

TRANSLATIONS OF “OUR LORD’S PRAYER” IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES: ISSUES OF INCULTURATION

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Preliminary Considerations

In support of French Bishops’ Conference retranslation of the Latin phrase of the Lord’s Prayer, *ne nos inducas in tentationem* (lead us not into temptation), which now reads, “*ne nous laisse pas succomber à la tentation*” (do not let us succumb to temptation), Pope Francis made an important observation concerning this last phrase in the Lord’s Prayer. That is, “... *lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*” According to the Pope, this last phrase in the Lord’s Prayer is poorly, translated in most of the Western Latin languages such as English, French, Italian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, etc. For this reason, the Pope asked that the last phrase in the Lord’s Prayer (*lead us not into temptation ...*), be retranslated in those Latin languages and others to reflect the original text and meaning of the ‘Lord’s Prayer.’

Since Patristic era, the Church had preserved the Sacred Scripture in Greek, which was the first language, the Bible (New Testament, in particular), was translated into from the original Aramaic Text.¹ The Greek Text of the Lord’s Prayer phrase, “lead us not into temptation”, according to experts, reads as follows: “*Kài mé eisenénkes kemas eis periasmōn.*” This, according to experts, loosely translates as follows: “*Do not allow ‘temptations’, or ‘trials’, prevail over us.*” In fact, some scholars from the Middle East of the Aramaic tradition and language group are beginning to say that the new French retranslation is closer to the original text in Aramaic than the Greek translation. However, I do not know about this.²

In any case, in France, the newly retranslated version of the Lord’s Prayer, which the Bishops’ Conference had long approved, became effective in all the

¹ Of course, Hebrew language was the original language of the Old Testament Bible. However, since Aramaic was the official language in the Middle East at the time of Jesus and the Apostles, the New Testament came to be written first, in Aramaic, and later translated into Greek, which was then the *lingua franca* of that part of the Roman Empire.

² Cf. P.-M. Gy, *The Reception of Vatican II Liturgical Reforms in the Life of the Church*, (The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 2003), Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, WI, 2003, 42ff.

churches in that country from First Sunday of Advent in December 2017. In some other countries, however, e.g., in Germany, the Bishops there said that for historical, theological and philosophical reasons, among others, the German translation remains as it is.

Pope Francis in requesting other language groups to look into the possible of revisiting the translation of the last phrase of the Lord's Prayer in their various languages, makes the following observations. According to him, in its present form the last phrase in the Lord's Prayer gives impression that it is God himself, who leads us into temptation (sin). But that is wrong, because, God does not lead human beings into temptation, but rather delivers us from it.

Here, a question naturally suggests itself: Do we have the same problem of poor translation of the last phrase of the Lord's Prayer, which according to the Pope exist in translations in Western Latin languages, in our African local languages? Digging into this problem is our task in the present article. We shall discuss all these as issues of inculturation since they all border on the question of translation of the Bible ("The Lord's Prayer") and Liturgical Texts into local languages. Although, I have had occasions in the past to share my opinion on this matter in a small scale, however, there is need to expatiate on it. This will help us to answer the question: Are African language translations and interpretations of the Lord's Prayer and Liturgical Expressions, closer to the original texts of the Sacred Books and Texts than the translations in Western Latin languages!

Before we proceed, however, the following facts about "Our Lord's Prayer" need to be noted: First, we must note that this is a prayer, which Jesus taught his disciples to pray. Both Matthew (6:9-15) and Luke (11:1-14) are clear about that. Matthew sets the whole Sermon on the Mount in the context of the disciples (Mt. 5:1); and Luke tells us that Jesus taught his prayer in response to the request of one of his disciples (Lk. 11:1).

This is understandable when we remember that in the Biblical world, it was the regular custom for a Rabbi to teach his disciples a simple prayer which they might habitually use. John the Baptist had done that for his disciples, and now Jesus' disciples came asking him to do the same for them. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer is shorter than Matthew's, but they both teach us all we need to know about how to pray and what to pray for.

Therefore, the Lord's Prayer is a prayer which only a disciple can pray; it is a prayer which only one who is committed to Jesus Christ can take upon his lips with any meaning. Commenting on this, William Barclay makes the following remarks: "The Lord's Prayer is not a child's prayer, as it is often regarded; it is, in fact, not meaningful for a child. The Lord's Prayer is not the Family Prayer as it is sometimes called, unless by the word *family* we mean the *family of the Church*. The Lord's

Prayer is specifically and definitely stated to be the disciple's prayer; and only on the lips of a disciple has a prayer its full meaning."³

This implies that the Lord's Prayer can only really be prayed when one who prays it knows what he is saying, and he cannot know that until he has entered into discipleship. Moreover, we must note the *order* of the petitions in the Lord's Prayer. The first three petitions have to do with God and with the glory of God; the second three petitions have to do with our needs and our necessities.

That is to say, God is first given his supreme place, and then, and only then, we turn to ourselves and our needs and desires. It is only when God is given his proper place that all other things fall into their proper places. Prayer must never be an attempt to bend the will of God to our desires; prayer ought always to be an attempt to submit our wills to the will of God.

The second part of the prayer, the part, which deals with our needs and our necessities, is a marvelously wrought unity. It deals with the three essential needs of man, and the three spheres of time within which man moves. First, it asks for *bread*, for that which is necessary for the maintenance of life, and thereby brings the needs of the present to the throne of God. Second, it asks for forgiveness and thereby brings the past into the presence of God. Third, it asks, for help in temptation and thereby commits all the future into the hands of God. In these three brief petitions, we are taught to lay the present, the past, and the future before the footstool of the grace of God.

However, the Lord's Prayer is not only a prayer which brings the whole of life to the presence of God; it is a prayer which brings the whole of God to our lives. When we ask for bread to sustain our earthly lives, that request immediately directs our thoughts to God the Father, the Creator and the Sustainer of all life. When we ask for forgiveness, that request immediately directs our thoughts to God the Son, Jesus Christ our Savior and Redeemer. When we ask for help for future temptation, that request immediately directs our thoughts to God the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, the Strengtheners, the Illuminator, the Guide and the Guardian of our way.

In the most amazing way, this brief second part of the Lord's Prayer takes the present, the past, and the future, the whole of man's life, and presents them to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, to God in all his fullness. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to bring the whole of life to the whole of God, and to bring the whole of God to the whole of life.⁴

³ W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1*, (Revised Edition), The Saint Andrew Press, Edinburgh 1975, 199.

⁴ W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1*, 200.

From a Contextualized Point-of-view

Taking Igbo as a case-study in this matter, it is likely that the Igbo version of the Lord's Prayer may not have the same problem of wrong translation and misrepresentation, Pope Francis has pointed out that this exists in some of the Western Latin languages' versions of the Lord's Prayer. Authors who worked on the 'Lord's Prayer' in the Western Latin languages might have taken their translations from the *Latin Vulgate* (original Latin version of the Bible), instead of the earlier texts in Aramaic language of the New Testament. We should not forget that the *Latin Vulgate* of the Bible was translated from the earlier texts of the New Testament in Greek. And of course, the Church from the earliest time, decided to preserve the Bible in Greek language.

