

## **INCULTURATION AT THE SERVICE OF THE KINGDOM**

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The relation between the Gospel and culture has been an area that has attracted a major portion of the missiological concern of our times. Yet it is not exactly a modern problem. It is as old as the Church itself. It was the very first question that the nascent community encountered, triggered off by the acceptance of the Gospel by the non-Jews. Immediately the dispute surfaced: should the non-Jewish fresh comers conform to the Jewish practices? This led to the Jerusalem Council where it was decided by the Holy Spirit and the Council that faith in the Lord Jesus was not a matter of Jewish cultural practices (Act 15:28). The new adherents can keep their own cultures except for certain matters to avoid scandal.

However the golden rule was laid to rest as the Church gradually became the state religion of the Roman Empire. The community that was on the margins of the society until then becomes the producer and protector of a culture. The Greco-Roman and Semitic culture that was identified as the Christian culture comes to be transported wherever the Church went. Except for some isolated instances such as the Slavonic experiments of Cyril and Methodius in the 9<sup>th</sup> century and the Chinese and the Malabar rites of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the "Christian culture" went unchallenged in all the regions the Church spread. Later, the colonial outlook of ethnocentrism came handy in the expansion of this monoculture, in the hay day of mission in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The evangelization that accompanied colonial forays either eradicated the native cultures or disparaged them. As Eugene Hillmann has

argued, evangelization became a matter of an unjust intrusion in so far as it was an instrument to undermine the cultural identity and dignity of many indigenous cultures (in V. Anthony 1997:86).

With the advance of social sciences, ethnology in particular, towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cultural presumptions of the Church began to crack. From the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century voices began to be heard, at first as a whisper but soon becoming a roar, as to the relation between the Gospel and the cultures of the people. Today this has developed into the mighty missiological force, generally christened as "inculturation".

### 1. Cultures and Inculturation

Culture is a complex notion to be fully brought into a neat definition. Kroeber and Kluckhohn gathered over 300 definitions of culture in their effort to bring together the confused notion of culture (in Luzbetak 1991:134). It is the way of life of a people including the way they die. That is to say culture consists not only of certain web of meanings, norms, beliefs, control systems, artifacts and symbols of a people but also their hopes, agonies, anxieties, fears, aspirations and disappointments. Hence culture of a people cannot be described without their lived history, with its various pulls and pushes. The social, economic and political realities are very much part of a culture. Hence *Gaudium et Spes* describes culture as "all those factors by which we refine and develop our manifold spiritual and physical endowments" (GS 53). Questions of justice, morality, living standards, political systems, and social structures, environmental degradation, globalization, etc., all come under the purview of culture. Hence today culture should be understood in its integral sense, comprising meaning, religion and history.

When we come to the notion of inculturation, the confusion is even more acute. To begin with, writers dissent among themselves with regard to the very term. One hears of contextualization, indigenization, localization, interculturation, acculturation, translation, etc., to indicate the reality signified by inculturation. Each of these terms has its own specific nuance and hence cannot simply be equated with the others. There is a general preference for the use of inculturation, especially in the English speaking countries, due to the closest similarity of the process we want to

describe by this term to the parallel anthropological process described as enculturation in sociology.

Enculturation, in sociology, indicates a process through which a baby grows into and becomes part and parcel of a given culture. It has to be admitted that the process is not a one-way traffic in so far as the given culture itself can undergo changes by the influence of its members.

Similarly, inculturation in general, could be said to be the process by which a Christian community grows into a genuine local Church, i.e., it becomes a dynamic presence from within the given context, so that it spontaneously becomes one with the context. At the same time, it is a transforming presence, in so far as it serves as an agent for changing whatever is dehumanizing in that particular context. The Christian community as the bearer of the Gospel, forges its identity of faith, worship and mission in the given context so that it can become the "salt, light and leaven" in that context. Inculturation basically has the character of "other-centeredness". This is derived from two reasons. First, the primary concern is not so much the community's identity as much as its impact on the cultural context. Second, it manifests the Gospel's inherent respect for "the other". The Gospel is the good news of the love of the God who is concerned not about God's own self, but about the "other", i.e. creation and human beings. Truly, the whole Gospel is about Jesus' rendering visibility and tangibility to this other-centeredness of God.

