

INCULTURATION AND THE LITURGY

Forty years ago the Second Vatican Council initiated a revolution with its document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) on the Liturgy. It recognized that the Church had now become a world-Church characterized by pluralism. The move to allow the use of different languages in the liturgy was only an indication of this awareness. It made provision, not only for the adaptation of the liturgy to the different cultures of the world (SC,37-39), but also for the emergence of new Ritual families (SC,40). The goal it set itself was the conscious, meaningful and active participation of the people in the liturgy. The reason why this was important was that life should be celebrated in the liturgy and liturgy should animate life and make it meaningful. The Church affirmed its power to change whatever is not divinely instituted (SC,21). It wanted to associate the Conferences of Bishops in this revolutionary task (SC,40). Though we have made some progress, the task remains as urgent as ever. About ten years later the term ‘inculturation’ was applied to this process. Today I am not going to ask whether we need inculturation. I am taking this for granted. I am going to ask rather *how* we can promote inculturation in the liturgy. But before I go on to answer this question I would like make some clarifications regarding the two words in my title.

What is the Liturgy?

My first question is what is the liturgy? I am not aiming here at working out a definition, but clarifying our understanding. Is the liturgy primarily a mystery - Jesus’ paschal mystery, for example - that we make present through symbols or is it primarily a symbolic action of the community – sharing food and drink together in memory of Jesus – that acquires a mysteric dimension, when celebrated in faith, because Jesus, in accordance to his promise, becomes personally (bodily) present there in that food and drink?

The sacramental action has a three level structure. At the first level is a community meal: a group of people eating and drinking together. This can happen in various circumstances. This is the ritual level. This meal symbolizes fellowship, togetherness and equality. Sharing food is sharing life. This is the second, social level of meaning. When this meal is taken in memory of Jesus by a community of his disciples obeying his command a third, mysteric level is added. Jesus’ bodily presence in the food is encountered in faith and the community has living fellowship with Jesus. Jesus giving his life to us and for us is a sacrificial action. Sharing his life he shares God’s life with us. In the process the symbolic action becomes prophetic. It challenges us to live what we symbolically celebrate, namely a life of fellowship and equality, and promote that life in the world. In celebrating the Eucharist we are symbolically living Jesus’ new commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you.” The primary symbolic action here is a group of people eating and drinking together. This action acquires further meaning in the context of the faith of the community. A similar action can have other meanings in other contexts and in other religions. The basic human/social meaning will be the same. But the mysteric meaning will differ according to the context and to the religious faith. The action itself can be transformative if it brings together around one table a community that is divided and in conflict.¹

¹ Cf. M. Amaladoss, *Do Sacraments Change? Variable and Invariable Elements in Sacramental Rites*. Bangalore:

The Symbolic Structure of the Eucharist

Sharing the life of God through the body and blood of Jesus - Mystery

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Celebration of community – Social event

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Sharing food and drink – Ritual action

The symbolic structure schematized here is very complex because of compound symbols. At the level of the ritual, it is a symbolic action made up of objects, gestures, words and actions. The Social event and the ritual action together constitute a symbolic whole, the ritual symbolizing the event. The ritual action and the social event together symbolize the mysteric event in the context of faith. The pivotal symbol in the whole structure is the social event. It can be ritualized in other ways. It can symbolize other mysteric events in other faith contexts.

If we wish to make the Eucharist relevant to a particular cultural community the aim is not how best to symbolize the mysteric meaning in that culture, but how meaningfully that community can celebrate a common meal. Inculturation starts therefore, not from above – from mystery –, but from below – the symbolic action of the community.

When we speak of the Liturgy, normally we limit our attention to the official rites that relate to the Sacraments and the Prayer of the Church. The worship of the people however includes also para-liturgical services and popular religious practices. Sometimes these may be more important in the life of the people. So we will have to keep in mind also these forms of worship.²

What is Inculturation?

