



Editorial	50
<i>"Ecclesia peregrinans natura sua missionaria est"</i> <i>The Mission of the Church</i> <i>in the Light of the Second Vatican Council (PART II)</i> <i>Prof. Dr. Franz Weber</i>	51
<b>Inculturation:</b> <b>A Dialogical Mission With Specific Reference to Africa</b> <i>Peter Lokiru</i>	64
<b>Cultural Diversity and Inculturation in India</b> <i>S.M. Michael, SVD</i>	77
<b>La misión en el conflicto interior de una sociedad</b> <b>entre la tradición y la modernidad</b> <i>Rosario Garrido García</i>	85
<b>COMING EVENTS</b>	96

# Happy Easter to All our Readers

The Risen Lord sends us, saying: "Go out to the whole world and proclaim the Good News to all creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved" (Mk 16:15-16).

The newly baptized persons the end-product of a patient and constructive two-way conversation between faith and culture. He/she hears the same injunction to go and radiate her/his faith, share it with others, and become a witness to the Resurrection.

Europe has entered the process of New Evangelization. **Prof. Dr. Franz Weber**, as an Augustinian Canon encapsulates, in the **Part II** of his conference on "**Ecclesia Peregrinans Natura (AG, n.2)**", the main reason for the crisis of the Church and Mission between faith and entire groups of the living sense of faith. have to discern the a globalized world and what the Spirit today communities (cf. Rev



**sua Missionaria est"** reason for the crisis of in Europe: the split culture has caused baptized to lose a Churches in Europe Signs of the Times in attentively listen to has to say to the 2:7).

John Mbiti states: notoriously religious" yet vital. **Rev. Fr. Peter** on: "**Inculturation: A with Specific Reference**

that the inter-cultural Gospel and African cultural and religious traditions is indispensable to the authenticity of Christian life of the ecclesial communities. When Churches in Africa express the faith in their own languages, then they can bring their contribution to the patrimony of Christianity.

"Africans are meeting Christianity is **Lokiru**, in his study **Dialogic Mission to Africa**", points out dialogue between the

India, has an ancient civilization which comprises various cultural complexes; and being the cradle of several religions, India is actively involved in the process of inculturation. **S.M. Michael, SVD**, in his reflection on "**Cultural Diversity and Inculturation in India**", highlights the fact that inculturation in the diversities of Indian cultures entails a prophetic role, which consists in daring to address the issue of the oppressive cultural values in Hindu traditions, and to develop a deep spirituality of mysticism and interiority.

All Cultures are dynamic; they change and adapt to new contexts and yet safeguard their inalienable values. **Rosario Garrido García**, a missionary in Tokyo, does a breathtaking re-reading of the Japanese culture, caught as it is, between tradition and modernity: "**La misión en el conflicto interior de una sociedad entre la tradición y la modernidad**". Her witness embodies the basic attitudes required to enter the inter-cultural dialogue. The missionary attuned to God has to accept "**to be born again ...**" (Jn 3:7) and become an incarnation of God's love.

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Executive Director

**Prof. Dr. Franz Weber**

**"Ecclesia Peregrinans Natura Sua Missionaria Est"**  
(AG, n. 2)

**The Mission of the Church  
in the Light of the Second Vatican Council**

**PART II**

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*Congress of the Confederation of the Canons Regular of St Augustine, Vorau,  
Austria — 17 July 2007*

**I** began my overview of the statements of the Second Vatican Council on the Mission of the Church in the world today with a text from Madeleine Debré. On the basis of her own faith and missionary experience this great and many-sided 20th century missionary-engaged woman and mystic recognized — it seems to me — a very important reason for the crisis of the Church and of Mission:

*As Church we no longer visibly proclaim the Gospel as good news because 'for us the living God is no longer something new and is no longer experienced as 'dazzling happiness'. We consider him too much as "our property".'*

Do we still believe as Church in Europe that we assuredly possess God as property of which we can dispose as we wish and which we can unproblematically hand over to the whole world? Or have we become so uncertain in our faith that we no longer have the heart to invite others to this faith and into our Church? Perhaps many who are still Catholic today would lack nothing if someday this God were no longer in their lives. Do we not live — even as religious — this way, as if God were not there, *etsi Deus non daretur*? Do we perhaps fundamentally "organize" our common life, choir, prayer and care of souls without considering the living God? Yes, there is indubitably also something like a "practical Atheism" in the Church today since our pastoral work does not reckon with God and His Spirit, but only with the needs of changing external structures — including questions of personnel and finances — which do not get genuine renewal of ecclesial life underway. We do not believe at all or even a little in the Spirit of God, who is also at work in the Church today. And this Spirit guides us not only in the venerable faith, but also creates new things in the Church.

It is obvious to us that there is much anxiety over the continued existence of our parishes and abbeys sometimes "past hearing and seeing" and we no longer discern what are the clear Signs of the Times and what the Spirit today has to say to the communities (*cf.* Rv 2:7). I wonder and you all wonder: Is not something relevant missing from our viewpoint for the Church today? We are often not capable of creatively cooperating in the renewal and new inculturation of the faith due to our anxiety not to lose the true old faith.

Has the theological-pastoral tenor of the "Aggiornamento", which John XXIII and the Second Vatican Council wanted to give the Church as a way into the future, got lost? Above all however I wonder if we — not only the Church in Germany and Austria but also in other European countries — do not run the risk of losing this global perspective

again, which was opened up by the Second Vatican Council, if we no longer truly think "catholic" globally, but only concentrate on carrying out our functions for our own dioceses, parishes, abbeys and Orders?

Thus we return to the thematic of Mission and World Mission upon which I would like to reflect further in this second discourse. I pose the introductory question regarding the mission of the Augustinian Canons in Europe to which I shall return at the end of this discourse. I will begin with some general observations about the changed situation of the Church in the globalized world of today and above all refer to the shifted and shifting centre of gravity of the Catholic Church today from the North to the South.

I will then continue our journey of missionary theological reading with a brief look at some of the documents of the post-conciliar Magisterium, above all at Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi", on "Evangelization in the Modern World" (1975), at John Paul II's missionary Encyclical "Redemptoris Missio" (1990) and at the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue's document, "Dialogue and Proclamation". In the final section I would like to speak on the question of what mission means for us in Europe and thereby look at some statements from well-known documents of the German and French Episcopal Conferences.

### **1. Augustinian Canons: A non-missionary Order nonetheless obliged to the Mission of the Universal Church**

First, I would like to ask a direct question: whether the thematic of Mission even concerns the Augustinian Canons? You are not a missionary order. What then does Mission mean for you and your communities?

In paragraph nine of the 1993 approved Constitution of the Austrian Congregation of the Canons Regular of St Augustine it speaks of the significance of the congregation for the Church in the following words:

*The Augustinian Canons also look upon the diocesan bishop as a member of the worldwide episcopate, and that is why they are involved beyond the local Church with the universal Church. Through the congregation and the confederation, which transcends the borders of countries and nations also, they know themselves to be in union with the universal Church. Therefore the canons are obliged to show interest in the life and plans of the whole Church for and to energetically support its concerns above all in the missions. So, the Order of Augustinian Canons is involved in 'building up and increasing the whole Mystical Body of Christ for the good of the particular Churches' (Christus Dominus, n. 33).*

This notable text, which stems from the perspective of the missionary theology of the Second Vatican Council and the changed missionary situation of today certainly, could still be developed by a deepening, a continuation and a concretization. What does this link with the whole Church mean for you as Augustinian Canons?

Will it do only to show interest in the plans of the whole Church and her concerns, "above all to support energetically the Mission"? Only in Latin America, Africa and Asia? Is there not also a Mission in Europe? Do you not as Augustinian Canons have a specific mission to accomplish here in Europe? It would perhaps be advantageous to hear these and similar questions as background and theme music, as I in the following discussion give an overview of the global Church and in particular the missionary situation of Europe. At the conclusion we can come back one more time to this question about the Mission of the Augustinian Canons.

The religious orders of the Catholic Church were for centuries esteemed as the first

and most important and often even the only bearers of the Mission to the world. Even if after the Second Vatican Council the awareness has grown that the entire Church — bishops, priests, and laity in their local churches and parishes — bears responsibility for the universal mission of the Church, nevertheless the religious orders have never stopped playing an important role in the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel. Unfortunately, in recent times the European missionary orders have lost many members and much of their significance — and some of them will very soon be threatened with extinction.

In his 1996 Post-Synodal Exhortation, "Vita Consecrata", following the World Synod of Bishops on Religious Life, Pope John Paul II highlighted the significance of religious for Mission.

*"The specific contribution of consecrated persons, both men and women, to evangelization is first of all the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters, in imitation of the Saviour who, out of love for humanity, made himself a servant. In the work of salvation, in fact, everything comes from sharing in the divine agape. Consecrated persons make visible, in their consecration and total dedication, the loving and saving presence of Christ, the One consecrated by the Father, sent in mission ..." (Vita Consecrata, n. 76).*

What is the specific contribution of the Augustinian Canons to the Mission of the Church in Europe and in the world, which itself as an Order feels called to *communio* with others, i.e. to exemplify the witness of fraternal community? The reply to such a question must be situated above all in the context of the aforementioned deep changes in the contemporary circumstances of the Catholic Church worldwide.

## **2. The Shifting of the Centre of Gravity of the Presence of the Church from the North to the Global South**

Again and again in the last centuries changes have often occurred in the understanding and description of the global Mission. New concepts have replaced old ones and have become in a short period of time dubious. After the Second Vatican Council one could no longer speak of "pagans" and "mission to the pagans". Also the distinction between "home" and "mission", between "home church" and "missionary territory" were called into question, at that time, as there were indigenous hierarchies and the former mission territories had become self-governing dioceses. Today most missionaries do not come from Europe. Latin American missionaries work in Africa. Indian, Korean, Filipino religious also work in Africa. And Africans work in Latin America, the USA and in Europe. Where then is Mission?

To talk about the "First World" and the "Third World" is not only discriminating, but also always less appropriate and theologically inaccurate. Before God there is only "one world" and "one human race", which independent of culture, language and skin colour, should possess an equal dignity and human rights as sons and daughters of God. And in the meantime does not the so-called Third World come to us in droves? Have we not already this Third World in many new forms of poverty and injustice in our own European house since a long time? Is the First World not also in these countries of the South since also there the rich become richer and the poor poorer?

Some decades ago, the famous Capuchin, the late Walbert Bühlmann had spoken about "the Advent of the Third Church", which the missionary scholar Hans Jochen Margull called the "Third Territory of Christendom". These expressions have become questionable since they — willy-nilly — take as their starting point a pecking order of local Churches within the global Church and are seen from a European perspective in which the Church of the West and the North is still the navel of the world and the point of origin for the global Mission. Already for a long time now Mission is no longer a one-

way street, which leads from the North to the South, but rather a worldwide dynamic with two-way traffic.

Even with good intentions one ought no longer to use the well-worn expression "young Churches" because it does not refer correctly to the historical reality. The Church is not only hundreds of years old in Latin America, but also in some countries of Asia and Africa. The expression "younger churches" is also inaccurate in other ways. For example, in the Global South the Catholic Church is not "young and dynamic" everywhere, as in many places she is bogged down, "old" and pastorally immobile and has thus lost many on the ground to Pentecostal churches and groups. Moreover the Catholic Church exists in the Global South only in those places where she brought life and is alive, i.e., where she is involved in the daily life of the people and is inculturated.

In the last century in the Catholic Church there occurred the "awakening of a poly-centric global church" (J.B. Metz), which despite a new movement towards centralization cannot be undone. The Church has become a multiethnic and multicultural global Church and can understand herself — already on account of the composition of her faithful — no longer as a 'West Church'.

*The Church has become a global Church today. She is no longer the 'West Church' from the 16th Century, exported to the whole world through the modern Mission of the Church, through which the exported theologies are not changed. The Church is today in act and not potency, the global Church with its regional local churches, which already have or are about to inculturate themselves in a historical and socio-cultural landscape distinct from Europe.*

K. Rahner, *Schriften zur Theologie*, Bd. XV, Zürich-Einsiedeln-Köln 1983, 88.

The centre of gravity of the Catholic Church and Christianity has without a doubt transferred from the North to the South. For the most part Christians no longer live in the North but in the Global South. I do not have here the most recent statistics available in detail. According to the data from the "Center for the Study of Global Christianity" in the USA, in 2005 there were 2.1 billion Christians, a third of the population of the world. There are still 531 million Christians in Europe, but Latin America is not far behind with 511 million, 389 million in Africa and 226 million in Asia. In the United States of America there are approximately 226 million Christians, which means, that worldwide only a little more than a quarter of Christians are Europeans. Regarding Catholics at the opening of the new century there were 461 million in Latin America, 286 million in Europe, 120 million in Africa, 110 million in Asia, 71 million in North America and 8 million in Oceania.<sup>1</sup>

Europe therefore is no longer "the world", but an ever decreasing portion thereof, whether one looks at Christianity in general — or at the Catholic Church in particular.

The Catholic Church has grown very robustly in Africa — at least from a strictly statistical point of view. Yet wherever evangelization remains superficial, many who have been baptized as Catholics quickly change to other churches or groups. Such drastic changes can be seen in Latin America, above all in Brazil, where, according to official statistics over the last twenty years, at least 18% of the Catholic population has joined Pentecostal churches.

Worldwide the great Christian Churches will decrease as the newer forms of Charismatic-Pentecostal Christianity increase. In view of this development the most recent Assembly of the Latin American Bishops' Conferences in Aparecida did not sweepingly polemize against the "danger of the sects" as is so often the case in the European media and in ecclesiastical circles, but rather gave a differentiated analysis of the new religious movements and the ecumenical dialogue, which they demand.

The Bishops acknowledge in the closing document of Aparecida (n. 114), that the dialogue with groups which work aggressively against the Catholic Church is not easy. They nevertheless challenge all to ecumenism:

*It is to be observed that once one begins with dialogue proselytism goes away and the knowledge of one another and the respect for each other grows and that opens up for the possibilities of common witness (n. 249).*

It would be significant for the Mission of the Church if we were less orientated to statistics on baptism and so forth, but rather sought another form of Mission which appears credible in the eyes of others.

No Christian church can forget that the life of the majority of mankind is determined by one of the other great world religions or one of the new religious movements or no religion at all. This requires from Christians everywhere and in every context an attitude and a practice of inter-religious and world-view dialogue.

On the whole, as Catholics we will not be building up a socially-influential majority in the future but rather become more and more of a minority, which in concert with the other world-views, religions and Christian churches and groups, has its part to play in raising its voice and developing its own religious and society-forming profile.

In many countries of the earth the Church is and remains a minority. The Catholic Church and or other Christian churches, which almost exclusively determined some societies, must now face the challenge of the presence of other world religions and their missionary claims.

This raises the question: what contribution at all can the Christian Church offer — without giving up her legitimate missionary duty and her very identity — to human coexistence and the cooperation of diverse currents and streams in a multicultural and multireligious society?

Moreover this needs to be applied and developed by the “discernment of spirits” and by an attentive and globally responsible theological reflection for which the Second Vatican Council gave a sound Magisterial foundation. - The situation of the Church in a “planetary Diaspora” (Karl Rahner)<sup>2</sup> requires a new understanding and a new practice of mission.

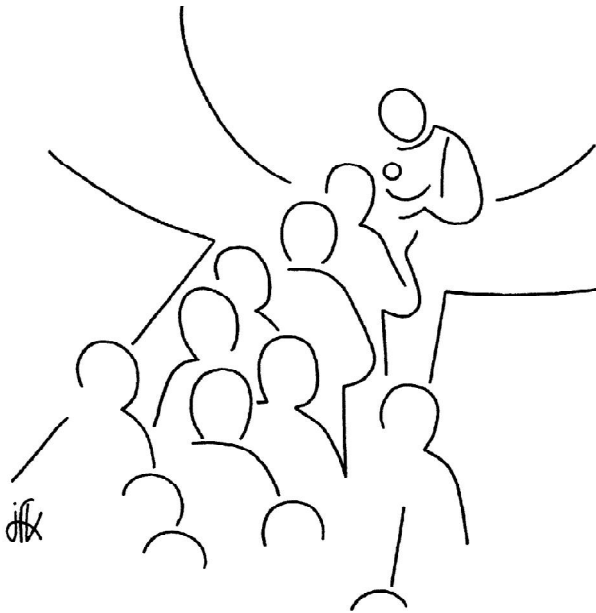
### **3. A Church in the Shadow of Missionary History and Halfway to the Realization of the Global Church as “*communio ecclesiarum*”**

The missionary work, which was carried out over the centuries by the Church of Europe — and especially by the religious orders and the commitment of many missionaries — must be recognized as a singular achievement. However, it must also be seen in the overall context of the European-Western conquest and colonization which casts a long shadow on the Church and her missionary work even until today.

The missionary movement of Modernity is formed by a perilous amalgamation of “God and Gold” (G. Gutierrez), of religion and economics, of the religious sense of mission and political claims of power, of Cross and sword. The Church’s first encounter with other peoples often occurred in violent circumstances. It left behind deep feelings whose effects are felt to this very day.

It was a long road, e.g., from the discussion at the beginning of modernity whether the people of the “New World” were human or animal or whether they had a soul; from the theological justifications of slavery to the recognition of the human dignity and human

rights of every nation, people and race. Inhuman oppression and many forms of exploitation and slavery, the European feeling of superiority and Paternalism have wounded deeply the



human dignity of many generations in Latin America, Africa, Asia and Oceania and often created a collective sense of self-hatred and infirmity. For a long time, the Catholic Church needed to ask to be pardoned for this history of guilt. The request for forgiveness by the Pope on the first Sunday of Lent, 12 March 2000 was in this matter a strong sign, whose significance was not admittedly understood or comprehended by everyone in the Church.

Despite the ecclesiological and missionary theological renewal of the Second Vatican Council the former missionary Churches in the Catholic Church stand halfway in their development to "self-governing local Churches". Above all they are still materially dependant on Rome, *Caritas*

and the relief agencies of the Churches of the North. Many local Churches of the South have invented new forms for the Church and the parish (Base Communities, Small Christian Communities, etc.) despite difficult external circumstances (poverty, armed conflict, social and ethnic divisions, etc.). In these small communities Mission is indeed realized — like the house churches of the early Church — in a new and credible way.

Leadership formation, above all of the clergy, occurs in many cases according to Roman-European theology. The unfolding of a contextual theology and an inculturated communal and sacramental practice are still at their beginnings. At the continental Synods of the late twentieth century of Rome there was a call not to miss the Asian, African and Latin American face of the Church. The local Churches find an ever stronger theological-pastoral-spiritual self-awareness for which the most important requisite is that they are able to find their place in the one "catholic" and "apostolic" global Church.

Not only bishops, priests and religious are the bearers of mission. Above all they are Christians in their communities, who certainly know their missionary task. The Churches in Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America take their missionary outreach today not only to their own countrymen who do not believe in Christ but also send missionaries to other countries and continents. The Magisterial development of a new view on Mission, of which I would like to speak in the following section has not yet been implemented everywhere in pastoral practice.

#### **4. Evangelization and the New Evangelization — Furthering of the Missionary Theology of the Second Vatican Council in "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (Paul VI) and "Redemptoris Missio" (John Paul II)**

Since the concept of Mission is historically burdened and stirs up negative connotations, the concept of Evangelization was introduced. Evangelization has become a central mission and pastoral theological concept in the last few decades — especially in the Romance languages and the Anglo-Saxon world — which describes the general task of the Church to make the Gospel known to all men through a variety of means.

In 1974 the World Synod of Bishops in Rome very creatively, but also with conflict, addressed the "Necessity – Universality, Finality of Evangelization". Pope Paul VI picked up



the impulse of this Synod in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi" (On Evangelization in the Modern World, 8 December 1975) which according to the opinion of many theologians up to today is the best Magisterial Document on Mission.