## **2. Incarnation and Inculturation**

Incarnation is the context and content of Inculturation. Through incarnation the Word who was present in the whole creation and who enlightens every one coming into the world (Jn 1:14) became a human being and thereby became also part of the human history (Jn 1:14), as God's presence with us (Emmanuel). He does not become a human being in general but an individual of a particular culture, "Jesus of Nazareth". Evangelist Matthew spells out this particularity by showing in his genealogy that Jesus was "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (1:1). Matthew, again, takes care to tell the reader how Jesus when he sent his disciples on mission, during his lifetime, insisted that they must work only among the Jews (10:5).

He was an average Jew, known to the public as "the carpenter from Nazareth" (Mt 13:55) whose mother and brothers and sisters were all well acquainted with the people. He was at home with their celebrations and way of life (Jn 2:1ff). He was a perfect Jew, but a counter cultural Jew. When it came to the customs, practices and laws that had no relevance but only served to dehumanize human beings, he considered them as deadwood to be excised. He had little regard for Sabbath observances that focused only on the letter of the law sacrificing its spirit, i.e., rest and regeneration for humans and nature. Hence he declared that the Sabbath was for human beings and not human beings for the Sabbath (Mk 2:27).

Inserting himself in the Jewish reform movement initiated by John the Baptist by receiving his baptism and standing in the tradition of the Old Testament prophets, Jesus criticized all forces of dehumanization. While accepting the Mosaic requirement that a cleansed leper presents himself/herself to the priest to be declared clean so that the person concerned can be reinstated in the society (Mk 2:44), he questions the Pharisaic interpretation of the law that one cannot be healed on the Sabbath (Lk 13:15), or that a healed person cannot even take the mat and go home on a Sabbath (Jn 5:1ff). In fact, almost with regularity, he cures people on Sabbath to bring home the point that human beings have precedence over the Law in itself (Mk 3:1ff). This in fact was one of the contributing causes of his death (Mk 3:6). Similarly, he had little regard for certain ritual practices and rules of purity and pollution (Mk 7:1ff). As opposed to the Jewish injunction not to invite the poor, the maimed, the elderly, people with bodily oozing, etc., Jesus advocated: "when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind" (Lk 14:13-14). The laws of purity and pollution served to marginalize people in terms of race, profession, bodily situation, sin, etc. The oft-repeated and all-inclusive table-fellowship is a radical questioning of such and regulations.

## 2.1 Inculturation and the Kingdom

The central theme of Jesus' ministry, the Kingdom of God, was the inculturation in practice for Jesus. The very symbol of the Kingdom of God stands in the Jewish tradition and in the context of the Jewish expectation of the Messiah who would liberate them and establish the divine reign. It was a polyvalent symbol of Israel's hope of liberation (Perrin 1976:33). Jesus gave a new

dimension to it by showing how the Kingdom stood in contrast to the tyranny of legalism and Satan's rule of lie, darkness and death. God is manifested as the liberator in Jesus Christ through his unconditional love, leading to freedom, fellowship and justice (Soares 1981:598). Jesus interprets the symbol through his words (parables) and more so through his deeds.

Through his ministry Jesus manifested that the God whom he experienced as the intimate parent (Abba) is to be reached through the neighbour. As we have seen he went so far as to relativize God in terms of the neighbour. The acceptance of God as the intimate abba and all human beings as brothers and sisters, with all that implies he described as the realization of the Kingdom. Ushering in this divine reign was his mission (Mk 1:14; Mt 9:35). Not only was his mission that of the realization of the Kingdom, but it is the same with his disciples too (Mt 10:7). He cautions the disciples against the "yeast of the Pharisees", i.e., their influence of following the Law for the sake of the Law, with little concern for the people (Mk 8:15).

