

TRACING THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION OF FAITH-CULTURE DIALOGUE

IFEANACHO Evaristus, PhD

Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria
eo.ifeanacho@unizik.edu.ng, ifeanacho@hotmail.com
DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.23939.78889

Abstract

The proclamation of the message of the Gospel is addressed to men and women who live in a particular historical and cultural context. God is one, unique and unchangeable, yet differently approached in different cultural ambients. Culture, as a vehicle for transmission of faith, helps in understanding the apparent multiplicity in the means and mode of the search for God. Bearing in mind, however, that there are almost as many cultures as there are peoples, one observes a certain tendency towards cultural relativism. Consequently, there comes the need of striving towards the maintenance of the objectivity of faith lest it becomes a victim of cultural vacillation and vicissitudes. To obviate this imminent danger of relativizing and adulterating the message of faith under the pretext of cultural adherence, it becomes pertinent to initiate an authentic dialogue between faith and culture. However, for us to unravel the dialogue of faith and culture, this research aims making an appeal to Christ himself who is the origin and epicentre of such dialogue. He was born within a culture; lived and experienced the good and ugly sides of the Jewish culture, and was thus better placed to challenge and transform elements of Jewish culture that were incongruous with the Christian living. St. Paul employed the dialogue of faith and culture in his missionary encounters. This research, therefore, applies an expository and interpretative approach to unravel biblical evidences regarding this faith-culture encounter.

Keywords: Faith, culture, Faith-culture conflict, dialogue, inculturation

Introduction

Man has a natural inclination to God. Consequent upon this innate tendency, his overall disposition and way of life are directly or indirectly, geared towards an avowed search for the Divine. This search becomes manifested in an act of faith that legitimises the innate religious option. This act of faith is more and more deepened, properly appropriated and responsibly responded to when its obligations and implications are undoubtedly appreciated and professed.

However, one must not forget that not only the full realization of faith but also the initial moment: *initium fidei* (beginning of faith) depends fully on God's grace.

But the transmission of faith does not take effect in a vacuum. For "how can they call upon the name of the Lord", says St. Paul, "without having believed in him? And how can they believe in him without having first heard about him? And how will they hear about him if no one preaches about him? And how will they preach him if no one is sent?" (Rom.10,10-15). Evidently, the human instrument is of fundamental and unavoidable importance in the transmission of faith. On the other hand, he remains also the recipient of the message of faith.

Inevitably, man performs a dual role in the process of the transmission of faith. It is therefore necessary to take into consideration the cultural context into which he is born. Nonetheless, such cultural background in which he lives is not without its attendant strings of explicit and implicit demands and responsibilities. Based on that existential fact, his life-situation and world-view normally condition his reception and transmission of this faith. It is within this cultural spectrum that one aptly comes to appreciate the faith, to comprehend it and to internalise it. On account of that, for effective and adequate communication of the content of the deposit of faith, one needs to pay ample attention to questions of culture. In fact,

Culture is the vital space within which the human person comes face to face with the Gospel. Just as a culture is the result of the life and activity of the human group, so the persons belonging to that group are shaped to a large extent by the culture in which they live ... From this perspective, it becomes clearer why evangelization and inculturation are naturally and intimately related to each other ... the Kingdom of God comes to a people who are profoundly linked to a culture, and the building of the Kingdom cannot avoid borrowing elements from human cultures. (John Paul II, 2000 no.21)

Notwithstanding this obvious interpenetration between faith and culture, conflicts frequently ensue in some areas. Sequel to such possible unfavourable occurrences, in areas of the faith-culture conflict, there is always the need to employ dialogue in order to arrive at a harmonised permeation of faith into the culture of a people, which has undoubtedly formed their way of life. Thus Mushete writes:

The fact is that every people, every human community, conceives and organizes its historical existence not according to a universal, immutable model, but according to its own particular situation in space and time. A perception of the world and its values always depends on different spaces, they experience and theorize their human relationships, their culture, and their religion differently. (Mushete, 1994, p.24)

Therefore, the proclamation of the message of the Gospel is addressed to men and women who live in a particular historical and cultural context. God is one, unique and unchangeable, yet differently approached in different cultural ambients. Culture, as a vehicle for transmission of faith, helps in understanding the apparent multiplicity in the means and mode of the search for God. Bearing in mind, however, that there are almost as many cultures as there are peoples, one observes a certain tendency towards cultural relativism. Consequently, there comes the need of striving towards the maintenance of the objectivity of faith lest it becomes a victim of cultural vacillation and vicissitudes.

