

CULTURAL RITES AND LITURGICAL INITIATIVES IN POSITIVE DIALOGUE FOR RESOURCEFUL EVANGELISATION

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INTRODUCTION

In the worship of the Church, the Church has given room for the proper implementation of cultural values, rites and other areas of people's lives that are in conformity with the Liturgy of the Church. Since the convocation of the Second Vatican Council, it is very clear that the Church is fully ready to accommodate areas of cultural values in worship. That is why in *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nos. 37-40¹, it spells out very clearly the process of inculturation in the Church. From this assertion, the Church has been making efforts to see how to implement the areas of inculturation within the Church's Liturgical worship.

Looking at the historical models of inculturation, one cannot but appreciate the efforts of the Church in making frantic moves to use the process of inculturation in positive dialogue for resourceful evangelization. For example, in the New Testament, we see Jesus making use of the elements from his cultural background to express the worship of the new people of God. He gave new meaning to some Jewish traditions without radically changing their external form. Rather he reinterpreted them in the light of his paschal mystery; the Christian baptism retains the Jewish form of washing in water but now it means forgiveness flowing from the cross of Christ: initiation into the life of the Trinity and incorporation into the Church of Christ. (Matt. 28:19; Rm. 6:3-11; Eph. 5:25-26); the Eucharist also had its beginning from the paschal meal of the Jewish people recalling their exodus from Egypt. Jesus equally celebrated his paschal meal in sacramental anticipation of his death and resurrection. (Jn. 13:1). The Last Supper thus retained the principal elements of the paschal meal – bread, wine, prayer of thanks: the bread now signifying his body, the wine signifying his blood, while the meal is seen as the anamnesis of his sacrifice; the Jewish rites with regards to Christian ordination, reconciliation and anointing of the sick were continued with by disciples of Jesus especially anointing of the sick cf. James 5:14-15. It should be noted that the practice is Jewish but now been carried out by Christians in the name of the Lord; Jewish feasts of Passover and Pentecost took on new meaning after the death of Jesus and at the coming of the Holy Spirit; Sunday which was been observed by the Essenes was kept by the disciples of Jesus as the day when their risen Lord appear to them in the proclamation of the word and the breaking of the bread (Lk. 24:1-35); the Rites of Christian Initiation for Adults (R.C.I.A) emanated from the culture of the Greco-Roman

world whose language, rites, feasts, art forms, architecture, etc were integrated into the liturgy in the 3rd -7th century,² etc.

In the light of the above, it is therefore, necessary for the Church to encourage everyone in the Church to work towards proper use of cultural values for resourceful evangelization. This will help the people to see the Church as belonging to them.

WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture has been defined as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society"³. Here, culture is what a human being learns, or acquires, as a member of society. This includes knowledge, belief, and art, morals, laws, customs, symbols, stories, myths, etc. According to Clifford Greets, culture is "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which human beings communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about, and their attitudes towards life"⁴. For Schineller P., culture can be defined as "a set of symbols, stories, myths and norms for conduct that orient a society or group cognitively, effectively conduct that orient a society or group cognitively, effectively and behaviorally to the world in which it lives"⁵. For the Fathers of the Church in the document of the Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, culture has been defined as "use of human knowledge and work for the improvement of the earth and its environment, of social life, customs and institutions of families and larger communities, of spiritual experiences and human aspiration through arts"⁶. From these definitions, it is very obvious that culture is essentially a transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a pattern capable of development and change. It follows that, if religion is a human phenomenon or human activity, it must affect, and be affected by culture. Hence, culture is anthropo-genetic and it is being reshaped by the values of mode of worship and leading us into the communion with its divine component- God.

WHAT IS LITURGY?

Liturgy is a word taken from the Greek word, *leitourgia* which means a secular work been undertaken on behalf of the people. From this description, Liturgy has been defined as the public worship of the people of God, the Mystical Body of Christ where adoration and praises are accorded God, our heavenly Father. Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical on Sacred Liturgy, "Mediator Dei" gave a classical definition of Liturgy as the "public worship that our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father as well as the worship that the community of the faithful renders to its founder, and through him to the Father.

It is, in the entirety of its Head and members”⁷ .

