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The Indispensability of Inculturation For Effective Evangelization: Revisiting The Evangelization of Sub-Saharan Africa

Mark Obeten

College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, mobeten001@csbsju.edu

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**THE INDISPENSABILITY OF INCULTURATION FOR EFFECTIVE
EVANGELIZATION: REVISITING THE EVANGELIZATION OF SUB-SAHARAN
AFRICA**

by

MARK OBETEN

No. 9 New Bussa Close

Garki-Abuja, FCT

Nigeria

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Dr. William Cahoy

Director

Mark Obeten

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This paper argues that the incarnation is a profound moment in the redemptive plan of God and hence paradigm of evangelization. It demonstrates that non-inculturated evangelization lacks depth and may lose the fruits of its labor with time. The evangelization of Sub-Saharan Africa is used as a case in point to show this connection between evangelization and inculturation as inevitable.

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INTRODUCTION

The incarnation in which God the Son took flesh in the womb of Mary, is a profound instance of God's initiative for human redemption and the goal of this research is to demonstrate the relevance of inculturation in the evangelization of a people. The church exists to evangelize and so everything she does is connected to this foundational and constitutive commissioning quest for the salvation of humankind. The content of her evangelization is the Good News of Jesus Christ for the salvation of the whole world.¹ The salvation of souls is intrinsically connected to the long history of God's desire and initiative to reconcile humankind to himself midwifed by the divinely orchestrated process of revelation reaching apogee in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, the second person of the Blessed Trinity.² The fact that Jesus fully assumed the human nature without suppressing his weakness but in solidarity with humanity,³ became like us in everything but sin,⁴ is the starting point for any meaningful consideration on the subject of inculturation.

This paper asserts with great respect, the fact that there was a great Christian evangelization stride in Africa⁵ in the 19th century with great fruits but that there was a significant lack of depth in the African's reception of the faith and even in the percentage of those who accepted the faith. This shallowness was occasioned by the approach of evangelization which was, to say the least,

¹ It is important to understand that the salvific work of Jesus brings redemption to humanity, according to the will of God, and not just the Christian. Karl Rahner, in his *inclusivist* theology of religions also makes the point that "this salvific will cannot be understood in any other way except as related to all people because a salvific will related only to Christians would make no sense to begin with. It will also contradict the fact that Jesus Christ is intended from the outset as the redeemer of the world." This eventually paved the way for his "Anonymous Christian" theology (Rahner, 317).

² Jacques DuPuis has a very rich articulation to scriptural evidences to demonstrate God's inclusive mien, ab initio, in terms of the salvation outside the chosen people (The Jews, but also the Christians). Cf. DuPuis31-33.

³ Gorringer, 488.

⁴ This research work on Christology takes seriously the fact that Jesus is fully human and so deems it necessary to clarify that the fact that Jesus did not sin (like us in everything but sin) does not in any way mean that he did not know or assume a part of the human nature; for sin was never part of human nature at the beginning. It was only after the fall that human nature took on a certain inclination to sin.

⁵ Africa will basically be used to refer to Sub-Saharan Africa in this paper.

hostile to the idea of inculturation. It shall progress by making some quick but relevant conceptualizations, to the extent they can foster better understanding in its quest. An overview of evangelization and the history of Christianity in Africa shall properly position it to delve into the scriptural and theological foundations for inculturation; leading it to making a case for the necessity of an understanding of evangelization basically as inculturation.

EVANGELIZATION

The term Evangelization has its foundation in the initiative of God for the salvation of the entire human race. God revealed himself progressively to man, through the prophets and through salvific events, until he brought to completion this self-revelation by sending his own Son as the climax and pattern of salvation. And as the *General Directory for Catechesis* (GDC) puts it, by coming into the world, "[Jesus Christ] completed and perfected Revelation, he did this by way of his presence and self-manifestation - by words and works, signs and miracles, but above all by his death and glorious resurrection from the dead, and finally by sending the Spirit of truth."⁶ In sending the spirit, Jesus empowers the community of believers to "go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation (Mark 16:15) and by doing so, to continue to expand the spread of the faith;" hence the GDC maintains that "the Church "exists in order to evangelize," that is "the carrying forth of the Good News to every sector of the human race so that by its strength it may enter into the hearts of men and renew the human race."⁷

The propriety of evangelization in the church is well expressed by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, as the reason the church exists:

⁶ *General Directory for Catechesis*, #40

⁷ GDC #46

It is a task and mission which the vast and profound changes of present-day society make all the more urgent. Evangelizing is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize, that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of His death and glorious resurrection.⁸

The term Evangelization will therefore be understood throughout this work as everything that the church does or puts into the joyful proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ in fulfillment of the mandate that the Lord himself has given, for the salvation of souls (*salus animarum*).