To obviate this imminent danger of relativizing and adulterating the message of faith under the pretext of cultural adherence, it becomes pertinent to initiate an authentic dialogue between faith and culture which has a biblical foundation. Such initiative will then engender the sifting, and where possible the remodelling of those elements that go contrary to the Gospel message; and not without extolling those elements that synchronize with the message. In this way, faith becomes properly rooted, belief more meaningful and the Gospel solidly incarnated and more exuberantly and convincingly proclaimed as a way of life.

Faith: a brisk survey

The word faith is etymologically founded on Latin and Greek roots. Faith derives from the Latin fifth declension noun "*Fides-ei* meaning trust, confidence, reliance, credence, belief, faith" (Simpson, 1959). Furthermore, this noun *fides* derives from a semi-deponent (Tantucci, 2000, p.130) verb of third conjugation - "*Fido-ere-fisus sum* - to trust, believe, confide in" (Simpson, 1959). More so, faith also translates the Greek noun πίστις. πίστις like its adjective πιστός was initially used in reference to personal relationship with somebody or something (Bultmann et al., 1968, p.176); on the contrary, their opposites - ἀπίστις and ἀπιστία have the senses of distrustful and unfaithful, unreliability and unfaithfulness respectively.

However, it is important to note that in classical Greek πιστός and πίστις were never used for true religious relationship to God or for the basic religious

where that faith is lived. It is in the same cultural context that conflict often times ensues with regard to the practice of faith.

Notion of faith-culture conflict

The meeting of two cultures, for example, the divine culture (faith) and temporal culture, is most often fraught with conflict and tension. The tension is consequent upon the divergence in their objective. The former has a transcendent goal; the latter, though ultimately geared towards the supernatural, is more so weighed down by its earthly ties. Undoubtedly, the opposition in their objective cannot be gainsaid because although man is created in the image of God and as such has the divine imprint right from birth, temporal culture has an existential priority in its concrete manifestation on account of which it gains a deep-rooted position from the onset. Any shift from its root creates conflict. This priority is obvious as man from the beginning shapes his cultural inclination through conscious or even unconscious imitation of others. We want what our neighbour possesses, and we desire what he desires or what we think he desires. The child's closest neighbours, for instance are the parents. The child starts by assimilating the social assumptions around him, and gradually the self comes to view the surrounding world with a particular slant, which in turn shapes his or her typical expectations of others. The tone and quality of these relationships in turn influence the kind of religious horizon likely within a given culture. In this way, culture becomes "a huge school of imitation and if dominated by a spirit of enmity, then it becomes a school of collective violence and conflict" (Gallagher, 2003, p.38).

All in all, it is evident that "all human cultures are infected with a spirit of rivalry between human beings" (Gallagher, 2003, p.38). This rival tendency confirms the fact that culture is in constant change and always in the process of becoming, and it is by its nature "shapeless, seething and shifting ..." (Archer, 1988, p.xxii) Girard describes in a penetrating manner this continual change that goes with culture using the analogy of the scapegoat. There is always a quiet violence of one desire over another and constant displacement of a weaker desire with a stronger one. This "conflictual mimesis" (Girard, 1987, p.26) presents the idea of victimhood, which goes to foster hostility, and this hostility in the long run culminates in what eventually sums up as culture. In the same vein, the entire "creation theology is the basis for the long adventure of human culture – symbolised in the mandate to human beings to grow and rule the earth. Thus there is a biblical foundation for seeing culture as the human response to God's

continuing creative gift, as a co-operation through our freedom with the creator ...” (Gallagher, 2003, p.121).

