

TANGAZA COLLEGE

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA (CUEA)

BIBLICAL DEPARTMENT

INCULTURATION FROM A SCRIPTURAL PERSPECTIVE

Long Essay submitted to the Biblical Department in partial fulfillment of the
requirement for Bachelor of Arts, Religious Studies

By
PAUL NAMPOTA, OCD

Moderator: REV. FR. AELRED LACOMARA, CP.

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Student's Declaration

Inculturation From a Scriptural Perspective

by

Paul Nampota, ocd.

I declare that this essay is my own original work and has not been submitted to any other educational institution for an academic credit.

Signed.....*P. Nampota* o.c.d.

Date.....*16th feb. 1998*

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INTRODUCTION

Do you remember the first time you heard the word 'inculturation'? I do. I was in my first year of formation as a postulant in the Order of Discalced Carmelites. From then on, I began to hear of different types of inculturation, some contradictory. Most of what I read about this subject seemed positive. What I heard about this subject appeared pessimistic, how impractical it is.

This essay is a reflection on the issue of inculturation. It is good to keep in mind that inculturation has always been in the heart of the church, right from the beginning. Of the many examples available to show how seriously the Church has taken this issue of inculturation, I have picked two: (1) the Church of the Apostles whose story we read in Luke-Acts; and (2) the Church of Africa.

Also, there is considerable weight given the issue of inculturation at Tangaza College, where I am presenting this essay as a partial fulfillment of the degree Bachelor of Arts and Religious Studies awarded by the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). This stimulated my interest in the subject, and I began reading more on this topic. While reading, I came to realize that there is a development of theology called 'Theology of Inculturation.' This theology attempts to reflect inculturation in the areas of Liturgy, Christology, Christian Anthropology, only to mention a few.

So far I have not seen any literature which reflects on inculturation as seen from a Biblical perspective. All the same, I learned much from Fr. Nicholas Fogliaco.¹ Fr. Lacomara² also reflects in his classes how inculturation has been used in the development of Israel's faith in the One God. From them I learned that there are many other ways we can use Scripture to reflect on the issue of inculturation. Encouraged by what they taught me, I thought it wise to reflect on my own about a topic of inculturation to see what other themes I could uncover in Scripture. Since Scripture is a wide field, I limited myself to the New Testament, and even more

¹In the Triune God and Christian Anthropology, Fr. Fogliacco uses a theology of inculturation to substantiate his subject matter to suit our reality as African students and students who are preparing to work in Africa.

²Who appeals to inculturation in his teaching of Scripture, especially in Wisdom Literature and Letters of St. Paul.

specifically, to the Book of Luke-Acts. Hence this essay reflects "Inculturation in the light of Luke-Acts." In the first chapter, I define inculturation. Also, I tried to see how we can talk about inculturation today, when things change so fast and cultures are changing. And if we can rightly speak of inculturation at all, who are to be involved in these efforts in our Church of Africa today.

The second chapter has three parts, following the divisions of Luke's Gospel: The Infancy Narrative, The Ministry, and The Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus. Through this process, I have come to reflect about the 'Incarnation as a divine step to inculturation.' The second chapter shows further that inculturation is "letting our daily lives be transformed by the Gospel and giving of a new expression to the Gospel in our daily lives."³

In this attempt, Luke the Evangelist has been my resource theologian. I reflected on the theme of inculturation in the story of Jesus that Luke presents in the Gospel and the birth and development of the Church in the Book of Acts. Hence the outline of the second chapter is as follows:

- * Incarnation as a divine step to inculturation. This is the main theme of the chapter.
- * Theology of inculturation in the Book of Luke-Acts. Focusing on Luke as a theologian of inculturation in addition to being a historian and apologist of the Christian faith.
- * And through the stages mentioned above: infancy, ministry, and passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the essay reaches its goal in exemplifying Incarnation as a divine step to inculturation.

The third chapter concentrates on how the Church has carried out the divine plan to save all humankind by adopting inculturation as a vessel for communicating this salvation to the people of the nations. Outstanding in this work of saving humanity is the Holy Spirit who is the key agent of inculturation. Through the human instruments of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and other disciples, the Spirit communicated the saving message of God to the Gentiles and enabled them to accept this message as their Good News. This has all been possible by the use of inculturation.

³See page 8., below.

In the conclusion I have tried to draw together and show how the Church of Africa continues the same story of Jesus and the Church of the Apostles in the furthering of salvation to the people of Africa through inculturation under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Hence this essay's title, "Inculturation from a Scriptural Perspective."

The Bible translation used for quotations in this essay is: The Catholic Study Bible, edited by Donald Senior, printed by the Oxford Press, New York, 1990.

CHAPTER ONE

INCULTURATION AND ITS MEANING

The synod of Africa reflected a great deal on the topic of inculturation. This synod considered inculturation an urgent priority in the life of the local Churches for firm rooting of the Gospel, especially here in Africa. This is an indication that the spreading of the Gospel to the peoples of the world would be of little success if inculturation were neglected. Hence the topic of inculturation is a topic worthy reflecting on, in all the times and ages for it is at the heart of the Church's central mission, which is to bring forth the Gospel to the whole world as she strives to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations (Lk 24: 47).⁴

Already, then, this shows the the problem of inculturation has always been there since the beginning of the Church and beyond. In spite of its long existence, this topic is always new and fresh. It offers new questions and challenges in all ages. And these challenges are still with us today. Our question today is: Since we are witnessing a lot of changes in the values and behaviors of the people, the norms of most cultures are no longer followed. Is there any culture existing now? If there is no culture at all, then what is the relevance of this topic of inculturation, that the synod stressed? Before plunging into this vast area of inculturation it may be wise first to stop and reflect on what do we really mean when we use this concept, inculturation.

The synod came to the understanding of inculturation as, "The ultimate transformation of the authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in the human cultures."⁵ In this definition given by the synod we see the word "culture" is coming again and again. This brings us back to our question we are trying to answer. Can we say that there is culture today? Or how can we understand culture today?

⁴ "and that, in his name, the repentance for forgiveness of sin would be preached to all the nations beginning from Jerusalem."

⁵John Paul II: Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *The Church in Africa*, no. 59, Paulines Publications, Africa, 1995, p 44.

I. CULTURE

Okot p'Bitek in his book *Artist the Ruler*⁶ has an interesting observation on how culture is understood. He observes that culture has been taken to be something that can be separated from the people and be placed somewhere for display or marketing. He observes that mostly here in Africa items such as old pieces of domestic equipments, arts, weapons for hunting and defence are placed in settings designed as tourist centers to attract visitors. These items are placed here to represent people's culture. Interestingly enough, most of these are no more in use in present day Africa, yet they are said to represent African culture. And in places such as Bomas of Kenya there are dances staged to portray the tradition of the different peoples of Kenya, and these dances are performed by professional people who might no longer come from the people whose tradition is presented. To many of us this is Culture.

What does this tell us that culture is? Surely, culture is something of the past. As professor Jude Oganga⁷ noted, when most of the African Culture scholars speak or write about African cultures, they usually use past tenses to refer to what was going on in the past African peoples way of life. This affirms the above statement that to many culture is something of the past, something that is no longer living. Something that can be taken to the theater and tourist market or something that you can go and look at in the museum. Culture is not something that lives with the people. This understanding of culture was much advanced by leading scholars of culture, such as Boas in America. This man is said to have contributed a lot to the collection of specimens for the museums. This is known as material culture.

Contrary to this material culture is the understanding of culture as the sum total of the daily living of the people of a given society. This is not the denial that culture entails the past experiences of the people. In fact culture comes about through the daily struggles of the people who lived before, to adapt to the condition of their own

⁶Okot p'Bitek: *Artist the Ruler*, Heinemann Kenya, Nairobi, 1986, p. 13-18.

⁷Professor Oganga is a lecturer at Kenyatta University in the department of Religious studies. He made the above observation at a Staff-Student seminar, titled Culture as a tool for the Understanding of the Scriptures, held at Catholic university of Eastern Africa, on 23rd January, 1998.

environment. Yet all these past experiences and struggles culminate in the present. "Culture comprises the way we do things. Another aspect of culture is, therefore, the means by which we do things."⁸ Therefore Culture has biological, psychological and sociological aspects.

The biological aspect of culture is that which comes about by means of peoples' struggle to find their place in the environment. We can talk today also of all those things that help us to be able to fit in our environment as forming our culture today. The psychological aspect is that which refers to the non-material needs of the peoples, day to day life. These include religion and ritual observances. Where as sociological aspects of culture include those things that help people to interact in society. With this in mind it can be noted that culture is not something that can only be confined to the past or that can abruptly start in the present. Culture is the whole progression of the way of life of the people of a given society. It projects from the past into present. Culture is dynamic. It is permanent yet it keeps on changing all the time. It is this characteristic of culture that poses a lot of problems when it comes to the understanding of inculturation.

