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An African Interpretation of Liturgical Inculturation: *The Rite Zairois*

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THE ISSUE OF INCULTURATION, WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE LITURGY, has been one of the most central issues for the church on the African continent since the late 1960s. Following inspirations drawn from the Second Vatican Council and statements made about Africa under the pontificate of Pope Paul VI (and later by John Paul II), theologians in Africa have continued to reflect together on how best to help Christian life be incarnated among the people of that huge continent. The task is both urgent and enormous. No one is ready for a repeat experience of the ill luck that was suffered by an earlier Christianity in North Africa, when it was almost completely crushed by the Islamic invasion of the area. A major reason for that demise has been attributed to the fact that the faith professed by the people in North Africa then was never allowed to place its roots deep into the local soil.

The church in Zaire has been a leader in the effort to make the faith feel at home in Africa. Even before the Second Vatican Council, the Bishops' Conference in Zaire had taken up positions that were to encourage the development of Christian

African philosophy and Christian African theology. With the now popular "Faculte de Theologie Catholique de Kinshasa" as its special organ for research and publication, the Zairean Bishops' Conference launched into ecclesiastical projects that have grown to prominence not only locally, but also around the world. One such project is the so-called *Rite Zairois* of the eucharistic celebration.¹ According to the late Cardinal Malula of Kinshasa, Zaire, this celebration is a living sample and result of the liturgical movement and inculturation program in the Zairean Church.²

I have been in regular contact with the church in Zaire since 1980 through residence in Kinshasa, return visits, and especially correspondence with confreres, academic colleagues, and friends. At the end of the last decade I completed and defended my research on the Zairean liturgical project, which, I believe, was the first full treatment of the subject in the English language. That effort was undertaken and accomplished under the inspiring direction of David Power (see note no.5 below). This paper will first give some historical data from the birth through the evolution and approval of the Zairean Mass. A special examination of the notion of inculturation will be made in relation to theological discourse in Africa, with emphasis on what this implies with regard to the liturgy. This will open up to the issue of liturgical sensitivity to traditional African values, which values will be identified in this paper. Then the *Rite Zairois* will be examined as a concrete expression of an African notion of liturgical inculturation.

The Zairean Liturgical Project

The bishops of Zaire gathered in an assembly in 1961 knew that there was a problem with the liturgy celebrated in Zaire. In an emphatic way they wrote:

The liturgy introduced in Africa is not yet adapted to the proper character of our populations, and therefore has remained foreign to them. The return to the authentic traditions of the liturgy greatly opens the way to a fundamental adaptation of the liturgy to the African environment. Such an adaptation is very necessary for the edification of the traditional (pagan) community on religious grounds, since worship is the most important

element which unites the entire community. Only a living and adapted form of worship can generate the indispensable deepening of the faith which cannot be given through instruction alone. .. An elaborate study and critique of the religious customs as well as a living contact with the people will reveal the fundamental cultural needs, and will furnish the necessary elements for the elaboration of a living African liturgy which is sensitive to the aspirations of the populations.³

What is remarkable in the above statement is that the bishops not only saw the problem, but also had a good sense of how best to develop a sound solution to it. The aspects of critical appreciation of the customs of the people and the necessary contact and communication with the people are very vital to the process of developing their projects in the future. Before Vatican II met to discuss and recommend its principles for the "adaptation" of the liturgy to the various cultures of the world, the Zairean Church had already made specific requests to Rome concerning its local liturgical needs. The years of the council and the years immediately following it proved to be somewhat passive by way of local creativity. The outcome of the Second Vatican council did not filter fast enough through Africa. In the meantime, the need for a realistic and honest appraisal of traditional African life by the church had become urgent.

It should be stated that the starting point for the new rite of the eucharist in Zaire is Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, which was promulgated in 1963. This document dealt specifically with the norms for adapting the liturgy to the various cultures of the world (CSL 37-40). When the new *ordo Missae* was promulgated on 3 April 1969, there was a general feeling in parts of Africa (especially in Zaire) that it did not adequately represent the religious and cultural feelings of African Christians. As a response to this, the Zairean bishops set up a commission to do the work of proposing a eucharistic liturgy that better suited the genius of the Zairean people. They were poised to go beyond the texts prepared in Rome and sent to them. For them, this would mean:

the necessity to open the liturgy to the cultural values of the people of Zaire. On the one part, this means (while respecting the common faith of the Church) the admission of modifica

tions in the forms and expressions of the liturgy in a way that identifies with the genius and character of the life of the Zairean people. On the other part, those cultural elements of the people of Zaire will be subjected to the process of purification and critique in the light of the Christian faith.⁴

It was a publicly professed position of the Zairean bishops at that time that to africanize the liturgy did not just mean adopting some customs usual in the African cultural context, but to create a liturgy which incarnates the mystery celebrated by the Christian community in an expressive and comprehensive manner. When the bishops submitted a schema of the new rite to the Congregation for Divine Worship in December 1969 asking for permission to develop it, the Congregation gave its support for the work necessary for the Zairean bishops to "integrate" the new ordo into Zairean life.⁵

From the beginning of its work, the special liturgical commission in Zaire worked its way through consultations at various levels of church life: parish and diocesan liturgical commissions, committee of bishops, and constant dialogue and correspondence with the Roman congregations. Using the Roman ordo as a starting point, the commission reflected on how the role of a village chief in a traditional assembly could be brought to bear on the Christian celebration of the eucharist. At that time, it was understood that the role of the presider at the eucharist would mirror the role of the chief in the village assembly. As time went on, the emphasis on the role of the presider was modified to include the role of the assembly. In the development of this rite, therefore, three models were somehow merged: the model of the Roman ordo, the model of the chief-presider and the model of the gathered assembly.

