

LITURGICAL INCULTURATION

The Future That Awaits Us

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Introduction

Among Lutherans liturgical inculturation is not a novelty. When Martin Luther translated the Latin liturgy into German and adopted popular songs for church services, he embarked on liturgical inculturation. The vernacular, unlike Latin, is a living language and is thus a sure vehicle of culture. It expresses the people's thought and behavioral patterns and is an established bearer of their values and institutions. In short, the use of the vernacular in the liturgy is in itself a sign that inculturation has taken place.

On the other hand, the type of the vernacular defines the quality of inculturation. There are many types of vernacular language. Some are suited to church worship, others to theological discourse in classroom; some are formal, solemn, and dignified; others are familiar, informal, and banal. The use of the vernacular is a first and important step, but its suitability is second and qualitative step of inculturation.

While Roman Catholics started to use the vernacular in the liturgy only after Vatican II, the Lutherans have had four hundred years of experience. Music is another area where Lutherans can claim longer tradition of using popular songs in contrast with the Latin Gregorian Chant. It is flattering to know that the Roman Catholics, no doubt influenced by the Lutherans, adopted the use of hymns for the entrance, offertory, and communion rites of the Mass, where in the past only psalms were sung. A third area where inculturation can significantly take place consists of ritual gestures, symbols, and material elements. A word of caution is needed. Some focus their attention almost exclusively on these external things, when actually in terms of priority the vernacular text deserves greater care. They think that inculturation is successfully implemented when the church is decorated in native motifs. Nonetheless, the text, the music, and the rites are all integral parts of the liturgy. And while music and symbols illustrate better the meaning of the text, they are also bearers of the liturgical message with or without the accompanying words.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest ways to continue the process of inculturation. The previous paper dealt with the experience of liturgical inculturation in the last forty years, with special reference to the recent Lutheran consultation on the subject. The question now is where do we go from here? What kind of future awaits us in the area of liturgical inculturation?

Clearly, the inculturation of Christian worship requires a sound working definition of both culture and liturgy as well as the parameter of relationship that should exist between them. But in order to make that definition work concretely, methods are necessary. I

would like to affirm from my experience that method is the quintessence of inculturation. Without the correct method we cannot shape the future of inculturation.

Methods of Inculturation

I propose two, though obviously there can be several others that are equally effective. These two methods are creative assimilation and dynamic equivalence.

Before we engage in the analysis of these methods, however, allow me to review briefly the definition of liturgical inculturation. It is a process whereby pertinent elements of a local culture are integrated into the worship of a local Church. Integration means that culture will influence the way prayer formularies are composed and proclaimed, ritual actions are performed, and the message is expressed in art forms. Integration can also mean that local rites, symbols, and festivals, after due critique and Christian reinterpretation, will become part of the liturgical worship of a local Church.

One significant effect of inculturation is that the liturgical texts, symbols, gestures, and feasts will evoke something from the people's history, traditions, cultural patterns, and artistic genius. We might say that the power of the liturgy to evoke local culture is a sign that inculturation has taken place.

Historical models of inculturation are not lacking. And they are always useful references, especially in the area of baptism, Eucharist, architecture, and music. But it is necessary to know how to handle them. One aspect of this question is learning to identify the cultural components that are present in Christian worship and to explain how and when they got there. The history of the Western liturgy teaches us that Christian worship, whose origin dates from the time of Christ and the apostles, has in the course of centuries integrated the culture of Greeks and Romans, the Franco-Germanics, and the nations of the late middle ages in Europe.

This brings us to the next step. How do we go about inculturating Christian worship? The question is one of methodology. Correct method is the key to correct inculturation. An examination of historical and contemporary models of inculturation shows that there are several methods one could possibly use. Two of these are what we might call creative assimilation and dynamic equivalence. In many ways these methods overlap.

1. The Method of Creative Assimilation

During the age of patristic creativity, especially in the time of writers like Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Ambrose, inculturation was often done through integration of pertinent rites, symbols, and linguistic expressions, religious or otherwise, into the liturgy. Examples are anointing at baptism, the giving of the cup of milk and honey, and the footwashing of neophytes. Included is the type of ritual language Christian writers introduced into the liturgy.