II. INCULTURATION

The above materialistic understanding of culture has really affected us to the extent that it affects our understanding of inculturation. Inculturation is also understood in a purely materialistic way by most of us. Many tend to think that inculturation is the demand on the Church to make a U-turn to the past peoples' way of life. Or, in other words, inculturation to many means turning the Church into a museum of the past values and norms. If this is inculturation, then the process of inculturation is a ridiculous project, really impossible to embark on as many have already argued.⁹ With this our present age which is still enjoying the fruits of

⁸Erick Ayisi: Introduction to the Study of African Culture, East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, 1992, p2.

⁹Some of my fellow students and even some of the priests have argued in my presence that inculturation can not be possible because we are living in a fast changing world and it is naive to ask people to go back in time and live their cultures which have so much changed.

modernization, it is really sheer nonsense to talk of reviving the past African cultures and express them today.

If really our attempts to inculturate our Christian way of life are to materialize, we need to understand the process of inculturation in a different way. The question here may be: What is inculturation? And how can we understand it? The word inculturation so to say is a theological development of two anthropological terms: Enculturation and Acculturation.

Enculturation is the process by which an individual is initiated and grows into his or her own culture. This process comes through experience and learning through struggles. Enculturation does not just stop at an early stage of an individual, it is an on-going process. One learns everyday what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in the society in which one lives. The process of enculturation has two dimensions: mechanical and active enculturation.

Mechanical inculturation takes place in the early days of an individual. At this stage an individual learns the basic patterns and values of the culture that is to be his own. At this stage an individual has little choice to make. He/she takes in and registers whatever he/she sees in the society. It is at this time that the permanent traits of the culture are imbibed by an individual.

The active stage is the stage at which an individual is able to evaluate the norms and values that present themselves by making a choice either to reject or accept any norm or value that he/she does not agree with. By so doing he/she contributes to the shaping of the culture of the society by bringing new values.¹⁰

Inculturation has similar characteristics of enculturation and at the same time there are some differences between the process of inculturation and enculturation. Enculturation assumes that a person does not have any cultural background before. This person learns the culture that becomes his own step by step through experience. But in inculturation the Gospel is received into the given culture already influenced by other cultures. Therefore we can add that in inculturation there is an element of acculturation. Acculturation is an anthropological term that is used to mean cultural contact. For this reason we should understand enculturation analogously in relation to

¹⁰It is at this level that the foreign influences affect the cultural expression of individuals that in-turn affect the whole cultural expression in the long run.

inculturation. As usual wherever analogy is used there are both similarities and differences in the analogy. Now the difference is that whenever we talk of enculturation we talk on a purely anthropological level and this means cultural education. But as inculturation is strictly theological and is used to refer to the fusion of the Gospel with the culture in which the Gospel is preached. "Theologically, then, inculturation means the on-going dialogue between the Gospel and culture"¹¹ Hence inculturation is a two way process that involves faith. It is the continuous conversion of the cultures in which the Gospel penetrated and reexpression of the Gospel by the cultures in which the Gospel is received.

Understanding culture as a sum total of our daily life; inculturation then means letting our daily lives be transformed by the Gospel and giving new expression to the Gospel in our daily life. As Africans, our effort in the process of inculturation should not be wasted in trying to revive the past ways of life. If ever we are to seek the values that were helpful in the past, this should be done with the aim of reexpressing a true Christian and African way of life that is applicable today. Inculturation therefore does not mean turning a blind eye to modern influences but making effort to express these influences with a flavor of the Gospel in it.

III. AGENTS OF INCULTURATION

If the process of inculturation is to be rooted in and to enhance our daily life by making the Gospel be expressed in our present cultures, and if these cultures are to be so transformed by the Gospel, the exercise of inculturation has to embrace everybody. For it takes everyone to live the culture. So far the process of inculturation has remained an academic process. The talk of inculturation has so far been coming from above to the grass- roots. It is now time that everybody be involved in inculturation of the cultures that they are presently living. Surely theologians are very important in this task, but most important are the people from the grass-roots. John Mary Wariggo suggests that no person should be spared in the task of inculturation: "The university lecturer, that illiterate fisher man, that corrupt administrator, that rowdy youth, that prostitute, that dedicated nurse, that indifferent

¹¹ Aylward Shorter: The African Synod, St Paul Publications, Africa, 1991, p54.

teacher, the tribalistic politician, a simple house-wife, a staunch traditionalist, the popular local medicine man, the anti-social sorcerer, the unconvinced Catholic, the committed Christian polygamist, the modern atheist, the pre-Vatican II church goer, the sophisticated religious Nun or Brother, the friendly or cynical Protestant neighbour, the former Catholic turned Muslim or Protestant, the unecumenical protestant pastor or catechist, the jolly dancer belonging to an independent church, and so on."¹²

This suggests that the work of a theologian is to collaborate in the effort of the people and help to influence it with more Christian values so that in the end we can emerge with a true African Christian culture that expresses the Gospel to the fullest and manifests a transformed way of life lived in the light of the Gospel. One crucial thing that is important in inculturation is that Christianity has to adapt the mentality of the people, in this case the Africans. This will promote the creativity in the people themselves to live their present culture, whatever it is, in the light of the Gospel.

A constructive criticism that can be made to the people who favour the process of inculturation is that we have wasted much time in looking at what the missionaries did to our cultures. We have accused the missionaries of doing this or that, condemning this value or that. Today is not the time to waste on such an occupation. Rather, we ought to thank the missionaries for their efforts and risks to Christianize Africa. Now our task is to Africanise the Christianity they left for us. This is the duty of all the people of God.

IV. SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY AS AGENT OF INCULTURATION

The Small Christian Community can be or is one of the important instruments for allowing the Christian experience to penetrate the cultures of the people. This, in turn, will bring new expression to the Gospel. Bernard Ugeux, M. Afr describes the understanding of inculturation as practiced in the Small Christian Community as planned and spontaneous inculturation.

¹²John Mary Warigco: Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and Inculturation, in Bible Pastoral Bulletin, Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar, Nairobi, January 1987 p.41

Planned inculturation: is "a process initiated and directed by the pastoral agents or theologians in limited areas like liturgy and catechesis to create new expressions of Christian life which are faithful to the Christian message, while taking into account the local cultural values."¹³ In this kind of inculturation the author says that, according to his pastoral experience, that the response of the people is minimal. The Christians themselves do not feel competent to undertake the process of inculturation especially in the areas underlined below: rite of baptism, marriage, healing of the sick. All they look to is the affirmation of the competent authorities, telling what they do is right. Yet some communities have proved effective agent of inculturation, especially through Bible sharing and interpretation of the Scriptures according to their everyday experience.

Another type of inculturation that takes place in the Small Christian Community is what the author describes as *Spontaneous inculturation*, "as soon as an individual hears the Christian message an unconscious process of inculturation begins and reaches the climax when the person is converted."¹⁴ This suggests that there is already potentiality for inculturating the Gospel and, of course, the Christian life, present among the members of the Small Christian Community. If given good direction inculturation becomes a spontaneous process.

What is striking is that in the descriptions given for planned and spontaneous inculturation, members of the Small Christian Community do not go back to the past or understand inculturation in reference to past cultures. They apply inculturation in relation to their daily life or lived experience. This is the genuine inculturation that the Church strives to promote. It is this inculturation that helps to convert the lived cultures of the people today and gives the Gospel and Christian expression to the cultures of the people of the local Churches.

Understanding inculturation as going back to the past to revive past values only helps to separate the Church from peoples' day to day life. So that we see dichotomy in peoples' life. The same people who contribute to and participate at an inculturated

¹³ Bernard Ugeux: Inculturation Through Small Christian Community, in *African Ecclesial Review*, vol. 37, no. 3, Gaba Publications, June 1995, p. 135.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 137

liturgy in church are the same people that promote corruption in offices, the same people that stand in the forefront of inter-tribal wars. Christian life takes the characteristic of something that can merely be put on and put off at any time. Christian life does not become life lived in a faith-blended culture, but faith becomes an entity separated from culture. And this is exactly what inculturation is not. Inculturation, therefore is the on going dialogue between the Gospel and Culture.

