

The Mission of the Church in Diverse Contexts: Disentangling Methodological Problem

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Abstract

Christian missionaries experience hostility when doing mission in diverse cultural contexts. This is largely because they bring with them ethnocentric attitudes; that their culture and message is superior to those they are evangelizing and their faith is the only one that contains absolute truth and ultimate salvation. Blinded by such attitude, they have packaged their culture as Christian faith and failed to purge the Scriptures off the culture in which it is wrapped. Such attitudes are informed by their misconception and ignorance of the other cultures and religions. To mitigate resentment, traditional methods of evangelism recommended in diverse religious contexts have included dialogue and diapraxis also known as 'nurture course'. However, these approaches have not achieved acceptability of the gospel since resentment has persisted. This article proposes dynamic inculturation as the alternative to traditional approaches. It is an emendation of the inculturation process proposed by Charles Nyamiti. It introduces a stage at which Biblical texts or divine mystery is purged off culture in which it has been wrapped.

Keywords: Mission, Church, Contexts: Disentangling, Methodological, Problem

Introduction

This paper is written in the backdrop of The East African Revival movement, which started in Rwanda in 1950s. This movement teaches against traditional African cultures. It teaches that Christian faith should not be mixed with traditional culture. They argue: what has the light got to do with darkness? Traditional culture is equated to darkness, while Christian faith is the light unto the heathens. They quote the scriptures which teach against putting new wine in old wine skin. According to them, Christian faith was the new wine which if put in the old wine skin, it would bust it. They also quote Jesus cautioning his disciples to beware of the Pharisees' yeast. The pharisaic yeast is likened to new world ideologies that teach against Christian faith. They are a product of the Missionaries' negative attitude towards traditional culture. African theologians have blamed early missionaries for demonizing African traditional cultures and attempting to convert them to Western civilization which was equated with Christian faith.

The missionaries were opposed to traditional medicines, songs and dances, traditional rites of passage and rituals that accompanied them, traditional liquor and tobacco, wife inheritance and polygamy, female clitoridectomy, superstition, magic and African witchcraft. All such practices were regarded as backward and barbaric and therefore, unchristian. They failed to acknowledge that these traditional cultural practices had offered solutions to African problems. This negative attitude towards African practices did not change even when the Church became African. Such ethnocentric attitude by missionaries towards receptor cultures has led to resentment of Christian faith. Eligius Mkulima in reflecting on the work of missionaries today in evangelizing Maasai people of Arusha Tanzania, notes that in such a fast changing cultural context, it behoves the missionaries to be inventive in devising new methods, techniques and expressions for effective methods that will not convert a Maasai into something else but in which a Maasai will remain truly Maasai even as they become truly Christians.”¹ This raises the question whether traditional methods are still relevant and effective in the 21st century postmodern world?

Traditional methods, dialogue and diapraxis recommended by missiologists in the past have been criticized for postponing the urgency of the Great Commission and of putting the Christian absolute truth at par with relative truths of other religions or cultures.

¹Eligius, Mkulima; *Spiritual Mission to the Maasai in the Archdiocese of Arusha in Tanzania: A Pastoral Approach in the Light of New Evangelization*. Candid Press, Arusha, 2014:53.

Second, since hostility and resentment towards Christian mission persists, it is a clear indication that these traditional methods have not achieved the intended acceptability.

Therefore, inasmuch as we are dealing with an old debate, we wish to raise new questions. How does the attitude of the missionary affect the mission of the Church? How would new proposed methods achieve elimination of ethnocentrism and objectives of the mission of the Church in dynamic society?

This paper proposes dynamic-inculturation, an emendation of Charles Nyamiti's inculturation method. Dynamic-inculturation aims at correcting missionary ethnocentrism. It also corrects Nyamiti's methodology which assumes that all doctrines are pure and do not have Jewish, Greek, Roman or Western cultures in which they were formulated, wrapped and transmitted. Nyamiti's methodology overlooks the heterogeneity of doctrines and assumes that all doctrines in the Bible agree. Therefore, this article introduces a hermeneutical stage where first the Gospel message and Church doctrines are purged off the culture in which they were developed, wrapped and transmitted before it is inserted into the receptor culture.

