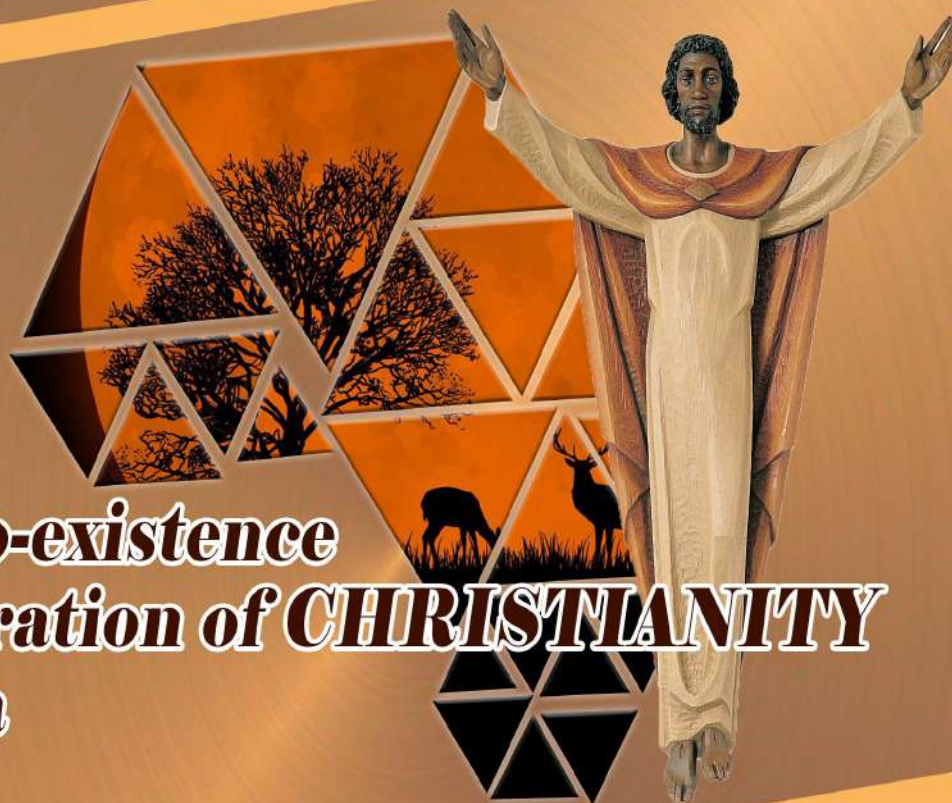




Utume Theological e-Journal

Don Bosco Utume

VOL. 1 (August 2020)



From Co-existence to Integration of **CHRISTIANITY** in Africa

featuring topics

- ♦ *African Religio-culture and Christianity: From Intolerance to Co-existence*
- ♦ *Inculturation: A Panacea to the Problem of Co-Existence of Christianity in Africa*
- ♦ *Integrating Christianity into the African Culture: Dialogue and Inculturation*
- ♦ *The Reality of African Christianity*
- ♦ *African Traditional Religious Values: A Platform for Integration of Christianity in Africa*
- ♦ *Christianity and African Traditional Religion(s): A Way Forward*
- ♦ *The Incorporation of the Acholi Death Rites of Passage into Christian Worship:
A Case Study of Namokora Parish, Gulu Archdiocese - Uganda*

Editorial Board

Director: Kalathipullatt Michael, SDB

Editor: Kidangan Ouseph Seby, SDB

Proof Reader: Preston Francis, SDB

Editorial Board

Onywoki Thomas Ogutu, SDB

Dughan Peter Abeku, SDB

Oballa Solomon Kenneth Igwebuiké, SDB

Ayogu Christian Kizito Chukwuebuka, SDB

Cover Design & Layout: Akinyele Sunday Cyril, SDB

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Word of Introduction from the Director

Kalathipullatt Michael.....iv

Editorial

Kidangan Ouseph Seby.....3

African Religio-culture and Christianity: From Intolerance to Co-existence

Denis Odinga Okiya.....4

Inculturation: A Panacea to the Problem of Co-Existence of Christianity in Africa

Ayogu Christian Kizito Chukwuebuka.....10

Integrating Christianity into the African Culture: Dialogue and Inculturation

Oballa Solomon Kenneth Igwebuike.....25

The Reality of African Christianity

Fernando N. D. Pascoal.....37

African Traditional Religious Values: A Platform for Integration of Christianity in Africa

Joseph Ngezahayo.....48

Christianity and African Traditional Religion(s): A Way Forward

Otieno Isaiah Mwango.....57

The Incorporation of the Acholi Death Rites of Passage into Christian Worship:

A Case Study of Namokora Parish, Gulu Archdiocese - Uganda

Tabu Lee Daniel.....73

Word of Introduction from the Director

“When we are about to do something let us see, first of all, whether it is for the greater glory of God. Having made certain that it is, go ahead, do not hesitate for your work will be successful” (Don Bosco). Following this advice given by Don Bosco I find the publication of this e-journal for us as Don Bosco Utume College a moment for glorifying God and it is in this Spirit that I congratulate our Editorial Board on the publication of this very first issue.

As a College, we felt challenged to come up with these theological reflections for our own growth and for the benefit of others. The challenges that COVID 19 has brought have also offered us an opportunity to venture into this initiative of publishing the e-journal.

The theme chosen for the first issue is **“From Co-existence to integration of Christianity in Africa”**. We came up with this topic following our reflection on the inaugural talk of the academic year 2019-2020 *“African Religio-Culture and Christianity: From Intolerance to Co-existence”* by Denis Odinga Okiya. In our reflections we came to realize that as true Disciples of Christ we cannot consider Christ and His message as something just to be tolerated. His message has to transform our very life, culture and beliefs.

In this context it is worth considering the message from the homily of Pope Paul VI which he gave on 29th November, 1970 in Manila, the Philippines. He said, “All things, all history converges in Christ. A man of sorrow and hope, he knows us and loves us. As our friend he stays by us throughout our lives; at the end of time he will come to be our judge; but we also know that he will be the complete fulfillment of our lives and our great happiness for all eternity”.

As an apostle of Christ and from his own deep convictions Pope Paul VI continued, “I can never cease to speak of Christ for he is our truth and our light; he is the way, the truth and the life. He is our bread, our source of living water who allays our hunger and satisfies our thirst. He is our shepherd, our leader, our ideal, our comforter and our brother. He is like us but more perfectly human, simple, poor, humble, and yet, while burdened with work, he is more patient. He spoke on our behalf; he worked miracles; and he founded a new kingdom: in it the poor are happy; peace is the foundation of a life in common; where the pure of heart and those who mourn are uplifted and comforted; the hungry find justice; sinners are forgiven; and all discover that they are brothers”.

If we have truly come to know Christ and His message then He is not one whom we merely allow to exist in peace, but one whom we should allow to enter into our lives, disturb us and transform us. We come to know Christ through His different instruments. However imperfect they might have been they have transmitted His message in its fullness.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Pope Paul VI states, “The conditions of the society in which we live oblige all of us therefore to revise methods, to seek by every means to study how we can bring the Christian message to modern man. For it is only in the Christian message that modern man can find the answer to his questions and the energy for his commitment of human solidarity” (EN 3).

It is with this firm belief that we too have made our reflections in this e-journal and present Christ as the only one who can help transform us so as to live as true Africans and true Christians.

I congratulate Fr. Seby Kidangan Ouseph sdb, the Principal of Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College, for taking this initiative of publishing and making this e-journal a reality, and also all those who have contributed their reflections. I wish all the readers of this e-journal a time of deeper reflection on how well we can live our Christian vocation faithfully in the African context.

Kalathipullatt Michael sdb

Bridging Faith and Culture

Twenty-five years ago, at the Synod on Africa, the Fathers did identify some of the noteworthy achievements of the Church in Africa especially in the area of inculturation.¹ The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, was a fruit of that memorable synod. Twenty-five years after the publication of this papal exhortation, we are faced with the very poignant question: what further achievements have we made in the area of inculturation?

In his presentation at the forum on *Ecclesia in Africa@25 years* held at the Tangaza University College, Nairobi in February 2020, Bishop John Oballa remarked that there exists “still an on-going degree of pastoral dichotomy between Faith and Life, between Christianity and Culture, between Catholicism and other religions; ‘Religious Dual-affiliation to righteous and unrighteous beliefs and practices refuse to die’”.² Considering the words of Bishop John Oballa and in the light of the articles of this present theological e-journal, it would not be out of place for us to admit that integration of faith and culture is still one of the predominant challenges confronting the Catholic Church in Africa.

True, we must confess, integrating Christianity in the African culture is a herculean task but one which, is not impossible. Undoubtedly, the integration of Christianity in Africa helps the Church to be of the people and for the people. Thus, the ongoing tendency to consider the Christian religion as something foreign has to be uprooted slowly from the minds of the people through proper catechesis. Integrating Christianity into African culture, is the ultimate task involved in inculturating the Gospel values in a way that is both human and African, and which must form the heart and meet the goal of the new evangelization.³ Inculturation includes two dimensions: i) intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration into Christianity; and ii) the insertion of Christianity in the various human cultures.⁴

¹ Pope John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa* on the Church in Africa, 14 September 1995, no. 38.

² Bosco Onyalla, “Ecclesia in Africa@25, An Ecclesial ‘revolution’, A Threefold Gap: A Kenyan Bishop,” <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/858/ecclesia-in-africa-at-25-an-ecclesial-revolution-a-threefold-gap-a-kenyan-bishop>, accessed on 19 June 2020.

³ Pope John Paul II, “Address to the International Council for Catechesis,” 26 September 1992, *L’Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, 7 October 1992, 5.

⁴ Pope John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate 7 December 1990, no. 52; *Ecclesia in Africa*, no. 59.

The Gospel is to be presented in the language and in the culture of its hearers. It should be made to “penetrate the hearts of men and women...and permeate their cultures, transforming them from within.”⁵ One must not forget the fact that at the same time culture itself needs purification and growth. Therefore, it is the duty of the Church, the bearer of the message of truth, to evangelize cultures in such a way as to inculturate the Gospel in them. In fact, the new evangelization is directed, ultimately, at the transformation of culture.

The theme chosen for this maiden edition of the Utume Theological Journal is “*From Intolerance to Integration of Christianity in Africa*.” Don Bosco Utume, the Salesian Theological College recently organized a Writing Competition on the above theme for the students of the college. The articles thus collected are edited along with other scholarly works giving the shape to this theological e-journal.

The article entitled ***African Religio-Culture and Christianity: From Intolerance to Co-existence*** by Denis Odinga Okiya challenges the students of theology to undertake and promote a deep-rooted study of the African religio-culture and to apply it to their theological studies. The author expresses the need to create an academic environment that fosters channels for coexistence of Christianity and African religio-culture based on genuine dialogue. Some of the practical questions presented in the article are worth pondering.

The insightful article by Ayogu Christian Kizito Chukwuebuka ***Inculturation: A Panacea to the Problem of Co-Existence of Christianity in Africa*** explores the urgent and inevitable need to move from coexistence to integration of Christianity in Africa. The author suggests ways and means to overcome the dichotomy between what African Christians profess as faith and how they live the ancient traditions of Africa.

In his well-researched article, ***Integrating Christianity into the African Culture: Dialogue and Inculturation***, Oballa Solomon Kenneth Igwebuike presents the views of African scholars regarding Christianity. He also makes an attempt to understand what these views entail especially using the methods proposed by the Canadian Philosopher and Theologian, Bernard Lonergan. He concludes by asserting that it is possible for Christianity to be integrated into the fabric of the African religious outlook.

Joseph Ngezahayo in his article ***African Traditional Religious Values: A Platform for Integration of Christianity in Africa*** examines some values of African Traditional Religion in

⁵ Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in America* on the Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ: the Way to Conversion, Communion and Solidarity in America, 22 January 1999, no. 70.

order to enhance the integration of Christianity in Africa. According to the author this will help build a genuine African theology. He also argues that the truths of Christian doctrine should not be compromised for African beliefs and tradition. To arrive at the desired integration of Christianity and African Traditional Religion, there is an ever-growing need to appreciate and build on similarities rather than to focus only on the differences.

In his far-sighted article *The Reality of African Christianity* Fernando N. D. Pascoal underlines the fact that Africa is a fertile land for evangelization. He makes an appeal to all the readers to uphold in an appropriate manner, the various charisms and gifts for the service of the people of God in the Church and to avoid any form of reductionism. He sees a silver lining in the fact that in spite of the challenges that Africa faces as there is an upward movement in the growth of the Christian Church.

The theological reflection summarized by Otieno Isaiah Mwangi in his article *Christianity and African Traditional Religion(s): A Way Forward* presents faithfully, the true face of Africa from the distant past to this point in time based on the geography, history, culture, and religion of the African continent. This reflection is a wake-up call to each and every African to be responsible for whatever action he takes in this religious, social, cultural and political continent and to be the best he can be.

Tabu Lee Daniel in his article, *The Incorporation of the Acholi Death Rites of Passage into Christian Worship. A Case Study of Namokora Parish, Gulu Archdiocese – Uganda*, underlines the importance of the Gospel message of Christ taking root in the culture of the local people. The article aims to incorporate Acholi burial rites of passage into Christian worship. One of his findings is that such incorporation of the Acholi burial rites in the Christian funeral liturgy of Namokora Parish, will be of paramount importance for the people of Namokora Parish especially in helping in understanding the meaning of Christian death.

Dear esteemed readers, this e-journal is a humble attempt of Don Bosco Utume, Salesian Theological College at nurturing the writing skills and capacity for deep theological reflections among its students. Therefore, I invite you dear readers to applaud and appreciate the efforts made by the authors. I wish that all of us become agents of building bridges between culture and faith, in our way giving shape to a Christian faith that is truly African in nature.

Editor

Seby Kidangan Ouseph, sdb

African Religio-culture and Christianity: From Intolerance to Co-existence

Denis Odinga Okiya

Introduction

One may ask: What's in a name? The name of St. John Bosco is alive today even though he was born on 16th August 1815. We speak of him today as if he had never died in 1888. He lived a human life for seventy-three years according to the values that his community expected of him, and that is the legacy that is alive today. The name Denis Odinga Okiya evokes African religio-cultural values of friendship, reincarnation and family ties or African lineage. The same name also carries with it the Christian value of Baptism, the Catholic Sacrament of Baptism and insertion into a Christian community.

The name given to a baby in an African context can have an enduring influence on its personality and upbringing. This is because some names carry with them the idea of ancestorship. Ancestorship conjures up ideas of being exemplary, of communality, of having offspring, of African hierarchy of beings, of fullness of life and dying a good death.

These ideas give us a window into how life is organized in the African-religio cultural worldview. In order to become an ancestor, one must live an exemplary life in the community; one must be seen as close to God in the hierarchy of life; one must also have offspring in order to continue the lineage; and one must live up to a good old age and die a good death.

To put the discussion above in perspective: Denis stands for the friendship that my father had with a trade unionist Dennis Akumu. The name eventually became my baptismal name. Odinga stands for the ancestorship of my great grandmother Odinga Nyayaro, a woman who is venerated for her skills in farming, counselling, motherhood and many other qualities. She is an outstanding provider of the "elements of the divine" to the community. "Divine elements" in this presentation means all the goodness that God has made available to humanity to be used for the service to creation. Okiya situates me within the family tree of my father. This is because the Luo community where I belong is both patrilineal and patrilocal.

1. African Religio-culture

African culture is so intertwined with its religious beliefs that it is not easy to disengage a person's cultural practices from religion. Cultural beliefs and practices manifest a deep religious correlation. This is the explanation of the use of African religio-culture in this presentation. Take, for example, the African cultural practice of greeting. Greeting is not just a casual handshake or hug. It is accompanied by a serious and "religious/spiritual" interest in the

welfare of the persons greeting and being greeted. This is manifested in the narrative that accompanies the greeting. Greeting is a mutual exchange between the greeter and the greeted. A dialogue ensues about family, livestock, house, homestead and others. This dialogue brings into the picture the rest of the community. If either of the individuals is unable to contribute to another's happiness instantly, he or she will recommend a person or persons in the community who can do so, for example, if one is agonizing over how to make a wedding successful or worrying about a chicken that requires medicine. A partial or full remedy will be provided over the length of the greeting. In this way then, the greetings translate into a spirituality, a spirituality which translates into a lifestyle that fosters the strengthening of relationships. Spirituality in this sense goes beyond religion and becomes the total lifestyle of an individual in fostering good relationships in the community. This can be called a "spirituality of relationship". It is a spirituality that embraces the wellbeing of the whole community. This, once again strengthens the idea that religion in the indigenous African culture is not an independent institution but an integral and inseparable part of the entire culture.

Chinua Achebe noted many years ago that the coming of Christianity interfered with this deep-seated religiosity or spirituality. He contends that with the coming of Christianity religiosity was confined to particular days of the week. After being holy, say on Sunday, a person could do whatever he wanted to do on the other days of the week. He did not have to take religion to the office.

2. African Cultural Knowledge

Prof. Michael C. Kirwen in the book "African Cultural Knowledge" presents what has been described in the prologue (p. i) by Prof. Edward Oyugi as:

- A colourful tapestry of African Culture
- An outline of the foundational substance (of African culture)
- Spiritual underpinnings and commonalities of the African cultural experience and practices
- A theoretical narrative (of cultural themes) that enjoys a near-universal application across ethnic, racial and social delimitation
- A clear statement that cultures can be studied, understood and appreciated.

The themes presented in the book are: God, Ancestors, Living Dead, Nominal Reincarnation, African Lineage, Leadership, Adulthood and Elderhood, Bride wealth, Marriage, Polygyny, Herbalist, Diviner, Witch, Witchcraft and Death.

These themes evoke in my mind four fundamental human existential questions:

- Where does life come from?
- Where does life go? An eschatological question
- How ought life be organized? An ethical existential question
- Where does evil come from?

These themes are the main ideas that create an African communication system by which the African interprets reality, creates artifacts, promotes behaviour and organizes space. The deep-seated ideas are an attempt to answer the fundamental questions of life outlined above for the purpose of providing its members with a harmonious life.

3. Christianity

Christianity is a messianic and mission religion, i.e. it has a messiah by the name of Jesus and sets up an organized effort to get converts. African religio-culture predates Christianity. Some writers on Christianity and Africa begin with Mathew 2: 14-15 as the point of contact between Jesus and Africa.

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

Christianity came to Africa in a formal way centuries ago. The history of Christianity in Africa makes a very interesting reading. It manifests both gains and losses for Africa. Isichei (1995) outlines the spread of Christianity in Africa demarcating several regions. Such as:

- East and East Central Africa to c. 1900
- East and East Central Africa from c. 1900 to c. 1960

One of the reasons advanced for the spread of Christianity in Africa, as documented by Isichei (1995), is that “There was a widespread feeling that the power and prosperity of the European, and their military success, meant that their religion was likely to be true (p. 228). Secondly, it is argued that the belief in God was already deeply rooted in Africa so that anybody preaching God was welcome. Thirdly, some were attracted to Christianity because of the “goodies” that came along with it, such as education, health care, etc.

4. African religio-culture and Christianity

First, both religious traditions strive for perfection and immortality. However, the devil is in the details. “The question then is”, according to Ephirim-Donkor (2011),

is perfection and immortality tenable on earth? And the answer is a resounding yes. The mundane is not the final destination of eternal existence but rather the abode of ethical existence and generativity leading to ancestorhood. In order to achieve immortality an individual must undergo a series of existential stages developmentally (pp. 143-144).

This is an answer that Ephirim-Donkor gives on behalf of African religio-culture. The Christian answer is tied in with personal holiness achieved through the relationship with God and others. This is what some people call spiritual maturity or perfection. One can only be perfect when one is united with God. It is clear from the foregoing that both religious traditions seek perfection and immortality for their members.

5. Intolerance

Why then the unwillingness to accept views, beliefs, or behaviour that differ from one's own if both religious tradition seeks perfection of their members? The intolerance has given rise to statements such as: “it is impossible to be an African and a Christian at the same time”. A statement that clearly spells out the incompatibility of African-religio culture and Christianity.

Katoke (1984) states that “The missionaries who brought Christianity, rid Africa of all its traditional values and religious concepts in order to have a clean plate on which to put the new faith” (p. 7). This intolerance has had a negative impact on Christianity because there has been only a theoretical effort to understand and consciously make an effort to seek the meaning that African religio-culture brings to the life of the Africans.

African religio-culture has always been judged from a foreign paradigm, either that of colonialism or of Christianity. African religio-culture has tried to embrace both African religio-culture and Christianity.

6. Christianity versus “Ancestianity” in Black Africa

When death strikes, it becomes evident that most Africans practice “Ancestianity” and not Christianity. In some instances, a dual spirituality is evident: a mix of “Ancestianity” where the unvetted ancestors take center stage, and Christianity where Christ is at the center. Maybe, people appear to uphold Christianity and yet “Ancestianity” is what matters. The real priesthood in us stands strong when misfortune strikes.

7. Coexistence

This presentation seeks to foster seeking a genuine dialogue between African religion and Christianity.

“Dialogue between African Religion and other world religions has, regrettably, been a much-neglected area in formal religious discourse in Africa to date. Moreover, up to now, the imperative of dialogue in the process of evangelism figures only peripherally - if at all - in the study of African Christian Theology.”

“How can Christian and African spirituality’s interact with and enrich each other on the basis of mutual respect, without - as has historically been the case - the one necessarily seeking to eradicate the other?”

(African Religion in the Dialogue Debate)

Tolerance has been manifested in the move to create or put together an African Christian Theology as well as a theology of inculturation. This has been spearheaded by the Catholic Church. However, this has been done from the point of view of the superiority of Christianity.