Jesus, through his teachings and conduct showed how persons and groups ought to live according to the divine will. In this we come across not only the poor, the sick and the oppressed but also political and religious leaders and their practices as well. Luke in particular presents Jesus identifying himself with the important social concerns of Isaiah. Jesus inaugurates his ministry with a quote from Isaiah, which summarizes the prophet's social stand (Is 61:1-2). Jesus makes it his own programme of action (Lk 4:18-19). When the disciples of John approach him inquiring if he were indeed the promised Messiah, Jesus replies by asking them to narrate to John what they actually saw and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor experience the good news (Lk 7:22-23).

Jesus does not compromise to the status quo. While accepting the invitation of the rich to dine with them, he at the same time dares them to divest themselves of their wealth or the dehumanizing and discriminating practices (Lk 14:1ff). Though Jesus was at the hospitality of the ruler belonging to the Pharisees' party knowing their opposition to his practice of healing on the Sabbath, he heals the man affected by dropsy. Further he drives home the lesson that human beings are more important than

animals for which the Pharisees had no qualms to make exceptions to the Sabbath law.

Jesus' position is one of concern and compassion for people from all backgrounds though he had a preferential option for the suffering, the poor and the defenseless. Jesus stood for an inclusive society where no one was excluded. This was so dramatically manifested in his table-fellowship. The all-inclusive community is a prominent aspect of Jesus' Kingdom centered inculturation.

## **2.2 Oppression & Injustice**

This aspect of Jesus' practice is many-sided. Through the parable of the wicked tenants (Lk 20:9-19) he criticizes the abuses of the religious leaders. What Jesus spoke in defense of the widows indicates his stand against their oppression. He denounces the scribes "who devour widows' houses" (Lk 20:47). The point of the parable of redressing injustice in the case of a widow (Lk 18:1-5) suggests the need to do justice to the widow.

In the Society of Jesus' time women suffered much injustice due to discrimination against them. Jesus adopted a pattern of behavior that paved the way for a personal identity and social standing for women. As Richard Cassidy underlines, "by implication their social roles were to be broadened appreciably, and they were to be participants in community life as independent persons" (1980:37). Women figure in a number of healings. He praised the generosity of the poor widow (Mk 12:43). So also his teaching about divorce and re-marriage implies his stand of justice to women (Lk 16:18). With regard to his attitude and respect for women we see how Jesus was at ease in the company of Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42) or in his conversation with the women at the well (Jn 4:7ff).

## **2.3. Relationship of Service**

Exercise of power and order was the norm of the Scribes and the Pharisees (Mt 23:2-4). But Jesus called for a reversal of values: the greatest must be the servant of all (Mt 23:12). In the service oriented new social order that Jesus advocated domination, as practiced by the existing religious and political rulers, has no place (Mk 9:35). Nor was there any room for chasing after ranks and positions. True greatness accrues from dedicated service to the community (Lk 17:7-10). The disciples are to discharge their

responsibilities as devoted servants. He spared no terms to criticize the contrary practices (Lk 11:43; 20:46-47). The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship; but among his disciples, the leader must be the servant (Lk 22:24-27). Self-oriented Sadducees and the chief priests are presented in the parable of the wicked tenants as irresponsible and murderous stewards (Lk 20:9-26). Commenting on the chief priests' relation to Jesus and the parable of the tenants Cassidy writes: "Jesus' actions at the temple, this parable, and his replies to the questions together establish beyond any doubt that he did not allow the wishes and policies of the chief priests to determine his course of action. That they controlled the temple and held important positions on the Sanhedrin did not deter him from challenging their economic practices" (1980:54).

