

## **VOICES OF INCULTURATION IN AFRICA: IN THE PAST, IN THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE**

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### **Introduction**

When one speaks of inculturation, the mind would ordinarily race to the “mission territories” where people want to be rooted in their cultures but desire to be Christians as well. At one level, this is wrong because the Christian life itself is inculturation: Christian faith requires continuous movement to a better relationship with Christ. At another level, inculturation is needed more in those places where Christianity is still young; where the language, symbols and gestures of Christianity are unfamiliar to its adherents. Africa is one such place. It is the desire to remain fully African and fully Christian that makes inculturation a privileged discussion in African Christian life. When one looks carefully at the joy and hopes, pains and anxieties of life of faith in Africa, one would see a domineering concern about inculturation. Inculturation gets attention because many pastors are ever desirous to explain the gospel in a manner that makes sense to the mind and heart of people in Africa. The anxiety comes, not on whether there is a need for inculturation, but on how to proceed about it. This paper sets out to examine the experiences of the African Christians in their efforts to remain authentically African and truly Christian through inculturation efforts. I call those efforts ‘voices’

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because at one time, one hears dissent, at another affirmation; at one moment, off notes, at another harmony. To capture the high, low and level waves that those voices produce, I have opted for a historical narrative of the efforts of inculturation in Africa. What is encouraging is that when one interprets the Christian life in Africa through its inculturation efforts, one has a high hope that the desires of the pastors are genuine and are actually addressed. The hope is based on outstanding results already on the ground, the current enthusiasm and vitality with which Africans discuss inculturation and a clear vision for the future. One can only wait, pray and work for a deeper incarnation of Jesus in African soil, attitude and mentality.

While describing the new task of inculturation, *Fides et Ratio* laid down some basic principles that could guide the effort. These principles, in the mind of the Pope, would guarantee fidelity to the “the providential plan of God who guides his Church down the paths of time and history.” In Africa, efforts of inculturation have been made in the past, it is being made in the present, and there is hope that the future would bear greater fruits. This paper sets out to examine the experiences of the African Christians in their efforts to remain authentically African and truly Christian. To capture those efforts, (1) there will be a brief contextualization of inculturation in Africa. The backgrounds that will be highlighted are aimed at putting into perspective the uniqueness of inculturation efforts in Africa.

Thereafter, (2) we shall highlight some of the past efforts in inculturation. These efforts include the positive affirmation of African identity and cultures, the effort of translating the gospel message into African languages and worldviews, the effort of transliterating the Church doctrines using African principles, and the effort of engaging with inculturation at academic level. The fruits of these four facets past efforts of inculturation in Africa have spurred new endeavors in inculturation. (3) The new efforts take the form reconstruction and advancement. In reconstruction, there is a realization that Africa needs an integrated approach to inculturation if it is to resolve some of the persistent difficulties in the building an authentic African Church. Coupled with reconstruction, we have theologians who are exploring new territories that will reset the basics of inculturation in Africa. (4) There will be no summary conclusion at the end; rather, we shall indicate areas where future efforts could be geared towards.

### **Background to Understanding the New Inculturation Efforts in Africa**

In general, the background for inculturation in the Africa Church is the same as in the universal Church. The universality of inculturation

was well articulated by Pedro Arrupe, SJ, when he defined inculturation in the mid 1970s as an on-going creative activity:

Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, 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 culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about 'a new creation.'<sup>1</sup>

The African continent's effort in inculturation fits into this ongoing search to find ways to express the Christian message in world cultures, minds and hearts. Arij A. Roest Crolius has noted that this general background of inculturation must always be born in mind in if the efforts of inculturation would safeguard the theological principles underlying inculturation. For him, inculturation is a two-way process "through which Christianity takes root within cultures and cultural values are integrated into Christianity."<sup>2</sup> Inculturation is also a work in progress. As an unending work, cowardice and haste are bad counselors.<sup>3</sup> For Crolius, inculturation should be approached with an open mind so that all authentic human cultures can be celebrated in the Christian spirit.