CHAPTER TWO

INCARNATION AS A DIVINE STEP TO INCULTURATE

Part one:

I. Theology of Inculturation in the Book Of Luke-Acts

(a) **Luke as a theologian of Inculturation:** The question as to whether Luke is a theologian or historian has been already settled by Howard Marshall.¹⁵ He established that Luke was a Theologian who used history at the service of theology. Luke did this to meet his pastoral intent. This intent is found in the fact that he tried to show that the story of Jesus that had been already circulating in the society and that had been given in oral and written forms (Lk 1:3-4) is the same story that was being continued in the Church up to the time of his writing. And, of course, it is the same story that is continuing in our time. Luke goes further to show that, "Jesus continues to be active by the Spirit and in the Church, so that the salvation which was manifested in His ministry is still effective for people separated from Him geographically and temporally."¹⁶

The universality of salvation is also central to the theology of Luke. He creates a place for the Gentiles among the people of God. "The text of Luke-Acts overwhelmingly suggests that Luke's audience was made predominantly of Gentile believers."¹⁷ He tells us a story of the early Church and connects this story to Jesus Christ and the whole of humanity. In doing this Luke presents the Church as a new Israel, the family of God. In this Israel the Gentiles are included. They are not merely incorporated, but they are citizens fully established with their cultures. It is through

¹⁵Howard Marshall: Luke as Theologian, in Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. 4, Doubleday, New York, 1992. p. 402-403.

¹⁶Ibid, P. 402.

¹⁷Luke Timothy Johnson: Book of Luke-Acts, in Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. 4. Doubleday, New York, 1992, p. 208.

the events that he says he is presenting sequentially (Lk 1:3) that he achieves this. In this work he interprets the Gospel within a pluralistic context which is composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

With this capability of bridging the geographical and temporal gaps between Jesus and Luke's audience, Luke emerges not merely a theologian, but a theologian of inculturation. As it has been presented above, inculturation is making relevant the Gospel to the lived cultures in which it is preached. On top of this, Luke brought the events accomplished in time close to the people he was writing to, both geographically and temporally. The things accomplished in the time of Jesus are the same things continuing in the Church to which he was writing. This is what Luke managed to do in his two volume work. Hence he stands out as somebody we should turn to for examples as we embark on the problem of inculturation.

(h) The meaning of Incarnation: The term incarnation is not, as such, a biblical term, yet it expresses a biblical idea, especially as present in New Testament writings. This term has its root in a Latin word *incarnatio*, which means, taking flesh, or, in other words, being en-fleshed. The usage of this term became popular among the Latin Christian writers beginning from about the year 300 A.D.¹⁸ In this usage, incarnation served as a theological term that was applied to Jesus of Nazareth, who is God made Man. He assumed human flesh and became fully human in all senses except sin. At the same time he retained his Divinity. Hence incarnation tells of a biblical reality of God who became man and remained divine in order to save humanity from sin. By becoming man, God in Jesus of Nazareth, redeemed the whole human race and raised it to the state of divinity.

Incarnation as a term expresses the climax of salvation history that is told in the Scriptures. The word of God that has been active in the salvation of Israel, God's chosen people now found new expression in the flesh. "And the word was made flesh and dwelt among us", to continue the original plan of Salvation. Therefore, again in Incarnation, the past and the present are combined into one account of salvation history.

¹⁸Walter D. Draughon: Incarnation, in Holman Bible Dictionary, Holman Bible Publishers, Tennessee, 1991, p. 693.

It is these major ideas of incarnation, salvation and readiness of God to be enfleshed, that parallel incarnation with inculturation. In incarnation God decided to communicate himself to humanity by becoming fully human with all its limitations. This step of God in his eternity, entering into creation and being limited by time is what is referred to as God's initial step to inculturation. Incarnation occurred in a specific human society that is, the Jewish society. To show this Luke presents the genealogy of Jesus (Lk. 4:23-38). In this genealogy, Luke pins down the incarnation to a specific lineage. This indicates that though God had planned to save the whole human race, he had to limit Himself to a particular lineage which is the lineage of David (Lk. 1:32).¹⁹ Hence incarnation also tells us that God in His readiness to save humankind, embraced a specific culture (Jewish) and became one as any other person of this culture. Incarnation is the story of God inculturating himself to humanity in the person of Jesus, a Jew of Davidic lineage who lived twenty centuries ago.

Reading the story of Jesus as Luke presents it, we are presented with an historical account of how God inculturated himself in history, by particularizing himself to one culture so He can become present in all cultures. The church herself is witness to this readiness of God to embrace all the human cultures.

II. Lukan Jesus, the master of inculturation

We have seen that incarnation presents God to us, he who is Divine and human, so that he can offer salvation to all humanity. We will now explore how this incarnation is presented by Luke, and to what extent Luke shows God in Jesus as the master of inculturation.

(a) Luke's infancy narrative: a presentation of Jesus embracing Culture: As previously stated there is a consensus among Scripture scholars that, Luke's audience is predominantly Gentile.²⁰ And Raymond Brown²¹ is of the opinion that this Gentile

¹⁹ "he will be great and will be called the son of the Most High and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father"

²⁰ Luke Timothy Johnson: *The Gospel of Luke*, in *Sacra Pagina*, Vol. 3, Liturgical Press, 1991 p. 135.

Church to which Luke was writing was the Church founded by St. Paul in his missionary effort. Therefore, to expose that Jesus, in spite of being a Jew, incorporates the Gentile in his saving mission, Luke gives an account that is apologetic in nature. The Jesus' mission that apparently failed among the Jews was from time immemorial prepared by God for the whole human race. This explains Luke's interest in Judaism which we find in the infancy narrative. His story starts in the temple (the annunciation of John the Baptist (Lk 1: 1-25), which was a significant place for the Jews. Within his attempts to contextualize the Jesus story, Luke places the infancy narrative within the scope of a particular history of Israel. In so doing he connects the salvation history to the contemporary world history. To do this Luke names the world rulers, "In the reign of Herod king of Judea"[1:5], [2:1-2]²². This brings us back to our issue of inculturation. The presentation of Luke's infancy narrative clearly states that Jesus, the incarnate son of God, enjoyed a specific moment of world history and a specific culture of a specific people. Like any other person, he was accepted into this specific culture and he accepted the culture into which he was incarnated.

(b) Annunciation of Jesus: Luke uses the style that was prevalent among the Hellenists in the birth stories of heroes or of philosophers, to present the beginning of Jesus' story. According to Luke Timothy Johnson,²³ the prophecy of the birth of Jesus would make sense to any Hellenistic reader. Since Luke's purpose was to present Jesus who became firmly rooted to a particular society, Luke adopted a literary method that was common in Hellenistic society. "It has been suggested that Luke-Acts resembles the Hellenistic romance or novel."²⁴ These Hellenistic stories of heroes contained the birth, teachings, and the progress of the followers of the Hero or

²¹Raymond Brown: The Birth of the Messiah, a commentary on the infancy narrative in Matthew and Luke, Image Books, 1975. p. 235.

²²In those days a decree was issued by Emperor Augustus for a Census to be taken throughout the Roman world. This was the first registration of its kind, it took place when Quirinius was the Governor of Syria.

²³Luke Timothy Johnson: The Gospel of Luke, in Sacra Pagina, Vol. 3, Liturgical Press, 1991. p. 51-53.

²⁴Ibid. p. 4

Philosopher. Luke has been accredited for being a fine story teller.²⁵ He reworked the common existent stories to fit his purpose . The prophecy of Jesus' birth is such an example. He uses the pattern of the Annunciation story that is already existent in the Old Testament: "Luke's story is patterned on the annunciation scenes in the Bible, above all that in Judges 13: 2-7."²⁶

From Luke's own testimony (Lk 1:1-2) there had been already different versions of the story of Jesus circulating in the Christian society of his time. Among these stories is the pre-Gospel annunciation of a Davidic Messiah. One of these is in II Sam. 7:8-16. And this is what Luke adopted as he presented the birth of his own Hero and teacher, Jesus Christ. Luke picked up this prophecy to show that Jesus is the fulfillment of what had been already promised to the people of Israel. The Lucan annunciation therefore has the overtone of the pre-existence of the word of God. It prepares the reader to note that the son we are expecting is not merely human. He is human according to the Davidic line and Divine for he is the son promised by God.

As we reflect on God's readiness to inculturate himself to human nature and culture through incarnation, it should also be noted that the motive is to raise or redeem humanity and its cultures to the level of the Divine. Luke's Jesus is not merely a conformist of the cultures. He paradoxically conformed to Israelite culture in order to transform the cultures of all people of God.

