

Full Length Research Paper

The theology of inculturation and the African church

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This paper investigated the theology of inculturation and the African Church. Specifically, the study set to examine the demand and relevance of inculturation for cultural development, assess inculturation message to Africa, determine the role of Small Christian Communities and examine the impact of inculturation in African Church. The study was based on both primary and secondary data collected for a period of two years. The study was principally qualitative in nature based on qualitative techniques of data analysis. The results of the study indicated that for an effective inculturation, facilitation of active local participation motivated and controlled from bottom-up approach through Small Christian Communities has been very crucial for a sustainable inculturation process. This approach has led to successful inculturation especially in areas of liturgy, moral theology, African leadership and the Church-as-family. The study recommended that to establish an authentic African Church, there is need to emphasize on the role of Small Christian Communities.

Key words: Theology, inculturation, christianity, catholic church, culture.

INTRODUCTION

Communication between human cultures can only take place effectively through dialogue and participation, through listening and through readiness to learn (Shorter, 1975: 132). Dialogue between Churches, religions and religious based countries leads to a better self identification and hope for convergence or growth towards a common horizon of truth. It is only through interdependence in corporation, and congruence that conversions can successfully take place. There is an emerging consensus that culture is a developing process in which there is and there must be a continuous dialogue between faith and culture. Practical inculturation is relevant to the African nations, which have been Christianized and areas where the Gospel has been proclaimed. As long as faith is present to a culture, then inculturation dialogue must take place.

The available evidence shows that the Catholic Church's official teaching on inculturation is that all cultures have the right to an independence existence within Christianity and that the introduction of Christian teachings in a new culture must involve an 'adoption' that preserves the essential integrity of culture, its values, institutions, and customs. However, despite the Catholic Church's stand on the theology of inculturation, it has proved difficult to make the gospel a reality in most African cultures, which takes into consideration the total collective religious, social, and moral life as it gradually

takes a concrete form in African cultures. Inculturation is still a theoretical issue rather than a practical one. In the process evangelization effort is suffering in most African nations today.

The question on whether the Catholic Church is adopting authentic African cultural beliefs and practices into its teachings has been ignored and remains a pertinent issue that needs to be addressed urgently to save the African Church. Inculturation message to most Christian countries in Africa is an important theological message, which was communicated to African Churches through Synods and addresses by various Popes. All this arrived at bringing dialogue between Christianity and African culture in particular. However, the impact of inculturation has not been felt in most African Churches. This emerging issue has led researchers both in academia and the church to rethink the role played by the local people in their local churches in making inculturation a reality.

Pope John Paul II insisted that there is an organic and constitute link between Christianity and culture and that "the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture, but also of faith" (Waliggo et al, 1986: 7; McGarry, 1995: 53). The Second Vatican Council has opened the eyes of many on one hand, to see in the traditional African religions, "a ray of truth which enlightens all men and, on the other hand, to admit that the Church

is not tied exclusively and indissolubly to any race or nation, to any customary practices, ancient or modern". It can then enter into communion with different forms of cultures, thereby enriching both itself and the cultures themselves (Radoli, 1993: 112; Baur, 1999: 231).

Virtually, the Pope's sentiments and the Second Vatican council express the need for inculturation. More so, from Vatican II onwards, the movement of inculturation has been advocated and insisted upon in numerous Papal pronouncements, Bishop's synods, pastoral letters and in books by scholars in the field (Pobee, 1979; Flannery, 1983; John Paul I message to Zairian Bishop, 1984). Therefore, what is the Catholic Church doing to enhance the process of inculturation? There is need to examine this pertinent issue and it is the purpose of this paper to provide insights on what steps the Catholic Church has taken to make an authentic African Christian Church? How successful has been the process of inculturation in Liturgy, Moral Theology, African Christian Marriage, African leadership and on the Church as a family. This study therefore sought to investigate the impact of inculturation on the African Church in Busia District. The empirical results of this article are presented according to the objectives of the study. Conclusions and recommendations were drawn based on the findings of the study.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of the study was to examine the Theology of inculturation and the African Church among the Luhya of Busia District. Specifically, the study sought to meet the following;

- (a) Examine the demand and relevance of inculturation for cultural development
- (b) Assess inculturation message to Africa
- (c) Determine the role of Small Christian Communities and,
- (d) Examine the impact of inculturation in African Church.

METHODOLOGY

The information contained here comes from two sources: first, library research, and second, field research conducted between March, 2001 and September, 2003. Primary data was derived from first hand information through personal interviews, observation, questionnaire and document analysis methods. Primary data was the core of our data, which was supplemented with secondary data from relevant library data gathered from published books, unpublished books, articles, government records, archival materials, and local dailies.