The Problem

Missionary Attitudes towards Cultures

Missionaries are faced with a myriad of challenges of how to communicate the gospel in ways that their audience understands and accepts it. Their attitudes towards indigenous cultures undermine the acceptance of the gospel among the people they evangelize. This results into superficial conversions among indigenous communities.² Therefore, how can they deal with their own ethnocentrism? How can they always remain relevant to ever-dynamic contexts? How do they ensure that it is the pure gospel and not their cultural biases breaking in and distorting the pure gospel or the culture in which it has been wrapped, they are passing over?

²Joseph, D. Galgalo. "Syncretism in African Christianity: A Boon or a Bane?" *African Contextual Realities* Rodney L. Reed (General Editor), Cumbria (UK), Langham Global Library; 2018:87.

The factors that undermined missionary work still persist today and therefore, they need to be addressed. For us to understand why missionaries have always had ethnocentric attitude towards cultures they evangelize, it is imperative that we understand the context in which they have been formed.

Roots for Negative Attitude

- (i) Absolutism: holding the position that Jesus is the only way, truth and life (John 14:6): This teaching would therefore, imply that outside Jesus, there was no truth and hence no salvation. Early Christians in the first century, convicted with this teaching went out with urgency to convert pagans to Christian faith. The motivating factor was love for Christ and for humanity to receive this salvation.
- (ii) Exclusivism: a belief that there is no salvation outside the Church, (*extra ecclesiam nullas salus*): This teaching had been advanced by Cyprian of Carthage (258 CE).³Cyprian had gone on to state that “he cannot have God for his Father who does not have the church for his mother.”⁴According to this teaching all those that rejected the Gospel stood condemned. Therefore, the Church used all means including force, to have pagans enter the Church which was equated to the Kingdom of God.
- (iii) Ethnocentrism: an attitude that criticises everything in the new culture as being inferior to that of the missionaries. With this attitude, the agent regards their culture as the normative and looks down on the culture of the other people they hope to evangelize.⁵ Driven by such an attitude, “Hegel, the German thinker on the Absolute Spirit and historical development [of humankind], denied that the black have consciousness of God, the law or any substantial objectivity.”⁶
- (iv) Error of misconception and the error of ignorance: In regard to this, Nafwor states: This is the delusion which links directly to the superiority complex of the missionaries that resulted into their false conception of African people as less human, people without any idea of God or any spiritual reality even of the devil and with no sense of morality.

³Gort, J. D., ‘The Search for Interreligious Convivance, ongoing challenge and charge’ *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29(3), (2008): 748.

⁴Cited by Gort, J. D., (2008): 748.

⁵Jose Antunes da Silva, SVD; “InculturationAs Dialogue,” *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (August 1995):204.

⁶Matthew IkechukwuNwafor, “Integrating African Values with Christianity: A Requirement for Dialogue Between Christian Religion and African Culture” Mgbakoigba, *Journal of African Studies*. Vol. 6 No. 1. (July 2016): 2.

The consequence of all these misrepresentations was the gigantic fallacy of assuming most of what they possess and practice as inheritance from the devil and accordingly, to be done away with.⁷

Indeed such were the contexts from which the early western missionaries had come and such attitudes have lingered on. In regard to philosophers like Hegel's attitude towards the black people, Nwafor wonders:

If these great minds and thinkers of the time could be soaked in this delusive thought about the Black-African people, how much more the missionaries some of who had no wider knowledge beyond their theological studies and were given little or no training about mission within these studies? What is more likely is that they were not free of these misconceptions too.⁸

However, it would be misleading to portray these attitudes as constant especially among both the Westerner and African Christians in contemporary Africa towards traditional African culture. There are those who still hang on it while others have changed.

Factors leading to Change of Attitudes

Mkulima notes that travelling around the world, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries, and studies on culture and language of the so called primitive peoples led to discovering that there were grains of truth in the primitive religions.⁹ These studies revealed that the initial condemnation of pagan religions as false and perverted was incorrect. The attitude changed from that of conquering other religions for Christianity to that of accommodating.

In 1934, the Negritude movement initiated by Leopold Seder Senghor, a Ghanian Pan-Africanist, advocated for recognition and respect for black people and their traditional religions. After the Second World War, "the Negritude movement was organised into the *Societe Africaine de Culturen* [African society of culture]"¹⁰ which held two congresses of Black writers and artists. Through the congresses African leaders were trained to work with people of different religious beliefs. Such were the forums where people of different religious beliefs met as equals. This prepared the ground for dialogue amongst Christian, Islamic and African traditional religions. Since then Christianity has become more open towards other religions and cultures than before.¹¹

⁷ Ibid., 4

⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹ Mkulima; 2014:56.