Between 1970 and 1985, the work of refining the proposed text of the rite and the liturgical experimentations were going on simultaneously. There was also a slow catechesis going on both within the Bishops' Conference and among the people. There were issues for which consensus was not possible, especially in what concerned costume and rubrics. The Congregation for Divine Worship together with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith were considering the liturgical and doctrinal positions of the proposed text of the rite. A joint meeting of the representatives of the Roman congregations

and the Zairean Bishops' Conference and liturgical commission was held in Kinshasa, Zaire, on 4 November 1986. It was at this meeting that the final ratifications were made in preparation for the eventual approval of the text of the rite. At that meeting, much of the debate and lack of consensus centered around several issues, the most important being the title of the project, and the nature of the explanations given for the invocation of ancestors in the Zairean liturgy.' Then on 30 April 1988, following repeated requests to Pope John Paul II by the Zairean bishops for the approval of the text, the Congregation for Divine Worship formally approved the Zairean rite of the eucharist with the official title: *Missel romain pour les dioceses du Zaire*. This title was proposed by Rome. The use of this title made it clear that this rite was intended (by Roman authorities) to maintain Roman identity. As for the invocation of ancestors, although the practice is in the approved text, the questioned explanations were omitted. What survived the purge was an irregular typology made of African ancestors with Old Testament personages like Abel, Abraham, and Melchizedek, as though the dignity of African ancestors depended on these personages. In spite of this, however, the successful emergence of this ritual of invocation of African ancestors in the church's highest form of worship will remain one of the most central identities of this Mass, and of course a major contribution to Christian theology.

The emergence of the Zairean Mass is usually cited as the clearest result of the inculturation movement in Africa. What is this notion of inculturation, and how has it been perceived by the church in Zaire? In the following section these questions will be treated in relation to the liturgy.

Liturgical Inculturation

Our earliest known use of the term "inculturation" occurred during the debates on "mission and non-Christian cultures" at the 29th Missiology Week at Louvain in 1959. Two of the contributions were entitled: "Actualité du probleme de l'inculturation" and "Lacunes et problemes de l'inculturation dans le contexte traditionnel et moderne."⁷ The term is, therefore, a neologism, at least in theology. In spite of this, the re-

ality that it represents has been present throughout church history. It is a basic presupposition of this writer that every genuine attempt in church history to have the message and life of the Gospel appropriated into the lived experience of a given culture could be classified as inspired by the spirit of inculturation.

Since the last decade, the term inculturation has been widely used in the areas of theology, missiology, and--in a special way--liturgy. Although the term does not appear in the documents of Vatican II, Anscar Chugungco has suggested that in some instances of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, words like *aptatio* and *accomodatio* could be rendered by the word inculturation.⁸ Inculturation is different from adaptation. It goes beyond cosmetic changes. This is what the 1985 Extraordinary Synod in Rome was emphasizing when its participants stated:

Since the Church is a communion which joins diversity and unity, being present throughout the world, it takes up whatever it finds positive in all cultures. Inculturation, however, is different from a mere external adaptation, as it signifies an interior transformation of authentic cultural values through integration into Christianity and the rooting of Christianity in various human cultures.⁹

Pedro Arrupe's definition of Inculturation following the 32nd General Assembly of the Society of Jesus in 1978 stated:

Inculturation is the incarnation of the Christian life and message in a concrete cultural situation, in such a way that not only is this experience expressed with elements typical of the culture in question (otherwise it would only be superficial adaptation), but also that this same experience transforms itself into a principle of inspiration, being both a norm and a unifying force, transforming and recreating this culture, thus being at the origin of a new "creation."¹⁰

In this definition neither the Gospel nor the culture is independent of the other. Both interact at a deep level of mutual give and take. In the process a new creation is made.

The project of inculturation proceeds from the incarnational experience of Christ. Pope John Paul II, addressing the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1979, said that inculturation "ex

presses one of the elements of the great mystery of the incarnation."¹¹ Thus liturgical inculturation pertains to the incarnation of Christian liturgical experience in a local worshiping community. Chupungco has described liturgical inculturation as:

the process whereby the texts and rituals used in worship by the local Church are so inserted in the framework of culture, that they absorb its thought, language, and ritual patterns. Liturgical inculturation operates according to the dynamics of insertion in a given culture and interior assimilation of cultural elements. From a purely anthropological point of view, inculturation means that the people are made to experience in liturgical celebration a "cultural event," whose language and ritual they are able to identify as elements of their culture.¹²

Liturgical inculturation carried to its logical implications opens up to a whole new area of not only making already established liturgical rites meaningful in a given local situation, but also of developing new dimensions in the church's worship patterns, thus bringing some new but yet authentic experiences of worship into the church. This would happen at the level of the sensitive and inspired translation of liturgical texts and the creation of entirely new ones;¹³ the transmission of rituals, and the creation of new ones according to local needs.¹⁴ Thus the challenge of liturgical Inculturation lies not in explaining away the Roman rite, say, in an African locality, but in celebrating the Christian mystery in question in such a way as to exhibit both the true sense of the mystery and the authentic cultic sense of the given African people.