Busia District in Kenya was our focus of study. The study confined itself on the Catholic Church as an agent of inculturation. Nine parishes were purposively sampled for the survey while systematic sampling technique was used to sample eighteen sub-parishes two from every parish. Non-probability sampling was carried out to sample (117) church leaders who included parish priests, assistant priest, catechists, deacons, nuns and parish council officials hence a total of (13) church officials from every pa-

rish. Simple random sampling was utilized to select five male and five female (parishioners) from every parish. This gave us a total of ninety (90) lay members from the sampled population. Nine (9) youth leaders were purposively sampled to represent each parish in the district. Therefore, the total sample size came to two hundred and twenty nine (229) respondents.

To obtain qualitative data for empirical analysis, qualitative methods of data collection, which included oral interviews, observation, focus group interviews and document analysis, were employed. Oral interview was done through structured interview that was employed on the key respondents and unstructured interview schedules were used on illiterate respondent. Observation method was administered through unstructured observation (participatory observation) and structured observation (non-participatory observation). Observation methods hence provided a detailed and comprehensive description of phenomena as manifested. Documents Analysis method was used to gather data from church documents and archives. Finally, focus group discussions were designed to obtain participant attitudes on a defined topic. The discussions were facilitated where six to fifteen people were brought together in a discussion. Qualitative methods of data analysis were employed to analyse the qualitative data.

These was done by coding the themes topics, sub- topics and issues systematically which were then described verbatim. The data was then systematically and logically compiled and presented through descriptive design.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The results of the study will be presented in the following order; the demand and relevance of inculturation, inculturation message to Africa, the role of Small Christian Communities in the process of inculturation, the impact of inculturation process on the African Church, conclusions and recommendations.

The demand and relevance of inculturation

The interaction of cultures is part of the normal pattern of cultural development. All cultures, throughout history, have undergone some form of change in which the structures of society and its patterns of thought have remained intact or changed. A Christian approach to any culture cannot be adequately elaborated outside that culture (Bediak, 1992: 30). This is not to say that culture supercedes the Gospel, but it does mean that, when the Gospel is transmitted and received within a culture, one begins to appreciate the true nature and the contours of a Christian approach to that culture. In other words, the question of a Christian approach to culture is always a dynamic process, which starts with the Gospel taking people as they are when it encounters them and continues to transform their worldview, their habits and actions and relationships into the image of Christ.

Evangelization is in the process addressed to human individuals who belong to clearly defined social groupings and who are profoundly linked to a cultural tradition. The Gospel cannot, therefore, be transmitted to or from people independently of their culture. In one-way or another, a culture is evangelized, along with its adepts. Evangelization involves change and it should not be a matter of

embarrassment that the Church is an agent of change (Shorter, 1975: 132). The conversion of the heart, which is the aim of evangelization, involves change at the deepest levels of cultural identity. Evangelization challenges that basic worldview, the religious root of culture, and the final location of meaning. It is, therefore, committed to bringing about the most radical kind of change. The Church and its Gospel message is thus a catalyst of structural change. In the evangelization process, therefore, people are presumed to retain their own choices hence become agents of their own structural change (Shorter, 1975:132).

There was need for dialogue because, first the missionaries found African traditional beliefs and practices repugnant and therefore condemned them strongly. African leaders needed answers to this so as to make an African feel at home in Christianity. Secondly, there were an entity ordinary with their unresolved duality, who are in need of internal dialogue to help them integrate the different outlook, or at least to confront them consciously. Thirdly, there was need for a situational theology, which was to look into their real needs and aspiration. Fourthly, those great religious personalities of the past are really interlocutors in one way or another who had to be dealt with. Fifthly, the missionaries who viewed African beliefs and practices as being pagan oriented were looking forward to forge a move to Africanize the life and worship of the Church as a betrayal calculated to produce what they termed a 'half-caste Christianity'.

Sixthly, there was tension among the educated who were strongly committed to cultural independence, who were scandalized by the apparent imperviousness of the Church to African culture hence were therefore tempted to reject Christianity altogether. Seventhly, there was considerable hostility to African Traditional Religion. Any African Christian who raised it risked victimization. That theology must be open to the aspiration of the people of Africa if it is to help Christianity to become incarnate in the life of the peoples of the African continent. Lastly, if the church was not to fall apart, then, there had were to be an attempt at reconciliation between those different sections of people. This could only occur as a consequence of general re-education in accordance with the trends of contemporary theology and pastoral practice. Therefore adaptation, which implied the elevation of the particular to the universal, was adopted (Vannestre, 1968: 173). So what is inculturation?

