

THE ROLE OF THE RELIGIOUS IN THE INDIGENIZATION OF LITURGY AND PRAYER*

By

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The Second Vatican Council, which ended last December 8, 1965, passed numerous resolutions on indigenization and the role of the religious. The resolutions are known to you and plenty of brilliant commentaries have been made on them. Hence there will be no need for me to repeat them here. Have we really implemented Vatican II? My impatience here is something like my impatience on some Asian theologians who say: "we must produce Asian theology" but do not do it. I hope that this seminar on indigenization will not end as another revolution of "we must" but really do some concrete action.

According to the Tagalog proverb, knowledge of our origin is the basis of where we should go. Hence the indigenization of liturgy and prayer, (1) we must know what the religious in the Philippines are now. I will then point out (2) some options and (3) some practical suggestions.

I. WHAT THE RELIGIOUS ARE NOW

Nature of the Religious

According to *Lumen Gentium* the religious are supposed to give witness to the people of God about the eschatological nature of the Church. The ordinary people expect the religious to embody the anticipated state of the future of God's people. In the words of *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (no. 69):

Religious, for their part find in their consecrated life a privileged means of effective evangelization. At the deepest level of their being they are caught up in the dynamism of the Church's life, which is thirsty for the divine absolute and called to holiness. It is to this holiness that they bear witness. They embody the Church in her desire to give herself completely to the radical demands of the beatitudes. By their lives they are a sign of total availability to God, the Church and the brethren.

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As such they have a special importance in the context of the witness which, as we have said, is of prime importance in evangelization. At the time as being a challenge to the world and to the Church herself, this silent witness of poverty and abnegation, of purity and sincerity, of self-witness capable of touching also non-Christians who have good will and are sensitive to certain values.

Furthermore, the religious are supposed to indigenize, or, in the Philippine context, are supposed to be Filipinized. "Filipinize" is a loaded word, but let it be understood in the context of inculturation or indigenization. I shall not document this assertion because enough has been said by other authors.

Since Vatican II ended in 1965, what has been accomplished with regards to indigenization? It left the execution to the local churches. Episcopal conferences like that of Africa and of India seem to be more advanced in the indigenization of liturgy and prayer life. I have the impression that the Philippine Church in general, with a few exceptions, is the traditional side.

Let us view the positive and negative aspect of the religious.

Positive

1. The diocesan clergy have been tied up with the traditional pastoral structures and therefore could not change readily. On the other hand, the religious have been more free to adapt themselves to the changes of time. The major problems of every age witnessed the creation of new religious orders founded to solve problems. We can therefore say that the religious have done many of the innovations which later were canonized and became a part of ordinary Christian life.

2. Church history has shown that the religious have usually been the leaders. I do not mean that the diocesan clergy are not leaders; in fact the bishop (who is usually of the diocesan clergy) is considered the leader of the diocese. But since the diocesan clergy has always been tied up with the traditional structures, they usually are not free to specialize and to innovate.

Philippine leaders working for indigenization have to cope up with their hindrance of being westernized. If plenty of our present leaders are Americanized, the same can be said of the leaders at the turn of the century. They were Hispanized Filipinos like Rizal, Mabini, and others. Although many of our present leaders who have had a Western background and formation, not a few had also an intellectual conversion. For example, Romulo used to praise

Mother America. Now he has changed his colors. Behn Cervantes is another and many others. In short, the religious and the other intellectuals can be the leaven of fostering indigenization.

The non-Filipino religious can also foster indigenization by assisting the role of specialists, similar to that of the Peace Corp Volunteers.

Negative

1. Because of our Western education, we have been brain-washed and thereby alienated from the common tao. Our values have become middle class. Our Western education imprisoned our thinking in the jail of western categories. We want to be one with them, but our aspiration and models are Western. We suffer from what is called the "paralysis of analysis" — we know so much, we analyze so much, but can do little. Our westernization blocks our full integration with the people. Hence we have double standards: what we wish to be in indigenization (elitist) is different from that of the masses (popular). This point clearly arose in the recent seminar-workshop on spirituality which was held in Tagaytay City. In other words, many of our intellectuals have not been really converted intellectually and weaned away from the Western frame of mind.

