

FAITH AND CULTURE DIALOGUE: IMPLEMENTING THE *ECCLESIA IN AFRICA* FOR AN AUTHENTIC IGBO (AFRICAN) CHURCH

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Abstract

The *Redemptoris missio* of Christ entrusted to the Church, full expressed in Christianity is possible through *faith* that is well rooted in the *culture* of the people to be evangelized. Christianity in human society is simply a replication of faith in continuous dialogue with the culture of the people. This *Faith-Culture Dialogue* is very crucial and possible for an authentic African Church as one implements the papal document *Ecclesia in Africa*. Using the method of critical analysis the researcher finds out that until Christian faith is rooted in the way and life of the people as their culture, evangelization is simply shallow. *Ecclesia in Africa* however gives boost and credence for this needed inculturation for an authentic African Church.

Keywords: Faith, Culture, African Church, *Ecclesia in Africa*

Introduction

Christianity though neither new nor foreign to Africans is yet to be “at home” in Africa and precisely in Igbo land. However, “in the course of time, with the advent of indigenous clergy and as the laity becomes more enlightened, the block of ignorance with regards to our culture began to billow away”.¹ Then, it began, like a dawn, Christians in particular began to appreciate our African cultural values. In the light of Gospel message then, the bad and good aspects of our culture started coming to lime light. This moment ushers in the era of *Africanization* of the Church or precisely, the indigenization of Christian religion among the Igbo people.

The first input expected of the Catholic Church in her evangelizing mission was the positive revaluation of traditional religions and cultural values of the people. This tendency which emphasises proper understanding and appreciation of African concept of Christianity has spurred many theologians today to embark on developing authentic African interpretation of the Christian revelations. Today, more than ever, in our bid towards the *Africanization* of the Church, we talk of African Theology, Protest Theologies and Inculturation. These are efforts toward a dialogue between faith and

¹ Iyiobi, C., *The Church: A threat to our culture*, Enugu: Truth pack Publishers, 1998, p.9.

culture, that is, maintaining fidelity to Christ and Africa. This is an intercultural dialogue: Christian culture and traditional culture. However, we must note that this dialogue is “meaningless for a Christianity which is no more than a transposition of foreign dogmas, rites and customs and which breaks abruptly with African traditions. But, it is a very serious problem for a faith which does not impose itself like a law, but sensitively assumes the characteristics of a culture. It is clear that, that kind of openness demands some pacification and liberation”²

This intercultural or transcultural dialogue invariably becomes a challenge towards change of attitude, understanding co-operation and intercourse between faith and culture. The second Vatican council made a bold move in this regard. The special Assembly for African Synod of Bishops and Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* of Pope John Paul II are efforts towards translating in practical terms, the full realization of the renewal of African church with a spirit of new evangelization and proper inculturation. Since there is the word of God and African culture as a given, the role of this new evangelization, which needs new evangelizers, is to reintegrate, adapt, reactivate and incarnate the gospel message into African traditional life and thought patterns taking cognizance of the influence of science and technology in the continent. It is a fact that Christianity presupposes a culture as well as African culture. In addition, the new evangelization in Africa must be aware of this otherwise the church in Africa could derail of the move for proper Africanization of the pursuance of a methodological practice that will guarantee fidelity to faith while remaining true to our Africanity.

My exposition in the chapters below is a review of the church in Africa and Igbo in particular and her need for renewal. This will be understood properly as I expose or examine the implications and aftermath effects of the Christianity that came, was practised and existed along with European colonization. Moreover, to propose an authentic Igbo Catholic Church in the light of post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, this writ-up will examine the possibilities of implementing the demands of such post-synodal document through faith-culture dialogue.

² Elea, J.M, “Ancestors and Christian Faith: An African Problem” in Herman, S.(ed), *Liturgy and Cultural Religious Traditions*, NY: Seabury Press, 1977. P.34.

Succinctly put, sound faith-culture dialogue leads to proper inculturation. This inculturation as a means or method of new evangelization is directly and essentially connected with the theology of incarnation. In this line of thought, we can say with certainty that Christ means to be African, to be Igbo, to belong to every race and people. Christ, of course, was real Emmanuel, theologically and culturally. He was like us in all things except sin. In our humanity, He was one with us. And I believe that there is nothing absolutely wrong or obscure with Christ being an African; and the church having an African face in the whole body of the universal church. In line with proper inculturation of building an authentic African church in an evangelizing mission, the appeal of the congregation for the propagation of faith, to the Vicar Apostolic of China suffices thus:

Do not waste your zeal or your powers of persuasion in getting these people to change their rites, customs, or ways of life, unless these be very obviously opposed to faith and morals. For what could be more ridiculous than to import France, Spain, Italy or any other part of Europe into China?