In particular, African inculturation has a very unique historical deficit to its effort. Up until recently, the starting point of African inculturation was a de-westernization of Christianity. From the church hierarchy, to theologians, to ordinary Christians, there is always a struggle to "strip it [Christianity] down to the essentials, in order to creatively inculturate gospel values"<sup>4</sup> into Africa. Where does the deficit come from? On the one hand, it is well documented in the history of missions in African that there exists links between slavery, colonization and neo-colonization and the spread of Christianity in Africa.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Christianity and

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<sup>1</sup>Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation", *AR* 17 (1978), 2.

<sup>2</sup>Arij A. Roest Crolius, ed., *Inculturation, Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures*, VIII, Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1989, 4.

<sup>3</sup>Crolius, ed., *Inculturation*, 6.

<sup>4</sup>Peter Schineller, SJ, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, New York: Paulist Press, 1990, 10.

<sup>5</sup>Erwin Fahlbusch, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Vol 5, Grand Rapid, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008, 59. See also William Larousse, *A Local Church Living for Dialogue: Muslim-Christian Relationship in Mindanao-Sulu (Philippines) 1965-2000, Interreligion and Intercultural Investigations, Volume 4*, Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2001, 59. For recent articulation of this link, see Assata Shakur, "Colonization and Christianity in Zimbabwe" in <http://www.assatashakur.org/forum/judaic-christian/33015-colonization-christianity-zimbabwe.html>, accessed on 20/02/2011.

westernization were presented as one entity by the missionaries.<sup>6</sup> Thus, efforts of inculturation in Africa always start by explaining true Christian faith vis-a-vis slavery, colonization, neo-colonization and westernization. If inculturation does not explain these links, it would always say why it chooses to ignore them. What this background brings to the inculturation effort in Africa is that Africans are perpetually in disagreement about the gravity of those links, the importance it should be given, and eventually how to deal with it. These disagreements create conflict.<sup>7</sup>

The next important background to understanding the new effort of inculturation in Africa is that even though African inculturation starts off with de-westernization, instead of a positive inculturation, it is a plausible choice. The merit of beginning with de-westernization is that it is therapeutic – it heals the African souls. It clears the head and renders the mind honest. It affirms that African humanity is what Africans really want to bring to the encounter with Christ, and not its truncated forms occasioned by colonialism and westernization of Christianity. When one encounters an inculturation effort by a theologian or a pastor that is wholly de-westernized, it is amazing how deeply African and Christ-like such effort is. The most appealing characteristic of such inculturation is that it is a de-complexed inculturation. It does not quibble about unimportant things, it is not “some form of superficial adaptation”,<sup>8</sup> but a truly mature engagement with Christ and His Church. Unfortunately, some of the vocal and public efforts of inculturation in Africa are not completely de-complexed efforts. That is why there are lots of hesitations by the promoters of such efforts to go through the process of dialogue that is required with the universal Church for specific items on the inculturation table. When hesitation is not wanting, it is bad temper to genuine criticisms.

## **Efforts of inculturation made in the past**

### *1. Effort of affirming Africanness and African identity*

Though the fact of westernization of Christianity was raised above as a mark of African inculturation, we need accept that the western

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<sup>6</sup>Alister E. McGrath, *Christianity: An Introduction*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006, 283. See Can Tran “Assessing Christianity’s Future in Africa, in *Ground Report*, Feb 18, 2011, <http://www.helium.com/items/561722-assessing-the-future-of-christianity-in-africa> (Accessed on 28/02/2011). See equally Nelson Jack, “Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion” in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* September 22, (1997) 576.

<sup>7</sup>Bénézet Bujo and Juvénal Ilunga Muya, *African Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The Contribution of the Pioneers, Vol 2*, Nairobi: Paulines Publication Africa, 2006, 74.