The Challenge of Liturgical Inculturation in Africa

There is a two-sided problem associated with inculturating the liturgy in Africa.

First, African culture, like all other cultures, is not static but participates in the process of evolution. The search for the genius of African culture runs the risk of invading the church of today with aspects of African life of the past which may today impede progress or which have by their nature, become redundant. There has to be a process of discernment: the Gospel can challenge traditional culture.

The nature of Christian worship demands that cultural elements and values to be incarnated into the liturgy undergo critical evaluation. According to the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (37), nothing should be admitted which is indissolubly bound up with superstition and error. Instead, they should be in harmony with the true and authentic spirit of the liturgy. For example, that some ancient African tribes sacrificed human beings during religious ceremonies is a fact that neither the Gospel nor today's African life wishes to resurrect. When we therefore talk about African heritage, we must do so in the context of the total growth experienced in its cultural evolution. This is a fundamental concern for inculturation.

The second problem is equally acute. Official church documents tend to give so much prominence to the primacy of the Gospel in such a way that the carrier of that Gospel, the church, is presented as having been fully made already. In that way, it looks like everything seen in the church's way of life is part of the authentic mystery of Christ. The church thus claims to be the judge of culture, the measure being itself (irrespective of its cultural accretions through history). Certain traits of a given culture then become condemned because they do not immediately fit the vision of the church as perceived by the evangelizer.

Authentic inculturation needs to respect the pillars of culture, or as Chupungco puts it, "the dynamics of culture."¹⁵ Inculturation brings the church and the culture into mutual dialogue and sharing, and introduces an experience of bonding. The end result, "a new creation," will bear the mark of authentic Christianity and authentic Africanness. According to Elochukwu Uzukwu:

If we insist that inculturation involves the meeting between the heart of the Gospel and the heart of African culture so that the Christ becomes the principle of animation to generate a new creation, then we must insist that conversion and on-going renewals are requisites. If a new African reality is presupposed in this experience, its experience in the eucharistic rite would embody commitment to the dead-risen Jesus who animates his African assembly convoked in joy to celebrate his mystery in the meal ritual.¹⁶

For real liturgical inculturation to happen, the heart of the local situation must encounter the Christ, an encounter which takes ritual embodiment. At the same time, the church's message will have to be "converted" into a mode assimilable to the culture, and expressible in the language patterns of the culture. The term "language" here is not just about words but the entire process of re-presenting the message of the Gospel in a concrete way.

This bifocal nature of authentic inculturation is well expressed by Engelbert Mveng:

When we speak of inculturation, we mean the evangelization of African culture in such a way as to enable it to be integrated into the eternal Christian heritage and to continue to make this heritage more "catholic." And on the other hand, we mean the africanization of Christianity to the point where it becomes a constituent of the spiritual and cultural heritage of Africa.¹⁷

Bruno Chenu discerns three stages in the inculturation process: the first is the "violent intrusion" of Christianity which comes to disturb the traditional beliefs of society. The second stage consists of a "trial marriage" between Christianity and the local culture. Here "neither of the partners emerges unscathed from the meeting." Then the final stage is the emergence of "a new creation."¹⁸

Why do we insist on the double (Gospel-culture) or, shall we say for clarity, the triple (Gospel, culture of the evangelized, culture of the evangelizer) aspect of the challenge of inculturation? We do not possess a pure Christian Gospel devoid of cultural traits. For this reason, inculturation will allow the Gospel as transmitted to be challenged and transformed with the view of liberating it from cultural accretions of other peoples. An African theologian, Justin Ukpong, wrote that inculturation in Africa (and elsewhere for that matter) involves what he called a "confrontation" of faith and culture, in which occurs the interpenetration and interrogation of both in order to yield a reality that is both African and Christian.¹⁹ Liturgical inculturation is not based on what the Gospel does with culture: it is about what the Gospel and culture do with each other in the continuous process of encounter and mutual embrace. Chupungco puts it thus:

There must be reciprocity and mutual respect between liturgy and culture. Culture has also its categories, dynamics and intrinsic laws. Liturgy must not impose on culture a meaning or bearing that is intrinsically alien to its nature. Authentic inculturation respects the process of transculturation whereby both liturgy and culture are able to evolve through mutual insertion and absorption without damage to the identity of each.²⁰

There are certain aspects of culture that by their nature witness to the highest realities of the Gospel. Chupungco refers to this concurrence of meaning as "connaturalness."²¹ This was how Christian liturgy adopted and maintains the uses of bread and wine, water, oil, incense, candles, genuflections, immersion, laying of hands, anointings, and so on. In all these, the cultural elements retain their traditional expression and vitality.

Three positions will therefore be identified at this time. First, some cultural values by their conditions of connaturalness with the gospel values, can and should have expression in the liturgy. Second, certain cultural characteristics might need to be purged of certain meanings before they can truly bear an evangelical character. The theologian of inculturation, inspired by the Gospel, should liberate such values from images contrary to the truth. Third, what is evidently and wholly contrary to the Gospel must not be admitted into the liturgy.