Paul IV calls "evangelization ... the vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She is here to evangelize" (n. 14). It is a new and very dynamic multilayered understanding of mission, which *Evangelii Nuntiandi* expresses:

*"For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new: 'Now I am making the whole of creation new' (Rv 21:5). [...] The purpose of evangelization is therefore precisely this interior change [...] the Church evangelizes when she seeks to convert, solely through the divine power of the message she proclaims, both the personal and collective consciences of people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs" (n. 18).*

With this view Mission cannot ever be mass conversions at any price. Mission consists of evangelization, whose awareness and reality have changed:

*"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" (n. 19).*

Paul VI does not have a purely "religious" understanding of Mission. For him there is no doubt that the commitment to a holistic liberation is a part of evangelization and that it cannot be limited to a purely religious field. Thereby he appeals to Liberation Theology, upon which the Bishops at the Synod had focused:

*"It is well known in what terms numerous Bishops from all the continents spoke of this at the last Synod, especially the Bishops from the Third World, with a pastoral accent resonant with the voice of the millions of sons and daughters of the Church who make up those peoples. Peoples, as we know, engaged with all their energy in the effort and struggle to overcome everything which condemns them to remain on the margin of life: famine, chronic disease, illiteracy, poverty, injustices in international relations and especially in commercial exchanges, situations of economic and cultural neo-colonialism sometimes as cruel as the old political colonialism. The Church, as the Bishops repeated, has the duty to proclaim the liberation of millions of human beings, many of whom are her own children — the duty of assisting the birth of this liberation, of giving witness to it, of ensuring that it is complete. This is not foreign to evangelization" (n. 30).*

The reason for this holistic understanding of Evangelization lies for Paul VI in the orientation of Mission to the Kingdom of God message of the Gospel:

*"Hence, when preaching liberation and associating herself with those who are working and suffering for it, the Church is certainly not willing to restrict her mission only to the religious field and dissociate herself from man's temporal problems. Nevertheless she reaffirms the primacy of her spiritual vocation and refuses to replace the proclamation of the kingdom by the proclamation of forms of human liberation; she even states that her contribution to liberation is incomplete if she neglects to proclaim salvation in Jesus Christ" (n. 34).*

A fundamental question of the handing on of the faith and of Mission which is very clearly posed and answered in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* is therefore the preoccupation of how does the message of the Gospel reach and deeply penetrate man in his culture and everyday life. One speaks in this context of inculturations. It is one of the new theological

concepts, which originally sprang from missionary scholarship and did not appear at the Second Vatican Council, but since 1977 has entered Magisterial Documents and since become a key word in theology. Very tellingly it is found in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*:

*"[...] 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 [...] always taking the person as one's starting-point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God" (n. 20).*

Wherever inculturation does not happen, the Gospel does not reach man. There is a gap between the Gospel and culture.

*"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" (n. 20).*

The question is to be posed in this context: where in the Church in the world of today is inculturation required? Certainly not only, as many will suggest, in Asia, Oceania, Africa, Latin America, but also in the modern and post-modern West, where the proclamation of the Gospel as it is practiced by the Church never ever penetrates the milieus and daily lives of many people. The Church has remained or become incapable of many things that need to be inculturated in the context of the modern and post-modern story of freedom.

Notable statements about the necessity of the inculturation of the faith and the Church are found also in the missionary Encyclical "Redemptoris Missio" of John Paul II, dated 7 December 1990 (nn. 52-54), which cannot be given here in detail.

Once again, this Encyclical, like *EN*, speaks expressly about Mission and uses the word Evangelization solely as an overarching concept for different situations of Mission.

*Looking at today's world from the viewpoint of evangelization, we can distinguish three situations.*

\* **"First**, there is the situation which the Church's missionary activity addresses: peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. **This is mission ad gentes in the proper sense of the term** (RM, n. 33).

\* **"Secondly**, there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission. In these communities **the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care** (ibid., n. 33).

\* **"Thirdly**, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a **'new evangelization', or a 're-evangelization'**" (ibid., n. 33).

\* "On the other hand, the boundaries between pastoral care of the faithful, new evangelization and specific missionary activity are not clearly definable, and it is unthinkable to create barriers between them or to put them into watertight compartments" (ibid., n. 34).

In other words: it was also clear to John Paul II that one cannot determine Mission

geographically in the world today and that whatever the Church does, she ultimately deals with mission.

In which of these situations is the parish in which you and our confrères are pastorally engaged? In Europe, just about everywhere, do we not have, at one and the same time and often in parallel, to carry out Evangelization, New Evangelization and the care of souls?

### **5. Mission Continent Europe, Mission Territory Germany, France, Italy, Austria, etc.**

We have seen that for a few decades up until the epoch of colonialism came to an end, on account of the political independence most countries of the South gained from the colonial powers, the Second Vatican Council laid the foundation for a new understanding of the global mission of the Church which it would develop later in the different documents.

Nonetheless as we have seen Mission was massively questioned and put into crisis. These were not only questions from the outside. Indeed many Catholics had their doubts about the legitimacy of the missionary task in today's world. Can the missionary outreach of the Church be fundamentally called into question? It is too little known in our Church, on a wider basis in our parishes and ecclesial groups and movements, that the Catholic Church herself and other Christian churches in the last decades have taken up in some far reaching documents a very decisive and theologically qualified position on the question of Mission.

In a document of the German Episcopal Conference with the descriptive title "Time for Sowing: Being a Missionary Church", Bishop Joachim Wanken soberly states:

*Our Catholic Church in Germany lacks something. It is not only the faithful who are missing. Our Catholic Church in Germany lacks the conviction to be able to win new Christians. This is precisely the most difficult lack.*<sup>3</sup>

This is a provocative sentence that answers the question whether we as Church and as Christians facing the challenges of a multireligious society may still win new Christians with a clear and decisive 'yes'.

Cardinal Karl Lehmann writes also in the Prologue of the document rather directly and vulnerably:

*A basic term of the Church's life returns: Mission. For a long time suppressed, even perhaps suspected, often silenced, becomes important anew [ ...] to be missionary Church means always to be ready to exhibit missionary witness [ ...] all ecclesial activity is to be understood against the background of the missionary dimension of the Church and thereupon to be strengthened.*<sup>4</sup>

As well, there appears to be growing in the Evangelical church in Germany (EKD) a new missionary awareness which likewise finds expression in its programmatic official documents. In this regard the church officials of the Evangelical church in Germany have published an EKD text with the winning title: "Bringing the Gospel to People".<sup>5</sup> At one of the study meetings of the "Working Group of Christian Churches in Germany" (1999) an ecumenical notification process about mission and evangelization as a common task of the Christian churches began. The documentation of this meeting bears the seminal title: "Departure for a Missionary Ecumenism".<sup>6</sup>

What form however should this "missionary ecumenism" take not only in Germany, but all over in a new Europe? The question needs to be asked whether the old concepts of Mission, Evangelization or New Evangelization as they are found in the official texts of

the Church are absolutely applicable to the historical — and in the future even more strongly multicultural and multireligious — reality of Europe, especially since these missionary concepts are enlisted above all by neoconservative groups and movements with, in part, a highly questionable and moreover sectarian evangelization practice?

Groups of Catholic origin appeal thereby with an affection for the Pope whose statements on the New Evangelization of Europe however do not point in a fundamentalist direction. John Paul II had already, in a 1978 Discourse before the Council of the European Episcopal Conference, depicted the post-Christian countries of the West as the most difficult missionary continent.<sup>7</sup> In his Apostolic Letter "Tertio Millennio Adveniente" (10 Nov. 1994) the Pope considered Europe anew as the addressee of the missionary activity of the Church when he writes:

*"With the fall of the great anti-Christian systems in Europe, first of Nazism and then of Communism, there is urgent need to bring once more the liberating message of the Gospel to the men and women of Europe".*<sup>8</sup>

In one of many significant references to the missionary preaching of Paul in Athens (cf. Acts 17:16-34) John Paul II refers to Europe as "*missionary territory*", taking the form of many different 'areopagi' meaning that "these are the vast sectors of contemporary civilization and culture, of politics and economics".<sup>9</sup>

In "Novo Millennio Ineunte" (6 Jan. 2001) the Pope still resolutely tries to open the eyes of the Church in Europe when he emphatically declares that

*"... the reality of a 'Christian society' which ... measured itself explicitly on Gospel values, is now gone. Today we must courageously face a situation which is becoming increasingly diversified and demanding, in the context of 'globalization' and of the consequent new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures".*<sup>10</sup>

Already in 1978 following his critical analysis of the ecclesial scene in Europe John Paul II had warned about letting oneself be induced to a pessimistic view on account of the newly emerging and more difficult circumstances of proclamation and so to withdraw oneself from the challenges and opportunities of this moment.

This pessimistic view is often met in the ecclesial movements which have written upon their flags the so-called New Evangelization of Europe. On the basis of a theologically questionable and ideological and suspiciously Fundamentalist spirituality Christians dream of a re-Christianization and perhaps even a re-Catholicization of Europe.<sup>11</sup> With their demonization of modernity and their denegation of the Second Vatican Council and its positions for the future of the Church they have poor premises for a credible inculturation of the Christian message in the context of the European history of freedom. "Does one want if possible the Christian Diaspora to evangelize Europe back into a pre-modern, pre-Reformation "Christian West?"<sup>12</sup> This question, which Johann Baptist Metz asked a long time ago, is legitimate and urgently necessary.

Europe is a difficult missionary continent. A practice of Mission, Evangelization and New Evangelization in today's Europe cannot have an "ecclesial Integralist conquest mentality" (Ottomar Fuchs),<sup>13</sup> which leads moreover to the conclusion that Christians have learned nothing from their harmful and culpable history of Mission and that they are trying to influence the whole of society exclusively according to their vision without entering into dialogue with and among other religions and the old and new cultures, which make up today's Europe. The churches must consider well the Signs of the Times, how they may carry out their indispensable Mission and act in a theologically responsible way. Their Evangelization must always be aware of the old and new dramas due to the gap between the Gospel and culture, which Paul VI had so clearly called by name in his Apostolic Exhortation "Evangelii Nuntiandi".

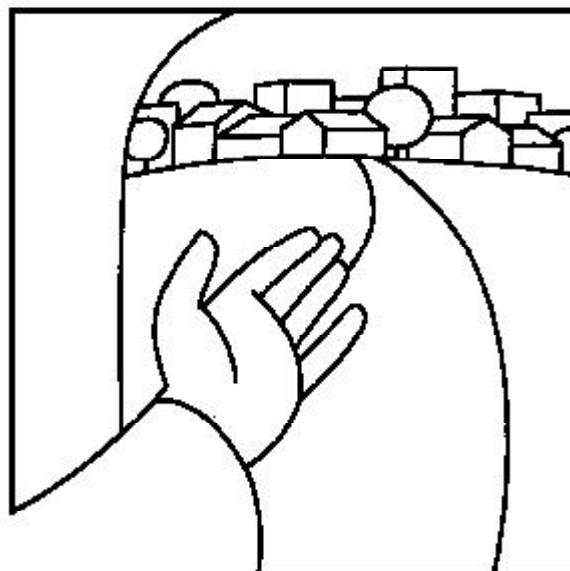
When Mission is not liberating, inculturated and willing to dialogue in mutual respect

people of other religions and cultures, it is not capable of Evangelization and then it is not Christian Mission. When it however is ready to dialogue and again and again to struggle, then it can also create the foundation for an encounter and a *modus vivendi* in a new multireligious and multicultural Europe.<sup>14</sup>

Evangelical churches and groups as well as extreme conservative Catholic movements very often tend to a fundamentalist Exclusivism, which theologically cannot be justified and is pastorally calamitous. In these circles it is not known that the Magisterium of the Church at the Second Vatican Council clearly rejected such an Exclusivism. Mission on the one hand, and ecumenical and interreligious dialogue on the other, do not simultaneously excluded each other, but are rather ordered to one another, as for example the joint document *Dialogue and Proclamation* of the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples and the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, dated 19 May 1991, clearly states:

*"Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church's evangelizing mission" (n. 77).*

*"In fulfilling her mission, the Church comes into contact with people of other religious traditions. Some become disciples of Jesus Christ in his Church, as a result of a profound conversion and through a free decision of their own. Others are attracted by the person of Jesus and his message, but for various reasons do not enter the fold. Yet others seem to have but little or no interest in Jesus. Whatever the case may be, the Church's mission extends to all. Also in relation to the religions to which they belong, the Church in dialogue can be seen to have a prophetic role" (n. 79).<sup>15</sup>*



In our pastoral practice in most of the parishes and ecclesial movements of today's Europe we are still quite distant from comprehending inter-religious dialogue as a pastoral duty because in a multicultural and multireligious society there are no other alternatives.

Likewise the Church's relationship to the world and to contemporary society in which the Church lives and realizes her Mission is often simply hardly present in the consciousness of the Church and her bishops, priests, religious and laity. To this question, the French Bishops in 2000 gave their answer in their Letter to the Catholics of France in the famous document "Offering the Faith in Today's Society" ("Proposer la foi") which in my opinion and the opinion of many others is exemplary not only for France, but for the Church's whole understanding of Mission.

In paragraph six the French Bishops described the mission of Catholics in society and formulated their duties this way:

*1. We do not permit ourselves to put up with the complete privatization of our faith as if the Christian experience in our hearts must remain buried without having any effect on the reality of the world and society. Our Church is not a sect. We do not build*

*ghettos. We oppose any attempt to withdraw the Church into herself [...].*

*2. Also when we dismiss any marginalization, we are not prevented from being realistic. The Catholic Church does not cover the entire French society. She does not allow herself to dream of acquiring a more or less established and privileged position through the State [...]*

*3. But even when the Catholic Church does not cover the whole of society, when she has shed any kind of domineering position, she remains nevertheless true to her missionary duty: that means she turns herself to all and is open to everyone [...]*

*In a word: the presence of the Catholic Church in France remains [...] a sacrament of presence. We are in our society a "sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (cf. Lumen Gentium, n. 1).<sup>16</sup>*

## **6. COMMUNIO ET MISSIO: The Mission of the Augustinian Canons**

Can this fragmentary overview of the new view of "Ecclesia missionaria", as it is founded on the missionary theology of the Second Vatican Council and further developed in some of the Documents of the Magisterium, prompt the question: how can the common life and pastoral work of the Augustinian Canons make a stronger and more specific contribution to a missionary Church in Europe?

This question can only be answered by each abbey, each congregation and the confederation itself. You understand your religious life as a service to the local Church and — trans-nationally — as a contribution to the unity and up building of the universal Church. Most of you do parish work. However the canons build a priestly common life based on the spirit of the Rule of St Augustine. This is so that you are better able to accomplish your ministry. Moreover, in the Constitutions of the Austrian Congregation of the Canons Regular of St Augustine it says literally: "So community and ministry are not seen apart from each other as separate characteristics but both involve and complete each other, to the full assertion of the nature of the Canonical Order" (*Constitution*, n. 1).

Also *communio* and *missio* are not separate from each other. Mission is not a private undertaking where each can 'missionize' according to his own style as he wants. It is the task of the whole Church and every single Christian community on the ground. Mission comes from the society of the Church and it leads to the up building of ecclesial society. It actualizes itself in the worldwide, "catholic" *Communio ecclesiarum*.

As a Catholic religious order you take part in the mission of the Church. No matter where she is and where she lives, the Church is of her very essence missionary and remains missionary, even in Europe. The care of souls on this continent must be a missionary care of souls carried out in new and qualified ways. Moreover, is it not the specific contribution you want to make as Augustinian Canons living out your Rule and your charism?

I would like to offer you at the conclusion a few sentences, which the President of the German Episcopal Conference wrote in the prologue of the Document: "Time for Sowing: Being a Missionary Church":

*Certainly the courage of one's own unchangeable profile belongs to being a missionary Church. Christian life obtains therein a liberating power, which empowers one for solidarity [...]. Being a missionary Church does not mean implementing extra church programmes. Communio and Missio, society and mission are always two sides of one and the same coin. All ecclesial activities are to be understood against the background of the missionary dimension of the Church.<sup>17</sup>*

This also indubitably applies to the pastoral ministry of the Augustinian Canons. I wish you may undertake this task with the courage of your own unchangeable profile, above all with God's blessing and the creative renewing energy of the Holy Spirit.

*\*\* Translation prepared by Dom Elias Can with the assistance of Dom Alipius Müller.*

<sup>1</sup> Vgl. P. Jenkins, Demographische Entwicklung der Christen weltweit: Auswirkungen auf die neue Evangelisierung, in: WeltMission - Internationaler Kongress der Katholischen Kirche, Dokumentation.2.-4. Mai 2006, Freising, Arbeitshilfen, Nr. 202, hg. vom Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 2006, 119-139. "Zeit zur Aussaat" Missionarisch Kirche sein (Die deutschen Bischöfe, 68), herausgegeben vom Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 2000, 5-6.

<sup>2</sup> K. Rahner, Sendung und Gnade. Beiträge zur Pastoraltheologie, Innsbruck, 1966, 47.

<sup>3</sup> "Zeit zur Aussaat" Missionarisch Kirche sein (Die deutschen Bischöfe, 68), herausgegeben vom Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 2000. 35.

<sup>4</sup> Ebd. 6.

<sup>5</sup> "Das Evangelium unter die Leute bringen". Zum missionarischen Dienst der Kirche in unserem Land, hg. vom Kirchenamt der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland, Hannover 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Evangelisches Missionswerk in Deutschland (EWM)/ Arbeitsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in Deutschland (ACK)/ Missio Aachen (Ed.), Aufbruch zu einer missionarischen Ökumene. Ein Verständigungsprozess über die gemeinsame Aufgabe der Mission und Evangelisation in Deutschland, Hamburg 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Vgl. dazu K. Koch, Neuevangelisierung im Missionskontinent Europa. Chancen und Versuchungen, in: 1. Müller (Hg.), Neuevangelisierung Europas, Freiburg/Schweiz 1993, 111-148, hier 111.

<sup>8</sup> Johannes Paul II., Apostolisches Schreiben "Tertio Millennio Adveniente" (Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls 119), Bonn 1994, n. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Ebd.

<sup>10</sup> Johannes Paul II., Apostolisches Schreiben "Novo Millennio Ineunte" (Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls 150), Bonn 2001, n. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Vgl. Koch, Neuevangelisierung, 111.

<sup>12</sup> J.B. Metz, "Was ist mit der Gottesrede geschehen?" Überlegungen zur Kirche in der Welt der Massenmedien, in: Herder Korrespondenz 45 (1991) 418.

<sup>13</sup> J.B. Metz, "Was ist mit der Gottesrede geschehen?" Überlegungen zur Kirche in der Welt der Massenmedien, in: Herder Korrespondenz 45 (1991) 418.

<sup>14</sup> Vgl. Paul VI., Apostolisches Schreiben "Evangelii nuntiandi", n. 20: zitiert nach: H. Rzepkowski, Der Welt verpflichtet, Sankt Augustin 1976, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz (Hg.), Dialog und Verkündigung. Überlegungen und Orientierungen zum Interreligiösen Dialog und zur Verkündigung des Evangeliums Jesu Christi (Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls 102), Bonn 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenzen (Hg.), Den Glauben anbieten in der heutigen Gesellschaft. Brief an die Katholiken Frankreichs von 1996 (Stimmen der Weltkirche 37), Bonn 2000, 27-28.

<sup>17</sup> "Zeit zur Aussaat" Missionarisch Kirche sein (Die Deutschen Bischöfe, 68), herausgegeben vom Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, Bonn 2000, 5-6.



**Peter Lokiru**

## ***Inculturation: A Dialogical Mission With Specific Reference to Africa\****

**I**n this paper we are going to explore Inculturation as a dialogic mission in reference to the African contextual reality. After defining the term, we will look at the dialoguing aspect of Inculturation in order to proceed to its dialectic dialogue – inculturation as inter-culturation – which, in its positive outcome leads to constructive dialogue between Christianity and the multi-facetted African reality with the optic of four principles of inculturation.