<sup>8</sup>The Extraordinary Assembly of the Bishops Synod, 1985.

missionaries could not have done otherwise. First, it is almost impossible to separate faith and life. Thus, the missionaries came to Africa with their whole life, faith and cultures inclusive. Second, most missionaries are not really experts in doctrine and intricacies of theology. They were mostly people of good faith, with a lot of pastoral energy and initiatives, and willing to take risks for Christ. Third, the first missionaries did not have referent points to weigh and compare their methods of evangelization and their effects on the new converts. Fourth, during the missionary activities in Africa, the ideology in the world was a conquering one. Thus, it was not surprising that western missionaries saw everything in either/or paradigm: conquer or be conquered, gain or loss, kill or be killed, good or evil, Christianity or paganism, and so on. While these observations do not excuse the historical errors, it puts them into perspective.

But it was in face of these observations that the first effort of inculturation was made in Africa. The first efforts of inculturation were to affirm the African values and cultures.<sup>9</sup> The effort of inculturation at this juncture was to affirm that African culture is good, that it exists, and that it could be articulated using basic human regeneration energies. Théonest Nkéramihigo attempted such articulation using his theory of *altérité* – otherness.<sup>10</sup> The underlying principle of this theory is that the reality of differences in the world cannot be doubted, and must be respected as such. More so, the grace of Christ is such in supra-abundance that one cannot really restrict its area of influence through cultural bigotry. While the traditional African may not respect this otherness completely, as shown by the political and economic structures, it is still the foundational method to extricate Africa from westernization and make Africans free to encounter the grace offered by Christ. To live and act according to the principle of otherness is not the same thing as listing the positive values of past African traditional society; it is to “translate from imagination the portrait of the human person that a society should

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<sup>9</sup>Théonest Nkéramihigo, SJ “La creation comme condition de la revalorization d’une culture” in *Inculturation, Etude sur l’actualité de la rencontre entre la foi et les cultures*, IV, Roma: Pontificia Universita Gregoriana, 1984, 39. Different options were proposed. (1) That African culture should simply be assimilated to the western dominant culture and thus, continue with western Christianity. (2) That Africans be content that they have lost their original culture and that they cannot be pick up the western culture. In this case, African Christianity will be a unique and fresh creation. (3) That it is impossible to pick up western cultures, thus, the African culture needs to be reset to zero. Looking carefully at these options, none really captures the historical realities of Africans and their deepest desire to encounter Christ.

<sup>10</sup>Nkéramihigo, “La creation...”, 41.

promote in fidelity to the foundations and destiny of the people.”<sup>11</sup> The inculturation would involve translating from African imagination the type of Christian that is desired, while remaining faithful to the African and Christian foundations and destinies.

*2. Efforts of translation of Christian message into African languages and worldviews. Most evident in liturgy*<sup>12</sup>

In the past, African inculturation flowed naturally from the African self-affirmation. Given the fruits of the self confidence that self affirmation has brought, the next inculturation effort was the translation of Christian sources to African languages, especially in liturgical matters. Elochukwu Uzukwu had noted that the Western Church softened its stands on pluri-liturgical formula for Africa, after it has changed its attitude toward the Oriental Rites.<sup>13</sup> The change of attitude spurred the African liturgist to action. But there are two fundamental gags to the enthusiasm felt by all. First, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* had advised that the “substantial unity of the Roman rite” be maintained, and that “variations and adaptations” are what is permitted.<sup>14</sup> The question is: can African really inculturate if the instructions of the Council Fathers are adhered to strictly? Surely, adaptation and variations are part of inculturation, but they are not its final destiny. The examples of liturgical rites in Africa today suggest that adaptation and variation were the watch words. As a matter of fact, the table of the Eucharist was not touched during Mass. It was not adapted or varied in any significant ways.

The philosophical enquires on language have shown that one should not neglect the effect of translations. In the African efforts at inculturation, the symbol of faith expressed in African language takes new meanings and implication. It does not matter whether the new meaning is intended or not. By its essential characters, language says what it says, and suggests quite another (the connotative character of language). This fact of saying something else is based on another factor: the context of the use of language. Since the context of Africa is unique, the translated words enter into realms of meaning that are unique to Africa. In entering the new context, it creates and shapes the meaning it provokes. Even the sound of language, the style and

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<sup>11</sup>Nkéramihigo, “La creation...”, 50 (transl. from the French original is mine).

