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Mission As Dialogue In African Context: Proposing The Model Of Mutual Enrichment And Syn-Culturation

Kizito Chinedu NWEKE, CMF

Abstract

The story of Christian mission and Africa has been a tense story with mixed feelings, involving abuses of human beings and resources, deception, destruction and theft, but also education, science and technology, and human developments. The arrival of Christianity in Africa has three different junctures. Early Christianity was basically construed partly by Africans, in Africa, and through African religious thought-structures. The 15th century Christianity in Africa was an episode, darkened by slavery and inhumane enterprises. It was devastating for Africa and adverse to true Christianity. Both Africa and authentic Christianity were victims of this episode. The 18th and 19th centuries Christianity came hand in hand with colonization, practically inducing Africans into relegating their history and identities in order to be saved. This episode laid the structures of Christianity in Africa today. All these phases of Christianity in Africa have their peculiar missionary approach and agenda. It would appear that their missionizations have been, not only incompatible with Africa and its socio-political development, but also left Africa confused and disorientated over its religious identity and what being an African Christian should mean. This article, therefore, challenges

the different phases of missionization in Africa, and proposes a missionization that has dialogic approach and orientation as the next approach for a successful Christianization in Africa; an approach that engages, respects and seeks to understand the African in his/her African spiritualities and cultures. It proposes the model of mutual enrichment and suggests syn-culturation as a process that would guide mission as dialogue in Africa.

Introduction

Theological academia has developed into a science that is very cautious of religious issues of evangelical orientations. It is, therefore, very courageous of this journal to have engaged scholars on a topic such as 'mission'. Mission has accumulated so much mud of negativity as it rolled through church history. Yet, it remains an essential part of Christianity, one that must be constantly readdressed and reinvigorated. It is even more interesting when one addresses mission in Africa.

Up until the 1980s and 1990s in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, a normal picture of a divine-mundane relationship was one religion, in one church. A typical community religion was Catholic Christianity. When the Pentecostal charismatic churches started emerging, Christianization in many regions became fierce and dogmatically exclusive. There were different traditional religiosities or spiritualities, with deities like *Ogwugwu*, *Ala-ukwu*, *Ala-Ogbaga*, etc. These were relegated to the brims of the society; the ancestors and their history along with them, and Christianity prevailed.

However, on special occasions, the servants of these deities would assume, even if it was for a little while, the center stage of the

whole community. If a boy impregnated his extended 'sister'; if cultural events were to be planned; if there was need for a rash and fearful consequence against an insubordinate and wicked fellow; if there was a plea for justice and fairness in a case too complicated for the elders; etc. then we had the chance to relive the expedience and reliance of our elders to these deities, despite Christianity.

Even though the cultural spirituality and its devotees were evidently needed for the discipline and moral strength of the community, Christianity was still in charge, teaching people to do good and avoid evil. The traditional spiritualities/religiosities merely tagged along and were walled off, unappreciated.

Recently, however, a revival of these spiritualities has become rife, across the wide spectrum of Africa. Tunde Ajaja titled his article published in a Nigerian Daily, *Punch*, *Lagos, Nigeria's mega city where shrines compete with churches, mosques*¹ (2017). This is an exposed, popular city in Nigeria and yet the shrines of deities like *Ogun, Esu, Aje, Sango*, etc. are everywhere. African spiritualities are being revived, alongside the multifariousness of Christianity. Attachment to cultural and historical identity is topical across generations of Africans these days. This development is engineering a lot of changes and concerns among Africans. Hence, the question: Does the African still need to become or remain a Christian? What is the place of Christian mission in this new Africa?

Understanding mission in Christianity

Missiology is a discipline that studies the interactive and communicative relationship of God to man. To simplify this,

¹ Tunde Ajaja, Article in *Punch*, Febuary, 2017.

missiology has been understood in the precise concept of *Missio Dei* – Mission of God. There is a long history to the *Missio Dei* concept, a history that has developed with time too. When Augustine used it, he was expressing the inherent nature of God reaching forth to save humanity.² Thomas Aquinas, from a different angle, elevated the concept to a Trinitarian context, arguing that God's triune nature is missiological.³ The Father sends the Son, the Son and the Father send the Holy Spirit, so the three extend the missionary nature by sending people forth into the world. Karl Barth built on this thought to explain that the church becomes authentic in its missionary responsibility if it aligns to the triune missiology.⁴ It was based on this thomistic triune foundation that Hartenstein could identify church endeavors that are not in response to *Missio Dei* as *Missio Ecclesiae*.⁵