This understanding necessitates encounter with different people across the world with their peculiar and diverse cultural orientations. One concern that necessarily follows this understanding would be, how does the church transmit the gospel to the peoples and cultures of the world in a way that makes it attractive enough for people to be drawn to accepting and allowing the it to transform them? Pope Francis relates well with this concern in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, when he says, “It is not by proselytizing that the Church grows, but ‘by attraction’.”⁹ So, will the church use the same method and language for every culture? Does a particular culture become the necessary medium for communicating the good news? Are there cultures that have no capacity for the good news, in which case they must be supplanted by the imposition of another culture in order to be capacitated for the good news and so be saved - is there a normative Christian culture?

This link between evangelization and the worldview of those to be evangelized is such that evangelizers, by reaching this understanding, become agents of inculturation, agents, bringing about the incarnation of the word among such a people. Schineller encapsulates this argument

⁸ *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, #14

⁹ *Evangelii Gaudium*, #15

forthrightly when he asserts that all preachers of the gospel are agents of inculturation: “Wherever the gospel is lived, wherever it is preached, we have the obligation to search continuously for ways in which the good news can be more deeply lived, celebrated and shared. This process is none other than the process of inculturation.”¹⁰

CULTURE

The term culture is simply used to refer to the totality of the way of life of a people. It is what makes one group of people different from others and the embodiment of their uniqueness as a people. There is a very wide variety of things that could be taken into consideration in trying to access the culture of a given people. This includes but is not limited to their language, worldview, process of initiation and socialization, their marriage rites, food, drinks and so on. Culture encompasses the entire worldview of a people and as such affects the way they perceive things in the world. This understanding also has an implication for the way a people will fair when they interact with other religions. For example, in *An Introduction to New Testament Christology*, Raymond Brown argues that there are truths about Jesus that were implicit in his words and actions, but which have become explicit by the gospel’s encounter with certain cultures.¹¹ How does this apply in the encounter between Christianity and new peoples/cultures. What are the indicators of an implicit presence of Christ that this encounter and the incarnation of the word in that culture can make explicit? So, how did the encounter of the Christian religion and the African milieu go, given the fact the African traditions and the religions seem so much tied together in many cases?

¹⁰ Schineller, 33.

¹¹ Brown, 14-15.

AFRICAN THEOLOGY AND CHRISTOLOGY

In various hidden ways God offers light and truth to all men and women.¹² Hence the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council speak of God's initiative for the salvation of the human race by affirming that the seeds of the word (*semina verbi*) are present in all cultures, not only in the Christian tradition.¹³ In this way, the council makes a very significant point on the universal Fatherhood of God. This realization goes to admit that there is, even if the littlest, an idea of God in every culture. Of course, this theological posture is the starting point for any true Christology. Hence, Schineller maintains that the agent of inculturation does not enter into godless contexts but steps onto holy ground insofar as God is already in contact with a given context, even if in imperfect and hidden ways.¹⁴ There is this presence of God which is understood as the *praeparatio evangelica*¹⁵ - the divine initiative whereby God prepares all peoples for the acceptance of the Good News even before the arrival of any evangelists.

It is plausible to assert that the pre-colonial Africa was not godless and was not devoid of theology. As a matter of fact, there was and still is a Traditional African Religion which tends to see the hand of God in everything, just everything - a rather superlative consciousness of the existence of the divine creator and ruler of the world, which can be seen in the way Africans talk about God and name various realities about themselves from their idea of God. The fact that the African religions have various deities has never really meant the worship of various gods but a

¹² Schineller, 46

¹³ *Ad Gentes*, #6 & 22

¹⁴ Schineller, 46. Of course, this does not suggest God is imperfect but points to an imperfect articulation of God's self-revelation in such a context.