The Gospel, on the other hand, is filled with a renewing and perfecting encounter. The acceptance of the Gospel message means some consolidation or shift from or a total rejection or even an overall remodelling of the temporal culture that has taken root. The Jewish and Hellenistic cultures experienced such purifying and perfecting touch when it came in contact with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. In the ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (Mtt. 5-7) where Jesus presents the manifesto of his evangelization we witness such a shift. It is a series of you-have-heard-that-it-was-said-to-the-men-of-old: you shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not swear falsely; an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; you shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy; but I say to you: whoever kills shall be liable to judgment; everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart; do not swear at all, rather let what you say be simply ‘yes’ or ‘no’; if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven (Mt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 31-45).

In fact, divine revelation sets man free from the same dark inheritance of culture and he thus becomes free to live out another existential vision. When the Gospel is thus accepted, one gives up mimetic desires and begins to share the desire of Christ himself (Girard, 1987, pp.430-431) and thus compassion assumes the place of victimising. Therefore, the adventure of Christian faith is that of healing culture of its inner logic of violence (Gallagher, 2003, p.38). That is what conversion is all about.

In this line of healing the culture of the time, the Church in all her apostolic endeavours insistently and tirelessly continues to combat the worldly cultures that go against the divine culture. There is always the ceaseless fraternal appeal against war, abortion, euthanasia, injustice, and every other form of violence and policies that go against the dignity of the human person as created by God in His image. In the same line, Karol Wojtyla through theatrical performances defiantly confronted and resisted the Nazi and communist ideology, which went all the way in suppressing human freedom. As a Pope, his inclination towards fighting oppressive cultures became more apparent. He tirelessly brought every effort to bear in expunging the political ideology of his time of its dark and inimical

vestiges. It began as “a clandestine act of cultural resistance” (Weigel, 2003, p.1) and later transformed in an overt manifestation. In fact, Pope John Paul II confronted a brutal attempt to crush human freedom, which was evident in the communism that had replaced Nazism as the usurper of Poland’s liberties. These ideologies, which he counted among the horrors of late twentieth-century life, are among the product of defective and vitiated concepts of the human person (Weigel, 2003, p.8). Once again, he was engaging in this venture not with any political or military might but with what he understood as the truth that could liberate his people in the most profound sense of freedom which entails the truth about the dignity, vocation, and destiny of human beings, and which he believed had been revealed in Jesus Christ (Weigel, 2003, pp.1-2).

From the foregoing, it is evident that for faith and culture to cohabit without friction, there is need for a dialogue. The blueprint of this dialogue is traced in the bible.

Tracing Faith-culture dialogue from the Gospels

The Gospel is replete with evidences of faith-culture dialogue in the ministry of Jesus Christ. One can easily glean this dialogue in all the facets of Christ’s life on earth; more especially in his encounter with the Jewish culture in which he was born, bred, and ministered. His birth into a particular culture sets in motion the theology of incarnation. “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn. 1,14). Hence, “the incarnation of Jesus Christ is the theological basis for inculturation ...” (Gallagher p.122). Being a Jew, Jesus paid attention to his cultural background in his ministry. He made use of the elements in his culture for effective proclamation of the Kingdom of God. In fact, “Jesus proclaimed the Good News to the Jewish people from within the perspective of the Jewish culture and...challenged that culture to respond to Good News by using its resources to express the message of salvation” (Ukpong, 1994, p.44). Undoubtedly, “Jesus can be described, as one who really knew Judaism from inside” (Kealy, 1989, p.28). Based on this evident awareness of the intricacies of Jewish culture, his proclamation of the God’s Kingdom was primarily aimed not only at evangelizing his people but also using their culture as the instrument for passing the gospel message. By so doing, he also passes the culture through the crucible of Gospel requirement. The culture is surely evangelized wherever it is found wanting. In this regard,

the gospels portray Jesus as showing a strong sense of mission to evangelize the Jewish people and their culture. All the gospels depict him

not only as a preacher of the coming of God's Kingdom but also as one who was aware that that was his special mission. (Ukpong, 1994, p.46)