Mission is the furtherance of the communicative nature of God into the relevance of the world. It is the continuation of the missiological process in the mandate of Jesus Christ and commission of the church. In this sense, there is an inherent connection between *Missio Dei* and *Missio Ecclesiae*. God's missionary character was not first revealed in Jesus Christ. In the historical encounters expressed in other religions, especially in

² Cf. Tormod Englesviken, *Missio Dei: The understanding and misunderstanding of a theological concept in European churches and missiology*. International Review of Mission Vol. 92 Issue 367. 2003, 482. Accessed November 24, 2017. DOI: 10.1111/j.1758-6631.2003.tb00424.x

³ Cf. John F. Hoffmeyer, John, "The Missional Trinity." *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 40. Issue 2. 2001, 108. Accessed November 24, 2017. DOI: 10.1111/0012-2033.00063

⁴ Cf. Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Constants in Conflict: A Theology of Mission for Today* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 290.

⁵ Tormod Englesviken, *Missio Dei*. 2003, 482.

Judaism, God has always revealed rays of himself into the seeking hearts and cultures of humanity. This missionary contact was manifested in different ways, according to the epochs and context in which the people searched for God. So, through the leadership time of Moses and Joshua, to the judges, the kings, and the prophets, God has continued his mission of revealing himself to man. With Jesus Christ, however, a soteriological phase in God's mission began. The author of the letter to the Hebrews captured it thus: "On many past occasions and in many different ways, God spoke to our fathers through the prophets. But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He made the universe" (Heb. 1: 1-2).

This soteriological phase, in which God participated differently in his mission, incorporated the church as a family of those who share in the same mandate to continue with the same *Missio Dei*. This mandate which was variously expressed in the Bible is summarized in the gospel of Matthew: "Then Jesus came to them and said; all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (28: 18-20). In this context, the church understands itself essentially, as a missionary body.

Pre-Vatican Council II missionary understanding

The authoritative, imperative connotation of the biblical mandate has defined its content. The understanding that Christians should 'go', (away from their already Christian places) to other people and Christianize them, making them obey the teachings of Christ

as Christ commanded, accompanied the various eras of church missionary activities. The church executed differently in the annals of her missionary engagements and motivation, whatever it could interpret mission to be. European countries were religious enough to send missionaries to other parts of the globe to do the pious and charitable work of converting and saving the souls of the non-Christians, bringing the light of Christ and civilization into the darkness of their lives. The conviction to look outwards and see oneself as better was as religious as the readiness to die for the cause.

However, political and territorial interests were even more evident in their missionary engagements. Through the *implatio Ecclesiae* method, churches were erected to secure territories outside Europe in the concept of mission mandate. Money, energy, time, lives, and other resources were spent to achieve this mandate of Christ. This also implied rights and influence over the new churches and territories. The missionary churches and countries determined the religious style and even contents of the missioned territories. Thus mission was an extension of the European encultured Christianity, with its church structure and theological nuances.

Mission in Africa

There is always the oversight that Christianity was first in Africa before it went to the now Western world. This oversight is as a result of two main reasons.

Firstly, the early Christianity that was decisive for Christian theology and politics was partly a product of the Alexandrian school of thought. The intellectuals, philosophers, and theologians of this school were part of the known civilized world as at the time.

With men like Origen, Cyril, Clement, Augustine, etc. it sophisticated the early church in the face of many theological tensions and strife.

They were not 'missionized'. They 'missionized' others. The era, understanding of mission and church politics, Christianized socio-cultural orientations, all these could not have let them engage in a rampage of missionary dominance. Evidently, history does not favor the uneventful. By the 7th century, a strong wind of Islam spread across the North African Christian regions, subduing and Islamizing them. So, this history was conquered.