From the foregoing reflections it can be said that for Jesus the Kingdom centered inculturation was a matter of identification on the one hand and contestation on the other. He identified himself with the poor, i.e., victims of an unjust society. On the other hand he spares no terms to criticize the powers of the Roman society or the Jewish religious authorities. He does not hide his contempt for the hollowness of the officials overseeing the order. He accepts neither the social patterns and practices nor the exploitation that was part of the system. The Gospels show how this inculturation in turn lead him to the cross. Thus the cross becomes the sublime paradigm of inculturation. But it was not the end. The God who sent him and who bore witness to him at his baptism affirms his ministry, the practice of Kingdom-inculturation, by raising him from the dead (Act 2:22-24). The Risen Lord, who has now transcended the particularity of the Jewish culture, sends the community of his disciples into every culture (Mt 28:18ff) so that the community may continue to be the transforming presence in each culture, through its inculturation at the service of the Kingdom and become salt, light and leaven in the respective culture.

### **3. Indian Church & Inculturation**

The Church is the community of the disciples of Jesus, the "little flock" (Lk 12:32), sent to continue the mission of Jesus Christ. It has to follow the same track that we have analyzed above, viz., one of identification and contestation. The first requirement in the Kingdom-centered approach to Inculturation is that the Church in

India has to become a local Church of India. It has to be steeped in the Indian culture, with regard to its life-style, worship, theology and mission. Human beings are culture-bound and so whatever they experience is filtered through their culture. If the Gospel does not subject itself to this process of filtering through the culture of a people, it will always remain "foreign".

It has been generally agreed upon that India is not just one culture, but also an aggregate of cultures, subcultures and subaltern cultures. If so, we cannot think of an Indian Church that is uniform in every part of India, rather pluralism will be a constitutive mark of the Indian Church. But it will be the local Church of India, i.e., the community of the disciples of the Lord in India. Though subject to the Petrine ministry of unity, the Church in India will not be "Roman", "Latin", or "Syrian", but the Catholic Church in India (the paper is dealing only about the Catholics).

### **3.1. Life-style**

In its life-style it has to be at home with the pluralistic Indian culture in which the Spirit of the Lord has been working, rendering identity and rootedness to the people of this nation. This culture has to be the flesh and blood of the Church in India. Only then can it become the mystery of God's presence within the Indian culture. Inculturation has to take place in the mind and heart of the Christian community, in its life and mission. It is a matter of the Church's attitude to the Indian culture by making that culture its own.

Naturally, one wonders if a local culture like Indian culture has significance in the context of globalization. We cannot deny the impact of a culture of globalization, with its technological and industrial values. Yet, globalization has also given rise to the revival of the local. The local gives reality its texture and contour, meaning and rootedness. In fact what we witness today is the tension between the global and the local, between the centripetal and the centrifugal tendencies. This tension is compounded by the rise of the sub and subaltern cultures as well. All this will have to go into the make up of the life-style of the Indian Church.

### **3.2. Worship**

A major aspect of the life of the local Church is its worship. Worship is the celebration of faith through symbols. Naturally to

become a genuine local Church its worship has to be through the cultural symbols of the place. At this juncture it is good to remind ourselves that what we call, Roman, Latin, and Syro, forms of worships are all depending on the cultural symbols of the respective places, almost 99% borrowed from the so-called "pagan" symbols. Jesus Christ has bequeathed to the community only one rite, the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup in his memory and one prayer, the Our Father. All the rest, including baptism, in some sense, are wholesale borrowing from other cultures and religions, a good deal from Judaism, but also from the Greco-Roman religions and cultures. While acknowledging the role time has played in rendering certain identity status to these practices, we must be equally open to the new situations.

