



New Testament Contextualization and Inculturation in Nigeria

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Abstract

The New Testament was written to the audience of the Graeco-Roman world of which the authorial intentions were crystal clear to the then audiences. There is the temptation of eisegesis in the application of the text to the Nigerian context which of course differs in many ways to those of early societies. Consequently, there is the need for the New Testament to be 'more at home' within the Nigerian cultural milieu and worldview for it to be relevant to the Nigerian culture. The New Testament was written within a specific context and it needs to be decontextualized from the Graeco-Roman culture and re-contextualized to suit the Nigerian Context and culture for proper contextualization and enculturation to occur. Inculturation is a term that is also applied to denote a progression of engagement between the Christian Gospel and specific cultures. The term is proposed conceptually both to defend the integrity of the Gospel and to encourage understanding to numerous cultural contexts. The method adopted in this study is a theologico - analytico method which emanates from the application of the methods and concepts of late-twentieth-century analytic philosophy (Wood, 2021). African inculturation theology is in essence a contextual theology that pursues an agenda to make the Holy Gospel far more meaningful within diverse cultural milieus. In this article the milieu is Nigeria. This type of theology has an important religious aim, which is essentially to make the Gospel all culturally embracing to non-Europeans. Without a contextual theology serving any missionizing activity it is difficult to make the gospel message totally understandable in any particular context. It makes it harder to motivate people to deeper faith and to equip ministers more faithfully and effectively to preach the gospel.

Keywords: Contextualisation, inculturation, enculturation, New Testament, Nigeria.

Introduction

According to Hesselgrave (1990:9), the missiological milieu is replete with concepts like indigenization, communication, conceptualization, incarnation, enculturation, inculturation and contextualization (Hesselgrave et al, 1990:9). These are words that are used to emphasize the need for effective methods of interpreting a concept or phenomenon in the New Testament for its relevancy to be maintained within a context. In contemporary mission, contextualization was introduced in 1971 and its companion term, inculturation emerged in literature in 1974 (Whiteman, 2021). Inculturation is centered on culture thus, there are primary differences between inculturation and contextualization.



While contextualization is often used by the Protestants, Inculturation is the term that Catholic leaders and theologians have used in recent decades to denote a process of engagement between the Christian Gospel of the New Testament and a particular culture. The term is intended conceptually both to safeguard the integrity of the Gospel and to encourage sensitivity to various cultural contexts. Thus, the content is meant to be retained notwithstanding the medium or means of transmission for which the Nigerian context is not an exception.

Inculturation, according to Doyle (2012:1-13) is a theological notion that has been specifically associated with Pope John Paul II's strategy for evangelization, including what is known as the "new evangelization" that focuses on cultures that had traditionally been Christian but which are now not clearly so.

In the opinion of Baba (2016:52-66), there are about four major methods of engaging the scripture as employed by the earliest interpreters numerous among which are: Jewish Literalist, Midrashic interpretation, Jewish Peshar Interpretation, and Jewish Allegorical Interpretation. These indicates some of the methodologies involves in the interpretation of the scripture for easy understanding by the audience.

Good biblical exegetes and missionaries have always been good anthropologists, this is because the duo are aware of human needs be it from the local way of life or from man's universal need of salvation. They are also cognizant of the fact that the various ways of life of different people are channels by which their needs take form, and through which, the solutions to such needs must pass (Nida et al., N.d). The burden of this paper is to overview contextualization and inculturation of the New Testament and draw implication for the Nigeria context. This study employ analytical and phenomenological approach.

Conceptual Overview of the New Testament

The term New Testament is the second major division of the Christian Bible with 27 separate works (books) attributed to at least eight different writers (Brand et al., 2003:1189). The books of the New Testament were written to instruct local congregations of believers and to inform them of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ (Dunnet, 2001:9).

In other words the New Testament represents a collection of twenty-seven individual books written in Greek during the first century CE They are organized not chronologically but topically and they follow the basic sequential outline of the events they address (Horton, 2016:281), The New Testament in question is made up of four gospels (which describes the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus), Acts (which explains the birth of the church and the spread of the mission from Palestine through the Graeco-Roman world), thirteen letters of apostles Paul, Hebrew, general epistles and Revelation (which concludes the collection by offering a glimpse into the world to come).