Is inculturation the mere translation of the Gospel in various languages and cultures of the world or is it the way that the people respond to the Gospel in their own cultures and languages? Is it translation or creative response? A response is obviously conditioned by the question. It is not given at random. But it is not a repetition of the question. Should a group of people give their own response to the Gospel in terms of their present context or should they repeat, by making it their own, the response given by some other group in some other place at some other time? Some people suppose that the Gospel has been given a privileged answer by the early Church and all that we have to do is to repeat it (the structure) in our own language and symbols. Others think that the Gospel has to be freshly responded to by every people in every culture and context.³

Theological Publications in India, 1979.

² Cf. Thomas Bamat and Jean-Paul Wiest (eds), *Popular Catholicism in a World Church. Seven Case Studies in Inculturation*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1999.

³ Cf. Anscar J. Chupungco, *Liturgical Inculturation*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992; M. Amaladoss, *Beyond Inculturation*. Delhi: ISPCK, 1998.

Are there some constants? Yes. The Church has spelt out seven symbolic community actions as sacraments: a person being admitted to the community, a person passing into adulthood, a man and a woman setting up a family, a person designated to a role of leadership in the community, a person needing the loving concern of the community in time of illness, persons that need to be reconciled and, finally, the group itself celebrating its togetherness. But these community actions can be lived in different ways in different cultures.

The Church believes that these actions have been chosen in some way by Jesus who endows them with a mysteric significance. In the process he has determined one or other action or symbol that the Church has to hold on to. When this matter came up for discussion in the Council of Trent in the context of communion under both the species demanded by the Protestants the Church affirmed its right to change all sacramental symbolic actions, provided the “their substance was preserved”.⁴ Theologians think that this substance refers to the various socio-anthropological situations that I referred to above. The Second Vatican Council mentions another criterion. The Church cannot change what has been “divinely instituted.” (SC, 21) Theologians once again think that the only symbolic actions that Jesus has determined are ‘washing with water’ in the rite of initiation and ‘eating and drinking together’ in the Eucharist. Theologians are discussing whether Jesus also intended to determine the use of the materials of bread and wine. This means that, provided the basic meaning of the sacramental actions are preserved, the field is wide open for the choice of symbols and formulae. The various Ritual traditions are proof of this possible variety. In any case, washing and eating, anointing and imposition of hands are common human symbols in every culture. What we need to look at are the celebrations themselves, trying to locate them in the social context.

The tragedy of course is that in spite of such openness at the Councils, Trent and Second Vatican, the authorities in the Church have chosen to insist on the preservation of the substantial unity of the Roman Rite for the Latin Church. A further dimension is that the central authority in the Church claims the exclusive right to control the process of inculturation. (SC,22) I think that this claim is not justified. Another realization of the Second Vatican Council was that the Church is a communion of local Churches and that the Church is primarily the People of God (*Lumen Gentium*, 9-17) served by chosen leaders (*LG*,18-56). These collegial and democratic dimensions of the Church however have not been encouraged and developed. It is strange that a central authority, localized in a particular place and culture, claims to discern the fine points of languages, symbols and cultures across the world even in a postmodern world. What actually happens is that while the authority in the Church keeps a tight control on the official rites, the people creatively develop popular rituals. They have shown creativity and responsibility in doing this. When the rituals of the Church developed originally, I suppose they emerged from the people, though the people in authority had a role of coordination, direction and discernment. I would like to suggest that the creativity of the people precedes the discerning and guiding role of the leadership.

⁴ J. Neuner and J. Dupuis, *The Christian Faith*. (1990), 1324.

Ongoing Tensions

There are many sources of tensions in the liturgical life of the Church today. The official Church, in the name of liturgical reform, has tidied up the many accretions in the course of history, going as far as possible to earlier texts and ritual forms. This is welcome. After this one would have expected a certain creative activity in the context of modern world and its multiple cultures. But apart from some local external decorative elements permitted in India and Congo no deeper and substantial creativity has been encouraged. Any creative process is set in the context of such complex bureaucratic controls that nothing new can really happen. Even the translations in local languages made with the help of local experts are controlled. The local Bishops' Conferences are allowed to add on some decorative local gestures. Some interested pastors and communities may add to these. This is the only concession given to cultural diversity. The consequence is that more and more people everywhere, even in the West, do not find the Liturgy meaningful and relevant and stop participating. They drift towards New Age and Pentecostal movements or independent Churches for their religious needs.

