

Carol Nyberg Caraviotis  
August 8, 2007  
Theology of Worship

## **Offering the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd to Children in the Episcopal Church**

*Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even on a cross. Philippians 2:5-8 NRSV*

Humility and great respect for the work of God in the child are hallmarks of the work of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. The committee adapting the Catechesis for the Episcopal Church has been working in this same spirit for the past several years. What appeared to be a small undertaking, changing a word here or there when the Book of Common Prayer differed from the Roman Rite, has proved to be a grace-filled journey into a deeper understanding of the nature of the Church, the child and the liturgy. We have come to see that our work is not one of adaptation or translation but of inculturation.

The differences between adaptation and inculturation have been highlighted since Vatican II. “In the years since the Council, concern was raised that “adaptation” was too superficial a term to speak of the profound transformation that is to be brought about by the dialogue between faith and culture.”<sup>1</sup> Gittins argues that authentic inculturation is the true incarnation of faith.<sup>2</sup> Inculturation is an embodied faith that is known not by the words and gestures of the liturgy but by the lives of the people. “It produces *something new*: a vital, incarnated Christian community of faith and works: a hitherto unknown or unimagined part of the body of Christ; the revelation of an astonishing new facet of

---

<sup>1</sup> Mark R. Francis, *Shape A Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States*. (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996.) . 59

<sup>2</sup> Anthony J. Gittins, *Beyond Liturgical Inculturation: Transforming the Deep Structures of Faith* . in *Irish Theological Quarterly* (69 2004) 49.

God's infinitely multi-faceted splendor; a gift to the whole Church, and a work of the Spirit in our time: the rest, by any other name, is *'praeparatio evangelii'*."<sup>3</sup>

Our process, as we have prepared and continue to review and refine the Episcopal materials, is an ongoing transformational conversation between the child, the Episcopal Church, the Montessori method and the work of Sofia Cavaletti and Gianna Gobbi in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. We began by simply opening the Book of Common Prayer and substituting Episcopal words for Roman Catholic words. We rearranged charts and added or dropped gestures as the rubrics indicated. Over time we found that these changes were superficial. They did not take into consideration the needs and development of the child, the essentiality of the Montessori Method or the culture and theology of the Episcopal Church. It was not enough to know the “what” of the differences between the rites. We needed to know the “why” and the “how”. Our first materials were a like formal correspondence translation, word for word they were correct but they failed to take into account the context and theological content of the prayers and gestures.

In search of a dynamic equivalence translation of the texts we had to become more familiar with the liturgical theology of the Episcopal Church; more experienced worshipping in a Roman Catholic community; more experienced in the atrium with the children and gain a deeper understanding of the Montessori Method.

(I)t is not sufficient that a liturgical translation merely reproduce the expressions and ideas of the original text. Rather it must faithfully communicate to a given people, in their own language, that which the Church by means of this given text originally intended to communicate to another people in another time. A faithful translation, therefore, cannot be judged on the basis of individual words: the total

---

<sup>3</sup> Gittis, op. cit. 72.

context of this specific act of communication must be kept in mind, as well as the literary form proper to the respective language.<sup>4</sup>

The process we have arrived at involves several steps. The first is to look at who the child is. What capacities, desires or insights do they bring to the church at this point of their development? We look at their language ability as well as the liturgical language they may be familiar with. It is also important to understand their worldview. Are they three to six years old and thus have a world that is smaller and more egocentric or are they six to twelve years old with the whole universe opening up to them. Montessori's work and Cavaletti's insights into the religious capacities of children are invaluable in making these determinations.

The second step is to look at the liturgical sign/text and ask how does it bring us into presence of God. How has the church understood this sign/text over time? How has this understanding changed? What is the Roman Catholic understanding of this sign/text that is presented in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd materials?

Next we ask, how does this sign/text reflect the Episcopal Community's ritual. How does it incorporate the liturgical theology of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer? How does this sign/text carry the content of our faith? If there are differences between the Catholic and Episcopal sign/text do they reflect a significant theological difference? What are the roots of these differences? How will this be reflected in the material as it is presented to the children?

