



Selected Bibliocentric and Socio-Cultural Practices and Necessity of Inculturation Hermeneutics in the Yoruba Context

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Abstract. Certain cultural practices were allowed by Yahweh of Israel in order to pass His message to His people. In this regard, the Canaanite cultural influences and environmental factors on some Jewish conceptions about their God, Yahweh Elohim could not be covered. Examples are attributing meteorological features to Yahweh in the Sinaitic and Exodus Traditions, such as “pillars of cloud”, “fire”, “sounding of trumpets”, a reminiscence of thunder from Baal, the active god of the Canaanites, mountain patronage, theophoric names, building of altars and sacrificing on them to God and the rest of them could not be denied in order to show elements of inculturation and enculturation. It examined the gap that Christianity and its mission activities cannot only be hermeneutically spread through Eurocentric hermeneutics, which would amount to a fallacy, and which would make Christianity a foreign religion to the Africans that has no bearing to the African religious sensibilities and existential needs. This study filled this gap by drawing attention of the Africans to similar cultural practices in the Bible as they have the same and demonstrated that God of the Bible is also for the Africans. It also focused on the selected bibliocentric cultural practices found on the pages of the Judeo-Christian sacred text in the African context. It examined these cultural practices during the biblical world and juxtaposed them with similar African cultural practices. We located where certain biblical practices are similar to the African socio-cultural practices and how it could better illustrate the teaching of the Bible to the Africans with the tool of “inculturation hermeneutics” for the exegetes. Finally, it argues for the necessity of inculturation hermeneutics and summed up that inculturation hermeneutics is the lasting solutions to entrenching biblical hermeneutics to the Africans and the survival of Christianity in this century.

1. Introduction

The involvement of the inculturation hermeneutics in the biblical interpretation in a peculiar context such as African setting cannot be underrated. The survival and advancement of Christianity in a foreign land depends on its ability to adapt to the culture of the people it spreads its tentacle to. Inculturation Hermeneutics remains a major tool in the hands of the frontiers of the biblical teaching and the missionaries of Christianity to gain upper hands among the competitive religions that are struggling for the souls of the people to be converted. The richness or shallowness of the presence of Christianity in a foreign land is undoubtedly dependent on its sensitivity to the cultures of the natives it has contact with or encounters.

One reality about Christianity is the fact that it is global religion. It has spread to many tongues, peoples and nations under the planet heavens. Akinade (2010, xvi) supports this view when he submits that “this atmosphere has engendered new and creative insights from Christians all over the world that are spreading considerable amount of energy in defining Christianity on their own terms.”¹ People who have contact with Christianity and embrace the Judeo originating religion, termed Christianity, after the Jewish Preacher from Galilee, Jesus Christ and His disciples from various classes of the society, have claimed it to be their own religion and are trying to situate or localize it to their situations or conditions. This “religious possession” by the natives has changed the face of Christianity worldwide. “They have claimed Christianity as their own and they are expressing their faith with stupendous gusto and confidence (Akinade, 2010).

As a global religion, Christianity cannot remain the same or static with Euro-centric face, liturgy, dressing, preaching and expressions. Coming in contact with other natives and peoples with relevant cultures,

inculturation hermeneutics is inevitable. There were many obstacles before Christianity in its inception era, but with divine backing, it navigated across the Mediterranean world and spreads to different cultures. Landing in many different lands and cultures, there have been many forms and expressions of Christianity in the garb of many cultures. It could be affirmed that ability to have elements of cross-cultural contacts and adaptation to the culture it found itself is a life wire of Christianity in these areas. Where its frontiers had been excessively rigid and Euro-centrally inclined to the core, the Christian faith did not have grip footing. Christianity is more diffused now than before in its spread to other nations.

Selected Bibliocentric Cultural Practices in African Context

Undoubtedly, there are evidence of cultural practices, similarities and tendencies in the Judeo-Christian sacred text that are found in African cultural contexts. Suffice to say that these selected bibliocentric cultural practices show that certain cultures in a nation could be found in another tribe. It should be affirmed that the Holy Bible has its own peculiar cultures and it emerged within certain cultural milieu. The divine Author of the Scriptures, the Holy Bible allowed, under His providence, and used certain social-cultural practices to pass His message across to His people and other nations. It is certain that for the Divine to pass His message to the humans, there is a necessity to use human cultures, customs, languages and traditional practices to disseminate and interpret His messages for proper humankind understanding. Among numerous examples, we would select few to buttress our point.