The word inculturation adapted by the Second Vatican Council remains a dynamic and stimulating analogy. It has a highly theological and imaginative contextual use. A short definition of inculturation is the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures. It is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures. Shorter further contends that inculturation is a developing process in which there is and there must be a continuous dialogue between faith and culture (1997: 13). Inculturation is as relevant to the coun-

tries of Europe and North America, for which have been Christianized, as it is to the cultures of the Third world in which the Gospel has only recently been proclaimed for the first time. As long as faith is present to a culture, the dialogue must take place. It is a process that never comes to an end.

Christian faith cannot exist except in a cultural form (Shorter, 1997: 12). When we speak of Christian faith or Christian life we are necessarily speaking of a cultural phenomenon. It is a distinctive way of life that can only operate culturally. Therefore, when we describe inculturation as a dialogue between a culture and the faith in cultural forms, in the first instance, it is a dialogue between a culture and the faith in cultural form. In the second instance, it is a dialogue between the Christianized culture of the missionary and the hitherto un-Christianized culture to which he comes. In other words we are speaking about acculturation or the interaction between cultures.

The Catholic Church's official teaching on inculturation is that all cultures have the right to an independent existence within Christianity and that the introduction of Christian teachings in a new culture must involve an 'adoption' that preserves the essential integrity of culture, its values, institutions, and customs. Inculturation, therefore, is the process of the interaction between Christianity and the cultures (Luhya cultures), which takes into consideration the total collective religious, social, and moral life as it gradually takes a concrete form in each culture. The process of "contextualization of the Gospel" the elaboration of a Christian approach to culture goes beyond selecting cultural elements which may be said to be positive or compatible with the Gospel. It is only as the word of God becoming 'flesh' in the people of God that the Gospel takes shape within culture (Padilla, 1980:78). According to God's purpose, the Gospel is never to be merely a message in words but a message incarnate in his Church, and through it, in culture.

From the foregoing background, is the Catholic Church ready to recognize some valuable African traditional beliefs and practices so that a theology of inculturation is realized to make Christianity a Universal Church? And how will African Christians be convinced that foreign missions are working towards inculturation? The Vatican II tells us to acknowledge pressure and promote the Gospel in any culture. In any process of social change there are elements of continuity. The Church must look for this table factors and adapt to them. The elements taken from traditional practices if inculturated will help to make the new rite comprehensible and relevant to the people, in so far as the symbols and elements compatible with Christian belief and practices are concerned.

Additionally, the traditional cultural elements that are reconcilable to Christian rituals may be admitted alongside similar practices already found in Christian tradition. There should be correct judgments about African beliefs and practices and determine their value for Christian wor-

ship and catechesis. Basically speaking, the Gospel message must retain the significant ideas of Christianity enriched and made intelligibly attractive by all means by considering what is good in a cultural heritage of a people. The Gospel therefore must always remain and be made to reflect a message of salvation through Jesus Christ from God. This message was destined for every nation, different people belonging to different cultural backgrounds in which every Christian will remain authentic citizen of their own tribes, cultures and nations.

Inculturation message to Africa

Inculturation messages to most Christian countries in Africa are important theological messages, which were communicated to African Churches through Synods and addresses by various Popes. All these aimed at bringing dialogue between Christianity and African cultures in particular. Pope Paul VI, in his letter "Africae Terrarum", supported and encouraged adoption of Christianity to African social organization. The Pope said:

The church views with great respect the moral and religious values of the African tradition, not only because of their meaning, but also because she sees them as providential, as the basis for spreading the gospel message and the beginning of establishment of the new society in Christ. (Hickey, 1982: 179 - 182).

The Pope, in Second Vatican Council (1964, Nov. 21), sees the importance of "Adaptation in Africa". He further acknowledges the providential values with the capacity to enrich and enhance the Gospel message and Christian communities. Hence, he affirms that the African traditional moral and religious values deserve ecclesiastical respect and understanding. The Pope told African Catholic bishops at Kampala in 1969 to have an African Christianity. The Pope's address reiterated the call for inculturation. He indicated to the bishops, in particular, and to all, in general, the vital task of adapting the Christian message to Africa with two prerequisites, namely, making the Church truly Christian and genuinely African (Shorter, 1975: 145).

