Inculturation in African Christianity: The Need for a Global Model

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Abstract: **The purpose of this work is to contribute to the on-going debate on inculturation by projecting a trajectory that appreciates the authenticity of all cultures. The chief objective for inculturation is to make Christianity more relevant, more appealing, more understandable or even more feel-at-home to the Afrucan continent (Walligo, 1986:12). Inculturation, as a concept, was coined to satisfy the need for addressing the mistakes made by some of the pioneer white missionaries who condemned indigenous culture as devilish and therefore one of the evils from which Africans required to be liberated (Kanu, 2012; Mugambi, 2002). To undo this erroneous ideology, African theologians began to push for a more sympathetic theological approach that could give credence rather tha general condemnation of their indigenous traditions. But the truth of the matter is ********that the damage was already done. Pro-western cultural attributes have already become entrenched in African mentality such that to completely remove them from people's minds is like a mission in vanity. For this reason, there is need to appreciate the fact that indigenous cultures may not always provide an adequate material for inculturation. In some instances, it may well be the vase that a more suitable material is available in the western culture, or any other foreign culture. This paper focuses on the following areas: examination of the prevailing approaches to inculturation in African Christianity; the need for a global model and an analysis of a proposed model. This work is underpinned by Grenham's (2001) observation that the process of inculturation infers a transformative and dialog*ical engagement involving Christian and nonChristian values aimed at revealing God's vision for humanity.**

Key Words: **Inculturation, African Christianity, interculturation, paradigm, intercultural dialogue.**

I. INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of the term inculturation, African Christian theology was provided with a necessary tool for propaga**ting Christianity in a manner that is oriented towards the African religio-cultural values. There was now available a new approach through which mistakes of former Euro-American missionaries could be corrected. This process has so far boosted the penetrstion levels of the Christian message in he African continent. This is especially so due to enhanced Bible Translation activities which enable various communities to read the scriptures in their own mother tongue. Inculturation was indeed the first method that was used to convey the Christian message to non-jews at the inception of the Christian Church (Walligo, 1986:13).

Given the pluriformity of African theology. It is not possible to envisage a unified approach to inculturation among African theologians. A close examination of current and past African theological works reveals three major approaches to inculturation;

II. THREE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO INCLTURATION IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

There are three major approaches or paradigms for inculturation in African Christianity. These are African-oriented, western-oriented and hybrid. These terms are selected for the sake of convenience. Let us now examine these three paradigms in greater detail.

Pro-African Approach

This category is indicative of the tendence among certain scholars to prefer the use of indigenous African cultural material in exchange for those from the western culture. This preference is driven largely by what could be termed as cultural egocentricism. But some would call it love or pride for one's culture. This is akin to the pro-black activism mentality of late 18th and early 19th century. This paradigm got its impetus in the post-independence period dominated by Africanization ideology. Africanization as an ideology was burtressed on African nationalism. It was initially targeted at ridding rhe political and economic sectors of foreign dominance. It was aimed at ensuring leadership positions in key sectors were passed into the hands of the Africans. It should be remembered that upon attainment of political independence, leadership positions in some key sectors were still in the hands of non-Africans. Soon, the scope of operation for this concept was widened to include the social and cultural aspects. In East Africa, the process of Africanization was perpetuated under the Kiswahili ardage, mwacha mila ni mtumwa (discarding one's culture is like plunging oneself into slavery). Africanization was modeled along principles akin to those of Ethiopianism. This approach can be detected in the works of Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta, and Kwame Nkuruma. In some instances, you come across people who have dropped the European names given them by their oarents for no other reason than just patriotism. Those who belong to this category argue that African Church must find its standing in purely African roots. For this reason, efforts must be made to get rid of whatever in Christianity that can be attributed to western identity and substituting it with an African alternative. One of the areas that was affected is people's names. Those who were influenced by thie ideology began to drop European names

