

**JUSTIN MARTYR'S *LOGOS SPERMATIKOS*: A THEOLOGICAL
FOUNDATION FOR THE INCARNATION OF THE GOSPEL MESSAGE IN
AFRICAN CULTURES**

Ibe, Julian Chukwuemeka, PhD
Albertine Institute, Kafanchan
frjulianibe@gmail.com

DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.30346.95682

Abstract

With the advent of Christianity in Africa, the early missionaries were confronted with the challenge of cultures that were entirely alien to them. Many of these cultures had practices that were totally irreconcilable with the Gospel message. The mistake often made was to see such cultures as fetish and demonic, totally lacking the presence of the Divine. This work is a revisit of St Justin Martyr's theory on the Logos Spermatikos which postulates that the Seminal Word was present in human cultures even before the incarnation of the Divine Logos in human history. It revisits it as a foundation of the incarnation of the Gospel in African cultures. This is often referred to as incarnational theology. The discourse begins with an introduction which sets the pace of our discussion. Having given a brief biography of Justin Martyr, it gives a detailed summary and exposition of his theory on the Logos Spermatikos. The doctrine of the incarnation is discussed as the theological framework of this work. This is backed by the Church's teaching authority. Against this backdrop, the incarnation is established as a model for inculturation and the work comes to a conclusion.

Keywords: Incarnation, inculturation, Justin Martyr, *Logos Spermatikos*.

Introduction

Since the Second Vatican Council, when the idea of inculturation began to gain worldwide attention, many theologies and theories have been adopted as bases for the theology of inculturation. One very detailed theory, though unknown to some modern schools, is the *Logos Spermatikos* theory of St Justin Martyr. This theory, proposed by St Justin Martyr, places the Divine Word, Jesus Christ, at the heart of all human cultures *ab initio*, even before the incarnation of the Divine Word in human history. This theory postulates that the Seminal Word was pre-existent in every human culture and this made

them ready for the incarnation of the Divine Logos when finally He came. This echoes the words of the Letter to the Hebrews: “In those days, God spoke to our fathers in various ways, but today He has spoken to us through His Son.” (Heb. 1:1-2) This study shows that theories about inculturation are not as novel as they seem. Many theologians have alluded to the presence of God in all human cultures, a pointer to the fact that, indeed, no culture is totally flawed since it has in it the presence of the Divine. In this study, we shall discuss Justin Martyr’s theory in detail. This will set us on firm foundations for our discourse on incarnational theology, popularly called inculturation.

Brief Biography of St Justin Martyr

St. Justin Martyr was born in Flavia Neapolis, a city of Samaria (now Nablous) near Jacob’s well in Palestine. The date of his birth is uncertain, but placed about 114AD (Roberts and Donaldson, 160). As a pagan nurtured in a Jewish setting, he studied Stoicism, Platonism and other philosophies in search of knowledge that would satisfy the cravings of his soul. He became a Christian in 132 at Ephesus, inspired by the fearlessness displayed by persecuted Christians even in the face of death and the truth he found in the teachings of the Old Testament (160), and went from place to place, proclaiming his now Christian philosophy in order to convert enlightened pagans. He is renowned as one of the most important of the Greek philosopher-Apologists of the early church. After his debate with the cynic Crescens some years later, Justin was denounced to the Roman prefect as rebellious and together with six companions, was condemned to death. He was martyred by beheading during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in 165 AD (160). The most popular works attributed to him are his two *apologies* and his dialogue with Trypho. Justin’s writings represent, “one of the first positive encounters of Christian revelation with Greek philosophy and laid the foundation for a theology of history” (1). Justin Martyr made distinctive contributions to Christian theology, especially in his conception of a divine plan in history, that is, a process of salvation which was structured by God *ab initio*. In this plan of God, “all the various historical epochs have been integrated into one organic unity and directed towards one supernatural end. The way Justin saw it, “the Old Testament and Greek philosophy converged and formed the single stream of Christianity”(1).