In 1974, there was a Christian ministry of dialogue organized by the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christian Religions on a consultation on African Traditional Religion at Gaba Pastoral Institute, Kampala. At this meeting, about twenty Roman Catholic participants, representing the seven countries of Kenya, Malawi, Rhodesia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, as well as the Vatican Secretariat itself, met local experts in African religion and local religious specialists. The aim of the meeting was to cultivate a way forward to dialogue on how to accommodate authentic African values within the Church [Shorter, 1975:147]. At the Roman Synod of 1974, where the theme of discussion was 'Evangelization',

the bishops of Africa repudiated the theology of adaptation. The bishops adapted the theology of incarnation and strongly affirmed that theology must be open to the aspiration of the people of Africa if it is to help Christianity to become incarnate in the life of the peoples of the African continent. The Synod in 1977, further clearly reiterated that the Gospel message has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue, which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of culture.

During his address to the Bishops of Zaire in 1980, John Paul II further stressed and reaffirmed the subject of inculturation of the Gospel and the Africanization of the Church. In the same year 1980, Pope John Paul II told an African audience in Nairobi; "In you Christ has himself become an African". In actual sense, such insights should be communicated to whole universal Church. This can only be done through the bishops of African and many other non-Christian worlds.

The African Council which came to be known as the "African Synod" was held in Rome from April 10th to May 8th, 1994. The theme of the Synod was "The Church in Africa and its Evangelizing mission towards the year 2000". Its outline was characterized by, proclamation of the Gospel, inculturation, dialogue, justice and peace and the means of social communication. Inculturation emerged as one of the issues with great interventions after justice and peace. During the Synod, the bishops pointed out clearly that inculturation of the Christian message in African cultures are essential, and necessary in the work of evangelization in Africa. They also acknowledge that true inculturation involves the complete and active participation of all the people of God (McGarry, 1995: 51).

In January 1985, Pope John Paul II came to Africa where he visited Cameroon and Kenya for forty-third international Eucharistic congress. He remarked African cultural freedom was guaranteed by the Christian faith, which can be assimilated into every language and tradition, the positive elements and spiritual values of which must be integrated and fulfilled. In Nairobi, at the formal opening of the Catholic Higher Institute of Eastern Africa, the Pope struck a most somber note. The Pope clearly stated that African theology must take this cultural patrimony, and not African culture, as its starting point. That under the bishop, there was an active dialogue between faith and culture. The main issue was to introduce African values into the life of the Church. From all these addresses and sermons it is a clear indication that the Catholic Church is willing to dialogue with African Christian Churches towards a theology of inculturation.

The Gospel as understood by the Luhya

It is significant to examine the agents of inculturation process. Inculturation at the grass roots means among other things, stimulating liturgical and catechetical creativity in the community. Following this, it appears that

implementation of inculturation must take place in and through the Small Christian Communities used hereafter as (SCCs). The SCCs therefore become a link of the Gospel to real life situations and intensifies the process of evangelization. In this regard the SCCs therefore qualify as agents of change at grass root level .In this discussion an attempt is made to examine the role of SCCs in the process of inculturation and to assess areas where the Church has been inculturated according to the Luhya in terms of liturgy, moral theology, African-Christian Theology, African Christian marriage, leadership and the Church -as-family.

Small christian communities as agents of inculturation

The whole purpose of inculturation is to make evangelization the influence of the Good News- more effective in human development. An integral human development necessarily includes cultural development and that cultural development is epitomized by inculturation. For effective implementation of inculturation, the task should be taken as a community project where the Christian community shall be fully involved both formally and informally. The building of SCCs was adopted as a pastoral priority by the bishops of Eastern Africa in 1973. This was justified by the fact that while the Church of Christ is universal, it is a communion of SCCs of Christians rooted in their own society. Church life must be based on the communities in which everyday life and work takes place. These basic Christian communities are manageable social groupings whose members can experience real interpersonal relationships and feel a sense of communal belonging both in living and working (AFER, 1974: 9 - 10).

The Catholic bishops felt that building SCCs was the best way of safeguarding human values and of rooting the Church in the life and culture of the people. Therefore, SCCs can be an important instrument of cultural development as they should be of inculturation itself. In this regard, it was agreed upon that creative pastoral approaches are needed today to adequately respond to the life situations of our people and communities (AFER, 1976:253). Ultimately, inculturation should involve the whole community for it to be successful. The community provides the criteria of authenticity and success, because it is the life of the community, which is in question. The community also provides the means of implementation through SCCs (Shorter, 1995: 266). As agents of inculturation the SCCs bring the power of the Gospel to bear upon all the departments of social life and of the culture that animates it. Through SCCs dialogue between the Gospel and indigenous culture is progressed. This is due to the fact that the SCCs are closer to the problems, which the official church is struggling to solve.

