

**TANGAZA COLLEGE**  
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**“HE DWELT AMONG HIS PEOPLE” John 1:14.**  
**INCULTURATION AND INCARNATION**

Moderator

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A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfilment  
of the Requirements for the Bachelor of Sacred Theology

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*To my family, friends and all those who supported me during the time of formation,  
especially my spiritual directors.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

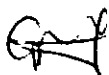
I would like to express my most sincere gratitude to Rev. Fr. Domingues Fernando M.C.C.J. for his help throughout the composition of this essay.

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## STUDENT'S DECLARATION

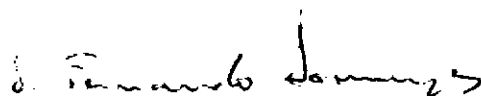
I, the undersigned, declare that this long essay is my original work achieved through my personal reading, scientific research method and critical reflection. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor in Sacred Theology. It has never been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit. All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed: 

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college supervisor.

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In this paper I wish to discuss the concepts Inculturation and Incarnation as the medium through which the Gospel message reaches people within a given context. The main emphasis on the part of Inculturation will be on the Son of God becoming man and living among people. On this, the prologue of St. John will much in focus; “He dwelt among his people” (Jn. 1: 14). Understanding the thought of this text will be a great help to the Church and her Pastoral agents to apply the Gospel message in a given cultural context. In this way, the people will live authentic Christian life in their own culture setting.

Inculturation being the issue at hand in the Church, I will begin with the first chapter reflecting on the historical background of inculturation. Special attention will be focused on the various descriptive definitions of inculturation in order to arrive at the basic thought of the word. In order to have a successful trend of incarnation, I will analyse the Old Testament’s attempt of God to come among his chosen people, the Israelites.

“He dwelt among his people” (Jn. 1:14). This is what the paper will consider as the core of Inculturation. The mystery of the second person of the Trinity becoming man and live among people. Here the concern is the understanding of

what it means for the Son of God to live among people. This is the heart of the second chapter.

The last chapter looks at the pastoral implication of inculturation as way forward for the Church's Inculturation. On this part incarnation will not be limited to the unique sense it takes when it is applied to the *Word* and *fresh*. Incarnation will be used in a broader sense as God's encounter with people in the world and into human lives as it was revealed to the Jews at that time. The emphasis will be the need for people to meet God in their own cultural settings as Jesus himself lived and proclaimed the Gospel message in his Jewish cultural setting.

I intend to limit myself to the Biblical text, in which I believe when it is understood can be applied to any area of the Church's inculturation. I shall conclude this reflection with few recommendations, which can be of help pastoral agents to communicate God to humanity in their own cultural settings.

## **Chapter I**

### **Inculturation**

#### **1. Introduction**

The theme of inculturation is a vital importance for the Church's mission. At present when the Church continuous to advocate for inter-faith dialogue in the evangelization, inculturation becomes an important element. The dialogue between faith and culture is evident. The dialogue between the Gospel message and the concrete circumstances of people's life is very significant. Religious systems are essentially cultural systems. These explain why inculturation is considered a basic foundation and a vital importance in the Church's mission.

This first chapter is an introduction of what we mean the basic elements of inculturation. It deals with the historical background of inculturation and the different attempts many theologians have made to give deeper understanding to inculturation. Much attention is given to two of the terminologies used to describe

inculturation “Incarnation and Inculturation”. This is because they touch the heart of the topic in question. Some various methods proposed for inculturation, the sources and principles of inculturation are also discussed. I conclude the chapter looking at the extent to which inculturation should cover in the life of a Christian.

## 2. Historical Background of Inculturation

Inculturation is quite a new term in the Church’s vocabulary. Until Vatican II no church Council addressed the question of culture in way as we have today. The effort to understand the word inculturation was rectified by His grace Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation “*Evangelii Nuntiandi*”.<sup>1</sup> He urged the Church to pay attention to people’s particular historical contexts and matrices in her evangelization. The emphasize was on the need to evangelize the cultures in a vital way and right to their very root. Thus to appreciation ones culture and enrich it with a radical challenge and transformation.<sup>2</sup>

Pope John Paul II picked up from John Paul VI and finally the word Inculturation appeared in an official papal document *Catechesi Tradendae* in 1979. Pope John Paul II focal point was to draw attention to the broader implications of the incarnational theme, which Vatican II had emphasized. His particular reference was on the strict missionary evangelization of people and their cultures.<sup>3</sup>

As point of importance, Pope John Paul II considered inculturation as a central point of the church mission in the contemporary world and therefore in 1982 established at Vatican a pontifical council for culture. The stress was on the organic and continuative link that exists between Christianity and culture, and between

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J. M. WALIGGO, *Inculturation*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. E. HILMAN, “Inculturation”, 513.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. E. HILMAN, “Inculturation”, 513-514.

culture and faith.<sup>4</sup> Since then, inculturation has been in the thought of the whole church as well as many church writers.

Although the question of inculturation has been recent thought of the church, it is not a new phenomenon in the church. The attempt to understand the dynamic between faith and culture has been the idea already of some early converts, particularly Saint Paul. Paul's great debate with the Jewish Christians could be seen as a practical attempt towards inculturation. The Jewish Christians confused their Christian faith with their own cultural practices and local law. To this, they try to impose their culture on non-Jewish who converted to Christianity (Acts 15: 1-30; 17:22-25; Gal. 2: 1-4).

The same idea was later taken up by some missionaries such as Matteo Ricci in China and Roberto Denobili in India with different ways of inculturating Christian life in different countries. Powerful authority such as the order of Pope Benedict XIV terminated the effort in eighteenth century. The European cultural influence also discouraged the effort. In the words Hilaire Belloc: "Europe is the faith, the faith is Europe." Thus, every form of Christianity was taken the form European culture.<sup>5</sup>

Although the effort for inculturation has always met with some difficulties, the cultural practices of each particular place affected and continue to affect the church in that particular culture or country. With this in mind Vatican II reaffirmed

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. L'Osservatore Romano, June 28, 1982, 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. E. HILMAN, "Inculturation", 510.

the validity and the urgent need of the church's inculturational approaches to all people.<sup>6</sup>

### 3. The Meaning of Inculturation

The search for a clear definition of inculturation has been the task of many theologians. Some common terminologies such as contextualization, reformulation, adaptation, indigenization, enculturation, acculturation and incarnation have played a significant role to the meaning of inculturation.<sup>7</sup>

*Contextualization* is an interweaving of the gospel message with particular situation. It speaks of the context into which the gospel must be inculturated. Thus contextualization calls for awareness and study of the particular context, historical development and change in order to contextualize the gospel message to the situation as it changes.<sup>8</sup>

*Reformulation* refers to improving the Christian doctrine in the thought and language that are understood by contemporary persons.<sup>9</sup> In other words making the gospel message understood by the people through their own language and way of life.

