

Inculturation as a Model for Education in a Catholic University

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The broad currency of the new term "inculturation" in contemporary theological discourse indicates the embrace of a concept that offers significant insight into the relationship between faith and culture. The term seems to have been introduced in its current theological sense in 1962¹ and is now recognized as a formal concept in numerous writings of Pope John Paul II², in the Final Report of the Second Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in 1985, in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (854), in current statements of policy in the Society of Jesus³, and in contemporary discussions of ecumenism, evangelization, interfaith dialogue, and secularization. The potency of the concept is due to its explicit acknowledgement of the dynamic and reciprocal relationship between faith and culture, a relationship in which the truth of faith comes to fuller expression through the contributions of many different cultures while the cultures in turn are transformed through integration with Christian faith.

Since the relationship between faith and cultures is at the heart of education in a Catholic university, it seems likely that the concept of inculturation could offer an important model for understanding the role and mission of the teacher in a Catholic university. Furthermore, since the concept of inculturation pertains to the complex relationship between the unity of faith and the multiplicity of cultures, it adds new light to our understanding of teaching and learning in the contemporary multicultural environment.

The first section of this paper explores the meaning and significance of the theological concept of inculturation. The paper then builds upon this discussion by analyzing the ways in which the concept illuminates our understanding of teaching and learning in a Catholic university. The paper concludes with a glance at new artistic manifestations of inculturation in some contemporary musical compositions, suggesting that the historical process of inculturation has widespread vitality in our world so that teachers in Catholic universities can find inspiration for their cultural work in the accomplishments of some contemporary composers.

I. The Concept of Inculturation

It is necessary first to dispel negative connotations that arise from the similarly-derived term "enculturation" (in the sociological sense) and from the term "indoctrination" that some might mistakenly associate with the concept of inculturation⁴. The sociological concept of enculturation points to the learning process through which an individual enters into the practices and values of a particular culture by learning and adopting those practices and values, thereby "internalizing" the culture. The process of enculturation might well be accomplished in a manner that lacks critical perspective and freedom, and

in general the culture itself is rarely changed in any discernible way through enculturation. The modern use of the term "indoctrination" generally indicates the use of manipulative and coercive techniques to compel an individual to hold particular beliefs (although older uses of the term do not carry the sense of coercion, and the modern negative sense of this term is probably derived from an Enlightenment suspicion of religious doctrine in general). Again, the elements of freedom and reciprocity are missing in the modern meaning attached to the term "indoctrination" and insofar as the term carries the sense of coercion it fully deserves its negative sense.

In contrast, the theological concept of inculturation points to an ongoing dialogue between Christian faith and a particular culture, a dialogue in which faith seeks new expressions of its truth and vitality through the language, symbols, and practices of a particular culture while the culture seeks a deeper grounding and spiritual transformation through faith. It is because inculturation is essentially dialogical in nature that the terms "enculturation" (when understood in the sociological sense) and "indoctrination" stand in contrast with it, since these concepts lack a dialogical quality. The dynamic character of the concept of inculturation is emphasized by Arij A. Roest Crolius, S.J.:

[I]nculturation is not some superficial adaptation, but is, rather, a 'two-way' process through which Christianity takes root within cultures and cultural values are integrated into Christianity. The 'hinge point' between these two dynamics is the interior transformation and the regeneration of cultural values....In the full sense, inculturation is going the way from Babel to Pentecost: not a return to the situation prior to Babel, when 'the whole world had one language and few words' (Gen. 11:1), but entering into a new communion which is actually brought about through the plurality of different expressions: 'We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God' (Acts 2:11). (4)

The process of inculturation involves the recognition of the legitimate values and symbolic modes of expression inherent in a particular culture and requires respect for the culture with which faith would enter into dialogue. John Paul II in his 1981 Apostolic Exhortation *On the Family* expresses this attitude of respect in section ten titled "Inculturation:"

