to a watering down or whittling away of truth. Our dialogue must not weaken our attachment to our faith. Our apostolate must not make vague compromises concerning the principles, which regulate and govern the profession of the Christian faith both in theory and in practice. An immoderate desire to make peace and sink differences at all costs (irenism and syncretism) is ultimately*

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<sup>10</sup> Another widely used definition is UNESCO's cultural definition given in Mexico 1982: “That in its widest sense, culture may now be said to be the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only the arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs... that it is culture that gives man the ability to reflect upon himself. It is culture that makes us specifically human, rational beings, endowed with a critical judgment and a sense of moral commitment. It is through culture that we discern values and make choices. It is through culture that man expresses himself, becomes aware of himself, recognizes his incompleteness, questions his own achievements, seeks untiringly for new meanings and creates works through which he transcends his limitations. (Final Report of the *World Conference on Cultural Policies*, Mexico July 26th - August 6th 1982, UNESCO, Paris 1982. Taken from: SÁNCHEZ DE TOCA Y ALAMEDA, MELCHOR, *El diálogo Fe-Cultura en el Magisterio Contemporáneo*, Primera Parte, 2.12, en «Culturas y Fe» 7 (1999/3) 191). Within our subject of study, we regard with great importance the works of John Paul II: JOHN PAUL II, *Speech given at the UNESCO headquarters*, Paris, 2-VI-1980, nn. 6-15; AAS 72 (1980) 735-752; ID., *Speech given to the accredited diplomatic services in the Holy See*, 12-1-1981, nn. 6-8; AAS 73 (1981) 185-196.

*nothing more than skepticism about the power and content of the Word of God, which we desire to preach. The effective apostle is the man who is completely faithful to Christ's teaching"*<sup>11</sup>.

With these words, it definitely makes clear the necessity to dialogue, of becoming the same, -identifying oneself- with each form of life of those whom we would like to evangelize. This idea will be later expressed with the fact that the Gospel's message must be embodied in the lives of those being evangelized, a true analogical comparison with the Incarnation.

During the canonization homily of Uganda's martyrs, Paul VI reaffirms the difference between evangelization and colonization<sup>12</sup>. It is not less significant that in Bombay (Mumbai), during the reconciliation period in his visit to India, he spoke of the Church's *active adaptation*<sup>13</sup> to the cultural surroundings as a necessity to fulfill its mission. He also encouraged Christians to live their own faith and devotion in harmony with India's civilization and in a more genuine Indian manner<sup>14</sup>.

Paul VI states, in his message to the African Hierarchy and peoples, that it is a duty to respect all heritage as a cultural legacy of the past; not only for its own importance but also because it is the providential foundation on which the Gospel's message is announced. The African citizen, when he accepts the Christian faith, does not renounce himself; but rather again harbors former traditional values in spirit and truth<sup>15</sup>.

Years later, in Kampala (Uganda), the Pope speaks of *adapting* the Gospel and the Church to the African culture as long as the essential unity is preserved; *adaptation* and pluralism are not only legitimate but also desirable. Adapting Christian life in the pastoral liturgy, rites, spiritual activities, and catechesis is not only possible but also favored by the Church<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> PAUL VI, Encyclical *Ecclesia suam* (6-VIII-1964), n. 33: AAS 56 (1964) 646-647.

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. ID., *Homily in honor of the martyr saint of Uganda*, Rome, 18-X-1964: AAS 56 (1964) 908.

<sup>13</sup> ID., *Homily of the solemn liturgy in the syro-malankara rite*, Bombay, India, 4-XII-1964: AAS 57 (1965) 127-128

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. ID., *Message to the Indian people*, Bombay, 4-XII-1964: AAS 57 (1965) 125.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. ID., *Message to the African Catholic Hierarchy and People*, 29-X-1967, nn. 13-14: AAS 59 (1967) 1079-1080.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. ID., *Closing Speech of the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar, Kampala, Uganda*, 31-VII-1969, 2: AAS 61 (1969) 576-577. ID., *Speech at the Parliament, Uganda*, 1-VIII-1969: AAS 61 (1969) 581.

Paul VI recalls, during a speech given to all the bishops of Asia, that the historical lack of knowledge of the Asian cultural richness has hindered the expansion of the Gospel's message; since this fact, somehow, renders the Church alien to this civilization. He also states, following Jesus Christ's example, that to be a catholic and an Asian is entirely compatible. Furthermore, the same Asian people, who know their own world and culture, are the most suitable to build the Church because there is nothing better than an Asian speaking to the same Asians<sup>17</sup>.

Later, in Manila (Philippines), he expressed that the Church should incarnate herself in whatever cultural climate or race; wherever the Church finds herself she must grow roots in the cultural and spiritual soil of the place and assimilate all genuine value<sup>18</sup>.

In the beginning of the year 1971, the General Directory of Catechesis was approved, as a result of the *Christus Dominus* Decree rule n. 44, which called for the need to develop new forms of expression in order to establish the faith in the new cultures and attain *the incarnation of the Gospel in the different cultures*<sup>19</sup>.

## **2.1 Synod of Bishops (1974)**

The III Synod of Bishops (1974), whose central theme was *Evangelization in the Modern World*, is an important step toward the explanation of the relationship between faith and culture: it considered the way to go about instilling Christianity in each nation's and peoples' cultural nature and character.

Cardinal Aloisio Lorscheider discussed, when speaking about the life of the Church in the last previous years of the Synod, that many local churches have begun to study more deeply indigenous cultures and many Episcopal Conferences have stated that among the more urgent problems is how to embody Christianity in the cultures<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Cfr. ID., *Closing Message of the Symposium of Asian Bishops*, Manila, Philippines, 28-XI-1970: AAS 63 (1971) 25-26.

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. ID., *Radio message to the Asian peoples*, Radio Veritas, Manila, Philippines, 29-XI-1970, 5: AAS 63 (1971) 38-39.

<sup>19</sup> CONGREGATION OF THE CLERGY, *General Directory of Catechesis 1971*, n. 8: AAS 64 (1972) 104.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. CAPRILE, GIOVANNI, *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi. Terza Assemblea Generale (27 settembre - 26 ottobre 1974)*, Edizioni 'La Civiltà Cattolica', Roma 1975, p. 140. See also, SARAVIA MARTINS, JOSÉ, *L'evangelo e la culture nell' ultimo Sinodo dei*

Mons. Pironio, who was at that time president of the *Latin American Episcopal Council*<sup>21</sup>, when talking about Latin American evangelization, insisted on evangelizing the religiousness of the people (the manner in which Christianity is embodied in the different cultures and ethnic strata<sup>22</sup>), action by which one sees the *semina Verbi*<sup>23</sup>. Many Latin American Bishops insist on paying more attention to the religiousness of the people and their values as an evangelization medium<sup>24</sup>.

Mons. Sangu, Mbeya's bishop (Tanzania), insisted, during a general presentation regarding African evangelization and the relationship between Christianity and cultures, that there is only one Christianity but it must be established in all nations according to their individual nature and culture<sup>25</sup>.

The Afro-Asian bishops stated that they have abandoned the *adaptation* definition and concept, instead they prefer *incarnation* when talking about the relationship between faith and culture: "We, the African Bishops, do not like the expression of 'adapting' the Church to any given culture. It is not about adapting the Gospel nor the Church and her laws to the African customs... More importantly, it is about studying more deeply the theological problems that oppose themselves to Christ's 'incarnation' in Africa..."<sup>26</sup>; proceeding in this manner, evangelization will not be considered as a transplant (*transplantatio*) coming from a foreign church, which renders an idea of superficiality and paternalism, but rather as an implantation

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*vescovi*, en AA. VV., *Evangelizzazione e cultura*, Atti del Congresso Internazionale Scientifico di Missiologia (Roma, 5-12 ottobre 1975), Pontificia Università Urbaniana, Roma 1976, Volume I, p. 58-59.

<sup>21</sup> From this point forward, this Council shall be named by its Spanish abbreviation CELAM.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr.: LG 16-17, AG 3, 11, 15. See also, EUSEBIO, *Preparatio evangelica*, I, 1: PG 21, 28 a-b; SAINT JUSTINE, *II Apology*, 8: PG 6, 457-458. CLEMENTE ALEJANDRINO, *Protréptico*, X, 110: PG 8, 225-228.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. CAPRILE, GIOVANNI, *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi Terza Assemblea Generale (27 settembre - 26 ottobre 1974)*, o.c., p. 152: Mons. Eduardo Pironio's intervention.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 354: Mons. José de Jesús Pimiento Rodríguez's intervention, Archbishop of Manizales (Colombia) in the B Spanish-Portuguese minor circle; and p. 354: Mons. Andrés M. Rubio García's Intervention, bishop of Mercedes (Uruguay) in the C Spanish-Portuguese minor circle.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 149: Mons. I.D. Sangu's interventions, bishop of Mbeya (Tanzania).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 620: Mons. Antonio Manikus's Intervention, bishop of Ban-gassou, Central African Republic.

(*implantatio*) of God's word which incarnates itself in a well defined sociocultural background, so that it may, as ferment, penetrate and transform the life of a human community<sup>27</sup>.