While carrying out this his special mission, Jesus made use of parables which formed part of the daily life of a common Jew, encouraged respect of civil authorities and reacted vehemently against the Pharisees who laid excessive legal burdens on the gullible masses and against a near uncomfortable insistence on rituals. The parables, which the rabbis were using for explanation of their teaching, formed an essential part of Jesus teaching (Meier, 2000, p.1320). In this way, he hammered home his message by using parables, which encapsulate what the people experience in their day-to-to life. On account of this homeliness of the parables and other forms of speech that derive from the wisdom and prophetic traditions of Israel, the people could easily draw the conclusion of his teaching without much labour.

He not only preached by using parables, but he also sought to confront and evangelize the Jewish culture, especially the Jewish Law that was more or less too legalistic. He gave the Jewish Law a new face. Conscious of the fact that the Law meant a lot for the Jews, he showed a reasonable respect towards their Law. The Jews had "one body of laws, the Torah, which was religious but governed both the religious and secular aspects of life. The Torah was regarded as the manifest will of God for Israel...a way of life for the Jews" (Ukpong, 1994, p.49). Since the Law formed a vital element in their daily life, since it has formidable root in them, since the "Torah became the central symbol of Judaism and the summary of what Jews believe and how they live..." (Brown et al., 2000, p.1080), it needed to be handled with utmost caution and charitable disposition in order to make an adequate rapport between faith and culture. His approach was not an offensive rejection of the Law but a tactically prudent transformation of the Law. He showed the supremacy of mercy over rigidity of legalism. A glaring example was the case of the adulterous woman who according to the Law was supposed to face death by stoning. As John has it in his gospel,

the teachers of the Law and the Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught in the act of adultery. They made her stand in front of everyone. Master, they said, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. Now the Law of Moses orders that such women be stoned to death; but you, what do you say.... Let anyone among you who has no sin be the first to throw a stone at her. (Jn. 8:3-7)

Here, they had the hidden intention of ensnaring Jesus.

If Jesus followed the Law and condemned the woman to stoning, he would appear to be heartless. On the other hand, if he showed mercy and released the woman he would seem to show no regard for the Law. In view of Jesus' new perspective on the Law in terms of love and mercy, there is no doubt that his intention was to show mercy to the woman. He did not, however, do this directly but turned the episode into an indictment of the character of the woman's accusers before releasing her. In that way, without attracting confrontation, Jesus implemented his perception of a new interpretation of the Law based on love and compassion. (Ukpong, 1994, pp.51-52)

And St. Augustine summarized it thus: "the two of them alone remained: *mercy with misery*" (Augustine, 1991, 33,5). More so, Jesus gave the Law of the Sabbath a new dimension. He interpreted it in the spirit of *epikei*, that is, "an interpretation of the human law not according to its letter but according to its spirit in those border cases which have not sufficiently been taken into consideration by positive law" (Peschke, 1991, p.197). By this attitude, he maintains the superiority of the intrinsic law inherent in human nature over the codified norms of positive law. He mellowed down the agonizing severity of the Law on Sabbath and gave it a human face. He took care of the urgent necessities of human life. Thus, he exalted the law of love and mercy above that of the temple and Sabbath. In fact,

Jesus, through his preaching and the total gift of himself that would lead him to the Cross, returned the Mosaic Law to its true and original intent. Here what is central is not the law or legal justice, but the love of God, which is capable of looking into the heart of each person and seeing the deepest desire hidden there; God's love must take primacy over all else....The misery of sin was clothed with the mercy of love. Jesus' only judgement is one filled with mercy and compassion for the condition of this sinner. (Francis, 2016, no.1)

Against the confrontations of the Scribes and Pharisees, against every accusation of transgressing the law of the Sabbath, he went on to heal the sick on the Sabbath, (Mk. 3:1-5; Lk. 14:1-6) allowed his disciples to appease their hunger by plucking ears of corn, (Mtt. 12:1-8; Mk. 2:23-28) and summarily emphasized that the Sabbath was made for man and not vice versa (Mk. 2:27). In all these cases,

Careful reading makes evident Jesus' attempt at incarnating the gospel in the Jewish culture. He accepts the Jewish culture but rejects its excesses. His attitude was not in any way based on disrespect for the Jewish Law and culture but on an inner understanding of God's will in relation to the Law; Jesus' interpretation was also a reaction against a false evaluation be it of the Law in particular or the culture in general (Ukpong, 1994, p.52).