On the other hand, the Second Vatican Council took a more descriptive approach, which illuminates a different aspect of this most important activity of the Church. Accordingly, the Council says that “the Liturgy is considered as an exercise of the priestly office of Jesus Christ. In the liturgy, by means of signs perceptible to the senses, human sanctification is signified and brought about in ways proper to each of these signs...”⁸ The same document goes further to say that from the liturgy “grace is poured forth upon us; and the sanctification of men in Christ the glorification of God... is achieved in the most efficacious possible way” and that the liturgy is “the summit towards which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fount from which all her power flows”⁹ .

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Liturgy is all about “the participation of the people of God in ‘the work of God’. And that through the liturgy, Christ our redeemer and high priest continues the work of our redemption in, with and through his Church”¹⁰ .

In all, we can find out that there are various definitions of liturgy with different areas of concern. Whatever the situation is, liturgy is so rich that we cannot exhaust it completely especially through the various definitions that are already in existence.

UNDERSTANDING LITURGICAL INCULTURATION AND EVANGELIZATION

First of all, inculturation is “the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. More fully, it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures. It is a dialogue between a culture and the faith in cultural form”¹¹ .

Inculturation involves three characteristics of rapport: a continuous process wherever the gospel is preached; that the Christian faith is non-existent outside a cultural form; and faith and culture- to be in interaction: reciprocal, integral. From this, it can be seen that inculturation refers to interior transformation of authentic values of cultures through integration into Christianity. In other words, inculturation is the rooting of Christianity into the human cultures, an integration, assimilation and reciprocity.

As noted above, three principal elements are of significance when we refer to inculturation. They are interaction – between Christianity and culture; integration of cultural values; and dynamism of transculturation – where Christian elements do not lose their identity as a divine-human institution but enrich it.

Liturgical inculturation is then all about inculturation of the liturgy whereby liturgical worship through a vibrant Eucharistic celebration is made to become

vital, challenging, and liberating. Through the homily, the Christian communities are confronted and comforted by the word of God that relates to their particular context; through the sacramental celebrations, they are linked with Paschal Mystery in their milieu. Without a doubt, the celebration of the Eucharist and other sacraments, if truly inculturated among the community of God's people, can become the source and summit of Christian life and impels them to bear witness to Christ wherever they may find themselves.

According to Chupungco, liturgical inculturation may be defined "as the process whereby pertinent elements of a local Church are integrated into the texts, rites, symbols, and institutions employed by a local church for its worship"¹². Going further, he explained that this integration may refer to the insertion "cultural components influencing the liturgical pattern of composing formularies, proclaiming them, performing ritual action, and symbolizing the liturgical message in art forms"¹³.

Evangelization, broadly put is "the proclamation of the Good news intended to bring everyone by missionary activity to Christianity"¹⁴. In the Apostolic Exhortation on Evangelization in the Modern World issued by Pope Paul VI on December 8, 1975, the document highlights the fact that evangelization and Liturgy are interconnected and interwoven such that evangelization must touch life in all ramifications. By this it means that natural life and supernatural life must both be affected positively whereby purification and elevation of both are brought into reality. No doubt then that evangelization has as its role, to educate people in the Faith following the example of Jesus Christ who came to proclaim the Good News to the world. And that it is in the liturgy that we fully realize the proclamation of the Gospel to the full.

AREAS OF CULTURAL RITES AND LITURGICAL INITIATIVES IN ACHIEVING RESOURCEFUL EVANGELIZATION

This paper is to explore the definite areas of cultural rites and liturgical initiatives in positive dialogue for resourceful evangelization. No doubt, some efforts have been duly carried out by experts in different fields of theology, liturgy, anthropology, etc. However, this paper will still have a critical look at them and suggest other areas of concern where the Church can work upon for resourceful evangelization of the people in their particular domain.

On this note, this paper will have a look at the celebration of the Sacraments vis-à-vis their cultural relevance or rites and liturgical initiatives.