¹⁵ Cf. Johnson, 98.

strong appeal to intermediaries between the people and the almighty God. Therefore, any prolific African Christology must grow out of/flow from this already existing theology.

SCRIPTURAL FOUNDATION FOR INCULTURATION AS EVANGELIZATION

The experience of Paul and Barnabas in their missionary journeys is a very important spring board into this consideration of the theme of inculturation and how it relates to the church's evangelizing mission today. One clear biblical expression of inculturation in the evangelization of peoples is Acts 15:1-35 - the conflict leading to the Jerusalem council in which, as it were, the apostles literally said to the Greeks that they did not need to become Jews before they can accept Christianity: you can be Christians even as Greeks. Put differently, your culture has nothing to do with circumcision and so we impose no burden of circumcision on you. The council used that opportunity to clarify the real demands of the Christian life. It is also a positive sign to recall that the decision of the apostles was motivated by compassion and mercy; chief attributes of God in his relationship with humanity.

From the foregoing, it is clear that there are certain things in strange cultures which may be completely different from what the evangelizer is familiar with and which may never have been part of his or her own cultural heritage. Such a moment calls for careful study and discernment. In the first place, the evangelist needs to understand what the people do and why they do it. While it is possible to discover that the practice is really fetish and antithetical to the Christian faith, it may also be a gift in disguise, for building up varieties of ways in which the Christian faith may be practiced. So, the simple fact that the culture is different does not determine whether it is consistent or inconsistent with the gospel.

In certain cases also, all that is needed is a careful interaction to bring the evangelizer to a realization that the practices in that culture have a way of pointing towards the message that he or she brings to the people and that building up on what is already a part of their life can make for smooth and speedy incarnation of the gospel among such a people, their preparation for the gospel (*praeparatio evangelica*), having been placed in motion by God. Lamin Sanneh wraps this point beautifully: “If, as early Christians believed, God is the universal source of life and truth, they were right to seek and see evidence of God’s prevenient activities in the cultures preceding them. This way of seeing things implies that no culture was fundamentally alien to the source of life and truth, and therefore mission was an assurance of continuity with that insight.”¹⁶

The conversation of Paul with the Athenians at the Areopagus represents another apical moment in the biblical foundation of inculturation. “For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with the inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore, what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). This text is of particular importance because of its link to the *Logos* Christology. It also shows how God, with his work, is constantly present among his people even before the arrival of any evangelizers. Paul’s reaction to the Athenians’ altar to the *unknown god* was the starting point of their conversation. He began from what they knew and led them to what was present yet unknown - God. They already knew their need for God, but had not at the time, any Christian knowledge of him. In this way Paul was able to establish God’s presence and call the people to properly identify God, in whom they lived and moved and had their being.

¹⁶ Sanneh, 43.

The question of the Christian approach to culture is always a dynamic process, which starts with the gospel taking people as they are when it encounters them. It then continues to transform their worldviews, their habits and actions and relationships into the image of Christ. The gospel cannot be transmitted to or from people independent of their culture. But then comes the argument of this research. At what point did evangelization cease to be in line with the Christian tradition as to becoming a supplanting of the culture of a people?

In regard to the experience of the evangelization of the African people, Michael Cook noted; “what I observed in Latin America is similar to what I observed in Africa: the experience of the people has too often been one in which their history has been suppressed, their culture despised, their spirituality alienated, and their communal values of solidarity and cooperation devalued.”¹⁷ This is very important in leading us to appreciating the immense need for the sustenance of discussions and efforts in regard to inculturation in Africa. The spiritual alienation has continued to stand as a barrier of difference between the African and Christianity on practiced in most parts of the continent. Sometimes it is difficult to know what the right questions are and as we shall see, the problem has always been the association of colonization and evangelization.¹⁸

Schineller also identifies a difficulty that confronts inculturation of the Christian message in Nigeria, for example, and talks about this in terms of primary and secondary evangelization.

¹⁷ Cook, 675.