Hence the Jesus who was incarnated into the Israelite culture during the reign of Herod, King of Judea, is God himself. "The idea of an annunciation of the birth of Davidic messiah, which is pre-Lucan and pre-Matthean, may have already existed in a pre- Christian Judaism; and so, it is not incredible that the message in that Jewish annunciation would have echoed II Sam. 7:8-16."²⁷

²⁵Ibid. p. 3

²⁶Ibid p. 38

²⁷Raymond Brown: The Birth of the Messiah, a commentary on the infancy narrative in Matthew and Luke, Image Books, New York, 1979, p. 310

III. Lucan Jesus at the heart of History and Culture of the People

(a) **The birth of Jesus:** As a historian, Luke uses history as a tool that helped him retell the story of Jesus, who is not only connected to the Jewish people, but also to the people of the entire universe. This Jesus was born during the reign of Augustus Caesar the Roman emperor of 27 BC - 14 AD²⁸. Though Luke has not been precise as to the exact year Jesus was born, the circumstances around his birth as recorded by Luke help us put Jesus' birth around 6-7 BC, following the dates of the census of Quirinius, Governor of Syria. (Lk 2:2)

At this time, "according to Greek inscriptions, Augustus was regarded in the Roman empire as "savior" and "god" and he was credited for establishing a time of peace, the *pax Augusta*, throughout the Roman world during his long reign."²⁹. To show that this peace of Augustus is short lasting, "Luke now presents Jesus as the Davidic Messiah who will bring the eschatological gift of peace,"³⁰ the peace that is lasting (Lk 2: 10-11).³¹ With this Luke sets Jesus at the heart of History. By doing this, he manages to portray God's salvation as not in the distant future, but as already effective in the present. Or in other words, God has found His home among the people who are living in the present.

Luke's portrait of Jesus the Savior and true bringer of peace, does not only place Jesus within a historical frame, but also within a cultural frame. In the birth story, Luke proceeds from presenting Jesus in his historical context to presenting Jesus in his cultural context. In the sign given by the Angel to the shepherds, Luke presents Jesus as swaddled and laid in a manger (Lk 2:12). As James M. Efir³² tells us, it was the practice of the Jewish culture that when a child is born, it was wrapped in the strips of cloth to keep its limbs straight. This was a sign of welcoming and care for

²⁸See footnote in Catholic Study Bible, p. 101

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Robert J. Karris: The Gospel According to Luke, in The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, Prentice Hall, New Jersey, 1990, p.682.

³¹ "he will be great and will be called the son of the Most High and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father"

³²James M. Efir: Swaddling, in Harper's Bible Dictionary, Harpers and Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1985, p. 1001.

the newly born baby following the Jewish customs. It is in this line that Brown interprets the gesture of the swaddling of Jesus: "The swaddling, far from being a sign of poverty, may be a sign that Israel's Messiah is not an outcast among his people but is properly received and cared for."³³ Therefore Luke presents us with the Jesus who was well received culturally.

(b)Circumcision and naming of Jesus: Hand in hand with the swaddling of the baby Jesus is the circumcision and naming of Jesus. He has been received among the Jewish people just as any other Jewish boy; now Jesus takes another step in being consolidated into the Jewish culture. Thus, eight days after birth, all Jewish male children are circumcised and named. Jesus likewise follows this custom (Lk 2:21). This is a step the incarnate Son of God undertook to show the Divine solidarity with humanity and especially with the Jewish People: "therefore he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest to expiate the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17).

(c)Purification and Presentation: The Lucan infancy narrative thus presents Jesus undergoing the initial stage of inculturation, that is, by undergoing the passive process of enculturation as described in chapter one above³⁴. Up to this stage, one can easily look at the Lucan Jesus as what is described as "the Christ of culture."³⁵ For the Infant Jesus to undergo this anthropological period of cultural education, he needed a society to help him learn. As usual it is the family that one encounters initially on one's way in life. Therefore, for Jesus the Holy family, the family of Mary and Joseph, forms this important initial cultural school. The scene in Jesus drama as presented by Luke in his Gospel (Lk 2:22-54) bears witness to the atmosphere in which the Infant Jesus was enculturated³⁶. We are told that "When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, they took him to Jerusalem to present him

³³Raymond E. Brown: The Birth of the Messiah, a commentary in the infancy narrative in Matthew and Luke, Image Books, New York, 1975 p. 419.

³⁴This is on page 7. Here is given the definition of the word enculturation as used now.

³⁵Richard P. McBrien: Catholicism, Study edition, Winston Press, Minneapolis, 1966, p. 383-84.

³⁶In other words Jesus learned his culture in the family of Mary and Joseph.

to the Lord," (Lk 2:22).

We have learned already that this infant Jesus is God made man, in spite of this, He was taken to be presented at the same time Mary went to be purified in Jerusalem, this presentation was not necessary for Him as such. But it was due to Joseph and Mary's faithfulness in observing the customs of the society, that He had to be presented. A woman was not allowed into the Temple until forty days following her giving birth. At this period she was considered impure according to Jewish customs. After this period then, she was undergoing a ritual of purification. This is what brought Mary to Jerusalem. It is at this time also that she had to pay the required ransom price as prescribed in the law of Moses (Lev.12:2-6). Charles Childers³⁷ comments on this thus: "Verse 23 explains that the law required a ransom price be paid for every firstborn son. This was to redeem him from priestly or religious service- the tribe of Levi had been chosen in place of the firstborn, but God wanted a perpetual reminder of his right of claim on the firstborn."³⁸

All that we can gather from this is that Jesus was brought up in a family which was very fervent in the observation of the cultural norms; and Jesus learned from them the culture of the society into which he was born. Within this family, it is reported that Jesus grew up physically, intellectually and spiritually (Lk 2:40).

(d) Jesus in the Temple: Jesus also learned by observing what was going on in society itself. His presence in the temple at the age of twelve, with the teachers (Lk 2:46), testifies to this. We are told by Childers³⁹ this was not a new happening in Jewish society. Meetings of the Rabbis were common and sometimes boys would come to listen. This is what Jesus did as reported in Lk 2:41-51. So Jesus became a man of culture and God in culture. Or, in other words, the Infant Jesus became enculturated God in the Holy family and local Jewish society's school of culture.

³⁷Charles L. Childers: *The Gospel According to Luke*, in *Beacon Bible Commentary*, Vol. 5, Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, Missouri, 1964.

³⁸Ibid P. 451

³⁹Ibid p.456.

Part two:

JESUS' MINISTRY, A CALL FOR CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION

I. Preparation of the Ministry

The Baptism of Jesus: From now on, the story of Jesus enters a new phase. Luke breaks Jesus' long silence by bringing Him to the public at the baptism scene. From now on Jesus is not a mere conformist of culture. He will now contribute to the culture. His contribution is to call people to live a life of commitment to the Kingdom of God, a call for people to live a transformed life. Before this, Luke wants to make it clear that Jesus' presence among the people is also God's dwelling among the people. Hence he begins the ministry story by showing that Jesus who is now entering into the ministry is the Son of God, the Most High (Lk 4:21).⁴⁰

This idea of Divine Sonship is not all that original to Luke. He borrowed this from the Jewish (Old Testament) Theology. For Luke, Christ is the continuation of the line of the Sons of God of old. In the Old Testament, the usage of the 'Son of God' takes on a three fold meaning: 1. It refers to divine or angelic beings; 2. To Israel as a nation; and 3. to individuals, such as kings.⁴¹ As individuals, these 'Sons of God' were expected to be righteous people, who would not tolerate sin. Brendan Byrne⁴² puts it: "More striking is the frequent use of the singular 'Son/Child [*huios, pais*] of God' in Wisdom 2-5 to denote individual righteous person, whose ultimate immunity to death and whose destiny to eternal life is acknowledged by his persecutors"⁴³

⁴⁰ "And a voice came from Heaven, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased"

⁴¹Brendan Byrne: Sons of God in Anchor Bible Dictionary, Vol. 6, Doubleday, New York, 1992, P. 156-9.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid 157.

Luke sees these ideas being fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is God who came from on High to live with the people. He is the Divine living among the people. As seen in part one, he is the fulfillment of the Messianic promise of God. He preexisted with God right from before the creation of time.⁴⁴ The same Jesus is the beginning of the new Israel, the nation of God that embraces everybody including the Gentiles. He is also an individual in whom sin can not dwell. He is an example of righteousness that people can imitate in order to qualify as Sons of God. This presentation of Jesus does not take away his humanity. As a human being Jesus exemplifies an ideal and perfect individual. By entering into prayer, this 'Son of God' shows his intimacy with his Father and his dependency on him as a human being (Lk 3:21).

At this time John the Baptist was baptizing and preaching. His baptism was the baptism for the forgiveness of sin, for moral change, "that is, its characteristic was that it indicated sorrow for sin on the part of those he baptized."⁴⁵ Jesus received this baptism not as someone who needed repentance, but as a gesture of solidarity with humanity that stands in need of conversion. And conversion here means beginning afresh, looking at the same realities of life in a new way. Jesus did not have any sin, to repent from, but his reception of this baptism is an invitation to those who may enter the family of Sons of God to be the people of converted hearts. To be a people of converted hearts means to manifest a changed way of life. This calls for a revolution in the whole world-view. Thus, it entails a cultural change. It is now that Jesus contributes to the transformation of the cultures. Here it is good to see Jesus as an informer and transformer of the cultures, in agreement with Charles Nyamiti.⁴⁶

⁴⁴This idea of preexistent of Jesus is more clear in the first chapter of John, verses 1-8. These verses reveal Jesus as a preexistent eternal Word of God, after the manner of Gn 1:1.