In the process of liturgical inculturation, what is said of the cultural values here applies to the liturgy itself. This is true when we remember the fact that so much has been accumulated into the Christian liturgy from the various cultures of the world. Whereas certain aspects of the liturgy today may have their references in Scripture, some do not. Even when Scripture and tradition promoted the use of a particular element in the liturgy, it is possible to find a cultural situation where that element bears a most negative meaning. Chupungco raised the question without offering an answer.

Among some peoples, the drinking of wine and the laying on of hands ranks high among the religious and cultural prohibitions. Since the use of wine for the eucharist and the laying of hands for ordination are of biblical origin and are essential to these sacraments, can the dynamics of transculturation in these cases be dispensed with? Can catechesis dissipate the religious and cultural objections against them? Or should the church

look into the possibility of adopting some other elements which can equivalently express the meaning of the sacraments?²²

If the dynamics of culture are to be respected in such cases, it would be inconsistent with the nature of inculturation to attempt to impose those foreign and "ungodly" elements over such people. Evangelical and missionary prudence would require the search and assimilation of other practices and elements which bear the marks of authenticity and gospel spirit. That is liturgical inculturation.

What, then, would be the characteristics of a well-inculturated African celebration (in this case) of the eucharist? Referring to the Zairean Mass, Elochukwu Uzukwu responded:

The Zairean liturgical experiment would meet our idea of an inculturated African Eucharistic celebration if it projects a Christian celebration which expresses joyously salvation from God in the Christ in a cultic meal-setting, and if it takes seriously assemblies and meal celebrations practiced in the traditional African experience of God, ancestors, spirits, and forces. The celebration would thus express how the African tradition is now under the transforming direction of the Christ whom African Christians confess as savior. Thus in the Zairean rite, one should expect a necessary freedom to express the transforming effect of God's salvific work in Zairean tradition which only Zaireans can truly and deeply experience. In addition, one should anticipate the dialectics of acceptance and rejection as the necessary consequence of the transforming action of God among African peoples to bring about in the Christ a new creation.²³

Uzukwu, who himself was one of the influential liturgists in and around Zaire during the 1980s, was one of those who kept challenging the Zairean liturgical commission to go much deeper in its efforts to evolve a eucharistic liturgy that is truly African and truly Christian. For me, this would include not only cultic sensitivity, but also the experience of the liberation movement in Africa.

The main Issue here is sensitivity to African cultural values. In the course of my research, I set out to make a synthesis of the theological discourse concerning traditional African values during the years following independence across the continent. So much of the literature came out after 1967, the year that Pope Paul VI issued his message *Africae Terrarum* to African

churches.²⁴ By way of reference, I mention the works of Mbiti, Mulago, Thomas, and Luneau, as classic examples of the literature on this subject.²⁵ In what follows, I will identify what will be proposed here as the juice of traditional African life, with-out which inculturation in *Africa* would be utterly fruitless.

The Genius of Traditional African Life

Before looking at the text and content of the approved Zairean Mass, it is important to see what are considered as the pillars of African life which should have some form of expression in liturgical celebration. Apart from the general theological and liturgical enthusiasm in Zaire in the early seventies, there was also a continental movement toward authenticity. Theologians and liturgists were not the only ones eager to get back to their true African roots in order to see how to enrich the church with its blessings: there were also social scientists and ethnologists inquiring into the once forsaken values of traditional African life. The results of their inquiries would motivate the theologians and liturgists in Africa, and the consequent reawakening of these experts to their call of duty helped to instigate a new courage and strength in embracing the authentic values of African life. Any valid appreciation of the Zairean Mass must be done from the point of view of its sensitivity to the core values of African life as they came to be reevaluated. It was already an accepted position in Africa by the early seventies that for any liturgy to be called African in any way, it ought to reflect in a visible way its sensitivity to traditional African values.

I do not intend to do any exhaustive overview here of the debates that accompanied the identification and enumeration of these values. I have already done so in another instance.²⁶ We will content ourselves here with enumerating and clarifying the values.

Active Presence of the Creator God in the World

First to be considered is the African notion of the active presence of the Creator God in the world. African spirituality gives a most prominent place to the Creator. This God is fa-

ther and mother. God is present, alive, active, and remains in direct communication and collaboration with creation. Although here with us, God is higher than us. God is the beginning without an end. All that exists has its origin and meaning in God and will terminate in God. In a special way, African spirituality sees the glory of God made manifest in humanity. Across the middle-belt region of Africa, names given at traditional naming ceremonies ordinarily have spiritual references to God, or have religious connotations.

Unified Sense of Reality

Second is the African unified sense of reality. For the African, divinity and humanity are not seen apart. The sacred and the so-called profane interact, and just as body is united to the soul, divinity is indwelling in our world. The visible and invisible worlds interpenetrate. All the beings in the universe and beyond exercise influence one over the other. The world of the spirits participates in the human world. Spiritual needs are as important to the body as bodily needs are for the soul. All are part of human experience, just as life and death are. The human body is like a capsule, an integral whole, incorporating blood, water, fire, air, soil, and all other symbols of life. In short, dualism has little or no place in African thought.

