

Inculturation and the Christian faith in Africa

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Abstract

Inculturation is a rare dictionary word that gained popularity after the Second Vatican Council. It is the incarnation of the Christian message in particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the Church and remaking it so as to bring a new creation. In this paper, the researchers argue that evangelization in post-missionary Africa, to be intensive and not just extensive, must imbibe the principles of inculturation. It further argues that inculturation provides the fertile ground for incorporating the culture of particular peoples into the life of the Church. This disconnects evangelization with the missionary concept of evangelization as a one-way traffic and connects to a process that is interactive and complementary. It is through inculturation that the church would reappraise her evangelizing mission so as to maintain and exceed the present successes and redefine its orientations and goals.

1. Introduction

Namibia, the last African country under colonial rule, became independent in 1989. With the announcement by President De Klerk of South Africa of the intention of his government to dismantle apartheid, the total political independence of the whole of Africa came into full sight. The Christian churches in Africa are growing tremendously, and churches are breaking out virtually every day and metamorphosing into new ones. The vocation to priestly and religious life are abundant. The number of pastors, evangelists, prophets etc. can hardly be quantified. About ninety nine percent of the clergy men and women now in Africa are Africans. With this development, Metuh (1993) argues that the church needs to reappraise her evangelizing mission so as to maintain and exceed the present successes and redefine its orientations and goals.

In spite of the evident success of missionary work in Africa seen in the teeming population of Africans who have embraced Christianity, there is an evident lack of depth in the faith and commitment of converts; there is also an increasing proliferation of Afro-Christian Indigenous Churches. This cannot be blamed on the lack of commitment of missionaries in Africa, for we saw them labour exceedingly. The cause, according to Metuh (1993), is due to the missionaries' intolerance of the tendency of the new African converts to introduce elements of the traditional religion into Christianity. There was a clash of worldviews and the failure of missionaries to come to terms with the traditional African cosmology.

This paper, using the library research method primarily, argues that for the realisation of an intensive evangelization in Africa, there is need for inculturation. Only inculturation would lead to an intensively Christianized community that would witness transformation of the different levels of its life, laws, customs, moral values and its worldview in the light of the gospel message. Waliggo (1996) avers that "the simple rules of communication require that the speaker adapts himself to the audience, and his message, in order to be understood by his audience, has to be clothed in the thought-patterns of the hearers" (p. 14). Since evangelization in Africa in the third millennium is primarily the responsibility of Africans, it should focus on the evangelization and Christianization of African worldviews, cultures, institutions and values. It is in this regard that the researcher proposes that the church in Africa would have to tackle inculturation as a matter of necessity and urgency in her evangelizing mission.

2. *The origin of the concept 'inculturation'*

A historical analysis of the evolution of the Church reveals that the idea of inculturation is a new one, but again it is as old as the Church. It is thus not surprising that Onwubiko (1997) said that inculturation is a new vision of an old problem in the Church or a new approach to a solution of an old problem. It appeared in missiological discussions not so long ago. According to Metuh (1996), the concept was probably first used in a theological sense by Joseph Masson, a professor of the Gregorian University Rome. Mason (cited by Metuh, 1996), argues that there is a more urgent need for a Catholicism that is inculturated in a variety of forms.

Schineller (1990) avows that the exact origin of the word as it functions in the theological community is unclear, but he points to its use by Cardinal Sin of Manila at the Synod on Catechesis held in Rome in 1977 and its first insertion into Papal Documents by John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis on October 1979. Since then, the concept has become a common place and was frequently used by the John Paul II during his visits to Africa. Metuh (1996), views the origin of the concept of inculturation from a secular perspective. He maintains that the term is borrowed from cultural anthropology where it denotes the process by which a person is inserted into his culture. This, however, has been given a slight change in its missiological use as a process by which the church becomes inserted into a particular culture. It is in this regard that Schineller (1990) says that "at its best, the term combines the theological significance of incarnation with the anthropological concepts of enculturation and acculturation to create something new" (p. 21).

3. *Inculturation as a theological concept*

A definition of the theological content of inculturation can be considered from a variety of angles. However, from whatever angle you choose to approach it, the theological content remains the same.