The bishops also reiterated that "culture and African thought are capable of expressing the faith and the sacraments. It is about trying to express the Gospel's message in each people's and culture's language, genius, and philosophy"<sup>28</sup>.

Another definition that appeared during the synod was *indigenization* of the faith<sup>29</sup>. This concept is explained in three movements that must be followed if the Gospel's message is to be received by the group to which the evangelizer belongs to: transmission, assimilation, and reformulation or re-expression of the message in categories, manifested already in the comprehension and genius of the evangelized culture<sup>30</sup>.

The works carried out during the Synod drew a lot of interest. In consequence, two events took place that will help us clarify our essay's central argument.

The first event is the Fourth Plenary Assembly of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). In this meeting, Card. Paul Zoungana, during his interventions, spoke about *inculturation* and the Gospel's transcending message concerning all cultures: The Gospel's content must not be adapted, culture is the one that must be purified of all actions and thoughts incompatible with Christ's teachings. All *inculturation*

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<sup>27</sup> Cfr. *Ibid*, p. 182 (Card. Peracattil's intervention, archbishop of Ernakulam, India) and p. 232 (Card. Darmojuwano's Intervention, archbishop of Semarang, Indonesia).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*. p. 229: Mons. B. Yago's Intervention, bishop of Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

<sup>29</sup> A possible definition is: "Indigenization is the announcement of the Gospel planted and sustained within the indigenous cultural forms -heterogeneous with western culture-; it rejects all superficial and extrinsic implantation, which is really difficult to avoid due to the complexity of the problem", cfr. ARANDA LOMEÑA, ANTONIO, *El Verbo Encarnado, principio normativo de la Indigenización*, en "Estudios de Misionología" N. 3 'La Actividad Misionera ante la indigenización', Ediciones Aldecoca, S.A., Burgos 1978, p. 70-71. And in that same reference, if the reader wishes to learn more about this subject: LÓPEZ GAY, JESÚS, S.J., *Indigenización de la Teología*, p. 99-123.

<sup>30</sup> Cfr. CAPRILE, GIOVANNI, *Il sinodo dei Vescovi. Terza Assemblea Generale (27 settembre - 26 ottobre 1974)*, o.c., p. 187 (Mons. Samuel Carter's Intervention, archbishop of Kingston, Jamaica) and p. 616 (Mons. Jeaz Zoa's Intervention, archbishop of Yaoundé, Cameroon).

demands a true incarnation of Christ's message in a specific sociocultural environment. Therefore, we transition from a missionary theology of adaptation to a theology of incarnation<sup>31</sup>.

The second event is the International Scientific Congress on Missiology that took place in Rome through the 5-12 of October in 1975, whose theme was *Evangelizzazione e Cultura* and goal was to scientifically study the relationship between culture and the Gospel. During one of the interventions, Yves Congar upheld the *acculturation* definition as the most adequate to illustrate the relationship between culture and the Gospel. Congar also stated, during his dissertation, that although it was not too elegant a word, it well expressed the meaning; in Japan, it has been modified to *inculturation*: plant the seed of faith in a culture and allow it to bloom, to express itself according to the resources and genius of that culture"<sup>32</sup>.

## 2.2 Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*

Pope Paul IV taught in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* that evangelization not only must focus on people but also on cultures: it must strive to pierce the Word of God in the personal and social lives of all men and women, changing or rectifying every thought, predominant value, criterion of judgment in every lifestyle which are against the Gospel:

*“Strata of humanity which are transformed: for the Church it is a question not only of preaching the Gospel in ever wider geographic areas or to ever greater numbers of people, but also of affecting and as it were upsetting, through the power of the Gospel, mankind's criteria of judgment, determining values, points of interest, lines of thought, sources of inspiration and models of life, which are in contrast with the Word of God and the plan of salvation.*

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<sup>31</sup> Cfr. ID., *Problemi dell' Evangelizzazione in Africa. Il simposio dell' episcopato africano a Roma*, en “La Civittà Cattolica” 126 (1975/IV) 485. This meeting took place from the 22 to the 28 of September in 1975 and in this essay the intervention of Cardinal Paul Zoungana, Archbishop of Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso), president of SECAM is published.

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. CONGAR, YVES, O.P., *Christianity as Faith and as Culture*, in «East Asian Pastoral Review» 18 (1981) 314-315. This publication is published in English, but Yves Congar's intervention was originally in French during the Congress.

*All this could be expressed in the following words: what matters is to evangelize man's culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), in the wide and rich sense which these terms have in Gaudium et spes, (cfr. n.53) always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.*

*The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, is certainly not identical with culture, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the kingdom that the Gospel proclaims is lived by men who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.*

*The split between the Gospel and culture is without a doubt the drama of our time, just as it was of other times. Therefore every effort must be made to ensure a full evangelization of culture, or more correctly of cultures. They have to be regenerated by an encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter will not take place if the Gospel is not proclaimed”<sup>33</sup>.*

The text is very clear in respect to the need of profoundly evangelizing: it is not about expanding to wider demographics, but rather a gain in depth; always starting with the people and reaching the neuralgic points of human thought where the ideas that decidedly influence society are generated. Knowing that by doing so, we are avoiding all shallowness and reaching instead the roots of mankind itself: criteria of judgment, predominant values, lifestyles, lines of thought, etc.

When evangelizing we will have to grasp a few elements of the culture we are preaching to, because men and women respond to them. However, it has been clearly established that the Gospel is completely independent of all cultures but, at the same time, the Gospel is compatible with all cultures and is capable of permeating them. And so, the transcultural sense of the Gospel is fixed: the Gospel transcends all cultures and must regenerate them and fit them in with the Gospel's values which are the true and complete human values.

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<sup>33</sup> PAUL VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* (8-XII-1975), 19-20: AAS 68 (1976) 17-19,

The drama of our times, the rupture between culture and the Gospel, is clearly exposed. And it urgently insists on the evangelization of the cultures in order to reduce the gap.

Later on, in the same document, Pope Paul VI talks about “*assimilating and transposing*”, in the sense of employing the own language of each culture to communicate the Gospel’s values, at the same time he warns of the dangers of this practice:

*“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 the 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.*”

*The transposition has to be done with the discernment, seriousness, respect and competence which the matter calls for in the field of liturgical expression,(cfr. SC 37-38), and in the areas of catechesis, theological formulation, secondary ecclesial structures, and ministries. And the word "language" should be understood here less in the semantic or literary sense than in the sense which one may call anthropological and cultural.*

*The question is undoubtedly a delicate one. Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. But on the other hand, evangelization risks losing its power and disappearing altogether if one empties or adulterates its content under the pretext of translating it; if, in other words, one sacrifices this reality and destroys the unity without which there is no universality, out of a wish to adapt a universal reality to a local situation. Now, only a Church which preserves the awareness of her universality and shows that she is in fact universal is capable of having a message which can be heard by all, regardless of regional frontiers<sup>34</sup>.*

This is where the problems begins: the preaching of the Gospel must adapt itself to the addressee's circumstances and mentalities but this process is not just an adaptation, it is much more than that, because the Gospel will permeate the addressee’s culture and mentality

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<sup>34</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, 63: AAS 68 (1976) 53-54

transforming their judgments, thoughts, lifestyles, etc.; the Gospel has this transforming and purifying force capable of weaving itself in the culture, of becoming the culture. However, magisterial texts limit themselves only to mentioning this “assimilation and transposing” without fully laying out the goal that will be explained later on: the Gospel becomes culture.

All things considered, this process must be carried out with absolute fidelity to the Gospel’s contents, trying not to lose unity by making concessions under the pretext of reaching comprehension among the different mentalities or cultures.

Paul VI gives us the example of the Oriental Churches. They are proof that there can be unity within a plurality of a wide range of mentalities, traditions and cultures:

*“It is precisely in the Oriental Churches where we can find, historically in advanced and fully proven, the validity of the pluralistic scheme; in such way that all modern inquiries, that want to verify the relationship between the Gospel’s announcement and human civilization, between faith and culture, have already in the history of these venerable Churches important conceptual elaborations and concrete forms in connection with the unity-diversity relation”<sup>35</sup>.*

This plurality manifests the possibility, and desirability if it is the case, that the Gospel can always live in the mentality, nature, genius, and culture of each people that receives it. And this is always possible if we safeguard the essential unity of the faith.

Furthermore, in another document, there is the intention of *Africanizing* religious life in the sense of harmonizing the values of the African culture with the Gospel<sup>36</sup>. One can infer that Pope Paul VI, without using the *inculturation* definition, expresses with other words the same concept and idea that, years later, we had wished to express with this definition<sup>37</sup>. It is hardly surprising that he does not use the *inculturation* definition since neither the II Vatican Council, with its cultural and worldly openness, got to use it<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> ID., *Speech given during the IV centenary celebration of the Pontifical Greek College*, 30-IV-1977: AAS 69 (1977) 345,

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. THE CONGREGATION FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SECULAR INSTITUTES AND CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF PEOPLES, *Instruction From October*, 3-VI-1978, 3: EV S1/667-674.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. LOURDUSAMY, D. SIMON, *Paulo VI e l’incontro con la Cultura*, in «Euntes docete» XXXVI (1983) 145-181.

<sup>38</sup> There are plenty of conciliar texts which talk about the inculturation definition that we wish to express, e.g. a) LG 8, 13, 17 y 48: AAS 57 (1965) 11-12, 17-18, 20-21, 53-54.