Christianity, as has been stated earlier is both a messianic and mission religion. It is attributed to a “founder” by the name of Jesus Christ and it evangelizes. African religion does not have a founder or founders and has been based on the oral traditions passed on from generation to generation. It believes that all creation is depends on each other and on God. Increasingly, scholars have begun to document some of the beliefs of African religion. These have been presented at conferences and published in journals and books. This is an indication of a growing tolerance of African religio-culture.

These efforts are not yet satisfactory. African religio-culture has to come to a coexistence with Christianity. After all, it is the African people that the evangelizers then and now have come for.

Doubts concerning the sincerity of Christianity and the missionary enterprise have been raised over the years, for example, through statements such as ‘there is no missionary and a colonialist (meaning that missionary work and colonialism are the same). Or “it is not possible to be an African and a Christian (expressing the incompatibility of the two systems)

At this point when there is a growing number of converts to Christianity in Africa can the air be cleared so that the sentiments such as that of Chinua Achebe quoted below can be laid to rest.

In fact, I thought that Christianity was very a good and a very valuable thing for us. But after a while, I began to feel that the story that I was told about this religion wasn't perhaps completely whole, that something was left out.

(https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/chinua_achebe_464002)

Conclusion

At this point I would like Don Bosco Utume to take up the challenge of studying culture (especially African religio-culture), and understanding, appreciating and critiquing it for the purposes of dialogue. In my own estimation, this would be a first stage. The second stage would be to apply this knowledge to the theological studies promoted by Don Bosco Utume.

We are challenged today to create an academic environment that fosters a basis for the coexistence of Christianity and African religio-culture, a coexistence that is based on a genuine dialogue that is founded on research and an appreciation of the prevailing situation in contemporary Christian communities.

Some practical issues to consider

How do you explain a God-man in an African environment where God is in a completely different category from human beings? How do you explain a God with a triune nature in a context where God is one and indivisible? How does Christian theology deal with a situation where evil is personified in a human witch? Where a witch is understood as a person whose fundamental stance is to create disharmony in society. African religio-culture and Christianity have coexisted for decades. They have been judged to be able to enrich each other. Can they now provide a truly Christian and a truly African faith?

Bibliography

- Achebe, C. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Anchor Books, 1994.
- Ephirim-Donkor, A. *African spirituality: On becoming ancestors*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2011.
- Isichei, E. A. *History of Christianity in Africa: From antiquity to the present*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
- Katoke, I. Christianity and culture: An African experience. *Transformation*, 1(4), 7-10.
Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43052890>
- Kirwen, M. C.. *African cultural knowledge: Themes and embedded beliefs*. Nairobi. MIAS Books, 2011.
- Magesa, L.. *African Religion in the dialogue debate: From intolerance to coexistence*. Zurich: LIT Verlag, 2010.
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K5nhvY88-fw> (African Spirituality)

Inculturation: A Panacea to the Problem of Co-Existence of Christianity in Africa

Ayogu Christian Kizito Chukwuebuka

Introduction

History has shown that religion and culture are so intertwined that they are inseparable in many ways. This is why various societies have had some form of religion at the centre of their cultural beliefs and practices. In ancient Near Eastern societies or in early Rome, for example, the practices of religion were so ingrained in their belief systems that the religion and culture of the society in question were indistinguishable.⁶ In pre-colonial African society, these interconnected spheres made it that a people was identified by its culture and socio-religious heritage, which embodied their learned patterns for thinking, feeling and acting. In fact, both are the foundations on which the ancient and modern norms and the values of societies were built.

However, the picture painted of Africa today does not show these links between religion and culture. It rather shows a delicate and demanding situation: the co-existence of African Religio-Culture with other religions. This essay therefore explores the cause(s) of this coexistence of African Religio-Culture and Christianity, in particular, and suggests a necessary effort by the Church today to move to the integration of Christianity in Africa through inculturation. Inculturation on its own would lead to an intensively Christianized community that would lead to a transformation of the different levels of its life, laws, customs, moral values and its worldview in the light of the gospel message: this is what this paper aims at defending.

Since evangelization in Africa today is primarily the responsibility of Africans, it should therefore focus on the evangelization and Christianization of African worldviews, cultures, institutions and values. It is in this light that this work, following the prompting of the Fathers at the African Synod, proposes that the Church in Africa should tackle inculturation in her evangelizing mission as a matter of urgency in her efforts to bring about the integration of Gospel values.

1. Situational Analysis: Events of African Evangelization

To understand the situation of Christianity in Africa, we shall look at the events of African evangelization in three different encounters in the following subsections.

⁶ eNote Editorial, "How Does Religion Affect Culture" *eNote*, 20 Aug. 2015, <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-does-religion-affect-culture-491094>. Accessed on 22 January 2020.

1.1 The First Encounter: Christian Antiquity in the Northern Half of Africa (AD 62-1500)

The roots of Christianity in Africa go back to the time of the Apostles. Egypt and other parts of North Africa with their great theologians such as Origen, Athanasius, Cyril and Augustine were the pillars of the universal Church. Unfortunately, as a result of the Arab occupation, which started in 640 AD, Christianity suffered a mighty blow and it died out entirely in most North African countries.⁷ The Coptic Church in Egypt and the Church in Ethiopia are the only witnesses to Christian life in Africa from the time of the Apostles.

1.2 The Second Encounter: Christianity in the Ancient African Kingdoms (1500-1800)

The second encounter involved the parts of the continent south of the Sahara. Portuguese explorers brought the Gospel to the coastal regions of Benin, Sao Tome, Angola, Mozambique and Madagascar. Because of many difficulties especially illness and disease, practically all the missions the south of the Sahara disappeared.⁸

1.3 The Third Encounter: Modern Christianity (19th Century)

The third phase has been characterized by both success and failure because it happened during the hey-day of European expansionism and the colonization of new lands outside Europe particularly in areas considered by the Europeans as backward or primitive.⁹

1.3.1 Success of the Third Encounter

The success of this evangelization is shown by the glory and splendour associated with the saints of the modern African Church: the Holy Martyrs of Uganda, Blessed Clementine Anwarite, Blessed Iwene Tansi, Blessed Victoria Rosoamanarivo, Saint Bakhita and Blessed Bakanja.¹⁰ Today, the Church in Africa is growing tremendously, and new churches are appearing virtually every day. The vocations to priestly and religious life are abundant. About ninety nine percent of the clergy, men and women now in Africa, are Africans.¹¹

⁷ John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62-1992* (Nairobi: Paulines Publication, 1994), 17.

⁸ AMECEA Pastoral Department ed., *The African Synod Comes Home: A Simplified Text* (Nairobi: Paulines Publication, 1995), 2.

⁹ D. W. Waruta, "The Educational Mission of the Church: An African Perspective," in *Mission in African Christianity: Critical Essays in Missiology* eds. A. Nasimiyu-Wasike and D. W. Waruta (Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1993), 111.

¹⁰ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995), § 34 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), 28.

¹¹ Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, "Inculturation and the Christian Faith in Africa," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2, no. 17 (September 2012): 236.

The efforts of the evangelizers are visible in the educational system and, very importantly, in their pioneering work in documenting African languages which laid the foundations for literature in these African languages.¹²

1.3.2 Failure of the Third Encounter

The missionaries failed to incarnate the gospel in the African culture. This has led to “no depth of faith”, an inauthentic Christian life, syncretism and the increasing proliferation of Afro-Christian indigenous churches. In the eyes of the colonial masters and their missionary counterparts, Africans were savages to be civilized, the cursed sons of Ham to be saved, and big children to be educated.¹³ This particular way of thinking is well portrayed by Rousseau (quoted in Ezenweke and Kanu) who claimed that the black people were unable to think in any reflective manner. Their engagement in arts was, therefore, a thoughtless activity which was the antithesis of the intellect.¹⁴

These ideas, in one way or another, conditioned the evangelization of the missionaries. European theology was considered the universal theology, valid for the whole world.¹⁵ The missionaries saw most of what the Africans treasured and valued in their culture as devilish and as demons to be cast out. They could confer only conditional baptism on the new converts, in case they did not have a soul. Thus, they planted a Christian message that reflected western culture. They created an educational system according to their own cultural, theological and philosophical background which represented a superior culture that had to be absorbed by their students in total.¹⁶

The result of all this was the imposition of a Christian message that reflected western culture, but failed to respect the indigenous belief and practices, leading to what Madu (2004) described as a ‘superficiality of faith,’ or what Ezenweke and Madu (2006) called ‘skin-deep Christianity’.¹⁷ For instance, many of the African Christians will piously worship God on Sunday but spend the rest of the week destroying and even murdering their neighbour for

¹² Viera Pawliková - Vilhanová, “Christian Missions in Africa and their Role in the Transformation of African Societies”, *Asian and African Studies* 16, no. 2 (2007): 249.

¹³ Kenyuyfoon G. Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa* (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2012), 78.

¹⁴ Elizabeth Ezenweke and Ikechukwu Kanu, “Perspectives of Syncretism and Its Modern Trend: Christian and African Traditions,” *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 13, no. 2 (2012): 72, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v13i2.4> Accessed on 30 December, 2019.

¹⁵ Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 289.

¹⁶ Waruta, “The Educational Mission of the Church”, 113.

¹⁷ Ezenweke & Kanu, “Perspectives of Syncretism”, 72.

political or material gain.¹⁸ Some even practice syncretism, that is, they are always quick to revert back to the traditional religious beliefs. They often live in two separate worlds: the world of the traditional religion and customs, and the world of Christian faith.¹⁹ Often they are tossed between their traditional religious culture and their Christian faith and move from one to the other.

2. Coexistence of Christianity in Independent Africa

Although the Church in Africa has shown a positive sign of geographical growth, a critical look at the authenticity of its prophetic life shows only a sense of coexistence. Coexistence means “the state of being together in the same place at the same time.”²⁰ That is to say, different things exist together at the same time, with the ability to live peaceably contending with each other’s differences.²¹ In our context, it is the existence of both African traditional culture and Christianity.²²

Coexistence is exemplified in the words of the Bishops at the Synod for Africa *Ecclesia in Africa* when they remarked that because the faith has not been received into their culture, African Christians are like frogs who have two legs on land and two in the water - when there is a disturbance in the water they jump on to dry land and when there is trouble on the land they rush into the water. For example, some Christians pray the rosary in the morning and practice witchcraft in the afternoon.²³ Thus, we see so many African Christians exhibiting a divided loyalty between their Church and traditional Culture.

Against this background, many scholars have argued that if a faith is not rooted in the culture of the people and “until faith has become fully indigenous”, no matter how successful or long it lasts, such a faith is doomed to die at some point.²⁴ Hinduism, for instance, has withstood the Islamic tide which swept through most of the other areas surrounding India because of its deep roots in the cultural life of the Indian people. Hinduism for India is not just a religion but a way of life. Unless Africans, like their Indian counterparts, accept Christianity as their way of

¹⁸ Warute, “The Educational Mission of the Church”, 120-1.

¹⁹ AMECEA, *The African Synod Comes Home*, 25.

²⁰ *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, International Student’s Edition, 8th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 274.

²¹ Liz Kauffman ed. *Webster’s Dictionary* (London: Nickel Press, 1990), 74.

²² Perhaps, Islam is also inclusive among the cultures that co-exist with African Traditional Religion in Africa, but we shall not dwell on it in the context of our discussion.

²³ AMECEA, *The African Synod Comes Home*, 25.

²⁴ Waruta, “The Educational Mission of the Church,” 110.

life, one cannot with certainty guarantee the continuation of such a faith in the future. Hence, the urgent need to move from coexistence to integration of Christianity into African culture.

Integration here means not just unifying or giving the Christian faith an African interpretation but also having African forms of transmission. As such, Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa today should focus not so much on quantity but on quality so that the statistics have to be read against the witness of a profound life of faith. It thus calls for a form of evangelization through inculturation, which proposes a new response of faith to the concrete problems of the people, a type of Christianity which does not ignore the pains and sufferings of the people and is deeply concerned about the people's life situation and cultural reality. This will require a Christianity which assumes, purifies, nourishes and leads Christians to realize fully their faith for the construction of a new and better society.²⁵ Thus, inculturation ought to help African Christians gain an identity as a people in the face of the changing world, so as to be able to incarnate in this identity the Gospel values.

3. Towards an Integration of Christianity in African Culture: Theological Foundations

Inculturation as a means of achieving a substantial integration of Christianity in African culture has some theological foundations. We shall discuss them in the following sub-sections.

3.1 The Mystery of the Trinity

The penetration and indwelling of the three divine persons reciprocally in one another, does not throw away the distinctiveness of persons in the Trinity. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct persons and consubstantially different. The beauty of this interpenetration lies in the fact of their distinctiveness. In accordance with Trinitarian appropriation, the Father has distinct qualities, as do the Son and the Holy Spirit. Their missions in the economy of salvation are also distinct, but it is still the same one God who acts.²⁶ Cultural diversity, itself, thus can be a source of unity in the African Church if it is respected and integrated well. Therefore, the integration of Christianity in the African culture does not pose a threat to the Church's unity; it rather adds to its beauty.

3.2 The Mystery of the Incarnation

Inculturation is written into the very logic of the mystery of incarnation.²⁷ Jesus is the Son of God, and through His incarnation, life, death and resurrection, the mystery of Christ

²⁵ Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, 109-110.

²⁶ Kanu, "Inculturation and the Christian Faith in Africa," 239-9.

²⁷ Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, 136.

remains the model for integration of God's message into any culture. At the Incarnation, he integrated two natures (divine and human) and participated in the culture of his people. He lived, prayed and felt like every other Jew.²⁸ So, just as the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14)", so the Good News, the Word of Jesus Christ, must take root and be incarnated in the life-situation of the hearers of the Word. Inculturation is precisely the insertion of the Gospel message into cultures, just as Jesus came among us and lived on earth in a particular culture.²⁹

However, Jesus challenged his culture where it was wrong and unjust. In the same way as a grain of wheat has to die to bear much fruit (John 12:24), some parts of our cultures have to die to come to new life.³⁰ Thus, the African culture needs to be transformed by the Gospel values in the light of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is by looking at Jesus Christ and the way he redeemed us that the true and false values of any society can be known.³¹

3.3 The Mystery of Pentecost

Inculturation also draws its strength from the mystery of Pentecost which marked a turning point in the faith and the mission of the early Christian Community. The fact that the Gospel message was understood in the first disciples' own tongue (Acts 2: 1-11) helped its comprehension, propagation and assimilation. The fact that the message was addressed directly to the people without any interpreter, touched each one in his/her concrete reality and instigated a hunger to hear more and, subsequently, to become witnesses and preachers of this message. In the same way, Africans need to comprehend and assimilate the Gospel message in a more genuine way. It must be proclaimed to them in their own language, interpreted into their real-life situation, through their own visions while taking into consideration their world and religious views.³²

4. Imperatives for Inculturation in the History of the Church

From the earliest days of evangelization, the Church has always experienced the theological and pastoral challenge of integrating the Gospel message into the diverse cultures it met. One of the first challenges was the contact with Hellenistic and Roman culture. Justin the

²⁸ AMECEA, *The African Synod Comes Home*, 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, 136-7.

Martyr made a notable attempt at arguing that the Christian faith is not only compatible with whatever is good and noble in Hellenistic and Roman cultures, but that the different cultures were inspired by God and should be appropriate for his service. He saw these cultures as prefigurations of Christ *Logos spermatikos* (seed bearing word). He taught that the *Spermatic Logos* has been implanted in the heart of every human culture since all things were created through Christ, with him and for him.³³

Clement also proposed a fundamental theory – a harmony between faith and Greek culture, which placed Greek philosophy at the service of faith. For him the ideas of Greek Philosophy were a gift to mankind, and find their unity in Christianity.³⁴ By the late medieval period, Christianity had become so deeply imbedded in European culture and social institutions such that there was an apparent triumph of Christian inculturation in what had once been a barbarian and pagan territory. The result was a faith that seemed inseparable from the categories of European life and thought.

5. The Magisterium on Integration of Christianity in a Culture

In the second half of the twentieth century, there emerged a new way of implementing *missio ad gentes* – bringing the good news of Jesus to those who have not heard it at all.³⁵ It was a game changer which helped the Catholic Church to shed the European, colonialist and ecclesiocentric garb of *missio ad gentes*, and encouraged the emergence and flourishing of the local churches, local missionary vocations and local theology worldwide. Corresponding to the socio-cultural and religious context of each continent, the Asian Church focused on interreligious dialogue, while the African Church implemented inculturation and the Latin American Church developed liberation movements.³⁶ Culture became the concern of the Second Vatican Council and of the many papal statements that led to the establishment of a Pontifical Council for Culture in 1982.³⁷ In fact, a review of some recent church documents will help us to understand some of the contributions to this development.

³³ Kanu, “Inculturation and the Christian Faith in Africa,” 241.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Patrick M Musau, “Theology of Mission,” *Exploring the Future of mission in Africa: In Celebration of Maryknoll’s 100 Years of Mission*, eds. Laurenti Magesa and Michael Kirwen (Nairobi: Mias Books, 2012), 95.

³⁶ Joseph Palakeel, “Anthropological Grounding of Evangelization: From Ad Gentes to New Evangelization,” *Sedos Bulletin* 51, no.9/10 (September-October 2019): 38.

³⁷ Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, 289.

Soon after the First World War, the Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* of Pope Benedict XV (1919) gave great importance to the formation of native clergy³⁸ and called for the end of Europeanism in Mission.³⁹ That was the start of growing number of native clergy and missionaries in Africa. The Encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* of Pope Pius XI (1926) opened the way for a truly local Church and a break with the colonial missionary methods.⁴⁰ The Encyclical *Evangelii Praecones* of Pope Pius XII (1951) highlighted the need to have positive views on non-Christian religions.⁴¹ *Ad Gentes* (1965) of Second Vatican Council assigned a rather creative role to religions in the process of human salvation; a marked change from a long held condemnatory view of other religions by many missionaries. The document sees religions and cultures as part of the “universal design of God for the salvation of the human race” and states that they may lead one to the true God and can be understood as a preparation for the Gospel.⁴²

The post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, of Pope Paul VI enlarged the concept of mission found in *Ad Gentes* and gave a holistic mission theology: “For the Church, evangelizing means bringing the Good News into all the strata of humanity, and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new.”⁴³ The Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* of Pope John Paul II also stressed that mission is an issue of faith. Without faith nothing will progress. The Church and her members – all those in ministry – will accomplish little unless their lives and apostolates are rooted in living faith.⁴⁴ The *Doctrinal Note* (2007) urged that evangelization must never be separated from commitment to help all persons to meet Christ in faith.⁴⁵ Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013) overflows with

³⁸ Benedict XV, Apostolic Exhortation on the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World *Maximum Illud* (30 November 1919), § 14, at The Holy See, www.vatican.va.

³⁹ Joseph Puthenpurakal, *Evangelizing Mission: A Manual for Missionary Animation* (Shillong: DBCIC Publications, 2008), 36.

⁴⁰ Pius XI, Apostolic Exhortation on Catholic Missions *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28 Feb 1926), § 21, at The Holy See, www.vatican.va.

⁴¹ Pius XII, Encyclical on the Promotion of Catholic Missions *Evangelii Praecones* (2 June 1951), § 56-60, at The Holy See, www.vatican.va.

⁴² Second Vatican Council, “Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 7 December, 1965,” § 3, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975), 716.

⁴³ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation on the Catholic Evangelization *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), § 18 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992), 14.

⁴⁴ John Paul II, Encyclical on the Permanent Validity of the Church’s Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990) § 11 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992), 20.

⁴⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, on some Aspects of Priestly Formation *Doctrinal Note*, (3 December 2007) §§ 4-8, www.vatican.va.

missionary dynamism and wisdom. He calls all Christians “missionary disciples.”⁴⁶ Today, evangelization is given a firm theoretical and practical basis in the Christian vision of man shaped in dialogue between the biblical doctrine and the modern and post-modern insights on man, society and nature.⁴⁷

6. Integration as a Means of New Evangelization of African Culture

African culture, like any other culture has its own limitations which need to be purified through evangelization. Thus, integration would be fruitful when the Church integrates the African spiritual vision of the universe, the sacred sense of human life and history, the concept of solidarity, family and society with the novelty of the Gospel.⁴⁸ A good approach would be perhaps to study the true values in the African culture and give them new life through integration, as suggested below:

First, Africans have a profound religious sense, a sense of the sacred, of the existence of God the Creator and of a spiritual world.⁴⁹ What this means is that Africans are generally very religious. Evangelism must therefore not begin with the question whether or not God exists, but rather who this God is. He is a loving God, who desires to have a close fellowship with the African people. To enjoy fellowship with God, Africans must therefore acknowledge that they have sinned against God, repent of their sin and receive Christ as his Saviour and Lord (not the worship of ancestor).

Second, Africans are very much aware of the reality of sin, both individual and communal sin, and know the need for rites of purification and expiation so as to be in right relation.⁵⁰ What this means is that Africans know a lot about morality and expiation. This needs to be acknowledged by the evangelizer and then integrated into the moral teachings and Sacraments of the African Church.

Third, Africans recognize the role of the family as fundamental. With his sense of family, of love and respect of life, the Africans love children and welcome them joyfully as gifts of God. Life is respected from the moment it is conceived and brought forth until its natural end.⁵¹ This is why they celebrate each stage of human development with rites of passage and

⁴⁶ Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013) § 119-121 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992), 66-68.

⁴⁷ Palakeel, “Anthropological Grounding of Evangelization,” 26.

⁴⁸ Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, 140.

⁴⁹ *Ecclesia in Africa* § 42.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 43.

initiation. The Church needs to purify any negative aspect such as blood sacrifice. It should uphold the truth (the sanctity of life).

Finally, African cultures have a deep sense of solidarity and community of life in the extended family. This includes even the ancestors who continue to live and remain in communion with those still living on earth.⁵² Because of this, feasts are celebrated with the whole village, and all Africans want to live a good life so as to become an ancestor after death, and by so doing continue to be in communion with the living. This value is a preparation for the belief in the communion of saints. Africans must preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to individualism.