Greeks and Romans had commonly practised these rites during the first four centuries. Some of them belonged to household rites, others to religious acts like what are known as mystery rites. By the method of creative assimilation they became part of Christian worship. They elaborated the core of the liturgical rite; they developed the shape of the liturgy. For example, the rite of baptism developed from the simple apostolic rite of "washing in water with the word" (Eph 5:26) to a full-blown liturgical celebration that included, after the fourth century, a pre-baptismal anointing, act of renunciation toward the West and the concomitant profession of faith toward the East, blessing of baptismal water, and post-baptismal rites like footwashing, anointing with chrism, clothing in white robes, and the giving of lighted candle.

I would like to mention that those who applied the method of creative assimilation often made recourse to biblical typology. This means concretely that cultural elements are reinterpreted in the context of biblical personages and events. We recall the ancient Roman practice of feeding the newly born infant with milk and honey to ward off evil spirits or as symbol of the child's acceptance into the family. The author of the third-century *Apostolic Tradition* reinterpreted this practice in the light of the promise that God would lead the chosen people into a land flowing with milk and honey. When creatively integrated into the rite of Communion, the cup of milk and honey assured the Church's newborn sons and daughters that passing through the waters of baptism they had crossed over to the new land of promise.

This method offers a wide range of possibilities. With effort one can discover similarities between the liturgical rites and those of one's own culture, between liturgical symbolism and the local system of symbols, and between liturgical language and the ritual language of people. It is here where the Lutheran Churches, unlike their Roman Catholic counterpart, have the advantage of decentralized status, where responsibility is primarily to the local congregation rather than to a central office in another part of the world that probably does not speak the language of the local congregation or is not familiar with its culture.

The revision of vernacular texts of the Lutheran worship service is an interesting case where creative assimilation can be applied. Language, which is one of the more weighty components of culture, has much to contribute to liturgical inculturation, that is to say, to making the liturgy a cultural expression of the local congregation. Creative assimilation would mean that suitable English idioms are introduced into the prayer formularies, that the literary style of these texts follows the English preference for rhythm rather than rhyme, accented ending of sentences, words of Anglo-Saxon rather than Latin origin, and so on. Creative assimilation could also include the contextualization of such texts, so that they reflect the contemporary experiences of the local congregation.

But allow me to ask my Lutheran friends certain vital questions. First, supposing the integrated cultural elements manifest some similarity to Christian liturgy, have they been made to undergo the process of doctrinal purification? We should remember that similarity is not always a gauge of orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Second, are the biblical

types that are used to “purify” or “Christianize” the cultural elements appropriate? We need to avoid doing violence to the biblical text in order to accommodate culture. Third, do the cultural elements enhance the theological understanding of the Christian rite? Although symbols should stand on their own, it is often convenient to accompany their performance with appropriate text. Fourth, do they harmonize with the other elements of the rite and are they sufficiently integrated with them? Perhaps they are no more than useless decorative appendices or cultural tokens with little or no role to play in the unfolding of the rite. And fifth, we need to ask a question too easily forgotten by people who engage in projects of inculturation: does the local congregation accept them as authentic contribution of culture to the enrichment of Christian worship?

2. The Method of Dynamic Equivalence

Dynamic equivalence differs from the first. While creative assimilation starts with what culture can offer and hence what can be added to Christian liturgy, dynamic equivalence starts with what exists in Christian liturgy and how culture can further develop its *ordo*, which is the composite of the rite (my friend Gordon Lathrop has introduced the word *ordo* among Lutheran liturgists). I would describe dynamic equivalence in terms of translation. In other words, it re-expresses the liturgical *ordo* in the living language, rites, and symbols of a local community. Dynamic equivalence consists of replacing elements of the liturgical *ordo* with something that has an equal meaning or value in the culture of the people, and hence can suitably transmit the message intended by the *ordo*.