What you carry with you is not a national culture but a message which does not reject or offend the sound traditions of any country, but rather wants to safeguard and foster them³ In the same vein then, African church will not be a different case. Hence, the need for sincere inculturation and proper faith and culture dialogue.

Ecclesia in Africa: An Overview of the Papal Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation

The post-synodal apostolic exhortation, *ecclesia in Africa*, of Pope John Paul II, given at Yaoundé in Cameroun on 14th September, 1995, is a detailed and realistic study of the challenges and future prospects of the evangelization in Africa on the threshold of third millennium of the Christian faith. The synod fathers were assisted by qualified representatives of the people of God: clergy, religions and laity. This papal document, *ecclesia in Africa* (EA) was primarily addressed to the pastors and lay Catholics, and other religion other Christian confessions, African Traditional religion followers, people of good will and Africans in general.

³ The congregation for the propagation of faith in Asiegbu, M., and Umezina, C.C., *Fidelity to Christ and Africa: A Biography of Msgr. Martin Maduka*, Onitsha: Veritas Printing and Publishing co. Ltd., 1994, p. 132.

This special assembly for Africa of the synod of Bishops (SSAAB) examined in six chapters, the theme: the church in Africa and her evangelizing mission towards the year 2000: you shall be my witness (Acts 1:8).

In chapter one, the synod fathers regards the Assembly as “an historic moment of grace for the local churches of African’s”. They recognise her greater responsibility of being both catholic and African. This Special Assembly showed to the whole world that the local church of Africa hold a right place in the communion of the church, they are entitled to preserve and to develop “their own traditions without in any way lessening the primacy of the chair of Peter (EA, no II)

Chapter two shows in three phases, a brief history of the two thousand years of Christianity and evangelization in the continent of Africa. The first phase recalls ‘the glorious splendour of African’s Christian past which goes back to the times of Apostles. There is equally a roll-call of saintly Africa popes, countless saints, martyrs, confessors and virgins, great doctors and writers then. The second phase (1st and 16thC.) portrays the periods of exploration, colonization and evangelization of African continent. The third phase of 19th century ushered in a systematic evangelization in Africa. It was a period of great missionary activities and rapid growth of faith and faith-response in Africa. In general, Pope challenges Africans “to reject way of living which does not correspond to the best of your traditions and your Christian faith.....look to the riches of your traditions, look to the faith.....here you will find Christ.....” (EA, no.48).

Chapter three deals with evangelization and inculturation as the church fulfils her Lord’s mandate of making “disciples of all nations (cf Jn20:21) oblivious of the national differences like traditional, racial language and cultural barriers. Nevertheless the church “exists in order to evangelize” (EA, no.69.). The need for evangelization of inculturation was stressed as well as its challenges.

In chapter four and five, there is a review of other present day challenges as family life and marriage. Adequate formation of African missionaries was stressed. Equally the document calls for new evangelization through proper inculturation.

Chapter six and seven dwells on the building of the kingdom of god and the nations of Africa through witnessing to Christ and mission of pacification by

the church; social justice and peace, good administration of public affairs and rule of law.

Conclusively, Pope John Paul II emphasises that “for all peoples of Africa, the best preparation for the new millennium must consist in a firm commitment to implement with great fidelity to the decisions and orientations which, with the Apostolic authority of the successor of Peter, I present in this Exhortation”. (EA, no. 141).

Understanding the Basic Concepts

Culture

It comes from a Latin word *colore, colui, cultum* meaning to cultivate; development of, to acquire. As a concept, the word culture for an African can be said to be the sum total of the beliefs, thought, art, music, myths, proverbs, signs, morals, symbols, laws, customs and all other acquired behavioural patterns of a people in a society, transmitted from generation to generation.

Culture is a fact of the spirit and of course, a product of man. Culture is an aspect of humanization. It makes one to have a particular, unique character. Since culture accepts changes, we can say that it is dynamic.

