

## **The face of the other's God: Notes on the theology of inculturation in latin america**

**Carlos Rodrigues Brandão**

brandao08@ig.com.br

### **ABSTRACT**

This article deals with a singular experience of evangelization of Indians, black people and of ethnic minorities in Latin America. Nominated Theology of the Inculturation and realized by Christians missionaries in the last decades, this experience aims to establish an intercultural dialogue between equals different and, not, between different being become identicals, affirming that the god's face of the other makes visible the face of my god.

**KEY WORDS:** Indians, Religion, Missionaries, Intercultural dialogue, Theology of the Inculturation.

Openness to the other involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me, even though no one else forces me to do so.

Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

### 1. ... *Fue como nos entendimos*

The relationship is so simple it could be reduced to a single formula. Which is awful, let us admit. But it helps.

For approximately the past five centuries, Christian missionaries have been sent from Europe, and later on, from the United States of America, to convert indigenous persons and peoples, regarded as heathens, to the Christian faith. This multiple act of relations by means of symbols and meanings is carried out through the "announcement of the Good News", which, once accepted and its consequences unfolded, converts a "heathen" into a "Christian". It obliges him to deeply and completely rewrite his own systems of feelings, ideas and interactions; it promises redemption and eternal life.

From a standpoint which indigenous peoples and missionaries share, each in their own way, the former may adopt one of the following alternatives towards the religious project, the institution and the person of the latter. Or else, an opportune combination of two or more of them. They can indeed convert to Christianity, and accordingly redefine their ways of life's practices and representations in a manner as complete and stable as possible according to its own conditions and in terms of their cultures preceding the personal or collective act of neo-adhesion. They can experience a kind of partial adhesion to Christianity and to a particular Christian church, catholic or evangelical, and so incorporate them into their own culture within a quite broad range of varying alternatives. The word "syncretism" tries to represent a bundle of them. Put in a simple manner, this is the case in which is said of a person or cultural group that they live their faith as "Christians in their own way". But would there be another form of "being Christian", or something of the kind? A well known variant of this option – perhaps the most universal – is the construction of syncretic systems of religious meaning in which uses and cults are organically combined within the same or different situations of social experiencing of belief and its motives: elements of the original religion, of the originally missionary christianity, and of a christianity already made indigenous once appropriated, (continuously) redefined, and incorporated into the cultural universe of the indigenous social unit.

The indians may accept adhering to Christianity under the condition of being able to keep believing and practicing their own previous system of meanings, either in a secret, open or veiled manner. I believe this alternative and the latter can be frankly combined. From the American indigenous peoples' point of view, conversion to christianity, especially in its catholic modality, means to adhere to one of the two alternatives above, or to one or more modalities of their combinations.

As has happened so many times, an indigenous tribe can refuse a social project of adhesion to Christianity in an evasive, diplomatic, resistant or event hostile way. This implies another set of alternatives, which range from expelling or even killing the missionaries to establishing a deal between one party and the other. Much of what ancient and current missionaries call the "Mission failure" is the cultural result of a deal of this kind. Undoubtedly, a quite civilized cultural contract.

In *From the Yucatec conversation to the Christian dialogue, and vice-versa*, Manuel Gutiérrez Estévez, speaking from and since his christianity, carefully describes an indigenous speech (Klor de Alba et al. 1955: 171-234) while proposing a challenging epistemology of the dialogue act. About the generous act of desiring to understand each other by acknowledging the difference and the construction of images of oneself and of the other, based on an irreducible difference. That is, from the other to myself, from myself to the other, and from my understanding to yours and vice-versa.

And it is through not fully assumed, accepted and inevitable misunderstandings, that a Yucatec indigenous and a Spanish anthropologist dialogue. They seek to understand something by understanding each other. An understanding which is the sharing of a moment of feelings in common, which, at least from a motive-rooted active, deliberate point of view, does not mean an adhesion to the other's thinking – although a dialogue is, or should be, a loving adhesion to the other by means of what he thinks.

This is the situation described. An indigenous who believes himself a Christian and introduces himself as such tells an anthropologist, whom he deems also a Christian – and who does not declare to the other his religious belief, which is quite common in these situations – a series of events experienced by another supposedly Christian. This was narrated to the indigenous interlocutor, who speaks about his religious-Christian imaginary when narrating to another, several years later, the story heard.

On that, the anthropologist states:

I can say he believed me and himself to be Christians. I can say he was an indigenous Maya Yucatec. He accepted that I considered him so, and confirmed it. I can say it was by making the misunderstandings verisimilar that we understood each other (Klor de Alba et al. 1955: 171).

Manuel Gutiérrez Estévez suggests that an I and an Other are recreated in all conversation, by means of a dialogue mediated by understandings and misunderstandings – "with words, stories, tales and events" said to oneself through the other and for the other. Such a conversation is not only a timely moment for constructing and reconstructing images and identities. It establishes and cements something which probably precedes dialogue and should persist after it and beyond it (Klor de Alba et al. 1955: 171).

The relationship to which I refer when I speak about a Theology of Inculturation – written, believed, and put into practice by some Latin-American and European missionaries in Latin America – has much to do with the words in the situation above. What varies is only its terms and, like it or not, its inverted mirror.

The missionary who believes himself Christian and who "is there" because of that and because of his mission addresses the indigenous whom he believes are heathens, or else imperfectly Christians, in order to bring them to the symbolic sphere of a unique religious belief by means of a culturally convincing and spiritually redeeming word.

The missionaries and other Christian followers of inculturated evangelization aspire to break with the heavy-conscience face of the cultural and historical misunderstandings of traditional missionary practice amongst American indigenous peoples. Before presenting here an imperfect synthesis of their ideas, I will synthesize now their assumptions and principles. I say that the Gospel inculturation intends to depart from a dialogue between different equals, and not between unequals to be made identical as religious subjects. I say that its ultimate goal is to turn into a cultural and stable reality the principle that the best Christian experience of an indigenous people is to live autonomously and fully its own religion, or the belief systems which are eventually created from the dialogue with the Christians and the arrival of the Gospel.

Allow me to describe in a few lines a personal experience which happened around twelve years ago. Although ephemeral, and without me having the time to observe it in other situations, it suits as a testimonial preceding the summary which I intend to make of some of the foundations of the Theology of Inculturation practice.

2. ... to be there

In 1986, two leaders of the Tapirapé people from Central Brazil went to Madrid along with one of the three Jesus' little sisters who had been living in their village for almost forty years. They had been chosen to receive the Bartolomé de las Casas prize, to be shared with a Spanish missionary living in Guatemala.

There is no need to describe here the originality of the silent, but never evasive, presence of the little sisters and brothers of Jesus scattered throughout the world, who adopt a lifestyle quite similar to that of Geneviève Hélène Boyè and her companions in the Brazilian Amazon Forest.