Apart from his attitude towards the Law, his general missionary approach was devoid of any propensity of segregation. There was no discrimination in his good works. Even the pagans and notorious sinners were not marginalized in his ministry. Rather, he converted them through his show of love and concern towards them. Despite the scornful and despising attitude of the Jews towards the pagans which actually inhibited them from understanding all that was foreign, Jesus showed them that salvation was meant for all. It was thanks to his broad-minded approach that he was able to discover that faith of a pagan woman, a Syrophenician by birth, who begged him to drive the demon out of her daughter. Based on her faith, Jesus healed her daughter not minding her being a pagan (Mk. 7:24-30).

His ministry did not exclude the Publicans and sinners. He mingled with them; dined and wined with them. This goes to prove the fact that conversion is not done from a distance but through contact with others and through proper understanding of the condition of others. When confronted regarding his association with tax collectors and sinners, he responded, "healthy people don't need a doctor, but sick people do. I did not come to call the righteous but sinners" (Mk. 2:17). What a method that demands emulation by those that are charged with the work of evangelization! What an open-minded approach that is needed in the dialogue of faith and culture!

It is noteworthy that "Jesus was set on evangelizing Jewish culture and religious thought from within by utilizing the resources of the culture" (Ukpong, 1994, p.49). Against this backdrop,

using the elements of Jewish culture, he sought to instil into the Law and the Jewish religion a new vision based on the Good News that he preached. This involved a challenge to people to rethink their basic beliefs, hopes, and institutions. Jesus issued this challenge from within the culture itself and not from outside it. This is the inculturation approach in evangelization. (Ukpong, 1994, p.58)

Actually, Jesus' approach to his ministry in the face of his challenging Jewish cultural background remains a legacy and a model that can be applied in the face of other cultures. Indeed, the fact of the incarnation is the inception of inculturation. Christ taking human form *ipso facto* incarnates the gospel into human culture with its attendant vicissitudes. This fact must be embraced by all missionaries and all preachers of the gospel. The gospel must be preached from within the perspective of the people's culture. On no account should a people's culture be forcefully expunged in the name of evangelization. Such attitude is detrimental to the true meaning of evangelization, and more detrimental to the eventual effect on the people's life pattern, and most detrimental to the type of faith they will embrace. Christ method of "he who has ear let him hear" (Mtt. 11:15; 13:9) must be adopted. St. Paul really applied this approach in his missionary encounter.

Tracing faith-culture dialogue from The Acts of Apostle and Pauline Epistles

Paul was a Jew by birth (Acts 21:39; Phil. 3:4) and initially a persecutor of Christians (Acts 22:4, Phil.3:6). After his conversion he took the Gospel message of Jesus to the Gentiles. For a better understanding of the encounter of these two cultures, it is necessary to expose the Jewish cultural background in which Paul grew up.

The Torah formed and shaped the Jews' cultural outlook. Consequently, they viewed their culture as being divinely inspired. They saw themselves as God's unique and holy people, set apart from the Gentiles, whom they regarded as sinners (Gal. 2:15). The Jews guarded the Gentiles' social life with some restrictions. In that context, the Jews deeply believed that eating with the Gentiles made them unclean and they strictly observed this code of conduct (Okure,1989, p.46). Aware of the fact that the Hellenistic culture is greatly different from the Jewish culture, Paul tried to adapt the Gospel to the new audience without denigrating the inherent values of their own culture. Thanks to this charitable adaptation, the result was a Gentile form of Christianity, one that engaged in dialogue with Greek and Roman philosophy (Schineller, 1990, p.9). The Areopagus speech thus becomes the first witness of Christianity to an encounter between the biblical faith in the creation and the cosmic piety of the Greeks (Legrand, 1976, p.349). It was neither a Christianity that stripped the Jews of their Jewishness nor one that aimed at divesting the Gentiles of their Gentileness (Pesce, 1987, p.205). Paul thus became an example of how Jesus'