### **1. Defining the term**

The term inculturation is the descriptive end-product of an evolutionary process, once called *adaptation*<sup>1</sup>, *enculturation*<sup>2</sup>, *acculturation*<sup>3</sup> and *accommodation*<sup>4</sup>, etc. – ecclesiological concepts that basically imply God acts only in the visible Church — and today called *inculturation* — a Christological concept — that presupposes a Paschal Christology in which the Spirit of God is already active amongst peoples yet to be evangelised, drawing them to Christ.

By the theological term *inculturation* is intended the continuous dialogue between faith and culture, in a dynamic and constructive relation. It is a true and proper 'incarnation' of the Christian message in a particular cultural context.

Inculturation – according to Pope John Paul II – is the incarnation of the Gospel in the native cultures and at the same time the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church.<sup>5</sup> In the same way it can be defined as "... a dynamic interaction between ecclesial faith and societal culture: between the living faith of an ecclesial community and the living culture of a concrete society".<sup>6</sup> The process has a dialogical movement that is one in essence but has a two-fold intentionality. It is a two-way mutual interaction towards both societal cultures, through the incarnation of the Gospel/Christian faith in them and the transmission of its proper values; and towards the ecclesial community, with the introduction in it of the values present in societal cultures, renewing them internally and leading them to a more universal communion. Hence, it is a process through which the Church becomes present in the culture of a people; and at the same time the renovation of the authentic cultural values of a people through an intimate transformation that is a result of the meeting with the truth and with Christian life. In this way, the message and the reality of which the Church is a sign and a presence, become better expressed, understood and received.

### **2. Inculturation as dialogue**

Dialogue – a two-way conversation – is an essential element in the process of inculturation. It is a method of communication that finds 'democratic' consensus in the African worldview, and thus can be most effective in the evangelizing mission of the continent. For it to become a reality, it should involve, on both sides, a sincere joint search for a wider truth in love, sincerity, openness, fraternity, respect for the dignity of others, equality, interdependence, solidarity, co-responsibility and the ability to accept differences, overcome fears, mistrust, prejudices and suspicion. It has its foundational roots in the Trinitarian mission and it has the relational status of the human subject whose relationship with others constitutes his nature and has the universal creative and salvific action of God in which Christ and the Holy Spirit are upon men of all cultures and epochs.

In principle, dialogue involves the induction principle. It excludes the deductive and reductive prospects. So, while it categorically excludes the latter principles, dialogue embraces the former principle. The deductive prospect of Inculturation involves the theoretical application of the classical model of inculturation in such a way that inculturation, as a



dialogical process, does not have any concrete contact with the practical experience of the people in the living context. This is the theoretical application of the concept of inculturation that does not actualise itself in practise. This application of inculturation is unrealistic and negative inasmuch as it remains an intellectual classical theory that neither involves nor influences the people's experience. This prospect is the basis of the classical theology theory, in which it was thought that theology was one, everywhere objective, and relevant for all people and therefore relevant to all situations. This theology, however, has been proved wrong by time and by the different contexts that have given rise to new theologies.

The reductive prospect of inculturation on the other hand, involves an aspect of Christianity that, having been preached for long centuries, suffers from a 'superiority complex error' and therefore does not want to recognize the positive values and the good found in human cultures in general and in the diverse cultural contexts of Africa in particular. This type of Christianity wants a super recognition that does not value culture and context and therefore reduces them to passivity, inactivity and inferiority. This prospect was the original idea behind the civilizing tendency – and consequently, the civilizing theology – of the Western missionaries in regard to the then so-called mission lands. This too, is not a true model of dialogue that can lead to a true evangelization of the African continent in particular and similar world contexts at large.

Dialogue instead involves the principle of induction — that in which the theoretical doctrinal *formulae* of the Christian faith are transmitted to other people in such a way that the theoretical knowledge of the Christian faith meets and gets inserted into the concrete and practical aspects of people's cultures and contexts in order to produce a new reality: an *inculturated faith* — a faith that is at home in a culture and the culture that feels at home in faith. Such a faith is lived and practiced, and understood by the people in their cultural forms and categories. It is in the application of this principle that past errors of deduction and reduction can be avoided in favour of the dialogical method that leads to assimilation, purification, transformation and responsible creativity in its varying stages of inculturation.

It is therefore here that we can find a true and authentic dialogue, which humbles the 'superiority complex' error of Christianity — especially its negative patrimony in the course of history — and elevates the 'inferiority complex' error that has for long been inflicted on culture and diverse contexts of African societies.

The process of inculturation is by nature dialogical. It is a two-way process that involves the way by which the Christian message and the Christian lifestyle come to influence the cultural context of the local Church on the one hand, and the way the Christian message and lifestyle come to be expressed, lived and transmitted in cultural categories and forms, on the other.

In this sense, dialogue presupposes a sincere theological esteem for non-Christians, who are already a depository of divine gifts, under the influence of the Word, creator and redeemer. The non-Christian therefore, is not simply a *homo corruptus et damnatus* or *in puris naturalibus constitutus*. Respect and esteem, however, do not undermine the sin and evil that come from man's heart and therefore contaminate cultures and religions. This is the reason behind the affirmation that the Gospel's function should always be presented in terms of "assumption, purification and elevation".<sup>7</sup>

For centuries, the reality of the meeting between the Gospel and culture, has mistakenly been preached in the context of 'evangelization of cultures' and yet in reality, this expression — 'evangelization of cultures' — expresses only one aspect of the inculturation process. It denotes the impact that the preaching of the 'Gospel' has — in its Western expression — on the cultures of Africa, but does not reciprocate the contribution of African cultures to the patrimony of Christianity. Hence, the expression does not convey the idea of the Church becoming present within a given culture and being affected by it in its forms of life and worship.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, without the cultural contribution of the African Church, Christianity will always be wanting, incomplete and non-universal in its patrimony. In fact, Christianity ought to go beyond merely affecting and being present in African cultures and contexts, but get into being affected in its turn, since Inculturation is a dynamic and continuous process that inserts true Christianity into all the different situations and epochs of humanity.

The dialogical character of the process of Inculturation gives it three principle stages

or levels. **The first stage** consists in the Christian message and life becoming present within a given culture. In fact, it corresponds to the evangelization of cultures. It coincides with the first stages of evangelization and therefore involves learning about the values of a new culture. Openness and receptivity to these values is necessary in order to be able to translate the message they carry in a manner that is understandable to its recipients. This can also be referred to as celebrative and/or local Inculturation. It is a didactic type of Inculturation where the attention is an anthropologico-ritual and adaptation and accommodation are common.

**The second stage** is the transformation stage, in which the effects of evangelization on the culture become evident in such a way that there is need for a long process of discernment, purification, and creation of new forms that can adequately express elements of the Church's tradition. The attention here is anthropologico-cultural where culture enters into dialogue with the Liturgy and Christianity seeking a reciprocal exchange. This is technically called 'aptatio'.<sup>9</sup> Here, the local Church, through its life and message, becomes the agent that reorients, renews and animates the local culture.

**The third stage** 'inculturatio',<sup>10</sup> is the incarnation of cultural rites and their transformation in meaning and their assumption to the Roman Rite. It deals with the establishment of a new communion. This communion starts in the local Church that has to be in communion with the culture of its people, which then later opens itself to the Universal Church and to all humanity hence qualifying the catholic nature of the Church. The adaptations at this stage that go so deep into the roots of the cultural pillars as to assume the true meaning of Inculturation, are not indicated in the typical edition<sup>11</sup> but these are to depart from the initiatives of the single Bishops' Conferences.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore an authentic indissoluble marriage bond between Christianity and the local cultures and contexts, can truly be understood in a sincere dialogue between 'a theology from above' based on the principle of incarnation – in which God reveals Himself through His Son Incarnate; and 'a theology from below' which is based on the principle of Inculturation. This is due to the fact that Christianity does not only consist of the message of the transfiguration: "This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to Him" (Lk 9:35) — a classic example of a revelatory message from above; but also of the message of the Incarnation of Christ, who took flesh and entered into a particular culture of humanity, and of the salvation history of the Jewish people. The message of Christ's Incarnation leads us to the second theological approach – a theology from below — a situation in which a search for God departs from the known in order to arrive at the unknown, which is only made known to us through Christ Jesus. It is therefore when a theology from above learns to dialogue constructively with a theology from below that a true and sincere Inculturation and consequently a true and relevant evangelization of peoples comes to fruition.

Rest assured that the Church's missionary nature has its foundations in the Trinitarian mission — the mission of God the Father, who commissions the Son through the Holy Spirit — it is not only correct but also just, to recognize that the evangelising mission of the Church in Africa should be understood as a dialogue between the Universal Church and the local believing community in its diverse cultures and contexts. And one of the motives for this dialogue is to discover the '*Semina Verbi*' latent in local cultures and to render explicit the implicit 'Christianity' therein, hence enriching the comprehension that the Church has of the Gospel message and of her very life.

Dialogue also involves a multiplicity of actors and contents. It involves actors such as the Holy Spirit who is the main protagonist of evangelization, other evangelizers, the evangelised and the universal communion; and its contents, namely, Christ or the person of Christ, the Gospel or message and the Church or community. The content of inculturation dialogue is threefold. It constitutes of faith in Christ; faith in His message; and faith in the believing community. The multiplicity of the dialogical process and the triple-form of the content of its Inculturation, all point to one single reality that in dialogue there are different partners who come together in a meeting in order to reciprocally enrich themselves from the 'otherness' of the other. There is therefore the 'other' who is different from the 'I' or 'me', has a different culture, way of life and thinking and probably a different language and context from my own. Hence, there is here a sincere admission of plurality, which is a prerequisite for a genuine dialogue.

However, dialogue, in its inculturation process as a reinterpretation of the faith in a cultural horizon, has rules to follow. It must be carried out in strict fidelity to the historical deposit of faith and it must not break the actual universal communion of faith and unity of the Catholic Church. It should therefore be adopted in such a way that Church doctrine does not only accentuate discontinuity with the past but remains in continuity with the traditional *depositum fidei*, and that the believers in Christ are open to dialogue with peoples of other faiths and living ideologies. This is because Christians represent Christ in the world and Christ came into the world to save, not only some but the entire humanity. God's will is that all people will be saved (I Tim 2:4-5): Hence salvation is universal for all. Therefore, an inculturated dialogue achieves its purpose when people speak the faith in their own language, and are able to be heard by other believers of different cultures, and when consequently, the common faith, is better understood and more deeply appreciated by all in the Universal Church. In fact, the proof of a locally inculturated Church, can be seen in her concern to give to the Universal Church new children and a new interpretation of what it means to believe in Christ.

It is however important to note that, besides the requirements of dialogue, there are also enemies of dialogue, who need to be guarded against if constructive dialogue is to be reached. These enemies of dialogue include: relativism, syncretism, superficial eirenism, dogmatism and self-sufficiency. This is the reason why inculturation is not a simple project to be drawn up round a table but is a slow and complex process that needs patience and prudent wisdom that seeks to reconcile the practical experiential aspect of the people with the salvific message brought by Christ for the entire humanity. The factors that favour constructive dialogue instead include: clarity and lucidity of one's own religious identity, sincere and reciprocal respect for the other person, his/her religion with all the spiritual values therein embodied, reciprocal openness that excludes egoism, and the vital experience of one's faith which is lived in search of, and in openness to, the common good of humanity regardless of denominational belonging. Through dialogue, humanity becomes open to its better angels and hence puts into practice the most basic and fundamental rule: "Do good!" – which is the foundation stone for the grace of God for every searching soul.

### **3. Inculturation as Inter-culturation : A dialogical encounter between Christianity and the African contextual reality**

A symbiosis between the Church and culture or cultures, is therefore the long-range goal of the process of inculturation. In the words of Starkloff, "inculturation always involves a conversation between two partners — the universal Gospel or fundamental 'good news' and the cultural uniqueness of each context in which that message is heard".<sup>13</sup> But it must be noted that the Christian faith does not exist at a pure, disincarnated state, but only in a cultural form: therefore talking of Inculturation really means we are dealing with a 'dialogue between a culture and faith in a cultural form'.<sup>14</sup>

So, when each new incarnation of faith in a particular culture requires a dialogue with other cultures in which the faith has previously found expression through an inculturated local Church, then the dialogical process is known as *Inter-culturation*. This term, which re-echoes the "need to rediscover the true nature of theology as *logos* and *sarx* (Jn 1:14), something transcendent and immanent, universal and particular, having a focus that is both eschatological, present and relevant",<sup>15</sup> can be defined as the end product of "an existential dialogue between a culture which takes the Gospel and another one that awaits it, both explicitly and implicitly".<sup>16</sup>

Culture is as universal as human nature, and the Church is as universal as the saving action of Jesus Christ. And yet human culture and the universal Church are expressed and lived in particular ways. The dialogue between human culture and the Christian culture — represented by the Church — make inculturation a process of both opportunity and risk. Therefore, Inculturation is both an opportunity and a risk. It is based on a dialectic dialogue between God's intervention through Self-revelation (theology from above) to save man, and man's response to God through man's constant search for Him (theology from below). When man's search for God is positive and reflects man's recognition of his Creator and of his position as God's creature, then the process of a constructive dialogue (an opportunity) can be said to have taken place; but when man's response to God's call is one

of self-sufficiency and autonomy, then the Inculturation process can be termed as a destructive one, hence, a risk. A true and authentic Inculturation is and can only be a result of a constructive dialogue, which is a result of man's response to God's revelation. Dialogue therefore depends on how man responds to God, be it positively — in which case Inculturation becomes an opportunity — or negatively, in which case, it becomes a risk.

In the theology from above, however, the principal subject and initiator of Inculturation is God through his Self-revelation in Jesus Christ. This then evokes a response from man who finds himself locked in a particular context and epoch that constitutes his habitat. In short, the theology from above presupposes a theology from below and *vice versa*. One is interlocked with the other. Depending on his response, it is therefore man to determine whether to opt for a destructive or a constructive dialogue that consequently results in either "destructive inculturation" or "constructive inculturation".

### **3.1 Christianity and the African Context**

Today, for a true and genuine Inculturation to take place, neither Christianity nor the different African realities can claim to ignore the presence and therefore the importance of the other. A claim to this effect by either party is a desperate attempt to negate the self and therefore a futile attempt to escape from reality. It is futile to attempt to escape from danger by resorting to the ostrich's 'trick' when it is confronted with danger: hiding its head in the sand while leaving its entire body exposed to danger.

Therefore a genuine encounter can only come about when both sides reciprocally acknowledge the presence of the other, as a foundation for a dialectic dialogue between the two parties. Therefore, while Christianity proposes the salvific message through Christ to an African, it ought to recognize the cultural, social, anthropological, political, economic, etc., realities of this vast continent; and the African contextual reality, in its turn, recognizes the newness of the Christian message brought by Christianity. It is only in this way, that inculturation can become a reality on this continent.

Bimwenyi-Kweshi, hypothesizes an encounter between African Traditional Religion (ATR/C) and Christianity in a systematic way that focuses on an African cultural theology. He centres on the theandric structure of Christian revelation, which though configuring Christian living, also determines the way of theology thus: "for 'African theology', the best method and the first rule is that of respecting its object: a dialogic reality which is simultaneously of man and of God, a concrete relationship historically situated, which is the place of the epiphany of both God and Man linked to each other".<sup>17</sup> This salvific encounter between Christ and the African is a communication event, which involves God, who speaks in Christ, through the ecclesial mediations proper to the incarnational dynamics of Christian revelation; and people, who exist in their concrete historical reality with their own specific cultural and religious identity. These form the two major poles of dialogic communication between God and African people. If one of the poles of this process of communication were to swallow the other, communication would simply not take place. If the salvific encounter is to take place, the 'full Christ' in the human mediations he chose, and the 'full African person' in his/her's own historical, cultural and religious identity, must be present.<sup>18</sup>

As to whether African traditional beliefs are a curse or a blessing, it is important to note and agree with René Luneau that Christianity will not take root in Africa unless it reaches the very heart of the cultural and religious traditions of those populations.<sup>19</sup> The first Symposium organized by the *Centre d'Études des Religions Africaines* (CERA) of Kinshasa in 1978 with the general theme "African Traditional Religions and Christianity" concluded that traditional religion not only could not be ignored, but was in fact an indispensable partner for Christianity. In fact, Traditional Religion was presented by them as the synthesis of the profound authentic cultural and religious identity of Africans, and the 'Christ event in Africa', as the encounter between Christ and the African religious person, taking place along the concrete paths of the latter's own spiritual journey.<sup>20</sup> For Africans, the fundamental challenge is the way, how to think, understand and confess Jesus Christ in their own cultures and history, which is permeated by tensions and conflicts.

Traditional Religion is the global view that configures the religious experience of the

African, even when new input arrives from other religious traditions. In accepting a new faith, people will only leave an important aspect of the former, if they find in the new one a better answer to the same need. Hence, if an important component of the former faith is not superseded nor contradicted by the new one, it will probably continue to play its role in the person's life, even when there is an official change of religious allegiance. This idea is corroborated by Bruno Novelli's observation that, for the African peoples, "change is accepted only when it does not threaten the guarantee provided by the traditional way of life, but rather proves to be able to enhance it".<sup>21</sup> The same author asserts that resistance to change by the Karimojong — and by analogy, by all Africans — is due to fear that, by abandoning the traditional way of life, which managed somehow to guarantee their survival in the past, they will not find, in what is proposed to them as 'new', the same degree of assurance about their survival as human beings and as people.<sup>22</sup>

In a theological approach therefore, it is worth focussing our attention on the encounter between the Gospel of Christ and traditional culture and religion in the context of the concrete life of today's Christian communities in Africa.<sup>23</sup> This is very important in that it values the cultural elements of African culture and religion. Hence: "To underestimate religion would mean to deprive the African culture of the essential elements of its dynamism".<sup>24</sup>

From an African sense of community and from an African philosophical axiom: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am",<sup>25</sup> we can derive an inculturation theology through an analogical dialogue between a theology from below and a theology from above, thus: "We are, because Christ is, and since Christ is, therefore we are". Here, the existence of the community finds its base in Christ, whose image can easily be understood in the image of Christ as ancestor.<sup>26</sup>

The whole traditional cultural and religious set-up of Africa is undergoing profound and rapid processes of change. But it is through man's capability to accept these changes that he finds himself at home in a changing world. There are, however three fundamental levels of change that Africa, like any other historical institution of peoples ought to undergo: institutional level, level of fundamental meanings and the level of culture and religion.

At the first level — the institutional one — traditional and Western structures such as family structures, forms of Government, socio-political authority, tribunals and customary laws co-existed for a long time. At the second level, the levels of basic notions, metaphors, symbols, the vision of mankind and his world, the primordial relationships in society with nature and with the spiritual world, etc., undergo a very slow process of change. The third level effects the essential changes in culture and religion that are the sources of the personal and societal identity of the African peoples.