The second source of tension is that, even where people are still practicing, not satisfied with the official liturgy which does not nourish them, they develop forms of popular religiosity. These are not only popular devotions. There are also parallel rituals that go together with the official ones and cater to their specific human, social and cultural needs.

When we discuss inculturation we often tend to focus on translation (at the moment) and look at decorative materials, symbols, gestures and language. The Gospel must not only take form in a new culture. It must also challenge the culture to transformation. In a community divided by economic, caste, class or ethnic distinctions, for instance, it is more important that the Eucharist is celebrated in such a way that real equality and fellowship are symbolically and really promoted and ongoing relationships in the community are transformed than whether we introduce some local dress, décor, music or dance.

What Can We Do?

We are in a moment of transition - in an ambiguous situation. We can wax eloquent on the need of inculturation. But if nothing substantial is happening or allowed to happen, what do we do? As things stand today we cannot touch the official rituals. While we go on agitating for the freedom to inculturate them we need not be idle. To start with, we can fully exploit whatever we are allowed to do now, even if it concerns only the externals. Beyond this we can transform the living and liturgical context in which the official rituals are celebrated. Through this we will be preparing the people to celebrate the liturgy in a new, relevant manner so that inculturation, when it is allowed (or when we dare to take it up), will be easier to do. I shall mention six ways of doing this.

Changing Attitudes

First of all we must change the people's attitude to liturgical celebration. People tend to look on the liturgy primarily as worshipping God. The stress is on the vertical dimension. We have to make the people understand that the worship dimension is set in a horizontal dimension

of a celebrating community. Liturgy is for life; life is not for the liturgy. The liturgy sets the life-cycle rituals in a sacred dimension of the mystery of Christ. It is not primarily an act of devotion.

Baptism, for instance, celebrates the admission of a new member into the community. In the process the individual, child or adult, participates in the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus and is reborn in the Spirit as a child of God. While the readings and prayers bring out the mystic dimension, the celebration itself is a social one. Rather than focusing exclusively on the mystic dimension, we can focus on the social celebration and make it really meaningful. This is not an attempt to ‘socialize’ the ‘mystery’, but an effort to find the ‘mystery’ in the ‘social’ as its depth dimension. The official ritual is part of the celebration. The tendency is to do the official ritual in the Church and the social celebration at home or elsewhere. Will it be possible to integrate both in a convenient location – in the home or in a parish hall or in the Church itself?

Becoming Agents

Secondly, we must make the people feel that they are the agents of the celebration. The priest, of course, has a ministerial role to play. But he should not be the dominating presence helping to verticalize the event. The people must be encouraged to do celebrate, with the priest being at their service. We could develop the ritual in such a way as to enable people to get more involved. The sacraments are community celebrations in which the priest also has a part. It is not a celebration by the priest in which the people happen to be present and participate. We need not idealize the church as a mystic entity and attribute agency to it. The celebrating Church is primarily the local community, in communion with other local communities all over the universe. We should persuade the people to own their celebration. As a part of this effort we should also encourage the women to take a more active part in the celebration.

One way to help people to participate actively is to make the readings from the Bible really meaningful, followed by a time of silence and shared reflection. People must be catechized so that they can share in the ritual as a spiritual event. It must give them spiritual nourishment. In other words we must form the people in living the spirituality of the celebrations in which they participate. When a sick person is anointed, for instance, the people gathered together can show their concern by imposing hands and praying over the person. The anointing by the liturgical minister can come as a conclusion. The people are not mere spectators but a comforting and interceding community. Some of the texts of the rituals do refer to this aspect. But normally the priest reads through these texts rapidly and the people hardly pay any attention to them. They are simply assisting in an act of devotion. For example, how meaningful is the profession of faith made by the parents, god parents and others during baptism? By making people participate meaningfully, we can build up a meaningful celebration around the official ritual.