We were returning from Marabá (in Southern Pará) to Goiás Velha (former state capital of Goiás). We had landed in Conceição do Araguaia, and, a bit farther South at the banks of the same major tributary of the Amazon River, in São Félix do Araguaia. D. Tomás Balduino, bishop of the Goiás diocese, coordinated the publishing of a document criticizing the life conditions and denouncing the violence against human rights by part of the Brazilian Military Midwestern Administration and in a good portion of the Brazilian Amazon. Bishops from other regions had done, or were doing, the same for the regions where they performed their pastoral work.

Some days before, we had been up to Marabá and, during the journey, stopped at some dioceses or catholic prelaties whose bishops had adhered to the idea of promulgating the document. On the way over, the Goiás Bishop left copies of the document for some of his partner bishops. On the way back, he collected the revisions to the text and adhesion signatures. A few months before, I had taken part in a research assessing life conditions in Goiás, and D. Tomás had promised me a trip to the North some day.

I did not have to wait long. On the way back, after landing at São Félix, where I dived into the Araguaia River while the two prelates conversed, we flied to Santa Terezinha, a few kilometers South, just to refuel the red airplane whose minimal size had scared me out three days earlier. There, I remember having met the French priest Francisco Jenthel, who some months later would be arrested for inciting peasant armed uprisings, judged by a military court, and condemned to be sent back to France, where he would die within the next year.

I suggested to D. Tomás that we land at the Tapirapé village, a bit farther South on our way back. He agreed to what would turn out to be nearly my last idea, and his last pilot landing. We would have lunch there with the little sisters of Jesus and follow our way home. Without much waste of time, we would be there before sunset. But in fact, we ended up arriving three days later.

When landing, one of the airplane's tires blew out. D. Tomás, a good bishop and better pilot, needed all his expertise to avoid flipping over, tank filled with gas, in the narrow and irregular dirt runway surrounded by savannah-like Cerrado trees in the Tapirapé village. When we finally landed, the airplane went off the runway, careened to the flat tire's side and touched its wing on the ground, irrecoverably crooking and bending a structural support bar. We got off feeling the scare and the joy of those who are reborn. It would be necessary to call for help by radio, and wait at least two days until the damaged parts arrived from Brasília or Anápolis. I then spent two days of my vacation month among the Tapirapé.

Followed by tribe children, women and men, two of the little sisters came to welcome us. One of them, we saw later, was burning with the malaria fevers. After being hosted and settled in the sisters' house, not much

different from those of the indians, G enevi e remembered asking D. Tom as to say mass. We gathered in their tiny living room: the little sisters of Jesus, a couple of teachers, the bishop, myself, and a lady and her young sister, who accompanied us on our way back. Some village boys and girls, curious and attentive, completed the small circle around a table improvised as an altar. The little sisters did not take advantage of the visiting bishop's presence for a public mass dedicated to the Tapirap e. Only those who desired to took part on it. Children. In the village there was no church; not even a chapel.

The next day, after a long and recomforting bath in the waters of the Tapirap e Lake, one of the countless tributaries to the Araguaia River, we went for a walk around the village. I noticed almost at the center of what would be the village plaza, a large semi-destroyed building made of straw wood, much bigger than any other house. Lu s, the teacher, and the little sister who walked with us explained that it was the *takana*, the public, ceremonial house to where the tribe young men converged after completing the rite whereby they were transformed into warriors and hunters. There, they enjoyed a good deal of a nice bachelor's community life. There, they welcomed single ladies for conversation, rites and free games of their young and slim bodies.

A strong wind had partly destroyed it some months before, and there had been no effort by the young men and adults to rebuild it, despite all its symbolic and social value. There were more urgent issues to take care of. The little sister told me that one of their current efforts was to stimulate the indians to rebuild the *takana* and reenact the tribal rites and customs inside it.

I then asked – which does not mean that I wished – why there was no catholic chapel there, as in other indigenous villages in which a religious mission has been present for many years. She answered that it was not necessary, and would not be a respectful enterprise to their indigenous hosts. They had their own beliefs and cult places. They did not need others, unless they came to feel their lack.

When we discussed at night the reasons for the strange missionary attitude of the Christians in the Tapirap e village, it was explained that it was an example of the daily practice of the principles of lifestyle and evangelizing presence of the missionaries in the religious communities created by father Charles de Foucault – a rare, intriguing silent presence, whose inspiration is the non-public life of Jesus in Nazareth. A testimony of Christian experience based on the unlimited respect towards the ways of living and being of the welcoming societies, whether tribal or not. An active involvement in human rights issues regarding the people, communities and peoples with whom one lives. A respectful exemption from any conversion activity, more public and motivated that the mere live presence of the missionary as the witnessing testimonial of a Christian life. There is nothing to preach about – and this very word does not apply – because there is no "other" to convert. Only the meanings and values of the destiny and cultural vocation of each person or group of "others". Unless the desire to become Christian, or also-Christian, comes from the free and demanding will of this very other.

This was in the early seventies. Some Pentecostal evangelical confessions, foreign (North-American) or national, extended to the continent's indigenous peoples the same radical proselytism which had yielded them an expressive demographic success in countries like Brazil, Chile, or Guatemala. Some more established, conservative catholic missions responded to that by intensifying the religious defensive fervor of their

missionary work. Not many years passed until, from Mexico to Patagonia, in some villages with less than 150 people, families and kin with up to six different Christian denominations learned to live together. That is something which until now challenges the shamans' wisdom and the anthropologists' theories.

Also worthy of note is, since the early years of proselytism, the omission of the Pentecostal agents and missions from struggles for the rights of the native territory and the ensuing human rights – that which came to be called in Brazil the "indigenous cause". In the opposite direction, starting with Dom Pedro Casadágua, several missionaries, catholic or evangelical religious or laypeople, were persecuted and killed from the seventies on because of their participation in the indigenous peoples' struggles. Several of them subscribe to or engage in, or have subscribed to or engaged in, one of the Latin American variants of the Inculturated Evangelization.

### 3. the criticism of the church, in the church

However, before considering the set of ideas – heterodox, but irreducibly Christian, according to the authors and practitioners of the Theology of Inculturation – in which the anthropologists (and many others, I suppose) should be interested, I want to bring up the small ethnography of another gesture. Because few things could be a better introduction to our theme than the ecclesiastic polemic triggered in 1992, in Santo Domingo, around the couple of gestures considered by the Christians as one of the most representative, interactive and symbolic of Christianity: the request, and the gift, of forgiveness.

Inculturation, Evangelization and Liberation in Santo Domingo is the title of Chapter 5 from the book *The Church in Brazil*, by the Brazilian historian and priest José Oscar Beozzo. "Santo Domingo" in the title refers to the Fourth Conference of the Latin American Episcopate which was held there between October 12 and 18, 1992.