The SCCs have effected changes through capacity building of the church. Church life is based on the com-

munities in which everyday life and work take place through basic and manageable social groups whose members can experience real inter-personal relationships and feel a sense of communal belonging, both in living and in work (Rev. Fr. Leonard Ekisa, Butula Parish, Kenya, Sep. 2003, personal communication) . The SCCs promotes a process of conscientization, community leadership training and emphasizing the integration of the spiritual pastoral and social development dimension. Fr. Mukhongo (Rev. Fr. Gabriel Mukhongo, Mundika Parish, Kenya, Sep. 2003 ,personal communication) revealed that the SCCs are truly the church in action among people, which is established and developed actively to form an active support system especially for those in need. Each SCC has its representative on the parish council and on most of the followers committees catechetical, maintenance, liturgy, finance, women, youth, and development among others. Each try to be self-evangelizing, self-ministry and self-supporting. Fr. Mukhongo acknowledges that there has been good progress on inculturation through SCCs as agents of inculturation. This has been attributed to their involvement from the life and experiences of the people at the grassroots hence come from the bottom up. Thus SCCs have become one of the practical ways of living the gospel today in Africa and elsewhere in the world. This exemplifies the value and lives a participatory Christian life. This is the sacramental life shared in the Holy Eucharist (AFER, 2005). Therefore, SCCs have been integrated in the parochial stratifications everywhere to engender faith and practice.

Impact of the process of inculturation

Moral theology

Today, the Church has consciously become a morally relevant social agent of change and transformation of the world. The Church is sent out to proclaim in God's name the Good News of the total liberation of humankind from the evil of all oppressive situations. Biblical foundation is the ultimate foundation of Christian ethics. Therefore, moral theology should be based on the Holy Bible (CHIEA, 1987: 140).To enhance morality, the Catholic bishops of Kenya established a justice and peace commission with branches in dioceses, parishes, SCCs, seminaries and in educational institutions in 1988. Their pastoral letter explained that it's purpose was "the education of people towards a stronger sense of justice... to guide pastoral action on fostering justice and peace within the church and in the social, economic and political life of the country..., to work for the eradication of injustice... and to support all those in opposition to injustice" (Baur, 1990).

To develop African morality, the local priests in various local parishes encourage Christians to avoid vices and promote virtues, through sharing, the responsibility of keeping order, being honest with one another, avoiding

corruption through favour or by bribing. A good Christian must forgive a person who has done something wrong to him/her. Through SCCs, Christians promote social justice by taking care of the disadvantaged. Solidarity towards humanity should be emphasized. These include caring for the sick, poor, orphans, widows, and the old. Morality is further promoted in sharing of goods and responsibility both within the family level and community level through SCCs. A reasonable sharing in responsibility and in decisions has been established and strengthened. This has encouraged communal responsibilities in fostering solidarity, interpreting authentically the norms of morality to be followed without waiting passively for orders and directives from other sources. The church's mission of reconciliation of humanity, God's family, and of creation itself has expressed itself in a concern for justice and peace in the world. The Luhya Church has had the responsibility to be committed unconditionally to the promotion of justice as a constitute part of evangelization.

The church has realized that to establish the kingdom of God as preached by Jesus Christ, it must carry on the task of transforming unjust structures in society and within itself. It invites all people to a conversion of heart and to promote human relationships. The church agrees that proclaiming the love of God is irrelevant without promoting justice and peace (McGarry, 1995: 117) . It is the role of the church to bring about the kingdom of love, unity, freedom and justice as announced by Christ. The Church is also giving greater attention to educate the faithful as a way to enable them to come out of ignorance and to struggle for their own rights. The people themselves are responsible for their own liberation from all the oppressive structures in society. Nevertheless they need the Church to walk with them in this process. Justice and peace can only be enhanced through SCCs the smallest cells of God's family, were all boundaries of racism and tribalism ought to be overcome. It is only through SCCs that work for justice and peace can be started and spread to the wider areas of the society through bottom up approach. Therefore, through the principles of justice and peace commission enshrined in SCCs, there is hope to live in brotherhood as action is undertaken to promote justice and peace within the local Church. This Christian hope comes primarily from the fact that the Lord is working in the world in His Body, which is the Church, and, through the Church, in the whole of humankind.

