

FACT SHEET 4 – INCULTURATION AND INTERCULTURATION

Evangelii Gaudium argues the need for inculturation not as a simple pastoral technique, but as an essential and inescapable dimension of the "Church that goes forth". Inculturation is the way in which the Gospel, by its dynamic and fruitful nature, truly encounters the hearts of peoples. A Church that "goes out" does not encounter an abstract world, but concrete people, shaped by a culture. Missionary outreach implies by its nature the encounter with cultural diversity. The passage from EG 116 is fundamental:

In this exhortation I have repeated several times that we must reach out to everyone, without allowing ourselves to be conditioned by the fact that we belong to a particular environment or adopt certain customs. I say now that in every people and in every culture the Gospel is fruitful and dynamic if it is received with an open heart. Grace **presupposes culture**, and the gift of God is incarnated in the culture of those who receive it.

Francis establishes a theological principle: "grace presupposes culture". Just as the Word of God became incarnate in a specific culture and time (the Jewish one of the first century), so the grace of the Gospel today must be incarnated in the cultures of those who receive it. A Church that does not inculturate itself is not truly "going forth", but remains on the margins, extraneous to the life of peoples.

Furthermore, EG contrasts inculturation with two drifts: sectarian proselytism and the imposition of a single cultural model. Inculturation is a process of mutual respect, dialogue and fertilization. A proclamation that imposes a foreign cultural form (e.g. a "European Christianity") is contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel. It is a form of spiritual control. Inculturation, on the other hand, is an act of trust in the Holy Spirit, who is already at work in cultures before our arrival. This is not a one-way street. It is a dynamic process in which the Church gives the Gospel and, at the same time, receives from cultures new riches to express it. On the one hand, the Gospel brings a new light to purify and bring to fulfilment what is good and true already exists in a culture. On the other hand, the different cultures, with their values and wisdoms, help the Church to understand and live the fullness of the Gospel in a richer way. Finally, Francis argues for inculturation with a principle of pastoral effectiveness and respect for the other. The message must be proclaimed in a "language" that people can understand, not only linguistically, but also at the level of symbols, mental categories and sensibilities.

Inculturation is therefore not an optional for specialists, but the very breath of a missionary Church which, going out of itself, recognizes that the Holy Spirit has already prepared the ground and that God's salvation is destined to put on the clothes of every culture on earth. In a dynamic of reciprocity, inculturation is a process that can also be described as "inter-culturation" – in the perspective of the so-called "*inter gentes*" mission – in which the Gospel, by becoming incarnate in a new culture, enriches its own expression. The culture that receives the Gospel is purified and elevated, while the universal Church, observing how the Gospel comes to life in a new culture, deepens its understanding of the faith. Even the cultures of origin of missionaries (e.g. the European one) are questioned and enriched by the encounter.

Two contributions for personal reflection. **Carmelo Dotolo** offers us a reflection on the requalification of the mission through the dynamics of inculturation/interculturalism; **Paolo Consonni** shares the experience of the Institute in Asia, in the perspective of dialogue and interculturalism.

Community Day – Our Mission Style

After leaving time for personal reading and reflection on the three short essays related to this theme, the community dedicates a day to reflection, sharing and community discernment.

At the heart of personal reflection (1 hour)

The insights offered by the ongoing PF programme touched on different aspects of the Comboni mission in relation to the inculturation of the Gospel. Each member of the community is invited to think back to the **experience of mission** in which he experienced the dynamics of the incarnation of the Gospel in another culture and/or the experience of allowing himself to be evangelized in the encounter with another culture. Time should be given to relive it through a contemplative gaze, seeking to see the presence of the Lord in the unfolding of history. Then, in an atmosphere of prayer, reflect:

- = How do the stimuli proposed by written contributions – or other personal insights – speak to that experience?
 - they could be ideas on the experiences of inculturation...
 - or perhaps on interculturation...
- = What does the Spirit suggest to you through this new awareness of your community's mission style today?

Community discernment¹

- = Invocation to the Spirit
- = Generative question: *From the prayer reflection on your experience of inculturation/interculturation, what does the Spirit suggest to you about the style of mission of our community?*
- = Silence²
- = First round of sharing: (30 minutes)
 - > Everyone offers their own answer to the question under consideration (maximum 2–3 minutes)
 - > There are no comments or reactions, just listening carefully
 - > A moment of silence between one person's sharing and the next
 - > It can be helpful to write down what strikes you during shares
- = Second round of sharing: (30 minutes)

¹Indications for communities of up to 5-6 members. In the case of larger communities, this exercise can be done in small groups. In such cases, at the end of the third round of sharing, there will be a space to share the results of the group work.

²Purpose of Silence:

- = Descent into the heart: Passing from mental agitation to inner recollection.
- = Listening to God: Creating the inner space to listen to the subtle movement of the Spirit, beyond one's own preconceptions.
- = Purification of intention: Ask oneself "What do you want, Lord, for me to listen to or say for the good of the mission as a community?".

- > *What did you hear or perceive from others in your group?* What does the Spirit move you to share what you have heard?
- > It's no longer about what you think, it's about what you've heard from the other members of the group
- > There are no comments or reactions, just listening carefully

= Third round of sharing: (30 minutes)

- > *What missionary style, in line with the Comboni charism, is the Lord asking of us today as a community?* What is the Spirit saying to us as a group?
- > At the end of the sharing, in dialogue the community tries to focus on one more action to be put into practice, in response to the invitations of the Spirit
- > A secretary records what the group decides together as 1–2–3 key points
- > Verification of consensus: do we, as a community, recognize ourselves in these key points to be put into practice?
- > When the group has concluded, a volunteer closes the conversation with a prayer of thanksgiving

The celebration

- = The community gives thanks in the Eucharist, preparing it with animation *ad hoc*
- = Take advantage of the possibilities that the liturgy offers to celebrate in a meaningful way the fruits of community reflection and discernment
- = Consider using significant signs
- = The experience and hopes of the community are to be brought to prayer