Culture, therefore, does not mean an involuntary act of man rather a deliberate act of man. Consequently, man has been defined as a “*homo culturalis*”, a cultural being. Culture concerns everyone and everything. As Puebla puts it, “culture is something that involves everyone, because it involves everything: work and play, economic, religion, theory and practise”. In relation to our exposition thus we must note that,

Every authentic culture is, in fact, in its own way the bearer of universal values established by God. Culture as every other natural reality and human, is susceptible or open to theological reflection, in the sense that theology students all things in relation to God and in the light of the sacred scripture. From incarnation of Christ into human culture, Christianity will ever remain a fount for human cultures.⁴

⁴ Okike, B.O., “Mission and Culture, Unpublished lecture, 2000.

Inculturation

The practise and reality of inculturation is as old as the salvation history of humanity, and the resultant Christianity. In this sense, incarnation becomes the seed of inculturation. But as a terminology in theological discussion, and its recent application, it seems to be a new concept. Inculturation, "is a process by which the Christian faith or the Gospel message is made one and the same to the culture of the evangelizing community"⁵. For Ayward, S., "inculturation is the ongoing dialogue between faith and culture or cultures". For Asiegbu, M.,

Indeed inculturation does not signify rejection of all elements of a "foreign culture....A culture blind to external influences is locked upon itself and hardly grows. Inculturation entails an inner transformation of a culture in the light of the gospel.... It expresses a harmonization of two lifestyles and cultures into a higher union.⁶

Inculturation therefore is that process of trying to give answer to the questions, enigmas and paradoxes that confront people within their own cultural milieu and background while embracing the christen faith. Expressing the same view, Okike, B., says, "inculturation remains the fusion of the world of God (Text) and a particular culture (context)"⁷.

Because of the enormous task of inculturation, it is identified with popular terms as contextualization, enculturation, concretization and localization of the gospel. However, Echiegu, A., prefers the word *Inkyriosation* meaning *Inchristianization*. For Ekwunife, "inculturation is an encounter of unalloyed gospel message with a new culture". And Pope John Paul II, defined inculturation as, the "the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and the insertion of Christianity in various human cultures"⁸. Suffice it to say then that,

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Asiegbu, M and Umezina, C.C, Fidelity to Christ and Africa: a Biography of Msgr. Mauka, Onitsha: Venitas Printing and Pub. CO. Ltd. 1994, p.146.

⁷ Okike, B.O., Unplished Lectures on Missiology.

⁸ Pope John Paul II Redemptions Mission, 7 Dec. 1990, no. 52.

inculturation is the end product of an understanding between faith and culture dialogue.

Faith

By faith we mean the Christian response to God. Faith is a human attitude, and then, more of a Christian attitude. It is a Christian way of living and interaction. It is one's relationship with God. The future and unknown have meaning to a Christian because of his or her attitude of faith. Through this attitude of faith, one takes the greatest virtuous risk with God; for God on several occasions, with the vicissitudes of life, our faith is tested. Faith is primarily a human attitude towards the Divine. "Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free asset to the whole truth that God has revealed"⁹. Hence, we talk of Christian faith which differentiates us from other religions. As Christians, and Catholics precisely, our faith is a response to one God, fully expressed and synthesised in the creed and elaborated in the doctrines, dogmas and sources of Church's teaching: Tradition, *Migisterium* and Sacred Scripture.

Dialogue

Dialogue is an intellectual activity which according to Longman's dictionary deals with conversation and examines differences of opinion. It's an effort of two people of different groups in coming to an agreement or a consensus. However, such new consensus reached gives rise to a new opinion or asserts a more objective opinion. In a reasonable dialogue, two good heads are ever better than one. In our context then, when faith engages culture in a dialogue the result is inculturation. Such dialogue as this is open and receptive to changes and challenges.