7. Challenges Facing Integration of Christianity in Africa Today

Though inculturation is an urgent priority for the firm rooting of the Gospel in Africa, it has not been an easy task. We shall discuss some of the challenges it faces in the following sub-sections.

7.1 Socio-Political Challenges

Today's African governments are more concerned with secular matters and completely distant from the spiritual dimension. For this reason, a political ruler is incapable of transmitting the vital force and of promoting life in the community. Unlike the traditional culture where those in authority were models and whoever lost the moral and human qualities was immediately deposed, today the power to rule is no longer dependent on the people, but more often on the individual's personal capacity, his shrewdness and the support from the West.⁵³ The Church in Africa, faithful to her mission, has to be the voice for the voiceless and the hope for the hopeless

7.2 Socio-Economic Challenges

Africa is in an economic abyss, its peoples plunged into deep misery and abject poverty. On the one hand the economy is weakened by internal political instability, and the exploitation from the industrialized world makes it difficult for Africans to adapt to the competitive mentality and action created by modernity. On the other hand, the prevalence of mismanagement and the prestige of the ruling class add to the predicament. The Church

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, 114.

therefore must see a way to change the mentality of the African Christians regarding justice, work and materialism.⁵⁴

7.3 Socio-Religious Challenges

There is a religious boom, the growth of a sort of religious “supermarket”, which has also created serious religious turmoil in Africa. There are, in addition to Christianity and African traditional religion, many other religions in present Africa today such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and the proliferation of many mystical movements, secret societies and other sects. These pose challenges to Christianity, not only because of their rapid increase and growing influence in the lives of the people, but also because of their conflicting ideologies. The worst of them is the upsurge of Independent and Healing Churches as well as the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.⁵⁵ Some writers claim that these churches represent a true African Christian religiosity because they are based on the anthropological foundation of the African worldview.⁵⁶

African Traditional religion also presents a great challenge to the theological, doctrinal and missiological reflections of the Church. Being a religion and at the same time the foundation of the cultural values of the people, it is difficult to be completely detached from it. The Church needs to make a profound study of it as a cultural heritage in order to provide an enabling environment for authentic assimilation of the Gospel message.⁵⁷

7.4 Socio-Cultural Challenges

African society is far removed from its original self because of its subjection to external influences that have caused so many deformities. Thus, we cannot point to what really is an African culture today, especially in the towns and cities. The rural areas are some what better and serve most often as a reference point for traditional rites such as weddings, burial, etc. Due to their mixed and diversified population, towns and cities have heterogeneous cultures, often affected by urbanization and Western influence. It is therefore difficult to talk of a single culture but rather multi-culture. This poses a huge challenge to the notion of inculturation, its essence and methods.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, 114-118.

⁵⁵ Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, 119.

⁵⁶ Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, 121.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 124-131.

7.5 Ethical Challenges

The widespread and acute sense of hopelessness as a result of change has led many to adopt illegitimate methods of improving their chances for survival such as armed robbery, carjacking, begging, money laundering and other social vices. Society itself has become permissive and tolerant, accommodating practices that are divergent from the values of Christian morality as well as from the traditional ideals. The core of the traditional values where the sense of common life is appreciated, has long been lost. Society no longer promotes values like hospitality and sharing which are fundamental for the extended family.⁵⁹

8. Results on the African Church Practice of Inculturation as a way to Integration

In spite of the full mandate given to Catholic bishops and priests to implement inculturation, it is sad that so little has been achieved. Inculturation seems to exist mainly in the academic field. Associations of theologians and exegetes are being set up in great numbers, and are organizing symposiums and colloquiums. The subject African Inculturation Theology is presently being taught either as a self-subsisting course or as a mini course under the auspices of another subject in most ecclesiastical institutions. A good number of journal articles and textbooks have been or are being published on it.⁶⁰ However, many of the suggestions made in the dissertations lie in the libraries or college archives. Not many the measures or recommendations proposed have been tried out in practice.⁶¹

Nevertheless, some practical achievements have been made in the liturgy, and they have moved rapidly from simple adaptations to creative efforts. There is now a wide usage of vernacular among African Christian worshipping communities. African art is now widely used in the liturgy and in decorating places of worship. Traditional forms such as drum strokes, hand claps, dancing and body language are now widely used in the liturgy to express certain elements of the Christian faith. As regards the Mass, in Ethiopia, there is already an Ethiopian rite in existence. In Zaire, now known as Congo, there is a Zairean rite. However, in places like Nigeria, Ghana and many West African countries, the proposed rites are still at the level of proposal and have not been implemented.⁶²

Regrettably, in most seminaries where inculturation is claimed to be practised, it is more of a caricature of what should be happening. It is usually limited to the liturgy of the Mass, and

⁵⁹ Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, 131-133.

⁶⁰ Kanu, "Inculturation and the Christian Faith in Africa," 241.

⁶¹ Kanu, "Inculturation and the Christian Faith in Africa," 242.

⁶² *Ibid.*

celebrated once in a while, most often when there are visitors around. In preparation for these liturgies, students go to dust up what is considered their culture for display. Once the visitors have gone, inculturation goes with them. This makes inculturation less of way of life, and more of a show in memory of antiquity.⁶³

Conclusion

The present situation of the Church in Africa shows that until faith becomes fully rooted in its people's culture and until it becomes the determining factor of their thought, vision, reality and life, no matter how long it survives and how successful it may prove to be, it will remain superficial,. And sooner or later it will be blown away by any wind of doubt or trial. Since, through evangelization, the Church endeavours to bring the Good News into every strata of humanity transforming it from within, a positive step toward solving this challenging situation of the Church in Africa is inculturation.

Hence, the concern of this paper has been to explore the urgent and the need to move from coexistence to integration of Christianity in Africa. This move will make alive and efficacious the core values of Christianity and the ancient tradition of Africa, at the same creating a new civilization in which an African Christian will feel at home, both as a Christian and as an African, in the events of his daily life, at home, at work, in leisure and recreation and in the neighbourhood where he lives In this way, the dichotomy between what an African Christian professes as faith and how he lives would be overcome. We have argued that Inculturation alone can bring about this integration which would lead to the creation of an intensively Christianized African community that would witness a transformation of the different levels of its life, laws, customs, moral values and its worldview in the light of the gospel message.

Bibliography

AMECEA Pastoral Department ed. *The African Synod Comes Home: A Simplified Text.*

Nairobi: Paulines Publication, 1995.

Baur, John. *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African History 62-1992.* Nairobi: Paulines Publication, 1994.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *On some Aspects of Priestly Formation Doctrinal Note*, (3 December 2007). www.vatican.va.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

- eNote Editorial. "How Does Religion Affect Culture." *eNote*, 20th August, 2015, <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/how-does-religion-affect-culture-491094>, Accessed on 22 January 2020.
- Ezenweke, Elizabeth and Ikechukwu Kanu. "Perspectives of Syncretism and Its Modern Trend: Christian and African Traditions." *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 13. no. 2 (2012): 71-84. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ujah.v13i2.4>
- Kanu, Ikechukwu Anthony. "Inculturation and the Christian Faith in Africa." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 2, no. 17 (September 2012): 236-244.
- Kauffman, Liz ed. *Webster's Dictionary*. London: Nickel Press, 1990.
- Musau, Patrick M. "Theology of Mission." In *Exploring the Future of mission in Africa: In Celebration of Maryknoll's 100 Years of Mission*. Edited by Laurenti Magesa and Michael Kirwen. Nairobi: Mias Books, 2012.
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: International Student's Edition*, 8th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Palakeel, Joseph. "Anthropological Grounding of Evangelization: From Ad Gendes to New Evangelization." *Sedos Bulletin* 51, no.9/10. (September-October 2019): 26-38.
- Pawliková -Vilhanová, Viera. "Christian Missions in Africa and their Role in the Transformation of African Societies." *Asian and African Studies* 16, no 2 (2007), 249-260.
- Pope Benedict XV. Apostolic Exhortation on the Propagation of the Faith throughout the World *Maximum Illud* (30 November 1919). At The Holy See, www.vatican.va.
- Pope Francis. Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013). Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992.
- Pope John Paul II. Encyclical on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990). Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992.
- Pope John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on the Church in Africa *Ecclesia in Africa* (14 September 1995). Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995.
- Pope Paul VI. Apostolic Exhortation on the Catholic Evangelization *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975). Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1992.
- Pope Pius XI. Apostolic Exhortation on Catholic Missions *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28 Feb 1926). At The Holy See, www.vatican.va.
- Pope Pius XII. Encyclical on the Promotion of Catholic Missions *Evangelii Praecones* (2 June 1951). At The Holy See, www.vatican.va.

- Puthenpurakal, Joseph. *Evangelizing Mission: A Manual for Missionary Animation*. Shillong: DBCIC Publications, 2008.
- Second Vatican Council, "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity, *Ad Gentes Divinitus*, 7 December, 1965" In *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*. Edited by Austin Flannery, 715-752. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1975.
- The Holy Bible. The New Revised Standard Version: Catholic Edition*. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2017.
- Waruta, D. W. "The Educational Mission of the Church: An African Perspective." In *Mission in African Christianity: Critical Essays in Missiology*. Edited by A. Nasimiyu-Wasike and D. W. Waruta. 108-131. Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1993.
- Wirba, Kenyuyfoon G. *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*. Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2012.

Integrating Christianity into the African Culture: Dialogue and Inculturation

Oballa Solomon Kenneth Igwebuike

Introduction

Christian missionary activity took root among the peoples in the 19th century. Today, many nations of Sub-Saharan Africa are largely Christian. The missionary evangelisation project has yielded results. From suspicion to co-existence, a large percentage of Africans today know Christianity as a common and resident religion. Although Africans have accepted Christianity as a resident religion, the question of integration is increasingly gaining attention. The question then is: Will there ever come a time when Christianity can be fully integrated into the African socio-cultural and religious schema? This is our concern in this essay. Employing research, analysis and argumentation, we seek to approach the quest at hand.

1. The Church's Mission and Evangelization Today

Without prejudice to the intervening historical epochs from the time of early Christianity to the era of the First Vatican Council, it is fitting that we should concern ourselves especially with the epoch of our special interest; the evangelization of sub-Saharan Africa.

Europe had emerged from the Golden Age as a unified civilization, the result of which was the emergence of a classical culture.⁶⁴ This cultural turn prided itself in the cultivation and glorification of cultural virtues. Education was incomplete without the imbibing of these values.⁶⁵

After the decline of civilization in Europe and consequently, of the Church's missionary fervor, the missionary activity of the Church experienced a remarkable resurgence with the re-organization of the *Propaganda Fide* in 1815 such that by the 1850s, there were already two Vicariates South of the Sahara.⁶⁶ This was a fruit of the missionary ardor of several European missionaries who risked hunger and drought to sow the seed of the Word among the peoples of faraway lands.

Although the generosity and ardor of missionaries are not in doubt, they remained the offspring of their own civilization. There were widespread reports from missionary lands of a certain approach to evangelization which smacked of pride in one's culture rather than the desire to preach the gospel as a universally valid message. When the time was ripe, handing

⁶⁴ Gerard Whelan, *A Discerning Church: Pope Francis, Lonergan and a Theological Method for the Future* (Newton: Paulist Press, 2019), 20.

⁶⁵ Whelan, *A Discerning Church*, 20.

⁶⁶ John Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages: A History* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005), 308.

over responsibility of the local churches to the local clergy was a tug-of-war.⁶⁷ The classicist cultural notion of an individual salvation and private devotion yielded little zeal among the missionaries to build a “church” or “community”, a situation that left the local clergy feeling as mere auxiliaries.⁶⁸ This is evident in a letter written to *Propaganda Fide* in the year 1847 by a local priest:

On the necessity in the abstract for an indigenous clergy, there is fairly general agreement, but when it comes to the point, no one is willing to put the policy into practice, and the reason nearly always given is that the people of this country are so devoid of intelligence and so weak in character that they are incapable of conceiving the grandeur and dignity of the priesthood and of fulfilling its demands.⁶⁹

There existed among certain missionaries, a nationalist mentality which Pope Benedict XV remarkably but gently rebuked in his encyclical *Maximum Illud* where he asserted:

Hence, wherever there exist a sufficient number of indigenous clergy, well instructed and worthy of their divine vocation, it may be justly said that the missionaries have successfully completed their work and that the church has been thoroughly founded (...) Remember that you have to make citizens not of any country upon earth but of the heavenly country.⁷⁰

Thus, we can surmise that the Church’s attitudes towards evangelization in general were those of amity, respect and collaboration. These dispositions, however sincere, were truncated by the classicist cultural disposition of certain missionaries who were too attached to their native cultural peculiarities to the detriment of the gospel. Furthermore, the prevalent social theory of the time upheld the superiority of the white race and the western culture over the rest of the world then considered as a world of darkened and backward peoples.⁷¹

2. Dialectic on Missionary Action within the African Religious Space

Recent decades have seen robust intellectual exchanges between the supporters of the African religious perspective and those of the Neo-Scholastic Catholic Theological School as they have debated the relevance or irrelevance of views regarding early missionary activity in Africa. According to Laurenti Magesa, there are certain unhelpful attitudes deducible from the methodology employed in the missionary evangelization of Africa. There is also the Neo-Scholastic Theological School, represented in our research by the views of George Kocholickal,

⁶⁷ Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages*, 309.

⁶⁸ Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages*, 309.

⁶⁹ J. Derek Holmes, *The Papacy in the Modern World, 1914 – 1915* (New York: Derek Holmes, 1981), 22.

⁷⁰ Holmes, *The Papacy in the Modern World*, 23-24.

⁷¹ Norbert Brockman and Umberto Pescantini, *A History of the Catholic Church* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2007), 160.

who insist that the views of the African scholars hold no water. We shall take a cursory look at these views and put them side by side. Thereafter, we shall proceed to propose a pattern of action in mission that will lead to integration of Christianity in Africa.

3. The African Perspective

Laurenti Magesa who here serves as our reference for arguments from the African perspective identified certain attitudes as unhelpful:

1. The Manichaeian Approach to Missionary Activity
2. Racism and a Corrosion of African Memory
3. Linguistic Erosion and Cultural Alienation

3.1. Manichaeian Approach to Missionary Activity

Manichaeism is the first serious heresy that taught that the world is divided into two opposing forces of good and evil; a world in which the spirit was denoted as good, and matter was denoted as bad or evil.⁷² Manichaeism maintains that beliefs and practices in other cultural climes are “allegedly lower”, primitive, savage, underdeveloped and barbaric. According to Magesa, it is the view of many Africans that this mindset prevailed among the early evangelizers in the African mission.⁷³

3.2. Racism and Corrosion of African Memory

Magesa holds that the dualistic approach to evangelization of the local peoples can only be explained in the light of a racist mindset.⁷⁴ This mindset basically considers the local peoples under evangelization as inferior. Converted Africans in the view of the missionaries, must therefore show themselves as having nothing or little to do with the ritual of their people. This leads to an erosion of memory, a denigration of cultural values and a willful blindness to the possibility of God’s presence within the cultural heritage of the people.

3.3. Linguistic Erosion and Cultural Alienation

It is a matter of history that African Christians could not be baptized in their local names, Masses celebrated in the local languages were forbidden. Religious instruction taught people to hate their own kin; they were taught to tear down the temples sacred to their peoples⁷⁵ and to see no meaning in the values upheld by their culture. Laurenti Magesa further argues that

⁷² Vidmar, *The Catholic Church Through the Ages*, 68.

⁷³ Laurenti Magesa, “How Many Loaves Do You Have? Christian Pedagogy and African Ethics,” *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission* no. 1 (2014): 32.

⁷⁴ Magesa, *How Many Loaves Do You Have?*, 35.

⁷⁵ Magesa, *How Many Loaves Do You Have?*, 41.

all cultural dialogue must occur within an ambience of “reciprocal enrichment” as well as a “deep cooperation and preservation” of man’s highest spiritual values and ideals,⁷⁶ the absence of which brings about a cancerous and gradual demise of native cultures and languages.

4. The Neo-Scholastic Catholic Theological Perspective

The study of the history of the inculturation of Christianity into the African cultural and religious space is one that is as exciting as it is demanding. Several African scholars including Henry Okullu, John Mbiti, Okot P’ Bitek, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Taban Lo Liyong, Kabiru Kinyanjui and Odhiambo Okhite,⁷⁷ have expressed a disconcertion with the pedagogy of evangelization used by missionaries in Africa. This view has been repudiated by another circle of scholars who hold that:

1. The critics consider Christianity as just one among any other religion, and not as the fullness of revelation.
2. To engage in any true dialogue with the African reality, Christianity has to abandon its claim to the fullness of revelation.⁷⁸

The views above hold that although all traditional religions contain elements of God’s revelation, it is not right to condescend or to accept that there is:⁷⁹

1. Saving faith outside the church.
2. Salvation is found only in the saving ministry of Jesus taken as a whole.
3. True faith emanates from the acceptance to this revealed truth revealed in the message and person of Jesus Christ.
4. True Christian spirituality goes beyond abstract knowledge or moralism towards knowledge, moral effort, and the response of a person to the word of God, living a life of love hidden with Christ in God.

It is clear from the aforementioned that what is placed before us in the presentation of the two sides of the argument is a question of history and orthodox Catholic teaching. We discern then, that this debate is a question of content and method, theology and praxis; pastoral ministry and dogma.

⁷⁶ Callisto Locheng, *Missiology; Introduction to the Roots of the Great Commission* (Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2011), 168.

⁷⁷ J.N.K. Mugambi, *Critique of Christianity in African Literature* (Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishing Ltd., 1992), 64.

⁷⁸ George Kocholickal, “Sir Give me Some of that Water so that I may never be thirsty again,” *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission* no. 1 (2014): 50-97.

⁷⁹ Kocholickal, “Sir Give me Some of that Water so that I may never be thirsty again,” 85-90.

5. From Co-Existence to Integration: Content and Method at the Service of the Mission

According to Bernard Lonergan, as quoted by Gerard Whelan, the Second Vatican Council dealt basically in all its discussions, with the problem of method, albeit unbeknownst to the Council Fathers.⁸⁰ We live in the era of the Second Vatican Council and are guided by its teachings. Behind the quest of Bernard Lonergan to inquire into the methods of theological investigations and history was a deeply rooted concern for the poor.⁸¹ This was the same sentiment that formed the basis of the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*:

The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the men of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted in anyway, are the joy and hope, the grief and the anguish of the followers of Christ as well.⁸²

We hope to achieve using the above reference, a harmony of ideas that seamlessly unite theology and praxis in the catholic faith.

6. Neo – Scholastic Catholic Theology and the Vatican II

At the opening address to the Council Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII called “for the event to be a pastoral and not primarily doctrinal”.⁸³ This gives us the opportunity to presume that the Catholic theological outlook up till the Second Vatican Council had been particularly inclined to the preservation of doctrine.

Catholic theology rests largely on the Neo-Scholastic understanding of faith and life which in turn is built on deductive reasoning. Most scholars hold that the works of Aquinas are a complete “overhaul of Aristotelianism”.⁸⁴ Therefore, deductive conclusions pertinent to Aristotle’s philosophy can also apply largely to Neo-Scholasticism. The Council fulfilled the call of the Pontiff by issuing documents which leaned towards the pastoral ministry of the Church.⁸⁵ The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, as well as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, are two great examples.

⁸⁰ Whelan, *A Discerning Church*, 8.

⁸¹ Whelan, *A Discerning Church*, 10.

⁸² Austin Flannery, ed., *Vatican Council II, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. 1 (Mumbai: St Pauls, 2010), 794.

⁸³ Whelan, *A Discerning Church*, 3.

⁸⁴ Tracey Rowland, *Catholic Theology* (London: T & T Clark, 2017), 47.

⁸⁵ Whelan, *A Discerning Church*, 3

7. Theology and Praxis: Doctrinal Orthodoxy and Pastoral Exigencies

Christianity thrived in the Roman Empire as a mono-faith culture.⁸⁶ This means that within Christianity, one was either a believer or not. On the other hand, in a multi-faith culture, there is immediately the question of others, and the reality of those who live outside our community and who believe in what appears to be a different god. To answer the concerns raised by this reality, Bernard Lonergan concerned himself with the dialectics around the dilemma of relativism and fundamentalism, empirical and classical culture, societal progress and decline, history and modern culture as well as pluralism.⁸⁷

Lonergan advocated a system of evangelization that employed historical consciousness as its tool. While acknowledging the prevalence of speculative reason evident in the older view of evangelization, he called for integration of the consciousness of the living agents in the process of evangelization.⁸⁸ Historical consciousness breeds authenticity among a people such that they are able to transcend experimental infrastructure to enrich it, extend it, organize it but never to slight it and even much less to violate its primordial role.⁸⁹ Praxis is especially relevant to religious studies because it is the world mediated by ultimate meaning and motivated by ultimate values.⁹⁰ In her task of evangelization, Lonergan holds that the Church today must embrace the battery of methods in a way that creates an overlap and discern where the different symbols of devotion are equivalent.

8. Towards Integration

Bernard Lonergan holds that theology ought not to be only doctrinal but also practical. To further this claim, he proposed some procedural methods which imitate the human process of learning and acquisition of knowledge.

8.1. African Historicity

All human share one nature but what a person makes of himself/herself is his historicity. African historicity is the African man becoming all that it takes within the African sphere to be considered a man. This happens through acquisition of knowledge and the taking on of new

⁸⁶ Kaye Twining, *Bernard J.F. Lonergan's Method in Theology*, Unpublished Dissertation, www.treelife.org.au, accessed on 15 January 2020.

⁸⁷ Twining, *Bernard J.F. Lonergan's Method in Theology*.

⁸⁸ Bernard Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 3rd Collection. Robert Dolan and John Dadosky, eds. (London: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 154-155.

⁸⁹ Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 154-155.