Secondly, the second contact of Christianity with Africa was rather so eventful that its episodes blurred the previous contact with Africa. It was the first phase of mission in Africa.

a) *First Phase Mission*

The Roman Catholic Church was the first to embark in the first phase of missionary endeavors in Africa, as early as in the 15th century.⁶ In 1462, Pope Pius II entrusted the evangelization of the Guinea Coast to the Franciscans led by Alfonso de Bolano. By 1486, Dominicans and others were active in West Africa, notably among the Wolof in Senegambia. Cape Verde mission covered up to the Guinea. It was very significant to have missionary relationship with the famous and powerful Benin Kingdom through the king of Benin who had come in contact with the Portuguese in 1485. So, Africa, from Guinea, Benin, Sao Tome, to the Congo, etc. was filled with missionaries, especially from

⁶ Cf. Adrian Hastings, *The Church in Africa, 1450 – 1950* (Oxford, Clarendon press, 1994).

Portugal, in the 15th century. Hence this phase was called the 'Portuguese Period'.

By the 16th century, the mission enterprise was already booming. The allegiance of the missionaries was to the church but also to their state. "While the government agents colonized the territories, the missionaries and teachers colonized the minds of the young Nigerians whom they taught."⁷ This 16th century episode of Christian mission in Africa has remained a disturbing thorn on the dignity of Christian message and an irredeemable part of church history. This has permanently altered the perception and reaction towards mission as a concept.

b) *Second Phase mission*

With the abolition of the slave trade by early 19th century, a different phase and method of Christian missionary story between Europe and Africa began. This new phase was coined by the very concept of Christianity that fought for the prohibition of African slave trade; that the African should be seen as a human being even when, in the expressions of Albert Schweitzer, he was to the European only like a younger brother. Let us note:

To many of today's ears, this has an unmistakable ring of paternalism and even racist condescension. But for a white European in 1913, leaving fame and adulation behind in Europe to dedicate his life to service to Africans in desperate need, the insistence that 'the African is my brother' expresses a spirit of radical solidarity that was far

⁷ Kalu Ogbaa, *The Nigerian Americans* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 7.

outside the mainstream of contemporary European culture.⁸

Some 50 years before this, the church, state, and society were at least tolerating or passively involved in the slave trade, with church leaders and preachers owning slaves and treating them as such. But a new Christian mindset developed on May 22, 1787, in a printing shop in London, championed by a group of young Anglican men who could not let the evil of slavery continue within the permission of Christianity. Among them were Granville Sharp, and the young Thomas Clarkson, who would devote his entire life to the cause. They called themselves the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Then they recruited the eloquent, evangelical and well-connected young MP, William Wilberforce, who led the campaign in the House of Commons and became the face for the abolition of African slave trade.

This, among many other factors, halted the slave – Christianization process and created the room for the second phase mission, the colonization – Christianization process. Europe was not yet done with Africa. While the political plots of how to regain control of the African enterprise was going on in Europe, Berlin scrambling and partitioning the continent like a piece of cake to European countries, the churches were equally hustling to secure some territories for their denominations, a fight that played no minor role in the denominational discrepancies and ecumenical hazards in African Christianity. The Anglican Church, Protestant churches, and their daughter evangelical churches were in the forefront of this. The Roman Catholic Church was hampered by

⁸ Albert Schweitzer, transl. C.E.B. Russell, *African Notebook* (Syracuse: University Press, 2002), xiii.

some factors, foreign and local, from being the first in this struggle for territories.

In Rome, on the one hand, the report was that the missionary work had begun well and Pope Gregory XV had founded the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide (Propagation of faith) in 1622, with the responsibility of managing and supporting the missionary engagements. But this positive report did not last longer than the early 16th century. The Portuguese church, which was a major sponsor in personnel and fund was having economic difficulties with this responsibility. The system that organized the mission work in Africa, 'padroado system', aimed at using Portuguese missionaries alone in securing political and territorial interest in Africa. Apparently, Portuguese national interests preceded religious interests.⁹ This equally corrupted the religious understanding of Christianity for the Africans who saw Christianity as a means to a political goal. However, when the Portuguese government had financial constraints to the 'padroado system' in the 17th century, the system could no longer provide enough personnel and enough fund. More missionaries began engaging in the slave trade.

Besides this, Napoleon and his French Revolution were rendering havocs in Europe in the 18th century. Monasteries, Nunneries, Seminaries, churches, etc. were being closed down, and the church was severely suppressed. Europe was religiously suffocating and had no vigor for missionary engagements.¹⁰

⁹ Thomas Mooren, *Freedom Through Subjugation* (Zürich, LIT Verlag, 2009), 68.