With regard to the liturgical inculturation it must be emphasized that it is the celebration of the community and hence the community must be involved in the process. Experts have their roles. However the process cannot be one from above only. The world of the worshiper, with its joys, sorrows, hopes and agonies, must find its place in the celebration. Naturally we cannot have one form of worship for the whole of India. There has to be room for diverse expressions according to the regions, places and occasion, though all must be under the guidance of the Bishops' Conference of India and the local Bishops respectively. The basic point in liturgical inculturation is the knowledge of the symbols and their meanings. There will be the need to catechize when all are not aware of the symbols and their meanings. One general criterion would be that nothing new is introduced without sufficient catechesis.

### 3.3 Theology

Theological inculturation is equally important to have a genuine local Church. Theology is the ideological framework that underlines the Church in its life, worship and mission. Theology is the community's reflection on the Word of God in a particular context so that the community can relevantly and meaningfully responds to the Word in that specific context. Naturally theology has to evolve out of that specific context. One cannot stock and barrel import theology from elsewhere. Though the Gospel / Faith is one, the way each community responds to it will be determined by the context. As pope John Paul II has emphasized, even Jesus'

own ministry was influenced by the historical context in which he carried out his mission (EA 5). That has constitutive relevance for the local Church's theology and mission.

Two areas that have become object of considerable theological reflection in India are Christology and Ecclesiology. The understanding of Jesus Christ need not be exactly the same everywhere as it is clear from the Acts of the Apostles. To the Jews Peter presents Jesus Christ as the fulfilled Messiah (Act 2:14ff). When we come to Areopagus, the seat of the Athenian justice, we see Paul speaking more about God with just a passing reference to Jesus as "the man in whom God established justice by raising him from the dead" (Act 17:22ff, v.31). No doubt the Christian has to confess Jesus Christ the Lord, and the only mediator between the One God and humans (1 Cor 8:6; Rom 10:9; Jn 1:1-18, etc.). In a religiously pluralistic context this confessing of Jesus as the Lord is done not at the expense of the value of religions, which we are bound "to acknowledge, preserve and promote" (NA 2).

A related issue is the identity of the Church. Vatican II described the Church as the mystery of God's presence on earth (LG 5), sent to continue the mission of Jesus Christ who was "Emmanuel", God with us. Hence the Church's identity is a missionary identity, to be at the service of the world. Once again in a context of religious pluralism are we justified in claiming to be the only religion that enjoys *de jure* existence? Rather, should we not acknowledge with Vatican II that we have "one common origin" and "one common destiny" (NA 1), with all the peoples? Biblical evidence, all the way from creation to the new creation, supports such an understanding.

### 3.4. Kingdom-Mission & Inculturation

All what we have been saying so far converge on one point: Inculturation is in relation to the mission of the Church in India. We saw how Incarnation was a process of inculturation for the sake of the Kingdom centered mission of Jesus. Even as Jesus' ministry was a constant struggle to actualize the divine reign in his culture, so also true inculturative effort is to be seen in the Indian Church's struggle to ring in the divine reign in the Indian context.

The very first point regarding inculturation in the service of the Kingdom is that we must speak about the Kingdom and the

requirements for the realization of it for which the community is sent. In other words we must shift the focus of our attention to the transformation of the non-Kingdom situations to the Kingdom situation. All other concerns must be subsidiary to this basic issue. We saw how it was the over-arching theme of Jesus' mission. This implies that we re-examine our missionary inculturation in the light of what we saw was the practice of Jesus.

According to this vision inculturation will no longer be a point of dispute regarding life-style or liturgy, however important they are, but a matter of reflecting the mind of the Lord who admonished the disciples: "you call me Teacher the Lord ... If then, your Lord and Teacher have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (Jn 13: 13-15). This service role has to be displayed at every avenue of today's culture. If we practice this type of service role in our culture today, we will be able to bring about a change in Indian society even as it succeeded in bringing about a change in the 19<sup>th</sup> century effecting the birth of neo-Hinduism.