It is therefore clear that the decisive encounter, the salvific event of communication between Christ and the human person in Africa, must take place at this third level. This is because, it is only insofar as the Word spoken in Christ reaches a person at the level of culture and religion, and when the latter's answer in faith comes from that same level, then we can truly say that African Christianity is authentic.<sup>27</sup>

ATR is a reality, which is in fact very much alive. Much of the pre-colonial ritual and public practice may have gone, but we must be aware of the fact that what little still surfaces in modern Africa is 'the tip of an iceberg'. This 'submerged' but immense reality is not only present outside the Christian churches; we encounter it daily as an integral part of the religious experience of our Christians, and not least in the journey of faith of the most committed and generous members of our Catholic communities.<sup>28</sup> Shorter puts it thus: "At Baptism, the African Christian repudiates remarkably little of his former non-Christian outlook. He may be obliged to turn his back upon certain traditional practices which the Church, rightly or wrongly, has condemned in his area, but he is not asked to recant a religious philosophy.... Consequently, he returns to the forbidden practices as occasion arises with remarkable ease. Conversion to Christianity is for him sheer gain, an 'extra' for which he has opted. It overlies his original, religious culture ... the African Christian operates with two thought systems at once, and both of them are closed to the other. Each is only superficially modified by the other. It becomes clear therefore that the heart of the dialogue between Christianity and the African Traditional Religion is located within the consciousness of the African Christian him/herself. It is there that the most serious exchange must take place".<sup>29</sup>

The above situation should not be understood however as a sign of lack of Christianity on the part of African Christians or a lack of personal commitment to a true life of Christian faith on their part, but as a drama that every African Christian, who is conscious of his new faith and of his cultural identity, is living as he sincerely strives to be faithful to Christ from within his whole human reality. John Mbiti equally attests to the truth of the above phenomenon in these words: "In many ways, African Religion prepared the way for the conversion of African peoples to Christianity. But their conversion does not mean that they have abandoned all their former religious ideas and traditions. Often their religious life shows a combination of African Religion and Christianity ... many millions of Africans are followers of more than one religion, even if they may register or be counted in the census as adherents of only one religion".<sup>30</sup>

ATR, in an immense variety of expressions, beliefs and practices, is alive not only outside, but right inside our Catholic Christian communities. In its different grades of intensity, it is a constitutive part of the spiritual and religious life of most African Christians. To this effect, Mbiti rightly affirms that Africans are notoriously religious. Intercultural dialogue with such a religious tradition is therefore inevitable. This dialogue is an essential element, which is vital to the authenticity of the Christian life of our ecclesial communities. Through this dialogue, there is an encounter between Christianity and the cultural and religious traditions of Africa. It is part of the process of salvation in Christ being concretely brought forward by the Holy Spirit in that particular context. Indeed, the presence of African Traditional Religion in the life of Christians may well become a gift in store that the African Church — through a true African Christianity — will eventually be able to offer to the Universal Church.<sup>31</sup>

### ***3.2 Inculturation: Towards a constructive dialogue***

There is tension between the two views: one that perceives the Church (or the Church that perceives herself) as the sole bearer of a message of salvation of which she has the monopoly; and the other is that which views the Church as an illustration — in word and deed — of God's involvement in the world. In the first model, the Church is seen as a partial realization of God's Reign on earth, and mission as that activity through which individual converts are transferred from eternal death to life. In the second model, the Church is, at best, a pointer to the way God acts in respect to the world, and mission is viewed as a contribution towards the humanization of society — a process in which the Church may perhaps be involved in the role of being a consciousness-raiser. When we observe these two tensional views, we note that the end result can either be destructive, in which case there is destructive tension and/or dialogue; or constructive tension and/or dialogue. The former (destructive dialogue) comes about due to the wrong view of the Church as a monopoly and therefore sole bearer of God's salvation for man; and the latter (constructive dialogue) comes about due to a just and humble view that holds the Church to be an instrument of God and therefore a conscience raiser for man to be ever in communion with his Creator/God. Here, the Church is a Sacrament, a sign that points towards God's full Reign.

Therefore, when the Church acknowledges her right position and role as God's instrument and man's consciousness-raiser, she facilitates a dialogue between believers, through their personal and positive response, and God that leads to constructive dialogue. The contrary is true, if the Church does not orientate herself towards her right place and role.

By way of application, inculturation as dialogic mission, comes to fruition in the fields of life involvement, common action, theological exchange and exchange of spiritual experiences<sup>32</sup>. In short, it is an exchange of ideas and actions in all spheres of life. There are diverse dimensions to its effect: first of all, there is a dialogue of life in which people try to live in an open and neighbourly atmosphere. They share their joys and sorrows, their human problems and life's preoccupations without regard to cultural or religious affiliations; after all, all humanity is a fruit of God's creation and an object of God's redemption in Christ, the Eternal Word. In African Religions, this aspect is clearly demonstrated in the people's religious practice in an ardent tendency to foster values of personal and societal life such as peace, justice, joy, harmony, love, etc; in celebrating fellowship and life over death, in cultivating spiritual activities like prayer, sacrifice, thanksgiving, praise, hope and trust; in practising kindness, helpfulness, healing and

consolation, etc; in people's struggle for survival even in situations of utter poverty and suffering, etc. In all these African peoples walk the way of the Lord — the way of salvation. They are in search of the Lord in the depths of their hearts.

There is next a dialogue of action where Christians and peoples of other denominations collaborate for the integral development and liberation of all people. This is an attempt on the part of all to achieve a common good. This is positive and should be encouraged by all. Through this action, man tries to make the world a better place for every person to live in. Hence, human dignity is greatly upheld. In the case of Africa, this is the field of human promotion, which is urgent in many parts of the continent. Here the concepts of Jesus as liberator, healer and ancestor could be used to pass the Christian message to the African peoples in their varied situations of social injustice, war, economic exploitation, etc. Rather than the classical definitions of the person of Christ, these familiar concepts with a cultural reference, can easily be understood by the common African man and woman, and therefore may become a pastoral strategy to use in the evangelization activity.

Thirdly, there is a dialogue of theological exchange. In it specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages. It is therefore after understanding this, that they will begin to appreciate each other's spiritual values, which should not be rejected but accepted as sources of reciprocal enrichment.

There is also a dialogue of religious experience in which people, who are rooted in their own different religious traditions, share their spiritual riches. This is the case in regard to prayer, contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God and/or the Absolute. This dialogue can help to overcome the religious fundamentalism that has been raging in many parts of Africa between Moslems and Christians, and conflicts amongst different religious denominations.

When dialogue is constructive by nature, it creates relations of communion, and therefore, the believing Church becomes a community of communion. But in many African contexts, there are so many religious divisions, wars, violence, poverty and suffering. Hence, it is only through constructive dialogue between African realities and Christianity that there can be a sincere insertion of the Gospel into the ATR, for "these religions are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people".<sup>33</sup> Constructive dialogue is the only means to achieve the unity of all African peoples and for that matter, of all humankind. It is in it that people will learn to promote human dignity and work together for the common good of all. Hence, if to-date, there is war, violence, suffering and poverty in Africa, it is simply because people have not learnt to dialogue constructively in the different aspects of their lifestyle (for if they dialogue at all, then, the type of dialogue is destructive); and that Christianity and the different African realities have not learnt to listen to each other in reciprocal respect. This may be seen, for example, in a tendency towards religious intolerance amongst different religious denominations. Among these are the intolerant, aggressive and expansionist designs of fundamentalist Islamic groups in some places in Africa, who constitute a Muslim minority on the African continent.

The Catholic Church's relationship with other religions, and also with the African ATR/C — in the entirety of its traditional and acquired capacities — is dictated by respect. Pope John Paul II in his Address to representatives of non-Christian religions affirms that "respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of life, and respect for the action of the spirit of man"<sup>34</sup> is a prerequisite for the Church's mission that respects and esteems these non-Christian religions because they are the living expression of the soul of vast groups of people. For this motive, the Catholic Church has often organized prayer meetings with leaders of non-Christian religions convinced that "every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit who is mysteriously present in every human heart".<sup>35</sup> In all the above interventions, we notice that other religions and cultural traditions are not useless matter to be discarded or let go of but rather that, these, are subjects of God's good action of creation and redemption. Therefore, all that ought to be done is to be open to dialogue to bring out the best in both the non-Christian religions and cultures and the Christian religions and their cultural subjects.

To bring out these positive values and practices, we are going to employ four principles of inculturation to enable Christianity and therefore its cultural subjects — God's people, to enter into a constructive dialogue through dialectic inculturation, with African traditional cultures, religions and contexts in their variety. These principles include: The preservation or valuing; the substitution; the purification and the abandonment principles. Let's look at them one by one.

*i) The preservation or valuing principle*

The meeting of cultures is possible because man, despite all the differences of history and social contracts, remains one and the same being. This one being, man, however, is himself touched in the depths of his being by truth. The fundamental openness of each person to the other can only be explained by the hidden fact that our souls have been touched by truth; and this explains the essential agreement that exists even between cultures which are the most removed from each other. There are therefore positive elements in each culture that need to be valued and retained even after the Gospel has inserted itself in the local culture.

Diversity leading to isolation can be accounted for by the finiteness of the human spirit. No one grasps the whole; the myriad insights and forms build a kind of mosaic displaying their complementarity and interrelatedness. In order to be whole, each needs the other. Man approaches the unity and wholeness of his being only in the reciprocity of all great cultural achievements. The valuing principle holds that not everything in African culture is pagan and therefore a thing to be avoided or substituted or discarded. It calls for the identification of all the positive values and practices in African cultures, which can be retained or preserved because they are good, just, noble, moral and therefore do not oppress anyone. These values and practices promote the dignity of the human person. In fact, there are many of these values in Africa. They include: the centrality of life, sense of community, centrality of relationship, respect, generosity, sharing, hospitality, consensus principle in decision making (reconciliation), deep sense of God as Creator, Provider, and Sustainer of the universe, religiosity or sense of the sacred, morality and ethics, sacredness of authority, holistic view of life, use of symbols in celebration and worship, belief in the after-life and therefore a strong bond of communion between the dead and the living. All these good values and practices ought to be incorporated into Christianity thus enabling an African Christian, not only to be Christian but also to be African.

*ii) The substitution principle*

This principle holds that some aspects of culture need to be substituted because they are no longer relevant to the people due to their adherence to a new religion that requires a new code of ethics. An example of this for Christians is, to substitute the wearing of amulets for protection with the wearing of Christian symbols such as the rosary or scapular. The traditional African practice of wearing amulets as protection from evil powers has been superseded and cannot be retained in Christian circles. In this case, there is a need to substitute this practice with the wearing of relevant Christian symbols or symbolism such as the Crucifix or Marian medals and rosaries. The traditional use of certain items to ward off evil can be replaced by the Christian use of holy water, candles or Christian exorcism. The point here is to use the old traditional practices as points of departure. Therefore it is a strategic method for an effective evangelization of the continent. At first sight, this may seem impossible but knowing that an inculturation process is a complex process that needs patience, prudence and at the same time docile openness — and not rigidity — to the Holy Spirit that speaks in secret to the heart of man and through man's culture, this can become a reality. In it the people, departing from the known practices of African culture can gain access to the Christian practices that will lead them to Christ the Saviour.

*iii) The purification principle*

For true and sincere dialogue to happen, it is inevitable that the inculturation involve a purification process. This can be referred to as the presence of the Cross of Christ in the inculturation process. The purifying process is two-edged: It involves the adjustment the evangelising agent or missionary from without the cultural setting must make; and those to be made by the local or indigenous evangelising agent, individuals or communities. In the first case, purification involves a missionary or evangelising agent who comes from outside a given cultural background, so to say. This aspect deprives the missionary/evangelizer of his/her particular culture's thought patterns and categories that are often in conflict with the new forms. Hence, to become an effective missionary, he/she has to undergo a purifying process, radically leaving behind his/her own former world-view and cultural way of thought and thinking that are in conflict with the new people and try to assume those of the latter, accepting their philosophy.



The second case is the purification of the destinatories of evangelization, namely, the local evangelizing agent or person, individuals and communities. It involves the purifying action of the Holy Spirit that enables Christian life to be expressed in cultural expressions at individual and community levels. The Holy Spirit in this case enables the local Church to assume her responsibilities with liberty, ability and creativity though without forgetting her Catholicity and communion with the Universal Church. It helps the local Church to accept the purifying of culture by the Gospel, that elevates it to a higher level of realization. In line with this argument is the African Bishops' demand for the African Church to be self-supporting, self-propagating and self-administering.

It is the relationship of discipleship with Jesus Christ and the personal assimilation of his message that will enable a person to discern what in his culture is compatible with following Jesus Christ and what is not. The Gospel itself, even as it is inculturated, will, in some respects, always be counter to the prevailing culture of any time and place. For the Gospel brings about a new creation (II Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). And so Jesus Christ, when truly received, becomes truly African and as such liberates the African cultural contexts. Thus, Christ leads them to a fuller knowledge and commitment to the God of life that they already knew.<sup>36</sup> In this sense, the novelty of Christianity, more than African Traditional Religion, is what enables the people to know more clearly how the God known in the ATR, who is the same God of Jesus Christ, wishes to be. He can, in fact, be better known and loved, as well as the journey of the human being, history and the destiny of both.<sup>37</sup>

This principle holds that there are aspects of African culture — its values and practices — that are essentially good but need the Gospel's purifying touch or modification to attain their complete relevance to the entire believing community of the Church, in order to transcend Africa's cultural limits and therefore lead man to his full realization as God's creature.

Some of these aspects in an African context include the following: the prostration of men before kings or the kneeling of women before men as signs of respect. But depending on the context, signs of respect may be shown through other body postures or movements such as hand-shaking, and the like.

The case of taboos also can be modified or purified in order to rediscover the deeper meaning behind the taboo. For example, in the taboo: "If you sit on the cooking stone your mother will die" was intended to cause fear in the people, especially the children but the meaning behind it was to protect children and other people from burning their buttocks since the cooking stones were always hot. In short the taboo method used by the African peoples was a kind of moral code that bound people to correct behaviour and rapport with others. Hence, these aspects of African practices do not need total condemnation but rather true guidance that seeks to remove the fear in people by explaining to them the moral teaching behind these taboos.

In the final analysis, the purification of the cultural aspects should not be reduced to a mere modification of such aspects or beliefs from error or superstition but above all, it should transcend this stage and become a profound transformation of these aspects that elevates them and gives them the fullness of goodness that they were lacking previously. And in Christian terms, this fullness is found in the person of Christ, that Christianity proposes to the culture making it rediscover the good inherent in it.

#### *iv) The abandonment principle*

There are certain aspects of culture that need to be abandoned completely since they are objectively oppressive, evil, anti-life, anti-development and against the dignity of the human person as such. In Africa, some examples of these practices include: revenge in the philosophy of an eye for an eye, the killing of twins in some African societies, female circumcision, evils of witchcraft and sorcery, polytheism, etc. These need to be totally abandoned for they are against God's project for man: life and human dignity.

The African Church is therefore challenged to look critically at her expression of Catholic teaching, her church structures and liturgy in all its forms; she should look critically at her church laws and traditions, which are historical products of other ages, other places and other cultures in order to find out how the local Churches of the African continent can be communities in which the members truly feel at home as African Christians. In line with the above, Paul VI, echoes the New Testament and asserts that the proclamation of "the

Kingdom of God ... is so important that, by comparison, everything else becomes 'the rest', which is 'given in addition'. Only the Kingdom, therefore, is absolute, and it makes everything else relative".<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the most important condition — and probably the most essential — for the renewal of the Church in Africa is that of focusing the attention of the people and of the evangelisers on changing the direction of their evangelization, from spreading and implanting the Church in Africa to spreading and proclaiming the Kingdom of God on the Continent.

In conclusion therefore, constructive dialogue leads to a reciprocal enrichment and respect between Christianity and African realities or situations. As Jesus incarnated himself into the Jewish culture and respected it, so should Christianity incarnate itself into the African realities in their diversity and respect them following the model of the Master. This means that Christianity, like Jesus, should value all that is good in the culture, though without compromising with the Will of the Father ( ... *your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven* — Mt 6:10). This implies preservation of all that is good and positive in culture; substituting with 'Christian values and practices' the cultural values and practices that are incompatible with the Gospel, to help the people to gain access to the Christian message due to familiarity with Christian cultural practices; purifying all that needs to be purified in culture through the modification of all that has been outlived in time and meaning with what helps Christians to be active members of the Christian message; and abandoning all that is incompatible with the Gospel and all that is against the dignity of the human person.

#### 4. Concluding remarks

African theology is partial theology — an African perspective of looking at the Universal with an African eye in order to give a contribution to the Universal from its particular cultural and contextual setting. The same can be said of African Christology. It is partial Christology — an African perspective of looking at the Universal Christ with an African eye. This Christology has many parts to it but other parts are missing.<sup>39</sup> This aspect is also demonstrated in Bahemuka's argument: "revelation is ... a process which began at the time of our ancestors, achieved its fullness with the apostolic times, extends to all history and will never cease".<sup>40</sup> She further reflects that while "Jesus Christ, the man from Nazareth ... lived and died ... the 'hidden' Christ, Jesus of faith, is alive. He is the subject of revelation".<sup>41</sup>

From this argument, it becomes evidently clear that Christ, was present in Africa before the coming of Christianity since Christ is one with God the Father. Furthermore, in ATR, the concept and consequently belief in God is not a new idea. So, if God revealed Himself to Africans and they responded to this call in faith, why can't they also discover Christ in the acts of faith revealed through their religious practices and cultural concepts that do not contradict the Gospel proposed by Christianity — which in its turn ought to proclaim the same Christ, Eternal Word of God? Such religious practices could be: Africans being in communion with God through prayer, the concept of Christ as ancestor, healer, master or liberator and the use of symbols such as water, fire and saliva in order to discover the presence of God in their daily life. These concepts that are not negative in themselves and are easily understood by the people so they can be used as strategic means to insert the Gospel into the people's culture. It will therefore require that cultural concepts be assumed in order to explain and make the Gospel message penetrate the lifestyle of people. Traditional concepts that have religious significance may therefore be useful and with sincere study and honesty can be employed to analogically explain the spiritual realities of the Christian faith. In the same line, we can conclude that inculturation is a continuous or dynamic process that began with Christ's Incarnation, underwent various conceptual developments and will continue to evolve in the course of history in the different epochs and in different cultures and peoples.

Our duty is therefore to guard against cultural relativism and its affirmation at the expense of the Gospel on the one hand, and to guard against the non-consideration of the importance of man and his cultural context as both a subject and object of the inculturation activity on the other. It is in this binomial dialogue between humanity through culture and context and the divinity through faith that a true inculturation comes about.

Therefore, recalling once more the Council Fathers, who summed up in *Gaudium et Spes* the Will of God for the entire human race and recalled the mystery of Christ that illuminates humanity in the words: "But, linked with the Paschal Mystery and patterned on the dying Christ ... the

Christian ... will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength which comes from hope (Phil 3:21; Rom 8:17). All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of good will in whose hearts grace works in an unseen way.<sup>42</sup> For, since Christ died for all men (Rom 8:32) and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every man the possibility of being associated with this Paschal Mystery".<sup>43</sup> Therefore, Christianity and cultures, through sincere dialogical and reciprocal relationships, must discover these possibilities of the Holy Spirit — each from the other — and try to put these possibilities at the common service of humanity.

It is however important to note that neither theory (*theoria*) nor practice (*praxis*) is ultimate in human history; instead both are judged by the *Logos*, the Word of God — incarnated in Jesus the Christ who sends the Holy Spirit as a gift to all. Hence, when one — man or woman — refuses the gift of the Holy Spirit, he/she introduces into human history sinfulness, which closes us into ourselves and makes of our history a drama of sin and grace<sup>44</sup>. This aspect therefore accentuates the transcendence of the Gospel — Christ-event — authoritatively interpreted by the Church, over the relativity of human cultures and contexts and Christianity as such. While the former is absolutely transcendent, the latter are partially and relatively contingent.

Inculturation as a dialogical method is a model of Christian proclamation. It is a missionary method that — as John's Gospel shows: episode with Nicodemus; that of the Samaritan woman; and that of a man born blind — has dialectic elements, namely, it enters into a respectful conversation with the other. There is therefore the biblical dialogue and the Socratic dialogue — that in which openness to the other is needed. So, while biblical dialogue is a dynamic revelation that needs one to be docile to the Holy Spirit; the Socratic dialogue is a philosophical reflection on the 'otherness' that holds human experience to be both an experience of self that leads to the experience of the originality of the other and an exodus from self to the other.<sup>45</sup> Hence, the absolute originality of the other — which is irreducible to something of 'mine' — means departing not from what is mine but right from a *meeting*, where the end result is not dominion but communication between the two subjects. It is in this sense that dialogue — is not only an affirmation of an honest meeting and absence of aggressivity but also the end of self-sufficiency of the 'I' or 'me' — but a radical discovery of the other and of the diversity between theoretically "knowing things" and "meeting the 'other'", who is different from 'me'.<sup>46</sup> It is therefore in the acknowledgement of the presence of the other that a sincere dialogue can result.