According to Edward L. Hayes (2011), the three basic question that is of interest to any text are: what does it say? What does it mean? How does it impact? The New Testament tells the story of one of the most remarkable religious and social movements the world has ever seen; it contents are like a small library, including personal letters as well as books of history and theology. These books were written by many different authors at different times and places in the Roman Empire during the first century CE. But they are all part of the same story, reflecting the fervor and devotion of the first followers of Jesus Christ (Drane, 1986:14).



The New Testament comprises of the Hebrew preparation, Greek preparation, and Roman preparation before its final composition and compilation. The teaching in question ought to be contextualized in the Nigerian context for it to remain relevant to the Nigerian culture.

Conceptual Overview of Contextualization

Each human has been born into a particular socio-cultural context which has greatly influenced his or her behavior and beliefs; the culture is the totality of the ideas and values conceptualized in his beliefs and practices. This is corroborated by Mbiti (2009) when he posits that: “the people of Africa experienced and witnessed the process of birth, growth, procreation and death, they felt the agonies of the body and mind, hunger and thirst, the emotions of joy, fear and love... These experiences stimulated them to reflect upon life and the universe in which they live”. Consequently, these experiences are characteristics of human existence which influence their thought and perception of things especially as they come directly in contact with the realities of this life (Audi et al, 2019:159). This emphasizes the important of context in shaping humanity’s worldview and presuppositions.

Whilst contextualization is a wide subject that can be applied to almost any discipline, it has featured very much in missiological circles since the term was coined in the early 1970s. Since the adaptation of the term, it has replaced earlier terms such as indigenization or adaptation; there has been no doubt about the need for it in mission. In fact, it is widely agreed that mission without contextualization is inadequate and there is no mission without making reference to the New Testament which gave instruction on the Great Commission.

Contextualization is a perennial challenge that Christians face every time they attempt to communicate the gospel across languages and cultural boundaries which calls for critical methodology. It is concerned with how the gospel and culture relate to one another across geographic space and down through time. Contextualization attempts to communicate the Gospel in both words and deed in order to establish the church in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural contexts, presenting Christianity in such a way that it meets people’s deepest needs and penetrates their worldviews, thereby allowing them to follow Christ.

There can be as many definitions of contextualization as there are scholars of the subject. Bosch (2013) explains the term by saying that it is having the church “incarnated in the life of the recipients.” Hesselgrave and Rommen (1990) define contextualization as presenting the Supra-cultural message of the Gospel in culturally relevant terms. Luzbetak (1988) says that the goal of contextualization is to “integrate the Gospel message with the local culture in such a way that it is faithful to God’s revelation. He defines contextualization as: “the process by which a local Christian community integrates the Gospel message with the real-life context, blending text and context into that single, God-intended reality called “Christian living”.

Another definition of contextualization comes from Beyerhaus, cited in Mashoko (2005) says, “The communicator of the Gospel would proclaim it in such a way as to set the proclamation free from the traditional western form in which it seems repulsive to the hearers, and to present it, clothed afresh in Asian, Nigerian or African form, so as to appear intelligible and relevant to both Christian and non-Christian hearers”. Hesselgrave et al (1990) explains contextualization as the communication of the Christian message “in a way that is faithful to God’s revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teaching of Holy



Scriptures” which is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts.

Bevans (Mashoko, 2005:12) says that the term “contextualization” not only includes all that is implied in the older indigenization or enculturation, but also seeks to include the realities of contemporary secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice. According to Gehman (2020), Contextualizing Theology is that dynamic process whereby the people of God living in community and interacting with believers throughout time and space, under the illuminating guidance of the Holy Spirit, proclaim in their own language and thought forms, the Word that God has spoken to them in their context through the study of Scripture. In another way, according to Engle, (1983:85), "Contextualization" may be defined as showing the whole Bible to be relevant to the total individual in all his relationships of life.

In his book, *Models of Contextual Theology* (1992), the American Catholic theologian, Stephen B. Bevans gives a classic definition of contextual theology as: a way of doing theology in which one takes into account the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Church; the culture in which one is theologizing; and social change within that culture, whether brought about by western technological process or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice and liberation.