To begin with, this attitude of service has to be instilled into every ministry of the Church, including that of the episcopal ministry. Then there will not be the present scramble for the ministries like that of the bishop from any quarter nor any effort to keep any quarter inaccessible to these ministries. Extensive changes will have to come in attitudes and alchemy of our hierarchical structures. Ecclesial leadership, in the context of inculturation, will be anchored not on *exousia* (power) but *dunamis* (authority), derived from the transparency of a life of service.

Service role has to be extended to today's culture of drugs, HIV/AIDS, globalization, removal of the quantitative restrictions, etc. HIV/AIDS is a major calamity of our culture. It involves not only physical pain and human loss but social ostracism as well. What is the Church's response? Service to HIV/AIDS surely is an urgent one that the Church has to impart. It goes beyond conducting a few centers of rehabilitation and care. This is an area where the teaching role of the Church can help the victims as well as those affected. To begin with at no point should the Church indulge in such negative views such as advocating that AIDS is a punishment from God. Surely, the Church has to promote good morals and sound principles, always projecting the image of God

as compassion. The Church has to speak against sins such as adultery, fornication, misuse of children, etc. At the same time the Church has to speak in defense of the right to life and the sacredness of it. Thus it cannot collaborate with activity that is intended only to hinder procreation.

On the other hand it can and must teach ways to prevent the transmission of HIV. It has to speak also for the right to life of the spouse of an HIV infected patient. These are occasions as Michael J. Kelly has argued, the Church must rethink prophetically about the blanket prohibition of the use of condoms or even positively to advocate the use of it (Kelly 2001:26-30).

Many moral, pastoral and mission practices will have to be reviewed in the context of our history. What are we to say about mixed marriages? Can we go further than the normal canon law prescription? The historical situation and the many human problems involved will have to be taken into account rather than confining to legalism. Another area would be the reception of the Eucharist by a non-baptized person, or divorced Catholics. To dismiss all these as permissiveness or liberalism would be shallow thinking or may even border on irresponsibility, in the light of the practice of Jesus!

Similarly, what is our stand on various social movements such as Feminist movements, Human Rights movements, Anti-pollution movements, Peace movements, etc., to mention a few? What is the Church's decisional and institutional impact on the whole array of culture trends brought in the wake of globalization?

### 3.4.1. Inculturation and Dalits

The Sanskrit root *dal* means split or broken. Thus the term dalit indicates a people who are oppressed and trampled upon due to an unjust caste system. It has an implication of poverty and injustice deliberately thrust upon by the powerful sitting on the top of the society. In this sense it includes not only the scheduled castes, but also scheduled tribes, neo-Buddhists, the landless and poor peasants, women and all those who are being exploited politically, economically and in the name of religion (Kanitkar 2000:258). Thus it is a class constituting the base of the Indian society. As the base this class bears the burden of the manual and menial labour and all the suffering and discrimination associated

with it, at the same time denied of the opportunity to enjoy the fruit of their labour. This in turn makes them not only anthropologically poor but economically poor as well.

Though the term dalit can be extended to include all those who suffer poverty and exploitation normally it is used more restrictively to those who suffer oppression and marginalization based on the caste system. The cumulative oppression of thousands of years has left them in a situation of "no people". Though under the impact of the Bhakti movement some saints of the caste Hinduism did speak of their awful lot, organized effort from within the dalits themselves to liberate themselves from this inhuman situation received the impetus from Christianity. In fact the first dalit movement to come out of the dehumanizing social and religious situation began with the conversion movement to Christianity in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The fruits of over half a century of independence have trickled down and the dalit-awareness of injustice has become more assertive demanding redress. Most often this has only met with violence from the part of privileged groups who do not want to loose their grip on power and riches. This is one of the major reasons for the violence against the dalits that has become a common phenomenon.