Thus, the last phrase of the Lord's Prayer under contention goes like this in its Latin version: "... *et ne nos inducas in tentationem; sed libera nos a malo.*" In Italian, it is translated thus: "... *e non ci indurre in tentazione, ma liberaci dal male.*" In English, it goes thus: "... and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

The wrong translation from Latin of this last phrase of Lord's Prayer in Western languages is more evident in German version of the Prayer, which goes thus: "... *Und führe uns nicht in Versuchung, sondern erlöse uns von dem Bösen.*" In this case, the expression, '... and lead us not into temptation', is emphasized with strong terms in German version with the words "...*führe uns nicht in Versuchung*", which literally, could mean, 'do not hurry us (early) into temptation.'

It is like asking that God delays, somehow, hurrying human beings into sin. The German version does not only make God a predicate of human sin but also the cause of it.

The French version of the Lord's Prayer was recently retranslated, thanks to the Pope's observations, and it came into effect from First Sunday of Advent (December 3, 2017). The retranslated French version goes thus: "... *ne nous laisse pas succomber à la tentation*" (which literally, means: 'don't allow us to succumb (fall) into temptation').

In general, apart from the newly retranslated French version, all other translations of our Lord's Prayer in Western Latin languages give the wrong impression that it is God himself, who leads us into temptations (sins). This is the wrong translation and interpretation which the Holy Father, Pope Francis asked should be revisited and corrected, because God does not lead human beings into temptation but rather protects and saves us from it.

All these could mean that existing translations of our Lord's Prayer in African languages are more correct, and perhaps closer to the original Aramaic and Greek Texts of the New Testament Bible than translations in the Western Latin

languages under consideration. For example, the Igbo translation goes thus, “... *ekwene ka anyi kwenye (dabanye) na nlonye (onwunwa), ma zoputa anyi na ajo ihe.*” In other words, while the Latin language translations accuse God as the one that leads (induces) us into temptation, the Igbo translation does not, but rather accuses man himself as being responsible for his temptations, and requests God’s grace and protection from them. However, as we continue to wait and expect further theological and biblical exegetical studies on this topic, one thing remains certain. Our pioneer missionaries and first-generation African priests, teachers, catechists, other indigenous scholars and experts on African Christianity and culture, who worked on these local translations of the Lord’s Prayer in our land, bequeathed us with solid and proud African Christian tradition. They left us with authentic translations in our local African languages of not only the Lord’s Prayer, but also of most of other traditional Christian prayer books, catechism, popular Christian hymns, and forms of worship.

However, if today we are beneficiaries of the good work and sacrifices of our forbears in the Christian faith in our land, the question now is, ‘can the present generation of Christians – church leaders, priests, pastors, theologians and other scholars alike, in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, live up to the challenges confronting the local church today in our land?’

For instance, have our local church leaders, priests, pastors, theologians and other Christian scholars of various linguistic groups in Nigeria, ever confronted themselves, in the light of our new reality, with the question of translating the basic texts of our faith (in addition to the Bible translations), into our local languages? If yes, what are the concrete steps taken so far and structures in place towards their realization! Do we see such a project and venture as priority; or do we just mention it at our meetings, for the sake of sounding politically, correct?

Take the Catholic Church in Nigeria for example. Have the Catholic theologians and scholars in Nigeria been confronted by the local church authority, charged under trust and support, with the responsibility of translating into our different local languages, the basic texts of the Vatican Council II, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1983 Code of Canon Law, Breviary, Sacramentary, and the new Roman Missal.

By now, we are supposed to be using local translations of these basic texts of our faith in our places of worship, teaching in schools, seminaries, universities, other institutions, and in private and public discourse in Nigeria. Nigeria ranks as number one country in Africa with the highest number of trained and educated Christian leaders, priests, pastors and theologians with specializations in various fields of ecclesiastical studies. The question is: how is the local church making use of these talents in our midst today? This is the crux of the matter!

The Translation of “*Adveniat regnum tuum*” (Thy Kingdom Come)

A further analysis of Igbo translation of the Lord’s Prayer will make us appreciate the work done by missionaries. This is evident in the Igbo translation of the phrase “*Adveniat regnum tuum*” (Thy Kingdom Come) (Mt. 6:10).

However, before this phrase of the Lord’s Prayer, “Thy Kingdom Come” was translated into Igbo, there was a very long debate, which was necessary, among members of the translation commission. The Igbo Translation Commission of the Lord’s Prayer had then a very long debate before they settled with what we have today – “*Ka ochichi Gi bia*” (Thy Kingdom Come).

In fact, a friend of mine, a Nigerian Holy Ghost priest, the current Vice Superior General of the Holy Ghost Congregation in Rome, Fr. Bede Ukwuije, CSSp., recently told me a story of his visit to Fr. Gogan C.S.Sp. at the Spiritan Fathers’ Elderly Priests Home in Dublin, Ireland, some years ago. That was before Fr. Gogan died shortly after. Fr. Gogan was a missionary in Igboland for many years and was a member of the commission that worked on Igbo translations of the Lord’s Prayer, among others.

According to Fr. Ukwuije, Fr. Gogan recounted to him of the long reflections they (Igbo Language Translation Commission) had before translating the Lord’s Prayer phrase, “*Adveniat regnum tuum*” (Thy Kingdom Come) into “*Ka ochichi Gi bia*”, instead of “*Ka alaeze Gi bia*.” Because “*Ochichi*” is dynamic reign instead of static sense of the “kingdom” (*alaeze*)."

The Igbo translation of “Thy Kingdom Come” into “*Ka ochichi Gi bia*” is *ad rem* and very impressive. Had it been that the commission had adopted the other suggestion, that is, “*Ka alaeze Gi bia*”, that would give the impression of equating and comparing God’s reign inaugurated in Jesus Christ with the earthly monarchical and feudal kingdoms, all the trappings such worldly kingdoms and reigns embody. But the Igbo translation of “Thy Kingdom Come” into “*Ka ochichi Gi bia*” is the most appropriate, one that is very close to the Biblical meaning of that phrase of the Lord’s Prayer.

In the first place, the phrase “The Kingdom of God” is characteristic of the whole New Testament. No phrase is used oftener in prayer and in preaching and in Christian literature. It is, therefore, of primary importance that we should be clear as to what it means so as to appreciate the Igbo translation of that phrase in the Lord’s Prayer.

The first point to note is the fact of the centrality of the Kingdom in the message of Jesus. The first emergence of Jesus on the scene of history was when he came into Galilee preaching the good news of the Kingdom of God (Mk. 1:14). Jesus himself described the preaching of the Kingdom as an obligation laid upon him: “I must preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was

sent for this purpose" (Lk. 4:43; Mk. 1:38). Luke's description of Jesus' activity is that he went through every city and village preaching and showing the good news of the Kingdom of God (Lk. 8:1). Clearly, the meaning of the Kingdom of God is something, which we are bound to try to understand.

In fact, the more one tries to understand the meaning of this phrase, the more one meets certain puzzling facts. For instance, as we tried to show earlier, we find that Jesus spoke of the Kingdom in three different ways. He spoke of the Kingdom in the *past*. He said that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets were in the Kingdom (Lk. 13:28; Mt. 8:11). In this sense, the Kingdom goes far back into history.

Furthermore, Jesus spoke of the Kingdom as *present*. "The Kingdom of God," he said, "is in the midst of you" (Lk. 17:21). The Kingdom of God is therefore a present reality here and now. He spoke of the Kingdom of God as *future*, for he taught his disciples to pray for the coming of the Kingdom in this his own prayer.