Now we look at the Montessori Method. How does this essential moment of our faith link with the Montessori Method? How do the sign/text and the method meet? How will the material isolate the essentiality of the sign/text? How will the child engage

---

<sup>4</sup> Francis, *op. cit.*, 64.

in work with this sign/text? How will the material engage their imagination and lead them to prayerful response? Does the method respect the content that is being presented?

Following the above process the material is prepared and the next stage begins. “It is clear that *inculturation* requires dialogue, between insider and outsiders, between local people and theologians.”<sup>5</sup> The material is presented to the children in a variety of Episcopal parishes and schools. Catechists observe and consider what serves the child in the material? The children’s responses are recorded and passed back to the committee. Questions to be considered are do they take the work off the shelf and use it? Does the children’s response reflect interaction with the essential content of our faith without distraction? Do they return to the material with prayerful work and reflection? Do their responses indicate that they have been drawn into the presence of God? Does the material set afire their imagination?

These reports are the community’s response to the committees work and are an essential and ongoing part of the process. After considering these reports the materials will continue to be reworked and refined and returned again to the community of children and catechists for their ongoing reflection.

While we have invested much pray, time, study and effort into this process we offer it humbly and hold it lightly. “Those co(m)-missioned to encourage inculturation must be aware that the *terminus ad quem*, the end point or outcome of it all, is something unknown and unknowable to us. We must not therefore attempt to control the process: it is in God’s hands.”<sup>6</sup> Sofia also reminds us, “the catechist proclaims a Word that is not one’s own and assists the child’s potentialities which in no way belong to oneself....At

---

<sup>5</sup> Gittis, op. cit. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Gittis, op.cit. 72.

times our hands touch the presence of an active force that is not ours, and it is precisely because it is not our own that it fills us with wonder and joy. There is a deep bond uniting God to the child, the Creator to His creature; it is a bond that cannot be explained as the result of any human work, a bond which no person should dare to interfere.”<sup>7</sup>

In order to put some flesh on the skeleton of this process we will look at some of the Level One Baptism work and the changes we have proposed for the Episcopal materials. While these changes may seem small they can help us walk through the process to see how decisions were made. In Level One there are three baptismal presentations that focus on the signs and gestures of baptism:

- Baptism I – Light and White Garment
- Baptism II- Gospel, Water
- Baptism III – The Gestures and Oils

Anyone familiar with the Baptismal rite in the Book of Common Prayer 1979 would realize that even the titles of these presentations venture beyond the rubrics of the BCP. In Baptism I the primary sign is the Paschal Candle which is of course a part of the Episcopal rite as well, but the individual candle lit from the Paschal Candle is mentioned only in the “Additional Directions”. After the Baptism, candle (which may be lighted from the Paschal Candle) may be given to each of the newly baptized or to a godparent. For a prayer to accompany this moment, one must go to “A Priest’s Handbook.” There are three different options.<sup>8</sup> This is also the only place where the white garment; the chrysom is mentioned with two different prayer options. So from the very first

---

<sup>7</sup> Sofia Cavalletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child*. (Chicago, IL: Liturgical Training Publications, 1983) 52.

<sup>8</sup> Dennis G. Michno, *A Priest’s Handbook: The Ceremonies of the Church*, Third Edition (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1998) 216.

presentation of Baptism from Level I, we have some questions to ask ourselves as Episcopalian catechists.

We look first at the child. This presentation is given to the youngest children in the atrium, around the age of three years.

When we begin our first presentation of baptism with the children, they already know about the Prophecy of the Messiah-Light in Isaiah, and the Easter Liturgy of the Light. Therefore we link our presentation of Baptism to these elements, concretizing this linkage around the sign of the paschal candle. We initiate our narration with the image of light: “There was a long time of waiting for the light to be kindled. When Jesus was born, the light began to illumine the world. (At this point we light the paschal candle before the children’s amazed faces.) However darkness overwhelmed the light for a moment. Jesus knew this could happen; in fact, he said: “The Good Shepherd gives his life for the sheep.” (Now we extinguish the candle.) But the victory of the darkness over the light was only momentary; for the light was relit, never to go out again. (We relight the paschal candle and begin to meditate with the children on this new light that illumines the world.) This is a very special light, so strong, so powerful, that never again will it be overpowered; and even more, it is a far reaching light. The risen Christ did not keep this new light for Himself alone. He gives it as a gift to all those who come close to Him. From the day when the light was relit, how many have received it into their hearts!...And then one day this light came to me and to you. (At this moment the children are called by name one at a time to come to the paschal candle to light their own little candles.)”<sup>9</sup>