¹⁸ Inculturation as discussed in this work may also be seen as a form of contextual theology. This present research, while staying on Inculturation as an African quest, is cognizant of Liberation Theology in Latin America which is rooted in the incarnational understanding of the Christian faith, focusing on praxis and amplifying the cries for a preferential option for the poor just as Christ entered history identifying with the poor and homeless right from his birth in a manger. It is a theology “which begins from the perception of injustice in the society and is an attempt to think through every aspect of theology from the standpoint of the oppressed, of solidarity with the oppressed” cf. Corringe, 481; See also, Gustavo Gutierrez. “The Task and Content of Liberation Theology,” Boff Leonardo. *Liberating Grace*.

The fact is that the lack of adequate inculturation in previous missionary efforts has often resulted in the need to focus on inculturation. In Nigeria today, for example, one is not sharing the gospel for the first time with those who have never heard of Jesus Christ. Rather, one encounters a Western European form or model of Christianity that is widespread and growing, but a form that is not indigenous to Nigeria. In other words, one has to, in some way, de-westernize Christianity, strip it down to the essentials, in order to creatively enculturate the gospel values into Nigeria. And this, I suggest, may be much more difficult than inculturation into a society or village that has never heard of Jesus Christ.¹⁹

So, part of the questions to be raised in regard to inculturation in Nigeria is whether it is about re-evangelization or inculturation of the people; evangelization or de-westernization of the people. This makes the dictum all the truer, that it is easier to learn than to unlearn. The African Christian for the most part, has learned that to be Christian is to be un-African. Becoming a Christian seems to begin from ‘de-africanization.’

INCULTURATION

Inculturation is acknowledged today as an integral part of communicating the gospel, if the gospel indeed is to be communicated... The theology of the West, we now recognize, was itself, a limited contextual product of a particular set of experiences. Every time and every culture has to reflect on faith on its own terms and needs to use its own lens to interpret scripture, past doctrinal formulations, ethical practices, and liturgical customs.²⁰

A very important question in the quest for inculturation, in Africa, is the same question put forth by Peter Phan, when he sought to have a Jesus Christ with an Asian face; “does one need to be spiritually a Semite or intellectually a Westerner in order to be a Christian?”²¹ This question resonates very well in the African quest for inculturation. The current situation of Christianity in Africa shows that there are two broad tasks of inculturation which correspond to the time of evangelization and the period of ‘re-evangelization.’

¹⁹ Schineller, 10.

²⁰ Bevans and Schroeder, 69-70.

²¹ Phan, 399.

Schineller describes inculturation in terms of the efforts of Christians in particular places to understand and celebrate their Christian faith in a way peculiar to that situation or context.²² He views inculturation as the incarnation of the Christian life and of the Christian message in a 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 culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about ‘a new creation.’²³ This idea of inculturation as a way of incarnating the word of God is of particular interest to this paper. It means that evangelization, as a process, is therefore supposed to bring about a new creation. This process may not lead to this creation and consequent expansion of the Christian gospel if the culture of the evangelizer is imposed on the people evangelized. In a word, Christianity stands to lose, if evangelization is devoid of inculturation.

Pope John Paul II expands the gains of inculturation in an address he titled, “The African Bishops’ challenge” thus,

By respecting, preserving, and fostering the particular values and richness of your people’s cultural heritage, you will be in a better position to lead them to a better understanding of the mysteries of Christ, which is to be lived in the noble, concrete and daily experience of the African life... it is the question of bringing Christianity into the very center of African life, and lifting up all African life to Christ. Thus, not only is Christianity relevant to Africa, but Christ, in the members of his body is himself African.²⁴

It will appear then that the church’s hierarchy is not closed to the whole issue of inculturation in evangelizing and living the gospel but at the apostolic era and then in recent times. Hence Jorge Presmanes could write; “The openness to cultural dialogue that marked the evangelizing effort of primitive Christianity came to an end by the fourth century when the Church wedded itself to the

²² Schineller, 1.

²³ Schineller, 6.

²⁴ Schineller, 9.