According to Walligo (1986),

Inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his Gospel of salvation ever more understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It is the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought patterns of each people.... It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity 'truly feel at home' in the cultures of each people. (p. 11).

In the contention of Arrupe (1990),

Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the cultures, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation. (p. 6).

From this perspective, inculturation becomes a process that plies the pattern of the 'Word made-flesh', which would involve the gospel taking life and flesh in the beliefs of people who welcome Christ and the values of the gospel. Just as Christ became man so as to win salvation for all, the gospel must become 'culture' so as to win the heart of 'local people'. John Paul II (cited by Udoidem, 1996) shares the same sentiments with Arrupe when he defined inculturation as "the incarnation of the gospel in autochthonous cultures, at the same time, the introduction of these cultures into the life of the church" (p. 2). He further stresses the need for reciprocity in the relationship between the gospel and cultures.

Crollius (1986) adds a new dimension to our concept of inculturation when he defined it as,

The integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people in such a way that the experience not only express itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion not only within the culture in question, but also as an enrichment of the church universal. (p. 43).

This notwithstanding, when all is said about inculturation, it must not be forgotten that it is a conscious and conscientious effort to help the people of Africa be converted down to the very roots of their culture. As its prospect, it strives at attaining a confluence between the conversion of mind and the conversion of the way of life, so that African Christians would be able to live their faith in all its depth and be able to give it expression in their own way.

According to Metuh (1996), there are concepts that may suggest the same meaning at the pragmatic level with inculturation, but are neither fully synonymous in conceptual content, nor compatible in their theological or ideological implications. These concepts include interculturation, enculturation, acculturation, indigenization, africanization, contextualization, adaptation and reformation. Amidst all these concepts, inculturation is chosen by the researcher as a veritable instrument for post-missionary evangelization in Africa because, as a concept, it possesses a wholeness that would enhance intensive evangelization in Africa.

4. The provenance of African Inculturation Theology

African inculturation theology arose against the background of attempts made during the missionary period to sow the seed of the gospel in Africa. Long before the advent of missionaries, some negative notions dominated Europe's concept of Africa. For instance, Homer (cited by Njoku, 2002) said that Africa is a remote place at the extreme of the universe where people worshipped and sacrificed to the gods. Hobbes (cited by Njoku, 2002) said that Africa is a timeless place in which there are no art, letters or social organization, but instead only fear and violent death. According to Hegel (cited by Njoku, 2002), Africa is an ahistoric continent even though it has a geographic location. The people live in a condition of mindlessness barbaring without laws and morality. Rousseau (cited by Njoku, 2002), said that the black people are unable to think in any reflective manner. Their engagement in arts is, therefore, a thoughtless activity which is the antithesis of the intellect. Comte (cited by Njoku, 2002) wrote that "Africans are people who lack the sophisticated linguistic skills, the scientific and political faculties of the European and are best suited to dancing, dressing up and singing" (p. 10). These ideas, in one way or the other conditioned the relationship between European missionaries and Africans: they undermined the worldview of the African people.

Metuh (1996) argues that African inculturation theology, grew out of the different movements which questioned the assumptions of this early missionary missiology. From this, a new vision of African missiology emerged, and emphasized that any theological application to Africa, must take account of the Africans to whom the faith is addressed, their culture, religion and civilization. It also recognized that Africans have come of age, and can no longer be treated as footnotes in missiological activities in their home land. They have the right to reflect on Christianity in their own terms, and express their faith in a theology and religious life relevant to their cultural situation. The pursuit is for a theology that would value the cultural and religious experience of the African people.

The main movements that influenced the birth and fired the spread of African Inculturation Theology include, the African Culture Society (SAC), which was a francophone Catholic strand; there was also the Anglo-phone All African Council of Churches (AACC), through which Protestants made significant contributions to the development of African theology; the liberation oriented and ecumenical strand led by the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), made contribution to the development of inculturation theology through their work titled *African Theology En Route*, which is made up of selections from papers presented at the Pan-African Conference of Third World Theologians, held in Accra, Ghana, in 1977. Black Theology, which developed in South Africa, in reaction to racial discrimination; while this could have contributed to the development of inculturation, it was more of a political theology. Contributions were also made by AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in East Africa) through sponsorship of conferences, workshops, colloquia and the publication in the Journal African Ecclesiastical Review (AFER). The Catholic Institutes of East and West Africa and the Association of Episcopal Conferences of English-Speaking West Africa (AECEWA) have also stirred up similar interests in theological research in the East and West African Regions. These communities, movements and Institutions provided a fertile ground for the sowing and nurturing of the seed of Inculturation Theology and have continued till date to influence its development.