The meditation continues and the lighting of the candle is expressly connected to baptism. Sofia explains that: “For every subject we present to the children we need “the linking point,” that is an especially striking element that emphasizes the vial nucleus of the theme.”<sup>10</sup> She continues, “It is not necessarily the most important liturgical or theological element; in Baptism for instance, the linking point is the light.”<sup>11</sup> The image of the light is profound for the young child. “The children “see” baptism as the participation in the death and resurrection of Christ through the candle that was lighted,

---

<sup>9</sup> Cavalletti, op. cit., 99-100.

<sup>10</sup> Cavalletti, op. cit., 98.

<sup>11</sup> Cavalletti, op. cit., 98.

extinguished and relit, whose light has been communicated to us. Becoming children of God is perceived through the light transmitted to us.”<sup>12</sup>

Considering the power of this presentation for the young child and its ability to so faithfully and powerfully carry the content of our faith in Christ the question becomes, how could we keep this presentation form children in the Episcopal Church. Most congregations do present the newly baptized with a candle lit from the paschal candle. Also most children who are baptized are wearing white. As Cavalletti reminds us: “Furthermore, it is well known what importance the image of the Christ Light had had, especially in the entire Christian tradition beginning with St. Paul and the Church Fathers up to our present understanding of Liturgy.”<sup>13</sup> The image of the Christ light represented by the Paschal candle, the baptismal candles and the chrysom/white garment are part of our Christian heritage even if they are not emphasized in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer.

In order to deal with the optional nature of these signs in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer we chose to have the prayers enclosed in brackets when the prayer cards for these moments are presented in Level II because this is the method that the 1979 Book of Common Prayer uses to indicate optional prayers.

This presentation has been offered to children in Episcopal parishes around the United States and their responses have been prayerful and deep. This work has also been used by many Catechists for baptism preparation classes. The images of light and darkness speak to all of us. Another fruit of this work is that the children are more aware and alert to the gift of the candle when a baptism is celebrated in their parish.

---

<sup>12</sup> Cavalletti, op. cit. 102.

<sup>13</sup> Cavalletti, op. cit, 98.

In conclusion those of us who have served on the Episcopal materials committee have seen our work move from the realm of adaptation to that of inculturation. Gittis describes what we have experienced when he borrows from the world of theoretical linguistics. He uses Chomsky's model as analogy for inculturation. In Chomsky's model there is the *base-component* that:

“produces grammatical rules that regulate the creation and relationships between noun phrases and verbs, and generates the underlying representations of sentences (the syntactic deep structure). The *deep structure* is an abstract underlying structure “That incorporates all the syntactic information required for the interpretation of a given sentence;” it generates a series of transformations that produce a surface structure (what we would recognize as an actual sentence).”<sup>14</sup>

To understand a language deeply and to speak it like a native requires a creative knowledge not only of the *surface structures* and their meaning but also an intuitive sense of the deep structure of language. This is what we have experienced. We have moved from the surface structures of liturgical theology, Montessori Method, child development into the place of a native speaker who can creatively and intuitively interact with the deep structures of these languages. Our prayer is that we are approaching what Gittis proposes: “As an adequate grammar reflects the native speakers intuition, so people of faith share the *sensus fidelium*.”

---

<sup>14</sup> Gittis, op. cit., 51.



## Bibliography

- Cavalletti, Sofia. *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy with Young Children*. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications 1983.
- Francis, Mark R. *Shape A Circle Ever Wider: Liturgical Inculturation in the United States*. Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1996.
- Gittis, Anthony J. "Beyond Liturgical Inculturation: Transforming Deep Structures of Faith." *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004): 47-72.
- Michno, Dennis G. *A Priest's Handbook: The Ceremonies of the Church Third Edition*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1998
- The Book of Common Prayer*. New York, NY: Church Publishing, 1979.