The opposite of dynamic equivalence is formal correspondence. It is called "formal", because it remains on the level of form or shape or external appearance. It does not take into consideration the cultural patterns, history, and life experience of the local community. The temptation to settle easily with formal correspondence is strong among Roman Catholics whose liturgical formularies are in most instances translated from the Latin. Dynamic equivalence is an extremely difficult method of translation. On the other hand, formal correspondence tends to be no more than a literal, word-for-word or phrase-by-phrase, translation to the point of ignoring the linguistic characteristics of the audience. Thus, while it may appear "faithful" to the original, it fails to communicate the message effectively.

But even among Lutherans there are examples of formal correspondence in the liturgy, and probably there is no way they can do away with it without doing away with biblical tradition. I refer to some formal translations that are no more than mere transliterations. Examples are the words “mystery” for *mysterion* and “sacrament” for *sacramentum*. Such transliterations, though they are doctrinally safe, do not enrich the assembly's understanding of what the liturgy is talking about. The list can be rather long, if we start to check our liturgical dictionary. Consider such common words as “baptism”, “Eucharist”, “Amen”, “Alleluia”, and a myriad of other traditional words we use in our worship services. The congregation is surely familiar with these words, but familiarity

with foreign words does not mean that they have become embedded in the cultural consciousness of the people.

Not only the liturgical *ordo* but also the cultural components need to be examined. In this connection let us review briefly the components of culture. These are values, patterns, and institutions. They are the cultural components that enter effectively into dialogue with the liturgy.

Values are principles that influence and give direction to the life and activities of a community. They are formative of the community's attitude or behavior toward social, religious, political, and ethical realities. Examples of values that have a special bearing on the liturgical *ordo* are hospitality, family ties or community spirit, and leadership.

If culture has its values, so does the liturgy. The values enshrined in liturgical celebrations are parallel to cultural values, although they are obviously seen in a Christian perspective. Thus the liturgical *ordo* includes such values as hospitality, community spirit, and leadership. Indeed without these three values our liturgical celebrations lose their ecclesial dimension. Lathrop has rousing discourses on Eucharistic hospitality, especially in reference to Christians of other Communion. The Eucharist breaks down the barriers that separate us: it is indeed the sacrament of unity.

Institutions, on the other hand, are society's traditional practices that celebrate significant phases of human life from birth to death, from one season to another, from one socio-political event to another. Liturgical feasts and such rites as initiation, marriage, and funerals are equivalent to cultural institutions of the same name. As one can easily perceive, there is much that the method of dynamic equivalence can pursue in the area of institutions.

Finally, cultural patterns refer to the typical way members of a society think and express themselves in language, rituals, and art forms. We can thus identify thought, language, ritual, and art patterns. These are at the root of social and racial identities. At this point it is useful to remember that cultural patterns give external shape to values and institutions. There is no doubt that every cultural group in the world prizes highly the value of hospitality. No people can be accused of lacking in hospitality. Yet patterns of hospitality or the manner of performing acts of hospitality differ from one cultural group to another.

The liturgy too, in its Western form, has cultural patterns, inherited from the Jewish, ancient Rome and Greece, and medieval Europe. The challenge that awaits us is how to re-express the existing liturgical values, like hospitality and leadership, in corresponding local values.

Application of Methods and the Challenges of Inculturation

The aim of this paper is to assist the participants in reflecting and perhaps shaping the future of liturgical inculturation in their local communities. As I stated earlier, the application of correct methodology plays an indispensable role. For the sake of being concrete, allow me to focus on the Eucharistic *ordo* in the light of those cultural components of values, patterns, and institutions that appear prominently in the said *ordo*.

In the rite of gathering we can identify the values of hospitality and community spirit. Hospitality is expressed by the openness with which community leaders welcome visitors and strangers to the Eucharistic tables. The Sunday ministers of hospitality welcome back members of the church community and lead them to their seats. In the usage of the Roman Church the purpose of the rite of gathering, also called entrance rite, "is that the faithful coming together take on the form of a community". The entrance song, which accompanies the procession of the ministers to the sanctuary, is also intended to enhance the community spirit. Singing together in assembly creates this bond.

Dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation offer several challenges in connection with the rite of gathering. In some communities there might be a need to bring to greater consciousness some of the elements of the Eucharistic gathering. Who welcomes whom to the celebration? How is hospitality made to interplay with leadership and the role of the servant-minister? What meaning should we attach to the procession of ministers to the sanctuary? Does the seating arrangement indicate equality and mutual respect among members of the assembly? As one writer has impressively put it, "a special welcome is to be given to the poor, even if the bishop has to surrender his chair and sit on the floor". Do we confine the rite of gathering to words and songs, or do we include gestures and material things to signify the meaning of Eucharistic gathering? What impact does the traditional greeting, "The Lord be with you", have on the assembly's perception of Christ's presence among his people?

In the traditional Eucharistic *ordo* the structure of the liturgy of the word consists of biblical readings, psalmody and alleluia, homily, and intercessions. As a unit they appear like a dialogue between God who proclaims the word and the community, which listens and responds to the word. The liturgy of the word can be described as the word of God proclaimed in the readings, explained by the homily, and responded to in the recitation of the Creed and in the intercessory prayer. In this part of the *ordo* the community leader occupies the presider's chair and breaks, as it were, the word of God through the ministry of preaching. The assembly listens as the word of God is proclaimed and explained, and thereafter sings words of praise, thanksgiving, and supplication. For the word of God is addressed to the assembly as a community, and the response that the assembly makes through supplications is the prayer of every person in the gathered community for every person in the human global community.

Here again the methods of dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation present challenges to local congregations. I realize that Lutherans proudly and rightly claim adherence to the *Scriptura* by proclaiming it in the vernacular and preaching it to the assembly. Until Vatican II Roman Catholics heard God's word in Latin, which they

obviously did not understand. Nonetheless, I venture to raise some questions if only to apply the methods I have described above.

Some local congregations (I am not sure whether to include Midwest American Lutherans) need a more solemn, perhaps even dramatic, presentation of the book of Scriptures. It should be noted that the Roman tradition has no special introduction to the liturgy of the word; this begins quite abruptly with the first reading. There are cultural groups that feel uneasy about such abruptness. Another challenge is the formation of readers who will combine the nature and qualities of liturgical reading with the cultural pattern of public proclamation with attention to voice pitch, rhythmic cadence, and public presence. Liturgical English needs to be proclamatory and performative. Lastly, it is useful to remember that the posture of the assembly during the readings has a cultural significance that should not be ignored. Liturgical tradition tells the assembly to sit at the readings, except at the gospel when the assembly stands to listen in silent respect. However, in some cultures the posture of standing while someone in authority is speaking is considered disrespectful, an indication of boredom or of an eagerness to take leave.

The presider too is challenged to preach on the basis of the word that has been proclaimed. To do otherwise can be as culturally shocking as ignoring an official message addressed to the congregation. In the middle ages, when the sermon among Roman Catholics no longer had relation to the reading, pulpits were built in the center of the church, thus aggravating the problem between the homily and the proclaimed word of God. I know that some Lutheran churches use a homiletic book independently of the lectionary. The word of God is preached, but it is my humble view that this system disrupts the flow of liturgical dialogue between God and the assembly.

The intercessions should likewise be inspired by the word proclaimed and explained. If the concept of dialogue is taken seriously, the intercessions as the assembly's response cannot entirely ignore the proclaimed word. Unrelated intercessions bring to mind the image of two deaf people trying to engage in a conversation. The challenge also includes the formulation of intercessions, using the local community's language pattern. It might be useful to note that the traditional Roman posture during the intercessions is standing, perhaps a reference to the priestly character of the assembly, to the *Ecclesia orans*. Lutherans will find in this *orans* posture a suitable affirmation of the priesthood of the baptized. Note, however, that in some cultures kneeling might express more convincingly an aspect of the intercessions, namely humble petition.

The two methods of dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation challenge us as well in the area of liturgical space and furnishings. For example, the lectern and the Eucharistic table should symbolize the unity between the word and Christ's sacramental presence. This will be more clearly manifested if the material and decoration (that are hopefully of local inspiration) of the lectern are identical with those of the Eucharistic table. Apropos we can ask where these furnishings, together with the chairs of the presider and ministers, should be located in relation to the assembly? What cultural pattern does the community follow in the use of space? Who sits where? Does the

seating arrangement correspond to the special feature of liturgical space that expresses simultaneously both community spirit and leadership?