⁴⁵Walter L Liefeld: *Luke*, in *Expositors Bible Commentary*, Vol. 8, Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, 1984, p. 854.

⁴⁶At the above mentioned seminar (cf. foot note no.7), Fr Charles Nyamiti looked at Jesus as the reformer and informer of the cultures, in response to a question raise on how relevant is Jesus to our African cultures.

II. Discipleship as a Cultural Revolution

(a) A call for the reconstruction of the Messianic understanding: The large part of Luke's ministry of Jesus continues exposing and revealing Jesus as God's given Messiah. This Messianic title continues the long Messianic expectation and hope of the Jewish people, which was still present in Christian society. Therefore, Luke has Jesus, after His baptism, proclaiming Himself the anointed one, the Messiah, full of the Spirit; His task here on earth is to bring Good News to the poor, to free the prisoners and to restore sight to those who are blind (Lk 4:18-19). Childers stresses that this passage, which Luke borrows with some moderation from the passage of Isaiah (61:1-3), is messianic, and points to, the messianic function of Jesus.⁴⁷ Thus Jesus begins fulfilling this messianic function by performing wonders and teaching with authority (Lk 4:31-37).

Before people recognized Jesus as a Prophet and Messiah, Luke has the evil spirits recognize Jesus as the "Holy one of God" (Lk 4:34). That is the Messiah, Son of God. Side by side with this, Luke shows us how insufficient peoples' knowledge was of Jesus as a Messiah. He brings this out by having Jesus make an inquiry about what people know about Him. The popular view of Jesus is reflected in the disciples' answer: "John the Baptist, others, Elijah; still others, one of the ancient prophets has risen" (Lk 9:19). This suggests that the idea of Jesus as a human messiah was comfortably accepted, but the challenge comes in raising this acceptance of Jesus from merely human level to the level of Divine, the level of Faith.

Peter, in his confession (Lk 9:20)⁴⁸ rises to this level. This is where the problem lies, "the Jewish leaders might accept a human messiah. But it was precisely this claim to deity which caused them to reject Jesus and condemn Him to death on the charge of blasphemy"⁴⁹

As pointed out above, Luke presents Jesus as someone who has come from

⁴⁷L. Childers: The Gospel According to Luke in Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol.6, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 1964, p. 468.

⁴⁸"you are the Messiah of God."

⁴⁹Ralph Earle: The Gospel According to Matthew, in Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol.6, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 1964, p. 154-55

heaven, the Son of God, who meets the Jewish understanding of Son of God as a Heavenly or a Divine being. To accept this, for the Jewish people, as well as any other people, calls for faith that will stand as a challenge to the cultural and traditional understanding of the messiah which was basically political. As already pointed out, the belief in the messiah was culturally accepted, but to accept one born among them as a Divine messiah, needs a cultural revolution which only faith can afford.

(b) Discipleship, costly to all: Only those people who were able to transcend their cultures to the level of accepting Jesus as a Divine Messiah could be called disciples, and it is these people who form the new Israel. This discipleship was not only the following of Jesus as he was going along the way to Jerusalem; discipleship is a life commitment. It is a way of life and what this life entails. Luke's usage of the term disciple refers to all those believers in Jesus. It is synonymous with Christians. "Disciples were all those who confessed Jesus as the Messiah."⁵⁰

Luke contrasts the crowd and the disciples. For him the crowd are the people who were following Jesus simply out of curiosity, or with other motives apart from having faith in him. The disciples are the convinced believers in Jesus. Therefore, Luke presents discipleship as deeply rooted in the heart of the believer and as a way of life. Hence, entrance into discipleship is found through faith alone: "More so than the other Evangelists, Luke stresses that the true faith is characterized by 'counting the cost', both positively and negatively, of what the life of discipleship entails."⁵¹

To stress this cost of discipleship, Luke lets his readers be challenged by listing the challenges involved in discipleship (Lk 14: 25-33). In this passage discipleship is presented as a radical detachment from all that can distance one from the Kingdom (Lk 14:26).⁵² What is suggested in this passage is that attitude is what matters in discipleship. "The point is not how one feels towards parents and family but one's

⁵⁰M.J. Wilkins: Discipleship, in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, a compendium of contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, Intervarsity Press, England, 1992, p. 184.

⁵¹Ibid p. 185

⁵² "If anyone comes to me without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters and even his own life can not be my disciple"

effective attitude when it comes to a choice for the Kingdom."⁵³ This attitude can be extended to cultures; there is so much in the cultures that need to give way to the Gospel if the person is to be a disciple of Jesus.

To crown it all, Luke presents the entrance into discipleship as a call extended by Jesus to all people. No matter what the cultural background, all are invited to the way of life as disciples. The parable of the great feast (Lk 14:15-24) stresses this fact. In this parable, the invited guests excused themselves from participation at the banquet, giving all different reasons. Each excuse given is valid in keeping with the Jewish culture; "What is the background and what is the nature of the excuses made by those first invited? The background may be provided- as has been suggested before- by the notion of holy war in Israel. Those who had just planted the vineyard or built a house or married a bride were excused from participation in the holy war, according to Deut 20:5-7."⁵⁴ Whatever the case might be, Luke hints that no cultural demand will excuse anybody from following Jesus according to the Gospel. Discipleship as a way of life has its own culture illumined by the Gospel.

Therefore, if one sets out to become a disciple, this person has to put the preference of the Kingdom before all else. Discipleship as a way of life calls for total detachment from one's cultural demands especially those that are not in keeping with the Gospel. Discipleship is costly, in that it calls for a conversion in one's way of life that entails cultural revolution and personal transformation. This, in turn, leads to cultural transformation.

⁵³Luke Timothy Johnson: The Gospel of Luke in *Sacra Pagina*, Vol. 3, Liturgical Press, 1991, p. 230.

⁵⁴ibid p. 231.

Part three

I. TRUE INCULTURATION: AN OPENNESS TO SUFFERING

(a) Discipleship as an example of Inculturation: Discipleship as just pointed out above has to be lived entirely as a way of life. To have an established way of life surely entails a culture. Therefore, discipleship culture is that sum total of the disciples day to day life which is totally illumined by the life of Jesus. To be a disciple does not mean to be isolated from the rest of the community life. Discipleship is lived and expressed within an already established society which has its own way of life. Discipleship as a way of life is simply a continuation of what was, yet introducing something new into this way of life, that is, expression of the Gospel in this life. This process of the old re-expressed anew in the life of a disciple is what is termed inculturation.

This chapter attempts to show how much this re-expression of the old way of life was expressed in the incarnation. It becomes clear then as we draw towards the end of Jesus' life on earth that in Jesus' life the old was always re-expressed anew. Obviously, this did not just come automatically, it had suffering as its by-product.

(b) Passover Meal, the re-expression of the Old, Anew: The story of Jesus which Luke narrates to us presents suffering as a part of God's salvation plan for humankind. "Indeed according to many interpreters, to the question why did Jesus have to die (suffer)? Luke seems only to answer, because God willed it."⁵⁵ Being the plan of salvation, Jesus embraced suffering fully, knowing its significance in God's plan. Therefore, Jesus, "not only does he set his face to go up to Jerusalem (Lk 9: 51) the place of rejection and death (Lk 18: 31-32), but also with the on-set of his passion, he exercises a surprising prescience regarding the details of his betrayal, arrest and death."⁵⁶

It is with this background that Luke introduces the passover meal by showing

⁵⁵J.B. Green: *Death of Jesus*, in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, a compendium of contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, Intervarsity Press, England, 1992, p160.

⁵⁶Ibid.

us that Jesus acknowledged the fact that he is to suffer soon (Lk 22: 15).⁵⁷ This particular passover meal, also known as the "breaking of the bread" (Acts 2: 42; 46; 20: 7; 11), the "Eucharist" (Lk 22: 17; 19), communion or mass by the later Christians, is the re-expression of the passover meal of the Exodus. The Exodus Passover reminded the Jewish people of their liberation from the oppressing hand of the Egyptians and the formation of Israel as a people of God. Now with Christ this passover meal takes on a new meaning, it portrays a restoration of Israel by Jesus himself.⁵⁸

Jesus, Son of God, now fulfills what was foretold at his baptism (Lk 3: 21). The term "Son of God" as used in Jewish understanding⁵⁹ is that the Son of God is a king of Israel who will lead the people into righteousness. This Son of God is Jesus himself, now he is establishing the Kingdom of God, the new Israel, which is to be conceived spiritually not politically as has been the trend of thought among the people of Israel.