The Logos Spermatikos Theory

St. Justin Martyr's theory on the *Logos Spermatikos* is contained in his teachings on the Natural Law. His “concept of the natural law should be understood within his broader understanding of man. Justin, like most Christians, was influenced by neo-Platonist doctrines” (1). Andrew Greenwell gives a detailed analysis on Justin Martyr’s *Logos*

Spermatikos and the Natural Law. According to him, Justin Martyr viewed “the nature of man to be composed of three distinct parts: body (σώμα, *soma*), soul (ψυχή, *psyche*), and spirit (πνεύμα, *pneuma*)” (2). Therefore, “his tripartite notion of man shaped his understanding of the natural moral law. When he describes the pneumatic life (that is, the vital spirit) in man” (2). St. Justin Martyr uses the expression, ζωτικόν πνεύμα (*zotikon pneuma*) which in Latin means *spiritus vitalis*. Apparently, St. Justin understood this ζωτικόν πνεύμα as, “the divine principle in man. This principle is the distinguishing feature of man’s nature and the basis of his unique dignity” (2). This ζωτικόν πνεύμα, for Justin, is a participation in the very life of the *logos*, therefore he denominates it the “seed of the word” or reason in man, the σπερματικός λόγος (*spermatikos logos*) in Latin, *ratio seminalis* (Greenwell 2). The way Justin saw it, “man was expected to govern both his soul and body by virtue of this ζωτικόν πνεύμα, this σπερματικός λόγος, “which never became an integral part of the soul, but which imparted life and true reason to it” (2). This ζωτικόν πνεύμα or σπερματικός λόγος which is the seminal word, constituted a divine particle in man which “imparted reason as well as life to the soul” (2). The divine principle in man, according to Justin, “is intimately related to the divine *Logos*, the Word of God in every man” (2). Justin Martyr believed that “there is a divine particle which served as a guide to man before Christ came in the flesh. It was what enabled man to live in accordance with right reason, which is itself a participation in divine reason, that was man's fundamental law" (2).

St. Justin Martyr believed that the use of reason by men, even in those who did not profess faith in Christ, was actually the *Logos* (Christ) at work, thus he expressed “we have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared . . . That He is the word of whom every race of men were partaken, and those who lived reasonable are Christians, even though they have been thought atheists.” (Apol. I, 46.1-4). For Justin, “all right principles that philosophers and lawgivers have discovered and expressed they owe to whatever of the word they have found and contemplated in part. The reason why they have contradicted each other is that they have not known the entire word, which is Christ.” (Apol. II, 10.1-3). Justin Martyr opined that “The seeds of truth are the formative principle of right knowledge and right living.” (Apol. I, 44). These seeds of truth or seeds of reason are possessed by all men. It is this Justinian view of natural law that presents us with the concept of the *logos spermatikos*, σπερματικός λόγος. Scholars dispute the precise nature of Justin Martyr’s concept *logos spermatikos*. While it is undoubtedly a Hellenistic term which St. Justin adopted into the Christian context, it is certain that St. Justin Martyr no longer applied it in its original pagan sense, but in a Christian context.

Justin Martyr appeared to have seen “these *logoi spermatokoi*, that is, these divine sparks in men, as being of the same substance (*homoousios*) as the divine *Logos* itself.”(3) The term *logos spermatikos* as used by St. Justin Martyr is sometimes seen as adapted from the stoic *semina virtutum*, an ethical term meaning “seeds of virtue”. Better put, “it might refer to those moral dispositions naturally infused in the soul and subject to organic or cultural development (*paideia*)” (3). St. Justin Martyr’s concept may not be unconnected to the scriptural parable of “the sower of seeds” (Matt. 13:3-9), as some form of grace sown in the heart by God. It may also be an intellectual fruit of the marriage between the doctrine of the *Logos* of the John’s Gospel in which Christ is presented as “*Verbum Dei, λόγος θεοῦ, logos theou*” (John 1:1) and the revelation in Genesis that presented man as, “created in the image and likeness of God, *imago Dei, εἰκόν’ θεοῦ, eikon theou*” (Gen. 1:26, 27). Going by this, “the *logos spermatikos* is consequently the image of the divine *Logos* in man” (3). This image, with which man is naturally endowed, makes him capable of virtue, irrespective of the faith he professes. In the words of Greenwell,

The *spermatikos logos* in each man provides a common, non-confessional basis in each man, whether as a natural or supernatural gift from God (or both), by which he is called to participate in God’s reason or *logos*, from which he obtains a dignity over the brute creation, and out of which he discovers and obtains normative judgments of right and wrong (3).