## 2.3 The terminology used during that time

As we have previously said, in that time, definitions such as accommodation or adaptation, contextualization, acculturation, enculturation, etc.<sup>39</sup> were used. Most of them only try to express externally the adaptation of the Christian message to the new circumstances. However, there are two definition, *indigenization and contextualization*, which many used interchangeably with the *inculturation*<sup>40</sup> definition.

The *enculturation and acculturation* definitions were put forward as a way of better expressing and understanding the process of insertion in the Church's culture and of Christ's message. Neither definition gets to explain it correctly and precisely. The reasons are:

By *enculturation* we understand the process by which an individual is integrated and integrates himself, since infancy, in his cultural community. In one sense, this process lasts all his life: our culture carries us during every stage of our existence until death. Furthermore, we may find two types of individuals. The first never gets to penetrate his culture and contents himself by letting culture guide his life. The second tries to understand his culture and develops through it his own creativity.

On the other hand, the *acculturation* definition in anthropological terms refers to the phenomenon that results from the contact between two cultures or two cultural groups (or

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b) GS 4-10, 22, 38, y 53-62: AAS 58 (1966) 1027-1033, 1042-1044, 1055-1056, 1076-1084.

c) AG 1, 10, 15-18, 21-22, 26 y 41: AAS 58 (1966) 947, 959, 963-969, 972-974, 977-978, 988-989.

d) SC 37-39: AAS 56 (1964) 110.

All of these texts constitute the magisterial background that will allow later on defining the inculturation concept. With these words, Pope John Paul II noted this fact: "The function of inculturation in the mission of the Church has been clearly defined in the II Vatican Council documents and in many apostolic exhortations promulgated during these last twenty years. The *Ad gentes* decree has stressed the importance of these concepts..." . cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *To the members of the Episcopal Conference of Rwanda*, Kigali, 9-IX-1990: AAS 83 (1991) 219-220.

<sup>39</sup> In theological literature we may also find the definitions: re-adaptation, integral dialogue, reunion, initiation, internalization, integration, reconversion, renewal, transformation, alienation...

<sup>40</sup> Cfr.: SCHREITER, ROBERT J., C. PP. S., *Faith and Cultures: Challenges to a World Church* in «Theological Studies» 50 (1989) 747 and ARÉVALO, CATALINO G., S. J., *Pre-notes to the Contextualization of Theology*, in «Philippiana Sacra» XIV (1979) 15-35. Although there are many opposing authors, cfr. HALEBLIAN, KRIKOR, *The Problem of Contextualization*, in «Missiology» XI (1983) 95-111.

between a person and a culture that it is not his own). These phenomena include: reciprocal influences, appropriations, imitations, transformations, syncretism, the possible exchange of cultural elements to a lesser or greater degree, the absorption of one culture over the other, or the synthesis of both, etc. Any phenomenon can occur at all cultural levels: from techniques to art or music. Cultural elements are seldom taken as they are. They are assimilated and transformed by the adopting culture and they react to the new cultural elements they encounter.

We do not announce the Gospel in a void space. Overall, evangelization produces acculturation phenomena: the evangelizer's culture (consciously or not, willingly or not) acts in the culture of the evangelized. And so on reciprocally. There is no disembodied Christianity. It is neither above nor alien to cultures. Planted in the historical event of Jesus Christ, Faith develops itself throughout history and, in consequence, it may or not happen. Although it always looks forward to the future, this Christian faith cannot escape its past. It is an ill-fated illusion to categorize Christian faith as distant, in a pure state that ignores the presence of this past.

Neither one of the definitions corresponds to what we want to express theologically. It is widely known that, because of the Church's nature and mission, the Church is not limited to a specific culture nor is evangelization a mere contact with any culture, rather it is a deep insertion of the Gospel and the Church in a specific culture until both become part of said culture. The aforementioned definitions do not sufficiently and properly describe the permanent state of Christ's transcultural message in the cultures. There was still lacking a better clarifying definition that would give a sound theological explanation.

In 1953, Pierre Charles states that the *inculturation* definition has been used for around twenty years<sup>41</sup>. In 1959, R.P. Segura writes an article citing this definition<sup>42</sup> and, in 1962, J. Masson speaks of *inculturated Catholicism*<sup>43</sup>. This definition is also used during one of the

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<sup>41</sup> Cfr. CHARLES, PIERRE, S.J., *Missiologie et Acculturation*, in «Nouvelle Revue Théologique» 75 (1953) 19.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. SEGURA, R.P., *L'initiation valeur permanente de l'inculturation*, in «Museon Lessianum Section Missiologie» 40 (1959) 219-235.

<sup>43</sup> Cfr. MASSON, J., S.J., *L'Eglise ouvert sur le monde*, 4, «Nouvelle Revue Théologique» 84 (1962) 1038.

accounts presented in the 1972 reunion of the International Theological Commission<sup>44</sup>. In the final document of the first meeting of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC), the Church is describe as an *inculturated and indigenous Church*<sup>45</sup>.

In 1976, the Congregation for Catholic Education published a document on priesthood education, which reminds us how important is for theology to address the cultural and scientific problems of our time. Several document key points -not including the *inculturation* definition- specify some aspects that need to be further explained.<sup>46</sup> It is very possible that during those years the *inculturation* definition was frequently used in the theological field, but it never reached an official status in the Church's documents.

## 2.4 1977 Synod of Bishops

Later in the IV Synod of Bishops (1977) whose central subject was *Catechesis in the Modern World*, during the sixth assembly, Cardinal Jaime Sin, of Manila, stated when talking about catechisms that "this is far from the II Vatican spirit an inculturational process advanced by the Council". He further adds "that is why we have to consider inculturation as a fundamental postulate of all catechesis"<sup>47</sup>. In the same assembly, Mons. Adimou, Archbishop of Cotonou (Benin), said "it is necessary -also following pontifical guidelines- to insist on the traditional environment because only in that way the indigenization of the Gospel and

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<sup>44</sup> Cfr. NEMESHEGY, PETER, S.J., *Incontro tra cristianesimo e cultura in Asia* (relazione alla riunione della Commissione Teologica Internazionale del 1972), in *Pluralismo. Unità della fede e pluralismo teologico*, Bologna 1974, p. 205-229.

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. FEDERATION OF ASIAN BISHOPS' CONFERENCES, *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, Final Statement No. 12, in *His Gospel to Our Peoples*, Volume II, Manila, Cardinal Bea Institute, 1976, p. 332: "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". This meeting took place in Taipei (Taiwan-Formosa) on the 22-27 April 1974.

<sup>46</sup> Cfr. CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, *Formazione teologica dei futuri sacerdoti* (22-II-1976): EV 5/1766-1911; especially in the numbers 15, 52, 59, 61, 66, 90 and 123.

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. CAPRILE, GIOVANNI, *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi. Quarta Assemblea Generale (30 settembre - 29 ottobre 1977)*, Edizioni "La Civiltà Cattolica", Roma 1978, p. 104-105: Cardinal Sin's intervention (archbishop of Manila, Philippines).

inculturation of the faith can be accomplished"<sup>48</sup>. Furthermore, Mons. Obeso, Bishop coadjutant of Jalapa (Mexico), pointed out the difficulties of evangelizing the present cultures and popular Mexican religiousness<sup>49</sup>.

In the minor Circles of this Synod, the synodal fathers also discussed the *inculturation* definition. The C English Circle, when speaking about the progress being carried out in today's catechism, mentioned the characteristics and mode that *inculturation* should have<sup>50</sup>.

In the A Spanish-Portuguese Circle, when speaking about the unity and universality of the faith and its insertion in the culture, alluded to the *semina Verbi*. Furthermore, the Circle insisted that faith is necessarily culture however it does not identify itself with any; then the Circle goes on to make a description of what *inculturation* is: the penetration of the faith in the inner space of man's life, in such a way that his manner of judging, feeling and acting is engrossed by the force of the vivifying Spirit<sup>51</sup>.

The Latin Circle stated the necessity of clearly defining the cultural insertion expression and maintains that inculturation cannot change the deposit of faith and the essential principles

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<sup>48</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 112, Mons. Christophe Adimou (archbishop of Cotonou, Benin): È necessario -anche secondo le direttive prontifice- insistere sull'ambiente tradizionale, perché solo in esso potranno attuarsi l'indigenizzazione dell' evangelizzazione e l'inculturazione della fede".

<sup>49</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 122, Mons. Sergio Obeso Rivera's intervention, coadjutant bishop of Jalapa, Mexico (7th general assembly, 5-X).

<sup>50</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 265: "Una materia valida in una nazione non sarà necessariamente valida allo scopo anche in un' altra. Ciò pone in campo l' intera questione della cosiddetta «inculturazione». I Paesi di missione debbono certamente molto a coloro che hanno portato loro la buona novella del Vangelo, ma inevitabilmente e inconsciamente il missionario riveste l'insegnamento del Vangelo coio concetti della sua cultura. La persona evangelizzata deve adeguare a sé quell' insegnamento e riesprimerlo nella propria lingua e nel proprio stile de vita. Questa opera di «inculturazione» normalmente deve essere esercitata da persone alle quali la nuova forma culturale è connaturale, come parte del propio patrimoni ereditario. Chiunque si accinga a quest' opera, che implica una nuova presentazione dell'annuncio evangelica senza mutazione della sua sostanza, può raggiungere qualche risultato solo attraverso l'esperienza e lo studio profondo. si dovrà fare in modo che la religiosità popolare di que popolo si evolva, si diriga se è necessario per nuove strade, senza tuttavia essere distrutta".

