

THE PROCESS OF INCULTURATION

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a. Know your culture

The process of Inculturation begins with an effort by all the agents of evangelization to get to know the cultures of the people they are ministering to. This can be theoretical knowledge but must include the desire to gain experiential knowledge of that particular culture. Theoretical studies of a culture give a student or researcher the methodology and the approach to that particular culture. Theory is a guide to language, giving one the vocabulary of the discipline in order to describe one's experience. Know the language and if possible get to know different dialects as well. Participate in the people's experiences. The evangelizer must have a desire to experience local culture; become empty of prejudices and keep reflecting and analysing the experience of the local people. Your presence and observation/participation can help the people to be more conscious of themselves, their habits, riches, vision, values and beliefs. Have a fascination and a passion for other cultures. As you enter this process:

- ❖ Know yourself your beliefs and your mission.
- ❖ Empty yourself. Go through a personal kenosis experience.
- ❖ "Take off your shoes". Be humble, open and receptive.
- ❖ Give up ingrained prejudices, revise preconceived ideas and allow your understanding of our faith to be purified.
- ❖ Go to the people and identify with them.
- ❖ Listen to them and learn from them.
- ❖ Love them and accept them unconditionally. Appreciate and value the rural experiences.
- ❖ Share what you have - your life and faith experiences are valuable.
- ❖ Synthesize your experience with theirs. Write down your experiences.
- ❖ Encourage them to respond to the liberating message of salvation in their own way.
- ❖ Discourage mimicking. Let them be original, innovative, and creative.

b. Be critical

Have a critical approach to culture. Ask questions and find out why people hold on to certain beliefs and practices. Certain beliefs and practices might be incompatible with the Christian message; some could be dehumanizing and denigrating. Have a critical approach because some of these practices might involve occultism. Be intelligent and make a sincere effort to understand what you hear and experience. Try to evaluate the truth, and challenge your understanding. Be critical of the form of Christianity we have received in Africa

which is closely linked to Western culture. Be critical of the Western paradigm which has formed and informed the kind of Christianity we have embraced. The Western paradigm neglected and marginalised the African paradigm. The process of inculturation entails free discourse; deconstruction of new, contextual theologies; critical questioning and creative interaction.

We must continue with a critique of our theology in present day Africa. We must acknowledge the fact that we have embraced a Christianity wrapped in western clothes. During the early days of evangelisation, western theology, Euro-American customs, languages and traditions were imposed on the indigenous peoples. Missionaries came here and did a lot of good. We must also acknowledge some of the mistakes they committed. Granted, they came with limitations imposed on them by their own native, cultural world views. Some of them came with the attitude of “teachers”, forgetting that they have to humble themselves first and learn from the people. They forgot to look out for the ‘footprints’ of the same Jesus who was already present, however implicitly, in Africa before their arrival. It is part of our sad history that they literally stripped our people naked and made them feel ashamed of themselves and of their culture. Local symbols were replaced with foreign symbols. Euro-American forms and practices were confused with the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is no secret that some of our missionaries did not accept African religions and did not respect African cultural institutions; according to them westernisation was a prelude to evangelisation. We must be critical to be able to distinguish between ‘missionary Christianity’ and ‘authentic Christianity’. Missionary Christianity is a rejection of African historicity; it is a Christianity of imposition. We must be critical of this type of Christianity and lead the way for the transformation and inculturation of Christianity.

c. Know your faith

Inculturation implies dialogue between Christian faith and local culture. As angels of evangelization and inculturation, we need to enter the process of inculturation with our own religious convictions. My own personal religious convictions rest in God who revealed God-self in Jesus Christ. It is a faith in Jesus who is the fullness of truth and grace. This dialogue will be a fruitful process if people enter it with convictions and personal commitments, while at the same time coming with openness to understand others. Dialogue is an opportunity to see what the Spirit of God has been doing in other people and in their cultures. This is not abandonment of principles; it is not adulteration of the Gospel message; it is not watering down the radical message of salvation. It is entering a process where one is giving and receiving. It is opening oneself to being challenged to live the deposit of faith fully. To believe is not merely an intellectual assent to a set of truths and doctrinal propositions. To believe implies self-donation and self-surrender to the revealed truth.

Inculturation is a movement towards deep evangelization. It is meant to help people to receive Jesus Christ and his message as fully as possible, so that they are moved to live in union with God, both as His children, and also as men and women that truly belong to their own people. "Inculturation through which the faith penetrates the life of individuals and their primary communities, is also a path to holiness. Just as, in the Incarnation, Christ assumed human nature in everything but sin, analogously through inculturation the Christian message assimilates the values of society to which it is proclaimed, rejecting whatever is marked by sin. To the extent that an ecclesial community can integrate the positive values of a specific culture, inculturation becomes an instrument by which the community opens itself to the riches of Christian holiness. An inculturation wisely carried out purifies and elevates the cultures of the various peoples "(EA 87).