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Another Look at Inculturation

SABINO A. VENGCO

Three years ago (18 February 1981) during his apostolic journey to the Philippines, Pope John Paul II told representatives of Chinese Christian communities from several southeast Asian countries that

From earliest times, the Church has learned to express the truth of Christ through the help of ideas and in the cultures of various peoples, because the message that she preaches is intended for all peoples and nations. The Christian message is not the exclusive property of any one group or race; it is addressed to everyone and belongs to everyone.¹

The celebration of the quadricentennial of Fr. Matteo Ricci's arrival in China gives us a fitting occasion to take another look at that process whereby the Church tries to express the truth of Christ in the culture of a particular people. In such an inculturation of the Gospel message, so fundamental to the mission of the Church, lies the historic accomplishment of the great humanist and missionary from Macerata, Italy.²

This article will discuss the notion of inculturation, its process and the challenge, and the problematics involved. We shall first discuss what cultural reality or culture is all about, aiming at a description that can help us understand inculturation. Then the imperative of dialogue among cultures will be explained, leading us, thirdly, to some reflections on inculturation as based upon the

1. Pedro S. Achutegui, S.J., ed., *John Paul II in the Philippines—Addresses and Homilies* (Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1981), p. 78.

2. See the address delivered by Pope John Paul II at the conclusion of the International Ricci Studies Congress on 25 October 1982, at the Gregorian University in *The Pope Speaks* 28/2 (1983): 97-103.

dialogue among cultures. It shall be seen that the process of inculturation pertains to the growth of the local Church and is an ongoing formation. Lastly, there will be a description of the stages of inculturation, in terms of which we shall briefly reflect on our state of inculturation in the Philippines.

MAN'S CULTURAL REALITY

In investigating the phenomenon of the encounter between the Christian faith and the various cultures of mankind, one can easily lose sight of the road in the confusing forest of languages and differing perspectives. Philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, theologians, and historians all have a word to say about culture, and about the relation between faith and cultures. Can we have a concept of culture that is practicable in a discussion on inculturation? For our purpose we can start with the long description of culture given by Vatican Council II in its "Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World."

The world "culture" in the general sense refers to all those things which go to the refining and developing of man's diverse mental and physical endowments. He strives to subdue the earth by his knowledge and his labor; he humanizes social life both in the family and in the whole civic community through the improvement of customs and institutions; he expresses through his works the great spiritual experiences and aspirations of men throughout the ages; he communicates and preserves them to be an inspiration for the progress of many, even of all mankind.

Hence it follows that culture necessarily has historical and social overtones, and the word "culture" often carries with it sociological and ethnological connotations; in this sense one can speak about a plurality of cultures. For different styles of living and different scales of values originate in different ways of using things, of working and self-expression, of practicing religion and of behavior, of establishing laws and judicial institutions, of developing science and the arts, and of cultivating beauty. Thus the heritage of its institutions forms the patrimony proper to each human community; thus, too, is created a well-defined, historical milieu which envelops the men of every nation and age, and from which they draw the values needed to foster humanity and civilization.³

3. Vatican II, "Church in the Modern World," no. 53. See R. Tucci, "The Proper Development of Culture," in H. Vorgrimmler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, Vol. V (London: Burns and Oates, 1969), pp. 257-59.

Although without any claim to being scientific, the above description of cultural reality has the advantage, first of all, of avoiding the separation of culture from civilization and nature. Every people has a culture, nor is a culture a matter only of the elite or of the educated. Wherever people develop physically and spiritually and whenever they develop the world around them, there is culture. The correlation between man and the world means that the self-realization of man by means of the world he exists in and works on corresponds to the humanization of the world.⁴ Thus culture is the refinement of man, as it is also the re-shaping of the world according to the image of man. These two aspects of the single historical process by which man becomes "cultivated" by cultivating his world are illustrated by agriculture, whence the notion and term of culture originated. Through the activity of man, the soil becomes a cultivated field and man himself acquires a new way of life and becomes settled, an *agricola*: a man who dwells and works on his field.⁵ In Tagalog, our term for culture, *kalinangan*, also derives from a word meaning a field under cultivation, *linang*. The verb form of this, *linangin*, means to cultivate, to develop.⁶ In humanizing the world, man himself is developed and becomes more human. Thus man's cultural reality pertains to his self-realization in the world.