¹⁰ Cf. Stephen Candia, *Eastern Africa contributions to the ecumenical movement: a Catholic reflection* (Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2004).

In Africa, on the other hand, the involvements of missionaries in the slave trade and its seeming Christian justification destroyed the positive fruits that could have come from this first missionary encounter. The letter of King Alfonso (1506–1543), who accepted Christianity into his kingdom, dated October 18, 1526, exemplified the atrocities that were done under Christianity, many of which were not recorded.¹¹

So, the first Christian relation to Africa was halted by Islam, leaving fragments of it at the margins of history in North Africa. The first Christian missionary engagement which spanned between the 15th – 18th centuries also died out, marred by a lot of factors. The second missionary engagements in Africa, from the 19th century is the one that has defined and coined the church in Africa, bearing manifold fruits.

Factors that marred mission in Africa

We must ask what the missionary understanding of Europeans who came to Africa between 15th – 18th centuries as missionaries was. What missionary concept sustained the enterprise? In order to answer that, we have to consider some factors, especially within the 16th century missiological context and its lasting effects.

a) Church and state religio-politics

As has been explained above, the missionaries had the obligation of honoring the national interests first. The state sponsored and supported the missionary explorations for political and territorial interests. Portuguese economy was adversely affected by the

¹¹ Alfred J. Andrea and James H. Overfield, *The Human Record: To 1700* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 474.

fierce propaganda and abolishment of slave trade since it was a major source of economic and political power. This, in turn, affected their financial support of the 'padroado system'. This factor did not only debase the religiousity of Christianity but also scandalized the Africans into thinking Christianity as a political means.

b) *Incompetent Personnel*

The missionaries were not properly prepared or trained for the intricacies of the life in Africa. Those of them who did not die or rendered ineffective by sickness and harsh weather, could not live as such that they were accepted by the local people. Scholefield narrated that there were strategic struggles and human tensions between the Africans and the Europeans who bedeviled them and their cultures, and betrayed in character what they preached.¹²

c) *Violent-aggressive Christian conditioning*

Western Christianity of the 16th century had already engineered the European to believe that "from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force" (Mtt 11:12). Christianity developed a theology of domination. Biblically, Genesis to Deuteronomy talked about Abraham going and dominating other nations like the Canaanites (Gen 12; Deut 20). "Ask of me, and I will surely give the nations as your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, you shall shatter them like earthenware" (Psalm 2: 8 – 9). The 'conquer and subdue' mentality was sharpened by the implicit or explicit

¹² Cf. Alan Scholefield, *The Dark Kingdoms: The Impact of White Civilization on Three Great African Monarchies*, Morrow, 1975.

supports of Pope Nicholas V's *Dum Diversas* (1452) and *Romanus Pontifex* (1455), and Pope Alexander VI's *Inter Caetera* papal bulls.¹³ The mixture of the slave trade and missionization was a disastrous combination with disastrous consequences. With slave trade, Christianity lost its moral compass and authority to convert and preach salvation. This Christianity has accompanied the European through the series of inter-European bloody wars and has supported their 'miraculous' defeat of the Moors, the worst of their adversaries in the 'Middle Age'. Fighting wars and 'religiousizing' them became part of Christianity and it ushered the Western world into the 'Modern Age'. So, it was not only instrumental in conditioning the European to aggression and violence, but it was also used in implanting the sense of superiority-complex over the Africans.

d) *Superiority-complex*

The superiority-complex factor resulted not only from the aggressive religious conditioning but also from the socio-political reality of the time. It was a world of rule or be ruled. If a nation existed, it had to be acquired or it would acquire others. The more states an empire or nation acquired, the more powerful it was, economic and political. The Christian believed that since Christianity is superior to other religions, he/she is equally superior to others. The Christian can conquer and rule and should not be a subject to other people. So, the European justified his slave and colonial enterprise in Africa by attaching Christianity to

¹³ Steven T. Newcomb, Original Nations of "Great Turtle Island" and the Genesis of the United States. In: McGraw BA (ed) *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Politics in the U.S.* (West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2016), 5 – 17.

it and invoking a superior consciousness, not just in the capacity to subdue the African with firearms, but also through their technical advancements.