Promoting Creativity

While the official Church is touchy about the ritual action and the formula that accompanies it, there is lot of freedom with regard to the artistic elements that can enrich and localize the celebration. This is true of the music, the décor, the dress, the symbols, etc. that give not merely local colour to the celebration, but root it in a particular place and time. Some

readings or rituals can be dramatized. This is already happening in many parts of the world. The initiative for this localization can be left to the people.

The liturgical ritual and texts are not magical formula that we have to reproduce literally so that it can have its automatic effort. They are like a page of music or the text of a poem or of a play that an artist creatively interprets to bring out its meaning. Interpretation is not a reaching out to the original author's mind or to a meaning set in stone. A creative interpreter may discover new dimensions of meaning in new contexts. If we feel free to interpret the text of the word of God in the Bible, we can feel free to interpret the texts of the Church. Liturgy, like the Sabbath, is for the people, not people for the liturgy.

In a recent letter to mark the 40th anniversary of the publication of the Second Vatican Council's document on the Liturgy, John Paul II writes:

The liturgical renewal that has taken place in recent decades has shown that it is possible to combine a body of norms that assure the identity and decorum of the liturgy and leave room for the creativity and adaptation that enable it to correspond closely with the need to give expression to the respective situation and culture of the various regions.⁵

Could we use this open policy as an occasion to push ahead in creative ways?

Focus on the 'Para-Liturgy'

Fifthly, experiments at inculturation often tend to focus on the Eucharist, since it is the rite that is most frequently celebrated and is also central to the liturgy. It is also the most jealously protected by the central authority in the Church. Maybe we should shift our focus to other sacramental rituals and come back to the Eucharist later when the process of inculturation has already taken a certain hold in the Church. In keeping with this orientation we should perhaps start with the life-cycle rituals and popular religiosity. Here the people have already taken the initiative to 'Christianize' their traditional rituals. The attitude of the priests at the moment is to tolerate it or even to encourage it because it meets the devotional needs of the people and brings them to the Church. Some would even profit by them to tag on a Eucharist. It may be helpful for the priest to get involved in the popular religiosity of the people and make it more conforming to the spirit of the liturgy. In this way the priest can help purify them from deviations. The priest should not attempt to de-popularize them by imposing what he considers rigid liturgical styles. For example, I have known priests who kill a good procession in which people sing and dance spontaneously by imposing an orderly march in line, holding candles and saying prayers. This is a narrow conception of liturgical practice.

The sacraments relate to a few life-cycle rituals. They do not cover all the life-situations that the people consider important. There are also cosmic (seasonal) and historical cycles that vary from place to place which popular religiosity takes seriously. Liturgy need not be limited to the sacramental rituals that are covered by the official books. We do have a list of blessings for various occasions and objects. But these need to be localized and elaborated.

⁵ *Spiritus et Sponsa* (Dec 4, 2003), 15.

Freeing the People

A final word about the dialectics between law and freedom. People familiar with the history of the liturgy know that the people or the local Churches often take creative initiatives that are later approved and sanctioned by the official authority in the Church. The reforms of the liturgy by the Second Vatican Council were preceded by liturgical movements in France and Germany. This could now be true of other parts of the Church. The local Churches will have to feel free to make creative attempts at inculturation. We need to encourage the people to feel and exercise this sense of mature and knowledgeable freedom in the Spirit, being faithful to the spirit rather than the letter of the law. We see this happening in many small communities and on special occasions. Thanks to the “sense of the faithful” (*sensus fidelium*) inauthentic experiments will slowly disappear and good, creative efforts will remain. The authorities in the Church can also exercise their discerning role at the appropriate time.⁶

After these general reflections on what can be done in the present pastoral situation, I would like to focus on some areas that I think are important for the life of the people. These are healing, prayer, reconciliation, the Eucharist and Festivals.