*Adaptation* implies the elevation of the particular idea to the universal idea. Archbishop Sarpong sees adaptation as conformity to an idea which is not your own with the belief that the person's idea is superior to yours.<sup>10</sup>

*Indigenization* connotes indigenous which implies something proper to the people. That is the gospel message coming from local community with its own

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Ad Gentes Divinitus. 9, 10, 11, 12, 22, Gaudium et Spes 44, 58, 29, 13, 17, Sacrosanctum Concilium. 37.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. J. M. WALIGGO, *Inculturation*, 11.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. P. SCHINELLER, *Inculturation*, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. M. WALIGGO, *Inculturation*, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. P. K. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ*, 30.

indigenous leader taking primary responsibility and task of making it known to the people. Thus the local church does the major work with its local leaders. The gospel identity is based on the cultural heritage and situation.<sup>11</sup>

“*Enculturation* consists in the parallel between the insertion of an individual into his own culture and the insertion of the Christian faith into a culture where Christians were not previously present.”<sup>12</sup>

*Acculturation* is the encounter between cultures. Culture itself comes to existence through collective processes, which are beyond the scope of individual human choice. A particular culture is modified through continuous interaction with other culture or cultures. Here there is possibility of the strong culture dominating the other culture.<sup>13</sup>

“Incarnation is the belief that God has made known his love and reconciled men to himself by coming among them in the person of his Son and by making himself vulnerable, not only to physical and mental condition of human life, but also to hostility and a cruel death was bound to shape, if not determine, a specifically Christian approach to the knowledge of God and specifically Christian way of life in the world. Christian spirituality and Christian ethics alike are elicited by the humanity of God in the incarnation.”<sup>14</sup>

While all the above-mentioned terminologies play a significant role in Inculturation, the most directly theological word to express the meaning of

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. P. K. SCHINELLER, *Inculturation*, 18.

<sup>12</sup> A. SHORTER, *Theology of Inculturation*, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER, *Theology of Inculturation*, 7.

<sup>14</sup> H. BRAIN, “Incarnation”, 210.

Inculturation is incarnation.<sup>15</sup> The knowledge about God is determined by the incarnation, which is already present in Johannine theology of Inculturation; “And the word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn. 1: 14).<sup>16</sup> From this gospel text, incarnation takes on its original depth significance. Incarnation therefore implies the total Christ-event. According to Saint Paul the mystery of incarnation is seen in the humble initiative of the son who took on the form of a slave and ended his human life on a cross (Phil.2: 6-11).<sup>17</sup>

Paul encouraged Christians to have the same attitude as that of Christ (Phil.2: 1-5). He was born, lived and died in a particular context. He learnt the culture, language and the customs and through these he expressed truth and love of God. Therefore, incarnation calls the Christians to identify ourselves with the culture, people and history which we are part of. In this way we make God’s love and truth to be revealed and present.<sup>18</sup>

*Inculturation* is a term that denotes the presentation and re-expression of the gospel in form and terms proper to a culture without being unfaithful to either.<sup>19</sup> However, the closest definition, which touches the core of our discussion, is that of Schineller. “Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. P. SCHINELLER, *Inculturation*, 20.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. H. BRAIN, “Incarnation”, 210.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. G. O’COLLINS, *Incarnation*, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. P. SCHINELLER, *Inculturation*, 20-21.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER, *Evangelization and Culture*, 32.

principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about “a new creation.”<sup>20</sup>

Inculturation is therefore, the insertion of the Gospel message into a particular culture in such a way that the Christian message finds expression through elements proper of that cultural language. Here the followers of Christ are called to learn from Jesus himself who did Inculturation by speaking in Jewish language and terms.

The Gospel message becomes an element, which animates, directs and transforms the culture. The message has to remain unchanged, but word has to be part of the people. To animate comes from Latin *Anima* meaning soul. So when the word of God comes in a particular culture, it should give life to the culture, that is elevate it.

The word of God comes like a “Boss” director. To direct here is to encourage what is good and eliminate what is not in conformity with the gospel message in a particular culture. In this way, the gospel message transforms the culture and lives in different form. This is to say the word of God is above all cultures and leads all cultures. However, for the word of God to animate and transform any culture, there is the need for proper methods.

#### **4. The Methods of Inculturation**

There are different methods of doing inculturation. There are some characteristics, which are common to all forms of inculturation. These are referred to as ‘Generic type.’ The Fathers of the church, following the teaching of the apostles

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<sup>20</sup> A. SHORTER, *Evangelization and Culture*, 6.

strongly advocated for the pluriformity that we today call inculturation.<sup>21</sup> The Vatican II council Fathers affirmed this statement adding more flesh to it in line of the teaching of Jesus. Jesus in his new covenant called all people, young and old, Jews and Gentiles to be new people of God. This is not from the flesh but in the Spirit.<sup>22</sup> This has been the strong point for John Paul II with his emphasise on John 3:3. “The Spirit blows wherever he wills.”

The Vatican II council stressed the universality of God’s call, which has its foundation in the created nature of the human being. Thus God’s saving power begun in creation and continue today in all races. These and many other good elements lay the foundation for the understanding of the Gospel.<sup>23</sup>

These theological reflections call for openness to individual’s cultures as well as races in respect to the religious contributions to the building of the church. Therefore the Vatican II council has this to say: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men...the church therefore urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussions and collaboration with members of other religions.”<sup>24</sup>

In addition to the theological reflection there are some practical elements, which contribute to pluriformity of inculturation. The first among them is

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 7.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 13.

<sup>24</sup> *Nostra Aetate* no. 2.

denomination difference. Each Christian or non-Christian religion while trying to deepening their knowledge about God in their own culture, needs to pay careful attention to their church's traditions and documents.

Therefore the point of departure of inculturation rests mostly on the people living the experience and their social environment. The word of God should be expressed through people's particular wholeness. This is to ensure the incarnation of the word taking flesh among us. 'And the Word became flesh and lived among us' (Jn.1:14).<sup>25</sup>

The examples from Archbishop Sarpong explain this better. He says where one comes from, where he lives and the environment conditions his whole personality. The environment determines his way of life, thinking, imageries and religious ideas. For example people who live in mountainous areas have ideas about mountains in their religious experience.<sup>26</sup>

In the same way the environment may indicate that one should be careful even in the use of scriptural texts and parables. This is because some general application in the biblical interpretation may be contradictory in some cultures. The Archbishop gave an interesting example from Trobriands who live on an island in the Pacific Ocean. These people live a kind of close relationship with pigs. For them the prodigal son, (Lk. 15:13-16), who squandered all his money and ended eating with pigs carries no value.<sup>27</sup> This calls for appreciation and study of people, their situation and environment in doing inculturation. From these principles, inculturation should include the existence of a local language as the medium to

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. BURKE, *Inculturation of Religious Life*, 189-190.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. P. K. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ*, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. P. K. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ*, 24-25.

transmit the gospel message. The local language must be seriously studied and developed to be able to convey the totality of the gospel message.<sup>28</sup> This needs much effort from the agents of inculturation.