<sup>12</sup>Apart from liturgy understood as using the rites, we have efforts in healing, marriages, songs, method of evangelization, small Christian communities, and catechesis. All these areas start off by translations, then something specifically African emerges.

<sup>13</sup>E. Elochukwu Uzukwu, *Liturgy, Truly Christian, Truly Africa*, Spearhead No. 74, Eldoret, Kenya: GABA Publications, 1892, 19.

<sup>14</sup>Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, #38.

the feeling languages provoke are important in understanding the far reaching effects of translation in the inculturation process in Africa. It is for the reason of translation that the Christian life in different parts of Africa has taken specific shape, and is progressing towards authentic inculturation at different levels and speed.

### *3. Efforts of transliteration and transposition – the Christological movements and doctrinal renderings*

In the past, for various reasons, including the ones mentioned in the background to understanding inculturation in Africa, some African theologians transliterated the Christian doctrine into African languages. This effort was marked by invention and ingenuity, because some of these theologians forced matters in African languages and worldviews to find equivalent categories that speak the Christian doctrine. "Typically, the translations were exclusively linguistic and literalistic."<sup>15</sup> We find books, articles and liturgical efforts which primarily try to explain the Christian mystery as it is already stated and defined using African concepts and language. The most resourced part of African life that was used for this kind of purposes was the African Religion's<sup>16</sup> belief systems. It was believed by those making this effort that African Religion, by the fact that it is a religion contains elements that are equivalent to Christian dogmas. Thus, there was African Christology, doctrine of Trinity, eschatology and theological principles. Let me illustrate with an example.

Charles Nyamiti employed all hermeneutical ingenuity to show that Trinity is analogous to the African ancestral veneration.<sup>17</sup> He believed

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<sup>15</sup>Eugene Hillman, CSSp, *Inculturation Applied, Toward an African Christianity*, New York: Paulist Press, 1993, 3.

<sup>16</sup> There is a serious academic discussion in Africa about the singularity or plurality of African Religion. This debate is part of colonial heritage. Early European anthropology and religious study in Africa categorized African beliefs and systems as less than a religious belief. Unspeakable terms were used to describe African spirituality. Later there was the acknowledgment that the African belief system is really a religious belief. But given the diversity of forms, it was termed a low, primitive or ethnic religion. Current research shows that diversity in forms of worship and emphasis on certain belief does not make African faith to be "African Religions". So, the most contemporary term is "African Religion". There are now efforts to articulate the central doctrine of African Religion, put in writing some of its basic theology and share it with the world religious community. In fact, *Ka: The Holy Book of Neter (The Soul of God)* is now considered the first scripture of African Religion. The singular form is still gaining popularity, so most literatures of the past decade may still be using "African Religions".

<sup>17</sup>Charles Nyamiti, "Ancestral Kinship in the Trinity, An African Theology on the Trinity" in *Inculturation, Working Papers on Living Faith and Cultures*, IX, Roma: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1987, 31.

that his effort will deepen the theological understanding of Trinity by the Church and help Africans appropriate the mystery of Trinity for pastoral actions and liturgy. He started his efforts by a study of the African ancestral veneration, and then he analogically linked his findings to the already defined doctrine of the Trinity: the relationships, persons, hierarchies and salvific implications. In the end, Nyamiti makes the following observations: (1) That Christian life descends from the divine. Thus, the Trinitarian life should be the foundation of Christian life, in Africa and elsewhere. (2) That the reality of sin breaks the chain of descendency. Thus, sin should be abhorred because it continues to impede relationality. (3) That fear (awe) of God's wrath towards sin should be better emphasized against contemporary turn to God's mercy and forgiveness. (4) Since relationality founds African ancestorship and community, Tradition must be privileged over any form of creativity. (5) Since divine descendency and relationality are the foundation of Christian descendency, therefore, all tribal and cultural incompatibility must be discarded. (6) Finally, since African culture of ancestorhood craves for children, we must accept that divine Trinitarian desire is to have many Christians.<sup>18</sup> Bingo, The missionary effort of conversion must be pursued with great zeal.