Since man is a social being who needs others, his culture entails firstly, patterns of division of work and economic and political organizations among others. It is manifested, secondly, in the results of agriculture, architecture, handicraft and industry, whereby the world is transformed for its utility to man. Thirdly, cultural reality manifests itself in language and literature, in music and dance, and in manifold forms of the pursuit and transmission of knowledge, inasmuch as man's self-realization necessitates communication with his fellowmen. Thus another aspect of cultural reality is seen in those results of human activity which are not directly utilitarian but more revelatory of the human spirit, like

4. We shall base ourselves here on A. Roest Crolius, S.J., "Inculturation and the Meaning of Culture," *Gregorianum* 61 (1980): 153-73. See H.B. Meyer, S.J., "Zur Frage der enkulturation der Liturgie," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 105 (1983): 1-31.

5. *Colere* means basically "to abide, to dwell," hence *colonus* is "settler" and *incola*, "inhabitant." See *The Classic Latin Dictionary* (Chicago: Follet Publishing Co., 1957), s.v.

6. J.V. Panganiban, *Diksiyunaryo-Tesaurus Pilipino-Ingles* (Lungsod Quezon: Manila Publishing Co., 1972), p. 642.

the products of the arts expressing man's own transcendence. These aspects of human reality and activity (as disparate as building a supermarket and writing a poem) analogously pertain to culture and portray the ability of the spirit to express itself in the world ("*Geist in Welt*"), transforming it and giving it new finality and meaning. So, an anthropologist has defined culture as that which "denotes an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."⁷ A symbol here would mean anything that serves as a vehicle for a conception.

The Vatican II description of culture points out too the historical and social aspects of culture. This indicates the reason for the plurality of cultures and their dialectical encounter and ongoing formation. Culture encompasses, as we have seen, the life of man in its socioeconomic, political, religious, linguistic, artistic and technological dimensions. That is why every people has its own culture, and every culture manifests both the limitations and the riches of a given people. Thus cultural diversity connotes that the different cultures are but partial realizations of what has been called the cultural project of mankind. They need each other; not one of them is perfect. No culture fully develops all human and religious values. Yet in certain aspects they are also mutually exclusive. In a way, the diversity of cultures can easily result in conflicts between cultures. Thus side by side with the foreboding of conflicts is the promise of mutual enrichment which however at times can even mean enrichment at the price of a conflict! Cultural particularities manifest therefore both the creative genius of different peoples, the universal amplitude of the human spirit as refracted in these similar though diverse "irradiations," and the challenge and the need to be open to the values of other cultures if only to acquire a deeper understanding and firmer possession of one's own culture.

7. C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1973), p. 89. See D. Power, "Cultural Encounter and Religious Expression," in H. Schmidt and D. Power, eds., *Liturgy and Cultural Religious Traditions* (New York: Concilium, no. 102, 1977), p. 100 ff.

DIALOGUE AMONG CULTURES

The lesson of history tells us that the encounter between different cultures has not always been enriching for the cultures involved. The destructive, one-directional process of cultural assimilation or imperialism violates the originality and creativity of a given culture and contributes to the impoverishment of human values. We have today culturally uprooted groups of people who live in a state of schizophrenia, alienated from their own culture and rootless and homeless in the supposedly absorbing culture.

In the family of mankind we live in a plurality of societies and of cultures. And if it is true that technology has reduced the world to the proportions of a village, the inevitable communication between cultures, in order to be beneficial, must take on the form of a dialogue. Such a mutual communication of diverse meanings (*dia-logos*) does not cancel out their diversities by some coalition into a single meaning but rather preserves the originality of the diverse meanings, while at the same time, manifesting by their very communicability the universality of these meanings. So, what true dialogue brings out is a synthesis, not just a juxtaposition, of inalienable originality and communicable universality, a communion of distinct and diverse cultures. It is because of "analogy"—"a mode of communication which holds the middle between pure equivocity and simple univocity"⁸—that a synthesis of unity and diversity is possible. In the encounter among cultures, a univocal conception of culture amounts to an ethnocentrism which would accept only one way of understanding cultural reality and would impose on all others this one cultural apprehension of values.⁹ This attitude is only capable of a cultural monologue, not a dialogue. Historically, this univocity was exemplified by the naive evolutionistic idea that occidental culture is the model which all other cultures are bound to conform with and develop into. At the other extreme is cultural equivocity which would amount to cultural relativism or to exclusive cultural particularism.¹⁰ All cultures would be considered as "equally perfect." The axiom "each

8. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 5.