¹⁰ Nkulu-N'Sengha, M., *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 33(4) 1996:535.

¹¹ Ibid.,535.

Other factors that led to change of spirit included the Church's leadership recognizing the light in other religions. It was until Pope Pius IX in 1863 dismissed the dictum *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, when he taught, "Those who labour under ignorance of the true religion, if this ignorance is invincible are not held guilty in this respect in the Lord's eyes",¹² that the Church opened up its doors to possibility of salvation outside Christianity. In most recent times, this teaching has been echoed by a 20th century Roman Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner, who in 1961 held that:

The exclusive claims of Christianity operate only where Christianity is known; non-Christian faiths, which are the combined products of grace and sin, functions as "legitimate" and saving religions where Christianity is absent; their adherents should be classed as "Anonymous Christians," having "implicit" faith.¹³

This perspective of presence of light in other religions was also reiterated in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*. The synod declared that "The Church respects and esteems non-Christian religions in other cultures because they are living expressions of the soul of the vast groups of people. Cultural values have sparks of revelation and can constitute a true preparation for the Christian Gospel."¹⁴

On the same breath, the *Lumen Gentium* no. 9 too teaches that there is some degree of truth in every human religion. It begins with a declaration that "At all times and among every people, God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right" (conf. Acts 10:35)¹⁵. In the same document, the *Nostra Aetate* no. 2, the Council Fathers in regard to non-Christian faiths, declare that, "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men."¹⁶ The Vatican II thus affirmed the possibility of salvation in other religions.¹⁷ Since then, the Church has adapted the spirit of dialogue with other religions.

¹²HenriciDenzinger, ed. "The Bull UnamSanctam", *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 1647. Quoted in TokunbohAdeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition*, Nairobi, Evangelical Publishing House, 1997. p .12.

¹³ Karl Rahner, "Christianity and non-Christian Religions", *Theological Investigations*, translated by Karl H. Kruger, Vol. 5, pp. 115-135 quoted in TokunbohAdeyemo, *Salvation in African Tradition*, Nairobi, Evangelical Publishing House, 1997. p .12.

¹⁴Ibid., 12.

¹⁵ Austin, Flannery, O.P. (Gen. ed). *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vatican Collection Vol. 1. New Revised Edition, Costello Publishing Company, 1992, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9.

¹⁶ Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate*, no. 2

¹⁷*Lumen Gentium* No. 16 and *Gaudium et Spes* No. 22.

Imperative of the Great Commission

Uniqueness of Christ and Christianity

Even though the Church recognizes some level of light or truths in other religions and world cultures, it still holds onto the uniqueness of Christ and Christian faith. Therefore, as we argue for uniqueness of Christ and Christianity, hence the need for inculturation, agents of inculturation should put in mind that,

When one culture is presented by its carriers as stronger because of its economic, military and political power, it tends to assume imperialistic attitudes. It can also demand for itself the status of normative culture, which in turn can lead to the abuse of acculturation, in which case it is described as cultural domination.¹⁸

This is also true of any religion whose attitude is that it is the only one possessing absolute and pure truth because of the nature of its revelation.

However, as Christians we must be deliberate in delivering the good news of Jesus Christ. As we approach other cultures, even though we have said, they too possess some elements of revelation; it is Christianity with full revelation. The Fathers of the Nicaean Council taught that Jesus Christ was true God (cf. Isaiah 7 and 9), begotten of the Father and not made, of the same essence (*homoousios*) with God the Father. The fact that Jesus is God and God as the Creator of the universe is indeed the source of truth and truth itself; makes Jesus' gospel the absolute truth and thus superior to all other revealed truths. In that case, all human truths are relative.

Similarly, God as the Creator is both the source of life and life itself. If Jesus is God, and God is life, then we are right to say Jesus is life (John 14:6). If Jesus is life then his message contains that life. This makes Jesus' message both unique and imperative to all living beings.