In conformity with her constant tradition, the church receives from the various cultures everything that is able to express better the unsearchable riches of Christ. Only with the help of all the cultures will it be possible for these riches to be manifested ever more clearly and for the church to progress toward a daily, more complete and profound awareness of the truth, which has already been given to her in its entirety by the Lord. (10)

This description of inculturation, in addition to expressing respect for the cultures with which Christian faith is in dialogue, also expresses the conviction that Christian faith does not renounce its own core position as it engages in dialogue although inculturation does require careful critical discernment that allows a separation between a particular cultural expression of revealed truth and that truth itself. The dialogue of inculturation

carries with it the hope and expectation that the inculturation of Christian faith in new cultures will broaden the expression and understanding of Christian faith among all Christians.

Inculturation is usually associated with mission work and evangelization, especially in Africa and Asia, and indeed the experience of the Catholic Church in Africa seems to have served as an impetus to the development and formulation of the concept of inculturation. However, since the concept points to an ongoing dialogue between faith and culture, inculturation as a process must proceed even in cultures in which Christian faith has long been present. Frances E. George, OMI, provides a survey of the current state of faith and culture in Europe, North and South America, Africa, and Asia, drawing upon the speeches of John Paul II in his apostolic pilgrimages throughout the world and shows how the particular relationship between faith and culture in each nation can be addressed. In the historical development of cultures, their relationship to faith often undergoes significant change and there may well be periods in which the dialogue of inculturation must be renewed with particular vigor within a culture to restore vitality to the relationship between faith and culture.

This is the condition of most contemporary Western cultures which after several centuries of the process of secularization stand in need of a renewed dialogue between faith and culture. This need comes to expression, for instance, through contemporary political controversies throughout the world in which the relationship between faith, culture, and political power is a subject of much confusion and dispute. It comes to expression also in the ecological crisis that reveals our failure to understand the meaning of our stewardship for the created world, and through the widespread failure in our culture to grasp the qualitative nature and ethical efficacy of the concept of the common good.

In a recent analysis of the concept of secularization, Wolfhart Pannenberg offers what could well be called an exercise in inculturation as he reflects upon the ways in which Christian disunity and lack of tolerance among some Christians played a significant role in the process of secularization in the Western world, and he argues that "the idea and practice of tolerance must be incorporated into the Christian understanding not only of freedom but of truth itself" (30). The dialogical quality of inculturation comes to expression in Pannenberg's accompanying argument that "[t]he absolutely worst way to respond to the challenge of secularism is to adapt to secular standards in language, thought, and way of life" (31); in other words, dialogue is hindered, not fostered, if the Christian renounces Christian values in an effort to win the approval of a secular culture. Pannenberg draws the dialogue of inculturation together by recognizing that Christian teaching must absorb what is of genuine value in secularist culture while still bringing the insight of Christian truth to secularist culture: "Authentic Christian teaching appropriates all that is valid in the secularist culture, while laying claim to, and focusing attention upon, the truth that the secularist spirit no longer deems worthy of attention" (31). This sentence captures succinctly the dialogical activity of inculturation in which Christian teaching opens itself to the legitimate values of a culture while bringing Christian truth to light in that particular cultural context.

II. Inculturation and the

Mission of a Catholic University

It is through consideration of the relationship between faith and culture in our own local and national context and through reflections upon the dialogue of inculturation in a largely secularized culture that we arrive at the meeting point of the theological concept of inculturation and the mission of a Catholic university. Students arrive on campus immersed (usually unreflectively) in attitudes, beliefs, and values derived from and constantly reinforced by the culture around them. Moreover, it would be a mistake to think that other forces in the culture are not deliberate and calculated in their effort to project and reinforce particular values. What we commonly call "consumerism" today points to the interlocked interests of many facets of our culture in the effort to project a compelling image of human flourishing as a condition dependent upon the purchase and consumption of products. The merchants of consumerism believe that desire must be unfettered to the maximum extent that is still compatible with the preservation of stable conditions for conducting business in order to heighten receptivity to their pitches, and so the consumerist culture deliberately cultivates an atmosphere in which most restraints of desire are viewed as tyrannical and illegitimate (and consumerism finds a strange ally in postmodernist thought in this regard.) Economic claims in general press to the forefront of modern thinking about how we might best conduct our lives, and it is for good reason that sociologist Robert Bellah has used the term "marketplace totalitarianism" to describe the consumerist culture.