Another aspect is the promotion of a maturing responsible and active participation of the laity. For inculturation to be successful, it needs the participation of the entire local church. It is only when the people are fully involved that they feel that what is being done is theirs and is for their own edification and sanctification.<sup>29</sup>

### **5. The Sources and Principles of Inculturation**

The sources and principles of inculturation are rooted in the mystery of the incarnation of Christ. "And the word became flesh and lived among us..." (Jn. 1: 14). This action of God in history is paradigmatic for the church's mission. "What God has done in Jesus *once and for all* (Heb. 7:27; 9: 26-28) in the historico-cultural terms of one particular people, the church must do among all peoples."<sup>30</sup>

The covenant that characterises the general outlook of the Jewish religion places great emphasis on God's will to place himself on a level of equality with people by making a reciprocal treat with them, in a covenant. God made his covenant with mankind and incarnated Himself through certain human rational forms.<sup>31</sup> God's determination to involve Himself in this contact was manifested by the love expressed to them by ever involving Himself in their day to day issues and also by being to their side in time on need and trouble. A covenant forms part of God's love, where God instituted the expression of fatherhood and demanded filial attitude in return. He further established the connotation of matrimony union in

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<sup>28</sup> Cf. J. M. WALIGGO, *Inculturation*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. J. M. WALIGGO, *Inculturation*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> E. HILLMAN, "Inculturation", 512.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. J. GALOT, *Who is Christ?*, 197.

which Yahweh appropriates the role and sentiments of the bridegroom. All these He did to show the ever-growing nearness to them through His involvement in their daily activities.

This institution of father-son, husband-wife relationship shows the authentic incarnation of God's love.<sup>32</sup> This is seen and implemented by the incarnation of God's word in the law, the prophets, of God's action in the history of the Jewish nation, God's presence in the midst of people, a presence localized in the Tent of Meeting and later in the Temple are all practical examples of inculturation. From here we can therefore conclude by saying that God adopted all the ways by which people communicate to one another where by; he spoke, he acted and he was present to them. In context we see incarnation as God's intention to enter into relationships with people by every possible means, and through kind of interpersonal contact.<sup>33</sup>

The Biblical God of the Old Testament is the God who promised them that "I will dwell among the Israelites, and I will be their God, and they shall know that I am the Lord their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt..." (Ex. 29 45-46; cf 26: 11-12)

When Jesus accepted the baptism of John, he professed his conformity with the tradition that had preceded him and with the messianic expectations it involved. By so doing he appeared as a culmination of long historical process. Now this historical process is considered in an incarnation of God among people.<sup>34</sup>

According to him Christian doctrine, incarnation is defined as eternal Son of God assuming a complete human nature as he was born of the Virgin Mary by the

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation*, 106-107.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation*, 107.

power of the Holy Spirit. This is the mystery of the second person of the blessed Trinity, Jesus Christ, becoming man.<sup>35</sup> This Word was with God at the beginning of creation. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word, was God. And the Word became flesh and lived among us. (Jn. 1: 1, 14).

This same Word of God, which was with him from the beginning, became a person and lives among people. This event has taken place in order to open up to people the way to divine life. It is a decisive point in human history of salvation.<sup>36</sup>

This is to say that when the Word is incarnated in Jesus, it became a living person in flesh and bone of Jesus Christ. In the act of God breathing his last word into the world, God became all in all in order to humanize the world and complete it according to his initial design.<sup>37</sup> Jesus was seen to perfect the world such that there should be a new earth and new heaven. The word made flesh further means that Christ became a visible person who lived among his people and participated in their day to day activities.

His erection of the Tent among us, and his physical body now show the ‘dynamism’ of incarnation at its closest range to people. Jesus lived among his people, learnt their culture, basically to make them become more close to him. This incarnate word came to perfect human nature by taking away all that is sin.<sup>38</sup> This was to eliminate what was wrong and redeem the people. This experience of Jesus’ life calls us to reflect on the totality of inculturation.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. E. A WEIS, “Inculturation”, 412.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. M. SCHMAUS, *God and his Christ*, 218.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. B. BUJO, *CHRISTMAS God Becomes Man in Black Africa*, 26.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. B. BUJO, *CHRISTMAS God Becomes Man in Black Africa*, 26.

## 6. The Scope of Inculturation

The scope of inculturation extends to the totality of the Christian life. It is important to note that inculturation should not be limited to some particular area of Christian life and mission. Talking to Archbishop Sarpong, he expressed his personal concern about some people limiting inculturation to the area of liturgy. He did not deny the fact that liturgy is a key area of inculturation; rather he highly recommended that inculturation should go beyond that. In the mind of the Archbishop, it appears to me that nothing should be left out of the process of inculturation. Rather all efforts should be put to gather to ensure that all aspects of Christian life influenced by the Gospel message.

Schineller reaffirmed that inculturation should extend far wider than liturgy by quoting Archbishop D. S. Lourdasamy, “Every aspect of the life and activity of the church should be inculturated or indigenous, indigenous life-style, indigenous arts, liturgy, spirituality, indigenous forms of religious life, indigenous organizations and institutions.”<sup>39</sup>

Archbishop Sarpong, reflecting on the words of his colleague Archbishop Lourdasamy, recommended three main elements which inculturation should deal with. The elements are Faith, Morality and Worship. These three elements make religion.<sup>40</sup>

Faith should be considered first in religion. To have a religion, you must believe in somebody or something, which is higher than yourself. You must believe in a reality that can help you and also you can depend upon.

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<sup>39</sup> P. SCHINELLER, *Inculturation*, 23-24.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. P. K. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ*, 34.

In morality, you mould your character to the wishes of the one you believe in. The being you believe in expects you to do good and avoid evil. This morality extends to the culture in which one lives. Therefore when we talk about elements proper to culture, we distinguish between good elements, evil elements and indifferent elements.

After faith and morality comes worship. Peoples who believe in the same being who is Supreme come together from time to time to express their faith, love and appreciation to whom they believe in the form of Liturgy.<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, to understand the scope of inculturation in a deeper sense, the church invites us to reflect on the image of the church as a Bride of Christ, which offers rich theological reflection for inculturation.<sup>42</sup> And as Waliggo says; “Whatever makes the church appear truly universal and truly local at the same time must be encouraged and promoted by all. It is in this sense, that Christian ministries and ministers, the Christian morality and spirituality, the Christian worship and living are all subject to inculturation so that Christianity in all its totality may accomplish its Founder’s mission to be to all people and win all for God.”<sup>43</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

The chapter has attempted to highlight the divine mystery of incarnation so as to encourage all people of God to take the challenge of inculturation. From the Church Fathers down to the local theologian, many attempts have been made to advocate and insist on the progress of inculturation. All these attempts are effort to bring to light the importance and urgent need of the divine mystery to be part and

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<sup>41</sup> Cf. P. K. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ*, 34.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Lumen Gentium* no. 6.

<sup>43</sup> J. M. WALIGGO, *Inculturation*, 19-20.

parcel of every culture. The divine mystery, which took place in the Old Testament and the New Testament, is to take place in every individual through their own culture realities. For the divine mystery to be incarnated into the culture there is the need for serious study of the local culture by the agents of inculturation. In this way the divine mystery, the word of God, authentically dwells and takes permanence among all the peoples in the world.

## **Chapter II.**

### **Theological Implications of Inculturation**

#### **1. Introduction**

The question of the relationship between the Christian message and inculturation finds its root in the incarnation of Christ (Jn. 1:14). In this text we have the full humanity of Jesus proclaimed. "In Jesus we see God living life, as He would have lived it if He had been a man".<sup>44</sup> How do we begin to explain and understand the awesome truth of God becoming a man, the transcendent became imminent and for what reason? This is where we need to delve into some of the theological implications concerning this truth to our lives.