BAPTISM AND NAMING CEREMONY

The Sacrament of Baptism is that which opens door to all the other sacraments and is through it that sins especially original sin are cleansed by the use of water which brings about new rebirth and sanctification in Jesus Christ, incorporating the baptized into the Church. By this baptism, the baptized passes from death to life whereby its liturgical celebration reflects the joy of resurrection. At baptism, the baptized is given a Christian name which is chosen from among the saints such that the Saint serves as a patron and model for the baptized. Hence, by imitating the virtues and holiness of the patron saint, the baptized is able to invoke the patron saint for help and intercession of God's divine watch over him/ her.¹⁵

Naming ceremony on the other hand is an act of giving a traditional name to a child born from a particular culture, for example in the Yoruba land or Igbo land, etc. Therefore, the importance of naming everything in the world also gave rise to the act of naming every child on the face of the earth. In different cultures of the world, the act of naming children differs from one culture to another and this has been affected by the Christian way of life. Whatever form it is, every child is given a name in order to identify who is who in the society. Since a child is born into a family, the environment plays vital role in the act of naming a child. No wonder, among the Yoruba, it has a proverb which says that: "It is the house that is been looked upon, before a child is given a name" – 'Ile l'a wo, ka to s'omol'oruko'.

The Christian liturgy of naming the child today is rooted in the various local ethnic experience. The integration or adoption of such a ritual into the Christian practice is made easy by the parallels existing between African and the Jewish ways of naming the child. It is therefore easy to select passages from the Jewish-Christian Scriptures for the celebration. There is no doubt that the core of the ritual is cultural, yet its adoption into Christian practice introduces a shift into this ethnic ritual.

From the above, it is very possible for the purpose of liturgical initiatives leading to a resourceful evangelization that both celebrations, baptism and naming ceremony, can be celebrated together without losing their identities. According to Uzukwu Eugene, he says that: "the Christian rite of Baptism could learn from the Yoruba naming ritual motifs, like the joy and optimism that inspire the Yoruba worldview"¹⁶. In addition, he opines that: "a radical adaptation of the rite of baptism should not be based only on the rite of naming the child", rather "it should be based principally on the initiation of adults, which inspired the recent forms of the Roman rite of Christian initiation."¹⁷

Furthermore, in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, we have a lot of repeated rites and ceremonies that can be looked into by the local Church and come out with an abridged form of celebration. Up till now, some local Churches do not implement the use of this rite. There is need to move forward in our local Churches and make spiritual life worthy of it for the Christian community.

In the children' baptism and also adults, the use of signs and symbols like white cloth, candles, rite of ephphetha; entrance rite can be adapted; the issue of baptismal name is another area of consideration whereby catechumens may be allowed to keep their traditional names provided these admit Christian interpretation¹⁸, the rite of anointing especially on the breast could be adapted by the local Church in her celebrations whereby this can be made on both hands or even on other parts of the body¹⁹. For example, there is no need to place white cloth on the infant if the infant is putting on white garment and this color may also be changed to another if the local conditions require it²⁰; candles are supposed to be lit from the Paschal Candle, Christ as the light of the world; entrance rite could be carried out in such a way that the parents and god-parents can fully participate without any hindrance. What we have today is too mechanical and not much involving.

RITE OF CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE AND TRADITIONAL MARRIAGE

The rite of Christian marriage is another area where cultural rites of the traditional marriage could be merged together in order to make marriage more meaningful to the people. First of all, the understanding of the areas of adaptation within the Church marriage will be highlighted. This include, the place of nuptial blessing which comes after the exchange of consent; adaptations in the area of ritual elements such as gestures and symbols like joining of the right hands, the blessing and exchange of rings, the veiling and unveiling of the bride, the reception of the Body and Blood of Christ by couples, the wedding garment itself, etc. More studies are needed in these areas and where this has taken place; there is need for proper implementation.

On the other hand, the incorporation of "the marriage customs of nations that are now receiving the gospel for the first time" into the particular ritual²¹ is of great consideration and relevance even today. Hence, following the example of the Roman church which assimilated the marriage customs of the Roman people into its liturgy, the churches in Africa and especially in Nigeria should consider how they can insert into their particular rituals whatever is good and noble in the marriage rites of their people. On this note, it is therefore pertinent that places where traditional rites of marriage exists i.e. among the Yoruba

and Igbo of Nigeria, the plan and structure, the place and the time frame, the formularies, and ritual gestures of the new rite could be patterned after them. For example, the texts, especially of the words of consent and the nuptial blessing could follow the corresponding native formularies; the marriage could take place in the home of the bride; only one ring can be used instead of two (traditional and Church rites); the priest could be present at the ceremony in the home of bride; both parents of the couples and priest can offer prayers for the newly wedded, etc. But what we now experience as effort towards inculturating the Christian marriage rite is the handing over of the bride by her father to the groom before the Holy Mass begins. This is not enough at all.