⁹⁰ Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 154-155.

responsibilities.⁹¹ This change in the person is even more fundamental when it concerns the highest ideals. Change in perception, brought about by education is the common ground for the meeting of cultures. Common meaning, consent and judgment are the requisites without which any inter-religious exchange cannot take place.

8.2. Natural Right in Historicity

Aristotle defined nature as an immanent movement of nature and rest.⁹² This principle is present in man in the raising and answering of questions. It moves by asking questions and rests by answering them. All questions lead to the unknown and contribute to what we are to be. Answers to a question, must meet the demands set by the question or disprove its claim.⁹³ Thus, no one can claim to know himself who does not ask the unavoidable questions that life place on him.

8.3. The Dialectic of History

In a community, the issues that people deal individually with, collates gradually into a communal outcry. People are responsible for the lives they live individually but collectively for the world in which they live them.⁹⁴ The natural rights of peoples find vindication in the dialectic of history that is faithful to and embraces the terms of Historical Consciousness.

9. Theology as Praxis

Lonergan develops three stages for the development of knowledge in a person and which he argues efficiently solve, in our case, the question of integration of Christianity in Africa.⁹⁵

1. The structure of individual development
2. The occurrence of identity crises in the Christian community
3. The necessity of a certain doctrinal pluralism

9.1. The Structure of Individual Development

The human person is not the same as an ants or a rat. These creatures socialize based on their genetic configuration and not as a result of learning and adaptation. Humans when born are innocent of all cultural encumberment that yields meaningful socialization in their cultural

⁹¹ Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 164.

⁹² Aristotle, *Physics* II, 1, 192b. 21-122.

⁹³ Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 166.

⁹⁴ Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 170.

⁹⁵ Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 192.

environment. The appropriate acquisition of the needed traits occurs through a process of enculturation.

9.2. Enculturation

All humans are born cultureless.⁹⁶ The process of learning a culture is called Enculturation. It is a lifelong process of mastering an adaptive system. It is an endless process of learning how to speak, feel, think and act.⁹⁷ Enculturation can be said to have taken place when the individual can no longer speak, feel or think without doing injury to themselves.

9.3. Occurrences of Identity Crisis in the Community

Human growth is marked by a period of remarkable self-discovery. This is when persons learn to ask questions and discover themselves as an individual in the society. The aim of this formative phase is achieved when the person has internalized the ideals of personhood in the society *vis-à-vis* his personal traits and capacities. In the religious schema, this is achieved when there is the common confession of faith by the recipient culture and the theology that bears the new message.⁹⁸ This stage includes a dialogical action that must be informed by empathy on the part of the superior faith and an openness on the part of the recipient community.

9.4. The Necessity of a Certain Cultural Pluralism.

Bernard Lonergan foresees that theology as praxis must also be open to a certain level of pluralism; one that is capable of entertaining a mutual exchange between any religion and its host culture. This takes place only when the new faith asks itself such questions as: “do the people find meaning in rote repetitions of the elements of faith?” The host culture must also ask itself whether elements of its cultural practices still bear the needed import in the light of the new dialogue.⁹⁹ Openness to healthy pluralism in a manner acceptable to the people and meaningful to their historical consciousness is a gain for orthodoxy since it expands the reach of its universality.

10. The Way to Integration: A Nexus

From the elements of our discourse, we can here create a system of integration of Christianity into the African socio-religious schema.

⁹⁶ Louis Luzbetak, *The Church and Culture: New Perspectives in Mission Anthropology* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 182.

⁹⁷ Luzbetak, *The Church and Culture*, 186.

⁹⁸ Lonergan, *Collected Works of Lonergan*, 193.

⁹⁹ Lonergan, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, 193.

The Christian mandate to evangelize is one which not only stands in fulfilment of the command of Jesus, but is a natural response to good news. I believe that even if Christ had not issued the explicit command to the apostles to spread the message, they still would have told it to their friends. That the message has continued to be proclaimed for two millennia, is a testimony to the action of the Holy Spirit in the Church and validity of the message.

History shows that evangelization in the course of history has shared the ups and downs of the civilizations that bore it. It has taken on the image and color of those who bore the message. Indeed, humanity continues to serve as a vehicle in fulfilling God's divine plan. Evangelization in Africa also shares in this history. The current feeling of discontent among Africans is a proof that there are still unanswered questions.

There are many scholars on the African side who uphold that there are unanswered question waiting for responses. There are also those on the other side who claim that these views are incoherent or at best ill-founded. We understand that this is primarily a challenge that touches on the disparity between faith and praxis. Thus, we applied the thoughts of Bernard Lonergan in his *Method in Theology* to answer to these questions. The application of his ideas is what inspires our proposals for the integration of Christianity in Africa.

Firstly, Africans must be allowed to encounter Christianity with the full awareness of their uniqueness as Africans. Then, the process of learning the new faith must be approached in a manner that respects African reality and sensibility. Africans must be allowed to ask their questions as is fitting for any growing person. The Church, with empathy, must respond to the questions put by Africans in a way that meets the criteria set by the questions. The present debate shows the African Church exhibiting the signs of adolescence as proposed by Bernard Lonergan. Thirdly, the Church must be willing to entertain certain elements of plurality in such a way that African Christians can make a contribution to the life of the church, all their own. Protecting radical orthodoxy does not favor the spirit of evangelization, and advancing radical religious parity obscures the truth as fully revealed in the person, life, ministry, passion, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

To this end, the Church should open windows to a process of dialogue that will bring about:

Inculturation – this is the mutual sharing of positive values through genuine cultural interaction. It is also defined as the activity of the church, at a particular place in time, to present and live the Christian message faithfully in languages, signs and symbols which appeal to the

people's sensitivity leading them to identify with it wholeheartedly, participate in it and then contribute to it.¹⁰⁰

Adaptation – adaptation involves the selective modification of Christian faith and worship using elements from African religion that are considered compatible with the Christian message.¹⁰¹ This is motivated by the need to ensure that the new does not supplant the old but enhances and enriches it. It is the desire of the church that adaptation in various pastoral fields such as ritual, didactic and spiritual activities be given its place.¹⁰² This kind of adaption is supported by the decisions of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 6:15 – 21).

Accommodation – another way through which Christianity can become integrated into the African socio-religious and cultural space is through accommodation. This means that while not accepting totally the contents of other religious beliefs, Christianity allows for or tolerates certain aspects of African religion, since¹⁰³ God accepts all people as they are and where they are.

Conclusion

In this essay, we have presented the views of African scholars regarding Christianity. We have also reported that this view has met with a certain resistance in certain members of the church. We have attempted to understand what these views involve, and lastly, using the methods proposed by the Canadian Philosopher and Theologian, Bernard Lonergan, we have advanced the argument that it is possible for Christianity to be integrated into the fabric of the African religious outlook.

With a respect for and sensibility to each people's historicity, the Church can bring every group of people to experience the fullness of Sonship which is a right every Christian attains at baptism. Without spilling tears over the errors of the past, the church can begin today to engage in a sincere dialogue with religious civilizations across the world in a way that will enable them to appreciate that all they have been seeking in the primitive religions has been fulfilled in Christ. All other elements in this ongoing dialogue such as inculturation, adaptation, accommodation will find their place when this exchange is carried out sincerely.

¹⁰⁰ John Onihamwo and Peter Ottuh, "A Critical Study of Inculturation and Evangelisation of African Culture," *International Journal of Integrative Humanism*, 9, no. 1, (June 2018): 93-98.

¹⁰¹ Orobator A., *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, (Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2008), 118.

¹⁰² www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/homilies/1969/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19690731.html. Accessed on 16 January 2020.

¹⁰³ Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 118.

Bibliography

Books

- Aristotle, *Physics* II, 1, 192b. 21 – 22 as cited in Whelan, Gerard. *A Discerning Church; Pope Francis, Lonergan and a Theological Method for the Future*; Newton, Paulist Press, 2019.
- Brockman, Norbert and Umberto Pescantini, *A History of the Catholic Church*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2007.
- In Derek Holmes, *The Papacy in the Modern World, 1914 – 1915*, New York, 1981, cited in Whelan, Gerard. *A Discerning Church; Pope Francis, Lonergan and a Theological Method for the Future*; Newton, Paulist Press, 2019.
- Locheng, Callisto. *Missiology; Introduction to the Roots of the Great Commission*, Nairobi, CUEA Press, 2011.
- Lonergan, Bernard. *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*; 3rd Collection; Robert Doran, John Dadosky (Eds.) London, University of Toronto Press, 2017.
- Luzbetak, Louis. *The Church and Culture; New Perspectives in Mission Anthropology*, New York, Orbis Books, 1991.
- Mugambi, J.N.K. *Critique of Christianity in African Literature*, Nairobi, East Africa Educational Publishing Ltd., 1992.
- Orobator, Agbonkhianmeghe. *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, Nairobi, Paulines Publications Africa, 2008.
- Rowland, Tracey. *Catholic Theology*, London, T & T Clark, 2017.
- Vatican Council II, *The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Vol 1), (ed.), Flannery, Austin. *Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, Mumbai, St Paul's, 2010.
- Vidmar, John. *The Catholic Church through the Ages; A History*, New Jersey, Paulist Press, 2005.
- Whelan, Gerard. *A Discerning Church; Pope Francis, Lonergan and a Theological Method for the Future*; Newton, Paulist Press, 2019.

Articles

- Kocholickal, George. "Sir Give me Some of that Water so that I may never be thirsty again." *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission* no. 1 (2014): 50-97.

Magesa, Laurenti. "How Many Loaves Do You Have? Christian Pedagogy and African Ethics." *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission* no. 1 (2014): 28-49.

Onihamwo, John and Peter Ottuh. "A Critical Study of Inculturation and Evangelisation of African Culture." *International Journal of Integrative Humanism*, 9, no. 1, (June 2018): 93-98.

Unpublished Sources

Kaye Twining, *Bernard J.F. Lonergan's Method in Theology*, Unpublished Dissertation, www.treeoflife.org.au.

Online Sources

www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/homilies/1969/documents/hf_p-vi_hom_19690731.html.

Accessed on 16 January 2020.

The Reality of African Christianity

Fernando N. D. Pascoal

Introduction

Three words central to this theological reflection are: coexistence, integration and Christianity applied to the African context. This approach invites us to journey from coexistence to the integration of Christianity by studying the African reality.

From the psychological point of view, coexistence can be understood as a mechanism of self-defence whereby, in order to avoid conflicts, one must accept the current order of existence in a certain complicated situation. As a mechanism of self-defence, coexistence can be useful when well applied to achieve survival goals. Integration, however, is a model of formation in which one accepts one's reality of life with faith and reason. Here one consciously evaluates one's own life in the context of the Cross of Jesus so as to transform reality by developing what is good and correcting what is ill.

Christianity is an encounter with Jesus Christ, Word and Life, an encounter that leads to *metanoia* or the radical transformation of the whole of life according to the Gospel. Now, since the concept of coexistence is very wide, it can be related to various aspects. We have before us a theme that suggests the presence of syncretism in Africa, specifically concerning those who are called Christians. Some people may attest to the presence of syncretism in Africa because the element of faith or religion is always linked to cultural realities. To create a synthesis between faith and culture is not always an easy task.

Though the reality of African Christianity from coexistence to integration may seem to suggest the presence of syncretism in Africa, it is not a betrayal to the African Saints, canonized and non-canonized. Non-canonized Saints are those who lived at a time and place where and when they were not able to proclaim with their own mouths that Jesus Christ is the Lord, though they lived an exemplary moral life. Christianity, or being a Christian, is not about saying "Lord, Lord, Lord," but witnessing by a life that pleases the Lord.

In this essay we shall discuss some of the historical issues of evangelization in Africa, an approach to coexistence as syncretism, integration of the Christian faith in Africa, as well as some of the unquestionable facts of the existence of African Religion.

1. Evangelization in Africa

The term “evangelization” comes from the Greek word εὐαγγέλιον, meaning the transmission of good news. It is a word often related to the mission of the Church, although not all scholars accept this perspective (Matthew 28: 19-20).¹⁰⁴

Historically, the first evangelizer of Africa, concretely in the North of the continent, was Saint Mark, who in the year 42 AD reached Alexandria in Egypt. The fruits of this Church are well known to us: Saint Cyril, Saint Clement, Saint Athanasius, and Saint Augustine, among others. With time, this florescent seed of Christianity would be disturbed by the arrival of Islam, the invasion of the Vandals and subsequent heretical movements.¹⁰⁵ The evangelization of the Sub-Saharan region of Africa started during the period of colonization, in the 15th and 16th centuries.

The Church played a very important role in the development of the African people, through its support of education. Given that the Church administered education separate from the colonial powers, in 1914, of the 5% of the children in primary education, 90% were in mission schools. In 1939, the ratio was 12% in government schools and 80% in mission schools. In 1965, it was more or less the same percentage in government and mission schools. In some countries, during the post-independence period, the political currents of thought produced new governments, with a specifically neutral, secular outlook, that created various difficulties for missionary schools. Xenophobic attitudes based on nationalism resisted any signs of colonization. From the 1960s, several national Churches gave up the running of their schools, a decision which also was made necessary by financial issues. This situation led anti-religious political regimes to confiscate Church schools. In countries like Sudan and Congo Brazzaville, the nationalization of schools took place. In the Central African Republic things were not so well organised; in Upper Volta, the Bishops themselves disposed of the schools.

The mission schools provided a form of education carried out within the paradigms of Western civilization. Against such a style of education, the African intellectuals of the time reacted strongly. Although the Church educated many of these African nationalists, they now turned against the activities of the Church.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Klein Slawomir, *Class Notes of Method in Mission*, 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Norbert Brockman and Umberto Pescantini, *A History of the Catholic Church* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2007): 24-34.

¹⁰⁶ Johan A. Verstraeten, *Catholic Education through the Centuries* (Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1984), 3-5.

In this context, it was remarkable that in August 1965, the first forum of the All-African Conference of Catholic Education happened at Leopoldville (Zaire), involving 35 African nations. During this meeting, the delegates analyzed the work of Catholic education over the past one hundred years. In 1976 there was a meeting of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), during which the Bishops stressed the duty, and consequently the right of parents to participate fully in the education of their children. This power cannot be taken over by the schools or by Governments. This decision was re-affirmed at a later assembly of SECAM held in Kenya in 1978.

During his West African visit in February 1982, at Libreville (Gabon), Pope John Paul II stressed the fundamental right of parents to educate their children in schools of their choice. This was very relevant in view of the fact that, in Benin, which the Pope also visited, all the schools had been nationalized.

In the 1980s Islamic movements continued to spread throughout Africa; some of these were promoted by governments. This led to issues and mismanagement in mission schools. At a time when the independent States were trying to reinforce their African identity (Africanism), evangelization was very much closed linked to education. Portugal, still a colonial power present in Africa, had signed a concordat with the Vatican in 1929 that assured some privileges to the Catholic missions. This impacted on the countries colonized by the Portuguese, such as Angola. In South Africa, the Bantu Education Act was still very influential. In Kenya, from 1969 onwards in the State University of Nairobi, a Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies was opened, in which many missionaries and one lay Catholic were lecturing.¹⁰⁷

It is important to remember that evangelization is the pastoral ministry through which the Church continues the mission of Christ, the Good Shepherd. In a broader sense, we may say, that evangelization is the soul of the Church that is expressed in the work of catechesis.

True evangelization is about the integration of faith and culture in a process named inculturation. This is founded on the mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God. This process goes beyond forms of coexistence, accommodation, adaptation, indigenization, acculturation, and enculturation that give birth to syncretism. We shall discuss syncretism in detail below.

It would be much easier to speak of integration to an African than to any other person because, for the African, a person is an indestructible unity of spiritual and social elements in

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

one harmonious existence. There is no occidental “dualisms” of body and soul.¹⁰⁸ The question that remains is why, then, the process of the integration of Christianity in Africa seems to have stopped at mere coexistence? Here are some reasons:

Some of the defective pastoral methods of the early evangelizers and their successors included:

1. The preaching of a Christianity that ignored the people’s situation. “The questions, needs and hopes of people were ignored, in order to preach an abridged version of Christianity which required only the obedience to and the implementation of what had been decided from above”.
2. The “conversion” required by such inherited Christianity was interpreted as the abandonment of the values and meanings that had hitherto informed African life. “To be a Christian meant embracing a new name and living the new life marked by separation from that of the ancestors. Even “Christian villages” physically separated the new converts from their pagan clans”.
3. The indiscriminate condemnation of people’s traditional religion as idolatry, superstition, etc. Missionaries were said to have rejected traditional African culture “whole and entire”. “Some missionaries did neglect or at least did not officially advert to the culture of the peoples they went to evangelize”.
4. The branding of traditional medical practice as witchcraft, by a church that could not heal diseases. This psychological need that is well exploited by self-proclaimed prophets today and healing churches or centres promising to handle all human problems, including Aids, etc.¹⁰⁹

Inculturation is a must in evangelization, for it ensures the authenticity and depth of faith in the African Christian. The African Church needs healing, a bridging of the gap between life and faith; in this way the instances of spiritual schizophrenia and other forms of coexistences will slowly disappear. Salvaging lost or disappearing spiritual values, giving them the possibility to survive, grow and be elevated and purified in the gospel is necessary.¹¹⁰ Every evangelization act should always promote the marriage of faith and life.

¹⁰⁸ Adriano Langa, *Relação: Espiritos- Religião (Relation: Spirits- Religion- Culture)* (Maputo: Paulines Publications Africa, 1991), 10.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Social Communication Departments AMECEA and IMBISA, *Communication, Culture and Community- Communication for Pastoral Formation*, Vol. 2 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999), 48-49.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 50.

2. Coexistence equals syncretism

The term syncretism comes from the Greek word *synkretizein*, meaning to combine or to mix.¹¹¹ Syncretism is a more or less unwitting attempt to assign culturally defined meanings to terms which have a much different meaning in their proper Christian or biblical context.¹¹² It is often a result of an unsuitable indoctrination or poor evangelization, as we have seen before.

Africans did not invent syncretism; it is rather a phenomenon found in many other cultures in their encounter with other civilizations. Poor approaches in evangelization in Africa contributed very much to the problem of syncretism. For example, how much were the “initiation schools” considered in process of evangelization of Africa?

The *Mukanda* or *Longo*, “schools” in Kikongo, an African language found in the kingdom of Kongo, are places of formation for the initiation of a man into adulthood. These existed in the Angolan part of the kingdom of Kongo. They have theoretical, practical, pedagogical and ethical-moral meaning as used in the Bantu worldview. They are meant for the training and education of young people for life in and for the community. They aimed at imparting every kind of knowledge and transmitting it from one generation to the next. *Mukanda* or *Longo* is the first school attended at the beginning of the child's socialization. It is a life-oriented school.

The root of the world is life. Life is present in our knowledge in innumerable forms. Many have been the interpretations of circumcision; fundamentally, all of them can be summarized in the principles of grooming, hygiene and morals, a sign of male virility. For the Bantu, the primary reason for circumcision is to make a man the absolute progenitor, someone who guards the secrets and principles of life, the respecter and continuer of his ancestors, of love and respect that is due to old people and adults. He must be “chief,” guaranteeing justice and tranquillity, a manager of the community and the family and the defender of his loved ones, his population and his in-laws. Here lies the importance of traditional authorities and other community entities in the formation of new generations and the passage of testimony through the initiation school.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Cf. Joseph Ngulo, *Class Notes in Church History I*, 2017.

¹¹² David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (USA: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 112.

¹¹³ Camilo Afonso Nanizau Nsaovinga, “Os Bakongo em Angola: Historia e Cultura.” <https://www.wizi-kongo.com/historia-do-reino-do-kongo/os-bakongo-em-angola-historia-e-cultura>, accessed on 04 October 2019.

According to J. Mbiti, by initiating young men and girls into its collective existence, the nation vivifies itself, its pace accelerates and its vitality renews. The initiation ceremony has a profoundly sacred character, because upon it rests the continuity of the nation, the solemn and religious dramatization of the conquest of man over death and annihilation. With the realization of these rites, the community feels assured of its survival and continuity. Entrance is reserved to young people duly chosen and prepared psychologically by their parents and teachers. In the forest, only the Masters and men initiated and circumcised survive and live; the impure are not allowed entry. It is a sacred place of dialogue with the ancestors. Thus, through his initiation, the young man acquires his affective education; initiation is active in structuring the personality of the individual for the rest of his life. The social status acquired in this school of life gives him dignity, respect and great honour among his own people.¹¹⁴

Due to globalization, in many places the initiation schools have completely disappeared. However, we know their value, and there are still many people who having undergone this experience can witness to its value. It is true also that some good missionaries did try to learn about the initiation schools in Africa, for these schools and their rituals can fit very well with what the Church refers as the catechesis for the Sacraments.

Another concrete example of things that lead some Africans to syncretism, and consequently, to embracing coexistence rather than integration of faith, is the approach of the Church as an institution. The Church as an institution has its own canonical ways of analyzing the challenges of life. This attitude, for some Africans in certain situations, encourages a bureaucratic and clericalist approach that delays solving the practical problems that affect them and their families, and makes them turn to more pragmatic ways.

3. Towards integration of the Christian faith in Africa

For the Bantu, and Africans in general, there is much truth in the proverb: “*muntu kalendi vanga konso kwa salu ko, kondwa kwa Nzambi.*” This Kikongo proverb means that the human person should not perform any kind of work or activity except in the presence of *Nzambi* (God). *Nzambi* is the omnipresent and omniscient. When Africans interact with life, rarely will we find boundaries between religion and culture. In the worldview of an African, everything

¹¹⁴ Cf. John Samuel Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 37-46.

has its origin in God who is an Almighty and life-giving Spirit. Integration of faith and culture is, therefore, of vital importance.¹¹⁵

In a more practical way, the Sacraments are at the centre of the life of the Church, so the Church must provide a profound and creative catechesis on the meaning of what is celebrated in the Sacraments, adopting an ecumenical spirit or greater openness to cultures, as the Synod of Africa suggested in 1994.¹¹⁶

A serious catechetical formation carried by the pastors, can prevent all kinds of syncretism. Of course this is achieved not only with words but also by the witness of their behaviour, showing the link between evangelization and sacramentalization.