We must also recognize that contemporary culture offers values that can be fruitfully embraced by Christians and that can serve as common ground as the dialogue of inculturation commences. Progress in expanding civil liberties throughout the world indicates respect for the dignity of each human person as a value that merits deep respect, and the dialogue of inculturation can pursue ways in which such a value can be strengthened; tolerance and love of others based on such respect is another common value. In the United States the political separation of Church and State can nourish an atmosphere in which faith is embraced with the full measure of freedom required for the authenticity of faith. The multicultural richness of contemporary American culture provides an opportunity to explore the variety of cultural forms in which faith comes to expression. Perhaps business productivity and economic efficiency also deserve respect in the dialogue of inculturation, although Catholic social thought has much to say about the dignity of all work, the fair distribution of income and wealth, and the importance of embedding economic activity within a cultural atmosphere determined by higher cultural and spiritual values, and these admonitions should be carefully considered in discussions of business practices and public policy.

Teaching and learning in a Catholic University can be said to follow the model of inculturation if we bear in mind a number of important guidelines.

The first such guideline is that inculturation itself—the ongoing dialogue between faith and culture in which we seek the full vitality of faith in its many cultural manifestations –

should be the leading goal of our educational efforts. To pursue our educational mission with such a goal in mind would mean that we were prepared to search for the unity of faith and culture in all areas of knowledge and in all areas of the curriculum. Such a unity would not be established by the imposition of ideas from faith or from culture but would be marked by our awareness of the larger horizons of experience and knowledge in which each aspect of human knowledge achieves the complementarity necessary to its completeness.

A second guideline is that the dialogue of inculturation should foster integrity in every area of the curriculum and in the knowledge acquired by our students. Integrity in this sense points to the deep awareness of personal unity and responsibility each person bears in every aspect of life, as well as to the harmonious and unified character of culture itself when it fosters the wholeness of human lives. Our educational discussions of the need to combine liberal education and career preparation are based on our desire to strengthen personal and cultural integrity. We expect a person engaged in business activity to practice the ethical behavior required of all human persons, and we reject any argument suggesting that a person can legitimately claim to act in one part of his or her life purely as a man or woman of business unbound by a larger concern for the common good. Motivated by the desire to find and develop integrity in our culture as a whole, we hold out the hope and expectation of eventually reconciling diverse areas of knowledge even when no one of us has yet discovered how that reconciliation might be accomplished.

A third guideline is that the dialogue of inculturation encourages us to foster and preserve an openness to transcendence in all areas of human knowledge. We know through the dialogue of inculturation that human cultures are constructed through human symbolic power and human action; we know also that the particular shape taken by our own lives is constructed by the limitations of cultural possibilities that obtain for us at a given moment of history. But we know also that the deepest values at the basis of the socially constructed world are not themselves products of human construction; we know in ourselves that we are not self-created. We recognize the claim of being self-made as an expression of pride. The dialogue of inculturation informs us that there are many possible historical and cultural expressions and manifestations of the transcendent, and it informs us that it has happened in our history that culturally-limited expressions of the transcendent have sometimes been mistakenly regarded as absolute. Still, following the guideline of inculturation in our approach to teaching and learning, we should reject an attitude of hostility toward all claims to transcendence, and we should recognize that such hostility often originates from justifiable anger against real injustices but then becomes misdirected against all claims to transcendence.

A fourth guideline is that the dialogue of inculturation shows us the necessary incompleteness and inadequacy of our own academic mode of organization, even though we may continue to endorse that mode of organization as an acceptable and suitable means to pursue our educational goals. Each academic department and discipline is a kind of subculture with its own particular strengths in discovering and expressing certain aspects of truth. The dialogue of inculturation warns us, however, against absolutizing each subculture and reminds us that each remains in need of complementarity and

openness fostered by frequent exchange with other areas of knowledge. The dialogue also tells us that each subculture needs to pursue its own particular dialogue with faith, since different problems and issues are likely to emerge for each academic discipline understood as a subculture.