This mission phase devalued Africa in her traditions and religions/spiritualities. It did not accommodate or allow Africans to be part of the mission both within and without. The missiological concept, expressed in these factors in Africa, still adversely affect missionary work in the Western world. When mission is mentioned, these factors come to mind. So, it remains difficult for Europeans to accept as missionaries the many fruits of their Christian seed in Africa who function in their needy pastoral contexts, and themselves as mission lands.

Post-Vatican Council II understanding

With the Vatican Council II (1962 – 65), a different question on mission arose; a question that sent ripples of immense changes and effects in the missionary understanding, motivation, and work of the church. Towards the end of the council, some documents of decisive importance were promulgated; *Ad gentes (AG)*¹⁴ and *Gaudium et spes (GS)*¹⁵. *AG* stated.

“The pilgrim Church is missionary by her very nature, since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father.”

¹⁴ Vatican Council II, *AD GENTES*, DECREE ON THE MISSION ACTIVITY OF THE CHURCH. 2.

¹⁵ Vatican Council II, Pope Paul VI, *GAUDIUM ET SPES*, PASTORAL CONSTITUTION ON THE CHURCH IN THE MODERN WORLD, DECEMBER 7, 1965. 4.

Since the church intends to continue the missionary work of Christ, GS added thus:

To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics.

These statements have been the missionary stand of the church, but at this time, they are confronted by the words of *Nostra Aetate*, which entertained clearly the submission that people of other religions and cultures do not totally lack the relationship with the savior God. In a monumental twist, the church reconsidered its relationship with other religions, accepted them as sincere searchers for God, expressed her similarities with them in their questions and search for answers,¹⁶ and culminates this inter-religious compact with;

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life"

¹⁶ Vatican Council II, Pope Paul VI, *NOSTRA AETATE*, DECLARATION ON THE RELATION OF THE CHURCH TO NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS, OCTOBER 28, 1965.1

(John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.¹⁷

There was neither any mention of conversion nor castigation of other religions. In the stead, the church embraced other religions as sharing the same spiritual root and religious interests, admonishing her members to a cordial relationship with other people of other religions. Clearly, the interest has shifted from making them Christians to accepting them for who they are. For a church that since the 15th century has held the view of the Council of Florence; “There is no doubt that not only all heathens but also all Jews and heretics and schismatics who die outside the Church will go into that everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels,”¹⁸ this was no small stride towards an opposite direction.

Consequently, it could be understood that the cordiality to other religions, mandated by *NA* in the Vatican Council II, contributed, among many other factors, in the decline of Christian religiosity both in number and piety of Catholicity, at least. That it might not be the intended outcome of the council fathers does not exactly deflate the point. If God is very much effective and salvific in other religions, no matter how minimal, it did not make much sense to travel across the globe to convert other people. One could not have believed in the salvific Christ so tenaciously, much less communicate him in a very convinced manner. There would be no need to continue building churches and schools where people are Christianized. So, the very core of Christian essence, the

¹⁷ *Nostra Aetate*, 2.

¹⁸ Pope Eugene IV, Council of Florence, *Cantate Domino*, February 4, 1442, Session 11.

missionary mandate of Christ, was touched by this council's new inter-religious mode.

In contrast to this development in the Catholic Church, evangelical Christianity continued rather aggressively in the evangelization – conversion church propagating system. If Christianity is still a very large religion worldwide, then it is as a result of the persistence of the evangelical churches in conversion and propagation of the Christian faith. The Catholic Church would appear to have a very little contribution to the increment in number and popularity of Christianity among non-Christian regions, since the Vatican Council II.

However, in fairness to this development in Vatican Council II and in view of the changing time and its realities, how long more could the Catholic Church have sustained an extreme exclusive missionary concept, in which other cultures and religions must submit to the Christian religion in order to live with or as Christians? The missionary case of Africa exposed the delicate nature of this question. Now, since Vatican Council II, the Catholic Church has started looking with respectful interests inside the church in Africa, engaging the fruits of this church in church positions and theological outputs. Now, Africa can produce capable hands for outward missions. In addition, through the inclusive tone of the council, Africans can now worship the same Jesus Christ in ways suitable to their cultures and spiritualities. They can stand with other Christians, and still stand in their identity.

Should this then be the end of Christian mission in Africa? With the boom of Christianity in Africa, should mission stop? Should the council be further interpreted to mean that there is no need for

evangelization and conversion? What concept of mission can sustain Christianity in Africa, especially in the awareness and revival of indigenous African spiritualities?

