

# Sizing Up the Inculturation of our Liturgy

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Our public worship, the Liturgy, is the first major reform the Church instituted after Vatican II Council. We began to celebrate our religious gathering in our native tongue, and greater changes happened. And where are we and what have we learned, asked Fr. Mark R. Francis, CSV, especially in the area of adaptation (*accomodatio* and *aptatio*) of our worship in our own culture 50 years after?

Stressing the need for this reform, which is considered to be the heart not only of the liturgical reform but "the entire program of Church renewal proposed by the Council," Fr. Francis then expounds on the process of updating, adapting, or inculturating; for the document on Liturgy proclaims, "The Church earnestly desires that all the faithful be led to that full, conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations called for by the nature of the liturgy" (SC no. 14).



Attendees like Fr. James Kroeger, MM, follow the handouts even as they attentively listen to Fr. Francis' talk on Eucharist and Inculturation.

Fr. Francis says inculturation involves a “double movement that enriches both the liturgical tradition of the church and local cultures,” a dialogical process.

He cites three cases upon which he bases his “evaluation” of the our liturgies and learnings that would help us as we move on to more meaningful celebrations:

*Liturgy in Zaire (Democratic Republic of the Congo):* Focusing on “the community of believers, attention to modes of African expression—especially the use of local proverbs—respect for ancestors, and for movement and dance in worship,” this rite has helped Christians around the world see that there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the secular in our spirituality;

*Liturgy in India:* Incorporating practices including semiprostration instead of genuflection, an Indian style of incensing, offerings of flowers and fruits, and the use of Indian musical instruments, this rite has taught other Christians in other parts of the world that Catholicism and liturgy has to undergo “a version of *inreligionization* (a term coined by Missiologist Fr. Aloysius Pieris) since most cultures in Asia are inspired and shaped by one or more world religions;”

*Misa ng Bayang Pilipino, Philippines:* Employing the “dynamic equivalence” method, i.e. translating both the texts and the ritual of the Roman Missal in the categories that are typically Filipino, this rite teaches us that while “elements from popular religious culture inspire ritual elements in the celebration, the *substantial unity* of the Roman Rite is not in danger of being compromised.”

While Fr. Francis presents the progress on liturgical reforms, he also points out that despite calls for reforms in all continents, the implementation seems to have dissipated. He says that the main cause of this lack of enthusiasm for inculturation “comes from the Congregation of Worship.”



Fr. Mark Francis, CSV, cite examples of inculturation from Africa, India, and the Philippines.

The Indian rite went through major changes before finally approved. The *Misa ng Bayang Pilipino*, even approved by the CBCP, remains unapproved, and gone back to the period of *ad experimentum*.

But what are the learnings we can glean? Fr. Francis says “the direct and respectful contact with what the Roman Canon calls the *plebs sancta Dei*, the holy common people of God, is an absolute necessity for any attempt at inculturation to bear fruit (Indian Church experience) and also that

“even if we arrive at the point of having satisfactorily inculturated our liturgy, the need for inculturation never ceases” (Congolese Church experience).

Fr. Daniel Pilario, CM and Fr. Amelito Racelis, SDB gratefully acknowledged the value of Fr. Francis’ exposition. Fr. Racelis thanked the speaker for making our hearts burn with desire, as in the Walk to Emmaus the disciples were brought to the New Jerusalem with the breaking of the Word and Bread, we were brought back to breathe the liberating Spirit of Vatican II. Fr. Pilario, on the other hand, raised more questions, honest questions without malice, looking at the status of our progress of inculturation: When does our *ad experimentum* end or is it *ad infinitum*? What is the role of the Roman Curia vis a vis the Bishops’ Conference in matters of implementing liturgical reforms? And, lastly, “what is wrong with our liturgists?”

- Br. Hansel Mapayo, SSP