<sup>51</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, pág. 294-295: "Bisogna tenere presente che la fede è necessariamente «culturale», ma non si identifica con una cultura. E questo è intimamente collegato con il mistero dell'incarnazione. La cosiddetta «inculturazione», in catechesi, significa la penetrazione della fede fino all'intimo della vita dell'uomo, così che il modo di giudicare, di sentire e di agire sia imbevuto dalla forza dello Spirito vivificante. Di conseguenza, benché gli attuali studi etnologici siano utili, soltanto gli evangelizzatori hanno la capacità di inserire nella fede i valori culturali".

of Christian morality<sup>52</sup>; and the German Circle clarified that inculturation will undoubtedly lead to pluralism, but that is not the same thing<sup>53</sup>. The Superior General of the Society of Jesus, during his intervention in the ninth assembly, also widely uses the inculturation definition<sup>54</sup>. Ultimately, in the final propositions of this Synod, the third to be exact, number 16 talks about inculturation<sup>55</sup>.

Eventually, the first time that the inculturation definition was used officially in a document of the Church is in the message to the People of God (no. 5) of this Synod of Bishops:

*“As the II Vatican Council indicated and Paul VI recollected in the apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, the Christian message must be planted in human cultures by assuming and transforming them. In this sense, catechesis is an instrument of inculturation, that is, it develops and at the same time illuminates from within the lifestyles of those whom this instrument is directed to”.*<sup>56</sup>

### 3. Documents from John Paul II

The Pontifical Council for the Laity published on October 3rd 1978 the document *La Formation des laïcs* that summarizes the ideas of *Evangelii nuntiandi*:

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<sup>52</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, pág. 324: “Viene chiesto dai Padre di definire chiaramente che cosa significhi l’espressione ‘inserimento culturale’, di cui spesso si sente parlare. Hanno affermato che evidentemente la cosiddetta «inculturazione» non può toccare il deposito della fede e gli essenziali principi della moralità cristiana”.

<sup>53</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, pág. 284: “L’inculturazione porta indubbiamente al pluralismo, ma non è la stessa cosa. Lo sforzo di inserire la fede in qualsiasi cultura deve essere lodato e promosso”.

<sup>54</sup> Father Pedro Arrupe spoke in the ninth congregation (6-X), like many of the religious members that assisted as synodal Fathers. For his intervention text, cfr. *Catequesis e Inculturación*, en «Vida Nueva» nn. 1103-1104 (5-12 nov. 1977) 2186-2188. A few years before, in the XXXII General Congregation of the Society of Jesus (that took place between December 1st. 1974 and April 7th 1975) the inculturation definition and concept was studied. As a result of various decrees of that Congregation, [Decree IV (nn. 36, 53-56); Decree V y Decree VI (n. 29)], the definition was published in a document years later: cfr. ARRUPE, PEDRO, S. J., *Carta y Documento de trabajo sobre la Inculturación* (14-V-78), en «Acta Romana Societatis Iesu» XVII (1978) 229-255.

<sup>55</sup> Cfr. CAPRILE, GIOVANNI, *Il Sinodo dei Vescovi. Quarta Assemblea Generale (30 settembre - 29 ottobre 1977)*, o. c., pág. 579-580.

<sup>56</sup> Cfr. SYNOD OF BISHOPS (1977), *Message to the People of God Cum iam ad exitum*, 5, 28-X-1977: EV 6/385. N. 5of the Latin text states: “Idem realisticus sensus nos invitat ad actionis catecheticae complexitatem considerandam: - culturarum diversitas pro catechesi magnam situationum pluritatatem efficit. Ut indicatum est a Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II et ut a Paulo VI iterum memoratum im Adhortatione Apostolica Evangelii nuntiandi, nuntio christianorum oportet ut in culturis humanis radices agat assumendo eas atque transformando. Hoc sensu dicere licet catechesim quoddam instrumentum «inculturationis» esse. Quod significat eam evolere et insimul ab intra illuminare vitae formas illorum ad quos sese dirigit. Fides christiana per catechesim in ipsas culturas inserenda est. Vera «incarnatio» fidei per catechesim supponit non solum processum «dandi» sed etiam «accipiendi»”.

“... the incarnation of the Gospel must show its own capacity to evangelize the cultures by inspiring, purifying, permeating, and transcending them. That is the only way the Gospel can truly enter in the deepest parts of the soul, the ethos, the wisdom of the peoples.

With that in mind, some of the members of the General assembly of the Pontifical Council insisted on the ‘inculturation’ of the Church and Christian message but always respecting their integrity; this will lead to the recognition of the “*semina Verbi*” values that constitute, according to the II Vatican, a true “evangelical preparation” and medium to announce the “richness of Christ’s ministry...”. They also considered that the vivacity of the Church’s incarnation resides in this inculturation. It is a condition to render Christian teaching less marginal and “completely alien” to the wisdom and lifestyle of the peoples and to forward it so that it may be more widely and profoundly received”<sup>57</sup>.

The previous text insists that the Gospel must deeply permeate the culture of the peoples, their *ethos*, the soul of the culture: the inmost characteristics of a specific culture. The text also calls for the acknowledgment and respect of the *semina Verbi*, so the evangelizing of the culture can be efficiently done.

The other important statement is to consider *inculturation* as the *vivacity of the Church’s incarnation* in any culture; as a result the basic idea that will later serve in the *inculturation* definition is outlined: the analogical relationship with the Incarnation.

In one of his first messages, Pope John Paul II, when addressing the international catholic organization for cinema, reinforced the need of mass communications to help in the inculturation of the Gospel's Message. This is the first time a Pontiff, in a speech acting as Pope, uses this concept: “It is a question not only of the first proclamation of the faith in a world that is often very secularized, or of catechesis to deepen this faith, but it is a question of the inculturation of the Gospel's Message at the level of each people, of each cultural tradition”<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Cfr. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE LAITY, Document *La Formation des laïcs*, 3-X-1978, III: EV 6/1048-1049.

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, Message *For The 50th Anniversary Of The International Catholic Film Organization*, 31-X-1978: IGP2 I (1978) 85.

In the following months, John Paul II, in the *Redemptor hominis* Encyclical, 4-II-1979, states when talking about the evangelizing mission:

*“In this unity in mission, which is decided principally by Christ himself, all Christians must find what already unites them, even before their full communion is achieved. This is apostolic and missionary unity, missionary and apostolic unity. Thanks to this unity we can together come close to the magnificent heritage of the human spirit that has been manifested in all religions, as the Second Vatican Council's Declaration Nostra Aetate says (cfr. II Conc. Vat., Decl. Nostrae aetate, I s.: AAS 58 (1966) 740 s.). It also enables us to approach all cultures, all ideological concepts, and all people of good will. We approach them with the esteem, respect and discernment that since the time of the Apostles has marked the missionary attitude, the attitude of the missionary. Suffice it to mention Saint Paul and, for instance, his address in the Areopagus at Athens (Heb 17, 22-31). The missionary attitude always begins with a feeling of deep esteem for "what is in man" (Jn 2, 25), for what man has himself. Worked out in the depths of his spirit concerning the most profound and important problems. It is a question of respecting everything that has been brought about in him by the Spirit, which "blows where it wills" (Jn 3,8). The mission is never destruction, but instead is a taking up and fresh building, even if in practice there has not always been full correspondence with this high ideal. And we know well that the conversion that is begun by the mission is a work of grace, in which man must fully find himself again”<sup>59</sup>.*

In this point, the Encyclical recalls the basic ideas that compose the evangelizers' attitude before the 'different', before the mentalities and cultures that find themselves in missionary work: respect, esteem, and discernment. It also gives the example of Saint Paul's attitude in his speech in the *areopagus*.

In April 1979, in the Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana*, in the Preface and various numbers, the Pope makes a synthesis between faith and culture by summarizing the *Evangelii nuntiandi* ideas, and emphasizes the importance of ecclesiastical universities and departments for this field of study<sup>60</sup>.

A few days later, John Paul II said to the members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission:

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<sup>59</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (4-III-1979), 12: AAS 71 (1979) 278-279.

<sup>60</sup> Cfr. ID., Apostolic Constitution *Sapientia christiana* (15-IV-1979): AAS 71 (1979) 469-499.