Of course the reasons for the day, month and year chosen are quite known. The core issues of the Conference referred to the three keywords in the Chapter's title. It was about finding ways of establishing legitimate and effective connections between them: evangelization, liberation (a word more used in Spanish than in Portuguese), and inculturation. The use of the first two in Christianity is ancient and daily. Indeed, it took much debating, many words and councils to understand them, and the meaning of the relation between them seems today much more troublesome in Latin American than in Europe. The last two of these three words have given origin to pastoral practices and theologies whose resonances have guided until now the life experience of missionaries and other Christians in Latin America, as much as they have kept sleepless prelates wearing black and purple in the Vatican. Liberation Theology and Inculturated Evangelization are young sisters, born in nearby territories within a few years' difference. It should be noted that while the authorship of the former is much more of Latin-American people and theologian priests, the latter involves the thought of Latin-American and European missionaries, non-missionary priests and Christian laypeople in Latin America and, in a much smaller scale, the Caribbean. I should bemoan the very narrow use of authors on these topics in this paper.

As in other cases, ecclesiastic authorities formed a committee preceding the Fourth Conference to prepare a draft on the issue: "unity and plurality of indigenous, Afro-American and mestizo cultures". Between the final document of the 1978 Episcopal Conference in Puebla (DP 1; 7; 412; 2996) and the preparatory document in Santo Domingo there is, among others, an important difference of points of view, and not only of concepts.

In Puebla, the eloquent formula is: "the continent's radical catholic substratum". This statement, at once anthropological and canonic, intended to convey the idea that a common cultural foundation permeated the whole Continent. In spite of ethnical and cultural differences and peculiarities among the nations and within them, this foundation was, in essence, catholic.

In the previous Santo Domingo document, which was changed for worse in the final document's text, emphasis was given to the cultural substratum move from the singular to the plural. That is, from the catholic substance of a wide cultural "substratum" to the evidence of a multi-ethnical and pluri-cultural continental reality. It is this reality which takes on and makes differentially possible the existence and expression of a catholic cultural substratum.

According to the pastoral action guidelines, in Puebla the "challenge of evangelization" consists in strengthening and keeping alive and active this "radical catholic substratum" in view of the consequences of cultural modernization, etc., by "purifying it", including from "superstitions and deviations". In the previous document of the 26 Committee in Santo Domingo, the proposed pastoral starting point suggests an open and respectful confrontation with an ethnical and cultural diversity which "shape different identities, not only social but also religious" (Beozzo, 1994: 315-316).

Herein lies the issue of forgiveness.

In the document brought to Santo Domingo by the Brazilian episcopate, there is an assumed acknowledgement of the catholic evangelizing missions' past and present errors, as well as a multiple (in several paragraphs) and emphatic begging for forgiveness. The signatories publicly assume (because it is something to be published) a "penitential attitude as pastors", and direct their detailed supplication to the "indigenous peoples" and the "blacks in the Americas".

I quote a passage:

When asking the indigenous and black peoples for forgiveness of our omission or open or veiled complicity with their conquerors and oppressors, we confess our past mistakes persist in many circumstances until today. The indigenous and black peoples of Latin America are still threatened by the current domination system and racism, and keep living at the margins of society and the institutional Church (Beozzo, 1994: 315).

The document concludes with an Episcopal decision based on an "unconditional solidarity" and a "commitment to the cause of indigenous and black peoples of the Americas". These proposals support what the Brazilian bishops came to call a "new evangelization" (Beozzo, 1994: 316). Apparently wishy-washy and almost only metaphorical, this open penitential act was, in the eyes of the Brazilian prelates, an indispensable first step

towards a process of de-solidarization of the Church with its past of mistakes and omissions. Without it, any effort of establishing a fraternal and fruitful dialogue with "non-white" peoples from Latin American and the Caribbean would be illegitimate.

Simultaneously, another Fourth Conference Committee, on Church History, was heading in an opposite direction. It took a stance of supporting the colonizing enterprise. One of its most outstanding members, Madrid's Cardinal Angel Suquia Goicoechea, iron-cladly opposed any written request for forgiveness as the official text of the Conference. The Committee 26 excluded from its final document the reference to an acknowledged ecclesiastic guilt and a detailed begging for forgiveness from the continent's black and indigenous peoples (Beozzo, 1994: 316-320). A curious, significant confrontation between two committees in Santo Domingo. In the History Committee, where two influential Spanish prelates prevailed, the document submitted to Assembly approval did not make reference to people such as Las Casas and Montesinos; did not acknowledge the Church's guilt during the "first evangelization"; and timidly requested forgiveness from the "African-Americans" only. In terms of recent history, references to the advances achieved in Latin America by the missionary practice following the Vatican Council II were omitted.

Committee 26, where Latin Americans prevailed, finally succeeded in submitting to the final assembly a paragraph where a vague acknowledgement of past guilts compromises the continent's Church in communion with the Pope himself, quoting him. At the end of this same paragraph an "inculturated evangelization" is proposed. "Inculturation" missionaries and theologians will try to carry it out by means of precepts and practices with which many of the bishops who approved its textual formula would never dream of. This is it:

After having asked for forgiveness, together with the Pope, to our Indian and African-American brothers, "before the infinite sanctity of God, for the facts marked by injustice and violence" (General Audience, Wednesday, October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1992), we wish to develop an inculturated evangelization (Beozzo, 1994: 320).

#### 4. an inculturated evangelization

In very close proximity to the Theology of Liberation, what is at stake (or, what creates the rite) in the Theology of Inculturation is, firstly, the anthropological question of the right to dialogue among cultures, whose historical relations and current positions and social relations were, and are, orchestrated by an irreducible inequality. Hence, like the other side of the same coin whereby two sides engage in difficult exchanges, the symbolic right to dialogue has to do with the duty of the Church's commitment to the social and political issues concerning the life contexts, the multiple and unchanging Latin-American scenario of expropriation, injustice and inequality among whites, mestizos, blacks and indigenous.

If both sides could be placed in the same side of the coin, it would be possible to build a simple four-alternative model, in which pure or combined alternatives for missionary intervention among the Continent's



indigenous peoples seem to be distributed. I have built it as an ephemeral tool, articulating only the two variables which, inter-combined, are those which matter here:

- a) the relation between a conversionist missionary practice (to convert the other to my system of belief by disqualifying his own, which amounts to turning into Christians those who are not) *versus* a dialogical missionary practice (I invest myself and the other with the right to the whole cultural experiencing of one's own religious belief, establishing between his and mine a dialogue of differences between equals);
- b) the relation between the non-involvement of the missionary presence and practice with the political dimension of social issues of the subjects and ethnic groups where the evangelizing mission is carried on *versus* an essential involvement with this dimension (concretely, with the struggles, questioning and woes of an "indigenous cause") as something constitutive of the dialogue relationship with other cultures.