This is also succinctly expressed by Heinrich Rommen, a historian on the natural law, thus:

The stoic notion of the natural law and its principle of the ‘seeds of the word’ or *spermatikos logos* was used by the Church Fathers, and in particular St. Justin Martyr, to proclaim the Christian doctrine of the personal Creator-God as the author of the eternal law as well as of the natural moral law which is promulgated in the voice of conscience and in reason. (Greenwell 4)

This faculty called the *logos spermatikos* might be seen as the aptitude to govern the lower nature of man.

If man is led by the promptings of the *logos spermatikos*, that is, the voice of this divine spark in him, then he is already living according to the law of God and by following it, is led to Christ the Divine *Logos*. This is because, by following the promptings of this divine spark, man has already perceived the seminal word of Christ, and this causes him to recognize his subordination to his creator, and realize his need for the Creator’s grace without which he is powerless in the face of the concupiscent and recalcitrant nature of his impulses (4).

Also, when he has erred, he recognizes his failure in conforming to that inner standard, that inner compulsion, that inner law that forms his default setting. By so doing, he recognizes his sins against his creator, and humbly seeks mercy and forgiveness, which ultimately leads him to Christ and His church. Therefore for Justin, “the *spermatikos logos* or *zotikon pneuma*, is the governing principle of human conduct and the source of the natural moral law - that law infused by God in the heart of man, which differentiates him from other animals. This is indeed, what makes man a special creature, a child of God and therefore a brother to his fellow man” (5).

Justin Martyr believed and stated clearly, that the Word existed in the world before the coming of Christ. In his discourse on “The Word in the World before Christ” in his First Apology, Chapter XLVI, he states:

But lest some should, without reason, and for the perversion of what we teach, maintain that we say that Christ was born one hundred and fifty years ago under Cyrenius, and subsequently, in the time of Pontius Pilate, taught what we say He taught; and should cry out against us as though all men who were born before Him were irresponsible – let us anticipate and solve the difficulty. We have been taught that Christ is the first-born of God, and we have declared above that He is the Word of whom every race of men are partakers; and those who lived reasonably are Christians, even though they have been thought as atheists; as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus, and men like them; and among the barbarians, Abraham, and Ananias, and Azarias, and Misael, and Elias, and many others whose actions and names we now decline to recount, because we know it be tedious. (Roberts and Donaldson, 178)

It was such teachings of Justin, which recognized the presence of the Word in every man and culture, even before the Incarnation of the Word in human society, which set the foundation for doctrine of Anonymous Christians championed by the likes of Karl Rahner. Justin Martyr captures it in his second apology thus:

For each man spoke in proportion to the share he had of the spermatik word, seeing what was related to it... Whatever things are rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians... For all the writers were able to see realities darkly through the sowing of the implanted word that was in them. For the seed and imitation imparted according to capacity is one thing, and quite another is the thing itself, of which there is the participation and imitation according to the grace which is from Him. (193)

However, “the Church has always held that grace builds on nature; that faith builds upon reason; and that the moral life is both natural and supernatural. Indeed, God is the author of both” (Greenwell 5).

This theory is important in this work as a validation of the presence of God (good) in all hearts and cultures even before the coming advent of Christianity. Our traditional religions, by virtue of the *logos spermatikos* or *zotikon pneuma*, were not devoid of Christ and His word, but the Divine *Logos* acting in the hearts of all men, prompted our ancestors to love what was moral and detest what was immoral, to do good and to shun evil, to reward virtue and to punish vice. Perhaps it was the absence of this knowledge that makes one love one’s religion at the expense of another’s as evident in historical antecedents.