Life as the Ultimate Gift

Third is the African notion of life as the ultimate gift. African spirituality identifies life as the prime act of donation from the Creator to creature. On the human plane, life is the starting point. It is to be received, sustained, enhanced, and safeguarded. Life at all levels is sacred. It is for this reason that marriage and procreation play central roles in the social and religious rites of African peoples. So also are the rituals of Initiation.

Between birth and death is the period when the rituals of healing occupy a most important place. This is the effort to regenerate and sustain life when it is threatened by illness or hostile environment. Traditional African healers occupy a most prominent place in the life of the village. Through the power of the spoken word, incantations, divinations, prayers, sacrifices and offerings, the use of roots, herbs, and other natural substances, the healing ministry continues to be promoted in tradi-

tional African life. The life and ministry of Archbishop Milingo of Zambia is also a testimony to this aspect of African life.²⁷

Family and Community as the Place to be Born, Live, and Die

Fourth is the concept of the family and community as the place to be born, live, and die. African spirituality discerns a vital link between a person and the members of the same family, clan, or community. Being born into a family plunges one into a kind of current, and it is one's ability to be identified within that family and community that will determine one's nature of existence and survival. The life of the individual is therefore lived in participation with others in the community. This is true for the men as it is for the women. (In fact, the position of the woman in traditional African thought is one of honor and respect, although modern trends tend to relegate them to the background. Some of the blame for this has to be taken by the religious and theological positions assigned to women by Christian and Islamic missionaries.) The kinship system which reinforces the traditional notion of the extended family is what has kept the predominant style of the African family alive today. In this sense, it could be said that the African is incomplete when alone. It is no wonder that the unique African style of hospitality has remained a big attraction today, especially to foreigners. This hospitality must be seen from the point of view of its origin in the system of the extended family and community. This too translates into the moral order, in the strict demand for the practice of social justice, and in the promotion of life and the well-being of others.

The Nature and Role of the Ancestors

Fifth is the African conception of the nature and role of the ancestors. The African world actively extends beyond the visible world. The ancestors (sometimes called "the living dead") are those "dead" members of the family or community whose lives left a great heritage and honor to the living, and who continue to influence their families through the legacy they left behind. Not all the dead are ancestors. In fact, I have argued that it is easier to become a Catholic saint than to be an African ancestor (the economic factors excluded). The memories of these

ancestors are invoked in various ceremonies and rituals of African peoples. They are invoked as intermediaries between God and the people, in continuation of their earthly function in which they combined headship of their families with ritual leadership.

It is perhaps in this context that we should mention the special respect and place accorded old people in view of their age. The elderly are believed to be in special communion with ancestors both by the fact of their having lived and worked for such a long time under the inspiration of the ancestors, and the fact of their proximity to joining their company. Old age is usually associated with wisdom, dignity, and respect.

Oral Tradition

Sixth is oral tradition in African *life*. African spirituality accords a great potency to the spoken word. There are three reasons for this. First, the spoken word derives from the divine presence in the world. The sounds of nature (thunder and lightening, for example) are some of the ways God's voice is actualized. Second, the spoken word proceeds immediately from the most privileged of creation, the human person. Words used to bless or curse are believed to possess the power to be effective. Third, the word is not just sound: it names, identifies, and describes a subject. It is what makes history real. The word in African thought encompasses the entire system of communication. This is what is generally referred to as oral tradition in African life, which also includes communication in music, song, dance, poetry, proverbs, storytelling, art, and rituals.

Sanctity of Nature and Environment

Seventh is the African notion of the sanctity of nature and environment. Africans see the presence of the divine in creation. The environment is like the writing board of the Creator. The moon and the stars, rivers and seas, hills and mountains, fish and animals, people . . . all carry the message of God's presence. In other words, created nature and the human environment (visible and invisible) bear the mark of goodness and godliness. This is the first premise in the African notion of the

environment. It is for this reason that human activities are generally considered from the religious point of view. All space is sacred. And in spite of the fact that there may be designated locations for worship and sacrifices the one who is on the way to worship is considered as already in the act of worshipping. The fruits of the earth coming from the labor of men and women are seen as worthy elements for offerings and sacrifices to God.

The seven values described above form the core of the African world-view or, in other words, African spirituality. How these may be expressed in the diverse cultures of the African continent may differ in their details but not in substance. There may be some isolated cases of discrepancy, like the case of the *Nuer* of Sudan who do not have a cult of ancestors. In spite of such exceptions, we still hold to our theory of unity: that there exists enough ground for holding to what has been called "a common Africanness" or "a basic world-view among Africans." This is especially true for the entire sub-Saharan Africa or, more specifically, middle-belt Africa.

Having identified the central values of African life, our next task is to examine in what ways, if any, these have found expression in the approved text and celebration of the Zairean Mass. In this task we must remember that it is not the value as such that has to be clearly expressed: it could sometimes be the symbolic expressions of these values that appear in the celebration. It is important that the text be seen in conjunction with the celebration itself, since it is evident that major differences exist between the two, and that, in fact, the celebration is far ahead of the text by way of sensitivity to local sentiments. We will now consider the approved text of the Zairean Mass. In so doing we will touch on some aspects of the Mass that give it an African identity.