early followers inculcated the counter-cultural message of the Gospel. He made use of a new symbol system, that is, parables that were in vogue in the cultural ambient where he preached. In his preaching, Paul, cognisant of the particularity of his cultural ambient, spoke of athletic competition (cf. 1Cor 9:24-27), grammar and phonetic (cf. 1Cor 14:9f), makes appropriate analogies with architects and builders (cf. 1Cor 3:10f), tutors (cf. Gal 3,24) and use of perfumes and mirrors (cf. 2Cor 2:14; 1Cor 13:12) (Mattam, 2003, p.231). This “apostle of the Gentiles preached the highest wisdom also before the more learned as when in the Areopagus of Athens he spoke to the onlooker of the unknown god” (Pius XII, 1951, no.42).

When Paul was confronted by the traditional beliefs of the Athenians at Areopagus he did not lay violent hands on their religious images and rites but rather anchored on them in a dialogical and persuasive manner to preach the true God. Ancient testimonies show that Athens had a religious background. Sophocles holds that “Athens is held of states the most devout...” (Sophocles, 1962, p.171). Livy in turn describes Athens as a city “replete with ancient glory...the statues of gods and men-statues notable for every sort of artistry” (Livy, 1962, pp. 342-343). For Cicero, in Athens, “men think civilization, learning, religion...tradition relates that even the gods competed for the possession of their city, so beautiful was it” (Cicero, 1962, p.511). Indeed, Athens is a city with “a nervously devout populace frequenting ubiquitous shrines, philosophers of famous schools dialoguing in the agora, new gods introduced from time to time...” (Dillon, 2000, p.754).

It was in an environment as this that Paul went to preach. It was a confrontation of the Christian faith with other religions. At his speech at Areopagus, Paul employed *captatio benevolentiae* which literally refers to the fishing for the good will of the audience. It is a “rhetorical category aimed at capturing the good will of the audience at the beginning of a speech. (Andoková, 2016, p.2). This is reflected when Paul acknowledged at the beginning that the Athenians were in every way very religious (Acts 17:22).

As a Jewish Christian, he realizes that pagan Greeks do not worship the ‘true’ God of Jews and Christians, but tries to show that the God whom he proclaims is in reality no stranger to the Athenians, if they would only rightly reflect. His starting point is Athenian religious piety, and he tries to raise them from such personal experience to a sound theology. Their piety, in his view, does not go far enough. (Fitzmeyer, 1998, p.607)

This primary acknowledgement disposes the minds of the listeners. Such appreciation of other people's religion promotes the dialogue of faith and culture. Any outright condemnation makes an outright abortion of positive progress in the process of evangelization. He respected their religious images but based on the one attributed to the "Unknown god" as a springboard for his preaching on the true God. "Now, what you worship as unknown, I intend to make known to you. God, who made the world and all that is in it, does not dwell in sanctuaries made by human hands, being as he is Lord of heaven and earth. Nor does his worship depend on anything made by human hands, as if he were in need." (Acts 17:23-25) In fact,

the God worshipped in the 'pagan' Athens is the same Creator whom Paul had come to proclaim. The speech thus provides the theological basis for the missionary enterprise among non-Jews and non-Christians. God is not circumscribed in a particular geographical ambient. He is acknowledged and worshipped by all men and women everywhere. (Isizoh, 2001)

Paul in this way made a missionary in-road no matter how little into Athens. It was an apt dialogue of faith and culture that would have on the contrary met with utter rejection were Paul to make a blatant denunciation of their gods.