However, we should not be blind to the fact that this message as declared by Jesus himself has been passed over to generations through human cultures. The pure message of the Son of God, on its way, gathered and got clothed in the various cultures which need to be shed off for the new audience to have experience of the power of the true pure word of God.

¹⁸da Silva, 201.

Importance of Culture in Evangelization

As much as human cultures are fallen, they have served as a conduit for receiving divine revelation and transmission of the same. God the Son incarnated into human epoch through Jewish culture and through Jewish culture it was transmitted to Gentiles. Nonetheless, culture is not merely a conduit but also within it are deposits of God's message which have acted as *logoi spermatikoi* for reception of the special clear revelation –the Gospel.

For this reason, Pope Benedict XVI recognizes the importance of people's culture in the task of evangelization. He states that traditional “religions are the cultural and spiritual soil from which most Christian converts spring and with which they continue to have daily contact.”¹⁹ He encourages that the Church should find Christian individuals knowledgeable in traditional religious practices to identify those traditional elements incompatible with Christian teachings for the purpose of discarding them.²⁰

Evaluation of Traditional Methods of doing Mission in Diverse Cultures

Dialogue and its pitfall

According to Adamo, dialogue is “a conversation between two people or an exchange of ideas and opinions.”²¹ Dialogue aims at achieving peaceful co-existence between interfaith. Interreligious dialogue begins with analysing historical injustices with the aim of ironing them out. This is then followed by the dialogue of theologies. This aims at removing inter-religious misunderstandings.

This approach does not aim at conversion but to foster respect and tolerance between the religions. Each religion is expected to recognize the right of the other religion to hold onto their faith's convictions; which may in actuality contradict the other.²²

Pope Francis advocates for inter-religious dialogue because it is necessary for peace.²³ This position is derived from Vatican II council which taught that, “The Church urges her sons and

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, Africa's Commitment: Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, Nos. 92.

²⁰ Ibid., No. 92 & 93.

²¹ Adamo, D.T., *Africa and Africans in the New Testament*, University of America Press, Lamhart, MD. 2006:82-88.

²² Gort, J. D., ‘The Search for Interreligious Convivance, ongoing challenge and charge’ *Verbum et Ecclesia* 29(3), (2008):744–763.

daughters to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions.”²⁴ However, the council cautioned her members to be careful while carrying out dialogue with other religions. The Church has to keep in mind that it is she with the ultimate and absolute truth –Jesus Christ.²⁵

Paul Knitter proposes *dialogue of praxis* and defines dialogue as “the exchange of experience and understanding between two or more partners with the intention that all partners grow in experience and understanding.”²⁶ He goes ahead to propose conditions for such dialogue: (i) dialogue must be based on personal religious experience and firm truth claims and (ii) dialogue must be based on the recognition of the possible truth in all religions; the ability to recognize this truth must be grounded in the hypothesis of a common ground and goal for all religion.”²⁷

Knitter avers that interreligious dialogue must be conducted by religious persons who have had personal religious experience; an encounter with the holy. He argues that “without personal religious experience, there is no way of grasping what the dialogue is all about.”²⁸ He further proposes that, “the partners, on the basis of their religious experience, must be able to take firm positions as to what they believe. These positions need to be affirmed not only as true for the individual but also as true, at least to some degree, for the other partner.”²⁹

Knitter’s proposal, especially of the universalization of such truth claim is faced with epistemological question of religious knowledge and religious language; how one comes to knowledge of something and if such knowledge can be empirically verified and communicated. How would one communicate their religious experiences to dialogue partners who haven’t themselves experienced similar or same revelation? For instance, Christianity claims to possess special revelation. Muslims on their part hold that the Qur’an is God’s special revelation. How can these two claims be verified as true for the dialogue partners?

²³Francis I, Encyclical Letter, The Light of Faith, *Lumen Fidei*, 29 June 2014, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, (No. 20):2013.

²⁴*Africae Munus*, No. 92.

²⁵*Ibid.*, No. 92.

²⁶Paul, K. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY. 2003:207.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 207-208.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 207-208.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 207-208.

Since theological language is non-logical, non-verifiable and inexpressible because its religious language is mythological, analogical, and symbolical and all these cannot be verified,³⁰ it is not possible to enter a meaningful dialogue. I.e., if religious experiences are personal and thus subjective and theological language is non-logical, non-verifiable and inexpressible, how can people with individual religious experiences with firm convictions of their truths enter dialogue?