Theological Framework: the Doctrine of the Incarnation

The doctrine of the Incarnation provides the theological framework of this discourse. The New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia describes the Incarnation as “the mystery and the dogma of the Word made Flesh” (1) while the Catholic Dictionary defines it as “The union of the divine nature of the Son of God with human nature in the person of Jesus Christ” (1). Thus, “The incarnation of Jesus Christ is a celebrated mystery which involves the Divine *Logos*, who is God the Son, taking on human nature, both body and spirit, and thus becoming our mediator and savior” (1). As incarnated man, His divine nature remained eternal and immutable, while His human nature experienced growth and maturity. For M. Sukdaven, the incarnation, in its simplest form is the doctrine “wherein God assumes human nature” (1). He lists the following implications of the doctrine:

- i. “Jesus is not a hybrid. He was not half human half God. He was fully God and fully man” (6).
- ii. “Jesus was not a demi-god. He was not a mythological being having more power than humans but less power than God” (6).
- iii. “The Incarnation of Jesus was a once and forever event, never to be repeated” (6).
- iv. “The appearance of Jesus on earth was not a theophany. His appearance was not a temporary form to convey a message and then disappear” (6).
- v. “Jesus did not seem to be human neither was He an illusion. Therefore the docetic explanation holds no substance. He was fully God and fully human” (6).
- vi. “Jesus was not an apotheosis. He was not made into a God. He was God” (7).
- vii. “Neither was Jesus a theosis. He was not united with God. He was God” (7).
- viii. “He died as a human being, but was raised to life thus fulfilling His purpose and mission on earth and returned to His abode from whence He came only to promise that He will return” (7).

Peter van Inwagen expresses the doctrine of the Incarnation concisely by saying:

Because God pre-existed and is superior to every human being, orthodox theologians have found it natural to speak of the union of the divine nature: at a certain point in time, at the moment of the conception of Jesus, it 'took on flesh' or 'became incarnate'; in the words of the Athanasian creed, the union of the two natures was accomplished not by conversion of the Godhead (*divinitas*) into flesh, but by taking of the manhood into God. (1)

When discussing the doctrine of the Incarnation, one prominent scholar that comes to mind is the German Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1904 – 1984). In the *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi* edited by him, he discusses the doctrine of the Incarnation. He begins by affirming that the teaching on Jesus Christ is the central mystery of Christianity and goes on to say that "Only in him, and in the union and distinction between God and the world found in him, is the God-world relationship and, as a consequence, God's very essence, made clear as self-communicating love" (690). Next he points out that the incarnation is a mystery. This is because "...the possibility of God's self-communication to the finite is a mystery" (691). Karl Rahner tries to state the basic doctrine of the incarnation. Referring to the Denzinger, he expresses it as follows:

By the hypostatic union (D 148, 217) the eternal (and therefore pre-existent) Word (*Logos*), the son of the Father as the second person of the Trinity, has united as his nature with his person in a true, substantial (D 114ff.) and definitive (D 85ff., 283) union a human nature created in time with a body and spiritual soul from the Virgin Mary, his true mother. The effecting of this union is common to the three divine persons (D 284, 429), but the union of the human nature is with the Word alone (D 392). Even after the union the unmixed distinction between his divine and his human nature is not affected. Thus the Word became true man (693-694).

He then proceeds to discuss Christ's divinity. He says "if this one and the same Jesus Christ is named, therefore, we must say that he is true God; the consubstantial Son of the Father; His Word, God from God, begotten not made" (694). According to Rahner, as the only begotten and a person of Trinity, Jesus Christ is "incapable of suffering because he is true and consubstantial Son, he is not an adopted son like us" (694). This means in as much as Christ was man and shared in our human characteristics, his divine attributes distinguish him from us. However, Jesus Christ is also true man. "He has a true body capable of suffering, not an apparent body or a heavenly one" (694). This body was united with the *Logos* from conception and possesses a rational spirit. Even in his humanity, worship is due to Christ and he is impeccable. Rahner notes that there are few official

pronouncements by the Church's magisterium on the person and work of Jesus Christ, except with regard to his redemptive work.

