

Inculturation

As a French major, I am pained to see that the land of my birth and the country whose language and culture I love seem unable to get along. Moreover, I find this very strange because, until relatively recently, our two countries took turns saving one another from annihilation. For example, the advocates of “freedom fries” take great glee in reminding the French that we saved their country for them during World War II. Unfortunately, these same people conveniently forget that, without France’s help during the American Revolution, we could never have gotten our independence. Thus it has always been: one hand washes the other - but without admitting that each hand also needs washing by the other. Sigh!

One part of the mutual interdependence comes with French wine. You see, a while back there was a blight which killed a lot of the grapevines in France. Now the Americans thought: “If we want champagne for New Year’s Eve, we’d better do something quick!” So, vineyards in California sent disease-resistant vine cuttings to France to replace the ones which had withered. Good for us: the French wine industry and New Year’s Eve were both saved!

An interesting thing happened: once planted in France, the California vines produced wine which was somewhat different from what would have been produced here. Why? The soil there is different, the climate is different, even the methods of cultivation and production are different; all of these differences added up to a different product in the end: both were still wine, but each was unique. I am reminded the parable of the sower, where Jesus compared the Gospel to the seed which was sown: all the seed was identical, no matter where it landed; nonetheless, differences of terrain led to considerable differences in the wheat produced.

The seed of the Gospel was originally “sown” in the “soil” of Israel, where it took root and produced an abundant harvest. But the Church could not rest on its laurels, because Jesus told the apostles to baptize all nations; that means that they had to move. As the apostles went out from Jerusalem, they took the same Gospel to exotic places like Antioch, located in what we now call Syria. There the Gospel also flourished; indeed, it was in Antioch that the followers of “the Way” were first given the name “Christians”. However, it should come of no surprise to us that the Church which grew up in Syria had a slightly different “flavor” than the mother Church in Jerusalem. When Constantine moved the capital of the Roman Empire to the brand new city of Constantinople, the Church got transplanted once again, and took on definite “Byzantine” characteristics. It is that Byzantine Church that Volodymyr brought back to *Kyiv*, thus very successfully planting it in the soil of *Rus’* – the future Ukraine; we, of course, are well aware of the glorious growth that took place in *Kyiv* – and indeed the uniqueness, such as the wonderful *Kyivan* chant. When the Gospel was brought to *Halych* and to *L’viv*, the Church took on the form which our people brought with them from *Halychyna* when they came to America.

I would be very surprised if somebody didn’t say to me “I see where you’re going with all this! You’re going to tell me that our Church will inevitably be colored by the American culture, and that it will be enriched rather than impoverished by the metamorphosis.” Gee, I guess I am pretty transparent, huh? Just one little correction to what you said: it’s not OUR Church; rather, it’s Christ’s Church. Christ only lends HIS

Church to us for a while, entrusting it to our care. It's like the parable of the master who left his "vineyard" in the hands of vinedressers, trusting that they would care for the vintage and give the produce to him upon his return. In this parable, as in the parable of the "talents", the master expects that his property will be improved by his servants' work before it is given back to him. When I compare this situation to what our demanding God expects from us when it comes to caring for His Church, I start to shake. Scripture asks the question, "When the Son of Man comes again, will He find any faithfulness on earth?" Shudder!

Please allow me one further rant. However, it is not only my rant, for I take my cue from our beloved patriarch Lubomyr. You know that many of our church buildings are now located in Hispanic or African-American neighborhoods. Imagine that we would go to the trouble of looking for ways to make these people feel welcome among us! (As the kids used to wear on cloth bracelets. "WWJD": "What Would Jesus Do?") At the blessing of the refurbished seminary in Washington, DC, +Lubomyr put forward a revolutionary thought: pastoral sensitivity and the salvation of souls might require us to offer liturgies in Spanish – or even Russian or Polish! (If you have a problem with that, don't come complaining to me; take it up directly with His Beatitude!)

An interesting opportunity presents itself – and no, I didn't call it a "problem": now that our Church has gone from the mainland of the US way out to Hawaii, imagine what fun we'll have there! (Instead of flower arrangements, the people there already festoon the chapel with Hawaiian *leis!*) The Gospel is infinitely adaptable – probably more adaptable than we! On the first Pentecost, the apostles were able to make themselves understood to speakers of many foreign languages; may the Lord work that miracle again – through us!

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