Rituals of Healing

Much of popular devotion and religiosity is need-based. This is so particularly among poor people. They have nowhere else to go except to God or to other divine intercessors in their moments of crisis. Pilgrim centres like Lourdes draw thousands of pilgrims. Since an important element of the Liturgy is thanksgiving for gifts received there is no problem in making known to God one’s needs. I think that the most important of these needs is healing from mental, emotional and physical illnesses. These are often interrelated. People are ready to cross religious boundaries when they recognize a sacred place or person. Ministers who claim to possess the power of healing attract thousands of people. This is one of the attractions of the charismatic movement. But there is nothing in the official liturgy that meets this need. Yet, healing is one of the important ministries that Jesus did during his life time. The sacrament of the anointing of the sick is often kept for the dying. In my parish, a priest used to bless oil every Wednesday and attract hundreds of people. In other parishes I have seen mothers bring their sick children for a special blessing at the end of the Eucharist. In some places lay people are seen to exercise the gift of healing. I have met Christian healers in Africa. I think that healing services can become part of the liturgical programme of the Christian community. A programme of psychological counseling could also be associated with it. People with gifts of healing and counseling could be identified. A ritual with readings from the Bible, prayer with imposition of hands, symbolic gestures like sprinkling with water or anointing with oil, counseling encounters, etc. could be evolved through experimentation. Some healers even use medical counseling, especially in the field of indigenous medicine, though anything professional should be left to qualified practitioners. In this context people could be encouraged to visit hospitals and old peoples’ homes, comforting them certainly and praying with them and for them where possible. This

⁶ John Paul II indicates the responsibility of the pastors as “discernment and guidance”. *Spiritus et Sponsa*,

ministry could also include members of other religions. The concerns of these people could be brought to the liturgical assembly at appropriate moments.

Praying Together

Apart from the liturgical rites the only prayer that the liturgy proposes is the “Liturgy of the Hours”. This had its origin in monasteries. I really wonder whether this is really suitable to the ordinary people, particularly the young. It is not workable in non-ecclesial settings either, though there is a tendency to idolize it by calling it the ‘prayer of the Church’ – once again, an ideal, mystic entity. It is significant that John Paul II has introduced the common praying of the Rosary.⁷ Among the more committed and during retreats there is also the practice of meditation. This has often become rational reflection in the West. In recent times the practice of shared prayer around a text from the Bible, especially in basic communities, is becoming more common. Today people all over the world are being attracted to different oriental methods of prayer. Anthony D’Mello of India was a pioneer in this field with his book *Sadhana*. There are many ashrams and prayer centres all over the world. The oriental methods of prayer are not action-oriented but lead to inner peace, which seems to be a great need today. People must be free to practice the method of prayer that they need and that suits them. Our own Holy Father Ignatius wisely chose not to impose any particular method of prayer on any one, but let it be discerned by each individual. I think that any kind of formation to Christian life must include an initiation to prayer. People must be exposed to different forms of prayer so that they can choose from them. In the parish we could encourage different groups of people practicing different forms of prayer. Common prayer can be encouraged. But common prayer does not automatically imply vocal prayer. A group can sit together in silent meditation encouraging and sending positive vibrations to each other as happens in Vipassana or Zen groups. Prayer will be the occasion for people to discover the value of silence.⁸ Then it would be meaningful and easy to build periods of silence into liturgical rites also. Silence can be enjoyed and be fruitful only when it is observed for a period of time accompanied by concentration. A minute or two of silence after a reading or other activity can be nothing more than a symbolic gesture.