Inculturation of liturgy

Liturgy used herein refers to means of communication with God within the context of worship. It is the prescribed forms of ritual for public worship. Practical inculturation has taken place in Christian worship in the past thirty-eight years. The liturgy is now celebrated in the local languages. This has been enhanced and positively implemented because most priests are able to communicate in local Luhya dialects these are the Abasamia, Abanyala,

Abakhayo and Abamarachi. The use of local languages in celebration of mass has been crowned by translation of all prayers into local languages using its rich imagery and, therefore, making the prayers meaningful for the people. The purpose of language in liturgical celebrations is to announce to the faithful the good news of salvation and to express the Church's prayer to the Lord. For this reason it must always express, along with the truths of faith, and holiness of mysteries that are being celebrated.

Regarding music, there is a break-through in making local African melodies and hymns develop entirely to genuine local African compositions. The songs have been improved, and harmonized to make them popular among the faithful. More so translations from European hymns to local languages have been made. It is with these new a development that the meaningfulness of a service is realized or expressed through songs. The liturgy has been made more lively through "active participation of the whole people in liturgical activities". This is enhanced by the local priest through the presentation of the gifts (Isadaka) . The processions by which the Bible is presented for the readings and the gifts for the offertory are brought to the altar accompanied by a liturgical dance from the choirgirls. African way of public celebration is encouraged through acceptance of the word of God followed by the reconciliation with God and the brethren through the rite of penance and giving of peace. This is concluded by the Eucharistic sacrifice and meal (Oral interview, James Baraza, April, 2004, Mundere, Kenya, Personal communication).

Finally, the rhythmic movements of all the faithful is expressed in prayer through dancing the local way, which is spontaneously expressed in the local dialect by various members of the faithful. The peace ceremony is a lively exchange of greetings accompanied with dance near the altar led by the presiding local priest. The solemn mass is then concluded by a dance of thanksgiving through acclamations and the recession. Such forms of external expression have a place in the liturgical actions of these peoples, on condition that they are always the expression of true communal prayer of adoration, praise, offering and supplication, and not simply a performance, This indicates that the Gospel has found its expression in the heart of the local people. There is also evidence of church decorations, pictures, statues, and holy vessels done the African way.

African christian theology

African Christian theology is a scientific study of the incarnation of the Christian faith community; an encounter of the Bible with the African cultural heritage; a confrontation of the African way of thinking and way of life with the European past of the church; a confrontation of the Sermon on the Mount with contemporary African society (Baur, 1990: 234 - 235). This is done by localizing the Church in the existing SCCs.

Regarding Christology, Jesus is referred to as a mediator or intermediary because of the role he plays as a traditional intermediary who preserves due orders. He is seen as a king who mediates between the living and the ancestors; and the ancestors also mediate between the living and the God. Jesus is also called a saviour and redeemer. Christ saves and redeems men from the forces of evil, witchcraft, death, drought, floods, sickness or any epidemic. This concept of saviour or redeemer is applied indiscriminately by many African Christians to God or Jesus Christ. Jesus is also seen as a liberator and as a healer. Christ as a liberator, liberating African Christians from disease, human and natural disasters, tribalism and inhuman political domination was his main concern. Jesus is conceived by Luhya Christians as a great physician, healer and victor over worldly powers par excellence (Oral interview, Edward Odongo, April, 2004, Rwambwa, Kenya, Personal communication). Christology is the foundation of an African ecclesiology. Ecclesiology is hereafter referred to as the Body of Christ. The Church being the body of Christ is related to an African clan as the True model of the African Church. This body of Christ is locally manifested through SCCs to mean the natural clan family-life.

Inculturation has also been successful in the theology of eschatology. The Luhya believe in life after death where the spirit of the dead joins their ancestors for eternal life has been harmonised with the Catholic Church's social teachings that the end of time will come when both the living and the dead will be raised on the Day of Judgment. This is reckoned to be the day when the good shall be separated from the bad depending on ones actions while on earth. The good shall be blessed by joining God and his Son Jesus Christ in Heaven for eternal life (theology of soteriology). Whereas the bad shall be condemned to hell forever.

The theology of Pneumatology where the Holy Spirit descends on the good and protects them from danger and destruction from Satan and his evil spirits has been harmonised with the Luhya believe that the good spirits of their ancestors protect them from evil spirits, showers them with blessings, fertility and protects them from misfortunes. In sum, whereas African Christian Theology has been slow, there is evidence that tremendous advance in this area has been witnessed since the declaration made during the Second Vatican Council.

