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THE PLACE OF CULTURE IN CHURCH GROWTH IN NIGERIA

Peter Olanrewaju Awojobi, PhD

Department of Religions, History & Heritage Studies, Kwara State University, Malele, Kwara State, Nigeria

Email- pawojobi@yahoo.com or peterawojobi@gmail.com

Abstract

Culture is a universal Phenomenon and inseparable from humans. Every people/ group or religion is a product of a culture. In most cases every human activity is guided and expected to conform to the culture that is operative in that particular society. One of the things that culture does is that it regulates the behaviour of the people. This paper examined the place of African Culture in the Growth of the Church in Nigeria. Historical method was used for this study. It was discovered that for the gospel message to make the expected impact in the society it must imbibe the culture of the targeted audience. The Church in Nigeria grew rapidly with the rise of African Indigenous churches that contextualized the gospel message as converts from other religions embraced Christianity. Also, there was migration of Christians from the mainline to the African indigenous churches. It is essential that the gospel message be contextualized in order to share it effectively in every culture around the world.

Key words: Culture, Church Growth, African Indigenous churches, Nigeria.

Introduction

It is believed in many quarters that culture has a crucial role to play in the religious belief of a people or nation. In fact, religious books are believed to be written in the cultural situation of their first recipients. For instance, the Bible is said to be written in the culture of the Jewish people. It is crucial to note that culture is as old as the world.

From the inception of the world, culture has largely influenced the lifestyle of the people. In Africa, culture is seen as a way of life of the people. The Africans are greatly influenced by their cultural heritage. However, when Christianity came to African continent some cultural practices were thrown away as being demonic. The church in Nigeria today has been greatly influenced by multicultural practices. Imposition and adaptation of different cultural beliefs and practices is one of the cankerworms that have eaten deep into the Liturgy of the Church today. It appears that the church has borrowed from her host culture. The question is: What role does culture play in Religion? Is the church expected to imbibe the culture of the host community? Is there Bible or Christian culture? What is the impact of African culture on the growth of the church in Nigeria?

Culture Examined

Culture covers areas like religion, art, agriculture, marriage, philosophy etc. It is sometimes expressed in worship, music, stories, proverbs, riddles, myths, legends etc. In fact, it can be said that culture covers all aspects of life. It is therefore difficult to define.

According to White, Culture is "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (White, 2009). Culture is the totality of knowledge and behavior, ideas and objects that constitutes the common heritage of society. It embraces all that the society knows and practices (Gayle, 1994: 4). Culture is the way the people live (Oyalana, 2000: 73). It consists of a system of ideas values, beliefs, knowledge, and customs transmitted from one generation to another within a community or group (Oyalana, 2000: 73).

Furthermore, Culture is the way of life of the people

in a given area. This way of life includes arrangements and methods of obtaining food from the environment and adapting to it. It includes rules and regulations that govern people's behavior in a particular society (Oyalana, 2000: 73). The culture of a people group is embedded in their beliefs, rules behavior, language, rituals, art, and technology, style of dress, ways of producing and cooking food, religion, politics and economic system (Cohen, 1974).

1). Culture distinguishes one human group from others.

It is an integrated system of beliefs or values, about what is true, good, beautiful and accepted as the custom of the people. In other words it is how to behave, relate to others pray, dress, work, play, eat etc. It also embraces the institutions which express these beliefs, values and customs which binds a society together and gives it a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity (Clement, 1989: 13). Culture is the things people learn and share in a group that will help them survive together. Culture is shown in the way a people or group organizes their World (Howell, 2002: 3).

It is a people's way of life, all the different customs, and values learned from their forebears, family and environment which together unite all the different aspects of their life into a logical whole. Culture also includes things as language or languages spoken, the way by which politics and the economy are organized, the other unspoken rules governing social religious behavior, interpretation of the psychological reasons for actions. In fact, all aspects of life have cultural dimensions. Individuals are both shaped by their culture and contribute to shaping it by their own actions and thoughts (Okorocho, 2006).

It is clear from the above assertion that culture is dynamic. It is not static but developing. In fact, culture is part of our daily living. Our cultural values are learned and shared through imitation and personal experience and

through indoctrination or teaching. This learning process is a lifelong process. It started from childhood and continues to adulthood. As one assumes new position or roles, he continues to learn the ways of life that best suit his status in the society. The content of what he learns varies from society and from a particular ethnic group to another. In a nutshell, culture is a continuous process.