Bevans (1992) here goes beyond classical or traditional theology by positing three main sources for contextual theology, namely, Scripture, tradition and socio-cultural context in which one is theologizing. For him, contextual theology is a way of theologizing on the Christian faith not only on the basis of Scripture and tradition - the two main theological sources of reflection of classical/traditional theology, but also on the basis of concrete culturally conditioned human experience or the socio-cultural and historical context (Okafor, 2014:1-14).

Contextual theology as a critical theological method is an interpretation of Christian faith, which emerges in the consciousness of its context. It differs from the traditional/classical theology which was considered to be changeless in content and is above culture and a historically conditioned expression. Because contextual theologians do not consider theology simply as a study of God, but as a study of what God says and does in a context, contextual theology actualizes a theological method which considers culture, history and contemporary thought forms along with Scripture and tradition, as valid sources for theological expression.

A Christian theologian has to take into account that he stands in the context of the 21st century as a human being. His theological existence is only one of the many aspects of his humanness. It includes the context of the communication and confrontation of his own civilization with other civilizations. As a Christian theologian he stands in the context of the authority of the Word of God recorded in Scripture. In this context, he is neither higher qualified nor less rewarded than his fellow Christians, who stand in the same context and under the same authority.

The Word of God received its inscripturation in a specific historical context. This should be recognized. Because the Word of God is normative for our life it should receive its concretization in a cultural context, where people listen with other ears, speak a different language and have a different history. There is identity with, and difference from, the past: identity, insofar as it is the same Word of God with the same message for mankind in the past and today; difference, because circumstances, culture, society and position in history are different. This does not imply a programme of demythologizing, as Bultmann and his



school try to insist. Scripture should not be geared to modern rationalist or irrationalist Humanism (Laan, Pdf).

Bosch (2013) states that most Protestants consider inculturation as a subset of contextualisation. Bosch for example, has placed inculturation under contextualisation together with liberation theology; with inculturation the primary concern is the relationship between faith and culture, while liberation theology includes the larger context, namely the socio-political situation. So although there remains close ties between culture and the socio-political context, when inculturation is in question, the focus should always be 'culture'.

Any definition given for contextualization today has to recognize the strides that have already been made towards finding a term that fits the current time. This will have to take into consideration that contextualization has evolved to the present terminology. It is instructive to realize that previously concepts such as "adaptation" were not going far enough as expressed by Ritchie (1999, in Mashoko, 2005). His observation is that adaptation meant replacing a white pastor with a black one who did exactly the same thing in exactly the same ways as did the "Euroamerican" pastor. This, he says, helped very little, if at all. He goes on to point out that by 1974, there was an "incarnation" of Christianity with truly African roots. This phase marked the rejection of "adaptation" and the adoption of the theology of incarnation in its place.

According to Ritchie(2012) this was progressive in that: African theologians were now in search of a church with African leadership, with truly African mind and spirit, and where Africans could feel free to explore the meaning of a truly African Christianity, without restrictions imposed from outside mission agencies, and without any "Euroamerican" Christians constantly looking over their shoulders. They wanted the freedom to innovate in their attempts to Africanise Christianity in a manner analogous to the founders of the African independent church movements. This background is a must in formulating a working definition of contextualization. Without it there is every possibility to make the same mistakes others have made.

Contextualization is part of an evolving stream of thought that relates the Gospel and church to a local context and the previous words used as a precursor to contextualization are: adaptation, accommodation, and indigenization. These all attempt to describe the relationship between Gospel, church and culture (Whiteman <https://spu.edu>). Tradition refers to any kind of teaching, written or spoken, handed down from generation to generation (Freeman, 1988:443). Contextualization creates a community that is both Christian and true to its own cultural heritage by forcing the church to have a more adequate view of God as the God of all persons. In contextualization, the common bond that unites and bridges the chasm created by language and cultural differences is the Holy Spirit who knows no boundaries of race, class, gender or social location.

Conceptual Overview of Inculturation

To be human means to be embedded in culture; the cultural-embeddedness of human existence has sparked an interest among theologians in every era in engaging with the cultural context in which they found themselves living. Yet, theologians have never been of one mind as to the role culture ought to play in theology and in the interpretation of the Gospel (Bosche, 2013). The word culture according to Grenz, (2000) is derived from the Latin *cultivare* ("to till the soil"). This etymological connection led to the original meaning of culture, namely, "the care and tending of crops or animals," especially as this activity is aimed at improving or perfecting its object.