Pairing up these opposing units, this is what appears to be an appropriate representation of the alternative Theology of Inculturation choices:

- 1st. conversionist missionary practice + non-involvement with the political issues of the indigenous cause;
- 2nd. conversionist missionary practice + involvement with the political issues of the indigenous cause;
- 3rd. dialogical missionary practice + non-involvement with the political issues of the indigenous cause;
- 4th. dialogical missionary practice + involvement with the political issues of the indigenous cause.

The words in this paragraph should be regarded as a draft. They serve only as a temporary sketch of missionary work styles among tribal groups in Latin America. Reality is much richer, and I do not have any personal experience, nor opportune elements for confrontation, for establishing a trustworthy model – if indeed there is such a thing.

The first alternative qualifies traditional catholic missions resistant to any process of inculturation and supporters of the principle that a missionary presence is tantamount to announcing the Gospel and to assistential work (education, health, improving life quality). It involves most of the protestant missions, especially those which deny any ecumenical closeness to other Christian confessions. Finally, it includes almost all neo-evangelical Pentecostal missions.

I believe the second option is rarer, but it exists. It combines missionaries and institutions who assume that the duty of explicitly and attractively announcing the Gospel should be in some way associated not only with socially-focused assistential work, but also with denouncing facts and effects of expropriation, injustices and threats to the physical existence of ethnical minorities. It is more frequent among catholic than protestant missions. It is almost non-existent among neo-pentecostal missions.

The third choice is virtually non-existent. The fourth alternative intends to characterize, with marked differences in terms of emphasis and styles, the inculturation missionary experiences. Both its writing and its individual or collective actions have been, so far, frequent among catholic missionaries. However, its proposal, such as that of the Liberation Theology, has been from the outset elaborated within an ecumenical scenario, shared by both catholics and protestants (excluding almost all Pentecostals).

Some priests and missionaries, when building what one of them would call the "inculturation paradigm" and which was seen in the final Santo Domingo document to be proposed as an "inculturated evangelization" (and in other instances as a "Gospel inculturation"), elaborated classificatory schemes in which the inculturated missionary action appears in confrontation with other modalities. I wish to present here a synthesis of some of these models.

Embryos of an inculturated attitude can be found since the beginning of the Iberian missions in the Americas. Alfredo Morin recalls the two previous evangelization models carried out by the Spanish: the "Canary mission" and the "Grenadian mission". Both were carried over from the catechizing of the moors in Spain to the evangelization of peoples found in the New Continent. One of them argues for a "persuasion method" in which a relative respect towards the colonized cultures mixes with an enthusiasm for turning their subjects into Christians. The other assumed as its principle for action a "blank slate method". It is a project of destructing, as completely as possible, all the founding scenarios and subjects of the autochthon beliefs, in an illusion of "sowing, right afterwards, the chemically pure Gospel over the debris" (Morin, 1995: 5).

Both methods varied according to personal vocations, as well as the orientation of missionary congregations. Both were and are applied until today by protestant and catholic missionaries. Both were part of that which, from the beginnings of the Iberian colonization until today, the church documents post-Vatican II and after Puebla, Medellin and Santo Domingo usually call "the first evangelization". At least among the catholics, this is opposed to a "new evangelization". The work of missionaries such as Bartolomé de las Casas, in Mexico, or José de Anchieta, in Brazil, would contain the first principles of an inculturated evangelization.

In a short consultation document, the German priest Paulo Suess proposes three current evangelization perspectives among Christian missionaries: the fundamentalist, the adaptation pastoral, and the theology and pastoral of inculturated liberation.

Without properly characterizing the first one, Paulo Suess suggests that it only provides immediate answers, based on a monolithic reading of the Holy Scriptures and directed towards filling emotional gaps, identity crises and ethical orientation, as well as "rich and poor" insecurities. Indifferent to the cultural values previous to the invading arrival of their missions, the fundamentalist pastorals impose an exclusive, non-dialogical reading of religion, also disobliging themselves from any consistent social-political action by not recognizing legitimate attachments between one and the other. The author concludes: "the explicit refusal of constructing a new worldly social order is one of the reasons why, especially in the Two-Thirds-World, fundamentalism has become a privileged branch of the neoliberal project" (Suess, 1994: 943).

The second missionary tendency would be characterized by considering the Gospel inculturation of other cultures' peoples as a simple matter of adaptation. Among its strategies there is the more frequently used, at least by Catholics: proposals for a tacit respect towards the meaning and belief values of other cultures. This is the starting point of a conversionist task which, even though without the restrictive and direct imposition typical of the previous tendency, denies a genuine dialogue with the other, by authoritatively assuming the exclusive excellence of the Christian message. And also by folklorizing the other's culture as any other culture subject to being purified and modernized by means of competent missionary action. Although there may be among their faithful, whether Catholics or Protestants, a more consequent effort in defense of the indigenous peoples' rights, such an evangelizing pastoral does not consider the indigenous subjects as protagonists of their own cause. It is "unable to engender the addressees' protagonism" (Suess, 1994: 943).

The reader should notice the union of two words in such a way that the first one, more popular and established with the name of a "new evangelization" theology, qualifies the other. In the same page in the document I am taking into account here, Paulo Suess identifies the tendency to which he declares himself affiliated as "the theology and pastoral of inculturated liberation", and, further, as "the pastoral of inculturated liberation".

Such a tendency has two basic foundations. *First*, the acknowledging of the non-white, indigenous other as a legitimate protagonist subject of his own culture, and performer of his own history. Such an inculturated missionary action should not only protect this unquestionable right, but also be co-responsible for strengthening it. The Gospel inculturation means more than a culturally-adapted reading of the other. It means its multiple reading from the standpoint of the dialogue with the other, assuming its free reading and the full freedom for choosing it. *Second*, the acknowledgement that evangelizing through the mission stretches beyond the mere "announcement of the word". One of the elements of the more advanced ecclesiastic and ecclesial sectors in Latin America after Vatican II is defined as "the option for the poor". Its supporters, who range from bishops to theologians, relentlessly mince no words nor biblical passages and papal messages supporting such a choice, without which the Church loses its own sense of "mission", widely understood.

The option for the poor forces missionary work to include within its vocation its insertion in all the other's fields and realities, in which it experiences its own existence. If an indigenous tribe's historical and social conditions of existence are the unjust result of processes of expropriation and unjustified ruling, then a liberating inculturated pastoral cannot avoid embracing this actual condition of the other as its own option, as the guiding principle and social locus of its action.

The Theology of Inculturation (or Inculturated Liberation), derived as it is from a predecessor of Liberation Theology and destined to bring it to the particular field of missionary work with non-white, non-Western peoples, cultures and ethnic groups, seeks to extend to the other the option previously made towards the poor.