According to John Paul II, ecumenism is the experience that springs from the same faith in Jesus Christ, an unavoidable encounter with all people who through history have come to faith in Jesus Christ. This assures Christians that what separates them is not as great as what unites them. The power of ecumenism helps us to understand that the Lord is present in all open hearts.¹¹⁷

To better illumine the history of the evangelization of Africa, it would be important not to ignore the ecumenical dimension of the Christian faith and dialogue with the religious movements:

In the course of the centuries, the Church has proclaimed and witnessed with fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus. At the close of the second millennium, however, this mission is still far from complete. For that reason, Saint Paul's words are now more relevant than ever: Preaching the Gospel is not a reason for me to boast; it is a necessity laid on me: woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel! (1 Cor 9:16).¹¹⁸

Especially from Vatican Council II onward, the call for dialogue has become stronger:

This explains the Magisterium's particular attention to giving reasons for and supporting the evangelizing mission of the Church, above all in connection with the religious traditions of the world. In considering the values which these religions witness to and offer humanity, with an open and positive approach, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions states: 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 teachings, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men Continuing in this line of thought, the Church's proclamation of Jesus

¹¹⁵ Camilo Afonso Nanizau Nsaovinga, "Os Bakongo em Angola: Historia e Cultura."

¹¹⁶ Cf. John Martin Owor, *Care for the Youth* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2019), 60.

¹¹⁷ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*, n. 1. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995).

¹¹⁸ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Dominus Iesus*, 1. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000).

Christ, the way, the truth, and the life (Jn 14:6), today also makes use of the practice of inter-religious dialogue.¹¹⁹

The Second Vatican Council affirmed that Christ founded one Church and one Church only. For this reason, divisions among the Christians, all those who consider themselves followers of Christ, contradicts the very will of Christ, scandalizes the world, and brings the work of evangelization to poor results.¹²⁰

Aware of the risks of modernity in Africa today, evangelization has to consider very carefully the following aspects:

- a) Christian values are perennial;
- b) Christian communities have to be more compassionate to the needy;
- c) Those who preach the Word of God have to witness to it with their lives;
- d) Increased attention must be paid to the social problems of families;
- e) Pastoral answers have to be relevant, and avoid superficialities.

In the process of evangelization of Africa, special attention has to be paid to young people because of their social vulnerability and their attraction to a materialistic style of life. They should know sound doctrine, celebrate the faith, and be committed to Christian mission.

4. The indisputable fact of the African Religion

To do justice to the deep meaning of this reflection, *African Christianity, from coexistence to integration*, I cannot avoid mentioning African Religion. To deal properly with issue of syncretism in Africa, or to move from coexistence to integration of the Christian faith, the methods of evangelization require a real acceptance of African Religion in two ways: as both an ethnic and a universal reality.¹²¹ Some scholars are not even aware of this fact and others, even though aware of it, do not understand it properly.

The process of integration of the Christian faith has to begin from what is essential in African Religion, for example, from the belief in God, the Creator, the Almighty, life-giving Spirit, and this, despite the existence of spirit-gods, the devotion to the ancestors, and so on. This worldview shows the universal character of the African Religion.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Cf. Vatican Council II, Decree on *Ecumenism* (21 November 1964), in A. Flannery, ed., *The Conciliar and Post conciliar Documents*, Vol. I (Mumbai: St. Paulus, 2014), 408.

¹²¹ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion. The Moral Tradition of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 24-33.

Regarding the essential unity in African Religion, a study conference of missionaries held at Le Zoute, Belgium, in the 1920s, already came to realize this. Having noted the diversities that mark Africa geographically, linguistically and even in the physical appearance of its various peoples, the Le Zoute conference nevertheless acknowledged that essential unity.¹²²

Research and study of the particular ethnic groups of the African Religion is to be encouraged for the sake of depth; however, this should not be used to ignore the universal character of the African Religion. In addition, this “universal character” should not minimise the various different expressions developed from it.¹²³

The reduction of African Religion to a description of appearances rather than a portrayal of a phenomenon with moral power that shapes and directs the lives of millions of people in their relationship with other human beings, the created order, and the Divine, resulted from mainly from the prejudice of nineteenth-century scholarship, tainted by Darwinism, slave trading and a colonial mentality.¹²⁴ Acknowledging that this factor injured the heart of so many Africans means that there is a need for reconciliation, one that starts from the heart.

The call for reconciliation was stated in the Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*. This call for reconciliation reaches the ears of the Africans because of the wounds from the evil of colonialism, wars among the African nations, and many other problems.¹²⁵

In order to restore the dignity of the person in a proper manner, this reconciliation must be psycho-spiritual, cultural and socio-economic, in short, holistic. It has to take place because the greatest resource of evangelization in Africa is the people of God.¹²⁶ The seeds of the Gospel cannot grow to their fullness in a non-reconciled heart for as it says in the Parable of the Sower (Luke 8:7): “*And some fell among thorns; and the thorns grew with it and choked it*”.¹²⁷

With this in mind, we can speak of a real integration of Christian faith in Africa. It would be a mistake to ignore the five aspects contributing towards the integration of the Christian faith and the need for reconciliation.

African Religion shares values with Christianity. The values of Christian life are not at all strange to the African people. All these values must be integrated fruitfully.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus*, n. 174 (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2011).

¹²⁶ John Lukwata, *Integrated African Liturgy* (Kenya: AMECEA Gaba Publications, 2003), 192.

¹²⁷ *The Holy Bible* (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010).

Conclusion

It must be affirmed that the seeds of Christianity can grow in Africa in an integrated manner. The Heavenly Father whom the African ancestors have always invoked as Creator is calling people to a path of new evangelization with an apostolic courage that comes from the Holy Spirit, who guided the Queen of the Apostles, our Blessed Virgin Mother Mary.¹²⁸ Respecting Aquinas's principle of causality, we can say, like Ernesto Pascoal, that the fulcrum of the Christian life is the very person of Christ. For this reason, Christian life is not an ideology, but a relationship of adherence to Jesus Christ, as we can see in the stories of the Saints.¹²⁹

The sense of ecclesial communion alerts us to the fact that what we have been reflecting on above are not just African problems; they are rather issues affecting the life of the whole Church. For Africa is part of the Pentecost of Jerusalem.¹³⁰ Africa is a fertile land for evangelization. Let us promote in an appropriate manner the various charisms and gifts for the service of the People of God in the Church, and avoid any form of reductionism.¹³¹ Despite the challenges that Africa faces, we strongly believe that Africa is a place of hope as we can see from the growth of the number of Christians.

Evangelization is God's initiative, so let us pray to Him to keep us faithful in his work. Jesus did not find any other place to come to, except Bethlehem.¹³² If Bethlehem was worthy enough to receive the Son of God, Africa too can be the channel, which brings salvation to this world.

Bibliography

- Brockman, Norbert and Pescantini Umberto. *A History of the Catholic Church*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2007.
- Cantalamesa, Raniero. *Life in the Lordship of Christ*. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1997.
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith Declaration *Dominus Iesus*. Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2014.
- Ngulu, Joseph. *Class Notes in Church History I*. Nairobi: Don Bosco Utume, 2017.
- Slawomir, Klein. *Class Notes in Method in Mission*. Nairobi: Don Bosco Utume, 2019.

¹²⁸ *Africae Munus*, n. 174.

¹²⁹ Ernesto Pascoal, *O Conhecimento de Deus na Perspectiva de São Tomás de Aquino*, 2013, p. 47.

¹³⁰ John Paul II, Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, n. 32. Nairobi: Paulines Publications 1995.

¹³¹ Vicente Carlos Kiaziku, *Construtores do Reino* (Padova: Segretariato Missioni Cappuccini, 2003), 192-202.

¹³² Raniero Cantalamessa, *Life in the Lordship of Christ* (Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1997), 179.

- Hesselgrave, David J. *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally*. USA: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.
- John Paul II. Encyclical Letter *Ut Unum Sint*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995.
- Kiaziku, Vicente Carlos. *Construtores do Reino*. Itália/Padova: Segretariato Missioni Cappuccini, 2003.
- Langa Adriano. *Relação: Espiritos- Religião (Relation: Spirits- Religion- Culture)*. Maputo: Paulines Publications Africa, 1991.
- Social Communication Departments AMECEA and IMBISA. *Communication, Culture and Community- Communication for Pastoral Formation*. Vol. 2. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1999.
- Mbiti John Samuel. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969.
- Pascoal Ernesto. *O Conhecimento de Deus na Perspectiva de São Tomás de Aquino (The Knowledge of God in the Perspective of Saint Thomas of Aquinas)*. 2013.
- Pope Benedict XVI. Post-synodal Exhortation *Africae Munus*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2011.
- Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Declaration *Dominus Iesus*. Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995.
- Vatican Council II. “Decree on *Ecumenism*” (21 November 1964), in A. Flannery, ed. *The Conciliar and Post conciliar Documents*, Vol. I. Mumbai: St. Paulus, 2014.
- Verstraeten, Johan A. *Catholic Education through the Centuries*. Bangalore: Theological Publications, 1984.

Internet Sources

- <https://www.wizi-kongo.com/historia-do-reino-do-kongo/os-bakongo-em-angola-historia-e-cultura;%20accessed%20on%2004/10/2019.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/christians>.
- Camilo Afonso Nanizau Nsaovinga, “Os Bakongo em Angola: Historia e Cultura.” <https://www.wizi-kongo.com/historia-do-reino-do-kongo/os-bakongo-em-angola-historia-e-cultura>. Accessed on 04 October 2019.
- <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/christians>.
- <https://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/christians>. Accessed on 12 December 2019.
- <https://www.christianpost.com/news/fastest-growth-of-christianity-in-africa.html>. Accessed on 12 December 2019.

African Traditional Religious Values: A Platform for Integration of Christianity in Africa

Joseph Ngezahayo

Introduction

This article intends to examine some of the values of African Traditional Religion in order to facilitate the integration of Christianity in Africa. This will help us to build a genuine African theology. The analysis of culture is the primary element to be considered. Culture is open to various interpretations and meanings. It can mean material elements as well as non-material elements such as ethical codes, religious ceremonies, taboos, customs, myths, etc. of a human society. The most basic element of human culture is religion. In other words, religion is part of human culture. In this way, it is somehow difficult to distinguish African culture from African traditional religion in many African societies because at the core of culture lies the religion of its people.¹³³ The culture of the people and their religion are so integrated it is difficult to quarantine them. Unfortunately, the first missionaries who came to evangelize did not take the people's culture as a basis upon which to build Christianity. They soft-pedalled the positive values of African Traditional Religion.

The missionary approach employed by the first missionaries did not appreciate the culture of African societies but rather considered these societies as made up of peoples without history and religion. Yet we know that Christ had to be born in the Jewish culture to bring salvation to humanity and his mandate was that God's Kingdom be preached to all nations.¹³⁴ The gospel has to be incarnated into the concrete cultural reality of any time, while retaining its eternal truths with their divine character as revealed by Jesus Christ.

We want to examine in this article how we can move from mere co-existence to a firm integration of Christianity in the African context. Co-existence implies that there is encounter between Christianity and African culture imbedded in African Traditional Religion. The two realities exist paralytically. We want to integrate them into the new reality, i.e., Christianity rooted in the African cultural context. The integration implies contextualization and inculturation. What then can Christianity take from African culture as elements of divine truths without losing its Gospel message? We believe that in every human society there is what we call "primitive revelation". God has placed in every human society the seeds of his word which

¹³³ Ferdinand Nwaigbo, "The Twenty-five years of Contextualization in the Catholic Institute of Western Africa," *African Ecclesial Review* 48, no. 4 (December 2006): 289-309.

¹³⁴ Chendekemen, *Contextual Theology*, 131.

make its peoples long for God in one way or another. These seeds of the word are also found in African Traditional Religion.

We will discuss this topic having in mind that Christianity in Africa did not start with a *tabula rasa*. Our approach will be divided into two major parts. In the first part we will examine the co-existence between African cultural religion and Christianity. Our focus will be on an analysis of African culture. Second part will examine the integration of Christianity with African cultural Religion. Genuine integration always requires an exchange. This paper seeks to answer the question: Is it possible to have an African Christianity?

1. Co-existence of Christianity and African Traditional Religion

Co-existence in the context of our study concerns a reflection on the relationship between African Traditional Religion and Christianity. We will analyze the fundamental elements of African culture such as its structure, its organization of traditional society and religion. We are convinced that the genuine establishment of the reign of Christ in Africa requires us to start from the most basic elements of African culture in order to revitalize the Christian message in the African continent. If we want to revitalize African theology, we have to live out of the African cultural heritage.¹³⁵ The incarnation of Christian message in African culture must take into consideration this African cultural heritage.

We cannot talk about coexistence without knowing what coexists! We are dealing with two different cultures - Christian culture and African culture, and two different theologies: first, the theoretical theology as it has developed throughout the history of Christianity in the West and second, the practical theology without verbalization as it has been lived in the African religious heritage.¹³⁶ The African traditional religion is practical; it does not have theories. Coexistence is about these two realities. The first Europeans missionaries considered the second reality, African traditional religion, as anti-Christian because it contained deviation from its Biblical foundations.¹³⁷ This was a mistake made by the missionaries, because Africans through their religious heritage express their experience of God practically, that is, without too much theoretical expression. They live rather than verbalize their theology.¹³⁸ The first missionaries failed to interpret the African religious language which was incarnated in the people's culture.

¹³⁵ B. Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context* (Nairobi: St Paul Publication, 1986), 15.

¹³⁶ J.N.K. Mugambi, *African Christian Theology: An introduction* (Nairobi: East African Educational publishers, 1992, 9.

¹³⁷ Mugambi, *African Christian Theology*, 3.

¹³⁸ Mugambi, *African Christian Theology*, 9.

They passed a negative verdict on African traditional life and its cultures. We cannot speak about coexistence of Christianity in Africa without knowing African culture. We will analyze some elements of African culture comparing them with Christianity, bearing in mind that religion is very much interrelated to culture.

1.1. African Traditional Religion

It is not bizarre to state that before the arrival of first missionaries in Africa there was an African Christian theology. Since religion was at the heart of the African people, we will identify two elements of the African religious outlook to show this traditional Christian theological reality: the conception of God in relation to human life, and the role of ancestors in African Traditional Religion

1.1.1. Understanding of life in African Society

Human biological life is the starting point of faith in God. In African society even before the coming of missionaries, African religion recognized God as the source of life, especially human life.¹³⁹ Physical life was considered as a dimension of religious faith and patrimony. This physical life is not limited to the biological life, but is to be understood in a larger sense. Life was celebrated even after death through some ritual ceremonies. In the Burundian culture that rite is called “Kubandwa”. People offer a cult to the ancestors so that they may intercede for them to God. The cult of ancestors is similar to the veneration of saints. We shall discuss this point later.

1.1.2. Understanding of God in African Society

Before the coming of the missionaries, Africans were not adoring gods but a God. This God was recognised to be supreme, unique and incomparable, similar to what is found in the Old Testament. This permits us to say with Benezet Bujo that “the novelty of Christianity for Africans did not consist in its proclamation of that one God but rather in the more complete and definitive proclamation of that one God, whom the African already knew, and who is also the God of Jesus Christ.”¹⁴⁰ What Christianity added was how God wishes to be and can be better known and loved.

Africans are different from Greeks who adored many gods. The original contribution of Christianity was not to bring the idea of monotheism to Africa. Africans already knew the Supreme Being. This faith in one God was connected to the African concept of life. Africans

¹³⁹ B. Bujo, *Introduction A la Theologie Africaine* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2008), 20.

¹⁴⁰ Bujo, *African Theology in its Social Context*, 18.

even before the coming of Christianity knew God as the one who possesses the fullness of life.¹⁴¹ This was seen in the way they named children. Some African cultures have a special way of naming their children. For instance, the Burundi (in Burundi) call God “Imana” to signify that God is the source of life, and that he is the one who sustains all creatures in being. Some people name their children, “Niyibitanga”, others, “Nimpagaritse” which means “it is God who sustains me in Being”. All these names mean that God is the source of everything.

The Bahema and Walendu of R.D.C name God, “Dja Lingi,lingi” , which means that God is self-sufficient, in need of no support outside himself.¹⁴² He is the giver of life, the creator who keeps all things and sustains every living reality. God has placed what a human being needs at his disposal: “sun, light, rain good harvests, fertile cattle, health. Even the medical plants owe their power to God for it is impossible for anyone to be restored without God’s action.”¹⁴³

The notion of prayer is also a visible reality in some African traditions. These prayers were addressed to God in all circumstances of life, either in difficult situations, or good situation as thanksgiving. For instance, in Burundian culture the welcoming of a new birth was accompanied by prayers through the rite of “ukubandwa” (explanation was given above) as kind of thanksgiving so that God might sustain the child in being and grant the family other children. This shows how Africans recognize God as the source of life. We must not forget that in the African tradition, life is considered as a unity. To be human in African culture is to share a sense of community. This community includes both the visible and invisible world. Life has to be understood in a metaphysical sense. Although life is transmitted by God, it passes through the ancestors and elders. This is the reason why there is a special place for the cult of the ancestors. The ancestors are the people who have reached the world of the spirits. We can compare them with saints in the Christian tradition.

Christians celebrate their ancestors through the rituals of sainthood.¹⁴⁴ We notice that the ancestors in Africa were not worshipped but venerated. The ancestors protect the living, they play the role of moral guardians, they give blessings and they are intermediaries for the people with God.¹⁴⁵ Africans believe that the final end and desire of each person is to reach the spirit

¹⁴¹ Bujo, *Introduction A la theologie Africaine*, 24.

¹⁴² Bujo, *Introduction A Theologie Africane*, 25.

¹⁴³ J. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann Publishers, 1992), 41-43.

¹⁴⁴ M.C. Kirwen, *African Cultural Knowledge: Themes and Embedded Beliefs* (Nairobi: Maryknoll, 2011), 17.

¹⁴⁵ Kirwen, *African Cultural Knowledge*, 5.

world of the ancestors. Thus, the idea of the afterlife, just as in Christianity, was not absent in African tradition. What was needed was to clarify of what this spirit world of the ancestors consists. This is still the belief in many African cultures where Christian Inculturation is still a problem.

1.2. African Ethics

African Ethic has an anthropocentric vision. What we have said above suggests that the traditional religions of Africa have their origins in the mystery of life and death. By living this mystery intensively, Africans find their place in the total schema of things. They find their relationship with the transcendent God who bestows meaning on their lives. In this religion which focuses on the mystery of life and death, humankind becomes the centre of concern. In many African cultures we notice that it is humanity and its conduct which is responsible for the appearance of sin and evil.¹⁴⁶

The moral order is understood not as some kind of relationship between God and humanity, but as the relationship between human beings themselves. Therefore, in the matter of sin, God cannot be directly affected by our wrong doing, because Africans believe that they can neither add anything to God nor take anything from him. From this we can conclude that moral behaviour and its consequences affect only human beings. For this reason, we may surmise that morality is not totally absent from the consciousness of the African people.

In the African tradition the content of the second commandment was there implicitly because Africans say that names have a sacred character, and that to call a person's name without good reason is to dishonour him or her. This gives clear understanding of why Christian law forbids calling the name of God in vain.¹⁴⁷ In the field of sexuality, the focus is on providing for the continuity of the clan. Sexuality was seen in context of procreation.

1.3. Social life in African Culture

In African tradition, the political and social life include some religious elements. For instance, in the Burundian culture, social gatherings often include food and drinks, especially beer. These gatherings express the sense of belonging. People gather around the drinks in a way similar to what we find in the early Church when people gathered for the breaking of bread. As the Eucharist is the centre of Christianity, the same is true in African culture where sharing the local wine is central. Gathering is not something new to Africans. For example, in the

¹⁴⁶ Bujo, *African theology in its social context*, 33.

¹⁴⁷ Bujo, *African Christian Theology*, 34.

Burundian culture, drinking has a social meaning. When people have serious matters to discuss, they discuss them over a drink. Even in some spiritual activities, drinks were very important. An example is the rite of “kubandwa” which was the most important of the religious festivals. It celebrates the feast of “Umuganuro” (eating the produce of the first harvest). “Umuganuro” was celebrated at the beginning of the new agricultural year.

There are also the political feasts which also involved religious and social elements. For example, there was ceremony of rendering homage to “Kiranga” (from “Kuranga” meaning to show), Kiranga was a representative of men in their relations to God, and he led people to God. And this is similar to Jesus in Christianity. Kiranga was a spiritual being who was the leader of all spiritual beings and ancestors, and who could come to the help of those who called upon him in their needs. When Kiranga came to visit a family that family had to prepare a lot of food and drinks because if he was not satisfied he could leave a curse on the house rather than a blessing. In Christianity, when we receive the Holy Communion without good preparation, we receive death rather than a blessing.

The conclusion of the foregoing considerations is that Africans meet God in their daily life. Integrating Christianity into the African culture requires a new epistemological approach.¹⁴⁸ This new approach is about insertion or engaging in a dialogue with the African culture in order to rediscover the traces of God in African traditions. We can ask: what can Jesus the Lord tell us today in Africa? We cannot deliver a speech on God if we omit an analysis of the lived experience of Africans. This analysis will help us to shape a new picture of African Traditional Religion and build a strong foundation for theology of Inculturation in African.

2. Integration of Christianity in Africa

Every society is built upon a certain system of symbolic exchanges.¹⁴⁹ Language becomes an important tool for interpreting the beliefs of every society. In order to understand a people, you need to know their language. Language is very important for genuine integration. Language has to be understood not only as a way of speaking, but also as key to the interpretation of the daily life of the people.