Culture, according to Niebuhr (2006) is the sum of all that has spontaneously arisen for the advancement of material life as an expression of spiritual and moral life- all social intercourse, technologies, arts, literature and sciences; it is the realm of the variable, free, not necessarily universal, of all that cannot lay claim to compulsive authority. The term inculturation (Nida, 1994) is from the root word, culture and culture is all learned behavior which is socially acquired, that is, the material and nonmaterial traits which are passed on from one generation to another. They are both transmittable and accumulative, and they are cultural in the sense that they are transmitted by the society and not by genes. A definition of the theological content of inculturation can be considered from a variety of angles, namely: Indigenization and contextualization, among others, have been used to define it respectively and collectively. However, while indigenization and contextualization addressed methodological aspects of adapting Christian faith to a new culture, inculturation furthermore is the activity of the on-going interaction or synthesis between faith and culture. Inculturation (Prom, 2013:37-38) therefore suggests is a creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures. Arbuckle (1984) is among those who argue for the ongoing critical interaction and assimilation between the gospel and culture.

While contextualization is often used by the Protestants, inculturation is the term that Catholic leaders and theologians have used in recent decades to denote a process of engagement between the Christian Gospel and a particular culture. The term is intended conceptually both to safeguard the integrity of the Gospel (content) and to encourage sensitivity to various cultural contexts (medium). Inculturation as a theological notion has been specifically associated with John Paul II's strategy for evangelization, including what is known as the "new evangelization" that focuses on cultures that had traditionally been Christian but which are now not clearly so. Yet inculturation, understood with a somewhat different emphasis, has also been associated with the Jesuit (Doyle, 2013).

Arrupe (2011) presents inculturation as the incarnation of Christian life and message in particular cultural contexts, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the cultures, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a new creation.

Contextualization and Inculturation in the New Testament

Culture provides the language by which Scripture (New Testament) is understood and by which the Gospel is communicated. Vocabulary, syntax, figures of speech, analogies, patterns of logic and arrangement, religious and philosophical concepts and functions, all form together the medium by which a theology is conceptualized and communicated. This is because context (man's culture), provides redemptive analogies by which men are enabled to understand the revelation of God (Doyle 2012:1-12)

The process of inculturation may be defined as the Church's efforts to make the message of Christ penetrate a given sociocultural milieu, calling on the latter to grow according to all its particular values, as long as these are compatible with the Gospel. The term *inculturation* includes the notion of growth, of the mutual enrichment of persons and groups, rendered possible by the encounter of the Gospel with a social milieu. "Inculturation is the incarnation of the Gospel in native cultures and also the introduction of these cultures into the life of the Church." (Faith and inculturation, international Theological commission). Kruger (2016:22-27) argues there is the need for Christians to understand the major historical, exegetical and theological issues within each of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. This is



because the New Testament in question is theological, redemptive-historical, reformed, multi-authored, and pastoral. All these call for proper contextualization for its relevancies to be maintained across cultures and the Nigerian context is not an exception.

In the culture of the New Testament, a holy kiss is encouraged among brethren; the kiss was not only used among men as a token of friendship and of homage to a superior, but as one of the ceremonies connected with divine worship, and intended to express mutual love and equality. The holy kiss in question was widely practiced among the early Christians as a manner of greetings, a sign of acceptance, and an imparting of blessing (Freeman 2012). This holy kiss is foreign to Nigerian culture therefore the concept of the holy kiss needs to be re-contextualized for it to be relevant with the Nigeria context.

Contextualization is a fine balancing act between necessary involvement in the culture, being in the situation and also maintaining an outside, critical perspective that is also needed. It also develop contextualized expressions of the gospel so that the gospel itself will be understood in ways the universal church has neither experienced, nor understood before, thus expanding humanity's understanding of the kingdom of God.

In contextualization, the gospel has the ability to speak within the worldview of every culture, thus, the empirical proof of the gospel's authenticity in contextualization, means that Christianity is not the exclusive property of any one culture, for it refuses to be culturally bound, and it continually bursts free from the chains of bondage to enlighten cultural tradition. Culture is a way of behaving, thinking, and reacting, though invisible it manifest in a particular objects and actions. The culture in question is not that of a particular society such as Graeco-Roman, the mediaeval, or the modern western one, this is because Christian faith is not integrally related to western culture but is global in orientation and focus.