5. The theological foundations of inculturation

Inculturation has a couple of theological foundations. These foundations would be discussed under the following sub-themes.

5.1 The mystery of the Trinity

The idea of the Trinity is a solid theological foundation for inculturation. The penetration and indwelling of the three divine persons reciprocally in one another, does not throw away the distinctiveness of persons in the Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons but consubstantial.

The beauty of this interpenetration lies in the fact of their distinctiveness. In accordance with Trinitarian appropriation, the Father has distinct qualities, as the Son and the Holy Spirit do. Their missions in the economy of salvation are also distinct, but still, it is the same one God who acts. Cultural diversity can itself be a source of unity in the Church if it is respected. Plurality in the one Church of Christ can also be a source of beauty to the Church. Cultural pluralism does not pose a threat to the Church's unity, it rather adds to its beauty.

5.2 The mystery of the incarnation

According to Krieg (1995), the incarnation refers to the "abiding reality of the hypostatic union of the divine nature and the human nature in Jesus Christ" (p. 659). For so many theologians, the idea of the incarnation expresses the whole process of inculturation. It is within the parameters of this understanding that Gaudium et Spes (1965) maintains that genuine inculturation should be based upon the mystery of the incarnation, seen not only as a mystery and as an event in the person of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, but as a process to be carried on in history till the end of time.

5.3 The mystery of creation

Scripture scholars generally agree that the book of Genesis was written during the exile to counter the Babylonian myths of the origin of man. It is in this regard that Gallagher (1997) observes that the narrative of Genesis was an early example of dialogue between faith and culture, "as against the Babylonian stories of wars and chaos, Genesis shows God freely and serenely creating as a gift to humanity, and indeed portraying God as an artist rejoicing in the sheer goodness of the finished work" (p. 105). He further maintains that these texts are much more than the stories of origin. They are rooted in God's continuing relationship with us in our responsibility for each other and human history. When God tells us to multiply and rule the earth, he gives us the mandate of continuing his work of creation; and this provides a biblical basis for us to see culture as a human response to God's continuing creative gift, since culture is a product of human ingenuity and creativity. And if all that God has made is good, human culture is also good. This does not rule out the proclivity of culture to become sour and lose its beauty, in that case, culture would need redemption. For John Paul II (1995), this is where Christianity has the capacity to transform human cultures, where necessary, so that they follow the logic proper to the mystery of redemption. This is achieved through the process of inculturation, which brings the divine in contact with the human.

5.4 The Paschal Mystery

The Paschal Mystery refers to the unified total event of Christ's Passion, death, Resurrection, in so far as it reveals and accomplishes God's previously hidden plan of salvation. John Paul II (1995) contends that every culture needs to be transformed by the Gospel values in the light of the Paschal Mystery,

Given the close and organic relationship that exists between Jesus Christ and the Word that the Church proclaims, the inculturation of the revealed message cannot but follow the 'logic' proper to the *Mystery of Redemption*". Indeed, the incarnation of the Word is not an isolated moment but tends towards Jesus' 'Hour' and the Paschal Mystery: 'Unless a grain of wheat falls on the ground and dies, it bears much fruit' (Jn 12:24). Jesus says: 'And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself' (Jn 12:32). This emptying of self, this *kenosis* necessary for exaltation, which is the way of Christ and of each of his disciples (cf Phil 2:6-9), sheds light on the encounters of cultures with Christ and his Gospel. (p. 85).