The question therefore, is, 'how then can the Kingdom be past, present and future all at the same time?' How can the Kingdom be at one and the same time something which existed, which exists, and for whose coming it is our duty to pray? In other words, the Kingdom Jesus preached and taught in the Lord's Prayer is dynamic and not static. It is the dynamic reign of God, yesterday, today and tomorrow, in eternity. This is the key to understanding the meaning of this double petition of the Lord's Prayer.

One of the commonest characteristics of Hebrew style is what is technically, known as *parallelism*. The Hebrew tended to say everything twice. He said it in one way, and then he said in another way, which repeated or amplified or explained the first way. Almost any verse of the *Psalms* divides in two in the middle; and the second half repeats, or amplifies or explains the first half. Here some few examples may suffice: "God is our refuge and strength – a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). "The Lord of Hosts is with us – the God of Jacob is our refuge" (Ps. 46:7). "The Lord is my shepherd – I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures – He leads me beside still waters" (Ps. 23:1-2).

If one applies this principle to these two petitions of the Lord's Prayer – "Thy Kingdom come – Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt. 6:10), then we have the perfect definition of the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is a society upon earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. Here we have the explanation of how the Kingdom can be past, present and future all at the one time. Anyone, who at any time in history perfectly did God's will was within the Kingdom; anyone who perfectly does God's will is within the Kingdom; but since the world is very far from being a place where God's will is perfectly done and universally done, the consummation of the Kingdom is still in the future and is still something for which we must pray.

In other words, to be in the Kingdom is to obey the will of God. Immediately we see that the Kingdom is not something which primarily has to do with nations and peoples and countries. It is something which has to do with each one of us. The Kingdom is in fact the most personal thing in the world. It is the reign of God in human hearts, in the heart of each and every man and women on earth. The Kingdom demands the submission of my will, my heart, my life. It is only when each one of us makes his personal decision and submission that the Kingdom comes.⁵

Pope Francis at the General Audience on Ash Wednesday, March 6, 2019 at the Vatican, on his catechesis on the Lord's Prayer "Our Father" phrase "Thy Kingdom Come", explains better the meaning of this phrase. In the words of the Pope:

This petition for the coming of God's Kingdom is offered frequently and urgently. Jesus has come, and there are multiple signs of the Kingdom, yet the world is still marked by sin and hearts of many remain closed, which compels us to implore the Lord: "your kingdom come."⁶

Going further, Pope Francis emphasizes the dynamic character imbedded in the meaning of the phrase "Thy Kingdom Come." According to him, sometimes we ask, why does it (the kingdom) emerge slowly? Because it has to follow the rhythm of God, not man's. God is not like us; God is patient. "He wants to establish his Kingdom not with violence but with gentleness, for it is like a grain of mustard seed, which, though tiny, grows into a mighty tree. The Lord always surprises us! We see this as the night of Good Friday gives way to the dawn of Resurrection, which fills the whole world with hope. "Thy Kingdom come!"⁷

The Translation of '*Et cum spiritu tuo*' in African Languages

Few years back, before his resignation, Pope Emeritus, Benedict XVI, introduced some retranslation of certain expressions in the "commons (Order) of the Holy Mass. Of particular importance here is the change in the words commonly used by the assembly in responding to the priest's invitation at liturgical celebrations, which now has been corrected and retranslated in some Western Latin languages, like English. For example, before, in the English translation of the Order of Mass, when the priest says to the people (assembly), 'The Lord be with you'; the people would respond, 'And also with you.' However, with the new retranslation introduced by Benedict XVI, when the priest says, 'The Lord be with you'; the people will now respond: 'And with your spirit.'

⁵ Cf. W. BARCLAY, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew*, Vol. 1, 212.

⁶ POPE FRANCIS, "Catechesis on the Lord's Prayer, "Our Father", at the General Audience on Ash Wednesday, March 6, 2019: Vatican News: www.vaticannews.va (assessed April 17, 2019).

⁷ Ibid.

The new directive from Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, that we should use the expression “And with your spirit”, instead of ‘And also with you’), is closer to the original Latin text of the Roman Missal, which has, ‘*Et cum spiritu tuo*’ (And with your spirit). Some Western languages like German, Spanish, Italian, etc. do not have problem with these new changes introduced by Benedict XVI, because they have correct translations from the beginning from the original text in Latin. However, English translation which used to have, ‘And also with you’, has been adjusted and corrected to read now, “And with your spirit”, in conformity with the original Latin text of the Roman Missal.

However, in the African case, most of the translations in our local languages of ‘*Et cum spiritu tuo*’, have the same problem as the English and are yet to be retranslated and corrected. For instance, the existing Igbo translation followed the English pattern of the old, ‘And also with you.’ In Igbo Mass, when the priest says, ‘*Onye nwe anyi nonyere unu*’ (The Lord be with you), the people would respond, ‘*Nonyere kwa gi*’ (And also with you).⁸

Translating the Latin, ‘*Et cum spiritu tuo*’, into Igbo, we would have, ‘*Nonyere kwa mmuo gi*’ (And with your spirit). But this is not going to be easy in the Igbo context, because of Igbo worldview and concepts of spirits and the Spirit. Thus, thorough theological investigations, to be followed by catechesis on Christian theology on the Spirit (Pneumatology) in the Igbo local church, is needed, should the phrase, ‘*Et cum spiritu tuo*’, be translated as, ‘*Nonyere kwa mmuo gi*’ (And with your spirit). In other words, before allowing the use of the translation, ‘*Nonyere kwa mmuo gi*’, in our local church during the Mass, the people need to be catechized first on the novelty of Christian teaching on the Spirit. This is very necessary if we do not want to put the local people, not yet versed in Christian theology and doctrine into crisis of faith and spirituality.

This last point is very necessary since majority of our local Christians are coming from the background of our African Traditional Religion (ATR), where spirits are believed to loom large, and distinction is hardly made between the world of man and the spirit-world.⁹ Moreover, the word ‘spirit’ among the Igbo, for instance, is a kind of conventional term applicable to any of the spiritual being or deities, in their various functions and hierarchy.¹⁰

⁸ Cf. The Catholic Bishops of East Central State, Nigeria, *Usoro Emume Nke Missa (The Order of Mass – Ordo Missae)*, 1973.

⁹ Cf. F.A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*, second edition, Leberit Press, Rome 2005, 136-138.

¹⁰ Cf. F.A. OBORJI, *Towards a Christian Theology of African Religion: Issues of Interpretation and Mission*, AMECEA Gaba Publications, Eldoret, Kenya 2005, chapter 2.

Among the Igbo, there is the Supreme Being (*Chukwu*), a multitude of lesser divinities and spirits, the ancestral spirits and evil spirits. *Chukwu* who is *Chineke* (Creator God), is the maker of heaven and earth, he sends the rain and makes the crop grow. Above all, he is the source of life and the source too from which human beings derive their *Chi* (accompanying spirit, destiny or selfhood).¹¹

But *Chukwu* is also conceptualized among the Igbo as a metaphysical personality, almost oriental in character. He is a distant Being of vague personality and sacrifices are seldom offered to him directly. Though, he can be invoked directly through prayers. This accounts for the reasons for the presence of lesser spirits and deities in the Igbo worldview. *Chukwu* has left affairs of people's daily life to his subordinates (deities, ancestors and other spirits). He is nevertheless a good God, so good that he does not hurt anyone. As Francis Arinze observes, the Igbo offer sacrifice to God (*Chukwu*) often through the spirits. Though, *Chukwu* is often invoked first, even in sacrifices to the spirits and the ancestors. The Igbo invariably invoke God in the beginning.¹²

Subordinate to *Chukwu*, there are many spirits – good and evil. At the head of bad ones is *Ekwenzu* or *akalogeli* (the devil). This great evil spirit's work on earth consists in causing misfortunes, sickness of different kinds and premature deaths to people. At times, it appears visibly and then it is a sad omen to anyone who see it. There are many spirits of this kind.¹³

Nevertheless, the good spirits are also many. Among these good spirits, is *Ikenga* – the first household spirit sought by a young man or woman at the beginning of his or her career for protection and success in life. There is the *Ala* or *Ana* (land spirit), which is another prominent deity and is regarded as the queen of the earth and the custodian of human morality. There are also deities named after the four days that make up the Igbo week (*Izu*). These are *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwo*. There are many other deities (spirits), which are particular to certain villages. Each of the above has its own special function in the families, individuals and in the village at large.