This chapter therefore analyses the incarnation's effect on human quest for the person of God. Jesus claims that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father (Jn. 11:9). His incarnation brings a new way to apprehend God. Therefore it

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<sup>44</sup> W. BARCLAY, *The Gospel of John*. I, 65.

provides the criterion for assessing claim to have seen God. The fact that God has chosen to take human form means He has found the most effective way in which to express Himself to the world.

## 2. The Message of the Text

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.” (Jn. 1:14)

The main thought of this verse is the reality of Jesus Christ’s incarnation that the Son being made man. Literarily, these words mean that the Divine saviour took upon himself human nature. He became a real man like us in all things except sin.<sup>45</sup>

He was born of a woman; he grew from infancy to boyhood and to adulthood.

Having become flesh, he experienced hunger, thirst, pain, joy, anger and compassion. Like everyman, and especially born in a Jewish culture, Jesus prayed, read the scriptures, suffered and was tempted. In the same body he died and was buried. Though he did not cease to be God, he became what he was not previously. Thus, what was infinite became finite. That which was invisible became something tangible. That which was beyond the reach of human mind became that which could be beholden within realm of human life.

Ripley explanation summarises the text in a better way when he says; “The second person of the Trinity assumed a full, entire human nature, a created body and soul. Yet he never ceased to be God. Thus, the Word incarnate has two distinct natures, divine and human, yet only one person. Into the unity and dominion of the divine person, the human nature assumed, henceforth, the divine person would operate in the human nature and through it.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. P. K., SARPONG, *Peoples Differ*, 22.

<sup>46</sup> J. E. RIPLEY, *The Last Gospel*, 199.

However, their individual characteristics remain distinct. The divine nature exists in the human nature and is expressed through the human nature. The divine nature taken the form of a human nature enjoys the fullness of grace, which is God Himself. Hence, the invisible God is expressed in human nature so that man can obtain and experience God in the daily life. By so doing man fulfills the New Testament economy, which is his salvation.

### 3. Analysis of the Text

The deeper thought of the text is that Christ, the incarnate Son, came as the embodiment of God. He dwelt among men so that men could contact Him and live in Him to enjoy the riches contained in God.

*And the word became flesh:* This Christ event means that the eternal word took on the weakness of human existence: “he became flesh”. Thus “flesh” means the whole person of man in his weakness before God, in his fragility and mortality (Is. 31:3; 40:5-7). As McPolin explains; “The Son of God took on the earth-bound, transient and perishable quality of man and the humanity of Christ is the new and earth-bound place of God’s presence among his people, the dwelling place and sanctuary of a new covenant.”<sup>47</sup>

*And dwelt among us:* This phrase expresses the Greek word *eskenosen*, which implies dwelt as in a tent or tabernacle. Here McPolin says; “The theme of tent (tabernacle) has important Old Testament associations”.<sup>48</sup> Israel was told to make a sanctuary (Ex. 25: 8-9) and in this tent God would meet the people of Israel and commune with them (Ex. 25: 22).

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<sup>47</sup> J. MCPOLIN, *John*, 38.

<sup>48</sup> R.E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John Vol. 1*, 32.

In this tent the people would know that God dwells among them (Joel 3:17) forever (Eze. 43:7). The tent or tabernacle therefore “became the site of God’s localize presence on earth”<sup>49</sup> and in that “Jesus is replacement of the ancient tabernacle. The Gospel presented Jesus as the replacement of the Temple” ( Jn. 2: 19-22).<sup>50</sup>

*Full of grace and truth:* The word grace here has the idea of something completely undeserved. Something that one cannot earn by himself. The word grace emphasizes the helpless poverty of man and the limitless kindness of God. The fact that God can dwell among us and to die for us is an act of pure love on the part of God.<sup>51</sup>

*The word:* John used the ‘word’ to refer to Jesus the Son of God. The Greek term for ‘word’ is *logos*. *Logos* has two meanings: ‘word’ and ‘reason’ and these two meaning are intertwined. Whenever *Logos*, the twin idea is used what comes to mind is the word of God and reason of God.<sup>52</sup> The ‘word’, was in the beginning, was with God, and was God (Jn. 1: 1). Why did the word, which was God, decide to become man? The title “*the word* in verses 1 and 14 explained how the divine being was destined to speak to men”.<sup>53</sup> The divine Word, who was present at the time of creation, is now dwelling among his people.

The word made flesh is not only full of grace but also truth. Jesus is the embodiment of truth. “I am the truth” (Jn. 14:6). To see the truth we must look at Jesus. Jesus becomes the one who communicates the truth (Jn. 8: 31) and his

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<sup>49</sup> R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John Vol. 1*, 32.

<sup>50</sup> R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John Vol. 1*, 32-34.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Gospel of John Vol. 1*, 66.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Gospel of John Vol. 1*, 30.

<sup>53</sup> R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John Vol. 1*, 32.

objective is the truth (Jn. 18: 37). The same truth will continue to guide us (Jn. 14:17, 15:26, 16:13) and makes us free (Jn. 8:32). Jesus died for the same truth (Jn. 8:40, 18:37-38). John continued to say that this truth is not something abstract but something, which must be done (Jn. 3:21). He acknowledged that the truth could be dishelieved (Jn. 8:45), as some people may reject the teaching of Jesus.<sup>54</sup>

*We beheld his glory:* The thought of the divine presence in Jesus who now serves as the Tabernacle, full of grace and truth, overflows into God's glory. The word glory means brightness. When it is used of a person, glory has to do with how a person appears to others. It suggests a character that is attractive and honourable. But according to John glory here is more than an image of honour, for it is a revealed character of God. In the Old Testament, glory of God implies luminous and powerful manifestation of God to men (Ex. 24:15-16).<sup>55</sup>

This glory is frequently seen in the power of God both in nature (Ps. 19:1) and in salvation history (Num. 14:22). "Just before the destruction of Temple, the glory of God left the city (Eze. 11:23), but in the vision of the restoration of the Temple, the glory of God once more filled the building (Eze. 34:4). Thus John referred to the particular manifestation of the glory of the incarnate word."<sup>56</sup> The glory has concrete manifestation in the witness of the apostles Peter, John and James in the transfiguration (Lk. 9:28-32). Thus when we look at this word become flesh, we see God's glory. The word becomes spirit bearing and we see the divine glory precisely in the flesh.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, 66-68.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Gospel of John*, Vol. 1, 68-69.

<sup>56</sup> R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John* Vol. 1, 34.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John* Vol. 1, 34.

#### 4. Theological Reflection on the Text

The reality that God became a man is certainly a mystery. The infinite God joined with finite man by becoming a man is a testament to God's love for us.

To understand the theological implications of the text, we turn to verse 1 where we are told the "divine being was destined to speak to men."<sup>58</sup> John made it clear that the "Word" is none other than God himself (Jn. 1:1). "The Word took on human form and thus founded the most effective way in which to express himself to men. In becoming flesh the Word does not cease to be the Word but exercises his function as Word to the full."<sup>59</sup>

The truth of the matter is that the Word-Jesus Christ did not come to existence when he took on flesh. He was always and existed. He was the same God who confronted Moses in the burning bush and gave his name as "I am" (Ex: 3:13). He is the same Christ who told the Jews, "Before Abraham was born, I am" (Jn.8:58). And so the person of Jesus Christ is eternal. Through the incarnation of Jesus Christ the eternal God now become eternal man.