Knitter's second presupposition that there are elements of truth in all world religions dispels ethnocentric attitude that "the others have only an 'incomplete' truth or that they can possess truth only insofar as it conforms with the norm of 'my truth'."³¹ He thus argues for the principle of *epoche*.³² He states, "This presupposition for dialogue – namely, that one recognizes and listens to the truth of the assertions of another religion – requires that the theology of all the partners take as a hypothesis that there is a common ground and goal for all religions."³³ His justification for this approach is that the common goal for "all religions is to promote the unity of humanity and to offset the danger of world destruction."³⁴

If Christians bracket their faith and conviction that Christ is the truth and saviour of humanity, what is left for Christian faith? What happens to the Great Commission (Mark 16:15)? Stanley S. Samartha observes that, "Given the evangelical assumption of the inerrancy of the Bible, it is hardly likely that any positive approach toward neighbours of other faiths will emerge in the coming years."³⁵

Although Knitter argues that for meaningful dialogue to take place, dialogue partners should enter the dialogue on the hypothesis that there is a common ground and goal for all religions, he nevertheless, recognizes the danger that this principle brings with it. John Cobb points out such dangers when he warns that in recognizing "that every religion centers on one ultimate reality, 'one can all too easily impose one's own definition of that reality on another religion'".

³⁰John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, SCM Press Ltd. London 1977:123-130.

³¹Knitter, 208.

³²Stepping outside one's religion and a suspension of one's own religious experiences and beliefs.

³³Knitter, 208-209.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 209.

³⁵Stanley, J. Samartha. "The Cross and the Rainbow: Christ in a Multireligious Culture" in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (eds), Orbis Books, New York, 1989: 71.

To insist, for instance, that the Buddhist notion of emptiness is really what Christians mean by God can be as arrogant as calling Buddhist ‘anonymous Christians.’³⁶ It is the same danger when Christians assume that their ultimate deity (God) is the same one worshipped by the Muslims (Allah).³⁷

Dia-Praxis and its downside

Diapraxis can be understood as living as an example by offering Christ’s hand of help to people of other faiths. In this approach, first step is to establish friendship between believers and the unevangelized before evangelization could take place. Very vital to this approach is the element of trust and friendship which need to be nurtured before the gospel is introduced. This approach has come to be known as ‘the nurture course’.

Diapraxis has also been defined by Lissi Rasmussen as “a relationship in which a common praxis is essential.”³⁸ According to Sicard, diapraxis should precede dialogue as it is a way of life, of living out, of acting, of implementing dialogue.³⁹ It is more than casual conversations at the market, on the street, at festivals, in the course of civic or humanitarian projects.⁴⁰ Thus, diapraxis demands that Christians and people of other religions or cultures work with one another toward reconciling existing social, political, and economic conflicts.

Thus, diapraxis is mainly concerned with orthopraxis and not orthodoxy. According to the advocates of this approach, religious truths are relative and therefore, they can wait; peace and peaceful co-existence is the most urgent thing to seek. This approach relegates the urgency of the Great Commission and trivializes the importance of true knowledge of God as taught in the Christian faith. It operates on the premise that all religions contain some truth that could lead to salvation; thus Jesus is not the only way, truth and life and if he is, he could wait.

³⁶John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982:97 quoted by Paul, K. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY. 2003:209.

³⁷ Christian God begets a Son, Muslim Allah does not. The Christian God is Three persons (Trinity), Muslim Allah is strictly one.

³⁸Sigvani, von Sicard. “Diapraxis or Dialogue and Beyond”, in *The Lutheran World Federation, Dialogue and Beyond: Christians and Muslims Together on the Way* (Geneva: LWF, 2003):131.

³⁹Ibid., 131.

⁴⁰Ibid., 131.

Diap Praxis tends towards humanism and Marxism; a spirit that human beings are the solution to their own problems. If the traditional approaches to mission have such pitfalls, it is important that we propose the way forward –Dynamic Inculturation.