Therefore, two uncomfortable observations from Nyamiti's effort. The first one is that he made the doctrine central to the Christian faith. This looks out of place when one notices that it was the first Council of Nicea (325) that defined this doctrine. It is amazing that Nyamiti would found African inculturation in an academic explanation of dispute of the time. While the elements of the Trinitarian formula have been used in liturgy from ages, the faith of the first Christians were not doctrinal definitions. It was a faith lived in worship of the person of Christ who has been raised by God. Thus, if Christianity must make as Nyamiti intended, he should have focussed on the person of Christ and His relationship to the believer. To make Christ-God-Spirit descendency the locus for inculturation is to start from the tail.

The second discomfort comes from the far reaching implications that he drew from his effort. In a swipe, Nyamiti dismisses the fruits of other African efforts in inculturation. He even calls efforts of liberation "a secular type of Christian behaviour"<sup>19</sup> because this effort makes liberation the primary concern of Christianity. For him, liberation efforts are a worldly affair that should not command the

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<sup>18</sup>Nyamiti, "Ancestral Kinship in the Trinity," 46-48.

<sup>19</sup>Nyamiti, "Ancestral Kinship in the Trinity," 46.



attention of true inculturation efforts. If one remembers the historical contexts of African Christianity noted above, one wonders why Nyamiti would frown at liberation efforts. More so, the Church of Vatican II is a Church that procures the “medicine of mercy”<sup>20</sup> and not anathemas.

Given the above discomforts, it is defensible that Nyamiti and his style of doing inculturation in Africa represent the transliteration current. He exploited the liberty presumed in analogy too much when he established the doctrine of relationship between ancestors and the human community because African Religion does not have doctrines. But the Trinitarian relationship is a well defined doctrine. Nyamiti forced the Trinitarian need for definition into the African Religion’s presupposition for ancestral veneration. The harm that transliterations, like that of Nyamiti, did to African effort of inculturation still lives on.

#### *4. Efforts of second level of inculturation – engagement of intellectual inculturation championed by African ‘liberation’ and ‘inculturation’ theologies*

Peter Schineller divided all efforts of inculturation into two levels. At the first level, there is the ongoing engagement in Christian life and mission. This continuous engagement is happening or should happen in all places and circumstances where Christians encounter one another. This engagement will be varied and local because of the different ways in which people meet, and the varied locations for the encounter. But there is the second level of inculturation. It is when there is a “critical, reflective study of inculturation in the classroom”<sup>21</sup> which will lead back and reinforce the first level. The caution for this second level is that it must guard against remaining an ivory-tower exercise that does not return to the basic level of lived experience.

The effort in inculturation has happened at the second level of inculturation. In fact, all the ideas presented or discussed so far are part of this second level of inculturation. Generally, this second tier effort has been articulated either as African theology of liberation<sup>22</sup> or

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<sup>20</sup>Cf. Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII – Pope of the Council*, London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1984, 109.

<sup>21</sup>Schineller, SJ, *A Handbook on Inculturation*, 12.

<sup>22</sup>A representative of liberative aspect of African effort of inculturation is Dr. Laurenti Magesa. *The Church and Liberation in Africa*, Eldoret, Kenya: Gaba, 1976; “Aspects of Christian Freedom and Liberation in Contemporary Tanzania” in *Service*, Nos. 5 & 6 (1987), 1-20; “Leonardo Boff and the Vatican: Theological and Pastoral Observation,” in *Africa Theological Journal*, 20, 1 (1991), 3-16; “Aids and Survival in Africa: A Tentative Reflection,” in J. N. K. Mugambi and Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike eds., *Moral and Ethical Issues in African Christianity, Exploratory Essays in Moral*

African theology of inculturation proper.<sup>23</sup> As I noted with Nyamiti, there is a squabble between the two currents in African theology. But this conflict is normal in intellectual debates. The negative side would be whether the squabbles translate into impasse when the second level efforts want to touch base as Schineller prescribed.