New Testament and the Nigeria Context

Nigeria is a country in West Africa which comprises of thirty-six states and Federal Capital Territory in Abuja. The three major languages in Nigeria are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo among other languages and ethnic groupings. There is the need for the New Testament to be made relevant to the Nigerian context The transition to contextualization as it is known today, did not begin until the New Testament era, with the completion of Christ's work of salvation and the resultant gospel. Early believers began the process of establishing a basis and specific strategies for overcoming intercultural obstacles, and the task was passed on to subsequent generations of believers (Hesselgrave & Rommen, 1990). The western missionaries that brought Christianity and the Gospel to Nigeria, failed to remove western garb from the Gospel because they considered the local religion to be diabolic and thus imposed the gospel 'hook, line, and sinker' with the western 'garment'. This warrants the need for New Testament contextualization and inculturation into the Nigerian context.

Contextualization implies that there is a need to understand the cultural plurality of the community of Nigeria and present the Gospel in a way that can be understood according to the forms and symbols of Nigerians' community. While one can explain the symbols used in the Bible from a Jewish culture, there is obviously a need to look into the language of the recipients of the Gospel and to make sure that the Gospel is presented in a language the recipients can understand. For the church to be incarnated in the community, it will mean interacting with the community with a view to appreciating the importance of the cultural dynamics in the process of relating the biblical message to the life of the local people (Mashoko, 2005).



This process is also necessary in the light of the realization that the Gospel message is a 'prepared message for a prepared people. If God has already prepared his people for the message by placing within their culture symbols and forms to aid in understanding the Gospel, it means all that the missionary and bible interpreters needs to do is to identify such elements of the culture that will make it easier for the communicator to be understood. Richardson asserts that God has already prepared all the people on earth to hear the Gospel. The presentation of the Gospel becomes easier when it is presented in such situations where God has already prepared. When a missionary goes into this context or culture the main thing for him or her is to know the context or the culture. Consequently, the New Testament should be interpreted in the terms of the Nigeria culture for her recipient to remain Nigerian Christian and not western Christian.

The main aim of missionary work in communication is to present the supra-cultural message of the gospel in culturally relevant terms and in doing so, there is the need to beware of the perception of the communicator's own cultural heritage as an integral element of the gospel; and a syncretistic inclusion of elements from the receptor culture which would alter or eliminate aspects of the message upon which the integrity of the gospel depends.

For some times Christians have struggled to communicate the "pure" gospel story across cultural boundaries; the gospel is indeed not naked, it is always 'enfleshed' in culture and constrained by human language. Therefore, the New Testament needs to be given body in Nigerian culture for Nigerians to easily assimilate and be edified by it. Thus, (Kraft, 1988:3) argues that there is the need for intercultural communication of the gospel in an increasing multicultural world and the church. Consequently, missionaries of all ages have had to come to grips with not only their own enculturation, but also the customs, languages, and belief systems of the world's people (audience).

The expatriate missionaries had a limited knowledge of African cultures with Nigeria included, and therefore they did not contextualize the Gospel. The church today has an opportunity to continue the good work started but needs to present the Gospel in a way that will be able to speak to the cultures of people irrespective of these seemingly serving as barriers. There is the need for contextualization of the Gospel so that it is proclaimed in a way that is appropriate and meaningful in a particular context. The missionising methods used in the past and present, by expatriate missionaries and by local witnessing community, are no longer appropriate for the current world.

There are a number of reasons for this. One of the reasons is that over the years there have been changes in the conception and methods of mission. Another reason is that people have become more and more aware of the importance of culture and finally there has been an expansion of knowledge among citizens. Whereas in the past they would have accepted the Gospel from expatriate missionaries without question, now they question before they accept things. Mbiti (2000) raises a critical point when he says, "...the starting point must be to develop a theology for the African church that accommodates African culture better than the Western theology communicated by missionaries in the past." This view shows that there is need to apply new methods of mission which are more relevant to the present situation. It is nonetheless noted that expatriate missionaries have, despite their limitations, done good work which we should now seek to build on. They should be given credit for laying a good foundation and Nigerians New Testament scholars need to take off from there and make the New Testament *Nigerianized*.