6.6 The mystery of Pentecost

On Pentecost day, religious people gathered in Jerusalem from all parts of the world. When the apostles spoke, they were all excited because they heard them speak in their own different languages (Acts 2:5-7). People from different countries in the world, culturally diversified but united as a Church and hearing the Gospel in their own various languages, was the beauty of this Church and the cause of feeling at home for new believers. John Paul II (1995) writes,

Thanks to the outpouring and action of the Spirit, who draws gifts and talents into unity, all the peoples of the earth when they enter the Church live a new Pentecost, profess in their own tongue the one faith in Jesus, and proclaim the marvel that the Lord has done for them. (p. 85).

6.7 Revelation and grace

Schineller (1990) holds that revelation and grace could be considered as theological foundations for inculturation. With regard to revelation he holds that the seed of the Word of God is present in every culture. And so the agent of inculturation does not step into godless contexts as some missionaries have earlier conceived, but rather into a holy ground, where God is already in contact with a given context, even though in an imperfect and hidden ways. This expands the traditional belief that revelation is only found in scriptures with their highpoint in Christ to the understanding of revelation as a dynamic and ongoing process. In this case, cultures, both traditional and modern, remain the *locus* for God's past, present and future revelation.

Related to the theology of revelation is that of grace. Schineller (1990) avows that grace,

Like revelation is offered to all men and women, and any exclusivist understanding of grace would deny the understanding of inculturation as a two-way street, a listening as well as sharing or teaching. The exclusivist understanding of grace accounted for the lack of respect for local cultures and traditional religion, and for the colonialist attitude of much traditional missionary endeavour. If, on the other hand, grace is offered to and in some ways present in cultures and contexts beyond the explicit Christian pale, then the agent of inculturation must attend to and search for the presence, learn from it and build on it rather than reject or ignore it (p. 47).

6. Imperatives for inculturation in the scripture

Jesus who is the Christ, the apostles, the Church Fathers in sowing the Gospel had respect for other peoples' cultures. Jesus and his apostles came from the Jewish background whose religiosity, prayers and practices of worship were well defined. However, Jesus' attitudes towards the Jewish cult were represented in two categories: fidelity and autonomy. In fidelity, Jesus had respect for the traditions of his time. He came not to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfil them (Matthew 5:17). He was faithful in observing the offering of sacrifices in the temple (Matthew 21:12), the service of words in the synagogue (Matthew 6:6), observing the day of the Sabbath, the feasts of Passover, Tabernacle, and Dedication (Matthew 26:17-19). However, his fidelity did not lie in passivity, but represented that of a "critical yes", a reforming fidelity, that placed a demand of purification to the worship of its time. His autonomy found expression in his challenge to fellow Jews to spiritualize and interiorize the Jewish religion and in this process he was giving birth to the era of Christian worship.

When Jesus preached the Gospel, he used categories familiar to his audience. We hear of absentee Lords and Tenant revolts (Matthew 21:31-45); Small family-run farms (Mt 21:28-30); debts and debtors (Matthew 18:25-35); extortion and corruption (Luke 16:1-9); uncaring rich (Luke 12:18); day labourers paid merely subsistent wages (Matthew 20:1-6); these graphically reflect the detail of the picture of Palestinian countryside during his time. St Paul wrote, "To the Jews I became a Jew, in order to win Jews... I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some" (Philippians 9:20 & 22); in the opinion of Metuh (1996), St Paul was talking about missiology, and at the same time using the language of contextual theology in which lies the theology of inculturation: bringing the Christian experience into the culture of the people, a process that makes alive the dynamic and eternal motion of the incarnation. Freyne (1980) observes how St Paul criss-crossed the Mediterranean world on sea and land with the Good News of Christ vying for the souls of the masses with religious leaders and philosophers. Any contemporary missionary will testify to the value of Paul's acquaintance with the language of the people and his ability to share many of their assumptions with them.