The problem on westernization is more accentuated in international congregations, be it of American, Belgian, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Spanish origin. The place of origin of a particular congregation is often reflected in the Philippines. For example, language is one case. We speak English instead of Filipino or any of the local languages.

However, we must note that some Westerners are more Filipinos than many of us. On the other hand, some European or American-trained Filipinos are really foreigners in their homeland.

Likewise, we cannot just accuse our non-Filipino confreres of being colonial. The same thing can be thrown into Filipinos. For example, I am told that Filipino missionaries in Ghana, Northern Africa, have introduced the Misa de Gallo to the Ghanas. Likewise, the Cursillo has been Filipinized. In the wake of its popularity, Filipino cursillo teams have preached the Filipinized Cursillo to many East Asian countries.

2. A second negative point is that we are not united. Not even the bishops of the Philippines are united. This factionalism is a form of weakness which will hamper our state of being comandos.

So far I was speaking about the state of the religious in the Philippines. A parallel thing can be said of prayer and liturgy. Although there have been attempts to incorporate oriental forms of piety such as techniques from Yoga and Zen as well as some experimental Oriental forms of liturgy, the spiritual formation given to seminarians and other religious candidates is still Western. Although much of the masses celebrated in the barrios as well as some sacraments are in the local languages, the spirit of the Philippine liturgy has been mostly a translation of Roman models. Liturgical texts from America and England usually find their use also in the Philippines.

In short, the religious state and that of liturgy and prayer in Western.

II. SOME OPTIONS FOR THE RELIGIOUS

We know that liturgy and prayer are so closely related that both can be considered almost as one. Likewise, liturgy is nothing else but applied theology and prayer is also the application of the faith. For example, we pray for the faithful departed because we believe in the Communion of Saints and in the existence of Purgatory. In other words, "lex orandi, lex credendi."

But the problem arises when we consider that there are many models of theology. Consequently, there will be many models of liturgy and of spirituality and prayer. In prayer and liturgy, one can have the charismatic model, the model of popular piety, the model of liberation theology, the Oriental model, and perhaps more. These models can be subsumed in two higher forms of models or approaches: (1) the adaptation approach and the (2) incarnational approach. The previous one presupposes only one model, which is the Western one which can be adapted in many cultures. But this model has been attacked by the various episcopal conferences and in the 1974 Synod in Rome. I am for the incarnational approach which means a plurality of models. In the Philippines, we must obviously approach indigenization in the light of Philippine culture. *Evangelij Nuntiandi* has something on this point (no. 20):

...What matters is to evangelize man's culture (not in a purely decorative way as it were applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots), .. always taking the person as one's starting point and always coming back to the relationships of people among themselves and with God.

The Gospel, and therefore evangelization, are certainly not identical with cultures, and they are independent in regard to all cultures. Nevertheless, the Kingdom which

the Gospel proclaimed is lived by man who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building up of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing the elements of human culture or cultures. Though independent of cultures, the Gospel and evangelization are not necessarily incompatible with them; rather they are capable of permeating them all without becoming subject to any one of them.

According to the 1977 Synod of Bishop (no. 5), "a true 'incarnation' of faith... supposes not only a process of 'giving' but also of 'receiving.'" Whereas the adoption approach only "gave," the incarnational approach also "receives" from the contribution of any give culture where the Christian faith is at work. In the words of the third preface of Christmas, God's eternal Word has taken upon himself our human weakness, giving our mortal nature immortal value. So marvelous is this oneness between God and man that in Christ man restores to man the gift of everlasting life." Without the mutual give and take Christ does not become one of us, just as he does not become present in the eucharistic species unless we offer bread and wine in the Mass.

The word "contextualization" can also be subject to many interpretations. It can be understood in the adaptation approach and the incarnational approach. I would rather avoid the word here in order not to be misunderstood.

The incarnational approach can have two sub-approaches: the elitist approach and the popular-based approach of indigenization. The elitist approach has been tried for centuries. But I believe that the Communist experience has weakened the elitist approach. The elitist approach tends to be colonial. I do not wish to say it has no merit. Perhaps it can be combined with the popular-base approach.

The popular-base approach means that we really begin not in the city but in the country. This also applies in traditional parishes. For example, one parish priest said that he could not introduce the concept of adult education and basic communities in his conservative parish. He had to start from the surrounding barrios and let the town-people see the effect of the new pastoral approach. The last and final target then was the town proper.