*“the ‘acculturation’ or ‘inculturation’ definition is not only a beautiful neologism but also expresses very well one of the components of the great mystery of the Incarnation”<sup>61</sup>.*

In the *Catechesi tradendae* Apostolic Exhortation, 16-X-1979, Pope John Paul II discusses the incarnation of the evangelical message in other cultures:

*“We can say of catechesis, as well as of evangelization in general, that it is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery (cfr. Rm 16, 25; Ef 3, 5) and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought. Two things must however be kept in mind.*

*On the one hand the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the biblical world or, more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived), nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.*

*On the other hand, the power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates. When that power enters into a culture, it is no surprise that it rectifies many of its elements. There would be no catechesis if it were the Gospel that had to change when it came into contact with the cultures (...)*

*Genuine catechists know that catechesis “takes flesh” in the various cultures and milieux: one has only to think of the peoples with their great differences, of modern youth, of the great variety of circumstances in which people find themselves today. But they refuse to accept an impoverishment of catechesis through a renunciation or obscuring of its message, by adaptations, even in language, that would endanger the “precious deposit” of the faith,(cfr. 2 Tim 1, 14) or by concessions in matters of faith or morals. They are convinced that true catechesis eventually enriches these cultures by helping them to go beyond the defective or even inhuman features in them, and by communicating to their legitimate values the fullness of Christ.(cfr. Jn 1, 16; Ef 1, 10)”<sup>62</sup>.*

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<sup>61</sup> ID., *Address to Participants In The Plenary Meeting Of The Pontifical Biblical Commission*, 26-IV-1979: AAS 71 (1979) 607.

<sup>62</sup> ID., *Apostolic Exhortation Catechesi tradendae* (16-X-1979), 53: AAS 71 (1979) 1319-1321.

The text underlines respect and knowledge of the cultures as an essential condition to achieve a proper evangelization, an evangelization that should produce those manifestations inherent to life, thought, and Christian's celebrations. The text also gives the idea that faith must go through a process of not only assimilation but also of something else: the Gospel must not change, it is the culture that must purify itself through the own transforming and regenerating force of the Gospel. Having Faith in Christ does not asks us to abandoned our own culture and adopt another; what it does imply is that the values of any culture become compatible with the moral demands of the Gospel.

In the following magisterial documents, Pope John Paul II no longer uses the acculturation definition but only the *inculturation* definition. As previously stated, the *acculturation* concept defined by anthropology poorly describes the process by which the faith and cultures meet. Remember that it is not an encounter between two cultural modules, but rather a meeting between the transcultural message of the Gospel and a culture until they become one.

Up to this point and conscious of the risk of interrupting this discourse, we must consider, before we can move forward, how the relationship between faith and culture has been depicted through a sort of moments in its history, that are<sup>63</sup>:

- *Dialogue*
- *Assimilation, accommodation, adaptation (years 1950-1970)*
- *Incarnation*
- *Contextualization*
- *Africanization*
- *Indigenization*

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<sup>63</sup> An author divides these definitions as follows: a) definitions that imply a pedagogical relation: adaptation, accommodation; b) definitions that imply a theological relation: incarnation and implantation; c) definitions that imply a social relation: indigenization, localization (indianization, africanization, etc.) contextualization; d) definitions that imply a cultural relation: acculturation, inculturation, transculturation, interculturalization, conculturation; in order to explain the reason for preferring the inculturation definition. You can read his justification in: ANTHONY, FRANCIS-VINCENT, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation, Toward an Empirical-theological Theory of Inculturizing Praxis*, Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose 136, LAS-Roma, 1997, Chapter I (pages. 31-56).

- *Localization*
- *Acculturation*
- *Inculturation*

The word *dialogue*, applied to the relationship between faith and culture, tries to explain how the bearers of the faith and the Gospel try to explain themselves through dialogue to the members who have a different cultural environment from their own. Although dialoguing is necessary in this evangelizing work, this definition does not give any indication on how to reach a mutual comprehension or intelligence of the message.

The word *assimilation* meant the simple adoption of the faith already inculturated in the evangelizers' countries; the missionary took inevitably with him the model of the church of his own country.

*Accommodation or adaptation* designated the dialogue procedure of the evangelizers: they should keep in mind the addresses' attitudes, seek ways of proceeding and presenting that do not give way to refusal, and adopt some elements, symbols and art of the evangelized culture.

In a few ecumenical surroundings -especially in Geneva and Lausanne, as well as in a few Asian Catholic environments- the *contextualization*<sup>64</sup> word is used to outline a posture that goes further than adaptation or a dialoguing attitude. Contextualization not only tries to notice the individual person to whom one speaks, but also regards the way this person acts and thinks in a specific sociocultural context. The greatest criticism that this definition has received is that

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<sup>64</sup> "Contextualization achieved prominence in 1957 when the Rockefeller Foundation gave three million dollars to establish a theological education fund to train leaders for churches in the third world. Grants were offered with a view to "contextualizing the gospel". The World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1972 in Geneva made use of the term, as did the WCC Conference in Lausanne in 1974. In 1978 an International Colloquium on Contextual Theology was held in Manila. More recent writings, such as those of Robert Schreiter, show a preference of this term": SCHINELLER, PETER, S. J., *A Handbook on Inculturation*, Paulist Press, New York, Mahwah, 1990, page. 19. We believe that the approach of liberation theology in Latin America, especially offered in chapter 7, is too optimistic. You may consult the following authors if you wish to have a better contextual vision of theology: ARÉVALO, CATALINO, S. J., *Prenotes to the Contextualization of Theology*, in «Philippiniana Sacra» 14 (1979) 15-35; SCHREITER, ROBERT J., C. PP. S., *Issues Facing Contextual Theology Today*, in «Verbum SVD» 21 (1980) 267-278; LUZBETAK, LOUIS J., S. V. D., *Signs of Progress in Contextual Theology*, in «Verbum SVD» 22 (1981) 39-57 and in a non-Catholic sphere: HALEBLIAN, KRIKOR, *The Problem of Contextualization*, en «Missiology» XI (1983) 95-111.

it gives the impression that the word of God, before leaving Palestine, had no tangible context, however this is fully and carefully denied by the biblical exegesis studies on the civilization of those days.

Missionaries and specialists in this field resorted many times to the *indigenization* concept to define the assimilation and reformulation, or new expression of the evangelical message in the native culture. This definition was not adopted, because the derivative words of *indigenous* -and even the same word- have a pejorative meaning and also fail to consider the meeting between Christians and peoples of another culture in the same country or nation, who are culturally distant from one another.

Subsequently, this relationship was reckoned as *acculturation*, i.e. a coming together between the evangelizer's and evangelized person's culture by initiating in a respectful dialogue, and mutually enriching and exchanging values. However, the risk of considering the Gospel as another culture grew greater with this definition and all of the previous reasons.

The *enculturation* concept belongs to the cultural anthropological field where Melville J. Herskovits probably defined it. He preferred *enculturation*<sup>65</sup> instead of *inculturation*, because the *in-* prefix is probably more confusing since it can be used to deny, as it is in the case of the adjective *incult*, when in reality the prefix means to express the idea of the Latin preposition *in*. Enculturation means in cultural anthropology the process by which a human being becomes, since childhood, part of his own cultural group; in other word, a process by which persons or groups during their existence absorb, mechanically by participating or consciously by reflecting or thinking critically, the culture of the society to which they belong.

Finally, for all those reasons, the *inculturation*<sup>66</sup> concept was adopted. However, there are other expressions in the magisterial language that might be applied either as *inculturation* or as

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<sup>65</sup> Cfr. HERSKOVITS, MELVILLE J., *Man and his Works*, New York 1952, pág. 39.

<sup>66</sup> For a more detailed exposition between the anthropological definition and its use in theology: ROEST CROLIUS, ARIJ A., S. J., *What is so new about inculturation?*, in «Gregorianum» 59 (1978) 724-737. SALES, MICHEL, S. J., *Le Christianisme, la culture et les cultures*, I, 4, en «Axes» XIII/1-2 (1980) 13-15. LÓPEZ GAY, JESÚS, S. J., *Pensiero attuale della Chiesa sull'inculturazione*, in «Vita Consacrata» 16 (1980) 542-561. ALSZEGHY, ZOLTÁN, S. J., *Il problema teologico dell'inculturazione del cristianesimo*, in AMATO, ANGELO - STRUS, ANDRZEJ (a cura di), *Inculturazione e formazione salesiana*,

other complementary concepts that are frequently used in John Paul II speeches, even if the inculturation word is not expressly cited. Some of these expressions are: "dialogue between faith and culture", "synthesis between faith and culture", and "symbiosis between faith and culture", etc.

Also there are other expressions. For example the use of the words "Gospel" or "church" that substitute "faith"; or more frequently the expression "evangelization of the culture"<sup>67</sup>, and sometimes "incarnation of the Gospel in the cultures", or just plain "the duty of the Church to deliver Christ or the Gospel to the cultures".