Furthermore, culture is any voluntary action that has been developed in a national or tribal community (Wundt, 1971: 374). It is all forms of spiritual, intellectual, religious, and ethical life in man (Kato, 1976: 37). It is best understood as humanity's efforts to assent its inner and independent being. With the idea of culture, man is able to live a life of contemplation rather than one of conquest and his attention is directed towards the remote rather than the immediate. Culture is a pattern of learned behavior, knowledge and benefit which are integrated in accordance with some dominant values or principles forming configurations which may be totally different from one another. In other words, culture differs one from another. It depends largely on the value and principles on which they are based. Culture is the totality of knowledge and behavior, ideas and objects that constitute the common heritage of a society. Religion is the heart of culture. This is because every aspect of life is given meaning and direction by religion (Kato, 1976: 37).

Some of the social and cultural values of the society "are relationships, selflessness, hospitality and a spirit of inclusiveness (Nhinola, 2005: 56-67). It is on these that the culture of most societies rested. Culture is the cultivation of human mind via education and Training (Ogunkunle, 2005: 53-66). It is the moral law, custom and any other capabilities acquired by a man from the society where he lives (Goodenough, 1996: 291). It is the integrated pattern of human knowledge, beliefs, customs, taboos, codes,

institutions, tools, techniques, works, rituals, ceremonies and other related component (Taylor, 1987: 782-786). Development of culture in a given society depends on the capacity, of man to learn and transmit knowledge to succeeding generations. Every one inherits and makes contributions to culture (Greutz, 1973: 96). Culture is therefore the concepts, habits, skills, art, and instruments institution of a given people in a given period (Webster, 1978: 444).

Also, culture is a design for living. It is how society adapts itself to its physical and social environment. It is a way of thinking, feeling, and believing. Culture is always learned. People learn culture from parents, neighbours and 'the-society' It is not biologically determined or restricted by race. Culture cannot be or ice As angularly It is custom of the general society.

It should be noted that culture constantly change. This is because of new system, or innovations, internal pressure and cross-cultural borrowing. Culture is a regular culturing; an adaptation that 'attracts changes over a period of time either technologically, sociologically and ideologically.

Church Examined

To some people a church is a building. A church is a people. It is a voluntary fellowship of believers in Christ. Church is an English word derived from the Greek word *Kuriakon* meaning belonging to the world. The-New Testament word used for church is *Ekklesia* which literally means "the called out ones". The church is the people that have been called out. It is the body of Christ. The assembly of believers in Christ which are-called out, baptized by the Holy Spirit into His body and joined to the Lord and to one another by the Holy Spirit (Awojobi, 2001: 3).

In the original secular Greek, the word was used to describe a political gathering or an assembly (Murphy,

2000: 202). Out of 114 uses of *Ekklesia* in the New Testament, it was used in 109 times to describe the community of God's people (Elwell, 1979: 95). A local church is an assembly of believers in Jesus, who have been washed baptized and who are organized to do God's will. They meet regularly for worship and fellowship. The local church is an organization as well as an organism in as much as it continues to grow and meet the purpose for which it was established.

The primary purpose of the Church is to evangelize the world and thereby produce mature, stable and holy Christians (John. 13:16; Lk. 10:1-20; Acts 1:1-8). The mission of the great commission to which the church is committed is to preach the total gospel of Christ and the unparalleled love of God (Awojobi, 2002: 2). The church was also established so that God might be given the praise and worship he deserves by his people (Isah. 43:21, Eph. 1:12).

Also, the Church is intended to bring out the best in God's plan for mankind. She is expected to set the pace for the world. By their good works, Christians reveal how people ought to live in their marriages, families, work, communities and in all relationships of life. History has revealed that the church has always been at the forefront of those movements in society which championed the mercy, goodness and justice of God. A good example of this was the abolition of slave trade by William Wilberforce who was encouraged by the church in Britain to spearhead it. The church also promoted Orphanages, schools for the blind and deaf, ministries to the handicapped and needy. It is the intention of God to use the church to restrain the world from becoming evil (O'Donovan, 1996: 164).

The Place of African Culture in the Growth of the Church in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation. It has over 250 ethnic groups. She is called the giant of Africa. Nigerians practice Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. Nigeria's first contact with Christianity could be dated as far back as the sixteenth century during the pre-colonial days through the Portuguese missionaries. The colonial days through Portugal came to Benin, Nigeria in first missionaries from Portugal came to Benin, Nigeria in 1514 (Falola & Adeniran, 1983: 83). Their missionary activities yielded fruits as converts were made and churches built. However, this could not be sustained because by 1733 Christianity has gone into extinction. Christianity was re-planted in Nigeria in 1842 by the Methodist missionary mission and its now spread like wildfire (Okonkwo, 1989: 40).