Thus, most of these good spirits have shrines dedicated to them and various kinds of sacrifices are offered to them in atonement, in propitiating them or in asking

¹¹ The word *Chi* is at times, used to denote the Supreme Being and at times this accompanying spirit. The commonest use however is in the later sense. It is important also to note that for the Igbo the word *Chi* does not mean "soul" (or human spirit). Some have translated it as "destiny", "selfhood"; (cf. Synod of Bishops, Special Assembly for Africa, *Instrumentum Laboris*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, Vatican City 1993, 105.

¹² Cf. F.A. ARINZE, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, University Press, Ibadan 1970, 49.

¹³ Cf. S.N. EZEANYA, *The Method of Adaptation in the Evangelization of the Igbo-speaking People of Southern Nigeria* (unpublished Doctoral thesis), Pontifical Urbaniana University, Rome 1956, 26.

favours. People salute, bow, genuflect and prostrate as the case may be, on passing nearby these shrines. However, it is necessary to emphasize here that the Igbo does not bow down to wood and stone. He bows down to the indwelling spirit only and therefore troubles little about the outer husk. No Igbo would for a moment have credited a material thing with spiritual power; it could be never be more than a receptacle for a spirit which worked through it.

In addition to these spirits, the Igbo believe that every human being has a genius or spiritual double known as *Chi*, which is associated with the individual from the moment of conception, to which his or her abilities, faults, and good or bad fortunes are ascribed,¹⁴ and into whose care is entrusted the fulfilment of the destiny which *Chukwu* has prescribed.¹⁵

All these mean that translating the Latin expression, '*Et cum spiritu tuo*', into Igbo as 'Nonyere kwa mmuo gi', there is need for a deeper catechesis and teaching of the novelty of Christian Pneumatology to the local Igbo Christians. Otherwise, the new translation may create more problem than it could solve in the spiritual psychic and worldview of the Igbo.

Thus, the new change in the translation of the Order of Mass introduced by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI affects not just the grammatical structure of the phrase under consideration but also its content and form. This, as we have seen, has enormous consequences for translation of the liturgical text in an African language such as the Igbo.

Again, in the Igbo context, we are not only confronted with the old phrase, "And also with you." The new phrase itself, "And with your spirit", rocks the entire perception of the traditional spiritual worldview of the Igbo. This is one of the most challenging aspects of inculturation of Christian theology, which came to us in Africa in its Western form and thought-pattern. In it, we meet the divergences as well as the convergences of African worldview and philosophy with the Western thought-pattern and philosophy through which Christian faith was brought to us.

If the old phrase in the Order of the Mass, 'And also with you', addresses the individuality of the human person as indivisible whole (body and spirit), which is in line with African philosophy and anthropology, the new phrase, 'And with your spirit', emphasizes the individuality itself of the human spirit, which, in traditional scholastic Christian theology, is the indwelling place of God, the Trinity in human

¹⁴ Cf. E.E. UZUKWU, "Igbo World and Ultimate Reality and Meaning", in: *Lucerna* (Bigard Theological Studies), 4(1983)1, 20.

¹⁵ Cf. S.N. EZEANYA, "God, Spirits and the Spirit World", in: K.A. Dickson and P. Ellingworth (eds), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1969, 35.

person. It is in the human spirit that God works first in a person in order to transform the entire being of the individual in question from within, in rendering praise and thanks to God Almighty within the worshipping community and the world.

Here we meet the novelty of the Christian faith, which is very important to the African thought-pattern and religious worldview and for authentic inculturation of the Christian faith in the continent. This is the most challenging aspect of the new change in Roman Missal introduced by Pope Benedict XVI. It has implications for the inculturation of the Roman Missal in Africa through its translations into local African languages.

Again, in the Igbo worldview, which we tried to analyze above, the concept of *Chi* (accompanying spirit), is a better concept that could be used in introducing the Igbo to the Christian mystery and teaching of the indwelling Spirit of God in the heart and soul of the individual.¹⁶ Thus, if the '*Et cum spiritu tuo*' in Latin is translated into Igbo as 'Nonyere kwa mmuo gi (Chi = spirit)', the Christian who uses that expression '*mmuo gi*' (your spirit (Chi)), will know that what is being referred to is the indwelling spirit of God in him and not any other type of spirit or *Chi*.

In other words, the Igbo word, *Chi* (as spirit), in the new dispensation, assumes a new significant on the account of novelty of Christian faith. It is now not just *Chi* (as in the traditional religious spiritual worldview), but the indwelling spirit of God in man which we acquired as a free-gift (grace) of God through the Paschal-Event of Jesus Christ and his gift of the Holy Spirit. This is because for the Igbo, *Chi* represents the individuality of the human spirit, which is the indwelling or rather operative human spirit of the individual.

It is now many years since Pope Benedict XVI introduced the new change in the Order of Mass. But up till now, not much debate is going on in our local Church – among theologians and scholars of different linguistic groups on how to effect these changes of translation of the liturgical text in our local languages. Although, there is a text of the translation in Igbo of the affected phrase already in circulation. However, one should have thought that enough awareness and catechesis should have preceded

¹⁶ However, this is without prejudice to what is in circulation for over a year now, as the approved new Igbo translation of the Pope Benedict XVI's instruction for the translation of the Latin phrase in the *Ordo Missae*, '*Et cum spiritu tuo*', into Igbo language. Whichever is the case, what is needed is a thorough catechesis to the faithful on the novelty of Christian Pneumatology – the Spirit, so as to protect the local Christians from confusion and syncretism. Again, the emphasis is on the novelty of Christian theology and understanding of the Spirit – Pneumatology. This is why the local church should be careful not to hurry over the use of any of the suggested translations of '*Et cum spiritu tuo*' into Igbo language, without first of all, engaging the Igbo local faithful with thorough catechesis on the Christian significance of the "Spirit" in relation to Igbo worldview and Ultimate reality and meaning.

such a rush. Moreover, before putting up such a translation for public use and approval by the Episcopal Conference of Igbo-speaking areas, one should have been expected a wider consultation since it is a community project meant to serve for posterity. Deep studies and research among experts of different fields in theological studies, African culture and linguistics, is needed to produce something we all shall be proud to call our own, and bequeath to future generations for posterity and permanence of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Igboland. This is to help the local church not push out to the public in a hurry, a half-hazard translation of sacred and liturgical texts, like the ones the Popes are correcting today, almost two thousand years after they had been in use.

