

**THEOLOGY OF EVANGELISM IN YORUBA
CULTURAL CONTEXT.**

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ABSTRACT.

This essay looks into the modus oprandi for communicating the Gospel in Yoruba cultural context. This comes from the understanding of evangelism as a divine task started by God in Eden after the Fall (Gen 3:8-21), and continued by the call of Abraham and the choice of Israel from among the other nations of the world (Ex. 19:5) as recorded in the Old Testament.

In the Gospels, the coming of Jesus has brought salvation to all (Jn 3:1-6) beginning from the Jews (John 4:22, Acts 2:39). The same message is expected to be preached in all cultures from one generation to another. (Mat. 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). For in it is the promise of God for the salvation of those who believe from the Jews first and also to the Greek. In it is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith (Rom. 1:16-17, paraphrased). This therefore underscores the need to be aware of God's methodology as can be discerned from the Scriptures.

The essay establishes the fact that God speaks in human oriented fashion. He reveals Himself in human terms and within each cultural enclave. He employs the thought form that would make the message transmitted through revelation to be received adequately with impact, in order to elicit positive responses necessary for salvation. Unfortunately, this was impossible through the Old Testament times. But by the Incarnation of Christ in the New Testament. It is possible for the Word to become flesh in each culture, that all can be saved.

From here the essay discovered some problems that hindered the flow of evangelism in Africa. These include Westernization of Christianity, polarization of theology and syncretism. These problems were eventually dealt with and the appropriate solutions suggested.

Finally the essay applied the principles of evangelism developed from the study to communicate the Gospel in Yoruba context.

The study has also made known the fact that God is not averse to any culture; that God employs culture as a vehicle for the communication of His divine will to man; that every culture has its good as well as its bad elements; that every culture can be tested the crucible of Christ in order to reveal its good and bad characters.

The study further reveals from the Acts of the Apostles and the epistles that contextualization is the work of the Holy Spirit. Then the Holy Spirit is working through the believer's experience of God through Christ appropriately employs and utilizes man's environmental factors that are appropriate for the communication of God's divine will in every society. And that both the interpretation of the Scriptures, as God's revelations³ and the response thereby reflect the principle of unity in diversity of man.

Then, coming to the problems of evangelism in Africa, the study discovered that the Gospel has not taken root in African soil.⁴ This was due to the western missionary approach which took the Western culture as the ultimate ideal for the communication of the Gospel. And that the Africans' attempt to free themselves from the toga of colonialism by building local theologies leads to relativizing the scriptures and syncretism.⁵ The study then came out of this debacle with the use of the Bible as the absolute standard of judgement and interpretation of human situations in all matters relating to the building of local theologies, interpretation of scriptures and syncretism. It discovered that precedence must be taken from the scriptures in matters of theologizing scriptural interpretation and contextualization in order for the basic elements of the Gospel not to be lost in the process of contextualization. This research work has found out that the Word has not become flesh in Yoruba context. Therefore attempt was made to communicate the Gospel in Yoruba context.

B CONCLUSIONS.

The following conclusions can therefore be drawn on the above research findings.

That God's communication to man is in human terms. The communication is based on God's love for man that made Him to

³Henry, p.13.

⁴Osadolor Imasogie, *Guidelines For Theology in African*, Ghana: ACP, 1983, pp46-47.

⁵Byang keto, *Theological pitfall in Africa*, Kenya: Evangel, 1975, p.55.

accept man as he is, by His understanding of man's nature and situations, crediting righteousness to man in the Old Testament, but offers salvation by grace in the New Testament by the blood of Christ.

The principles developed is an intricate one containing a conglomerate of ideas and ideals coming together to form an organic whole. It includes the various manifestations of God in understandable manner to man in his religio-cultural, socio-political, economic and historical contexts. The revelation thereby received is decoded within the totality of man's environmental factors. But hindered by the human nature, the original intention in the communication is not absolutely absorbed. This results in the distortion of human response to God, and religions.

Christ as the Incarnate Word of God instituted the process of restoring the divine image in man (Jn 3:3-5; IICor 5:17), by the coming and indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the believer. But still man would continue to aspire to confirm with the heavenly ideals by constant study of the word of God and putting into practice the truth as revealed in the scriptures.

The principles here developed form the bedrock of contextualization. Contextualization should be based solidly on the awareness of this parameters of evangelism without which the activity itself would become an orphan. The roots of contextualization are drawn from the understanding of God as an evangelist and the manifestation of His evangelistic intentions from the period of creation to the period of redemption and beyonds. Also, the understanding should include that of God's relationships to human culture and religions which is of acceptance and renewal, subjecting everything unto Christ.

Contextualization is therefore a subset of these God's evangelistic ideals. The God's principles subsume and x-ray, contextualization, revealing the ramifications of its contents. This principle is therefore comprehensive, looking at the backgrounds, and the reason behind contentualization.

As comprehensive as these principles are, they do not promise to be final. For no man understands the mind of God absolutely. The errors that may be there committed are therefore human and not divine. Since revelation of God is a continuous process, it is hoped that better understanding of the mind of God on evangelism will continue to come as we move closer to Him and engrossed in His works.

Meanwhile, this entire work is a veritable representative of the divine will of God for man, who called the researcher into His evangelistic work and guided him throughout the gestation and formulation periods of the study. It is believed that this research work will stimulate further studies in this area of evangelism and that the principles developed will be utilized to enhance understanding of the Gospel message from the biblical contexts, and the dissemination of the same message in various human contexts.

C. RECOMMENDATION.

From the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendation could be drawn.

In the first instance, every communicator of the Gospel must be well versed in the Bible and the contextual milieu of his audience. He must be aware of the contemporary theology, the world trends, and social conditions, the native world where he operates, and its thinking⁶ in order to apply the biblical message appropriately.

He should take seriously the biblical text and the existential needs of the people in order for the message to be relevant and responsive to the local needs.

The communicator of the Gospel should see his work as a divine task, and should therefore be opened to the leadership and the approval of the Holy Spirit in his evangelistic operations.

The Gospel should be preached with the goal of making the target to see Christ, to encounter Him and experience Him dynamically within his environment. In this way he must strive to allow Christ to incarnate in all cultures.

⁶Oosothuizen G.C., *Post-Christianity In Africa. A Theology and Anthropology Study*, Grand Rapids, Michigan W.B. Eerdmans, 1968, p235.