African christian marriage

When Christianity was introduced in Busia District, African marriage practices were rejected as being incompatible with those of the Christian idea of marriage. These included polygamy, Sororate and levirate marriages. However, the African episcopate raised a number of wide-ranging issues, among which are those regarding giving due recognition to the values of African customary forms of marriage; and recommending that the Church

adapt itself more effectively to the African cultural contexts (Kanyadago, 1991). The local churches have taken upon themselves as their duty to inculturate customary marriage. Good African customs have been integrated into the Christian rites, in view of effecting appropriate inculturation. It was realized that going back to polygamy, Sororate and levirate marriage does not represent progress for Africans, or for any other people, but rather a damnable regression. Therefore, any person involved in these marriage systems once baptized and confirmed is thereafter allowed to marry in Church. However, they are barred from receiving the holy sacrament. But when a couple that had been baptized in childhood wants to marry they have to follow the law of the Church (Heromus Wesonga, April, 2004, Busia, Kenya, personal communication).

Christians are also educated on ways to integrate Christian marriage and African Christian marriage. The progressive stages leading to African marriage have been refined to suit Christian marriage starting from when a spouse is introduced to the parents of the interested party but also subsequently in accompanying the married couple in their married life.

African leadership

The major concern of the local churches was the establishment of an African leadership. To make the Church authentically African, a number of local people have received training in various seminaries in the country. It was evidenced that most priests running various parishes are locals who have taken leadership of the parishes from missionary priests. Our findings revealed that out of twenty-one priests in the district, nineteen are locals while only two Rev. Fr. Ryk M. H. M and Rev. Fr. Adrain Linsen are missionaries at Sirimba and Dakhiro parishes. It was established that Butula parish has three local priests, Butunyi-three, Mundika – two, Kisoko – two, Busia – two, Nangina – two, Dakhiro – two, Sirimba-two and Port-Victoria- two local priests.

Change has also been witnessed on the growth of the number of local sisters. Most sisters in the district are locals. Hence six at Mundika, six at Kisoko, five at Butula, five at Busia, two at Butunyi, six at Nangina and four at Port-Victoria parishes respectively. Sirimba and Dakhiro parishes have not been lucky to have sisters/nuns for lack of convents. This shows that the Church is being inculturated through African local leadership. The leaders are able to understand the local culture and also Christian doctrines, therefore, making it easy to inculturate Christian message into the local cultures.

The church-as-family

The Church-as-family is herein used to refer to an African way of being Church where communion, solidarity, sharing,

openness and dialogue form the hallmark of Christian living. The fathers of the Synod made a fundamental opinion of the Church as family. This became an integral framework of our understanding of the Church, such that whenever we think of the Church, we express its meaning in our lives as family (Orobator cited in McGarry, 1995: 34). In Africa, the institution of the family remains an important value and dimension of life. It constitutes part of the wealth of our cultural life which the Church of Africa seeks to share and offer to the entire Church within the setting of the African Christian community. The Church as a family is in relation to the African concept of community is correctly observed by Orobator when he asserts that an African would hardly define himself/herself without reference to his/her immediate or extended family. The African family is a lived cell from which models of the Church and experiences lived in Africa is found. This is a reminder of what Pope Paul IV meant when he referred to the family as a 'domestic Church' in which there is to be found the various aspects of the entire Church (Evangelii nuntiandi: 71).

From the African conception of family, the family constitutes the pivot of African social systems," the fundamental base of humanity and the society and the sacred place where all the riches of our tradition converge". This point illustrates Pope Paul VI, affirmation that African culture is defined by its palpable sense of family' a high spiritual vision of life, and the sense of community (African Terrarum, 1967, in Hickey, 1982:180). An African family is characterized with unity, solidarity, participation and co-responsibility. The family is a place where life is welcomed, nurtured and revered; shared in common with the living and the living dead (ancestors); understanding, living and being together, fraternity, mutual aid, trust, reconciliation through rites tradition and authority; and hospitality (Orobator, Orobator cited in McGarry, 1995: 36). When translated into the model of the Church these positive values offer as a living, vibrant and promising ecclesiology of Church-as-family (Bulletin, No.30, 20th April, 1994).

When the family becomes the Church-as-family God becomes the father and not the clan or community. Through baptism, "water becomes thicker than blood", unlike many African believe that 'blood is thicker than water". Through inculturation, the Church is considered as a family so that it may be truly incarnated in the African mentality and tradition. The Eucharistic meal is the center of unity, a place of gathering of the children of God. It brings God's entire children home to the table of love where the very life of God is offered to all co-members of God's family. From an African perspective, the Church-as-family receives its fundamental identity in the Eucharist not only because it constitutes the "center" around which the family gathers in order to evoke its ancestral memories (Bishop Monsi-Agboka, Bulletin No.15, 18/04/1994). In this sense, as some African theologians already hold, the Eucharist is an ancestral meal,

an inexhaustible source of life for all the co-members of the Church-as-family.