The Importance of Inculturation

Among the Catholics, for example, who knows how things could have been today had the Vatican Council II not directed that sacraments, especially, the Holy Eucharist be celebrated in local languages. In Nigeria, we started from 1970, immediately after the Vatican II to celebrate the Holy Mass in our local languages. After over forty years of that practice, the result is there today for all to see. The active participation of our people in liturgical life of the Church is today, second to none.

Inculturation has been the way of the missionary life of the Church from its beginnings. This is because the scope of the Church’s mission is universal and all-embracing. It entails crossing of all human boundaries and meeting peoples of all cultures and religious traditions. Hence, no culture or people could monopolize it. Though this fact looks very clear today, yet it took the apostolic Church some time to appreciate the universal dimension of Christianity and its missionary – inculturation implications.¹⁷ The question of the admission of Gentiles into the Church without imposing Jewish law and culture on them initiated a general council before it could be resolved (cf. Acts 15). For Karl Rahner, that was the first major theological development in early Christianity: a transition from a Judaeo-Christianity to a Christianity of the Gentiles.¹⁸

However, when this initial problem was resolved, Christianity spread gradually beyond its original Jewish surrounding into the Gentile world. In the process, the Church came to appropriate new structures, categories and symbols in an effort to make Christianity relevant to the people of the new socio-cultural milieu. It was really an effort towards the incarnation of the Christian faith through “inculturation”. Hence, the early Christian apologists described the good elements in Greek

¹⁷ Cf. F.A. OBOJJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II: A Missiological Orientation*, 69ff.

¹⁸ Cf. K. RAHNER, “Basic Theological Interpretation of the Second Vatican Council”, in: K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol 20, Darton, Longman and Todd, London 1981, 83.

Philosophy as *praeparatio evangelica*,¹⁹ and as *semina Verbi* planted in creation by the *Logos* which took flesh in Jesus Christ.²⁰

Furthermore, philosophical categories of the Mediterranean cultures were adopted by the early Church when Christianity reached the region. Examples of such categories include *ousia*, *homoousios*, *physis*, *hypostasis*, *substantia*, *consubstantia*, *natura*, and so forth. These were adopted to formulate central Christological dogmas. However, ecumenical councils were held to ratify and define the use of such terms as Christian dogmas.²¹ Once that was done the category or symbol so adopted acquired a new meaning which transcended its original meaning, on account of the novelty of the Christian faith. In the same spirit, David Bosch explains that the early Christians did not simply express in Greek thought what they already knew; rather, they discovered, through Greek religious and philosophical insights, what had been revealed to them. Hence, Bosch writes, “the doctrines of the Trinity and of divinity of Christ...for example, would not be what they are today if the Church had not reassessed itself and its doctrines in the light of the new historical, cultural situations during the third through the sixth centuries”.²²

Moreover, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire in the fourth century, Christian liturgy developed with structures adopted from elements of the Roman cultures. Cardinal Newman describes the elements the Church adopted from other cultures at the time thus: The use of temples...incense, lamps, and candles; votive offerings on recovery from illness, holy water, asylums, holydays and seasons, use of calendars, processions, blessings of fields; sacerdotal vestments, the tonsure, the ring in marriage, turning to the East, images at a later date, perhaps the ecclesiastical chant, and the *Kyrie Elesion*, are all of pagan origin, and sanctified by their adoption into the Church.²³

In a similar manner, A. Chupungco explains that the rites of Baptism, the Eucharist and Ordination of the Roman liturgy were developed through the incorporation of elements from the cultural milieu of the time.²⁴

Furthermore, when Christianity began to spread to other parts of Europe after its consolidation in Rome, it carried along the Greco-Roman cultural elements it

¹⁹ Cf. EUSEBIUS OF CAESARIA, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, I, I: *Patrologiae Cursus Completus* 21, 28 AB (edited by P. Migne), Series Graeca, Paris (1857-1866).

²⁰ Cf. JUSTIN THE MARTYR, *I Apologia* 1-4; *II Apologia* 6:3, 8:1, 10:1-3: *Patrologiae Cursus Completus* 6 (edited by P. Migne), Series Graeca, Paris (1844-1855), 398-399, 454, 458-459.

²¹ Cf. *Concilia Carthaginensia: Patrologiae Cursus Completus* 3, Series Latina, 875-887.

²² D.J. BOSCH, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1993, 190.

²³ Cf. J.H. NEWMAN, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 6th Edition, University Press, Notre Dame, 1989, 373.

²⁴ Cf. A.J. CHUPUNGO, *Worship: Beyond Inculturation*, Pastoral Press, Washington DC 1994, 1-65.

had adopted. Nevertheless, the new converts were allowed to retain their customs which were not opposed to the Christian faith. It was from this understanding that Pope Gregory the Great, writing to Mellitus in 601, instructed the latter to advise his confrere, Augustine, not to destroy the sacred places of the Anglo-Saxons, but to preserve them for worship of the true God. However, they were to destroy the idols inside the temples. On the feast of martyrs, the people could kill bulls, as was their custom before becoming Christians. But now only as food in praise of God.²⁵

Again, from the time of Emperor Constantine the Great, when Europe embraced Christianity as their religion, the nascent Church in Europe began an aggressive evangelization of the continent through inculturation of the Gospel. This was how Europe transformed itself, thought and culture through the Gospel. So much so that it may not be an over statement to say that Christianity gave Europe its present identity, culture, civilization and technology.²⁶

Through the work of inculturation, the churches of the West and East of Europe from the earliest stages of the evangelization of that continent were able to give their people and land an enviable cultural identity and solid Christian foundation. This is why today, we all see Christianity as the ‘religion of Europe’ and the bedrock of their culture, civilization and thought-pattern. But in reality, theirs was simply an inculturated Christianity which eventually, they used to give their people a new culture of civilization and scholastic philosophy of thought from which modern science and technology came to be born.

The Arab world did the same with Islamic religion and Arab culture. They gave themselves a new culture and civilization through Islam and Arabic language. We should not forget that in the beginning of his mission, Prophet Mohammed was not welcomed in his native land, the present Saudi Arabia. He was sent in exile and his followers took refuge in African crescent of Ethiopia where they were treated with kindness and African hospitality. That is why the Holy Quran forbid any Jihad against the Ethiopians, which it described as good people of priests and monks.

It was only many years later, after Prophet Mohammed had gone that the people of Arabia peninsula decided to unite themselves under Islam, Arabic culture and language. Today, the highest weapons the Arabs have in confronting the world is their Islamic religion, Arabic language and culture. These three elements – Islam, Arabic culture and language have given the Arabs an indelible identity, culture and civilization that nothing will ever take away from them.

²⁵ Cf. GREGORY THE GREAT, *Epistola 76 ad Mellitum Abbatem: Patrologiae Cursus Completus* 77 (Series Latina), 1215-1217.

²⁶ Cf. J.H. NEWMAN, *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*, 373.

In other words, there is power in cultural identity and local language of a people. Until we learn and begin to store and live our faith and civilization in our local languages and African culture, nobody will take us serious. This is what Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Koreans, among others, are doing today. These countries and their people are today highly respected by the world not just because of their economic power but more especially, because of their cultural consciousness and identity upon which they have decided to rebuild their nations as modern states. What lesson can we learn from these countries for own advancement not only in inculturation, but also in overall human development and civilization?

Has it worried any of us that till today, none of the agreements African nations, whether individually, or collectively, have entered with foreign nations is written or stored in African languages. All the agreements, African nations, and individuals, have entered with outsiders and among themselves since the dawn of modern era, are all written and stored in foreign languages.