and replace them with African ones. Some of them perceived this behavior as an expression of mental decolonization. They argued that by allocating western-styled Christian names to Africans,the Euro-American missionaries had effectively succeded in colonizing the mental framework of the indigenous population into believing in the inferiority of their own antive cultures. Whereas this was a move in the right direction, some people rook it to an extreme whereby they attempted to arouse sentiments that western culture is evile and therefore unfit for African adoption. But one may be given to pose the question as to what really is the matter with an Western name. This trend also manifests itself through literal works especially in the area of bible translations. Under the influence of this approach, there seems to have arisen a cliché of individuals who fault the initial bible translation modes. They claim the prior translations are still full of western-styled images. Hence, there is need to retranslate and rid the vernacular translation sof all western-styled cultural images. Thus, the new translations are filled with pre-modern native vocabulary that is no longer applicable. For example when the Kimeru (the dialect of the Meru people of Kenya) bible was retranslated in 2011 and was lauded as a masterpiece of great ingenuity and research, it later emerged that the language used there was out of step with young Meru nation. Furthermore, the language used in the new bible could only benefit the older generation whose kimeru vocabulary was still adequate. However, the majority of whom are illiterate and therefore cannot read that bible. A similar story can be said of such neo-modern Bible translations involving other African communities. The truth of the matter is that the majority of Africa's youthful population are not fluent in their local dialects. to purify our local languages is a noble thought. However, it requires more than mere therapeutic changes on cherished documents for its success. It would requires a multi-fimensional approach that may involve such other sectors as education. Such a venture would require redesigning school carricualar to accommodate the envisaged revisions.

Pro-Western Approach

This category is the exact opposite of the previous one. It operates almost in the same way as the pro-African approach only that in this case, the leaning is more towards the western culture. Idally, this category is made up of those Africans who –for one reason or another – feel more more comfortable to associate with western cultural mindset rather than their own indigenous cultures. Those who belong to this paradigm argue that western culture is more versatile and more pragmatic than the African one in that it offers a greater variety of linguistic and cultural expressions.

Western cultural traits are cherished as the ideal and therefore glorified at the expense of African culture.   Under this dimension, western culture is viewed as more flexible and thus an important aid in navigating one's way around today's global set-up. This approach –or the mentality it creates- is largely detectable among adherants of mission-founded Churches and manifests itself in various ways, foremost of which is the tendency by some Africans to shun own cultural heritage, however good it may be. There is also emphasis or even over-emphasis on dogmatic aspects of western oriented Church life as well as an uncritical endorsement of denominationalism. While choosing to distance themselves from African culture, some of them even refuse to be associated with African names. They sort of think that associating themselves with the cultures of their motherland is a downgrading move. The way they talk, dress, eat, live or even think has to be western oriented. This trend is similarly noticeable among the new religious movements, particularly those who belong to the prosperity gospel brand. Material prosperity, in such Churches, is often associated with western culture while poverty or ignorance is associated with African cultures. Names of such churches are carefully selected so as to give them an international outlook. By so doing, they hope to prick the ego of the largely western-oriented youth and some elites who form the captive audience for such Churches. The weakness with both pro-African and pro-western approaches is that they tend to be subjective in outlook.

Hybrid Approach

This category encampuses those who take a middle point between the above two extreme positions. The rationale behind this model is that inculturation is essentially burtressed on the need for effective communication. It does not matter, therefore which one of the two conflicting cultural viewpoints is utilized to provide the required idea or phrase. The strength of this approach is that it puts emphasis on effectiveness of message communication rather than on cultural orientation. In this approach, the emphasis is on flexibility. It builds on the principles of intercultural dialogue. The belief it strives to portray is that once two cultures come to an encounter, none of them can afterwards keep its cultural outfit as intact as it was in the pre-encounter period. At the point of encounter, the two parties interact and go through a process of dialogue that involves a give and take cultural exchange. Both African and western culture came to an encounter during which there was a give and take cultural exchange that transcends cultural elaciticity. No amount of elasticity could ever revert the African culture to its prinstinr state. The best way is to accept the reality that African culture has been influenced by the western culture. This approach is, thus, more objective and tends more towards cultural relativism. Its major weakness is that it does not appreciate other non-western exotic cultural elements.

III. THE NEED FOR A GLOBAL MODEL

We are living in the age of glovalization. Globalization presupposes an increased inter-national inter-connectedness and interdependence. There is need, therefore, to craft African Christian models in such a manner as would be alliigned the global reality of modern society. increase in information communication technology and the resultant liberalization of airwaves and market systems, has rendered modern territorial boundaries completely irrelevant in determining flow of

information. Social mobility is now happening at a greater rate than ever before and the global nature of modern society is virtually reflected at village level. This means that Africans have migrated to almost every part of the world and have similarly welcome into their villages people from almost every part of the globe. For this reason, it untenable to stick to models of inculturation that are location specific.