Review of the African and Igbo Catholic: Need for Renewal

After the first Vatican Council (1869-1870) there arose a need to model the church of her obsolete practises and teachings and renew her vigour in adapting to the changing society, hence, the convocation of the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965). During the sacred council sessions,

The word 'aggiornamento' was very influential...Pope John XXIII who convened the council used the word 'aggiornamento' to mean 'updating'. Resonating in all

⁹ The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), Kenya: Paulines Publications 1997. No. 150.

corners of the conciliar hall, it referred to the church's renewal in the light of the gospel to meet demands of the council...¹⁰

Renewal in the spirit of the second Vatican council implicitly means the era of inculturation. The renewal connotes change and denotes need for adaption in a sense of inculturation. In our review, it is clear that Africans are too slow in adapting and hearkening to what the sacred council set out to achieve namely, "to impart an ever increasing vigour to the Christian life of the faith; to adapt more closely to the needs of our age....Accordingly it sees particularly cogent reasons for undertaking the reform and promotion of the liturgy"¹¹. In our local churches there is no serious attempt yet towards a genuine contextualization or adaptation in liturgy or in the whole Catholic Church practises. The situation is disheartening when we consider the rich elements for inculturating the Church that exists in African counties and in Igbo particular. Pope John Paul II, stressed this fact when he said,

African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life.... It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptations to individualism which is so alien to its best traditions¹²

In our assessment, let's take rites for example. After many centuries of Catholicism in Africa with all her rich cultural elements, which rites does African church use in their liturgy so as to be home to her people? As Elea, J.M., said,

Rite is still a paradigm for the difficulties of Christianity attached to a particular type of civilization and incapable of freeing itself from contingent structures in order to open itself up to the universal element present in history¹³.

¹⁰ Ikenga, K.O, and Ejifor, L. "Protest Theologies through Eschatological Lenses" in *Nacaths Journal of bTheology*, Vol. 9, Marcg 13, 1999, P. 6.

¹¹ *Sacrosanctum Concillium (SC)* in Flannery, A. (ed), Vatican II, Vol. 1, NY: COnstellio Press, 1988, no. 1.

¹² Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 14 Sept. 1995, no. 43.

¹³ Elea, J.M., "Ancestors and Christian faith", P. 34.

If not for the Zairean rites of 1988, there is no other particular rite for the African Church to boast of, knowing that “particular rites for African local churches are a ‘right’ instead of a concession”¹⁴.

The Local Churches of Africa is yet to experience *aggiornamento*. And this renewal cannot be achieved except in a proper dialogue between Christianity (faith) and African culture. Those dialogue geared towards proper inculturation give this era of new evangelization more vigour in meeting up with the demands of an authentic African Christianity. Inculturation therefore becomes one of the primary means by which Catholic Church will be deeply rooted in Africa since, “the black African is called by God as black and it is as a black he must accept the word of God and enter the kingdom.....Then will the black Africans moral life be Christian without ceasing to be Africa”¹⁵. However, an inculturation programme which protests against imperialism and seeks liberation of cultures is what the local churches of Africa must implement so as to contribute fully to the universal church as Africans. Realising this need, the synod fathers stressed the urgent task for “evangelization of inculturation, the process by which catechesis ‘takes flesh in various cultures”¹⁶. The whole programme of inculturation simply requires “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity, and on the other hand, the insertion of Christianity, in various human cultures”¹⁷. But, it is disheartening that with regards to the stage and process of inculturation in our local churches that “all along, no serious attempt has been made in genuine incarnation or adaptation in liturgy”¹⁸. Hence, Pope John Paul II, reaffirms inculturation as “urgent priority in the life of the particular churches, for a firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa”¹⁹. The local African churches need a renewal. They need updating. They need proper meaningful and practical inculturation in accordance with the “Lord of Inculturation” who is Christ. This need for renewal according to Msgr. M.O. Maduka is urgent since, “many peoples in Africa regard Christianity as an imported religion or colonialists’ religion and refuse it because of the lack of inculturation. Is this a light matter?”²⁰

¹⁴ Uzukwu E.E., *A listening Church*, Enugu: Snapp Press, 1996, P. 65.

¹⁵ Benezet, B., “Can Morality be Christian in Africa” in *Theology Digest*, Vol. 36, no. 3 fall 1989, 214.

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Orji, G., et al, “Inculturation in Nigerian Church: The Journey so far” in *NACATHS Journal of Theology*, p.54.

¹⁹ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 59.