Moreover, all the formal education Africans have been receiving since the dawn of modern era, are all done in foreign languages. No matter how intelligent you may think you are, you can never surpass in originality of thought the owner of the language in which you do your thinking and writing. There is something pathological about language.

No matter how much English grammar you think you know, you can never be more original and creative in that language than the native English speaker who may not have even received formal education in his or her language. In other words, we shall continue to be second-class citizens of the world until we begin to think and practice our faith and work in our local languages.

Liturgical Inculturation in Africa since Vatican II

Vatican Council II was in effect a real watershed in liturgical inculturation, and especially, in the positive evaluation cultures of non-European peoples. Before Vatican II, African people and culture did not receive as such, a very positive evaluation from European people. This attitude reflected not only in missions but especially in European literature, intellectual scholarship about African people and culture. However, Vatican II changed all that. In fact, before Vatican II, the African story was always portrayed with negativity in all existing scholarship and relationships between the outside world and people of the continent. Thus, the appreciation of African culture and thought pattern for the work of inculturation as we know it today, passed through some checked history, especially from the 15th Century, but in particular from the 19th Century European missionary expansion in Africa.

Therefore, when Western Christianity began to encounter Africa from the 15th Century onwards, and especially, from the 19th Century European missionary

expansion in Southern continents, there was no theological or liturgical shift similar to the one that took place when Christianity encountered the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. The African was considered primitive and so has no culture as such upon which the Gospel of Jesus Christ could anchor. To be a Christian the African has to assimilate the culture of the missionary. The African was made to abandon his culture so as to embrace Christianity.²⁷

Meanwhile, it suffices to say that it would be easy for us today to judge the past missionary attitude to the African and his culture with hard tone, as a good number of African scholars have done in the past. However, the situation was much complex than that, even though the eurocentrism and racism could not be ruled out completely. To be noted, however, is the fact that up to the beginning of twentieth century, at time of the renewed effort towards the authentic planting of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, there was no well developed theology of mission in the Catholic Church. Even when it came to be developed, thanks to the efforts of German Josef Schmidlin (1874-1944)²⁸ and later of the Belgium Jesuit Pierre Charles (1883-1954),²⁹ among others,³⁰ there were two main developments, which did not help the matter as such.

The first development concerned itself with the question of salvation of souls of non-Christians. And in African situation, it was regarded as the salvation of souls in darkness. The second development, which represents a certain progress compared with the former, is when the aim of mission came to be regarded as the implanting of the Church throughout the world as the universal means of salvation intended by God for mankind. And in the Africa situation, this was interpreted as the implanting of the Church among people of *tabula rasa* (without culture and civilization). Hence, the Church is to be implanted in Africa with the cultures of the missionaries.³¹ However, the two perspectives, salvation of souls and the implanting of the Church are two aspects of the Church's mission. The latter persisted unto Vatican Council II. The former has been broadened with the modern emphasis on

²⁷ Cf. J-M. ÉLA, *My Faith as an African*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1995, 33-34.

²⁸ Cf. J. SCHMIDLIN, *Catholic Mission Theory (Techny III)*, SVD Mission Press (Sankt Augustin, Bonn), 1931, 255ff. Originally in German as *Katholische Missionslehre im Grundriss* (Münster, 1919), edited and translated into English by M. Braun).

²⁹ Cf. P. CHARLES, *Les Dossiers de l'action missionnaire: Manuel de Missiologie*, Vol.I (2nd ed.), AUCAM, Louvain, 1938, 24.

³⁰ Recent authors in that regard include – André Seumois, Angel Santos Hernàdez, and Louis J. Luzbetak (who may be described as a contemporary protagonist of the theology of adaptation); cf. A. Seumois, *Théologie Missionnaire*, 5 Vols. PUU, Roma, 1973; A.S. Hernandez, *Adaptación Misionera*, El Siglos de las Misiones, Biblao, 1958; L.J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1993.

³¹ Cf. J. DUPUIS, "Evangelization and Mission", in: R. Latourelle and R. Fisichella (eds), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, Crossroads Publishing Company, New York 1994, 276-277.

the integral dimension of salvation and the recognition of cultural diversity, together with the present practice of interreligious and intercultural dialogues.³²

However, things began to change with the development of social sciences in the late nineteenth century and early this twentieth century. The new scholarship and its subsequent application to Christian missionary activities opened up new prospects for evangelization.³³ People once considered uncivilized and uncultured were discovered, after careful study, to have complex cultural systems, religious beliefs and high moral standards. It was also realized that culture had a much deeper influence on the person than was previously thought. And that merely converting individuals and isolating them from their native cultural milieu so as to protect their faith was a useless endeavor. Rather, what is required is authentic conversion through a real penetration of the cultural milieu itself with Gospel values.³⁴

This new development in the appreciation of culture and its impact on the person, introduced a further challenge in mission: is it justifiable to transplant for the sake of uniformity, a Christianity developed in another cultural context, to all peoples and cultures around the world? This challenge initiated the debate on missionary adaptation, which eventually led to the development of the modern theology of inculturation.³⁵ The teaching of Vatican Council II on the value of local cultures for missionary adaptation and inculturation, owe much to this development and theological debate.

In this regard, Vatican Council II Dogmatic Constitution on Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC), was the first document of the Council to be approved and promulgated by the Council Fathers. This shows the primary importance of liturgy in the life and mission of the Church. In addition, the conciliar document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* is unique not only because of the attention it gave to liturgical reforms, but moreover, because of its emphasis on cultural adaptation (inculturation) of the liturgy. The Council Fathers used the word “adaptation” not in the old sense of that word, but actually, in its new sense, that is, in sense of the new terminology, inculturation.

At the time of the Council, the term inculturation was not in common use. The Council Fathers developed the theology of the “word” – the planting of the seed

³² Cf. F.A. OBORJI, *Trends in African Theology Since Vatican II. A Missiological Orientation*, 73.

³³ Cf. M.C. AZEVEDO, “Inculturation I: The Problem”, in R. LATOURELLE & R. FISICHELLA (eds), *Dictionary of Fundamental Theology*, 506.

³⁴ Cf. P. CHARLES, “Missiologie et acculturation”, in: *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 75(1953), 26.

³⁵ For instance, the fourth missiological week of Louvain in 1926 had for its theme: “*Autour du Problème de l'Adaptation*” (*Compte rendu de la VI Semaine Missiologique de Louvain*, 1926), Museum Lessianum, Louvain, 1926. Also the third week of missionary studies of Canada in 1950 was dedicated to religious values of pagan religions; cf. *La valeur religieuse des religions païennes* (*IIIe Semaine d'Etudes Missionnaires du Canada*), Québec, 1950.

of the "Word" through proclamation, in all cultures and among all peoples (AG 6). In this context, the Council Fathers spoke gloriously of the incarnation of the Gospel message in local cultures and the importance of contextualized theology in that regard that will be at the service of inculturation (AG 26). The new theology of inculturation and theology of the "word" emphasize the mystery, which occurs each time the Gospel encounters a new culture through proclamation. The mutual interpenetration of the Gospel into the local culture and the culture into the Gospel, in such a way that a new people and culture is born through the evangelizing work of the Church in any particular cultural context.³⁶ This is the recognition of the importance of cultures (of which language is an essential element), in evangelization.