This nation has a rich cultural heritage. There is a strong tie between the citizens and their culture. In most communities in Nigeria, culture and religion are inseparable. Historically speaking, God is the author of culture. The human race developed into different languages and culture groups through the descendants of the sons of Noah (Gen. 10:4, 20; 31-32). The Bible informed us that at tower of Babel, God confused the language of the whole World. It was from here that they scattered over the face of the whole earth. (Gen. 11: 9). It was this event that led to different languages. People who spoke the same language started to live together and thus communities were formed based on common language. It is believed that it was these language groups that developed their own pattern of culture.

Jesus commanded his disciples to take the gospel of salvation to all nations (Matt. 28:28-18-20). That is to say, all the people's group or culture. The author of the book of Revelation reveals to us that when God's purpose on earth is

accomplished, there will be people from every ethnic group or culture gathered around his throne to worship him Rev. 5: 9-10; 10: 7:9-10). It is clear from these scripture that God sees every person on earth as belonging to a particular language, culture group (nation). His plan is that people from every culture would in Jesus Christ and become a part of his Church.

However, it has been observed that no church or Christian association can successfully communicate the gospel message by ignoring the culture of the people they intend to reach. The gospel will be seen as a threat to their culture which to them is the fabric of their society, their national or tribal solidarity (Stott, 1990:93). The gospel message is rejected in some quarters today because it is perceived as an attempt to impose their own culture and way of life.

To facilitate understanding of the place of culture on the church in Nigeria the issue will be discussed under the following headings:

Worship

Most of the worship patterns in our churches today are modeled after the church missionary societies that started them. The prayer book liturgies, clerical dress, musical instruments, hymn book etc were imported. Also imported were church system of Government and hierarchical order of Church officers (Niebuhr, 1989: 119). It should be noted that these patterns were eagerly adopted by the Nigerian Church.

However, when the indigenous churches came on board, some Christians preferred their mode of worship and as such migrated to those churches. Their services were not stereotyped. They design their programmes to meet the felt need of the worshippers (Alokan, 1999: 298).

Music

Music forms an integral part of the African culture. Every ethnic group in Nigeria has its own traditional music which she played at religious and social functions. From inception the church in Nigeria was used to Western music. The music in the church at that time was patterned after the Western culture. The white missionaries introduced their own music. Piano, Guitar, Organ, Flute, Violin, trumpet and so on were the musical instruments used in the church.

However, the African has many types of drums as part of their own culture. It is these drums that are used during different occasions, ceremonies, festivals, or worship. Examples of such drums are "Gangan", "Dundun", "Bata", "Apala", "Sekere", "Aro", "Kanago", and so on. Whenever these instruments are being played people are happy and feel fulfilled in worship. They also dance to the tune of the melodious music. Originally, when Christianity was introduced in the African continent, dancing during worship service was not part of it. Worship services were solemn. Culturally Africans love dancing. When indigenous African music was introduced more people "came into the church. This brought excitement, and joy to the worshippers. They are able to express themselves to God in their own culture. Today we sing choruses composed by Africans in our churches.

Prayers

When Christianity was first introduced on the soil of Africa it came with prayer books. These books were read during worship services. The name of Jesus was always mentioned at the close of the prayer session. Prayers were said quietly. This mode of prayer was strange to the African mind. He believes that prayers must be offered with concentration, zeal, and gestures of the hand and the head by the person praying and even by the members of the

congregation (Alokan, 1999: 298). He also believes in praying aloud. A high level of emotions displayed during prayer.

The African indigenous churches' mode of prayer tallies with the belief of the people. They organize different types of prayer meetings at different time and places. For instance they have vigils, pray at three hourly intervals from dawn to dusk. Venues of prayers include the church, the home, the hills or the mountains or the power house.

Moral Life

Understanding that the Church is the gathering of people with common opinion about God. The purpose of the Church is to praise and worship God who is the creator of man. The church has the responsibility of making all the nations (culture) or ethnic groups on the earth know God and glory in him. Members of the church are to live exemplary lives that are worthy of emulation (Alokan, 1999: 298). In the same fashion, every ethnic or cultural group in Africa especially Nigeria teaches high moral standard. Culture helps to shape and fashion the moral standard of the society.