What is disheartening is that though many dalits embraced Christianity attracted by the teachings of Jesus Christ in whom they saw the redeemer of the oppressed and depressed people, their situation has not become much better either socially or economically. Socially there is little inter-marriage between Christians of dalit origin and other Christians. Conversion has not changed appreciably their economic levels either. Though a sizeable portion of Indian Christians hail from dalit background their representation in the Church leadership remains at deplorably low levels.

Inculturation in the context of the dalits demands of the Church that it creates the atmosphere within it such that the dalits can feel fully at home in the Church in every respect. Their culture and values will find expression in the life, worship and mission of the Church. Every form of decision-making in the Church will have to enjoy at least proportionate representation from the dalits. However existing trends seem to suggest that the Church has not

fully awakened to the situation. Many inculturation efforts, regrettably, are confined to the Sanskritic values. This is a betrayal of the Christians of dalit background, for, as S. Devaraj has shown, they embraced Christianity to get liberated from the hegemony of the upper castes (2000:63). Inculturation will have to take into account the struggles and experiences of the dalits, their religiosity, language, myths, world of meanings and symbols. It is good to remind ourselves that it is not only an issue of Christian faith but a question of Human right as well. Dignity, freedom and decency have to become the dominant human concerns as well as the norm for social relationships.

### 3.4.2. Inculturation and Tribal Identity

The tribal people, along with the dalits form more than half of the Indian Christians. Though the tribal situation is different from that of the dalits, due to certain isolated existence, there are common basic ingredients in their socio-economic and political situation. They are the *Adi* people, the indigenous people of India. Along with the dalits they share in the anger, protest and rejection of the existing socio-political and religious order.

Many developmental programmes and industries have left the tribal people disinherited and dispossessed. Much of the progress that the country has made is at the expense of the tribals who in the process are left uprooted and disoriented. One sad factor that the tribal people feel deeply is that the outsiders have invaded their territory and have occupied their lands leaving them disinherited and uprooted.

What attracted the tribal people to Christianity, above all, was the similarity between the Christian myths and their own myths. The role of the land both in the bible and in the tribal tradition is analogous. Even as Naboth in the bible, the tribal people believe that they do not possess the land but they are possessed by the land. It is their clan inheritance. It is in this background that we can understand the success of Constance Livens and Hoffman among the tribal people. In the Gospels the tribal people find inspiration for various mass movements aimed at establishing a new order of life and bringing about social change, changes in thought, behaviour, and social relationships. Jesus Christ is the Mediator-Messiah who liberates them from their distress by espousing their

cause and leading them to total well being and fullness of life already now and in the world to come.

Inculturation in the context of the tribal community involves greater stress on integral liberation. Social justice will be a leading concern. The Church in the tribal regions will have to make every effort that it does not become a *dhiku* (outsider) who displaces them. It is a question of fine sensitivity. Another point that needs to be taken care is that the Church does not become a dividing factor among the tribals. It is a well-known fact how the Church in the past unwittingly became an instrument of division among the tribal people. Great care must be taken to ensure that Christian members of a tribe do not break their social relation with the rest of the tribe. What Fr. Marianus Kujur, a tribal scholar spoke about the Church in Chotanagpur is equally true of other areas as well. He wrote: "The Tribal Church of Chotanagpur cannot be genuinely vibrant unless the larger tribal community also flourishes" (1998:74). Church's respect for other religions must be extended to the tribal religions as well. No effort must be spared to restore tribal unity. Community is an important value for the tribal people.

### 3.4.3. Interreligious Dialogue

While speaking about theological inculturation we pointed out that the Church in India does not see itself to be the only true religion with exclusive claim for existence. Nor does it situate itself to be the fulfillment of other religions, even less, the displacer of other religions. As the community of the disciples of the Incarnate Word, it has a mission of service to the world. This service is to be discharged in the spirit of dialogue with the followers of other religions. Inculturation takes seriously their God-experience. This is sanctioned by the biblical evidence as well, more so in the creation narrative, in the Wisdom literature and in the Johannine Prologue. Conscious of how God, as the Lord of history, is involved also in the history of the people of other religions (Amos 9:7) and of the fact that it is faith in this God that saves all peoples (1 Tim 2:1-4) through the only mediator Jesus Christ (1 Tim 2:5), the Church has to be open to the followers of all religions.

