

LETTING THE INCARNATION HAPPEN

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I AM very glad to have this opportunity to think about the incarnation because, just as I sometimes think everything is summed up in the eucharist, at the same time it appears to me that the incarnation also provides the meaning of everything'.

It all seems to hinge on the incarnation, the taking on of human flesh and culture, by the son of God, become Jesus of Nazareth: a hidden life. Jesus assumed the 'limitations of his humanity', the 'poverty of our humanity' fully (Const 25; Const 7), voluntarily embraced his own first century Jewish culture in Palestine - yet 'his own received him not'. (Here in Chad we white-faced foreigners are known as 'Nazara' - an interesting experience. I hasten to add that the Chadians mostly **do** 'receive' us with real warmth and friendliness.)

With Jesus' resurrection the effects of his incarnation spread to the ends of the earth. The risen Christ is alive and active now in **every** culture, but we could say that in one way he still remains dependent on us human beings to make that effective; he is still irrevocably human, has thrown in his lot with the human situation. Can it really be that he 'has chosen to **need** men and women in every age to reveal his love, to make known the reality of the incarnation' (Const 1)?

An earlier version of the constitutions went so far as to speak of **extending** the reality of the incarnation. Surely this is true too. I remember an article by Virginia Wallwork SHCJ (Source 3 1972) where she explained so well that we Holy Child sisters are called not primarily to 'do' one or other of the things Christ did but essentially to reproduce in our own lives the 'stance' of the Son, the Holy Child Jesus, receiving everything from the Father (a hidden life in reality, not just a devotional idea). Is it that the child within us, wanting to grow and reach out to the child in others, is the Holy Child whom we "will constantly strive to see.. in each of the children whom [we] have to train" (para 7 Rule 1953).

Christ is there, but people need to know that. "For this is our mission: to help others to believe that [God] lives and acts in them and in our world" (Const 14). The Son is there within us and in those to whom we are sent, but God has not finished revealing his presence, as St Paul recognised: "The time came when he who had set me apart before I was born and called me by his favour, chose to reveal his Son to me, that I might spread among the gentiles the good tidings concerning him" (Gal 1:15-16). Paul felt small in the face of this task: "When I came among you it was in weakness and fear, and with much trepidation. My message and my preaching had none of the persuasive force of 'wise' argumentation, but the convincing power of the Spirit" (1 Cor 2:3-4). When we too are feeling small I suppose we ought to say, 'So much the better! At last the Holy Child in me has space to grow. If I am inadequate, dumb, feeling strange, then perhaps that is a truer kind of poverty than a deliberately chosen 'option for the poor', a more Nazarene state..' (a state that anyone can be in at some point in her life).

So my conclusion is that inculturation (the extension into here and now of the incarnation) is Christ's action not our own. We have to let **him** do it. All we

can do, and all we are required to do, is try to help create conditions, prepare the ground, 'water it in patient hope..', then go to sleep (said to be a great christian virtue). "This is how it is with the reign of God. A man scatters seed on the ground. He goes to bed and gets up day after day. Through it all the seed sprouts and grows without his knowing how it happens. The soil produces of itself first the blade, then the wheat in the ear" (Mk 4:26-28).

In brief - let the incarnation happen!

MEETING GOD IN DAILY LIFE

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AS I begin to write this article, the opening words of the constitutions, "God has chosen to need men and women in every age to reveal his love, to make known the reality of the incarnation" come to mind. In what ways do I encounter God in the daily events of my life? St John says, "The word was made flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14). How do I encounter God enfleshed in Jesus every day, every moment?

I recall an experience I had some time ago in a retreat. I was worried about my weight; my dresses did not seem to fit. Thoughts about this came outside my formal prayer time, and I did not think they were 'holy' enough to be embodied in my reflections. I was beginning to feel guilty about them - then I heard the Lord tell me that God is interested in all the things that affect me, because God is interested in me. That insight transformed the way I see God in my daily life; God became real in a new way. God was no longer an abstract image to be feared and loved at the same time, but a real person who cares for and loves me. I remember after that incident in the retreat I used to invite God to accompany me for my meals, sit down at table with me and literally be present as I walked about. During the retreat the difference between my formal times of prayer and other times became blurred.

However, the question remains: how do I experience God in the ordinary events of life? It is at this point that the words of the constitutions "God has chosen to need men and women.." hit me. Yes, God's love is revealed to me through the love I receive from and give to those with whom I live in community and encounter in my apostolate every day. Since God has chosen to need you and me for the revelation of God's love, we become God's image in our world.

As a novice in the Society I experienced God's love in sharp focus at a time when I was very lonely and sad for no apparent reason. I was feeling very low at that time and I could not trace the source of it, but I remember the words of a professed sister when it was her birthday. "Joy, the only gift you can give me is your own happiness." Those words sounded like music in my ears. I was deeply touched. Had those words been spoken on a day when everything was bright and beautiful the impact would not have stayed with me all these years. That my happiness was the concern of this sister was for me a clear manifestation of the reality of the incarnation; I could feel the presence of Christ living and acting among us in that encounter.

Some time ago I received a letter from a friend who wrote, "When someone