This rapport between faith and culture was also evident at the decision of the Council of Jerusalem. The Council intervened to douse the fire of commotion, which arose in Antioch consequent upon a desire to impose circumcision on Gentile Christians. This imposition was based on the fact that circumcision was insisted upon as a necessity for salvation. The Council under the guidance of the Holy Spirit quelled the upheaval when it decided that "to be a Christian one does not have to be circumcised or have to obey all the prescription of the Mosaic Law." (Fitzmeyer,^{1998, p.544}) The faith-culture dialogue detests excessive burden on the converts.

Following from this, the pastors of today should emulate the approach of Christ in his ministry and that of St. Paul in his various missionary ventures. A situation where a pastor of soul incites the overzealous faithful, through his preaching, to indulge in a desecration of the sacred geography of the Traditional Religionists is an arrant negation of what evangelization is all about. Worst still, a wholesome iconoclastic tendency against their religious artefacts in the name of bringing them to the faith is nothing but an uninformed method of spreading the gospel. Such bespeaks of a breach of religious freedom. Such pastors must as a matter of

urgency be reminded of the words addressed by Pope John Paul II to the Bishops of Nigeria,

The Church truly respects the culture of each people. In offering the Gospel message, the Church does not intend to destroy or abolish what is good and beautiful. In fact she recognises many cultural values and through the power of the Gospel purifies and takes into Christian worship certain elements of a people's customs. The Church comes to bring Christ; she does not come to bring the culture of another race. Evangelisation aims at penetrating and elevating the culture by the power of the Gospel. (Palermo, 1993, no.1752)

Therefore, "the Gospel is not opposed to any culture, as if in engaging a culture the Gospel would seek to strip it of its native riches and force it to adopt forms which are alien to it." (John Paul II, 1998, no.71)

Rather, "evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the question they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life" (Paul VI, 1975, no.63). As we bemoan the mistakes of the early missionaries that came to Africa, saw numerous objects used in religious functions and called them idols, dismissed Africa Traditional Religion as paganism, idolatry, heathenism and fetishism, (Isizoh, 2001) indigenous pastors of soul must be on their guard so as not repeat the mistakes of the past. We must take our bearing from Christ himself who was very exemplary in the way he tackled issues arising from Jewish culture with commensurate missionary respect. Faith must have to touch the lives of Nigerians, and manifest itself in respect for life and search for peace. When faith permeates the lives of Christians, domestic violence, insecurity, kidnappings, killings and other related societal ills will surely fizzle away. Otherwise faith-culture encounter will only be a lip-service exercise. On this note, we must remember that in the encounter between faith and culture, faith purifies and transforms the pagan culture from every trace of error.

In short, the missionary activity is primarily concerned with preaching the gospel to the ends of the earth. To achieve this, imminent cultural problems could be obviated if the pastors of soul are groomed and properly abreast with the unavoidable necessity of spreading the faith in the perspective of culture.

Conclusion

Faith and culture, all things being equal, should enjoy an interconnected co-existence. All the same, dialogue remains a veritable medium for ensuring collaboration between faith and culture. Such healthy cohabitation thanks to dialogue helps to root out any tendency of friction and to engage in re-establishing peace where the friction already exists. Therefore, dialogue forms an integral part and remains a reliable vehicle of faith transmission in every evangelizing mission.

There is, therefore, no gainsaying the fact that much depends on the pastors who engage in the apostolate of preaching and ministering to the people in the different cultural situations. More so, much depends on the magisterial office of the Church. For, "it is the task of the Pastors, in virtue of their charism, to guide this dialogue with discernment" (John Paul II, 2000, no.21). Adequate caution is necessary so as not to impose the faith on the people. Rather due patience must be taken to preach to the people in an unhurried manner from their cultural background. This disposition goes to say that "it is necessary to inculturate the preaching in such a way that the Gospel is proclaimed in the language and in the culture of its hearers" (John Paul II, 1999, no.70). If not, the faith will be foreign to them and will end up engendering protracted faith-culture conflicts instead of continuous dialogue.