On the one hand, in the inculturated option there is the obligation to fully assume the point of view of the right to life and autonomous realization of a way of life. The "indigenous cause" becomes the cause of the

inculturated mission among the indians. And it is this commitment to share a struggle which was made common, but where the indigenous right to the protagonist role is acknowledged, which makes legitimate the religious dialogue between the missionary culture and the indigenous culture.

On the other hand, it binds the "announcement of the Good News" to a pan-ecumenism so far extended by the Catholic Church only to evangelical confessions. The intended dialogue takes the religion of the other as a meaningful value exempt from all manipulation, while taking the announcement of the Gospel not as an orthodoxy to be imposed at any cost, but as a message of salvation to be proposed as the word in the dialogue which the Christian has to offer. The very irreducible universality of the Gospel message suggests that it is not property of any particular culture. Hence, it should not be used as a tool for expropriating meanings from any other culture. I leave to Paulo Suesse the task of summarizing this thought, with the particular emphases of his proposal:

Inculturation aims at a radical and critical approach between the Gospel and cultures. This approach is a presupposition for the communication of the Good News of God's love in the different cultures. In inculturation, goal and method are intertwined: the salvation's universal with the presence's particular. The universal "both promotes and expresses the unity of the human genus, at once respecting the particularities of all cultures" (GS 54). The goal of inculturation is liberation, and the way to liberation is inculturation.

[...]

By not identifying with any particular culture and inculturating in them all, the Gospel and evangelizers respect alterity and preserve the identity of the message and of the cultures. Inculturation aims at a respectful approach to alterity, which is critical towards sin and solidary in suffering.

[...]

In inculturated evangelization, the Church demonstrates it is not indifferent towards the different; instead, the different is consecrated by the Word's incarnation and the Holy Spirit's animation (Suess, 1994: 34-35).

##### 5. the difficult dialogue: the practice of inculturation.

Among inculturation followers, those more orthodox speak about an "indigenous church". Those less so, not even that. They speak about moving from an indigenist pastoral to an indigenous pastoral. That could, in an innovative manner, suppose a transfer of the making of Church and professing the Christian faith from the missionary to the indians themselves. Something that, somewhere else, Claude Lévi-Strauss believed could happen to ethnology itself. The description of some of the principles of inculturated missionary action should be preceded here by a small set of notes with which I intend to finish this summary presentation of the Theology of Inculturation. Towards this end, I focus more on its anthropological stance towards the other than on its properly theoretical dimension.

Let us return for a while to José Oscar Beozzo. He focuses on two rights and on one question the foundations of a dialogue which is at once liberating and inculturated.

At the beginning of the topic "Gospel inculturation" – a critical thought on some of the Church's stances before Latin-American ethnical groups – José Oscar Beozzo does not speak from the standpoint of safeguarding the Church itself, but from the lives and rights of those to whom it addresses. "To realize how vital is this debate in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is worth remembering what is at stake for 50 million indigenous and 100 million African-Americans" (Beozzo, 1994: 320). Unless a very subtle line defending Catholic Christianity's power and threatened demography is implied, what the document by this priest, and all other inculturation pastoral authors and missionaries I read, offers is an open bet on risk. A speech which apparently is not afraid of weakening an institutional church, in the name of the duty to redirect it to the reality of its own vocation. In terms of its relations with indigenous and black subjects and peoples, the missionary meaning of inculturated vocation should be established from them, from their even greater fragility, as read in the gap between the Gospel's present historicity and the current history of such persons and peoples.

When speaking about a primeval right of blacks and indigenous to the autonomous experiencing of their own beliefs – whether established as a religion or not, and taken in absolute equality *vis-à-vis* all the others, Christianity included – José Oscar Beozzo refers to another document where the term macro-ecumenism is important. I transcribe below a long passage from it:

TRUE ECUMENISM IS GREATER THAN ECUMENISM, because *Oikoumene* is the whole inhabited earth.

In this first meeting of the God's People Assembly, we experienced that, apart from increasingly strengthening ecumenism among Christian churches, we should open ourselves to Macro-ecumenism, a new word for expressing a new reality and a new consciousness. The common thread of the whole meeting, present in the debates' central issues, confluences, tensions, searches and hopes. It is an ecumenism which blankets over the same universal dimensions of God's people.

In discovering this, we begin ridding ourselves of our prejudices and embrace, with many more arms and hearts, the one and only greater God. Many languages, songs, symbols, gestures – with souls and bodies on prayer – testify and celebrate.

This point is almost unanimous among the followers of Inculturation, and surely not easily accepted by the Vatican as well as by the visible majority of Latin-American bishops. From a more cultural-legal rather than theological standpoint, what is at stake is a principle of dignity equivalence among all religions. What is argued for is a stabilized equivalence of/among religions, not a previous strategic acceptance of the other and of its beliefs for, over a falsely common terrain, establishing my own cult system's primacy, which is respectful, but no less cunningly deceiving. Only assuming that the others (persons, groups of persons, tribes, peoples, nations, or whatever) deserve, like me, the right to keep being who they are, believing in what they believe, and performing their cults as they do, I can tell him what is my belief, how I experience it, and how I ritually manifest it.

In this sense, to "inculturate the Gospel" means to establish, through it, a dialogue with the other. Not with the purpose of making the other accept it and, through it, become like myself. But so that we can accept each other, in our terms, and theirs. The announcement of the Good News stops being the departure point for a dialogue with the other, so that the reaching point is its conversion to my evangelical point of view, which is itself converted into a point of view from which I open myself to the other. And with a generous risk of the converted one being me.

The Inculturation missionary does not deny his Christian being; he shows himself and lives with others as a Christian, by announcing himself as a Christian. If that was not so, what would he have been doing "there"? However, as opposed to other missions, he announces his religious identity, that is, announces with the testimony of his own life, turned into a loving form of presence: the Gospel. And he does so certain that it is his duty to take his spirit to the other, without the right of wishing to convince, to convert this other to his own letter. For not only due to ethical and legal rights, the peoples with whom one is can and should aspire to keep being who they are, and also from a religious perspective. An inculturated evangelization experience intends to believe that religious dialogue through the gospel occurs on a level of transcendence of the evangelical message itself to the cultural reality and testimony of a unique religion. Somehow the fully loving Gospel dialogue is not so easily understood. Hence, to impart him any motive which is alien to an absolute love for the other such as he is, and inasmuch as he is different from me, would deny the very evangelical message?

But what if conversions occur?

By arguing for the baptized and Christian blacks' and indigenous' right to live "their Christianity according to their culture and customs", José Oscar Beozzo introduces, firstly in the phrase I transcribed above, and later in the one below, a verb-like pronoun and a noun from which is worth beginning: their Christianity, and, later on, building churches with a face of their own (Beozzo, 1994: 321).

How far should Inculturation missionaries take an issue which is so difficult among Christian catholics? Protestants have their own way of solving the problem of multiple religious unity by fractioning it amongst various differentiated confessions, with unique cultural, ethnical and particularly religious vocations, etc. Meanwhile, catholics deal with the same secular and evident differences by forcing them to live together in a unique, difficult confessional unity.