2. The Circumstance- Names and Naming in African Context

Certain names came up in the Jewish culture, which are reflected on the pages of the Bible in order to show that they are circumstance-names (Bruce, 1989:245). For instance, after the death of Abel, who was killed by Cain, Adam gave birth to another son. He gave him a name, Seth, according to the circumstance he found himself. He said, *For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel who Cain killed* (cf. Gen. 4:25). By giving him the name, Seth, Adam found in him a replaced person in the position of Abel. Abel had vacated his position as the second born of Adam through an untimely death from the hand of Cain but Seth had come to fill that position. In a typical Yoruba parlance, such a circumstance is well at home. Investigation revealed taht having lost a son in any Yoruba family, traditionally and culturally, the next birth that survives will be given a names such as “Ropo”, or “Firopo”. This is a pointer that the family

has lost a son or girl. At times, “Ropo” could carry a theophoric prefix or root, “Oluwafiropo”, meaning, “God has replaced the deceased with this one”. All this is to show the circumstance that revolves around his birth. We can say, Seth is the Hebrew name for Yoruba name “Ropo” or “Firopo”.

Another circumstance name is Isaac, meaning, Laughter as given by Sarah, having waited for eighty nine years. In Isaac, Sarah found circumstance of the birth of Isaac to laugh. (Gen. 21:1-7). The circumstance that revolved around the birth of Esau and Jacob called for their names- Esau, meaning Red or Hairy and Jacob meaning, Supplanter (Gen. 25: 21-25). The name, Reuben in Genesis 29: 31-32, Joseph in Genesis 30:22-24, Moses in Exodus 2:1-10, Samuel in First Samuel 1:20 and Ichabod in I Samuel 4:19-22 portray circumstance-name. These are also found in traditional names. Certain names such as

Malomo, Do not go or Do not die again

Durojaiye Stay with me or Do not depart (standing for Do not die again)

Kosoko There is no more hole for digging graveyard

These are all names of circumstance. The tool of inculturation hermeneutic approach to interpret Genesis 4:1-15, 25-26, will be meaningful to the African mothers who have experienced infanticide for years. Equating Jewish or biblical Seth with a Yoruba Ropo, Firopo and/or Oluwaropo will be more meaningful to the Africans with the tool of inculturation hermeneutics in face of infanticide and/or any other disaster in the family.

3. Biblical Theophoric Names in the African Context

Theophoric names are common in the Bible among the ancient Jews. Such names include Joshua, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Samuel, Eli, Elimelech, Eliab, Eliakim, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and so on. Joshua, meaning, Yahweh is Salvation; Isaiah from Hebrew *Yesha'yahu* with its shortened form *Yashaiah* means Yahweh is salvation; Jeremiah from Hebrew *Yirmeyahu* or *Yirmeyah* literally means Yahweh throws, Yahweh Establishes, Appoints, or Sends.” Ezekiel from the root *Yeheziel* means God strengthens or “Strengthened by God; Samuel- Heard by God or the name of God (see preface to the Books in the Bible); Eliab-My God is My Father and so on among others. These are Jewish traditional religious names that show and identify the bearers with their God. People bore names in the ancient near east and the Semitic world for various reasons that are very similar to the Africans. Abba (1989, 245), Rankin (1956, 157)

and Baur (1970, 611) have asserted reasons for given names among the Semites and their influence on the Jews. Olanisebe (2012, 74), in support of these reasons, submits that these factors include circumstances surrounding the birth of the child... the religious and social occasions happening during the birth of the child.

The Africans, especially the Yoruba, Ibo, Tiv, Igala, Nupe and others bore names associated with their traditional gods before their encounter with the Christianity. Examples of the Yoruba names associated with their divinities and gods are:

- Ogunbowale, meaning, Ogun, the god of iron has come home;
- Ogunsola, meaning, Ogun gives honour,
- Ogundare, meaning, Ogun justifies someone
- Sangogboye, meaning, Sango, god of thunder, has won a chieftaincy or excellence,
- Faleyimu, meaning, Ifa god of oracle, has overtaken this one, Faleti, Ifa has ears to hear
- Osunwole, water goddess comes home and so on.