Finally, the dialogue of inculturation suggests to us that our primary relationship to our students is through conversation. We seek that personal transformation that can come about only when knowledge and faith are brought together in the experience of the student and when the process of assimilation—an ongoing, recursive process perhaps never reaching completion—is carried forward actively by the student, driven by the student's desire to learn and know, accomplished in the words and actions of the student.

III. Some Musical Models of Inculturation

It might seem whimsical or capricious to end this reflection on inculturation with some references to contemporary music; I will admit that I can offer no more than a series of suggestions and conjectures combined with the hope that they are relevant to the topic at hand. For myself the claims I will make and the examples I will cite remain sufficiently compelling after much exploration and consideration that I am willing to risk the charge of whimsicality.

It seems to me that there are numerous examples in the world of contemporary composition to constitute what I could call the emergence of a new period of artistic inculturation in which composers in many different parts of the world are seeking to reinfuse the many sound worlds of contemporary music with spiritual and religiously-grounded insight and values. This phenomenon deserves to be called a kind of inculturation because new riches of musical culture are being discovered in the effort while new ways of bringing the experience of faith to musical expression deepen and extend the possibilities of faith in the contemporary world. Just as with the broader dialogue of inculturation, there is never only one new moment of dialogue in which spirit and music, or more broadly faith and culture, engage in their dance. Composers in every age have taken part in such a dialogue, in some ages taking for granted either the musical language from which they begin or the landscape of faith from within which they work, in other periods raising new questions about musical possibilities or the life of faith or both. The dialogue of musical inculturation to which I point has the character of the resumption of the possibilities of the sacred within contemporary musical language, possibilities that have not been much in evidence in the culture at large even while they have never been truly absent from the contemporary world.

I am thinking, for instance, of the life work of the great French composer Olivier Messiaen, who died in 1992. Messiaen throughout a long life of fruitful work created many great musical works that bring to expression through his own unique musical language the convictions of his deeply-held Catholic faith. Musicologist (and also a great performer of Messiaen's compositions for piano) Peter Hill expresses Messiaen's position in the world of twentieth-century music in this way:

At a time when to do so was deeply unfashionable Messiaen retained an unshakable faith in music's power to describe or symbolize. Even to some of his pupils this seemed perverse, or perhaps endearingly quaint, although arguably it is this fearless lack of inhibition which is the greatest contribution Messiaen made to the music of his era. Almost single-handedly he embodied a kind of musical counter-reformation, in revolt against austerity, engaging in his music with the central issue of existence at a time when many composers have confined themselves to the margins of experience. (3)

Messiaen's works such as *The Transfiguration of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, or his opera, *St. Francis of Assisi*, or his organ music such as *Livre du Saint Sacrement*, bring to expression in musically modern, challenging, and distinct ways Messiaen's Catholic faith.

Numerous composers especially from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union come to mind here as well. The accomplishments of Polish composer Henryk Górecki are well known in the world of music now, his *Third Symphony* having achieved an unprecedented degree of popularity throughout the world in recent years. Górecki's work extends well beyond this one popular piece, however, and in contemporary musical language often (not exclusively) expresses issues of religious faith. His choral composition *Beatus Vir*, was commissioned by Karol Cardinal Wojtyła before he became Pope and was first performed in Krakow in 1979 upon the occasion of the Pope's first visit to Poland after his election in 1978. Even Górecki's choral setting of a Polish folk song, *My Vistula, Grey Vistula*, composed in 1979, captures with powerful directness the confidence of the Polish people who know themselves to be grounded in faith, as Górecki asserts through his song (with the River Vistula, the principal river in Poland, speaking through personification): "I collect my waters/From this Polish land/This beloved land/Above which there is no other." Surely this song in 1979 had powerful political overtones, and amounted to an assertion that Poland rooted in its Catholic faith defied its temporary political subservience to the Soviet Union. The mode of the folk song with its roots in the religion of the people and the love of the land of the people is ideally suited to this musical expression.