After Jesus, Dulles (1983) argues that his apostles continued to employ the same model in their attempt to bring the Good News to the peoples of their time. With the conversion and subsequent mission of St Paul to the Gentiles, so many gentiles were converted to Christianity and there now arose the question as to whether to allow the Gentiles to become Christians without imposing on them the law of circumcision held in high esteem by the Jews. This called for the Council of Jerusalem between 49- 50AD. The Judaizers held that circumcision, as contained in the Old Testament was necessary for salvation, while St Paul and his followers maintained that all that was needed for salvation was faith in Jesus and baptism in his name (Acts 15). According to Schineller (1991),

Peter's position which agreed with Paul's, prevailed, and it was decided not to lay extra burdens on the Gentile converts. Because of this liberating decision, the mission of Paul continued with great success, and the Church expanded far beyond the borders of Palestine. One did not first have to become Jewish before becoming a Christian. (p. 30).

7. Imperatives for inculturation in the history of the Church

Justin (cited by Shorter, 1988) made a notable attempt at arguing that the Christian faith is not only compatible with whatever is good and noble in Hellenistic and Roman cultures, he holds that the different cultures were inspired by God and should be appropriate for his service. He saw these cultures as prefigurations of Christ "a Logos spermatikos" (seed bearing word). He taught that the Spermatic Logos has been implanted in the heart of every human culture since all things were created through Christ, with him and for him. Justin (cited by Shorter, 1988), stated further that,

We are taught that Christ is the first born of God, and we have explained above that he is the word (reason) of whom all mankind have a share and those who live according to reason are Christians, even though they were classed as atheists... Thus, whatever has been spoken aright by any man belongs to the Christians, for we worship and love, next to God, which is from the unbegotten and ineffable God. (p. 76).

Clement (cited by Shorter, 1988) established a fundamental theory- a harmony of faith and Greek culture, which places Greek philosophy at the service of faith. For him the ideas of Greek Philosophy were a gift to mankind and find their unity in Christianity. He further stated that,

Philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness until the coming of the Lord, and even now it is useful for the development of true religion, as a kind of preparatory discipline for those who arrive at faith by way of demonstration. For, "your way will not stumble" the Scripture says, if you attribute to Providence all good things, whether belonging to the Greeks or to us. For God is the source of all good either directly or indirectly as in the case of philosophy. But it may even be that philosophy was given to the Greeks directly; for it was a "schoolmaster", to bring Hellenism to Christ, as the law was for the Jew. (p. 136).

Following the expansion of the Church from Palestine to Rome, it became clear that the church was going into a new culture and would have to have new ways of expressing herself. In 312 Constantine, through the edict of Milan, gave freedom of worship to Christians, which paved a way for the initiation of large numbers of people to Christianity and the shaping of their belief systems on the Greek and Roman philosophical thought, principles and methods. At this time, the Greek language dominated, after which Latin overpowered it in the West while Greek remained in the East. With the dominance of Greek language it influenced the culture of the Church at the time, especially Greek Art; and so many concepts of theology have their etymology from the Greek language. The court which Constantine relinquished to the Church for a place of worship influenced the Church structures, event to this day. The Roman juridical system was a basis for the Church's hierarchical structure. The celebration of Christmas replaced the Roman pagan feast of the sun.

St Augustine learnt much from Greek Philosophy, especially from Plotinus which he used greatly in his writings. It is his opinion that as faith runs on earth and takes its citizens from all nations and languages; and faith is not to be pre-occupied with customs, laws and institutions, neither is it to reject or destroy any of these, but rather it should observe and conserve them so that they do not constitute an obstacle to the religion that teaches the true worship of God.

From the foregoing, the question that arises here is how much of the African thought system has influenced the faith they have received so that it becomes the faith of the African people?

8. Current results on the practice of inculturation

The benefit of hindsight reveals that the church in Africa has gone far as regards the practice of inculturation. The subject African Inculturation Theology is presently been taught either as a self-subsisting course or as a course under another in most ecclesiastical institutions. A number of dissertations have been written on it by both graduate and post-graduate students. A good number of journal articles and textbooks have been or are being published on it.

Associations of theologians and exegetes are being set up in great numbers, and they are organizing symposiums and colloquiums. These research work, combined with the Christian sense of the African faithful has today given birth to a distinctive African theology which has emerged out of the identity of the African people and draws on African categories of thought and speaks to the historical situation of the African people, and by a deep reflection on the African way of seeing God, human beings and life, is enriching the universal church.