Roman Empire.” Suggesting that the idea of supplanting cultures was never in the early Christian character but of political influence, he continues: “The bold and prophetic understanding of an inculturated gospel for all nations was usurped first by the power and might of the Empire and subsequently by the privileged and powerful position assumed by the Church within European social structures.”²⁵

THE INCARNATION AS A PARADIGM FOR INCULTURATION

The inseparability of inculturation from genuine evangelization is excellently linked to the incarnation in the Post-synodal exhortation of Pope John Paul II *Ecclesia in Africa* thus:

The incarnation refers to a truth of the Christian Faith that God the Son, the Word, became flesh and dwelt among us (*Jn* 1:14). It is in the same manner that the Good News, the Word of Jesus Christ proclaimed to the nations, *must take root* in the life-situation of the hearers of the Word. Inculturation is precisely this insertion of the Gospel message into cultures. For the Incarnation of the Son of God, precisely because it was complete and concrete, was also an incarnation in a particular culture.²⁶

This quote sounds very nice yet there is still an important question that it does not answer: what exactly is the meaning of insertion of the gospel message and how is this to be carried out? We find a glimpse to the answer we seek here by returning to the same document in an earlier statement where it says, “Inculturation includes two dimensions: on the one hand, “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity” and, on the other, “the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.” This document went on to insist that inculturation is an urgent priority for the various particular churches in order to make the gospel firmly rooted in Africa: *It is a requirement for evangelization.*²⁷

²⁵ Presmanes, 59-76.

²⁶ *Ecclesia in Africa*, #60

²⁷ *Ecclesia in Africa* #59.

THE HISTORY OF EVANGELIZATION IN AFRICA

In the Post Synodal exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, Pope John Paul II, gave three stages in the evangelization of Africa. This may be understood as the period of the first evangelization, coterminous with the apostolic era; the second era of evangelization which was in the modern period and saw to the first efforts at reaching Africa, South of the Sahara and the Third, which was a more organized and systematic evangelization of the sub Saharan Africa, recording massive success.²⁸ It is this third stage of evangelization that is directly concerned with the focus of this research. It is also very instructive to note here that this period of evangelization coincided with and was closely connected to the colonization of the continent of Africa following the partitioning of Africa according the interests in available natural resources by Europeans at the Berlin Conference of 1884 - 1885.²⁹ So that both colonization and evangelization were happening concomitantly.

Part of the concerns of this paper is to review the Christian religion practiced in most parts of Africa today as merits from Twentieth Century *colovangelizers* of the continent. For Michael Cook, today, “Africa suffers from a kind of faith schizophrenia,” not in the conception of God, but in the interpretation and understanding of Christ.... Christ entered the African scene as a forceful, impatient and unfriendly tyrant. He was presented as invalidating the history and institutions of a people in order to impose his rule upon them.³⁰ One may therefore speak of the history of Evangelization in Africa as one that is marked by a continuous struggle to be more relevant in the African’s socio-cultural reality.

²⁸ *Ecclesia in Africa*, # 30.

²⁹ Shepperson, 37-48.

³⁰ Cook, 669.

INCULTURATION: ECLECTICISM OR SYNCRETISM

Paul acknowledged that the people in Athens were already serving the almighty God without knowing it, hence the inscription *to an unknown god*. He did not stop there but went on to set certain boundaries regarding the form ‘serving the unknown God’ must take if they must properly worship the almighty God as revealed by the Risen Lord. Also, in Acts 14:14-18, he invited the Gentiles in Lystra, who tried to worship him and Barnabas. In effect, it becomes necessary to take note of those things that could be preserved in the African culture without any injury to the proper practice of the Christian faith while it is also necessary to guard against the possibility of simply mixing up practices of both Traditional African Religion and Christianity in the name of inculturation. This exactly is the root and thrust of the argument for or against inculturation as we have it today.