The Son of God actually became man as he was conceived by the Holy Spirit. To this we use the expression; Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man. This testimony of John is unique. He directs men's attention to the word-Jesus Christ whose life is our light. He presents the 'word made flesh' as a man visible to our eyes and human like us. This means that the "divine presences, which it was

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<sup>58</sup> R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John Vol. 1*, 32.

<sup>59</sup> R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John Vol. 1*, 32.

believed was especially located in the tabernacle and later in the temple has now come to dwell in the man Jesus.”<sup>60</sup>

John continued to say that the Word is full of grace and truth. The truth is that we meet God in the person of his Son Jesus. When you come to know what Jesus is like, you know what God is like. Thus, God reveals himself in Jesus. In a sense everything that we see in Jesus is so real of who God is. God is the truth and the truth is the reality of God. God is not only the truth but also the grace. God is free, overflowing and lavish his good to sinful creatures, this is grace. This is the essence of God’s reality because nothing reveals the fullness of His deity more than the freedom of his grace. God is full and sufficient in his himself a does not want us to meet his need.<sup>61</sup>

However, He is surging with infinite energy and fullness to meet ours, and this is grace, which we see in the glory of God. This grace and truth are the son’s hereditary right. Jesus possessed them from the first moment of conception and possesses them in all their fullness. He matured in this grace and truth with God and with men (Lk. 2: 52).<sup>62</sup>

The life of Jesus was the manifestation of God’s glory. In the Old Testament the glory of God comes at a time, when God was close to his people (Ex. 16: 10, 24:16 40:34, Eze.1: 28, Is. 6:3).<sup>63</sup> At Mount Sinai God established a covenant love with His people, and in the same setting, the tabernacle became the dwelling for

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<sup>60</sup> R. V. G. TASKER, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 48.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Gospel of John, Vol. 1*, 66-67.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. F. J. RIPLEY, *The Last Gospel*, 214.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Gospel of John, Vol. 1*, 69.

God's glory. So now "the supreme exhibition of God's love is the incarnate word, Jesus Christ the new tabernacle of divine glory."<sup>64</sup>

### **5. Inculturation as Incarnation of the Word**

We have seen the gradual incarnation of the word of God starting from the Old Testament where we see the Son involvement in the creation story (Gen. 1:26). He is the same God who was with the Israelites (Ex. 25:22). He is the same God who was and is (Ex. 3:14, Jn. 1:1). The movement of incarnation is therefore held in Jesus. Everything contacted in the old is perfectly fulfilled in the new and in a unique form. The newness consists in the fact that Christ is himself the whole incarnation.<sup>65</sup>

As Jesus accepted the baptism of John he professed his conformity with the tradition that had preceded him and with the messianic expectations it involved. By so doing he appeared as a culmination of long historical process. This historical process is considered as incarnation of God among people.<sup>66</sup> John proclaims that the word became flesh and dwelt among men, that is; "The flesh of Jesus Christ is the new localization of God's presence on earth".<sup>67</sup> The word did not only become man to redeem man, which he could have done by a single act of his will. He lived among us so that we could learn how God lives a human life. Christ's life focused on Godhead into human life. In Christ we see God worshipping, praying, teaching,

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<sup>64</sup> R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 1*, 35.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 1*, 40-41.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. G. GUTIERREZ, *A Theology of Liberation*, 106-107.

<sup>67</sup> R. E. BROWN, *The Gospel According to John, Vol. 1*, 33.

suffering, obeying and humbling himself (Phi. 2:6-9). In short we see God practicing every virtue.<sup>68</sup>

As noted earlier we see God in the person of Christ growing from childhood with all his struggles. God as a man lived in a home in the village in the countryside in the community with family and friends.<sup>69</sup>

Why should God live with man? By living with man he becomes a model for man to emulate. Man's life therefore has to be changed in every aspect. These aspects have to refocus on God. God has to be brought into work and play, art and science, state and politics, civil and social life, family and education. The whole order of what is not Christian has to be uprooted and take the direction of the person of Christ. Evil customs and worships have to be incarnated. That is everything in human life has to be transformed into the image of the incarnate Son.

An interview with Archbishop Sarpong, he explained that this is the real inculturation. He stressed the fact that inculturation has no limit. All aspects of human life has to be inculturated, has to be touched by the word of God. This idea has serious implications for the official worship of the Church. In the words of liturgist Anscar Chupungco, we might conclude that liturgy must; "think, speak, and ritualize according to the local culture pattern."<sup>70</sup>

Inculturation therefore must continually returns to the incarnation of Jesus Christ for its paradigm. Jesus immersed himself in his Jewish culture. He observed the laws and customs of his time with critical approach. He spoke strongly about the narrow and legalistic interpretation of the law. In this way Jesus learnt the language

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<sup>68</sup> Cf. P.K. SARPONG, *Peoples Differ*, 22.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. F. J. RIPLEY, *The Last Gospel*, 202.

<sup>70</sup> A. CHUPUNCO, *Liturgical Inculturation*, 30.

and customs (Lk. 2: 27, 39-52). Through these he expressed the truth and love of God. He instinctively took part fully in the culture he was born into. As a result he was able to critically affirm and challenged that culture. In the words of Pedro Arrupe: “The incarnation of the Son is the primary motivation and perfect pattern for inculturation. Just like him and because he did so, the church will become incarnate, a vitally and intimately as it can in every culture, being enriched with its values and offering it the unique redemption of Christ, his messages and resources for a new life.”<sup>71</sup>

In the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, Vatican II invites the whole Church to emulate the example of Jesus as way of doing inculturation. It explains that in order to offer salvation mystery to all men, the church must implant itself among all cultures in the same way that Christ through his incarnation committed himself to his Jewish culture.<sup>72</sup>

Incarnation therefore offers us an obligation of Jesus example. We are to identify ourselves with the culture, people and history we are part of it. We are to take seriously God’s creation and human re-creation of that world through culture<sup>73</sup>. In this way, God’s love and truth are revealed and made present in and through particular cultures and in its contexts.

## **6. The Church and Inculturation**

As we noted in chapter one, inculturation is the integral element of the church’s mission and evangelization in the world. The Church sees inculturation as a logical consequence of the great commandment of love for God and neighbour.

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<sup>71</sup> In P. SCHINELLER, *Inculturation*, 20.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *Ad Gentes Divinus*, no.1

<sup>73</sup> Cf. P. SCHINELLER, *Inculturation*, 21.

Throughout the history of the Church, inculturation has been part and parcel of the process of the church either directly or indirectly. However, the idea of inculturation received its fullest theoretical expression in Pope John II addresses and writings. His predecessors through the Papal, councilor and synodal declarations testified to an evolution of the same thought. Without repeating historical details, we look at some of the instances where the Church directly or indirectly has expressed concern for the need of inculturating the Gospel message.