Dynamic Inculturation

Notion of Inculturation

John Paul II defines inculturation as “the process by which ‘catechesis takes flesh’ in the various cultures.”⁴¹ Thus it is “the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in Christianity and... the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.”⁴²

Following the same trajectory, Laurent Magesa, states, “From the Christian theological perspective, inculturation is understood to be the process whereby the faith already embodied in one culture encounters another culture.”⁴³ He goes on to explain that:

...in this encounter, the faith becomes part and parcel of this new culture. It fuses with new culture and simultaneously transforms it into a novel religious-cultural reality...in practical terms; this process involves the interaction of mutual critique and affirmation. It entails acceptance or rejection of thought forms, symbolic and linguistic expressions and attitudes between faith-cultures in question.⁴⁴

John Mary Waliggo, on his part emphasizes the importance of cultures as the instruments and means for realizing the incarnation process of the Christian religion.⁴⁵ He understands inculturation as:

...the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It means the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought-patterns of each people. It is the conviction that Christ and his Good News are even dynamic and challenging to all times and cultures as they become better understood and lived by each people. It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly “feel at home” in the cultures of each people.⁴⁶

⁴¹*Ecclesia in Africa*, 59.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 59

⁴³ Laurent, Magesa (2004), *Anatomy of Inculturation*, Paulines Publications Africa, Nairobi, p. 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ John, M. Waliggo, *et. al.*, *Inculturation: Its Meaning and Urgency*, St. Paul’s Publications, Nairobi, 1986, p. 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

In line with the foregoing thought, Nyamiti says, “...in theological inculturation emphasis should be laid on the Christianization of the African cultures rather than on Africanization (indigenization) of the Christian message.”⁴⁷ By this he means that by inserting Christian gospel or values into cultural elements, African cultural data is Christianized. In such approach, no syncretism may result. This approach is what we refer to as ontological or noetic approach.

Nyamiti in his noetic approach proposes the following steps in inculturation: First, choosing a Christian mystery for inserting into the culture of the people. Second identify an appropriate cultural item or theme to employ for theological elaboration of the Christian mystery.⁴⁸ The appropriate cultural theme should be informed by social, pastoral, biblical, moral, spiritual, liturgical or doctrinal problem in the local churches.⁴⁹ Thirdly make a close and detailed analytical study of both the cultural theme and the Christian mystery so as to find out their various components as well as the similarities and differences between them.⁵⁰ At the third stage, the cultural element is purged of any elements that are incompatible with Christian or biblical teachings. The divine revealed mystery is then made to enter into the cultural mystery, by way of comparison; transforming it and thereby forming the spirituality of the believer.⁵¹

Note that in Nyamiti’s process, it is the cultural element that is purged of elements inconsistent with Christian faith. The assumption is that divine mysteries are infallible. Yet according to *The Confessions of 1967: Inclusive Language Text*, a church document of the Presbyterian Church of United States, in its article 9.29, Scriptures and Church doctrines are not without human interpolations. It states:

...The Scriptures, given under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, are nevertheless words of human beings, conditioned by the language, thought forms, and literary fashions of the places and times at which they were written. They reflect views of life, history, and the cosmos which were then current. The church, therefore, has an obligation to approach the Scriptures with literary and historical understanding. As God has spoken the divine word in diverse cultural situations, the

⁴⁷Nyamiti, Charles, *Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Humankind: Methodological and Trinitarian Foundation* (Nairobi: CUEA Publications, 2005), 17.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp. 22–24

⁴⁹John, Kyule, John Lukwata and Clement Majawa, (eds.), *A Guide to Research Work and University Studies for the Faculty of Theology*, CUEA Press, Nairobi, 2013, p. 58.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Kyule, et al., p. 25.

⁵¹For full elaboration of the process, refer to my book, *The Tripartite Office of Christ in the Light of Worgoondet: Towards a Sabaot Christology of Inculturation*, CUEA Publications, Nairobi, 2017.

church is confident that God will continue to speak through the Scriptures in a changing world and in every form of human culture.⁵²

This makes it imperative for one doing inculturation of Christian mystery to strive to purge it off such cultural interpolations before inserting into the new culture. Noticeably, Nyamiti misses out on an important step that would purge the doctrines or the gospel off such cultural wrappers. It is for this reason we are proposing an emendation to Nyamiti's processes of inculturation. We propose a dynamic process which includes a stage at which biblical texts and doctrines are subjected to some thorough hermeneutics before they are inserted into the receptor cultures.

What is Dynamic Inculturation?