A skin-shallow cultural adaptation of catholic Christianity has been tolerated, especially after Council Vatican II: let each people live in and with its own culture and its own way of being catholic-Christian. But this millenary experience in Church history cannot overstep the strictly controlled borders of orthodoxy variation when it comes to costumes and cults. Let everyone sing as one wishes, as long as all follow, una voce, the same way, the same essential assumptions – sometimes more those from canon law than from evangelic faith.

A Gospel inculturation presupposes the possibility of the differential construction of churches "with a face of their own" (and not only an appropriate one) and the consequent creation of "autochthonous churches". The Committee 26 report in Santo Domingo so states it.

These commitments shall help us fulfill the ideal of autochthonous churches with a face, heart, mind and pastoral agents and organisms of their own. Of communities which express their cult to God by means of their indigenous languages, Afro-American expressions, mestizo customs, and their respective unique cultural resources.

Protagonists in and of their own salvation history, these peoples will make the Gospel, germinated in their own cultures, bloom and flourish into genuinely indigenous, Afro-American, and mestizo churches which, in full communion with the universal Church, are capable of conveying Jesus' saving message.

The creation of indigenous (autochthonous) churches in Latin America, instead of reproducing the same church in different indigenous cultures, has been one of the axes of inculturated catholic thought. Several documents criticize the "opportune" uses of "cultural values" by the mission addressees for an implantation of Christianity in their cultures, or in the name of a pure and simple, almost folkloric, recreation of a superficially adapted Catholicism.

This still limited inculturated proposal suggests the power transfer for implementing Christian experience in other cultures. In dialogically and respectfully entering the other's world, but doing so by taking to the other a message of faith which is also an invitation to adhering, the Gospel inculturation challenges towards an opening to the creative invasion of other cultural actors at the heart of its very system of roles and identities; of representation of life, the world, and divinity; of orientation derived from interactive conduct at different levels.

In like manner to economics and politics, inculturated missionaries too argue for an autonomously protagonic dimension to indigenous peoples and persons and – true to the same continuum – this lies at the heart of the very Church as a social institution among cultures and histories of multiple and diverse peoples.

At the most advanced edge of the proposal, an indigenous church is autochthonous not only as a cultural fact realized as religion. It is so because of being – in its own measure – as autonomous as possible. That does not mean assuming a protestant confessional model. It means the possibility that strengthening Christian religious experiences among catholic indigenous or blacks engender indigenous and black subjects holding ecclesiastic power (which is not new among blacks, but still rare among indians) as well as non-Western, ethnical-minorities ecclesiastic units with the same degree of liberty and relative autonomy enjoyed today by catholic dioceses in Galicia or Poland.

Here is a third issue of rights: double confession. By introducing this complicated challenge to the Church, José Oscar Beozzo refers to the events at Santo Domingo. He suggests a very enlightening opposition, in my opinion.

Referring to the openly "inculturated" proposal of Committee 26, the Conference's final document, and to the complements added by the Vatican to it, Beozzo opposes an inculturated evangelization to an evangelization of cultures. Inculturation theologians and missionaries, as well as the Committee 26, speak of the first formula.

Santo Domingo's final Assembly and the Vatican, without denying the term "inculturation", speak of the second. Below I transcribe a passage of José Oscar Beozzo's paper citing documents from "both sides".

Santo Domingo thus oscillates between two proposals submitted in the final document: of an INCULTURATED EVANGELIZATION and of the EVANGELIZATION OF CULTURES.

The first was placed among the priority pastoral guidelines:

*An inculturated evangelization [...] which incarnates in INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURES. (SD 302)*

It assumes deep changes in the Church, as well as the beginning of a process of wide cultural diversification aiming at pluralism in liturgy, theology, pastoral organization, sacrament discipline. The second harks back to the proposal of an EVANGELIZATION OF CULTURES in order to establish a Christian culture with the likely rebirth of ancient intolerance and integrisms:

*Faith, by incarnating in these cultures, should correct their mistakes and avoid syncretism (SD 320).*

It presupposes the existence of "universal" symbols, above and beyond any culture. This only unveils the deep ethnocentrism of the proposal, and places the Church's general discipline as a normative criterion for accepting inculturation (Beozzo, 1994: 324-325).

I do not wish to play with words at a time like this. But especially in the final paragraph of the passage quoted, it is possible to infer from the direct criticism of Church's orthodoxy, from Santo Domingo to the Vatican, the defense of another criterion for valuing the meaning of religion and of the communication between cultures through it. For it seems quite evident to me that the passage from the traditional precept – church creates dialogue by means of the evangelic message – to the founding precept of a "new evangelization" which is boldly announced and assumed, also entails risks: dialogue creates churches through the Gospel.

From a socially practical standpoint, we face two different dimensions, two diverse dilemmas for an inculturated missionary proposal. One thing is co-existence, within the same tribe, within the same village, of two different religions, each with a clear definition of the adhesions to one side and to the other; recalling the individual rights to confessional choice can solve the issue well. Another thing is the cultural wish to a double-faith experience, as a whole or in proportional parts. This is not the same as syncretism. It means the possibility for a mission's addressee community to adhere to Christianity in free will, without giving up the freedom to preserve its own ancestral belief and cult systems.

Although I have found a clear answer to this question in the texts consulted, I ran here and there into statements defending the full right to this possibility. For when a dialogic relation establishes between culturally different subjects who are made equal for and through the very dialogue, to it and its cultural fruits is invested the right to establish consequences. Any other previous criterion would destroy the actual value of the proposal of establishing dialogue as a foundation for the communication between I and the other.



The first step of an inculturated pastoral attitude follows from the idea that the very reception of an evangelical message which is no longer imposed, but proposed as a universal revelation opened to the reading of each culture within its own history, does not disqualify and would not seek to destroy the culture, memory and history of those who would eventually incorporate to the Gospel and be part of its universal community of followers.

"Go and Preach the Gospel" – so argue the inculturation missionaries. As the Gospel is not to be silenced and cannot but be announced, so too its own message cannot be more than put into dialogue. This is its entire preaching. Beyond the Church, beyond churches in its institutional dimensions, the pan-ecumenical dialogue carried out in pluri-cultural, multi-religious contexts "has a unique status, and does not represent the first phase of an inevitable conversion or incorporation" (Suess, 1994: 83).

By proposing to move from a clerical dimension of law teaching to a dimension of exchanging knowledge and meanings between culturally-different human-equals, inculturated mission abandons the right to control the process of dialogue, and so the very prediction of its effects. As I stated a few pages earlier, when trying to translate in my own terms one of the most difficult points of the inculturated evangelization Christian proposal, once the "announcement of the word" is centered in a "macro-ecumenical" dialogue, this dialogue ceases to be, as in other doctrine situations, a didactical strategy whose terms are given, and whose results are predicted by one of its interlocution poles, and turns into the cultural creator of its own terms and outcomes.