²⁰ Asiegbu M., and Umezina, C.C., *Fidelity to Christ and Africa*, P.170

Advent of Christianity and Colonization

Africans' encounter with Christianity was as ancient as Christianity herself. As Baur, J. wrote, "Christianity in Africa is not a recent happening nor is it a by product of colonization- its' roots go back to the very time of the Apostles...."²¹ It is interesting equally to note that Christ, Himself, within few days of his birth took refuge in Africa, invariably the Goodnews reached Africa, while Africans tacitly protected the Goodnews that was Christ (cf Mtt 2:13-23). Being aware of this damning truth Msgr. Maduka once wrote in a poem "To Africa" thus,

Oh thou are blest Africa dear
Which served the Lord as Land of peace
For, once you gave with every cheer
The driven Christ a place of ease²²

Being aware of these historical facts of Africa's contribution to the universal church, Pope John Paul II, reiterating the words of Pope Paul VI, wrote,

We think of the churches (Catholics) of Africa whose origins go back to the times of Apostles and are traditionally associated with the name and teaching of Mark the evangelist. We think of their countless Saints, Martyrs, confessors and virgins.... Great doctors and writers....²³

Other contributions of Africa to the universal Church abound. History attests of the beginning of Monastery in Africa by Anthony of Egypt and other, and as well as African Pope like Victor I, Melchiades and Gelasius I. These are some of the ancient glories of Catholicism in Africa amidst the vicissitudes of history. Nevertheless, in the African coasts by Portuguese was soon accompanied by the missionary activities and evangelization of the regions of sub-Sahara Africa. This can be regarded as the second missionary activity in African continent.

Moreover, this second march of Christianity reached Africa along with colonization. Hence, there was clash of cultures: African culture, European

²¹ Baur, J., 2000 Years of Christianity in Africa, Kenya: Paulines Publications, 1994, P. 17

²² Asiegbu, M., and Umezina, C.C., Fidelity to Christ and Africa, P. 29.

²³ Pope John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, no. 31.

culture and Christian culture. Amidst this clash of cultures, there was confusion of values. As Ekwuru, E., opines, “the clash then represents an inward situation of cultural resistance and opposition”²⁴.

This clash of cultures demonstrates the fact that the Igbo traditional culture, a living cultural heritage, is not ready to embrace fully all the Western cultures. Of course, it sounds bizarre for a truly African to forgo his culture for any other. Hence, for the African, to be is to belong with a cultural setting. So, the attempt of European to “brainwash” Africans and infuse their culture as well as Christianity embedded in their culture met a strong resistance and opposition. As Osuagwu, I.M., recaptured the scene, “they had all sorts of bizarre and false ideas about the African continent and its peoples and cultures”²⁵.

However, some of these exigencies and inadequacies of the European colonizers and most importantly, the missionaries in appreciating our African cultural values, for a proper and authentic Christianity, have given rise to many protest theologies here in Africa and beyond. These protest theologies: Black Theology in South Africa; Inculturation Theology in the rest of Africa, and Liberation Theology in America emerged to situate the Gospel message and make it relevance in any particular culture. These theologies, to an extent, confront all sorts of man-made conditions, institutionalised injustice and impositions that seem to condemn some cultures; poor ones and the down-trodden to perpetual dependency, servitude and their cultural alienation; and cultural injustice, which according to Msgr. Maduka, “seems to be by far the worst of all injustice in so far as it is the summary of all injustices. When cultural injustices are committed, they tend to pervade all aspects of human life....”²⁶. That was a situation report parse. It was a “colonized Christianity” with nuances of improper Christianization.

Colonized Christianity: Nuances of Improper Christianization

It has been a fact that after decades of evangelization and missionary activities, Christianity is not yet at home in Africa, especially in Igboland. The daily proliferation of Christianity into several sects or denominations is a living testimony to this fact. I believe that the cause of this dichotomy is a basic misunderstanding of the nature, motive and mission of the church.

²⁴ Ekwuru, E. G., *The Pangs of an African Culture in Travail*, Owerri: Totan Pub, Ltd, 1999, p. 58.

²⁵ Osuagwu, I.M., *African Historical Reconstruction*, Owerri: Assumpta Press, 1999, p. 13.

²⁶ Asiegbo, M. and Umezinwa, C.C., *Fidelity to Christ and Africa*, p. 142.

Many Christians identify the church with European culture which has come simply to destroy the African or Igbo culture. Such Christians view the church as a socio-humane organisation born human machination with its sole task as the impoverishment or at best, the supplantation of people's culture.