Communication of the Gospel in Nigeria will be more effective when it takes into consideration the context of the recipients (Nigerian culture and context). Mission can be



looked at as contextualization because in order for mission to make sense to any group of people, it has to be carried out within the context of the people in symbols they will understand such as Nigerian tales, folklores, poems, idioms, festival etc.

Van der Meer (2016) states that when Christ came into the world he did not come into a vacuum but he became part of a particular cultural, religious, socio-economic and political context. He had a culture of heaven from where he had come from but he did not bring that with him to the Jewish culture into which he was born. He, by being born in a specific culture and incarnating into it, demonstrated that mission had to be contextualized.

If the Son of God contextualized his life and mission, it shows that, “The church, God’s missionary community, does not operate in a contextual vacuum”. This suggests that the New Testament though written in the Graeco-Roman culture, ought to identify with the Nigerian context because the Gospel is cultureless and thus the need to give it body so to speak, in the Nigerian culture. There is the need for the New Testament to be made at home with the Nigerian culture and context since the audience of the then Graeco-Roman world is quite different from that of the Nigerian worldview as a result of cultural and geographical gaps. Though the authorial intention is intact, the audience are not the same and the same applies to the culture.

Evangelicals have a love-hate relationship with contextualization because they are concerned that the process will lead to syncretism. Every part of the New Testament is itself a contextualization of God’s eternal truth for a specific historical and cultural setting. His Holy Gospel unpacks the New Testament as contextual theology in Acts, Paul’s epistles (with detailed case studies from 1 Corinthians and Colossians), the Gospels and Revelation. While others have pointed out the implications of such passages as Acts 15, Paul’s sermons in Acts and the unique emphases of each Gospel for contextual theologizing, Flemming’s study of the methodology of Paul and other New Testament writers takes his insights on contextualization in the New Testament to a far deeper level. His interaction with Paul is particularly strong. Flemming exposes Paul’s deep immersion and interaction with the culture of his day, his use of current hermeneutical and expositional tools and his relevant contextualization of the Old Testament to his readers (Flemming, 2006).

According to Campbell (2014), New Testament authors were themselves embarked on a careful process of contextualization, as they sought to present the gospel of Jesus Christ to the various cultures of their day. He argues that contextualization is therefore quite biblical and that the New Testament corpus contains biblical principles and guidelines that should be utilized by all who seek to share the gospel today.

God’s revelation of Himself is often in human culture notwithstanding the limitations existing in human culture. This is because God starts working with human beings where they are solely on the basis of their commitment to Him. If God could reveal Himself through the limited human culture, the New Testament should be contextualized to the culture of their recipient (Nigeria) for relevancy. In the Nigerian traditional religion the priests of Ifa, Amadioha, Chukwu and other gods still act as intermediaries between man and gods and interpret their command, which always contain pattern of behavior. Thus, the New Testament should be interpreted in the context of Africa Traditional religion without being syncretistic in application and interpretation. (Flemming, 2006).

Contextualization like the event in Acts 15, was expected to enable the early church to break free from Jewish or western cultural practices and trappings and resulted in the important decision at the Council of Jerusalem that one could follow Christ without first becoming a



Jew culturally, white or foreign missionaries or practice 'whiteianity' instead of Christianity. In the same vein, the New Testament should enable Nigerians to remain Nigerian in their understanding of the Gospel without being American, German or anything else in the practice of their Christianity.

Contextualization captures in methods and perspectives of the challenge of relating the gospel to culture and this is done by going back to the early church and struggles to break loose from its Jewish cultural trappings and it entered the Graeco-Roman world of the Gentiles. The Nigerian context needs to be put into consideration for the gospel to be relevant to Nigerian culture. Patterns of culture are exceedingly complex in some societies by virtue of the very multiplicity of activities and organization; culture is not a mere accumulation of traits, but an arrangement of parts in such a way that there is a systematic functioning of the society.

Effective missionaries and Holy Bible interpreters have always sought to immerse themselves in a profound knowledge of the ways of life of the people to whom they have sought to minister, since only by such an understanding of the indigenous cultures could they possibly communicate a new way of life to possible new adherents.