As in the case of individuals, religions too pass through various stages of isolation, competition, conquering, collaboration, etc. The Catholic Church also had its share in fostering such attitudes towards other religions. Biblical evidence and the culture

## Inculturation at the Service of the Kingdom

of our times justify only the last one, collaboration. We can no more afford to indulge in isolation or aggression. In an inter-dependent and radically inter-connected world, the Church can fulfill its mission of realizing the divine reign as manifested in the ministry of Jesus Christ only in dialogue with other religions. The signs of the times invite the Church as well as the followers of different religious traditions to come together. Hence Pope John XXIII said while opening Vatican II, "In the present order of things, divine providence is leading us to a new order of human relation which, by men's own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward the fulfillment of God's superior and inscrutable designs" (Abbot 1966:712-713).

As far as Vatican II is concerned this new order of relations is manifested above all in the conciliar document *Gaudium et Spes*, addressed to "the whole of humanity" (n 2). The very opening words of the document, "The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the [men] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ", brings out the Church's profound desire to be in dialogue with all the people of the world. No 11 gives the theological basis for this dialogue. The Church believes that "it is led by the Spirit of the Lord, who fills the earth. Motivated by this faith, it labours to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose in the happenings, needs and desires in which these people (the Church) has a part along with other [men] of our age".

Our commitment to Jesus Christ reminds us that our obligation is not just to Christianity, but to God who reveals God's self in Christ and to God's world. Being preoccupied only with Christianity is a deviation. The very nature of Christianity is other centeredness and hence an introverted Christian is a self-contradiction. We are challenged to a new historical involvement. In this context it has to be insisted that every parish priest has an obligation not only for the Catholics of the place but to the human community of the place. In this spirit he must conscientize the Catholic community to be open in dialogue to all the people of the area.

At a time of religious violence and communal disharmony, religious leaders must realize, as Pope John Paul II reminds us, "to

wage war in the name of religions is a blatant contradiction. Religious leaders in particular have the duty to do everything possible to ensure that religion is what God intends it to be: a source of goodness, respect, harmony and peace" (1999:885). This relationship of respect, harmony and peace among the followers of religions prepare the way for the realization of the Kingdom.

Respect and harmony flows out of a conversion, conversion to God and to each other. This is one of the fruits of dialogue. However this conversion cannot rest at a religious level alone. That is to say acceptance of the other is not only in terms of the other being a religious person. But it must be extended to all, more so to all those who are suffering in any way, including the suffering earth, our home, due to environmental degradation caused by human greed. Interreligious dialogue must flow into amelioration of life for all. At a time of the collapse of values and accountability in public life interreligious dialogue must evolve strategies to bring in transparency and respect for human rights. Otherwise interreligious dialogue will remain in the ivory tower of nice talks and exchange of pleasantries.

The sufferings of the millions of people in our country are caused by the religious world-view, i.e., the caste system. It is part of the culture caused by human selfishness. This world-view can be changed only through education and conversion. This is part of the interreligious dialogue and an essential part of the Christian mission of realizing the divine reign. Thus dialogue leads to communion among all people, which is vital to the realization of the Kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have reflected on inculturation in the context of the Church's mission as the servant of the Kingdom. In this perspective Jesus' own mission was a programme of inculturation: one of identification and contestation. We have spelt out some of the ramifications of this type of inculturation for us in India. Such an inculturation cannot remain at the peripheral issues like the dress or mode of prayer. It will have to enlarge itself to every aspect of the Indian society either identifying with it or taking a prophetic stand against it. Thus the Church in India has to become the fragrance of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 2:14) in the Indian society.

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