INCULTURATION IN MINISTRY FORMATION

The workshop paper as read contained three sections: (1) a description of examples of a "symbolic leadership process"; (2) a sketch of a theory of symbolic leadership; (3) a discussion of praxis in ministry formation. To comply with prescribed workshop report length, the ceremonial descriptions have been omitted. These descriptions highlighted three forms of indigenous symbolic leadership: the traditional tribal; the traditional revitalizing; and the Christian revitalizing. The argument is that leadership in ritual experience effects social and cultural leadership as well.

The foundational argument here, grounded in many sources, is confined to two points, both intended to lift up the importance of indigenous ministry. First, the right of a culture to an indigenous ministry is analogous to, if not identical with, traditional natural right arguments. Secondly, using the social ethic of Gibson Winter, the paper emphasized the power of symbol.

From the natural law tradition, the most recent church teaching on basic human rights from Pius XII to John Paul II was cited. These basics describe what is now identified as a people's right to its "culture." For example, Clifford Geertz has called culture the set of symbolic devices "providing the link between what [men] are intrinsically capable of becoming and what they actually, one by one, in fact become." In this definition of culture, Geertz is describing *human* becoming. This train of thought was dramatically highlighted in the Second Vatican Council's decree on *The Church in the Modern World* (*Gaudium et spes*), as well as the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* (*Ad gentes*). *Gaudium et spes*, in chapter 2, discussing the human community and the "common good," calls both for respect of basic human rights and especially for a people's right to develop its culture. In agreement with all this, *Ad gentes* makes an especially creative use of the concept of the "genius" of a people, as bearing a culture's "seeds of the Word." In the classical sense of the word, this concept signifies a people's "guardian spirit." The paper argued that such principles are mandatory not only within the "world," but within the church, in its teaching, legislation and practices.

The fundamental concern of the paper was the role of the ministering person as a leader in marginalized tribal societies, but there are obviously wider implications. It is true that one can still find native spiritual leaders exercising a powerful religious and social influence among their own people because of the sharing of common metaphors and symbols, while such symbolic leadership is not generally available to mainstream North American parishes. In these it seldom seems possible for the clergy to so strongly unite a "common culture" though evocative symbolic activity.

For Gibson Winter, symbolic activity is both effective of and manifests the "ethic of responsibility" of H.R. Niebuhr and G.H. Mead. Winter sees the "significant gesture" as a participation in the symbolic process of one's cultural community, and the charism of the leader as the art of calling forth a response to symbols, or the exercise of the "artistic metaphor." Later disussion of the paper dealt with preserving this potential among tribal peoples and retrieving it in mainstream culture. The artistic metaphor— representing a giving of form to life— nourishes the ideological experience of a people, understanding ideology here, not as a bias masking social inequity, but as the intellectual-affective dynamic in community motivation. Every culture must eventually deal with its own demons, and thus with the distortion of symbols, but it is precisely such a vocation to which the Christian leader might be called—to employ the symbol to call his or her people, not only to a deeper sense of its own identity, but to its vocation to labor for universal solidarity. Most North American native leaders, especially if they are Christian, testify to the deep desire for unity along with cultural diversity.

The paper was concerned with the local process in its reinforcing of the common culture, especially among a people marginalized by mainstream society and even threatened with extinction. We may call this the "project" of a society, as it is assisted by its whole system of meanings, so that symbol-making becomes a contextual praxis of social ethics. It is difficult to concretize the theory of "the common good," but modern ethicians may find an example among the tribal groups where the shared symbol creates a sense of the whole.

The paper also emphasized Winter's insistence on the evocation of the "universals"—freedom, equality, power and love, "which form the historical expressions of justice for a people and render their historical culture a continuing unified whole." The Christian ethic of responsibility, based on Jesus Christ as the "symbolic form" of these values, must always be the corrective to narrow particularism or tribalism.

The word "globalization" has recently entered into theological vocabulary, triggering efforts among theological educators toward a praxis of inculturation in mainstream theological institutions. Critical questions deal with the globalization of curriculum, both to familiarize North Americans with cross-cultural questions, and to assure that third world students find sufficient support for their time in this hemisphere. We must also try to insure that these students do not return home as "clones" of North American theologians. It has been difficult to "mainstream" the very concept of inculturation, let alone to concretize it in actual courses and programs, although feminist methodology promises to further the process. The idea also needs help among Native Christians, where cultural groups have suffered what Freire called "cultural invasion," which has destroyed the self-confidence of many societies, and caused divisions between native traditionalists and native Christians.

The paper suggested some attitudes needed among those who practice cross-cultural theological education. One of these is simply to accept the suffering of being a "lightning rod" for local anger, as one works to aid healing. Secondly, mainstream theology students who participate in tribal symbolic struggles come to realize that they too have a certain "tribal" mentality that is not to be annulled but transcended. Winter calls this work the healing of the sphere of shared culture and law.

Church discipline does not often respond well to such processes, being rooted in a Latin canon law. Many canonists seem to appreciate this problem now, and are asking theologians to treat it from a justice perspective.

The discussion focussed on several critical issues. The first was the process of formation of third world students in such a way as to avoid the aforementioned "cloning." The problem lies not merely in concepts but even in the kind of logic employed, and this point led to a question as to what teaching should take place at home for these students and what might be done abroad. Persons familar with third world students, especially Africans, pointed out that such students do look to "the West" to provide them with at least initial methods of research and interpretation.

One important question was precisely how Western educators might assist in the creation of a theory and method for non-Western theologians to employ. The response of the presenter was that rather than try to formulate a theory of this, it might be possible *solvere ambulando,* or simply to solve the problem through praxis. For example, some native ministry students are creating symbolic dwellings in response to the theology presented, without as yet articulating complex theory. Perhaps the most helpful suggestion emerging from the discussion referred to a feminist methodology for developing a critical theology grounded in experience. This "dialectic" proceeds through the three stages of: (1) careful attention to subjective experience; (2) the objectivizing of that experience for purposes of critical analysis; and (3) the reconstruction of both experience and critical thought into a new synthesis and a new praxis.

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