African Christians are asking a question that they doubt was ever asked by their 19th century *colovangelizers*, given that their religious practices are closely tied to their culture. There are two possibilities that can result from this kind of marriage of religion and culture. First is to confuse what the African does simply because of his make up as an African, which has nothing to do with his religion, and label it religion; in which case, a new religion would simply dismiss all such practices as pagan worship. The second lens is to make the necessary distinction between what is culture and what is religion for the African. If this is properly distinguished, then there is room to properly introduce Christianity to the African without making him any less an African. Pope Benedict VXI corroborates this point thus:

It would be helpful to recall that the First Synodal Assembly for Africa spoke of the need for an in-depth study of African traditions and cultures. The Synod members noted a dichotomy between certain traditional practices of African cultures and the specific demands of Christ’s message. In her concern for relevance and credibility, the Church needs to carry out a thorough discernment in order to

identify those aspects of the culture which represent an obstacle to the incarnation of Gospel values, as well as those aspects which promote them.³¹

Schineller argues that evangelization has to be deep rooted in inculturation as this is a very foundational reality in Christianity. He uses the fact of the existence of four gospels to show how the early Christians bore witness to Christ to different people living in different communities with different backgrounds:

The existence of the four gospels indicates the absolute necessity for inculturation. The story of Jesus is multifaceted, and the communities to whom the good news was preached were also diverse. Some were Jewish Christians while others were Gentiles; some were struggling under persecution while others were flourishing and expanding. Under the inspiration of the Spirit and through the creative efforts of the first Christians, the story of Jesus is presented in the gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each of them provides both a model for inculturation and also, a message to be enculturated, the good news of God's love in Jesus Christ. And each of them presents this good news in its own particular creative, inspired way.³²

Although it is understandably difficult to accept a different cultural tradition into an existing (Christian) community, as we saw in Acts 15, we may be right to say that this difficulty remains a setback to the great sacrifices of the European Christian Missionaries of the late 19th century.

³¹ Benedict XVI, *Africae Munus*, #36. Here, I recall how growing up, Christianity meant Westernization and the experience of Mr Okon strengthens this claim. Okon had some pieces of Precious stones in his house while most of his neighbors had holy pictures and rosaries hanging in their homes. The entire neighborhood saw him as an Idol worshiper and felt he was playing double standards by going to church and still having these stones in his house. It turns out that this man simply liked these beautiful stones (some of which he inherited from his late Father) and placed them conspicuously in his house as a thing of pride and as decoration. It is important to point out here that those concerns are by no means to be laughed off as mere delinquent quibbles. This is exactly what happened to most of the artifacts that Africans kept in their homes prior to their conversion to Christianity but were made to dispose of them on the pretext of Idolatry. Today, in a Catholic school one finds the same kind of stones decorating various places even around the School of Theology and St John's University as a whole. So, the Europeans refused Jesus incarnating in the African, presenting a Jesus that just could not be African but readily replaced the 'Africanness' of a man in order to welcome him into the Christian religion.

³² Schineller, 8.

LOGOS CHRISTOLOGY AND THE QUEST FOR AN AFRICAN CHRISTOLOGY

This paper posits here that the long and ancient Christological tradition of the Church has been obviously enriched by the depth of the Greek culture and Philosophy. These and more were only possible because the Greeks were not forced to become Jews in order to be Christians. Christianity was received based on their culture and it has turned out to be a gift to the church and Christology. The Nicenoconstantinopolitan and Chalcedonian Creeds are crucial in appraising how much this interplay between Greek culture and revelation has led to great respite in the times of crises and consequently developed church doctrines and practices.³³

In his homily at the 40th anniversary of the Yoruba Liturgico-cultural group's celebration in May 2007,³⁴ Fr Thomas Makuonjola Ilesanmi recounted how he and a few other classmates were marched to the Rector's office for expulsion by the Rev Sister in charge of the liturgy in the seminary. The charge against them being that they were introducing "juju worship" into the liturgy of the seminary, despite its prohibition by the liturgist. Apparently, they had made several attempts at dialogue to be permitted to introduce some Yoruba songs that expressed the same things they always sang in Latin and struggled to understand but the liturgist will not give her nod. In the same vein, certain seminarians were said to have been ostracized for introducing some percussion instruments into the seminary, even before having the chance to play these instruments. Of a truth, Africans are culturally very expressive and loud in worship and this does not contradict Christianity.

³³ Sanneh, 46-47.

³⁴ This was in my fourth year of seminary formation. By this time, the celebration of liturgy in the seminary by the various cultural groups had become a custom in Bodija. Like many other Alumni, I will say that Mass was never so heavenly like on the grand finale of one liturgical cultural group or another.