Examples of Ibo names associated with their divinities are:

- Onyedikachi, meaning, who is like God
- Chukwuemeka, meaning, God has done great things
- Chizaramu, meaning, God has answered me or God answers me
- Okechukwu, meaning, God's own
- Chukwudi, meaning, there is God
- Chidima, meaning, God is good
- Chizoba, meaning, God saves

These names do not “folklorize” (Manus, 2002, 49-67) their religious beliefs in their gods only, they also bring or connect the past with the present their faith in them. The importance and meanings of names are well at home with the Africans. The Christians with theophoric and compound names such as Oluwaseun, Jesutofunmi, Olorunfemi, Jesufemi, Tijesuni, Jesulonimi, Olorungbeja, Olorundare, Oluwadarasimi and so forth will understand better the meanings and religious rationale and factors behind their names. The nature, reasons, purposes and circumstance surrounding their names as expressed in these names, the “dictated” destiny through the names they bear and how to protect their names are exposed to the bearers. Or how would African Christian converts know the in-depth meanings of their names beyond religious titles unless it is interpreted to them with the tools of inculturation hermeneutic, especially when they have bearing and similarities with the biblical theophoric

names? This is the work of a biblical exegete using what they know already and using inculturation Hermeneutics tool to “net the goal”.

4. Death Bed Speeches, Or Patriarchal Blessings and Curses in Africa Milieu

Falola (2016, 136) reiterates the reality of death among the Africans and its relatedness and connectivity with religious rites, celebrations and sacrifice. Precisely, he asserts that “culture (*asa*) and religion (*esin*) are interlocked and both involve services and duties to God, gods, goddesses, spirits, and to human beings. According to him, “people (the dead) are usually buried in their places of birth... Birth and death are united by land and identity (Falola, 136). The dead are buried into the bosom of the earth, mostly in Yoruba cultural practices. Rites are performed in order to bring the dead close to the family and community, where the living can contact them, seek their favour, prayer, guidance in times of disasters, calamities, existential needs and further communication and communion (Falola). All these forms of ancestors’ veneration are rooted in Africa. As a result of the beliefs in the “existence” of the dead in the incorporeal worlds and close proximity of the departed ones to the living, their last wishes and speeches are not treated with levity because they are viewed as the “living dead” wishes to be carried out by their posterity.

African religion(s) is intimately associated with the reality of speeches of the elders. The blessings and curses from the old parents and elders in African society are never toiled with by the posterity. At least, there are two prominent death bed speeches recorded in the Bible. The first one is Jacob’s blessings and speeches to his children in Genesis 49. Jacob had attained an old age and about to die but before he passed on, he called his children and blessed them. The blessings were in three divisions:

One, Blessings for children that served him, pleased him through their character. Two, curses on the children that did not meet these criteria. The third category was in general statements about the future of the children. The second-death bed speeches were those of David to Solomon in I Kings 2:1-9. He was well aware that he would soon die, I Kings 2:1-2a; Solomon was to be strong and prove that he is a man, that is, matured enough to take charge of the control of the nation as the king after him. Solomon was instructed to keep to pure Yahwism; observe the Torah, Law of Moses, the “ways”, “statutes”, “commandments”, “judgements” and “testimonies” of Yahweh. The purposes are: one, Solomon would prosper if he followed the instruction. Two, God

would fulfil His covenant for him and three that Davidic dynastic might be established through him. Death sentences were passed over Joab and Shimei for their evils but the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite were to be spared and allowed to eat with Solomon on his table. These instructions detailed the wishes of David after his death, which he could not do while alive but to be executed by Solomon.

These patriarchal blessings and/or death bed speeches from Jacob, David and even Joseph in Genesis 50:22-26 show a Jewish cultural practices and in the Semitic world. The belief was that the aged fathers possessed higher authority and power, capable of conferring blessings, curses, futuristic sayings to the children and post-death wishes they wanted their posterity to execute. African fathers with grey hairs are also considered to be religiously powerful while on earth and spiritually potent to command respect, obedience and obeisance from their living ones. It is believed that what they have said or say is bound to be accompanied by powers of word and carry authority of fulfilment. These similarities in the bibliocentric cultures and African cultures cannot be fully interpreted with Euro-centric tools to the Africans and thus opens for inculturation hermeneutics to the Africans. The biblical exegetes have already gained a watered ground through this medium to make these instances known to their hearers. The evils in the speeches of their fathers could be reversed by the higher authority of the God of the Bible. It is no wonder that portions of the Bible such as the Gospel of John 1:1-5 and the epistle of Apostle Paul to the Galatians, chapter 3:13 and Colossians 2:14-16 are often quoted by the Africans while dealing with wrongly spoken words by the ancestors against them. This is to show the pragmatic nature of the religion in Africa.