In the light of the above, the Church saw the need for the combination of Church and traditional marriages together arriving at one rite when she says that: "Among peoples where marriage ceremonies customarily take place in the home, sometimes a period of several days, their customs should be adapted to the Christian spirit and to the liturgy. In such cases the conference of bishops, according to the pastoral needs of the people, may allow the sacramental rite to be celebrated in the home"²².

Furthermore, it is crystal clear that a lot of challenges await the local Church to rise up to the challenges. This aspect requires the conviction and support of church leaders, the expertise of local liturgists, and the professional assistance of experts in the related sciences. No doubt, since the matter is very complex, it will take some years to realize the dream of the Church in this regard and to come out with enriched and truly meaningful local rites of marriage. Though some churches in Yoruba land are making frantic efforts nevertheless, more still need to be done properly.

RITE OF PENANCE

On this, the church has already given opportunity to each local Church through the conference of bishops "to prepare translations of the texts adapted to the character of each people; also to compose new texts of prayers for use by the faithful and the minister, keeping the essential sacramental formulary intact"²³. In translating the text of the rite of penance, it will take into consideration the linguistic pattern, words, phrases, and formularies used commonly to express penance and reconciliation. No doubt, every culture has its penitential vocabulary and this should be used diligently when translating especially the words of absolution or the compositions of prayers i.e. act of contrition, litany, and the thanksgiving after reconciliation.

RITE OF ANOINTING THE SICK

When celebrating the rite of anointing the sick, the church admits into the rite appropriate elements from the traditions and culture of individual peoples. The elements referred to here are gestures, symbols, formulas, and material things that people make use of in time of illness in order to relieve the sick, to comfort them, and to bring them healing²⁴. It is now left for the local churches to discover these areas and begin to implement them for the good of the people.

THE CELEBRATION OF THE EUCHARIST

The celebration of the Eucharist is divided chiefly into two major parts: the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. The liturgy of the word is described as a ritual dialogue between God and the assembly: God proclaims his word, the president explains it, and the people, having been fed by the word, make their petitions in the prayer of the faithful. The readings from the sacred scripture, the homily, and the general intercessions are thus the three integral elements of the liturgy of the word. Together they constitute the ritual dialogue²⁵.

The liturgy of the word begins with the introductory rites which comprise the entrance procession accompany with song, the kissing of the altar by the priest, the signing of the cross, the penitential rite, Gloria (where applicable) and opening prayer. The purpose of introductory rite "is that the faithful coming together take on the form of a community and prepare themselves to listen to God's word and celebrate the Eucharist properly"²⁶. This part of the Mass can be looked into with regards to inculturating depending on the social rituals or traditions of each cultural group. Some can have prolonged and solemn introductory rites, other may prefer a simple one.

For the purpose of cultural adaptation, and in the light of dialogue nature of the word of God, these areas can be considered: its structural outline, the place and furnishings for the reading, the manner of proclamation, the form of the homily and the intercessions, the external appearance of the liturgical books, and the bodily posture of the assembly.

With respect to the liturgy of the Eucharist, it has been explained that "the Church has planned the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy around the parts corresponding to the words and actions of Christ" at the last supper. These actions and words point exactly to what Jesus did and said to his apostles. Hence, the liturgy of the Eucharist has three corresponding parts: the preparation of gifts, the Eucharistic prayer, and the breaking of the bread and communion²⁷.

From this assertion, it is then clear that the liturgy of the Eucharist lends itself to cultural adaptation because of its meal structure. This meal is related to the last supper and is modeled upon a meal of a ritual kind. In this sense, the work of inculturating the liturgy of the Eucharist should not ignore the meal aspect of the preparation of the gifts, the recitation of the Eucharistic prayer and the rite of communion. This is also applicable to the arrangement of the sanctuary, the appearance of the Eucharistic table-altar, and its furnishings²⁸ and the manner of presenting the gifts and of setting them on the table. These are areas where inculturation can duly take place. Furthermore, with regards to new composition of Eucharistic prayer, this aspect should be given utmost priority reflecting the cultural values of each local area for the use in the Church. This is so because the Church has already given the go ahead to realize this project²⁹. The permission to compose new Eucharistic prayers stemmed in a measure from the need of some local churches for liturgical texts that suit their cultural expressions. The concluding part of the Mass is also another area of cultural adaptation. In some cultures, ending a ceremony may take a considerable length of time while for some it may be short. Whatever it is, the cultural form which gives the Eucharistic celebration a fitting conclusion should be looked into. Other areas of consideration are: the way and manner of presenting the gospel before its proclamation; moderate presentation of beautifully dressed young people in leading the offertory procession; traditional way of receiving blessing from elders with respect to receiving blessing at Mass; traditional way of dancing and how it affects liturgy; prayer of the faithful in local dialects proper as to involve the entire community of God's people, giving of homilies with proverbs, adages, witty sayings and making occasional references to the scripture, etc.