9. See David Tracy, "Ethnic Pluralism and Systematic Theology: Reflection," in A.M. Greeley and G. Baum, eds., *Ethnicity* (New York: Concilium, no. 101, 1977), p. 96. See also M.J. Herskovits, *Cultural Relativism-Perspectives in Cultural Pluralism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), pp. 11-34.

10. Tracy, *ibid.*

culture has a right to live its own life" would here mean the absoluteness of each culture within its own realm, not the participation in a dialogal community of cultures, working for mutual completion and betterment. Such cultural equivocality, historically a reaction against the monopolistic and ethnocentric assertion of a particular culture, falls into the same error and produces now not only one, but a plethora of ethnocentrisms, albeit minor; it ends up not with a monologue but with a cacophony of monologues.

The encounter among cultures, if it is to be a dialogue, must be based upon analogy. Conceived in an analogical way, cultures in their diversity can nevertheless confront one another in certain points of meeting and understanding. In such a dialogue, the partners learn to understand not only each other, but also themselves. According to David Tracy's apt description of this attitude, "the genuinely analogical mind, precisely by its responsible commitment to its own cultural apprehension of values, is freed to understand others."¹¹

INCULTURATION AND THE DIALOGUE AMONG CULTURES

The problematic of inculturation arises precisely in connection with the phenomenon of cultural encounter. The dialogal character of the encounter between cultures should make us sufficiently aware of the dialogal character that should also qualify the relation between the Church and the diverse cultures of peoples. Several terms have been used to designate this relation. Perhaps the earliest and most widely used was "adaptation," whose meaning would be identical with the term "accommodation." These expressions, directly borrowed from the French usage, were at first much used before and immediately after Vatican II,¹² but eventually receded because both were felt to be more expressive of

11. Ibid.

12. On the application of the terms in the field of liturgical renewal, see R. Kaczynski, *Enchiridion documentorum instaurationis liturgicae I* (1963-1973), (Rome: Marietti, 1976), s.v. aptatio, accomodatio. For the earlier usage, see A. Santos, S.J., "Panoramica metodologica dela actual adaptacion de la Iglesia en su obra evangelizadora," in *La Adaptacion Misionera*, 10 & 11. *Semana Missionologica* (Burgos: Hijos de Santiago Rodriguez, 1959), pp. 213-37; F. Kollbrunner SMB, "Die Akkomodation im Geist der Katholizität (1919-1959)," *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft*, 28 (1972): 161-84; 264-74. On the following terms, see A. Roest Crolius, S.J., "What is so new about Inculturation?" *Gregorianum* 59 (1979): 722 ff; see also F.X. Clark, S.J., "Inculturation: Introduction and History," *Teaching All Nations* 15 (1978): 211-25.

an extrinsic contact between Christianity and a particular culture rather than of the implantation of the faith in different cultures.¹³ "Contextualization," a term adopted especially by the World Council of Churches, seems to focus more on the work of scientific theology, and to some it is not really very different from accommodation and adaptation.¹⁴ "Indigenization" is even more restricted, since for some people only in exotic, far-away countries can "natives" and something "indigenous" be found. Another term widely accepted in anthropological sciences is "acculturation," denoting the contact between cultures with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns.¹⁵ This expression is inadequate for the relation between the Church and a given culture, which is a profound insertion and not just a contact. Nonetheless, we shall be drawing upon the concept of acculturation, in order to understand inculturation better.

The term that has made its appearance not long ago in missiological discussion is "inculturation."¹⁶ The Final Statement of the First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference speaks of "a church indigenous and inculturated."¹⁷ The neologism "inculturation" can be understood as the contraction of the expression "insertion in a culture."¹⁸ To be distinguished

13. For a different understanding of the terms, see A. Chupungco, "Liturgy and Inculturation," *East Asian Pastoral Review* 18 (1981): 267-68. The author mentions three ways of the "adaptation of the liturgy": "accommodation," "acculturation," and "inculturation." The first is simply adapting to the special needs of a particular group; the second means that cultural elements are incorporated into the Roman Liturgy as complements; and for the last, an indigenous pre-Christian rite is taken and given a new meaning.