But does reform not begin from the top in the hierarchy? It is true that an enlightened bishop can do much to change the diocese. But any change — as in the case of indigenization — needs a mass base to carry it out. Plenty of highly thought out innovations in the past have failed precisely because they could not be fully implemented in the barrios. Furthermore, not a few superiors are *seguristas*; they do not want to take the risks of

making mistakes. The approach to the grassroots will purify the approach. Church history has shown that the superiors are among the last to give the imprimatur of programs which had passed the test of experience.

In the past, we always had the elitist approach. Everything had to start with the capital city, Manila and branch out to its satellites. We can say that the other cities in the country have also been elitist: they followed the role of Manila centralism to a lesser degree.

We religious can also examine our approach in the light of these models.

The problem of indigenization is this: We as religious want to be living witnesses of Christ. We want the common tao to see us concretely embody what they wish to be, just us people who see Mother Teresa work among the dying beggars of Calcutta want to be like her. But we are not models because we tend to be Westernized and rather give the wrong example. So we tend to have two or double standards: one for the elite and another for the masses.

I believe, we are tired of saying "We must indigenize" but do little or nothing at all. Our Lord's comparison is that of the man who builds his house on sand, or of the man who only says yes-yes. We have not fully applied Vatican II with regards to indigenization. It is time that we really start doing it no matter how imperfect it may be. Let the systemization take place later on. We must have something to start with.

If we want to be mass-based and to be one with the common tao, then we must try to embody and embellish what the common tao has with regards liturgy and prayer, namely, popular piety. According again to *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (no. 48):

These expressions were for a long time regard as less pure and were sometimes despised, but today they are almost everywhere being rediscovered. During the last Synod the Bishops studies their significance with remarkable pastoral realism and zeal.

Popular religiosity of course certain has its limits. ... But if it is will oriented ... it is rich in values. It manifests a thirst for God which only the simple and the poor can know. It makes people capable of generosity and sacrifice even to the point of heroism, when it is a question of manifesting belief. It involves an acute awareness of profound attributes of God: fatherhood, providence, loving and constant presence. It engenders interior attitudes rarely observed to the same degree elsewhere: patience, the

sense of Cross in daily life detachment, openness to others, devotion. By reason of these aspects, we readily call it "popular piety", that is, religion of the people, rather than religiosity.

If the voice of the people through popular piety can be the voice of God, one possible area to look into is the liturgy of Advent. We know that the Paschal Mystery is the center of our faith. By Christ's resurrection, every day can simultaneously be Christmas, Lent and Easter. Although we insist on the spirit of Advent and do not dare to sing Christmas songs until the eve of Christmas, the common tao does not understand the meaning of Advent. For him Christmas begins as early as November and goes as far as February 2 in the older tradition. It is said that the Philippines has the longest tradition of Christmas.

III. SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

In Tacloban City, we once had a seminar for college theology teachers. We planned to have a Filipino experimental mass as a culminating activity. But since the bishop forbade the proposed liturgy, so we resorted to a simple bible service on indigenization. The group was composed of two American priests, one Filipino priest, several Filipina sisters, seminarians, and theology teachers of a university. In spite of the simple liturgy, we felt the Holy Spirit there. Some were moved to tears in the prayer. The lesson is that rite or externals are not enough. True, they can help in producing the desired effect, but what is more important is the disposition. And indigenized rite without disposition can become like a carnival or a folkloristic show.

Basic Attitudes which Religious should have:

- 1) We must have the courage to be different and to achieve something. This includes the daring spirit which entails calculated risks of making educational guesses and mistakes.
- 2) Non-Filipino religious to have the attitude of service, not to be served. This is most evident in non-Filipino parish priest who no longer have, by law (Presidential Decree No. 176), the privilege of becoming administrators in Catholic institutions such as schools.
- 3) A re-education of our sense of values. For example, we have been used to the Western individualism and existentialism of self-perfection. This is very much against the *sakop* spirit and *sakop* fulfillment. I have explained this point in my books.

What can we really do? With our Westernized training and all our setbacks, what can we accomplish? Let us be realistic: we can only do what is possible for us.