The meal of thanksgiving, also called liturgy of the Eucharist, has a plan whose essential elements can be traced from a report of Justin Martyr (+ 165 A.D.). Bread and wine (mixed with water) were presented to the presider. He recited a lengthy prayer of thanksgiving over these elements; at the end the people shouted out "Amen" to express assent to the prayer made in their name. The Eucharistic elements were then distributed to the assembly and to those who could not be present. Justin mentions that collection is made for widows and orphans and for the sustenance of the guests of the community. In the Roman Catholic liturgy revised by Vatican II these various elements are represented by the preparation of the gifts, the Eucharistic prayer, and communion. What stands out in this part of the Eucharist is the aspect of communal meal. While it is true that Martin Luther practically reduced the Mass, especially at the Eucharistic Prayer, to a community meal with no reference to the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, some Lutheran theologians today recognize a certain sacrificial aspect in terms of anamnesis. But what is important is that at this part of the Mass we are dealing with a rite that goes back to or at least is inspired by the Last Supper of Jesus.

The different elements of the Eucharistic liturgy project the values of community spirit, leadership, and hospitality. In the ancient *ordo* observed in Rome and North Africa the community offered bread and wine for the community's communion. What was superfluous, and we can presume that there was much, was distributed to the needy members of the Church. The Eucharist became an occasion to be generous to the poor; communion became like a token meal, in order to have enough to give to the hungry. In the powerful words of Lathrop, "At Communion we eat and drink less, so that the poor may have more". We can, to some extent, understand the stern words addressed by Cyprian of Carthage to a wealthy person who came to church Sunday after Sunday bringing no gifts for the community, yet "dared to eat", he said, "the bread offered by the poor". The Eucharist urges the rich and the poor alike to share their possessions with the members of the community. It is through this generous sharing of goods that the community spirit is fostered.

The challenge here is to find appropriate rites to present the gifts to the community. What are the words exchanged at this moment between the offerer and the receiver? What gestures are involved? At what time of the celebration is the presentation of the gifts most appropriate: at the rite of gathering or at this part of the celebration? What type of gifts, other than the accepted tradition of bread and wine, can be brought to the community for its needs and the need of the poor? The poor you always have with you, and I suspect the Lutherans in the Midwest are not exempted from this. The socio-cultural context of the local community should not be overlooked. Contextualization and inculturation go hand in hand.

In the recitation of the Eucharistic Prayer the role of the presider as leader has been evident from as far back as the second century. Witnesses are Justin Martyr in the second half of the second century and Hippolytus of Rome in the third century. It is

worthy of note that “the one who presides”, the proestòs, recited this long and solemn prayer in the name of the assembly. That is why Justin remarks that the assembly shouted out its "Amen" to signify that it consented to what the presider had prayed in every one's name. We can say that during the Eucharistic prayer the values of leadership and community interplay. In the liturgical thinking of the third and fourth century Christian writers the two fundamental roles of the presider at the Eucharist consisted of the homily and the Eucharistic Prayer.

The challenge regarding the Eucharistic Prayer is the composition of new prayers, which are not only integral (dialogue, preface, narration of the institution, prayer of anamnesis and epiclesis, intercessions for the Church and the world, and final doxology), but also local in its language and use of images. Language is not only a compendium of words and phrases; it is above all a mirror of the people's thoughts and values. That is why, liturgical language, especially for this central prayer of the Eucharist, should integrate the linguistic qualities of the assembly: noble and beautiful, but accessible; prayerful and uplifting, but rhetorical employing what is proper to the local language like idioms, proverbs, and maxims. When we fail to use the literary qualities of a language, we produce prosaic prayers that do not imprint on the minds and hearts of the hearers anything memorable that can accompany them through life.

Another challenge is the manner of pronouncing the Eucharistic Prayer and the rites that should accompany it. How does a leader proclaim solemn orations in American society, and what are the traditional gestures or postures assumed by the assembly to express the attitude of reverence and unity with the leader? Do bowed heads, hands lifted up, standing, and kneeling mean anything culturally?