5. Child Bearing and Adoption in Jewish Conception and Cultural Practices

This first birth on earth, which is recorded in the Bible, is in Genesis 4:1-2. The "occasion-name", Cain, Eve gave to her first born showed that she cherished child-bearing as one of the cardinal blessings of Yahweh to His creatures (cf. Gen. 1:28) after the fall. The infanticide that Adam suffered on Abel, through Cain was a painful one (cf. Gen. 4:25). The quest for child-bearing in the life of Abraham in Genesis 15:1-3 and the promise that followed (cf. Gen. 12:3; 15:4-5; 18:9-14); the prayer of Isaac and his plea that Rebekah his wife should conceive in Genesis 24:20-26; the struggle between Leah and Rachael for child bearing showed the importance of child bearing in the ancient Jewish socio-cultural beliefs and practices. Both the Deuteronomistic blessings in Deuteronomy 7:12-13,

28:1-14 and Davidic covenant contain the blessings of posterity-2 Sam. 7:1-17. The case study of Hannah in I Samuel 1:6-2:5 also shows how important child bearing was to the Jews. It is conceived as a curse and denial of divine blessing if one was barren among the Jews or a punishment from God (cf. Gen. 25:21; 29:31, 30:1-2. 2 Sam. 6:23). Child bearing was significant to the Jews for certain reasons.

- To enjoy the Abrahamic covenant
- To maintain their family line among their tribes
- To continue in the race and the posterity as Jews.
- To inherit the land as promised to Abraham's descendants

The same thing goes for adoption of children through a slave as in the case of Sarah and Hagar in Genesis 16 and cases of Leah, Zilpah, Rachel and Bilhah in Genesis 29:15-30: 24. In a situation where legitimate wives could not give birth to a child, the slaves or handmaids would be married to the husbands and their children would be that of the legitimate wife or wives. The Africans, especially the Yoruba have the same socio-cultural practice that is welcomed. In order to show the importance of child-bearing, the Yoruba have some coded words to describe this. Such include: *Omo l'ere aye*, meaning, children are the lasting gains or rewards or profits on earth; *omo niyun, omo nide*, meaning, children are gold and bronze, *omo l'aso* or *omo l'aso mi*, meaning, children are my clothes for a cover.

Children are the greatest jewels and wealthy possessions because *iyun* and *ide* in Yoruba cultural settings are the priceless and most expensive ornaments, so they compare such with children, even though children could not be bought with money. According to Falola (2016), reproduction maintains this connection. Thus, the most disturbing problem is childlessness to the mothers. Without children, wealth, education, peace, fame and glory become loathsome. Anyone with children is rich because children can go beyond the heights of their parents, take care of them at old age and survive them. Infertility is seen as a great sign of human deprivation and denial of survival after death by the children. In order to procure religious solutions to the causes of infertility among the Yoruba, there is divinity in charge of children and fertility. It is called *Kori*, the Yoruba children divinity. She is a divinity in charge of caring for the children. Adebajo (1989, 12) supports this when he affirms that "the greatest benefit derivable from *Kori* is the gift of children... guides the children in their day to day undertakings. The care and guidance is always total

that within a short time the children would have grown and multiplied. The inter cultural relatedness of these cultural beliefs and practice in both Jewish culture and Yoruba culture calls for inculturation hermeneutics. It is a ground well prepared for the biblical exegetes to plant the seed of the word in African soil and souls of the hearers.

Levirate Marriages, Burial rites and Mountain Veneration Versus Bibliocentric Cultural Practices and Inculturation Hermeneutics in African Context

Levirate marriage is another bibliocentric cultural practice in ancient Israel. Levirate marriage is a kind of marriage where a male who is a relative of the deceased gets married to the surviving wife and continues his lineage. (cf. Dt. 25:5-10; Ruth 4) This is found in among the Yoruba though not common in the cities nowadays but among the natives in rural areas. Many children have come out of this kind of marriage. Another one is the burial rites of parents, heroes and kings in ancient Israel seemed to have affinities with cultural practices in Yoruba cultures. The Semitic ancestry from where Abraham hailed from had influenced this practice in Israel. Burial grounds and graves were considered as sacred places and preserved. It was a cultural practice among the Jews to bury their ancestors in the same burial vicinity and caves- (cf. Gen. 23:1-20; 2:7-10.5). Isaac “was gathered to his people”, probably he was buried in the same cave of his parents. (cf. Gen. 35:27-29). Jacob was buried in the cave that is in the land of Machpelah- Gen. 49:29-33 where Abraham and Sarah were buried.