One of the most controversial topics of Christology is the problem of the two-natures of Jesus Christ. This is technically called "the problem of the one and many". The danger is often to over-emphasize one at the expense of the other, thereby demeaning the essence of the Incarnation and redemptive work of Christ. Discussing the humanity of Jesus Christ, Rahner warns that in expressing this mystery, we avoid giving it a 'mythological flavor'. According to him,

This always happens if Christ's human nature is made to look like God's livery, which the *Logos* puts on to make himself known, or if it seems to be a sort of passive marionette manipulated from outside and used by God like a mere thing or instrument to attract attention on the stage of world history (695).

He further explains "it must be understood in such a way that "Christ in all reality and in all truth is a man with all that this involves" (695). Rahner believes that modern day Christology (preaching or theological reflection), "must speak of the Incarnation in such a way that "the experience of the actual historical Jesus is so profound and radical that it becomes the experience of that absolute and definitive presence of God to the world and to our human reality in Jesus" (695). Thus, he expects that our modern reflections on the person of Jesus Christ must address the existential situations of the people to whom the Gospel message is preached.

On his part, while discussing the person of Jesus Christ in his *Systematic Theology Volume II*, C. Hodge states that,

Christ had a true body. This true body meant a material body composed of flesh and blood. This also implied that this body possessed the essential qualities of the bodies of ordinary men. "It is not a phantasm, or a mere semblance of a body. Nor was it fashioned out of any heavenly or ethereal substance (381).

He says this was as a result of being born of a woman, the Virgin Mary. Hodge goes on to submit that this human body of Christ passed through all the ordinary stages of development, from infancy to adulthood (this point would be a very important reference in our fifth chapter). It was subject to "pain, pleasure, hunger, thirst, fatigue, suffering, and death. It could be seen, felt, and handled." (381). Referring to the Old Testament that, "foretold Jesus Christ as "the seed of the woman; the seed of Abraham; the Son of David", Hodge concludes by saying Nothing, therefore, is revealed concerning Christ more distinctly than that he had a true body" (381).

The doctrine of the Incarnation is not complete without the proper understanding of the two natures in Christ, divine and human. Understanding his human nature is very important in this study. This is because the human nature of Jesus Christ, this human body possessing human characteristics, made it possible for him to live, suffer and die as man. They are also his meeting point with the Jewish culture into which he was born, and, by extension, his point of contact with all human cultures. This is the main thrust of our study.

Magisterial Backing

“The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the Church alone. Its authority in this matter is exercised in the name of Jesus Christ” (*DV* 10, CCC 85). This teaching authority of the Church is called the Magisterium. The Magisterium exercises this authority conferred on it by Christ to the fullest extent, when it defines dogmas. The summary of such dogmas, which constitute the truths of the faith, is contained in the Creeds. Very fundamental to our Catholic, and indeed our Christian faith, is the confession:

Qui propter nos homines et propter nostra salutem, descendit de caeli, et incarnatus est de Spiritu Sancto, ex Maria Virginem et homo factus est.

Translated in English as:

Who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary and was made man.

The above excerpt from the Nicene Creed expresses the Church's creedal statement of the Incarnation and forms the primary magisterial formula of the Church on the Incarnation. The word “Creed” is derived from the Latin word “credo”, meaning “I believe”. The creeds therefore, are summaries of belief. Particularly in the first few hundred years after the death of Christ, the Church faced the problem of differing views over such subjects as whether he was truly God and also whether he had a human and/or divine nature. Out of these disputes the Church formulated statements of belief, which to this day form, an important part of how Christians express their faith. The Nicene Creed is the most common creed used in Christianity. Later revised at the council of Constantinople in 381, the creed was originally formulated in 325 at the council of Nicaea. At the time the Church was struggling with the Arian heresy, which denied that Christ was truly God, but that he was a created being. The creed was formulated to repudiate Arianism and clearly states that Christ is part of the Trinity. That he is consubstantial, co-equal and co-eternal with the Father and Holy Spirit.