The modern phase of mission in Christianity

The understanding of mission as a core element of Christianity and an essential part of the church means that as long as Christianity exists within the margins of churches, as groups of people who believe in and follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, then Christian mission cannot be obscured. However, it should, as a matter of necessity, understand and accommodate the usual changes of human beings in different eras and places. This means adopting new concepts of mission that will still maintain the same objective of Christianization, and yet attentive to the complexities and changes of variable human races and orientations, religious and cultural.

Dialogue has been suggested to be adopted in various theological dimensions, including inter-religious disciplines. As D'Costa stated, "it is difficult to think of a more important question facing Christianity in the twenty-first century."¹⁹ Nweke thus adds that "this is the era of dialogue and dialogical relationships."²⁰ As such, missiology and missionary engagements are to imbibe the principles of dialogue in order to function better in contemporary Christianity. Although highly recommended, certain reservations have trailed the adoption and application of dialogic principles in

¹⁹ Gavin D'Costa, *Christianity and World Religions* (West Sussex, John Wiley & Sons, 2009), p. X.

²⁰ Kizito C. Nweke, *Dialogues and Conflicts among Religious People: Addressing the Relevance of Interreligious Dialogue to the common Public* (PhD Thesis University of Würzburg, 2017), 2.

many theological disciplines, especially in inter-religious encounters and missiology.

Two rules are generally regarded nowadays as fundamental for interreligious dialogue: 1. Dialogue does not aim at conversion, but at understanding. In this respect it differs from evangelization, from mission; 2. Accordingly, both parties to the dialogue remain consciously within their identity, which the dialogue does not place in question either for themselves or for the other. These rules are correct, but in the way they are formulated here I still find them too superficial...the search for knowledge and understanding always has to involve drawing closer to the truth.²¹

It would appear implied that conversion, for example, is parallel to these principles. Or, especially on Christianity, intrinsic factors like 'truth' would seem to be struggling for meaning and importance with dialogue.

Dialogue thus moves into the centre of theology and of theological processes, it becomes constitutive for Christian self-understanding which considers truth not as (its sole) possession, which restricts the search for truth not to its own tradition but regards itself as depending on the questions and answers of people of other religious convictions.²²

Dialogue as a concept would seem to precede peace and love, and in some sense, would replace 'truth' in order to be fully applied.

²¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia on the occasion of Christmas Greetings, December 21, Vatican, 2012.

²² Gritt Klinkhammer, "The Dialogos Project", in: Wolfram Wieße et al., (Eds.), *Religions and Dialogue* (New York: Waxmann, 2014), 119.

This factor could threaten a lot of things, from the pivot of Christ's salvific position to the interconnectedness of Christian teachings.

Yet, dialogue engages people better. It grants certain principles that are indispensable for a successful inter-cultural/religious relationship. For example, mutual respect and understanding are necessary for Christian mission today. So, dialogue affords people acceptance and tolerance in their different values. It accommodates the complexities of diversity in culture and religions. It is necessary for achieving a peaceful inter-religious relationship and mission engagements. Yet, if dialogue should be a factor in the concept of mission in this new era, it is important to know what concept or model of dialogue that would be.

Model of mutual-enrichment

The model of mutual enrichment was developed in consideration of the limitations and necessities of dialogue.²³ It presents dialogic mission as an inwards – outwards human and religious encounter. Mission becomes a proposition of Christ and his message to oneself and to the other, in the openness of mutual respect, learning, and understanding. It is a dialogic model with certain factors aimed at identifying the missing link between dialogic theoretical ideals or hierarchical encounters and the practicability of dialogue with and among the common people. These factors enable this model to be applicable to the missionary development of Christianity in Africa in our contemporary time.