Three works can be highlighted as responding to the critical and systematic aspect of inculturation in Africa. The first one, by Eugene Hillman,<sup>24</sup> starts off from that fact that incarnation was an inculturation event. The humanity of Christ and His option for the marginalized was foundational inculturation events. Jesus left the above of Father to be completely one with humanity is an example of the ultimate goal of inculturation. While on earth, Jesus decidedly identified himself with the marginalized. Another mark of Jesus' incarnation is its pragmatic stance on life: any encounter with Jesus changes peoples' lives. In the same vein, Christianity should seek to be ultimately one with all human cultures; and opt, by that fact, for the human liberation as Jesus did. From the symbolic incarnation, (not doctrine of Trinity like Nyamiti), the effort of inculturation would proceed analogically into various spheres of human-God relationship.

The second representative of the second tier inculturation is by Alyward Shorter.<sup>25</sup> From the perennial need for evangelization

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*Theology*, Nairobi: Acton Publisher, 1993, 197-216; "The Mission of the Church in African in the Post-Cold War International Order," in A. Nasimiyyu-Wasike and D. W. Waruta, eds., *Mission in African Christianity, Critical Essays in Missiology*, Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1993, 132-157; "The Church in Eastern Africa: Retrospect and Prospects," in *Journal of Inculturation Theology*, 1, 2 (1994), 168-178; "The African 'Debt' Crisis and in a Christian Perspective. An Analysis and an Approach to Resolution," in Viggo Mortensen, ed., *A Just Africa, Ethics and the Economy*, Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, LWF Studies, 1994, 151 – 162; "The Political Axis of African Liberation theology," in George De Shrijer, *Liberation Theologies on Shifting Grounds, A Clash of Socio-economic and Cultural Paradigms*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998, 130-152; "The Dream of Ujamaa after the Collapse of Communism," in *Exchange*, 28, 4 (1999), 342-350; "Theology of Democracy" (see also the introduction which he co-authored) in *Democracy and Reconciliation, A Challenge for African Christianity*, 1999; "The Global and the Local: An African View," in M. Amaladoss, ed., *Globalization and Its Victims as Seen by Its Victims*, New Delhi: South Asia Books, 1999; "A Theological Journey," in *Exchange*, 32, 1 (2006), 43-53; "Locating the Church among the Wretched of the Earth," in James Keenan, ed., *Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church*, New York: Continuum, 2009, 49-56.

<sup>23</sup>Nyamiti, Elochukwu Uzukwu, John Lukwata, Benezet Bujo, John Mbiti are good representative of this current in Africa.

<sup>24</sup>Hillman, CSSp, *Inculturation Applied, Toward an African Christianity*, New York: Paulist Press, 1993, 101.

<sup>25</sup>Alyward Shorter, *Evangelisation and Culture*, New York: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994, 164.

(witnessing), Shorter notes that inculturation in Africa must move away from love of power picked up by Christianity during its formative years in the western feudal society. Christianity should rather turn to "the power of love" which will enable evangelization to be based on the dialogue, inculturation and liberation. Unless love reigns, the efforts of inculturation will not bear much fruits. Prominent among the hindrances to true inculturation in African is that consultations are done on vital projects, but the results are usually set aside when pronouncements are finally made. Closely related to this is that the Church, dominated by westerners, does not yet believe that the young Churches of the world are mature enough to go full length with inculturation. As a panacea, Shorter suggests that the Church should apply to its internal governance the principles of solidarity and subsidiary that was developed in the Church's social teachings.

The third representative of the intellectual engagement with inculturation is a documented study of how inculturation is lived in Eastern Africa by Laurenti Magesa.<sup>26</sup> His first observation is that there is an intricate and complicated relationship that exists between popular and academic officials regarding inculturation. Currently, the true advocates of inculturation in Africa are some intellectuals who hold no official positions in the Church, who are considered 'heretics' bent on derailing the faith by the Church hierarchy. Thus, there is an overriding repudiation of inculturation efforts from the popular Church.<sup>27</sup> The second point is that apart from the fact that incarnation is an inculturation, the Church needs to take a decision to orient the Church in the direction of inculturation. In this way, inculturation becomes a developmental goal of Church in our time. Taking such decision is in accordance with the natural way human beings react to social realities around them. Thus, the development of African Church should be tied to the efforts of inculturation.