In our case of inculturation as a dialogic mission, we note that the two poles of communication — the Church and African reality — can sincerely and reciprocally meet each other, only after the radical discovery of the existence of the foreigner — 'the other', who by now represents a richness and not a threat to 'my' existence. Reciprocal listening to the Holy Spirit is therefore paramount, be it by Christianity or by the various cultural realities and contexts. The Gospel is a 'foreigner' who needs to be received by both realities. It is through dialogical inculturation that man — Christian, traditional or Moslem — listens to the Holy Spirit that makes his spirit docile to tenderly yearn and seek to be in union with the Paschal Mystery of Christ.

### Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup> D.S. Amalorpavadass, «New Approaches in Asia», in *Dei Verbum*, SVD 21 (1980), 301.

<sup>2</sup> Standard Dictionary of English Language, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Inc. Chicago 1962, p. 922.

<sup>3</sup> E. H. Spicer, «Acculturation», in *International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, vol.1, The McMillan Company New York 1968, p. 21; P. CHARLES, «Missiologie et Acculturation», in *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* (1953) 15-32; J. LOPEZ-GAY, «Pensiero attuale della Chiesa sull'Inculturazione», in *Inculturazione: concetti, problemi e orientamenti*, Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis, Roma 1979, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. K. Müller, «Accommodation and Inculturation in the Papal Documents», in *Dei Verbum*, SVD, p. 357.

<sup>5</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Slavorum Apostoli* (2 June 1985), n. 21.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. F.V. Anthony, *Inculturation in Catholic Schools*, Kristu Jyoti Publications, Bangalore 2000, p.11.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 17 and *Ad Gentes*, n. 3 (From now on, these documents will be referred to as LG & AG).

<sup>8</sup> See A. Roest Crolius, «Inculturation», in AA.VV., *Following Christ in Mission*, Pauline Books and Media, 1996, pp. 151-152.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, (4 December 1963), n. 65: AAS 56 (1964), 97-134, with specific reference to SC nn. 37- 40 of "The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation". The document of the Council, from hereafter will be referred to as 'SC'.

<sup>10</sup> SC, n. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. SC, nn. 37-40.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Sacred Congregation for Sacred Worship, *Instructio tertia ad Constitutionem de sacra Liturgia recte exsequendam Liturgicae istaurationes*, 5 Septembris 1970: AAS 62(1970), 692-704.

<sup>13</sup> C.F. Starkloff, "Inculturation and Cultural Systems," *Theological Studies* 55 (1994), 69.

<sup>14</sup> A. Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation*, New York 1997, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> J. Blomjous, "Inculturation and Interculturation" in *AFER*, 22 (1980), 393.

<sup>16</sup> G. Buono, *Missiology: Theology and Praxis*, Paulines Publications, Nairobi 2002, p. 146.

<sup>17</sup> O. Bimwenyi-Kweshi, *Discours théologique Nègro- Africain. Problème des fondements*, Présence Africaine. Paris 1981, p. 418.

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## ***Cultural Diversity and Inculturation in India***

*Professor in Cultural Anthropology, University of Mumbai, and the Faculty, Institute of Indian Culture, Mumbai, <smmichael2000@hotmail.com>, the author makes a sociological study of India and of the meaning of inculturation, shows its necessity in the task of evangelization and analyses how he sees its performance in the past. He offers suggestions for a more authentic involvement in inculturation that takes into account the composite Nature of Indian culture and its orientations in our times.*

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### **1. Introduction**

**I**ndia is an ancient civilization composed of various, complex cultural strands. It has given rise to several religions, which are active and alive, and co-exist with each other, and influence the life patterns of people, not only in India, but also in different continents of the world. India, at the same time, is a place of contradictions. The disparity between the rich and poor is scandalous. The conflicts and violence in the name of religion, language, ethnicity and culture inflict pain on the civilization which is God fearing, hospitable and pluralistic in its essence. Hence, India has both the role of enriching humanity with its vast experience of living with diversity of cultures as well as that of learning from the wealth of experience of other cultures. All these offer opportunities and challenges for the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the Christian faith in India. This paper tries to understand the diversities of Indian cultures and their implication for inculturation, evangelization and intercultural dialogue. Since these are an important area of the life of the Church in India, we need more scientific research into the cultures of India as well as into the interaction between the Gospel and cultures.

### **2. India: A Land of Diversity of Cultures**

#### ***(a) Ancient Heritage***

India is a land not only with a rich and ancient heritage but also with an ancient history, comparable with that of China, going back to 3,000 B.C. or earlier. The Harappan civilization, the first known civilization of India, stood alongside the Egyptian and Mesopotamian civilizations as one of the early, advanced civilizations of humankind. They belonged to the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Although historically later than the civilizations of the Nile and the Twin Rivers (Euphrates and Tigris), the Indus civilization was spread over a wider area of 1,000 square miles and maintained links with Mesopotamia, both by land and by sea (for details see D'Souza, 2007:1-55). India also has the distinction of being one of the few countries of the world, along with China, to have a continuous tradition from ancient periods. This tradition, however, does not represent one culture and one people. It is more a reflection of the diverse cultures that have co-existed and then synthesized over a period of time, with different strands, sometimes meeting, sometimes conflicting, sometimes merging, but continuously co-existing (*ibid.*).

#### ***(b) Cultural Diversity***

India is a subcontinent with a vast population of the most diverse levels of culture. Anthropological knowledge of the people of India reveals that almost all known racial groups have migrated to India at different times in the past with their own language,

religion and culture. The cultural inputs and influences from the ancient tribes of India, the urban-centred Indus Valley people, and the whole galaxy of subsequent arrivals — Sanskrit speaking people, the so-called Aryans (pastoral nomadic, horse-riding) — laid the foundation for the cultures of India. Since there was plenty of space, the migrating cultural and racial groups could pass on and penetrate further into the interior without much opposition. Thus, the various cultural groups did not destroy each other, but continued to live on and consolidate into the main components of the present-day population (see Jha 1997). The caste system also helped to keep the diverse racial, social and cultural groups apart, for it effectively prevented them from mixing with one another. Later, other cultural influences were brought to India by the Greeks, Scythians, Parthians, Shakas and Huns before the eighth century, as well as by Arabs, Persians, Turks, Afghans and Mongols between the eighth and twelfth centuries — who were part of the vital and living process of many migrations into India since time immemorial.

Thus the population of India is very heterogeneous. Variety and diversity permeate the whole subcontinent, every State and district, every town and village. Indian civilization is the outcome of a confluence of various cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic traditions. Over the years of mutual fecundation, synthesis and challenge, Indian civilization has come to be characterized by a diversity of cultures, religions, languages, races and caste groups. According to Kothari, “in the absence of a centralized political authority” it was “the Indian civilizational enterprise” which “over the centuries achieved a remarkable degree of cohesion and held together different sub-systems in a continental-size society” (1988:2223). So, the unifying force of Indian civilization was the acceptance of multiculturalism and linguistic diversity rather than a political ideology of regimentation.

### **3. A Diversity of Cultures in Co-Existence**

This unity in diversity in terms of diverse cultures, religions, languages and ethnicity needs to be valued highly. While there is so much violence in the world, and particularly in India. India’s ability to co-exist with many cultures, religions, languages and ethnic groups needs to be highly appreciated. Research into the reasons for the variations in cultures and civilizations in different parts of the world point out that the ecological background and history of peoples influence their respective cultures (see Michael 1989). Geographically India is very diverse and the historical background of its different ethnic communities favoured the continuity of these diverse cultures. The natural geographical boundaries and a sense of tolerance and mutual co-existence helped to maintain the specific cultural identity of different ethnic communities.

Sudhir Kakar, a well known psychologist in India, is of the opinion that Indians have an ego which is relatively less differentiated than its Western counterpart, thus indicating that Indians are less individualistic. Hinduism is strongly influenced by the thought that the human soul (*atma*) is but a part of the universal soul (*paramatma* I God). In this capacity the human being always remains trivial and inconsequential before the larger, omnipotent universal self. The consciousness of being a mortal, a sheer grain of sand in the vast cosmos, tends to take the wind out of egocentric sails. The enormous plurality in India of languages, races, ethnic groups, religions, subcultures, times, climates and attitudes thrives on paradoxes. Any assertion about India has to be qualified with the opposite characteristic. For example, India is both deeply religious and secular. Indians enjoy a great deal of freedom, but at the same time are very much bound by family, community or social norms (see Wandel, 2004). The West focuses more upon individualism, specialization in jobs, dividing life up into private and public spheres, workplace and home, work and vacation. Indian cultures do not seem to be so focused, are less individualistic and the boundaries between the various spheres of life are not so clearly drawn. God or the divine mystery is not the ‘you’ outside of ‘me’. He is not the object opposed to the subject. In the Indian understanding the divine mystery is intimately connected with the person or subject who seeks God (see *ibid.*).

The richness of India lies in its deep spirituality and its ability to deal with diversity.

#### 4. Diversity under Challenge

##### **(a) *Misconception of India as a Monolithic Culture***

Having said that India has something beautiful to offer the world, especially its long experience of living with diversity, we need also to look at today's situation with caution. Although India stands out among the comity of nations in the world as a model of unity in diversity, nevertheless it is a unity which is seriously threatened by economic disparities, religious fundamentalism and ethnic conflicts. There are cultural movements which try to depict India as a mono-cultural entity. These ideological groups have been depicting Christians, Muslims, Parsis and some others as foreigners in their own native land. There has been communal violence in the name of culture, religion and ethnicity. Today, the interesting debate in India is on its cultural identity (see Michael 2003:78-107).

According to Hindu nationalists the Hindu religion and culture form the basis of the political identity of India. They identify India with a monolithic Sanskritic culture. They call their movement Cultural Nationalism. Anybody who does not subscribe to this vision is considered an enemy of the nation. This idea of Hindutva implies that to be Indian is to be Hindu. According to them to be an Indian is defined by religion. An analysis of the attacks on Christians in India would show that one of the reasons is related to the ideology of Hindutva (Michael 2000a:9-22). Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) urged a regeneration of Hindus through adherence to a purified "Vedic faith". He founded the Arya Samaj in 1875. Its favourite mottos are "Back to the Vedas" and "Aryavarta for the Aryans". This view simply equates Indian culture with Brahmanic Hinduism and Sanskritic culture, all non-Hindu aspects being regarded as contaminating influences. The Vedic Aryans are described by Dayananda as a primordial and elect people to whom the Veda has been revealed and whose language, Sanskrit, is said to be the "Mother of all languages". They would have migrated at the beginning of the world from Tibet — the first land to emerge from the Oceans — towards the Aryavarta. This territory, homeland of the Vedic civilization, covered the Punjab, Doab and Ganges basin. From this position, the Aryans would have dominated the whole world till the war of the Mahabharata, a watershed opening a phase of decadence. The national renaissance implied, for Dayananda, a return to the Vedic Golden Age.

The Arya Samaj is probably the first movement in India defining nationalism in terms of ethnicity. Dayananda Saraswati's views are said to be the basis from which the later-Hindu movements and organizations such as the Hindu Mahasabha, R.S.S., Siva Sena, V.H.P., Bajrang Dal and BJP were formed. The leaders of the Hindu nationalist movement based on a revival of Hindu culture openly acknowledged their identification of nationalism with Sanskritic or Upper Caste Hinduism (Michael 2003:78-107).

##### **(b) *Indological and Orientalist Foundational Misunderstanding of India***

There are several approaches to the understanding of Indian society. The approach one chooses influences one's methodology on the Christian mission. There is a debate on what constitutes 'Indian Culture' and 'Indian Identity'. Anthropological writing on India over more than fifty years provides some key reference points for this debate (Ganesh 2005). The 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Indological approach developed by the orientalist and colonial administrators perceived the Sanskritic culture as the mainline culture of India. It gave identity to Indianness. Today, with the increasing anthropological knowledge of India, there are movements challenging the idea of a homogenous Indianness. Despite the power and influence of 'Indology', with its reliance on classical texts and high culture, the bulk of the work of anthropologists and sociologists after Independence has been towards empirical documentation of the enormous diversities in the society and culture of India. There are two major axes along which issues of cultural identity now appear: the idealized homogeneous notion of Indian culture and the contrasting notion which conceptualizes Indian 'culture' as plural. These two axes and their ramifications are currently at the heart of debates on culture and identity (see Robinson 2003). The missiological approach to inculturation and mission in India has been largely from an Indological perspective. With the increasing anthropological knowledge of the pluralistic nature of Indian identity, the Tribals and Dalits are asserting their cultural identity in the India of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This has missiological implications for the Church.

### ***(c) Current Anthropological Understanding of India***

Earlier ideas of the origin of India in the Aryan-speaking people now stand corrected. These ideas were initially put forward by the leading Indologist Max Muller, who had spoken of (i) the Aryan origin of India, and (ii) the Aryan people as a racial group. It was largely due to the authority of Max Muller that these ideas were easily accepted and popularized as the truth, though later scientific findings have denied it as fact (see D'Souza 2007:2).

Orientalism, as Inden (1990), Trautmann (1997) and Thapar (1997) point out, includes both the knowledge produced by European scholars and the European representation of the Orient. The work of an entire body of Indological scholars and administrators came together in the construction of the racial understanding of Indian civilization that became established in the Aryan theory. The idea is also being put forth and popularly accepted today, that the cultural and religious identity of India is traced back solely to an Aryan origin. These scholars included William Jones, H.H. Wilson, Henry Colebrooke, Charles Grant, James Mill, Max Muller and others, who interacted to form certain patterns. As Thapar (1997: xiii) elucidates, even the discovery of the pre-Vedic Indus Valley Civilization did little to dislodge the Aryan theory. Rather, various elaborate efforts were made to contain the Indus Valley Civilization within the confines of the myth of the Aryan race. The people of the Indus Valley Civilization were sometimes treated as non-Aryans who were conquered (as were the Dravidians) by the Aryans. Otherwise, attempts were made to redefine the Indus Valley Civilization as an Aryan civilization.

It appears to me possible to argue that the search for the mythical Hindu Arya has had widespread ramifications for the understanding of the cultures of India, its identity and religio-political history. One of the ramifications of the orientalist understanding is the definition of India as "Hindu" India and the idea that a central position has to be accorded to caste as the most important social and cultural marker. One might trace here the marginalization of the study of other communities and their cultures (Robinson 2003). The orientalist and indologist understanding of India is shown today to be fallacious, by the recent scientific findings of paleontology, archeology and linguistics. Archeological evidence, supported by linguistic paleontology and other modern sciences, reveal the multi-cultural history of India.

## **5. Indian Diversity and Its Implications for the Church in India**

### ***(a) Importance of Scientific Research in Inculturation and Evangelization of Cultures***

For the last several decades the Indian Church has been actively involved in the process of inculturation. Immediately after Vatican II there were vigorous attempts in the form of research seminars, publications, and practical workshops towards inculturation. This enthusiasm seems to be weakening day by day and there is not much progress towards such inculturation. Historically, we know that many missionary movements have originated not from theories but from the missionaries' struggles and their search for authentic Christian life. When we examine the reasons for this lack of interest in inculturation we propose the following as one of the possible causes. The Indian Church is made up of a large number of Tribals, Dalits and people from non-Brahmanic castes. But the earlier attempts at inculturation were mainly made from the upper caste (Sanskritic) perspective. This approach to inculturation was a result of the understanding of India mainly from the indological perspective and a direct follow-up of the colonial orientalist perspective. Today, anthropological research shows that the field reality is very different from the text-oriented indological and orientalist view (Michael 2006:40-50).

Moreover, there is a power shift in the self-understanding of India's cultural reality. For the last three thousand years the Brahmins and other upper castes had defined the identity of Indian culture. With the coming of democracy and each individual's right to vote to elect his/her representatives, the power is slowly shifting to middle, lower, Dalit castes and Tribals. All these affect the very self-understanding of the culture and identity of India (see Dahiwalé 2005). Hence, any attempt towards inculturation must take into account the field reality and the



changing self-perception of the different segments of the Indian population.

**(b) *Inculturation - Call for a Prophetic Role***

Through the process of inculturation, the Church inserts itself in the culture of a people. It integrates the Christian life and its message into a given culture. It involves itself in the life-realities of the people by participating in their historical struggle for meaning and emancipation. It is very important for the local Church to play a creative role in this process of inculturation in the midst of constant change. The emerging culture of India is greatly influenced by globalization, the mass media and internet, and these are providing opportunities as well as challenges to traditional Indian cultures and values. A growing secularization and materialism are silently undermining the values and principles of India's traditional cultures. In the process of inculturation, local Christians play a vital role in giving direction to cultural change through their selective assimilation and cultural continuity. The symbol-creativity of a people and their search for meaning are manifested in the changing cultural scenario without alienating themselves from their cultural roots (Michael 1990:6-18). The inherent nature of inculturation has two important dimensions. One, is the celebration of cultures for their life-giving values and the second, is the transformation of (challenge to) values which are life-negating (Michael 2000:167-73).

The cultural nationalist forces are increasingly seeking to homogenize the cultures of India towards an upper caste, Sanskrit, Brahmanic culture. Anything outside of this cultural orbit is denied legitimate existence in Indian society. The Hindu fundamentalist organizations claim that the Tribals and untouchables (Dalits) are backward Hindus. But the Tribals and Dalits reject this super-imposed identity. They are struggling for their survival, human dignity and cultural identity. The visionaries from the suppressed masses like Jotirao Phule, E.V.R. Periyar and Dr Ambedkar battled for a true humanism and for the equal dignity of all by a vigorous critique of Brahmanic culture and its perpetuation of caste-based discrimination (Michael 2007:108-31). Conversion movements have been one of the means by which peoples have moved up the social ladder. A large number of Dalits and Tribals have converted to Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam and Christianity (Michael 2007a). More than 70 per cent of Indian Christians today are from these lower layers of Indian society.

This socio-cultural and political reality has also to be taken seriously in the process of inculturation. While the mystical and interiority traditions of Hinduism are very important in inculturation, at the same time Christians need to view them critically and assimilate them selectively (Michael 1990:6-18). This is because the credibility of the contemplative values of Buddhism, Jainism and especially Hinduism need to be tested in the light of the Indian social reality of grinding poverty and its vast system of legitimized social oppression. The Hindu religious world-view is not able to give the minimum human dignity to the vast majority of its people. Millions of people do not even have the minimal resources for their survival. At the same time, there are people who enjoy all the privileges and comforts of life. The Tribals, untouchables (Dalits) and other Backward Caste communities who for a long time have been treated with contempt and oppression are struggling to get the bare necessities. The impression of India as a paradise of religion is deceptive in the context of its grinding poverty and its vast system of legitimized social oppression. Inculturation must also imply a prophetic role by challenging (transforming) the oppressive cultural values in Hindu traditions. The relevance of Jesus lies precisely in the context of the social concern in the reconstruction of modern India.

The Christian commitment to equality, fraternity and dignity by abolishing poverty, ignorance, injustice, and other forms of deprivation calls for deeper and varying methods of inculturation. The recognition and empowerment of Tribal and Dalit and other ethnic communities' cultures are also very important. Inculturation must pay attention to this pluralistic cultural reality of India. The values and the world-views of indigenous peoples (Tribals) are particularly significant. Their sense of community, solidarity, rejection of greed and eco-friendliness embody a humanism that is holistic and life-giving. Christians can treasure such humanism as a precious gift from God, and integrate it with the Good News of salvation.

**(c) *Dynamic Nature of Culture and Inculturation***

The process of inculturation must take account of the dynamic nature of culture.

Culture is never a finished product. All cultures are dynamic, adapting themselves to ever new situations. India cannot isolate itself. In modern times, the world has been transformed by information technologies into what we call the global village. In essence, globalization is an ever-growing, finely meshed network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterize modern life (Tomlinson 1999:2).