Saint Paul gives us an example: in the places he visited during his missionary journeys he always started from a knowledge of the daily life of the people. It is this that can make

¹⁴⁸ K.K. Appiah - S. Torres, *African Theology en route* (U.S.A.: Orbis Books, 1983), 5.

¹⁴⁹ J.M. Ela, *Repenser la Théologie Africaine : Le Dieu qui libère* (Paris: Karthala, 2003), 19.

possible a genuine integration of Christianity in Africa. As long as there still exists any kind of discrimination, genuine integration will not be possible.

We have to understand African traditional religion. This is because religion is a way of life and not a view of life.¹⁵⁰ Religion is part of every human being. It is the basic element of human culture. If you destroy someone's religion, you destroy their culture. The real integration of Christianity will be possible through bringing Christian message to a people, their culture and religion. Thus, integration is all about contextualizing Christianity into the African way of life.¹⁵¹

We can say that for any successful effort to communicate the gospel to a people across cultural boundaries, there must be some measure of relating biblical truth to the known practices and beliefs of the people.¹⁵² This was not how the first missionaries evangelized. They came on the pretext of promoting the values of Christianity while imposing the foreign norms on the evangelized Africans.¹⁵³ The result was negative because they ignored or underestimated the cultural strength of the African people.¹⁵⁴ There was a kind of dehumanization of African culture. Such a situation could not lead to real and credible integration.

Real integration begins with the evangelization of the culture. This means penetrating it, knowing its language and the reality of people and their history.¹⁵⁵ Knowing that Traditional Religion has always been an inseparable part of the culture of the African people, we maintain that the genuine integration of Christianity will be the one that starts from the cultural context of people. It must help the Africans to rediscover and rehabilitate the cultural heritage of their past. This will allow Africans to understand and admire the person of Christ through their religion.

The nature of this integration is understood in terms of the person of Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁶ Thus, the need for integration of Christ in African Traditional Religion. African Traditional Religion is based on the homage given to the ancestors and elders. We need to start from the analysis of the role of ancestors and see how we can integrate the person of Christ into this. As we have seen, the cult of the ancestors is both cultural and religious. The Africans give

¹⁵⁰ Nwaigbo, *Twenty five years of contextualization*, 294.

¹⁵¹ L. Magesa, *A Notion on Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2007), 48.

¹⁵² Gehman Richard J., *Doing African Christian Theology: An Evangelical Perspective* (Kenya: Evangel Publication, 1987), 26.

¹⁵³ Gehman, *Doing African Christian Theology*, 130.

¹⁵⁴ E. Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 13.

¹⁵⁵ Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, 36.

¹⁵⁶ Nwaigbo, *The Twenty-five years of contextualization*, 289.

importance to their ancestors because they believe that they secure their life both here on earth as well as the life hereafter. From this belief, we can formulate a new Christology. How then should the Africans consider Jesus? First by remembering that the ancestors in African religious tradition have a saving role.

In his earthly life Jesus showed precisely all the qualities and virtues the Africans attribute to their ancestors and which push them to invoke them in daily life. Jesus appears as the one who lived the African ancestor-ideal.¹⁵⁷ He worked miracles; he healed the sick. As the ancestors did, Jesus left a “testament” to his disciple and this “testament” is transmitted from generation to generation as it is by the ancestors. The term “ancestor” is applied to Jesus in an eminently analogical way, otherwise there can be a risk of considering him as an ancestor among others.¹⁵⁸ Can we consider “Proto-ancestor” as a genuine term for Jesus? Christ taught his disciples and at the end, he gave life in fullness to those who would follow him. We can conclude by affirming that the African ancestors are the forerunners of Jesus the Proto-ancestor. This really the confirmation of what Justin the Martyr said about “the seeds of the word”. Another Christological element that could be explored is the African tradition of healing. Jesus can be understood as a healer of the healers.

Conclusion

This article has reflected on co-existence and the integration of Christianity in Africa. As we have seen tradition and religion are very significant in Africa, thus they cannot be silently ignored. The co-existence of Christianity and African Traditional Religion is a reality with which we live. The integration of Christian message will be possible through the reconciliation of these two realities.

One way of achieving the real integration of Christianity in African theology is by abandoning the attitude of superiority as it was evident among the first missionaries. The African traditional values have to be respected. This respect is the true way towards the integration of Christianity and African Traditional Religion. At the same time, the truths of Christian doctrines must not be compromised for the sake of respecting African beliefs and tradition. To reach the true integration, the two approaches, those of Christianity and African Traditional Religion, have to recognize and build on their similarities rather than only focus upon their differences.

¹⁵⁸ Bujo, *Introduction a La Theologie Africaine*, 80.

Different cultures have their limits, but at the same time, Christianity has a lot to learn and borrow theologically from the African Traditional religion. The integration of Christianity will be credible when African cultures meet Christ as the ancestor par “excellence”, the healer, and the Giver of Life.¹⁵⁹

Bibliography

- Benezet, B. *African Theology in its Social Context*. Nairobi-Kenya: St Paul Publication, 1986.
- Bunezet, B. *Introduction to African*. Fribourg: academic press, 2008.
- Gehman, R. J. *Doing African Christian Theology: An Evangelical Perspective*. Kenya: Evangel Publishing House, 1987.
- John, M. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1992.
- Kirwen, M. C. *African Cultural Knowledge: themes and Embedded Beliefs*. Nairobi: Maryknoll, 2005.
- Kubi, K. A., and T. Sergio, eds. *African Theology en route.*, U.S.A.: Maryknoll, 1983.
- Magesa, L. *A Notion of Inculturation, Transforming the Church in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2007.
- Martey, E. *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*. New York: Orbis Books, 1994.
- Mugambi, J. N. K. *African Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1992.
- Nwaigbo, F. “Twenty-Five Years of Contextualization in the Catholic Institute of West Africa (CIWA).” *African Ecclesial Review* 48, no. 4 (December 2006): 289-311.

¹⁵⁹ Nwaigbo, *Twenty-Five Years of Contextualization*, 302.

Christianity and African Traditional Religion(s): A Way Forward

Otieno Isaiah Mwango

Introduction

African Religion is an indigenous system of beliefs and practices integrated into the culture and the worldviews of the African people. Although diverse in its local manifestations, it has common basic elements that testify to its unity regionally and at continental level. Among the main beliefs of African Religion is the acknowledgement and affirmation of one God who is the creator and sustainer of life and of all things. African Religion also recognizes the reality of the invisible world in which human life continues after death.

The basis of African Religion lies in the strong belief in the unity of the cosmos, where religion embraces the natural and supernatural, the sacred and the secular. Religion permeates all aspects of life making the whole person a religious being in a religious world. The presence or absence of rain, the well-being of the community, giving birth to and naming a child, the cutting or planting of a tree, etc. come under the scope of religion.

Prayer is central to African Religion from time immemorial. The community is the core in which religion is expressed. The integrity of the community is sustained by a common understanding of moral and ethical values. Among others, these include the understanding of life as a gift to the community, which means that each member of the community is responsible for one another and obligated to provide for the welfare of the other. It is this sense of community that enables adherents of African Religion to care for the needy and vulnerable, such as widows, orphans, children and the old. Accountability for one's behaviour, both in private and in public, is regulated by the community's values. African Religion is historically the original religious system of Africa. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and later, Hinduism and others, have now also found a home in Africa.

Statistically, it would seem that the number of adherents to African Religion has decreased due to many conversions to these new religions in Africa, but in reality, this is only at the surface level. People continue to be influenced by and to treasure African Religion in their life as a whole, whether they acknowledge it or not. Their belief is pluralistic in nature and quite hospitable to other belief systems.

1. African Religions in Antiquity

Starting from the 19th century, foreign missionaries, colonial administrators and overseas anthropologists gave their home countries the first inkling of African Religion, which, as we know, they presented in the most gruesome terms, often with very wrong interpretations. Part of the problem on their part was pure arrogance, racial prejudice, misunderstanding, a narrow concept of anthropology, and an unwillingness to be challenged and enriched by other peoples and cultures.

The Western world that was the main consumer of these books, articles, verbal reports, drawings and exhibitions of stolen or otherwise acquired works of African art, accepted them naively and without raising questions about their reliability. These popular views of the Western world about AR have not greatly changed, even though today fewer books and articles follow the old line. You need only to give a lecture outside the university classrooms in Europe or America and Canada to hear people remark: “But missionaries told us that Africans worshiped spirits and were very frightened of them!” “But we sent missionaries to bring God to the Dark Continent where people had no religion!” There is no need to spend our energies exposing the ignorance about AR which was transmitted in various ways to the rest of the world.¹⁶⁰

It is regrettable that this early phase did much damage in different ways. It blocked the possibilities of cultivating a dialogue between AR and Christianity at an early stage in their encounter. It therefore, neglected the values of African Religion, that had sustained society for millennia of human history. These early contacts put an unfortunate and false stigma on AR in the minds of Christians in Africa and abroad. Many Christians, especially the older converts and those brought up in “extreme” evangelical circles, still react negatively to AR.

Even today, some missionaries and African Christians do their utmost to condemn AR and to demonstrate how, according to them, AR is of the devil and has to be wiped out. Consequently, they create and propagated enmity among people, dividing them according to their religion, into “good” (if they are Christians) and “evil” or “bad” (if they follow AR), something which is extremely unethical and unbiblical. Unfortunately, many individuals, families and communities have been driven to adopt these mental attitudes and social behaviour. These attitudes have suppressed and even silenced open discussion and objective evaluation of AR, especially among Christians. For this reason, many of them are forced to behave

¹⁶⁰ George Kaitholil, *Make Caring Your Target* (Mombay: Better Yourself Books, Bandra, 1997).

hypocritically by leading one form of life (Christian) openly while practicing some aspects of AR in secret or during major crises in life. This is not healthy and leads to serious pastoral problems, especially in connection with sorcery, spirits, health, sickness, healing, marriage, death and social relationships.

In spite of these critical remarks which are often made and rightly so, we recognize and appreciate the value of recording and preserving African life in various forms, whatever the intentions of the missionaries and colonial rulers may have been. There were degrees of accuracy and error in transmitting and interpreting the materials they gathered. Even in that early phase, some foreigners saw value in AR and African culture and treated them with a degree of respect.

One of the greatest achievements of the missionary presence in Africa was the translation of the Bible in part or in full into African languages, a task that is still going on. It was first carried out by Protestant missionaries and African converts, but in recent years, Roman Catholics have joined in. Translation of the Bible brought AR into living proximity with Christianity and paved the way for dialogue. The Bible in African languages has set alight an ever-burning fire of religiosity, fueled with firewood from both traditions. This fire has greatly shaped African Christianity.

2. Some Areas of Theological Discourse in African Religions

2.1. The nature of African Religions

African Religion (AR) is a terminology created to cover the many manifestations of religion in ethnic or indigenous cultures of Africa as indicated in the preamble of this paper. Everyone is born into a “primal religion” as a way of life with its cultural manifestations and religious implications. AR is an integral part of the African ethos and culture. AR manifested itself in various forms in ancient Egypt as it does today in an agricultural festival or other celebrations in Togo.¹⁶¹

The classical models of this religion would be the Hebrew religion, as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible, Confucianism or Hinduism, except that these have extant written sources. Although described as ethnically based, there is sufficient commonality to warrant the nomenclature “African Religion.” Its ontology, for example, is very much one basic system centered on God, the source of all reality. Here, reality is described in communitarian terms

¹⁶¹ Joseph G. Healey, *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Black Christian Values* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981), p. 29.

with God as the source of its life and cohesion. A further perspective on reality in AR is that it is composed of a dimension that is mundane and another that is supra-mundane. These two are in constant communication, intimately intertwined, and closely related. God the Supreme Being is the source of life and exercises unquestioned sovereignty over it. Other characteristics of religion such as holy places, cultic functionaries, and communication with the spirit world, ethics that regulate personal and communal life, are to be found in AR and are life affirming. AR projects all of creation as working together to sustain life.

2.1.1. The sources of African Religions

The sources of AR remained oral and experiential for millennia and generations until scholars, especially African scholars, began to collect and to document the phenomenon. Today we have, for example, collections of prayers of AR (Mbiti) and the corpus of the poetry of the Ifa Divination System of Nigeria (Wande Abimbola). Several books, research theses and notes are also available to those who read; and other sources are available in daily life within ethnic cultures. Names of God, names of divinities and names of human beings are all carriers of religious beliefs. Likewise, greetings, blessings, prayers (incantations and invocations), songs, oracular poetry, myths and proverbs also express religion and from them we derive an understanding of AR. Other sources include practices associated with human and natural life cycles, legends and myths.

2.1.2. The Role of Faith in African Religions

The Africans, like other people, often express fear that is generated by the unknown and the human inability to predict and control the future. Living close to nature, they are acutely aware of the multiple dangers inherent in human interaction with nature, other individuals and the spiritual world. Whatever threatens human survival and denies fullness of life generates fear¹⁶². In the light of such fear, however, AR affirms a belief in God, the benevolent Creator and sustainer of all life. Through this faith, the people entrust their lives and future to a supernatural being who is able to protect and save life. African cosmology is deeply religious, presupposing that Africans live by faith. Believing in the existence and reality of the spirit world and spiritual being, AR holds that what happens in the spirit world affects the mundane world and vice versa. Faith in the AR is both personal and communal; it is the basis of African hope. Expectation of the “good” from the spirit world encourages offerings, sacrifices and other

¹⁶² Hannah W. Kinoti, *Aspects of Traditional Gikuyu Morality*, Ph.D thesis (University of Nairobi, 1983), pp. 165–166.

religious rituals. It also encourages a communal spirit and a striving towards the common good. It is faith in the inherent goodness of humanity that makes Africans expect that when the right hand washes the left, the left hand will also wash the right.

Spirituality in AR has been described as “values by which a person individually or in community relates to the spiritual realm” (Mbiti). It is born out of a relationship between human beings and other realities, which include God, the spirits of the departed, divinities, spirits associated with natural objects and phenomena, and nature itself. Africans are extremely aware of the “triangle of reality” as a community in which they participate and to which they belong. Their spirituality is governed by the sensitivity to this reality of relationships and communication. The relationship between the mundane and the supra-mundane is maintained through religious activities and practices such as sacrifices, festivals and prayers. Of these, prayers are the most intensive expression of African spirituality. They are spiritual messages for the attention of the spirit world. A study of prayers reveals elements of spirituality such as holiness, purity and cleanliness of heart.

Prayers portray humility, faith, trust and confidence that humans have in their relationship with the spirit world. Prominent among the themes of prayers in AR are peace, love, tenderness, care and gentleness in the relationships of the human community.¹⁶³ Praise, thanksgiving, joy and blessings received are also present in the prayers. From these, we can gather what Africans require of religion.

The ultimate concern of the fullness and blessedness of life is the central theme of prayers and that for which people struggle. AR wrestles with the reality of evil, suffering and pain. Prayers may or may not be accompanied by offerings. Sacrifices are another avenue of communication with the spirit world in the search for life and the defeat of death. They may be accompanied by vows that involve an ascetic life or other modifications of life-style. Spirituality in AR often means the quest for freedom from negative influences, protection from evil forces or liberation from life-denying circumstances. Here, spirituality often takes the form of rituals of reconciliation as well as of those of separation. All these affirm that living as an African is living in and with the spirit world. Spirituality motivates and undergirds people to build community, to respect the individual and to develop sustainable relations with nature. It is

¹⁶³ David B. Barrett, *Schism and Renewal in Africa. Six Thousand Co-Movements* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968).

spirituality for fullness of life lived in the knowledge that God and the world of spirits participate in our human dimension. Unity of life is hereby affirmed.

2.1.3. African anthropology: life in community

African Religion holds that life is the greatest gift, which God has bestowed on living things. Hence, Africans are brought up, taught and trained to seek and attain a life which must be enjoyed to its fullest, peacefully and undisturbed.¹⁶⁴ At the same time, AR teaches that human life and the pursuits of life are not attainable in isolation and apart from one's community because by definition, it is a social life, a communal life nurtured and sustained by a network of interdependencies of individuals and community, individuals and the spiritual world, as well as the natural environment.

Therefore, in all of life's pursuits, AR reminds individuals to strive always for the maintenance of a relationship with their extended families and clans, their ancestors, nature and God. Existing in this network of relationships, individuals cannot avoid experiencing and being influenced by the customs of their community, customs that shape and influence their own lives as much as they shape and influence the lives of their neighbours.

Beyond the communal life, however, AR teaches that spiritual powers exist which can shape and influence individual lives, for better or for worse. Therefore, it is important to seek ways and means to manipulate or control these external powers and agencies that are more powerful than human beings, through practicing rituals and magical recipes and charms prescribed by religious authorities to those who feel threatened.

2.1.4. Instruments of salvation in African Religions

In order to provide salvation and relief from social sins, AR has designed a variety of protective rituals, magical recipes and charms. These are aimed at immunizing potential victims against witchcraft, evil spirits, bad luck, infertility, thieves, and forestalling failure in life's ventures and at promoting recovery from illness and other misfortunes. To forestall the impending destruction of individuals and their communities, purifications are used to cleanse those who are defiled. In addition, religious rituals and sacrifices have been devised to make peace with the living dead (ancestors), so that they might continue to support and protect their descendants. These rituals and religious sacrifices, individually and collectively, are believed to have proven themselves effective in saving and preserving the lives of individuals, their families

¹⁶⁴ E. S. Jones, *Mastery: The Art of Mastering Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1956), p. 205.

and community. Indeed, the greatest attraction of the African Instituted Churches (AIC, also known as founded churches) lies in their ability to integrate African religious belief and the Christian faith.

These are churches that have severed ties with overseas mission churches and from one another. They address the fact that salvation is not complete if it fails to address individuals' concrete, daily problems such as healing, driving away troublesome spirits and protecting them against evil forces through charms. The AICs openly invite members and others to bring their fears and anxieties about witchcraft, bad luck, illness, unemployment and other misfortunes to the Christian community so that they may be given relief.

The mainline churches in Africa are being challenged to come to terms with the reality of African cosmology to meet the spiritual and bodily needs of their adherents. It is predicted that, if "historical "churches fail to provide holistic salvation, they will lose members to the AICs and the charismatic churches. Churches must engage in serious dialogue with AR in order to better understand African religious life and needs.

2.1.5. The human destiny

The problem of death and human destiny occupies a central position in many religious traditions. In the Christian faith, the focus is often on the individual salvation apart from and without reference to one's community, because individuals' faith and response to God determine their destiny. However, it must be recognized that theologically, the church is a community based on the Trinity and that the church is also the Body of Christ or the people of God. The Western emphasis on individual salvation without reference to society contrasts sharply with AR, which is community-centered. Africans hold the view that individuals exist because they belong. Therefore, anxiety about individual destiny and afterlife is foreign to the African worldview.¹⁶⁵

In the African anthropology, individuals are assured of their afterlife because at death they are taken up by and gathered to their departed living dead (ancestors). Thus, individual salvation is not possible apart from or outside the community. It is significant that even urbanized African Christians put such a high premium on being transported back to their original homelands when they die, so that they may be buried with their forebears. Because death reunites individuals with their departed relatives, death is not perceived as the final enemy

¹⁶⁵ N. Mndende, "The Teaching of African Religion in School," in Toit and Kruger, op. cit., (note 10), p. 115.

who annihilates their life. Rather, death is seen as an inevitable and natural conclusion of life, especially for those who die at a mature age; it is an ecstatic experience of fulfillment that reunites an individual with the spirits who have gone to their final home (to live forever). Because individual immortality is understood as coming automatically, fear and punishments are dealt with on this side of the grave so that, by the time of death, individuals have made things right with their fellows, spirits and, ultimately, with God.

Furthermore, some African peoples underline the indestructible nature of the human soul by holding that, when persons die, their spirit continues beyond death. This view rests on the premise that the human soul is a divine spark that, at death, returns to God who made it in the first place. chemicals, industrial waste, overpopulation, depletion of natural resources, mass-killings of certain animal species and desertification, are only a few examples of the abuse of nature. In the social sphere, Africans are slowly losing the human-centered and communal orientation that was central to the religious ethos and beliefs of their forbears. In consequence, Africa is experiencing serious social crises, marked by injustice and oppression, exploitation, the violation of human rights, ethnic divisions and conflicts that result in Africans killing their fellow Africans in civil wars, and the political intolerance that is creating floods of refugees. Against this background, the teachings of some Christian groups, which largely focus on the future intervention of a kind of messianic figure to rescue human beings from their misery, is not realistic enough. They may well succeed only in creating a kind of dependency syndrome among Africans. Instead of challenging Africans to stand on their own feet and to tackle the socio-economic problems confronting the continent, these religious groups encourage them to pray to God to do the job for them. At worst, the dependency syndrome has encouraged African governments and citizens to beg and expect the European and American donor countries to rescue Africa from its ills. By taking a dim view of human beings and their achievements, these teachings tend to promote despair, paralysis, defeatism, moral dullness, social indifference and social irresponsibility.¹⁶⁶

The discussion of sin and salvation made clear that while AR teaches that God is the Creator and sustainer of life, nowhere does it suggest that human beings should avoid confronting social problems in the belief that God will solve them. It teaches that survival and salvation are brought about by human willingness to work for them. People have to take control

¹⁶⁶ Fiedler, K., *Christianity and African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900–1940* (Leiden, Boston, Tokyo: Brill Academic Publishers, 1997).

of their lives and responsibility for themselves and for their neighbors by engaging in activities for the welfare of the community.