The paradigm of Church-as-family is also realized in SCCs. This has been a successful experience in the number of parishes in Busia District. The SCCs have taken up the sociological set up in most local communities. Through SCCs, the concept of the family, clan and kinship as effective means of promoting communion and co-responsibility as well as providing a sense of belonging is strongly emphasized. It is through these SCCs that the Church-as-family concretely embraces and effectively translates into reality its mission and concern for justice and peace, and the promotion of life." The Church-as-family fraternity or communion leads us to justice and peace". The Church-as-family forms a basis for dialogue. In Africa, the family is the place par excellence for dialogue. Family life facilitates dialogue by the very fact that it is open to and offers welcome to all co-members. In reality, many African Christians belong to families where there are as many religious confessions as there are members in the family (Bishop Monsi-Agboka, Bulletin No.15, 18/04/1994). It is, a "family affair" which seeks to bring all believers to the realization that we are all children of the same Father, God (Working Document no. 98).

The Church-as-family recognizes women as the backbone of society and their role in the family. The plight of women is recognized since on one hand, they are at the heart of the family life and, on the other hand, they suffer much in the family through widowhood, desertion, abuse, oppression and divorce. Through the Church-as-family, the status of women has been improved by ensuring that they have a voice within the Church and the society. Women are consulted before decisions are made in matters concerning them and their interests. This is done not only at the level of the parish pastoral council but also at diocesan and bishop's conference level. Appropriate lay ministries are made for their formation and preparation for these ministries. Opportunities are also given to religious women to train according to their capacities. Laywomen are also given quality formation to prepare them for responsibilities as a wife, mother and in other social careers. By so doing the Church is promoting the dignity of women and therefore liberating them from marginalization (Mc Garry, 1995: 90).

The Church is deeply conscious of the youth in local Churches and the problems they face in society. Therefore it has reached out to the youth through the establishment of schools to curb illiteracy, and youth polytechnics to provide the necessary skills for employment. Youth programmes have also been formed at the parish level with an aim of encouraging the youth to be self reliant and self supportive. All these activities have been realized through chaplaincies, parishes, Catholic youth action teams and prayer groups. The youth are also encouraged to take initiative in the total ministry of the Church.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has shown that the Catholic Church is aware of the importance of cultural reality of Luhya beliefs and practices, which should be used to shape the evolution and changes in their pastoral attitudes. Secondly, the Church appreciates the link between customary forms of Luhya religious beliefs and Christian worship. The Church has therefore taken a positive role in appropriately integrating valuable Luhya beliefs and practices in to Christian worship. We have seen what the Catholic Church has done through various Popes' declarations, post Second Vatican Council, through African Bishops Synods and through local clergy and lay as a way forward to inculturation. This is an indication that the Catholic Church is ready to work with the local communities to establish an authentic African Church. This chapter has revealed areas where inculturation has been successful especially in areas of liturgy, moral theology, African Christian marriage, African Christian theology, African leadership and the Church-as-family. The role of SCCs has also been emphasized. Hence, through this inculturation process, Luhya Christians have been able to make the Church more authentic, more African and therefore a place to feel at home!

The findings of the study show that inculturation is a prerequisite for the Gospel to be rooted in a particular people so as to Christianize their culture not from without but from within. That for an effective Inculturation, facilitation of active local participation motivated and controlled from bottom-up approach through Small Christian Communities is very crucial for sustainability of Inculturation process. That inculturation is not only a prerogative of theologians and pastoral workers but also the whole Christian Community as a whole.

Recommendations

Indeed there is much discussion about making the Gospel message relevant to the African today (Shorter; 1997, McGarry; 1995, AMECEA; 1993, Ogotu; 1989, Waligo; 1986). The foregoing debate can successfully be realized through inculturation for evangelization and Africanization. The following are some suggestions for the Catholic Church in dealing with the problem of making a Church that is truly African. It is recommended that:

- The Church should adopt an alternative adequate approach which can produce a favourable effect in encounter with the indigenous people concerning their culture to avoid conflict.
- The Church should re-examine some of the cultural practices and identify good morals found in them, so as to employ them for an effective catechisms.
- Inculturation can be very successful if the Church incor-

porates SCCs in its endeavor to make the Luhya Church more African. The SCCs are an inculturational contextualization model of Church that tries to form and evolve from the grassroots up out of the daily life and experience of the people themselves.

- To reshape its theology, liturgy, forms of ministry and Church growth, the Church should encourage the Gospel according to the experiences and needs of the people of God in their localities.

- Christian leadership in Africa should be well equipped to help the Christian in responding simultaneously to the demands of the Gospel and the demands of their culture.

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