After this brief explicatory *excursus*, we now return to John Paul II papacy. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, 22-XI-1981, the Pope states,

*"In conformity with her constant tradition, the Church receives from the various cultures everything that is able to express better the unsearchable riches of Christ. (cfr. Ef 3, 8; GS n. 44, Ad gentes nn. 15 y 22) Only with the help of all the cultures will it be possible for these riches to be manifested ever more clearly, and for the Church to progress towards a daily more complete and profound awareness of the truth, which has already been given to her in its entirety by the Lord.*

*Holding fast to the two principles of the compatibility with the Gospel of the various cultures to be taken up, and of communion with the universal Church, there must be further study, particularly by the Episcopal Conferences and the appropriate departments of the Roman Curia, and greater pastoral diligence so that this "inculturation" of the Christian faith may come about ever more extensively, in the context of marriage and the family as well as in other fields.*

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Editrice S. D. B., Roma 1984, pages. 15-39. GUGLIELMINETTI, PIERFILIPPO M., S. J., *Dall'inculturazione alla transculturazione. Rapporti tra evangelizzazione e cultura alla luce del Decreto conciliare «Ad Gentes»*, in «Rassegna di Teologia» XXV (1984) 211-226. DHAVAMONY, MARIASUSAI, S. J., *Problemativa dell'inculturazione del vangelo oggi*, in «Stromata» XLI (1985) 258-261 y 266-271. CHEUICHE, MONS. ANTONIO DO CARMO, O. C. D., *Marco de referencia actual sobre la problemática de la inculturación*, en «Medellín» 15 (1989) 435-444; TORNOS, ANDRÉS, *La nueva teología de la cultura. Los cambios de lenguaje de los documentos oficiales de la Iglesia, a partir del Vaticano II*, 4, in «Estudios Eclesiásticos» 66 (1991) 19-26. ANTHONY, FRANCIS-VINCENT, *Ecclesial Praxis of Inculturation, Toward an Empirical-theological Theory of Inculturizing Praxis*, Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose 136, LAS-Roma, 1997, pages. 31-56.

<sup>67</sup> Cfr. for example: AAS 72 (1980) 400; AAS 74 (1982) 615 y 1230; AAS 75 (1983) 384, AAS 76 (1984) 984, 985 y 987; AAS 77 (1985) 741, 742 y 853; AAS 79 (1987) 97, 105 y 106; AAS 80 (1988) 161; AAS 82 (1990) 856 y 858. Footnotes are abbreviated.

*It is by means of "inculturation" that one proceeds towards the full restoration of the covenant with the Wisdom of God, which is Christ Himself. The whole Church will be enriched also by the cultures which, though lacking technology, abound in human wisdom and are enlivened by profound moral values.<sup>68</sup>*

It is part of the Church's tradition, according to the Pope, to accept everything that the cultures offer that it is capable of helping express the riches of the faith. Although the concept or process of *inculturation* is still not thoroughly and clearly defined, the two principles of its validity are rightly given in the previous magisterial texts: the compatibility with the Gospel and the communion with the Universal Church.

In May 1982, John Paul II created the Pontifical Council for the Culture, with the purpose of giving the Church an instrument that would allow her to fulfill more efficaciously her evangelizing mission in the cultural world and therefore deepening the relations between faith and culture:

*"And, what if culture is the means by which man, as regard to man, becomes more man, and man's very destiny is in play. That is why it is so important for the Church, as the one responsible of that destiny, a mindful and clairvoyant pastoral action in the living culture, i.e., the whole principles and values that constitute the ethos of one people: "The synthesis between culture and faith is demanded by both faith and culture... A faith that does not become culture is not a fully embraced, reasoned, and fully lived faith". (Speech to participants in the National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment, 16-I-1982, 2: IGP2 V/1 (1982) 131)"<sup>69</sup>.*

At the end of the previous text, John Paul II, on the whole, summarizes his line of thought regarding the need to synthesize faith and culture. This synthesis is demanded by faith, since man lives a truly humane life because of culture, a culture that humanizes and perfects man. Therefore, a believer's cultural effort is not true if it is not consciously directed to its fulfillment in the faith, which clearly outlines the truth about man and his dignity. Holding true

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<sup>68</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22-XI-1981), 10: AAS 74 (1982) 90-91.

<sup>69</sup> ID., *Creation of the Pontifical Council for the Culture. Letter to the Secretary of State*, 20-V-1982: AAS 74 (1982) 685.

the Christian vision of man, this does not restrain, on the contrary, it enables the creation of a true culture: universally humane and humanized<sup>70</sup>.

However, this synthesis is also a demand of the faith. Even though it is true that faith does not identify itself with any culture and is independent of it, it is not less true that the aim of faith is to permeate all culture. It is the whole man, in his daily concrete existence, that Christ saves; that is why it is the whole man, together with his culture, that must be fulfilled in Christ<sup>71</sup>.

By the end of that same year, the Congregation for Catholic Education published a document that emphasized the need of the laity to be witness of the faith in schools. It also called for the teaching and practicing of the synthesis between faith, culture and life. Moreover, it remained educators to maintain a critical attitude toward culture in order to transmit the true Christian and human values<sup>72</sup>.

In 1984, the International Theological Commission, in a document about ecclesiology, wrote about *inculturation*<sup>73</sup>. It position the doctrinal principle of *inculturation* in the mystery of Christ (incarnation, life, death, and resurrection), and in the diversity and multitude of beings created by the same God who wishes that the multitude of beings be image of his vast goodness<sup>74</sup>.

Just as Jesus Christ took upon his own person the particularities and peculiarities of the human condition in an exact time and place, and within a certain people, the Church must incarnate herself in every place, time and people, assuming everything that is particular and

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<sup>70</sup> ID., *Speech with the world of culture*, Quito, Ecuador, 30-I-1985, 4: AAS 77 (1985) 854: "... " [the Church] has the conviction that the Gospel's encounter with man and society creates an authentic culture. The Church knows that the culture born out of that encounter with the Gospel is humane and humanizes, it is capable of reaching the inner depths of the heart and beneficially irradiating all areas of society, fields of thought, art, technology, everything that constitutes a true culture, it is an authentic effort to promote and express everything that the Creator has put into the heart and intelligence of men for the good and harmony of all the creation."

<sup>71</sup> Cfr. ID., *To participants in the National Congress of the Ecclesial Movement for Cultural Commitment*, 16-I-1982, 2: IGP2 V/1 (1982) 131.

<sup>72</sup> Cfr. CONGREGATION FOR THE CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Document *Lay Catholics in schools: witnesses to faith* (15-X-1982), nn. 29-31: EV 8/329-331.

<sup>73</sup> Cfr. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, Document *Temas selectos de Eclesiología* (1984), 4, en COMISIÓN TEOLÓGICA INTERNACIONAL, *Documentos 1969-1996, Veinticinco años de servicio a la teología de la Iglesia*, BAC, Madrid 1998, pages: 342-347.

<sup>74</sup> Cfr. *Ibid.*, read excerpts from the *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 47, a.1, of Saint Thomas of Aquinas.

good of those circumstances; in other words, the Pentecostal event must continually repeat itself during the life of the Church, taking -for the preaching and construction of the Kingdom of God- elements whose origin precisely lies in human cultures.

The Gospel also serves, as a criterion of life to the cultures; that is the Gospel highlights not only the positive values of a culture but also the limits, errors and sins that exist within her. The evangelization of the cultures and *inculturation* of the Gospel interact between themselves in order to stress a singular exchange: on one side the Gospel reveals every culture and sets free the ultimate truth regarding the values that said culture has within herself; on the other side every culture explains or expresses the Gospel in an original manner and emphasizes new aspects of it. Therefore, all this constitutes *inculturation* as an additional element of the recapitulation of all things in Christ (cf. Ef 1,10) as well as an element of the Church's Catholicism.

*Inculturation* touches several aspects of the Church. Regarding the life of the Church, *inculturation* makes possible that the Church's concrete, expressive and organizational forms and figures correspond in the best way to the positive values that belong to a culture. In the field of language (in the anthropological and cultural sense), *inculturation* absorbs the contents of the faith in the words and categories of thought, symbols and rites of a culture, and then gives a doctrinal answer to whatever might be incompatible with the Gospel in that culture. Thus, the Gospel has a transcultural value and its identity must be recognized in any culture, there lies the need to make the culture readily available to other cultures.

In the *Slavorum apostoli* Encyclical, 2-VI-1985, John Paul II writes how the saints Cyril and Methodius carried out the labor of *inculturation*:

*"The work of evangelization which they carried out as pioneers in territory inhabited by Slav peoples-contains both a model of what today is called "inculturation" the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church. (...)."*

*For this activity is an essential task of the Church, and is urgent today in the already mentioned form of "inculturation". The two Brothers not only carried out their mission with full respect for the culture already existing among the Slav peoples, but together with religion they eminently and unceasingly*

*promoted and extended that culture. By analogy, today the Churches of ancient origin can and must help the young Churches and peoples to mature in their own identity and progress in it.*"<sup>75</sup>

In this text, we practically have the first description of the *inculturation* process: the incarnation of the Gospel in the cultures and, at the same time, the incorporation of these in the life of the Church. The Church will really enrich herself with these cultures and those cultural values will allow a deeper and better understanding of the mysteries of the faith.

The Synod of Bishops, in the Extraordinary General Assembly of 1985 (24-IX to 8-XII), spoke about *inculturation*:

*"From this perspective we also find the theological principle for the problem of inculturation. Because the Church is communion, who joins diversity and unity in being present throughout the world, it takes from every culture all that it encounters of positive value. Yet inculturation is different from a simple external adaptation, because it means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures. (...) It is therefore necessary to make every effort towards a generous evangelization of culture, more precisely of cultures. They must be regenerated through the encounter with the good news. But this encounter will not be brought about if the good news is not proclaimed."*<sup>76</sup>

It is very interesting that the final thoughts of the Synod of Bishops lay the theological fundament of *inculturation*: the ecclesial communion that joins diversity and unity, which is that preserving the faith's unity does not eliminate the possibility of living the faith in different mentalities and diverse cultural circumstances. The Church, as it has been stated before, absorbs everything that is positive in the cultures such as the Son of God assumed, in his human nature, everything that is human.