Over time people have devoted much energy and resources to devising appropriate ceremonies, rituals and religious activities aimed at coping with the ills of this earthly life. AR has encouraged people to take their life in their own hands because it believed in them and their abilities to right the wrongs in their communities by healing broken relations and restoring the disturbed balance between the spiritual world and interpersonal relations. This optimistic anthropology is one of the treasures which Africans could fruitfully appropriate to regain confidence in the human ability to confront and overcome social problems. This should challenge us to develop a theology of responsibility whereby we become co-creators with God, in order to transform our social and natural environment for the better. It challenges us to assume responsibility and to take our actions seriously. It reminds us that human dignity and glory lie in the responsible and creative powers locked in our nature, powers that are capable or re-ordering and transforming our communities for the sake of a healthy, sustainable, human, and just society.¹⁶⁷

The emphasis that AR puts on human relationships and the social wrongs and evils, which individuals commit against others, should be offered as an African contribution to Christian churches. It reminds the churches that sin is not only an evil activity, which is directed against God, but that it also has to do with social evil existing between individuals in society. This African insight gives greater strength to the central biblical insight which teaches that sin is both a vertical and horizontal reality. For sin to be truly understood, the stories of Gen 3 and Gen 4 should be read together because they are two sides of the same coin, a reality that the theological emphasis on the sinful human before God has often neglected, especially in Protestant churches. By calling attention to social evils, the African insight underlines the fact that in the final analysis, it is not God who suffers evil; rather it is the individual who suffers at the hands of oppressors and exploiters. However, when individuals suffer through evil, God who is the Creator of all humans is also offended.

The focus on social relationships by AR also has the positive aspect of reminding the churches that what is the heart of religion, especially the Bible, is not human obedience to law but life-giving relationships between God and human beings, and among human beings

¹⁶⁷ A. Mazrui, *Cultural Forces in World Politics* (London: Heinemann, 1990), p. 19.

themselves. The purpose of religion is to nurture these relationships or restore them when they are broken. An appropriation of this human-centered approach in AR will help redirect theological teaching away from overemphasis on the other worldly concerns, to the network of human relationships. These must be supported and continually transformed in order that society may be humanised and enable its members to live fulfilling lives. As theology begins to sensitize individuals about social sins, it will also challenge them to reflect morally on what they do in their relations with their fellow human beings.

Finally, by focusing attention on the formation of healthy relationships and the creation of life-giving structures, theology will make necessary linkages between right believing and teaching (orthodoxy), and the right doing (orthopraxis), between faith and ethics. In so doing, it will challenge believers to match their “correct” verbal profession (dogma) with their actions. By using a simple test of asking believers to demonstrate the authenticity of their faith by promoting healthy human relationships in the society, the churches will at last be affirming a very deep religious insight which St. James gave to the church, when he noted that: “So faith by itself, it has not works, is dead” (Jas 2:17, 20). This is exactly what Jesus Himself taught (e.g., in Mat 22:36–40; Mk 12:28–31) and the apostle John (1 Jn 3:17–18; 4:7-8, 11–11, 19–21), namely, that whoever claims to love God must also love his or her fellow human beings, simply because faith and good works belong together.

3. Caring in African Christianity

The lawyer who prompted Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan got the scriptural prescription right when he answered Jesus by saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself. (Lk10:27)”

Jesus demonstrated in the parable that the neighbour stands for anyone in need of help, attention, sympathy, and practical service. In the parable, the religious leaders failed dismally for they did not know that religious piety must be given expression in humble service to other people. This parable continues to be a rebuke to our misconception about what Christianity is all about. Christianity is not a question of looking “Christian” by adopting Western dress, church attendance, and simulated Western “Christian” life-styles. Christianity is about love for our fellow human beings, and sacrificing personal convenience to help others. In his message about the final judgment (Mt 25:31–46) Jesus predicts that there will be two types of people facing the Shepherd as he separates the sheep from the goats. Those to be rewarded will be those who

performed mundane services. “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. (Mt 25: 35–36)”

Conversely those under the curse of God are said to have “refused to help” any of those listed above in need of care. In this parable, they are depicted as simply being insensitive to the needs of the unfortunate. Of course, they would have done anything for Jesus! What can we say about Christianity’s record of caring for and providing practical love for one’s neighbor? There are positive as well as negative responses to this question. In my view, a critical evaluation would probably tip the balance towards the negative.¹⁶⁸ There are mitigating reasons for this. Christianity was introduced in Africa at the height of European expansionism and colonialism and conversion to Christianity was a process of submission to the new colonial order in which Africans were placed on the lowest rung of the social ladder. (In Kenya, the class system took the following order: Europeans, Asians, Arabs, and last, Africans.)

The socio-political, religio-cultural ideology of colonialism interfered with the real gospel of Christ, which is good news about God’s love and redeeming grace. Individual missionaries might have wished to show “brotherly love” and indeed some did, but circumstances confined the kind of caring emanating from the efforts of missionaries to the new Christian institutions: the school, the hospital and the church. Even in these segregation was the norm. In South Africa, it took the extreme form of apartheid. David Barrett reports on other things that precipitated the rise of independent churches a few decades after Christianity was introduced in Africa.¹⁶⁹ In the case of the Luo of Kenya, the biblical concept of love was comparable to the Luo concept of *hera* and consisted of “the love of God, love for the underprivileged, love for one’s neighbor, and love for the brethren.” This was lacking in the context of missionary paternalism. Another reality was what the early African clergy interpreted as discrimination, namely, the deliberate attempt to withhold advancement from them. On the positive side, Christians have been known to show real concern and care for one another, especially in times of life’s crises, for example, with regard to challenges sometimes experienced in marriages and at funerals. In the face of national crises such as politically

¹⁶⁸ B. J. van der Walt, *The Liberating Message: A Christian World View for Africa* (Potchefstroom: PU for Che, 1994), p. 213.

¹⁶⁹ B. Goba, “Corporate Personality: *Ancient Israel and Africa*,” in Basil Moore (ed.), *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1974), p. 68.

instigated ethnic clashes, institutional Christianity has spoken out in defence of the marginalized and displaced. The militancy of some clergy and lay Christians has been interpreted as a way of caring for the voiceless and the oppressed.

4. The Wholeness of Life

Life is a holistic form or the wholeness of existence. It is a holistic phenomenon that is composed of the spirit (Ka) that constitutes the immortal aspect of our human existence. Because of its mystical divine properties, it does not die. It is eternal. The mind (Ba) is the creative spark within the human body. It is the seat of divine intelligence-wisdom out of which flow a variety of virtues and attributes such as truth, justice, compassion, rationale, love, concern, care, and a sense of sharing, which are some of the divine elements of “humanness/Ubuntu.”

The body (Chat) is matter, a substance out of which man is made. It is commonly referred to as the “slime” or “dust” of the earth to which the body must return at death: “Thou art dust, and unto dust thou shall return.” The physical body is the visible part of the human constitution. It is the “slime” of the earth (matter) out of which man was made; and it is into the “nostrils” of matter that Thoh (life-giver or God of life) breathed the divine element that effected the transformation of matter (man) into a “living soul”

According to the Christian doctrine, God breathed into man an element that contained the divine essence, power, the “image and likeness” of the creator (Utongo). Then man, as a “living soul,” made in the image and likeness of God, and with the placing of divine “intelligence/wisdom” into his soul/mind, became different from other created beings and was endowed with a power that conferred on him dominion over the rest of creation.

It is only when the above mentioned three main components of man: spirit (Ka), mind (Ba) and body (Chat) exist that life, which is the “wholeness of existence,” starts to be. Yet, this “wholeness” is deemed incomplete without the incorporation of “divinity,” the “supreme being,” who is the “ultimate reality” of existence, into its constitution. It is the presence of God that makes life a divine reality, which is enjoyed by a variety of beings: in the celestial/spiritual world, in the cosmos (universe), and on earth (terrestrial world). The celestial world is the world of God and his spiritual beings. In the cosmos are the planets, the moon, sun and stars—and all that constitutes the splendor of the heavens. The earth is the habitat of the created beings: human beings, animals, plants, reptiles, insects, fowl, insects, rivers, stones, etc. It is out of the concept of the “wholeness of existence” that the doctrine of “macro-microcosmic emanations”

emerged—expressed in the axiom: the above is as the below, the below is as the above. This simply means that there is a “oneness” of existence between the celestial world (world of God and his angels), the spiritual world (world of the living-dead: ancestors and saints) and the mundane world (world of the living on earth). The celestial and the spiritual worlds are invisible, while the cosmos, the mundane and their inhabitants are visible.

Therefore, what we commonly call the “universe,” is a composite of divine, spirit, human, animate and inanimate elements, hierarchically perceived, but directly related, and always interacting with each other. Some of these elements are visible, others invisible. They correspond to the visible and invisible spheres of the universe: the visible world being composed of creation, including humanity, plants, animals and inanimate beings; and the invisible world being the sphere of God, the ancestors and the spirits.¹⁷⁰

There is order and balance in the universe. Harmony reigns between the celestial beings, the cosmos and humanity. There is also a “mystical fusion” between the divine, the spirits and the living. The “communion” or “inter-twinedness” of the spirits, the ancestors (the living-dead) and the living, in the form of individuals, family, clan or nation, is a mystical union. It is alleged that, the visible world is ONE with the invisible and there is no break within the two, still less between their inhabitants, since the family, the clan and the nation extend beyond death, and thus form the invisible and most important element in the community.¹⁷¹

The creation of the “oneness of existence,” where there is order and an harmonious relationship between the inhabitants of both the visible and invisible worlds, motivates a sense of mutual or reciprocal concern, care, compassion and sharing. The existence, misfortune, or death of one of the integral units within the shared world (or community) becomes the concern of the co-inhabitants of both the visible and invisible worlds. Actions motivated by compassion and a sense of sharing prompt the community to a sharing of the burden or sorrow. No one faces it alone. No one “sings a solo song” of grief. There is always a helping hand. There is always a “breathing out and into” of the “breath” of Ubuntu/humanness.

4.1. Death

Then comes death, that inevitable and, in many societies, most disruptive phenomenon of all. It stands between the world of human beings and the world of the spirits, between the

¹⁷⁰ Laurenti Magesa, African Religion. *The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1998), p. 44.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

visible and the invisible.¹⁷² The living, the living dead and those in the spiritual world feel the destructive power of death or its effects. It is a common phenomenon of life, yet no one gets used to it. In its ruthlessness, whether it comes through violence or natural causes, it succeeds in severing or removing the affected individual(s) from the order and harmony of existence. There seems to be, however, a current of compromise between death and the living in that they sometimes refer to it in “kindly” terms, as the “gateway” into the spiritual world or an “exit”

4.2. Caring in Burial and Bereavement

While death is still the “destructive” element within life, and the cause of the decomposition of matter, which is the physical body (Chat), it does not succeed in inflicting a blow or harm on to the spirit (Ka), which is immortal and indestructible. It is our religious belief that the soul survives (the blow) and continues to live in the invisible world of the spirits together with those who have gone before us, and are now living in the gallery of the living-dead (ancestors). Death disturbs, or disrupts, the harmony of existence. It thus causes concern amongst the living on earth, the family, relatives, the clan, and those beings in the ancestral world.

However, we realize that mourning for the deceased becomes a paradoxical phenomenon. While wailing in sorrow for the loss of the beloved and the destruction of the deceased’s physical existence, the individual, family or community are, at the same time, celebrating (spiritually) the anticipated arrival and triumphant entry of the deceased into the ancestral world—hoping that he will, one day, become an ancestor. The paradoxical existence of “death” and “life,” or what we may call the scenario of “despair and hope,” (or “sorrow and celebration”), influences the mind (Ba) in the determining of the formulae of burial rites and ceremonies. We see here a clear act of reciprocity: The body housed the mind, and now the mind determines a divine ritual and ceremony for the dignified, sacred burial of the body.

The acceptance of death as an exit or “gateway” to the spiritual world, and the “welcome” of loss with “understanding,” are acknowledged and enacted in the burial rites: Dhi gi kwe (“go well in Luo language”), “Greet them where you go. We shall meet again...” (So the community sings parting songs in the full belief and hope that the deceased will meet them in the celestial world). Preparations for the “trip” to the “nether-land,” with the hope that the deceased will be accepted in the spiritual world are revealed during the burial.

¹⁷² John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 149.

The communal concern that is generated motivates the sense of care, and the process of caring becomes a shared phenomenon where members of the family, community, clan or tribe participate in the burial. People are brought together, as members of the corporate society, to share in the pain of loss and to care for the bereaved.

Conclusion

This theological reflection paper has tried to faithfully to present the face of Africa from the distant past in antiquity to the known time. It is based on the geography, history, culture, religion and how these values are harmoniously blended critically. It has presented us with the new fading face of Africa. Ever since Christianity was established in the African soil there have been a variety of indigenous responses ranging from the development of prophetic movements in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the recent emergence of Neo-Pentecostal Christianity towards the end of the twentieth century.

Scholars view the variety of responses as a manifestation of religious independence and innovation in Africa. They are an attempt by Africans to forge new identities for themselves experimenting with and breaking down traditions. They provide an interface for the encounter between African and Western ideas and a forum for social and religious change, they are regarded as processes of enculturation of Christianity in the African context. They have retained an African ethos and their theology has a distinctive African flavour.

These African responses to Christianity have been described variously as African initiatives in Christianity. This reflection calls for each and every African to be responsible for whatever actions he or she takes in this religious, social, cultural and political continent, and to bring the best they can bring of themselves, so as to live a life worth living as the people of African prepare for the life to come in the eternity.

Bibliography

- Barrett, David B. *Schism and Renewal in Africa. Six Thousand Co-Movements*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Fiedler, K., *Christianity and African Culture: Conservative German Protestant Missionaries in Tanzania, 1900–1940*. Leiden, Boston, Tokyo: Brill Academic Publishers, 1997.
- Goba B. “Corporate Personality: Ancient Israel and Africa.” In *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, edited by Basil Moore. Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, 1974.
- Healey, Joseph G. *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Black Christian Values*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981.

- Jones, E. S. *Mastery: The Art of Mastering Life*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1956.
- Kaitholil, George. *Make Caring Your Target*. Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 1997.
- Kinoti, Hannah W. *Aspects of Traditional Gikuyu Morality*. University of Nairobi, 1983.
- Magesa, Laurenti. *African Religion. The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*. Nairobi: Pauline Publications, 1998.
- Mbiti, John S. *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann, 1969.
- Mndende, N. “*The Teaching of African Religion in School.*” In Toit and Kruger, op. cit., (note 10).
- Van der Walt, B. J. *The Liberating Message: A Christian World View for Africa*. Potchefstroom: PU for Che, 1994.

The Incorporation of the Acholi Death Rites of Passage into Christian Worship.

A Case Study of Namokora Parish, Gulu Archdiocese - Uganda

Tabu Lee Daniel

Introduction

Inculturation has been seen as a prominent need for the incarnation of the Gospel in the African context since the end of the Second Vatican Council. Inculturation is defined as “the insertion of the Gospel message into cultures.”¹⁷³ Charles Nyamiti holds the same view but he talks of the insertion of the Gospel message into a particular culture.¹⁷⁴ This write-up is an attempt to delve into the theological realm of inculturation, by exploring the possibility of incorporating the death rite of passage of the Acholi people into Christian worship. The main aim is to assess the possibility of this inculturation in Namokora Parish, Gulu Archdiocese in Uganda. We shall therefore, first try to explore briefly the Namokora Parish, then there will follow a brief exposition of the Acholis’ religio-cultural worldview of death. We shall finally envisage an inculturated Acholi Christian Funeral Liturgy for Burial.

1. A Panoramic View of Namokora Catholic Parish

The Acholi tribe is the major ethnic group found in Namokora Catholic Parish, in the Gulu Archdiocese, Uganda. This parish is located in the northern part of Uganda, in the Kitgum District, Chua East Constituency, Namokora Town Council. Comboni Missionaries (Verona Fathers) evangelized the entire Northern region of Uganda, including this parish, which is composed of 39 Chapels (out-stations) with a population estimated to be around twenty-seven thousand five hundred and eight (27,508). These missionaries were zealous in their evangelization, but they failed to inculturate the liturgies into the religio-cultural beliefs and practices of the people. They implanted a European Christianity on the locals. This has caused the indigenous people of Acholi to always go back to their traditional ways, even after going to Church. They always find themselves in a dilemma about which religious practice to follow. This is why there is an urgent need of inculturation in the liturgy of Acholis, especially that of concerned with death.

¹⁷³ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, on The Church in Africa (Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 1995): n. 60, in AAS 88 (1996): 37-38.

¹⁷⁴ C. Nyamiti, *Studies in African Christian Theology*, Vol. 1: *Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Humankind, Methodological and Trinitarian Foundations* (Nairobi: Catholic University of Eastern Africa Publications, 2005), 176.

2. Death in Religio-Cultural Worldview of the Acholis

Worldview is said to be the way in which a particular set of people perceive their world which, in turn, influences their ways of knowing and doing. In the worldview of Acholi people, every person who lives has three important moments in life: birth, marriage and death.¹⁷⁵ So, the Acholi life cycle includes birth, marriage and death. Birth brings about the physical existence. Marriage establishes a new family and brings children into the world. Death separates a person from his or her household and marks the end of that physical sharing of life, work, and joy by which a person contributes to his or her family and community. But the dead person is still alive in a different world of the ancestors. And since, there is a connection between the visible and invisible world, death is not perceived as a discontinuation/cessation of life but a natural transition from the visible to the invisible realm. In fact, death is a necessary part of life that everyone needs to confront because death makes life in the realm of the ancestors possible. The essence of a person is not destroyed, rather, death is considered as a rite of passage.

3. Death as a Rite of Passage

The Acholi people understands death as, “One of the rites of passage that an individual must pass through. As a natural phenomenon, it is a passage that is inescapable, a state of spiritual growth, and a moment when the individual has to separate himself from the earthly group in order to be united with the ancestors.”¹⁷⁶ This is to say that the Acholis conceived death as a transition to a different and supernatural state of life, a beginning of a journey to the land of the ancestors.¹⁷⁷ This is why they believe that death is not an end in itself, nor is death a destruction of the individual, but rather the supreme fulfilment of the person. It is a bridge, a means of transformation to a life beyond.¹⁷⁸

4. The Acholis’ Ways of Interpreting Death

Even though the Acholis accept the reality of death as a rite of passage, the situation and the age of the dead person matters. Like most African societies, they believe that death is either unexpected (sudden) or expected. Unexpected deaths are often believed to be caused by sorcery,

¹⁷⁵ Gulu Archdiocese Liturgy Committee, *Guidelines for Funeral Rites*, (June 2016), 22.

¹⁷⁶ J.N.K Mugambi, *A Comparative Study of Religion* (Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1990), 272.

¹⁷⁷ Mugambi, *A Comparative Study of Religion*, 272.

¹⁷⁸ Mugambi, *A Comparative Study of Religion*, 275.

spirits, curses, etc.¹⁷⁹ In order to avoid any sudden death, the Acholis have some common practices for protecting themselves against sickness and death. Some wear amulets or stich anti-death medicine in their clothes especially in their underclothing, and they will wear it every day. Normally they get these medicines from traditional healers/herbalists or from witch doctors.¹⁸⁰

In the case of an expected death, when it is apparent that a critically ill person is about to die, some measures are taken by the Acholi to make sure that the dying person will depart safely to the land of the ancestors. 'Pagak': this word is used to avoid speaking of death directly; it is a polite word that describes death. A farewell is organized and people slaughter a goat, a cow or a chicken depending on the family's wealth and a farewell meal for the dying person is arranged. During this farewell, the sick person blesses the people if he/she is an adult. He blesses the family members as well as the members of the entire clan. The purpose of the sacrifice and blessing is to reconcile the community and the dying person to ensure that there is a good relationship between the living and the dead. "The belief behind such rituals is that a person who dies unhappily becomes a vengeance ghost who later on may haunt or torment the people on earth."¹⁸¹ The Acholi believe that the spirit of those who die unhappily could bring misfortune and death to those who are still alive, whereas the spirit of those who die peacefully will not take any revenge.¹⁸²

5. Acholis' Understanding of Life after Death

We have already seen that Acholi people understand death to mean the abandoning of the physical earthly body while the spirit of the person continues to live in *Pagak*.¹⁸³ They also cherish an expected death because the one who dies does so in the comfort of their home, surrounded by their children, friends and relatives who have come round to pay their last respects to the dying person and give him or her a worthy sent off.¹⁸⁴

However, the fact that death is accepted as a necessary part of life does not preclude the fact that there is also a lot of fear surrounding death, and a great sorrow that follows the death of

¹⁷⁹ Acholi believe that uncles, grandmothers, grandfathers and parents can curse someone that is why they are always accorded maximum respect. Cf. John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, (1975), 112.

¹⁸⁰ Sabino Ocan Odoki, *Death Rituals among the Luo of Uganda: Their Significance for the Theology of Death* (Gulu: Gulu Catholic press, 1997), 23.

¹⁸¹ Zanon Simon., *Two Ki Too*, (Gulu Diocese- Uganda, 1985), 2-3.

¹⁸² Fayzan Zahid., "Different Rituals Ugandan Tribes Perform on Widows", <https://www.chimpreports.com/different-rituals-ugandan-tribes-perform-on-widows/15/6/2017>, accessed on 26/2/2020.

¹⁸³ Gulu Archdiocese Liturgical Committee, *Guidelines for Funeral Rites*, 22.

¹⁸⁴ *Kristo Oto Kristo Ocer*, 31.

a loved one. Fear comes because when the funeral death rituals are not performed well, bad omens are believed to happen.¹⁸⁵ It is believed that the spirit of the dead on leaving the body, runs and hides in the bush or in the big tree or a hill near the homestead. If such spirit is abandoned and is not invited to return to the homestead for the farewell, it may well become an evil spirit known as *Ayweya/gemo*. This is the kind of spirit comes later to disturb the peace of the living; it is the spirit which brings sickness, sudden death, and misfortunes such as accidents, infertility in women, the failure of crops to yield a good harvest, and many other misfortunes.¹⁸⁶

There is also another practice for appeasing the spirits of the dead. This is done by taking good care of the tomb, slashing the grass that has grown around it, sacrificing animals to them or giving food, spilling the blood of a slaughtered animal, and offering libations of the local brew on the grave. Food and drinks are also poured under the earthenware pot so that the spirit of the dead can eat and drink. It is a symbolic act which shows that the living are in communion with the dead.¹⁸⁷ The Acholi believe that when the spirit of the deceased person is called back in this way, and the funeral rites are well fulfilled, the spirit of the dead person will now join the family and becomes a friendly spirit who will stand by them during the various events of their life.¹⁸⁸

6. The Acholi Customary Funeral Rites

Acholi customary funeral rites consist of three moments; the burial (*yiko kom lato*), the smearing the grave (*puyu lyel*) and last funeral rites (*guru lyel*). We shall describe each one in the sub-section below.