The rite of Communion has much to say about community spirit. The common recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the sign of peace, if it is done at this moment, are some of the more significant expressions of community spirit. Originally, as we find in Justin Martyr, the sign of peace was placed after the intercessions, thus acquiring in the writings of Tertullian the name of *sigillum orationis* or seal of prayer. Pope Gregory I transferred it at this point as a *sigillum communionis* or sign of communion.

The central and eloquent symbol of community is, of course, the New Testament "breaking of bread" which is the name given by Acts 2:42 to the Eucharist. The one bread must be broken, like the body of Christ "broken" violently on the cross, in order to be shared. For there is no sharing, unless there is a breaking; and there is no Eucharist, unless there is a sharing. Likewise the communal cup mentioned in 1 Cor 10:16-17 suggests unity among the members of the assembly. The principle of a communal cup would make us believe that before the age of the basilicas the size of the cup was determined by the size of the community. The later practice of pre-broken bread might have come about as a practical solution to the large number of communicants or, what seems a more likely explanation, as a consequence of the use of thin wafers called hosts. These practical solutions should not make us forget the basic value of community spirit expressed by the one bread that is broken and the one cup that is shared.

The methods of dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation present cultural challenges in connection with Communion. For example, the appropriate manner of giving the sign of peace is a question that torments both ecclesiastical authorities and liturgists alike, and probably it will take several more years before a suitable cultural sign can satisfy each member of a local community. There is also a need to study the ritual pattern of sharing food and drink in community. Who offers them? How are they presented to the people, what words are used by the one who offers, and what response is given by the one who receives? What gestures accompany the reception of food and drink? At this point it is important to note that the Eucharistic Communion does not tolerate cultural patterns where a distinction is made between races, sexes, and social positions. To affirm the nature of Christian service, it might even be helpful if the leader receives communion last. In some cultures, in fact, parents eat after feeding the children and hosts eat after ministering to their guests.

The values of leadership and community spirit surface again at the concluding rite, sometimes strangely called by the Roman Catholics the "rite of dismissal", a phrase that offends hospitality. The presider, in the capacity of community leader, invokes God's blessing on the assembly before sending them off. Something of the parents' action of blessing their children as these leave the house seems to be evoked by this gesture. The practice of some presiders to see off the assembly at the door of the church heightens this sense of family.

It has become fashionable nowadays to stress the aspect of mission on the basis of the words *Ite, missa est*. Although such connection does not enjoy etymological and historical support, one cannot deny that the dynamism of the Eucharist is such that it compels the assembly to be preachers and doers of the word and sharers of Christ's gift of himself.

The challenge presented by dynamic equivalence and creative assimilation is to examine the local pattern for ending a gathering. Do people say, politely and in so many words, "go" at the end of a meeting or a visit, or do they normally say, "Come back soon"? But words at this point can be deceiving. In some cultures it is possible to say, "You go now, while I stay here" to mean "I am sorry to see you go". What gestures do people perform as they take leave of each other, even if for a short period of time?

Conclusion

This paper has discussed two methods of liturgical inculturation, namely creative assimilation and dynamic equivalence as instruments of inculturation. Both can be useful, depending upon the local situation. Creative assimilation starts from what there is in culture, while dynamic equivalence from what already exists in the liturgy. Creative assimilation tends to introduce new elements, while dynamic equivalence, which is a type of translation, confines itself to transmitting the message of the liturgical rite in the local cultural pattern.

I realize that this exposition has many loose ends. The method of dynamic equivalence, when taken seriously, can be quite complicated and requires much effort. Part of the complication is the liturgical *ordo* of the church, which dynamic equivalence presupposes. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church that has an almost monolithic liturgical *ordo* for every celebration, some Lutheran congregations still have to address in some way the question of a liturgical *ordo*, which is in a fluid state because of the lack of typical edition. For both Lutherans and Roman Catholics in the United States there is also the serious problem of how to define their own cultural values and patterns. What is typically American?

It is my hope that this paper will stimulate my Lutheran sisters and brothers to engage in the work of inculturating their worship in order to transmit the riches of liturgical tradition and practices in language and symbols the people are able to understand.