Another starting point for an inculturated missionary action is the uncompromising defense of all rights to life, freedom and happiness as a fully-lived experience of human rights such as read from within each indigenous culture. Its supporters understand that the message of a new evangelization is not one of individual and collective redemption in another time and space. If it is so, it should be inasmuch as it anticipates the here-and-now of present social life. The liberation announced in the theology from which inculturated evangelization derives is an issue which commits the Christian mission's emissaries to all immediate and historical dimensions of their addressees' daily lives.

An approved passage from the Santo Domingo Final Document which was recalled by Roberto Viola translates this commitment the following way.

One of the inculturated evangelization's goals will always be the integral salvation and liberation of a particular people or human group, which strengthens its identity and confidence in its specific future, opposing it to the death powers, and adopting incarnated Jesus Christ's perspective, which saved man starting from poverty, weakness and the redeeming cross. The Church stands up for the authentic cultural values of all peoples, especially the oppressed, defenseless, and marginalized ones, against the overwhelming strength of sin structures manifested in modern society.

In the inculturated Theology of Liberation, it is common to denounce macro-structural factors responsible for the conditions of poverty and marginalization of the Americas' indigenous peoples. The association between the usual oppression and inequality factors, as well as the strengthening of neoliberal projects in the continent,

will also be frequent. Finally, a perverse link between conversionist missionary practices of a fundamentalist style and the expansionist interests of neoliberal capitalism shall not be forgotten.

In the name of human dignity, in an inculturated evangelical vision, and in the name of the ethnical minorities and peoples' rights, inculturated mission has the right to stand up against such projects. A universal pan-society which is political-economically equal, culturally multiple, and autonomously differentiated, is the lynchpin at the grassroots of the Inculturation utopia.

A set of precepts used by missionary Paulo Suess to define the role of an authentic indigenist pastoral (for him, always somehow opposed to traditional "indigenous pastoral") deserves to be transcribed here.

However, there are common tasks we can point to, signals we owe the indigenous peoples, sacraments of an Indigenous Pastoral. These task-signs do not have a chronological order. These are signs which have their meaning as a whole, like in a rainbow. At the same time, they are practical tasks which any missionary should assume, here and now.

1. To defend the land. Tribal territory is a guarantee of tribe survival. To defend the land—against planned extermination – means to testify, announce and celebrate life.
2. To learn the language. Against the ethnocentrism which disqualifies the indigenous language as "slang", the missionary – by learning the language and cultural code of his respective people – submits himself to the sacrifice of incarnation-inculturation in order to be able to communicate the Word made flesh.
3. To foster self-determination. The Mission helps the legally-protected indians to become subjects of their own history. The assemblies of Indigenous Leaders help to achieve critical consciousness and coordinated action.
4. To enable for contact. The contact situation between indigenous nations and the enveloping society varies a lot. In the short or long run, contact is unavoidable. The missionary provides the necessary means for defense against capitalism and civilization's vices and illnesses.
5. To rescue memory. To write down the indigenous people's history, collect its myths, tell its martyrdoms and victories, against the officially ordained amnesia. The presence of the past opens the pathway towards future.
6. To make hope explicit. Against historical fatalism and political-economic determinism, the missionary, from his option of faith and practice of love, makes the Gospel explicit as hope, as integral liberation and fullness of life.
7. To encourage alliances. The new missionary church, freed from complicity with the powerful, helps indigenous peoples see their problems together with those of the oppressed (Suess, s.d.: 88-89).

In a more concise and concrete fashion, Suess synthesizes, in a document on fundamentalism already quoted here, the tasks of the missionary commitment to the cause of the "poor, excluded and others" as:

uncompromising support to its citizen protagonism, including where it has to do with the "new forms of democratic participation in the nation's decisions"; calling for an integration of all, according to each one's peculiar conditions, in a unique liberation project, "in a horizon which also includes future generations"; legal and political struggle for constitutional rights and ethics in politics in order to build a future, solidary society; defending the territories, a fair land reform and the right to work, to whomever this may concern; strengthening the true autonomy of peoples in all levels, "their organizations, their subjectivity, identity and solidarity"; articulating "from the multiplicity and its historical projects from a non-capitalist and non-neoliberal perspective of structural change"; generating and strengthening "a passion for justice and a rationality of hope, in which the Christian faith's missionary experience and the indigenous peoples' ancestral experiences of struggle for life are associated" (Suess, 1994: 944).

## 6. dialogue or ravings?

However, it could all be thought inside out, in which case no one would be more open to dialogue than a fundamentalist. The Christian desperate for having been overwhelmed by a unique, irreducible, exclusive truth out of which everything is untrue, and who is forced, by a divine mandate, to share this unique discovery indispensable to everyone else. To attract them to the only meaningful place where dialogue is possible.

It is thus necessary to acknowledge it among the truly fundamentalist Christians – and, in this, they claim to be precisely as the first Christians: it was not through dialogue among humans that they achieved the ownership of truth. This may have been the way, but is not the moment, the only essential moment, of the door that finally opens. They were overwhelmingly taken over by the truth, which is not constructed, as in human knowledge. It cannot be investigated and cannot be split, shared by differences. It comes from God. "God one day gave me all this I know. The Holy Spirit put this revelation in me. Thanks to the gift of God's Grace, I am what I am." And so the revealed truth can be taken to others, can and should be endlessly announced; but it cannot be discussed with those who are outside of it, with those who were not touched by the same revealing Grace and are outside its reach.

That is why there are, among all possible categories of human beings, only two who count: those who believe – the believers, the "Lord's saved ones" – and those who do not believe, the worldly ones, those who do not know, those to which the only truth which counts has not arrived, yet – and so they should wait for it and for it only, for everything else is illusory – or forever – for whom a life of ignorance (even to those amongst the worldly who are "wise") and a doomed eternity of absolute condemnation awaits.

Being the truth-which-matters is one, unique, indivisible, it is situated outside history, and, when it enters a culture, it does so in order to transform it as a whole, according to the only meaningful terms for representing everything and ordaining everyone's lives; *id est*, which contains the meanings through which people inside the truth can dialogue. They can dialogue the words of truth, and can take them, as an announcement of full intrinsic authority, to all the others. "Others" is the name for those placed outside the truth-which-matters.

To the eyes of the inculturated missionary, there is nothing more inconsequently anti-Christian. For if it is true that faith comes from Grace and is given by the divinity to man, religious belief in God is faith made culture, shared, built through dialogue, historically read and transformed through it. It is culturally made particular, different, even though a legitimate part of a unique universal whole, through it; of an interrupted dialogue between historic eras, between the eras' subjects and between cultures: similar, alike, close, different, or very different.