After the World War II, Pope Benedict XV expressed his concern to strengthen and co-ordinate the Catholic missionary efforts. He asked mission heads in particular countries to collaborate with one another to negotiate common interests together.<sup>74</sup> In the same document the Pope stressed the need for adequate training of the local clergies to be fitted for the divine tasks and to enable them to undertake with credit the administration of his own people.<sup>75</sup> Through the influential thought of Benedict XV the church of Zaire started reflecting about her liturgical rite and today we have Zairean rite.<sup>76</sup>

In 1926 Pius XI “Pope of the missions” as he was named, issued his encyclical letter *Rerum Ecclesiae* on the mission exhibition. It included the specimen of the Christians art from mission countries, which was an unconscious instance of inculturation.<sup>77</sup>

The unrest of inculturation continuous until Vatican II when in fact the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy was the first councilor document to be approved

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<sup>74</sup> Cf. *Maximum Illud*, nos. 34-35.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. *Maximum Illud*, no. 35.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER, *Theology of Inculturation*, 181.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER, *Theology of Inculturation*, 180-181.

and promulgated.<sup>78</sup> Finally in the 1974, the concept of inculturation became more crucial and more compelling. The message of Vatican II indicates that inculturation is crucial because it is a vital dimension of every mission of the Church to evangelise cultures and enriched by them.<sup>79</sup>

When Pope John Paul II assumed office, he took up the challenge of inculturation, beginning with his apostolic exhortation *Catechism Tradendae*. The Pope sees inculturation as a factor of the great mystery of incarnation, which brings the power of the gospel to every heart of culture and cultures.<sup>80</sup> The Pope's visits to Africa have strengthened the urgent need of the Church inculturation. According to John Paul II, the evangelizers who effectively inculturate the faith do open the culture to universal value, hence to the light of the revelation and to the Gospel of Christ. "Therefore an unremitting effort of the inculturation must be perused in order that the faith may not remain superficial."<sup>81</sup>

Today after the concept has undergone several changes, the Church still considers inculturation as the practical way to make the gospel message to be rooted in all individuals and their own cultures. While it is true that the concept of inculturation favours Church's mission, it cannot dispense with the other basic ecclesiological component, which is the hierarchy. As shorter stated: "Catholic missions rest on the promise of teaching authority exercised in matter of faith, sacrament and ministry."<sup>82</sup> That is any form of inculturation is subjected to local ordinary approval as well as the central authority. This is to ensure strictly the

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<sup>78</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER, *Theology of Inculturation*, 191.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER *Theology of Inculturation*, 211-215.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER *Theology of Inculturation*, 225.

<sup>81</sup> L'Osservatore Romano, 9 September, 1985.

<sup>82</sup> A. SHORTER, *Evangelisation and Culture*, 85.

logical consequence of an honest acceptance of the inculturation, which is of true catholicity.

## **7. Conclusion**

As we come to the end of our reflection on this chapter, St. John bids us with some thoughts. The eternal Word, equal in all things with the Father became man and lived among us. For our sake he came on earth to be incarnated in order that we could see God in the person of his Son. Christ is God; he is full of divine life. By becoming one of us, he gives the same life to us and makes us share his own divine life. Peter, James and John saw his glory when they detached from all that is not God. That is our vocation and the vocation of the whole church. The object of our call is to make Christ known to all people and transforms all cultures and makes them dwelling places of God.

## Chapter III

### Pastoral Implications of Inculturation

#### 1. Introduction

In this chapter we are going to take inculturations of Christianity as insertion of the Christian faith in the people's culture.<sup>83</sup> We take inculturation of Christianity as the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time<sup>84</sup>. It emphasizes on the reformation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people. It is the conviction that Christ and his good news are ever dynamic and challenging at all times and cultures as they become better understood and lived by each people. It is a continuous endeavor to make Christianity effective in the cultures of each people.

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<sup>83</sup> Cf. JOHN. PAUL II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 44.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. J. M. WALIGGO, *Making a Church that is Truly African*, 12.

## 2. The Concept of Inculturation and its Implications

We noted in the first chapter that the search for a clear definition of Inculturation has not ended. All that we have are descriptive definitions. These sometimes pose difficulty when it comes to the implication of inculturation. However, we can identify some elements it implies by setting new emphases on the relationship between the Church and culture. Since the Church's inception it has always engaged with cultures having Pentecost event as her model. The apostles who were present in the Pentecost event gave testimony to inculturation (Acts 2:1-13). In this event the Holy Spirit gave birth to Church and at the same time the event became very public act of inculturation. The apostles became the first witnesses to the creative act of inculturation and agents of inculturation, given us the practical implication of inculturation.<sup>85</sup>

Inculturation therefore has to be understood in "its elementary and modest use."<sup>86</sup> Effort has to be made to clarify what it meant when the word inculturation is used. As adaptation definition suggests, inculturation is an expression of dynamic relation between the Church and the variety of cultures.<sup>87</sup> It is a process by which individual becomes part of the culture. This implies that inculturation is not insertion of individual into his culture, but the process by which the Church becomes part of the culture of the people. Thus the term inculturation denotes the process by which the Church becomes inserted in a given culture. In this sense when we speak about

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<sup>85</sup> Cf. J. O. GAGGAWALA, *Fully Christian Fully Man*, 85.

<sup>86</sup> J. W. WALIGGO, *Inculturation*, 31.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. P. SHINELLER, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 16-17.

enculturation; we speak of the insertion of the Church in a culture, rather than of an individual.<sup>88</sup>

Inculturation as a theological discourse corresponds to the consideration of the salvific event in Jesus Christ. Here we consider the human reality in relation to the Christ event. “Given Christ event as basis of inculturation, it is easier to see the dynamic quality of inculturation as an ongoing process of doing theology.”<sup>89</sup> This implies a historical extension of the mystery of the incarnation, whereby the divine and human elements meet. In this way, “both incarnation and culture exist in a kind of symbiotic process of give and take.”<sup>90</sup>

Inculturation therefore would imply accommodating culture thereby animating, orienting and innovating people’s life.<sup>91</sup> It becomes an attempt to interpret and evaluate God’s revelation to humanity. It demands that the revelation takes root in the culture. It becomes part and parcel of the people’s life and makes the cultural values of the people rich.<sup>92</sup>

### **3. Inculturation- The Growth into one’s Culture**

Inculturation of Christianity is to make the message of Christ received in one’s own setting. Just as the Old Testament was able to form the Israelites into a people of God because it incorporated their world view, their histories, their wisdom, their culture, their total identity, so do the process of Inculturation of Christianity help us to form the people. The God of the Hebrews was nearer to them

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<sup>88</sup> Cf. J. W. WALIGGO, *Inculturation*, 31-32.

<sup>89</sup> P. C. CHIBUKO, “Liturgical Inculturation”, 4.

<sup>90</sup> P. C. CHIBUKO, “Liturgical Inculturation”, 4.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. P.K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, 22.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. L. J. Lebulu, “Inculturation”, 212.

he was actively participating in their daily life, consequently they could relate with him in all circumstances.