It is important to note that a creed is a synthesis of our faith. “This synthesis of faith was not made to accord with human opinions, but rather what was of the greatest importance was gathered from all the Scriptures, to present the one teaching of the faith in all its entirety” (CCC 186). Such a synthesis is called a profession of faith or a symbol of faith (CCC 187). The Nicene Creed, cited above, draws its great authority from the fact that it stems from the first two ecumenical councils of Nicaea in 325AD and Constantinople in 381 AD (CCC 194). Thus, it is also called the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It is very central to all the Churches of both the East and West. The Creed is divided into three parts which express the work of the Blessed Trinity in the economy of history: the first speaks of the first divine Person, the Father, and the wonderful work of creation; the second speaks of the second divine Person, the Son, and the mystery of redemption; the third speaks of the third divine Person, the Holy Spirit, the origin and source of our salvation (CCC 190). Our focus is on the second part: the second divine Person and the mystery of his redemptive work in the history of human salvation.

As expressed in the Nicene Creed, the Church, drawing inspiration from the Scriptures: “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), makes her creedal statement on the doctrine of the Incarnation. The doctrine of the Incarnation holds that Jesus, the pre-existent Divine *Logos* (“*Koine*” in Greek for “Word”) and the second person of the Trinity, God the Son and Son of the Father, taking on a human body and human nature, “was made flesh” and conceived in the womb of Mary, the *Theotokos* (Greek for “God-bearer”; Latin: *Mater Dei*). The doctrine of the Incarnation, then, entails that Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, His two natures joined in the hypostatic union. The Eleventh Synod of Toledo (675 AD) succinctly captured the Church’s doctrine of the Incarnation and expressed it thus:

In this wonderful contraption by which Wisdom has built herself a house (cf. Prov. 9:1), “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). The Word himself, however, was neither transformed nor changed in the flesh in such a way that he who willed to be man would have ceased to be God; but the Word became flesh in such a way that in him there is not only the Word of God and the flesh of man, but also a rational human soul, and that this whole is called God on account of God and man on account of man. (DZ 534)

The doctrine of the Incarnation is also recapitulated in the Catechism of the Council of Trent (1545-1963). The Fathers of the Council, explaining the words of the evangelist John, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” (John 1:1, 14), declared:

The Word, which is a Person of the Divine Nature, assumed human nature in such a manner that there should be one and the same Person in both the divine and

human natures. Hence this admirable union preserved the actions and properties of both natures; and as Pope St. Leo the Great said: the lowliness of the inferior nature was not consumed in the glory of the superior, nor did the assumption of the inferior lessen the glory of the superior". (Article III)

In these words, the Council of Trent expressed that the human nature was taken up (assumed) and thus did not, in any way, contaminate the divine essence, neither was it divinized. This means by virtue of being true man, Christ was not granted any special immunity from the human existential challenges. He bore our pains and experienced our sufferings. He, therefore, participated in everything that was human except sin (cf. Heb. 4:15).

The central theme of the Incarnation is "why did God become man?". This echoes St Anselm's *Cor Deus Homo?*. The answer to this pertinent question is supplied by the creed: "*Qui propter nos homines et propter nostra salutem, descendit de caeli...- Who for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven...*". The salvation of humankind is the reason for the Incarnation. The Incarnation is God's act of self-communication, self-manifestation and self-revelation. The Church's Magisterium, in her Catechism of the Catholic Church, lists four reasons for the Incarnation:

