

THE NEW EVANGELIZATION INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPELS

Brother Andrés Rosero Bolaños

The term “inculturation” is relatively new since it appeared for the first time in 1962, having been used for the first time by J. Masson, a Frenchman, when he referred to “Incultured Catholicism”.

Later, Father Arrupe used it in the 1974 synod. The following year it was used at the Assisi Episcopal Conference Assembly and in 1977 Cardinal Sinn used it at the Synod’s Sixth Conference, affirming not only its usefulness but the necessity of “INCULTURATING THE GOSPELS”.

As a recently elected Pope, John Paul II underscored the richness of the new term in number 53 of *Catechesi Tradendae*: “The term inculturation expresses in a wonderful way the great mystery of the Incarnation”. Ever since then, this term keeps appearing in official Church documents that deal with the Evangelization of cultures.

And so in number 24 of the opening conference in Santo Domingo, the Holy Father alluded to number 52 of *Redemptoris Missio* where inculturation is defined as the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values by means of an integration in Christianity and an implantation of Christianity within various cultures.

The Gospel, which is Christ, is transcultural: we cannot reduce it to any one culture in particular. To inculturate the Gospel implies the creation of a new culture; one cannot say that one knows Christ and yet go on living as if one did not know him.

The neologism “inculturation” cannot be reduced to a merely anthropological or sociological concept. It is the mystery of the Son of God made man, the mystery of a culture that breaks into the history of mankind not to interrupt the cultural process of humanity but to save it by transforming it and offering itself up as the model of the fulness of unity. And so inculturation permits, on the one hand, the integration of Christianity with the authentic values of the culture and it includes, on the other hand, the incarnation of the Gospel within those same cultures.

The word **inculturation** is composed of the prefix “in” that means **within, inside, in the midst of** and the word **culture**. The inculturation of the Gospel, then, is the Gospel incarnated within the culture, immersed in it, as the leaven penetrates the dough to transform it and make it rise.

That’s what is meant by the inculturation of the Gospel: the Gospel is immersed within the culture of humanity and not just to illuminate it but to transform it from within.

So it does not destroy culture but it makes clear that which is good within culture and how to find meaning in it, humanizes it and transcends it...and it makes clear the means and the methods to be used for this.

Cultures are not empty wastelands which lack their own authentic values; nor is evangelization a destructive process but one of consolidation and strengthening of said values since Jesus Christ is the measure of all culture and of all human labor.

The goal of all Gospel inculturation will always be the salvation and the integrated liberation of a specific nation or human group.

Jesus gave us examples of the inculturation of the Word in the parables. He used what the nation was experiencing and doing. He was aware of the life of the farmer and when he taught he alluded to the daily toil of the life of farmers so that they would be able to assimilate the Word of God: some examples of this are found in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:19); the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15: 3-8); the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 19:25-37); of the mustard seed (Luke 13:31-32).

He also spoke to the learned at their level in view of an incarnation of the Gospel in their midst: the parable of the pharisee and the publican (Luke 18:9-14); the parable of the treasure and the precious stone (Matthew 12:44-46); the parable of Lazarus and the greedy rich man (Luke 16:9-31); the parable of the wedding banquet (Matthew 22:1-14).

Nowadays we need to keep in mind the urban culture, the scientific culture, the culture of the mass means of communication, the culture of the so called poverty areas in large cities or even in suburban areas, the culture of rapid changes themselves and the culture of great discoveries in all fields of science; we should also keep in mind the way or the culture which is the way that mankind relates with the cosmos, with other human beings and with God.

Based on this fundamental principle, those relationships are very different. Our indigenous population has a very important earth cult which they call “la pacha mama” or mother earth; they have a deep respect for being accepted and for one’s own word; they maintain an attitude of being in search of something of a higher order...Christianity needs to keep all these values in mind if it is to flourish in that culture.

Inculturation is, then, the discovery of the Christian character within those values and the incorporation of the missing Gospel values within that culture. It is already within the realm of history and culture in general and so it is there that the Gospel must be incarnated. So evangelization is the growth of the “seeds of the Word” which are present within a culture.

It is necessary to inculturate the Gospel in the light of the three great mysteries of salvation.

- CHRISTMAS which points out to us the path of the Incarnation and allows the evangelizer to share with the one being evangelized, therefore shows that the principle of St. Ireneus is valid: “That which is not accepted is not redeemed”.
- EASTER, which invites us to purity and provides the link between death and life or the change from our own way of life to a more perfect one which we call “conversion”.
- PENTECOST, by the power of the Spirit makes possible the discovery of God’s wonders within a culture and which are expressed in one’s own language, just as happened to the apostles.

Inculturation is similar to the process of grafting that a gardener does. The sprig that is attached to the plant receives nourishment from the part that received it and, in turn, is a participant in the qualities of the receptor; in that way, if the plant used to produce red flowers, the grafted part produces those of different shades of white and the two plants keep their own identities, help each other and complement one another as well; and for those who witness this phenomenon, it is indeed a marvel to behold.

This is a kind of image of the inculturation of the Gospel. Culture is the main plant and the Gospel is the sprig which is attached to the plant which does not destroy it but it makes it grow even more, it has a transforming effect and it makes it even more beautiful and more stable.

Pope John Paul II , in his opening conference at the Sixth Latin American Episcopal Conference, tells us that “Faith has penetrated into the deepest part of people and has succeeded in penetrating the culture of nations, so that the Gospel forms the basis of their thinking, their judgment, their actions, etc...”; at the same time he suggested that there be a continuation of the relationship with and a deepening of the theme of inculturation of the Gospel. (VI S.D. Number 24).

We catechists should consider this theme of INCULTURATION OF THE GOSPELS very seriously but we should not limit its application only to indigenous peoples, whether they be Africans or American mestizos. It must be extended to include all current cultures so that it spreads rapidly through continents and transforms relationship of mankind with itself, with the cosmos, with others and with God, which is the real meaning of culture and into which the Gospel must penetrate, according to the widest interpretation given by the second Vatican Council, Puebla and Santo Domingo. This is what we have attempted to reflect on in this paper. •