We see two important cultural processes now taking place simultaneously. On the one hand, due to the increase of communication systems, cultures are exposed to one another, and there is a kind of universal culture in the making. On the other hand, increasing nationalistic tendencies seize every opportunity to mobilize their people in their unique and specific cultural identities and heritage. Inculturation takes place in this context of universal and particular cultural realities. Since Christianity is universally present with specific cultural identities, the inculturation process must include universal Christian symbols and rituals to express its universal faith, morals and celebrations, as well as particular cultural expressions in theologically acceptable symbols, rituals and celebrations. Hence, inculturation is both universal and particular. That is why the interaction between Gospel and culture is a process of inter-culturation.

#### **(d) Inculturation and Inter-culturation**

It is also very important to understand that inculturation is a process of interculturalization. The Gospel itself came to a culture with previously acquired particular cultural expressions. Hence, inculturation is a process of mutual fecundation between Gospel and cultures, i.e., the dynamic relationship between the Christian faith and cultures is a meeting of two cultures, or inter-culturation. This implies that inculturation is more than Hinduization; it is the Gospel interacting with Indian cultures. As a result, the Indian cultures are enriched and the Gospel finds a better expression of its values within Indian cultures. The cultures of India are not extrinsic to Indian Christians. Indian Christians are insiders to, and inheritors of, their cultures. Christians bring the treasures of their cultures to their faith and become believers rooted in their soil. In Indian religions and cultures, there is an emphasis on respect for all life, compassion, and hospitality. The universal solidarity of all peoples or *Vasudhaiva kutumbakam* ("the whole earth as a family") is a tradition that is being retrieved by people's movements and dialogue initiatives of India (VJTR Editorial, 2008/4:241-4). Such humanism needs to be reaffirmed in the context of narrow cultural nationalism, regionalism and communalism.

The Gospel-culture interaction should shine forth as a light within us. The evangelization of culture is a continuous process. To be evangelized and to evangelize go together. In our zeal to evangelize others, we need to be ready to be evangelized by others. The humanism of the Gospel should be at the heart of evangelization while it celebrates and challenges cultures to conversion (transformation). It helps to detect a divine presence in cultures and religions that opens the way to dialogue and collaboration so as to build a just, humane and peaceful society. Inculturation is also inter-cultural dialogue.

### **6. Conclusion**

India is an ancient country, whose history goes back at least five thousand years. Historically it has never been a closed territory. It has lived with various migrant populations and their cultures. The Indian experience of living with diversity has an important lesson for the world and for the Indian Church. Inculturation and the evangelization of cultures and inter-cultural dialogue in India must take this cultural diversity very seriously. With the past experience, we now understand that inculturation is a complex and constant process of implanting the Christian faith in the cultural creativity of Indian people. This can be done in many ways. Here are a few practical suggestions that could point to a new process of inculturation, but they are not exhaustive or comprehensive:

1. Develop a deep spirituality of mysticism and interiority. Indian cultures have been marked by a deep sense of the spiritual where God occupies a central place. With globalization, secularizing tendencies are creeping into our cultures. We must make sure that globalization

does not deny or exclude God, the Creator who is the source and fount of everything. Indian Christians must incorporate, value and live the Indian values such as love of silence and contemplation, simplicity, harmony, detachment, non-violence, discipline, respect for elders, hospitality, compassion, a sense of community. Appropriate institutions like Christian *ashrams* or community centres should be created to impart the above Indian cultural values. The three *margas*, i.e. *Jnana Marga*, *Karma Marga* and *Bhakti Marga* should form part of Christian spirituality. Attempts should be made to explain the Christian mystery in the Indian philosophical traditions as St Thomas Aquinas did with Greek philosophical wisdom.

2. Social involvement is needed in the reconstruction of modern India with the values of equality, fraternity and social justice. As citizens Christians should actively participate in politics and peoples' movements which promote human dignity and promotion of life.

3. Since language is the embodiment of culture, creating good and valuable Christian literature in the regional and national languages and dialects of India is a must. Indian Christians must be rooted in their mother tongue, and they should be creative and knowledgeable in their languages.

4. The Indian Church must recognize, appreciate, value and empower the cultures of India and encourage the cultural creativity of Tribals, Dalits and other ethnic communities. This means that the recognition of the diverse cultures of India should be the basis of inculturation in India. In other words, it means that inculturation should not be limited to Hinduization or Sanskritization of Christian life.

5. There should be mutual interaction and respect between the local Church and the universal Church in terms of expressing the Christian meaning and life in the symbols and rituals of the liturgy and life. For example, in the context of India, the Hindu *Om* cannot *replace* the Christian *Cross*, because the theological foundations and the world-view of these are very different in terms of their meaning, content and moral implications. Even when inculturation took place in the context of Hellenistic culture, the Greek letters *Alpha* and *Omega* were used not exclusively but with the *Cross*, as for example in the Easter Vigil Service. As the Greek letters *Alpha* and *Omega* do not fully express the mystery of the *Cross*, similarly the Sanskrit *Om* is inadequate to signify the meaning of the *Cross*. There are varied and contradictory meanings of the term "*Om*" in Hindu traditions. If a theologically acceptable and agreeable consensus of the term "*Om*" is arrived at among theologians and the Indian Christian community, then "*Om*" could be used together with the "*Cross*" in an esthetically appropriate manner. But this requires much research, deep reflection and pastoral prudence. Similarly, the use of the *saffron shawl* in the Latin Liturgy requires reexamination. The Universal Church has developed well thought-out colour symbols to mark the different Liturgical Seasons of the year. Violet or purple to mark Advent and Lent as preparations; white for the Christmas and Easter Seasons; green for Ordinary time; red for the martyrs; white for virgins; and gold for solemnity, etc. This is a very meaningful symbol system in the Universal Church. Using the saffron shawl on Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost does not bring out the emotional and aesthetic aspects of the Christian celebration. Moreover, today, the saffron colour is getting highly politicized as a mark of the cultural nationalists of the Hindutva ideological organizations. If the use of a shawl is very meaningful in the liturgy, and a mark of inculturation in India, then why not use a shawl with different colours, like white, green, red, purple, golden, etc., according to the different Liturgical Seasons and occasions? This will bring unity (universality) and uniqueness (particularity) between the universal Church and the local Church. We need to be more creative in our inculturation rather than merely sanskritizing the Christian Liturgy. Indian Christians must become more creative in incorporating the appropriate symbols into the arts, rituals, music, dance and other aspects of culture which are truly Indian as well as truly Christian.

6. The Christian community in India should actively celebrate regional and national feasts and festivals which are compatible with the Christian vision of life and promote peace and harmony among cultures and ethnic communities.

7. The most important events in a culture are the rites of passage. The Christian meaning of life can be well articulated without alienation from the Indian context if Christians adopt the rites of passage and give them a Christian interpretation and meaning (for more details see Michael 1990 a:76-90).

8. The Christians in India must live and actively promote our cultural values of family, community, and respect for elders, modesty, hospitality and other life-giving values.

9. We humans are both rational and emotional. The cultures we create have these contents. Hence, the Christian faith should be expressed both rationally and emotionally. The intellectual articulation of the Christian faith in theology must be expressed emotionally in the Indian cultures through well thought-out and theologically sound popular devotions, pilgrimages, observance of fasts, processions, parish feasts, *bhajan* singing (chanting), story telling, passion plays, etc. (These points were already suggested by me some time ago, see Michael 2000:166-72).

To conclude I repeat that India is known for its diversity of cultures and that they co-exist with mutual respect and recognition in spite of recent efforts at homogenization. As Christians we need to learn from this experience of cultural diversity. Though the roots of Christianity in India are very ancient and deep, yet cultural integration still remains a task to be done. The inculturation and evangelization of cultures are urgent needs. The Christian cultural centres need to engage actively in research to reach a deeper understanding of the cultural forces at work, and offer their services for an effective, relevant and meaningful inculturation.

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**Rosario Garrido García\***

## ***La misión en el conflicto interior de una sociedad entre la tradición y la modernidad***

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### **INTRODUCCIÓN**

**E**scribir sobre un país tan fascinante y complejo como Japón y además haciendo referencia al tema "La misión en el conflicto interior de una sociedad entre la tradición y la modernidad", es como meter el agua del océano en un hoyito de la playa.

Comenzaré por decir que he conocido a mucha gente, y yo misma he caído a veces en el error de pensar que los asiáticos son todos iguales. Nada más equivocado. Sin embargo, hay rasgos comunes. El Sínodo de Asia del 1998 nos habla de estos rasgos, y enumera una serie de valores religiosos y culturales tales como: "Amor al silencio y contemplación; sencillez, armonía, desapego, no violencia. Espíritu de duro trabajo, de disciplina, de vida frugal; sed de conocimiento e investigación filosófica. Respeto a la vida, compasión por todo ser vivo, cercanía a la naturaleza; respeto filial a padres, ancianos y antepasados. Sentido de comunidad muy desarrollado; familia como fuente vital, comunidad integrada y solidaria. Espíritu de tolerancia religiosa y coexistencia pacífica; capacidad de adaptación y apertura natural al enriquecimiento recíproco de pueblos en la pluralidad".

Cuando uno viaja por Asia se da cuenta de que cada país asiático es muy distinto, y en mi experiencia, Japón el que más. Al hablar de Japón, me gusta mucho utilizar la expresión de Pedro Arrupe: "Este Japón increíble". Japón sorprende al que se acerca a él, y es un país lleno de contrastes, como muy bien expresa el título del libro de Ruth Benedict: "El crisantemo y la espada". Quizás puede ser un país muy conocido por sus coches, motos, relojes, sushi y otras curiosidades, pero muy desconocido en otras muchas facetas.

### **1. CONOCER SU "AYER" PARA COMPRENDER SU "HOY"**

Japón entra en la mira de Europa en el 1549, con la llegada de mercaderes y misioneros, cuyo mayor representante es Francisco Javier. Estos, que provenían de una Europa renacentista del siglo XVI y un Siglo de Oro español, se encuentran con un conjunto de islas llenas de campesinos pobres y oprimidos por un férreo sistema feudal, donde los "shogun" (gobierno militarista) y "daimios" (señores feudales) guerrearán entre sí. Francisco Javier está tan sólo dos años, pero deja puestos los cimientos de una floreciente iglesia. Más tarde, jesuitas, franciscanos, agustinos y dominicos aúnan fuerzas, y en el curso de una generación el número de cristianos había subido a los 300.000. Javier llamó a Japón "la delicia de mi corazón y el país de Oriente más adaptado al cristianismo".

¿Qué es lo que sucede para que algo tan floreciente, desaparezca casi por completo? La respuesta la encontramos en un patrón repetitivo: Ukon Takayama. Ukon fue bautizado con el nombre de Justo a la edad de 11 años. Él y su padre, daimio (señor feudal) del castillo de Sawa, abrazaron la fe, y fruto de su testimonio muchos otros se convirtieron. A los 21 años, Ukon, fue nombrado señor de Takatsuki, convirtiendo el distrito de Mishima en uno de los mayores centros cristianos de Japón. En ese tiempo unos 50 daimios se convirtieron al cristianismo, repitiéndose el mismo patrón. El mensaje del Evangelio de igualdad, amor fraterno y justicia estaba mermando la sólida estructura feudal de entonces, lo que provocó que el shogun Hideyoshi Toyotomi prohibiera el cristianismo y expulsara a todos los misioneros extranjeros de Japón. A partir de entonces se comienza a perseguir a los cristianos con la práctica del *fumi-é*: (*fumu* - pisar; *é* - dibujo), obligar a pisar un icono de la Virgen y el Niño para ver si eran cristianos o no. Los que se negaban eran torturados y obligados a abandonar la fe. Fueron muchos los que testimoniaron

su fe con cárceles, suplicios, destierros y muerte. Por supuesto, también hubo cristianos que apostataron, son los llamados "korobi".

En enero de 1597, unas 26 personas son obligadas a caminar 1,000 kms. en pleno invierno, desde Osaka hasta Nagasaki. Se les corta la oreja izquierda y atraviesan muchas grandes ciudades para mostrar lo que pasaría a los que abrazaran la fe cristiana. Era tanta la alegría y paz con que se les veía, perdonando a sus propios verdugos, que provocan el efecto contrario, y muchos más se convierten al cristianismo. Un mes más tarde, esa comitiva formada por misioneros extranjeros y japoneses, laicos y hasta tres niños, son crucificados en la colina de Nagasaki. "Pablo Miki y compañeros" serán los primeros 26 mártires japoneses canonizados en 1862.

A pesar de las cruentas persecuciones, el número de cristianos sigue aumentando hasta que otro shogun, Ieyasu Tokugawa en 1614, manda un edicto para la aniquilación total del cristianismo. Ante el miedo de que la religión se extendiera y el daimio perdiera el poder o fuera a caer en manos extranjeras, en 1639 Japón se cierra por completo al mundo exterior y queda incomunicado. Es la época "sa-koku" (*sa*-cadena, *koku*-país). Dos siglos durará esta reclusión hasta que en el 1853, el almirante norteamericano Matthew Perry, obliga la apertura del Japón al comercio y a la relación con otros países.

En 1858 se permitía sólo a los extranjeros profesar su fe, y la construcción de iglesias. Fueron casi tres siglos de horribles persecuciones, desde 1596 hasta 1873, fecha en que se suprimió el decreto de prohibición del cristianismo. Casi la incipiente iglesia japonesa estuvo a punto de desaparecer ... sin embargo, un extraordinario hecho confirma lo contrario. Durante la clandestinidad, a pesar de sufrir toda clase de dificultades, los cristianos escondidos luchan por defender, conservar y transmitir su fe. De esta forma, en 1865, tiene lugar el llamado "descubrimiento de los cristianos ocultos de Nagasaki" (*kakure kirishitan*). Una delegación de ellos se presentó en la iglesia de Oura, construida para extranjeros, ante el padre P. Petitjean de los misioneros de París, pronunciando la famosa frase: "el corazón de todos los que estamos aquí, es el mismo que el suyo". Todavía el miedo a la persecución obliga a muchos otros a permanecer ocultos.

En 1867 el poder político es devuelto al Emperador. Un año después, la restauración del Emperador Meiji, con cambios trascendentales a nivel político, social y económico, lleva a cabo la entrada de Japón en el mundo moderno. En 1889 se promulga la Constitución y con ella la libertad religiosa para todos los japoneses. A esta etapa le sigue un periodo de guerras, invasiones y anexiones de otros países asiáticos; I Guerra Mundial, y con la Guerra del Pacífico (1941-45), Japón entra de lleno en la II Guerra Mundial. Las dos bombas atómicas sobre Hiroshima y Nagasaki marcarán la rendición de Japón y el fin de la guerra. Con el general MacArthur llega la ocupación americana, y en 1946 se redacta una nueva Constitución, en la cual uno de los artículos más discutidos es el nº 9: "el pueblo japonés renuncia para siempre a la guerra como derecho soberano de la nación".

La pérdida de la guerra, la proclamación de que el Emperador no es Dios, y sobre todo la espantosa destrucción de la bomba atómica conduce al pueblo japonés a un gran despertar espiritual. Muchos buscan en el cristianismo respuestas, y son muchas las conversiones, bautismos y vocaciones religiosas que se suscitan. ¿Es que había llegado "la hora de Japón"? Muchos lo creyeron así, pero lo cierto es que por una parte faltó la ayuda, tanto misionera como económica, para volver a poner bases sólidas a una débil iglesia, y por otra, se vio claro la forma de ser de un país abierto a todo lo nuevo, pero que conserva su idiosincrasia y su cultura.

### **a) La cultura japonesa, no deja indiferente sino que provoca un cambio total**

Mi vida misionera se ha desarrollado en muchos países y puedo decir que he tenido la suerte de conocer diversas culturas: norteamericana, latinoamericana, europea, asiática. De entre todas, la japonesa es la única que ha hecho que tengan un eco especial en mi corazón las palabras de Jesús a Nicodemo: "**Tienes que nacer de nuevo**" (Jn 3,7). El que vive en Japón sabe que tiene que aprenderlo todo de nuevo: **pensar** (la estructura de pensamiento japonés es diametralmente opuesta a la nuestra. Una simple frase como: "quiero ir a Tokio" sería "Tokio a ir quiero"; **escribir** (el idioma japonés consta de un abecedario que se escribe de dos formas: hiragana y katakana; y una multitud de "kanji" o ideogramas japoneses cuyas combinaciones son muchas); **leer** (el abecedario japonés es fácil de aprender, pero no así los *kanji*. Por ejemplo, para leer el periódico se necesitan saber

como mínimo dos mil *kanjis*, con sus distintas combinaciones); hablar (los niveles de educación japonesa se reflejan en la conversación. Es decir, según la edad, rango y sexo de la otra persona se emplean distintas formas de lenguaje; también, cuando se refiere a otro: se utiliza el honorífico, cuando se habla de uno mismo: la forma humilde; a los niños también se les habla con otras palabras); *comer* (aunque los japoneses saben utilizar nuestros cubiertos, la forma normal de comer es con palillos y estos se cogen y manejan de una forma concreta); tomar un baño (en Japón está la costumbre del "ofuro" o baño japonés. Primero, uno se ducha y se lava bien, y después se mete limpio en una gran bañera de agua caliente para relajarse. Una vez fuera, generalmente se vuelven a duchar y limpiarse); *des calzarse* (antes de entrar en las casas, uno se quita los zapatos, los deja correctamente puestos para que al salir se los pueda poner, y se pone unas zapatillas para huéspedes que hay en todas las casas); *comportarse* (cuando conoces a alguien, no se estrecha la mano ni tampoco se le da un beso. Basta con una inclinación de cabeza y torso. La etiqueta es no hablar demasiado, ni hacer demasiadas preguntas), inclusive para *contar* objetos, animales y personas la forma cambia: no basta contar 1, 2, 3 ... dependiendo del objeto es distinto el cómputo. Por ejemplo, una carta se dice: *ichi mai*, un libro - *issatsu*, un coche - *ichi dai*, una persona - *hitori*, un perro - *ippiki*, un ave - *ichiwa*, etc.

En resumen, el lenguaje mismo revela una forma de pensar y sentir del pueblo japonés muy distinta a la nuestra, y a la que hay que abrirse y aceptar. Revela también una cortesía y humildad nada fáciles en muchos momentos; un hablar no directamente sino dando rodeos aparentemente para nosotros (por ej. si alguien pregunta: "¿estás de acuerdo?" y la respuesta nuestra sería un "sí" o un "no", en Japón se diría: "bueno, pues, a lo mejor" dejarían un silencio y después contestarían. El que escucha tendrá que llegar a su propia conclusión si el otro está de acuerdo o en desacuerdo. Por supuesto que no se puede generalizar, sin embargo, en mi opinión la mayoría sigue esos parámetros. Es un lenguaje que deja intuir más que afirmar y es el que escucha el que está llamado a responder. En una visita, si el invitado quiere que el anfitrión abra la ventana porque hace calor, no se lo dirá directamente. Simplemente insinuará: "hoy hace un poco de calor, ¿verdad?". El anfitrión que estará atento, enseguida abrirá la ventana.

### ***b) Dificultades de todo encuentro personal***

Este encuentro con una cultura tan distinta, que no es otra cosa que encuentro con las personas, provoca en el misionero *dificultades y desafíos*. La primera dificultad es una mirada superficial. Esta mirada superficial puede ser de *dos clases*: una, la que *sólo ve lo que es igual*. Ve "lo de fuera": el gran desarrollo de los japoneses, su forma de vida bastante occidental, comida internacional, conocimiento de otros idiomas, facilidad de acoplarse a lo extranjero... y piensa "bueno, somos bastante iguales". Esta mirada hace que se conforme con lo que ve y piensa, y no quiera ir a más profundidad. Es decir, lleva al desconocimiento del corazón japonés. Recuerdo a una persona que al mes de llegar a Japón organizó una reunión en inglés para japoneses para conocer la Biblia. Como estos entendían el inglés, y a ella le era más fácil expresarse, pensó que era suficiente. Siguió así durante un año, hasta que al final se dio cuenta de que entendía las palabras, pero no les entendía a ellos.