A brief recapitulation is in order at this point. The books chosen as sample of efforts of inculturation are based on three major concerns of inculturation. In Eugene Hillmas' book, we find the foundations of inculturation. In Shorter's work, we find the method that should be employed in order to arrive at the desired end. In Magesa' book, we find a feedback about what has been done. Overly, grassroots efforts are not based on the foundations as articulated. The method is not followed with convictions, and the result is not what the real

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<sup>26</sup>Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation, Transforming the Church in Africa*, Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2004, 311.

<sup>27</sup>Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation*, 90.

advocates of inculturation in Africa desire. Yet, one has high hopes that the on-going work of inculturation is happening in Africa. Let us see its current state.

### **New Efforts in Inculturation**

The fruits of past efforts of inculturation gave the foundation for new advancements. We see that slow but continual exposure to new situations and values, which follows human community throughout life, continues to shape Africa today. We also see that the few who are pushing for inculturation in Africa see it as the only authentic way of being African and Christian. Anything short of inculturation would be self-defeating for the Christian faith. Thus, some current inculturation efforts tackle some root problems that are holding/slowing down the process of inculturation, while other efforts push the process further even if the result of the past effort is less than desirable. Let me give an example of each.

An example of current inculturation effort that tackles the hindrances to inculturation is by Clement Majawa.<sup>28</sup> He argues that what has been holding/slowing down inculturation in Africa is that inculturation has not yet been approached in an integral way. Apart from the reality that some people in Africa still see inculturation as something new from the Vatican II, there are still those who fear that the result of inculturation would not be good for the African Church. For Majawa, such fear is because those who experience inculturation do so in a compartmentalized manner. However, if they experience inculturation in a holistic way, they will know that inculturation should originate from anthropological supposition of every culture, move into the faith community, reach out to the world, and then support the Christian hope. The end of inculturation would be a human development that is based on faith and morality. It will be liberative, relational and salvific.

An important point of departure for this new effort of inculturation in Africa is that a theology of inculturation in Africa should not depart from the articulation of the African culture. Rather, it should emanate from the scripture which is the true source of all Christian theology. By departing from the scripture, the African inculturation movement would have the same grounding as other facets of the Church theology.<sup>29</sup> One of the implications of starting from the scripture is that it will open up the worldview of African inculturation to other

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<sup>28</sup>Clement Majawa, *Integrated Approach to African Christian Theology of Inculturation*, Nairobi: Creations Enterprises, 2005, 448.

<sup>29</sup>Majawa, *Integrated Approach to African Christian Theology of Inculturation*, 67.

aspects of human life that are normally neglected. An example would be that most efforts of inculturation in Africa have privileged worship some time at the exclusion of other sensitive spheres of life in Africa. To my knowledge, there is no study about inculturation and social questions *per se*. The discussions that mention social issues approach it from the liberation perspective. If we follow Majawa, it is possible to evaluate the social questions using the inculturation principles directly rather than through a detour of liberation theology.

Apart from efforts to reset the bottom for a better inculturation, we have in the new effort of inculturation a move to bring African Religion on the same pedestal with Christianity so that the two can dialogue as equals. This is a great shift from the way theologians have viewed African Religion. All along, African Religion has only been approached as a raw database where Christian theologians can visit at their fancy to pick and choose what they may consider important for their Christian purposes. That African theologians now think that inculturation in Africa has to take the route of dialogue with African Religion is a new thing. According to Lautenti Magesa, the existence of African Religion is not in question. Apart from the fact that there are identifiable people who profess its creed and who practice it, "African Religion is the controlling sensibility" for all Africans, "with Christian and Muslim teachings being add-ons, especially if and when the latter diverge profoundly from African belief system."<sup>30</sup> More so, one of the uniqueness of African Religion is that it is so intertwined with African culture that all aspects of life are considered sacred, and is differentiated only on the degree of sacredness. The complexities of the African culture explain the complexities of the African Religion.