In Lk 22: 24-30, the passage termed as the discourse at the table by Luke Timothy Johnson,⁶⁰ points out the difference between the Kingdom which Jesus has established and is now reigning in as King and the kingdom which the rest of the Jewish people are expecting. In Jesus' Kingdom, the Kingdom of Heaven, the disciples, as the leaders, are to be servants. They are to serve God and one another. They are not to be authority bearers as was the practice among the gentiles, but their greatness will only be noted by the extent at which they are able to serve each other and God. This too entails suffering, and this suffering is embedded in peoples' inability to understand the implications of this Kingdom. Even the Apostles themselves did not understand fully the meaning of the Kingdom of God (Lk 22: 24). To live this

⁵⁷"I have eagerly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer."

⁵⁸Cf. J.B. Green: *Death of Jesus*, in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, a compendium of contemporary Biblical Scholarship*, Intersivity Press, England, 1992, p160.

⁵⁹The usages of the term Son of God as understood in Jewish theology as given above in part two of this chapter are Son of God as: divine or angelic beings, Israel as a nation and Son of God as an individual king who is expected to lead the people of Israel into righteousness. It is this third aspect of the Son of God that I am developing here.

⁶⁰Luke Timothy Johnson: *The Gospel According to Luke* in *Sacra Pagina*, Vol. 3. Liturgical Press, Minnesota, 1991, p. 347- 9.

notion of the kingdom calls for inculturation. In this inculturated Kingdom of God, the old way of understanding the expected kingdom is now re-expressed and lived anew in the light of what Jesus has taught (Lk 22: 25-26).⁶¹

Just to re-express this teaching of Jesus in the light of inculturation, it may be said that Jesus gave the ideals of the Kingdom of God, now he calls his disciples to inculturate this Kingdom, that is to express it in their everyday life.

(c) **The agony:** As an example of expressing the kingdom of heaven in one's daily life, Jesus, the incarnate Son of God continued to carry out the Jewish customs faithfully. His going out to the Mount of Olives to pray (Lk 22: 39-46) was in accordance to the Jewish custom. "D. Daube points out that the Rabbis allowed finishing the passover meal in one place and moving elsewhere to praise God."⁶²

It is at this time that Jesus passed a great agony of his life. This agony does not suggest that Jesus' human nature over-powered the Divine nature at all, the agony was only an indication that Jesus lived the human nature to the fullest. And to live the human nature to the fullest means to accept all human realities as they are. "In part, the Lucan portrait is colored by the desire to have Jesus in his passion revealed as a model to Christian sufferers and martyrs."⁶³ Therefore, Luke shows us that suffering being a human reality, was accepted willingly by Jesus as a plan of God to save humanity and raise it to the level of the Divine (Lk 22: 42).

This agony expressed in Jesus' life, reaching its climax at the Mount of Olives as recounted by Luke, is the highest moment of inculturation. Jesus, God-man, lived the day to day life of an ordinary Jewish person. The only notable difference that Jesus' life made was that he lived his life in the light of the Kingdom of Heaven. In other words, Jesus lived a Jewish day to day life with a vision of the kingdom of God. It is this difference in the approach to the daily life that brought him the misunderstanding and finally rejection. These misunderstandings and rejection were

⁶¹"The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them and those in authority over them are addressed Benefactors; but among you it shall not be so. Rather, let the greatest among you be as the youngest, and the greatest as the servant"

⁶²D. Daube, cited by Raymond Brown: The Death of the Messiah, Vol. 1, Doubleday, London, 1994, p. 122-3.

⁶³Ibid p. 157.

the source of Jesus' life-long agony that was finalized on the cross (Lk 23: 33-43). All the same Jesus remained the master of his own destiny, thus indicating to us the goal of inculturation.

Judas' betrayal (Lk 22: 21-23; 47), being deserted by his own disciples, including the twelve minus Judas, rejection by the high priests,(Lk 22: 66-71), the rulers, and his own people (Lk 23: 1-17): all this was meant to be a lesson for his disciples that if they live up to the demands of the Kingdom of God, or rather if they inculturate the Kingdom of God, which is their primary calling, they will also be misunderstood and rejected by the world. The message in this passage of the agony is that the success of inculturation lies in letting go the human securities and placing all the trust in God as Jesus showed us at the Cross (Lk 23: 46).⁶⁴

II. RESURRECTION: THE GLORY OF CULTURES

(a) **Jesus, Lord of the cultures:** Resurrection as a fact of incarnation is the center and the beginning of Christian faith. It is with the resurrection experience that the disciples found an extra energy to believe in Jesus Christ as the Lord. It is this faith in Jesus as the Lord that had a transforming effect in the life of the community of the disciples and the communities that afterwards received the message of resurrection. "The traditions concerning the first encounters between the risen Lord and his followers were handed on from the first as historical validation for the Spiritual transformation."⁶⁵ It is this Spiritual transformation that makes the difference in any culture that comes into contact with the Gospel message of Christ's resurrection.

It would be then not wrong to conclude that Christ at His resurrection, glorified humanity with him and together with this humanity, all the cultures were also glorified. Jesus Christ is the Lord of all the people who accept him in faith. Henceforth, he is the Lord of their cultures.

(b) **The appearance stories, Christ's presence in cultures:** In these appearance stories, Luke portrays Jesus appearing to his disciples as the disciples were going

⁶⁴"Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit."

⁶⁵Luke Timothy Johnson: The Gospel of Luke, in *Sacra Pagina*, Vol. 3, Liturgical Press, Minnesota, p. 389.

about their daily lives. In the Emmaus story (Lk 24: 13-35), Jesus came and joined in the life experience story of the two disciples which they were discussing as they journeyed on to Emmaus. In the same story, the risen Jesus received the customary hospitality of the disciples before he revealed himself. In the end, he was "recognized in the ritual gestures of the community fellowship meal"⁶⁶ The final appearance story has Jesus appearing to the gathered disciples who were sharing their fears and surprises at the recent happenings. The basic intention in these appearance stories as Luke Timothy Johnson⁶⁷ tells us, is that Luke portrays the different ways Jesus will be present to his followers from now on. That is, Jesus will be there in our every day life to urge us blend our daily lives with his teaching that is found in the Scriptures. And this is the living definition of inculturation.

As a conclusion, it can easily and clearly be seen, with the guidance of the Gospel of Luke, that incarnation is an initiative of God to inculturation into a human culture. God set Himself into a human culture and became a master of this culture in order to raise humanity together with its cultures to the level of the divine. To make this possible, God used a particular culture and a specific moment in history so that all the cultures and times benefit the union with God.

The presence of God in the culture of the people was not just a mere presence. This presence was an invitation to the human cultures to be transformed by becoming God centered cultures. It was an invitation that the cultures of the people become cultures oriented towards God's Kingdom, other than remaining simply a human reality. Transformed cultures are therefore, the cultures of peoples' day to day lives that have the Kingdom of God as source goal. And these are the cultures that let God lead their daily lives for the glory of the people who live these cultures.

Once God comes into contact with humanity, the consequence is that the humanity should remain open to accept the plan of God which is to exalt this humanity. This might entail suffering, but all the same the suffering is purifying. This suffering is for the glorification of all of humanity. This is the goal of inculturation.

⁶⁶Ibid P. 398.

⁶⁷Ibid p. 404-5.

CHAPTER THREE

EVANGELIZATION AS A PROCESS OF INCULTURATION

I. EVANGELIZATION

Luke ended the story of Jesus as narrated in his Gospel by having Jesus commission his disciples (Lk 24: 46-48).⁶⁸ With this Luke stresses that the Church has her foundation on the twelve Apostles chosen by Jesus himself and has as her major task, the spreading of the Good News to all the people, starting with those living in Jerusalem.

The Gospel is the Good News which in Greek is designated as *Evangelion*. This is the root or the origin of the term evangelization. Therefore evangelization is the process or activity of bringing the Good News from one place to another or from one people who are the bearers of the Good News to another who have never heard about the Good News. This term evangelization is commonly used by Catholic theologians to express the same idea designated by the term evangelism. Henry Muzorewa says that "evangelism is the type of preaching that announces God's work of salvation as what St. Paul and Barnabas did in Lycaonia, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 14:7) for example. The term "evangelism" is most commonly used with reference to preaching the Good News where the message of God's grace and love has never been heard or accepted before (Rom 15:20). Evangelism is preaching the newsworthy acts of God that have been manifested first to the Jews, and then to the Gentiles. However, during the 19th and 20th centuries, evangelism has been thought of in terms of Christianizing people of the third world."⁶⁹

From this, it is clear that evangelization is the movement of the Gospel, the Good News from one geographical place to another. Hence from this it can be deduced that in the different geographical places the Gospel is announced, it is

⁶⁸"Thus it is written that the messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day and that the repentance, for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are the witnesses for these things"

⁶⁹Gwinyai Henry Muzorewa: *African Theology of Missions*, in *Studies in History of Mission*, Vol. 5, The Edwin Mellen Press, Queenston, 1991, p. 146.

announced to people of different cultural backgrounds. In short, the Gospel meets different cultures as it moves from one place to another. Therefore, for the Gospel to remain the Good News, it has to address the deepest fibre of these cultures. Otherwise, the Gospel may be rejected. This tells us that for evangelization to be possible, there has to be an inculturation of some form. The people who receive the Good News have to make it the Good News of their own personal lives and express this Good News in their daily lives.