The Approved Text of the Zairean Mass

The approved text of 1988 retains the two main parts of a traditional eucharist: the liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the eucharist, which are preceded by an introductory part and followed by a concluding part. The introductory part includes: entrance of the announcer (welcome of the assembly and invi-

tation to worship); entrance procession of presider and ministers; veneration of the altar; salutation of the people and introduction of the liturgy; invocation of saints and ancestors; song of acclamation (*Gloria*); opening prayer. The liturgy of the word includes: first reading; responsorial psalm; second reading; enthronization and proclamation of the gospel; homily; profession of faith; penitential rite; kiss of peace; prayer of the faithful. The liturgy of the eucharist includes: procession to the altar with gifts; eucharistic prayer; Lord's Prayer; communion and thanksgiving; prayer after communion. The concluding rite includes: blessing and sending forth, exit procession.

A look at a comparative table of the Roman and Zairean Masses reveals that their basic structures are the same. Within the segments of the liturgy however, there are some remarkable differences. The Zairean Mass has a more elaborate opening rite. The role of the announcer in the Zairean Mass is a reflection of native tradition, especially the role of the town-crier in village life. Other differences include the invocation of saints and ancestors in the opening part of the Zairean Mass. Let us also note the position of the penitential rite and the kiss of peace in the Zairean Mass. Whereas the Roman Mass has the penitential rite in its introductory part (before the *Gloria*), the Zairean Mass uses it to conclude the liturgy of the word; and whereas the Roman Mass has the kiss of peace in the liturgy of the eucharist as preparation for communion, the Zairean Mass has it in the liturgy of the word as conclusion of the penitential rite.²⁸ Within the Zairean Mass, we must recognize an entirely new element, which is the invocation of African ancestors.

Apart from structural differences, there are some ceremonial differences. We already indicated the role of the announcer in the Zairean Mass. He or she fulfills a unique ministry of leading the assembly to a fuller participation in the liturgy. Readers in this Mass ask for and receive a blessing from the presider before proclaiming the word, just as the deacon does before the gospel in the Roman Mass. In a typical African situation, no one in the village assembly would rise to speak without first seeking the presiding chief's permission to do so. The act of "giving the word" to someone is the sole way the power of speech is delegated to individual members of the village assembly.

There is also some difference in the ceremony of the presen

tation of gifts. The procession in song and dance in the Zairean Mass, and the words used during the presentation itself, bear marks of originality. Again, the version of the eucharistic prayer which, although growing out of Eucharistic Prayer II of the Roman Sacramentary, bears marks of both a native touch and distinctive theological positions. The Zairean Mass has officially one eucharistic prayer, whereas the Roman Mass has nine.

In conclusion, we identify four areas of structural independence: the position of the invocation of the saints, the inclusion of the invocation of ancestors, the position of the penitential rite, and the position of the kiss of peace. Other signs of independence are: the more powerful role of the presider, the role of the announcer, the more elaborate processions with dances (Including dances around the altar), and the use of a distinctive eucharistic prayer. The role of orality and music, poetry and dance, native costumes and instruments, all contribute to giving the Zairean Mass its native touch.

Further Critique of the Zairean Mass

No one will doubt the highly¹ religious and God-filled nature of the Zairean celebration. The reason for the gathering, for the celebrating, for offering, for singing, for dancing, for who we are, is God. This God is seen to be active in the environment, and prayers made to God reflect the richness that is found in the Zairean sky, land, and waters. These prayers are trinitarian, and they bring forth the African sense of the divine presence. However, this liturgy is still dependent on the prayers of the Roman Sacrament ~y for the opening prayer, prayer over the gifts, and prayer after communion. African theologians and liturgists have frowned on this, noting the dry character of these Roman formulas. The church in Zaire knows this handicap and hopes to evolve its own prayers. When this happens, such prayers should reflect the poetic, repetitive, proverbial, short-phrased, God-centered nature of traditional African prayers. Above all, there ought to remain room for reflective spontaneity in the proclamation of liturgical prayers.

In the context of the structural differences already described, we find the Zairean Church reflecting certain ele

ments of traditional African life. The invocation of saints and ancestors at the beginning of the liturgy helps to establish a creative link between the past, the present, and the future church. Africans have continued to cherish the identity with their ancestors. This invocation is a rite of contact and communion. What is unfortunate here in the liturgy is the complete absence of any names of ancestors. Later, at the end of the preface, the ancestors are again mentioned without names. This is unfortunate because ancestors are not mental concepts but historical people. Among many African tribes (Igbos, Yorubas, etc.), their names are mentioned during rituals. The approved text is still caught up in the debate of who indeed is an ancestor. Besides, one notices a poverty of words in the way the Zairean Mass describes the ancestors. The text should somehow indicate that the ancestors are seen as the source of unity, survival, and life of their offspring: they regulate the moral order and act to render justice in the name of the Creator; they are custodians of law and order in their tribes. Their memorial in the Mass should therefore take a more positive and pronounced style.

Next is the rationale for the position of the penitential rite. In this Mass, the rite is seen as a sign of conversion following the announcement of the word of God.²⁹ Bishop Anselme San-on of Bobo-Dioulasso, Burkina-Faso, put it more graphically in comparing African and Roman practices:

Take the celebration of the eucharist, for example. You people begin it with a penitential liturgy. This is an approach which is altogether contrary to our own mentality. For we have the custom of first of all greeting one another before anything else, and then listening to the message which is brought to us .