References

- Andoková, C. (2016). The role of *captatio benevolentiae* in the interaction between the speaker and his audience in Antiquity and today. *Systasis* no.29. pp.1-12.
- Archer, M. (1988). *Culture and Agency: the Place of Culture in Social Theory*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Augustine, (1991). *Homilies on the Gospel of John*. In Schaff P., (Ed.). *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, VII. Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Brown, R.E. et al. (2000). *Apocrypha; dead sea scroll; other Jewish literature*. In Brown R., et al., (Eds.). *The New Jerome biblical commentary*. London: Geoffrey Chapman. pp. 1055-1082.

- Bultmann, R. & Weiser, A. (1968) «□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□□». In Friedrich, G. (Ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* vol. 6, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Cicero, (1962). *Pro Flacco*. in *Loeb Classical Library*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Dillon R.J. (2000). *Acts of the Apostles*. In Brown R., et al., (Eds.). *The New Jerome biblical commentary*. London: Geoffrey Chapman. pp. 722-767.
- Fitzmeyer J.A. (1998). *The Acts of the Apostles, a new translation with introduction and commentary*. vol.31. New York: Doubleday.
- Francis, (2016). *Mercy and peace. (Misera et Misericordia)*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Gallagher, M.P. (2003). *Clashing Symbols, An Introduction to Faith and Culture*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Girard, R. (1987). *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*. London: Stanford University Press
- Girard, R. (2001). *I See Satan Fall like Lightning*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Isizoh C.D. (2001). *African traditional religious perspective of "Areopagus speech" (Acts 17,22-31)*. Retrieved 24/4/2001 from <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/areopagus.htm> .
- John Paul II, (1995). *The Church in Africa. (Ecclesia in Africa)*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- John Paul II, (1998). *Faith and Reason. (Fides et ratio)*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- John Paul II, (1999). *The Church in America. (Ecclesia in America)*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- John Paul II, (2000). *The Church in Asia. (Ecclesia in Asia)*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana..
- Kealy S.P. (1989). Jesus' approach to mission. *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)* Vol. 31(1). pp.27-36.
- Legrand, L. (1976). The Areopagus Speech: its Theological Kerygma and Missionary Significance, *La Notion Biblique de Dieu*, Vol. 41. pp.337-346.
- Livy, (1962). *History*. *Loeb Classical Library*. Vol. XIII. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Mattam, J. (2003). Inculturated Evangelization and Conversion. *Theology Digest*. Vol.50 n.3, pp. 229-235.
- Meier J.P. (2000). *Jesus*. In Brown R., et al. (Eds.). *The New Jerome biblical commentary*, London: Geoffrey Chapman. pp.1316-1328.

- Mushete, A.N. (1994). *An Overview of African Theology*, in Gibellini, R. (Ed.) *Paths of African Theology*, London: SCM Press.
- Okure, T. (1986). *Inculturation in the New Testament: its Relevance for the Nigerian Church*. In *Inculturation in Nigeria, Proceedings of Catholic Bishops' Study Session*, Lagos: Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria.
- Palermo S. (Ed.) (1993). *Africa pontificia* vol.2. Rome: Edizioni Dehoniane.
- Paul VI, (1975). *Evangelization in the modern world. (Evangelii nuntiandi)*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Pesce, M. (1988). Paolo e l'Evangelizzazione delle Nazioni. *Parola, Spirito e Vita*. pp.187-208.
- Peschke K.H. (1991). *Christian ethics*. Vol.1. Bangalore: Theological Publications in India.
- Pius XII, (1951). *On promoting Catholic missions. (Evangelii praecones)*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Schineller, P. (1990). *A Handbook on Inculturation*, New York: Paulist Press.
- Simpson, D.P. (1959). *Cassell's New Latin-English, English-Latin Dictionary*, London.
- Sophocles, (1962). *Oedipus at Colonus. Loeb Classical Library. Vol.1*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Tantucci, V. (2000). *Urbis et Orbis lingua, Corso di Latino Morfologia e Sintassi*, Bologna, 2000.
- Ukpong, J.S. (1994). *Christology and inculturation*. In Gibellini R., (Ed.). *Paths of African Theology*, London: SCM Press.
- Weigel, G. (2001). *Witness of Hope, the Biography of Pope John Paul II*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.