Otra clase de mirada es la que *sólo ve lo que es distinto*. Esta mirada lleva a la crítica corrosiva. Como casi todo es distinto, o se intenta comprender, aprender y aceptar, o todo es motivo de comparación y discusión. Al final, se está tan a disgusto que generalmente la persona acaba yéndose del país. Este fue el caso de un compañero australiano de la escuela de japonés. Sabía seis idiomas y había vivido en varios países, por lo que pensó que ni con el idioma japonés, ni con Japón tendría problemas. Sin embargo, le costó tanto entrar en una mentalidad y cultura tan distintas a su lógica que tuvo que dejar Japón para salvar su salud mental.

La segunda dificultad es una *mirada moralista*. Cuando uno ve las cualidades innatas de los japoneses, se encuentra tan lejos muchas veces, que le lleva a pensar que no tiene nada que hacer allí. "¿Cómo les voy a transmitir a Dios si me dan cuarenta vueltas? Yo que soy tan impaciente, orgulloso, irascible ...".

El encuentro con un pueblo que te enseña tanto lleva a una continua humildad, conversión y aceptación personales. Se necesita la mirada profunda de que aunque sea un pueblo muy "trabajado", también hay otros rasgos humanos que no tienen y que necesitan. Yo misma me veía con tantas carencias, que me costó darme cuenta de lo que les podía aportar. A muchos extranjeros les llama la atención la inexpresividad de los japoneses y la

seriedad de sus rostros. Puede parecer un detalle sin importancia, pero esto crea un tipo de relación entre ellos muy concreta. Por eso, una de las cosas que entendí que les podía contagiar es: la acogida a través de la sonrisa. De principio se muestran serios, pero cuando ven una cara sonriente y acogedora les invita a tener ellos la misma actitud. Sobre todo en un país donde llegar a hablar supone bastante tiempo, "el apostolado de la sonrisa" es uno de los más eficaces y enseguida se puede empezar a realizar. A esta expresividad le han dado un nombre: "akarui" que significa "luminosa".

El último peligro es el de una *mirada apresurada*. El entrar de lleno en la sociedad japonesa, lleva a ver muchas carencias que vienen de la falta de fe, de Dios, de amor. Esta mirada puede tornarse negativa cuando se quiere que *cuanto antes* conozcan a Dios. Si en todos los sitios el quemar etapas es negativo, en Japón resulta totalmente contraproducente. Mi experiencia misionera en Japón me dice que cuanto más tiempo uno "pierde" en el trato humano desinteresado, de amistad, el corazón japonés más se prepara para abrirse al conocimiento de Dios. Aunque los japoneses llevan un ritmo acelerado en todo, su corazón va muy lento a la hora de entender el Amor de Dios. En vez de ir en el "tren bala", el corazón parece ir tirado por un carro de bueyes. Es el gran contraste de un ritmo de vida acelerado, ante la gran lentitud del "Kokoro" japonés. Es interesante saber que en japonés, la palabra "kokoro"- corazón, abarca tanto el campo de los sentimientos como el de los pensamientos.

### **c) Algunos desafíos**

El constatar todas estas dificultades y peligros, nos lleva a entender más los *desafíos*. Uno de ellos es la *necesidad de ser muy paciente* con uno mismo y con los demás. Empezando por el idioma, es de todos sabido que en Japón, un extranjero empieza a defenderse a los cinco años de haber acabado los dos años de estudio intensivo. Si la evangelización es lenta, las conversiones tampoco son rápidas. Va con el ser innato del japonés. Hay un dicho que tiene que ver con los jardines japoneses. En ellos siempre hay un pequeño estanque, y se atraviesa por medio de grandes piedras llamadas "tobi-ishi", piedras saltarinas. Se llaman así porque hay que saltar de una a otra, hasta llegar a la otra orilla. El dicho japonés se podría traducir así: "No te apresures en cruzar. A no ser que quieras darte un remojón, asegura bien tu pie en la piedra antes de dar el siguiente paso". Yo he tenido la suerte de ser madrina de bautismo de seis jóvenes universitarios: todos han pedido el bautismo después de unos cuatro o cinco años de haber descubierto la fe. Por eso, también es un desafío muy grande el ir más allá de las evidencias. Es muy fácil caer en el peligro de valorar el trabajo misionero contabilizando sólo los éxitos: cuántas conversiones, cuántos catecúmenos, cuánta gente viene a las reuniones, etc. *Creer que, a pesar de lo que se vea, el Espíritu sigue trabajando en el interior de cada persona es un desafío*. En Japón se nos invita constantemente a vivir lo que tantos hermanos en la historia de la iglesia han vivido: "Todos somos colaboradores de Dios. Uno es el que siembra, otro el que riega, pero es Dios el que da el crecimiento" (I Co 3,9) Y también: "el que dé, que lo haga gratuitamente y con alegría" (cfr. II Co 9,7).

Nosotros, los misioneros del siglo XXI, sabemos que si hoy podemos trabajar en Japón, se debe a la cantidad de misioneros ("Sempai") antiguos, que nos han precedido en la tarea evangelizadora, y han dado generosamente sus vidas por el pueblo japonés. Empezando por los mártires del siglo XVI, siguiendo por Maximiliano Kolbe y su compañero el hermano Zeno, hasta terminar por el padre Arrupe son incontables las personas que han sembrado la semilla del Evangelio, la han regado y cuidado. Quiero mencionar al actual General de la Compañía de Jesús, Adolfo Nicolás, ha sido un gran apóstol y compañero de evangelización en Japón, y quiero recordar a todos los misioneros que en la actualidad están luchando e intentando, con toda su alma, corazón y vida, que Japón descubra el amor grande y misericordioso de Dios. A todos ellos, gracias de todo corazón.

## **2. JAPÓN, UN PAÍS DE CONTRASTES. ES NECESARIO COMPRENDERLOS PARA AMARLOS**

Resulta sorprendente el ver que siendo los japoneses muy espirituales, sólo un 30 % de la población se declara con una creencia concreta. La historia nos enseña por qué el pueblo japonés desconfía de las religiones extranjeras, sobre todo, cuando las ve luchando entre sí. Dogen, maestro zen del siglo XIII, expresa de esta forma la auténtica religión: "¿Hay algo más necio que aquel que valora tanto su religión que le lleva a destruir la ajena, dejando a



su paso odio y luchas? La religión verdadera, en cualquier momento de la historia, es la que ilumina a las personas y las conduce a una forma de vida pacífica. Los creyentes, sea de la religión que sea, nunca deben desenvainar la espada y luchar unos contra otros”.

En Occidente, se le conoce a Japón como un país imbuido de espiritualidad. Esto no sólo tiene que ver con el budismo, shintoísmo, meditación zen etc. Aparte de las creencias religiosas, el pueblo japonés ha tenido siempre como rasgo peculiar el ser muy espiritual.

Se podría decir que la espiritualidad japonesa, desde el antiguo Japón hasta ahora, está brevemente expresada con las palabras:

**“Wa”** - paz y armonía, ejemplarizadas por las personas que realizaban sus actividades cotidianas sin crear problemas.

**“Kei”** - el respeto mutuo deberá ser siempre el gobernador de las relaciones humanas.

**“Sei”** - la pureza puede simbolizarse de forma óptima evitando el exhibicionismo y la ostentación a favor de la sencillez.

**“Jaku”** - la tranquilidad deberá mantener su preeminencia incluso estando enfrentados a situaciones difíciles.

Este fuerte sentido de respetuosidad, una profunda gratitud, y una ecuanimidad mutua, están muy bien reflejados en la **ceremonia de té**, cuando el anfitrión sirve una taza de té a su invitado. El frente de la taza es siempre girado de forma que quede encarado al invitado, para mostrar el respeto que el anfitrión tiene por él. Después de recoger la taza, el invitado la gira un cuarto de vuelta antes de sorber el té. Esta acción da a entender simbólicamente al anfitrión el sentimiento de humildad por el honor recibido. Antes de devolver la taza, el invitado encara el frente de la misma hacia el anfitrión para expresar su gratitud y respeto.

Bajo estos conceptos espirituales se encuentran todas las artes tradicionales del Japón: ceremonia de té, arreglo floral, origami (papiroflexia), artes marciales: *kendo* (esgrima japonesa), *judo* y *aikido* (variante del judo más espiritualista), *karate*, *kyudo* (tiro con arco). Estos conceptos también eran parte de los principios del guerrero samurai (bushido). Aquellas personas que hayan leído novelas o hayan visto películas japonesas, creo que les será más fácil entenderlas a la luz de lo que aquí se expone.

### **2.1. Luces y sombras del pueblo japonés**

La antropóloga neoyorquina Ruth Benedict realizó, después de la II Guerra Mundial, un estudio del pueblo japonés resumiendo su gran contraste en el título de su libro: “El crisantemo (sensibilidad, delicadeza) y la espada (fuerza, agresividad)”. Aunque desde entonces han pasado muchos años, Japón sigue siendo un país de grandes contrastes. Podrían llamarse luces y sombras de un pueblo en el que las mismas virtudes llevadas al extremo se convierten en sombras. Me gustaría enumerar algunas de ellas:

#### **Respeto e indiferencia**

El respeto al otro hemos visto que es un valor muy grande, pero a veces llega a ser una carga tan pesada que se torna en indiferencia. Las relaciones humanas para los japoneses son muy importantes, pues son una parte muy importante de la sociedad; sin embargo, pueden llegar a resultar muy complicadas. Nada se hace desinteresadamente, sino siguiendo la ley del “dar y recibir”. El que recibe lo hace sabiendo que, sin mucha demora, tendrá que devolver lo que se le dio. El respeto y la consideración al otro lleva a lo que se llama “on” (deuda moral o agradecimiento), y va desde lo más grande a lo más pequeño. Para que se entienda, daré un ejemplo de la vida cotidiana. Una vecina trae en un plato, algo cocinado por ella. El “on” lleva a devolver el plato, pero nunca vacío sino con algo en él. Lo que se devuelve no puede ser mejor que lo recibido (porque entonces se pecaría de ostentación, y se incurriría en una falta de respeto); tampoco puede ser una nimiedad. A través del “on” se muestra el respeto y el agradecimiento; sin embargo, en otros momentos supone una gran carga. Se transforma en “giri” (obligación).

Ante esto, la reacción de muchas personas es no complicarse demasiado la vida en las relaciones con los demás, y su salida es la **indiferencia**. En argot nuestro, “pasar del otro”. Esto crea una sociedad fría e individualista en la que la exigencia causa estragos, sobre todo entre los más jóvenes. Como no pueden llegar a las expectativas de esta sociedad, experimentan la soledad y el aislamiento, se sienten ignorados y rechazados. Este es el caso de los **“hiki-komori”** (*hiku* - replegarse, *komoru* - no salir). La mayoría

son adolescentes y adultos jóvenes que se ven abrumados por la carga de la sociedad, y se sienten incapaces de cumplir los roles sociales que se espera de ellos. Reaccionan de esta forma con un aislamiento total: se encierran en una habitación durante meses e incluso años. Según estimaciones, puede que haya un millón de *hikikomoris* en Japón (uno de cada diez jóvenes). La mayoría de ellos son varones, y muchos también primogénitos.

### **Sensibilidad y dureza de corazón**

La gran **sensibilidad** al arte, naturaleza, delicadeza en las relaciones, etc, contrasta con la insensibilidad y dureza de corazón que muestran muchas veces. Es de todos conocidos la pasión de los japoneses por la naturaleza. Esta se muestra sobre todo en las temporadas de cambio de estación, como la primavera y el otoño. El árbol del cerezo en flor, "sakura", ha llegado a ser un icono del Japón. Así también el cambio de hoja del otoño o "koyo". La naturaleza se viste de una multitud de tonos rojos, verdes, castaños, amarillos que provocan la admiración de todo el que la contempla.

También en las relaciones, el pueblo japonés es famoso por sus detalles en el agasajo del otro, escucha profunda de la otra persona, respeto y valoración de la opinión ajena aunque difiera de la propia, etc. Sin embargo, esta sensibilidad grande es muy fácil de herir y toma la forma de **dureza de corazón**. El miedo a las heridas y a la intrusión íntima provoca que se pongan una coraza de insensibilidad, una máscara. Esto lo hacen para protegerse de los posibles golpes y no mostrar sus auténticos sentimientos. Antiguamente era una cosa de pudor y virtud el no exteriorizar lo íntimo de uno mismo. Una cosa es lo que hay por dentro: ternura, cariño, preocupación, y otra lo que sale por fuera: frialdad, rigidez, seriedad. Ahora los jóvenes están cambiando bastante, pero aún así este "honne" (lo que hay por dentro) y "tate-mae" (lo que se ve por fuera) se ve muy frecuentemente en las relaciones humanas: marido y esposa, novios, hermanos, compañeros de trabajo, etc. Ahí, la labor misionera está en no quedarse en lo de fuera, sino en penetrar y llegar al corazón, tanto para uno mismo como para ayudar a los demás a hacer lo mismo. Durante mi última estancia en Tokio, estuve acompañando a una pareja que se iba a casar. La mayor parte del tiempo estuvimos trabajando lo mismo: como pareja, ayudarse y ayudar al otro a ir más allá de la apariencia, y aprender a dialogar acerca de sus sentimientos.

### **Sed de conocer y apertura - sincretismo y eclecticismo**

Los primeros misioneros que llegaron a Japón no encontraron ningún obstáculo en difundir el cristianismo. Eran los mismos japoneses los que preguntaban y se interesaban. El problema llegó cuando los poderosos vieron amenazada su estructura jerárquica. El pueblo japonés hoy en día sigue abierto a todo, y su sed de conocer es inmensa. Por ejemplo, no he visto nunca restaurantes de tantos países como los que he visto en Tokio. Las escuelas de idiomas ofrecen al estudiante una gran gama de lenguas europeas y asiáticas. Es también muy frecuente ver japoneses viajando, hasta en los parajes más recónditos del planeta. Esa curiosidad innata en el japonés, que le lleva a valorar y querer conocerlo todo, tiene por otra parte la desventaja de llegar a un **sincretismo** donde todo cabe y todo vale. Por eso, Japón es terreno abonado para todo lo nuevo: nuevas filosofías, movimientos, sectas, productos etc. No obstante, esto no quiere decir que todo lo hagan suyo. El sentido ecléctico les lleva a asimilar y adaptar todo lo bueno y valioso que encuentran: (valores, inventos, recursos etc.) Ese fue el espíritu del Emperador Meiji, en el siglo XIX, que le llevó a elevar a Japón a una de las futuras potencias mundiales.

### **Espíritu comunitario - cerrazón y aislamiento**

Entre los japoneses existe un claro predominio del espíritu de grupo sobre cualquier egocentrismo o vedettismo personal. Esto puede provenir de sus raíces shintoístas y budistas donde el sentido de participación impersonal en la naturaleza, lleva a una especie de difuminación del yo, y de cuanto signifique exaltación del individualismo. En los pasados Juegos Olímpicos de Pekín, el equipo de natación japonés ganó dos medallas de oro. Cuando los periodistas preguntaron acerca de tal hazaña, el entrenador japonés contestó que hasta ahora habían seguido la técnica americana: "ser el primero", y no les había funcionado. Era demasiada presión psicológica. Por eso en la preparación para los del 2008 habían dado importancia al grupo, y a intentar dar lo mejor de cada uno. Más que

conseguir el oro, a través de una lucha encarnizada, lo más importante era disfrutar de nadar y de contar con cada uno. La alegría, distensión y ambiente de compañerismo llamó la atención de todos. Cuando la prensa les preguntó por las medallas, cada nadador elogiaba a sus compañeros más que hablar de él mismo. Cuando leía este artículo del periódico, recordaba otro que había leído en Irlanda acerca de Japón. El título era: "Japón, el único país donde la humildad sigue siendo una virtud".

Aunque el pueblo japonés tenga un sentido muy fuerte de comunidad, también existe el peligro de quedarse reducido al grupo pequeño y cerrarse a los demás. Esto lo hemos visto en la visión histórica cuando Japón permaneció cerrado al mundo exterior durante dos siglos. En aquellos momentos fue por miedo, pero hoy en día puede ser por inhibición o timidez ante quienes no pertenecen al propio círculo de relaciones. También el "grupismo" se favorece cuando se da demasiada importancia o énfasis a la propia empresa, universidad o grupo. Hay una cierta tendencia a separar los grupos: niños, jóvenes, trabajadores, amas de casa, ancianos etc y raramente se juntan. Recuerdo la sorpresa que se llevaron los jóvenes que conocíamos cuando les propusimos una reunión donde juntáramos a toda la gente que habíamos conocido hasta entonces. Al principio se negaron por no haberlo hecho nunca, pero cuando se abrieron a la posibilidad y vieron los frutos, sólo querían volver a repetirlo.

### **Disciplina y sumisión - facilidad de ser manipulado**

Ante una población total de 127.417.244 habitantes (la novena del mundo), con una superficie total de 377.835 kilómetros cuadrados (más o menos la extensión de Alemania) se necesita ser muy disciplinado. Sobre todo si la superficie donde se vive es el 67% montañosa y sólo un 13% son llanuras. Sin embargo, no sólo por necesidad los japoneses son disciplinados, sino que forma parte de su tradición y cultura. Hay una **disciplina** y sometimiento espontáneo (o al menos dócilmente aceptado) a un orden jerarquizado: la edad, antigüedad, la posición relativa en el grupo y la estructura social, el cargo o autoridad que se ostenta, no se cuestiona sino que prevalece ante otras consideraciones. La disciplina se practica en todos los ámbitos: en el de las relaciones y también en el de las artes. Son famosos los japoneses por cómo llegan a dominar lo que se pro-ponen, sea: danza, guitarra, piano, deportes, etc. La capacidad de disciplina conlleva también una capacidad muy grande de sacrificio. Sin embargo, el sacrificio no tiene la misma connotación que para nosotros. Disciplina y sacrificio es "lo normal" para ellos.

Aunque la disciplina y la sumisión son características del pueblo japonés, llevado éstas al extremo puede tornarse en **facilidad para ser manipulado**. Un pueblo sumiso no se rebela, y esto le puede ayudar a apagar la iniciativa personal, la creatividad. Hay un dicho muy antiguo que reza: "clavo que despunta, se le da un martillazo". La II Guerra Mundial nos dio un buen ejemplo de esta sumisión y facilidad de manipulación con los famosos "kamikazes". Es verdad que muchos de ellos ofrecieron su vida por el Emperador sin pensarlo dos veces. Sin embargo, también hubo una gran cantidad de jóvenes que no pudieron rechazar el "honor" que se les brindaba, evitando así la vergüenza de la familia. Las cajas negras mostraron que, en vez de ofrecer sus vidas gritando: "banzai" (grito de victoria al emperador), acababan sus vidas gritando: "madre". Por eso, se puede seguir afirmando que una cosa es lo que se ve fuera, y otra lo que pasa por dentro. Cuando uno viaja a Japón, lo primero que le sorprende si entra en el metro, a la hora de ir a la oficina, es la uniformidad. Todos van vestidos igual: trajes oscuros (negro, gris, azul marino) y con corbatas poco llamativas, para los hombres. Trajes de chaqueta para las mujeres. Los jóvenes son más libres, pero cuando estos entran a trabajar a una empresa, sumisamente visten lo que "se debe" vestir. Aunque hay excepciones, son muy pocas.