According to Shorter, "Inculturation goes beyond merely inserting Christianity into previously non-Christian cultures."⁵³ It should be an ongoing process that demands for a continuous dialogue everywhere because when Christianity comes to a culture it comes already wrapped in the cultural forms of the evangelizer."⁵⁴

Dynamic Inculturation presupposes that Divine mysteries are dynamic in nature; always relevant to dynamic cultural practices. There is continuity and discontinuity both in the culture of the people and in the divine mystery. The intrinsic message remains true to all times and places but dynamic as it addresses different cultural situations. This supposes that correct hermeneutics should begin with the question: what was the intended message of the author to the first audience, and what is it speaking to us today?⁵⁵

The first question purges the mystery off the cultural elements which it has acquired over the time it has been traversing through cultures. The second question compels us to investigate the contemporary culture, context or experiences of the people being evangelized.

⁵²https://www.pcusa.org/site_media/media/uploads/theologyandworship/pdfs/confess67.pdf

⁵³ A. Shorter., *Towards a Theology of Inculturation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988): 11, in Jose Antunes da Silva, SVD; "InculturationAs Dialogue," *African Ecclesial Review*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (August 1995):202.

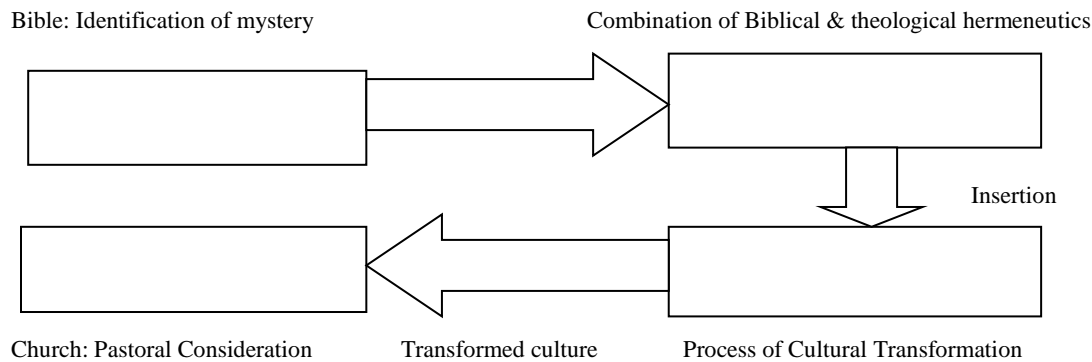
⁵⁴da Silva, 203.

⁵⁵Gordon D Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible For All Its Worth*, Scripture Union, 1999; 19.

How does Dynamic Inculturation work?

First step is to identify the mystery from the Scriptures (Bible) or from Church tradition. Second step would be to subject the mystery or biblical text to a combination of hermeneutical methods (biblical or theological), in order to identify cultural interpolations (impurities) that are inconsistent with divine revelation for the purpose of purging them. Third step is to identify a cultural element suitable for use in the process of inculturating. Using biblical and or church traditions, the cultural element is purged off any elements incompatible with Christian teachings. It is at this point the purified mystery is inserted into the culture of the people via the purified cultural element. The pure Christian mystery will transform the culture of the people. Fourth step the transformed culture can be used in the Church for pastoral relevance. As held by da Silva that “there is a need for a critical symbiosis. The faith criticizes the culture, and the culture enriches the Christian faith.”⁵⁶

Conceptual Framework



At the stage of purging doctrines or biblical texts off their cultural wrapper a combination of biblical and theological hermeneutics are used. Very crucial for us at the stage of purging biblical texts and divine doctrines off their cultural interpolations, is the Historical Critical Method. Since doctrines emerge from biblical hermeneutics, historical method will suffice. According to Swetmon,

The historical method of hermeneutics approaches the Scripture with the understanding that the text was written in another period and from within a culture different from Western civilization. Instead of asking, ‘What is the meaning of the text for me today?’ the historical method asks, ‘What is the meaning of the text to those who first read it?’ The history and culture behind the text are what

⁵⁶da Silva, 203.

determine the real meaning...The implication of this method of interpretation for the Restoration Movement is that many proof-texts which have been used to support favourite doctrines must now be challenged as to their application for the 20th century church.⁵⁷

The flow of our process of dynamic inculturation as shown in our Conceptual Framework should ideally end up with introducing the transformed culture back into the Bible, but this is not allowed to happen. Instead it introduces the new transformed culture into the Church. The reason why the new transformed culture is not allowed to be introduced into the Bible is that the Bible is a sealed canon and not even an iota should be changed. Therefore, the transformed cultural element is used in the Church to clarify the Christian Mystery (or Gospel) for the purpose of answering people's worries. This is based on the understanding that since Divine Mysteries transcend human problems, any Divine Mystery can be used to solve any human problem(s).