Kings were buried in the same city and graveyard. David and Solomon were buried in the City of David (1 Kgs. 2:10; 1 Kgs. 11:41-43). Rehoboam, Jehosaphat, Abijam, Asa and the rest of Kings in Judah were buried in the city of David (1 Kgs. 14:19; 31; 15:24, 22:50; 2 Kgs. 9:28); except Manasseh who was buried in his own garden (2 Kgs. 21:18) and Joash who was not buried in the graveyards and tombs in Jerusalem. Tombs of the Jewish ancestors were part of the chief concerns of Nehemiah while in captivity (Neh. 2:1-3). Burial grounds of ancestors are preserved also in the Yoruba cultural practices. This is a factor for ancestors’ veneration in African society.

Mountain veneration, patronage and mountaineering (Alabi, 2013, 44-45) occupy a conspicuous space in Exodus and Wilderness Traditions in the Pentateuchal Narratives. Riggren (1966, 46) submits that the Sinaitic Tradition betrayed the Canaanite culture and influence in the Jewish conception of sacred places and mountain veneration. The patronage of other sacred places such as rivers and pool such as the River

Jordan and Siloam for healing respectively (cf. 2 Kgs. 5; Jn. 9: 1-7); sacred sites such as Gethsemane, pilgrimage to religious sites, the Temple and Synagogues are countenanced in the Bible. The incorporation of musical instrument, emotional dancing, the case of David in 2 Samuel 6:14-16 for instance are all at home with the African Christians. The transference of features of animal and qualities from nature to God in praises as witnessed in the Poetic books and the Psalter in particular point to cultural similarities in Africa. These are religious affinities in the Judeo-Christian sacred book with African religious cultural traditions, similarities and practices. They are equally open doors for inculturation hermeneutics in Africa.

Compelling Necessity of the Inculturation Hermeneutics in African Context

Reading through Acts of the Apostles 17 in particular, Christianity came across different cultural practices and religion. Paul sensing the level of the religiosity of people, and he found people of other religious cultures. Yet he could still direct them to the true God and another culture of new gospel of repentance and doctrine of resurrection from the dead. Paul understood the force of adaptation of his gospel in another culture. As the Greek language has a linguistic migration and cultural movement to the Hellenized world including the Jewish nation and Roman Empire, Christianity also demonstrated its migrating power and religious capability to cross to other nations, peoples and cultures. On landing on another man’s land and cultures, it cannot be the same again.

Christianity did not survive on mono-cultural influence or factor even in the early years of its existence. The influence of Hellenistic language, Greek, (*koine* Greek), common Greek, certain forms, thoughts, terms, ideas, theological ideas and the rest betrayed the influence of inculturation in the Christianity. The biblical concepts, forms, thoughts, ideas and theological teaching are better expressed to the natives through their own cultural ideas, practices, forms, expressions and context. This calls for inculturation hermeneutics that appeals to the people rather than Euro-centric approaches. The linguistic force and meaning of “Amen” in Hebrew could be better illustrated with its Yoruba cognate *Aṣẹ* (Adodo, 2004, 34-36), which literally means “authoritatively confirmed” or “confirmed by authority”. A Yoruba man who says “Amen” to a prayer offered for him might not understand the potency of the word but a traditional Yoruba man who says *Aṣẹ* to a blessing offered for him by an elderly person would better understand the force and/or authority of what is said.

This is because the cultural interpretation of the word *Aṣẹ* in Yoruba would mean so much to him than the Anglo-Saxon “Amen” that he says liturgically to the blessings.