It should be noted that biblical and African cultures do not support adultery, fornication, incest and other negative sexual practices. Both cultures are against indecent dressing. Women are not allowed to wear clothes that will expose their nakedness which may attract the male sex (Ibrahim, 2007: 16). Wearing of sexy dresses makes a woman an easy prey for men. Our culture teaches decent or moderate dressing.

Evangelism

Culture puts taste to what the church teaches or preaches. For proper understanding and application of the scriptures it must be contextualized. It is when a gospel

identify with the culture of the people that it will be accepted. It should be noted that every African Society is culturally based (Willowband, 1978: 72). Culture helps to integrate the idea of evangelizing the world by the church. For a group to be effectively reached with the gospel of Christ the church must adopt the instruments and tools of the society to convey the word of God to them.

Furthermore, culture, being a transmitted idea of one generation to another helps to broaden the knowledge of the church about the reality of the God we serve. Culture is older than the church (Willowband, 1978: 72). The Bible writers made use of the cultural materials available to them in their books. Culture educates the church on how to readily influence the society. The church learns from the society every day. Understanding the people, land and history is an instrument to measure the way of life of the people.

Giving of Names

Culture helps to maintain name and identity. Giving of name is customary and culturally bound (Gretz, 1962: 728). The Bible and the church are not strangers to this practice. For instance, in the Jewish community, names of cities and person are deeply rooted in their culture.

On the contrary to the Yoruba culture, many converts to Christianity were given new names that are not found in the Bible but in the Western culture simply because they were very easy to pronounce by the white missionaries. Those names include Richard, Vincent, Joy etc. But, salvation is a free gift from God and is not attached to any tribe, race name or culture. Names therefore are to be given in the understanding of our identity rather than imposition of Western culture. God values all tribes, particularly those who recognize him through Jesus Christ. Bearing names of our language and culture would never grieve God to

abscond our Christian community. Today Christians bear names like Ohuwatosin, Jesuseun, Ayodeji, Titilayo, Abiola etc.

Nigerians worship the living God in different cultures today. Our culture helps to understand ways of appreciating and serving God better. For instance, the Yoruba people value the existence of God and as such have different titles from the cultural imagination to appreciate the goodness and the favour received from God.

Conclusion

It is clear from the study that the church of Jesus is within a culture and it is cultured. The place of culture on the church is positively inseparable which helps to take the gospel to the unreached. It is essential that the gospel message be contextualized in order to share it effectively in every culture around the world. Syncretism should not be allowed. It is therefore expedient for the church to be deeply rooted in the scripture and to develop her own understanding of the interrelation of the gospel and culture with reference to God's revelation, the interpretation and the communication of it and help the church to respond to their conversion and lifestyle of the people. We must always remember as Christians that our primary identity is not in a particular culture, but in Jesus Christ, one Lord, one Faith and one baptism (Eph. 4:3-6).

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THE CONCEPT OF RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AMONG THE APOLOGISTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH (AD 160-430): A SEARCH FOR SOLUTION TO THE RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION IN NIGERIA

By

Pastor Azanor Eddy Thompson

M.A Student, Department of Religious Studies and Philosophy
Delta State University

Abstract

Religious liberty is all the more becoming an issue of great concern in Nigeria with the unprecedented killings, kidnappings, forced conversions, land grabbing, burning of churches and raiding of Christian villages. But one big problem is that the government and our politicians have not protected the peoples' inalienable right to believe and practice their faith according to the dictates of their consciences as enshrined in the nation's federal constitution. This work examined the concept of religious liberty among the early church apologists and the relevance of the arguments that are rooted in the very nature of God and the essence of true worship. The fact that the religious policies of politicians and leaders, like Emperor Constantine, were informed by the writings of these thinkers and that of modern nations, shows how relevant they can be in the Nigerian context. Our political and religious leaders will do well to consider the principles advanced by writers like Tertullian and Lactantius in the context of the Nigerian federal constitution to ensure peaceful coexistence in a multi-religious country.

Introduction

The concept of religious liberty among the Christian religious and philosophical thinkers of the second to the fourth centuries, who argued not only in favour of Christian doctrines and practices but also for religious liberty, known as the apologists, sure has a strong relevance for twenty-first century Christianity, especially in Africa and Nigeria in particular. This is especially so since Nigeria is pluralistic or diverse in faith with

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