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<sup>75</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Encyclical *Slavorum apostoli* (2-VI-1985), 21a y 26b: AAS 77 (1985) 802 y 807.

<sup>76</sup> SYNOD OF BISHOPS (1985), Second Extraordinary General Meeting, final remarks *Ecclesia sub verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrans pro salute mundi*, 7-XII-1985, II, D, 4: EV 9/1813:

"4. Inculturatio. Hic etiam principium theologicum pro problemate inculturationis habemus. Cum Ecclesia communio sit, quae diversitatem et unitatem coniungit, praesens in toto mundo quicquid in omnibus culturis positivum invenit, assumit. Inculturatio tamen a mera adaptatione externa diversa est, quia intimam transformationem authenticorum valorum culturalium per integrationem in christianismum et radicatioem christianismi in variis culturis humanis significat. «...Renasci eas necesse est ex sua cum bono nuntio coniunctione. Verumtamen huiusmodi coniunctio non evenit, nisi bonus nuntius proclamabitur» (EN20)".

The idea that *inculturation* is a mere transformation (or assimilation, adaptation, transferal, etc. like this process used to be called) is abandoned; because inculturation is not simply an outward adaptation that initiates a two-way process: first, it is an intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity, thus eliminating everything that is not compatible with the Gospel; second, the planting of Christianity in the different human cultures. All this together is what the *inculturation* definition would like to exactly express.

The description of inculturation that the Synod of Bishops refers to is based on the *Slavorum apostoli* Encyclical. The text highlights the urgent need to evangelize the cultures and that this activity is in fact part of evangelization.

In the beginning of 1986, the Congregation for Catholic Education published a document about the education of future priests regarding social communication skills, it warned that it was necessary to make them aware and prepare them to continually modify their future pastoral activity, including the inculturation of the faith<sup>77</sup>.

The Instruction on *Christian Freedom and Liberation*, 22-III-1986, when writing about *inculturation*, recalls the ideas of previous magisterial documents, it practically absorbs the Synod's declaration:

*"Faith inspires criteria of judgment, determining values, lines of thought and patterns of living which are valid for the whole human community. (cfr. Exhort. ap. Evangelii nuntiandi, 19) Hence the Church, sensitive to the anxieties of our age, indicates the lines of a culture in which work would be recognized in its full human dimension and in which all would find opportunities for personal self-fulfillment. The Church does this by virtue of her missionary outreach for the integral salvation of the world, with respect for the identity of each people and nation. The Church, which is a communion, which unites diversity and unity through its presence in the whole world, takes from every culture the positive elements, which she finds there. But inculturation is not simply an outward adaptation; it is an intimate*

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<sup>77</sup> CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION, Document *Orientaciones sobre la Formación de los Futuros Sacerdotes para el uso de los Instrumentos de la Comunicación Social* (19-III-1986), 20, c): EV 10/100.

*transformation of authentic cultural values by their integration into Christianity and the planting of Christianity in the different human cultures. (cfr. II Sínodo Extr., Relatio finalis, II, D, 4: L'Osservatore Romano, 10 diciembre 1985, 7) Separation between the Gospel and culture is a tragedy of which the problems mentioned are a sad illustration. A generous effort to evangelize cultures is therefore necessary. These cultures will be given fresh life by their encounter with the Gospel. But this encounter presupposes that the Gospel is truly proclaimed. (cfr. Exhort. ap. Evangelii nuntiandi, 20) Enlightened by the Second Vatican Council, the Church wishes to devote all her energies to this task, so as to evoke an immense liberating effort"*<sup>78</sup>.

In the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod of Bishops of 1987 regarding the vocation and mission of the laity, it reads:

*"Twenty years after the Council, the Synod's extraordinary meeting further studied the dynamic of the Gospel's 'inculturation'. By force of the principle of communion, which is capable of establishing diversity in unity, the Church, without any easy external adaptation, is capable of deeply harboring all positive elements that are found in different cultures (Cfr. Synodus Episcoporum (1985), Relatio finalis Ecclesia sub verbo Dei mysteria Christi celebrans pro salute mundi, 7-XII-1985, II, D, 4: EV 9/1813; SA nn. 18, 19 y 21: EV 9/1592-1594.1596s.). Evangelizing the culture and inculturating the Gospel are interwoven in the missionary duty of the Church, hence those actions make the Church a participant in the building of a civilization governed by truth and love"*<sup>79</sup>.

Later the same document writes about the importance of the peoples' religiousness, it reads:

*"Guided by the Holy Spirit and the Church's teachings, the faithful have given the Christian faith, in many countries, a lively and spontaneous expression, which is manifested in the costumes and language, devotions and feast days, pilgrimages to certain shrines, art and popular Christian wisdom. This inculturation of the faith that has been done throughout the centuries is respectfully accepted and promoted. Any faults or deformities that may appear in these manifestations will be remedied by an appropriate catechetical effort, thus consolidating the 'sensus fidei' of the people"*<sup>80</sup>.

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<sup>78</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, Instruction *Libertatis conscientia* (22-III-1986), 96: AAS 79 (1987) 596-597.

<sup>79</sup> SYNOD OF BISHOPS (1987), "*Instrumentum laboris*" on "Vocación y misión de los laicos en la Iglesia y el mundo a 20 años del Concilio Vaticano II", 22-IV-1987, 47: EV 10/1689-1690.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 75: EV 10/1727.

Two ideas stand out from the previous text: the role of the laity in the *inculturation* of the faith and the acknowledgement of this process: throughout the centuries the faith has been inculturated. A process that is manifested by the peoples' religiousness, which deserves to be pastorally cared for; since, like everything that is human, things may become distorted, for example elements that come from syncretism and/or superficial simplifications that might exist within the peoples' cultures or that have been furtively introduced throughout time.

Subsequently, in the Synod's propositions, the synodal fathers suggest:

*“ Inculturation. The principles that regulate all Christian inculturation are: 1) Christology: the mystery of the Incarnation of the Verb; 2) Liturgy: the dialogue between man and God that is manifested in a community manner with symbols and specific signs; 3) Anthropology: acknowledgment, the eventual value purification and elevation of a particular condition of people (cfr. GS 57-58); 4) Political Sociology: Paying attention to different cultures”<sup>81</sup>.*

In 1987, the International Theological Commission took up again the inculturation subject, this time it wrote a study dedicated entirely to this<sup>82</sup>. The document has three parts. The introduction summarizes the reasons for writing about *inculturation* and comments a few of those reasons. It reminds us that the Pope has taught that the Verb's Incarnation has also been a cultural incarnation<sup>83</sup> and that Revelation transcends all cultures: God's word cannot be exclusively identified or tied to any cultural element that would serve as a vehicle in order to live, express or manifest it. On the contrary, God's word demands that all cultures, costumes and actions be purified and improved: an honorable culture reveals and fortifies man's nature.

The second part studies Christian anthropology: nature, culture, and grace in regards to *inculturation*. The primary individual of the culture is the human person with all the dimensions of his being. Man cultivates himself through laboring in the culture and because he has a cultural memory. That is the reason why culture is the medium in and through which people can grow. Christian faith is compatible with all cultures and with everything that is in

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<sup>81</sup> ID., *Elencus ultimus propositiorum Post disceptationem de vocatione et missione laicorum in ecclesia et in mundo viginti annis a concilio Vaticano II elapsis (29-X-1987)*, Proposición 34: EV 10/2172.

<sup>82</sup> Cfr. INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, Document *La Fe y la Inculturación* (1987), in COMISIÓN TEOLÓGICA INTERNACIONAL, *Documents 1969-1996, Veinticinco años de servicio a la teología de la Iglesia*, o. c., pages. 393-416.

<sup>83</sup> Cfr. JOHN PAUL II, *Speech to university professors and men of the world of culture in Coimbra, Portugal*, 15-V-1982, 5: IGP2 V/2 (1982) 1694-1696.

compliance with righteous reason and good will within those cultures. On the other hand, Christian faith is a prominently and dynamical factor of the culture. At the end of this part, the document gives an inculturation definition reminding the *Slavorum apostoli* Encyclical concept:

*"The Church's effort to pierce Christ message in specific sociocultural surroundings invites every value that is reconcilable with the Gospel to grow and bloom. The inculturation definition includes the idea of growth, mutual enrichment of people and groups, and a coming together of the Gospel with the social surroundings"*<sup>84</sup>.

The third part analyzes inculturation throughout the history of salvation: during the Old Testament, Jesus' time, and the apostolic era. The last part comments some current problems that inculturation faces: peoples' religiousness, non-Christian religions, recent churches and their past Christian faith, Christian faith and modern times.

In the apostolic Letter *Euntes in mundum*, 25-I-1988, John Paul II reminds us the historical manner in which the Gospel incarnated and inculturated itself in the slave peoples through the labor of Saint Cyril and Methodius: the slaves, embracing the word with all the obedience of faith, wished at the same time to express it in their own language and forms of thought; in this way a particular and fruitful inculturation of the Gospel and Christianity was accomplished<sup>85</sup>.