From this we can tell that God does not operate in vacuum he needs a medium, which in this case is a person in his own natural setting. God can not encounter and save man except within his being as man. Relating to him outside his context as a human being, then a person ceases to be a real self, and the message carries no meaning. Jesus comes to render the whole humanity and not part of it.<sup>93</sup>

Inculturation of Christianity continues to serve the same purpose of helping Christians to see Christianity not as a foreign religion, which has nothing to do with their day to day life. It helps to close the gap and avoid the dichotomy, which most Christians experience in their living of faith. Inculturation of Christianity makes Christianity enter into the blood and veins of the people. The early Church proclaimed the good news, the gospel of Jesus in their different cultural set up and situations. As the Gospel passed from the Hebrew culture to other peoples it underwent massive inculturation, in the same way this has to be done even now through the Inculturation of Christianity.

In the past there has been a tendency to identify the cultural conditional expression of our faith in Jesus Christ with 'Christianity as such.' We do not realize that 'Christianity as such' does not exist. Christianity is assimilated into people's lives. It becomes at home when it touches people's lives where and as they are. Many times it has been stated that faith is not culture, and it is true because faith can only find expression and lived in a given culture. It becomes living and dynamic in terms of culture. Pope Paul VI had no hesitation when he called for evangelisation

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<sup>93</sup> Cf. F. DOMINGUES, *Christology and Traditional*, 509.

saying; “Evangelisation will lose much of its power and efficacy if it does not take into consideration the people to whom it is addressed, if it does not make use of their language, their signs and their symbols (culture), if it does not answer to the questions which are relevant to them, and if in word it does not reach and influence their way of life”<sup>94</sup>.

The pontiff here called for the attention to the individuality of particular churches and peoples, which definitely will enrich the universal church. Such attention will help them to discover their own identity. It will respond to the very nature of Jesus the Church of Christ, which embraced all people of the world and to embrace them in their characteristic and their way of being. So Inculturation is the task of every Christian to allow it to take hold of his inmost being.

Inculturation of Christianity as we have discussed is an on going process. In recent document of the Church Inculturation of Christianity is seen as the process by which the catechizes ‘*take Flesh*’ in various cultures.<sup>95</sup> It involves the ultimate transformation of the authentic cultural values into accepted Christian value. Faith therefore must continue its dialogue with a culture or cultures. More fully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and the culture or cultures.<sup>96</sup>

#### **4. Inculturation as On-going Process**

The analysis of the concept of inculturation has shown that it is not simple, one time effort. In the words of Joan Burke, the process of inculturation is “a long term, on going process in which the message receive through a concrete medium

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<sup>94</sup> *Evangelii Nutiandi*, no. 11.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Ecclesia in African*, 59.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER, *Theology of Inculturation*, 11

interacts with a group of human beings situated in a given socio-cultural tradition at a specific moment.”<sup>97</sup>

Important to the process of inculturation is the openness and active awareness of the individuals who are living the experience. The gospel message has to affect people’s thought patterns and values as the standard of judgment. Just as Jesus took flesh in a particular culture and time, the gospel message has to become incarnated in the different cultures within which people live.<sup>98</sup>

In the words of missiologist Donal Dorr, inculturation is a continuous process. “It would be totally wrong to assume that the process of inculturation has already been completed in the Western world and to imagine that Western culture has already been fully Christianised and is now a Christian culture... Western culture like other cultures needs to be transformed in the light of the gospel and by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>99</sup>

Dorr’s explanation is well expressed by Shorter when he says, “Inculturation is a task always yet to be achieved because it involves a never-ending appeal to cultural conversion.”<sup>100</sup> Therefore, we are obliged to remain within the realm of towards discourse where inculturation is concerned. There is no ready-made model. This is because “the gospel escapes domestication.”<sup>101</sup>

In the same way Dorr acknowledged that the transformation of a culture through the gospel is an on-going process, which is never complete. He is of the

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<sup>97</sup> J. BURKE, *Towards the Inculturation*, 19.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*, 94.

<sup>99</sup> D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*, 94.

<sup>100</sup> A. SHORTER, *Evangelisation and Culture*, 33.

<sup>101</sup> L. Newbigin, *The Enduring Validity of Cross-cultural Mission*, 50.

view that even the patterns of living that seemed to have come close to the Christian ideal may suddenly be shown up as having some major weakness.<sup>102</sup>

We can therefore deduce from the reality that envisaged inculturation that it is a process throughout the existence of the Church. This reality is far back as the time of Gregory the Great. As the Pope admits, it is impossible to effect radical changes all at once and one must proceed slowly and by stages.<sup>103</sup> Thus every age and time in the Church's life needs inculturation. This calls for dialogue with the people and their culture.

### **5. Inculturation as a Dialogue among Cultures**

Inculturation is an ongoing dialogue between cultural and religious faith. By definition religion is a cultural system. It helps people to construct their lives, using the symbolic and concepts of their culture.

The starting point of inculturation is recognising the presence of the Spirit of God in a culture of a particular people. Missiologist Donal Dorr was convinced with this notion when he says: "This work of the Spirit becomes embodied to a greater or lesser extent in people's culture and way of life. So when a formal process of evangelisation begins to take place the first task of the evangeliser is to recognise and celebrate this prior work of the Spirit."<sup>104</sup>

Inculturation does not come automatically. Those evangelisers who take challenge of inculturation are to empty themselves and take example of Jesus (Phil. 2: 7). Although they cannot remove their long philosophical tradition, which forms part of their thinking, they should open their minds and try to enter deeply into

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<sup>102</sup> Cf. D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*, 95.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. P. SHINELLER, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 32.

<sup>104</sup> D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*, 91.

another person's worldview. This brings mutual understanding and a common action. It fosters freedom, openness and reconciliation, which are the conditions and prerequisites necessary for persons of different world-views to engage in a mutual dialogue. In this the Church is able to assimilate and transform the cultural value with the gospel message.

Inculturation and dialogue have become important concept of the mission theology since Vatican II, especially in the document *Gadium et Spes*, which the council seems to stress the priority of the faith over culture.<sup>105</sup> However, some writers regard the culture as the ultimate source and norm of faith. They are of the view that the elements of the gospel are already hidden in every culture. It is therefore the work of pastoral agents to find this hidden treasure and bring it to light.<sup>106</sup>

This insight has important consequences. As Shorter puts it; "The word inculturation correctly express the sociological and theological reality, both at the individual and collective, cultural level. Inculturation should be carried out in partnership by individuals who represent different cultures."<sup>107</sup>

Therefore I believe that dialogue is one of the concrete ways to do inculturation. When persons are willing to focus on a common goal, they listen to each other and admit that nobody has the whole truth in himself. If inculturation is carried out in this way, people will be able to understand better the God's universal plan of salvation.

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. *Gaudium st Spes*, no.10.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. P. SHINELLER, *Inculturation*, 26-27.

<sup>107</sup> A. SHORTER, *Theology of Inculturation*, 14.