In addition, some Catholics and extreme Christians would not like to associate Christianity with anything Africa, Igbo tradition or culture, for such people, they cannot understand how Christ can be an African. For them, they would find it difficult to think that providence would have allowed Christ to incarnate in our cultural milieu thereby identifying with our cultural heritage. Accepted that the European missionaries came that Africans might have a taste of the Goodnews of Christ, but their association with colonial masters seem to blockade their attention at identifying with us, instead, they came to Africa with a mind set at dusting up and off evils that made up the African culture.

Consequently, what these march of Christianity and colonization left behind were differences among nations, confused value systems, clash of cultures, different Christian denominations, antagonism between Christians and other religions especially Catholics and traditional worshippers. Msgr. Maduka laments on the European's effort to rob us off our identity in being Africans Christians thus,

Some foreign missionaries, not realising where their work ended, started to (sic) form and train African students for the priesthood to be carbon copies of themselves, so that these African can live with them "especially" instead of being trained to live with their people (African) for whom they are to be 'Alter Christus'²⁷.

Paths to Neo-Paganism: A Later Year Experience!

The growth and flourishing era of Christianity came to twilight along with an improper evangelization in Africa. One of the facts of the improper evangelization is the sole inability of Christianity to properly identify with the people it comes to convert. As a result, Africans being culture bound have tendency to return to that religion that gives them some sense of uniqueness, and that is, their African Traditional Religion (ATR). This neo-

²⁷ Ibid., p. 122.

paganistic tendencies are later year experiences among Christians. "Today many Igbo Christians are still battling with religious crisis of identity..... (they) hold tight to the practise of their traditional religious belief. In many instances, the modern Igbo bestride two opposing religious systems in which he or she claims to participate fully"²⁸. With this understanding, the path to neo-paganism widens. However, it is pertinent to note that neo-pagamastic tendency is as a result of a wrong effort of being authentic Africans and authentic Christians. It is an improper dialogical crisis of faith and culture. It is that of a cultural crisis where one returns to the Traditional religion after trying Christianity. Ekwuru, E., recaptures the situation thus, "this tendency to hold fast to two opposing systems of cultural ideologies puts the Igbos in a state of a clash of cultural values"²⁹. Realising this crisis, Christianity has to engage itself with the task of making authentic Africans and Christians.

²⁸ Ekwuru. E.G., *The Pangs of African Culture*, p. 75.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Towards an Authentic Igbo Catholic Church in the Light of Ecclesia in Africa (EA)

As noted earlier, Catholicism has a universal character. For Christianity to be at home in any nation or with people, it must adapt to the people's way of life. Realising this, some early careful missionaries tried to adapt Christianity to the rich culture of the evangelizing nations. Other missionaries nevertheless were assimilating the converts to the "European Christianity.

This trend of event, however neglected the demands of having an authentic Igbo catholic church in the light of Ecclesia in Africa. In this new dispensation of Inculturation and ecumenism, evangelization must be open to the people's way of life as long as such will help the faithful Christian in understanding and expressing the faith. However, this papal document, *Ecclesia in Africa*, in a special way urges African, with a renewed spirit and vigour to be authentic African Catholics. To realise this, Pope stresses the need for an authentic inculturation in and for the African church. In his words, "the synod considers inculturation an urgent priority in the life of the particular churches, for a firm rooting of the gospel in Africa"³⁰. So, to bridge the yawning gap between the faith and cultural conflicts, we must return to the practical aspects of inculturation. This will nevertheless make Catholicism relevant in African society. As Pope John Paul II, says,

Inculturation is a movement towards full evangelization. It seeks to dispose people to receive Jesus Christ in an integral manner. It touches them on the personal, cultural, economic and political levels³¹.

Implementation of Ecclesia in Africa through Faith and Culture Dialogue

In the chapters above, I have tried to show the urgent need for inculturation and "the particular importance for evangelization of inculturation"³². The realization of this fact lies in a proper dialogue between Christian faith and African culture. We must that "a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted....not faithfully lived"³³. This dialogue must be an "intimate

³⁰ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, no.62

³² *Ibid.*, no.59

³³ *Ibid.*, no.78

transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity in the various human cultures”³⁴.

It is time for African church to take up the challenge of meeting the demands of her people. However, The challenge of inculturation in Africa consists in ensuring that the followers of Christ will ever more fully assimilate the gospel message, while remaining faithful to all authentic African values³⁵.