6. Impacts of Translations of Bible into Other Languages and Inculturation Hermeneutics

The translation of the Bible into local languages has already shifted the paradigm from the centre of gravity to Afro centric arena, where the locals would see the message of the living God as their message and proclaim it as its frontiers and possess its blessings as its beneficiaries. A great strategic step was taken for inculturation hermeneutics through the translation of the Bible into various and different native languages. The translation of the Bible into numerous languages of the local doctrine does not support the idea that Christian message is a form of or an expression of any “culture imperialism”. Its translations to other tongues rather affirm the original and relevance of other cultures, customs and practices in cultural hermeneutics. And Christianity in the way appreciates, recognizes, affirms, adopts, adapts and utilizes the cultural and traditional practices and values of the peoples and nations that God sends his message (Sammeh, 2003).¹⁸ By implications, this shows that one, God accommodates inculturation and enculturation in the divine task of extending the works of the mission and evangelism. Two, God appreciates the fact that no matter how crude the cultural and traditional values and practices of some “unconverted ones” are, the missionaries or preachers cannot reach them outside their languages. This calls for inculturation hermeneutics. Three, of course, the missionary coming to preach to the nations has his own culture and it is a vehicle of preaching to people of other cultures; it is because Christianity first came to his land and culture that he could also make these factors vehicles of reaching the unreached. Or how could the natives see the message as their own in Hebrew, Latin or Greek language yet they are being told that God is for them? How can they be told to jettison the evident similarities in their traditional values and cultural practices to the biblical cultures, customs, and practices, yet we say the Bible is for them? This again calls for the necessity of inculturation hermeneutics. There cannot be proper and meaningful understanding of the message of the missionary if it is clothed and crowned in the cultures that are dominantly foreign to the natives.

The spread of Christianity to other cultures through translations of the Bible into local languages and rising of the local preachers cannot avoid the inevitability of

contextualization and inculturation hermeneutics. The local preachers cannot interpret certain sacred texts with meaningful applications to the natives without contextualizing the message. Gone are the days that Christian message was Euro-centric and colourized with Europeanized garbs and culture. It is without argument that contextualization enriches Christianity in a foreign land. It disrobes the imperialism of Euro-centricity. Using the wisdom, native knowledge and culture of the locals to spread and interpret the Bible is unavoidable as the sacred text witnessed, attested to and accommodated from its origin. Muonwe (2011, 31), addressing this factor, opines that the utilization of the wisdom, philosophy, and in fact, the entire cultural riches of each people in the process of evangelization has been the goal of the Church, since the second Vatican Council. It is a vital key to the promotion of Christianity in foreign lands. Nearly all the African theologians who trained in the Western world and Europe adopted tradition-historical methods of interpreting the Bible and Christian message before their audience. By implication, this form of interpretation is foreign to the natives and insensitive to their God-given identity, uniqueness and fails to appreciate their age long acceptable cultural sensibilities on the platform of religious parlance. It could be said that there is much disdain and disrespect for anything African by the westerners across board. But those missionaries who incorporated elements of African values with deep appreciations made headways than those who did not.

7. Universality of the Christian Mission and Salvific Message

The universality of Christianity and its very compelling message to the whole coupled with the Divine ownership of the cosmos negates exclusivistic inculturation hermeneutics in foreign lands. The Eurocentric preachers of Christian message and their claim to the Great Commission, which is universal, cannot be purely true if they are insensitive to the traditional values, customs, culture and practices of the locals. The compelling force of inculturation hermeneutics in African lands according to Sugirtharaja (1999, 11), “seek(s) to acquire and celebrate their God-given identity by delving into their indigenous resources” to interpret the Scripture in their own culturally relevant manner to their people. This makes the message of the loving God meeting their unique and existential needs as never before. The universality of the Great Commission, which the church is committed to, cannot be “a lone ranger” with Eurocentric hermeneutics and thrive among the natives. After all, God has given certain general revelation of Himself to other natives, tongues,

peoples and nations according to the Psalmist in Psalm 19:1-6 and the Epistle of Apostle Paul to the Romans in Romans chapter 1 verse 19-20. Inculturation hermeneutics, according to Adamo, may not be rightly observed by the westerners, “not because it is incomprehensible, untranslatable to indigenous languages, but because they (the African interpreters now using inculturation hermeneutics, emphasis mine), but because they employ ground rules which differ from the normal western rules set by the Eurocentric academy (Adamo, 2005, 2).