14. See Shoki Coe, "Contextualization as the Way Toward Reform," in J. Elwood, ed., *Asian Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1980), pp. 48-55. See also the special issue of *Philippiniana Sacra* 14 (1979) on the International Colloquium on Contextual Theology held in Manila, 20-23 June 1978.

15. See P.G. Gowing and W.H. Scott, eds., *Acculturation in the Philippines* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 1971). This term has been employed by Pierre Charles, S.J., "Missiologie et acculturation," *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 80 (1958): 1042-61; 81 (1959): 41-59, esp. p. 49.

16. See J. Masson, S.J., "L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde," *Nouvelle Revue Theologique* 84 (1962): 1032-43. He speaks of "un catholicisme inculture" (p. 1038).

17. Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, *Evangelization in Modern Day Asia*, First Plenary Assembly, Taipei, 22-27 April 1974, Final Statement, no. 12, in *His Gospel to Our Peoples II* (Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, 1976), p. 332. See *On Fostering the Task of Inculturation of Faith and Christian Life*, texts from Fr. Pedro Arrupe, S.J. and from the Decrees of the 32nd Jesuit General Congregation (1975), (Manila: Cardinal Bea Institute, n.d.); also P. Arrupe, S.J., "Catechesis and Inculturation," in P.S. de Achutegui, S.J. and J.L. Roche, S.J., *Word, Memory, Witness, The 1977 Bishops' Synod on Catechesis*, Loyola Papers 11 (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1978), pp. 152-55.

18. Crollius, "What Is So New," p. 724. See Vatican II, "Decree on Missions," no.

from inculturation is the expression "enculturation" used in cultural anthropology. By *enculturation* is meant the learning process by which an individual becomes inserted into his own culture, is initiated and grows into it. By *inculturation* we mean, on the other hand, the process by which the Church becomes part of the culture of a people. Essentially, inculturation is different from enculturation because inculturation in theological discourse corresponds to the consideration of the salvific event in Jesus Christ. Another fundamental difference in the analogical processes of enculturation and inculturation is the fact that the Church in becoming inserted into a given culture is already linked not only with elements of another culture, that of Jesus' Israel, but many elements belonging to her very nature, like rites, dogmas, spirituality, discipline and structures, are themselves of a cultural character, according to our description of culture above. That is why the process of inculturation has also features of acculturation, i.e., the contact between cultures bringing about cultural change.

GROWTH OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

The problem of inculturation, to be appreciated, must be considered in the concrete situation of the local Church. As noted by the Bishops of Asia in Taipei in 1974, "The local Church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions — in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own."¹⁹ Inculturation refers primarily to the dynamic relation between the local Church and its own culture, i.e. the culture of its people. According to the formulation of Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortations on "Evangelization in the Modern World," this endeavor of the local Church to be inculturated means that

10: "In order to be able to offer to all men the mystery of salvation and the life brought by God, the Church must become part of (Lat.: *sese inserere debet*) all these groups for the same motive which led Christ to bind Himself, in virtue of His Incarnation, to the definite social and cultural conditions of those human beings among whom He dwelt."

19. See footnote 17. See M. Amaladoss, S.J., "Local Asian Churches and the Tasks of Mission, Inculturation," in C.G. Arevalo, S.J., et al, eds., *Toward a New Age in Mission*, International Congress on Mission, 1979, Book III, (Manila: Loyola School of Theology, 1981), pp. 33-45; "Consensus Paper," *ibid*, Book I, pp. 37-41.

The individual Churches, intimately built up not only of people but also of aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of living, of looking at life and world which distinguish this or that human gathering, have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language.²⁰

Language is here used explicitly in the anthropological and cultural sense of the word. The particular churches, therefore, "in and from which comes into being the one and only Catholic Church,"²¹ have the task to inculturate themselves locally, not only in order to enter into communion with the peoples among whom they live, but also in order to live up to their catholicity to the enrichment of the entire Catholic Church.²² The consequent cultural plurality in the Church becomes thus an expression both of its universality and unity. Apropos of this unity in diversity, the Oriental Churches have been referred to by Paul VI as a "historical anticipation" with paradigmatic value for other particular

20. Paul VI, *Evangelization in the Modern World*, no. 63. According to John Paul II, *Catechesis in Our Time*, no. 53, "... inculturation may be a neologism, but it expresses very well one factor of the great mystery of the Incarnation. 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 particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expression 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."