## 6. Inculturation as Enrichment of the Church

In spite of some difficulties, Inculturation has received the Church's appraisal until the recent directives from Rome, which seem to suggest that the Vatican has little enthusiasms for profound inculturation of liturgy.<sup>108</sup>

The message of Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* on inculturation is explicit and compelling indicating that inculturation is important in the Church. It is a vital dimension of the very mission of the Church to evangelise cultures and be enriched by them<sup>109</sup>. John Paul II stressing the importance of inculturation says that the evangelisers who effectively inculturate the faith, do open the culture to universal value, hence to the light of the revelation and to the gospel of Christ.<sup>110</sup>

Missiologist Roest Crollins shares the same views when he says that inculturation creates a new unity and communion within the culture in question and also an enrichment of the Universal Church.<sup>111</sup> Dorr expelled out clearly that the process of inculturation brings about "an enrichment of the Church itself, It creates the church anew, embodies the gospel, and then enriches the Church"<sup>112</sup>

The process of inculturation also enriches the missionaries in their work as well as the local people who are in the same Church. It is enriching at the personal and at the collective, cultural level. The enrichment is reciprocal. The Christian message transforms the culture, in the sense that the cultural values also enrich

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<sup>108</sup> Cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum* no. 4.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, no. 63.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER, *Theology of Inculturation*, 232.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. J. M. WALIGGO, *Inculturation*, 43.

<sup>112</sup> D. DORR, *Mission in Today's World*, 95.

Christianity.<sup>113</sup> To this John Paul II says that by becoming inculturated in different areas the Church comes to know and to express better the mystery of Christ.<sup>114</sup>

In this way the Church shares the fundamental elements of the gospel. The gospel message is then incarnated in a uniquely original way. The Church then grows in number and enormously enriched in its understanding of the gospel and in the way it responds in faith.

## 7. Recommendations

Inculturation as a theological term is comparatively new in the Church, though the reality is said to be old as the Church. The many descriptive definitions given in the first chapter bear witness to this fact. As a new term inculturation needs careful study.

In these descriptive definitions, inculturation is a way of teaching the Gospel message such that it will be according to and through the concepts, ideas and vision of a given people. The customs that are in the people's culture are to be inserted in the Christianity. I am convinced that if people are allowed to insert their models into the Christian reflection, art and liturgy without compromising Christian standards, they will certainly find Christian teaching more meaningful.

As it appeared several times in this reflection, if inculturation is to be achieved, there must be a basic understanding of the core of one's culture. It should be noted that even the committed Christians are heavily oriented towards the observance of popular beliefs and practices, which are sanctioned by the community. Therefore there is the need for the Church to come to terms with cultural practices of its converts.

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<sup>113</sup> Cf. A. SHORTER, *Theology of Inculturation*, 14.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, no.52.

At this point, I would like to recommend strongly the statement of Archbishop Peter K. Sarpong as one of the concrete ways of approaching inculturation. In the introduction to the recent book "Peoples Differ", His Grace stated that he made a regulation, which compels all missionaries coming to his Diocese to devote at least three months acquainting themselves to the life of people in the Diocese.<sup>115</sup>

It is my strongest believe that, many bishops have taken similar steps in this challenge of inculturation. However, to clear the doubt, I would recommend that the native clergies especially the Bishops, who have not taken the step, should emulate the example of His Grace Peter Sarpong, to initiate movement of inculturation in the various dioceses. In addition, seminars and symposiums should be organized which should be attended by priests, nuns and lay people who are well informed on the culture of the group they come from. They are to find out elements in their own mold, which could possibly be inculturated.

As Archbishop Sarpong recommend in my discussion with him on this reflection, those to take the challenge of inculturation should be consultative team of experts; Experts who are well informed in their culture and the Catholicity of the Church. This is to ensure that Faith is taken in its totality of the Christian experience. The concrete mode, in which Christianity is incarnated in the people, lived by them and manifested in the existence.

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<sup>115</sup> Not long after I had become a Bishop, I made a regulation that missionaries both African and non-African, coming to the Diocese of Kumasi, devote at least 3 months to acquainting themselves with the life of the Asante in particular and Ghanaians in general. For this purpose, a programme of cultural orientation was drawn up which comprised an introduction, the grammar of the Asante language, colloquial Asante, liturgical Asante and Asante culture. My part in this course was the *Introduction on the Culture of the Asante and Ghanaians*.

It should be noted that the Pastoral agents are not only working with the people, but also living with them. Therefore there is the need to reflect on how they can help to integrate the culture into Christian life. Often times they have to ask themselves; How did Jesus do it? As the reflection on “Incarnation” has shown, it was through participatory observation. This should be the challenge to Church and her Pastoral agents.

The Church should witness to deeper values. Living an authentic life should safeguard and promote the essential values of the culture of the people. The Church should be sufficiently flexible to incorporate and promote life style and rhythms of his member. The entire first letter of Paul to the Corinthians was to promote the unity of the Church in Corinth. Eventually, in chapter 12, Paul calls the people of Corinth to the unity using Christ as their model.

It should be noted that not all expressions and practices of people’s religiosity have the same value for inculturation. This statement is primary based on the fact that not all cultural practices are compatible with the official teaching of the Church. Therefore the cultural practices should be purified and renewed to take the form of “incarnated word”. The mystery of the Trinity and the theologically balanced Christ image should be at the heart of the cultural practice.

## **8. Conclusion**

The analysis of the Pastoral Implication offers us with some challenges of doing inculturation. First, the concept itself needs a thorough study in the order to grasp the meaning and to integrate it into the culture of the people. As concept, inculturation has to grow into the people’s culture and way of life. This needs time and continuous reflection since culture in dynamic, always changing. One cannot do

this in isolation and therefore need to dialogue with the people and their culture. This also calls for humility, acceptance and appreciation of elements one's culture and way of life. Like Jesus, one has to empty himself (Phi. 2:7) in order to assimilate the cultural elements. It is the only way one can evaluate, challenge and purify these elements into Christian living.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

The reflection on “Inculturation and Incarnation is a two sided coin. One side consists how the Gospel message is to be understood by the pastoral agents. The other side includes how the message, which is understood, is applied and lived in the cultural context. The Incarnation of the Son of God is therefore the model to unite the two thoughts.

In the Old Testament we see God who speaks through intermediaries and ever coming near to his people by localizing his presence in the Tent of meeting. Then in the Temple in order to be more humanly accessible, God shows his total involvement. He accompanies the people through his thought, will and activity and offers his permanent presence.

“The Word become flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). This is the incarnation of Jesus Christ where the love of God is fully incarnated by sending his only son Jesus to be among people. The Son of God is to stay with people near their culture and to all their things to make them understand the message of Good news in their own setting.

Inculturation therefore becomes the most profound way to be at the heart of each Christian. Christianity will carry a meaning when it takes the culture of people seriously. In this way, the culture will be sustained and carried that meaning when it

incorporates faith in itself. In the words of Shorter; “Faith has survived because it has become culture and culture has survived because it has become faith.”<sup>116</sup>

The Church’s call today is to uphold the religious and human values of local cultures in the power of the Gospel. This has to be done in the light of a certain culture in which the gospel finds itself. The proclamation of the Good News about Jesus Christ does not outmode the traditions but gladly recognizes the truth they contain.

In the light of inculturating the Gospel message, respect, dialogue and Christian love are essential for preserving and promoting oneself and the culture. These are prerequisite to see beyond people’s masks and culture in order to touch more than the surface. The Church, Pastoral agents as well as individuals Christian should be willing to suffer, sacrifice their life for one another’s sake. To struggle together in love for the sake of the Gospel and the salvation of souls is what the Church is all about.

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<sup>116</sup> A. SHORTER, *Evangelisation and Culture*, 106.

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