### **Espíritu de duro trabajo — stress emocional**

Los japoneses son trabajadores por idiosincrasia. Trabajan mucho y bien. Son puntuales, meticulosos, detallistas, minuciosos, rápidos y eficaces. Más que crear (y también lo hacen), perfeccionan, y el acabado es por eso fundamental. Todos los que vivimos en Japón, somos testigos de ello: los productos japoneses son los mejores y los que más duran. Los extranjeros que visitan Japón se quedan con la impresión de que los japoneses viven para trabajar. No es así para las generaciones jóvenes, pero sí para aquellos que tuvieron que sacar a Japón de los cimientos de la II Guerra Mundial, y convertirlo en una de las mayores potencias mundiales. Sus

huelgas eran trabajar más. Hoy en día, los trabajadores siguen llegando a su casa muy tarde debido a las horas extras que tienen que hacer. Conozco a un matrimonio joven con una niña pequeña. El esposo llega a su casa pronto para bañar a su hijita, estar con ella y una vez que ésta se ha acostado regresa a la oficina para seguir trabajando.

Este espíritu de duro trabajo también cobra factura. Llevado al extremo, provoca un **stress** tan grande que desemboca muchas veces en depresión y enfermedad. Son muchas las personas en la actualidad que sufren depresión, y muchas también las que la depresión o los trastornos psíquicos y emocionales les llevan a suicidarse. El **suicidio** es un problema social muy grave. Resulta muy alarmante que desde 1998 la tasa de suicidios haya aumentado hasta llegar a 30.000 suicidios anuales. La mayoría son varones entre 40 y 60 años, y el motivo: evitar deshonor a la familia debido a un fracaso laboral, a un despido o a la quiebra de su empresa. El stress laboral y las depresiones por exceso de trabajo, muchas veces no diagnosticadas ni tratadas, provocan en la persona la necesidad de quitarse la vida. Hoy en día, no sólo adultos, sino también niños se suicidan debido a que son víctimas del ("ijime") mofarse, ridiculizar y golpear a los compañeros de clase para humillarlos. En toda esta situación, es muy importante tener en cuenta la cultura y la ética antigua japonesa, donde el "harakiri" (abrirse el estómago), o la elección de la propia muerte estaban consideradas como algo noble y decoroso.

Considerando los condicionamientos sociales y todo el bagaje cultural y ético, no se puede juzgar a las personas que realizan este acto. Más bien sentir compasión hacia ellas, y preguntarnos qué tipo de sociedad estamos creando que lleva a adultos, jóvenes y niños a ese extremo. Por esto, la Iglesia más que condenar trata de prevenir, ayudar a las personas que necesitan apoyo y tratamiento psicológico. Desgraciadamente, en Japón las enfermedades psicológicas son todavía un tabú, algo a condenar o a ocultar dentro de las familias, más que verlo como algo que se puede curar con el tratamiento adecuado. Debido al rechazo que experimentan, muchos que padecen estas enfermedades — aun no siendo creyentes — se dirigen a la Iglesia para recibir ayuda. Por esta razón, la Iglesia Católica ha hecho de estos enfermos "leprosos del siglo XXI" una de sus prioridades.

## **2.2. Necesidad de algo distinto**

Constantemente percibimos que cada país, cada cultura, cada religión, cada persona tiene sus luces y sus sombras. Cosas buenas de las que se puede aprender y que reflejan la belleza, lo bueno, lo verdadero, y también aspectos sombríos que necesitan curación. Heridas, aspectos frágiles que necesitan ser amados, ser comprendidos, no ser juzgados. Aspectos que necesitan ser vistos en su contexto más amplio para poder ser valorados justamente. En Japón encontramos muchas cosas bellas y buenas de las que podemos aprender, recibir con las manos abiertas y admirarnos. También hay otros aspectos que cuando los descubrimos nos dejan en silencio, y necesitan ser meditados largamente y conocidos a profundidad para poderse comprender.

Como misioneros tratamos de enriquecernos de todo lo positivo que tiene cada persona y cada cultura. También intentamos aportar la luz del amor y de la fe, sobre todo en aquellas heridas más dolientes del corazón de las personas y de las culturas. Estas heridas nos hablan de la **necesidad de algo distinto**, la **necesidad de algo nuevo**. Nuevas relaciones interpersonales en la familia, entre amigos, en la sociedad, y en la misma Iglesia. Crear espacios y ocasiones donde se den nuevos lazos humanos de cariño, comprensión y amor. La misma sociedad japonesa se está dando cuenta de ello y muchos grupos están poniendo medios: campañas contra el suicidio valorando el sentido de la vida, prioridad a la vida de familia por encima del trabajo, ayuda médica y psicológica a los que sufren depresión, etc. Son débiles intentos pero que sensibilizan y hacen tomar conciencia a la opinión pública. Sin embargo, en mi opinión, se necesita algo prioritario y urgente: **el amor misericordioso de Dios**. Iª Cor. 13, 1-8 "Si no tengo amor, nada soy, ni nada me aprovecha. El amor es paciente, bondadoso, no tiene envidia ni orgullo. No se engríe. No es grosero, ni egoísta; no lleva cuenta del mal. No se alegra de la injusticia sino que goza con la verdad. Todo lo excusa, todo lo cree, todo lo espera, todo lo soporta. El amor no acaba nunca".

## **3. EVANGELIZAR DESDE EL AMOR**

### **3.1. La palabra menos utilizada pero más necesaria: "Ai"**

La palabra japonesa para el amor durante mucho tiempo ha sido muy poco utilizada,

y menos aún expresada. De hecho en el lenguaje hablado se emplean cantidad de sinónimos: ("me gusta", "pienso con cariño", "enamorarse", "tiene importancia"), pero apenas se utiliza la única para el amor: "Ai" (amor), o "Ai suru" (amar). La razón es que los japoneses no tienen la misma necesidad que nosotros de verbalizar. Expresan el cariño no a través de palabras, sino de otra forma. Tampoco el contacto físico es frecuente. Los abrazos y besos entre padres e hijos, o entre hermanos son escasos. Hoy en día, debido a la influencia occidental, cada vez sale más "el amor", "te amo", en películas, novelas, "manga" (comic japonés), sin embargo nunca se oye utilizarla a las personas. A pesar de que las formas de expresión del amor cambian con la cultura, es interesante percibir que la misma sociedad japonesa ve la necesidad de expresiones visibles del amor. Por ejemplo, últimamente hubo una campaña mediática para animar a las madres a que abrazaran a sus hijos pequeños. Decían que el niño tiene necesidad del calor de la madre, del contacto de la piel, de su cercanía. También unas religiosas cerca de nuestra casa tienen un centro para bebés abandonados y niños con problemas. Uno de los voluntariados que ofrecen a los jóvenes es: abrazar a los bebés y niños pequeños.

Aunque la palabra amor en sí no aparezca en el lenguaje hablado, bastaría que apareciera el contenido, pero desgraciadamente para muchos japoneses "el amor" se halla confinado a la relación romántica entre hombre y mujer. Amor, aunque existe el ideograma, carece de contenido para mucha gente. Sin embargo, ya en el mismo kanji de amor se expresa un contenido muy profundo. La parte de arriba son unas manos que llevan dentro de un pañuelo un corazón (parte del medio), que es entregado a otras manos que lo reciben (parte inferior). El amor es el regalo del corazón que se ofrece al otro. Elocuente, ¿verdad?

### **3.2. La Iglesia Católica como lugar de encarnación del amor**

Esta experiencia de amor misericordioso, por la forma de ser del pueblo japonés, necesita crecer en el seno de una comunidad. Una comunidad de hermanos, amigos, unidos por "un solo corazón y una sola alma" (Hch 4,32) que les lleve a amar hasta el final. Así lo vivieron los cristianos japoneses en la época de las persecuciones: "La fuerza indómita con la que tantos católicos del siglo XVII resistieron a las torturas y afrontaron el martirio provenía del espíritu comunitario con el que se sostenían en la fe mutuamente. Fueron los "kumi" — comunidades de cristianos — el terreno sobre el que florecieron los 188 mártires. Aquella Iglesia de Japón era una verdadera Iglesia de pueblo", afirmaba el P. **Shinzio Kawamura**, SJ, en un simposio en Takushima, en septiembre de 2007. Este amor, debido a la misma dinámica de la Encarnación, necesita hacerse visible, palpable, audible a través de hermanos. La Iglesia Católica en Japón está llamada a ser ese lugar abierto a todos donde se pueda experimentar el amor misericordioso de Dios.

Para llegar a los católicos y a los no católicos, la Iglesia Católica aprovecha todo lo que está a su alcance. Sabe que el japonés es muy ritual y estético, muy amante de la música, por eso aprovecha los tiempos litúrgicos: sobre todo los de Navidad y Pascua, para contagiar la alegría y esperanza de un Dios que nos ama tanto. Las iglesias se llenan tanto que mucha gente queda afuera sin poder entrar. No son pocos los que fruto de ese primer contacto quieren conocer más el cristianismo. Otro foco de interés para el pueblo japonés y que la iglesia aprovecha para formar corazones, es el deseo que tienen de celebrar su boda en las iglesias católicas. La arquitectura, vidrieras, música, el romanticismo que conlleva les atrae tanto que hay listas enteras de no cristianos esperando casarse. Como ellos no son católicos no pueden recibir el sacramento, pero sí una bendición. La iglesia propone unos cursillos de conocimiento y formación para la pareja y después les acompaña en su enlace. La mayoría de veces la experiencia es tan positiva que los mismos cónyuges pasan la voz a otros y así sucesivamente. Una de las cosas que he aprendido en Japón es que el número de bautizados puede ser concreto, pero son muchos más los que piensan y sienten en cristiano.

Las comunidades japonesas cuentan con 848 parroquias, repartidas entre 13 diócesis y 3 archidiócesis: Nagasaki, Osaka y Tokio. Los católicos alcanzan el millón y medio aproximadamente (1% de la población) Estos han aumentado últimamente debido a los hijos de emigrantes japoneses "nissei", (provenientes la mayoría de Perú y Bolivia) que han regresado a Japón. También, hay una gran cantidad de emigrantes de otros países: sobre todo Brasil y Filipinas, a los que la Iglesia Católica trata de atender, ayudar e integrarse en la sociedad japonesa. Esta integración es otra de sus prioridades. Junto con la atención a los enfermos

mentales, anteriormente mencionada, hay una tercera prioridad: la formación de los laicos. Sacerdotes y religiosos no bastan para atender a todas las necesidades de la Iglesia, por eso es tan urgente la formación de personas que puedan atender, ayudar y guiar a tantos otros que vienen a llamar a sus puertas.

Mi experiencia misionera en Japón es que el japonés es un pueblo muy sensible para descubrir el amor. Quizás se muestre reticente ante la religión, pero nunca ante el que ama de una forma desinteresada. Y ese amor se puede manifestar a través de una sonrisa, una acogida de corazón del otro, espontaneidad, muestra de confianza, etc. Como el japonés es muy detallista, las cosas pequeñas son de vital importancia. Todo puede ser revelación del amor. Quizás por eso es tan importante hacer vida el gran amor que Dios nos tiene a cada uno.

Desde la óptica del amor, se abren cantidad de caminos para la evangelización del corazón japonés. Cristianismo se escribe "enseñanzas de Cristo". Sin embargo, shintoísmo se escribe "camino hacia los dioses". Estoy convencida que uno de los desafíos de la evangelización es abrir caminos, trazar puentes hacia Dios, desde lo que es genuino japonés. Antiguamente el convertido dejaba de ser japonés y se occidentalizaba, es decir se oponía a todo lo que era típico japonés: su religión, sus costumbres, sus antepasados, etc. Hoy en día, muchos sacerdotes y cristianos japoneses coinciden en que se hace necesario un diálogo con las raíces sintoístas, budistas y japonesas del pueblo. Quitar miedos y prejuicios para reconocer lo que lo japonés tiene que aportar a la fe cristiana, y lo que la fe cristiana tiene para iluminar y dar plenitud a la fe sintoísta y budista. No puede haber más antagonismo sino diálogo. Hay un camino a recorrer. Son muchos los que nos han precedido, muchos los que están trazando puentes y muchos más los que los desean. Hay un librito que el Instituto Español de Misiones Extranjeras (IEME) publicó en el año 2006 a raíz del V Centenario de San Francisco Javier titulado "Dar razón de la misión hoy". En el apartado titulado "Misión abierta al diálogo en un mundo plural" Juan Martín Velasco trata muy bien este tema.

### **3.3. Referencia a tres experiencias**

Por último me gustaría relatar algunas experiencias de encuentro con distintas personas creyentes y no creyentes, jóvenes de los que he aprendido muchísimo y me han ayudado a entender más el amor de Dios y a intentar reflejarlo mejor.

- **Okaasan** (nuestra "madre" japonesa y prácticamente ciega). Católica desde los 19 años. Actualmente tiene 82. Esta madre de ocho hijos y abuela de doce nietos, ha sido una de las personas que más me ha enseñado el amor al detalle de Dios. Estábamos buscando casa en el inmenso Tokio y no podíamos encontrar nada asequible a nuestros bolsillos y posibilidades. Cuando estábamos a punto de claudicar, un día nos llamó por teléfono diciendo que se había enterado de que estábamos buscando un sitio donde vivir. Nos dijo que su marido había fallecido y que nos dejaba su casa para poder realizar nuestra misión. Ella se iría a vivir con su segundo hijo. Cuando le expresamos nuestra situación económica nos dijo que el mejor pago que le podíamos hacer era utilizar su casa para que los japoneses se encontrasen con Dios. Por supuesto que desde entonces fue nuestra más fiel colaboradora y apóstol.

- **Sensei** (dentista) padre de familia, no creyente. 59 años. Conocí a Oshima Sensei cuando era un joven dentista de 29 años debido a una muela careada. Decidimos hacer un trueque: él me arreglaba la muela y yo trabajaba para él gratis. Durante ese tiempo pude darme cuenta con qué amabilidad y entrega trataba a sus pacientes. Al que no le podía pagar le decía que no se preocupara, que cuando pudiera lo hiciera. Una de sus frases célebres era que para los ancianos "los dientes eran la vida". A los que no podían ir por su consulta, por ser demasiado mayores, iba a atenderles gratis a la casa. Al final terminamos siendo muy amigos, siendo nosotras testigos del nacimiento de sus tres preciosos hijos, ahora ya universitarios. Un buen día nos dijo: yo no creo en Dios, pero sí en el Dios en que vosotras creéis. Con lágrimas en los ojos expresa que si cuando era joven no nos hubiera conocido hace tiempo que se hubiera quitado la vida. Vive para su familia y dice que en su funeral sólo quiere a su esposa e hijos y a nosotras misioneras.

**Jóvenes.** Son muchos jóvenes los que he conocido a lo largo de diecisiete años. De entre ellos hay tres de los que me gustaría hablar.

- Uno de ellos es un joven brillante llamado Seiji, salido de la mejor universidad de Japón y con un futuro muy prometedor. Lo conocimos en su primer año de universidad. No

era católico pero empezó participando en las actividades que teníamos para jóvenes y cada vez se fue involucrando más. Un día su madre se presentó en nuestra casa diciendo que quería conocernos. Estaba muy agradecida porque decía que, aunque Seiji era su hijo, había cambiado tanto que no lo conocía. Este participaba de la eucaristía, hacía oración pero no daba el paso al bautismo. Sus padres se convirtieron a la fe por él, pero él seguía sin decidirse. Tardó cinco años pero al final me pidió ser su madrina y se bautizó con el nombre de Pedro. Había sido una roca dura. Cuando terminó la carrera de ingeniería espacial se puso a buscar trabajo. Me extrañó que no lo consiguiera enseguida pues se lo rifaban las empresas. Un día me enteré de la causa: todo le parecía muy bien, excepto que la mayoría de las empresas le exigían que trabajara en la investigación de misiles. El respondió que no quería que lo que había aprendido sirviera para matar a nadie. Ahora trabaja, aunque con menos sueldo pero más feliz, en el departamento de investigación de la universidad de Tokio. Hace un año se casó y acaba de tener una niña.

- Otra joven de la que me gustaría hablar se llama Naoko. Estudiante de arte y con muchos problemas de carácter. Chocaba mucho con su madre. Cuando empezó a descubrir a Dios, sobre todo el amor de Dios como Padre, se sintió totalmente amada y aceptada. Tal fue así que habiendo terminado la carrera quiso estudiar Puericultura para dedicarse a los niños. Decía que los niños necesitaban sentir el amor desde muy pequeños, por eso quiso trabajar en una guardería. Después de seis años pidió ser bautizada. La sensibilidad que tiene por Dios es sorprendente y la delicadeza con los otros también. Hoy en día es una feliz esposa y madre de una niña. Le ha puesto el nombre de Satoko. Ambos padres quieren que su hija llegue a ser como esta japonesa en proceso de beatificación: Satoko Kitahara. Era una joven de 19 años perteneciente a una rica familia de Tokio. Después de la II Guerra Mundial se dedicó junto al hermano franciscano Zeno a ayudar a los más pobres. Contrajo tuberculosis dando su vida por los niños más pobres de las barriadas de Tokio.

- El último joven es católico. Había recibido el bautismo de pequeño, pero no practicaba. Era un "kirishitan banare", se llaman así a los alejados de la Iglesia Católica. De Hiroshima vino a Tokio a estudiar la carrera de matemáticas, y lo conocimos en una residencia universitaria. Al principio no iba de nada, pero a través de una banda de música que montamos y un teatro, le pedimos colaboración. El trabajar con jóvenes, le abrió los ojos a ver la necesidad tan grande que había en sus corazones de cariño y valoración. Decidió dedicarse a la enseñanza y ahora es un profesor comprometido en dar a sus alumnos no sólo matemáticas sino el amor encarnado de Dios. No le es fácil porque los profesores en Japón están sometidos a mucha presión, pero el intento es lo que vale. Fue padrino de bautismo de Seiji.

Cuando recuerdo a estos jóvenes, y muchos otros, no puedo por menos de alegrarme y pensar que a través de ellos y con nuestras pobres vidas, estamos ayudando a cambiar el futuro de Japón y del mundo.

#### 4. CONCLUSIÓN

La Iglesia de Japón es minoritaria pero tiene mucho para aportar. Yo he aprendido mucho de ella y me siento orgullosa de ella. Al ser pequeña, no tiene de qué darse importancia, ni tampoco lo pretende. Cuando llegó una de nuestras compañeras a Japón fuimos a presentársela al arzobispo de Tokio. Este, con una sencillez encantadora, se inclinó ante ella y le agradeció de corazón que hubiese venido como misionera a Japón. Supo encarnar el respeto, humildad y agradecimiento japoneses de una forma asombrosa. No hemos venido a otra cosa que aprender y a aportar lo que tenemos: la alegría de conocer a Dios y ser amados por Él. Los conflictos son muchos, pero los dos ideogramas de la palabra conflicto "kiki", nos enseñan el significado: peligro y oportunidad. El conflicto es la oportunidad de aprender, de crecer, de intentar. Todos somos necesarios, desde donde estamos, desde lo que hacemos. Nuestros pobres intentos son muy valiosos para Dios. El Espíritu Santo, motor de la Iglesia, nos hace tener un corazón universal, en comunión con todos nuestros hermanos de todo el mundo. Somos de la raza humana y todos necesitamos de todos.

*\* Forma parte de la Comunidad Misionera Servidores del Evangelio de la Misericordia de Dios. Trabaja en Tokio integrada en una comunidad multicultural. El testimonio fue presentado en la 62 Semana Española de Misionología, celebrada en Burgos, julio de 2009.*

Réf.: *Misiones extranjeras*, n. 232, Septiembre-Octubre 2009.

## ***Events***

### **NEXT SEDOS SEMINAR 2010**

**18–22 May**

***"The Prophetic Challenge  
of the African Churches"***

**- ARICCIA -**

**"CASA DIVIN MAESTRO" -**

***Daily Sub-themes: (With emphasis on Formation)***

**18, Tuesday evening:**

*Overall situation of Africa: Political, Social, Economical, Religious*

**19, Wednesday:**

*Kerigma: Evangelizing for Non-Violence*

**20, Thursday:**

*Koinonia: Building Communities in Justice and Peace*

**21, Friday:**

*Diakonia: Being Instruments of Reconciliation*

**22, Saturday:**

*Guidelines for Formation*

***... more details will follow***