II. THE NASCENT CHURCH: THE CHURCH IN CULTURE

In the book of Acts, Luke brings us face to face with the solution to the question we may ask from the commissioning scene (Lk 24:36-49): "How will Jesus the messiah be able to preach to all the nations in fulfillment of the Scripture?" With his expertise as a historian, Luke puts us into the circle of Jesus' disciples, "the commissioning is addressed to a larger group than the twelve."⁷⁰ And with them he leads us to see how the Church developed from Jerusalem and spread to the pagan world. As he does this, he at the same time let us confess with the people who received the Good News that Jesus is the messiah, now risen. And the spreading of the Good News, the news about God's salvation to the whole world is the proof that really Jesus is the messiah.

Thus the Church, which is the instrument of communicating this news of salvation to the whole world, has the foundation in the reality of Israel as a people of God. This explains the disciples' question, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1: 6). The justification for this question can be grounded on the following facts: First of all it is a consensus of almost all the Biblical scholars that the leadership of the Church we find in the book of Acts was fashioned after the twelve tribes of Israel. Robert Karris⁷¹ tells us that the selection of these twelve Apostles comes from God, for Jesus climbed the mountain for a time of prayer before

⁷⁰ Robert J. Karris: *The Gospel According to Luke*, in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1990, p. 721.

⁷¹ *Ibid* p. 694.

proceeding to choose the twelve. " For Luke, the twelve symbolize the continuity with Israel"⁷².

The second reason which can be attributed to this question is suggested by Ralph Earle,⁷³ that the disciples were still waiting for the material kingdom, (because they had not yet received the Holy Spirit), instead of waiting for a spiritual kingdom that has no territory. The resurrection of Jesus empowered them to think that this is now the moment when the kingdom they have been waiting for would be realized.

In view of this, Luke forwards the new understanding of the kingdom. In this kingdom Jesus is the Messiah-King, his rule lies in his ability and authority to rule peoples' hearts. This is a redefinition of the old understanding of the kingdom. The new kingdom has no territory and embraces all, the Gentiles included. Yet it is based on the old kingdom in that all the people that belong to this kingdom form one people in Christ, the people of God.⁷⁴

In this Luke points out that the Church, even though it has its beginning from the Jewish milieu, is like Jesus her founder who took a particular culture as a starting point in order to embrace all the cultures of the people of the nations. Therefore, the spreading of the Church, together with it the Gospel or, in other words, evangelization, can be possible only within the context of the culture. Drawing from this, there can never be an existence of the Church that will be independent from the influence of any culture. Inculturation flows necessarily from the nature of the Church itself.

III. THE HOLY SPIRIT AS A FORCE BEHIND EVANGELIZATION

Luke's understanding of the Spirit is a continuation of the Old Testament understanding. In the Old Testament the Spirit is understood as the working of the

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³Ralph Earle: The Acts of the Apostles in Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol. 7, Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 1965, p. 261.

⁷⁴Cf. *ibid.*

Divine power in the people.⁷⁵ Hence Luke understands the Spirit as the working of the Divine power in Jesus and the people that follow him. In the Gospel, Luke portrays Jesus as the one full of the Spirit. He as well states that Jesus is the man with Divine powers. For him, the preaching of Jesus is the preaching done under the power of the Holy Spirit (Lk 4:4).⁷⁶

The acts of healing which Jesus performed during his ministry show that Jesus has a mysterious power in him. This power did not just remain in him, but came out and was felt by the people around him. This fact is brought out by Luke in a skilful presentation of a woman with a hemorrhage (Lk 8:43-48). Luke further portrays Jesus as healing those who came to hear him. This shows that people around Jesus realized that there is power coming out of him that heals the people (Lk 6:19).⁷⁷

Seeing this power, Luke comes to conclude that this power in Jesus that healed people during his public ministry is the same power he gave to the Apostles in the person of the Spirit. And it is this very power that enabled the Apostles to carry out the work of evangelization and it is the same Holy Spirit that caused the gentiles to convert and accept the message of Christ as a Good News to them.

The book of Acts tells how the preaching of the Good News spread starting from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria and then to the whole world. (Acts 1:8; 13:47; 22:21). Based on this, Luke's work is taken to be the opening chapter of the history of the church. While still considering Luke as a historian, it should be born in mind that Luke is not presenting his history in a scientific sense of the term. He stresses the mission of God to his people in the world.

Luke sees the Church, which according to the political and religious environment of that time was facing a lot of difficulties yet she continued getting members and surviving opposition both from within and without. So Luke attributes the survival of the Church to the work of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the Church

⁷⁵Thomas R. W. Longstaff: The Holy Spirit, in Harpers Bible Dictionary, Harper and Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1985, p. 401-3.

⁷⁶"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor"

⁷⁷"And all in the crowd were trying to touch him, for power came out of him and healed all of them."

then is not a new establishment within the Jewish set up, but is a continuation of Israel on a higher plane. This Church has become universal to all people as opposed to the old Judaism which was an establishment for only one of people. The Church attains this universal characteristic from the universal mission of salvation of Jesus himself. And she accomplishes this mission under the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit.

IV. PENTECOST: THE UNIVERSALIZATION OF THE GOOD NEWS

The idea that the coming of the Holy Spirit took place exactly fifty days after the resurrection is peculiar to Luke. Examining other Gospel writers like John, who has the Spirit coming on the Apostles on Easter Sunday (Jn 20: 22-23), scholars have concluded that the explanation that the Holy Spirit came on the Apostles on Pentecost Day (Acts 2:1-3) is a fruit of Luke's theological reflection on the influence of the Holy spirit in the community of believers⁷⁸.

Pentecost is one of the three important feasts celebrated by the Jewish people. This feast is commonly known as the "Feast of Weeks." It falls on the seventh week after the celebration of the Passover Feast. Pentecost has its origin in agriculture, marking the end of the grain harvest⁷⁹. This became an appropriate model for Luke: Jesus gifts humankind with the first fruits of his redemptive act, the Holy Spirit. He chose this day to be the day for the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to his disciples⁸⁰ (Acts 1:8).⁸¹ On this day Luke has the Holy Spirit coming with the sound of a mighty wind and tongues of fire rested on all and gave them the gift of languages (Acts 2: 2-4). This made it possible for all who were present to receive God's message as proclaimed by the Apostles.

⁷⁸Cf. Joel C. Slayton: Pentecost, in The Anchors Bible Dictionary, Vol. 5, Doubleday, London, 1992, p. 223.

⁷⁹Joseph B. Tyson: Pentecost, in Harpers Bible Dictionary, Harpers and Row Publishers, San Francisco, 1985, p. 769.

⁸⁰Cf. *ibid*.

⁸¹"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of all the world"

Luke's explanation is pregnant with Old Testament allusions. "God created sound at Sinai and turned it into fire, (Exod 19:18); the Lord descended in fire (Gn 11: 1-9); the confusion of languages at the tower of Babel."⁸² On the Feast of Pentecost also is included pilgrimages to Jerusalem. This Feast was a festive shared joy. People rejoiced for God's blessing on all the people. Luke sees God's mission as all embracing and fitting to be realized on this day. So Luke presents all the people who were present on this day as able to hear their various languages being spoken by the Galileans (Acts 2:5-7). This also becomes a reversal of the confusion of the languages of the tower of Babel (Gn 11) that caused separation of the peoples. At Pentecost all became one and the Good News became universal to all.⁸³

V. THE HOLY SPIRIT: JESUS' GIFT FOR ALL PEOPLE

After the reception of the Holy Spirit, Luke sets the Apostles into an active and vigorous ministry of the word. They preached repentance and healed many. All the Apostles are now the instrument of the Holy Spirit. He has Peter heal a lame man at the Beautiful Gate in the name of Jesus (Acts 3: 1-11). This is the first miracle so far reported by Luke after Pentecost. He connects this miracle to the Spirit poured out on the Pentecost day as being active and its presence now being felt in the community.

The Spirit has no boundary. Luke continues to present the new era, the age of the Spirit, as the age of equality for Jews and Gentiles. Luke, the universalist, goes on to proclaim the universal salvation and the creation of a kingdom in which barriers between classes and peoples is abolished. He pictures this era by having the Gentiles also receive the Holy Spirit which the Jewish Christians had thought was only reserved for the themselves. The story of Cornelius in chapter ten of the Book of Acts, emphasizes that the gift of the Holy Spirit is for all. This passage goes on to strengthen the message he earlier gave that "All were filled with the Spirit"(Acts 2:4).