In the apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, 30-XII-1988, John Paul says:

*"In this sense, culture must be held as the common good of every people, the expression of its dignity, liberty and creativity, and the testimony of its course through history. In particular, only from within and through culture does the Christian faith become a part of history and the creator of history. The Church is fully aware of a pastoral urgency that calls for an absolutely special concern for culture in those circumstances where the development of a culture becomes disassociated not only from Christian faith but even from human values, as well as in those situations where science and technology are powerless in giving an adequate response to the pressing questions of truth and well-being that burn in people's hearts"*<sup>86</sup>.

By the end of 1989, the Congregation for the Evangelization of the Peoples published a Pastoral Guide, which dedicated a section to the evangelization of the cultures and insisted that

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<sup>84</sup> INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, Document *La Fe y la Inculturación* (1987), I, 11, in COMISIÓN TEOLÓGICA INTERNACIONAL, *Documents 1969-1996, Veinticinco años de servicio a la teología de la Iglesia*, o. c., pages. 398-399.

<sup>85</sup> Cfr. ID., Apostolic Letter *Euntes in mundum* (25-I-1988), II, 3: AAS 80 (1988) 938-941.

<sup>86</sup> ID., Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30-XII-1988), 44: AAS 81 (1989) 478-481.

priests must also be pastors dedicated to the evangelization of the cultures: Inculturation, finally, is not something that is done once and for all, but is the continuous integration of Christian experience in a culture, which is never stable or closed<sup>87</sup>. Then, it highlighted the importance of making a correct judgment regarding cultural values in order to avoid considering as a value any cultural manifestation. The guide ends by reminding the value of peoples' religiousness.

At the beginning of 1990, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life published a document about religious education, which called for the education of these institutes in current affairs such as the relation between religious life and culture and proposed to verify how members of a religious order inculturate their faith to their culture of origin and help them achieve it<sup>88</sup>.

John Paul II, in his apostolic *Letter for the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World*, 29-VI-1990, recalled the great evangelizing role of the religious orders in the evangelization of America and the labor of cultural and human advancement done in almost every social environment. He also encouraged all members of Latin American religious orders to continue embracing the cultural richness of the peoples and finding strength in apostolic creativity, while being faithful to the charism, that will guide them in the preaching and inculturating of the Gospel<sup>89</sup>.

Later, in an apostolic Constitution regarding catholic universities, the Pope stated that universities have always been the primary and privileged place to reach a fruitful dialogue between the Gospel and the culture. He insisted that these places must, through dialogue, help to better understand the different cultures, judge their positive and negative aspects, embrace their authentic human contributions, and develop the means by which the faith may be more comprehensible to men of a certain culture<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>87</sup> CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE PEOPLES, *Guía pastoral para los Sacerdotes Diocesanos de las Iglesias que dependan de la Congregación para la Evangelización de los Pueblos* (1-X-1989), 11: EV 11/2554-2556.

<sup>88</sup> CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE, *Normae Directivae de Institutione in Religiosis Institutis* (2-II-1990), nn. 90-91: AAS 82 (1990) 522-523.

<sup>89</sup> JOHN PAUL II, *Apostolic Letter for the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the New World* (29-VI-1990), 28: AAS 83 (1991) 43.

<sup>90</sup> ID., *Apostolic Constitution Ex corde Ecclesiae* (15-VIII-90), 43-44: AAS 82 (1990) 1498-1499.

In the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, 7-XII-1990, John Paul II touches the subject on inculturation in a more profound and systematic manner; he defines and characterizes it, and shows the principles by which it must be governed:

*"As she carries out missionary activity among the nations, the Church encounters different cultures and becomes involved in the process of inculturation. The need for such involvement has marked the Church's pilgrimage throughout her history, but today it is particularly urgent.*

*The process of the Church's insertion into peoples' cultures is a lengthy one. It is not a matter of purely external adaptation, for inculturation "means the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures." (Extraordinary Meeting of 1985, Final remarks, II, D, 4) The process is thus a profound and all-embracing one, which involves the Christian message and also the Church's reflection and practice. But at the same time it is a difficult process, for it must in no way compromise the distinctiveness and integrity of the Christian faith.*

*Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. (cfr. Exh. Ap. Catechesi tradendae, 53; Ep. Enc. Slavorum apostoli, 21) She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. (cfr. Pablo VI, Exh. Ap. Evangelii nuntiandi, 20: l. c., 18). Through inculturation the Church, for her part, becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission.*

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

*Inculturation is a slow journey which accompanies the whole of missionary life. It involves those working in the Church's mission ad gentes, the Christian communities as they develop, and the bishops, who have the task of providing discernment and encouragement for its implementation (cfr. Conc. Ecum. Vaticano II, Decr. Ad gentes, 22)<sup>91</sup>.*

Further on, he delineates inculturation's limits:

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<sup>91</sup> ID., Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* (7-XII-1990), 52: AAS 83 (1991) 299-300.

*In this regard, certain guidelines remain basic. Properly applied, inculturation must be guided by two principles: "compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal Church." (cfr. Exh. Ap. Familiaris consortio, n. 10) Bishops, as guardians of the "deposit of faith," will take care to ensure fidelity and, in particular, to provide discernment, for which a deeply balanced approach is required. In fact there is a risk of passing uncritically from a form of alienation from culture to an overestimation of culture. Since culture is a human creation and is therefore marked by sin, it too needs to be "healed, ennobled and perfected." (LG, 17).*

*This kind of process needs to take place gradually, in such a way that it really is an expression of the community's Christian experience. As Pope Paul VI said in Kampala: "It will require an incubation of the Christian 'mystery' in the genius of your people in order that its native voice, more clearly and frankly, may then be raised harmoniously in the chorus of other voices in the universal Church." In effect, inculturation must involve the whole people of God, and not just a few experts, since the people reflect the authentic sensus fidei which must never be lost sight of. Inculturation needs to be guided and encouraged, but not forced, lest it give rise to negative reactions among Christians. It must be an expression of the community's life, one which must mature within the community itself, and not be exclusively the result of erudite research. The safeguarding of traditional values is the work of a mature faith<sup>92</sup>.*

In the Instruction *Dialogue and announcement*, 19-V-1991, which reflects on the announcement of the Gospel and interreligious dialogue, it expressly states the need to announce the Gospel in an inculturated manner: the Gospel must be incarnated in the culture and spiritual tradition of those whom it is being preached to; thus not only will the message be more intelligible in itself, but it will also be perceived or grasped as an answer to their most inner aspirations<sup>93</sup>.

Moreover, the Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for Europe, in their final statement, insisted that evangelization of the culture must include the inculturation of the Gospel<sup>94</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 54: AAS 83 (1991) 301-302.

<sup>93</sup> Cfr. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR INTER-RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AND THE CONGREGATION FOR THE EVANGELIZATION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD, Instruction *Diálogo y anuncio* (19-V-1991), n. 70: AAS 84 (1992) 438-439; *errata corrigere*: AAS 84 (1992) 1263.

<sup>94</sup> Cfr. SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Special Meeting for Europe 1991, Declaration *Ut testes simus Christi qui nos liberavit* (13-XII-1991), II, 3: EV 13/625: "Evangelizatio enim non solum homines singulos, sed etiam culturas attingere debet. Culturae vero evangelizatio secum fert Evangelii «inculturationem». Munus inculturationis Evangelii in novo statu

Finally, in the apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 25-III-1992, Pope John Paul II says:

"A further problem that is strongly felt these days is the demand for the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the message of faith. An eminently pastoral problem, this should enter more broadly and carefully into the formation of the candidates to the priesthood: In the present circumstances in which, in a number of regions of the world, the Christian religion is considered as something foreign to cultures (be they ancient or modern), it is very important that in the whole intellectual and human formation the dimension of inculturation be seen as necessary and essential." (cfr. Propositio 32) But this means we need a genuine theology, inspired by the Catholic principles on inculturation. These principles are linked with the mystery of the incarnation of the word of God and with Christian anthropology, and thus illumine the authentic meaning of inculturation. In the face of all the different and at times contrasting cultures present in the various parts of the world, inculturation seeks to obey Christ's command to preach the Gospel to all nations even unto the ends of the earth. Such obedience does not signify either syncretism or a simple adaptation of the announcement of the Gospel, but rather the fact that the Gospel penetrates the very life of cultures, becomes incarnate in them, overcoming those cultural elements that are incompatible with the faith and Christian living, and raising their values to the mystery of salvation which comes from Christ (cfr. RM 67)<sup>95</sup>.

We see how the Pope, when speaking about the educations of future priests, mentions the necessity to also study *inculturation* which is founded upon the Incarnation and principles of Christian anthropology; however this *inculturation* must be completely faithful to Christ's message so that the Gospel vitally pierces all cultures.

Ricardo Acosta Nassar  
[rjacosta@inculturacion.net](mailto:rjacosta@inculturacion.net)

[www.inculturacion.net](http://www.inculturacion.net)

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culturali Europae, non solum modernitate signato, sed etiam sic dicta postmodernitate, provocationem implicat cui pro viribus respondere debemus: ad hoc perficiendum contributio hominum in cultura peritorum requiritur, necnon theologorum ex corde cum Ecclesia sentientium".

<sup>95</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* (25-III-1992), 55: AAS 84 (1992) 754-757.