Since the existence of African Religion, though related to African culture but not identical with it, is affirmed, one should then look at the possibility of coexistence between African Religion and Christianity in Africa. Inculturation would mean, from the perspective of coexistence that Christianity stops making efforts to "swallow up or otherwise eliminate"<sup>31</sup> African Religion. Closely related to mutual respect is that both Christianity and African Religion state, in all honesty, the concepts and values that are constitutive of their complex identities that are non-negotiable. These concepts and values may be respected if they do not go against the basic function of religion – the promotion of life.

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<sup>30</sup>Magesa, *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate, From Intolerance to Coexistence*, Zurich: Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wein, 2010, 52.

<sup>31</sup>Magesa, *African Religion in the Dialogue Debate*, 69

With the irreconcilables stated, Magesa advocates for tolerance between African Religion and Christianity, because tolerance makes sense only when differences are insurmountable. As Paul Copan says, "Contrary to popular definitions, true tolerance means 'putting up with error' - not 'being accepting of all views'...It is because real differences exist between people that tolerance becomes necessary and virtuous."<sup>32</sup> Magesa's plea<sup>33</sup> for tolerance is supported by what he believes African Religion can contribute to the world religious heritage. This means that while inculturating Christianity in Africa, one should pay attention to the way the African Religion relates to the African culture. The relationship and function of African Religion in African society would indicate to Christianity how best to take root in African soil and soul.

### **Conclusion: Where the Future Lies**

As indication to where inculturation should go from the current effort, let me mention four voices that are still silent in the inculturation efforts in Africa. The first one is the women's voice and is not yet clearly heard. This is not to say that the voice of African women theologians are lacking. The point rather is that this voice is infused into the whole feminist theological liberation movement. While such efforts are not completely outside inculturation in the broadest sense given in the general understanding of inculturation indicated in the background to efforts of inculturation, they are not specifically inculturation theology in the strict sense analyzed in the development of this work. It will be advantageous to see the feminist perspective to the past and present efforts of inculturation in Africa.

It has been suggested that inculturation is an ecclesiastical affair. This means that efforts of inculturation are rather placed within institutional self-understanding of the Church. For Africa if new efforts of inculturation are to really take off, there is need to analyze and set aside the superficial and transitory manifestation of Christianity so that it could concentrate on the Church's deepest and most permanent structures. It is the duty of Africans to do this stripe-search for the wider Christian community because it is in their interest the Church's institutions are decongested. The efforts we see from different quarters about decentralization of the Church are more about power devolution than interest in inculturation.

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<sup>32</sup>Paul Copan, *True for You but Not for Me: Deflating the Slogans that Leave Christians Speechless*, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998.

<sup>33</sup>Pages 75–88 are a long plea from Magesa for Christianity to change its attitude towards African Religion. He believes that if Christianity emphasizes the 'Spirit Ecclesiology,' it would have lots more creedal notions in common with African Religion. I opt not to comment on this part because I believe he was apologetic for Christian purpose.

From the fruits of stripping Christian institution to the basic, the final orientation that the new effort of inculturation in Africa should take is to bring some naughty issues about African cultural beliefs and request for a special consideration of African sensitivity if the issue cannot be reconciled to Christian practice. Let us take the question of what constitute marriage. The determinant of Christian marriage is consent: a singular and momentous act that lasts till the death of one of spouse. But in African culture, marriage is a *process*. It has contours and full of meta-analysis. If we take the difference between Christian understanding of marriage and the African cultural principles on marriage, we will understand better the constitution of families, relationships and faith. Since the Church is a witness to Christian families, it cannot ignore what leads to authentic family life in Africa. Since African culture is so desirous of meeting Christianity as equals in dialogue, it cannot underestimate the salvific elements that Christianity is proposing in its understanding of marriage.