6.1. Burial (Yiko kom lato)

When someone has died, the neighbours gather to strengthen the family members and the digging of the grave starts immediately.¹⁸⁹ The burial often takes place within 24 hours because of the tropical heat, which makes the body decompose quickly.¹⁹⁰ The grave must be within the homestead. For a woman, it should be adjacent to the hearth-stones (*keno*) because

¹⁸⁵ One respondent in an interview at Gangdyang, Pandwong Division, Kitgum District, 15/6/2019.

¹⁸⁶ Gulu Archdiocese Liturgy Committee, *Guidelines for Funeral Rites*, 22-23.

¹⁸⁷ Gulu Archdiocese Liturgy Committee, *Guidelines for Funeral Rites*, 22-23.

¹⁸⁸ One respondent in an interview at East Word A, Kitgum Municipality, on 28/7/2019.

¹⁸⁹ Odoki, *Death Rituals among the Luo of Uganda*, 37.

¹⁹⁰ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 113-114.

the proper place for women in Acholi is the kitchen where she play her role of cooking and feeding the family. The hearth-stones and fire are symbols of the woman's presence in the home. Women are buried near the fire place in the house so they can continue to spiritually play the role of motherhood.¹⁹¹ Men, however, are buried outside the house where there are no hearth-stones, at a different location to that of a woman. So, the place of the grave is determined by the fire-place in the house.¹⁹²

Before the body is buried, there are some rituals which must be monitored by an old woman. At the same time a goat is slaughtered for a rite that emphasizes, "the spirit of sharing wealth with the dead; and it is believed that if this is not done, the deceased will feel insulted and may inflict disease on the members of the family and their cattle or other domestics animals."¹⁹³ And finally, the body is laid to rest with great respect to avoid the wrath of the dead person.

Among the Acholi, there are some specific groups of people who are given special burial ceremonies. These groups of people include; babies (*lokere*), youth (*bulu*), chiefs (*rwodi*), warriors, victims of cold-murder, and victims of misfortunes and epidemics.¹⁹⁴ Among the above-mentioned categories of people, the Chiefs (*Rwodi*) receive many remarkable rituals.

For example, the grave of the Chief is dug just like any other grave; inside, another hole is dug on the side of the grave which looks like a cave. This is where his body is supposed to be laid after it has been covered with the skin of a black bull. Even today when the dead bodies are put in coffins, the chief's corpse is removed before the coffin is buried in the grave. Then, the corpse is buried in the small hole dug in the side of the grave. The successor of the chief never attends the funeral of his predecessor. He will be kept/hidden during the burial. He only comes out when the burial is finished because he is not supposed to see how his colleague is buried.

¹⁹¹ Odoki, *Death Rituals among the Luo of Uganda*, 38.

¹⁹² V. Opoka, *Traditional Values of Acholi Religion and Culture for their Evangelization* (Rome: Università Lateranense, 1980), 79.

¹⁹³ J. Okumu, *The funeral rites in the Acholi Tradition*, 174.

¹⁹⁴ One respondent in an interview, 25/6/2019.

6.2. Smearing the Grave (Puyo Lyel)

The smearing of grave takes place three days after burial for men and four days for women.¹⁹⁵ The grave is smeared with a mixture of dark soil collected from the river side and cow dung by an elderly woman who belongs to the lineage of the deceased. During those three or four days, a fire is lit in an earthen pot in the evening, and an elderly woman of the family sleeps near the tomb to show that “the spirit of the dead is alive”.¹⁹⁶ In this ceremony, the local beer (*kwete*) which is brewed earlier for the occasion is poured on the grave as a libation for the deceased member.¹⁹⁷

6.3. Last Funeral Rites (Guru Lyel)

This celebration is only for those who have died at an advanced age and never for those who died before 50 years of age. It is celebrated with much joy and festivity. For, those who died at the age of 60 and above, there is an even more elaborate festivity as an expression of communion between the living and the dead.¹⁹⁸ This is a way of celebrating the life of the deceased person, and marks the end of mourning, though a person may personally continue to mourn his/her beloved for the rest of their life. Thus, it is believed that on the day this rite is performed, death is chased away from home, and the spirit of the deceased is brought back home where it belongs.¹⁹⁹

The celebration always takes two days and normally begins on Friday evening lasts to Sunday when everybody is expected to return to their own homes. This ritual is composed of a number of activities which includes sending messages to the relatives, in-laws and friends, the widow inheritance (*lako daa to*), distributing the belongings of the deceased (*poko jami pa latoo*) and lastly, collecting the ashes of the grave (*jobu buru lyel*).²⁰⁰

7. Theological Meaning of Death in the Scripture and Church's Tradition

The Sacred Scriptures and Tradition see death as a consequence of the fall of humankind described in Genesis chapter 3 and Christ's coming to redeem us through his death on the

¹⁹⁵ Gulu Archdiocese Liturgy Committee, *Guidelines for Funeral Rites*, 24. Also see Opoka, V., *Traditional Values of Acholi Religion*, 81.

¹⁹⁶ Gulu Archdiocese Liturgy Committee, *Guidelines for funeral Rites*.

¹⁹⁷ J. Okumu, “The Funeral Rites in the Acholi Tradition and the Pastoral Problems they arouse,” in *Incarnating Christianity in Uganda*, Second National Theological Week, Uganda, Katigondo-Masaka. 1983. 175.

¹⁹⁸ Okumu, “The Funeral Rites in the Acholi Tradition and the Pastoral Problems they arouse,” 175.

¹⁹⁹ Lamunu Irene, *southworld.net/Uganda-life-is-celebrated-during-the-last-funeral-rite/November-2017*, cited on 18/1/2020, at 10:00 am.

²⁰⁰ Gulu Archdiocese Liturgy Committee, *Guidelines for Funeral Rites*.

Cross. Therefore, we mourn in hope, for those who die in Christ shall be raised with him (Rom 5:12-21). This truth we shall briefly explore in the following subsections:

7.1. Old Testament Understanding of Death

Death was never God's intent. He formed human beings (in Genesis 1 and 2) to live eternally in deep relationship with Him. He created the rest of the universe just by a mere command and the whole of it came into being. But when it was time for the creation of human beings, God's involvement was much more direct and intimate, for he took dust and created a human person in his own image and likeness, and breathed his breath into him and he became a living being.

Human beings were made to enjoy this present life, not as their final end, but as a transitory stage leading to transcendent life in God. As a consequence of the Fall, however, this transition has taken on the form of death, and the hope of life beyond has become faint and obscured.²⁰¹ Because of this moral disorder, man was condemned by God to return to the dust from where he was taken. This return is a symbol of death "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). Thus, human beings lost their intimacy with God (indicating spiritual death). This was expressed both in the feeling of shame and sense of nakedness (Gen 3: 9-10). And as well men and women began to die physically.

Death in the Old Testament therefore means a state in which the soul (*nephesh*) detaches itself from the body or corpse.²⁰² This '*Nephesh*' is the spirit of God and once it is taken away, a person dies (Ps 104: 29).

7.2. New Testament: Christ's Death on the Cross Pays the Full Penalty for Sin

The New Testament teaches that just as death enters through one man, one man's act of righteousness leads to the justification of and life for all. In fact, on the Cross, the two deaths (physical and spiritual) were paid for through the redemption that Christ purchased for us. Therefore, for those who die in Christ, death leads to union with the Lord. We see this in Luke 23:43 where Jesus promises the righteous thief on the Cross "today, you shall be with me in paradise." We see St. Paul longing to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23) and he affirms that it is

²⁰¹ J. D. Douglas, *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church* (The Paternoster Press, 1974), 287.

²⁰² J. Paul, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1994), 213.

necessary to be absent from the body (that is, to be dead) before we can be at home with Lord (2 Cor. 5:8).

Christians therefore mourn their departed ones in hope of the resurrection in Christ. When we lose a loved one, it may feel as if a part of ourselves has been taken away with them. We grieve the moments we will no longer be able to share together with them physically. Though this pain is actual and profound, we still believe in faith that they belong to Christ and so, our sorrow is always tinted with the certainty that one day we will see them again in paradise when we too die. In the first letter to Thessalonians 4:14, Paul states, “For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.”

7.3. Understanding of Death in the Sacred Tradition

The Sacred Tradition sees physical death as inevitable, and that this was never God’s intent for His beloved creation neither does He wish us to remain here. So, in Christ, He offers us life that is beyond, that is, to experience, through our relationship with Him, all the good and lovely and amazing blessings He has planned for us. He wants to surround us with His love, from now into eternity, and in so doing, cast out all fear.

Many Church Fathers comment on death. For instance, St. Ignatius of Antioch (98 A.D - 111 A.D) saw death as a new birth and said “Death is the beginning of true life”²⁰³. St. Gregory of Nyssa (335 A.D- 394 A.D) depicted death as “The crowning of the bride of Christ. Hence soul, death and resurrection are the final restoration of all things, that is, *apocatastasis*.”²⁰⁴ St. Ambrose of Milan (339 A.D – 397 A.D) divided death into three kinds: Spiritual death, this kind of death comes through sin; Mystical death which comes as a result of identification with Christ; and Physical death which comes as a result of the separation of the body and soul.²⁰⁵

St. Augustine of Hippo (354 A.D- 430 A.D) linked death with the theology of redemption and he described two kinds of death: bodily death and the death of the soul. For him, bodily death is the consequence of the sin of Adam and death of the soul is caused by the lack of Christ’s grace. Therefore, there are also two kinds of resurrection that is, resurrection of

²⁰³ J. Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. 1, Christian Classics, Westminster, (Maryland, 1986), 64.

²⁰⁴ Quasten, *Patrology*, 70-71.

²⁰⁵ Quasten, *Patrology*, 157.

the body and of the soul.²⁰⁶ Thomas Aquinas (1225 - 1274) postulated four things that we are faced with at death; they are: death, judgment, heaven and hell. According to him, “At death, the soul separates itself from the body, it goes either to its reward or punishment before the resurrection.”²⁰⁷ At the resurrection, “The body will rise again from the grave”²⁰⁸ and after the resurrection, “All will appear before the judgment seat of Christ for reward or punishment.”²⁰⁹

Vatican Council II stated that the Pilgrim Church finds its fulfilment in the glory of heaven and that fulfilment implies the restoration in Christ of all things including mankind and all that is in the world. That promised restoration that we await has already begun with Christ and is being carried on by the outpouring and sending of the Holy Spirit. It continues through the Church, and in the Church we are joined more closely to Jesus Christ who nourishes us with his body and blood. Hence he makes us partakers of his glorious life. But before reigning with him there is judgment about which we must be vigilant (*Lumen Gentium*, 48).

8. Toward an Inculturated Acholi Christian Funeral Liturgy for Burial

We have seen that for the Acholi people, burial must take place within 24 hours after the death occurred. Consequently, the celebration of an inculturated Acholi funeral liturgy should fall within that time range. However, such a celebration is always a bit of a challenge because often the relatives and friends of the deceased are still crying and wailing uncontrollably, especially when the deceased is a youth.

The Acholi idea of death as “a rite of passage into the community of ancestors” should be integrated into the Christian notion of the heavenly kingdom. In an inculturated Acholi Christian funeral liturgy, an Acholi elder (*ladit kaka*) or elders could be called upon to sing an Acholi funeral song or songs, which praise the good deeds of the deceased and console the bereaved family with the hope that the deceased has already entered into the land of the ancestors (which has been inculturated to mean “heaven”).

The prayer asking the ancestors (inculturated to mean “saints”) to receive the deceased person into their company can be recited also by an elder or elders. The Acholi people also

²⁰⁶ J. E. Dewart, McWilliam, *Death and Resurrection: Message of the Fathers of the Church* (Michal Glazier Wilmington Delaware, 1986), 164-165.

²⁰⁷ E. J. Gratsch, *Aquinas' Summa: An Introduction and Interpretation* (New York: Alba House, 1985), 288.

²⁰⁸ Gratsch, *Aquinas' Summa: An Introduction and Interpretation*, 290.

²⁰⁹ Gratsch, *Aquinas' Summa: An Introduction and Interpretation*, 292.

believe that there is a possibility of not entering into the land or community of ancestors so, there is a need to pray to the ancestors to have mercy on the departed, and welcome him/her into to their company. The Acholis' land of the ancestors can be equated with the "heaven" of Christianity while *kalony* can be equated with "purgatory" and *kapiny* with "hell". So, the Acholi know that there is a possibility of entering either t *pagak* (heaven), or *kalonyo* (purgatory) or *kapiny* (hell). Hence, there is a need to pray for the dead.

At the burial site, we recommend that burial should also take place in the Acholi way. For example, the position of the grave at the homestead should follow the Acholis' traditional because for the Acholi, the position of the grave indicates the spiritual role that the deceased person continues to perform for their family and the entire community. If the burial takes place at a cemetery, the liturgy can conclude with words of thanksgiving and encouragement recited by the clan leader while the final blessing should be given by the ordained minister or in his absence, an invocation or paraliturgical prayer can be said by an acolyte or a catechist.

The second stage of Acholi burial ritual, the smearing of grave, can also constitute the second stage for Acholi Christian funeral liturgy. For the Acholi, if a deceased is a male, this celebration takes place three days after his death and four days for a female. This celebration includes many rites of purification and reconciliation that are very close to the Christian sacrifice of Mass, which is a celebration of purification, reconciliation and sacrifice between God and man. It is right and fitting that the inculturated Acholi Christian ritual of smearing of grave be replaced with the Eucharistic sacrifice which is indeed the highest human – divine celebration of reconciliation and union between the living and the departed fulfilled in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ.

As a way of achieving incuturation, the Acholi dirges of love, praises and prayers for the remembrance of the departed member could be sung at the beginning and the end of the Mass or during any other celebration of the Inculturated Acholi Christian funeral liturgy),. The homily too should center on the theme of the Acholis' concept of death as an entrance into the community of the ancestors. The funeral Mass would replace all the other sacrifices, for example, the sacrifice of the animal blood or the placing of food on the tomb of the departed.

After the Holy Sacrifice of Mass, a meal can be served to all who attend the celebration. This will safeguard the Acholi's emphasis on the communion or unity between the living and

the dead. Also, we recommend that, instead of serving food and placing it on the tomb of the deceased, a photo or portrait of the deceased person could be brought and placed at the center near the altar and an elder is invited to call the name of the deceased to join those present at the celebration. This would symbolically stress the idea of communion between the living and the departed person.

The celebration of the last funeral rites among the Acholi takes place after a month, or one or two years after a person's death. This Acholi ritual is celebrated only for those who die at an advanced age and have many grandchildren. For the young and those who die below 60 years, there is less festivity. Those who die in their childhood, there is no celebration at all. Therefore, we recommend that this celebration should be adopted for all the departed, no matter their age because before God all are equal.

This final ritual is believed to free the community of those living on earth from any danger which may come from the spiritual world. It springs from Acholi belief that the unhappy departed spirit returns to torment the living community. As a result of this ritual, the Acholi believe that the unhappy spirit will calm down, and thus be able enter into the community of the ancestors. Thus, it creates a good relationship between the departed soul and the living community. For the Acholi, this is a joyful celebration consisting of eating, drinking and dancing because the departed person will hence forth shower blessings upon his/her grandchildren present at this celebration. In this celebration, therefore, there is no more crying or wailing because the Acholi believe that with this celebration, the deceased person is now in the community of the ancestors.

The inculturated Acholi liturgy for the last funeral rites should include the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Mass, because the celebration of the holy Mass is the sacrifice of Christ's paschal mystery for the salvation of mankind. We believe that in this sacrifice the deceased person will share also in the victory of Christ Jesus over death. Hence; he/she enters into the heavenly glory.

This celebration should not only be for relatives and friends of the deceased, rather for everyone. It should include members of the parish pastoral council, the parish community, chapel council members, chapel community members, and members of all small Christian communities. The duties and responsibilities for the preparation of this celebration should also

not be left only to the relatives and friends of the diseased, but should be shared among the Christian community.

The order for the Acholi Christian last funeral rites could include the following;

- i. The arrival of the Christian community, relatives and friends.
- ii. The ceremony of calling home the spirit of the departed and the ancestor in heaven.
- iii. The Eucharistic celebration.
- iv. The communal sharing of a meal by all present.

After the arrival of the Christian community, the principal celebrant could invite the elders (*Ladit Kaka*) of the departed person to call the name of the deceased, by reading his/her life history. Photographs or portrait of the deceased could be used when calling his/her name, afterwards they could be placed before the altar. The invocation of the names of the ancestors of the family could also follow. Afterwards the litany of the saints could be sung or recited, and prayers for the repose of the souls of the departed offered by the congregation. This would show that the departed has now entered in the community of the ancestor in the life of the Trinity, as well as with all the faithful departed in their heavenly home.

After invoking the names of the Acholi ancestors and saints, the Eucharistic celebration would begin. This should be the climax of the Acholi enculturated Christian ritual for the last funeral rites. By celebrating the sacrifice of the Mass, the soul or souls of the departed and the members of the community of believers here on earth are joined together with the ancestor Christ in the heavenly glory of God. The holy Mass and the prayers of the faithful is offered for the deceased that he/she may be united with Christ in his eternal life. And for those who are still living here on earth, this is a foretaste of the life to come for all who believe in God.

So, the focus of the inculturated Acholi Christian rite of the last funeral rite should be centered on the idea of the entrance of the departed into the community of the ancestors and with God. This communion should also be expressed among those who are still living here on earth in their everyday life as Christians.

Finally, the Acholi people would eat together as a sign of friendship, love and communion with one another. This aspect of communal meal is important and should be part of the celebration in all Acholi funeral rites. The meals would also serve not only for bodily nourishment but also signify the covenant of brotherhood, that is, the relationship with and the

acceptance with other Acholi because the Acholi never eat with their enemy until reconciliation is achieved and ratified with a communal meal and drinking. For the inculturated Acholi Christian last funeral rites, therefore, this aspect must be maintained, but it should be celebrated with moderation because the family of the deceased will also need material support. At the end of the celebration, we recommend that those present for the celebration of the last funeral rite, for an inculturated Acholi Christian last funeral rite, should generously contribute to a collection to support the family members of the deceased person.

Conclusion

The paper has aimed at integrating the Acholi death rites of passage into Christian worship, through a case study at the Namokora Catholic Parish in an attempt to promote the theology of inculturation. From the result of our study, we have found out that it is really important that the Gospel message of Christ should take root in the culture of the local people. We have emphasized that the inculturated Acholi Christian funeral rites, are a moment that brings people together, a moment where the communion between the living and the dead, between ancestors and God is expressed through the sharing of funeral meals and the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice of the Funeral Mass. They should also be a time of for acknowledging our relationship with our ancestors and the saints in heaven, and a moment of spiritual nourishment through the Word of God, and the Body and Blood of Christ.

Bibliography

- Douglas, J. D. *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. The Paternoster Press, 1974.
- Gratsch, E. J. *Aquinas' Summa: An Introduction and Interpretation*. New York: Alba House, 1985.
- Gulu Archdiocese Liturgy Committee, *Guidelines for Funeral Rites*. June 2016.
- Irene, Lamunu. <https://www.southworld.net/Uganda-life-is-celebrated-during-the-last-funeral-rite/November-2017>, cited on 18/1/2020, at 10:00 am.
- John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*, on The Church in Africa: n. 60, in AAS 88 (1996): 37-38. Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 1995.

Kristo Oto Kristo Ocer. Gulu-Uganda: Gulu Catholic Press, 1989.

Mbiti, John S. *Introduction to African Religion*. Great Britain: Heinemann International, 1975.

McWilliam, Dewart, J.E., *Death and Resurrection, Message of the Fathers of the Church*. Michal Glazier Wilmington Delaware, 1986.

Mugambi. N. K. *A Comparative Study of Religion*. Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 1990.

Nyamiti, C. "Studies in African Christian Theology," Vol. 1: *Jesus Christ, the Ancestor of Humankind, Methodological and Trinitarian Foundations*. Nairobi: Catholic University of Eastern Africa Publications, 2005.

Odoki, Sabino Ocan. *Death Rituals among the Luo of Uganda: Their Significance for the Theology of Death*. Gulu: Gulu Catholic press. 1997.

Okumu, J., *The Funeral Rites in the Acholi Tradition and the Pastoral Problems they arouse, in Incarnating Christianity in Uganda*. Second National Theological Week, Uganda, Katigondo-Masaka. 1983.

Opoka, V. *Traditional Values of Acholi Religion and Culture for their Evangelization*. Rome: Universita Lateranense, 1980.

Paul, J. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 1994.

Quasten, J. *Patrology*, vol. 1, Christian Classics, Westminster. Maryland, 1986.

Simon, Zanon. *Two Ki Too*. Gulu: Gulu Catholic Press, 1985.

Zahid, Fayzan "Different Rituals Ugandan Tribes Perform on Widows", <https://www.chimpreports.com/different-rituals-ugandan-tribes-perform-on-widows/15/6/2017>, accessed on 26/2/2020.



DON BOSCO UTUME, SALESIAN THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE (Affiliated to the Salesian Pontifical University - Rome)
P. O Box 24370 Karen, 00502 - Nairobi, Kenya



0722200567/ 0786466360



dbutume_secretary@yahoo.com



<http://www.dbutumestc.org>