CONCLUSION

I wish to conclude by saying that the evangelization of cultures and inculturation or adaptation of the gospel have always existed in a mutual and reciprocal relationship, presupposing a constant discernment in the light of the gospel. This is attested to by Pope John Paul II when he says that: "Through inculturation the church makes the gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community. She transmits to them her own values, at the same time taking the good elements that already exist in them and renewing them from within. Through inculturation the Church, for her part becomes a more intelligible sign of what she is, and a more effective instrument of mission"³⁰.

Hence, there is need for the local churches to work assiduously with all her experts in Church disciplines and come out with positive results. According to Jungmann, "Society, political life, the lives of the people, family life, the position of women, the appreciation of human dignity, whether slave, child or infant yet unborn—all this was transformed in a slow but sure process of fermentation: out of a pagan society a Christian society was born"³¹. No doubt then that the process of inculturation in adapting the cultural values of our local areas for use in the Church can be an effective and resourceful means of evangelization.

END NOTES

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- ³ Tylor, Edward *Primitive Culture*, Vol. 1 (London: J. Murray 1891), p. 1.
- ⁴ Geertz, Clifford, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books 1975), p. 89.
- ⁵ Schineller, P. "Ten Summary Statements on the Meaning, Challenge and Significance of Inculturation" in Zuern et al, 1983, pp. 1-14.
- ⁶ Flannery, Austin *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, op. cit. p. 958.
- ⁷ Pius XII, The Encyclical, *Mediator Dei* no 20
- ⁸ Flannery, Austin *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, S.C. 7 op. cit p. 5.
- ⁹ Flannery, Austin *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, S.C. 10 op. cit. p. 6.
- ¹⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994), nos. 1068-69.
- ¹¹ Shorter, Aylward *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1988 p. 11
- ¹² Chupungco, Anscar *Handbook for Liturgical Studies* Vol. II, op. cit., p. 339; cf. also Chupungco, *Liturgies of the Future: The Process and Methods of Inculturation*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), pp. 28-29.
- ¹³ Chupungco, Anscar *Handbook for Liturgical Studies* Vol. II, op. cit., p. 339;
- ¹⁴ Lang, Jovian P, *Dictionary of the Liturgy* (New York: Catholic Book

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¹⁵ Lang, Jovian P, *Dictionary of the Liturgy*, op. cit., pp. 52-55.

¹⁶ Uzukwu, E. Elochukwu, *Worship as Body Language, Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1997), p. 280.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adulorum*, (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1972), no 88, p.38.

¹⁹ *Ordo Initiationis Christianae Adulorum* op. cit., no 130, p. 52

²⁰ Ibid. no. 225, p. 94.

²¹ *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1969 no 16, p. 10.

²² *Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, op. cit., no. 18, p. 10.

²³ *Ordo Paenitentiae* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1974) no 38c, p. 24.

²⁴ *Ordo Unctionis Infirmorum Eorumque Pastoralis Curae*, (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), no 38c, p. 21.

²⁵ *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani, Missale Romanum* (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975), Chapter II, no 33, p. 35.

²⁶ *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani, Missale Romanum*, op. cit., Chapter II, no 21, p. 32.

²⁷ Ibid. no 48, p. 38.

²⁸ *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani, Missale Romanum*, op. cit., Chapter V, nos 258-70, pp. 75-77.

²⁹ Congregation for Divine Worship Circular letter *Eucharistiae participationem*, 1973, no. 6

³⁰ John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, On Mission of the Redeemer (Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), no. 52.

³¹ Jungmann, J. *The Early Liturgy to the Time of Gregory the Great*, (London: 1966), p. 165.