Justification of Dynamic Inculturation

Hiebert observes that in doing mission among a people, "we need to understand the people and their thinking to translate the gospel into their thought patterns; we need also to understand the scriptures within their cultural context, so that we can translate them into the local culture without losing their divine message."⁵⁸

This perspective is built on the principle that "There has been a genuine evolution of self-understanding, of doctrine and morals, throughout the history of Christianity. 'Evolution' means that such new ideas are both continuous and discontinuous with what went before; they are not totally new, but they are genuinely new."⁵⁹

For the purpose of illustration, take for example, in the Roman culture, criminals were executed by being hanged on the cross. Jesus Christ considered a criminal by the Roman authorities was hanged on one of the crosses alongside other criminals. During Christendom, the Cross acquired new meaning and significance; it became the symbol of suffering and means of redemption for humankind.

⁵⁷ Bill, Swetmon, "The Historical Method in Hermeneutics." *Image*. West Monroe, LA: Worldwide Missionary and Educational Foundation. 1989, 23. Quoted in Wayne Jackson, "Command or Culture: Discerning the Difference" <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1050-command-or-culture-discerning-the-difference>

⁵⁸ Paul, Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985:97.

⁵⁹Knitter, 172.

Whatever was traditionally a Roman cultural practice became a “Christian” gospel. In the proposed methodology such cultural elements are purged so that we are left with the pure message for inculturation.⁶⁰

This evolution is depended on a particular time in history and place. Secondly, as doctrines evolve, culture has also been evolving. For this reason, it is advisable that contemporary culture of the people is used and not the long dead cultural practices; one should not endeavour to resuscitate repugnant cultural practices.

Paul Knitter notes the inadequacy of understanding a doctrine (e.g. Christology) only based on its historical context. He would rather that a text and the context “be understood only within the ‘horizon’ of experience and meaning as that horizon expands through history.”⁶¹ This is what Raimundo Panikkar calls “the ‘universal’ context or the ‘texture’ of the text – the constantly expanding human universe of new experiences, allowing new insights and calling forth new judgments and decisions.”⁶² Knitter goes further to state that,

Unless the text and its context are continually being reheard in the ever new texture, one is really not hearing what the text means. And when there are real shifts or changes within the texture, especially when human experience evolves from the tribal to the global, there must be new interpretations of the text. Otherwise, we are not being faithful to the New Testament; we are not hearing what it really means.⁶³

According to da Silva states, “Through the Paschal Mystery, the Church realized in every local church, needs to be born anew in each new context and culture.”⁶⁴

Conclusion

In this paper we identified reasons why Christian missionary work is resisted in diverse religious contexts. Missionaries puffed with ethnocentric attitude, fail to recognize the fact that their culture is not Christian gospel and because of this weakness they do not sieve the gospel off the culture of the carrier. They pass over their culture as if it was synonymous with the gospel.

⁶⁰Evidence to this claim is based on the fact that the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross has been interpreted variously in different contexts and times. For example classical atonement theories and theories developed later differ. Most of the classical atonement theories emphasize objectivity of the work of Christ, while later or modern theories and especially by existentialists emphasize subjectivity of the work of Christ. Each of the perspectives is informed by a people’s socio-political experiences and situations.

⁶¹Knitter, 172.

⁶²Knitter, 172.

⁶³Ibid., 172.

⁶⁴da Silva, 206.

This is what is causing hostility and resentment towards Christianity in diverse religious contexts today. The paper sought to find a suitable method of doing mission in such diverse religious contexts.

Dynamic inculturation is proposed as a means in which the missionary recognizes the fact that the gospel is wrapped in the culture of the carrier and therefore it needs to be unwrapped before it is passed onto the recipient. This method also helps the missionary to recognize their own ethnocentrism and deal with it at the point of purging the doctrine off any cultural elements.

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