As regards the Mass in the Catholic Church, in Ethiopia, there is already an Ethiopian rite in existence. In Zaire, there is also a Zairean rite which speaks to the people's religious categories. However, in places like Nigeria, the proposed Nigerian rite is still at the level of proposal and not practice. Among the African Independent Churches much has been realised: African names are used by believers, African local musical instruments are highly prized. Categories peculiar to the African worldview like healing are incorporated to feed the spiritual hunger of the African soul. As such, the spiritual leader is not just a teacher but a healer. So far in Africa the great majority of attempts at inculturation have been carried out in the area of liturgy, and this has moved rapidly from simple adaptations to creative efforts. There is now a wide usage of vernacular among African Christian worshipping communities. African art is now widely used in the liturgy and in decorating places of worship. Traditional forms such as drum strokes, hand claps, dancing and body language are now largely used in liturgy to express certain elements of the Christian faith.

Nathaniel (1994), however, observes that in spite of the full mandate given to Catholic bishops and priests to practice inculturation, it is sad that in this all-important task of making Christianity more meaningful to Africans, not much has been achieved. However, many of the suggestions made by many Nigerian theology lecturers and students in their dissertations rot away in the libraries or college archives. Nothing of their proposals has been tried out in practice. There are still many African theologians who don't see the need for inculturation, they still prefer to walk, talk and live in the white man's culture, which they perceive as more superior to theirs. In most seminaries in Nigeria, where inculturation is practiced, it is more of a caricature of what inculturation should be. It is usually limited to the liturgy of the Mass, and celebrated once in a while, some times when there are western visitors around. In preparation, students go to store to dust up what is considered their culture for display, as long as the celebration lasts or the white men are in sight. Once they are gone, inculturation goes with them. This makes inculturation less of a way of life, and more of a show in memory of antiquity.

9. The challenges of inculturation

A community of factors have clung to the wheels of inculturation, either reducing the speed of its implementation or stopping its movement completely. According to Nathaniel (1994), unless these obstacles are removed Africa is likely to disappoint not only her sons and daughters, but also the entire universal church for her inability to take the initiative and make good of Africa's finest hour. These factors that have constituted obstacles to the development of inculturation include:

9.1 The problem of language

Language identifies a people more than other traits, including customs, traditions, dressing, attitudes and other behavioural patterns. It is therefore a very significant instrument of inculturation. Nathaniel (1994) observes that language plays the most leading role in the entire effort to bring Christianity much more closer to Africans; it makes the Christian message clearer and more meaningful. The Germans, the French, Italians and English people celebrate their liturgy, including paraliturgical activities in their various languages. Their ministers preach in their languages. When the liturgy is celebrated in Latin or other languages, it is usually for a special purpose. Here in Africa and Nigeria in particular, although much has been achieved, there are still many ministers who cannot preach or administer the sacraments in their local languages. They might be very good in Latin, Italia, French or Spanish, but when it comes to their local languages, they find it difficult to communicate. They seem not to have taken note that the language of the people is a key factor in evangelization.

9.2 The Problem of scepticism

Numerous African Independent Churches have obviously taken the initiative of adapting the Christian religion to the mentality and lifestyle of the African people. These adaptation are found in the area of liturgy: sacred music, dancing, drumming and the use of African art and local materials at worship. They have adapted the devotional prayers and hymns to suit the African mode of worship and needs.

However, Nathaniel (1994) observes that many Bishops, priests and even the lay people of the mainline churches are too cautious in giving any impression that they are imitating the African Independent Churches. For many who belong to this group, they see it as downgrading for Catholics to copy the mode of worship found in these spiritual churches. Many of those who belong to the mainline churches see the leaders of these churches as false prophets. It should however be noted that the mainline churches cannot be said to be imitating the African Independent Churches since both denominations are drawing from the same pool, namely African culture. If this African culture is not evil, immoral or superstitious, and can help give more meaning to Christian beliefs, why should these not be incorporated. This explains why members of the mainline churches desert their churches for these spiritual churches where their spiritual aspirations find more fulfilment.