- a. "The Word became flesh for us in order to save us by reconciling us with God, who 'loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins'." (CCC 457). Thus the expiation of our sins as a necessary prerequisite for heaven is one reason for the Incarnation.
- b. "The Word became flesh so that we might know God's love" (CCC 458). Through the Incarnation, mankind comes to know the love of God, who so loved the world that he sent his only Son (cf. John 3:16).
- c. "The Word became flesh to be our model of holiness" (CCC 459). Through the Incarnation we learn to be like Christ, who was tempted in every way but did not sin (cf. Heb. 4:15). In the incarnated Word, Jesus Christ, we learn how to be more human and more holy.
- d. "The Word became Flesh to make us partakers of the divine nature'." (CCC460). It is purely gracious and gratuitous act through which God extends His hands in love and invites mankind to partake in His divine life:

It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will. His will was that men should have access to the Father, through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature. (CCC 51)

In the words of St. Athanasius, “For the Son of God became man so that we might become God” (*De Inc.*, 54, 3: PG 25, 192B; CCC 460). This is echoed by St. Thomas Aquinas who says: “The only-begotten Son of God, wanting to make us sharers in his divinity, assumed our nature, so that he, made man, might make men gods.” (*Opusc.* 57: 1-4; CCC 460). The Incarnation makes it possible for man to respond to God’s call to know him and to love him: “By revealing himself God wishes to make them capable of responding to him, and of knowing him and of loving him far beyond their own natural capacity” (CCC 52).

The Incarnation as a Model for Inculturation

The incarnation of the Eternal Logos, “Jesus Christ, has so profound implications for humanity that to expound them all in this work would be impossible. However, one particularly unique implication of the Incarnation stems from its dimensions on inculturation” (Dunham 1). The fact that the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, Jesus Christ, came into the world, and by that very act “God inhabited human culture with the divine objective of bringing redemption, thereby calling mankind to God, has profound implications for the Church’s modern methods of evangelization” (1). It is relevant, then, to speak of the incarnation as a model for inculturation and therefore a model for evangelization which is the Church’s primary mission. The idea of incarnation as an inculturation model has been explored in numerous works and by numerous preachers, pastors, theologians, and missiologists.

When we reflect on the general doctrine of the incarnation of Jesus Christ, several fundamental facets are drawn: firstly, that “Jesus Christ inhabited sinful human culture; secondly, that Jesus had an uncompromising goal of redemption; and thirdly, that Jesus used culture to achieve that desired goal of redemption”. Exploring what he describes as the *Incarnation and Cultural, Contextualized Ministry*, Dave Dunham states:

When we speak of Jesus’ inhabiting human culture we mean that the holy, pure, just God took on an earthly form, became a man, and lived and dwelt among the sinful world that had rejected and hated Him as God, and would continue to do so (even to the point of crucifying Him). The application that we derive from this aspect of the Incarnation for Church ministry is that despite what diminished Fundamentalism has taught, the church should not, and in fact *cannot*, hide away from the world in order to do ministry. (1)

Jesus Christ did not shy away from the existential context of his Jewish environment, but got assimilated into the world. He lived among the vilest of sinners. He was seen

spending time with prostitutes and tax collectors. He dined in the homes of hated and rejected men like Zacchaeus. However, as Dunham observes:

Some Christians will tend to use the expression “in the world, but not of the world,” as a defense of abstaining from culture. But here is Jesus in the midst of corrupt culture, and if ever there was one who was “in the world, but not of the world,” it was clearly the Messiah. (2)

The implications of these for the Church are that she can no longer ignore culture and hope to achieve far-reaching evangelical results. “What she must do is take a cue from the ministry of Jesus Christ and from the incarnation. While this may imply a plethora of things for the practicalities of ministry, to a large extent, it means the readiness to adopt and adapt to new methods that incorporate the uniqueness and particularity of different cultural contexts” (2). The missiologist, Dr. Ed Stetzer, in his work *Why Is Cultural Relevance A Big Deal?*, captures it keenly in these words: “Every church is culturally relevant. It is simply a matter of whether the culture of the church is in any way similar to the culture of its community or only meaningful to itself” (3).