The 1977 Bishops' Synod said in its final "Message to the People of God" (no. 5) that "catechesis is an instrument of inculturation." See de Achutegui and Roche, *Word, Memory, Witness*, p. 46.

21. Vatican II, "The Church," no. 23.

22. See Karl Rahner, S.J., "Über eine theologische Grundinterpretation des II. Vatikanischen Konzils," *Zeitschrift für Katholische Theologie* 101 (1979): 290-99; J.L. Witte, S.J., "Ecumenism and Evangelization," in M. Dhavamony, S.J., ed., *Evangelization* (Roma: Docum. Miss. 9, 1975), pp. 197 ff; W. Buhlmann, "Die Entwicklung der Evangelisation seit dem II. Vatikanum," in L. Bertsch and F. Schlosser, eds., *Evangelisation in der Dritten Welt* (Freiburg: Herder, 1981), pp. 11-29.

churches in their task of inculturating.²³

This new awareness of the reality and the mission of the local Church provides the context for our contemporary discussion on inculturation. In fact, Church documents on the subject are almost always in recognition of the rights, responsibilities and accomplishments of the local Churches. The rites and devotions proper to individual churches, according to the "Constitution on Sacred Liturgy" are respected and recognized,²⁴ as also "the qualities and talents of the various races and nations" which must be taken into consideration in the work of liturgical adaptation.²⁵ The "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church," while underlining the universality of the Church, affirms that in this communion there is a rightful place for the particular churches having their own traditions, and that the Church "fosters and takes to herself, in so far as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of peoples. In so taking them to herself she purifies, strengthens and elevates them."²⁶ The "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity" says that the laity, the religious and the clergy of the local Church have the duty to proclaim the Christian faith and life with the help of their own culture and to celebrate the liturgy in harmony with the character of the people.²⁷ Bishops are enjoined to insure the relation between the tradition of the universal Church and the local Church's own culture. The young Churches are particularly encouraged by the decree to search for an intimate adaptation of the genius and originality of their respective cultures.²⁸ Paul VI was of the mind that the real tragedy of our time is the breakage between evangelization and culture. Every effort must be undertaken, he asked, so that the different cultures can be penetrated by the Gospel from within. Without being dependent on one culture, the Gospel is open to all and is needed by all, a task that falls on the local Church directly to minister to.²⁹

23. Paul VI to the participants in the celebration of the quadricentennial of the Pontifical Greek College, *L'Osservatore Romano*, 1 May 1977.

24. Vatican II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nos. 4, 13.

25. Ibid., nos. 37-40. See A.J. Chupungco, O.S.B. "The Magna Carta of Liturgical Adaptation, *Notitiae* 14 (1978): 75-89; idem, *Cultural Adaptation of the Liturgy* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

26. Vatican II, "The Church," nos. 13, 16-17.

27. Vatican II, "The Church in the Modern World," nos. 42, 44, 58.

28. Vatican II, "Decree on Missions," nos. 16-22.

29. Paul VI, "Evangelization in the Modern World," nos. 18-19, 21, 62. See O.

INCULTURATION AS AN ONGOING PROCESS

Just as an individual grows into his culture, i.e., becomes *enculturated* not only through childhood and adolescence, but the process continues throughout his life, so also in a similar way does a particular Church go through the process of inculturation all throughout its life. The culture of a people in which a local Church is embedded is such a vast and complex reality it can hardly be said that its exploration and assimilation can be accomplished within a so-called formative period only. It is a life-long endeavor. In addition, it is to be kept in mind that a culture is a living reality and therefore itself in a continuous process of change. For the Church, the changes taking place in the local culture, its customs and values, represent correspondingly ever new choices. Now, since inculturation is going on or must go on throughout the existence of a local Church, it is clearly the concern of every local Church, whether young or evangelized long ago, without exception. As Paul VI expressed it, the task "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"³⁰ is the responsibility of all particular churches. True, a young Church in its formative period needs especially to adapt or accommodate specifically in proclaiming the Gospel, but "this accommodated preaching of the revealed Word ought to remain the law of all evangelization."³¹

