

SEMINAR ON LITURGICAL THEOLOGY

The focus of our seminar discussion this year was liturgical inculturation.

The members of the seminar read and studied a paper submitted by James A. Schmeiser (Kings College, University of Western Ontario) entitled "Inculturation of the Liturgy."

Schmeiser focused on examining liturgical inculturation through its theological and historical substrata.

His working definition of inculturation, taken from the *Canadian National Bulletin on the Liturgy*, was:

the integration of the Christian experience of the local church into the culture of its people, in such a way that this experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orientates and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion, not only in the culture in question but also as an enrichment of the Church universal.¹

Furthermore, Schmeiser explained that his understanding and use of the term "culture" includes a view of life, common values and meanings, religion, symbols, modes of behaviour, religious practices and some degree of tradition.

Schmeiser's references to inculturation were generally in terms of native (Canadian) cultures, but they are more broadly applicable. Citing the work of other theologians, he referred to three dimensions² of liturgical inculturation:

- "adaptation," which involves bringing aspects of native culture into a basically nonnative liturgical rite
- expressing Christian symbols and liturgical rites in native media
- viewing native religious rituals through Christian eyes.³

He then traced the development of "liturgical inculturation" in the magisterium, from the Council of Trent through the work of John Paul II and the Extraordinary Synod of 1985.

After offering a few theological reflections on creation, incarnation, and the universal nature of the Church, Schmeiser addressed some specific considerations: native peoples, Canada as a multicultural nation, women, and youth.

¹*National Bulletin on Liturgy* 19 (1986) 212-13.

²Although the authors cited by Schmeiser refer to these as "stages," "levels," or "degrees," he uses this broader, and less hierarchical approach to the discussion.

³*National Bulletin on Liturgy* 19 (1986) 237.

Sister Rosa Maria Icaza (Mexican American Cultural Center, San Antonio) responded to Schmeiser's paper and further developed the theme. While acknowledging their different perspectives, Sister Icaza noted the absence of two important historical sources to the study and practice of inculturation: the "liturgical movement" itself, which she noted was specifically concerned with inculturation in practice, and the contributions of CELAM.

She cautioned that sometimes it seems that inculturation has a "folkloric" connotation to it, which we need to guard against. Rather than limit ourselves to language and costume, she recommended other sources of "inculturation":

- using opportunities already available within the rites themselves when the text reads, "in these or similar words";
- incorporating cultural gestures of reverence;
- being attentive to creation itself;
- embracing the poor.

JULIA UPTON, R.S.M.

*St. John's University
New York*