We could also promote other forms of group prayer like singing together, *bhajans* for example, or listening to sacred music, either vocal or instrumental or even watching sacred drama and dance. This is common in the Bhakti traditions of India. The Latin (Western) tendency is to look on art and music as decorative, the primacy being given to the word. But the arts can also be mediations of prayerful self-expression, sometimes more powerful than words. Paintings and sculptures can also be objects of meditation, not merely media of illustration. All methods of prayer require attention and concentration. We must be warned of course that the line between praying and being an observer of a performance, even one’s own, is rather thin.

Reconciliation

Jesus, during his public ministry, presents God as a forgiving Parent. The parable of the Prodigal Son is a good example. (Lk 15:11-32) He often heals through forgiving. (Lk 5:17-26) He exhorts his disciples to forgive without limits. (Mt 18:21-22) In the prayer that he teaches his

⁷ John Paul II, *Rosarium Virginis Mariae*. (2003)

⁸ Cf. *Spiritus et Sponsa*, 13

disciples he links divine forgiveness to mutual forgiveness among them. (Lk 11:2-4) He teaches that reconciliation must precede offering of gifts to God. (Mt 5:23-24) Forgiveness is a dimension of love. In the early Church the sacrament of reconciliation was used to reconcile public sinners who had hurt the community in some way. But historical development has made it an individualistic forgiveness of sins in secret. Even this individualistic ritual is not very much used today. Contemporary community celebrations of the sacrament of reconciliation have nothing to do with real community reconciliation. They just offer a community atmosphere for individual reconciliation. In an atmosphere of personal and structural conflicts between persons and groups and of movements for liberation from various sorts of oppressions we have to rediscover the sacrament of reconciliation as a social act of forgiveness. The ritual must be preceded and surrounded by various activities that promote peace and concord at every level. There must be opportunities for public confession of guilt. We have to develop practices of conflict resolution. The spirit of forgiveness must also extend beyond the community to include actual and imagined enemies locally and globally – the economic, the political, the social and the religious others. The enemies that the Lord asks us to forgive may be of all kinds. We cannot ask for forgiveness unless we have an open heart free of all rancour and enmity. Many of contemporary psychological maladies are related to unhealed hurts and unresolved hatreds. Reconciliation then is closely related to healing which I have spoken of above and can be developed together. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and elsewhere offers a good example of a method that could be recreated in an ecclesial setting.⁹

The Eucharist

The celebration of the Eucharist by a community that is characterized by inequality of any kind without any ongoing effort to overcome such inequality is a scandal rather than a sacrament. The source of inequality may be caste or race or social or economic status. The community cannot sit around the Eucharist if the participants cannot relate to each other as brothers and sisters, not merely ‘in the Lord’, but actually. Since some of these inequalities are culturally rooted, a cultural transformation is required. I am not saying that equality and community must precede any authentic celebration of the Eucharist. But if the community is not making some active effort at promoting equality and community, the symbolic action becomes insincere. The community must at least be aware of its guilt and make a firm purpose of amendment. Such an inculturation of the Eucharist may be more urgent than its decoration with some local symbols, gestures and music.

The Eucharist is certainly the summit of the Christian liturgy. But it has become largely an act of devotion focused on the sacrificial dimension. I am not saying that the ‘banquet’ dimension must predominate over the ‘sacrificial’ one. I am rather asking that the Eucharist must be a symbolic celebration of a living and experiential communion of a community. This means that the Eucharist becomes meaningful only in the context of a vigorous project of community building. While I understand the devotional role of the daily Eucharist, the ideal frequency of a meaningful community Eucharist is open to discussion.¹⁰

⁹ Cf. Desmond M. Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York: Doubleday, 1999; Douglas Johnston (ed), *Faith-based Diplomacy*. New York: Oxford, 2003.

¹⁰ Francis Gonsalves (ed), *Body, Bread, Blood. Eucharistic Perspectives from the Indian Church*. Delhi: Vidyajyoti, 2000.