I would propose the following:

- 1) Let us start with the language of liturgy and prayer. Take the example of 'sangre', 'blood', and 'dugo'. 'Dugo' has more impact in us. Let our liturgies be in the local language. Again there is the practical difficulty of implementing it.
- 2) Let us create the climate wherein our successors will be more capable of doing the job indigenization. In doing so we lay the foundations for better people to carry out the task of indigenization. This job is common to us westernized Filipinos and our non-Filipino confreres.

The Problem of Change

The problem of change is among the hardest for administrators and for social workers. One top administrator once remarked: "You have to wait for a few more funerals before you can carry out your plans". In the Philippine church, we cannot carry things overnight. The hierarchy and the Roman Catholic Church has been known to be patient — the Italian style.

Let us ask the practical question: How can we religious bring about the indigenization of liturgy and prayer with our given limitations? Allow me to borrow a few thoughts from the social scientist. Let us illustrate it with one example, the use of the vernacular in liturgy and community prayer.

The human body is a perfect example of change and permanence. We are the same persons we were ten years ago. At the same time we are different because we grow and cope with new situation ideas. The body changes because it accepts what is conducive to its own good. Change, furthermore, must be according to the nature of the body. E.g., from ordinary rice you produce strains for miracle rice.

Habits are hard to change. There is the law of inertia and man is proverbially lazy. In the case of liturgy, the popular backing which Cardinal Lefebvre has for the Tridentine Latin Mass shows that Vatican II was not fully understood by all people.

The following are some principles used for change (in our case, indigenization):

1. **Conscienticize and motivate:** We cannot just legislate that from now on, we only will pray in Pilipino. To use force will only create counter-results. Here, I leave the door open to other details.
2. **Involve all the people concerned:** "What is shared is cared." Psychologists say that people tend to cooperate more if they are involved in the planning stage. Here, for example, learning the language is both for non-Filipinos and Filipinos as well. There are Filipinos assigned in other parts of the country (e.g., Visayan in an Ilocano province or vice versa) who do not pick up the language of the province. There are also non-Filipinos who are much better than Filipinos in speaking the local language.
3. **Use the present system.** Iconoclasts must beware that they cannot just throw overboard our liturgy as colonial or foreign. We must take what we have and begin from there. We can learn from the experience of the Population Commission people: they tried to enforce change agents who were foreign to the barrio (hired social workers). Now they have learned to use the *hilots* and *parteras* to be agents to change. We also cannot junk our traditional piety. Let us start from here.
4. **Use the new system together with the old system.** One example can be that of the implementation of modern math. Math teachers found out that the old system of mathematics was obsolete. The Americans revamped everything in the implementation of modern math: they revamped the school system, the method of teaching, the textbooks. This experiment amounted to millions of dollars plus the broken hearts of many people. The British, on the other hand, did not follow the American Model. They let modern math be one of the minor branches. The branch eventually grew and changed the whole math system. The British model was more economical and dislocated less teachers, and students.

We repeat: one cannot change people overnight. This is also true of Vatican II which allowed the old and the new undergo a transition period.

5. **Demonstrate.** Let us now just show abstract theories. Let us demonstrate our liturgy and prayer life in action. In doing so, people can imitate us better.

6. **Work with the young.** We are aware of the saying that "you cannot teach an old dog new tricks." It is hard to change fixed habits and the old anyway will die some day. So to work on the young and our successors will pay off better results. This is to the scope of formation people. Let us try to work with the new generation.

In this connection, let us look at the example of Christ, the foremost social changer. Christ did not aforementioned principles of change. In fact he was so successful that he changed the world. For example, he faced the problem of institutional slavery which we consider today as inhuman and unlawful. But his contemporaries thought, slavery was correct and just. He did not rally against the Emperor of Rome or make a protest that slavery is unlawful. To do so would be useless. Christ began his reform with the training of a few "seminarians" in a remote barrlo of the Roman Empire. We all know the rest of the story.

I feel that the religious have the most important role in the indigenization of prayer and liturgy as well as the other aspects of enculturation. The religious have always been the primary change agents in the history of the Church. Vatican II has provided all the guidelines, majority of which remain to be accomplished. The formation personnel have this task and challenge to face. I hope this convention-seminar will accomplish some real action.