

REFLECTION

BY FR. ROY CIMAGALA

That is a task that has to be made more known because it is supposed to be done by all of us, albeit in different ways.

Inculturation here refers to the inculturation of our Christian faith in our common religious beliefs and practices as a people, as a portion of Christ's Church. It is making the spiritual and supernatural gift of faith our very own as a people.

It is professing, living and expressing our faith in our own distinctive ways as it impacts on our popular piety, liturgy, as well as in our social customs, our business and political systems and mechanisms,

In fact, since our faith has to animate all areas of our life, the task of inculturation involves a continuing process of making our faith the living principle in our own distinctively Filipino ways of doing business and politics, for example, and all the other fields of endeavor that enter into our identity as a people.

These fields of human endeavor and interest can include our professional work, our sports and entertainment, our studies, our sciences, arts and technologies. As we can see, there is a lot of work to be done in this regard. Judging at how things stand at present, we can consider ourselves still in the primitive stage of inculturation.

So far, we can say that even the term 'inculturation' has not really entered yet into our common vocabulary. And if it has in some way, it is often understood in a very reduced way. So far, it is restricted only to religious matters as in things of popular piety and liturgy. It practically has not entered yet into our secular world where it is most needed.

The basic assumption here is that both our faith and our culture come from God, and therefore, there is a certain connaturality or fittingness between them. Even without considering yet the effects of sin, inculturation would already involve tremendous effort to uphold and defend that fittingness between the two. With the effects of sin considered, the effort becomes even much more demanding.

To be sure, the task of inculturation is a most complex effort. It is not supposed to detract from the absolute and essential content of our faith, even if such content also has come to us in a historical process and therefore with some cultural influences and conditionings. Thus discerning the unchanging essential part of faith can be tricky.

What are of great help are the catechisms and the different magisterial doctrinal definitions. These definitions, of course, can still stand more development and progress in a homogeneous way as time passes by and as more considerations have to be made.

And a people's culture itself is a very dynamic animal. It is subject to a numberless variety of factors and conditions, historical, social, political, etc., which can interact with each other in a most dizzying way.

Even the climate of the place, the color of the skin, the more or less common genetic make-up of the people, etc., contribute in the making of a people's culture. Not all of these factors and conditions though have the same value. And figuring out the proper hierarchy for all these factors can be very confusing also.

Inculturation, to be sure, does not mean that the culture is one monolithic phenomenon. Its basic identity and unity can include a certain plurality of things, of options, opinions, preferences. What is certain is that we can say that a particular way of looking at things, of understanding and reacting to them, even if they can be different and conflicting, is our Filipino way, is our Filipino culture.

Inculturation involves humanizing and Christianizing all aspects of our Filipino culture. It can involve many things we share in common with other cultures, but it has its own peculiarities also

that need always to be respected, upheld and even fostered.

Inculturation involves a certain openness to whatever comes in life but somehow keeping one's own identity and distinctive culture. I would suppose that the original model and animating principle for this is none other than Christ, the Son of God who became man, adapting himself to us in all things except sin itself, though he made himself like sin, for the purpose of our own salvation.

This is also a most crucial element in inculturation. Its ultimate purpose and reason for being is our human redemption. It's not simply a matter of our self-identification and affirmation.

For inculturation to be truly operative, meaningful and successful, it has to aim at our eternal salvation. Otherwise, it would just be an exercise in vanity.