Festivals

Festivals relate to the cycles of nature. It involves the whole community. It is a symbolic celebration of the community which manifests and confirms its structures and its interrelationships. Recent attempts to prescind from these structures have resulted in making the festival centred on the Church and the priest, in which the people merely participate. In doing this I think that the Church has lost a powerful tool for social transformation. In some places the people continue to celebrate the festival marginalizing the priest and the Church. In other places secular festivals have replaced religious ones. These often reflect the newer social structures of a global, post-modern society. Festivals are also occasions for the manifestation of popular religiosity.¹¹

I think that the Church must discover ways of being present to the festivals of the people. Festivals are occasions for family reunions. They relate the community to the wider world and to nature. We have to evolve ways through which God can be present also to these celebrations of community. If the Church is present there, then there is a possibility that it can try to transform the social structures that often underlie the organization of the festival. Factors like who contributes to the festival and in what way and who is involved in its organization and management reflect the existing social order. This is particularly true in rural areas. Getting involved is necessary for any effort at transformation.

Liturgy and the World

Just as liturgy is for life, the Church is for the world. Its liturgy must not make it to close in on itself. Liturgy is said to have a missionary dimension. Today this would mean that the community that gathers to pray is an open community. In every part of the world the community will be in dialogue with people belonging to other Churches, religions and ideologies. I shall not however go into the challenges of intercommunion here. With regard to other religions I think that we should explore the possibilities of common prayers and celebrations rather than participating in each other's official ritual. In our dialogue with people who follow ideologies rather than religions we may have to evolve secular celebrations that focus on basic human values.

But inculturation involves a process of inreligionization,¹² since every culture is animated by one or more religions. People at the level of popular religiosity do it rather spontaneously. At a more conscious level we explore the possibility of using the scriptures and symbols of other religions interpreting them in our own faith context. We should look at this with a new awareness. For me, Hinduism is not another religion. It is part of my own heritage. It is the religion of my ancestors. God has reached out to my ancestors through them. So I do not look at its scriptures, symbols and methods as something foreign to me. I have the right and

¹¹ Selva T. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey (eds), *Popular Christianity in India. Riting Between the Lines*. Albany, NY: SUNY, 2002; M. Joseph Britto, *Festivals and Social Change*. Dindigul: Vaiharai, 2002.

¹² The term is that of Aloysius Pieris, *Fire and Water*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996.

the liberty to integrate them as part of my spiritual tradition. At a certain level this sense of belonging can extend to the whole of humanity. As the Latin poet said: “Nothing human is foreign to me!” I can rephrase it to say “No gift of the Spirit is foreign to me!”, since we accept today that the Spirit of God is present and active in all religions and cultures. We need not interpret them as ‘Christian’ as some of the Fathers of the Church did. But we can see God reaching out to us also through those manifestations.

Conclusion

We will not make any progress in inculturation till we assume our right and liberty as the People of God gathered to celebrate God’s presence with and action in us. The community that celebrates is the Body of Christ. Christ is present in it as it celebrates. There are people – the ministers - who are designated to serve the community. But Christ and the Spirit who is praying in us do not need mediators to make their presence effective. In practical life prudence and wisdom may be necessary. But they need not extinguish the creative freedom that is the gift of the Spirit to us. We have the right and the responsibility to respond to the Gospel through our own culture. There are institutional difficulties in doing this. But if we do not do so we should not be surprised if the people around us look on us as foreigners in our own land or consider our rituals are ‘other worldly’ and alienating, if not magical. This brings on us a crisis not only in our mission as dialogue, but in our identity itself. Multiple identity is not a rare thing these days.¹³ It is even inevitable in the post-modern world. But we will have to have our roots somewhere. Strangely enough, if we search for our roots in our faith, it sends us back to life in the world. The mystery of the incarnation, which is the model of inculturation, confirms this change in perspective. Liturgy, after all, is the celebration of life.

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¹³ Dennis Gira and Jacques Scheuer (eds), *Vivre de plusieurs religions. Promesse ou illusion?* Paris: L’Atelier, 2000; M. Amaladoss, “Double Religious Belonging and Liminality”, *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Refelction* 66 (2002) 21-34.