IV. A PROPOSED GLOBAL MODEL FOR INCULTURATION IN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

The fact that the world has become a global village resulting in increased and simless social mobility, it becomes imperative to device a new paradigm for inculturation. The target of inculturation is to make Christianity become more deeply rooted in the African continent. However, the view that the process of inculturation in African Christianity must necessarily involve the African culture on its pure form isa misplaced idea. Cultures are naturally dynamic, and this dynamism is even more protracted in this globalized era. Moreover, Africans – who are the target beneficiaries for this inculturation – not only continue to move to diverse destinations world over but have also welcomed into their very villages people from diverse cultures worldwide. Thid means the debate for inculturation is no longer a subject for only two cultures (that is African and western cultures) but a myriad other cultures. All these cultures could be treated as potential sources for inculturation material. It is in this light that the following modl has benn proposed.

It is called the conveyor belt (CB) model. This model is derived from the production process in a factory. One key installation in a factory that greatly facilitates the production ptocess, especially the mocement of materials and products from one point to another is the conveyor belt. In a tea factory, there are two types of conveyor belts. The hooked ones are raised from the ground to a favourable height, some as high up as two metres or so from the ground. When tea leaves are transported to the factory from the various tea buying centres, the sacks containing the produce are girst oggloaded from the lorry then loaded directly to the motional hooked comveyor belt. They are received at collection centre where the sacks are unhooked and then placed on conveyor belt beds to be moved around for subsequent stages of processing.

Understood in this way, globalization can be likened to a conveyor belt that keeps going round and round regardless of territorial boundaries. Every individual has the freedom to upload items into theis velt or offload items. Whaever he or she loads on the belt depends on his or her the type of product they have. Equally individual soffload from the belt items according to their consumption needs. In other words, every individual serves a dual role or is a dual centre of activity; production and consumption.

Inculturation in African Christianity is to follow this pattern if it hopes to become fully realizable. African Christians load whatever they regard as most suited for their culture and

nayone is free to offload and consume the same. Similarly, other Christians from non-African backgrounds laod their cultural materials into the global conveyor belt and Africans, like any other person worldwide can offload and consume as much of these as they feel necessary. Information technology plays a crucial role here by serving as the conveyor belt hooks on which cultural (and other items) can be loaded and enroute to markets and from which such material can also be offloaded for consumption.

V. CONCLUSION

Although inculturation has greatly contributed to the rapid growth of African Christianity, there looms a danger of losing these gains if nothing is done to the models of doing this inculturation. The African Church has become so complex that sticking to the traditional models may not be an action in the right direction. This calls for African theologians to become more innovative and increasingly engage in remodeling as a continuous process. As observed earlier in this paper, huan beings are guided by reason in making their choices. Biological scientists assert that the way living things propagate themselves in through natural selection or survival for the fittest. There is also a wise saying that when the going gets tough, the tough ones get going. In the philosophical viewpoint of memetics, those communities which have discovered ways of preserving their cultural heritage in a more permanent manner possess a better comparative advantage for self propagation. Those who lack it are faced with the danger of extinction.

In Hegelian ideology, human culture is not static but is continually changing. Human culture is nurtured by the flow of ideas. Ideas develop grom thesis, anti-thesis to synthesis. The resulting outcome of this interaction between ideas js threefold: replacement, complementation and co-habitation. When two ideas come to an encounter, one is a thesis while the other is an anti-thesis. Qhwn the tow ideas interact, they go through what sociolofists call social exchange, since ideas are normally carried by human beings. Through this process, there is concession, disagreement, adjustment on either of the ideas so that what is finally agreed on becomes a synthesis. The synthesis then becomes the new mode of operation and forms the basis for understanding between the two parties. It thus becomes the new thesis for both parties and the cycle repeats itself. Based on this understanding of Hegelian theory, it can be said that all cultures are constantly evolving. Every culture is informed by another in its process of evolution. Thus all cultures influence and are influenced by one another. This is a reality that African theologians must take stock of so as to craft a newe trajectory that is all-inclusive of all aspects of African religio-cultural thought.

Basically, this paper seeks to adcance the argument that the world we currently live in has become quite complex. No one nation or race can claim monopoly of knowledge. The covid 19 pandemic that is currently sweeping across the world has taught us the need for inter-dependence among nations. The

African Church can seize this opportunity to device and project a trajectory that adequately equips her members for global citizenship.

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