²³ Kizito C. Nweke, *Dialogues and Conflicts among Religious People*; 2017, 2.

a) *'Possession of the other'*

This is an important factor of this model, and very necessary for mission. "Possession of the other implies the readiness for anybody who hopes to achieve success in dialogue and its practicability to learn and understand the other well. There is no enrichment if there is no respect and understanding between dialogue partners."²⁴ This means that since mission involves encountering other people, one has to be ready to understand them. "However, understanding the other well entails seeing the world through his own eyes, perceiving and projecting the world in his own structures and values. One has to 'possess the other'. To go to this depth, the missionary would have the courage, strength, awareness of his own identity, and disposition to newness and change. One must know that possessing the other is not acceptance of the other as same, equal or better. It is at this stage only in the intention of understanding and knowing the other better."²⁵

b) *Identity and Complementarity*

The missionary should start with him/herself in any missionary endeavour. This means being conscious of one's cultural and religious identity, and understanding why one is meeting the other with a different identity. This factor is expressed more in the religious parlance of the 'New Evangelization', propagated by popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI. Through new evangelization, the Christian (Catholic) is to be aware of his/her faith, comprehending what the faith implies and being able to

²⁴ Nweke, *Dialogue and Conflicts*, 2017, 316.

²⁵ Nweke, *Dialogue and Conflicts*, 2017, 316.

communicate it. Aware of his identity, the missionary can understand how complementary the other religion could be.

It is however, not about complementing a religion in the understanding that it is incomplete. It is about underlying the fact that religions are different and these differences should be in a necessary mutual understanding and connectedness... It is about considering the perspective of the other as an extension or assistance to one's own perspective over the same matter. So the teachings of a religion might be complete but its human explications always carry the imperfection of man into it. In other words, the model of mutual enrichment is a complementary extension whereby that which the other values is used to assist another's values.²⁶

c) *Acceptance of Change*

Different from other dialogic models, the model of mutual enrichment supports and appreciates as necessary, a freedom and aim orientated dialogic process. In missionary engagements, this implies the openness to conversion. Dialogic mission is not engaged with the determination to accept the other or the dismissal of learning from the other. But it must be clear from the onset that the dialogic missionary could accept and learn from the other and be able to respond to the revelations of his/her mind towards change (conversion) to another religion/spirituality without fear or the feeling of betrayal.

The change involves two aspects: the readiness to imbibe new ways of life and structures of thought of the others to the extent that one's conviction enables him. The other

²⁶ Nweke, *Dialogue and Conflicts*, 2017, 315.

aspect is the disposition to understand and treasure better that what one has already possessed which constitutes his life.²⁷

d) *Syn-culturaltion*

In his work, *Is syncretism really harmful to Christianity: The Igbos of West Africa as a case study*, Nweke argues that against the negative connotations of syncretism, the inculturation understanding of syncretism has been part of the process of the multiplicity of religions and would be necessary for the furtherance of religions in the fast changing world.

In order to regain them and sustain this Christianity, which has dissipated into various denominations, the Igbo started revoking his traditional spirituality gradually. He brought his traditional instruments to the church, clapping, singing and dancing. He joyfully dances with his offerings to the altar. He has even remodelled the content of his prayer to liken the traditional ways; praying for the wrath of God against his enemies and using his material possessions for the priests and churches, as pacifying means to attract God's friendship. Through the syncretistic application of traditional religious elements, he has regained some level of spiritual satisfaction in his Christianity. In this sense, inculturation is syncretism.²⁸

Hence, syn-culturation is coined. It is a terminology describing the combination of the positive understanding of syncretism and the

²⁷ Nweke, *Dialogue and Conflicts*, 2017, 323.

²⁸ Kizito Chinedu Nweke, *Is syncretism really harmful to Christianity? The Igbos of West Africa as a case study*, Theology, June 2017, SAGE Publishing, DOI: 10.1177/0040571x17698411, 267.

necessity of inculturation. Syn-culturation is an important aspect of the dialogic model of mutual enrichment which would be effective for mission. At least, it protects the partners involved in missionary encounter from theological domestication; an ideology that considers irrelevant or unimportant the implications and consequences of any religious/cultural view on a general scale, beyond the locality that upholds it.

There is, for example, a current theological clamour in Christianity to expunge that which is foreign, especially Western, transmitted under the cover of Christianity to other cultures, and to retrieve the indigenous constructs as equally valuable soil on which the seed of Christ's message can be sown. This development is partly supported by indirect syncretism. This means that the change which occurs through the exposure and contact with the other, is not always to assimilate the foreign contact. It could equally be on the side of insistence on one's identity and the passionate effort to cherish it.²⁹

Syn-culturation, therefore, finds the balance between the extremes of blocking out positive enrichment from outside missionization and adopting everything foreign to the detriment of indigenous cultural values.

²⁹ Nweke, *Is syncretism really harmful to Christianity?* 2017, 263.