9.3 Fear of syncretism

Tippet (cited by Yamamori, 1975) defines syncretism as the union of two opposite forces, beliefs, systems or tenets so that the united form is a new thing. This agrees with the understanding of Schreiter (1994), who defines syncretism as the “mixing of elements of two religious systems to the point where at least one, if not both, of the systems loses basic structure and identity”. Pinto (1985) has a dismal concept of syncretism. In his opinion, it is the “fusion of incompatible elements” or the “mingling of authentic notions and realities of the revealed faith with realities of other spiritual worlds”.

Syncretism occurs when basic elements of the gospel are replaced by religious elements from the host culture. It often results from a tendency or attempt to undermine the uniqueness of the gospel as found in the Scriptures or the incarnate Son of God. Many clergy men and women and the laity fear that what we call inculturation may turn out to be another form of what fetish priests, witch doctors and fortune tellers do in African traditional religion. For Nathaniel (1994), even here a lot of work need to be done, namely to purify what appears to be “superstitious” and “syncretistic” and adapt them to the gospel message of liberation.

9.4 Distrust for things African

The distrust for things that are African is another serious obstacle to the progress of inculturation. Many Africans are afraid and ashamed of being Africans. With the slave trade and later colonialism, the whites gave blacks the impression that they were a superior race. In French colonies, through the principle of ‘assimilation’, they tried to stop the indigenous languages of colonies, which they considered inferior to the French Language. In British colonies, English was taught at schools. Many Africans have grown with the impression that their language is inferior. Many Africans, see their traditional poetry, including freelancing with songs, dancing, and theatrical renditions as pagan. When we lose our culture, we lose our identity, we suffer self-alienation because we become less African, and unfortunately never European. To achieve our goal in inculturation, Nathaniel (1994) argues that we must liberate ourselves from this negative self-image syndrome.

10. Conclusion

For many in Africa, inculturation is limited to the activities in the Church premises, especially in the area of translation and liturgy. However, inculturation must not be limited to any particular field or aspect of evangelization in Africa because it is a movement towards full evangelization. John Paul II (1995) avows that it is a process that must underpin the entirety of the evangelization process, ranging from the church’s structure, liturgy, translation and interpretation of scriptures, pastoral method to theological research; it must touch on the personal, cultural, economic and political levels so that Africans can live a holy life. It is a process that must affect even our way of thinking, so that whether in the church or at home or in our working places the process continues to evolve into something integral and dynamic. This therefore calls for the need for research in the field of African cultures in all their complexities.

In the area of scriptures, the African church should be able to make the scriptures accessible to the people of God by translating it into the languages they understand. This has been greatly achieved in Africa, as most cultures now have the sacred scriptures translated into their local languages. However, there remains more to be done, as there are still some tribes that are yet to receive the Word of God in their local languages. The pastoral method is another field for the experimentation of inculturation. Many Christian communities in Africa need to be organized along the lines of the idea of the church as a family of God.

This provides an ecclesiastical structure that is African, and which allows the people of God the opportunity of seeing themselves as a communion of parts which must stand together. This also affects the way they share responsibilities, such that it is not entirely left to the clergy or the lay faithful. In the area of catechesis, there is the need to take African symbols and cultural values into account. The translations of the catechism into African languages were done from the Catechism of the Council of Trent with little or no adaptations and with foreign languages. Its methodology of questions and answers are not African. Learning through stories and proverbs is more common to the African Background.

Inculturation should also be practiced in such a way that it relates the Gospel of liberation to the experience of the Nigerian woman. Inculturation does two things: it roots the gospel in a culture and inserts that culture into Christianity. To root Christianity in a culture prompts two events: the first is the transformation of the Nigerian culture that oppresses women; secondly, it involves positively developing the culture of the Nigerian people so that they enhance positive potentials towards the development of the woman. Inserting the Gospel of liberation into the experience of women means allowing the gospel to be read and understood in the context of the experience of women, their joys and pains, their hopes, disappointment, their achievements and failures. In this process Christ is again brought into the experience so that they hear him say to them again "Talitha Qumi", which means "Daughter arise", thereby liberating her from the dehumanizing conditions.

It is through inculturation that the church in Africa would reappraise her evangelizing mission in the third millennium so as to maintain and exceed the present successes and redefine its orientations and goals.

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