Therefore, according to our own custom, the Word of God and the homily precede the confession of sins, contrary to what is customary.

It is generally accepted across Africa that this placing of the penitential rite better expresses awareness of African religious consciousness. The penitential rite is followed by the kiss of peace, as a conclusion of the rite of reconciliation. It is an outward manifestation of the inward conversion and reconciliation accomplished before the offering, according to the spirit

of Matthew 5:25: "Go first and reconcile with your brother, and then come to make your offering." Reconciliation in African tradition is usually followed by mutual embrace or pact of friendship.

Beyond these, we notice the deep expression of family and community spirit in both the text and celebration of the Mass. Participation at the liturgy offers an inclusive feeling of belonging. Women as well as men have creative access to ministry in the liturgy. With the exception of the ministry of the presider (and that of the deacon introduced by Roman pressures), women minister prominently in the sanctuary. The Zairean Church is perhaps the first in Africa to have women "pastors" in some rural parishes. The church is family; the church is community. Hospitality is a central element of this spirit. Visitors to the local church in Zaire will meet the traditional style of hospitality that can sometimes be scandalous, in that people often seek to offer visitors what they themselves do not regularly afford for themselves or their families. But in spite of this, the Mass has no reflection of the tribal conflicts and disunity experienced by many of the participants. Public enemies still share at the eucharist, when African tradition would expect them to reconcile publicly before sharing a meal.

The question of the rite's sensitivity to the issues of liberation, social justice, and peace, is an enduring one. Christians in Zaire are among the poor of that country. Many live under leaking roofs, and so, the three hours or so that the liturgy lasts on Sunday may be their best time in the week. The liturgical project in Zaire has not generated much enthusiasm for the temporal needs of the people, contrary to the traditional demands to look out for the good of the members of the tribe and beyond. There is, however, a new outlook on this issue since the approval of the text in 1988.

The Zairean Mass is celebration. Music, song, dance, are all ways of expressing the life of the people. This reflects the theme of oral tradition in Africa. The whole body is involved in the act of worship. The spoken word offered in proverbial styles, incantations, summons and responses, movements and rhythms, clapping, and shriekings are some of the ways one senses the African character of this Mass.

There is a difference between the text of the rite and the actu

al celebration. The text is very formal, rigid, non-spontaneous, more Roman than African, very much an academic work. The celebration, on the other hand, is full of life, spontaneous, responding to local sentiments, artistic, and rich with religious symbolisms. A good attempt at recapturing the experience at this celebration has been made by Edward Braxton.³¹

There are two aspects of traditional African life that seem to have very much eluded serious consideration in the evolution of this liturgy. First, the centrality and primacy of life could have been better articulated if there were some ritual of healing in the liturgy. This is a major omission, since healing rituals are among the most central in traditional life on this continent which continues to be menaced by all sorts of disasters to human life and survival. Second, the question of the adoption of local sacramental elements for eucharistic celebration was not really addressed by the commission in Zaire. We have in mind here the sanctity of the environment, and the fact that God has blessed the African soil with nutritional elements holy enough for worship. The importation of wines from Portugal, Spain, and the United States, as well as white wafers, may be some of the aspects of the domination of Roman Christianity that ought to be challenged in the spirit of the inculturation movement.³²

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What we have presented here could never be exhaustive. Even with the approval of the text of the Zairean rite of the eucharist, the project is still, and ought to continue, in its growth process. We have cited some of its strong points as well as some of its weaknesses. It is yet on its road to being a new creation. And yet it stands out, as others have already attested, as the most inculturated liturgical celebration in Africa today. For this reason it would be presumptuous for any African Church, or any local church community that identifies with African culture and spirituality, to begin a project of liturgical inculturation today without first experiencing in some way the project in Zaire.

So much ground has been covered in Zaire, and this Mass is offering a new vision of what the African Church is offering

the world-church. The African Church places a challenge to the church today¹ in the effort to prepare the ground for the church of the twenty-first century. African-American Christians have already taken this challenge further than many Africans on the African continent, in their search for authentic liturgies that will witness to the African past as well as participate in the culture of North America.

Notes

1. The official title of the approved text is "Missel romain pour les dioceses du Zaire." See *Notitiae* 24 (1988) 455-472. Some earlier versions: "The Zaire Rite for the Mass," *African Ecclesial Review* 17 (1975) 243-248; "Le rite solennel zairois de la celebration eucharistique," *Communautes' et liturgies* 62 (1980) 57-76.

2. Cardinal Malula's address to Pope John Paul II, Rome, 23 April 1988, in *La Documentation catholique* 85 (1988) 659.

3. Conference Episcopale du Congo, "Apostolat liturgique - Adaptation du culte," in *Actes de la Vie' assemblee pleniére de l'episcopat de Congo* (Leopoldville: Secretariat General de l'Episcopat, 1961) 362-363.