STAGES OF INCULTURATION

Having considered the process of inculturation in the context of evangelization, and its similarities with acculturation and enculturation, we can now discuss the stages of inculturation. Growth into a culture or enculturation, as it extends over the lifetime of the individual, shows a basic difference, according to anthropologists, if it takes place at the beginning of a person's life or in later

Bischofberger, "Die Evangelisierung der Kulturen. Zur Frage der Anpassung in Evangelii Nuntiandi," *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 32 (1976): 315-23. Along this line Pope John Paul II established on 20 May 1982, the Pontifical Council for Culture for the purpose of promoting the dialogue among cultures and the evangelization of cultures.

30. Paul VI, "Evangelization in the Modern World," no. 20.

31. Vatican II, "The Church in the Modern World," no. 44.

years. In the early stages of life, initiation into a culture means enabling the individual to function within the group, learning to understand and use the various signs of language, becoming accustomed to the culture's patterns and values, conforming oneself to the norms of the social group. This early stage is a "conditioning process," with little freedom of choice for the individual who becomes assimilated to his culture. In this beginning he *learns* his culture, and culture is *transmitted*, thus making for cultural stability in a given society. In later stages of life, however, though still exposed to this learning experience, the individual in the measure of his maturity has by then a more independent mind, and by rejecting or accepting elements of his cultural reality he actually contributes to a certain re-orientation of his culture, thus inculcating cultural change.

Similarly, in its formation years of inculturation, the local Church has first to be accustomed to the basic patterns of the people's culture and to be able to operate with their forms of thought and expression. However, there are differences between early enculturation and initial inculturation. The local Church may well have from the start members who already act with some degree of reflection and greater freedom of choice, so that the encounter between the Church and a culture from the very beginning already entails cultural change. Moreover, the beginning of a new local Church connotes both the birth into new life of those who believe and are baptized in Christ, and their initiation into the one People of God as a new and distinct Christian community.³² A new local Church is consequently not merely an extension of the universal Church, but a true birth of a Church in a given culture. Thus, a newly established particular Church in relation to the universal Church always has the two-fold dimensions of continuity and of a new beginning. Because of the first, i.e., the aspect of continuity, when the universal Church puts down her roots in a given culture and social and human terrain, this process of inculturation is similar to an acculturative encounter between cultures. And because of the second aspect of a new beginning, the same process of inculturation is comparable to the enculturative experience of the individual. And in this perspective, we note the particularity of the initial stage whereby the particular Church

32. Vatican II, "Decree on Missions," no. 15.

conforms to and assimilates the language and symbols of the local culture. Distinct from it is the phase when the local Church is in a position to exercise greater freedom in dealing with the culture, reorienting it in accordance with the Gospel, purifying and elevating it, as the "Dogmatic Constitution on the Church" has expressed it.

We can therefore delineate three movements in the process of inculturation. These movements are both consecutive and concomitant, they can take place in a sequence and/or in varying simultaneity. The first step is when the Church comes in contact with a new culture, and the Christian message and life are presented in the forms of another culture. Notwithstanding minor adaptations and translations, the Church comes across as foreign, and for the natives to be converted would mean to leave behind their own culture. This first stage is more like a process of acculturation, "cultural *translation*," in which missionaries and local Christians assimilate elements of each other's cultures.

The second stage is when the Church becomes more assimilated to the local culture. This start of inculturation proper takes place as larger numbers of the population join the Church and particularly as a local clergy develops. But during this stage of "*assimilation*" the adaptation of the Church to the surrounding culture may still be rather passive. The more active role of transforming the culture belongs to what may be termed the third stage. More predominant now in this stage of "*transformation*" would be the active reorientation of the local culture.