Composer Alfred Schnittke from the former Soviet Union is well-known for his demonstrations of the possibilities of what he calls "polystylism" in music, an eclectic amalgamation of many different styles in which the fragments of musical history are brought together in new forms. Perhaps less well known are some of the great works of Schnittke in which his Catholic faith comes to deep expression. Striking in this regard is his *Second Violin Concerto*, composed in 1966 and written under the influence of serialism. About ten years after composing this piece, Schnittke revealed that the concerto is built on a literary model, namely on the model of the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. This religious dimension of the work, necessarily suppressed while the Soviet regime was in power, can be clearly heard and experienced by the attentive listener and is deeply embedded in the musicality of the piece. More overt in this regard is Schnittke's *Symphony No. 4*, (1984) which is a kind of ecumenical symphony in which what Schnittke calls "four spheres of intonation" predominate and alternate, the spheres linked to themes that alternately and in varying combinations convey associations with

Jewish, Catholic, Orthodox, and Lutheran traditions. When the work was first performed in the Soviet Union, the work ended with vocalizations by a chorus. Only later after resettling in Hamburg was Schnittke able to restore the proper ending to the piece, replacing the vocalizations with the text of the Ave Maria. His Choir Concerto (1984-85) sets selections from a religious text called The Book of Lamentations by the tenth-century Armenian poet Gregory of Narek, and in a soundscape that builds upon the rich Russian choral tradition and extends that tradition into modern dissonance conveys powerfully the experience of Christian prayers of humility and repentance.

Russian composer Galina Ustvolskaya, a pupil of Shostakovitch who has remained largely unknown outside of the Soviet Union until the last six or seven years, expresses through harsh and rigorous music the insistent reintegration of religious experience and contemporary music in compositions such as Symphony No. 4 "Prayer." This short work for mezzo-soprano, trumpet, piano, and tamtam features the soprano expressing a deeply-felt prayer for salvation that emerges recurrently from a relentlessly repeated melody and rhythm sounded by the trumpet and tamtam. Ustvolskaya has refused to allow her music to be categorized as "chamber music," and she insists that her music is best heard in the setting of a church (though not within the liturgy itself), and one can hear the powerful expression of a spiritual dimension in music reasserting itself against a repressively secularist atmosphere.

There are many other examples of contemporary composers working in what I am calling the musical task of inculturation, including the well-known Arvo Pärt from Estonia (who seems to have inspired a new generation of Estonian composers following his lead), Sofia Gubaidulina from the former Soviet Union, Giya Kancheli from the Republic of Georgia, John Tavener and Jonathan Harvey from England, and perhaps even (in some moments of his recent work, at least) the American Aaron Jay Kernis.

What, then, is the relevance of this review to the theme of inculturation as a model for teaching and learning? Just this. It may well be that a broader artistic effort aimed at a new period of inculturation has already been launched in the world of music, and that teachers at Catholic universities can look out at the world around them and discern hope-inspiring signs of spiritual renewal. It could well be that artists must break ground for a new period of vigorous inculturation in which faith and culture may draw closer together and nourish one another, while Catholic universities and the teachers who strive to fulfill their mission can themselves contribute to the effort. If this conjecture is something other than a form of wish fulfillment, perhaps our efforts to understand more deeply the implications of the concept of inculturation will aid us in our work as teachers.

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2. In John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae* (1979), in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), in the encyclical *Slavorum apostoli* (1985), and in numerous addresses around the world.

3. Society of Jesus, 34th General Congregation [GC34], Decree 4, 1995.

4. Aylward Shorter provides a helpful discussion of the terms "culture," "enculturation," "acculturation," "inculturation," and "interculturalization," in *Toward a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll, New York: 1988) 3-16.

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