The vision of contextualization is that Jesus Christ and his kingdom find fuller expression in the whole life of people in every culture. Consequently, authentic contextualization brings honour to God, the faith, and is uplifting of Christ, His incarnation, cross and resurrection, led and made possible by the Holy Spirit and thus it is also true to the whole Bible. Contextualization of the New Testament in Nigeria has the wherewithal to unlock the door that has hitherto bound up Christianity in a westernized room and garb and make it more at home within the local locality and Nigerian culture and worldview.

Contextualization forces the church to have a wider loyalty that corresponds to an enlarged and more adequate view of God as the God of all persons, male and female, and as a God who especially hears the cry of the poor and needy notwithstanding their status, race, colour, location and background. Contextualization attempts to communicate the gospel to meet people's deepest needs and penetrates their worldview thereby allowing them to follow Christ and remain within their own culture without being forced into other cultures that are foreign to theirs.

Contextualization is a necessity in contemporary mission for the gospel to be presented locally in ways that connect to people's language, culture, and worldview so that world evangelization not a 'mirage'. Thus, the biblical model of contextualization is in the Lord's incarnation; the contextualization in question is different from denominational extension, this is because a denomination can expound and have branches elsewhere without being contextualized (Flemming, 2006).

God's desire is to see Himself communicated to humanity in all cultures and translation is basic to all kinds of worldview change and a transformational culture change. This is because effective translation stimulates conversion to Christianity. The translation in question, besides its value in channeling new concepts to new hearers, also has an important impact on the translators. If translators are translating the Bible and other ancient materials, they need to understand the cultural worlds of the Bible as well as that of the receptor of the language.

Evangelization is defined as the understandable hearing of the gospel and if the gospel is to be understood, contextualization must be true to the complete authority and



unadulterated message of the Bible on the one hand, and it must be related to the cultural, linguistic, and religious background of the respondents on the other hand. The New Testament need to be used as a means of Evangelization even within the Nigerian culture for it to be at home within that context. Just as the *Logos* 'took flesh' and entered into the culture of the first Century Palestine, so must the Christian faith in the New Testament take on the Nigerian culture that receives the gospel and at the same time be influenced by the culture thus defining a culturally relevant Gospel. By implication in inculturation, the gospel affects the culture and the culture affects the Gospel within its context.

Thus, indigenization and contextualization are the two-fold opposition functions of inculturation, as the gospel infuses into the local culture of a people and at the same time takes on unique characteristics and concerns of the culture. Therefore, Shorter (1999) argues that in inculturation the gospel transforms a culture and is transformed by the culture, not in a way that falsifies the content, but in the way whereby it is formulated and interpreted anew. It is through this process that a foreign-born religion is incarnated into a native religion and culture, just as God incarnated as Christ engaging a culture and revealing the gospel. For Schineller (1990) inculturation is the combination of the theological significance of incarnation with the anthropological concepts of enculturation and acculturation to create something new. Inculturation has been the practice of the church from apostolic times this is because the gospel 'incarnates' in the socio-cultural milieu of the evangelized and the experiences and perspectives that this creates in turn enrich the understanding and experience of Christianity for the global church. It is noteworthy that the efforts in the New Testament and the Early Church to articulate the Christian message in non-Jewish categories of thought have something to contribute to the current debate on inculturation within the church in Nigeria (Nyirenda, 2007:99-100). Christ is the classic example of contextualization of God's message without compromise. By means of the incarnation God perfectly contextualized his communication (Hebrews 1-2). He met his target culture where it was, and as it was in the form of a God-man Christ Jesus, his sinless Son (Hebrews 2:9-18; 4: 15).

Conclusion

This paper has examined the conceptual overview of contextualization and inculturation of the New Testament in the Nigerian context. Both contextualization and inculturation are often used interchangeably by the Catholics and the Protestants; the New Testament though written in a context is meant to be re-contextualized to meet with the Nigeria context for it to be relevant to the current audience and situation of the church in Nigeria. One of the critical methods of New Testament studies is contextualization and inculturation. There is no meaningful interpretation of the New Testament text without a context in view. The New Testament as a whole was written and addressed to the Graeco-Roman context of which inferences are drawn for the contemporary context of which Nigeria is not an exception. Contextualization makes the gospel to be at home in every culture; this suggests that contextualization removes every form of bondage and estrangements from the gospel. Therefore, the New Testament should be made accessible in the culture and context of Nigeria and indigenous populations, for it to be thoroughly incarnated into the Nigerian culture and worldview and indeed those of other cultures.

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