In his monumental work entitled: *Worship as Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship - An African Experience*,³⁷ the Nigerian Spiritan African theologian, Elochukwu Uzukwu writes that successful liturgical inculturation process makes the Christian liturgical celebration a cultural experience. Besides, as a public worship, liturgy is like a barometer, which measures the maturation of the Christian faith in the local Church, because the particular character of a Church is made manifest in its cult.³⁸ For Peter Schineller, if a liturgical worship is to be genuine, it must reflect the faith experience of the community which celebrates it. It must express their faith and their struggles for fullness of life, for justice, and their living of the Kingdom vision. A people addressed by the Gospel must respond with an act of faith which should be reflected in their prayer and worship.³⁹ Hence, the axiom, *lex orandi lex credendi*: the law of praying is the law of belief. This faith response is made in the cultural reality of the people, since culture is an integral part of the self-realization of every people (cf. GS 53).

The foregoing remarks imply that we must recognize the cultural factor in liturgy, and accept its immediate consequence of diversity and communion (SC 37-40), since there are numerous cultures in the world. No single form of liturgical celebration, venerable and ancient as it may be, could respond adequately to the religious needs of all peoples. It follows therefore that each cultural area should

³⁶ Cf. VATICAN II, SC 37-40; *Ad gentes* (AG) 26; *Gaudium et Spes* 53-63; See also Paul VI, *Evangelii nuntiandi* (EN) 18-20; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Slavorum apstoli* (1985) 21; John Paul II, Exhortation Post-synodal *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT) (1979), 53; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio* (RM) 52; Benedict XVI, Post synodal Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, 114; and finally, Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, nos. 45-48.

³⁷ The Liturgical Press Collegeville (Pueblo Book), Minnesota, 1997.

³⁸ Cf. E.E. UZUKWU, "Africa's Right to be Different: Christian Liturgical Rites and African Rites" (Part I), in: *BTA* 4 (1982) 103.

³⁹ Cf. P. SCHINELLER, "Inculturation of the Liturgy", in P.E. Fink (ed.), *The New Dictionary of Sacramental Worship*, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin, 1990, 599.

develop its own form of liturgical celebration and expressions, according to its own genius, while maintaining communion with the universal Church. It is against this background, that liturgical worship, especially, since Vatican Council II, is considered one of the most privileged areas of inculturation in Africa. This is the background for our emphasis on cultural sensibilities in the translation of liturgical texts in African languages in the present article.

Although, some often use the expression “African liturgy” in discussing the issues under consideration, however, it is necessary to emphasize that “African liturgy” as it is sometimes used by African theologians, is wider than the local theological efforts for the inculturation of Eucharistic celebration. It covers all the liturgical, theological, and disciplinary patterns and expressions found in the celebration of all the sacraments or rather liturgical life of the Church. It includes especially, the issues of translation of liturgical and other Sacred Texts into African languages. Likewise, is the term “rite”, which sometimes are used to refer to the emergent forms of liturgical celebration in Africa. It is always good to use the term in its rightful theological sense, that is, in the sense in which the Roman (Latin) Rite, for example, is distinguished from the Eastern Rite, to show their differences in doctrines and sacramental disciplines. The emergent African local forms of liturgical celebrations are within the Roman (Latin) Rite. In other words, they require the approval of the Holy See.⁴⁰

Consequently, African forms of liturgical celebration and translations of liturgical texts are still in making. But since the Eucharist is the focal point of the Church’s life, and with the officially approved Zairean (Congolese) Mass, an advanced stage has been achieved in the area of Eucharistic celebration.

Furthermore, and in General, we can identify three major stages in the liturgical reforms introduced by the Vatican Council II.⁴¹ These stages were developed in the African churches. All these reforms are intended to help the faithful to understand their liturgical celebrations with ease and to “take part in them fully, actively, and as a community” (SC 1-3; 21).

The first stage was to be the revision and translation of established texts into local languages (cf. SC 36). In the African local churches, this spurred not only the

⁴⁰ Cf. CONGREGATION FOR DIVINE WORSHIP AND THE DISCIPLINE OF THE SACRAMENTS, *The Roman Liturgy and Inculturation* (IVth Instruction for the Right Application of the Conciliar Constitution on the Liturgy (nn.37-40), 37: Vatican Press, Vatican City, 1994, 18; see also J. Dinh Duc Dao, “Missiography: Present Situations and Emerging Tendencies of Mission”, in AA.VV., *Mission for the Third Millennium: Course of Missiology*, Pontifical Missionary Union, St. Paul’s Press, Bangalore, 1993, 44-46.

⁴¹ Cf. E.T. CHARLES, *From Adaptation to Incarnation: A Study of the Theology of Inculturation in the Teachings of The African Bishops* (1969-1994), 208-209.

use of African languages for liturgical celebrations, but also the adoption of local liturgical hymnody accompanied by drums, gongs and other native instruments, hand clapping, rhythmical swaying, and dancing, and the increasing visibility of local art and architecture (e.g., vestments made of African textile, sacred images and paintings, etc.). In the same vein, Elochukwu Uzukwu observes that these elements have started to demarcate liturgical life in the African region.⁴²

The second stage was to consist of variations and adaptations of already established forms of liturgical celebrations according to the needs of local churches, particularly in mission territories. In this regard, the Council recommends that suitable “elements of initiation rites ... already in use among some peoples” could be incorporated into the Christian ritual for initiation, provided the conditions given in SC 37-40 (such as the preserving of “the substantial unity of the Roman rite” (SC 38) were respected (SC 65). The Episcopal Conferences were to initiate such adaptations (SC 22; 39).

Among the Yoruba of Nigeria, a reasonable progress has been made in this regard. This is in the area of naming ceremony, which is the first major (and symbolic) gesture through which African societies begin the socialization of the child – the beginning of his or her social definition as a person. The Yoruba child is born and introduced into the Yoruba (African) world through this ritual. This is the way toward the emergence of the Yoruba human type. Each child is welcomed as a unique creation. The name imposed on the newborn baby already encapsulates his or her destiny. Infant baptism, among Christians has overshadowed this native African practice. However, the Church in Yorubaland in its liturgy for the celebration of baptism adapted the traditional patterns of the naming ceremony.⁴³

Similar adaptation is made in the Moore ritual (for use in the diocese of Diebougou, Bourkina Faso. The Moore ritual is based on the traditions of the Mossi of Bourkina Faso. It is an effort to rediscover the spirit of the reformed rite for Christian initiation of adults (catechumenate in stages and baptism of adults) and to make it turn native in the Mossi country. The Moore ritual draws analogies from the Bobo traditions in Bourkina Faso, and has this insight: the tree of the cross and the tree of initiation; the procession into a large court (of a local chief) and procession into the house of God; imposing new names on the neophytes by both traditions, which makes the initiate live the communion of ancestors or saints; the rhythm of formation in stages to acquire a new knowledge and wisdom; and finally putting

⁴² Cf. E.E. UZUKWU, *Worship As Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship - An African Orientation*, 271.

⁴³ Cf. T.M. ILESANMI, “Eto Ati Adura Isomolorukoi”, in: *Adura Onigbagbo*, Iranoo-Owuro Press, 1978; quoted in E.E. Uzukwu, *Worship As Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship: An African Orientation*, 275.

on new clothes or being dressed in white.⁴⁴ In the past the glaring analogies that exist between Christian and native rites of initiation posed a serious problem for missionaries who evangelized this region. But today, with the Moore inculturated liturgy of Christian initiation it becomes easy for neophytes to appreciate and appropriate Christianity as ancestral tradition.⁴⁵

Finally, the third stage in the Vatican Council II's liturgical reforms called for a more "radical adaptation of the liturgy" which, though not stated explicitly, might involve a radical modification of, or even going beyond, the established Roman Rite of liturgical celebrations. This includes the creation of a new form of liturgical celebration of the Mass for a particular region. Thus, this stage was to begin after a careful study of the liturgical traditions of the Church and the religio-cultural traditions of the people concerned. It was also to be carried in dialogue between the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences concerned, so as to establish the necessary guidelines for the process (SC 40).