The question sometimes is, what has the rich tradition of New Yam festival, in Ugep, Southern Nigeria, contributed to the understanding of Christianity, more than a century since the Christian religion arrived? Up till now, the New yam Festival, which is the biggest occasion and the gathering of Ugep sons and daughters from across the globe is still seen as intrinsically different from the Christian religion, yet 80% of the Christian population of the village take part in the festival in various capacities. This is an opportunity that has not been tapped into due to the way and manner the people were made to receive Christianity in the culture of the colonial masters and the view of evangelization as ‘Europeanization.’ Theology must be open to the aspirations of the African if it is to help Christianity to become truly incarnate in the life of the peoples of this continent.

The following quote from Richard Gaillardetz suggests that evangelization that precludes inculturation breaks from the tradition of the apostles and this is a good way to wrap up this section:

The Christian faith was never understood as a passive acceptance of some body of information but as an active and ongoing appropriation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. At Vatican II, we find a renewed sense that if Christ laid the foundation for the church, it is the spirit who continuous to animate the church, guiding it along its pilgrim journey... Moreover, those who received the apostolic message [at Pentecost] heard it “in their own language.” The Spirit did not erase the cultural distinctiveness of the hearers of the gospel, who came from places as diverse as “Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya and belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome” (Acts 2:8-10)... For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose no further burdens on you than these essentials (Acts 15:28).³⁵

Therefore, while Africa craves liberation from unjust and oppressive systems or regimes of governments that have continued to impoverish a greater chunk of its populace, an equally fundamental need would be met by addressing the issue of inculturation. The two are not mutually

³⁵ Gaillardetz, 180-181.

exclusive but must be made to receive serious attention by African Theologians of today.

Inculturation is creating a room for the risen Lord in the heart of Africans. Cook observes that,

the risen Jesus experiences Africa in her authentic culture, that web of meanings and values that informs her way of life and comes to expression in her stories, her celebrations of life, and her religious symbols. Cultures are composite with some elements unique and others common across all cultures. Every culture can and must learn from other cultures. Cultures can be romanticized as invariably good, holy, and valuable and so can fail to be open to encounters with other cultures. However, acculturation, the meeting of diverse cultures, is unavoidably necessary in our contemporary world of increasing global consciousness and interdependence. An acculturated way of life, then, must bring a sense of freedom in that it enables personal and communal self-transcendence in relation to others and to God. The possibility of such self-transcendence is Jesus' gift to Africa as host at the banquet of God's reign.³⁶

All theology, if it is valid, is practical; that is, it touches and transforms the lives of people at all levels. Authentic theology emerges from the concrete commitments of many people over long periods of time. It must be grounded in the lived experiences of the people at the grassroots whose voices must be heard but it also must come to expression through the visions and genius of one or more persons who can feel and express the indigenous experience and instinctive pulse of the people.³⁷

CONCLUSION

There is a subtle difference between the agents of evangelization and the agents of inculturation; as Pope Paul VI observed, the process of inculturation cannot be effected by those who are the evangelizers but that in the final analysis the members of the culture themselves are ultimately responsible for it³⁸ and there is a sense in which this can account for the difference between evangelization and inculturation. This research has shown among other things that,

³⁶ Cook, 690-691.

³⁷ Cook, 691.

³⁸ *Evangeli Nutiandi* #60.

evangelization and inculturation are two branches of the same quest – the salvation of souls. It may be likened to the process of communication which remains incomplete until it has been received and assimilated by the receiver. For proper communication to take place, there is a shared responsibility in which the sender is careful to ensure that the message gets to the receiver and in a decodable form and, the receiver also has to listen properly and be open to receive the message sent.

Therefore, the argument of this paper is that, evangelization is the communication of Christ and the message of his salvific thirst for the souls of all men and women, from every nation, tribe and peoples. This communication cannot be complete if it is not inculturated. Evangelization, whether primary or secondary lacks depth if it is not properly received by the process of inculturation. Non-inculturated evangelization is, to say the least, half-baked and the faith that accrues from such an effort stands the risk of an inimical manifestation with time. More so, while for the most time, many Africans think that to be Christian is to lose one's African identity, this paper argues that the only authentic Faith an African can ever have is the faith that is mediated through the Africa's culture and with a transforming effect.

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