The challenge has a task of giving local churches of Africa a new face while maintaining fidelity to Christ and the universal church, in carrying out this implementation programme, we must be mindful of Baur, J., words,

The birth of an authentic African Christianity has been intimately connected with the rebirth of African culture. Colonialism had denied Africans their own proper civilization and decried their cultural traditional as barbaric. How could a genuine African Christianity develop in a cultural vacuum? The Christian faith could but vegetate as an imported ‘second hand’ Western Christianity. The result has been the so often depl ored dichotomy of the African Christian personality: Christianity was grafted on to the person as an alien faith and exercised on the surface while deeper convictions and reactions remained rooted in traditional religion. In order that C hristianity might establish roots in the traditional culture with its specific religiosity, it was necessary to re-evaluate this culture³⁶.

These recorded facts make necessary serious and urgent, unique and *ad rem*, our call for a dialogue between faith and culture and the consequent implementation and a return to proper catechesis.

Inculturation

Christianity in Africa has been besieged by some structural hindrances. Today, some African Christians are not yet able to willing to distinguish between the substance of Christianity and its European garbs. If they do,

³⁴Ibid., no.59

³⁵ Ibid., no.78.

³⁶ Baur, J., 2000 Years of Christianity, p. 290.

they are not serious with the differentiation. Inculturation shows Christianity as a transcultural religion as Msgr. Maduka strongly believes,

For a successful evangelization especially for the year 2000, inculturation needs to be greatly emphasized whatever the emphasis, it can never be 'under' or 'over-stressed' nor 'unnecessary'. Genuine evangelization entails inculturation. It is the mainstay of the church³⁷.

We must remember that faith that is not communicated in a culture of people, language and experience is a faith that is not lived. Christ demonstrated this by taking our humanity, speaking the language of his people, eating his people's food and refusing to come to us with anything from heaven. Incarnation buttressed this fact more in a very unique way. Therefore, any faith without or outside the people's culture is a patch. It is a defected faith. However, an authentic and proper inculturation must be guided by two principles: 'compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal church'³⁸. Inculturation involves the whole Christian existence and experience. So, The synod father rightly affirmed that a serious concern for a true and balanced inculturation is necessary in order to avoid cultural confusion and alienation in our fast evolving society³⁹.

New Evangelization

The concept of Evangelization deals with bringing of or heralding of the good news of Christ to all peoples. It is a mandate from Christ (cf Mt 28:19). There is need for new evangelization which must take care of undeniable negative tendencies affecting the "new spring time" of Christianity especially in Africa. As Pope wrote, "I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the church's energies to new evangelization and to mission *ad gentes*"⁴⁰. Consequently, in the same view of our Pope, ...in Africa there are millions who are not yet evangelized, the church is faced with the necessary and urgent task of proclaiming the good news to all...⁴¹.

³⁷ Asiegbu, M., and Umezina, C.C., Fidelity to Christ and Africa, p. 28.

³⁸ Pope John Paul II, Redemptori's Mission, no 54.

³⁹ Pope John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, no. 48.

⁴⁰ Pope John Paul II, Redemptoris Mission, no. 3

⁴¹ Pope John Paul II, Ecclesia in Africa, no. 74

This new evangelization nevertheless calls all to the deepening of faith through witness of life, inculturating the faith, evangelizing the family through preparation of the agents of evangelization and other forms of missionary co-operation.

A Return to Proper Catechesis

Catechesis is an instruction of someone, especially a Christian, on the teachings of Christ (cf Act 18:25). A return to proper catechesis leads to a more maturity of faith. Catechesis, therefore, does the function of disposing Christians to a more, explicit and enlightened understanding of the mystery of salvation with a deeper insight.

Catechesis is very much needed is inculturation is to be more meaningful for our people. Unless Christians are catechized on the need, theology, difficulties, process necessity and ignorantly continue to misunderstand the whole issue.

Conclusion

Inculturation is the product of faith and culture dialogue. Proper inculturation, we must say, is not an imposition or a die-hard effort of equiperating every traditional cum cultural concept with Christian concept. It is not a must affair of situating everything African in Christian revelations. In this case, it contrasts in both concepts. Nevertheless, one cannot water-down the urgent need for inculturation as an instrument of new evangelization especially in Africa, with her rich cultural elements. This is the message and demand of the papal implementation of the demands of this document will make the church to be at home in African soil.

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