Accordingly, the local churches around the world availed of the new opportunities offered for liturgical reforms. The local churches in Africa also responded positively, since it could be said that the reform led to the birth of the Roman Missal for the Dioceses of Zaire (Congo), and the other experimentations in the same direction in various parts of Africa. For instance, the *Ndzon-melen* Mass in the diocese of Yaounde, Cameroun (though not yet recognized by the Holy See, but at least enjoys the approval of the local Bishop).⁴⁶ To this must be added the ongoing liturgical creativity or rather efforts (mainly on theological level), at the various higher ecclesiastical institutes in Africa.

Put together, since Vatican Council II, two stages could be distinguished in liturgical reforms in Africa. The first was the translation of Roman liturgical texts. This stage had already begun before Vatican Council II, as some rituals, prayers and hymns were translated into African languages by some missionaries. Those efforts were to be followed by the translation of the Mass text into local languages. The second stage is the present era, which began when the initial liturgical adaptations

⁴⁴ Cf. A.T. SANON-R. LUNEAU, *Enraciner l'Évangile: Initiations Africaines et Pédagogie de la Foi*, Cerf, Paris 1982, 132-133.

⁴⁵ Cf. R. OUEDRAOGO, "Rituel Moore", in: *Le Calao*, 51(1980)3, 34-47; cf. also E.E. Uzukwu, "Africa's Right to Be Different: Part II: African Rites in the Making", in: *Bulletin de Théologie Africaine* (BTA (DR Congo), 4(1982), 263-267.

⁴⁶ Cf. A. ABEGA, "L'expérience liturgique de Ndzon-Melen", in: *Telema*, 16 (1978), 41-50; cf. also E.E. Uzukwu, *Worship As Body Language: Introduction to Christian Worship - An African Orientation*, 295ff. In this collection Uzukwu presents a good synthesis of the Ndzon-melen Mass, and of other efforts in the same direction within African churches. In addition, he details how patterns of African ritual assemblies have merged with Jewish, Gospel, and early Church traditions to create living Christian communities and liturgies.

were criticized for having evolved within the framework of the theology of adaptation of the old. In other words, they merely juxtaposed the Roman-Judeo-Christian worldview and the African religious worldview without actually providing space for mutual interpenetration, transformation and enrichment.⁴⁷

The quest for liturgical inculturation in Africa as we know it today springs from this awareness. This stage calls for rigorous research into Christian theology and liturgical traditions, African anthropology and religion, so as to develop liturgies that are authentic expressions of both the Christian faith and the African spirit of prayer and worship. This explains why many African local churches have not reached this stage of liturgical inculturation. In fact, a good number are still grappling with the problems of translation, due to factors such as lack of trained personnel and material resources. Other local churches have made some progress, particularly in the composition of local forms of Eucharistic celebration.⁴⁸ Among these, that of Zairean Mass has received remarkable acclamation. Moreover, it is the only one approved by the Holy See.⁴⁹

47 Cf. E.T. CHARLES, *From Adaptation to Incarnation: A Study of the Theology of Inculturation in the Teachings of the African Catholic Bishops* (1969-1994), 209-211.

48 Cf. A. SHORTER, "An African Eucharistic Prayer", in: *AFER*, 12 (1970), 143-148; cf. also A. Shorter, "Three More Eucharistic Prayers", in: *AFER*, 15 (1973), 152-167. The latter are efforts from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda. A composition of an "Igbo Eucharistic Prayer" is worked out by E. Uzukwu in his article, "Blessing and Thanksgiving among the Igbo (Nigeria): Towards an African Eucharistic Prayer", in: *AFER*, 22 (1980), 19-22. However, the next most popular Eucharistic liturgy in Africa after that of Zaire (DR Congo), is the *Ndzon-Melen* Mass (named) after the parish, Saint Paul de Ndzon-Melen, in the diocese of Yaoundé, in Cameroun where it was begun and is still being experimented. It was started in 1969 by a Camerounian priest, Pie-Claude Nguma, assisted by another Camerounian priest, A. Abega. Inspired by the mystery of the Incarnation, in which humanity becomes the medium of God's self-communication as salvation and by the understanding of the Christian sacraments as prolongation and re-enactment of the saving actions of Christ in space and time, the composers of this Mass wish to bring together both Christian and African elements in the liturgy, so as to enable African Christians to worship authentically and to encounter God through their cultural medium. It also aims to help the African faithful to overcome the dichotomy which they experience between Christian life and African religious life. To achieve this aim, they restructured the Roman Mass according to the traditional assembly of the Beti people of Cameroun, characterized by two major elements: active participation in the word and in the sharing in the meal of communion; cf. A. Abega, "L'expérience liturgique de Ndzon-Melen", 41-50. Fr. Abega is a co-composer of the Mass liturgy.

49 Apart from the local forms for the celebration of Mass and for Christian initiation, other areas of the liturgy are also being explored, such as the ritual for religious profession in Zaire, based on the Bantu rite of blood pact; cf. F.K. Lumbala, *Alliances avec le Christ en Afrique: Inculturation des rites religieux au Zaire*, Karthala, Paris 1994. Zimbabwe has developed "a Catholic Kurova guva", a "Liturgy for Second Burial"; cf. A. Shorter, *Evangelization and Culture*, Geoffrey Chapman, London 1994, 129.

Conclusion

The work of translation of basic texts of our Christian faith into our local languages is the most important aspect of inculturation of the Gospel. The local church of Nigeria must show leadership in this regard in the African continent. In fact, it appears we are already behind many African countries in the area of inculturation and translation. We have been overtaken many years ago by the local churches in Francophone Africa as well as Anglophone countries of Eastern Africa. Even Ghana, our nearest neighbour in West African sub-region, is already miles ahead of us in this area of inculturation and translation.

Without inculturation and translations into local languages of the basic texts of our Christian faith in our local churches in Nigeria, the Christian faith will never reach the desired maturity in our land. We shall continue to complain of syncretism living side-by-side with the Christian faith of our people with no solution in sight. We shall continue to complain of charlatan pastors and priests, their multiplication of healing centers of which distressed poor masses are their easiest victims.

One could imagine how our faith could have been today had the Bible not been translated into African languages. In fact, experts in African Christianity tell us that it was from the time the Bible came to be translated into African local languages that the number of African Christians began to increase in a way never seen in the history of modern Christianity.

All this implies that there is no alternative to an authentic inculturation of the Gospel in our land if we want Christianity to take root in Nigeria. The ongoing menace and deformation of authentic African spirituality and Christianity by most of the fake pastors of Neo Pentecostalism and the so-called ‘priest-healers’ in the mainline churches will die a natural death once we have an authentic inculturated Christianity in Nigeria.

Our people will begin to worship God in truth and spirit only if we take seriously the work of inculturation and translation of basic Christian texts in our local languages. In fact, until we are able to translate, interpret, live and celebrate correctly the Christian faith and doctrine in our local languages, culture, philosophy of life, idioms and customs, the Gospel of Jesus Christ can hardly take root in our land.