8. Local Charismatic Preachers and their Positives Waves

The indigenous discovery and acceptance of the Christian religion and message is rising daily. There are many charismatic preachers who now preach the gospel and control big audience and crowd. They are less concerned about the critical tools of interpreting the Scriptures but rather concern with how a particular text would meet the needs of their audience. Taking the text out of context is not their focus but pragmatic results among their audience. The *Aladura* (Owoeye, 2010:305) pioneers and frontiers, for instance, were not preoccupied with the tradition-historical approaches to the interpretation of the Scriptures but the power of the word to produce results that would meet the needs of their members. The new Pentecostals and new generation denominations practically believe in “noise and fire” mode of service for meeting the needs of their followers (Asaju, 2010, 96). These natives want to see how the universal Christian messages are relevant to their life and daily needs. Reading the passages of the Judeo-Christian sacred text, they are finding the relevance of the text to their situations. It should be noted that religion has never been theoretical or academic to the Africans but practical and pragmatic. If the message of God carries potent power that can produce results that meet existential needs of the people, the teaching, preaching, and utilization and interpretation of it must be result oriented and people oriented. If it must do this, inculturation hermeneutics is the wing on which it can fly, ride and thrive.

The fear of syncretism among the theologians and other custodians of Christian faith have risen to a level that it has become problematic to handle. Scholars such as Droogers and Greonfield (2001, 27), Ringgren (1966, 46), Shineller (1992, 52), Schreiter (1985, 145) and Pannenberg (1971, 86) among others have argued for and against the word “Syncretism” when there was debate on inculturation and African Christianity. We would like to call the attention of all to the fact that the cross is the centrality of the Christian message and the

Man that was hung on it for the redemption of humanity. These pivotal factors have no corresponding universal positive effects, power and authority among all the religio-cultural beliefs and practices of nations. For instance, the efficacies of the suffering and death of the suffering Servant of Yahweh as the Light to all nations have no parallel and the same effects as Isaiah prophesied (cf. Isa. 49-53). Specifically, Isaiah says:

*... It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
... I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth* (Isa. 49:6).

Again, in Isaiah 53:11, it says:

*He shall see the labour of His Soul, and be satisfied.
By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities.*

The heroic action and sacrifice of Moremi of her only son, Oluorogbo in Yoruba Epic for the deliverance of Ile-Ife people, was not a match for the salvation of the whole Yoruba race but only for Ile-Ife people during the invasion of Ugbo people in the past recent years. We argue for the power behind the Christian faith and message with its penetrating force to root out the origin of man’s problems, which is sin. The power behind Christian faith is God and His goal is to make His person and power known to all principalities that He sent His son to come and deal with them ruthlessly. This His son did through His atoning death and resurrection from the dead. Thereby, He offers life to all and Sundry that have faith in Him.

The goal of inculturation, according to Muonwe quoting Derrida, is integrating the Christian faith into a people’s culture in such a way that this faith becomes, so to say, their way of life (2011). In the course of doing this, inculturation adopts and utilizes the cultural ways of life of the people such as their religious beliefs where there are similarities with Christian beliefs, philosophy, morals, arts, customs, ethics, traditions, mores, sayings as Paul did in Athens (cf. Acts 17:28) and so on. The purpose among others is to create better understandings and illustrations from among the natives and their environments through sound intercultural exegesis.

Christianity as a revealed religion has its identity beyond mere mind illuminations of humankind. It has survived many oppositions, compromises, cultural infiltrations and/or pollutions. Inculturation hermeneutics does not mean loss of Christian faith and its identity. Rather, it creates better understandings through the illustrations from the native environments of the hearers of its message. As Muonwe (2011) has

submitted, “it seeks to make this identity ever more recognized and appreciated in any specific cultural context. At the same time... helps to promote those values within them that are reconcilable with the Christian faith (Muonwe). There are values, patterns, habits, forms, traditions, practices and beliefs of people in other nations that are compatible with Christian faiths. Inculturation hermeneutics calls for the usage of these elements either by the “foreign” missionaries or the indigenous Church preachers of the Christian faith and message.

9. Imperativeness of the Incarnation of Jesus and Inculturation Hermeneutics

The doctrine of incarnation of the Son of God, came to the world argues for the inculturation hermeneutics. If Jesus Christ had come in angelic or celestial form, no one could have stood to see a heavenly super imposed figure and believed His message of redemption. In fact, it would have been impossible for Him to be arrested, tried, condemned, crucified, died, buried and resurrected because He was in “Spirit” form that could not be approached by the humans. If God had not come “in human flesh”, the work of restoration and reconciliation would have been difficult. In as much as God defeated this celestial-terrestrial barrier, through incarnation, He has opened the way to eternal lesson of inculturation hermeneutics in African context. The message from heaven that the incarnated Jesus Christ brought was better understood because He used the “logos” of the Greek, the “light” of the Jews, the “vine”, “figs”, “bread”, “wine from the vine”, “the shepherd” of David’s conceptions, “mustard seed”, “wheat and tares” of the Jewish agricultural life, “the law of Moses” which the Jews were accustomed to, the “Temple”, which was the most sacred place of worship to the Jews, “the Passover feast” and so forth as His inculturation hermeneutical tools to speak to the Jews and convince them that He came from heaven. It will amount to cultural pride and religious insensitivity to ignore relevant cultural practices of people we are dealing with and feel that the message belongs to them at the same time.