In trying to establish a theological basis for inculturation, Umunnakwe in his work *The Gospel and Inculturation in Local Cultures and Churches: A Case-Study of the Igbo Catholic Church in Nigeria*, captures the relationship between the Incarnation and inculturation in this manner:

Theologically speaking, if the necessity that the evangelical message be inculturated is drawn from the very mystery of the Incarnation, the Church must set out to follow the path traced by her master, who came not to abolish but to complete and heal (Mt. 5:17). The Word being God Himself took on a real human nature in His own person and lived every aspect of human existence, except in sin, in a definitive place and time. (Ihenacho, Nnabugwu and Achunike, 317).

In this vein, the incarnation as the theological model of inculturation could be described in two senses: In the first sense, it means the process of mutual penetration of the Christian Gospel and culture in order that Jesus Christ may be made present today in every culture, while in the second sense, it refers to the event of Bethlehem, when “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). Accordingly, this is the primordial inculturation of the Word of God in human flesh and consequently, human history, and therefore it is the foundation and model for all subsequent inculturation.

Conclusion

Justin Martyr's theory on the *Logos Spermatikos* is profoundly rich theological foundation for the incarnation of the Gospel in African cultures. This is because it sets the background for the presence of the Word of God, Jesus Christ in every human culture. This theory finds its fulfillment in the doctrine of the incarnation. The incarnation is one of the most fundamental Christian doctrines. Built on the doctrine of the Triune God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, it is the doctrine that teaches that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, assumed human flesh and lived on earth as a man, as attested to by scriptures. The doctrine of the incarnation, like the doctrine of the Triune God, is very central to the Christian faith. Consequently, they are not just doctrines, but dogmas. This makes them irrefutable and undeniable. Thus, while Catholics and Christians in general can differ in their beliefs on many other doctrines of the Church, to deny or reject any of these two doctrines (Trinity and Incarnation) is to reject the Christian faith itself. The concept 'incarnation' is also one of the modern terms used to refer to the attempt at inculturating the good news of Jesus Christ in African cultural traditions. A proper understanding of the incarnated Son of God as man, living and working in a human environment and culture provides good insights into the incarnation of the gospel message in African cultures. The doctrine of the Incarnation is the theological framework of this study. It is the trajectory from which inculturation springs forth. The relationship of the man-Jesus to His Jewish culture forms the backdrop of all inculturation. Inculturation as incarnational theology asks the question "If Jesus were Hausa, Igbo, Ijaw, Tiv or Yoruba, what will He do?" Of course, he would obey the good cultural norms of His people, while rejecting the bad ones as the Gospels demonstrate for us. This is the central message of incarnational theology.

References

- Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Ibadan: Pauline, 1988.
- Catechism of the Council of Trent*. North Carolina: TAN, 2015.
- Catholic Dictionary*. www.catholicculture.org. Web 10.11.2022.
- Denzinger, Heinrich. *Compendium of Creeds, Definitions, and Declarations on Matters of Faith and Morals*. Forty-Third Edition. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2012.
- Dunham, Dave. *The Incarnation and Culture*, March 10, 2008. Web 10.06.2022.
- Greenwell, Andrew M. "St. Justin Martyr: The *Spermatikos Logos* and the Natural Law." *Lex Christianorum*. Web. 26.12.2020.
- Hodge, Charles. *Systematic Theology*. Vol. II. Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2011. Print.
- Ihenacho, David A., Nnabugwu, Titus I. and Achunike, Hilary C. (Eds.). *Priests of the Third Millennium: Reconciling All Things in Christ*. Owerri: Edu-Edy, 2012. Print.
- Inwagen van, Peter. "Incarnation and Christology." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 1998. Web. 22.01.2020.

Justin Martyr's Logos Spermatikos: A Theological Foundation for the Incarnation of the Gospel Message...

New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia. www.newadvent.org. Web 22.10.2022.

Rahner, Karl. *Encyclopedia of Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi.* Mumbai: St. Paul's, 2010.

Roberts, Alexander and Donaldson, James. Eds. *Ante-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 1: The Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus.* Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2012. Print.

Sukdaven, Maniraj. *The Concept of Incarnation in Philosophical and Religious Traditions Juxtaposed the Concept of Incarnation in Christianity.* Web. 22.10.2022.