4. See Jean Evenou, "Le. missel romain pour les dioceses du Zaire," *Notitiae* 24 (1988) 454-455.

5. See Chris Nwaka Egbulem, *The "Rite Zairois" in the Context of Liturgical Inculturation in Middle-Belt Africa since the Second Vatican Council* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America, 1989)14. Available through microfilm: University Microfilms International, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

6. With regard to the title, the Zairean bishops proposed to us (in order of preference): "Rite zairois de la celebration eucharistique," or "Rite de la celebration eucharistique pour l'eglise du Zaire," or "Rite romano-zairois de la celebration eucharistique." With regard to questions about ancestors, it was asked that four citations be removed from the text. In brief these stated: that the invisible world comprises of God, spirits, ancestors...; that God is referred to as ancestor; that we commit sin by abandoning God or the ancestors...; and that our sacrificial offerings have reference between us and God or the ancestors. See the full treatment of these issues in Egbulem, *The "Rite Zairois"* 24-29.

7. *Mission et culture non-chretiennes: Rapports et compte rendu de la 29e' semaine de missiologie*, Louvain, 1959 (Louvain: Desclee De Brouwer, 1960) esp. 5, 50, 219-223, 235, 311, 315. Aylward Shorter indicated

in his book that the first time it was used "in a theological sense seems to be by Fr. Joseph Masson, S.J., professor at the Gregorian University in Rome, shortly before the opening of the Second Vatican Council in 1962." See Shorter, *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988)10. The reference is to Joseph Masson, "L'Eglise ouverte sur le monde," *Nouvelle revue theologique* 84 (1962) 1038. Barthe says that the term first appeared in an official document of the 1977 Synod: "Message to the People of God," as a synonym for the incarnation of catechesis in a culture. He also claims that the word has been known since the thirties; see C. Barthe, "The Theologies of Inculturation," *Catholica* 2 (June 1987)12.

8. Anscar Chupungco, "A Definition of Liturgical Inculturation," *Ecclesia Orans* 5 (1988)11, 16. Chupungco went on to say that "SC #65 which allows in mission lands certain initiation elements in use among individual peoples, and SC #77:3 which empowers the Conferences of Bishops to draw up a completely new rite of marriage should in fact be read within the framework of liturgical inculturation." The final document of the Extraordinary Synod, in *The Tablet* (14 December 1985)1328, n~. D.40. Pedro Arrupe, "Lettre sur l'inculturation" of 14 May 1978, as quoted in Bruno Chenu, "Glissements progressifs d'un agir missionnaire," *Lumiere et vie* 33 (1984) 75. Translation is mine.

11. Pontificia Commissione Biblica, *Fede e cultura alla luce della Bibbia* (Turin, 1981) 5, as quoted by Chupungco, "A Definition of Liturgical Inculturation" 16.

12. Chupungco, "A Definition of Liturgical Inculturation" 17.

13. See the instruction "Comme le prevoit" of 1969, in *Documents on the Liturgy* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1982) 291.

14. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (77) gave the conferences of bishops the option to draw up a completely new rite of marriage in accord with the usages of peoples and places. See also Chupungco, "A Definition of Liturgical Inculturation" 22.

15. Chupungco, "A Definition of Liturgical Inculturation" 19.

16. Elochukwu Uzukwu, "Inculturation of Eucharistic Celebration in Africa Today," *CHIEA: African Christian Studies* 1(1985)17.

17. Engelbert Mveng, "African Liberation Theology," *Concilium* 199 (1988)18.

18. Bruno Chenu, *Theologies chretiennes des tiers-mondes* (Paris: Le Centurion, 1987)144, as referred to by C. Barthe, "The Theologies of Inculturation," *Catholica* 2 (June 1987) 8-14.

19. Justin Ukpong, "The Emergence of African Theologies," *Theological Studies* 45 (1984) 516.

20. Chupungco, "A Definition of Liturgical Inculturation" 19. He then gives examples of how the liturgy "assimilated" cultural aspects from Greek, Roman, and the Franco-German lands, in each case respecting the "dynamics and laws of culture."

21. Ibid. 20.

22. Ibid.

23. Elochukwu Uzukwu, "Inculturation of Eucharistic Celebration" 18.

24. Pope Paul VI, Message "Africae Terrarum," AAS 59 (1967) 1076-1080, 1085-1086; also in *African Ecclesial Review* 1(1968) 71-84.

25. John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1969); idem, *The Prayers of African Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1975); idem, *Introduction to African Religion* (London:

Heinemann, 1975); Vincent Mulago, *La Religion traditionnelle des Bantu et leur vision du monde*, 2d ed., revised and corrected (Kinshasa: Facultie de Theologie Catholique, 1980); Louis-Vincent Thomas and Rene Luneau, *La Terre africaines et ses religions: Traditions et changements* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1975).

26. See Egbulem, *The "Rite Zairois"* 195-286.

27. E. Milingo, *The World in Between: Christian Healing and the Struggle for 'Spiritual Survival* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984); Aylward Shorter, *Jesus and the Witch doctor* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985).

28. For a comparative table of the Roman and Zairean Masses, see Egbulem, *The "Rite Zairois"* 377.

29. See *Notitiae* 24 (1988) 461.

30. As quoted by B. Jarczyk, "Mgr Sanon, eveque du Burkina-Faso: L'amour avant le pardon," *La Croix* (8-9 December 1985)16.

31. Edward Braxton, "An African Church for African People," *America* (24 November 1984) 340-343.

32. See Elochukwu Uzukwu, "Food and Drink in Africa and the Christian Eucharist: An Inquiry into the Use of African Symbols in the Eucharistic Celebration," *Bulletin of African Theology* 2 (1980)171-187.