The question can be posed as to which stage the present process of inculturation in the Philippines belongs. Are we still in the first stage, that of translation? We have said that these stages can be concomitant and simultaneously operative. Some observations can be made to indicate our present whereabouts in the process of inculturation. After more than four hundred years of evangelization in the Philippines, we still are waiting for the official, definitive translation of Sacred Scripture in Pilipino. The urgency and priority of this task does not seem to be sufficiently appreciated by Philippine Church authorities. Our translation of liturgical texts still leaves so much to be desired.³³ After the pioneering adapta-

33. See S. Vengco, "Aklat ng Pagmimisa sa Roma: A Critique," *Philippine Studies* 31 (1983): 253-71.

tions to Filipino culture by the missionaries of the early period,³⁴ there seems to have been a long hiatus of passivity—principally consisting of simply handing on the tradition bequeathed to us. We appear to remain at present in this stage of more or less passive assimilation. In certain instances, we fail to improve upon and correct what we have received. For instance, some would consider the simple use of the old *Pasyong Mahal* for Church Lenten devotion as inculturation. This is to disregard the many and serious defects in content found in this book. To use the *Pasyon* as it is, is archaism or archaeologism, but hardly inculturation. The same can be said of *Panunuluyan*,³⁵ mere conservation of traditional cultural values does not contain inculturation's promise of life. On the contrary, it could mean a form of theological apartheid. True love for our cultural heritage means improving on it and not just dusting it off. Critical inculturation is not a matter of temperament, but an imperative of authentic respect.

Also, no updated ecclesiology appears sufficient to incite us to drop the term *simbahan* when referring to *ekklesia*, and we are still hoping for a change of *Aba*, *Ginoong Maria* according to exegetical insights and philological evolution in the way we have renovated the vernacular of the Lord's Prayer. There are even cases of deterioration, as when the Beatitudes' *makarioi* is now given as *mapalad*, thereby connoting merely luck, and sacrificing the biblical stress on divine gift.³⁶ We are still some way from the third stage, that of transformation. Pivotal here is maturity in the assimilation of the Gospel message according to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (63), without betrayal of its essential truth.

We have inculturated a lot down the centuries. But side by side with accomplishments are many omissions and inadequacies. Perhaps a clearer understanding of the process of inculturation can help and motivate us. Undeniably, we need more indigenous theologians who are at home and competent in the teachings of the Church while rooted in the culture of our people.

34. See John N. Schumacher, S.J., *Readings in Philippine Church History* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University, 1979), pp. 74-84.

35. See Meyer, "Enkulturation der Liturgie," pp. 18-21. Regarding some efforts to adapt the *Pabasa* and the *Panunuluyan*, see A.J. Chupungco, O.S.B., *Liturgical Renewal in the Philippines* (Manila: Maryhill School of Theology, 1980), pp. 71-98.

36. This rendition is the one given, for example, in the new *Ang Pagdiriwang ng Pag-iisang-dibdib*, Lupon Para sa Wikang Tagalog sa Liturhiya, 1983, p. 63. See S. Vengco, *Jesu Kristo I* (Manila, 1980), pp. 124-26.

CONCLUSIONS

Inculturation is a process of integration: the integration of the Christian faith and life in a given culture, and the integration of a new cultural experience in the life of the universal Church. Inculturation is not primarily a matter of theory, still less of legislation, but a process of growth towards maturity and fulness of the Christian experience in the specific cultural setting of a local Church. Inculturation is lived by the actual Christian community, not something put together as in a test tube by theologians and anthropologists, though their studies and researches may be vital.³⁷ Inculturation is not just one aspect of the missionary activity of the Church, but the central concern of evangelization.³⁸ Inculturation is to render present the light and life of the Gospel in each culture, so that each culture may become a worthy habitat of God's pilgrim people.

We can recapitulate and say that

the inculturation of the Church is the integration of the Christian experience of a local Church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients, and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only within the culture in question but also as an environment of the Church universal.³⁹

But to return to where we started, John Paul II describes Fr. Matteo Ricci as "a true bridge" between the Chinese world and the universal Church. This perception of the role of the Christian in the process of inculturation as bridge-building in accordance with one's priestly function is succinctly captured in Fr. James Reuter's play on the life of Matteo Ricci, *The Bridge*. In the play, Xu Guangai, a disciple of the great missionary, exclaims that "the bridge is science. . . The bridge is truth. . . The bridge is love. . . But, sometimes, the bridge is courage, and the warm, human heart of a man."⁴⁰ Inculturation in flesh and blood can well be the warm, human heart of a Christian — mediating to his people the gift of the Gospel and offering to the Church the genius of his people!

37. *Ad Gentes*, no. 22; *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 44.

38. Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 20.

39. Crollius, "What Is So New," p. 735.

40. James Reuter, S.J., *The Bridge* (Manila: mimeographed, 1983), p. 44.