⁸²Joel C. Slayton: Pentecost, in The Anchors Bible Dictionary, Vol. 5, Double Day, London, 1992. p 223.

⁸³Cf *ibid.*

VI. COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM AND INCULTURATION

The Holy Spirit, who according to Luke is the principal agent of evangelization, made it possible through the human instrument, the Apostles led by Peter, Paul and Barnabas, that the Gentiles too share equal right of exercising their faith in Jesus Christ just as the Jewish Christians had. This is testified in Peter's speech which he gave at the council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:7-8).⁸⁴

This resulted in an increase of Gentile converts in the Church. This growth made some Jewish Christians to be mistaken and think that Christianity has only to be expressed within the confines of the Jewish culture. As a result, they tried to impose their customs and mosaic laws on Gentile converts (Acts 15:1). This was missing the essence of the Good News altogether. This group, known as Judaizers, confused faith with cultural observances. They taught that salvation is gained through circumcision and observance of mosaic law. Until then it is true that faith in Jesus Christ was enjoyed within the Jewish cultural setting. But now that the Holy Spirit opened the way for the Gentiles, things are no longer the same. Faith can now be exercised within the gentile cultures and customs also.

This is what the Council of Jerusalem was all about. The Jewish Christians, who were still scrupulous about their laws and customs, were demanding the observance of mosaic laws and circumcision to be a condition for admittance to Christianity, just as it was for the Proselytes to join Jewish religion and become the members of the Synagogue. The Apostles seeing how disastrous this could be for mission of God, especially to the Gentile Church, were compelled by the Holy Spirit to defend the course of Gentile converts (Acts 15:6).

Faced with this crisis, the Church went through three basic stages, as outlined by Ralph Earle, to avert the crisis: Dissention (Acts 15:1-5), Debate (Acts 15:6-12) and Decision (Acts 15:13-21).⁸⁵ This Decision was that, "the Church with one voice recognized that salvation was by grace alone. The Gentiles needed only to believe.

⁸⁴"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witness in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of all the world"

⁸⁵Ralph Earle: The Acts of the Apostles in Beacon Bible Commentary, Vol VII, Beacon hill Press, Kansas City, 1965, P. 436.

Those who were troubling them and demanding circumcision, were refuted (Act 15:14-21).⁸⁶

It is in this Decision taken by the Church at the Council of Jerusalem that we find an openness to inculturation. It was the consensus of the Apostles that faith can not root itself in the Gentile people if enveloped in a Jewish culture. Rather Faith springs naturally under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in peoples' every day life. This takes us back to our definition of inculturation given in chapter one. It is evident here that inculturation means to live the faith in our daily lives. If faith comes with new unnecessary practices it becomes difficult to live it because it becomes foreign. This is the reason why the council said "it is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us not to place on you any burden beyond these necessities" (Acts 15:28).

It can also be pointed out from the Book of Acts that inculturation and evangelization are two sides of the same coin. If the Church did not move from Jerusalem to other parts of the world, there would be no need for inculturation of the Gospel. But it is the salvation plan of God that the saving message be preached from Jerusalem to the ends of the world. Inculturation now becomes necessary for this commission. Evangelization goes hand in hand with inculturation. Evangelization is a process of inculturation, and it is willed so by Christ Himself in order to fulfill the Scriptures, "that the repentance for the forgiveness of sins, would be preached in his name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Lk 24:47).

⁸⁶R.H. Stein: Jerusalem in *The Dictionary of Paul and his letters*, a compendium of modern Biblical Scholarship, Intervarsity Press, England, 1993, p.469.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of inculturation is to cultivate a faith that is genuine and authentic. This importance has been noticed by the Church from its very beginning. Through the ages, the Church has kept the issue of inculturation in mind. Yet in every age there arise issues which affect the progress of inculturation and keep it from becoming fully realized in the lives of the people in the Church. It is, perhaps for this reason, that the Church of Africa in the recent synod, gave more attention to the subjects of inculturation and evangelization. These are key areas in the growth of the Church, especially of the African Church. "The synod considers inculturation an urgent priority in the life of particular churches for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa."⁸⁷

Also along this line, the first chapter of this essay considered inculturation as what the Church strives for in order to make the Gospel relevant to people in their daily lives, and to help them transform their lives by the Gospel. Inculturation is easy and possible only if we understand culture as something that is living: a sum total of a people's daily lives, that have an inevitable connection to their past, yet expresses the present. For example, our cultures today here in Africa show a lot of external influences that are acquired through the use of mass media, education, and interaction with people from other parts of the world. But at the same time, these influences change our being Africans. We can not say that this is not our genuine culture, or even that our real culture is what was going on in the past before these influences came. Whatever life we live today forms our culture. It is our living today. This is why the synod fathers said, "considering the rapid changes in the cultural, social, economic and political domains, our local churches must be involved in the process of inculturation in an on-going manner, respecting the following criteria: compatibility with the Christian message and communion with the universal Church."⁸⁸ This suggests that inculturation has to be understood in a holistic and integral manner, for it embraces the entire daily lives of the people.

⁸⁷John- Paul II: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exaltation, *The Church in Africa*, no 59, Pauliness Publication, Nairobi, 1995, p. 44.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, no 62, p. 47.

Our model in this understanding of inculturation is the evangelist, Luke. He presents a God who came to life among us as the first one to show us what is to be inculturated. From the moment of conception up to the time of his death and resurrection, Luke has shown Jesus in his culture, specifically his Jewish culture. Jesus promoted this culture in all the areas that needed promotion but also he conflicted with the culture wherever the culture was not able to show the truth about the Kingdom of God. By doing this, Luke shows us that God is at work in all the cultures. This is the story on which Luke concentrated his twenty-four chapters of his Gospel. Here, Luke managed to show us how Jesus expressed the kingdom of God in his own daily life, and how he led other people to the living of this reality of the Kingdom of God in their daily lives. This is a key to inculturation: expression of the reality of the Kingdom of God in all the circumstances of our present daily lives.

By letting Jesus undergo the Jewish customs and learn the Jewish culture, Luke presents Jesus to us as a man of culture and a God amidst the people of different cultures. An incarnate Son of God learned his culture from his family, Mary and Joseph, and the whole Jewish society that surrounded him. Learning from this, the Church emphasizes "Just as the word became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn 1:14), so too the Good News, the word of Jesus Christ proclaimed to the nations, must take root in the life situation of the hearers of the word."⁸⁹ This can always be possible through the process of inculturation, "for inculturation of the son of God, precisely because it was complete and concrete, was also inculturation in a particular culture."⁹⁰

Some fear that a call to inculturation comes about from the fear of living up to a committed life of the Gospel. This is not true. Real inculturation commits the Christians to living up to the Gospel in their everyday daily lives. This is our challenge as it was also in the life of Jesus. In his ministry, Jesus challenged the Jewish people to live a transformed life. This meant to transcend some cultural convictions that were contrary to the Gospel. Inculturation as we have seen in the second part of Chapter Two of this essay, does not mean syncretism, but it is a lived

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, no. 60, p. 45-6.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

commitment to the truths and values of the Gospel. Thus the Church cautions, "In all cases care has to be taken to avoid syncretism."⁹¹ In other words, inculturation is people's response to the call to discipleship, the discipleship that is authentic and genuine to them in their own cultures.

It is through inculturation that the Church of Africa can prove her authenticity and genuineness to discipleship. As stated above,⁹² discipleship entails suffering. It is by living the Gospel values that African Christians will accept the suffering that is caused by the tension arising between Gospel values and cultural convictions.

Just as the glory of Christ came about as a result of enduring the cross, the glory of Christian life in Africa will also come about through perseverance in inculturation of Gospel values. The glory of Christian life in the African Church is to be genuinely Christian and genuinely African, for inculturation proceeds towards "the ultimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and on the other hand insertion of Christianity into the various human cultures."⁹³

Finally, the process of inculturation is the recognition of the Holy Spirit who is at work in the Church. "Inculturation also has a profound link with the mystery of Pentecost. Thanks to the out-pouring and action of the Spirit, who draws gifts and talents into unity, all the people of the earth when they enter the Church live a new Pentecost, profess in their own tongues (and express in their daily lives) the one faith in Christ and proclaim the marvels the Lord has done for them."⁹⁴ This is the reality of the African Church today, as it carries out the command of Jesus, "You will be my witness" (Acts 1:8).

⁹¹Ibid., no 62, p. 47.

⁹²In chapter two, part three of this essay.

⁹³Ibid., no. 59, p. 44-5.

⁹⁴Ibid., no 60, p. 46.

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