A difference related to the Bible itself can be useful here. Among Pentecostal fundamentalists – at least among those with whom I have had contact and a direct relationship – what is written in the Bible was made by men, even though men directly illuminated by God, placed beyond the entrapments of culture. Unique translators, in an exclusive moment, of the only truth personally revealed by God's mind to the human beings'. Since everything is a divine revelation of facts, deeds and precepts, although in the dialogue among those "saved by the Lord" there could be diverse understandings, it is not possible to make interpretations different from what "is written". If it is written that God made the world in six days, he made it in six 24-hour days and, literally, rested on the seventh. If it is written that Joshua stopped the sun during a battle by raising his arms, so the cosmic sun – not the metaphorical – was physically still while he kept his arms up, in obeisance to Jehovah's command.

On the contrary, inculturation missionaries – some of them historians or anthropologists, let us not forget – share with priests and laymen followers of the Theology of Liberation and linked to CEBs (grassroots church communities), to Biblical circles and to other catholic and evangelical units of a progressive christianity in Latin America, a quite historical and even ethnographical reading of the Bible. A book directed to such communities could be a good example. Marcelo Barros (1989), a Benedictine monk from the state of Goiás, wrote it. It is called *Our Parents Told Us*, intended as a reading of the Old and New Testament. Several of its passages are presented as myths, as popular stories told among people, in a moment of a determined culture so that a kind of knowledge could be shared and become somehow a plausible understanding of the real. In several occasions, the historical circumstances in which a certain book of the Bible was written are clearly identified, also in order to establish a critical ethnography of its contradictions.

Even though the "history of salvation", in its inaugural and decisive moments, has already been written and is contained in the canonic books of the Bible, it persists in history. Perhaps that is why the old saints of Spanish and Portuguese calendars are judiciously forgotten, or relegated to a back seat, in the calendars so common among the Christian "liberation" and "inculturation" groups throughout all Latin America. Then a privileged place is accorded, each in his own due day, to heroes of popular struggles, Latin-American martyrs of past and recent history, as well as to events revealing the active presence of God's will in the fights for justice, solidarity and freedom, performed yesterday and now by "today's powerful ones", as well as (increasingly) by women and men, Christian or not, indigenous, blacks and even whites who are considered as protagonists of "the announcement of the Word" – in fact, of the liberating deeds of the "poor and the oppressed".

The essential datum of Inculturation, given that all others are consequences and comments, is the fact that the "Good News", the Gospel message, is an absolute universal. It is for all, and is no one's property: of any historical and cultural subject, be it an individual, a social group, a social institution, a people or a nation.

Having occurred in a precise place and time in human history, and having been, in these immediate moments and in those which followed its written fulfillment as "word", lived and thought within a culture and in the crossing of different cultural, historically-close subjects who are the central or supporting characters of a same salvation drama, the Good News recreates history. It rewrites the meaning of human experience, transcends the particularities of eras and cultures. However, it can and should be particularly read, understood, experienced and practiced from within, and in the terms of, each human culture.

Somehow, Inculturation missionaries intend to think of themselves as emissaries not of a properly instituted, consecrated church, in the name of which they speak to the others the "announcement of the Good New". On the contrary, they wish to portray themselves as emissaries of a message with the power of creating churches. This is the meaning of the transition from an "evangelization of cultures" to an "inculturated evangelization". Catholic missionaries of Inculturation do not fear being canonically contradictory, announcing the transition from a church emissary of an indigenist pastoral to a mission which co-creates, together with the indians, multiple "indigenous churches".

Such a christianity thus appears as a creation, not as the orthodox transmission of a faith revealed as an exclusive, established belief. If the pan-eccumenic message of the Gospel is "incarnated" in history and incarnate, as a consequence, a Church in the cultural reality of the multiple experiences of "being a church" (expression dear to the progressive Christians), and if the legitimacy of the missionary presence is based on an absolute, evangelical respect towards the being-of-the-other in all its dimensions, then it is inevitable that to the other, the subject in dialogue with me by means of my message in his culture, is attributed the right to receive it in his own terms. Even to make his experience one of being: a) a non-Christian, who now knows the Gospel; b) also a Christian, practicing his original religion; c) a neo-Christian, not only residually "his own way", but constructively creator of his own Christian experience; d) an indigenous Christian, but in ways as similar as possible to the missionaries' Christian-being.

On the other hand, if the Christian message is read as the announcement of salvation, the inculturated missionary's testimony inevitably obliges him to an effective commitment to his addressee's "liberation" urgencies, here and now. Hence, a political sharing – "political" here taking multiple meanings and hues – of the other's cause ceases to be a political choice, an ideological choice, as in other instances. It is adhered to the Gospel, according to such a reading. It so adheres to the inculturated mission' vocation, that it becomes, more than any other, its quality criterion. One cannot dissociate the creation of being-Christian experiences with the other by means of a dialogue between supposedly equals from a presence, together with him, in the historical project whose goal is to turn him, as a person and as a people, into a real one: equal.

At its outer frontier – and I do not allow myself to know how far it has been achieved in practice – the inculturated evangelization is willing to run the risk of its own inefficacy. Wit the demographic outcomes of

Pentecostal missions – which have so much less material and fewer theoretical resources – and the evident lack of material means plaguing inculturated catholic missions. Although it may seem an urgent concern, the inculturation missionaries argue that this is not at all a criterion.

Because getting to the other by means of the inculturated evangelization practice, and speaking to it "from the Church" or "like the Church", expands the choice of standing from, or on, its side. This starts by seeing the other's culture not as a mutable and ephemeral being, but as a value-in-itself. Hence, with rights to everlastingness which challenges my own desire to make it like myself, to make it like mine... even if it is for the sake of saving it. Saving it from what?

I may establish a dialogue with the other at the precise extent of our differences, inasmuch as we create between us the dialogue because we are different. And for getting out of it different: different from the other and from ourselves, as we were before it. In a frank religious dialogue, I can believe my faith's possibility is its inequality, which is given to me by the other. Somehow, I can believe that it is the face of the other's god who draws, who make visible, my own god. For it is my true wish to understand it, to try with all my power and force to understand it, for it is not mine that I understand mine, my faith and... myself.

"I can get to know what the other thinks, not what I think". With this Wittgenstein's provocative epigraph, Manuel Gutiérrez Estévez introduces the text which – the reader shall remember – triggered my own. Nothing better than finishing with it. Nothing more daring than bringing it to these thoughts and giving it a slightly different meaning, leaving it as a challenge for thought and reflection. I can believe through the other, not for myself. Or, and why not? I can believe in the other, not in myself.

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Received in 18/10/200

Approved in 14/02/2003

Translated by Letícia Maria Costa da Nóbrega.

Translation from *Teoria & Sociedade*[on line]. 2002, vol.10, nº.2, pp.8-37. ISSN 1518-4471.