It is a fact that two nations may have similar culture and traditional values, but they are not exact or carry the same traditional in-depths or meaning and appreciations. Here lies the richness of the two different cultures. The heavenly or divine culture was brought to the world through the incarnated Christ. Here is the honesty of Christianity that the Son of God came from heaven but used the Jewish culture, language and environment to preach His eternal and redemptive message to the lost world. If He had spoken in heavenly language, it would have been

meaningless to his hearers. He made His hearers sensitive and conscious to His message by pointing to and using common things in their environment. As a result, they felt at home and understood His message. Even on the cross, when He cried out “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani” the hearers knew that “Eli” means “My God”, which was a root of the name of a prominent prophet in the history of their nation, Elijah (cf. Mt. 27:46- 47; Mk. 15:34-35).

Waliggo (1986, 11-12) asserts this fact when he submits that inculturation is “the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by people of every culture, locality, and time. It is the continuous attempt to endeavour to make Christianity truly, “feel at home” in the cultures of each people (Muonwe). In other world, to preach the gospel of incarnated and *inculturated* Christ in a new culture without elements of such environment is to make Christianity a definitive foreign religion in its homeland. Experience has confirmed that where there has been cultural adaptation, enculturation, acculturation trans-culturation and inculturation within Christianity in a new environment, the natives embraced it more than where it is exclusivistic and insensitive to others culture (Uwineza, 2011:103-112). It is to “masquerading” Christianity with its salvific mission and foreign in look to the beholders. The emergence and revivals of the *Aladura* movements with their Africanized elements corroborates our argument for the necessity of inculturation hermeneutics. The *Aladura* incorporated the mode of worship and music (Adedeji, 2010:231-248) in African cultural practices to the gospel and thereby Africanized Christianity.

10. Inculturation Hermeneutics in African Christianity

Mulrain (1991:1) asserts that in the history of hermeneutics, it is glaring that “there has never been an interpretation that has been without references to or dependent on a particular cultural code, thought patterns, or social location of the interpreter. Sensitivity to one’s environment in the areas of cultures, customs, arts, idioms, sayings, mores, traditions, philosophy, cosmological views and the rests is a great tool for the biblical exegetes to appeal to the religious psychics of his hearers in African context. In order to avoid the danger of “culture pride” from the exegete, considerable recognition must be given to the traditions and cultural practices of the Africans where they are in conformity with the teaching of the Word of God. Many African words are rich enough, well explained and illustrating when used to espouse, exposit and teach the Bible.

Just as the African cosmological views accommodates the spirit world, realities of sickness, pains, poverty, death, life, exorcism, blessings, influence of the unseen world over the seen world and the rest as it is found in the scriptures, Eurocentric terminologies cannot explain these better to the Africans. Any form of biblical exegesis and hermeneutics that does not accommodate and tolerate these African cosmological views and values, will definitely make the scriptures a “dead” book to the Africans and incapable of meeting their peculiar and existential needs. Hermeneutical tools such as form, textual, grammatical, historical, canonical, traditional, redactional and other critical approaches to the exegesis and hermeneutics that ignore the inculturation hermeneutics in African lands and for the Africans is amounted to preachers’ oriented and a display of the Euro-centric theological brilliance and prowess that has no bearing to the desires and needs of the Africans. As Falola (2016:136) has rightly observed, “culture, defined and lived by the Yoruba (Africans emphasis mine) cannot be fragmented into autonomous pieces.

Religion is mostly pragmatic and practical to the Africans rather than idealistic or philosophical in approach. African religious approaches and practices tend more towards results orientations with a purpose of solving human life challenges, difficulties and problems rather than philosophical favour of the westerners. Anything idealistic, philosophical and theoretical in religion do not appeal as such to the Africans. Here lies the need for inculturation hermeneutics in the biblical interpretation in African soils if more new converts would be made and the converted sustained. This will further the entrenchment and sustainability of Christianity in Africa.

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